PRINTED AND BOUND: THE PUBLISHERS' CASE BINDING AND 19TH-CENTURY WOMEN'S CRITIQUE OF MARRIAGE

by

Carolyn Suneja

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ABSTRACT
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This dissertation investigates the coevolution of industrial book formats in the 19th century and women's critique of marriage in fiction, arguing that the highly decorated case binding both reflected and shaped broader cultural anxieties engendered by the accessibility of new literary forms to mass audiences and the impact of that literature on the cultural logics by which women understood their roles and options. Given the reciprocal relationship between the mechanisms of industrial print and women's writing, the material conditions of book production are important considerations for the literary scholar. The four novels examined in this dissertation—Fanny Fern's *Rose Clark*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Lizzie Holmes's *Hagar Lyndon*, and Rosa Graul's *Hilda's Home*—are not merely examples of the intersection of material textuality and literary studies, they are critical interventions in women's struggle over the 19th century for sexual and reproductive autonomy. Fern in *Rose Clark* explicitly links the capacity of the industrial steam presses to the production of fraudulent narratives about women and presents a radically revised heroine in Gertrude Dean, a woman who can navigate the world of print and envision alternatives to marriage. Jacobs makes clear in *Incidents* and the actions she took to bring it to print that the legal and ideological system of American slavery denied her ownership of both self and story, an ownership she reclaimed by writing

her story and purchasing the material text in the form of its stereotype plates. The Free Love writes Rosa Graul and Lizzie Holmes serialized their novels in Moses Harmon's anarchist newspaper, *Lucifer the Light Bearer*, where the Free Love community's open exchange of ideas gave rise to the women's free love novel, an early and unacknowledged example of the process utopia that called explicitly for women's sexual autonomy and the abolition of marriage.

For Manu, Jaya, Mya, and Emma, who never got tired of hearing about the 19th century.

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But we raise our voice with all our might against the miserable cant that matrimony is essential to the feebler sex—that a woman's single life must be useless or undignified—that she is but an adjunct of man—in her best estate a helm merely to guide the nobler vessel.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Married or Single?*, 1857

[The] book cover is a thing all by itself in art. And it demands a recognition of the literary significance of books, that a book is to be looked upon as a book, and not like anything else, and that it is to be looked at in such a way that its meaning, its bearings, and its relations to us and our lives shall be deeply understood.

Sarah Wyman Whitman, "Notes on An Informal Talk on Book Illustrations, Inside and Out," 1894

Chapter One: The Case for the Case Binding

Introduction

This dissertation grew out of two separate but related areas of inquiry: the revolutionary changes in book production technology that took place in the second half of the 19th century in the wake of the steam press and related innovations, and the appearance in women's fiction of a strong critique of marriage as the dominant social structure. In my dual roles as both a literary scholar and as a professional bookbinder, I found that my work suggested to me a deep and tactile connection between the book as "essence of thought" (McGill 8) and the book as object. In my study of women's fiction about marriage, however, I found no critical model for giving equal weight in literary analysis to both the textual and material book. Book historical scholarship typically focuses on the particulars of printing and publishing history, while literary criticism often dispenses altogether with the material book and the changing ways it was presented to a reading public. Yet, a study of women's critique of marriage in fiction during the 19th century—a critique that appeared contemporaneously with the industrial book—seems to require a close investigation of the material conditions of book production that made the critique possible. My inquiry requires an interpretive model that brings into closer contact book history's attention to the details of print production and the literary critic's close reading of texts.

I argue in this dissertation that the simultaneous development of the industrial book on one hand and of women's growing critique of marriage in fiction on the other is not coincidental: the technology of the industrial book emerged with and enabled women's

entrance to the literary market and their growing calls for socially recognized options for women beyond marriage. More broadly, I argue that the material conditions of book and print production impacted what was written by whom, and that impact can be read in the text. The novel—specifically, in this study, those written by women and envisioning a different life for women than that offered by patriarchal marriage—thus contains traces of its material embodiment in its very characters, settings, and plot. The literary scholar who attends to these traces can thus situate a textual reading within the possibilities and constraints of the historical and technological moment.

In this chapter, I first survey and evaluate the fields of book history and New Materialism to understand the extent to which they bring together the textual and the material. I then set the stage for the discussions of specific novels in the chapters that follow by overviewing both the industrialization of the book, which resulted in the case binding and its ability to flood the literary market with cheap books in attractive covers, and marriage as a social and legal entity that was at once binding and restrictive and yet subject to change through social pressure. Women's critique of marriage in fiction coincided with the explosion of the literary marketplace for novels and presented a two-pronged threat to the established view of marriage and society in the democratization of literature, and in women's calls for more equal footing in domestic and economic relations. I present a brief history of the changes to book production and debates in marriage law to argue that what emerges from their intersection is a critique of marriage that both carries authority and cultural sanction because of its participation in the industrialized literary marketplace and is censured as dangerous because it threatens the patriarchal order supported by marriage.

The Material Turn: A State of the Field

My argument that the literary scholar should attend to the material format of the book is not new: book historians, especially those who reside in English departments, argue for the inclusion of the material in the study of the textual and bemoan the chasm between bibliographical and book historical writing on one hand and literary criticism on the other.[1] Yet, book historical scholarship often reproduces the very split between the material and textual that leaders in the field have long decried. Book historians, with some notable exceptions, do not often connect the texts of the books they study to their conditions of production; more frequently, the field examines publishing histories or advances arguments that situate specific texts as examples of technological impacts. Rarely are the technology of book production and the material form of the book seen as co-constitutive of the literature, as I argue they must be.

Two main themes of book historical scholarship are illustrative of the gap that remains between the material and the textual. In the first, the history of book production is explored to widen the field of textual production beyond author and publisher to include the associated crafts of paper making, typesetting, book design and binding, and bookselling. The work of scholars like Roger Chartier and Robert Darnton stands out in this field; Darnton proposed a model of book production that encompasses all the material and transactional functions and has investigated the records left by traveling book salesmen in the 18th century, for example, as an illustration of book historical scholarship employing

[1] See Leon Jackson's 2010 article, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian," in *Book History* and Meredith McGill's *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* for particularly forceful calls for cooperation between the fields of book history and literary studies.

that model[2]. Chartier examines the material book as the product not simply of an author, but of a set of processes that "suppose a broad variety of decisions, techniques, and skills," including the original writing, the production of a copy legible enough for the typesetters, the selection of materials and format and run size, the setting of type, copy-editing and corrections, and finally binding and selling (17). Recognition of these various processes and actors allows the book historian to see that "[what] was happening here was thus not only the production of a book, but the production of the text itself in its material and graphic forms" (17). Chartier defines the book as having a dual nature, setting the "essential identity of the work" or "ideal and transcendent text" against "the indefinite plurality of its states" (12). Chartier's work in particular thus emphasizes the contribution of many hands to the resulting material book, but not the way that the text is influenced or constituted by the technology that produces it.

The second main theme of book historical scholarship complicates the idea of an ideal or transcendent text by confronting the material text in all its variations through the process of producing scholarly editions. Paul Eggert, for example, sees each new instantiation of a given text as carrying with it the traces of previous readings, including those readings by editors, proofreaders, and others who work to produce the edition[3]. He argues that the work of the bibliographer is often unmoored from meaning-making, while the literary scholar assumes the "work" is a stable and transhistorical category; as a

[2] See Darnton's essay, "The Travels of a Publisher's Sales Rep, 1775-76," in *Book History*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2017.

[3] See also Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (1991), in which he argues that while the literary critic can ignore the material text (at their peril), the editor of scholarly editions must confront the materiality of the book in the inconsistencies in prior editions, illegible manuscript texts, or in various publication formats. For McGann, the process of producing the scholarly edition is an entry point for seeing and appreciating the material book.

response, he posits a model in which the differences between editions—the bibliographer's focus—can be read over time to show the work the text is doing at particular moments. Eggert's project is to develop a model for studying both the bibliographical and the literary; for works published in more than one edition over time, that model focuses on acts of reading at all steps of the book production process. Reading, Eggert argues, transforms the "book" into a "work" that is dynamic and can be studied as both object and art. The flaw with book historical scholarship, Eggert argues, is that it does not require a reading of the text contained in the material object it studies, and so does not provide for literary studies an interpretive model informed by materiality. As much as I agree with Eggert's observation, his model focuses on acts of reading by editors, publishers, and reviewers, and the traces those readers leave on the text, rather than on the material conditions of production and their ability to shape what is written. Eggert, in my opinion, does not go far enough to investigate the impact of the material on the production of literature.

Both Meredith McGill and Jonathan Senchyne provide models for the reading of both the material book and the text. McGill examines in *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* the intersection of copyright law development and the high-volume steam presses of mid-19th century publishing to describe the impact of rampant reprinting of literary texts on the development of a literary market that was largely reader-centered, rather than author-centered. Modern scholars of 19th century literature, McGill argues, focus on individual authors' struggles in the literary marketplace without examining in equal measure how that marketplace worked. Such scholarship "presumes that texts and authors could somehow inhabit this market without being shaped by it," (4) an assumption that misses the insights such contextualization could yield. On the other hand, McGill sees

the shortcomings of book historians for whom "the rhetorical analysis of texts [is] of secondary importance" (5). She characterizes her project as "an extended experiment in thinking about the relations of literary texts to their conditions of production" (5). McGill's model is a good one for literary scholars interested in focusing equally on what she calls "text-as-object" and text as "essence of thought" (8). Yet, while she writes *about* Tennyson, Poe, and Hawthorne in the chapters that follow her compelling introduction, her only sustained textual analysis is with Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, highlighting the difficulty of bringing into the same argument the material conditions of production and the content of the novel.

Senchyne's 2020 book, *The Intimacy of Paper in Early and Nineteenth Century American Literature,* successfully integrates the literary and the material, but does so in the context of literature *about* the material. In it, he attempts to understand the nature of "material textuality" by evaluating 18th and 19th century writing about the manufacture of rag paper as a communal process imbued with "narrative, memory, and meaning" both "within rag paper's content as well as written on it" (5). Most relevant to my inquiry is Senchyne's idea of a "material public" as an alternative construction to the discourse-based Habermasian public sphere. In the early part of the 19th century, paper mills were dependent on American households—and especially American women—to save linen and cotton rags to supply the mills that in turn supplied the printers and stationers. Senchyne examines writing of this time period and argues that the communal nature of paper making created "material publics" who preceded the printed word on the page, and whose "traces" remained in the paper that began as clothing and was transformed into the newspaper or letter (37). Michael Warner defines a public as self-organizing around discourse, as coming

into existence through being addressed and responding to various genres of text; Senchyne revises this definition by positing that its basis is not exclusively discursive, but also material.

Ultimately, Senchyne's model suggests that scholars "oscillate" between the presence effects of materiality and the meaning effects of texts: "This oscillation is at the heart of what material textuality, a configuration that links these terms and creates generative tension, offers as a paradigm for our field [of book history]" (24). Yet he acknowledges that as scholars we have no vocabulary with which to discuss or describe the presence effects of a particular print artifact—especially one that holds significance for us— which "vibrate on our skin in the same way that low bass notes register in our bodies, shaking us; how would we even begin to talk about this?" (27). Although I do not want to focus on the body as the locus of meaning of the material text, I appreciate the difficulty Senchyne is here describing: the terms that scholars have suggested for investigating the material aspect of the book all fail to capture the "certain enchantment" Senchyne highlights. "Material embodiment" (McGill), "bibliographic code," (McGann) and even "presence effects" all fail to capture how the book as object vibrates on the skin of the literary scholar.

While book history has struggled to bring the book as object into conversation with the book as text, a broader material turn within the humanities has offered other strategies for studying the book's materiality, including Thing Theory and the broad umbrella of New Materialism. Bill Brown, who coined the term "Thing Theory," asks in *A Sense of Things* "why and how we use objects to make meaning, to make or re-make ourselves, to organize our anxieties and affections, to sublimate our fears and shape our fantasies" (4). Brown's

guiding mantra is William Carlos Williams's phrase, "no ideas but in things," which Brown uses to interrogate the existence of a thing's interior and the concept that might reside there, arriving at books as the only objects whose surfaces contain interior ideas. While he expands his discussion to probe the interior of objects generally for their "souls" or ideas—to "penetrate [objects], to see through them, and to find…within an object…the subject" (12)—it is ultimately in the context of literature and the book that Brown situates his reading of things, rather than in the material world. That turn to literature helps to answer some of the questions he raises, but simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically removes those answers from the material and places them squarely within the realm of language. Thing Theory as Brown defines it, then, is an interpretive strategy for reading the cultural significance of things in literature, rather than the book as thing.

New Materialism is a rebuttal of the discursive turn of the late 20th century. It encompasses a broad coalition of philosophers and theorists who have in common the desire to challenge the role of discourse as the primary strategy for understanding the world and instead reexamine a physical world of matter and forces in which the human is positioned as a mere part, rather than the primary actor. The difficulty with much New Materialist writing is precisely that its adherents remain dependent on discourse in their attempts to theorize, for example, an object-oriented ontology. Decentering the human perspective and experience yields important insights, especially for addressing the environmental and existential challenges of the 21st century, but I argue that it is not a helpful approach for a study of the material book, which operates within and exclusively for the human experience. The book's primary entanglement is with human culture. My interest lies in how the book as object shapes the text that lies within it, creating

expectations in both author and reader of what the novel is and how it performs, both as a literary creation and as a commodity on the bookstore or home library shelf, as well as creating the material incarnation of social tropes—the painted woman, the eligible suitor, the base seducer (which I will discuss later in this chapter).

My project in this dissertation, then, is to illustrate the ways that the book as object—its material format and the technologies that produce it—impacted what people, specifically women, wrote as the book was industrialized and presented to consumers as a commodity. This inquiry requires me to adopt a different methodology than most book historians, one that gives equal attention in analysis to the textual and the material. Further, my project stands apart even from book historians like Jonathan Senchyne because the literature upon which I focus does not deal directly with book production or its technology. Where Senchyne turns to writing about paper making and the communal recycling of linen and cotton for evidence of an awareness of "the intimacy of paper," my project looks more broadly to read the influence of changing technology in the literature by women that technology produced.

"Volumes Stamped by Steam": The Case Binding

If the material form of the book constrains or shapes the text it contains—and therefore the experiences of both writing and reading—then the literary scholar should pay attention to form to explore its impact on the resulting genres of writing. While this relationship between form and thought is evident throughout the history of the book, it is particularly visible in the 19th century when the conditions of production underwent

radical changes that resulted in new material forms and new processes through which reading publics interacted with books. In this section, I overview the changes that took place to book production and explore some of the cultural consequences that followed for the novel.

Printing, according to Richard Gabriel Rummonds, is a slow-moving industry whose heavy equipment and material costs made it resistant to radical or unproven changes in technology. During the 400 years of the hand press era, the press itself changed only incrementally and the process of producing a printed book from a manuscript was limited and paced by the capacity of human-powered labor. While it is tempting to attribute all the changes that convulsed the industry in the 19th century to the steam-powered press, in truth several key innovations across the print industry in the first quarter of the century enabled the explosion of print so often acknowledged by literary and cultural scholars. The 18th century saw the introduction of technology to pulverize linen and cotton fibers for paper; paper making was thoroughly mechanized in the 1830s and 1840s such that by 1845, only two mills were left in America that made paper by hand (Winship 50). Similarly, experiments with casting plates from page forms of standing type were underway in England by the turn of the century; the resulting stereotype technology was commercialized and broadly adopted in the United States by 1840. The increased output of mechanical paper making processes and the ability to replicate the work of the type compositor for use on multiple presses set the stage for the steam powered presses to increase the production of printed pages from 100 per hour in 1800 to 10,000 per hour in 1850. In the 1860s, the rotary steam press, using curved stereotype plates, could produce 20,000 impressions per hour on continuous roll paper (56).

As a result of this increase in print capacity, no part of the book production process could remain unaltered. By 1831, publishers began to issue books bound not in temporary paper wrappers meant to be replaced when the purchaser had the book bound, but in edition bindings done in cloth (Allen 11). These commercial bindings were simplified so that they could be produced quickly by workers who specialized in one step of the process, and executed in a new material, book cloth, that cost a fraction of traditional leather. The resulting binding, termed a "case binding," was made by gluing the front and back boards, along with a spine lining, onto a piece of starched cloth to make a case; the sewn sheets that made up the book could then be "cased in" by pasting the first and last pages (appropriately called "pastedowns") into the case. The key difference between a traditional binding and a case binding is that the latter is made separately from the book, so it is a flat, unbroken cloth surface before the text is cased in. This feature not only meant it could be made quickly by a worker with less skill than a traditional journeyman or master bookbinder, it could also be decorated as a flat canvas using metal blocks, gold leaf, and an arming press. By 1834, machine stamping of case bindings had been widely adopted (Allen 11), further reducing the production time by removing the role of the finisher, a highly trained bookbinder skilled in the art of hand-tooling in gold who usually built up designs using a number of hand tools. The decorated case binding was instead made with blocks that executed the entire design in one impression of the arming press.

These qualities of the case binding—speed of production, division of the work process into lower skill steps, and a flat surface for decoration—gave rise to what became known as the edition binding. For the first time in print history, publishers issued editions of books all bound in the same style, thereby removing the consumer from the process of

book production and making the book a commodity. Where once a book buyer would purchase the printed pages, quickly sewn and wrapped in paper, and take those pages to the bookbinder to be bound according to their tastes and budget, the edition binding meant the consumer bought the book as a finished product. Michael Winship argues that with the edition binding, "the publisher was responsible not only for the typography and appearance of the printed sheets but also for the design and production of the binding in which they were sold to the public," and that this new responsibility created a different relationship between book producers and consumers, "not just through the text of works…but also through the package in which that text appeared" (59). Prior to the introduction of the case binding, the consumer held some responsibility for the final format of the book. Only a limited number of steady sellers—bibles and schoolbooks predominantly—were sold ready-bound, since the cost of binding them prior to sale was too much of a financial risk in the already-risky print industry. But the cheaper, faster case binding allowed publishers to remove readers from print production altogether and instead market standard formats of books to particular segments of readers. [4]

Publishers lost no time in exploiting the book cloth of the case binding as a tool for the advertisement of the text it contained and in targeting segments of readers with particular designs. During the 1840s and through the 1870s, publishers commissioned engraved metal blocks that could be used to stamp the front covers of case bindings with a design that imparted some sense of the content of a book. Michael Winship notes that the

[4] The edition binding did not entirely displace the consumer in the book market: As Mary Van Kleek notes in her 1913 report, *Women in the Bookbinding Trade*, "job" binderies, in which "each book is bound by hand for a 'private' as distinguished from a 'business' customer," existed in decreasing numbers over the course of the 19th century, and by 1910 just 16% of New York City binderies took on job work (24, 26).

industry "quickly discovered that a publisher's binding could not only reflect a book's content or genre but in itself influence a customer's decision whether or not to purchase it" (60). As a result, "[p]ublishers needed stamps that were pictorial, specific, [and] expressive of the nature of the book," (Allen 13-14) ushering in an era in which engravers played a central role in creating the case binding as a medium on which to advertise the book to the consumer. Over the course of the century, book producers "found the decorated case binding a cost-effective method of advertising and selling books" (55). By the 1880s, Allen reports, all fiction published in the United States was available in a decorated case binding, often among other cheaper or more expensive binding options; the binding was an integral part of the work's aesthetic and economic appeal to its audience.

That the quantity and variety of bindings was confusing to consumers is evident in a scene from Susan Warner's best-selling novel, *The Wide Wide World* (1850), in which young heroine Ellen Montgomery and her mother visit a bookshop to purchase Ellen's first bible. The purchase of the Bible is an important one that requires a great deal of consideration: her mother is ill, and the Bible will become a stand-in for her in Ellen's life. Warner depicts the scene in strikingly sensual language as Ellen enters the shop and remarks on the "delicious smell of new books" and sees "children's books, lying in tempting confusion" that immediately "fasten Ellen's eyes and attention" (29). Ellen "pored in ecstasy" over the large selection of bibles, "very evidently in love with them all" (29), inspecting them "with flushed cheek and sparkling eye" and "a brow grave with unusual care" (30). Warner describes Ellen's choices using the language of book formats: a "large royal octavo bible," will be too heavy, a "miniature edition in two volumes, gilt and clasped" will be too hard to read. Finally, recognizing that Ellen "had lost the power of judging

amidst so many tempting objects" (31), her mother steps in to help her choose one of an appropriate size and typography—to select from the range of material formats the most suitable. *The Wide Wide World* is as much conduct book as it is novel; as she does elsewhere in the text, Warner here offers readers assistance navigating the material world by providing a buyers' guide to the proliferation of formats in which a book like Ellen's bible now appeared. Where at the turn of the 19th century a printer like Matthew Carey could keep just two formats of the bible in standing type for cost-effective printing on demand (Makala 61), 50 years later Warner envisions the possibility that her readers are overwhelmed with choices offered by publishers who have targeted book formats toward all sorts of potential buyers. Further, Warner describes Ellen's process of selecting and purchasing her book in the language of physical reactions to the pleasures of the book, language that Jonathan Senchyne argues is now impossible for 21st century academics.

The fact that Warner includes in her novel a guide to selecting a book from the new choices available points to an anxiety provoked by the proliferation of industrially-produced books on the market; Warner is not alone in her concern that consumers make wise choices. The novel in particular bore the brunt of the cultural anxiety engendered by the capacity of the steam press and the industrialization of the book. In conduct manuals and in newspapers, commentators decried both the flood of new novels coming off the presses and what they saw as the dangerous effects of this new, cheap literature on the minds of young readers. The *Buffalo Christian Advocate* in 1853 warned against "the unprecedented circulation of fiction [that] has become one of the most momentous influences acting on the popular mind" because of its ubiquity: "In the year 1849 it was estimated that 5,500 different novels were offered for sale in this country…the purchasers

and readers of these 5,500 novels must be counted by millions" (1). The same newspaper a decade later compares the proliferation of novels in England and the United States to a biblical plague:

> [We] meet them everywhere, in every book store, on every book stand, forming the bulk of every circulating library, thrust into our faces in every railroad car, occupying nearly every centre table, and every young ladie's [sic] boudoir. Like the frogs of Egypt, they get into the kneading troughs of the kitchen! They are everywhere, and everywhere an evil (2).

The *Vermont Chronicle* in 1867 similarly calls out "[a] corrupt Press" from which "Millions of pages are yearly struck off and thrown out upon [communities]," describing publishers as attempting to "corrupt the morals and pervert the imagination of the young" (1) by blanketing neighborhoods with printed pages. For these commentators, thousands of novels read by millions of consumers amplified the "evil" threat of this new, cheap literature.

The threat of the novel was twofold: first, a taste for "yellow-covered"[5] novels quashes a young person's ability to concentrate on anything more strenuous, and thus destroys the reader's prospects later in life. Beyond their ability to "enfeeble the mind" ("Dangers" 1), however, novels create unrealistic expectations of life and marriage by portraying characters whose problems are solved by near-miraculous events, rather than by patient industry and hard work. Readers, according to this critique, come to expect the

[5] This term, which appears in several of the critiques of novel reading, refers to the yellow paper wrapper that served as an inexpensive binding for fiction. Paper wrappers were used in the hand press era and into the 19th century to protect unbound pages until the purchaser could have the book bound in a more permanent format (where those wrappers are extant, the pages are often uncut, attesting to the need to have the book trimmed and bound after purchase). By the middle of the 19th century, though, a paper wrapper was the cheapest kind of binding and the term appears in the conduct literature as a cultural shorthand for cheap literature, equating the quality of the contents with the quality of the material format.

same kind of benevolent intervention and are set up for an untenable conflict with reality. Reverend Samuel Harris, writing in the *Advocate*, relays the story of a young woman who assumed her life would turn out like a novel and drowned herself when confronted with unpaid bills and unrequited love, a tragedy Harris calls "suicide by novel reading" (1). Because the characters of cheap novels have "no counterpart in reality" ("Novel Reading" 1), men and women go into marriage expecting companionship and connection; when the companionate ideal does not materialize, the married couple devolves into an unhappy state made worse by an early education of novel-reading. If women must be conditioned to accept their limited role in the domestic sphere, novels that presented another model of marriage—companionship if not romance—would work to raise expectations that cannot be met. Forces working to maintain and reinforce the status quo of marriage therefore censured the novel as a corrupting influence on the minds of young women.

The prohibitions against novel reading can be best understood as part of a larger social anxiety engendered by the movement of especially young Americans from rural communities to industrial cities. Karen Halttunen, in *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, describes this phenomenon and its consequences, arguing that the unmooring of social relationships from the authority of the family structure meant that new arrivals in the city encountered strangers and had to determine who was trustworthy and who was not. The anxiety associated with assessing the stranger manifest in the figures of the confidence man and the painted woman, both of whom appear to be respectable on the surface, but whose motives are evil.

The notion of the painted woman is particularly relevant to my argument: Haltunnen defines her as "sometimes a prostitute, but more often a woman of fashion, who

poisoned polite society with deception and betrayal by dressing extravagantly and practicing the empty forms of false etiquette" (xv). The painted woman is the opposite of the sentimental woman, who cannot be hypocritical since she is "involuntarily transparent," conveying her interior emotions through exterior displays of tears or swoons. Halttunen further argues that since the middle-class white woman did not work outside the home in the newly industrialized cities, her role was to create a "retirement or retreat from the larger world" (58) in which she was responsible for the exercise of sincerity to counteract the moral peril her husband faced in society. The sentimental role of the sincere woman safeguarding the home from the morally degrading influences of industrial society could be undermined, however, by the specter of the painted woman: a creature of fashion whose external appearance no longer matched her interior character and motivations. Halttunen argues that in antebellum American society, the promise of upward mobility and the disavowal of birth as the prerequisite for gentility created the possibility that outward appearance was not an accurate reflection of inward worth or character. In other words, an undue interest in fashionable dress or speech could turn a woman—upon whom the American home and man depended for sincerity—into a painted woman or a hypocrite. This possibility would have dire consequences: "The life of fashion, in destroying personal sincerity, threatened to reduce middle-class 'society,' and by implication American society, to complete chaos" (67).

The possibility that the middle-class woman may not sincerely think and feel what she ought to spawned industries that attempted to mitigate the anxiety such a possibility created; each solution proposed to ensure that the interior matched the exterior, however, also contained the possibility of further deception and hypocrisy. Halttunen cites the

proliferation of conduct books in the antebellum era as one such solution. True manners, according to the sentimental writers of conduct books, were "simply the outpouring of right feelings from a right heart" (93). When outward behavior was a reflection of inward self-possession, etiquette would be unnecessary and manners would take on a natural "grace." However, while polite manners were presumed to be the expression of "right feelings," they are actually the product of the detailed rules set forth in conduct manuals. Similarly, sentimental dress drew a parallel between simplicity and sincerity, equating elaborate dress styles with superficiality and simple, unadorned styles with grace and sincerity. But much like the contradiction embedded in the existence of the conduct manual, sentimental dress itself became a fashion, undermining the notion that dress could be read as an indicator of sincerity. Ultimately, both manners and dress could become costumes intended to disguise insincerity, further complicating the task of differentiating between the sentimental true woman and the painted lady.

That the deep suspicion about the novel as a corrupting influence on young minds coincided with the appearance of the highly decorated, widely available case binding is not, I argue, coincidental. When viewed in the context of conduct literature and newspapers that warned Americans about the potential fraudulence of fashion and unnecessary gilding and about the dangers of being taken in by beauty that conceals dangerous inner content, the material form of the novel becomes part of the indictment. The case binding becomes the painted woman whose fashionable exterior masks a duplicitous or corrupt interior; readers of such literature risked becoming superficial and gilded themselves. While the examples of conduct literature I have cited mention specifically the "yellow covered" novels, all fiction, as Sue Allen points out, was sold in the decorated case binding format as

a tempting, beautiful object advertised to consumers who were then at risk of "suicide by novel reading." This dynamic, in which the steam-powered expansion of literacy is countered by the cultural prohibition of certain kinds of reading and certain book formats, illustrates the ways in which American society grappled with the industrialized book, sanctioning some kinds of literature and some book formats while castigating others. Indeed, at the time these critiques of novel reading were printed, publishers were creating house binding styles and series in an attempt to counter suspicion and anxiety with commercial curation.

Also evident in this dynamic is the inherent unevenness of new technologies and the stratification by class, gender, and race that occurs at moments of broadening access. As the price of the commodified book came down and the idea of a home library became a normal white middle class expectation, the backlash against such democratization was both moral and material. In addition to the moral prohibitions against novel reading discussed above, Lara Langer Cohen argues that women's participation in the literary market was characterized as fraudulent and women authors as unfeminine (I will return to this argument in Chapter Two). The accessible format of the case binding inspired a material backlash as well, as the elite taste in books arts turned toward a medieval and pre-democratic aesthetic[6]. In 1883, Brander Matthews notes that among the cultural elite, "the

[6] At the end of the century, when the case binding had reached its apogee in the hands of designers like Sarah Wyman Whitman and A. A. Turbayne, the book arts sought a return to a medieval aesthetic of hand printing and binding in the Arts and Crafts movement, embodied most notably in the Kelmscott Press in England and the Roycroft Press in New York. The Kelmscott *Chaucer*, produced by William Morris and bound by T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, epitomizes this impulse to combat industrialization and the democratization of the book by returning to an earlier text as well as earlier printing and binding styles and methods. This aesthetic returns also to a period of elite book ownership, as according to the British Library, the vellum edition of the *Chaucer* sold in 1893

taste for fine bindings, for clothing a good book in the best attire, for glorifying a great author's work by a truly artistic setting," was making a resurgence. Matthews acknowledges that some publishers' case bindings are artistic but argues that "the more artistic and more permanent binding in leather…alone permits of indefinite adornment;" for Matthews, only the "rich appearance of a bookcase filled with volumes bound in calf, vellum, Morocco or Russian leather" will do (165). The literature in reach of the masses is thus devalued at the end of the century in favor of inaccessible texts priced out of reach of the consumer of yellow-covered novels.

"The Closest and Dearest Relation of Life": Marriage and American Society

I have confined my exploration of the material book's relation to literature to women's writing about marriage in order to explore how two defining social phenomena—marriage and the book—shaped not just each other, but authors and readers as well. Marriage is simultaneously intimately textual and ultimately social, dependent as it is on both laws and documents as well as community approbation and social conditioning. In this section, I review the main themes of legal and social debates that inform a reading of women's fiction about marriage to situate the literature I discuss in the chapters that follow within the shifting and uneven landscape of legal marriage that defined the possibilities for women's lives.

for the equivalent of $15,000; a limited number of copies bound in alum-tawed pigskin, a common covering material for lectern bibles in the 16th and 17th centuries, presumably sold for more.

Women's writing about marriage was a particular threat in the 19th century because marriage had long been and continued to be the organizing principle for American society. A review of recent scholarship on the history of American marriage reveals a contradictory picture: while white, Christian, middle class marriage is constitutive of American society and enabled the nation's expansion geographically and through a particular definition of "Americanness," real people conducted their marital relationships both within and outside of that definition. Yet, for all the historical variety in marital relationships, the basic structure of American society—the monogamous couple, their children, their property—has not been substantially altered. Marriage, as Nancy Cott argues, "[sculpts] the body politic" (5). In other words, who gets to marry whom determines the kind of population the nation will have, making marriage a site of public debate and surveillance even as it is a personal or private decision and commitment. Control of marriage for any government is thus "decisive for the social order" (6). In addition to this legal surveillance, Cott asserts that marriage "[defines] the realm of cognitive possibility for individuals," (8) limiting what men and women can picture for their own futures. Marriage, then, both as custom and as law, is the institution at the center of constructions of nationhood and belonging at a national and an individual level.

The centrality of marriage as a shaper of American society has a long history dating to the colonial period generally and the writing of Thomas Jefferson in particular. Brian Steele argues that Jefferson's conception of Americanness was founded on the gender-based constructions of the independent homesteader who can provide for his dependent wife and children, and the married woman whose labor is confined to the domestic realm, rendering it economically invisible. Two institutions were integral to this view of gender

and the nation: slavery, which Jefferson overlooks in his construction of the American family, and marriage. But if the support of a homesteader and the economic invisibility of labor define the ideal American wife, then that definition left out large groups of women, including immigrants who were not yet able to replicate that ideal, and Black women to whom marriage and economic independence were systemically denied. Marriage, then, as it was constructed from the earliest days of the nation, created the American family as white, middle class, and economically secure, even if that security was generated by exploiting the forced labor of others.

Nancy Cott argues that in the colonial period and through the 19th century, monogamous marriage was an apt metaphor for the American system of government: both democracy and marriage depend on the consent of the parties involved (10), making Jefferson's idealized independent household a reproducible microcosm of the nation. Monogamy, in turn, provides predictable and reliable scenarios for childcare, preventing children from becoming the responsibility of the state, and clarifies lines of property inheritance. It further dovetails with Christian marriage: "The legal oneness of husband and wife derived from [English] common law but it matched the Christian doctrine that 'the twain shall become one flesh,' having exclusive rights to each other' bodies" (11). Under common law, this becoming of one flesh is called 'coverture,' and means that the married household has only one legally-existing person—the husband, who takes over his wife's identity in all civic, governmental, and economic matters. While certain elements of this legal principle remain in 21st century marriage, in the 19th century a woman's legal erasure was total: she could not vote, hold her own property, or keep her own earnings or children, all of which belonged to her husband (11-12). Auguste Carlier, a French observer

of American marriage, wrote incredulously of the system of coverture which rendered a wife "so legally incapacitated for civil rights as to place her nearly in the condition of minors, and those declared incapable of directing their own affairs" (57). Carlier further calls coverture "an anomaly in a democratic country," (58) in which presumably each citizen should have direct input in civic matters. The American view, however, held that the husband was the wife's civic representative, just as an elected representative stood in for his constituency.

Debates about the nature of marriage were not limited to its compatibility with representative democracy: at mid-century, two distinct views of marriage competed in American society and jurisprudence. On one hand was the courts' willingness to recognize informal unions by considering marriage a contract that could be entered (but not exited) at will. On the other was an increasing push for the regulation of marriage as an antidote to the pressures exerted by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, which threatened the self-sufficiency of the white male homesteader and his family and made marriage seem "an appropriate site for reining in a society that appeared to be spinning out of control" (Dubler 1905). The widespread presence of informal marriages, the variation in legal opinions about what constituted a valid marriage, and the presence of immigrants with their own marriage customs meant that marriage took many forms outside of the officially sanctioned ones. As Cott explains, "Marital behavior always varies more than the law predicts" (8); in other words, people made the arrangement work in whatever ways they could and took desperate steps to escape it when they could not. Further, marriage was available as a social and legal benefit based on both race and class: while "poor and backcountry whites" still overwhelmingly chose common law marriage throughout the

19th century, wealthy white slaveholders made "elaborate weddings into occasions to display wealth, reaffirm social networks, and mark the consolidation of properties," and slaves had no access to marriage and the intact nuclear family at all (Cott 32-33). Thus marriage and the weddings that announced it becomes ways to cement racially-based class status by ensuring the transmission of wealth from one generation to the next, provided that the bride adhered to the standard of true womanhood by remaining chaste until marriage to prevent muddying the lines of inheritance.

But as Cott points out, "social demands put pressure on legal practices," (8) and marriage is as much a social institution as it is a legal one. As such, it was also shaped and pulled by the changing expectations of particularly women with the rise of the women's rights movement and the traction gained by the idea of the companionate marriage. Alexandra Murray argues that in the antebellum era, women's rights activists "set out to increase women's awareness of their own oppression and to force public recognition of the problem" (141) of legal erasure of women and gender inequality in marriage. Without the ability to participate directly in the political system, however, women's rights activists were limited to emotional and moral appeals to the American public—newly available publics created by the technology of the steam press—rather than direct attacks on the legal structure of marriage. After Emancipation, the social structure that privileged the white male homesteader as the microcosm of the nation was threatened by the rights granted to Black Americans in the 14th Amendment, and marriage law became a way to regulate the lives and choices of former slaves, whose family structures were often complicated by generations of forced family separations. In that climate, the social appetite for significant marriage reform waned even as the Free Love movement began to gain

prominence with its vision of an American society without marriage and with reproductive autonomy for women. Murray suggests that the women's rights movement's decision to distance itself from Free Love prompted its abandonment of marriage abolition and its later focus on women's suffrage.

The Free Love movement highlighted another major strain of marriage reform: the gradual and uneven shift from patriarchal marriage to companionate marriage. Patriarchal marriage emphasized economic security for the naturally dependent woman in exchange for obedience and submission to the husband, including bodily submission to sexual demands and childbirth. As depicted in Free Love literature, patriarchal marriage left no room for friendship or even conversation between spouses and bound each to the other for life even if both were miserable with the arrangement. Jesse Battan investigates the letters and publications of Free Love adherents, which often reported first-hand knowledge of married couples' sex lives, making the "everyday experiences of men and women that were hidden from public sight" known (168), making visible the competing models of marriage in play throughout the second half of the century. The primary complaint in these very personal accounts is that marriage deteriorated when husbands stopped acting like lovers and began denying women sexual and reproductive autonomy. Battan's investigation of Free Love writing illustrates the messy and incomplete transition from patriarchal marriage to companionate marriage, in which women are lured into marriage by an eager lover and the promise of companionship but find a patriarchal husband who insists on his "rights" after the marriage takes place.

If, as Cott argues, the law serves to condition the possibilities the individual can see for herself—her thinking, her ambition, her experience—then the role of the artist or

novelist is to trespass over the line the law creates and imagine an alternative. At a time when the models and merits of marriage were being debated and both the novel and the decorated case binding were bound up with notions of fraud and suspicion, women's writing about marriage was potentially subversive, a danger Fanny Fern's *New York Ledger* column, "Women of 1867," positions as a direct result of women's discontent with loveless marriages and domestic confinement. The remedy for such loneliness and discontentment, Fern argues, is writing: women's private diaries would provide "a safe outlet for thoughts and feelings, that maybe the nearest friend you have, has never dreamed had place in your heart and brain." This kind of writing, for women, is an outlet for emotional or spiritual expression not found in women's daily lives of housework and other drudgery or in marriages in which there is no conversation beyond "the price of groceries, and the number of shoes Tommy had kicked out." Fern implies that no woman writes of "gridirons and darning-needles," but instead she writes what "cries out for sympathy and expression." Further, keeping a journal and cultivating an inner life of the mind can act as an antidote to the monotony of manual labor and "lessen the number who are yearly added to our lunatic asylums from the ranks of misappreciated, unhappy womanhood." A life of housekeeping and childrearing, far from Jefferson's ideal of "simple republican domesticity" (Steele 26), becomes for Fern the danger of being "mentally annihilated"—a danger that can be fought with words on paper.

This kind of writing need never be made public, but its very existence threatens the social order based on women's contentedness with the domestic sphere because it reveals women's resistance to or deep dissatisfaction with that role:

> One of these days, when a diary is found, when the hand that penned it shall be dust, with what amazement and remorse will many a husband, or father, exclaim, *I never*

> *knew my wife*, or my child, till this moment; all these years she has sat by my hearth, and slumbered by my side, and I have been a stranger to her. And you sit there, and you read sentence after sentence, and recall the day, the month, the week, when she moved calmly, and you thought happily, or at least, contentedly, about the house, all the while her heart was aching…(emphasis added).

Robert Gunn discusses this column as an illustration of what he calls Fern's strategy of pseudonymity, in which she uses misdirection and masking not to keep a private self out of the public eye, but to keep many authorial selves simultaneously in play. I would argue, though, that "Women of 1867" suggests that if the housewife picked up a pen and wrote, the resulting text would reveal a true, inner self that stands in stark contrast to the socially-prescribed roles of wife and mother and that demands intellectual development and expression. In other words, there is a true self that is not acknowledged or nurtured in patriarchal marriage. Fern tells women, "Write! Rescue a part of each week at least for reading, and putting down on paper, for your own private benefit, your thoughts and feelings," advocating that women recognize their own dual nature as contained in the domestic and uncontainable. Women's writing, as Fern describes it, is always potentially subversive, because it can give voice to thoughts and ideas far beyond daily domestic concerns and resist the self-effacement and self-sacrifice that is part of true womanhood. Add to these violations a critical attitude toward marriage and women's writing becomes a very real threat to the patriarchal power structures of the 19th century.

In this way, women's writing about marriage finds its parallel in the industrial case binding and thus in the idea of the painted woman: Fern assumes that the discontented wife who puts pen to paper will reveal a transgressive inner self that will not match her beautiful and decorated outside. The slippage between inner content and outer appearance is dangerous, whether it appears between text and cover or between woman

and thought, for if women are not, as Jefferson would have his contemporaries believe, naturally suited to the domestic, then patriarchal marriage as an organizing principle for American society no longer makes sense. Read in this context, Hawthorne's famous castigation of the "damned mob of scribbling women" (ironically, he exempts Fern) reads like an acknowledgement of an existential threat.

The questions this dissertation asks are perhaps deceptively simple: what does it matter to the literary scholar what material form the novel takes at any given point in time? What do we gain when we read the material along with the literary? What additional valences of meaning become visible when the material history of any given text is part of its interpretation? Simple though they may be, these questions have been the focus of book historians since the inception of the field. Yet, as Meredith McGill, Leon Jackson and others have noted, book historical scholarship tends to deemphasize the text in favor of the publication or edition history, while literary criticism often assumes an idealized or disembodied text independent of the material conditions of its production. Further, when book historians do examine texts, they tend to select texts that deal with aspects of writing and book production so that the focus remains squarely on the material and only tangentially on the literary. My intent in this project is to bring a book historical perspective and my own experience with the material book to literary scholarship on the novel, to explore the way that meaning is situated in the material text, and to give equal weight in the analysis to both the book as object and the book as text.

In the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I investigate the mainstream and margins of women's critique of marriage in the age of the steam press and the case binding. In Chapter 2, I read Fanny Fern's second novel, *Rose Clark,* in the context of the high-

volume, steam-powered print environment for which Fern wrote. Fern was a household name whose success was enabled by what McGill calls "the culture of reprinting," in which an original message could be amplified and transported from newspaper to newspaper and from publisher to publisher, quickly transcending local print cultures and circulating on a national scale. *Rose Clark* has as its central trope the doppelgänger; that is, the main character's lover is either a seducer or her husband depending on which of the many voices and texts encountered by the reader is to be believed. The replication and revision of texts about Rose and the overt yet uncertain duplication of the character Vincent Vincent as conceivably two different people leave the reader to judge Rose's marital status throughout the novel. Fern's strategic disorientation of readers concerning the legitimacy of Rose's and her child's legal and social standing illustrate the ways in which women are defined socially and legally by the texts that circulate about them.

While Fanny Fern and *Rose Clark* represent the mainstream of American publishing, the novels I examine in Chapters 3 and 4 represent the margins of that system. Chapter 3 looks at Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, her autobiographical exposé of the sexual exploitation at the economic core of American slavery. Jacobs, like other Black authors in the antebellum period including Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and William Wells Brown, bought the stereotype plates to her novel when her publisher, Thayer & Eldredge, declared bankruptcy before printing the book. Stereotype technology allowed her to own the material embodiment of her text and control its reproduction at a fraction of the cost of resetting the type. Reading *Incidents* in the context of it material form, both printed and unprinted, foregrounds issues of reproduction and autonomy that are often obscured by editorial choices in scholarly editions and by interpretations uninformed

about the significance of Jacobs's insistence on her own agency in the publication of her book.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the Free Lovers, a sex radical reform movement advocating for the abolition of marriage at the end of the century that circulated its ideas for societal reform in newspapers that operated on the fringes of the mainstream, steam-powered presses. I examine two novels serialized in Moses Harman's anarchist, free love newspaper, *Lucifer the Light- Bearer*: Lizzie Holmes's *Hagar Lyndon*, and Rosa Graul's *Hilda's Home*. I argue that the material and literary conditions for radical women at the end of the 19th century enabled the free love novel to emerge as a process utopia, a subgenre of utopian fiction that illustrates the steps necessary to achieve a more ideal future. The iron hand press—a ubiquitous piece of equipment turned to radical use outside of mainstream print by editors like Moses Harman—along with 19th century traditions of women's fiction created the conditions for women to write novels that demonstrate, step by step, what an alternative to institutional marriage would look like for young couples who wanted love and children without the legal constraints of marriage.

My intent in each of these chapters is to examine the ways in which elements of 19th century print culture—the high-volume steam presses, the stereotype plate, and the iron hand press—shaped the literature they helped produce. Print and marriage have in common that both are institutions that form the contours American culture; reading one in the context of the other illuminates the ways dominant cultural narratives are produced and disseminated in the press and the ways that individual authors and texts can resist those narratives.

Chapter Two: Fanny Fern's *Rose Clark* and the Industrial Book

Introduction

On the 24th of July, 1846, the Milwaukee *Daily Sentinel* reported that a 17-year-old woman was seduced by a man who later robbed and abandoned her, leaving her "homeless and friendless" with a baby to care for. The next day, the Louisville *Daily Courier* ran the story as well, reprinted from the *Buffalo Courier*, expanding the narrative to include the details of the affair. The young woman was the daughter of a wealthy Canadian; she was placed in a boarding school in Rochester where she encountered a man who "won her affections and deceived her by a sham marriage, lived with her two years, confessed the fraud, and then took her money and left her, alone, and with two children. She has followed him since, thousands of miles, day and night, sometimes on foot, at others by the swiftest conveyance—has shot at him twice, but as yet he has escaped her" (*Daily Courier* 25 July 1846). Her sole object in her desperate travel by foot, rail, and boat around the ever-expanding country: a legal marriage to her seducer to legitimate her children. Her sensational story was reprinted widely, traveling over large circuits that mirrored and amplified her own pursuit of legality. This young woman's story raises compelling questions about the legal and social nature of marriage in the mid-19th century and the potential for fraudulence at its core, and places those concerns in a growing geographic and print network capable of replicating and amplifying the story beyond the couple's local community.

The sham marriage is a particularly interesting phenomenon in a century obsessed with fraud and sincerity in the face of a rapidly changing social order. As I discussed in

chapter one, Karen Halttunen explores the anxiety that resulted from the pervasive idea of social mobility and the reality of young men and women leaving small, tight knit rural communities to make their way in cities whose growth was fueled by industrialization. Suddenly free from community and family oversight, young people in the city were confronted not only by the lack of social structures that determined their place in society, but also with the ideal of social advancement available to those members of the middle class who strove to attain it. Young men and women, according to the conduct manuals of the day, found themselves at the cusp of both great opportunity and great danger: the strangers with whom they now interacted could be the helpful hand they need to establish themselves, or—as in the case of the young woman whose story of victimization and sham marriage was so widely reprinted in the newspaper—could be scheming to defraud them. The ever-present threat of fraud shifts attention to surfaces and the potential disconnect between the surface and the interior; reading the surface of dress and manners becomes a critical skill for determining the worth or sincerity of an acquaintance or suitor.

The anxiety created by the social fluidity of the industrial city in antebellum America encompassed not just people, but things as well. In particular, the newly available industrial book reflects the tension inherent in the surface/interior dichotomy: just as the anonymity and mobility of the city unsettled notions of class and trustworthiness in social relationships, so too did the availability of imitation fine bindings unsettle ideas of value in literature, and by extension, the influence of that literature on the minds of those who read it. The steam press, invented in 1811 and ubiquitous by the 1840s, exponentially increased the number of printed pages produced per hour by American publishers and set off a chain reaction of innovations in book production that turned the industrial book into a cheap and

highly decorated commodity that preserved the conventions of fine binding while it made those conventions for the first time available to a middle-class audience. In so doing, these gilt and embossed books eroded the class distinctions long associated with book ownership. The book became by mid-century a sort of prop that could communicate class pretensions as easily as it signaled taste and refinement. Nina Baym writes that the novel as a form garnered its immense popularity with a new category of reader—the newly literate member of mass culture, rather than the intellectual elite, prompting the elite to "[look] back nostalgically to a social era when books were out of public reach and the ability to own and read them conferred power and prestige" (29). With novels in the hands of the masses, the trustworthiness and respectability of reading material was as much a topic of 19th century anxiety as the worthiness of suitors: both the book and the lover could hide a corrupting influence within beautiful covers.

In this environment of steam-driven, industrial book production and social anxiety engendered by the potential for fakery and fraud, Fanny Fern rose to prominence as both a novelist and a newspaper columnist. *Rose Clark* is Fern's second novel, published in 1856, just a year after *Ruth Hall*. The reader first meets Rose Clark as a young orphan deposited by her crass and unfeeling Aunt Dolly in an orphanage run by the hypocritical Mrs. Markham. When Rose is old enough to be useful in Dolly's milliner's shop, her aunt brings her home but continues to deny her the love and care she needs. Eventually Dolly grows jealous of Rose's blossoming good looks and sends her to a boarding school where Rose meets Capt. Vincent L'Estrange Vincent, who takes her away from school to be married. Shortly after the wedding, Capt. Vincent leaves Rose to visit his dying father and is waylaid by his evil cousin, also named Vincent L'Estrange Vincent, whose henchmen rob him, beat

him and leave him for dead; he convalesces for several years among strangers. In his absence, Rose bears Capt. Vincent's child and is disowned by her Aunt Dolly for having what Dolly is convinced is an illegitimate child. Unable to authorize her version of events without her husband's presence, Rose sets off across the expanse of the nation to find him, first travelling to New Orleans, where she befriends Gertrude Dean, a divorced artist who makes a comfortable living selling her portraits, and Gertrude's brother, John. Together, Rose, Gertrude, and John travel to Boston where, after a series of coincidences, Capt. Vincent is reunited with his wife and young son. In the novel's final chapter, Rose, Vincent, and their son Charley are living with Gertrude and John in Boston, thus restoring Rose to a domestic sphere in which she is protected by both husband and brother.

However, the reader of *Rose Clark* is not presented with this chronological view of Rose's story; Fern withholds the details of Rose's marriage to and separation from Capt. Vincent until one of the last chapters of the novel. Instead, the evil version of Vincent—who brags about his conquests of young girls he pretends to marry in sham wedding ceremonies—creates the possibility that Rose has been seduced and only believes herself to be married. The dissonance between Rose's faith in her husband and Vincent's apparent unworthiness makes the reader choose throughout the novel which version of Vincent to believe. Fern's narrative strategy of disguising the simultaneous presence of husband and seducer in the novel calls attention to Rose's inability to speak for herself and raises questions about the epistemic foundations of marriage and who has the authority to determine a woman's social status as a result of marriage.

In this chapter, I argue that in *Rose Clark*, Fanny Fern illustrates a fundamental unknowability at the center of marriage—an uncertainty that interiors match exteriors,

that a marriage formed on the basis of reading another person's exterior, or "talismans of character" (*Ladies' Vase* 68) will be valid, much less successful. I show that the high volume, industrialized print environment of which Fanny Fern was both product and critic created, circulated, and reinforced cultural narratives about marriage as the only sanctioned choice for women's social and sexual lives that simultaneously made reliance on 'character' and the rituals of courtship fertile ground for fakery and fraud. Marriage's central unknowability could have disastrous consequences for women: the sham marriage destroyed reputations and cut women off from social networks that sustained them; the bad marriage was made miserable by the legal privileging of husbands as a class and the protracted and scandalous nature of divorce. In a novel focused on exposing hypocrisy and fraud in familial and social relationships, Fern does not pull back the curtain on Vincent's con until the final pages of the book; by keeping the question of Rose's marital status open for most of the novel, Fern underscores how readily women are defined by the texts that circulate about them and how contradictory the many voices and narratives defining women can be. *Rose Clark* is not a novel about books and reading, but the language of industrial print pervades it, drawing compelling parallels between Rose as possible wife and Rose as text that reveal the undercurrent of anxiety that ran through the marriage market and the literary market alike[7]. That unknowability is bound up with the high volume, industrialized print environment in which she was writing, as well as with the potential for pretension, fakery, and fraud that accompanied the social changes wrought by

[7] I am indebted to Sarah Wadsworth's *In the Company of Books,* and particularly her chapter on Louisa May Alcott's story "Pansies," for drawing the parallel between the personified book as object and the objectified, marriageable woman.

industrialization. These parallels make visible Fern's detection of the shaping reach of industrialized print into the mid-19th-century social formation of marriage.

Unlike Fern's well-known novel, *Ruth Hall* (1855) and her collections of sketches, and despite its original reviewers who claimed that "Rose Clark will live when Ruth Hall is forgotten" (*Buffalo Morning Express* 1 Feb 1856), *Rose Clark* is largely unremarked upon by literary scholars. Fern biographer Joyce Warren devotes a chapter to Rose Clark in *Fanny Fern: An Independent Woman* and in 1991 published the only scholarly article on the novel, in which she illustrates the autobiographical elements in the character of Gertrude Dean, the novel's other female protagonist, and her divorce. As Warren notes, Fern omitted her own disastrous second marriage to Samuel Farrington from her semi-autobiographical novel *Ruth Hall*, using it instead as background for Gertrude. Fern, like Gertrude, remarried after the death of a much-loved first husband; both Farrington and his fictional counterpart Stahle proved to be jealous, tyrannical men who used deceit and slander to demoralize and eventually divorce their wives. Fern, like Gertrude, achieved financial independence by creating sketches that captured the truth of her subjects. Warren argues that Gertrude's story allows Fern to explore "the problem [she] faced as a writer of fiction at a time when women's fiction was expected to fulfill conventions that her own experience had called into question" (Fern's *Rose Clark* 92). Warren's concludes that Fern uses her own marital experience as a foil to Rose Clark's more conventionally portrayed true womanhood and unwavering faith in the goodness of her husband.

In 1856 when *Rose Clark* was published, the development of print—both newspapers and books—as a mass-produced industrial commodity was in full swing. The steam press had been adopted for newspaper printing first in 1814; by 1830 they were in

used around the world. While the first steam presses could produce 1000 impressions per hour, a ten-fold increase over the hand press, those employed by mid-century used curved platen and continuous roll paper which increased the speeds to up to 10,000 impressions per hour. Not only did this enormous output require changes all along the book manufacturing process that I discuss in Chapter 1, it became in itself an object of fascination as newspaper and book publishers alike advertised the size and speed of their own operations as well as the number of copies sold of their popular works. In addition, the editorial practice of copying articles from one paper to another, what Meredith McGill calls the "culture of reprinting," was an indication of popularity, rather than piracy, as it expanded the influence of a particular author or article beyond the local print sphere. Circulation and sales volumes became the key metrics by which value was judged by the reading public, as the ability to print, bind, and distribute great numbers of books and print objects enabled sales and marketing strategies based on volume. The emphasis in the 1850s in the nascent field of book advertising on sales volumes reinforced the notion that high production and sales numbers indicated literary success.

Fanny Fern's career illustrates this emphasis on circulation and volume created, in part, by the steam press. As Warren details in her biography of Fern, in 1851 Sara Eldredge Farrington sold her first article to the *Olive Branch* in Boston; that article was immediately reprinted by another Boston paper (Warren *Fern* 92). In September, 1851, she began writing under the pseudonym "Fanny Fern," and, although early in her career she occasionally published articles under other signatures (98), she continued to write as Fanny Fern until her death in 1872. From 1851 to 1853 while Fern was writing for the *Olive Branch*, Warren notes its circulation "soared" and her articles were reprinted "in

newspapers all over the country and across the Atlantic" (100, 101). In this competitive environment, being first with original material was what sold new subscriptions; the desire to be first with new articles from Fanny Fern led the *Musical World and Times* to make Fern an offer of exclusivity in 1853, the same year that publishers Derby and Miller offered to publish a collection of her newspaper articles. Within a few months of releasing *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, Derby and Miller were advertising its sales numbers as a selling point. In 1854, Mason Brothers publishers took that strategy a step further, advertising the demand for Fern's first novel, *Ruth Hall,* even before it launched, creating the hype that it was "destined to be one of the most popular books ever issued from an American press" (qtd in Warren *Fern* 123). While as Warren notes it was Fern's frank style and bold opinions that created a connection with her audience, the advertising for her work focused on the circulation of her columns and the sales volumes of her books instead of on her writing.

Robert Bonner, the editor of the *New York Ledger* who negotiated an exclusive contract with Fanny Fern in 1855 and made her the most highly paid newspaper columnist of her age, created a sensation of Fanny Fern. Frank Luther Mott places Bonner in the same category as P. T. Barnum as giants of advertising in the 19th century who employed innovative strategies to capture attention and drive public perception, a comparison that speaks to the element of "puffery" in 19th century literary promotion. Both Mott and Warren detail Bonner's strategy of purchasing whole pages of other New York papers in order to "repeat upon it one sentence," (Mott 16) conveying a message like his exclusive

arrangement with Fern[8] by calling attention to repetition and volume. Bonner paid Fern $100 per column[9] to write a story exclusively for the *Ledger* and then advertised the outlay of money to draw attention to the story's financial implications, rather than its literary ones. By 1856, these strategies resulted in the *Ledger's* circulation rising from 2500 to more than 100,000; it would climb to 400,000 by 1860 (Warren *Fern* 147). Fern continued to write exclusively for the *Ledger* until her death in 1872, by which time her sketches, collections, and novels were reprinted and circulated across the country and across the Atlantic. The ubiquity of steam-powered print combined with the nascent art of advertisement made Fanny Fern a celebrity not based solely on her writing, but on the scale of her readership, the sales volumes for her books, and the extraordinary sums of money she was paid.

The Fraudulence of Things

The high-volume presses that enabled the sales and advertising strategies that contributed to Fanny Fern's success as an author also engendered anxiety about insincerity and fraud, particularly as they eroded the class-based distinctions associated in earlier centuries with literature and book ownership. The idea of fraud—both as fear and as fascination—was a pervasive part of 19th century culture, as I will show. In this section, I investigate Fern's exposure of hypocrites and conmen particularly through their

[8]The repeated text strategy stemmed from the weekly magazines 'policy of not using display type—if all type is the same, the only way to get attention is to do something unique, like print the same words over and over (Mott 17).

[9] For comparison, the *Atlantic Monthly* paid its authors $6.00 per page in 1857; it paid Louisa May Alcott $50 for a short story in 1859 (Mott 20). Bonner's payment of $100 per column of type to Fern was extraordinary.

relationship to objects in the novel as an entry point for analyzing Fern's critique of fraud not just in industrially produced objects, but in mass culture generally as it discredits women's experience as an indicator of truth. In *Rose Clark*, things take on particular significance as indicators of either sincerity and good taste or of fraudulence and spurious claims of gentility. Fern creates a mise-en-scenè for many of her sketch-like chapters, signaling to the reader through her characters' relationships with things whether their exteriors match their internal morality or class.

Mrs. Markham, the headmistress at the orphanage where Rose is sent after the deaths of her parents, represents a moral fraud whose actions perpetuate a system that keeps the poor oppressed while assuaging the consciences of those who could help. Mrs. Markham feeds the orphans "bread and molasses" on "wooden plates" in "a large, uncarpeted, barren-looking room" (30); the lack of good food and exercise makes the children listless and numb. Yet when the committee that oversees the orphanage comes to observe the children, the members "remarked how inevitably the children of the lower classes inherited poor constitutions from their depraved parents, and went away satisfied as if, granting this to be the case, they were humanely endeavoring to remedy the inherited curse" (32-33). Fern intimates that the charitable contributions meant to run the orphanage are instead directed to Mrs. Markham's comfort: her room contains "comfortably plump sofas and chairs" and "gilt candelabras;" she eats "warm biscuits" with butter and fine tea (37, 38), all items the children are denied. To ensure the "perpetuity of her salary" (28), she flatters the wealthy Mr. Balch, one of the committee members, leaving a single glove on her mantlepiece "because it served as a text for Mr. Balch's little complimentary speeches about hands, and hearts, and pairs" (38). Mrs. Markham is more

than just a hypocrite, though, because her moral fraud is part of a larger social failure to raise young girls in particular to be strong enough in body and in mind to see through the deception of the conmen like Vincent they are sure to encounter. For Fern, the orphanage with its "farce exhibition days" and the boarding school with its "show-circulars" (47) are part of a confidence game played on society and parents, soliciting donations and tuition funds but turning out only sickly, under-educated women.

In addition to the moral fraud, Fern takes aim at pretensions of gentility and susceptibility to flattery. Rose's aunt, Dolly Howe, is a prime example: a milliner until she lures the wealthy John Howe into marriage, Dolly is crass and uncultured, and is compared unfavorably to her sister, Rose's gentle and intelligent mother. After Dolly marries, she attempts to put on the trappings of wealth and refinement but cannot disguise her true nature; her seamstress gossips to another woman, "you wouldn't believe if I should tell you what caterpillar that butterfly came from" (151). Dolly Howe's domestic space is a clear sign of her fraudulent pretensions to class and refinement, a statement Fern delivers through a detailed examination of objects. Among the objects that Fern describes in Dolly's parlor are books "whose principal merit was their 'pretty binding'" (158), pictures in "gaudy frames with their elaborate gildings" and statues that "looked down from little gilt roosts" (158). In the social calculus that determines class, the presence of undue amounts of gold gilding is a sign of fraud: Dolly's gold frames are "gaudy," her statues are compared to chickens in a coop, her books will never be read.

The role of books in "pretty bindings" as signals of fraud deserves close examination. Gerard Curtis investigates the ways that book design shapes and reflects readers' relationship to the book as both text and object and notes the ways that book

manufacturing moved the desire for tasteful libraries—previously the domain of the cultural elite—to the middle class by the mid-19th century. While deluxe editions were still out of reach for ordinary book buyers, Curtis argues "their 'imagery' fostered downmarket demand" (223) for cheaper books that were highly decorated. As the binding became a marketing strategy for the book as object, Curtis writes, "ornateness exploited the book as an iconic and materialistic commodity in and of itself—the book…merely representing the book" (223). In other words, for the middle-class book buyer, the gilt binding ceased to contain a particular text and instead came to suggest the status associated with library ownership. For Fern, when the book becomes a decorative object, absent the class status and education that would allow a reader to appreciate both text and object, it becomes fraudulent: Dolly's unread, heavily gilded books tell the reader that she is claiming class and refinement that she does not possess. Even more, since the gilded binding is the book's "principal merit," the text is potentially fraudulent, pretending to have the sanction of the literary establishment conferred by "a gilt top and a stiff back" (Kipling 177), but instead containing poor writing and unreadable typography.

Dolly's penchant for gilt not only signals her class pretensions, it also makes her vulnerable to the machinations of Mr. Finels, a con man who flatters her in order to extract Dolly's dinners and her husband's money. Fern's exposé of Finels's fraud and Dolly's victimization warns the reader away from superficial book ownership, bound to result in showy exteriors that conceal an internal lack of worth. Sarah Wadsworth picks up this thread, examining the advice about reading and book ownership Louisa May Alcott gives to young readers in her story "Pansies," and notes that for Alcott, the book's format and appearance are as important as its content. Wadsworth argues that binding design came to

symbolize various strata of refinement and taste for American readers; as such, the book a young woman was seen to be holding had as much impact on the perception of her character as the book's contents might have on the development of her mind. In other words, in the hands of a young woman, the bound book "operates as an outward sign of the woman's inward qualities," serving as "an advertisement set out to attract a certain kind of buyer" (189). This implicit mirroring between the format of the book and the internal qualities of the woman reading it, in Wadsworth's formulation, makes both book and woman objects to be read: both are "[texts] to be decoded" (189). While Dolly's ostentatious display in *Rose Clark* is a text easily read by Finels the conman, whose ruse is to call her a "blue-stocking" (*RC* 275), better books would attract better men.

By mid-century, better books could be recognized by consumers (and suitors) at a distance as publishers began to use the format and binding of the book to combat the anxiety created by the increase in the number of texts in circulation and the feared consequences of reading substandard literature. Wadsworth posits that publishers used house binding styles and book series to help readers navigate the marketplace; most prominent among these publishers was Ticknor & Fields, who early in the 19th century "proved that the physical book could itself be used as a medium for advertising and marketing" by developing the Blue and Gold house style that "minimized, for the consumer, the element of variability in quality and 'essence'" (173). Eric Conrad concurs, arguing that the development of recognizable house styles coincided with the advertising of books, such that the style became the advertisement: all a consumer needed to know about the content of a book was signaled in its exterior. Ticknor & Fields's blue and gold bindings immediately became "one of the most visually recognizable brands in the nineteenth

century literary marketplace" (Conrad 76), and as such were copied by other publishers, including Fern's[10]. When *Rose Clark* was issued by New York publisher Mason Brothers in 1856, the inaugural year of Ticknor & Fields's blue and gold series, it was bound in bright blue cloth stamped with a large gold fern leaf covering much of the spine. Readers of the novel thus encountered Dolly Howe's fraudulent literary pretensions—and her victimization by a conman who could read her like a book—in a book that plagiarized the social credibility of another publisher. In its material format and in its text, *Rose Clark* challenges the knowability of any interior, including its own.

Yet some characters—the good Mrs. Bond and Gertrude—offer a model of sincere ownership or relationships with things. Rose boards with Mrs. Bond after Charley is born; her physical environment falls between the moral failure and hypocrisy of Mrs. Markham's barren dining room at the orphanage and the fraudulence of Dolly's gilt-covered home. The house is "neat and clean—but so bare and desolate" (101); there is nothing to spare in the home—no evidence of industrially-produced excesses—because Mrs. Bond invests her money and energy feeding hungry children and caring for outcasts like Rose. In her case, the exterior environment of simplicity and utility matches her pious and generous interior. Gertrude, too, is a sincere owner of things: her studio is littered with "pictures and picture frames, canvas and brushes, sketches in oils, engravings and crayons" with "little regard to a housewifely order," yet "[she] was a picture herself" at work on a painting (185). Outside

[10] Eric Conrad notes that while house styles and the visual and aesthetic uniformity they promoted sent powerful signals to consumers defining quality in literature, there was a push in the opposite direction as well. Thayer & Eldridge, publishers of Whitman's third edition of *Leaves of Grass,* rather than create a house binding style, "[celebrated] idiosyncrasy and typographical excess" (79). So, on one hand, uniformity created a publishers brand and increased consumer confidence in the quality of the text; on the other, individual bindings, such as that for *Leaves of Grass*, could strive for material/textual coherence.

of the tools of her trade, Fern depicts Gertrude with one other object: a locket she wears on a chain and which she loves because it contains a picture of her father. Rather than cast Gertrude as vain or pretentious, this locket is the means of her reunion with her brother John, who recognizes the picture. Mrs. Bond's house can be spartan without being cold and Gertrude can own jewelry without being vain because they are sincere; in other words, the objects with which they are pictured are no less props than the pretty bindings in Dolly's parlor, but they are props that broadcast sincerity and trustworthiness rather than immorality or classlessness.

Communicating sincerity was a paradoxical task for the 19th century woman, as sincerity was supposed to be unstudied, to spring spontaneously from right feeling and inner value. Manners, which included the material aspects of dress and home decor, were then assumed to be the outward manifestation of intrinsic feelings and characteristics. Yet this spontaneous expression of sincere manners spawned an entire industry in the conduct books targeted to young men and women that expounded the rules for those manners. One such often-reprinted conduct manual, *Ladies' Vase*, emphasizes to its readers the need for sincerity: "True politeness is the smoothness of a refined mind and the tact of a kind heart" (9). Here the "refined mind" and the "kind heart" are the source of good manners, rather than the information in the book itself. So the reader of the conduct manual is caught in a bind: if they are truly polite, they do not need the book; if they need the book, they are pretenders attempting to put on manners that they must evidently study. The young woman reading the conduct manual must simultaneously categorize herself as genuinely polite and take the writer's advice to project a refinement that she is evidently still acquiring.

The tension between natural and sincere goodness and artificially adopted manners encapsulated in the conduct book adds another layer to the possibility of deception that is created in the slippage between appearances and interiors. The anonymous author of *Ladies' Vase* writes:

> It is always taken for granted, unless there is decisive evidence to the contrary, that the manners are the genuine expression of the feelings. And even where such evidence exists—that is, where we have every reason to believe that the external appearance does injustice to the moral dispositions; or, on the other hand, where the heart is too favorably represented by the manners—there is still a delusion practiced upon the mind, by what passes under the eye, which is not easy to resist (13).

In other words, publicly-facing manners are a window to the private or interior person—unless they are not. Here the observer of another person's manners is at a disadvantage because it is impossible to tell whether impeccable manners are indeed the product of internal goodness or if they are "a delusion practiced upon the mind." If neither outward appearance or outward behavior are reliable indicators of character, as the conduct literature seems to intimate, then accurately assessing another person's motives or intentions—fraudulent, sincere, honorable or devious—seems an impossibility. In such an environment, the possibility of fraud is everywhere.

The ubiquity of fraud in *Rose Clark* taps into a larger cultural obsession with hoaxes and trickery in the mid-19th century. Lukas Rieppel acknowledges the outsized role fraud played in 19th century entertainment, arguing the popularity of "stories regarding the difficulty of distinguishing truth from untruth" (501). More significantly, Rieppel sees the way that fraud functions to determine who gets to know things and how that knowledge can be deployed: "the authority to demarcate truth from falsehood…imparts immense *social* power. To know something is not just to have access to the truth, but to have the community sanction such access as genuine and worthy of recognition" (528-529). Truth,

then, is socially constructed, since the community that holds such social power can decide what is true and what is false such that it retains power. While Rieppel is writing in the context of 19th century scientific communities' policing of quackery, the notion of community-sanctioned knowledge is resonant for women and marriage, where the community can either sanction or censure particularly women's sexual activity. A young woman who claims to be married does not have the requisite social power to prove that claim true without the corroboration of a more authoritative, and therefore knowledgeable, voice.

In *Rose Clark*, the authority to distinguish truth from falsehood and to have the community sanction that truth is contested in ways that bring women's vulnerability in marriage sharply into focus. As I will discuss in the next section, Rose does not directly assert the truth of her marriage for most of the novel; while it is clear that she believes herself to be married, the reader hears only secondhand the opinions of the community around her regarding her history and the stories of Vincent's deceitful conquests. Most remarkably, her own experience of courtship, marriage, and childbirth is irrelevant in deciding her status: by herself, she has no say in constructing her narrative. As such, in Rieppel's formulation Rose has no social power, a fact reflected in the indirect circulation of texts around Rose but never issuing directly from her. She is a woman who trusted a lover, which in Fern's estimation is a vulnerable figure indeed.

While Rieppel writes about anxiety and its causes and effects surrounding fraud as the basis for inclusion or exclusion from communities, Lara Langer Cohen sees fraudulence as the defining concern of antebellum American literature, arguing that literature could not simply have recorded the century's obsession with fraud and humbug without at the same

time participating in it. She contends that "the primary threat faced by literature in the antebellum United States was not fraud, such as imposters, forgeries, plagiarisms, and hoaxes, so much as fraudulence, or the hopelessness of distinguishing impostures, forgeries, plagiarisms, and hoaxes from literature proper" (2). This state of fraudulence has a material basis: as the print market became flooded in the 1830s and 1840s with "pamphlet novels and story papers" (11), these cheap formats that were most accessible to new categories of writers were panned by the literary establishment. The authors who wrote for these new formats were labelled "hacks," which Rieppel might say meant that the knowledge community comprised of traditional (white, affluent, male) authors was trying to expel them. Cohen writes that the struggles to define the value of formats of literature "are inseparable from the difficulties of assessing social status in a period of unprecedented class mobility, both upward and downward" (11). In other words, the new material forms of literature that proliferated at mid-century mirrored the social upheaval caused by industrialization; as a result, knowing what to read was as difficult as knowing who to trust.

Print itself is potentially fraudulent in the novel; specifically, the ability of the print industry to make many copies which then devalue the original text. Particularly intriguing is Fern's use of the word "stereotype" to mean something replicated so often that it no longer has meaning. Unlike the modern sense of the word, in the mid-19th century to stereotype meant to create thin metal plates from a page of moveable type in order to enable that page to be printed on more than one press; in other words, the stereotype plate was a copy of an original that in turn enabled the making of more and more copies. Fern uses stereotype specifically and copying generally only to describe the negative: in the

orphanage, the inmates are "all habited alike, all with the same listless air, flabby-looking limbs, and leaded complexions," (45) reciting pre-arranged answers to questions with "parrot-tongues" for the inspectors (48), and beginning their dinner with a "stereotyped blessing duly mumbled" (30). Fern characterizes the small town where Rose lives with her aunt Dolly as "doomed to stereotyped dullness," (96) suggesting that time passes in Difftown by duplicating previous years, rather than by moving forward. Later in the novel Gertrude opines that women who need work could offer their labor to weary mothers who are "over-tasked" and "whose annual baby comes ever between her and the bottom of the stereotyped 'stocking-basket'" (281). Finally, Finels, the novel's petty conman, writes to his friend a warning not to "prate stereotyped stupidities" while traveling in Europe. In each case, not only are the objects Fern describes mindlessly duplicated, their replication is a social ill: the identical orphans are stamped out of human misery like a chain of sickly paper dolls; the passage of time in the small town is immune to the 19th century's narrative of progress; the mother's pile of mending—much like the number of her children—reproduces itself faster than she can work; the American tourist cannot formulate an original thought[11].

That an author dependent on the machinations of industrial print for her audience and livelihood would cast so negative an image of one of industrial print's pivotal inventions suggests that even for a high-volume author like Fern, there is a limit to the

[11]Lara Langer Cohen notes Fern's use of "stereotype" in the 1853 publication of *Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio*, Fern's first collection of sketches, but argues that at the time Fern was writing, "stereotype" had already entered the language in its present meaning of "a widespread preconceived idea" (140). I disagree with Cohen's reading: in both instances to which she refers, "stereotype" is used to convey a sense of something copied mindlessly or to excess. "Stereotype" would not take on its present sense of the word until well into the 20th century.

number of copies the press can produce before the value is so diluted that the copy is worthless. This idea that the mass-produced copy is both meaningless and valueless is one that grows out of a literary marketplace seen at midcentury as dominated by women. Lara Langer Cohen argues that as the literary marketplace opened up to women's participation, the commercial nature of the book as commodity gave the literary establishment anxiety about class and gender distinctions around literacy and aesthetics. The market, in her formulation, thus became gendered: the narrative of the dilution and degradation of literature was associated with women's writing, "[placing] artistic integrity and originality [male] on one side, and commerce and imitation [female] on the other" (137). Women's writing was perceived as a type of fraud: women wrote by reducing men's writing to a formula and mindlessly repeating that formula without feeling or authenticity[12]. In fact, the more writing women produced and circulated, the more they were seen to merely "traffic in formulas" (139). Cohen summarizes, "According to this model of women's literary production, women writers did not so much produce as *re*produce each other's words, exchanging conventions and clichés without originating any material themselves" (139).

Yet, while Fern uses "stereotype" as a pejorative to describe meaningless sentiments or household chores, it is the predominantly male literary establishment—the editor—for

[12] Scholarship has long reinforced the erroneous idea that women who write do so by imitating men's writing without feeling or authenticity. Frank Luther Mott, in *Golden Multitudes* (1947) for example, dismisses E. D. E. N. Southworth as "incapable of passionate devotion to an idea" and as having "picked up all the tricks of the popular writers of the day". Further, Mott writes, her critics "compared her humorous passages to those of Dickens, and her work is full of echoes of Scott. *Ishmael*, her best known novel, is reminiscent of *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Her use of minor characters often reminds one of Cooper" (138). Mott's critique of Southworth accuses her of stealing the best techniques of popular male writers of the time rather than crediting her inventive and creative fiction. In this line of criticism, Mott's estimation that Southworth's sold more than six million books in her lifetime becomes part of the indictment, as though her commercial success proves the supposed fraud of her writing.

whom she reserves her venom. When Rose suggests to Gertrude that she will write a book in order to support herself, Gertrude discourages her, saying that Rose would open herself up to criticism from editors, none of whom would review her book on its merits—even if it was "a *good* book" (246)—because it was written by a woman. Gertrude imagines the editor of a small paper recognizing genius in a woman's book and being so overcome with jealousy that he writes a misogynistic review; another editor will pan the book because he sees himself in a satirical character or to promote his sister's book. In short, Rose's imagined book—much like her contested marriage—would not be faithfully represented by the male literary establishment because as a woman she has no authority to demand such representation. The ideal editors, according to Gertrude, are those who not only recognize good writing but also offer constructive criticism, "who find fault, not as an escape-valve for their own petulance or indigestion, but gently, kindly, as a wise parent would rebuke his child" (249)[13]. Fern recasts the editorial relationship as familial, rather than commercial, suggesting that the familial would be capable of offering sincere advice and guidance to the writer and gesturing to the resolution of the novel in which not only is Rose's marital relationship restored, but she also gains the protection of John Perry, Gertrude's brother.

[13] Fern was no stranger to the misogyny of editors. *Ruth Hall* came out in December 1854 immediately followed the same month by vengeful columns by her former publisher of the *True Flag*, James Moulton, the sensationalism of which Warren surmises boosted the sales of the novel. These attacks were followed in March of 1855 by the anonymously published pseudo-biography, *The Life and Beauties of Fanny Fern*, which Warren conjectures was also produced by Moulton to discredit Fern. Moulton, a male editor, used his access to print a fraudulent attack on a woman writer's character and ability to be a successful professional in the new public world created by steam-powered print.

Later in the novel when Rose, Gertrude and her brother John have traveled to Niagara Falls, Gertrude again satirizes editors as she scans a morning newspaper, emphasizing the commercial and fraudulent nature of mid-century print culture. These editors write about human tragedy to sell papers or write sham letters to compliment their own editorial work, just as "transparent" writers "puff" hotels in "stupid letters from watering-places" (280) to pay for their lodging. These literary frauds Gertrude places next to Niagara Falls's commercial cons: "'moccasins' to buy from sham squaws—'stuffed beasts' to see by the roadside—'views of Niagara' done in water-colours, 'for sale' at shanties" (281). Gertrude is warning Rose of these cons that will result in the "depletion of [her] pocket-book" (281) in the same breath as she pans newspaper editors for playing to "the appetites of their various readers" (280) with exaggerations and half-truths. Rose, then, is surrounded by the possibility for fraudulent transactions and needs the protection of the worldly Gertrude to navigate the reading of the morning paper or a tour of the Falls. Gertrude, in fact, characterizes her own exposé of newspaper editors as "[getting] a peep behind the scenes," (280) as though newspaper editing is a sleight-of-hand trick to which she knows the secret.

Implicit in the depictions of writing and fraud in *Rose Clark* is the perception that the increase in the volume of print materials in circulation indicated a commensurate decrease in their quality. The conman Finels writes to a friend that he is not writing literature to make money because it "does not pay; for there has been such a surfeit of poor books, that even a good one is now eyed with suspicion" (273). That is to say, the fraudulence of degraded literature taints even good writing, and the consumer is left to discern the difference. But unlike later literary scholarship on the 19th century novel,

which saw women writers as the perpetrators of fraud through imitative and formulaic writing, Fern does not specify the gender of those writers of degraded literature. In fact, she holds out the possibility that Rose could write with real merit were it not for the discrimination she would experience at the hands of (male) editors whose motives are not genuine improvement or promotion of new talent, but base self-interest. Editorial practices, Gertrude—and by extension, Fern—seems to argue, need to adopt the sincerity and good intentions of the familial in order to increase the quality of books on the market, thereby also making better books accessible to readers like Dolly, who cannot discern the good from the bad themselves. Read in conjunction with Fern's critique of women's education as inadequate to the task of navigating a world of conmen and bad books, Fern here indicts both the production of texts and the production of readers and calls for new versions of both.

The Fraudulence of the Marriage Narrative

So far I have argued that Fern exposes her character's hypocrisy through their fraudulent relationships with things—especially newly-available, mass-produced commodities like the industrial book. Further, the print industry generally and editors specifically are positioned as potentially fraudulent throughout the novel. In this section, I expand Fern's critique of print to include the dominant cultural narratives about marriage promulgated by the capacity of the steam press and dependent on industrialized printing and mass distribution. Domestic fiction, as well as the seduction novel, shaped the social definitions of marriage and warned their readers about the dangers to be avoided in courtship, ultimately positing marriage as a reliable and safe path to the economic,

emotional, and sexual security of the domestic. *Rose Clark* undermines those dominant narratives about marriage by allowing husbands and conmen to circulate widely and freely, undetectably and with no guarantees of a happy ending—that is, in ways that neither the domestic novel nor the seduction novel can contain. In so doing, Fern illustrates the ways that mass culture both creates ideological cohesiveness and turns women into subalterns—unable to speak for themselves or to authorize their lived experience of marriage and motherhood—while simultaneously asking the reader to participate in the communal, mass-cultural effort to define Rose as faithful wife or fallen woman.

Fern's narrative strategy—the sketch—illustrates the ways in which her protagonist is silenced and unbelieved in the face of dominant narratives of marriage. Kristie Hamilton defines the sketch as not just "a verbal rendering of visualized scenes and characters," but as "short works of many kinds" that could be written "discursively, allegorically, fictively, psychologically, or descriptively" (15). Popularized by Washington Irving, the sketch became the predominant vehicle through which working- and even middle-class readers encountered literature, as they were printed in cheap story papers and magazines that remained more accessible than books at mid-century (27). Hamilton situates the sketch as a literary genre within the technological changes of the first half of the 19th century, reading in the sketch's conventions and material format a normalization of the changing modes of perception brought about by innovations like the railroad, the speed of which extracted the viewer from the landscape and "fragmented" the view into brief glimpses. She writes that because of the sketch's emergence alongside inventions like the railroad, "the literary sketch plays an intermediary ideological and historical role within the cultural processes that were already replacing the centered, idealized observer of a stable,

objectively known world with a decentered (transient), observing subject of flitting images and fleeting moments" (138). In other words, what was happening both in the technological advances in transportation and in the sketch was a change in scale: no longer rooted in place or fixed in time, the observer of American life had to adjust to the speed at which steam power allowed that life to move. This change in perception is the difference between walking or riding from one village to the next and looking at those villages from the window of a speeding train. The sketch, Hamilton argues, helps its readership adapt to and normalize the speed and brevity of the views they are getting.

As a sketch writer, Fanny Fern claims that she never intended to write a book. In the oft-quoted introduction to *Fern Leaves From Fanny's Portfolio* (1853), Fern objects, "What! *I,* Fanny Fern, write a book? I could never have believed it possible" (v). The book—her collection of sketches—grew by accumulation, rather than by design, as she contributed more writing to the pages of the papers for which she wrote. While Hamilton notes that the sketch was a marketable genre, well suited not only to the story papers in which they so often appeared, but because they made the leap easily from the disposable story paper to the more durable book in the form of collections, Fern also used the sketch as a narrative strategy for the novel. A reviewer for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1855 remarked on the sketch-like quality of *Ruth Hall*, writing that it was "not a novel," but "a succession of 'Fern Leaves, 'strung together on a telegraphic wire, and charged with lightening" (*Republican Banner* 9 Dec 1855). *Rose Clark* was received as more traditionally novel-like in form, but it too uses the sketch to advance the plot, creating a novel in which the protagonist is sketched and filled in from various perspectives and through the accumulation of opinions and observations, but does not offer her own version of events. The reader gets a

fragmented and secondhand account of Rose's life and marriage; Rose's narrative silence throughout the book calls attention to how powerless she is to insist upon her own story in her husband's absence. This strategy links the novel rhetorically to Fern's columns, which were sketches that varied widely in subject and tone and moves the focus of the novel from Rose's own examination of her life and marital status to the reactions and impressions of those that surround and define her. By employing this technique in the novel, Fern calls attention to the ways that women are subject to the judgment of the voices that define the mainstream—voices that have more authority to determine their social status than women themselves do.

Nearly all the information the reader gets about Rose circulates secondhand through a multitude of textual and verbal formats: letters between minor characters, gossip exchanged by characters who disappear from the novel, stories told by those who encounter Rose briefly or who have an ulterior motive in undermining her credibility. When Rose first appears with her infant son Charley, for example, the other characters in the scene speculate about Rose's relationship to the baby: "Wonder if that girl *is* the child's mother? Can't be, though…she's nothing but a child herself." The novel's narrator presents contradictions about her: "young in years; but old in sorrow--a child, and yet a woman!—a mother, but the world said, not a wife" (99). In this scene, Fern illustrates the speculation and conjecture to which a solitary young woman's appearance with an infant gives rise, making Rose's body and its relationship to the infant a text for strangers to read and interpret. The speculation continues as Rose enters Mrs. Bond's house, where her aunt Dolly has arranged for her to live, and is handed a letter from her aunt denouncing the "plausible story of [her] marriage." No matter what that story is, Dolly tells Rose, "It is quite

useless. I shall never associate with you" (101). In this introduction of Rose as a young mother, nothing is directly knowable: the carriage passenger casts doubt on the fact of her motherhood; "the world," rather than an omniscient narrator, says she is not a wife; her aunt will not believe her story simply because Rose is the one who presumably would tell it. These secondhand stories imply that as a young woman, Rose's account of her own experience is inherently unreliable. Later in the novel, the story of her marriage is circulated as gossip between two seamstresses, one of whom tells the other that Dolly pushed Rose out into a "great wide cold" world to attend school, where she met Captain Vincent, who "took her away from school, to be married, as he said, and then ran off and left her" (154). This edition of Rose's story has the feeling of something often-repeated, familiar to readers of the 19th century not only as gossip, but as the plot of the seduction novel, another text circulating the background of *Rose Clark*.

Rose does not contradict these apocryphal accounts in the novel; instead, her lack of self-definition creates in the text what Lara Langer Cohen, writing about *Ruth Hall*, calls "absences" and "strange silences" (146). Even in scenes that would invite self-definition, Rose remains curiously passive as others variously define her as a seduced girl, an abandoned wife, an insane woman, and an imposter. In one scene, Rose is trying to do her laundry while supervising little Charley, who continually interrupts her work. Rose wonders to herself, "Oh, where was Vincent? Would he never return, as he had promised?" (149). This is the first time she has named her husband, but doing so does not strengthen her case that she is a legitimately married woman as the reader has already encountered Vincent telling his associate that he pretends to marry young girls in order to seduce them. Saying Vincent's name here only creates the impression that Rose is another of his victims.

When the kind Mrs. Bond asks her wash girl to help Rose, the girl refuses because Rose is not an "honest woman" (150). Rather than defend herself against the accusation, Rose faints, rendering herself unconscious and therefore mute, passively receiving the girl's slanderous text without producing one of her own.

Even when Rose does assert her own version of events, she does so in passive and inadvertent ways. When Rose reads in the papers of the death of a man named Vincent L'Estrange Vincent, she falls ill and is attended to by Dr. John Perry, Gertrude's brother. In her insensible state, she "[talks] so incoherently" that he is able to discern her story of marrying Vincent and being separated from him; the story she did not intend to tell is exposed unintentionally, leading John to assume that she had been abandoned by a seducer. She does not offer him a lucid version of her history; instead, John offers her a "secret" of his own--his love for her--emphasizing Rose's inability to speak intentionally for herself. Further, Rose's revelation that her Vincent still lives and is true to her comes in a dream: she can offer no reason for her sudden change of heart. In response, Gertrude is "terrified at the idea which forced itself upon her: 'reason gone! Poor Rose!'" (297-298). Now cast as delusional, Rose still does not offer Gertrude or the reader an alternative version of events.

However, even if Rose could defend herself, her word is not enough in 19th century society to prove her marital status. Her pregnancy and child only prove that she had sex; on her own she cannot determine if the marriage was socially and legally sanctioned or if it was fraudulent. Unlike pregnancy, which is observable on her body, the social contract of marriage requires witnesses and texts. As a woman, she also occupies an unstable position in relation to marriage: she can be fooled by a man intent on seduction. Since sex was only

sanctioned within the confines of marriage, the sham lover may simply be seeking sexual gratification, rather than a marriage based on love and companionship; he may act the part of sincere lover but turn out to be "a hypocrite, and a gross sensualist" (*RC* 200). Further, because husbands are endowed with legal rights that neither women nor lovers are granted, all men transform into another category of being—the legally protected class of "husband"—when they marry. A woman cannot know ahead of time what this transformation will bring and so in a legal sense is always marrying a stranger. This epistemic uncertainty in marriage is at the heart of the many versions of Vincent that circulate in the novel: he can be simultaneously Rose's faithful husband and an unrepentant seducer of young women. Vincent's con, pretending to marry young and inexperienced girls in order to seduce them, is not only an extreme version of marriage rituals, it can only work because of customs that required women to marry with limited knowledge of their intended husbands.

The uncertainty Rose must navigate is in part geographic. Like the journey of Fern's columns from their native Boston newspapers to their national reprinting, Rose's search for Vincent becomes suddenly and bewilderingly unbound from the local as she leaves the good Mrs. Bond's house to search for Vincent "the wide earth over" (157). Rose travels without explanation to New Orleans to look for Vincent, crediting only a "magnetism which had drawn her thither." Each day in New Orleans, she carries her son and walks aimlessly around the city as the "great busy human tide ebbed and flowed past her," and joins the crowds "drifting hither and thither" (173) circulating with them through the city, trying to read in the crowd something intelligible so that she can be reunited with her husband. As she does, she is also a text being read: John Perry, who has met and fallen in love with Rose

on the journey, follows her in her wanderings in "a little disguise, false whiskers, etc" (169) to protect her from the throngs of strangers. Capt. Vincent, too, traces her movements in New Orleans, hearing her story from the boat captain with whom she traveled and moving in her wake until the novel's conclusion. The currents on which Rose drifts are as large as the newly connected nation; no longer just local, the geography she must traverse, armed only with her personal "magnetism," makes her search for Vincent seem hopeless.

Yet in this suddenly national search for her husband, some of the texts she encounters are legible. While Rose is watching out the window of her lodging in New Orleans for Vincent, a prostitute collapses on the sidewalk below; Rose brings the woman inside and hears her story of seduction through a sham marriage in which a servant had played the role of priest, and of hearing her new husband "plan with his servant to decoy a young school-girl to his arms, and blight her as he had me" (175). She realizes that she has been tricked and flees; with no options for reputable work, she finally turns to prostitution[14] to avoid starvation, encounters her supposed husband in the brothel, and poisons his wine. She tells Rose, "If Vincent sees your pretty face, you'll go down, too, but Vincent's dead" (177). Vincent's con game of pretend marriage is a story the reader already knows; the prostitute's retelling of it acts as a reprint to both amplify it and to remove it from its original context such that it appears Rose is the young schoolgirl duped by the evil

[14] New Orleans as the setting for this action in the plot would have held additional meaning for readers in the 19th century. Auguste Carlier writes in his 1867 book, *Marriage in the United States*, that "a special quarter of the city" (94) was devoted to the homes of mixed-race women who had "become white, or nearly so" (92) but were prohibited from marrying their white lovers. These women entered into "counterfeit" engagements—concubinage or prostitution—even as the men who support them financially go onto marry their "legitimate [wives]" (95). Despite railing against the racial prejudice that bans such interracial marriages, Carlier criticizes the women who consent to these relationships knowing they can never be legal and that the men will eventually move on to legal marriages and families.

Vincent. Rose consoles herself that there was "more than one person of the name of Vincent in the world" (180); since the prostitute is "half-crazed" (177), she is not a reliable source of information. The next day, however, Rose takes a scrap of newspaper—a medium so ubiquitous it has appeared from nowhere in her infant son's hands— and reads of the murder of "Vincent L'Estrange Vincent," a man "about twenty-five, of splendid appearance" (181). This retelling of the prostitute's story confirms the name of Rose's husband (itself another duplication) and changes the point of view to focus on Vincent's exterior "splendid appearance" rather than on his debased interior and the destitution to which his fraud drove the woman who killed him.

The textual evidence of Vincent's death causes the main act of replication in the novel as Rose splits him in two, creating one man whom she loved, and another who was unworthy of such love: "Rose's Vincent? No, not *hers*. The idol is dethroned forever: the Vincent *her* innocent heart loved was good, and pure, and true" (182). By duplicating him, she creates room for both stories to exist, admitting that he was a seducer murdered by a wronged woman while maintaining that her version of Vincent was "good, and pure, and true." This attempt to accommodate both stories makes sense given the broader backdrop of the 19th century discourse about marriage, in which not only did a lover transform into someone else entirely—a husband—but also in which women could through their domestic influence create a good man where none existed before. The husband, in both scenarios, has no stable interior that shapes his behavior or identity after the marriage ceremony; instead, he is a creation of marriage law on the one hand, and his wife's domestic influence on the other. *Rose Clark* takes these cultural strands to their illogical endpoint and creates

two versions of the same man, thus highlighting the absurdity of both the law and the discourse of the domestic.

Rose's splitting of Vincent anticipates Fern's resolution to the novel, in which Vincent is physically duplicated into two separate men: cousins both named Vincent L'Estrange Vincent, one a corrected printer's proof of the other. The reader learns secondhand the details of Vincent's marriage to and separation from Rose and his long search for her as Gertrude relates the story to her brother, continuing the narrative strategy in which Rose—and now Vincent—lack a subjective self. The newly-married version of Vincent left Rose to visit his dying father; his corrupted cousin had him attacked on the journey in order to steal his inheritance. Badly injured, the good Capt. Vincent spends years with amnesia and convalescing before he begins to track down his wife and son. Like Rose, he "travelled unceasingly in steamboats, railroad cars, and stages; haunted hotels, haunted villages, and loitered trembling in churchyards" (348). He follows Rose by tracing the texts circulating about her: he stays with Mrs. Bond and hears her story of the young mother; he travels with the boat captain who ferries Rose to New Orleans and who tells Vincent he wants to see Rose's seducer "run up the yard-arm yonder" (324). All of the information Vincent needs to track Rose circulates second-hand, in the absence of reliable texts. Even the climactic scene of their reunion is mediated through reflections and representations, rather than presented through direct narration. Once in the boarding house where Rose and Gertrude are living, Vincent first sees a portrait of Charley and recognizes "his own eyes" in the features of his son; he then sees Charley and makes him guess his identity, forcing the boy to say what he will not, that he is the boy's "papa come home to see him" (345).

The effect of the many texts that define Rose is not to provide clarity, but to confuse and obscure the facts of Rose's history, to create a cacophony from which the reader must identify the credible or likely strands of the story and amid which the presumptions and prejudices that define women become visible. In forcing the reader to evaluate these strands and sift the credible from the slanderous, Fern creates a sort of epistemology of marriage, outlining what a woman has the cultural authority to know for herself, and what must be sanctioned by a male voice or by the community at large. Rose has faith that Vincent is an honorable man to whom she is truly married, but her belief in his goodness, and her own experience of having married him, do not meet the burden of proof demanded by a society that sees women as lacking the authority to sanction their own sexual activity. In the absence of her husband's presence, and therefore of his authority to validate the fact of their marriage, Rose is subject to the opinions that circulate about her. By making Rose right in the end about the validity of her marriage, Fern exposes how little Rose was trusted throughout the novel to be her own arbiter of sanctified or illegitimate motherhood,

At the end of the novel, John has transformed his love for Rose into that of brother for sister, and Rose and Vincent have agreed to share a home with John and Gertrude. Mrs. Markham, Rose's tormentor from the orphanage, is discovered dying in the street; John brings her in and upon seeing Rose, she begs for mercy. Fern ends the novel with the reflection, "God is just!" (355), reflecting the appropriate resolution for each of her characters. But while the ending satisfies the editorial demand to resolve neatly the action of the plot, it does not similarly resolve the weight of doubt and risk developed over the course of the novel. Fern gives her readers the satisfaction of a heroine vindicated but leaves unaddressed the larger cultural narratives of marriage as a stable entity or of the

gendered suspicion and prejudice to which Rose has been subjected. After exposing the ways in which the dominant narratives of marriage as a reliable and stable entity ultimately fail women by rendering them untrustworthy and unauthorized, Fern's thinnest of happy endings cannot overcome a narrative that makes Rose's enshrinement in the domestic the most unlikely of outcomes.

Marriage as Fraud

Fern offers two main critiques of marriage in *Rose Clark*: the sham marriage that is a fraud against a woman's purity and preys on her naiveté and lack of useful education, and the marriage without love that is a fraud against the institution itself and is undertaken out of economic necessity. In this section, I examine in more detail the sham marriage plot in both of its iterations and argue that Fern's inclusion of the many texts that define Rose and Vincent, as well as her emphasis on fraud and hypocrisy, allow her to leave open the question of Rose's marriage and locate an epistemic uncertainty at the foundation of the marriage contract. That both plot resolutions—that Vincent seduced and abandoned Rose, and that they are indeed legally married—are equally plausible suggests that marriage contains within it some inherent state of fraudulence. On one hand, if Vincent is dishonest in his intentions and has only played the part of a lover, Rose will not know who she is marrying. On the other hand, marriage law further introduces uncertainty by transforming a lover into a new, legally-created person: a husband endowed with absolute legal rights to his wife's person and property. Fundamentally, *Rose Clark* depicts the nature of marriage as unknowable at its outset and tasks the naive Rose with navigating that uncertainty.

The reader first meets Vincent L'Estrange Vincent after the scene in which Rose and her infant son are introduced and "[sob] themselves to sleep" in their spartan room in Mrs. Bond's house after reading Dolly's letter calling them "a sad disgrace" (102). The scene switches abruptly to an elegant "private parlour of one of our great Southern cities" where two men with "very white" hands, "whiskers in a high state of cultivation," and "diamond rings of the purest water" are discussing Vincent's sexual conquests. Vincent tells his companion that a "slipper of Cinderella dimensions" belongs to "the pretty boarding school girl. I really had quite forgotten her. I wonder what ever became of her? She was a perfect little Hebe, effervescent as Champagne, quite worth three months' siege." His companion responds, "'And believed herself married to you, I suppose?'" (103). This, then, is Vincent's con as it is revealed through various sources throughout the novel: he courts "primevally innocent" girls until they agree to marry him, then has his servant pose as a priest to perform a sham wedding ceremony in order to gain their consent to sex. The confidence game is too much for Vincent's companion, who protests, "shoot me if I could be the first to lead a woman astray" (104).

Vincent's con is both echo and amplification of sensational stories of sham marriages reprinted in newspapers from Maine to Missouri in the antebellum period. While sham marriages appear to be a relatively rare occurrence in the 1840s and 1850s, the cases that resulted in legal action were picked up and reprinted over a great geographic region, amplifying their impact not just to the modern researcher, but presumably to the local readers poring over details of cases that occurred elsewhere in the country. In one much-reprinted case, a teenager named Laura Harvey was convinced to leave her home in Rockford, Illinois "by means of a sham marriage" to George Lawrence; after the fake

wedding ceremony, Harvey and Lawrence were killed by a third man, who absconded to Beloit, Wisconsin, with Lawrence's money. While the Harvey case was sensational for its violence, most stories of sham marriages draw their tragedy from the paucity of options women face after being tricked into illicit sex. Mary T—-, an 18-year-old housekeeper tricked by her employer into a sham marriage, killed herself in 1848 rather than live a life of shame and censure (*Buffalo Courier* 12 July 1848). Another injured woman attempted to shoot her ersatz husband in the street; when she realized she had missed, she "begged to be permitted to kill him" (*North Star* 9 August 1851).

These stories raise compelling questions about the nature of the marriage contract in antebellum America and inform a reading of *Rose Clark*. In some of the stories, the defrauded women take legal action to restore their reputations after being seduced, bringing suits against the men who posed as husbands and the men who performed the sham ceremonies. In most cases, however, the only resolution was a legal marriage with the seducer, who was forced by a judge or magistrate to "[marry] the girl in a more acceptable manner" (*Louisville Daily Courier* 6 April 1860). This resolution elevates the social sanction of marriage over the long-term interests of those involved, anticipating the objection of marriage reformers later in the century like Lizzie Holmes, who contended that a man who would seduce and abandon a woman is not worth having as a husband. A marriage ceremony forced by a judge to sanctify illicit sex, the consent for which was fraudulently obtained, both enables the women in these stories to consent to sex and removes her ability to withdraw that consent. Thus, in both the sham marriage and the legal marriage, women's sexual activity is a matter for public judgement; a deceived woman

who believed herself married had no socially acceptable option but to legally formalize the fraud.

The criteria for determining the validity of a marriage were not a matter of settled law, creating the disorienting situation in which men and women could misapprehend their marital status. Further, those criteria varied by geographic region and thus required interpretation when intent did not align with authority. In South Carolina, for example, a man impersonating a magistrate performed a marriage ceremony which the supposed groom knew to be in jest, but the woman believed to be legally binding. A judge found that the marriage was valid despite both the lack of legitimate civil authority and the lack of intent, writing, "Any one may solemnize a marriage, and the mere declarations of the parties themselves, in the absence of any more precise testimony, is sufficient to establish the fact of their marital relation" (*Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 25 May 1859). Here, the "declarations" do not have to be sincere; the words alone are enough to effect a marriage. On the other hand, in New York, two "marriages in fun" were performed at a party by a justice of the peace who believed he was marrying the couples in earnest. Those marriages, too, were declared legal not by the declarations of the parties involved, but by the authority of the officiant (*Daily Constitutionalist* 26 February 1851). In this case, civil authority trumps the intentions or desires of the couples involved. The picture of marriage as a legal institution that emerges from the newspaper coverage of sham marriages is complex and contradictory, leaving open important questions of individual and civil authority to determine marriage validity, and highlighting the gender imbalances in the consequences of fraudulently entering into marriage and sex.

An 1857 editorial titled "Our Marriage Laws" in the *New York Times* illustrates the ramifications of ambiguity in marriage law for children whose parents are not legally married and for women who are ensnared by fraud. The editors write, "The difficulty with regard to any proposition for rendering more definite and certain the contract of marriage, consists in the evil often inflicted on innocent progeny by branding them as illegitimate, and the mistakes into which ignorant young girls would be often led by designing men, who might seduce them, under the form of sham marriage." Because of these dangers, the editors agree with New York's common law, under which a couple is deemed married if they live together and claim to be married: "cohabitation, and acknowledgment of each other as man and wife by the parties, [is] sufficient evidence of the contract." But the editors see the fact that the marriage contract does not require formal ratification or publication as an anomaly in contract law, since any other contract requires documentation, but "the contract which is to bind two persons together for life may be entered into in any form." Further, they acknowledge regional differences in the law: not only does the northern states' "publication system" to announce the marriage to the community and therefore solemnize it differ from the southern states' licensing system, New York City requires licenses when the rest of the state does not (*NYT* 9 September 1857). The regulatory issues the editors probe reveal that not only did marriage law vary from state to state (a condition which of course continues today) but the definition of marriage itself—as well as the method for authenticating the nature of a relationship between two people—remained uncomfortably ambiguous.

These questions, and the stories of sham marriages that both circulated and contextualize them, are at the heart of *Rose Clark*. In fact, the story of the young Canadian

woman with which I began this chapter bears a striking resemblance to the main plot points in *Rose Clark*, including the seduction at the boarding school, the potentially fraudulent marriage, and her subsequent travels around the country; indeed, Fern responded to other newspaper stories in her columns. In an 1853 a column titled "Have We Any Men Among Us?", she cites both a "Men Wanted" poster and a newspaper story of a woman who shot the man who "calumniated" her because, presumably, no male protector would step up to avenge her reputation[15]. She excoriates these men—editors, men who claim to know her, "milk-and-water husbands and relatives" who "force a defamed woman to unsex herself"—for leaving vulnerable women who appear to violate a gender norm. She ends the column with the assertion, "Yes; it is very true that there are MEN wanted," recasting the employment poster as a demand for men who will uphold their part of the social contract: it is not just laborers who are needed, but protection for women against exposure to scandal and censure in both literary and marital matters. The column further illustrates the reflexive nature of writing in the periodical press as Fern responds both to a placard she sees on the street and to a news article; these two texts inform her column, which itself is reprinted in other more varied contexts.

If Fern is indeed retelling and revising the sensational case of the betrayed woman who traversed the country to find the man who seduced her, and if her readers would recall the story from the newspapers, the effect would be to downplay the autobiographical element in *Rose Clark* after the publication of her semi-autobiographical novel *Ruth Hall* in 1855. As Kristie Hamilton notes, Fern's identity was revealed in *The Life and Beauties of Fanny Fern*, an unauthorized exposé, just as *Ruth Hall* was published, such that the novel

[15] Joyce Warren also cites this column; I am indebted to her biography of Fern for highlighting it.

"was immediately read as autobiographical and indicted for being 'unfeminine' both in its satire of her family members and in its indulgence in unseemly 'self-praise'" (95). Indeed, an 1855 review of *Rose Clark* in the *Weekly Indiana State Sentinel* claims, "The public understood [*Ruth Hall*] was simply an autobiography of the amiable Fanny herself, and they read it mainly for the purpose of ascertaining how many hard things she could say of her family" (13 December 1855). Despite the inclusion in the novel of a vivid depiction of marital sexual abuse by a man modeled on Fern's second husband, Samuel Farrington, *Rose Clark* was not read as autobiographical until Warren recovered the novel and identified Gertrude's husband Stahle as Farrington. Instead, the critical reaction to *Rose Clark* was positive: the *Buffalo Morning Express* writes, "A more beautiful character than Rose herself does not exist in English literature" (1 February 1856).

Gertrude's story is the flip side of Vincent's con: where Vincent pretends a marriage has taken place in order to gain consent to sex, Gertrude marries Stahle without love and is forced to consent to sex forever. Gertrude Dean's marriage draws, as Joyce Warren points out, on Fern's own disastrous second marriage to Samuel Farrington. Both Gertrude and Fern were widowed after brief but happy marriages and were pressured to marry again for financial security; both soon realized their incompatibility with the men they married and went through protracted divorces in which they were slandered and mistreated. Warren reads the presence of Gertrude's/ Fern's story in the novel as "[providing] the principle means by which the reader can deconstruct the cultural order represented by the story of the other female protagonist" (*Fern* 206). In other words, while Rose's blind faith in her husband is ultimately vindicated, the presence of Gertrude's story in the novel undermines the happy ending with a vision of marriage at its worst. While Warren is right that

Gertrude provides a stark contrast to Rose, I would argue that the very cultural order Rose's story represents—that of happy, monogamous marriage—is deconstructed through both Gertrude and Rose, as Rose's story illustrates how easily a woman's understanding of her own marriage's validity can be called into question and reveals the downside of the true woman's submission and self-effacement, while Gertrude's shows that consenting to marriage merely for safety and security's sake is a wager on shaky ground, much like choosing a book by its cover. These two stories present in the novel offer mirrored images of marriage, but both are predicated on women's economic and social vulnerability from which marriage itself can offer no guarantee of its promised protection.

Gertrude's story explores emotional fraudulence as another way in which marriage can be corrupted: a brokenhearted widow with a young son and no employment options, she marries Mr. Stahle out of economic necessity rather than love. After she accepts his proposal, she attempts to call off the wedding, telling him that "the marriage must not be consummated—that my heart was in my husband's grave—that I could not love him as I saw he desired" (198). Stahle responds "that [her] promise was binding, and that [she] could not in honor retract it" (198). Stahle forces the wedding ceremony to occur by showing her a newspaper announcement of their marriage, claiming ignorance of how it appeared in print, and pressuring her to marry him quickly in order to make the announcement true. Here Fern revises the sham marriage plot: not only is the promise of marriage the binding element, the announcement of a wedding that did not occur makes performing the ceremony a necessity. While a public announcement of a marriage was enough to formalize the union, Stahle's ruse again creates uncertainty about the constitution of legal marriage and unsettles notions of intent and consent to enter into such

a union. The text of the announcement supersedes in some way Gertrude's own volition: she marries Stahle in a haze during which she "was hardly conscious" (199), her action dictated by the text that precedes it.

Her marriage, undertaken fraudulently but executed legally, has the same result as the sham marriages published in the newspapers: "marriage was only the stepping-stone to an else impossible gratification." He married her for sex, and the fact that she did not love him (and indeed was still in love with her first husband) does not matter at all to him. She describes her physical revulsion:

> I was wild with despair. O, the creeping horror with which I listened to his coming footsteps! I sprang from my seat when his footfall announced his approach—not to meet him, as a wife should meet her husband, as I in happier days had met Arthur—but to fly from him—to throw out my arms despairingly for help, and then to sink back into my chair, and nerve myself with a calm voice and shrouded eye to meet his unacceptable caresses (200).

In this passage, Gertrude describes marital rape, a crime for which in the 19th century there was no remedy. As such, the fraud continues in Gertrude's "calm voice" and "shrouded eye," meant to disguise her revulsion and keep a roof over her son's head even as it represented to her a "bill of sale" (203). Her duplicity she calls "a sin against God;" further, it is one "of which every woman is guilty who goes from the altar with perjured lips" (201). Marriage without love is the biggest con of all, and one which marriage reformers would at the end of the century liken to legalized prostitution.

The legality of Gertrude's marriage soon becomes a trial since the law leaves Gertrude with no option but forbearance against Stahle's cruelty. As Stahle becomes increasingly jealous of his wife and tries to crush her spirit through mistreatment and neglect (much like, as Warren points out, Samuel Farrington's treatment of Fanny Fern) Gertrude knows she has no legal recourse. When she objects to his snooping among her

first husband's letters, Stahle replies, "'the law says you can have nothing that is not mine.' O, how many crushed and bleeding hearts all over our land can indorse the truth of this brutal answer" (215). Stahle's concern for his own reputation prevents him from abandoning Gertrude outright; instead, he tries to force her into behavior that would give him cause for divorce. When that fails, he writes that he has left "on business." After his disappearance, he continues to send letters in a "legally concocted" plan to leave a paper trail proving Gertrude abandoned the marriage. While sending letters ostensibly asking her to join him, he is "covertly" circulating rumors "by the underground railroad of slander," (217) such that the official, textual record is at odds with the narratives passed among their acquaintances. Gertrude, it turns out, is in a position parallel but opposite to Rose, escaping a husband who is using texts to perpetrate a fraud. By juxtaposing Gertrude's marriage and Rose's faith in her absent husband, Fern tests the limits of what can be considered marriage, calling attention to the ways that marriage custom and law sanction the miserable and fraudulent as well as the happy and harmonious.

Warren's argument that Gertrude's story is how we deconstruct Rose's true womanhood, that she is the shadow behind Rose's (rosy) faith in her errant husband, perhaps does not venture far enough. In Gertrude, Fern is offering a model for a new woman not just in relation to marriage, but in relation to the flood of information suddenly available as a result of the print and infrastructural innovations that occurred in the first half of the century. Gertrude not only extricates herself from an abusive marriage and makes a comfortable living by her own art, she translates and interprets for Rose, who has no such interpretive powers, the information she reads in the industrially-produced newspapers and in their physical environment. Rose is a true woman—she exists in the

domestic sphere, not the public sphere of print—and as such she is defined by the dominant cultural narratives around her, but she cannot direct or even respond to them. Gertrude, though, directs Rose's travel from New Orleans, where Rose had felt inexplicably pulled, to Niagara and Boston, where Rose and Capt. Vincent are ultimately reunited. Further, Gertrude speaks for herself: in a break with the narrative strategy in the rest of the novel, Gertrude tells her story in the first person and at length, defending her actions and her reputation in ways that Rose never does. In direct contrast to the true woman confined to the domestic, in Gertrude Fern presents a woman capable of reading scenes, print, and exteriors, and of orchestrating them as well.

And yet she, perhaps like the reader, is wrong about Vincent; the one element she misreads in the novel is the status of Rose's marriage. In fact, Fern does not present the solution to Rose's marital puzzle until the penultimate chapter of the novel, refusing to draw back the curtain on Vincent's con even though she does so for every other fraud in the book. In all the other instances of deception and fraud, her characters' hypocrisy and deceit are exposed because Fern presents both sides—we see in his letters Finels's intention to flatter Dolly for his own gain and in Dolly's responses her susceptibility to that flattery; we see Mrs. Markham's greed and cruelty and the determined blindness of the orphanage committee. The readers' inclusion in these frauds highlights the marriage plot as the one exception: we do not know the answer to the question of Rose's marriage because the answer is not knowable, at least not from observation of surfaces and manners. In other words, all frauds are legible except the marriage plot. In this way, marriage reflects the dual nature of the book, whose internal reality may or may not match its external appearance. Through her narrative alongside her in-depth experience with the

publishing industry, Fern crafts a critique of the normative literary interiors of published texts about marriage just as important as those being debated by her contemporaries about the relationship of cover to text, suggesting that the uncertain relation between the material covers and insides of books is matched by the potential for unreliability and even fraudulence in dominant narratives both literary and social about marriage as a stable sanctuary for women.

Conclusion

In *Rose Clark*, Fern creates a novel in which not only does she duplicate her protagonist's husband, separating him into two men who represent the ideal suitor and the shadowy seducer who can circulate undetected in the spaces created by mainstream ideas about marriage, she duplicates her protagonist as well. In Rose and Gertrude the reader is presented with two versions of the ideal woman: one created by the discourse of true womanhood and limited to an uncritical faith in marriage as an institution, and the other an independent woman able to read and navigate the changing landscape of industrialized print. In a way Fern fractures her characters into their component parts—the fraudulent and the sincere, the mass-cultural and the individual—just as she fractures the narrative of marriage, revealing the instability and uncertainty at the heart of the institution most constitutive of American culture. That instability is articulated in Fern's narrative voice, itself fractured into the many voices and hegemonic narratives that define Rose.

Ultimately, *Rose Clark* offers a critique of marriage that could not have been written at any moment in US print history prior to the rise and dominance of the steam press and the joining of local print networks by infrastructural improvements. Trish Loughran argues

in *The Republic in Print* that in the first half of the 19th century, as the capacity for print increased and transportation technology created the possibility of a national media from what had been local communication networks, the previously insular, regional voices came into contact—and conflict—with one another. She challenges Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community linked by literature and the newspaper, arguing that the Civil War was the inevitable result of the "sustained contact" of many regional voices espousing radically different ideologies (23). Prior to the moment when "internal improvements finally trumped geography," the idea of the United States was "based largely on ignorance and miscommunication, producing in turn a union untested by the pressures of actual contact or sustained exchange" (23-24). In other words, the idea of the United States as an imagined community only worked when it was only imagined. Rather than enable a cohesive national literature, the new technology joining the nation textually and spatially exposed its fault lines.

In *Rose Clark*, the dynamic Loughran describes of many texts leading to conflicting ideologies is apparent as the many voices that describe Rose give contradictory and inaccurate accounts. For Fern, most contradictory of all is the metanarrative of marriage manufactured by the mainstream presses that described it as more safe and settled than it was in practice, given differing local laws, access to public manipulations of women's reputations and action in print, and the ability of men to circulate freely and to have sex without sanction even as women could be disbelieved and sanctioned at all turns. With her extensive knowledge of the print industry and editorial practices, Fern has extraordinary insight into the manufacture of national narratives of marriage and gender; in Rose and Gertrude she offers her readers a clear choice in how they internalize and act upon that

dominant narrative. For Rose, the cultural compulsion to marry results in years of suffering and silence in which she cannot authorize her own experience, only to be re-enshrined through coincidence and luck in a domestic space where she will again lack an agentive self. Gertrude presents another option altogether: a woman able to critically evaluate print and the processes that produce it, who can support herself by her own talents, and who can recognize as fraudulent the narratives manufactured by the steam presses.

Chapter Three: Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and the Stereotype Plate

Introduction

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs's narrator, Linda Brent, discovers her young daughter asleep in the crawl space underneath the plantation home of the son of the book's antagonist, Dr. Flint. Linda has been sent to work on the plantation, away from the protection of her grandmother, as punishment for her refusal to consent to Dr. Flint's relentless sexual harassment. As she works to prepare the house for the arrival of Mr. Flint's new bride, Linda must neglect her daughter, who eventually cries herself to sleep in the dark space under the house. This image of the neglected Black child under the foundation of the white domestic space is a compelling one: in it Jacobs encapsulates the ways in which slavery both supports and undermines white notions of womanhood and marriage while it denies Black women entry to domestic spaces and definitions of womanhood. As I discussed in Chapter 1, marriage can be seen as the organizing principle of American society in the 19th century, allowing for the replication of the domestic household and its nuclear family as the country expanded westward. But that replication was racially based, dependent not only on the removal of indigenous people and the seizure of tribal lands, but also on the labor of enslaved Africans and Black Americans who worked the plantations and built the white domestic spaces. Jacobs, in the image of her young daughter neglected and asleep under the house, indicts the system of slavery that replicates the white American family on the bodies of Black women. In *Incidents*, Jacobs critiques her own exclusion from marriage and its legal advantages, but her main appeal to her audience of white, Northern women centers around the corrupting influence of slavery

on white marriage and motherhood, neither of which can perform the work of civilizing and nation-building until slavery is abolished.

Jacobs's critique is economic as much as social. Without the legal protection of marriage, the Black enslaved woman is reduced to a bearer of capital in the form of children, and that capital can be bought, sold, or willed by its own father, who is not recognized under the law as a parent. Thus, the capitalist market intrudes into the Black woman's intimate relationships, forcing her exposure on the auction block to raise funds or settle debts and tallying her worth only in terms of the capacity for work, reproduction, and sale. In contrast to the white woman, who at least in theory is protected from the realities of capitalism by marriage and her enshrinement in the domestic, the Black woman cannot shield herself from the multiple threats of sale or her engagement with the world in fundamentally economic terms. The sale by a white man of his own children, conceived in rape and borne by enslaved women he purports to own, is the sin by which Jacobs makes her strongest appeal to her white, female, Northern audience.

My consideration of marriage and economics in Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* encompasses her text as well as its publication. Jacobs sets up an economic model in the book that allows free and enslaved Blacks to purchase themselves or loved ones out of slavery using cash accumulated through extra work. This model gestures "outside the text" (LeRoy-Frazier 158) to the process by which Jacobs was able to print her book through her purchase of its stereotype printing plates, an act of literary agency performed by several prominent Black authors of the antebellum period. In this chapter, I argue that Jacobs's ownership of the material form of her text is the ultimate result of her exclusion from the institution of marriage: without the protections that normally shielded women

from economic realities in the 19th century, Jacobs was forced to participate in a system in which she had to purchase her freedom, literally and literarily.

Marriage in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Since Jean Fagan Yellin's work in the 1980s to recover *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and establish Jacobs as its author, much has been written on the text. In this scholarship, two common emphases are discernible: Jacobs's frank discussion of her sexual history and her deliberate choice to enter a sexual relationship with Mr. Sands; and the seven years Jacobs spends in hiding in a garret above her grandmother's storeroom as part of her long escape from slavery. For example, Patricia Hopkins examines Jacobs's sexual harassment at the hands of Dr. Flint, the book's antagonist, arguing that Black women are not "read" on their own in terms of violence, but are always understood in the context of either Black men or white women: "when sexual exploitation is discussed, the images of the virtuous white female victim or the tortured black male body overshadow that of the black female body" (5). Stephanie Li argues that in the character of Linda Brent, Jacobs constructs a narrator whose sole motivation is motherhood as a way to bridge the gap between her own experiences and political stances, and those of her white, Northern, female readers, and to erase other potential and complicated motivations for her actions, such as sexual desire or ambition. Miranda Green-Barteet uses the idea of interstitial spaces as a theoretical framework for her reading of both Jacobs's literal space in her garret and her metaphoric space as a Black female author. The interstitial space of the garret allows Jacobs's narrator to be both unseen and seeing; further, Green-Barteet argues, Jacobs's

entire narrative is an interstitial space because it "is an in-between location, arguably more public than private, in which she is able to discuss private matters such as motherhood, sexuality, and abuse, in a public forum" (55). Georgia Kreiger argues that Linda Brent "plays dead" in the book when she chooses "entombment" in her grandmother's garret in order to "save her life and reputation in the North" (607).

Fewer scholars have addressed marriage in *Incidents*, perhaps because Jacobs herself never married and her text presents no legally recognized marriages among the book's Black Southern characters. While some characters consider themselves married, none of the marriages are depicted as intact nuclear families. Linda's parents were married, but both are dead; her grandmother had seven children, but there is no mention of her husband, although scholars have suggested that Jacobs's grandfather was likely a white slave owner. Linda's aunt, Nancy, is married, but her husband is a "seafaring man" and is not present for most of the text. In fact, the only Black married couple living in a shared domestic space is the Reverend Durham and his wife, whom Linda meets in Philadelphia after she has escaped slavery. But the lack of legally recognized slave marriages in the text does not render marriage invisible or irrelevant in Jacobs's construction of her autobiography. In fact, her exclusion from marriage and its ability to normalize and stabilize family relationships encapsulates her social position as both a woman and a fungible asset in the capitalist system of slavery. The conspicuous absence of marriage among the book's Black Southern characters also creates the opportunity to recognize the many forms slave unions and economies took in the antebellum period as a consequence of their exclusion from legal status.

In her essay "Blacks of the Marrying Kind," Ann duCille argues against the surety of knowledge about the intimate lives of enslaved Black Americans portrayed in historical and official writing in the 19th and 20th centuries and for a more nuanced approach to imagining issues of love, marriage, and sexuality that is grounded in an evolving understanding of history but able to imaginatively read the absences and erasures in the archive. DuCille's reading of Jacobs focuses on the "undertells" in the text: places in the narration that shift the locus of sexual abuse to another body or in which the narrative is silent because Jacobs cannot describe her own abuse to the reader. These silences in the firsthand accounts lead historians to an over-reliance on slave law and other official sources for an account of slave life; revisionist histories of the 20th century "sought to expose the brutal, dehumanizing effects of the system [of slavery] and their destabilizing impact on marital and family relations" (43). Out of that scholarship came a persistent narrative of dysfunctional Black families in which angry women headed households and emasculated Black men, leading to a picture of the Black family as one in which "black women ruled the roost in slavery and in freedom and indiscriminately populated the country with hordes of mostly fatherless children" (51). For duCille, seeing past the official history of Black marriage and family in the time of slavery means a return to the silences and undertells of writing like Jacobs's.

Tera Hunter, in her 2017 history *Bound in Wedlock*, argues that laws enacted in colonial America ensured that Africans and later African Americans could not achieve the same economic or domestic footing as their English counterparts. Colonies began legislating the marital options of Africans with a 1643 law that required a tax on the labor

of Black women, which "stigmatized black women's bodies as constitutionally different [because of their capacity for labor] and amenable to super exploitation" (9). While white families were able to add the results of wives' or daughters' labor to their wealth, Black women—and their ability to marry and establish their own households—were held back by additional financial requirements. Hunter further argues that the colonies' ownership of Black women's labor led directly to legislating ownership of Black women's children: by 1662, Virginia codified slave status in the body of the mother, ensuring that slave women would bear children into slavery and "[removing] any possibility that black women could resort to the law for protection against the sexual predations of white men" (10). These two foundational moves developed into a legal system of slavery in which Black family relationships were imperiled by economic hurdles, sexual exploitation by slave owners, and the threat of family disintegration through the sale of its members. By the 19th century, slave marriages were illegal because slaves' status as chattel granted their owners authority over their relationships and reproduction. As Hunter summarizes, "Slavery could not be reconciled with the pledge of exclusivity and permanence of legal marriage" (12).

Under slavery's legal system Black enslaved women could only give birth to enslaved children. According to Jennifer L. Morgan, the knowledge that their children were enslaved even before their conception created an ontological framework in which enslavement was permanent and thus distinguishable from indentured servitude or other forms of forced labor. Morgan claims that women's "reproductive lives were at the heart of the entire venture of racial slavery" (4) and as such, their history illustrates the "connections between commodification, production, and reproduction" (6). As Morgan phrases it, "all women must work, but some women will work forever" (75). Reproduction

was part of the work of slave women; their children, who inherited the permanent condition of slavery from their mothers, were the "conduits of stability and wealth to the white community" (83). In other words, the colony could go on existing as long as there was enough labor to maintain it.

Yet, the love of parents for children and the desire for stable family relationships are integral parts of the human experience; white efforts to regulate Black marriage out of existence did not, of course, mean that enslaved Black women did not want to get married and raise families. Frances Smith Foster argues in *Love and Marriage in Early African America* for a reading of laws "as evidence that something was being done so often and by so many that it threatened or irritated" those in power (xv); the existence of laws prohibiting or proscribing marriage among slaves can be seen as proof of the foundational role marriage played. Further, Foster links this foundational role to the existence of a "viable print culture" in Black owned newspapers and magazines that published writing about love and marriage, writing that reflected a communal belief that "love, marriage and family were the trinity" (xxiii).

Likewise, Jacobs argues early in *Incidents* that enslaved Black women fall in love and desire marriage just as white women do. As Linda reaches adolescence and Dr. Flint begins his sexual pursuit of her, she writes the "one pure, sunny spot for [her]" was "in [her uncle] Benjamin's heart, and in another's whom [she] loved with all the ardor of a girl's first love" (Jacobs 19). In comparison to the "unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of" (27) with which Dr. Flint harasses her, her first love is pure, a feeling which, positioned alongside the love she has for her uncle, provides respite from Flint's sexual pursuit. This first brief mention of her young love occurs in a chapter devoted to Benjamin's rejection of

slavery and his attempts to escape, positioning the experience of first love amid the ongoing struggles to negotiate the larger question of humanity under slavery. Romantic love, for Jacobs, is part of being human: by describing Linda's first crush she demonstrates to her white audience that slave girls are capable of the same feelings and desires that white women are.

Slavery denies Linda the opportunity to marry. In the chapter entitled, "The Lover," Brent begins by highlighting the futility of a slave girl's love by asking, "Why does the slave ever love? Why allow the tendril of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence?" (37). She answers this question with the narrative of her courtship with a free Black carpenter. Love is not racialized in the narration; rather, "Youth will be youth" (37) regardless of race. In the rest of the story of her relationship with the young lover, Jacobs explores the power dynamics that govern the enslaved Black female body and its sexuality. She knows that she would need to be freed in order to marry legally, but also "[knows] that Dr. Flint was too willful and arbitrary a man to consent" to sell her, and that Mrs. Flint will provide no assistance that leads to her happiness (37). She cannot be a bride or wife but remains an object of sexual control to Dr. Flint and a sexual threat to his wife. Dr. Flint limits her marriage options to one of his own male slaves, which Linda recognizes as continued vulnerability to his sexual pursuit. She asks, "Don't you suppose, sir, that a slave can have some preference about marrying?" (39), highlighting the gap between sexual availability and love in their respective definitions of marriage. Allowing Linda to be purchased, freed, and married would end Dr. Flint's domination over her and afford her self-determination and domestic happiness—something that Dr. Flint and the system of slavery cannot abide. Instead, Dr. Flint threatens

to kill Linda's lover, saying he will "teach [her] a lesson about marriage": (40) that lesson is that marriage is not an option.

The disappearance from the text of Linda's free Black lover demonstrates the precarity of free Blacks in the antebellum south. He leaves for Georgia where he has inherited some property from an uncle, property which represents in the narrative Linda's lost chance to establish her own home. Because of her slave status, if she had been allowed to marry, her marriage would have lacked legal standing despite his status as a free man. Freedom or manumission did not confer benefits of citizenship on Black Americans; in fact, free Blacks had no right to marriage in the South and often had to leave the state in which they were manumitted, or were subject to a heavy "security" to "ensure their good behavior" (Hunter 86, 90). Slavery was predicated on the premise that the natural state of Africans is to be submissive and dependent on whites; the presence of free Blacks in southern society undermined the pseudoscientific foundations of slavery. As such, that presence was highly regulated.

As a result of her exclusion from legal marriage, the Black enslaved woman has "no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death" at the hands of white slaveowners (Jacobs 27). As Hunter notes, "Raping a slave woman was not a crime, and avenging her honor by killing a white man was not defensible" (79). Therefore, the slave woman has neither legal nor personal recourse against the actions of white men. Jacobs illustrates this legal reality and the physical precarity Linda would experience as Dr. Flint's concubine; rather than securing her future, giving in to his sexual demands would imperil her ability to remain near her family, as Dr. Flint often sold slave women after coercing them into sexual relationships. Early in the text, Dr. Flint whips a man rumored to

have "quarreled with his wife, in presence of the overseer, and [to have] accused his master of being the father of her child. They were both black, and the child was very fair" (13). The punishment does not resolve the fight over the paternity of the child, and both the man and woman are sold to a slave trader:

> When the mother was delivered into the trader's hands, she said, "You *promised* to treat me well." To which he replied, "You have let your tongue run too far; damn you!" She had forgotten that it was a crime for a slave to tell who was the father of her child (13).

The crime for which the mother is sold away from her child is speaking about rape; the rapist, on the other hand, "put their value in his pocket" (13).

Even if she could marry her lover, her status as a wife would not protect her from Dr. Flint's sexual predation. As long as she is in proximity to him, she is in danger: "if I was married near home I should be just as much in [Dr. Flint's] power as I had previously been, —for the husband of a slave has no power to protect her" (37-38). Thus whatever family Linda would be able to create, with children fathered by her husband or by Dr. Flint, would remain what Hortense Spillers calls a "shadow family," living "in the interstices of the institution of marriage, or in the shadows of the 'official' family." Spillers asserts that the rape of slave women "was so common across the Atlantic world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that we don't even have a name for it yet" (Spillers and DuCille 7) and that the systematic rape of Black women and the existence of "shadow families" destroyed white marriage as well. She asks,

> Do we still call the Big House relations between a husband and a wife a *marriage*, and if so, what kind of marriage was it? Do we call the relations between husband and wife under these conditions love relations? What happens to our concepts of love and intimacy under those circumstances? … the whole social calculus comes under question when and where slavery prevails (8).

Jacobs asks the same question and extends her critique of marriage to white Southern women who marry slaveholders with "romantic notions of a sunny clime" (36) but who ultimately must confront the reality of the slave children their husbands father. For white women, marriage is the culmination of the ideal of True Womanhood: once they are established in a domestic space as a wife, they are able to influence their husbands' actions in the broader world because of the civilizing effect of their own purity, piety and domesticity. However, slaveholding men, as Jacobs illustrates, do not honor their marriage vows; their presence as the "third flesh" in slave unions corrupts marriages both Black and white. The civilizing force of the domestic sphere is powerless against the domination slavery gives men over Black women; as a result, the wives of slaveholders become bitter, cruel creatures, rather than the pious and submissive women white culture holds up as the ideal. Mrs. Flint, who suspects her husband is carrying on an affair with Linda, resorts to an increasingly paranoid surveillance of the young girl, often watching her sleep for any signs that would betray a sexual relationship with her husband. Linda's body becomes a perversion of the third flesh, driving a wedge between the white husband and wife. She appeals to her reader to imagine "what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you," (34) contrasting the genteel Southern wife among "the flowering vines that all year round shade a happy home" (36) with the nightmarish and monstrous woman Mrs. Flint has become.

With this argument that "slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks," (52) Jacobs appeals to her readers' self-interest, rather to their morality or sense of compassion. She puts children fathered by white slaveowners in the place of livestock to illustrate the degradation in parental feeling not in Black parents, but in white fathers.

When an enslaved woman bears children to a white master, "the offspring are unblushingly reared for the market" as more livestock to be sold, regardless of the feelings of the mothers. While the Black family is torn apart, slavery "makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and make the wives wretched" (52). Ducille notes that the "charge that slavery…delegitimized marriage and customarily broke family bonds was at the heart of the abolitionists 'impeachment of the institution" (29). However, it is not only the denial of Black marriage and the breaking up of Black families against which Jacobs writes; equally harmed by slavery are white marriages and white families, especially when white fathers sell their own children in the slave markets.

Yet, the wives of slaveholders can exert influence over the fates of the slave children their husbands father, even if they fail to civilize their husbands. Some women "regard such children as property, as marketable as pigs on the plantation" and sell them away from their mothers. But Jacobs offers to her reader as a model of the true Southern woman two wives who asked their husbands to manumit slaves they had fathered:

> These husbands blushed before the superior nobleness of their wives' natures. Though they had only counseled them to do that which it was their duty to do, it commanded their respect, and rendered their conduct more exemplary. Concealment was at an end, and confidence took the place of distrust (36).

Here, the ideology of true womanhood does the work of restoring the white marriage relation by refusing to enslave the master's children. Since by law children follow the condition of the mother into slavery, here Jacobs gives true womanhood and women's "superior nobleness" the ability to overturn two centuries of legal precedent by making the master's mixed-race children free. In this anecdote, Jacobs presents a choice for white

women in particular: follow the dictates of true womanhood and strengthen the institution of marriage or put children up for sale and allow the institution of slavery to destroy marriage.

But even this choice—to use the influence of true womanhood to secure freedom for slaves or to remain complicit with the system of slavery—is circumscribed by the legal nature of marriage itself. Jacobs offers another anecdote of a pious and kind woman whose slave woman and children, along with the free father, "had a comfortable home of their own, parents and children living together" (50), one of the few shared Black family spaces in the book. When this mistress marries, she loses the ability to treat the slaves well or to give them their freedom, and the slave family becomes the property of the new master. Marriage as a legal contract removes the mistress's ability to own her own property or direct her affairs; the institutions of marriage and slavery combined render her powerless to ensure the wellbeing of her slaves or the good behavior of her husband. The husband rapes the slave women and breaks up the family; the mistress, taking on the role Hazel Carby ascribes to the heroines in sentimental novels, dies of shame, "glad to close her eyes on a life which had been made so wretched by the man she loved" (51).

In her foundational text *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelis*t (1988), Hazel Carby reads *Incidents* as "the most sophisticated, sustained narrative dissection of the conventions of true womanhood by a black author before emancipation" (47). Carby argues that the stereotype of the Black woman as hypersexual, a willing participant in sexual relationships with white slave owners and incapable of being raped because of that implicit willingness, is not the product of slavery alone. Instead, Carby posits that the material realities of slavery worked in conjunction

with the ideology of true womanhood, which "[described] the parameters within which women were measured and declared to be, or not to be, women" (23), to construct the white woman and the Black woman as opposites. The ideology of true womanhood, even as it excluded Black women, was nevertheless constituted by Black women's sexuality and its perceived threat to the white social order. The Black enslaved woman's "reproductive destiny was bound to capital accumulation; black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves, and all slaves inherited their status from their mothers" (25). In other words, Carby argues that sex, motherhood, and economics are inescapably linked for Black women in ways that they are not for white women or for Black men.

The entanglement of sex, motherhood, and economics is most visible in Linda's relationship with Mr. Sands, the "white unmarried gentleman" who "expressed a great deal of sympathy" for Linda's predicament in the Flint household (54). Unlike Linda's free Black lover, Mr. Sands is not subject to Dr. Flint's prohibitions; white men's sexual relationships with Black women are not policed in the text. Linda admits feeling flattered by Mr. Sands's attention, but it is the threat of removal to the house Dr. Flint has built for her that prompts her to "[make] a headlong plunge" (55) with Mr. Sands. This is no romantic choice, but a calculated and economic gamble: she knows that if she is forced into a sexual relationship with Dr. Flint, he will eventually sell the resulting children. Mr. Sands, on the other hand, would be more likely to provide financially for any children, and she banks on his willingness to eventually manumit them. As Stephanie Li notes, "in choosing Mr. Sands as the father of her children, Linda fundamentally disrupts the power dynamic between master and slave woman and introduces the possibility of freeing her children" (22). The

affair with Mr. Sands would also serve as the impetus for Dr. Flint to sell Linda, increasing her chances of obtaining her own freedom from her lover. In fact, it makes Dr. Flint so angry that Linda is able to live at her grandmother's house with her infant son, and eventually her daughter as well, in the only domestic arrangement in the text in which she and her children live under the same roof.

Black women's status as excluded from the domestic spaces they worked to maintain was perpetuated by the notion that slavery was the natural state for Blacks, an idea repeated by cultural elites with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. In an 1858 speech before Congress, South Carolina Senator James H. Hammond crystallized a longstanding Southern political and social belief that "all societies had hierarchies between the elites and the less fortunate," and that those hierarchies served a greater good by organizing people according to their natural abilities, which were, in turn, determined by their race (Rich 15). In his address to Congress, Hammond referred to enslaved Black laborers as the "mudsills" of society, so named for the "timbers driven into the ground to support the plantation homes above" (Richardson *Letters*). What came to be known as "Mudsill Theory" held that Southern society's mudsills provided a foundation of labor that supported the elite white planters, who in turn gave the laboring classes direction and protection they could not provide for themselves (Richardson 34-35). By equating social class and race, Southern society cemented the social positions of enslaved and free Blacks.

Jacobs rejects the underlying argument that enables Mudsill Theory, that the Black man "belongs to an inferior order of beings" (44) in a chapter titled, "What Slaves Are Taught to Think of the North." In exposing the lies at the heart of the peculiar institution,

Jacobs traces the root cause for that inferiority: enslavement itself. In language that would be echoed later in the century by feminist and utopian writers, Jacobs argues:

> I admit that the black man *is* inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the North, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. *They* do the work (44).

In this argument, Jacobs inverts the logic of slavery by positioning the inferiority of the slave not as the cause of his enslavement, but as its result. She begins the narrative with the enslavement of Africans, rather than with African inferiority. Further, she argues, to categorically denigrate Blacks goes against biblical teaching: the assumption that Blacks are born inferior is a "libel upon the heavenly Father, who 'made of one blood all nations of men'!" The final prong of her argument against the notion of inherited inferiority is the most damning: white slaveholders have raped so many Black women that Black and white are no longer the distinct categories upon which slavery's social order can depend. Jacobs asks, "And then who *are* Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves?" (44). Her inclusion in the book of a chapter dedicated to the lies told by Southern slaveholders and her bold assessment of the results of white sexual aggression illustrate her need to correct the narratives that justify slavery by internalizing inferiority in the body of the slave.

Jacobs's corrections to dominant cultural narratives answer a call in David Walker's *Appeal To The Colored Citizens of the World* for Blacks to contest white narratives of their inferiority and to write new stories to "correct the false grammar of [white] language" (Walker 39). Walker's *Appeal*, written in four articles and published in a highly portable pamphlet form, is a sermon imploring Black Americans to recognize their inherent dignity

and rise up united against slavery and oppression. In Article II, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Ignorance," Walker rails against the disunity among Blacks that results from a misguided complicity with white power structures and calls for African Americans to embrace education and religion. He does not advocate for simple literacy, however. It is not enough to write "a neat hand"; as E. Jennifer Monaghan also notes, for Walker, the learning of manuscript does not qualify as education, since "[writing] a neat hand" (34) only allows a student to copy other people's words. Only composition, or in Walker's terms, grammar, constitutes real education and a real impact on the world. He quotes Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* as a testament to the power of composition and the printed word, citing passages in which Jefferson theorizes that Blacks are racially and intellectually inferior to whites. Walker argues that Jefferson's words have "sunk deep into the hearts of millions of whites, and never will be removed this side of eternity" (32). In an essay that places such a great importance on expression through the written word at the expense of manuscript, "the hearts of millions of whites" become the white paper that receives the imprint "sunk deep" of type, which "never will be removed." Ink stays on the surface, but moveable type penetrates the fibers of the paper to leave an impression of the words. He further calls the passage from Jefferson a "verse," linking it rhetorically to a Bible verse and comparing it to what his audience might consider an infallible text. Just as the chapters and verses of the Bible recount the creation story, so does Jefferson create Africans as slaves through his pseudoscientific analysis in *Notes*. Thus, the belief in Black inferiority is a text copied again and again in each blank white page; Walker's plea for

education is a call for Black-authored texts to counter the impression Jefferson's text has made.

Through their reproduction and dissemination in American society, these competing texts create a friction between the dominant ideology and enslaved and free Black authorial voices. Jefferson's assignation of Blacks to an inferior biology and intellect, and Hammond's social view of their natural position as mudsills, have behind them the force of amplification afforded by their social status and access to print media. Speeches on the Senate floor were recorded and printed in the newspapers, whose high-volume steam presses ensured their circulation far beyond the Senate chamber. Jacobs, like Walker, had far fewer options for the reproduction and circulation of their texts; in fact, owning a copy of Walker's *Appeal* was prohibited by law in many Southern states. As Monaghan details, Walker's *Appeal* inspired a slate of legislation in Southern states between 1819 and 1830 aimed at curtailing the circulation of abolitionist or "'disaffecting'" literature by imposing heavy fines, corporal punishment, jail time and even death for those who wrote, printed, or distributed it (332). Further, states began in this period to outlaw the teaching of reading to slaves and in some cases free Blacks, so that if abolitionist tracts circulated surreptitiously, they would remain unintelligible to their intended audience (333).

Historian Heather Cox Richardson notes that Abraham Lincoln refuted Mudsill Theory at a speech before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society in 1859. In that address, Lincoln aligns Free Labor with the future of a prosperous United States, in which the common man is educated and uses that education to work independently of capital. He describes the Mudsill Theory as labor compelled by capital, which either pays wages, or buys slaves. In this system, laborers are a distinct social class from the capitalists, and are

consigned to wage labor or slavery for life. By contrast, Free Labor proponents argue "that labor can exist without capital, but that capital could never have existed without labor." If capital is the result of labor, then "there is no such thing as a freeman being fatally fixed for life" to the class of wage laborers. According to Lincoln, "[the] prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself," then works independently, supports his family, or even hires others. Free Labor includes the possibility of upward mobility; Mudsill Theory consigns workers to wage labor or slavery for life.

The second thread of Lincoln's argument centers around education for the laborer, and again aligns Free Labor with America's future, and Mudsill Theory with an aristocratic past that the country has thrown off. In the past, the educated classes did not work, but were instead supported by the labor of a much larger class of illiterate workers. But Lincoln envisions educated agricultural laborers who demonstrate "cultivated thought" in their ability to continuously improve the processes by which they do their work, resulting in efficient farming that can provide for a rapidly growing population. Adherents of the Mudsill Theory would keep workers illiterate, a stance reinforced by the patchwork of antebellum laws that prohibited slaves from acquiring literacy.

In the context of this debate between Free Labor and Mudsill Theory in the years before the Civil War, Jacobs presents an image that seems to reject both Hammond's position as well as Lincoln's in the brief vignette of Ellen underneath the plantation home. Linda Brent will not be broken on the plantation and accept her place in Hammond's hierarchy, but as long as she remains in slavery, she is left out of Lincoln's vision of Free Labor: the "freeman" is not "fatally fixed for life," but the Black enslaved woman is excluded

from economic opportunity and thus from upward mobility. Instead of Lincoln's gradual economic progress through industry towards an inevitable independence, Jacobs depicts the slave mother dragging her imperiled daughter out from among the mudsills and sending her back home to an extended community of allies and kin who will keep her visible, and thus somewhat protected from the physical and sexual threats that surround her on the planation. For the Black mother, who cannot marry and provide a sheltered domestic space for her children, only an escape from slavery will ensure a future for her daughter.

In this scene, Linda has been sent to the plantation in an attempt to "break her in" so that she accepts Dr. Flint's sexual overtures. The plantation is owned by Dr. Flint's son, who, Jacobs intimates, also threatens her sexually: "He was 'a chip of the old block'" (86). Linda understands her presence at the plantation as an attempt to make her feel like a slave, rather than "too much of a lady," so that she will consent to a sexual relationship with Dr. Flint. Her removal to the plantation is an attempt by the Flint family to force Linda to take her place among the mudsills, thus perpetuating the economic model on which their survival as planters depends. She resolves to work as much as she can, to "appear as contented as possible" and "to seem calm and indifferent to [her] lot" (87), manipulating the family's expectations of her labor by performing her work well while contemplating her escape and secretly journeying home to visit her son. Linda does not relinquish her role as a mother; rather, she defines herself as not yet overpowered by the Flints because she still responds to her children as a mother should. Those slave mothers who were "broken in" could not protect their children from abuse at the hands of the master: "the mothers were so crushed by the lash, that they stood by, without courage to remonstrate. How much

more must [Linda] suffer, before [she] should be 'broke in' to that degree?" (87). Motherhood as a centering role for Linda keeps her from the despair and inaction of those women whom the system of slavery had defeated.

The centrality of motherhood is at the heart of Linda's rescue of Ellen from under the plantation home. After listening to the sounds of the neglected child "crying that weary cry that makes a mother's heart bleed," Ellen's silence worries her:

> I looked out, and she was gone. As it was near noon, I ventured to go down in search of her. The great house was raised two feet above the ground. I looked under it, and saw her about midway, fast asleep. I crept under and drew her out. As I held her in my arms, I thought how well it would be for her if she never waked up; and I uttered my thought aloud (87).

This image of the slave mother pulling her daughter out from underneath the foundation—the mudsills—of the plantation home is a powerful representation of the failure of political discussions of labor and class in antebellum America to consider also race and gender. Excluded from the possibility of living in the home she is compelled to maintain, Jacobs refutes the Mudsill Theory and Free Labor: the former because it is built on the backs of Black enslaved labor, and the latter because it excludes Black labor from the possibility of upward mobility. They both trap Black bodies at the foundation of society. Her answer is for Black women to take matters into their own hands—to escape—in order to provide a better chance for their children to succeed. It is an answer that resonates across more than a century of women since Jacobs who have endured hard labor and extreme risk to procure for their children the chance to participate in Lincoln's version of a future.

Ultimately, though, the book offers a tepid assessment of her success: Linda escapes to the North and finds employment with Mrs. Bruce, who eventually purchases her to secure her freedom from the Flint family, who has tracked her to New York. Her work for

the Bruce family does not allow her to "save a surplus," in Lincoln's words, to establish her independence or reunite with her children in a home of her own. She remains working for wages, writing her narrative "at irregular intervals, whenever [she] could snatch an hour from household duties" (Jacobs 1). Jennifer Larson argues in "Renovating Domesticity in *Ruth Hall*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and *Our Nig*" (2009) that the protagonists of all three narratives "successfully and …independently found freedom through work," (556) and therefore challenged the conventions of domestic fiction that assign work to men and domesticity to women. While this argument may be true for Fanny Fern—and Larson admits to making *Ruth Hall* the "central model of comparison for both of the black women's texts" (539)—work does not lead to freedom or independent domesticity for Jacobs, nor does it lead to the financial security emphasized in *Ruth Hall*.

Economics in *Incidents*

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Fanny Fern rose to literary prominence concurrently with the newly professionalized role of editor. Much like her own patriarchal relationship with Robert Bonner of the *New York Ledger*, Fern's white, middle class character Ruth Hall is shielded from the masculine, market-based realities of publishing by an editor who acts as both father and chaperone; as a result, Ruth's work as a writer, and the proceeds from that work, remain firmly grounded in the domestic sphere. Fern is a groundbreaking figure in the 19th century, one who shaped the high-volume periodical presses and demonstrated women's ability to earn money through their labor. In contrast to Fern, with whose family she is so closely associated, Harriet Jacobs is excluded from the institutions of industrial publishing, just as she is excluded from the legal and social structures of marriage. In order

to get her book into print, she must replicate the marginal economic strategies of her enslaved and free Black characters: laying by cash assets and using those assets in attempts to purchase freedom. By replicating this economic model from the text, Jacobs makes visible the ways in which Black labor creates stable and transmissible white wealth.

Jacobs introduces this economic model in the opening pages of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. She describes her father as a carpenter who was able to hire out his time and earn his own money, although for that privilege he was made to pay "his mistress two hundred dollars a year," and pay for his own food and clothes (Jacobs 5). Similarly, Jacobs's grandmother, Aunt Marthy, had a marketable skill in her ability to bake. She arranged with her mistress to "bake crackers at night, after all the household work was done," and sell the baked goods to women in the neighborhood "provided she would clothe herself and her children from the profits" (6). The income earned by working beyond what was compulsory is used in the attempt to purchase loved ones out of slavery, setting up an economic model that is repeated throughout the text, and indeed in the book's publishing history when Jacobs "apparently [uses] what was left of her savings" (Yellin *A Life* 143) to purchase the plates to her book and rescue it from oblivion.

The marginal economy of slaves has no guarantee of safety or security; immediately following its introduction, Jacobs relates her family history in which her manumitted grandmother was recaptured and sold back into slavery. While a cash reserve meant a chance to buy freedom, that cash could not be deposited in a bank, so a slave's assets were unprotected and therefore vulnerable to loss. Jacobs illustrates the risk involved in the strategy of "laying by" when her grandmother's savings, a total of three hundred dollars in cash, is "borrowed" by her mistress and never repaid, since "a slave, *being* property, can

hold no property" (6). When her mistress dies, the reader learns that the $300 was spent on a silver candelabra that her son-in-law, Dr. Flint, will not surrender as repayment for the loan; in fact, he claims that the estate is insolvent and that he must sell Aunt Marthy herself in order to raise funds. It is no accident that the money Aunt Marthy laid by resurfaces as silver in the drawing room of a white slaveholder. David Walker, in his 1828 *Appeal*, a text Jacobs was no doubt familiar with from her time working in an antislavery reading room, refers several times to the exploitation of enslaved Blacks who "dig [the] mines and work [the] farms" of white Americans (9). Blacks, Walker writes, "have enriched their country with our blood and tears—have dug up gold and silver for them and their children, from generation to generation" (19). The silver trade was a major outcome of imperial excursions to the Americas, enriching the Europeans and decimating the local populations. Silver mining was followed by sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean, propelled by the trade in African slaves (Coatsworth 548). The presence of the silver candelabra in Dr. Flint's house not only embodies the loss of Martha's savings, it evokes the forced labor of her ancestors and suggests a progression of white wealth- and nation-building from the exploitation of native people to importation of slaves. The candelabra embodies the ways that white slave owners were able to transform the unbanked assets of slaves and free Blacks into secure and transmissible wealth that perpetuated the system of slavery and ensured Black poverty. Against the weight of this system and its history, Aunt Marthy's $300 is lost.

Dr. Flint's sale of Linda's grandmother vividly demonstrates the enslaved Black woman's exposure in the capitalist marketplace. When Dr. Flint tries to protect his own reputation by "[disposing] of her at private sale" rather than on the auction block at the

"public sale of negroes, horses, &c," Aunt Marthy insists on displaying herself—and Dr. Flint's treachery—on the auction block before the community (11). She is purchased and subsequently freed by her late mistress's sister, who knows "how faithfully she had served her owners, and how cruelly she had been defrauded of her rights." Aunt Marthy's exposure on the auction block in front of a community that knows her, her history, and her work calls attention through her body to the injustice of reckoning the worth of a human being in economic terms. The incident also challenges the equation of literacy with superiority that long had been used to justify the subjection of Africans and African Americans in slavery. The mistress who taught Linda Brent her letters fails to free her, but Aunt Marthy's deliverer cannot even sign her name on the bill of sale. Jacobs asks, "But what consequence was that, when she had a big heart overflowing with human kindness?" (12).

The precarity of cash is one vulnerability of the economic model in Jacobs's text; the other vulnerability is in the consent needed from both slave and slaveholder in order to purchase freedom. Jacobs explores her enslaved characters' complex and conflicting responses to the prospect of being sold, pitting their desire for autonomy against the belief that their humanity makes them ineligible for such a transaction. When the young Linda Brent tries to cheer her brother with the thought that they are nearly old enough to "be allowed to hire [their] own time, and…earn money to buy [their] freedom," he responds that "he did not intend to *buy* his freedom" (10). This is a conscious choosing not to participate in the economic model of the slaveholder class that categorized him as a thing that could be bought and sold. Linda is pragmatic in the hope that she can participate in the informal, cash economy of slaves and lay up enough money to purchase her freedom.

William is an idealist: he does not appear to object to earning money; rather, he cannot consent to purchase himself. Likewise, Benjamin, Linda's uncle, rejects the possibility of his mother purchasing him in order to secure his freedom in New York. Aunt Marthy" had pledged her house, and with difficulty had raised money to buy him. Would he be bought?" (25). Benjamin does not object to the idea of purchasing slaves out of bondage but wants his mother to invest in her children who are still in the South, and who can stay with her. At this point in the story, Benjamin has already run away twice, spent months in jail as punishment, and managed to escape to New York City. He considers his freedom already secure—his mother's "hard earned dollars" should be used to purchase another family member. In the end, she purchases another son, Phillip, exchanging $800 for a "precious document that secured his freedom" (26).

Jacobs ends the chapter detailing Phillip's purchase out of slavery with the idyllic domestic scene of "happy mother and son … together by the old hearthstone" making plans for the future (26). Jacobs's depiction of this scene simplifies for her audience of Northern, white women the complex and threatening reality of free Blacks in the South. Freedom was not a monolithic category that stood in opposition to slavery in the North nor in the South. The purchase of freedom often was accompanied by the threat of forced movement as states increasingly required free Blacks to leave after their manumission. As Tera Hunter argues, southern free Blacks "encountered an avalanche of restrictive legislation, psychological assaults, and physical threats and violations that diminished their status in the antebellum era" (87). Legal assaults on the status of free Blacks included not only the laws that required them to leave the state after their manumission, but also yearly taxes to

maintain their status as free, and exorbitant "securities" "to ensure their good behavior" (90). Failure to pay taxes or securities resulted in periods of forced labor or a return permanently to slavery; paying these fines for freedom enforced Black poverty.

Linda and Aunt Marthy repeatedly attempt to purchase Linda's freedom from Dr. Flint; their negotiations demonstrate the difficulty of obtaining the consent needed to sell or purchase a body out of slavery. The threat of being sold is most often portrayed as a punishment in the text, as it is associated with separation from loved ones and a journey further south at the mercy of unknown slave traders who deliver their human commodities into unknown and perilous conditions. Linda recounts incidents in which families are broken apart for profit or punishment, or women are sold as a statement of their value after they have borne children to their masters. Yet Dr. Flint's refusal to sell Linda and her children, even when her family and friends contrive to make the sale anonymous or pay a high price, inflicts as harsh a punishment by keeping Linda in a position of sexual vulnerability. After Linda tells Dr. Flint she is pregnant with Mr. Sands's child, Flint presses her again to move to the cottage he has built and become his concubine. When she refuses, he tells her, "'You are my slave, and shall always be my slave. I will never sell you, that you may depend upon.' Hope died away in [her] heart as he closed the door after him" (*Incidents* 60). Neither an emotional appeal to his sense of morality or decency nor an overt economic appeal to his financial self-interest can overcome Dr. Flint's desire to dominate Linda sexually, or to exact his revenge for her continued resistance.

In her illustration of Dr. Flint's refusal to sell Linda, Jacobs is participating in the abolitionist debate over the practical aspects of ending slavery. In the industrial North, a fragile alliance was developing between abolitionists and wage reformers; each group

advocated for emancipation but disagreed about how to end slavery without devastating the economy of the agricultural South. Sean Griffin examines the overlap between abolitionists and labor reformers in the antebellum era, tracing tension between the two groups over the comparison of wage laborers to slaves and illustrating the role of Owenites and Fourierists in uniting abolitionists and labor reformers against slavery. The main point of contention between these two groups centered around wage reformers' claim that slaveholders had a right to be compensated for emancipated slaves, a view which conflicted with the abolitionists' belief that human beings could not be for sale. Initially, labor reformers like the Fourierists (see Chapter 4) acknowledged the economic impact of emancipation, and proposed plans for abolition that involved slaves working "extra hours for wages" to "[accumulate] enough earnings to compensate their former masters at market value" (253). William Lloyd Garrison criticized the acknowledgement implicit in such plans of the slaveholders' right to compensation, demanding instead that slaveholders "compensate [slaves] for the past injustice inflicted upon them" (qtd. 254). Griffin's argument outlines two main prongs in the abolition discourse: moral and economic. The moral discourse called for abolition because of slavery's inherent evil and injustice, arguing that no person could "claim the right of property…in the bodies and souls of another class of their fellow beings'" (J. L. Clarke, qtd. 254). The economic discourse, on the other hand, argued that emancipation must include the practical measure of compensation for the loss of slaves in order to prevent a disintegration of the Southern economy while depriving it of its primary workforce.

While Jacobs depicts slavery as a pervasive moral evil that degrades every foundational aspect of American life, she demonstrates the weaknesses in both of these

approaches to reparations in *Incidents* by complicating the notion that the sale of human bodies was motivated purely by economics. She depicts enslaved women sold in order to keep them quiet about the fathers of their children, mixed race children sold to pacify angry white wives, and slaveholders who refuse to sell the enslaved to their friends or family members even when the price is right. For the individual enslaved person, neither an appeal to morality nor an offer of compensation was a reliable or predictable path to freedom. When, for example, Mr. Sands attempts to buy Linda's brother William and her two children from Dr. Flint, he rejects an offer of payment far above the market value, choosing to act against his own financial interest in order to maintain his control over Linda. Jacobs writes, "If it had been merely a question of money, the doctor would have sold any boy of Benny's age for two hundred dollars; but he could not bear to give up the power of revenge" (105). Instead, Dr. Flint borrows $500 to pursue Linda to New York after her escape, preferring to take on debt to regain his control of her rather than sell her for his profit.

In fact, the narrative ends with a problematic economic transaction: as Linda is pursued by agents of the Flint family in New York, her employer, Mrs. Bruce, arranges to purchase her for $300. Jacobs does not frame the purchase of her freedom as sisterly or compassionate, but as starkly transactional: in a letter, Mrs. Bruce writes, "I am rejoiced to tell you that the money for your freedom has been paid to Mr. Dodge" (199-200). An unnamed "gentleman near [Linda]" confirms that he has "seen the bill of sale" (200), immediately making this private transaction between Linda and Mrs. Bruce into a public spectacle. Linda objects to the very existence of a bill of sale because it will leave a record of her status as property:

> 'The bill of sale!' Those words struck me like a blow. So I was *sold* at last! A human being *sold* in the free city of New York! The bill of sale is on record, and future generations will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion (200).

Here she describes her reaction to her sale with the same language she uses to describe Dr. Flint's violent reaction to her desire for marriage as well as his reaction to the birth of her first child: in the first case, he "[gives her] a stunning blow" (39); in the second he moves to hit her and "[she doesn't] know what arrested the blow" (59). The sale of her body has the same emotional force as the violence of a cruel master. Further, the fact that the sale occurred outside the geographic bounds of legalized slavery erodes the association of freedom with the North and slavery with the South. As Hunter notes, especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, skin color determined slave status, rather than geography. Finally, the bill of sale in this passage is reminiscent of Ruth Hall's bank note: a document which solidifies Linda's social standing as a result of her struggle for freedom and independence. Unlike Ruth's liberation from poverty, however, Linda's freedom is anything but triumphant.

After the initial shock of her sale, Linda reunites with Mrs. Bruce in an emotional scene: "the arms of my benefactress were thrown round me, and our tears mingled" (200). Yet the transactional language continues to emphasize the economics of slavery and freedom. Mrs. Bruce tells Linda, "You wrote to me as if you thought you were going to be transferred from one owner to another. But I did not buy you for your services" (200). While she is telling Linda here that her intention is to manumit her, there is no doubt in the language that it is entirely within Mrs. Bruce's power to retain ownership. She does not say, "I have purchased your freedom;" but instead in the phrase "I did not *buy you* for your services" emphasizes that she has bought Linda herself. Jacobs portrays Linda's freedom as

a gift of her white employer, who has "bestowed on [her] the precious, long-desired boon," (200-201), and again "has bestowed the inestimable boon of freedom" (201). The privilege to bestow freedom that Mrs. Bruce enjoys undermines Linda's joy and relief at her final escape from Dr. Flint, who "demanded payment for what never rightfully belonged to him or his" (200). Like her brother, who would not consent to be sold, Linda rejects the system that defines them dually as humans and commodities; like her grandmother, who insisted that the shame of her sale be made public, Linda makes visible the money and the bill of sale that finally achieve her freedom.

Marriage, Economics, and Publishing in *Incidents*

The two themes I have discussed so far in this chapter—Linda Brent's exclusion from the definition of womanhood and therefore from the domestic and institutional protections of marriage, and the contested notions of ownership resulting both from slavery's premise that a human body can be bought or sold and from the marginal economic model used by enslaved and free Black Americans to purchase loved ones out of bondage—reach beyond the text and into the book's publishing history, particularly in Jacobs's purchase of her book's stereotype plates as a way to bring it to print. Jacobs published the book under the same conditions in which she wrote it; the same prejudice and limitations she faced as a Black woman in New York also prevented her from working with a publisher or entering into a contract. She writes in the book's concluding paragraphs that she and her children "are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in *my* condition" (201). In other words, while she was free from

the particular oppression of Dr. Flint and his family, the systematized legal and social racism and cruelty of slavery was still the predominant character of the country. The shadow of slavery could not be escaped, regardless of geography, as long as the system of slavery was allowed to continue. Under that circumstance, Jacobs's printing and distribution of the book can be read as an extension of the text. Reading its production deepens an understanding of ownership and autonomy in the text. I argue in this section that given her exclusion from institutional protections, Jacobs's purchase of her plates is a reclamation of her autonomy as an author and an assertion of her ownership of her story as both discourse and in its embodied, material form.

Jean Fagan Yellin unearthed the book's publication history and documented it in the 1987 Harvard University Press edition of the text, as well as in a biography of Jacobs and an edited collection of Jacobs's papers. Using letters between Jacobs and Amy Post, a Quaker abolitionist friend, and between Jacobs and Lydia Maria Child, Yellin reconstructs Jacobs's decision to write the narrative and the travails of bringing it to print. Jacobs had offered to dictate her story to Harriet Beecher Stowe, who rebuffed her and threatened to extract the story of her seven years in hiding for her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. To retain control, Jacobs decided to write the story herself, keeping the work hidden from her employer, litterateur N. P. Willis, and writing "at irregular intervals, whenever [she] could snatch an hour from household duties" (*Incidents* 1) between 1854 and 1855. She could not publish the book without a preface from a known white author; potential printer Thayer and Eldridge agreed to take the project on only if she could secure an introduction from L. Maria Child. Jacobs used her connections within the abolitionist community in New York to meet Child, who agreed to act as editor and agent for the book (Yellin *ILSG* xxii).

Publishing in the 19th century was a precarious activity: while technological advances opened new markets and reduced some costs, with a few well known exceptions publishing firms were short lived and fluid in their make-up. Albert J. Von Frank notes that the book trade suffered a "near collapse" as a result of the Panic of 1857 and a reading public preoccupied by increasing tensions in the run up to the Civil War. He quotes Child's observation in 1860 that "'the market is now glutted with plates sold by booksellers that have failed'" (65). After the first printer with whom Child contracted on Jacobs's behalf failed, she encouraged abolitionist Wendell Phillips to use the Hovey Fund to guarantee a large purchase of the books for resale in order to make the publication profitable for Thayer & Eldridge, the only other printer willing to take on the project, in the hope that they in turn could be generous with Jacobs. In a letter to Jacobs dated September 27, 1860, Child acknowledges the possibility that Thayer & Eldridge might fail before the project was completed but explains that she "made the suggestion because [Thayer & Eldridge] were beginners" (280). This underscores the changeable nature of 19th century printing: Child negotiated the contract in September, by November Thayer & Eldridge was advertising the book in a "coming soon" spot, and by mid-December they were out of business.

Stereotype technology offered a way for Black authors to mitigate some of the risk involved in bringing a text to market. Black authors were particularly susceptible to the vagaries of the publishing market because of their need for white intermediaries and the refusal of large, stable firms to undertake their projects. If, as was the case with *Incidents*, a printer failed after type had been set, the author would incur the set-up expenses again with the next attempt to publish. However, once stereotype plates were cast, they became a commodity that could be purchased by the author or another printer, allowing a project

begun by one firm to be picked up by another without demanding a duplicate investment in typesetting[16]. When Child agreed to a contract with Thayer and Eldridge in September, 1860, the question of stereotyping Jacobs's text was not yet answered. She wrote to Jacobs,

> They ought to have the monopoly of it for some time, if they stereotype it, because that process involves considerable expense, and if you change publishers, their plates would be worth nothing to them. When I spoke of limiting them to an edition of 2000, I did not suppose they intended to stereotype it. They have agreed to pay you ten per cent on the retail price of all sold, and to let you have as many as you want, at the lowest wholesale price" (Yellin *Papers* 280).

Jeffrey Makala notes that by mid-century, many publishers included in their contracts a clause that allowed authors to purchase their stereotype plates after an initial sales period or in the case of bankruptcy, or to pay for the plates at the outset from royalties (176, 201). Child does not mention an option to purchase the plates; while stereotyping was a common and relatively inexpensive process by 1860, a small print run of a new author's work would not have been a strong candidate for casting in plates since it had no guarantee of needing a second printing and therefore did not need to exist in a permanent, static state. The decision to stereotype the text would have great implications for Jacobs as a Black woman relegated to the margins of industrial publishing: the moveable type arranged in the sequence of her particular text was ephemeral and subject to the favor or fortunes of the

[16] By 1860, the most common method of making stereotype plates involved the use of plaster, although paper mache was used for newspaper printing. In 1866, printer Thomas MacKellar described the casting process in *The American Printer*: the type is set by the compositor and carefully proofread. The form is then lightly covered with oil and then with plaster, which is removed once it is dry enough to handle and baked in an oven to form a plaster mould. The mould, which now has the impression of the typefaces, is submerged in a "casting pan" filled with molten metal, which forms a thin plate. The moulds are removed from the molten metal, the plate is removed, washed, and trimmed to a uniform thickness, and finally "boxed, ready for the printing press" (20-21). The resulting plates were lightweight, thin metal replicas of the surface of the type; while the plate replaced moveable type in favor of a static impression, they were themselves highly mobile, traveling from foundry to print shop, or being stored until demand was sufficient to press them into service.

publishers who agreed to work with her through her white intermediary. Unless the compositor's work was captured—made static and available for future use—she could not control or influence the production of her text and the circulation of her authorial 'body'.

Jacobs's book was stereotyped, perhaps because of the influence of the Hovey Committee, the radical abolitionist views of Thayer and Eldridge themselves, or the literary popularity of slave narratives. After the plates were cast at the Boston Stereotype Company but before printing had begun, Thayer and Eldridge declared bankruptcy, and "apparently using what was left of her savings, Jacobs paid half the price outright and bought the plates" herself. Yellin writes, "Somehow…she arranged to have her book printed and bound" (*A Life* 143). The title page of the original text includes no printer's identification; only "Published for the Author;" Boston Stereotype Company is identified on the verso. These material traces speak to Jacobs's larger struggle as a Black author to bring her text into being in an authoritative book format.

The publication histories of slave narratives have garnered critical attention in recent scholarship, largely as a strategy to differentiate individual texts within a genre initially defined by sameness. In their foundational 1985 study, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Charles T. Davis make an early argument for the importance of the slave narrative as the discursive forerunner of African American literature of the 20th century and give the genre literary borders. In so doing, they treat Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Jacobs's *Incidents* as representative texts and underscore what slave narratives have in common. The most salient element of their definition is the slave narrative's emphasis on the acquisition of literacy:

> Almost all of the narratives refer to literacy in three ways: they recount vividly scenes of instruction in which the narrator learned to read and then to write; they

> underscore polemical admonishments against statutes forbidding literacy training among black slaves; and they are prefaced by ironic apologia, in which the black author transforms the convention of the author's confession of the faults of his tale, by interweaving into this statement strident denunciation of that system that limited the development of his capacities (xxviii).

Literacy is a crucial element of the slave narrative given the long history of white explorers, philosophers, and statesmen claiming that Blacks are inferior because of their lack of a written history. "Learning to read and write meant that this person of African descent took one giant step up the Great Chain of Being; the 'thing' became a human being" (xxix). Against this history, "[the] slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to *write themselves into being*" (xxiii). Authorship is "an act of self-creation through the mastery of language" (xxiii).

As important as literacy is as a recurring theme within slave narratives, Gates's and Davis's definition leaves out publishing as a necessary step the formerly enslaved author had to negotiate. The act of writing is essentially private and can be accomplished by the individual author through the mastery of language as Gates and Davis suggest. However, the pages of a fugitive slave's autobiography do not create the Black subject in the public sphere until they are set in type, printed, bound, and made available to a potential readership. Writing alone is not enough; the private act of composition must become the public act of print, sale, and circulation. To bridge the divide between private writing and public publishing, the Black author needed to navigate institutions from which she was expressly excluded: contract law, publishing houses, print shops, and book sellers. Teresa Goddu raises a similar objection to Gates's and Davis's definition of the genre, arguing that writing is not enough if it cannot get into print; a focus on authorship but not publishing

"elides the complex historical conditions under which that authorship was produced" (Goddu 151).

Goddu further critiques Gates's and Davis's emphasis on the commonalities among slave narratives in their study, which had the effect of "[homogenizing] a complex tradition and [narrowing] the diversity of its canon to a few 'representative' texts." The impression this scholarship gives is that "to read one slave narrative is to read them all" (150). Goddu argues that the diversity of texts within the genre can be seen in their material histories; in a genre defined by the similarity of its texts, a book historical approach can tease apart individual differences by attending to the material circumstances of their production. She argues,

> Through its publishing as well as its textual histories, the slave narrative tells complex stories about the economics of authorship and the negotiations of ownership. Rather than remain a discursive struggle within the text, these issues extend to the publication process. The rhetorical restraints inherent within the slave narrative are often magnified by the economic and material constraints of publication (153).

In other words, Goddu argues that the publishing history of the slave narrative can be read as an extension of the text; the "negotiations of ownership" are both discursive and material. In contrast to Gates's and Davis's equation of writing and liberty for the slave, Goddu sees "a more intricate, and often less liberating, account of the possibilities for early African American authorship" (153).

For Jacobs and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the "discursive struggle[s] within the text" do indeed "extend to the publication process," to borrow Goddu's formulation. Reading the publication history alongside the book amplifies Jacobs's exploration of exclusion and ownership and makes visible the ways those notions are freighted with both ideological and material meaning. For Jacobs, the act of writing is intensely private,

shielded behind a pseudonym and fictionalized place names and hidden from not only her employer, but from Harriet Beecher Stowe, who sought to extract it for *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Under threat from Stowe[17], Jacobs demonstrates her ownership of her history by writing it herself, thus fulfilling Gates's and Davis's formulation of the former slave "writing [herself] into being". Yet that private writing is not sufficient. In order to engage in activism, to place the story in front of a public who might be moved to political action by reading it, she must also negotiate social institutions from which she is expressly excluded and for which she needs a white intermediary: law, womanhood, and publishing. Child acts as both editor and literary agent, and until Yellin established Jacobs's authorship and authenticity, was assumed by later scholars to be the author of the work as well. Jacobs's struggle with exclusion and ownership plays out on the title page of the book: "Published for the Author" is a statement simultaneously of exclusion and empowerment. No printer or publisher acknowledges involvement or takes credit for the material book, yet the book exists, brought into being by a "Slave Girl" who successfully manipulated the possibilities of print to produce it.

Because Black authors were excluded from the developing systems of large-scale industrial publishing, Black print culture in the 19th century utilized technology that allowed for the material ownership of texts—specifically, the stereotype plate. The stereotype, by casting a thin metal plate of the surface of a page of moveable type, created a

[17]Abolitionist Amy Post had encouraged Jacobs to tell her story as a contribution to the anti-slavery effort, and, at Jacobs's suggestion, had sent an overview of Jacobs's life to Stowe with a request that Stowe write the narrative. Stowe refused, and instead sent Post's letter to Cornelia Willis, for whom Jacobs worked, in order to verify the facts of Jacobs's life, including her time spent in hiding and the identity of her children's father. Yellin writes, "If the facts were true, [Stowe] suggested, she would incorporate it into *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*." Jacobs had never told Willis about her sexual past and called Stowe's behavior "not Lady like" (*A Life* 121).

lightweight, portable, printable form of a text. The technology was something of a Holy Grail for printers, who had long tried to develop a way to keep a press-ready form of books on hand; to keep type standing after an initial print run consumed too much space and type to be economically feasible for all but the most frequently reprinted products. The calculus for printers hoping to quickly supply the market had to balance the cost of space and type against the sunk cost of printing and storing unsold pages or the future costs of typesetting. The casting of stereotype plates, once commercialized in the first quarter of the 19th century, was a leap forward in print capacity that coincided with the development of steam presses and what Meredith McGill has termed the "culture of reprinting." This lightweight, portable technology provided an unanticipated advantage to authors who, like Jacobs, were excluded from publishing firms and worked with less stable job printers. By purchasing the plates outright, these authors purchased the portability to move from printer to printer, directing the reproduction of their texts.

In the history of print, this material ownership of text is unique to the 19th century and the commercialization of stereotype technology and is opposed to the type of theoretical or discursive ownership that is granted through a text's copyright, which normally privileged the printer, rather than the author. At no other point in print history could an author own the material embodiment of her text other than the sewn and bound paper copy—prior to plate printing, the moment that the printed book was placed in the author's hands became the moment at which the text was embodied. Plate printing created a material form of the capacity for print, giving the author who purchased her plates ownership of future printing ability more effectively than copyright law could ensure. Teresa Goddu notes that Lydia Maria Child owned the copyright to *Incidents* (154), but it

was Jacobs who was able to ship the plates to England for a second printing and distribution among English abolitionists. Stereotype technology gives Harriet Jacobs what she never achieved through copyright or even in the pages of her own book: reproductive autonomy.

The publishing history of another slave narrative, William Grimes's *The Life of William Grimes, Runaway Slave*, illustrates the critical difference between legal and material ownership for marginalized authors. Grimes published his narrative in 1825 and applied for a copyright for the text. Like Harriet Jacobs, Grimes was a fugitive in the North, where after his escape "he was still not free from the power of the slave system and the social problems attendant upon poverty" (Ashton 130). He was discovered in Connecticut and forced to use his savings to buy his way out of slavery through friends who negotiated for him in what Ashton characterizes as a "humiliating but necessary transaction" (131). As slave narratives gained popularity towards mid-century, Grimes attempted to issue a new edition of his narrative but did not own a copy of the book and was unable to obtain it from the copyright office in which he had registered it. He was forced to advertise in the newspaper to find a copy in order to update it for a second edition, and to incur the expense of typesetting in addition to that of printing. Despite Grimes's assertion of his "broader claim to his own self" via copyright (128), the ephemerality of his arrangement of moveable type and paper meant that he could not claim his text once it ventured out into the marketplace. The afterlife of Grimes's narrative suggests that Jacobs, like other Black authors who owned their material texts, was a savvy businesswoman.

The constitutive role of stereotype printing in Black print culture is made even clearer when Jacobs's seizing upon this technological opportunity and the alternative

economic model of publication it afforded her is placed in the context of other Black authors who owned the plates to their texts. William Wells Brown carried his stereotype plates with him to England, intending to pay his way as he traveled by printing and selling copies of his narrative. According to an introductory letter from William Lloyd Garrison, Brown self-financed his speaking tour of England, rather than traveling under the auspices of an anti-slavery society, "because he prefers to stand alone, responsible for what he may say and do" (Senchyne 140). Jonathan Senchyne links Brown's desire for independence from anti-slavery handlers to the freedom from heavy, expensive moveable type: "Brown can carry his stereotypes across the Atlantic and around England without remaining tethered to a publisher or a particular print shop's type" (142). Book historian Michael Roy reports that Brown paid $300 for stereotyping and printing his narrative; Frederick Douglass paid a similar amount for his plates (75). Similarly, Sojourner Truth purchased the plates to her *Narrative* from the printer, regularly reprinted the book, and sold it at lectures as a souvenir (Painter 473). Historian Nell Painter writes, "Sojourner Truth, acting as her own distributor and bookseller, was well within the bounds of ordinary practice" in the 1850s (473). Publishers, too, regularly bought and sold stereotype and electrotype plates; Jeffrey Makala demonstrates that the plates had a residual value after the first print run of the texts, and circulated in their own right.

All together, these pieces of evidence suggest that Jacobs was acting with purposeful agency when she bought her plates: rather than simply acquiescing to the bad fortune of a bankrupt printer, she pursued an established path for Black authors to gain control of the means of buying, selling and circulating of narratives on one hand, and of producing those narratives on the other. Far from being sheltered from the transactional nature of literary

production, because of her lack of an institutional or sanctioned standing in American society, she was a full participant in the sales, exchanges and transactions that bring her life story into the material form and circulation that create the power of public advocacy. In this act she lays claim to her authority as a producer of text and demonstrates textual ownership and self-ownership. To revise Gates's formulation, she publishes herself into being. In so doing, she thwarts the system that had defined her legally as a fungible asset whose bodily reproduction had been capitalized. Just as she took control of her reproduction within the text by defying Dr. Flint and choosing the father of her children, beyond the text she lays claim to her own reproductive capabilities by outwitting the systemic exclusionary logics of industrial publishing and commercial capitalism.

* * *

Nineteenth century print culture and publishing were dual edged, defining narratives that excluded Black Americans from full personhood and full cultural participation while also offering Black authors paths to print, paths to influence, activism and circulation outside of the sanctioned or protected institutions of editing and publishing. This includes the creation and sale of plates like Jacobs's on the margins of the trade sales taking place among printers and publishers, that at once provide her with a way to get her book produced and also highlight the multitude of print pathways that are foreclosed because of her race and the frank sexual history she writes about. It is this dual character—the tension between the productive forces of industrialized print and the exclusionary forces of white print culture—that forces Jacobs and other Black authors to

the margins, to self-publishing, to a system of book production and exchange that occurred in parallel to but separately from the high-volume steam presses and booksellers of the popular press. The result is a hierarchy of textual ownership that privileges the publishing institution by keeping its assets safe and forcing the individual marginalized author to assume the financial risk of creating a book as a commodity for sale. Jacobs's purchase of her plates ultimately replicates the economic model developed in her text: she uses her private assets—cash laid by from labor—to purchase that which the dominant system of oppression denied her. In the text, those assets were used to purchase freedom; in her publishing history, she purchases the ability to get into print.

This hierarchy of print ownership is illustrated in popular writing about the publishing industry, which offers a compelling comparison between authors like Jacobs and William Wells Brown, who carried their plates to England in suitcases and shipping crates in search of less prejudiced printers, and mainstream publishing's hoarding of plates as valuable commodities. Jacob Abbott, writing for Harper & Brothers in 1855, describes the electrotype [18] operation and the storage of the resulting plates in *The Harper Establishment*, one of a series of "storybooks" Harper published for young people. Most striking about the process description is Abbott's admiration for the volume of printing plates Harper & Brothers had stored in elaborate vaults as a sort of metal archive of past pages. Although printers of the era were most interested in the ability to use plates to reprint books without incurring the set up costs and without introducing new errors, Abbott extolls Harper's

[18] Electrotyping uses an electrical current to deposit a thin layer of copper over the surface of a page of set up type, or an engraving for an illustration. It was thought to be a superior process for creating finely detailed illustrations, and its development at mid-century cast the stereotype plate as a cheaper, rougher option, and may have contributed to "stereotype" entering common usage in the 19th century to mean a cheaply reproduced phrase or sentiment.

collection of plates from past issues of *Harper's Magazine*, a publication less likely to be often reprinted, as "rapidly approaching ten thousand" (102). Of the vaults Abbott writes,

> The vaults extend under ground for two hundred feet in length…and the shelves are loaded with plates—stereotype and electrotype—representing all the works published in the establishment. There is one plate for every page of every one of the many hundreds of volumes which the house publishes, making from fifty to seventy tons in all. When a new edition of any book is required, the plates are brought out from these vaults and put upon the presses. When the work is finished, they are taken back again to the vaults (102).

Here Harper's plates are a treasure, stored underground and carefully managed so that the correct set can be found and pressed into service to satisfy whatever need or opportunity arose in the market. Indeed, when the Harper complex caught fire in 1842, the *New York Evangelist* reported that "a large stock of books were consumed," but "[its] very valuable stereotype plates were not injured" (87). Abbott's description impresses upon the reader the size of Harper's operations and the depth of its resources; the vaults of plates are literally beneath the reader's feet, "under the streets that surround the building" (102), a material textual foundation to the discursive activities above. For Jacobs, though, just as there is no bank that can protect the slave's laid by cash in the text, there is no vault in which she can deposit her plates, protect them, and profit from them in the future; her exclusion from this system and its ability to secure and transmit wealth is complete.

Conclusion: *Incidents* in the 21st Century

So far in this chapter I have explored the consequences—literal, textual, material—of Jacobs's exclusion from legal marriage in an effort to read the material circumstances of the book's publication as an extension of the "discursive struggles" taking place in the text. When Jacobs buys her plates and directs the printing of her book, she is reclaiming a

reproductive autonomy denied to her under slavery. In this reading, her more recent publication history is no less revealing, no less relevant, than that of the first edition. With Jean Fagan Yellin's 1987 edition, Jacobs assumes a place in the canon of African American literature; her text moves from the margins to the center. The tradeoff for canonical status, though, is exposure and the loss of autonomy: Yellin's detective work uncovers all that Jacobs concealed and prints it alongside Jacobs's work, a move that directs the reader's attention to her story as incontrovertible and historical, much like the "white envelope" of abolitionist testimonials did for slave narratives in the antebellum period (Sekora 502).

In fact, few readers now will encounter the text in its material first edition, as most of those copies are tucked away in rare book rooms and special collections libraries, accessible only through their scanned avatars. Paul Eggert posits that it is only through the act of reading that a particular text is materialized; for Eggert, each act of reading by editors, publishers, reviewers, and members of a public leaves a trace or change to the text, and those traces can be recovered to provide the basis for new interpretations of the work. Those interpretations are historically situated so that the work is never stable or transhistorical: "The reading in the present is the only one that can absorb the context of the here and now" (32). Editorial choices color that reading; it follows that a 21st century understanding of Harriet Jacobs's work is shaped by its most influential modern publication, Yellin's scholarly 1987 edition. As an editor, Yellin makes choices in her representation of Jacobs's text and life in the same way Lydia Maria Child did nearly a century and a half earlier. Yellin's work was pivotal in identifying Jacobs as the author and establishing *Incidents* as an autobiography rather than fiction, as well as in rescuing the work from obscurity and ensuring its place in the canon of Black literature. Yellin's work

authenticating Jacobs's text made available to twentieth- and twenty first-century scholars an atypical slave narrative that foregrounds the sexual exploitation of Black women under slavery.

Yet Yellin's editorial choices necessarily shape and influence future acts of reading. She introduces materials that establish the historical identities of the book's characters and locations, including an architectural drawing of the garret in which Jacobs hid for seven years and a map of Edenton, North Carolina, where the events take place. In addition to her own scholarly introduction, Yellin includes Jacobs's correspondence and extensive notes on the text providing historical details from her archival work with Harriet Jacobs's papers. These editorial choices emphasize the historicity and accuracy of Jacobs's narrative for the reader, and have the perhaps unintended effect of deemphasizing the text's presence in the book overall. Jill Leroy-Frazier notes that Jacobs exercised a great deal of control over her original publication by limiting the number of testimonials and other authenticating materials: "the narrative itself dominates the entire volume as few other slave narratives were able to do" (158). In Yellin's edition, however, the narrative itself comprises a little more than half the volume. Jacobs chose to write behind a pseudonym and disguise the identities of her characters; the reader gets the sense that Yellin's work has solved a literary mystery, but has also outed Jacobs in some way, reproducing her picture along with the names of her family members.

Beth A. McCoy investigates the role of paratextual elements in the exercise of and resistance to white control and interpretation of Black writing and experience. Drawing on the work of Gerard Genette, McCoy writes that a text is only perceived as a "book" to a potential reader because it contains paratextual elements—title pages, prefaces, footnotes

and endnotes, margins—that frame it as such. In slave narratives, such paratextual elements as prefatory letters circumscribed possible interpretations of the text by insisting that the narrative was factually true. McCoy argues that the addition of white-authored endorsements of the slave narrative's strict realism "reduces fugitive author to fugitive reporter, a construction that accommodates Thomas Jefferson's distasteful declaration that 'never yet could I find a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration'" (157). By limiting the formerly enslaved narrator to a recitation of just the facts, the white envelope reenacts white domination over Black authors. This is not to say that Yellin's intent is to enact textual domination over Jacobs's work any more than did Child, Thayer, or Eldridge—abolitionists all—but the editorial choice to include in the same volume the authenticating materials continues what McCoy calls "paratextual echoes" over time, and raises questions about the racial justice of positioning Jacobs's work within the arguably white structures of academic publishing.

Yellin's editorial choices echo the tension in Jacobs's text and publication history between the exclusion she faced as a Black woman writing and the empowerment she found on the margins of the industrial presses. That tension is an uncomfortable reminder that a twenty-first century understanding of Jacobs's work continues to be informed by her status as a marginalized person whose experience was, to some extent, mediated by the involvement of a white editor. Modern scholarly editions of *Incidents* place scholars in a double bind: the private information appearing alongside her text feels transgressive, but allows us to gain insight into the interactions among her text, the material traces left by her efforts to publish it, and the editorial choices made on behalf of modern readers. A close examination of those interactions allows us to recognize in Jacobs's purchase of her plates

both her reclamation of her authorial self and the complicated sort of empowerment that reclamation yielded. In turn, the material history of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* makes visible the ways that Black authors created their own access to print and prevented mainstream publishing from asserting complete control over the narratives of slavery in circulation at mid-century and kinds of speech possible for anti-slavery activists.

Chapter Four: The Free Love Process Utopia and the Iron Hand Press

Introduction

In her novel *Irene; or, The Road to Freedom*, Sada Bailey Fowler presents a scene in which a bride calls off her wedding midway through the exchange of vows. Moments before the ceremony, the groom had spoken aloud his desire to live in the bride's beautiful house, to which she responded that she has sold the house and purchased a publishing operation so that she can produce "Woman's Rights literature and other reformatory works." He chastises her, reminding her that once they are married, he will own all her property: "you must know that the law is on my side. A husband has the legal right to control the property of his wife" (79). He intends to sell the publishing house and prevent her from performing advocacy work, as he "[desires] her to be a lady." The bride realizes the peril of her situation at the altar, as marriage will place her identity, her assets, and her autonomy into the hands of another; her husband will have the power to limit her actions and freedom. Rather than surrender her ability to engage in print and reform work, she "[vows] never to become a wife until woman can not only own and control her property, but also own and control her person" (80) and leaves him at the altar.

This scene neatly encapsulates a complex dynamic involving print, utopian thinking, and anti-mainstream sentiment at the heart of the late 19th century free love movement. While no single definition of free love existed, its adherents generally believed that "men and women should be free to move from one relationship to another when love dies, or commitment fades, without the permission of or interference from the state," (Reid 79) as

opposed to legal marriage based on the "essential matrimonial elements of permanence and exclusivity" (86). Print, like the literature the bride in *Irene* plans to produce, created and connected communities devoted to espousing free love principles and imagining a future in which women were not subject to the legal, physical, and financial control of their husbands.

In this chapter, I argue that the material and literary conditions for radical women at the end of the 19th century enabled the free love novel to emerge as a process utopia, a subgenre of utopian fiction that illustrates the steps necessary to achieve a more ideal future[19]. The iron hand press—a ubiquitous piece of equipment used outside of mainstream print by editors like Moses Harman—along with 19th century traditions of women's fiction created the conditions for women to write novels that demonstrate, step by step, what an alternative to institutional marriage would look like for young couples who wanted love and children without the legal constraints of marriage. To make this argument, I first explore the specific critiques of marriage offered in *Hagar Lyndon* and *Hilda's Home;* I then draw on the work of Erin McKenna to define the process utopia and explain how the free love novel fits within that schema; finally, I investigate the role of the iron hand press in creating the material conditions of print production that contributed to the development of the women's process utopia.

[19] I will discuss Erin McKenna's definition of a process utopia in more detail later in this chapter. McKenna is not the only scholar to move the definition of utopia away literary descriptions the perfect state: Tom Moylan defines the critical utopia as one aware of its own evolution; Ruth Levitas sees utopia as method rather than endpoint. See Moylan's *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986) and Levitas's "The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: Utopia as Method" (2007).

Historians trace the origins of the free love movement to the 1830s when it came into the national spotlight at mid-century with a highly public debate about the nature of marriage in the *New York Tribune* between Henry James Sr., radical Stephen Pearl Andrews, and *Tribune* editor Horace Greely[20]. By the 1860s, free love was most commonly associated with the notorious Victoria Woodhull and her radical magazine *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, in which she advocated for the abolition of marriage, and from which she launched her ill-fated presidential campaign. The public debates and notoriety gave American mass media consumers a salacious and inaccurate picture of free lovers as obsessed with sex and willing to take on multiple sexual partners. That picture, combined with a fatalistic view of most utopian, communal experiments of the 19th century has led some modern scholars to characterize free lovers as a "lunatic fringe" (Stoehr 3) or an "offbeat [cause]" (Haveman 223) and ultimately ineffectual in their calls for the abolition of marriage.

To dismiss the free love movement as eccentric or failed, however, would be to overlook one of the longest-lasting utopian experiments of the century—one whose rhetorical legacy is still at work in American political and social life. Long after Victoria Woodhull exited the public stage, the free love community continued to publish newspapers, stories, and novels that confronted the problems posed by the legal rights granted to husbands by the institution of marriage and envisioned alternative social structures that would grant women personal and reproductive autonomy. Facilitated by former schoolteacher and preacher Moses Harman, they carried out their discussions in the columns of Harman's weekly newspaper, *Lucifer, The Light Bearer* from 1880 through

[20] This debate was published by Stephen Pearl Andrews in 1853 as *Love, Marriage, and Divorce, and the Sovereignty of the Individual*.

1907[21]. This community of perhaps 2000[22] subscribers created and debated the definition of free love, free thought, and anarchism and discussed topics of sexuality and biology prohibited in nearly every other setting in American life.

In addition to printing editorials and reader contributions, Moses Harman also serialized two free love novels written by women[23]: Lizzie Holmes's *Hagar Lyndon*, printed in 1893, and Rosa Graul's *Hilda's Home*, serialized in 1897. Taken together, these two novels articulate a specific critique of marriage and offer a definition of free love much different from the promiscuity popularly associated with its mainstream depictions and critiques. Both novels tell the story of women who refuse to marry based on their observations of marriage and its effects on women physically and emotionally, and who choose instead to enter into committed relationships and bear children as single women. While the solutions they proposed did not, ultimately, materialize, I argue that the utopian work of imagining a better future and debating visions of that future was accomplished not just in the novels, but also in the columns of Harman's paper as readers wrote letters to the editor with their own thoughts on the novels, critiques of the status quo, and dreams of women's equality.

The environment created by the autonomy inherent in *Lucifer*'s production method and by the free discussion among community members through their letters promoted the

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[21] Harman's newspaper began as *Valley Falls Liberal* in August, 1880; the name changed to *Kansas Liberal* in 1881, and finally to *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* in September 1883.

[22] Joanne Passet reports that *Lucifer's* subscription numbers jumped from 700 to 2000 when Harman was arrested for obscenity in 1887 following his printing of an explicit letter describing marital rape.

[23] Harman began the serialization of Mrs. J. E. Ball and Elmina Slenker's story, "Marrying an Infidel," in 1881 but discontinued it six months later, citing a lack of space. The story was transferred to *The Kansas Blade* in 1882 for serialization, and appears to deal with free thought principles, rather than free love. *Lucifer* also serialized Hugh Conway's *A Family Affair* beginning in 1886.

development of a type of utopian fiction based not on discovering the ideal society, but on building it step by step. The free love novels that appeared in *Lucifer* are what Erin McKenna terms process utopias; like several other free love novels published in the second half of the 19th century[24], these process utopias were written by women and recognize the ways that women used their societal roles as influencers and shapers of morality to point the way towards a better future, to imagine better and lead others to their vision. The female protagonists use their womanly influence to raise awareness about the ways that women are oppressed in marriage, and to effect the conversions of other characters to the tenets of free love. Some, like *Hagar Lyndon*, acknowledge the limits of what the individual woman can achieve; in so doing, they illustrate the process utopia's ability to test a particular solution and abandon it when the results are not what is needed. Others, like *Hilda's Home*, envision an ideal resolution to the marriage problem as the culmination of women's influence and ministrations. Women's free love novels do not present an end-state—a fully (re)formed society upon which characters first stumble and are then educated—as men's free love fiction often did[25]. Rather, women's novels first demonstrate the need for change and then imagine the ways in which that change could occur incrementally in the society in which the characters (and the readers) live. The difference is that the change is not set at a distance; it is immediate and calls the reader to think differently and act differently within their current circumstances.

[24] See also *Papa's Own Girl* (1874) by Marie Howland, *Irene, or, the Road to Freedom* (1886) by Sada Bailey Fowler, and *Chains* (1900) by Nellie Jerauld.
[25] See *An Experiment in Marriage* (1889) by Charles Bellamy and *A Cityless and Countryless World* (1893) by Henry Olerich.

In this way, women's process utopias are more actionable and concrete than the traditional utopian plot line in which a new society is discovered on a different planet, in the future, or in a remote and geographically isolated place. The criticism leveled at the free love movement—that it did not achieve its aim of abolishing marriage—ignores the ways in which the movement opened a space for alternative visions of American society's most powerful organizing principle: marriage and the nuclear family as the replication of the nation. Further, the critique of utopia as unachievable misses the point of these novels, which is the change in thought and values that result from a frank assessment of women's current state. The solutions proposed in the novels are daydream-like visions of an ideal future rather than blueprints for utopian communal experiments; the real work of utopia comes in the changing of minds that will eventually change women's current state regardless of whether any particular solution is implemented.

While historians have documented the free love movement of the 19th century, the novels the movement produced remain an understudied field. Holly Jackson and Blaine McKinley have written specifically about *Hagar Lyndon*; Michelle Campbell penned a critical introduction to the novel's reprinting in book form in 2019. As of this writing, only historian Joanne Passet has published scholarship relating to *Hilda's Home*. There could be several reasons for this dearth of scholarship, beginning with the inaccessibility of the texts themselves. *Hagar Lyndon* was not reprinted as a book after its serialization in *Lucifer* until the 2019 edition, making it difficult to find and read the complete text. Moses Harman published *Hilda's Home* in 1899 in a print run of probably fewer than 500 copies; copies available today are scanned and printed on demand or are completely digital. Further, the novels often sacrifice character development and plot on the altar of their utopian visions.

William L. Andrews condemns free love literature as being filled with "flat characters" and having a "strongly didactic tone," resulting in "thesis-ridden novels" (26). Recent scholarship like Holly Jackson's *American Radicals: How Nineteenth-Century Protest Shaped the Nation* (2019) recoups the reputations of free lovers; I argue the free love novel's rhetorical echoes can still be heard in 21st century debates over reproductive freedoms and gender equality.

Hagar Lyndon

In *Hagar Lyndon*, serialized in 1893, Lizzie Holmes explores the limits of free love for an individual woman who chooses a different life from that which she sees her mother and sister living. Hagar's abusive, religious father humiliates and dominates his wife and children, forcing his daughter Lucy into marriage as a young teenager. As a result of the misery she sees her mother and sister endure, Hagar decides she will never marry; she instead leaves her father's house and finds work that allows her some measure of freedom to read and attend lectures. She refuses a marriage proposal from Paul, her true love, as well as from an affluent acquaintance who could keep her in comfort. For Hagar, the true test of her free love beliefs comes when she realizes her desire for children; she convinces Paul to father a child but is then ostracized for being a single mother. At the close of the novel, she and Paul decide to write their own marriage vows that include only the parts of marriage that focus on love rather than ownership, shifting the focus of the novel from marriage abolition to marriage reform.

Unlike more conventional utopian literature, which depends upon a tour guide to explain the utopia to the reader, the protagonists in women's free love utopias come to

their beliefs and ideas of utopia by observing the wives and mothers around them. As a child, Hagar Lyndon watches her father lock her mother in a storeroom overnight as punishment for intervening as he beat their daughter Lucy; the narrator suggests that the storeroom was better than the bedroom, as Mrs. Lyndon "knew of more disagreeable ways of spending a night" (8). Hagar often sees her mother "rocking the cradle with one foot while she patched children's clothes heaped upon her lap," (15) echoing a common complaint that women's health was ruined by the exhaustion of caring for multiple, often unwanted children. When teenaged Lucy is caught by their father with a boy in the house, she is forced to marry him the same day; marriage here is undertaken lightly and without forethought to give the appearance of propriety to a misunderstood but innocent teenaged transgression. Further, Hagar's father forbids her to associate with her aunt, Clive Daley, whose lover and family abandoned her when she became pregnant. Clive's baby died due to malnutrition and exposure, and she eventually turned to prostitution to support herself; yet, she is depicted as a charitable and wise woman upon whose outsider viewpoint Hagar depends as she questions what she sees around her.

Based on these observations of the women around her, Hagar comes to believe that marriage is the problem. Holmes describes her radicalization as a spontaneous and natural outcome of her own reasoning and reflection given the state of women's lives within marriage, and not the result of external influences. As a child, Hagar articulates her developing beliefs to her mother as she imagines the kind of life Clive could have had as a single mother if she had been able to find a home:

> "A dear baby to love, all her own, and no father to come and worry and make them both afraid. And just one baby! Not too many, so that she would get tired out and not love any of them enough… You never go anywhere except to that tiresome church, that you have to hurry yourself to death to get ready for. You never have any fun,

> you never talk much to anybody, and—you've always got father's coming home to expect at night" (18).

She imagines an ideal existence of autonomous motherhood and contrasts it to her mother's life and treatment at the hands of her father. These observations will develop into her disavowal of marriage and embrace of free love later in the novel; they, like the characters' observations in *Hilda's Home*, illustrate free love as the natural outcome of observation, of the examination of married life and the examples the reader encounters in daily life. If only the reader will look objectively at marriage, Holmes implies, she will see the necessity of free love.

Hagar's conversion to free love is also bound up with print, which serves to connect her to a larger community of radicals despite her isolation in her father's house. Holmes situates print in the novel as a secondary influence such that Hagar's experiences and reflection are the main impetus for her developing free love beliefs. Yet, the reader of Hagar Lyndon is accessing the story, and thus experiencing Hagar's conversion, through the medium of Harman's weekly paper. So while Holmes would have her readers trust their perceptions of the women around them, they are indeed encountering free love primarily through print. An anecdote in the novel illustrates the primacy of print for effecting the conversion to free love: When Hagar is no longer a child, her aunt finds two radical books she has been reading and her father confronts her, demanding to know where she got them. She answers, "I sent money for one and borrowed the other," (87) indicating the ways that radical literature like *Hagar Lyndon* built a sense of community among sex radicals. *Lucifer* advertised lists of radical pamphlets and novels sold through its office to raise funds; sending money for a book suggests that Hagar read a radical paper as well. Readers often wrote to *Lucifer* about the circulation of both the paper and books purchased

through it among their friends and acquaintances; Lizzie Holmes, then, demonstrates to her readers how radical literature might contribute to an education that begins in their ability to see past the ways that cultural norms have determined their own lives.

In adulthood, Hagar's critique of marriage focuses on the legal rights granted to men when they transform from lovers into husbands. This transformation is not individual, but systemic: the law grants husbands ownership of wives' bodies, earnings, and children. Hagar tells her childhood friend and romantic interest Paul Deane, "Husbands as a class are sure to be disagreeable in one way or another; good men are never husbands." When Paul protests that his father is "a good man," she responds, "I cannot reconcile his goodness with his willingness to make a good woman his wife" (59). Knowing the oppression to which wives as a class are subject, a "good man" would not choose to enter into marriage. This is opposed to the social logic of the time, which held that women exerted a civilizing influence on men within the domestic sphere and could create a good man by marrying him and taming his wilder impulses. Marriage in the free love critique has the opposite effect: by giving husbands absolute legal and social authority over their wives, even a good man becomes corrupted, "savage, jealous, tyrannical and brutal" (59). It is this corruption of good men by marriage that Hagar seeks to avoid.

But while marriage is depicted as unnatural and corrupt, motherhood remains a central concept in *Hagar Lyndon,* albeit one separated from the need for a husband. Hagar wants children and is enabled to support a child when she inherits her aunt Clive Daley's money. She convinces Paul Deane to father a child even as he acknowledges that the judgement and censure she will experience as a single mother is something "he could not bear for her" (148). When her child is born, she does indeed suffer the social consequences:

women in her community gossip about her, her landlord propositions her for sex, and a brothel owner makes her an offer of employment as a prostitute. She tells the brothel owner, "I am a free woman and have never given a man a look, a word, a caress that was not natural and true." Further, she tells the madame, "I did not wish to become a wife, but I have an inherent right to be a mother" (167). Here, natural, true, and inherent are code words for opposition to custom and artifice, signaling an internal sense of morality and honor opposed to what is conventional or socially acceptable. Her sexual relationship with Paul and her resulting motherhood, because they are true and natural, are moral and honorable in ways that sex in loveless marriages and unwanted children are not. Angelika Bammer argues that feminist utopias make a "distinction between the experience of motherhood and motherhood as an institution;" as *Hagar Lyndon* demonstrates, it is only the institution of motherhood that is oppressive to women. Lizzie Holmes seems to ask, in Bammer's formulation, "if motherhood could be freed of existing material and ideological constraints [whether] its utopian potential could be set free" (Bammer 59).

Hagar must continually defend the morality and honor of her relationship with Paul and her single motherhood to members of conventional society who assume that she either a fallen woman or has been victimized. For example, she attends lectures and befriends the lecturer as her intellectual capacities grow. When this lecturer meets her son, he assumes that she has been seduced and abandoned, and offers to avenge her by finding the child's father and making him marry her. For Hagar, a forced marriage to an unworthy man would be worse than life as a single mother: "if a man ever had deceived, betrayed and then deserted me, *I would not marry him*" (180). She sums up her position on free love succinctly:

> I am the victim of no mistake, no deceit, no wrong of any kind. My child's father is one of the noblest men that ever lived. I did not wish to marry because marriage as it exists makes slaves of women and is the grave of love and happiness of both men and women. I longed to become a mother and I possessed the natural right to motherhood, being healthy, financially independent, and fairly intelligent. I simply chose to exercise it (180).

Motherhood is here decoupled from marriage. The "natural right to motherhood" is not only associated with gender, though, but also with class. Hagar has inherited money and does not need to work for a living; she does not therefore suffer ill health as so many working women do, and she has time for lectures and self-improvement. These class advantages make her a suitable mother, so she claims the "right" to have a child, regardless of marital status. She has paid a price for that decision, but only because the society around her still judges women's right to bear children based on marriage, rather than class. Left out of this natural right to motherhood, then, are poor and working class women and women of color; the implication is that if only educated, financially independent women reproduced, humanity as a whole would not be burdened with so many sickly, poor children, and thus the widespread adoption of free love will hasten the perfection of the human race.

Despite Hagar's internal utopian vision, she comes to a dead end in her pursuit of a life as a single mother. She is completely ostracized: she can write letters to radical newspapers, but every other undertaking that would provide her with fulfillment is a failure. Blaine McKinley sees in these failures echoes of Lizzie Holmes's own frustration with the failure of her anarchist beliefs to gain ground in American society as well as her increasing awareness of the "crippling difficulties which trap" her main character. McKinley argues that in order to resolve Hagar's untenable situation as a single mother, Holmes is forced to "moderate her radical message" (57). Paul writes Hagar a letter that

refocuses the critique of marriage from its legal evils to the unfair burden that women bear in trying to effect change. The problem with Hagar's stance—insisting on single motherhood that causes her to be shunned and which will eventually harm her child as well—is that only women bear the brunt of the social scorn. Men escape it: Paul is as much a single parent as Hagar is, but, as McKinley points out, is "an honored and respected member of society" who "escapes all consequences for his fatherhood" (59). The fact that only women are judged for relationships outside the boundaries of marriage is the fundamental problem with free love: as Paul writes, "If a mutual agreement is entered into to last as long as both wish and is afterward dissolved, only the woman suffers" (Holmes 188). He wants her to work for incremental change in marriage law and society's views of women, but not to "suffer all the pangs of a race regenerating itself" (189).

This letter is a critical point in the novel, as it suggests the need for a strategic decision in the marriage and free love debate. Rather than imagining a utopian experiment that allows the characters to live unmolested by society or in which the consequences of temporary "mutual agreements" are borne equally by men and women, Holmes assesses the landscape of judgement and censure and finds that there is no viable path for single women to become mothers and insist on their own autonomy. They cannot make a living or function in society; they may keep their lovers, but, Holmes suggests, they will lose everything else, no matter how pure and noble the intentions. Holly Jackson writes that marriage serves as such a powerful determiner of social acceptance and legal protection that the only resolution possible is individual amendment or alterations to marriage vows, rather than on the abolition of marriage altogether. Those alterations center on a disavowal of legal ownership and sexual exclusivity, and guarantee sexual and reproductive

autonomy for women. Ultimately, especially for Lizzie Holmes in *Hagar Lyndon*, characters reach the "limits of extramarital life," (Jackson 697) and capitulate to marriage as a way to avoid social stigma or gain legal rights.

By the end of the novel, the question with which Hagar wrestles is the nature of the "right relations" (197) between men and women. She and Paul struggle to agree on a model that will allow them to live together without Hagar suffering from the judgement of the people around them. The answer is a reformed kind of marriage that recognizes the legal bias toward men in the institution. They marry, but Paul does not claim his "right" to her body—he acknowledges the need for consent and autonomy in all things. As a result, they build a home in which they "each have [their] own apartments" (203) for privacy, so they can live together and be married, but each have somewhere to go to escape the other. Paul says, "*our* home will be our own" (203) while they are working towards a more just society, implying that the changes they are discussing are not the broad utopian visions of *Hilda's Home* or Charles Bellamy's *An Experiment in Marriage*, but the personal domestic arrangements of patient radicals. Rather than making a martyr of Hagar, she and Paul will conduct "a new experiment; [they] will *see* if under the best conditions possible in the world at present, love *is* lasting and exclusive" (204). At the close of the novel, Hagar is what Susan Lynch Foster in another context describes as "a utopian character trapped, at this point, in a dystopian world" (39), facing a future that looks very similar to that which she was trying to escape.

Implied in the novel's ending is the power of women to make a society in which they can experience freedom in love and autonomy in childbearing—they do not discover that society; rather, they create it through their choices in the present. For Lizzie Holmes in

Hagar Lyndon, the individual woman quickly reaches the limits of her ability to create a new social order from nothing more than her own relationships and motherhood. But the ending of *Hagar Lyndon* is not a capitulation to institutional marriage; instead, as Moses Harman editorializes in *Lucifer*, it is the first step in achieving a better future for women. He writes, "The first condition necessary to all progress is *desire*—a genuine hunger or longing for something better" (28 July 1893). The work of utopian thinkers, or what Harman terms "agitators and educators," is to awaken "this desire, this hunger" and create the possibility of an alternative to marriage. Holmes settles for marriage reform; Rosa Graul will take the next step into utopian dreaming in *Hilda's Home*.

Hilda's Home

Rosa Graul's *Hilda's Home* has much in common with *Hagar Lyndon*, but imagines a communal, rather than individual, solution to the problems posed by legal, lifelong marriage. Serialized in 1897, it tells the story of Imelda Ellwood's conversion to free love principles and her participation in an ever-expanding circle of like-minded friends who eventually build a cooperative, utopian home. Imelda comes to her free love beliefs by observing her parents: her mother forced her father to the altar at gunpoint because of an unwanted pregnancy, and they tormented each other until the mother's death in childbirth with her seventh child. The majority of the novel focuses on the conversion of Imelda's friends and acquaintances to free love and illustrations of the ways in which marriage can go wrong; the communal home of the title to which they all retreat is built only in the last 40 pages of the book. By the end of the novel, the characters are all paired with, but not married to, their lovers—even those who had been married to others at the start of the

story. Graul leaves her readers with a scene of healthy, nurtured babies surrounding the satisfied parents in the communal home, and with plans for the replication of communal free love homes across the country. The ending implies that the communal home does more than protect the free lovers from censure; it allows for the birth of a superior generation of children, and its replication, much like the replication of the novel, will create a sea change in public opinion about marriage.

Graul offers a critique of marriage similar in its fundamentals to Lizzie Holmes's in *Hagar Lyndon,* and stemming both from its lifelong obligation and from the legal rights granted to husbands. These two defining characteristics of marriage—its inescapability and the legal ownership of women—corrupt men, destroy women, and ultimately weaken the human race. By giving a man legal rights to his wife's body, marriage creates the legal class of "husband," a "man who commits continual outrages upon the woman who is legally bound to him, upon her who bears the name of wife" (*Hilda's Home* 38). The wife, then, has no choice but to give birth to a series of unwanted children and to be exhausted from the stress on her body and the amount of manual labor she must perform to care for those children. This dynamic of marital rape, multiple pregnancies, and exhaustion is referred to as "sex slavery" in free love rhetoric (41).

Sex slavery affects not just the married couple, but also the next generation of Americans, who are gestated by women too worn out to care for them, and so are "ill-natured and puny from their birth, born only to pine away and die." Graul espouses the belief that the mother's feelings toward the growing baby impact that child's development and personality. Those children conceived in sex without love as a result of a woman's inability to refuse her husband Graul calls "unwelcome, unwished for mites of humanity

that sprang from the germ of a father's passion, gestated by a mother with a feeling of repugnance amounting almost to hate…No amount of *later* love could undo the mischief done *before its advent*" (19). In this way, marriage is responsible for a host of social ills as those ill-natured children grow up to be ill-natured adults. As one of the protagonists, Margaret, asks Imelda, "Is it any wonder that the world is filled with criminals and idiots?" (37).

While free love adherents rejected marriage outright, their critique of motherhood is more nuanced. *Hilda's Home, Hagar Lyndon,* and the contents of *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* all distinguish between willing motherhood, which it was believed results in the births of superior children, and the unwilling motherhood into which women are forced in marriage as a result of being unable to refuse sex with their husbands. Within the marriages described in the novel, motherhood is unwelcome and both physically and economically taxing; however, the novel's ending valorizes childbirth outside of marriage, where motherhood is a choice and is entered into freely, and where women can limit the number of children they have. The design of the communal home includes apartments for pregnant women in which they can relax, create art, and enjoy a quiet and beautiful space—exactly the opposite of what the married and exhausted women of the novel experience. The beautiful environment created in these apartments will lead to beautiful children, thus eliminating many of the social problems at the heart of industrialized society:

> Here the builder of the coming child could withdraw to perfect rest and quiet, and here she could steep her soul in music and poetry, and the child which was asked for, which was longed for and demanded, as a pledge of love— the child which was begotten under holiest influences and gestated under such perfect surroundings — could such a child be anything else than ideal? anything less than divine? (Graul 394-395).

The argument that children conceived in free love will be superior to those born to unwilling and exhausted married women has its roots in 19th century scientific discourse. According to Wendy Hayden, the rhetoric of free love leaders drew heavily on popular understandings of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in its arguments for a return to a natural, as opposed to socially constructed, view of sexuality. Hayden argues that Darwin's theories provided the rationale for the belief that women's equality in sexual relations would result in the progress of the species, as only children conceived in love, rather than forced or unwilling sex, would "produce the best progeny" (Hayden 122). Graul employs this scientific argument throughout *Hilda's Home*. At a lecture Imelda attends early in her development as a free lover, the speaker depicts as a natural consequence of women's sexual and reproductive freedom the improvement of the next generation. The speaker links the current oppressive situation for women to an inborn propensity for their children to be criminals: "so long as this child is undesigned and undesired; and so long as the gestating mother suffers for and craves what are impossibilities to her, just so long will there be crime and records of crimes, just so long will prisons be filled with criminals" (Graul 59). Women's anger at their subjugation to men has as its direct, genetic consequence that they will give birth to "a race of slaves, a race degenerated by having planted in the heart of the unborn child" the mother's outrage (61). The only way to secure the progress of the human species is through free love relationships that result in superior children.

Free love rhetoric does not blame men for the sex slavery and inferior children that marriage produces; the fault lies solely with the institution of marriage. As such, even good

men cannot be good husbands. The novel opens with Imelda rejecting a marriage proposal from her true love, Norman:

> 'You love me, and do not know if you can marry me! Imelda, you are an enigma. I cannot understand you. What can you possibly mean?'
> A sigh escaped the parted lips. 'I mean, my Norman,' —laying a hand on either of his cheeks—'I mean that I would fain keep my lover! I am afraid of a husband. Husbands are not lovers" (2-3).

This distinction between lovers and husbands is a common theme in free love writing. In Sada Bailey Fowler's free love novel *Irene, or, The Road to Freedom*, the protagonist laments, "How often young women yield because they never learn until it is too late that *husbands* are seldom what they were as *lovers*" (79). Jesse F. Battan argues that marriage changed the fundamental balance of 19th century relationships such that a woman could end up married to what seemed like a different man than the one she courted: "Although their suitors were able to conceal their true nature during courtship, wives frequently complained that, once they were married, their lovers became husbands and they became their husbands' property" (172). The idea that the husband and the lover are two separate entities permeates *Hilda's Home* as well, as the female characters vow to keep their lovers and their autonomy by avoiding the "rose-woven and stain-covered fetters called marriage bonds" (34).

Given the powerful normative role marriage played in 19th century society, individual action to enact free love was impossible. No individual woman could put free love into action and avoid social censure, as *Hagar Lyndon* illustrates. Community, rather than individual sacrifice, is integral to the utopian project of envisioning an alternative to marriage. In *Hilda's Home*, the community that would provide the social support required to live out free love principles is built through a series of coincidences that expand the

circle of free lovers beyond its beginnings with Imelda and her friend Margaret. To the 21st century reader, these coincidences are improbable and even ridiculous: Imelda's runaway carriage strikes a young woman who turns out to be her lost sister; the horses are stopped by Margaret's lost brother; the women who care for the injured girl are revealed to be the sisters of Margaret's lover. Each character introduced not only has a prior connection to someone else in the circle, but they are each in turn converted to free love simply by hearing the others speak of women's oppression in marriage. By the time the circle has expanded enough to consider a communal living arrangement, their numbers include an architect, a doctor, and a millionaire capable of financing their utopian project.

As contrived as the series of coincidences appears, it serves to refute common criticisms of free love that linked it to suffrage for women and saw the destruction of the American family as the result of both. As Lisa Cochran Higgins illustrates, critics of the women's rights movement in the late 19th century cast the suffragists together with more radical movements like free love as the enemy of the nuclear family and its organizing influence in American democracy. Voting, for these critics, was akin to adultery, as both were an abandonment of women's fundamental role establishing and maintaining the domestic sphere. Higgins argues, "Through the rhetorical use of female adultery within the suffrage debate, conservative writers negatively associated woman's vote with some of the most controversial 'foreign' movements of the period, including Fourierism, Socialism, and Free Love" (194). The rhetoric linking of free love, women's rights, and suffrage was so pervasive, Higgins argues, that "in the public imagination of the mid- to late nineteenth century, Socialism and Free Love became synonymous for the adulterous individualism presumably behind women's suffrage" (202). In other words, if women have the ability to

vote, to easily obtain divorce or choose a sexual partner, and to support themselves economically, American society could disintegrate.

Graul responds to the charge that an insistence on women's rights will result in the downfall of American society by restoring familial relationships throughout the novel. Instead of destroying the family, free love restores it. Those that Imelda and Margaret convert to free love are not just strangers who share a set of values; they are brothers, sisters, lovers and coworkers. Imelda's sister had taken for a lover a married man, millionaire Owen Hunter, and expected Imelda to judge her harshly for doing so. Imelda, however, honors the purity of her sister's love and welcomes her into the circle of free lovers, thus repairing the bond between the sisters. Likewise, Margaret's brother had been estranged from their mother because of lies their father told after their mother left the abusive marriage; once he becomes aware of women's oppression generally and the truth of his mother's situation specifically, the mother-son relationship is restored. Even when the newly-converted free love adherent is not a blood relative, the family relationship is the primary focus. Owen Hunter saves a man from suicide who turns out to be the clerk from his own company who embezzled thousands of dollars to please his wife. Owen forgives the debt, converts the man to free love, and ensures his wife's future happiness in a series of events that prioritizes personal relationships over business sense. This dynamic occurs repeatedly in the novel so that each conversion to free love also heals a familial relationship broken by traditional marriage.

The desire for connection and community surely resonated with readers of *Lucifer*, who often wrote to the paper expressly looking for such community. Many writers refer to Moses Harman as "Bro. Harman," and sign letters with phrases like, "Love to you all." Nida

E. Pardun, in the August 18, 1893 paper, addresses her letter to "Dear Old Lucifer," and writes, "How I wish I could see your spotless pages for a few hours today. I feel lonely and your face would look like an old friend" (3). Here the paper is personified, with the "spotless pages" transforming into a "face" of "an old friend." Further, these letter writers replicate the action of *Hilda's Home* that expands the circle of free lovers as they describe circulating the paper in order to gain new subscribers and devotees to the cause. Pardun adds a postscript to her letter asking for more copies of the paper so that she can send Harman "a few Subscribers" from among the "broadminded free-thinkers" she has met. In the context of the paper and the desire for community among its readers, the coincidences in the novel help build the impression that connections could be made with others who share radical opinions simply by reaching out, that in the faceless strangers are kindred spirits waiting to be discovered and converted—the collective fantasy that the imagined community can be made real and material.

The Free Love Novel as Process Utopia

Much of the action of *Hilda's Home* revolves around raising awareness of women's oppression under legal marriage and gaining adherents to free love principles. But once the characters are aware of the evils of marriage, the question remains how to live according to their free love beliefs in a society structured by marriage. When Imelda poses this question to Margaret's lover Wilbur early in the novel, he admits that he does not know: "The solution of that problem will, no doubt, be the work of future years, albeit much can at the present, and also in the near future, be done to make the way clear. 'Making the way clear' is what we are trying to do" (81). I argue that like other free love novels written

by women in the late 19th century, *Hilda's Home* is a process utopia precisely because the way is not yet clear; the free love utopia must be dreamt, discussed, and built in the world of the novel step by step. Further, I argue that the same imagining and debating of potential futures takes place in the pages of *Lucifer*, facilitated by Moses Harman's editorial policies, such that the free love community created around *Lucifer* and its texts is itself a process utopia.

Erin McKenna defines the process utopia as the continuous imagining of a better future, in contrast to the end-state utopia, in which the perfect society already exists as a static entity. She bases the process utopia on John Dewey's model of democracy, and as such it calls for an informed and engaged citizenry that critically and continuously evaluates the current state, or what Dewey calls "received experience." Dewey argues, "what is needed is intelligent examination of the consequences that are actually effected by inherited institutions and customs, in order that there maybe intelligent consideration of the ways in which they are to be intentionally modified in behalf of generation of different consequences" (qtd in McKenna 86). In other words, the status quo can always be debated, evaluated, and changed in order to work toward a different and improved future. In McKenna's model, individual choices and actions in the present create possible futures, or what she terms "ends-in-view," and in turn, those desired ends-in-view guide present actions. To achieve the desired and imagined future, the process utopia conducts experiments and makes adjustments, keeping what works and discarding what does not: "It requires that we recognize how our participation affects what our future can be. It requires that we recognize that there is no end-state at which we must work to arrive, but a multiple of possible future states which we seek and try out" (83). The process model of

utopia works when a society identifies its current problems, creatively and collectively imagines alternative institutions and structures that could solve those problems, tests potential solutions, and evaluates the results.

The process utopia's emphasis on imagination, experimentation, and critique stands in marked contrast to what McKenna describes as the "static/perfectible" end-state utopia (9), in which the perfect society is already developed and so works to maintain itself, rather than to improve. End-state utopias begin with the assumption that the future is directed toward a concrete and identifiable vision of perfection; once achieved, authority in the form of the state or a leader controls the idealized society so that it is perpetuated into the future, most often at the expense of the individual. McKenna summarizes, "The end-state approach tends to be preoccupied with ends and indifferent to means, views individuals and society as a totality, makes dogmatic assumptions, is preoccupied with management, and neglects human variety" (18). The management required to maintain the end state of perfection often involves violence on the part of the authority, which is nearly always white and male. Finally, the maintenance of the ideal utopia spells the end of the utopian impulse, since any change to the definition of perfection is a degradation.

The process utopia is a uniquely feminist form in the 19th century. While men also wrote novels supporting free love, those novels are typically end-state utopias or fail to provide a solution for women to achieve equality. Charles Bellamy's *An Experiment in Marriage*, for example, is an end-state utopia in which the male protagonists travel to Grape Valley, an ideal community in which marriages can be easily dissolved, women have equal economic opportunities, and child raising is a communal responsibility. To get to Grape Valley, the protagonists must travel blindfolded from New York City to an undisclosed

location in the West and traverse a riverbed whose waters are temporarily diverted to allow access to the community; both the already-perfected state of the community and the difficulty of traveling to find it are common elements of 19th century utopian fiction. Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* depicts a woman who chooses single motherhood in order to give birth to the generation who would reform marriage entirely, but the novel offers no workable solution for single mothers. The protagonist's daughter disavows her and chooses conventional marriage, making a martyr of her mother, rather than a savior. Finally, Henry Noyes Miller's *The Strike of a Sex* advocates for women's right to refuse sex and therefore pregnancy and childbirth by depicting a city in which all of the women have taken refuge together to demand reproductive autonomy, leaving the men to struggle with inedible food and burned linens. When the women return, however, the implication is that they will once again take up their domestic chores of cooking, laundry, and cleaning—hardly a utopian solution to the problem of marriage inequality.

Women, too, wrote end-state utopian novels to highlight gender inequality and suggest different organizational principles around which a society could be constructed. As Carol Farley Kessler notes in her bibliography of more than 200 utopian works by women between 1836 and 1988, women's utopian novels "frequently mirror what women lacked and what women wanted at the time when the books were published" (1). The perfect societies imagined in these end-state utopias serve as a contrast to the gender roles and limitations experienced by their authors. For example, in *Women's Rights, or, How Would You Like It?* (1870) Annie Denton Cridge creates a flipped society on Mars where women smoke cigars, run businesses and literally wear the pants, while men are not educated, have no jobs, and must wear impractical clothing. In *Mizora* (1890), Mary E. Bradley Lane

sets a perfect society deep beneath the North Pole, where the inhabitants are all white women who can procreate without men. These utopias, as Kessler notes, argue for women's equality by suggesting alternatives to gender norms—they do not suggest steps involved in achieving those alternatives. In fact, Kessler identifies the critical utopia in which the ideal is "still in the process of becoming" as a product of the mid-20th century, rather than of the 19th century (1); women's free love novels of the late 19th century are, in my assessment, an early and understudied exception.

While the free love novel reached its apex in form and message in the 1890s, the door begins to open much earlier in the century for women in fiction to leave relationships or eschew marriage. Margaret Fuller's 1845 treatise *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* explicitly links legal marriage to women's oppression, as women are subject to men who do not honor their end of the marriage bargain and who must be supported through women's industry even as they claim legal rights to women's income and children. Catharine Sedgwick's 1857 novel, *Married or Single?*, as the title implies, asks whether a single life would be better than a bad marriage[26]. Sedgwick does not advocate for free love, nor does she paint the institution of marriage as universally bad; instead, it is the expectations of women going into marriage, and the behavior of both women and men after marriage that are fraught with the possibility of failure and unhappiness. Sedgwick anticipates a main theme of later free love novels when her protagonist wonders, "What transformation is there… in the old myths, half so horrible as that of a lover into a husband?" (157). Mary Gove Nichols's 1860 autobiographical novel, *Mary Lyndon*, details her first disastrous

[26] Sedgwick's better-known novel, *Hope Leslie*, also concludes with one of the female protagonists choosing to remain single.

marriage, the public shame and expense of her divorce, and her subsequent love of two other men. Nichols was a spiritualist and a self-styled water cure healer and was involved in several utopian experiments; *Mary Lyndon* is, in my survey of the genre, the first free love novel. By the end of the century, the argument identifying marriage as the root cause of women's oppression would reach its apogee in the utopian free love novel.

As radical as the novels are in their rejection of gender norms that demanded women be sexually pure until they entered legal marriage, they are limited in the scope of their critique. Race and class are not rethought: the protagonists are white, middle-class women who might be temporarily reduced to working in a shop or as a ladies' companion for money, but who nonetheless possess refined sensibilities and taste in home decor, music, and art. Black characters, when they appear, are written in dialect and occupy roles as servants. The female protagonists are described in diminutive, feminine language; they do not take on masculine characteristics or behavior due to their free love beliefs, nor do they condone promiscuity. In two free love novels, *Hilda's Home* and Marie Howland's *Papa's Own Girl*, the communal living solution that enables the free lovers to live according to their beliefs is financed by a wealthy individual industrialist (*Hilda's Home*) or European aristocrat (*Papa's Own Girl*); despite the socialist overtones of the communal living experiments with which the novels end, capitalism is alive and well. Angelika Bammer notes that feminist utopias of the 19th century present race and class as "natural" and therefore not subject to revision. Marriage, on the other hand, is for the free lovers a cultural invention, and as such can be altered or abolished to fit current needs.

Within the broader genre of women's utopian fiction, the free love novel stands alone in its focus on the process of becoming; however, the form of the women's free love

novel would have been familiar to readers of the time as the type of fiction women had been writing for most of the 19th century. Nina Baym describes what she calls "women's fiction" of the 19th century as novels which tell "the story of a young girl who is deprived of the supports she had rightly or wrongly depended on to sustain her throughout life and is faced with the necessity of winning her own way in the world" (11). The heroine of these novels grows from a dependent and poorly-educated child, unprepared for the realities she faces, to a woman with "a strong conviction of her own worth" (19) who wins the approval of those around her and earns a place in a happy domestic sphere through a good marriage. The quintessential domestic heroine, Ellen Montgomery in Susan Warner's bestseller *The Wide Wide World*, exemplifies this character type. Ellen is the daughter of a passive and pious mother who must abandon her because of illness; young and ill-equipped for the harsh realities of the world, she gradually adopts Protestant Christianity and learns to control her emotions and submit to authority. As she conforms more thoroughly to the ideal of piety and submission, she receives the praise of those around her and ultimately becomes worthy of marriage. Baym notes that novels like Warner's were didactic, teaching a moral lesson through a heroine to whom the reader could relate.

Women's free love novels borrow many of the conventions of the domestic heroine and plot line, with a significant revision in the content of the moral lesson they impart. Both Hagar Lyndon and Imelda Ellwood find early in life that they cannot rely on their parents or on marriage as a path to economic support or domestic happiness; without that conventional path forward they must rely on what Baym calls their "inner possibilities" (19) to figure out their next steps. While Ellen Montgomery and other conventional domestic heroines are victims of circumstance that robs them of support, the free love

heroine chooses her exile. She sees the flaws of marriage when others around her do not, and chooses to take action based on her observations even when that action will invite censure. She demands not to be worthy of her intended lover, but to be equal to him in all regards; in this way, the heroine does not attempt to earn his love but instead causes her lover to grow and change. Finally, motherhood, not marriage, is her rite of passage into a domestic space that she determines and controls.

I argue that despite the radical nature of the message, the heroine who delivers it to the reader would have been a familiar figure. Susan Lynch Foster suggests that the use of the domestic conventions foregrounds "the cultural power of feminine influence" (32) over direct political action in Marie Howland's *Papa's Own Girl*, another free love novel. Free love heroines are able to wield such influence because they are depicted as essentially true women, rather than as dangerous radicals. Angelika Bammer contends that feminist utopian fiction promised its readers "that only the bad would change; everything else would stay happily the same," resulting in fiction in which "even in visions of the future that were in other respects quite radical, readers were reassured that at least gender would remain constant" (43). In other words, the heroines in these novels retain the feminine characteristics already defined by 19th century American culture, even if the society in which they live is reimagined in other respects. They are described in nearly angelic language, dressed in "white cashmere wrapper[s]" and "surrounded by [halos]" (Graul 184, 288); their goal is the creation of the ideal domestic space, rather than the replication of the deeply flawed marriages of their parents.

The free love heroine takes on the responsibility for the process of utopia. Although Imelda acknowledges that she "was not yet standing in the full glare of light that should

show her the path that lay in the direction of perfect freedom," (139) the action of the novel makes clear that women will bear the consequences for their experiment if it fails, and so must develop a workable solution. In *Hilda's Home*, Margaret's lover Wilbur seems to refer to Hagar Lyndon's fate when he tells the group of free lovers:

> As yet we have not arrived at the point of action. We have not yet the strength to stand and walk alone. As yet we are only theorizing. The few advocates of Love in Liberty with whom we have been associating in an intimate circle are not egotistic enough to expect our women, our girls, to shake off the restraining hands of society and act in accord with their beliefs and views. That would mean ostracism. We dare not place so heavy a load upon weak shoulders without giving them the assurance that at all events their future is provided for (130).

Wilbur acknowledges that there is no perfect end state towards which they are working because the ideal is still being imagined. They do not know, in practice, how to live as free lovers; what is clear is only that women will bear the brunt of the stigma that results from the rejection of marriage.

Imelda takes the first concrete step toward utopia by rejecting Norman's marriage proposal and using her feminine influence to move him away from the companionate model of marriage to a model of relationships as voluntary, equal, and escapable. Norman "expected to find heaven in the arms of [a woman]" with whom he would fall in love and marry. Imelda, though, wants to "rid [him] of the illusion that a compulsory marriage law can command such fidelity and steadfastness" (140) and convince him that their relationship should last only so long as they both desire it to continue. Norman represents the companionate model of marriage, which Jesse Battan argues emerged slowly and unevenly during the course of the 19th century and raised the expectations of women, who learned to desire "reproductive autonomy, emotional intimacy, and sexual fulfillment"

(174) in marriage. But even if the companionate model offered women a more satisfying married life than what Battan terms "patriarchal marriage," for the free lovers it did not go far enough in remedying marriage's fundamental flaws. In the novel, the feelings that give rise to the companionate model are themselves temporary and thus incompatible with lifelong legal marriage. In other words, the companionate model only works as long as the companions do not turn into spouses. Norman, then, must give up his notions of marriage as based on romantic love and be persuaded by Imelda's arguments to embrace free love; once converted, the question remains of how he and Imelda can live out their devotion to personal and reproductive freedom.

When the long-awaited solution does present itself, it comes in the form of a "vague sweet dream of [a] future cooperative home" (377), rather than as an actionable or concrete plan. As the novel's title suggests, the home is the dream of Wilbur's sister, Hilda:

> [Hilda] spoke of the spacious halls where the ardent searchers after knowledge of any kind might find their teacher; of the library stocked with volumes from the ceiling to the floor; of the lecture hall and the theater; of the opportunities where every talent could be cultivated; of the liberty—the free life—where every fetter should be broken; of the dining hall where they would partake of their evening meal midst flowers and music; of the common parlor where every evening should be an entertainment for all wherein love and genuine sociability should always preside; of the sacred privacy of the rooms where each man or woman should reign king or queen—the sanctum of each, closed to all intruders, consecrated to the holiest and divinest of emotions and self-enfoldment (377).

Hilda finishes her description of the home with the admission that "it is only a dream" (378) because the group of radicals has no ability or resources to build such a place; from here, the novel takes a fantastical turn toward the utopian. No one in the group, with the exception of Imelda's sister and the reader, knows of Owen Hunter's "almost limitless wealth" (380), but now he steps in, Rockefelleresque, to finance the project. Owen gives Hilda free rein over the design and assigns another member of the group to be the

architect; a site is selected "in the west," (381) drawing on images of the frontier as full of potential. The building is constructed with a conspicuous absence of labor: construction workers "found their tasks easy," the building grows "as if by magic," and contains "wonders of beauty and elegance" (392). The rooms are simultaneously "warm and cozy for the winter, cool and shaded for the summer," resulting in a "picture [so] alluring that we cannot help letting our imagination wander" (396). The reader is asked to imagine a home of comfort, taste, and ease as the details are not forthcoming.

By contrast, free love novels by men conform to more conventional utopian language, rather than the indirect, open-ended visions presented in women's free love novels. For example, in Henry Olerich's *A Cityless and Countryless World*, the narrator describes the Marsian society to an American family, presenting it as an end-state utopia that identifies and solves problems not only of gender inequality and forced childbearing, but also of economics, labor, education, and dress. Here the narrator describes ideal housing, similar to a Fourierist phalanx:

> I have already told you… that a 'big house' is about eight stories high; that it accommodates about a thousand inmates—men, women, and children; that the 'big houses' are located about half-mile apart on the motor-lines all around, the rectangular communities twenty-four miles long and usually six miles wide (see p. 115). This arrangement gives us two tiers of big houses with a motor-line between them (80-81).

While this excerpt is representative of most of the text of Olerich's novel, it is significant that he also includes a diagram of the layout of "Marsian" communities, reinforcing the idea of utopia as a blueprint for future action. While the women's free love utopia remains undefined and dream-like, and thus open to interpretation or suggestion, free love novels written by men tend to offer concrete, end-state solutions to social problems.

The magical language in Rosa Graul's ending to *Hilda's Home* would seem to support critics who fault utopian visions for their impracticability. I argue, however, that the very dreamlike nature of the solution encourages collective imagining and debate so vital to utopian thinking without offering a blueprint for a solution, thus keeping the emphasis of the free love utopia on process, rather than on a particular end state. Further, by demonstrating the creation of the communal home, Graul keeps the utopia in the world of the reader, rather than placing it out of reach temporally or spatially. McKenna argues that in the process utopia, "[we] learn to engage the world we are in, unmake what is problematic, and make it the world we want it to be" (12). Engaging the world we are in means not obscuring the rupture between the society of the reader and the utopian society: there is no narrator buried under a mountain for three hundred years or flying to Mars; instead, the action of creating the utopia occurs within the recognizable society of the novel. McKenna's model of the process utopia focuses on experiments based on consensus of the community to transform an environment methodically, incorporating what works, and discarding what does not. While the communal home Graul envisions is suggestive of an end state of perfection, the success of the home as a utopian solution is qualified: the community surrounding it does not know that its occupants are unmarried lovers and parents. As Graul writes, "The world is yet too completely steeped in superstition and ignorance to have permitted [the home's] existence had the full meaning been known." Further, Graul admits her characters' lives are not perfect at the end of the novel:

> Would you ask us if happiness was so unalloyed within those walls that no pangs of regret or of pain could enter there? Well, no! We are not so foolish as to make such claim. There are hours of temptation; there are moments of forgetfulness; there are sometimes swift, keen, torturing pangs that nothing earthly can completely shut out. Our heroes and heroines are not angels. They are—when the very best of them has

> been said—only intelligent, sensible and sensitive men and women—but men and women who are possessed of high ideals and who are striving hard to reach and practicalize them (424).

Implied in Graul's description of her characters at the end of the novel is the possibility of change as the lovers continue to make their philosophy practical. For McKenna, it is the ongoing possibility of change and improvement, rather than the stasis of perfection, that defines the process utopia.

Utopia and the Hand Press in *Lucifer, The Light Bearer*

At the heart of this utopian work happening in the free love community are the material conditions of print production created by the iron hand press—a technology that enabled cash-strapped radical editors like Moses Harman to create and maintain geographically dispersed communities of like-minded reformers. Utopian communities often owned printing presses they operated themselves to circulate their particular views about social progress. Ashley Rattner argues that utopian experiments early in the 19th century included the capacity for print in order to recruit additional members or provide guidance for other reformers to follow. Further, Rattner asserts, the disjointed print networks of the early 19th century, kept local and distinct before the post office and railroad linked the nation, helped reformers see themselves as part of local communities that could be replicated across the nation through acts of reading. By the late 19th century, local print networks coalesced into a national press and individual utopian experiments and their hand presses no longer seemed a viable way to transform the nation. But the utopian impulse did not disappear with the development of a "reliable national [print] sphere" (185). Instead, reform-minded Americans participated in utopia not by living in

communes but by reading and writing for the radical newspapers that operated autonomously on the margins of homogenized, national print, thus both sustaining radical communities and developing their messages in the forums the papers provided. For radicals like Moses Harman, the iron hand press allowed the creation of niche counterpublics like the community of *Lucifer* readers. For some printers, the use of older, manual printing presses was a rejection of industrial book aesthetics and of capitalism[27]; for others, Harman[28] included, use of the hand press was most likely an economic necessity rather than a protest in itself.

The iron hand press was developed early in the 19th century as an improvement over older wooden presses; they offered durability over their wooden counterparts and required less force to produce a clean impression, making them easier to operate as well. Steam and gas-powered rotary presses were commercialized by the mid-19th century, but they were room-sized machines that required up to eight pressmen to operate and that could produce 1800 or more impressions an hour (Moran 125). Small papers like *Lucifer*, however, had neither the staff to operate such a press nor the demand to afford it[29]: the

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[27] This sentiment motivated William Morris's Kelmscott Press in England and the Arts & Crafts movement that saw a resurgence of fine hand printing and craft bookbinding. In the United States, the Roycrofters were the largest imitator of the Kelmscott Press.

[28] While I have found no records indicating what kind of press Harman used, there are clues in the paper about the process of its production. In 1885, he attempted to raise money for a cylinder press as an improvement over his existing equipment. Cylinder presses were introduced at mid-century; even without power, they were an improvement over the flat-platen presses. It appears that he was not able to raise the money to purchase a new press until 1897, however, as evidenced by a format change to the paper to make it "more suitable for binding". From his fundraising appeals, I conjecture that Harman operated an iron hand press until 1897. The most authoritative history on the production dates of various presses in the United States and England is James Moran's 1973 *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times*.

[29] Lucifer was a four-page paper until 1897; using Joanne Passet's subscription estimates, a paper of that size would have taken only an hour to print on a steam-powered rotary press such as the models used by the major newspapers of the East Coast. On an iron hand press, the weekly edition at the height of its circulation numbers would have taken about three days to print.

iron hand press was an economic and labor-saving alternative that allowed individual printers to circulate messages on a small scale. The use of the hand press—even from economic necessity—would have aligned Harman and *Lucifer* with other marginalized print communities who saw their exclusion from mainstream print as part of their identity as radicals. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller argues that what she terms "slow print" was a reaction to mass-oriented print that manufactured public opinion and thus could not reflect the true opinions of its readership. Slow print, on the other hand, was "print that actively opposed literary and journalistic mass production; it was often explicitly political in objective, as socialist, anarchist, and other radical groups came to believe that large-scale mass-oriented print was no way to bring about revolution social change" (2). In other words, small scale print produced on the iron hand press could signal to its readers a material form of dissent outside of, or in addition to, its content[30].

Because Moses Harman owned the press and type he used to produce *Lucifer* and was not dependent on the services of a printer[31], he had complete control over the paper and its content. He used that control to establish editorial policies in line with his anarchist beliefs in personal freedom and a free press, including his policy of printing reader letters without censoring ideas or language and with names included; Joanne Passet notes that this policy "transformed *Lucifer* into one of the few forums where rural and working-class

[30] Scholars define presses like Harman's in various terms: Rodger Streitmatter and others categorize them as dissident presses; James P. Danky defines as oppositional presses "nonstandard, nonestablishment publications that advocate social change" (Danky 269).
[31] Harman advertised job printing in *Lucifer* as another revenue stream for the paper, which would indicate that he owned, rather than outsourced, print capability.

women and men could investigate sexual topics without fear of censure" (*Reading* 311). Typical of these letters is one published on March 10, 1897, from a public health nurse:

> Most of my patients are women in confinement, and could I tell you all the pitiful stories I hear, of enforced motherhood, you would perhaps be startled more than you ever have been,--familiar as you are with the subject. My heart has ached for those helpless mothers and for the little unwelcomed babes when I have taken them into my arms. So many of my patients have asked for knowledge in regard to prevention that I have decided, if I can obtain the desired information, that I will do what I can to prevent unwelcome babies, and save worn-out women from this awful burden.

This letter deals with birth control and the lack of information available to women to prevent unwanted pregnancies; as such it would not have been printed in mainstream forums.[32] These policies resulted in a community that could speak its mind even about sexual topics and that was held accountable to each other. Heather Haveman argues that publications like *Lucifer* "develop rich reciprocal interactions with their readers," that in turn allow the publication and its subscribers to "mutually construct communal identities" (5). In other words, the debates taking place in the pages of *Lucifer* helped the free love community define its own vocabulary and the terms of its membership. Harmon was not alone among radical newspapers publishers; Holly Folk notes that the editors of the anarchist paper *Discontent*, produced from the Home colony in Washington state, also welcomed even those viewpoints with which they disagreed. Its editors wrote, "We shall aim to make of our columns an open forum of liberal views, but we specially invite Anarchist writers to contribute to the work of spreading the Anarchist propaganda into every quarter of the world" (quoted in Folk 4). Policies that solicited contributions from

[32] Harman printed a similar letter from W. G. Markland in the June 18, 1886 edition of *Lucifer*, which described the marital rape of a woman recovering from traumatic childbirth. He was subsequently arrested under the Comstock Law for mailing obscene material and imprisoned.

readers laid the groundwork for the exchange of ideas McKenna sees as fundamental to the process of utopia; the ability to print those contributions makes the dynamic work.

Harman uses his editorial discretion and material capability to reinforce the process of utopia in the pages of *Lucifer*. In the December 1, 1897 paper, he explains this process with regard to *Hilda's Home*:

> In all human enterprises, or undertakings, the ideal, the unseen, the imaginary, the abstract, the unsubstantial, must precede the actual, the visible, the concrete, the substantial. And before the ideal, the imaginary, the abstract, can be formed there must be discontent with the present and a desire for something better (4).

Hilda's Home, he contends, has as its goal first to raise awareness of the problems with marriage, then to "arouse desire for something better," and finally to lay out an ideal that solves some of the problems the novel articulates; the community of readers then debates the utility of the proposed solution in the print forum *Lucifer* provides. In this way, the novel is both a process utopia and participates in the process of utopia: its form and function perform the same work as the text suggests a possible future and the readers debate that future in print alongside the novel.

This community of readers demonstrated a fundamental faith in texts to bring about social change. Miller contends that by the late 19th century, English radicals "had lost faith in the narrative of print enlightenment, because the achievement of a mostly unfettered print sphere and the emergence of hundreds of cheap radical papers had failed to counter the hegemony of commercial mass print" (261). While English and American radical thinkers often reprinted each other's texts and correspondence, the lack of faith in print to change minds Miller describes did not cross the Atlantic. In *Hilda's Home*, Imelda's first act to convince her lover Norman to renounce marriage is to put her life story into writing, giving Norman "the history of [her] life" (169) so that he can learn from the text that is her

lived experience. Bammer, too, writes that 19th century feminist utopias "present history as a process of change and revision in which texts, like actions, can intervene" (49). In other words, writing—and printing—can create an understanding of the past and envision a different future. In the novel, Imelda's textual intervention is successful; Norman's conversion begins the process of widening the circle of free lovers such that a communal solution becomes possible.

The faith in texts to enact change extends beyond the novels to their readers in the *Lucifer* community, who saw the novels as tools to effect conversions among their own social circles. Mrs. M. E. Dobson writes that *Hagar Lyndon* is popular among her friends and will help recruit new subscribers for the paper: "There is a number of my neighbors very much pleased with Lucifer. I trust you will hear from some of them ere long." She signs the letter, "Most sincerely a co-worker," an appellation that emphasizes the expansion of the *Lucifer* community as the work of its texts. Another reader emphasizes the work of conversion that *Hagar Lyndon* can do: "I am making a scrap book of the story…so I can send it around to my friends to read." Likewise, a reader in the June 23rd, 1893 edition sends a check for $30 and asks that back issues of all the papers with installments of *Hagar Lyndon* be sent to a list of 33 potential subscribers so that "[perhaps] some good may grow therefrom." Lois Waisbooker, in the July 28, 1893 edition, admits that *Hagar Lyndon* depicts single motherhood as an imperfect solution, but writes that she is "glad Hagar Lyndon is being born into the world of literature. The seed being sown will bear fruit in the future, and then we shall have intelligent and honored motherhood" (3). Waisbooker, herself a

prolific novelist, claims a causal link between the serialization of *Hagar Lyndon* and the achievement of a new social order.[33]

The *Lucifer* community recognized the serialized novels in the paper as ephemeral and limited in impact; in order for the novels to reach a wider audience than the already-converted readers of *Lucifer*, they must be produced in book form. While some readers will make scrap books of the novels or have the papers bound, the larger discussion around both *Hagar Lyndon* and *Hilda's Home* asks whether the community will finance their printing as books, since Moses Harman lacks the financial resources to undertake the project without the promise of sales sufficient to make up the cost. There is no question of the texts' ability to effect change; in his appeals to his reader, Harman wants to ensure that *Hagar Lyndon* has the chance to do "the work that this splendid creation of woman's brain and hand might otherwise do" (September 8, 1893). Readers shared their ideas about bringing the works out in book form: in August, 1893, W. M. DeCamp suggested that if *Hagar Lyndon* had been "electrotyped in the news form it might have been reproduced in double column pages at moderate expense." Harman responds that "it was at first our design to stereotype the matter as it ran through Lucifer's columns…but hard times and small means seemed to forbid. Another reason against it was, that our type is scarcely fit for book work,—it is too small and too old and worn" (2). This exchange brings into full relief the format of the novel and the material requirements of printing, highlighting the

[33] Not all readers had Waisbooker's confidence in the paper or the novels to bring about change. Mrs. E. M. S. writes that she will "try to get you some new subscribers if I can, to help you out a little bit, but it is hard to get many to take an interest in this who can afford it" (June 16, 1893, page 2). In the same edition of the paper, reader Ella H. confesses that she cannot subscribe because the paper "keeps stirring up the bitter prejudice of some of my family and friends, to an uncomfortable degree."

ways that the work of the radical community is both enabled and limited by its material circumstances. Serialization in the paper is an accessible format to the dissident press, the book, much less so. The same issues of cost and print capability made printing *Hilda's Home* in 1898 a challenge as well; however, its optimistic utopian ending garnered enough enthusiasm to secure sufficient orders to reprint the text in 1899.

The process utopia is an outgrowth of the material and ideological environment created by the editorial autonomy afforded by the hand press: one of informed and engaged readers actively contributing to a community forum, refining their understanding of a problem, and working to widen their sphere of influence through textual interventions. It is also one that I argue women were uniquely situated to write, given the type of fiction women had written for most of the 19th century. This kind of utopian fiction depends not on force or authority, but on influence and persuasion—the domain of women's fiction. Those characters (and readers) who would realize the utopian future must change hearts and minds by portraying oppression and imagining an alternative reality that works for the entire community. Since these novels explicitly imagined futures in which women could have more than one sex partner in her life or refuse sex altogether, no mainstream publisher would produce them; in fact, with the exception of only two free love novels, all of the novels I have identified appear to be self-published or serialized in a radical paper and not produced as books at all. The tradeoff for publishing these works in the dissident presses is one of scope and control: while industrial publishing offered a wide reading audience, it restricted the type of message that audience could receive. On the margins, the iron hand press gave the author and editor freedom to print a radical message, but restricted circulation to a niche group of self-selected radicals.

Conclusion: The "Failure" of Free Love

Scholarship on 19th century free love tends to focus on the headliners, the radical writers who moved the free love philosophy onto the front pages of New York newspapers in the 1870s. In large part, these front-page radicals advocated for what the free love community called the "varietist" lifestyle in which free love meant the opportunity for many sexual partners, rather than for the ability to leave a monogamous relationship when love died. John Humphrey Noyes created this strain of free love with the complex marriages of the Oneida utopian community earlier in the century; Victoria Woodhull embodied it when she famously proclaimed, "I have an *inalienable*, *constitutional* and *natural* right to love whom I may, to love as *long* or as *short* a period as I can; to *change* that love *every day* if I please" (quoted in Stoehr 39-40). Taylor Stoehr, in his *Free Love in America: A Documentary History*, all but declares free love dead after Woodhull's departure from American news media for a respectable married life in England: "Although here and there little knots of the faithful persisted, it was no longer evangelical or coherent enough to be considered a movement" (45). He shifts the focus of his study after 1880 from the writings of free lovers to early literature on birth control and sexuality and excludes free love fiction from his history entirely. By omitting the continuation of free love discourse "so far as it existed outside Woodhull's aura in the 1870s," (44) Stoehr makes a faulty assumption about the coherence (although not the size) of the late-century free love movement and misses an opportunity to connect that movement to present day struggles for women's bodily autonomy. By the 1880s and 1890s when the free love novel takes

shape as a process utopia, the point of free love was not more opportunities for sex, but the rights of women to control their sexuality and reproduction.

Perhaps Stoehr has a point: the free love movement never gained the critical mass necessary to overthrow marriage as the organizing principle of American society. After the turn of the century, even Moses Harman seemed to move on; Passet characterizes *Lucifer's* progression after 1900 as increasingly focused on eugenics and "scientific breeding," and dominated by male voices rather than by reader contributions. The utopian spark that flared in the 1880s and 1890s gave way to more strident editorial viewpoints that dismissed dissenting voices, especially from among his female readers (*Sex Radicals* 167). The eugenics language in *Lucifer* valued unborn children over the rights of women and raised the expectation that women would make choices in relationships to produce the most advanced or superior children. Harman began to "impose restraints on ideas that he now found unsuitable" (169), and while women spoke out against the change in emphasis and editorial policy, the columns of *Lucifer* were no longer a forum for community exchange and discussion. *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* became *The American Journal of Eugenics* and, as Passet notes, "it became evident that nineteenth-century sex radicals no longer fought for social and sexual equality" (170). The free love process utopias lost their readership and disappeared.

But the process utopia is a continuous cycle of imagining and testing possible futures. If the free love novel is a process utopia, its success must be judged on a longer timeline, not by its immediate results, but on the staying power of its problem articulation and the variety of the solutions it inspires. Unlike an end-state utopia, there is no single vision against which a community's success or failure can be judged: it is not the specific

solution and its feasibility that is the relevant measure, but the ability to imagine a different future. The free love movement did not see the widespread adoption of selective wedding vows or the creation of communal homes across the country, but I argue—drawing on the work of both Erin McKenna and Ruth Levitas—that those specific failures are part of the utopian process. The free love novel participated in a challenge to social and gender norms that continues today. Even more, that challenge is still highly relevant in the gay marriage movement as Holly Jackson argues, and in the resistance to escalating legal attacks on women's reproductive autonomy. Rather than draw an artificial boundary around free love that confines its vision to the 19th century, scholars today could acknowledge the continued relevance of the free love emphasis on bodily autonomy and consent, as well as choice and reproductive freedom.

Ruth Levitas defines utopia as a method, rather than a goal—a formulation useful for historically situating the work of the free love movement. Viewing utopianism as a method takes the focus off entrenched political talking points and focuses instead on "reconstructing from fragments the implicit good society embedded in political positions, and thus facilitating critique, engagement and dialogue about these implicit utopias" (300). In other words, defining utopia as method deemphasizes its blueprint-like connotation and shifts the focus to the creative envisioning of and debate over the alternative visions of the "good society." Anti-utopianism, according to Levitas, is the "[rejection] of radical alternatives" (298) as unrealistic or dangerous, and thus constitutes a refusal to debate alternatives on their merit. The result in modern politics is "piecemeal reform" (300) that is insufficient to meet the existential challenges of the 21st century. Likewise in the 19th century, the refusal of politicians and legislators to debate alternatives to a social structure

defined by marriage led to piecemeal reform of marital property and divorce laws. But for Levitas, the value of utopia is in its ability to "[enable] us to think about where we want to get to, and how to get there from here" (300). Utopia is not the destination; it is the "radical, holistic thinking that does not assume that we can basically go on as we are" (301) that generates alternatives and moves them into "the sphere of democratic debate" (300). Levitas further argues that any particular utopian solution "must fail adequately to articulate the desire for a better life, and is also bound to fail, even at the practical level, to resolve all present problems without creating new ones" (303). That failure, however, means the attempt to realize a better society is ongoing, which is better than not attempting radical change at all.

Susan McManus agrees in principle with Levitas. She argues that utopia is misunderstood as the static end state or utopian project in which the emphasis is on realizing and then maintaining a utopian system. But utopianism, she argues, cannot be judged on the basis of its "realizability, implementation, and feasibility." She posits that there are four elements to utopia: "those of alterity and critique, and those of prefiguration and transformation;" these four elements can be seen "as two utopian moments: the disruptive and the institutional" (3). Judging utopia based only on its implementation, a problem which she recognizes is at the heart of current "[debates] on utopia as impossibility" (5), means that the institutional moment takes precedence over the disruptive and will ultimately "preclude the radical leap in imagination and action that utopianism *is*" (3). McManus argues that Bloch's definition of utopia is fundamentally disruptive and forward moving rather than static; in fact, "the institutional moment of utopia signals its *end*" (4). When the utopian vision becomes the new system of

governance or social order, it needs to be disrupted and critiqued again, or it dies. In this way, not only can there be no end-state utopia (because the utopian vision is always being reimagined) it is the act of dreaming or imagining the ideal that is utopian, rather than the making of that ideal into reality.

These novels articulate women's objections to the ways that marriage-based society circumscribed their legal, emotional and sexual options, objections which still resonate amid 21st century debates about sexual consent and reproductive freedom. Twentieth- and twenty-first century feminist dystopias like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Leni Zumas's *Red Clocks* depict futures in which women have no autonomy in childbearing such that their lives are dictated by biology. *The Handmaid's Tale* in particular has become a cultural shorthand for the endgame embedded in anti-woman legislation sponsored by conservative religious and political groups and embodied in the recent US Supreme Court decision to overturn the legal precedent set in *Roe v. Wade*. Women's free love novels raised the same alarms, confronting the ways women were oppressed legally and socially in marriage and demanding a future in which neither the state nor the church could dictate their sex lives. Women in the 19th century blamed the legal structure of marriage for their lack of freedoms; women today are more likely to blame legislation that restricts or eliminates access to abortion. In both cases, however, it is women's sexuality and freedom of choice that is subject to the scrutiny and involvement of the state. A *New York Times* article published September 26, 2021, echoed rhetoric used by the free love movement in the 19th century when it quoted the director of an abortion clinic in Texas discussing the fallout of a new law outlawing abortion after just six weeks of pregnancy: "'I think a majority of women are being sentenced to being parents,'" (Tavernise 1). The idea of forced

motherhood, rather than what Moses Harman called "motherhood in freedom," is a common thread linking the free love movement directly to the 21 century. Recovering the 19th century free love novel contextualizes the current struggles for reproductive freedom within a longer genealogy and makes clear the ways that texts—then and now—intervene.

Epilogue

> The beauty of the modern book is not that of the book of yore. There will aways be between them the difference which separates work done by machine from work done by hand—a difference wide enough, and deep enough, to admit of no denial. But the volumes stamped by steam may have their own charm and their own qualities—to say nothing of their superior fitness for the nineteenth century when democracy is triumphant.
>
> Brander Matthews, *Bookbindings Old and New*, 1895.

I have argued in this dissertation that the material conditions of book production in the 19th century shaped what was written and by whom, making those conditions—and the resulting formats of the book—important considerations for the literary scholar. Further, I have argued that neither book history nor New Materialism currently offers a model that integrates a literary reading with a material one. Yet such an integrated reading of 19th century literature yields important insights into the production of newly mass-cultural narratives about marriage and gender roles as well as the ways that individual texts and authors found to resist the shaping influence of the steam press. The 19th century is particularly fertile ground for such an interpretive model since all acts of writing, printing, publishing and reading were material, and those material processes underwent profound transformation as they were industrialized in the first half of the century.

The industrialized book took the form of the publisher's case binding, presenting to the reading public for the first time an edition of a novel in uniform bindings. Prior to industrialization, the consumer played a role in book production by purchasing the unbound pages from a printer and commissioning a binding according to their tastes and budget. But by the 1840s and due to the tremendous increase in the output of printed pages from the combination of mechanized papermaking and the steam press, publishers

could afford to bind the books they sold in cheap, highly decorated case bindings whose covers served as billboard for their contents. Thus the book became a commodity, part of a mass culture that sold not just texts but the idea of the book to a newly-expanded reading public. This new and accessible form of the book played a critical role in circulating dominant mass-cultural narratives of marriage as regulating and normalizing the nuclear family as the microcosm of the nation and as the only stable and viable path in life for women; as a commercial form it also coincided with women's entrance into the literary marketplace and their forceful critique of marriage in fiction. As both instrument of mass culture and of resistance, the case-bound novel in the 19th century is a compelling object of study.

The works I have investigated in this dissertation are not merely examples or illustrations of the mutual constitution of print technology and the critique of marriage in the 19th century, they are critical interventions in the long arc of women's struggle for sexual and reproductive autonomy against mass cultural narratives that sought to selectively sanction women's sexual activity through the regulation and enforcement of marriage as the only respectable and viable life choice. Recovering these novels and reading them alongside the material struggles to bring them before a reading public is crucial to recognizing what women have thought possible for themselves and how they have used print and the novel to move toward those possibilities. Taken together, these four works demonstrate the inability of dominant narratives of marriage to contain the lived experiences of married and unmarried women and call for a broadened cultural understanding not only of gender roles, but of the ideological constructs of motherhood and womanhood as well.

Fanny Fern, whose rise to prominence was powered by the same presses that manufactured the discourses of marriage and motherhood, exposes in *Rose Clark* the fraudulence of those narratives and how they were replicated, circulated, and amplified by editors and publishers who controlled the presses and whose misogyny colored their representation of women writers. In Gertrude's story, Fern brings to the mainstream reading public a depiction of marital sexual abuse that highlights the married woman's predicament: by law she has consented to sex as part of the marriage ceremony and can not withdraw that consent. Yet in Gertrude Fern offers an alternative and nearly revolutionary path forward for the survivor of marriage's fraudulence: she need not surrender and die like the heroine of a seduction novel but could instead insist on a truly independent life supported by the respectable and profitable use of her own talents. Gertrude is the new woman, capable of navigating a world comprised of print and living a productive life as a single woman.

Harriet Jacobs had none of Fern's access to steam-powered print but intervened powerfully in the cultural definitions of womanhood and marriage nonetheless. Reading *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* alongside its publication history makes clear that the legal and ideological system of American slavery denied her ownership of both self and story, an ownership she reclaimed by not just writing the story of her sexual exploitation and escape from slavery, but by guiding it into print by purchasing the material text—the stereotype plates—and directing its reproduction. While the act of writing creates the authorial self, by itself it is not enough: it is the act of publishing that puts the author into the public sphere where political action takes place. By purchasing her plates and accessing print outside of mainstream publishing, Jacobs is able to put into circulation a story that

exposes the ways that Black women are excluded from the definition of womanhood and the protection of marriage and inspire in her readers the outrage and sympathy necessary to take action.

The free love novel draws directly on the rhetorical legacy of *Incidents* in its exposure of women's vulnerability in marriage to the "sex slavery" of unwanted pregnancies and to loveless marriages based on one spouse's legal power over the other. Both *Hagar Lyndon* and *Hilda's Home* see the abolition of marriage as the end of such "slavery" and cast the new, autonomous woman as sexually pure because she can consent to sex based on love and free choice rather than obligation. This new woman can experience "motherhood in freedom," thus rewriting the notion of the seduced or fallen woman to focus on reproductive choice. Such a rewriting is made possible by the free love community's open exchange of ideas in the anarchist newspaper *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* and the editorial discretion exercised by the paper's publisher, Moses Harman. Because Harmon owned his press, set the type, and printed the paper himself, he could set editorial policies that resulted in the envisioning of alternative social structures to marriage and the community debate necessary to the process of utopian thinking. The resulting free love novels written by women, including *Hilda's Home* and *Hagar Lyndon*, are unacknowledged early examples of the process utopia, a subgenre of utopian fiction that describes the process of achieving a utopian vision step by step, rather than focusing on the discovery of a perfect society. The free love process utopia calls unequivocally for women's sexual autonomy using the language of consent and choice that would inform calls for reproductive freedom to the current day.

My desire to bring into closer contact the literary text and the material book stems from my own experience as both a student of literature and as a bookbinder. For more than a decade before my return to graduate school, I worked as a bookbinder and book restorer. While I have restored books dating from the 16th century to the 21st, many of the books that come to my shop date from the 19th century. In my bindery, I have taken those books apart, studied their construction and materials, and learned the decorative elements as they changed during the course of the Industrial Revolution. For a decade I worked only for institutions and collectors, and so the books that passed through my workshop and my hands were those a curator of some sort had deemed worthy of preservation: those with steel engravings by William Blake or maps of early America, bibles denounced by Martin Luther or bound in tawed leather colored by centuries of candle smoke. More recently, I have expanded my audience (a webpage!) and now see a different kind of book come into my shop: the mass-produced edition, the much-loved children's book, the heirloom cookbook, the thoroughly annotated and worn-out personal bible. From these objects, I have observed how book consumers not just acquire books, but how they read them and interact with them, and how they assign them value.

When book owners call me to discuss a restoration or rebinding of these mass-produced books, the textual is always and inextricably bound up with the material in their request. Often the call begins with a description of the book's contents, whether it is an influential work in a given field or contains some paratextual or extratextual element—genealogy pages in a bible, for example—of importance to the owner. Simply buying another copy of the book is an unsuitably transactional solution for these owners, as what is replaced is merely paper and ink without what Ian Hodder has called the

"entanglements" that have accrued between human and object. I have restored and preserved books that were never meant to outlast a childhood or a lifetime because for those who possess them, the particular text is situated in a specific material form that also has meaning: the two must remain hand-in-hand, book and binding, text and format. I have learned from these interactions that for these book owners, neither the text nor the material book is primary—the two are nearly always read together.

It is this integrated approach to reading and valuing both the literary and the material that I call for in this dissertation. The machinery, tools, and systems that produce texts as material objects matter in the process of meaning-making not only in the interpretation of the individual texts I examine, but also in making visible the ways that book production technology shapes the very literary forms, terms, and logics through which 19th women writers made explicit arguments in favor of sexual and social autonomy. While the relationship between the text and its material conditions of production is made more clear given the 19th century's emphasis on the machinery of mass culture, reading the material as an interpretive strategy will render insightful readings of 21st century literature as well, as new conditions of production shape new literary forms and new cultural narratives.

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Appendix: Bibliography of Free Love Novels, 1860-1900

Listed in chronological order

Nichols, Mary Gove. *Mary Lyndon, or, Revelations of a Life, an Autobiography*. W. A. Townsend & Company, 1860.

A young woman makes a disastrous marriage, leaves her husband, and enters other romantic relationships. Free love; autobiography.

Nichols, Mary Gove and Thomas Nichols. *Esperanza: My Journey Thither and What I Found There*, 1860.

A young man travels to Esperanza, a utopian free love community. Epistolary end-state utopia.

Howland, Marie. *Papa's Own Girl*. John P. Jewitt, 1874.

A young girl leaves an ill-suited first marriage, achieves financial independence, and builds a communal, self-sustaining home in which labor is divided equally to achieve gender equality. Process utopia.

Fowler, Sada Bailey. *Irene, or, The Road to Freedom*. H. N. Fowler, 1886.

Likely self-published. A young girl and her half-sister develop alternate views of love and marriage and eventually build a communal home in which they can live out these views and work for social justice. Process utopia.

Bellamy, Charles. *An Experiment in Marriage: A Romance*. Albany Book Company, 1889.

Three men from New York travel to Grape Valley in the west to experience a society in which marriage is easily entered and exited, women have equal economic opportunity, and labor is divided equally. End state utopia.

Pittock, Mrs. M. A. *The God of Civilization: A Romance*. Eureka Publishing Company, 1890.

A young woman and her companions are shipwrecked on a Pacific island, where they learn the customs of the islanders regarding marriage. End state utopia.

Gestefeld, Ursula. *The Woman Who Dares*. Lovell, Gestefeld & Co, 1892.

Likely self-published. A young girl comes of age and marries to escape her overbearing father, but finds that she has transferred control from father to husband. After years of marriage, she refuses to have sex with her husband until he acknowledges her right to self-determination and bodily autonomy. Process utopia; free thought.

Olerich, Henry. *A Cityless and Countryless World*. Gilmore & Olerich, 1893.

Likely self-published. A visitor from Mars explains the Marsian system of economics, labor, land distribution, farming, and sexual relations to an enlightened family on Earth. End state utopia.

Holmes, Lizzie. *Hagar Lyndon*. 1893. Serialized in *Lucifer, The Light-Bearer.*

A young girl observes her parents' and sister's marriages and decides to never marry. She bears a child and is ostracized; eventually she marries the father of her child, but they write their own vows to remove the references to men's ownership of their wives. Process utopia.

Allen, Grant. *The Woman Who Did*. Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1895.

A young woman falls in love but remains true to her belief in freedom and so refuses to marry her lover. She bears a child and is ostracized; her child discovers the truth of her birth and disavows her mother, who commits suicide. Process utopia; hagiography.

Miller, George Noyes. *The Strike of a Sex*. Alice B. Stockholm & Co. 1896.

A man visits a town in which all of the women have left their homes and gathered together to demand sexual and reproductive autonomy. Advocates marriage and sex reform but offers no utopian solution.

Graul, Rosa. *Hilda's Home*. 1898. Serialized in *Lucifer, The Light-Bearer*; reprinted in book form by M. Harman, 1899.

A young girl observes her parents' marriage and her sister's seduction and adopts free love. She, her lover, and her friends convert their families and acquaintances to free love and eventually build a communal home where they can all live without censure. Process utopia.

Steward, T. G. *A Charlestown Love Story, or, Hortense Vanross.* 1899.

A young woman marries a man who uses free love as an excuse for infidelity. She cannot escape the marriage and dies brokenhearted; he sees the error of his free love beliefs, adopts religion, and becomes a better man. Free love critique.

Jerauld, Nellie. *Chains*. 1900. Serialized in *Discontent,* 1900-1901 (journal of the anarchist colony Home, Washington State).

No summary available. I have not been able to locate copies of *Discontent* to read this novel; however, the novel is mentioned in other radical publications as a free love novel.