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SAMANTHA DAVIS

The Caged Lioness: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Antebellum Femininity, and the First Women's Rights Movement in the Era of Reform

On a summer day in July in upstate New York in 1848, a crowd of nearly three hundred gathered anxiously to hear the moving words of activists, and to unite in grassroots solidarity for a common moral cause. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, having served as a moving force behind the event, appeared before the audience to deliver her first public speech in defense of women's rights. In her address, she insists to the audience, "so long has man exercised tyranny over her, injurious to himself and benumbing to her faculties, that few can nerve themselves to meet the storm."¹ And no one was more apt to weathering that storm than Stanton and her brilliant band of colleagues including Susan B. Anthony, Amelia Bloomer, and Lucretia Mott during a convention that marked the beginning of the American feminist crusade.

"The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," the declaration signed at Seneca Falls read.² Wisely channeling the same political concepts of individual liberty and self-government found in the Declaration of Independence, the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments charged that the natural rights, proclaimed so confidently in the constitution, that were bestowed onto humankind by God were, by far, not shared in proportion to the masses in the early nineteenth century. In the years following the establishment of the Revolution, the egalitarian rhetoric that attracted so many also worked to bring painful awareness to those left out on those sacred privileges of citizenship. Women, slaves, immigrants, and the poor often found themselves all a part of a disenfranchised population that possessed little rights or political power in the shadow of the white man.

As America began to experience the challenges accompanying expansion and industrialism at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the happenings at Seneca Falls were just one example of how women began to adopt revolutionary rhetoric to fight for their own cause. Uncomfortable class identities and the religious revival of the Second Great Awakening during this time provided for widespread reform movements, the reach of which seemed to touch all communities and lives. The Era of Reform goes greatly underestimated in the role it played in launching the status and political activity of women in the United States. Additionally, women's social standing in Victorian society positioned them within a favorable scenario to seize the plentiful opportunities that provided ambitious women the convenience to gain power and exercise agency outside of the home while remaining true to a moral cause.

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Address Delivered at Seneca Falls: July 19, 1848," in *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony: Correspondences, Writings, Speeches*, edited by Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 28.

² "Declaration of Sentiments," *Women's Rights: National Historical Parks*, last modified October 17, 2013, accessed October 20, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/report-of-the-womans-rights-convention.htm>.

Women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton began their career during this time by becoming involved in anti-slavery and temperance activism, only to identify gender inequities existing within and as extensions of the societal wrongs they were working to improve. It was through championing the rights of others that women came to realize the full scope of their political restriction and social degradation. These women knew that in order to properly empower others, they must first voice the demand for their own empowerment from a nation that was currently denying roughly half the nation's inhabitants a legal identity. The tumultuous era of reform movements and lofty societal shifts proved to be the ideal hour for women to seize what should have always been rightly theirs: respect, recognition, influence, a voice in the crowd, and a seat at the table.

Similar to most group narratives, there is always a less appealing side to each beaming historical triumph. The early American women's rights activists faced immense challenges during their crusade in the defense of early feminism. Though they rejected most oppressive conceptions of womanhood and domesticity present in the mainstream, they were still forced to operate within those parameters to a certain degree. Women's rights activists of the time struggled with balancing contentious political activism and benevolent service with continuing to operate as the moral compass to the family and as dutiful wives who were careful not to disgrace her virtuous family. Certainly, these difficulties did not only plague the efforts of common women. The trials of many influential women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton are well documented by her own pen as she struggled to maintain influence while not abandoning her duties as wife and mother. In this context, Stanton serves as an example, both common and exceptional, of the demands and challenges of the women's rights movement that evolved from the reform movements during the first half of the nineteenth century.

One cannot acknowledge the individual trials and triumphs of Elizabeth Stanton without a foundational appreciation for the cultural context in which early feminism arose. Many look at the fevered, widespread reform efforts in antebellum America and wonder why this particular phenomenon took place at this specific time. A closer cultural analysis of American life in the aftermath of the American Revolution until the Civil War will reveal that a great number of Americans were dedicating their lives, or at least volunteering a great deal of their time and money, to reform movements as a way to exert control within their world that was otherwise so dramatically changing.³ During this time, the American consciousness transformed greatly alongside the rapid transitions taking place throughout society caused by increasing population, an expanding republic with growing democratic values, the advent of industrialism, and the widespread revival of religious sentiments throughout the nation. None of these factors were independent of any of the others, and each served as vital components to the popularity and endurance of these powerful reform movements.

As one historian put it, "the vortex of industrialization drew everything toward it and nothing unchanged."⁴ The early nineteenth century produced enlightened political ideas of liberty and equality that were dismantling the hierarchical social infrastructure in America accompanied by the

³ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers: 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 13.

⁴ Nancy F. Cott, *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 179.

Market Revolution. This revolution transformed the economy as industry flourished and cities urbanized. The entire nature of labor was redefined as men left their homes and entered the more structured, public workforce. As industrialism swept the North, a thriving middle class emerged possessing a unique set of values for the communities they were participating in. While men were expected to competitively participate in the increasingly perceived immoral and demanding public workforce, women were considered “too fair a flower to survive in business or politics.”⁵ As a result, women, especially of the upper and middle class, were backed further into a corner of isolation. They were elevated to a problematic pedestal characterized by unrealistic expectations of domesticity and femininity.

The aforementioned economic and social shifts of the nineteenth century all helped to perpetuate exaggerated conceptions of superior female virtue and piety. Though much of that advanced morality may have been the product of a cultural self-fulfilling prophecy, it is not difficult to draw connections between this cult of domesticity and the common belief of the time that “her strongest moral organ is benevolence.”⁶ Women’s virtual seclusion to the private sphere and the expectation to oversee the development of children paired with uncertain economic times and uncomfortable emerging class dynamics made women the ideal candidates for benevolent organizations. Because most of these women were largely compelled to participate in such organizations due to the doctrine of their Protestant backgrounds, it is only logical that their involvement with reform movements and benevolent organizations blossomed during the era of the Second Great Awakening.

The period between the 1790s and the mid-1830s is often referred to as the Second Great Awakening due to the aggressive religious revivals throughout the country that encouraged many women to take up a cause with abolition, temperance, education, dress, and women’s rights.⁷ Though benevolent activity was common across all Protestant denominations, none was as active as the Quakers. Practicing a form of Christianity that held to a more egalitarian doctrine than most allowed Quaker women to be more outspoken in opposition to slavery and drink, as well as to become heavily involved with benevolent service and progressive reform movements.⁸ While the men and a handful of women preached as advocates for a return to strict biblical principles, ideas about the appropriate treatment of others, particularly women and blacks, came into the limelight. Even Elizabeth Cady Stanton, not particularly religious herself, understood the power of religious validation during this time and used it often in her speeches to assert that “woman stands by the side of man, his equal, placed here by God, to enjoy with him the beautiful earth...having the same sense of right and wrong and looking to the same Being for guidance...”⁹ The double standard surrounding ancient mandates of unconditional love and constitutionally based doctrines

⁵ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers: 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 103.

⁶ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 11.

⁷ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers: 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Address Seneca Falls,” *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, edited by Ellen Carol DuBois, 28.

of natural rights began to come under the scrutiny of the religiously enlightened of the early nineteenth century.

In some respects, the appeal of reform movements during the early nineteenth century could be negatively classified as reactionary or backward. Indeed, much of the rhetoric of this era echoes that of evangelism and a certain nostalgia for the past. However, as the scope of reform expanded, ideas about what was best for society began to assume a different, more progressive appearance. Shifting economic demands, societal expectations, and household dynamics worked in other ways to expand the conversation about rights and increase the amount of leverage women had in creating their own forms of autonomy. Much of this autonomy was created out of the reform-aimed sentiments of antebellum America that, for good reason, attracted women across racial, sectional, and class lines.

It is during the beginning of the nineteenth century that women become visible in assuming more seemingly masculine roles in leadership of influential reform attempts and service organizations. Women were all too aware of their political powerlessness within the home and sought to capitalize on the advantages offered by a female collective working publicly with benevolent aims. One historian described their motives as “careful to preserve the power and autonomy they possessed as a public corporation but lacked in private life.”¹⁰ Elite women wielded more power in these unions with more access to influence and financial contributions, though working class women and freed blacks developed successful organizations of their own.

Though the spectrum of reform targets were endless in antebellum America, two particular movements seem to shine brighter than the others in terms to popularity, support, and the tendency for women’s rights to blossom out of it. Temperance and anti-slavery activities were most responsible for grooming the most prominent of women’s rights advocates. It was through the rhetoric and reasoning in opposition of slavery and alcohol consumption that many men and women became activists for something entirely different. Through speaking out about the vices of drink and disgrace of human bondage, women discovered the stifling double standard existing in American society that grossly restricted their own lives.¹¹

It was during this time of social upheaval and religious revival that many Christian reformers began to critique the problem of alcoholism in American society. As the stakes grew higher for production and livelihood within a new economy transformed by industry, attention toward the importance of moderation and personal responsibility grew. As the primary representative of morality and virtue within the home, women’s involvement in temperance organizations increased throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Whether intentional or not, these exclusively female groups began to realize the other, sometimes more significant obstacles they faced in everyday life through their temperance activism. One historian noted that “women who supported temperance reform actively supported a broad definition of women’s rights” because “they believed that the temperance issue would most effectively change attitudes about women’s injustices and encourage

¹⁰ Anne M. Boylan, “Women and Politics in the Era before Seneca Falls,” *The Journal of the Early Republic* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), 366, accessed October 1, 2013, JSTOR.

¹¹ Lisa Shaver, “Serpents, Fiends, and Libertines:” Inscribing an Evangelical Rhetoric of Rage in the *Advocate of Moral Reform*, *Rhetoric Review* 30, no. 1, 3, accessed October 1, 2013, EBSCO.

women to become active on their own behalf.”¹² The narrow focus of temperance only opened the door for women to recognize and work to topple other injustices such as certain legal restrictions and, perhaps most famously, suffrage.

With these broad goals in mind, women mobilized to achieve their aims by moving, as one author described it, “from pedestal to pen and podium.”¹³ The rhetoric used by these women served as a powerful sentiment to their struggle in the temperance movement and society as a whole. In forming a female community, women began to identify with one another about areas of their lives that concerned them or common circumstances that many suffered. Women were increasingly dissatisfied with the limits of their legal identity and rights that had been historically restricted because of their gender. For example, a prevalent problem many women experienced was the inability to divorce or separate from an alcoholic and/or abusive husband. In one speech, an early advocate for temperance reform and women’s rights and close friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Bloomer conveyed this struggle best when addressing the crowd with this shocking, yet realistic question: “Can it be possible that the moral sense of a people is more shocked at the idea of a pure minded, gentle woman surrendering a tie which binds her to a loathsome mass of corruption, than it is to see her dragging out her days in misery tied to his besotted and filthy carcass?”¹⁴ As this quote demonstrates, temperance reform was among the earliest avenues women used to gain fervent momentum for the later, more militant activism that is more characterizing of the first wave of feminism.

Perhaps even more important than temperance efforts in raising awareness of the struggle for women’s rights was the anti-slavery and abolitionist activities that women took part in during the years preceding the Civil War. In championing the humanity of black slaves, women found themselves increasingly identifying with some aspects of their condition. Of course women were not subjected to the comparable horrific lifestyle of Southern slaves, yet women still recognized similarities in the denial of basic citizen rights under both the eye of the law and within the stratified, exclusive codes of patriarchal society. One historian points out the vital role that anti-slavery activism played as being a provider of “an egalitarian philosophy, an organizational structure, financial support, a readymade constituency, [and] an opportunity to enlarge the definition of woman’s ‘proper sphere.’”¹⁵

In the midst of women rethinking and challenging their legal and cultural position in the context of harmful vice and the race-based enslavement of millions, women’s emerging ideas about the empowerment of themselves and others gained momentum in the face of vehement attempts at silencing and humiliation. For example, upon attending a Sons of Temperance meeting in 1852, Susan B. Anthony was reprimanded for attempting to speak by the chairman that hastily informed

¹² Carol Mattingly, *Well Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵ Sylvia D. Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Woman’s Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 9.

her “the sisters were not invited there to speak but to listen and learn.”¹⁶ Other women shared countless similar instances of silencing and repression within the public sphere that may have hindered their message for the moment, but proved to be a powerful testament to the selfless dedication of early women’s rights activists.

Only after a sufficient reconstruction of the social, economic, and religious conditions under which the topic of women’s rights developed and gained popularity in the United States can the example of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s activism and feminist rhetoric be understood and appropriately appreciated for its daring assertions that reached far beyond its time. Stanton’s ideas were a composite of all of the aforementioned preconditions that led to the women’s rights movements. Like many others, Stanton recognized that the popular belief of women’s natural predisposition to morality by virtue of their sex could be used to exert social and political influence that challenged the power men had formerly held over them.

Elizabeth Cady had grown up with a desire for knowledge and a dissatisfaction for the limited roles antebellum American society offered her, but did not have the opportunity to act upon those grievances until she married Henry Stanton in 1840. Henry was ambitious and deeply involved with local politics and anti-slavery movements. Though Stanton’s first love was politics and she is most remembered for her radical demands for the lot of women, she began her career by investing her time and emotions largely to the abolitionist cause. Identifying the similar barriers faced by slaves and women, Stanton depicted slavery as a “question of religion, philanthropy, political economy, commerce, education, and social life on which depends the very existence of this so called republic.”¹⁷ Stanton denounced the immorality of slavery while unearthing the social and economic systems that similarly oppressed and disenfranchised women.

It was in the company of Henry Stanton that Elizabeth made her first journey to London in 1840 to attend the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention.¹⁸ The Stanton’s set out on a voyage to London that lasted weeks, only to learn upon arrival that the female delegates of the American Anti-Slavery Society had been excluded from participation. The convention served as a double edged sword in the developing ideology of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. On one hand, Stanton and the other female delegates were outraged and humiliated after a vote took place to exclude the women from addressing the convention or voting on measures, however it was also at this convention that Stanton befriended other women who were already active within the inner circles of anti-slavery and feminist aims.

On this adventure, Stanton met her kindred spirits “who believed in equality of the sexes and who did not believe in the popular orthodox religion.”¹⁹ Lucretia Mott was present at the convention and nearly instantly became Stanton’s role model in independent thinking and radical activism. Stanton would later remark of one English male delegate who had denounced her new friend and future mentor, Lucretia Mott: “In all my life, I never did desire so to ring a man’s neck as I did his and I never enjoyed anything more than his agonizing sea sickness crossing the

¹⁶ Lydia M. Belzer, “Raising Her Voice: Early Feminist Efforts At Obtaining the Right to Speak: 1835–1860,” *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 13, no. 2, 322.

¹⁷ DuBois, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 7.

¹⁸ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

channel.”²⁰ The bitter irony the women experienced of attending an international convention advocating principles of divinely mandated equality, only to be rejected, scolded, and silenced by their peers served to be a pivotal moment in the radicalization of the American women’s rights movement. Fortunately, involvement in the abolitionist cause brought Stanton and her feminist peers face-to-face with some of the most daunting power centers in the nation, which was exactly the kind of fight they desired. In fact, it was less than a year after returning from England that Stanton encouraged many of the same women who had accompanied her in London to conduct a different kind of convention in which they would most certainly be heard.

Following the conclusion of the London convention, Stanton continued to prod Lucretia Mott and others with letters explaining: “the more I think on the present condition of woman, the more am I oppressed with the reality of their degradation.”²¹ In the several years following the disheartening events in London, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a political novice in every way, seemed to easily distance herself from the abolitionist cause in order to lend her fullest energies to the women’s rights arena. By 1848, Stanton received her wish upon organizing their first women’s rights convention with the help of several influential peers.

Elizabeth Cady’s Stanton’s address at Seneca Falls urged for the social and moral equality of men and women, while protesting the unjust and oppressive practices of both government statute and cultural norms. “We are assembled today to protest against a form of government,” Stanton proclaimed, “existing without the consent of the governed—to declare our right to be free as man is free,” deeming the countless unjust laws described in detail as “a shame and a disgrace to a Christian republic in the nineteenth century.”²² Stanton was certainly unwavering in what she had to say about women’s rights, but a closer look at her address at the convention and the Declaration of Sentiments that was a product of the meeting will show that many ideas expressed at this convention were more mainstream than militant. In addition to criticizing women’s civic inequality and social immobility, the rhetoric of the convention was also sure to urge women to stop contributing to their own oppression by remaining apathetic to the rights of women. To that end, one resolution in the declaration urged women against “declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.”²³

One of the more moderate demands made at the convention and argued by Elizabeth Cady Stanton throughout her career was the education and equal intellectual treatment of women. Despite being excluded from most colleges, Stanton had received the most quality education offered to women at the time from the Troy Female Seminary that instilled in their curriculum many of the principles that would later be expressed throughout the women’s rights movement. Possessing the privilege of wealth, semi-progressive parents, and an excellent education, Elizabeth Stanton believed that education was a significant component needed in order for women to gain

²⁰ Ibid. 40.

²¹ Stanton, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 11-12.

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ “Report from the Woman’s Rights Convention,” Women’s Rights: National Historical Park: New York, last modified October 25, 2013, accessed October 31, 2013, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/report-of-the-womans-rights-convention.htm>.

personal sovereignty and political autonomy. In her address to the crowd at Seneca Falls in regards to men's unfair assumed position of intellectual superiority as an argument to keep women uneducated and in the home, Stanton announced that "when we shall have our freedom to find out our own sphere, when we shall have our colleges, our professions, our trades, for a century, a comparison may then be justly instituted."²⁴

Another more conventional theme expressed by early women's rights activists was the promotion of greater balance between the sexes under both state and federal law codes. Activists voiced resentment toward laws and customs that made divorce a near improbability, deprived them of access to their children in the rare instances of divorce, denied women access to ownership and inheritance of property, shorted them wages, and barred them from certain careers and universities. In her address to the legislature of New York in 1854, Stanton speaks to highlight in the legal inequities of the Empire State to be unjustly harsh on even upstanding women in the community by arguing that "we are moral, virtuous, and intelligent, and in all respects, quite equal to the white man himself, yet by your laws we are classed with idiots, lunatics, and negroes," and goes on to argue that the place of women in society was lower than that of either because while the lunatic or slave could possibly gain some sort of personal satisfaction through work or access to money, women were bound by law into their sphere.²⁵ Playing on the common conception of female morality, Stanton continues by explaining "we who have guided great movements of charity, established missions, edited journals...discovered planets, and piloted ships across the sea are denied the most sacred rights of citizens, because, forsooth, we came not into this republic crowned with the dignity of manhood!"²⁶

In that same address, Stanton reiterated one of the most basic tenants of women's rights rhetoric dealing with laws regarding married women and issues of divorce. During the early nineteenth century, the old English laws of coverture still reigned, meaning that a woman's legal identity upon marriage became completely absorbed with that of the husband's. In the face of such laws, Stanton characterized the nineteenth century legal status of married women and divorce limitations to be "in open violation of our enlightened ideas of justice, and of the holiest feelings of our nature."²⁷ In her relentless speeches in favor of more flexible divorce legislation, Stanton and her peers managed to add a controversial component, similar to the gay rights debate taking place today, to the question of the sanctity of marriage as opposed to marriage existing as a practical civil function. After one event in which Stanton proclaimed to the crowd that any compact "that failed to promote human happiness could not, in the nature of things, be of any force or authority; and it would not be only a right, but a duty to abolish it," Stanton proudly boasted that "we have thrown our bombshell into the center of woman's degradation and of course we have raised a rumpus."²⁸

Indeed, if it was a rumpus Elizabeth Cady Stanton was looking for, she certainly received her wish with the more controversial components of the demands formulated at the Seneca Falls

²⁴ Stanton, "Address Delivered at Seneca Falls," *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 29.

²⁵ Stanton, "Address to the Legislature of New York on Women's Rights: February 14, 1854," *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 45.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁸ Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 98-100.

Convention of 1848. Stanton, long before many other activists, recognized that in order to facilitate the changes that they were so vehemently arguing for, they would need the ultimate symbol of political autonomy: the vote. In her address at Seneca Falls, she presented her reasoning for demanding the vote by saying: “Had woman a vote to give, might not the office-holders and seekers propose some change in her condition? Might not Woman’s Rights become as great a question as free soil?”²⁹ As provocative as the notion seemed to many, Stanton knew that only when women gained the right to cast their ballot alongside men could they wield the influence they so thirsted for. Stanton also drew connections between gaining the right to vote and men finally acknowledging woman’s equal intellectual and moral capacity. She received mixed reviews from those attending her address in which she noted that to have “drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rumselling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys fully recognized, while we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens, it is too grossly insulting to the dignity of woman to be longer quietly submitted to.”³⁰

Even from some of those closest to her, Stanton’s call for female suffrage was not a popular sentiment at first. Regarding the demand for the vote that added a radical note to the Seneca Falls proceedings, Stanton’s own husband warned her that “you will turn the proceedings into a farce.”³¹ Also, Stanton differed from many of her colleagues in that she formed her ideologies without much religious affiliation that enabled her to think and speak more freely, but also brought her into opposition with some of her close friends. Lucretia Mott, fearing the reaction of the Quakers that made up a majority of the women’s rights movement upon the introduction of such overtly political demands exclaimed affectionately to Stanton, “Lizzie, thee will make up ridiculous.”³² Despite the vocal discomfort of those closest to her, Stanton did not change the demand for inclusion in electoral politics as the focal point of her career.

Strangely, Elizabeth Cady Stanton seemed to be more affected by critics who were virtual strangers. Newspapers across the nation were eager to publish the events at Seneca Falls, but far fewer were willing to throw their support behind the movement prematurely. After the convention, Stanton was shocked to find that “what seemed to us so timely, so rational, and so sacred, should be a subject for sarcasm and ridicule to the entire press of the nation,” as “all the journals from Maine to Texas seemed to strive with each other to see which could make our movement appear the most ridiculous.”³³ Nevertheless, the publicity Stanton received, negative or not, for her words and actions in aims of female empowerment worked to establish her and the movement that she was a part of a force to be reckoned with. To many, she was taken seriously either as a threat to the establishment or heroine to the disenfranchised majority. However, the criticism by the press and personal tensions created by some of Stanton’s rhetoric still offered setbacks to the more radical aims that is more characterized by early twentieth century.

²⁹ Stanton, “Address Delivered at Seneca Falls,” *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

³¹ Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 60.

³² *Ibid.*, 61.

³³ Lydia M. Belzer, “Raising Her Voice: Early Feminist Efforts At Obtaining the Right to Speak: 1835–1860,” *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 13, no. 2, 335.

In many ways Elizabeth Cady Stanton's experiences embodied the restrictive dichotomy of the public/private sphere that women struggled with during this era. Not only did she receive criticism and resistance for so dramatically entering the public sphere and taking on such a masculine, political identity, she also struggled with maintaining that image within the confines of an unconventional nineteenth-century marriage and expectations of motherhood and domesticity. After returning from the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, Henry and Elizabeth Stanton's political ambitions seemed to often pull them in different directions as Henry remained loyal to his anti-slavery aims within New York and Elizabeth increasingly turned her attention to women's rights. Despite long periods of separation, the Stantons were still able to produce seven children who proved to restrict the professional efforts of Elizabeth to a great degree.

In an androcentric culture that valued women primarily for their ability to reproduce and raise the next generation, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was no exception in facing pressures to bear children and create for them the ideal nineteenth-century domestic life. An article in one 1830s lady's magazine urged to readers that "to render home happy is woman's peculiar province—home is her world."³⁴ Despite Stanton's prolific career and historic strides to dismantle the oppressive domestic pedestal, she spent much of her life operating within those boundaries herself. "I pace up and down these two chambers of mine like a caged lioness, longing to bring to a close nursing and housekeeping cares," Elizabeth grumbled to her close friend Susan B. Anthony in one of their many correspondences.³⁵ Though the media had depicted Stanton and many other women in favor of women's rights to be angry, bitter individuals that disrespected the authority of their husbands and violated traditional modes of femininity, Stanton was quite loyal to the needs of her family, prioritizing the role of mother above all else. To Anthony, she wrote: "I forbid you to ask me to send one thought or one line to any convention, any paper, or any individual; for I swear by all the saints that whilst I am nursing this baby I will not be tormented with suffering humanity."³⁶ The openness Stanton displays in these types of records shows a controversial side of Elizabeth that freely spoke of how domestic life complicated bigger aspirations, but served as an important example of how her bold ideology was limited by the realities of the era.

Another controversial component of reform efforts simultaneously serving the purpose of women's rights that was also greatly restricted by these realities was the dress reform movements of the early nineteenth century. During the 1850s and 1860s, women began to fire upon the impractical petticoats, heavy skirts, and burdensome corsets that were popular at the time, wishing to replace it with the infamous "bloomer costume."³⁷ The outfit was fashioned with billowing pants meant to make a political statement as much as it was for utilitarian purposes. "What incredible freedom I enjoyed for two years," Stanton later cheerfully remembered of the short period in which she took a visual stance on female health, sexuality, and femininity.

³⁴ Nancy F. Cott, *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 239.

³⁵ Stanton, "Stanton/Anthony Letters:1852-1859," *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony*, 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷ Amy Kesselman, "The 'Freedom Suit': Feminism and Dress Reform in the United States, 1848-1875," *Gender and Society* 5, no. 4 (Dec., 1991): 495-510, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190097>.

Not surprisingly, the increasingly radical movement to increase female mobility and physical comfort did not phase through without ruffling some feathers. Stanton's father and husband both voiced their disapproval of her new choice in garments, especially after many of Henry Stanton's political colleagues expressed that they would not vote for a man whose wife wore bloomers and popular jingles sneered: "twenty tailors take the stitches, Mrs. Stanton wears the breeches!"³⁸ However, in the face of familial disapproval and public badgering, hundreds of women rushed to obtain for themselves the bloomers—more a symbol of liberation than fashion. This instance of popular, widespread defiance exposed a grassroots transformation of the attitudes of women everywhere, no more limited to a handful of intellectual elites.

What is evident within the histories of the early American women's rights movement and personal documents of Elizabeth Cady Stanton is the expansive scope with which the aims of these activists encompassed in the culture of the United States. Whether a majority agreed with their ideas or not, their voices were certainly heard and consequently began conversations about what American womanhood should look like in an emerging middle class society professing religious and political enlightenment.

Within societal reform movements and religiously driven benevolent organizations of the early nineteenth century, women drew links between their own lives and the social, economic, and civic inequities of the urban poor and slaves of the American South. Using that same rhetoric, women launched a more personal attack on powerful individuals and institutions, demanding greater autonomy in the public sphere with their pens and voices, in the home alongside their husbands and children, at the ballot box, and over their own bodies.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton served as a remarkable force in sophisticating and forwarding the agenda of the early women's rights movements. She tirelessly threw her efforts behind the moderate claims of the movement, but was also responsible for developing a far more radical component to the American feminist movement. In her demand for female suffrage, Stanton guided the movement through a significant transformation from a sort of spinoff hybrid rising out of the Era of Reform to a highly developed, politically feminist campaign. Furthermore, Stanton's proud championing of more taboo subjects such as female suffrage, flexible marriage boundaries, and openness regarding female sexual agency painted her as a thinker far beyond her time. A popular motto in post-Revolutionary America said "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance," observing that for a republic with a large, diverse population to thrive, the people themselves must be proactive in constructing their own destinies.³⁹ No one better understood this sentiment than Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the women that worked closely beside her. Her efforts made a lasting impact on the status and opportunity of American women and set the stage for the better known, more militant feminist movements of the early twentieth century that managed to obtain the vote for women that Stanton had wanted so badly.

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³⁸ Ginzberg, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 80–82.

³⁹ Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of Civil War* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1999):3.

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TARA LAWSON

“I won’t be bound that way”: Subversion and Containment of Wonder Woman in Comic Books

After being hit with a bullet from Eros, Wonder Woman stands before a congregation of the dead. She is about to marry Hades, the god she is now forced to love. Around her neck is her magic lasso, shaped in the form of a noose, which Hades calls her “wedding ring” (Azzarello no. 9, 22). Wonder Woman has already promised to love the fearsome underworld god, but Hades declares that her promises do not matter—she must prove it to him. He tries to tie her with her lasso, but before he can Wonder Woman exclaims, “Bind me? With proof, not **trust?** I won’t be bound that way to any man... woman... or **god**” (Azzarello no. 10, 3–4). She attempts an escape from Hell, but is quickly caught again by Hades. Wonder Woman explains that she loves everyone, including him, and that “you can’t make anyone love you unless you love yourself” (Azzarello no. 10, 16). Hades is upset by this newfound revelation and allows Wonder Woman to leave Hell. The idea that a woman can be independent and have free choice over those she decides to have a relationship with is an inspiring one. Certainly Wonder Woman, the first female superhero who was not reliant upon a man as either a love interest or a savior, is an ideal voice for this message. However, the empowerment that Wonder Woman is briefly granted is quickly revoked. Immediately after Wonder Woman leaves Hell with Hephaestus, she learns that she did not really have any free will in the situation: Hephaestus had everything predetermined for her.

The preceding episode is a classic example of Wonder Woman trying to be subversive, yet being contained. What appears to be a subversive message in the *Wonder Woman* comic book—the idea that Wonder Woman can be independent from the male characters around her—is ultimately refuted when Hephaestus shows his omnipresent control over her. This example is not a singular instance of limitation on the character; her many attempts at trying to uproot mainstream ideology in favor of a more feminine vision are often either ignored or suppressed by various factors.

When I speak of subversion and containment of Wonder Woman’s character, I am using Stephen Greenblatt’s definition that he presents in his landmark “Invisible Bullets.” Greenblatt defines the subversive as “those elements in Renaissance culture that contemporary audiences tried to contain or, when containment seemed impossible, to destroy and that now conform to our own sense of truth and reality” (39). *Wonder Woman* is clearly a much more modern text than Shakespeare’s plays. However, it is similar to his works because of the subversive themes presented in them. The ideas were mentioned by Shakespeare, only to be contained in the last act; likewise, comic book writers successfully contain Wonder Woman’s power simply to maintain the genre’s status quo.¹ Wonder Woman was designed to be a subversive character, and each writer has a

Endnotes

¹ Comic books are part of a genre that is so ingrained in popular culture and mass media that they have to maintain a certain status quo. Where it is frowned upon for characters in other texts to remain stagnant, it is necessary

different idea of what anti-normative message she represents, or what issue she challenges. However, a close reading of the text shows that each instance of subversion—each issue that the writers are trying to convey—is ultimately contained. Often, Wonder Woman is contained through an active decision on the author’s part, such as with Brian Azzarello, the current writer on *Wonder Woman*. Other times, cultural values shift, such as the case with Wonder Woman’s creator, William Moulton Marston.²

Marston was a psychologist with a Ph.D. from Harvard who had meticulously planned his depiction of Wonder Woman—she was designed to make a social statement about the dominant presence that he felt women should have in society. Committed to the idea that men were not capable of enough love to rule the earth peacefully, he believed a revolution was going to occur, in which the U.S. would turn into a matriarchy. This unusual political prophecy owes much to the unconventional circumstances of his personal life, as Marston resided with both his wife, Elizabeth, and their mutual lover, Olive Byrne (Stanley 146–147). Marston’s chief belief about the dominant power of women was that men wanted and needed to submit sexually to them. He states in *American Scholar*, “Give... [males] an alluring woman stronger than themselves to submit to, and they’ll be *proud* to become her willing slaves!” (qtd. in Wright 22). Although Marston clearly supported the subordination of men to women, the majority of his bondage scenes featured women as the victim and *not* vice versa. This inconsistent message drew a gendered criticism of his work from such names as Josette Frank, an employee of the Child Study Association who was in charge of supervising comic books. Frank wrote on February 17, 1943 that “...this feature does lay you [M. C. Gaines, the editor of *Wonder Woman*] open to considerable criticism from any group such as ours, partly on the basis of the woman’s costume (or lack of it), and partly on the basis of sadistic bits showing women chained, tortured, etc.” (Daniels 61). Marston tried to have a subversive message in his comics, and to some extent he succeeded. His rebuttal against Frank’s charge is that “Sadism consists in the enjoyment of other people’s actual suffering. Since binding and chaining are the one harmless, painless way of subjecting the heroine to menace and making drama of it, I have developed elaborate ways of having Wonder Woman and other characters confined” (Daniels 63).

Wonder Woman as a character is certainly less physically violent than her superhero counterparts. The purposes of her most famous weapons, her magic lasso and bulletproof bracelets, extend beyond causing harm to others. In fact, most of the time they do not cause physical harm at all. The magic lasso was originally used as a “lasso of obedience”—the one bound was compelled to obey Wonder Woman (Stanley 147). The lasso later evolved into the more famous “lasso of truth,” which compelled the one bound to honesty. Wonder Woman’s bulletproof bracelets are also primarily defensive, not offensive. Since Marston’s goal was to have women as the dominant presence, his binding of Wonder Woman contains the subversive, less violent, message of the text. In fact, since chains are only effective on Wonder Woman if it is a man who binds her, it ultimately reinforces the very notions of male dominance the text works to dismantle.

for comic book characters. Otherwise, a reader would have to read over seventy years’ worth of comic books in order to understand a single issue. For example, if Batman were to accept his parents’ deaths and move on, it would subtract a fundamental element of the character.

² Marston wrote under the pen name Charles Moulton.

Although Wonder Woman was created to embody subversive ideas about gender and power, these radical aims were challenged by the traditional, masculine-centered requirements for entry into the superhero canon, which forced her to be contained to a small degree. Wonder Woman is a blending of the masculine and the feminine. While her strength parallels that of Superman, she is still drawn with large breasts and a small waist. She is almost always wearing a skirt or a dress to battle or to do diplomatic work, and despite her hair being long and flowing, it never seems to get messed up. She can be as rugged and tough as any man and she still looks like a Barbie at the end of it. This gender blending has benefitted her character in many ways. One is that she has a rightful place in the genre when evaluated by classical conventions, but writers can still write her character so that their anti-normative messages come across. Another is that because she has a place in the genre, her audience is more likely to read it. Despite these concessions to the male-dominated genre, writers are still able to incorporate subversive feminist ideas. The problem is that the writers present ideas that do not need to be confined, but containment occurs regardless.

For instance, where most male superheroes would stereotypically encourage war, Wonder Woman's message is always one of peace. Ethan Van Sciver, a professional comic book artist who has worked for both DC and Marvel, relates this peaceful message back to her Amazon culture. He explains that because Wonder Woman is a trained warrior, her values are not rooted in the masculine warlike ideology. "The technique of war is something that they [the Amazons] study the same way that athletes study their sports or their games... they can outfight armies of men because that is what they are trained to do. It's fun; it's the Olympics to them. But actual war is repellant to them... [war] is boys' silliness," Sciver says. Wonder Woman has no desire to go to war with anyone, but she believes so firmly in the establishment of world peace that she is willing to fight in order to create peace.

While Wonder Woman is as physically strong as any of the male superheroes (and is stronger than most) she also brings a refreshing feminine viewpoint of peace to the comic book genre. Many superheroes fight for "truth, justice, and the American way," but Wonder Woman wants no part of that imperialistic ideology, which makes her subversive on two levels. On one hand, she bends gender stereotypes, and on the other she challenges the very foundation of the comic book genre. Wonder Woman represents both war and diplomacy, blending stereotypically masculine and the feminine approaches to foreign affairs. Her anti-war stance and her desire for world peace is a unique ideology because war is necessary for the superhero genre to thrive. If Wonder Woman reaches her goal, she will put herself out of business. This aspect of her character adds to the bizarre nature of Wonder Woman's great paradox. Since she is "fighting for peace," she is seen by many as a joke.

Wonder Woman's paradoxical position ought to make her stand out in a positive way instead of a negative, though. Professor Carolyn Cocca, who presented on negotiating the third wave of feminism in Wonder Woman 1987-2012 at the Denver Comic Con, explains that her subversive nature is precisely what makes her special. She states that:

She [Wonder Woman] is anti-normative... we [Americans] have passed laws that have made men and women unequal. We have passed down cultural norms that have made men and women unequal. She stands against those norms, which makes her anti-establishment and anti-normative, and therefore powerful and threatening. The way she is performing these things through this female body is also what makes

her special, with an open heart and an open mind and an open hand, not with a closed fist. (“Wonder Woman Panel”)

Since no other superhero brings this ideology to the genre, Wonder Woman has a built in subversive quality, which puts her in the unique position of allowing her to be a political figure. However, after Marston’s death in 1947, her ability to be a political activist was slowly eradicated, and did not even begin to make a comeback until George Pérez took over her book in 1987. Wonder Woman’s second origin story was a reboot of the original character, but with less emphasis on her sex appeal and more on her essential womanhood. Pérez realized that Wonder Woman had become an icon of feminism, and as a feminist himself, he did not want to disappoint that niche of his audience. In Pérez’s first story arc, *Wonder Woman: Gods and Mortals*, the Amazons are a race of previously battered women who are given strength and immortality by the gods, and live on Paradise Island. Diana (who wouldn’t adopt the name “Wonder Woman” until moving to America) is chosen by the gods to represent the Amazons and save mankind from their own destruction. The Amazons are a warrior race, but unlike the Amazons of Greek mythology, they never resort to violence as their first method of resolution. Instead they value diplomacy, art, architecture, and worship of their gods.³ This type of resolution is subversive because it shows an oppressed people, battered women, overcoming their trials and triumphing in the face of evil.

The text promptly contains what small empowerment it has allowed these women, though, by making them fight for their place in the superhero canon—literally. When Ares creates a terror that is powerful enough to consume the entire Earth, the female goddesses that created Paradise Island ask for a representative to protect the planet. Although many of the women have already proven themselves capable warriors, the gods insist that the representative be chosen through a competition. Diana, masked, enters the competition and wins. Her victory is significant because she is the only one who is not battered. when Queen Hippolyta died in a past life, she was pregnant with Diana, and the gods resurrected Diana especially for the event. Despite the continuous trials that the abused women have overcome, Diana’s predetermined role means that they could never have been worthy of being the gods’ chosen warrior. It is also important because Diana was resurrected specifically to save Man’s World. Similar to Azzarello’s containment of Wonder Woman’s free will, Pérez also eliminates her option of choice. Diana cannot choose to win; her victory has already been predetermined for her. Similarly, the other Amazon’s cannot choose to lose the Games, because they are already unworthy of the success.

It is important to note that the first challenge that Wonder Woman encounters is her right to be a superhero in the first place. Most male superheroes do not have to earn their right to save the world; they simply make the decision and then act on it. Yet Wonder Woman, the most prominent female superhero in the genre, has to prove herself worthy of the title before she even encounters conflict. At such moments, the plots of these comics and the conflicted misogynist politics of their readership are inseparable.

³ Paradise Island was created by a group of female goddesses, led by Athena, who wanted a group of women on earth that would lead the rest of mankind back to worship the Ancient Greek gods. The Amazons are these women, and thus they are very religious and worship is an important part of their daily lives. It is through this avid worship that the Amazons have forged a close (in comparison to the rest of the world) relationship with the gods, particularly Athena.

Wonder Woman constantly having to prove herself is a popular theme in the *Wonder Woman* comics. Even after Wonder Woman is an established superhero and is a founding member of the Justice League, she still has to fight to keep her place among them. One example of such a fight is in Greg Rucka's *Wonder Woman: Eyes of the Gorgon*. Wonder Woman, as Athena's champion, is forced to fight the gorgon Medusa in single combat. The Justice League (which only includes three females in a group totaling seventeen) is shown debating whether to help her or not, and ultimately they decide against it (Rucka no. 209, 19). Wonder Woman realizes that she must battle Medusa on her own, and is more than willing to. Wonder Woman believes so strongly in saving the lives of the people around her that she intentionally blinds herself in order to defeat the gorgon (Rucka no. 210, 15). The Justice League, the same one that watched Wonder Woman defeat the gorgon while blind, decides to hold an evaluation to see if her powers are still up to par. The evaluation is done by having several of the Justice League members attack her at once, while Superman and Batman observe. Wonder Woman successfully defeats all of them, but is disappointed because she knows that they are coddling her because of her disability. When Batman does enter the fray, he is the only one that Wonder Woman feels actually tested her ability. She is still victorious over him (Rucka no. 212, 1-9, 12-13).

Wonder Woman realizes that she is alienated because of her gender and confronts Superman about it. She asks him, "...if our **positions** were **reversed** would **he** [Batman] have **tested** you as well?"

"If **our** positions were reversed, Diana, I'd have already **resigned** from the **league**," Superman answers her (Rucka no. 212, 9). This response clearly angers Wonder Woman (she is seen crushing the gun that Superman attempts to shoot her with using only one hand) because it is evident that the male superheroes that she works with do not trust her to make a rational decision about her own abilities to be a part of the Justice League by herself. Wonder Woman leaves the evaluation before an official decision is made, and since she gains her eyesight back only six issues later, the issue is left unaddressed. The fact that Wonder Woman is never given a definite answer is problematic. The insinuation that she could have been expelled from the Justice League, despite having been victorious over all of her evaluators, is allowed to linger in the minds of the mostly male comic book audience. If she had been a male superhero, she would not have received this type of treatment. Since this is a recurring theme in the *Wonder Woman* book, it is implied that her gender is a factor in her exclusion from the Justice League.

Wonder Woman also does not only care about women in the United States, but instead she cares for all of humanity. This is evident in Darwyn Cooke's limited series, *DC: The New Frontier* (2004). He gives Wonder Woman a voice to represent oppressed women who are not American. Many superheroes focus on American issues in their main books⁴ (they are, after all, geared towards an American audience) but ignore the challenges that people of other countries have to

⁴ A flagship book about a superhero is the one that sets the stage for all of the other books about the character. For example, Batman's flagship book is titled *Batman* and contains the main storyline for the character. However, other books about Batman include *Detective Comics*, *Batman Inc.*, and *Batman and Robin*. Similarly, Superman has *Superman*, but he also has *Action Comics*, and *Superman Unchained*. Wonder Woman only has one book outside of her flagship book, which is titled *Superman/Wonder Woman*.

face. Cooke uses Wonder Woman to defy the notion that superheroes only care about the American people when he sends her to Vietnam in the 1950s (just weeks after the Korean War ended). In this storyline, Wonder Woman is supposed to be working for the United States government. Once she gets to Vietnam and sees the atrocities that the comfort women of the Vietnamese soldiers have encountered, she ignores the government and acts on her own moral code instead. Superman (who also works for the government), on discovering what she has done, is furious and demands an explanation for Washington. Wonder Woman tells Superman that she was on an undercover mission for the United States when she saw the women locked in cages. She finished her mission and went back to free the women. She disarmed the soldiers, laid their weapons in a clearing, freed the women, and then just stood back to let the women decide for themselves how the situation should be handled. The women killed all of the soldiers and then celebrated their victory with Wonder Woman. Superman accuses her of “cold-blooded murder” to which Wonder Woman replies,

What, hand them a smile and a box of flags? Their families, their mates... their children were murdered before their eyes. This is civil war. I've given them their **freedom** and a chance for **justice... the American way!** [...] We can't get involved unless it's some dirty act of sabotage that our government sanctions. Take a good look around. There are no rules here. Just suffering and madness (Cooke no. 2, 10).

Wonder Woman not only helps the Vietnamese women, but she also does it in open defiance of the government that she is working for. Although the story is written post-Watergate, it is set in 1953, where an open act of government defiance would have been much more problematic. This raises the cultural question of whether Wonder Woman's defiance was more rebellious because it was set in a time when the government was trusted by civilians more, or if Cooke wrote Wonder Woman's defiance because he lives in a post-Watergate society and does not see her decision as radical. Regardless, Cooke brilliantly illustrates how Wonder Woman cares about humanity as a whole, and not just her native Amazons and the Americans. It is important to show Wonder Woman fighting for all injustices, not just the United States government because too often, writers of the character imply that American concerns are human concerns.

Wonder Woman is revered for her status as an anti-normative superhero. Her subversive traits and ideals are inspiring for readers and they push the boundaries of what defines traditional superheroes. However, her containment is problematic for the genre. It reinforces the notion that the masculine is better than the feminine, and therefore implies that Wonder Woman can never be as heroic as her male counterparts. The notion that Wonder Woman has less power than her peers is troubling because it reinforces binary gender roles and it shows female readers that they cannot overcome mainstream culture through subversion because they will always be contained. The continued restriction of Wonder Woman is harmful to the character because it displays little knowledge of why Wonder Woman was created. Additionally, it shows that the writers do not respect her rightful place in the comic book canon and by challenging it they diminish her importance. The persistent containment of Wonder Woman is also harmful for society because it demonstrates a lack of growth in gender equality. However, the simple recognition that progressive gender politics are being stifled in efforts to promote stereotypical gender roles creates an awareness that can lead to change. Further study can be done on the containment of other

female superheroes in order to determine the larger scope of women's suppression in the comic book genre.

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RACHEL JOHNSON

Reconsidering The Rachel in *Moby-Dick*

Moby-Dick (1851) may indeed be the great American novel. Melville's novel represents nearly every aspect of antebellum culture and ideology and is still applicable in modern America. Yet for all its irrefutable greatness, one cannot read the novel without noting the dearth of women in the text. Several scholars have examined, evaluated, and critiqued *Moby-Dick's* themes, motifs, and deeper meanings of the text, yet few scholars consider the lack of female characters presented in the text or the importance of the ship, the *Rachel*. The *Rachel* is more than a symbol of embattled motherhood. *The Rachel* is a vessel by which the novel engages in debates over women's rights, just as the lack of women represented in the text represents the lack of women's rights in 19th century America.

When discussing the *Rachel*, scholars too quickly explain her presence at the end of Chapter 128, "She was Rachel, weeping for her children, because they were not"¹ as an allusion to Jeremiah 31:15²: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not." After connecting *The Rachel* to the scripture in Jeremiah, scholar Rita Bode claims, "As the biblical Rachel is the mother not only of individual children but of the Hebrew nation, so Melville's *Rachel* stands for the maternal principle that saves Ishmael. In her 'devious cruising' and "retracing search" the persevering *Rachel*, in the novel's final moments, affirms the mother's saving presence."³ Granville Hicks examines and discusses reasons why Ishmael survived and why the rest of the crew died, yet he does not once mention *The Rachel* as the ship that rescued Ishmael.⁴ Instead, Hicks focuses on the contrast between Captain Ahab and Ishmael. It seems as though scholars either believe that the ship is only a symbol of motherhood or the ship is entirely insignificant to the novel.

Merely crediting *The Rachel's* rescue of Ishmael to represent the motherly qualities of Rachel based on the Jeremiah 31:15 leaves much unexamined. This myopic view of the ship is confirmed by looking at the detailed account of Rachel, the wife of Joseph and the mother of two of the tribes of Israel in the book of Genesis. Yes, Rachel is one of the early matriarchs recorded in the Bible, but if Melville wanted to highlight motherhood, there are much better women in the Bible to cite than Rachel. For instance, Leah, Rachel's sister, described as being less beautiful and

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

² Jeremiah 31:15 KJV

³ Rita Bode, "Suckled by the Sea: THE maternal in *Moby-Dick*," in *Melville and Women*, ed. Elizabeth Shultz and Haskell Springer, 181-197 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006).

⁴ Granville Hicks, "The Meaning of Ishmael's Survival" in *Moby-Dick as Doubloon: Essays and Extracts (1851-1970)*, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford, 265-266 (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970).

less loved by Jacob, Rachel and Leah's husband, is the mother of the majority of the tribes of Israel and the New Testament traces Jesus Christ's lineage back to her.⁵ Also, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, much like Rachel, was barren for many years and prayed to God for a son that she would "give back" to Him to be raised in the temple; God blessed Hannah with a son, she fulfilled her promise, and then God blessed her with more children.⁶ Furthermore, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a more universal symbol of motherhood than perhaps any other female recorded in Christian scriptures and in much of literary history. One could elaborate infinitely on the "best mothers" in the Bible: Eve, the first mother, Deborah, a prophetess and judge, Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David, whom there is a book of the Bible dedicated to, and countless others. Each of these women are better symbols of motherhood than Rachel, and considering Melville's encyclopedic knowledge of texts, he did not name the ship *The Rachel*, to symbolize motherhood.

Rachel is Hebrew for "ewe." An ewe is a female sheep or lamb, which may be interpreted to symbolize innocence. Innocence is a stark contrast to a matronly identity. Rachel is a very dynamic character, perhaps the most dynamic female recorded in the Hebrew Bible. When she is first mentioned in Genesis Chapter 29 it is when Jacob first sees her watering the flock. Rachel is the youngest daughter of Laban, and while Leah, her sister was described as tender eyed, Rachel was described as beautiful and well-favored.⁷ Thus, Rachel's "story" begins as her being "just" a beautiful farm girl whose beauty captivates Jacob. When Jacob asks for her hand in marriage, Laban agrees-- if he will work for him seven years. At this point, Rachel is now merely a bargaining tool between her father Laban and Jacob. After Jacob completes his seven years of labor, he is tricked by Laban into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. Still bound by her father's rules, Rachel cannot warn Jacob that the oldest daughter must be married before the youngest can wed. Rachel represents a victim of patriarchy, like many women in 19th century were when Melville wrote and published *Moby-Dick*.

Like many of the romanticized stories and happy endings popular throughout literature, one would expect Jacob and Rachel to live happily ever after. She captivates him with her beauty, he works a total of fourteen years for Laban to marry her, and despite the obstacle of being tricked into marrying Leah before Rachel, it would seem as though Jacob and Rachel should be able to overcome all obstacles. However, this is not the case. Rachel is barren for many years, which leads to conflicts in her marriage and her relationship with her sister, Leah. Women at that time, just as in the 19th century, were valued based upon their ability to produce children. Rachel understood that being barren was shameful to herself and Jacob's household in the eyes of the culture. Many years later, Rachel does have a son, Joseph. Since Joseph is Rachel's son, he instantly becomes Jacob's favorite: Joseph is given a coat of many colors. This angers Leah's sons and the brothers decide to sell Joseph into slavery and lie to Jacob and Rachel and say that Joseph was killed by a wild beast (they smear goat's blood over his coat). Rachel lives the rest of her life, believing that her only son was killed. Years later, Rachel has another son, Benjamin. Before dying during

⁵ Genesis 29:16-35 KJV

⁶ I Samuel Chapter 1-Chapter 2 KJV

⁷ Genesis 29:17 KJV

childbirth, Rachel names him Ben-oni, which means, son of my sorrow.⁸ Despite being the wife that Jacob loved most, Rachel was buried alone along the road to Ephrath, whereas Leah was buried with Jacob in Egypt.

Furthermore, the majority of women in the bible fall into one of three categories: docile, quiet, and wholesome (Mary, Hannah, and Leah); corrupt and evil (Jezebel, Potiphar's wife, and Delilah); or they change entirely (Rahab or the Samaritan woman at the well). Also, it is important to note that the women of the Bible (other than the gospels which record information from the same time period and place) only "enter" the "stage," or the "Bible," then quickly "exit." Rachel, however, is mentioned in both of the first books of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Perhaps, Melville alluded to the scripture in Jeremiah to encourage readers to closely examine the character of Rachel, because one cannot understand Jeremiah's reference to her if one does not understand the role Rachel had in Genesis (the first book of the Old Testament) and how Jeremiah's prophesy was fulfilled, which is recorded in Matthew (the first book of the New Testament).

In Chapter 128 of *Moby-Dick*, *The Rachel* approaches *The Pequod* requesting the ship's help to find their missing crew members, one of which is the captain's son. When it seems as though Stubb and the rest of the crew are ready to assist Captain Gardiner, Captain Ahab intervenes and harshly refuses.

"Avast, Cried Ahab—"touch not a rope-yarn"; then I a voice that prolongingly moulded every word—"Captain Gardiner, I will not do it. Even now I lose time. Good bye, good bye. God bless ye, man, and may I forgive myself, but I must go. Mr. Starbuck, look at the binnacle watch, and in three minutes from this present instant warn off all strangers: then brace forward again, and let the ship sail as before."⁹ (419)

In this scene, Captain Ahab's refusal to help *The Rachel* can be seen as the nation's stout refusal to help women gain suffrage and rights. *The Pequod* can be seen as society's agreement that *The Rachel*, or women, do in fact need help in gaining these goals, yet still not helping the cause. In the end, it is *The Rachel* that perseveres and, while the ship does not find its missing crew members, it does find Ishmael, which "saves" the novel all together.

Rachel is a symbol for all women who are victims of the patriarchy, which is why Melville named the ship *The Rachel* instead of any other female character, because the Bible records more instances of Rachel's suffering than any other female. Rachel represents the need for love and compassion, she represents a woman's bitterness of a broken heart, she represents the tension of sibling rivalry; Rachel represents so much more than motherhood. Thus, by ignoring *The Rachel* and its appearance and placement in the novel, scholars are missing the larger meaning of the novel. *The Rachel* is just as important as the book's opening line, the doubloon, and the whiteness of the whale. Scholars should be examining why *The Rachel* is weeping and why can she not be comforted. There is a reason why the ship continuously preserves and saves Ishmael; it is the duty

⁸ Genesis 35:18 KJV

⁹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

of devoted scholars to examine this ship and her importance to the novel. It is a shame to write off the ship and Rachel as merely symbols of motherhood.

BETHANY OAKES

Exploring Beth March: Saving Angel or the Death of an Era?

Meek, saintly, fragile, and picturesquely domestic are all ways to describe Louisa May Alcott's beloved character, Beth March. Alcott's novel, *Little Women*, paints the idyllic domestic scene in cozy New England. However, this cannot be taken at face value as one begins to read and make meaning throughout the novel. The character that poses a particular interest and intricacy, but who is often overlooked by readers, is Beth March. Beth comes across as the saving angel in the house; a true example of virtue and goodness. Yet, upon taking a deeper look at the character of Beth, new ideas come to light. Alcott's endearing character is far more complex than a general reading of the novel suggests. She is representative of the many changes that were occurring throughout the Victorian Era in which Alcott was writing in, and about.

Louisa May Alcott is most famously known for her domestic works such as *Little Women* and *Jo's Boys*. This type of literature produced by her is largely representative of her childhood in New England. Alcott grew up in Boston and Concord under the care of her "philosopher-teacher" father, and her mother, who became deeply involved in social work.¹ Echoes of this thoughtful type of lifestyle can be seen repeatedly throughout *Little Women*. One particular piece of biographical information pertaining to Alcott that resonates with the character of Beth concerns Alcott's younger sister, Lizzie. Lizzie, like Beth March, died young due to the lingering impact of scarlet fever.² This suggests that the sickly Beth was inspired by Alcott's personal tragedy. With such a personal connection to the author the character of Beth emerges as a very complex and striking figure.

Initial descriptions concerning Beth March depict her as a sympathetic and loving figure who wants nothing more than to love and be loved. Within chapter four of the novel the following scene illustrates this gentle and domestic nature of Beth. In describing Beth the following is stated:

Beth was too bashful to go to school; it had been tried, but she had suffered so much that it was given up, and she did her lessons at home with her father. Even when he went away, and her mother was called to devote her skill and energy to Soldiers' Aid Societies, Beth went faithfully on by herself and did the best she could. She was a housewifely little creature, and helped Hannah keep home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to be loved... There were six dolls to be taken up and dressed every morning, for Beth was a child still and loved her pets as well as ever. Not one whole or handsome one among them, all were outcasts till Beth took them in; for, when her sisters

¹ "Louisa May Alcott: 1832-1888," in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Nina Baym, 1733-35, 33 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012).

² *Ibid*, 1734.

outgrew these idols, they passed to her because Amy would have nothing old or ugly. Beth cherished them all the more tenderly for that very reason, and set up a hospital for infirm dolls.³ This scene continues on to discuss the gentleness of Beth's care for the dolls and the kind way she speaks to them. From this selection the core nature of Beth can be seen. She is at once presented as this shy and timid figure that seems especially fragile while also as a female with strong moral character and compassion. She is a true "angel in the house", which seems in line with standard nineteenth century models of the time. In a book entitled, *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel*, we can clearly see the nineteenth century distinction between the "true woman" versus the "new woman". The book relays the following information:

Emerging as a result of the suffrage movement, the New Woman was the antithesis of the woman immersed in the Cult of True Womanhood—that early nineteenth-century embodiment of romanticism that conflated domesticity and piety. The True Woman was pure, pious, and homebound; she wanted nothing more than to serve those she loved. The New Woman was strong, politically convicted, and independent of thought.⁴

Connecting the above information to the earlier description of Beth, two opposing views of women in Alcott's novel can be seen. Beth is in every sense a "true woman" in the way that Alcott depicts her. She is confined to the home, she is very focused on compassion and piety, and her greatest desire lies in serving her loved ones and obtaining their love in return. The world is only a distant thought for Beth, just as it would have been for the true woman. The true woman would have been the angel figure in the household; the one responsible for maintaining the romantic ideals of the home life. Beth is presented throughout the novel as a type of conscience figure for the rest of her family that ventures out into the world. While her mother and sisters must make their way into the world through work and education in order to support the family, Beth remains at home, pure and untainted by the cruelty of the world. In this way, Beth is the saving angel in the house. She is as of yet unexposed to the cruelty of the world and can thus spend her time building up the morality of her beloved family that is contaminated through their interactions with the outside world. This matches with the concept of the angel in the house. The following explanation of this theory in the context of the nineteenth century speaks to the traits and personality of Beth.

In the narrowest sense the angel was the one near to God, the pious one who kept the family on the Christian path. In secular terms the angel provided the home environment that promoted her husband's and children's wellbeing in the world; she also provided a haven from its worst pressures through her sound household management and sweetness of temperament.⁵

³ Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*, 40-51 (First Signet Classics Printing, 2012), 44-45.

⁴ Roberta Seelinger Trites, *Twain, Alcott, and the Birth of the Adolescent Reform Novel*, 92-113. (EBSCOhost) (University of Iowa Press, 2007), 92.

⁵ M. Jeanne Peterson, "No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Pauper Women," *American Historical Review*, no. 3 (June 1984): 677-708, 677, EBSCOhost Database, <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.library.acaweb.org/> (accessed November 12, 2013).

The character of Beth stands in stark contrast to the character of Jo March. Jo can be perceived as the “new woman” who stands against everything Beth, as the “true woman” represents. The disparity between the two characters only adds to the depth and sustenance of Beth as a character and hints at the need to further explore her presence within the novel.

Continuing with the idea of piety and virtue, as seen within the Beth character, it is important to highlight her proximity to death and God. In chapter 36, “Beth’s Secret”, the closeness to God that was characteristic of the angel is brought to light during Jo and Beth’s trip to the seashore. When Beth confesses she is weakening and dying she attests that she is unafraid of death.⁶ She appears as the pious angel, ready for her fate and ascension to heaven. In every scene Beth remains true to her angel-like status; she never strays or falters in her role as a spiritual and moral compass for her loved ones. Even with death looming nearby she remains with the angel in the house code. She stood as the perfect example of a domestic woman figure of the time that every woman were recommended to be. However, by the late nineteenth century, when this novel was set, this picture of the woman would have been beginning to encounter a challenge.

Before the Civil War, the woman’s place was in the home, attending to her family and household duties. However, after the war industrialism flourished and the need, coupled with the opportunity, for women to contribute to the income grew. *Little Women* was published between 1868 and 1869. By that time the attitude towards working women had shifted. As one source suggests, “The domestic ideal held that women should not work for wages but rather dedicate themselves to the creation of ‘a nest where conjugal love and maternal care would nurture, secure, and protect the family from the ‘outside,’” which we can clearly find within the character of Beth.⁷ Yet, while this may have been an expectation of women after all of the men returned from war to resume their position as head of the household, many women found that they needed to work in order to support their families due to the financial devastation that settled in firmly after the war, as we know from general understanding of the reconstruction era. Thus, the character of Beth takes on even more meaning and complexity. While the other three March sisters stand firm and strong in the changing world around them, Beth appears as a fainter figure within the novel. She is unable to cope with the changes of the world around her after the war. Just as the “new woman” steadily replaced the dying idea of the “true woman” the idea of Beth as a character had to begin to die as well. In a changing society that saw women entering into the workforce and ever closer to the evils of the world a character as fragile as Beth could not survive. Her death within the novel stands as a possible result of this change in social ideology after the Civil War. Just as Beth was unable to survive in the changing world that required more of her than domestic practices and isolation from

⁶ Alcott, 379–384.

⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age*, (1982): 129, quoted in Janis Dawson, “Little Women Out to Work: Women and the Marketplace in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and *Work*,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 34, no. 2 (June, 2003): 111–130, 114, EBSCOhost Database, <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.library.acaweb.org/> (accessed November 14, 2013).

the world, the “true woman” could no longer survive alongside the “new woman” who sought more intellectual and social freedoms.

Muted Beth stands as a figure for the death of the innocent in literature. While it has been discussed that she is a pure and virtuous figure her untimely end as a young person was not an uncommon practice in literature during this time period. Many texts from early American Literature convey this same message of purity and piety being related to early death. One such popular example is the character of Little Eva from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Little Eva is depicted as pale and angelic. She is one of the few characters with genuine compassion for Uncle Tom. However, throughout the course of the story the reader is soon enlightened to the fact that Little Eva will not make it to adulthood.⁸ Upon deeper discussion and investigation it is common to address the idea that the truly pure and innocent youthful figures in nineteenth century literature die before reaching adulthood in order to preserve their piety and purity before the world has a chance to ruin such perfection. Therefore, characters that are so full of humanity, unjaded love, and concern for their fellow humans perish right at the brink of adulthood. Just as pure Little Eva had to perish before seeing the horrors of war as an adult Beth had to exit before she was forced to face the world in the role of a new woman like her sisters. The poignant thought here is that the fragility of purity is taken care of through the tragic death of the young. Nineteenth century literature fully embraced such reasoning.

Similar thoughts concerning the death of Beth can be found in the article, “Self-denial was all the fashion,” concerning the reasoning behind Beth’s death:

All the girls live to the end of the book and marry, except for Beth who conforms to the feminine form so perfectly that she dies in the middle of book 2... She is perpetually contented and striving to keep others content with their places in life and at peace with each other... Since Beth’s entire life involves cheerful self-denial, making sacrifices no one sees, by definition she makes herself invisible.⁹

This once again attests to the idea of purity being connected to compassion and humanity. Due to the fact that Beth acted as a caretaker for her fellow beings and creatures throughout the novel she easily makes herself obsolete. She minimizes herself so completely that the significance of her death outweighs her presence in the story. The contribution and role of Beth cannot be fully realized until her death in the novel. The significant role of Beth is alluded to within chapter forty, “The Valley of the Shadow,” where Beth remarks simply, “You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I’m gone. They will turn to you, don’t fail them...”¹⁰ The implications of Beth’s declaration are many. This suggests that Beth has been the quiet support of

⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly*, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Nina Baym, 807-904 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012).

⁹ Greta Gaard, “Self-denial was all the fashion: Repressing anger in *Little Women*,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 3-19, 14, EBSCOhost Database, <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.library.acaweb.org/>, (accessed November 13, 2013).

¹⁰ Alcott, 426.

her household for so long that the others do not even realize how heavily they rely on her. Beth seems aware of her faithful and obedient role in the house and is preparing her loved ones for the time when she will no longer be able to act as that loving support and moral guide for them.

Characters come in many shapes and forms. They are almost always a product of their time period. Beth March is no exception. The character of Beth serves as a balance between the old idealistic way of thinking about what it meant to be a woman and the new definition of womanhood. She stands in the gap between the death of the angel in the house and the birth of the independently thinking new brand of woman. A more complex character within the novel would be difficult to find. While her appearance and disposition may come across as meek, and perhaps unimpressive to the general reader, a close reading of *Little Women* will allow the reader to begin chipping away at the complexity and depth of Beth March. Beth March is able to do what many characters can only ever hope to achieve. She overcomes death through her memory, shared wisdom, and her namesake in the form of her sister Amy's daughter.¹¹ Even the most minute dialogue and descriptions are expanded through close and thoughtful examination of this mild mannered character with a strong presence that allows her to transcend death.

¹¹ Alcott, 497-499.

CASEY MCGOWAN

What it takes to be Elite: The English Literary Canon and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*

Canons are compilations of works that have been deemed necessary reading materials for the public. The criteria to be admitted into any canon are not objective; there are no precise or specific technical elements of writing that an author can incorporate into his or her work to receive canonical status, yet many works in the English literary canon, for example, are similar in convention and style. The incorporation of a work into the English literary canon is instead based on subjectivity. More specifically, those who decide which works will be placed in this particular canonical realm make their decisions based on their opinion(s) of important characteristics of writing. Since the English literary canon is not a factual or concrete structure, there are disagreements concerning which texts should be added to certain anthologies, such as Norton, and therefore receive canonical status. A text's belonging to the canon renders status and social, political, and economic importance for both the author and the specific work.

As Sarah M. Corse and Monica D. Griffin point out in "Cultural Valorization and African American Literary History: Reconstructing the Canon," "canon formation is not preordained, but rather a set of conscious and political choices" (175). Some works, however, have maintained canonical status for centuries. According to Jonathan Brody Kramnick in "The Making of the English Canon," these works have had a major impact on the study of literature because of their "antiquity" (1097). These works repeatedly survive in the most prominent literary anthologies are therefore reproduced and studied in classrooms for generations, constantly reinforcing and shaping the ways that scholars view literature and culture. To be included in the canon is to be elite; those authors whose works are maintained in this privileged realm decide what texts belong and what texts do not.

Although the works of the canon are constantly changing, the canon still symbolizes power (especially over the student studying literature) because it decides which texts are important enough to read. As Corse and Griffin assert, it is a hierarchy that perpetuates itself and has traditionally left out certain authors, particularly women and minorities (175). Feminist response to the canon and a revaluing of what works are considered important to literature has led to an increased inclusion of women writers in the English literary canon, although they are still underrepresented and often go unnoticed, especially in classroom studies of British literature. Although the reshaping of the canon has been somewhat limited, the incorporation of authors like Aphra Behn in the Norton anthology is a major step toward a more representative and diverse English literary canon. Specifically, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688) is now studied and appreciated in the realm of British literature for reasons that have not traditionally been attributed to elements of the canon. *Oroonoko* is canonical not solely because of its place in Norton; among other reasons, it deserves its place in the literary canon because it is one of the first and most influential works in relation to the beginning of the novel and it touches on the most important political and ideological issues of its time.

Oroonoko's main hero is Prince Oroonoko, who falls in love with a woman named Imoinda. Imoinda is the daughter of Oroonoko's grandfather's general. Tensions arise when the king also falls in love with Imoinda and commands her to be his wife, although she is married to Oroonoko. Eventually, Imoinda is sold as a slave. The king tells Oroonoko that Imoinda has been killed. Later, Oroonoko is also sold as a slave. Both Imoinda and Oroonoko are taken to Surinam, an English colony in the West Indies. They are reunited there, and Oroonoko organizes a slave revolt. The slaves are forced to surrender and badly punished. Oroonoko retaliates by planning to kill the deputy governor and decides to kill Imoinda, too, to save her from violence after his death. Imoinda agrees to the plan, and she is killed by Oroonoko. Oroonoko is found mourning her body and is executed.

Oroonoko can be justifiably placed in the canon because it significantly impacted the development of a form of writing that later became termed as the "novel." Certain texts have been included in the English literary canon for centuries because they are one of the first examples of its genre or they substantially impact the construction and shaping of the genre. Although it could be problematic to simply privilege a text because it is the first of its kind, its inclusion is sometimes imperative in order for scholars to understand the development of the particular genre. Although many critics cite Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) as the first English novel, *Oroonoko*, published thirty years earlier, is especially instrumental in the development of the genre of the novel. The term "novel" did not actually maintain stability and start being passed around until the middle of the eighteenth century. Some of Behn's proponents have argued that she was not considered the first female English novelist because, at least partly, she was a woman and did not write multiple works, like Defoe, that could be considered novels. Feminist critics have argued that the lack of recognition of Behn as pivotal in the development of the English novel comes from the tendency of literary history to overlook how *Oroonoko* and other works by Behn have established not only an early example for the formation of the novel but also a foundation for the work of women novelists.

Some critics have disagreed with the assertion that *Oroonoko* and other fictional works by Behn are influential in the development of the novel. These critics usually agree with novel historians who consider the beginning of the novel to coincide with the development of modernity. Therefore, these historians are reluctant to identify romantic fiction as influential to the novel's origin. J. Paul Hunter's "Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction," for example, argues that Behn's fiction "usually (but not always) looked backward toward the ideas and manners of high-life romance rather than toward present centered stories and the ordinary and everyday" (398). Hunter's argument supports the idea of some novel historians who claim that the novel materialized as a direct variance to the romance. Whereas the romance involved the mystical and supernatural, the novel focused on common everyday realities and people. To these historians, *Oroonoko's* supernatural hero and lack of concern for ordinary people characterize the work as romantic and, subsequently, anti-novel. However, Vernon Guy Dickson points out in "Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*" that the "wonders" and "romantics" of Behn's novel are the methods Behn uses to present "truths" of contemporary social views and enlarge the "scope of understanding" of everyday circumstances (557). Moreover, even if *Oroonoko* can be considered as highly romantic, it still reflects some aspects of modernity,

including the concentration on the narrator's experience, attention to Surinam's geographical descriptions, and use of science to detail the hero.

The failure of some novel historians to identify *Oroonoko* as influential in the development of the novel because of romantic elements reveals that the conventions which define the novel are determined in hindsight—that is, novel historians looked back in time to certain texts to determine what elements would be deemed novelistic. Writing about Behn as a form of the novel, William C. Spengemann explains in “The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*” that “the form itself, the world it describes, its peculiar language, the readership to whom it speaks—did not yet exist, were only in the process, so to speak, of being invented” (388). In short, analyzing *Oroonoko* with contemporary novel constructions is problematic because it discredits authors, like Behn, who were integral in the forming of the novel but failed to adhere to future conventions of what the novel should be.

Along with *Oroonoko*'s impact on the development of the novel, it deserves a position in the English literary canon because of its interaction with the politics and culture of its time. Traditionally, texts have been included into the canon because they comment on the politics and culture during which the text was written and/or they seek to make a political statement about current controversies in a society. Texts that contribute to politics and the study of a culture are canonical because they go beyond common aesthetics and seek to change society. Behn's *Oroonoko* is representative of such a text because it reveals important dynamics of British culture during the seventeenth century, including the treatment of slavery, gender, and nobility. Specifically, criticism of *Oroonoko* has tended to focus on the text's treatment of slavery and race, with many scholars citing *Oroonoko* as a pro-abolitionist text. As Anita Pacheco points out in “Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*,” even critics who were reluctant to classify *Oroonoko* as pro-abolitionist cited Behn's novel as a contributor to anti-slavery thought, at the very least, mainly in its humanization of an African and its criticism of Western civilization (491). The few critics who analyze *Oroonoko* as pro-slavery text do so because of Behn's perpetuation of hierarchical and governmental institutions.

Although many have interpreted *Oroonoko* as a denunciation of slavery, others have focused on the text's emphasis on the innate ability of the “royal slave” as a much more profound representation of Behn's politics. In *Oroonoko*, Behn uses a colonial setting so that she can safely and openly comment on English politics. In *Oroonoko*, Oroonoko is distinctive from the European colonists in that Oroonoko's abilities are innate whereas the colonists represent emerging capitalism and the ability of common individuals to gain power over noble, or divine, persons. Through *Oroonoko*, Behn is able to comment on the benefits of nobility and emphasize her political belief that monarchy and/or aristocracy are the true, and rightful, forms of government.

Although *Oroonoko* has been traditionally left out of the English literary canon until recently, it is a text that deserves its place in the classroom and scholarship because of its contributions to the development of the novel, its contribution to the discussion on the politics and culture of its time, and many other reasons (including its negotiations with gender, race, and class). As politics and societal views change, the canon will evolve, too, in order to represent the most important issues of the time. However, works, like Behn's *Oroonoko*, transcend the evolution of politics and cultural movements and should be entitled to a place in the English literary canon for generations to come.

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BRANDON GIRDLEY

Gems in Beach City: Toward a Redefinition of Gender Norms in American Animation

November 4, 2013, saw the premier on the Cartoon Network channel of *Steven Universe*, an animated adventure show about a boy and a group of female warriors, the Crystal Gems, who protect the world from various evil threats. It follows a typical adventure show format, with heroes, villains, superpowers, and magic. At first it seems that a show following the old, stale adventure narrative could not help but play into stereotypes about gender norms, thus perpetuating commonly-held notions of masculinity and femininity. However, *Steven Universe* and its production crew break from these conventions and create new perceptions of gender roles, challenging, in the process, the gender norms that characterize American animation.

The show disposes of traditional gender expectations before it even appears on television. The crew behind its production is itself a diverse group of artists, led by Rebecca Sugar, a 26-year old animator from Maryland. Sugar is the first woman to be a solo show creator in Cartoon Network's 21 years on the air (Cavna). However, rather than thinking about the expectations associated with breaking such a boundary, Cavna points out that Sugar is entirely dedicated to her creation: "She is thrilled to achieve the breakthrough, but with just days until the debut, she's not focused on being the first female creator — she's too busy simply being a creator, with plenty to still decide and coordinate." Sugar began her Cartoon Network career as a writer and storyboard artist for *Adventure Time*, one of the network's most popular shows. While there, she was unafraid to use the show as a canvas for exploring gender dynamics in animation. One of the episodes she created, "Fionna and Cake," is based around the show's heroes switching genders (Ito). Sugar worked on 21 *Adventure Time* episodes and earned Emmy Award nominations for "It Came from the Nightosphere" and "Simon and Marcy" ("Adventure Time"; "Emmys 2013"). She was also nominated for an Annie Award for Best Storyboarding in a Television Production (Beck). *Forbes* magazine placed Sugar on its "30 Under 30" list for prominent contributors to the world of entertainment.

Sugar is also multi-talented. In addition to her roles as writer and storyboard artist, she has produced and written original music for *Adventure Time* and *Steven Universe*. Many of those shows' best songs come from Sugar and her ukulele or hammered dulcimer. Sugar's brother, Steven (the inspiration for the title character in *Steven Universe*), sees her as a collaborative and empathetic manager: "As far as being a good boss, she has a lot of respect for her crew... She puts a lot of trust in everyone to bring something personal to the show. It seems to me that really helps foster a creative studio environment" (Ito).

Rebecca Sugar is not the only *Steven Universe* animator to come from *Adventure Time*. Ian Jones-Quartey is an African American storyboard artist and voice actor who serves as the creative director for *Steven Universe*. His Tumblr blog, IANJQ, is often used as a collaborative message forum where aspiring animators ask questions and receive answers from Jones-Quartey (e.g., What is a "distance model" in animation? How does one prevent digital animation from looking clunky and mechanical?) The blog often uses models from the *Steven Universe* production process to answer these questions, which, in a way, democratizes the show's creation, opening it

up and including its viewers in a collaborative production effort. This spirit of collaboration is a feminist approach to television production that is rare in animation; it is also evident in *Steven Universe*'s narrative arc, which is discussed later. Jones–Quartey is also the creator of his own show, *Lakewood Plaza Turbo*, the pilot of which was pitched to Cartoon Network Studios and recently accepted for production into a full series. The success that Rebecca Sugar and Ian Jones–Quartey have had in breaking into a field typically dominated by white men is a testament to the impact of *Steven Universe* on the animation industry.

To understand how the characters and story of *Steven Universe* challenge gender norms that are prevalent in American animation (and in the mass media in general), it is necessary to present an overview of the show. It follows the antics of a young boy, Steven, and a group of intergalactic female warriors, the Crystal Gems, as they protect Beach City from the various threats that arise from magical creatures. There are three Crystal Gems, each of whom gains her power from a gemstone imbedded in her body: Garnet, the strong and silent leader of the group; Amethyst, the impulsive and immature wild child; and Pearl, the intelligent and sophisticated strategist. As the series unfolds, the viewer is invited to see the interactions between Steven and the Gems as they learn from one another and develop connections that help to protect the city and the world.

The viewer also understands more and more about the history of the characters, and sees glimpses of their pasts. Steven in particular is interesting in this regard, as his mother, Rose Quartz, is a former Gem who sacrificed her body to give birth to him, leaving Steven and his father Greg alone in Beach City. In this regard, *Steven Universe* bucks the trends of typical animated adventure shows, which focus almost exclusively on masculine pursuits like battling, competition, and domination, and ignore character development and emotional exploration. *Steven Universe*, however, embraces these latter qualities as it pursues a deep and engaging storyline; it is unafraid to grapple with issues like death, aging, gender conformity, and sacrifice. *Adventure Time* creator Pendleton Ward sees the complexity inherent in *Steven Universe*, saying, “Rebecca is so caring and empathetic with her characters. She respects them and isn’t cynical with how she writes for them, which makes her characters more real, more genuine, which, I think lets her audience fall deeply into the world that she’s creating” (Ito). That the viewer can fall into this fantasy world and experience it firsthand is a reminder of the collaborative nature of *Steven Universe*, and is based on a rejection of hierarchical power structures that often characterize both a production process and a show itself.

Perhaps the clearest example *Steven Universe* offers of its rejection of gender norms is the nature of the characters themselves. Garnet, the leader of the Crystal Gems, is an African American woman. It is rare to see African American women represented in animation at all, much less in positions of leadership, power, and moral authority. Garnet has a calm and collected personality; she is soft-spoken on the rare occasions that she does talk, and exudes a sense of calm during crisis situations. Steven and the other Gems look to her for guidance during their missions. Garnet’s identity is one of an intersectional nature—she is female and African American, but *Steven Universe* challenges the racial and gendered dichotomies of those labels by placing Garnet in a position of authority over the others. Moreover, Garnet’s identity lends itself to the rejection of racial and gender hierarchies by allowing an African American woman to be her voice actor (Garnet is voiced by Estelle Swaray, an African American woman and Grammy-winning artist),

thus following the example of Rebecca Sugar and Ian Jones-Quartey in breaking down the barriers of the animation industry.

Another member of the Crystal Gems is Amethyst, the rowdy, junk food-loving wild child. Amethyst too challenges gender norms by refusing to conform to standards of feminine beauty. She is short, pudgy, ill-mannered, and loves to eat and sleep—in short, everything that a feminine and cultured woman is not. She wears tattered clothes and her bedroom looks like it has been hit by a tornado. She burps and snores and eats cheesy nachos with her mouth open. At one point, Pearl says that Amethyst is “childish.” Amethyst replies in kind, saying, “Yeah, yeah, don’t forget reckless, vulgar, loud-mouthed...and that’s just what makes me so awesome!” However, despite all this, her most radical rejection of femininity occurs when she is not even herself. The show’s ninth episode, “Tiger Millionaire,” deals with constructions of masculinity and femininity in a fairly overt way, with Amethyst at the center. In this episode, Amethyst sneaks out of the house every week to go into town and participate in the Beach City underground wrestling competition. She uses her shape shifting ability to form her wrestling alter ego, the “Purple Puma,” a large, muscular, hairy-chested man. Throughout the competition, the announcer refers to Amethyst (the Purple Puma) with masculine pronouns (e.g., “Let’s introduce his opponent, or should I say victim...the Lochness Blondster!”). At the end of the episode, Garnet and Pearl discover Amethyst’s whereabouts and attempt to bring her home. However, Amethyst refuses, breaking down in tears and saying that she is forced to assume this male alter ego because she cannot be herself. That is, she wishes to engage in traditionally masculine pursuits but is ostracized for doing so. Garnet and Pearl finally understand Amethyst’s plight and realize they have been forcing an identity upon her that she cannot conform to. This is *Steven Universe*’s most candid exploration of gender norms, and it concludes with a rejection of binaried definitions of masculinity and femininity, opting instead for more fluid definitions of gender identities.

The last Crystal Gem is Pearl, the intelligent and precise strategist. Pearl, much more so than Garnet or Amethyst, embodies the traditional aspects of a feminine physique, with her pale white skin, slender, ballerina-like body, and dainty tutu. She is clean, proper, organized, and easily flustered when things go awry, as they often do. However, her feminine qualities end there and the remainder of her identity gives way to traditionally masculine traits. She is the most outspoken of the three Crystal Gems. She values logic, structure, and rationale thinking, all of which are mental characteristics most often associated with masculinity. Whereas Garnet’s and Amethyst’s weapons of choice are fists and a whip, respectively, Pearl uses a sword and spear, suggesting that she is more apt than the others to initiate in direct combat with real weapons. Thus, Pearl assumes an identity consisting of both masculine and feminine traits, rather than adhering to the strict gender constructions of one or the other. In so doing, *Steven Universe* embraces the complexity inherent in gender identities, thereby rejecting essentialist definitions of gender norms.

Of course, *Steven Universe* challenges the gender norms of American animation in other ways, namely the content and narrative arc of the show itself. Steven’s mother, Rose Quartz, is portrayed throughout the series as a hero and someone whom the Gems look to as a sort of maternal and spiritual guide. In the second episode, “Laser Light Cannon,” Steven and the Gems must use a magic cannon to destroy a menacing red eye encroaching upon Beach City. When the cannon fires, a beam of light erupts from its barrel and takes the form of Rose’s spirit. Steven’s father, Greg, watches with tears in his eyes as his wife’s spirit protects the city and her family. In

another episode, “Giant Woman,” Pearl and Amethyst (who never normally get along and enjoy tormenting each other) must fuse together into Opal, an enhanced, Vishnu-like character (voiced by Aimee Mann) who saves Steven and completes the mission. This emphasis on collective cooperation over individualistic endeavors is one aspect of a prominent feminist thread that runs throughout *Steven Universe*’s narrative arc. It is also reminiscent of the collective collaboration mentioned earlier, which characterizes everything from the show’s production to Ian Jones-Quartey’s Tumblr blog. Finally, the whole premise of the show is a clear rejection of the male-as-hero concept that imbues most animated adventure shows. Steven has inherited his mother’s gem, and with it, her powers and her place among the Crystal Gems. However, he has far from mastered his own abilities, and must rely on Garnet, Amethyst, and Pearl—all women—to guide him and teach him what it means to be a hero.

The American media landscape, including animated television shows, is littered with programming that reinforces—consciously or unconsciously—harmful notions of gender norms. These ideas perpetuate archaic beliefs about masculinity and femininity that only serve to hold in place hierarchical systems in which women, minorities, and others who do not fit traditionally defined norms are refused entry into the very fields that influence the way we think about our own identities. Fortunately, *Steven Universe* is a refreshing reversal of this trend, with its diverse array of creative artists and uncompromising challenge to gender norms. It is a reminder of the power that animation has, despite being overlooked because of its target audience of children. Indeed, animation should be appreciated as perhaps the most important tool for changing hearts and minds, for it is today’s children, after all, who will choose to continue or disrupt the gender norms that have plagued our society up until now. One can only hope that progressive and endearing shows like *Steven Universe* continue to be produced. If they are, one can feel confident that the old rules will be tossed aside.

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AARON GOODE

“Washed by Water”: Quentin Compson’s Suicide as a Baptism”

“Some people are just not meant to be in this world. It's just too much for them,” writes Phoebe Stone in *The Boy on Cinnamon Street* (2012). This sums up Quentin Compson. The realization that his values – chastity in particular – were no longer relevant or cared about in society, and most hurtfully by his sister, pushes Quentin over the edge (of a bridge). As a result, he seeks solace in a final cleansing by water. The suicide of Quentin Compson in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is laden with religious imagery that suggests we understand Quentin's suicide by drowning as a religious experience akin to baptism. A perversion of baptism, but a baptism nevertheless. His motivations support this reading, as a preoccupation with purity informs most all of his actions.

Quentin's sister, Caddy, is the primary source of his distress. Her promiscuity bothers him to no end, even in childhood as we see in reference to her wet dress--

“I'll take it off.” she said. “Then it'll dry.”

“I bet you won't.” Quentin said.

“I bet I will.” Caddy said.

“I bet you better not.” Quentin said.

Quentin is puritanical in his determination to make Caddy fit his ideal, and when she takes her dress off, he slaps her (Faulkner 12). This illustrates not only Quentin's devotion to his belief in chastity, but also the violent ends to which he is willing to go to uphold it. So, the precedent is set. It isn't clear at this time, though, whether this is a religious issue or not. Quentin's religiosity comes out more as his suicide draws nearer.

The religion of the Compson family isn't overtly discussed in the novel. We know that in the final section, Dilsey, the Compson's long-time servant, is bringing the children to church on Easter. Presumably, when Quentin was young, he and his siblings had been taken to church the same way, though we can't know how often. Regardless, a thoughtful boy like Quentin was likely strongly impressed by his experience in the church setting, since he obviously didn't get his moral views from any kind of education at home. His own father tells him, “Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature.” (Faulkner 74). It becomes more apparent later on that Quentin has some religious learnings, as he mentions God and Hell more often as he stands on the bridge and reflects on the river.

Tumbling peacefully they would, and when He said Rise only the flat irons [...] And maybe when He says Rise the eyes will come floating up too, out of the deep quiet and the sleep, to look on Glory [...] *If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame(...)* Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame. (Faulkner 71, 74)

In his article, “Faulkner and the Southern Religious Culture,” Charles Wilson discusses several traditions held by prominent branches of Christianity in the South, observing that “the central theme of Southern religion is the need for conversion in a specific experience that will lead to baptism, to a purified new person” (Fowler and Abadie 25). Later, Wilson points out, “Faulkner grew up in and knew the Southern religious culture” (26). Given his knowledge of Southern religious beliefs, it seems reasonable that Faulkner would enact some of them through at least one of his characters. “Rigorous morality” was stressed in this culture, and Quentin typifies this in that he projects his own morality onto Caddy and cannot cope with her not adhering to it (Fowler and Abadie 25).

Now, we have an understanding of the dominant religious tenets of the South, as well as of Quentin's beliefs and motivations. Given these, the reality of Caddy's promiscuity is understandably the most difficult thing Quentin has had to face. His alcoholic father, self-pitying mother, a mentally disabled brother-- all pale in comparison to Caddy's moral decline. After his failed attempts at “rescuing” Caddy, Quentin falls to the only recourse he has left.

“Tormented by what he sees as corruption and anxious, like Adam and Eve, to evade the penalties of the Fall, Quentin casts about in his mind for some means of escape, settling at length on two of the propositions posited by Eve: sexual abstinence and suicide.” (Hall 50).

Constance Hill Hall, in her book, *Incest in Faulkner: A Metaphor for the Fall*, says that Quentin “regards death as a haven, a path to Eden, seeing in the peaceful 'grottoes and caverns' of the sea that will receive him the very 'grotts and caves' of Milton's Paradise” (Hall 50). I agree that Quentin had two options available to him, abstinence and suicide, but beyond this I differ.

Quentin's virginity was something he discussed with his father and he is essentially called gay by other students at Harvard because of his noticeably reserved attitude toward women. So, it seems to me that Quentin *did* elect the path of abstinence. Given that those were his two options, why then would he commit suicide? And why by drowning? I believe abstinence was not sufficient to satisfy Quentin's morality because Caddy had already failed him in that respect. Quentin then has to not escape, but purify himself as best he can. In keeping with his Southern religious beliefs, he does this through baptism--the most extreme baptism he could perform.

In a novel built on cyclical behavior, the fact that Quentin goes to the river is significant because the first instance of his issues with Caddy involved water, and he jumps off the bridge, drowning himself. This was a cleansing act for Quentin, not an escape. When Quentin is first looking down into the river, his italicized stream of consciousness repeats the phrase “clean flame” three times. So, even in death, Quentin is concerned with purity. His thoughts are not on heaven or Eden; They are on Hell, and a cleansing fire.

Quentin's intense moral standards and his sister's failure to meet them push him to what, in his mind, is the only logical action. By joining his need for total purity with his religious upbringing, Quentin allows Caddy's indiscretion to drive him to the most extreme act he could devise-- a permanent baptism to cleanse himself of a society and sister that have thrown aside his traditional morality.

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CHELSEA DERMODY

Patriarchy's Last Breath: The Exposition of and Challenge to Patriarchal Constructions of Womanhood in Joyce Carol Oates' "Smother"

For decades Joyce Carol Oates has been praised for her detailed stories and literary genius. Oates' emphasis on the complexities of controversial social issues has catalyzed her popularity. Scholars have weighed in on Oates' implied societal messages from her suggestions about the hierarchical affairs of the academy, to her campaign for feminist values. Bender suggests that much of Oates' autobiographical work insinuates messages on "academic life: the politics of faculty meetings, the egocentric display of professional ambition" (416). An exceptional amount of attention has been paid to Oates' short stories, though, for their messages on subjects such as "social changes that do allow for elasticity in gender roles" (Friedman 479). Such criticism has drawn attention to Oates' status as a feminist writer. Indeed, a focus on the relationship between society and the female is a common thread among her stories. Although Oates' recent work, "Smother," contains perhaps the most feminist qualities of her fiction, the story has largely evaded critical analysis since its publication in 2010. Its absence from the academy, though, will likely be short-lived, as "Smother" presents a unique and powerful message on the constructs of patriarchal society. In particular, "Smother" exposes and challenges patriarchal constructions of gender, especially through its illustration of the male police officers' perceptions of Lydia's "unfeminine" behavior.

The term "patriarchy" describes a society of male supremacy. Critics define patriarchy as "a sex/gender system in which men dominate women, and what is considered masculine is more highly valued than what is considered feminine" (Renzetti and Curran 3). It is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a society, past or present, divorced from this unbalanced organization. Despite revolutionary efforts to equalize society, America still reflects patriarchal constructions today. Taekhil Jeong, citing IBM's corporate databank, explains that international surveys conducted on the brink of the 21st century reflect, "American culture is identified as individual and masculine-oriented" (Jeong). Indeed, America's adherence to a social system defined by gender is reflected in our values, morals, and philosophies. This phenomenon is most boldly revealed in the social expectations of women. Among patriarchy's gender norms regarding women, and arguably the most predominant patriarchal expectations of women in America, are the ideas about women's emotional instability and the dichotomy of the nurturing mother versus professional woman.

Gender expectations are instilled in children from the earliest of ages. Toddlers quickly learn that while girls may cry, boys must maintain dry eyes and "suck it up." From adolescence, females are taught that society expects them to be emotional and unstable individuals. Society's dependence on the emotional female expectation endures from childhood to adulthood. America recently witnessed this expectation on a vast scale through the outcry surrounding Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. Americans rallied against the potential presidency of a female due to her suspected emotional instability. Blog posts and newspaper articles littered news and social media with headlines resembling, "Ladies too emotional for politics," and "Hilary's Emotional Outburst" (New Hysterisms). This response to the possibility of a female president reflects the patriarchal

expectation of female emotional instability. The magnitude of such an outcry is directly indicative of the presence and weight of patriarchy's female expectations in American society.

Patriarchy's branding of the female as emotionally unstable is accompanied by a rigid dichotomy of female expectations. While emotion is a blanket expectation of the female gender, the dichotomy of the nurturing mother versus working woman, insists that females choose which set of expectations they will strive to meet. While the opportunity for choice is appealing over its alternative, this patriarchal construction remains oppressive and problematic. Patriarchy expects females to either fit the mold of professional or working woman, OR fit the mold of nurturing mother. D. Stidle explains women must choose between the "career track or mommy track" (77). Under patriarchy's expectations, "both" is not an option. The boundaries of these distinct identities are not to be blurred. Martin LaPointe explains, "Even though the society has entered a new millennium...women continue to be confronted with tough choices *between* family and career" (LaPointe). By all published accounts, the age-old, patriarchal expectation that women must be mothers *or* professionals has not faltered. Scholars have weighed in on the expectations of this dichotomy.

In "Taking the True Woman Hostage," Nancy Hewitt describes the nurturing mother as the "mantra" of "piety, purity, domesticity," and "submissiveness" (156), dubbing these women, "hostage[s] in the home" (157). Her use of the term "hostage" indicates female's inability to escape her chosen set of expectations. Betty Friedan, author of "The Feminist Mystique" expands on these expectations' by describing what she calls the "suburban housewife" as "concerned only about her husband, children," and "her home" (18). Friedan references patriarchy's dichotomy by explaining that these women (the "housewives") "are not career women...they are women whose greatest ambition has been marriage and children" (27). Unfortunately, 50 years since Friedman's publication, these expectations remain. In an article written in 2012, critics explain that these patriarchy's expectations of the female are reflected even in the perceptions of sports fans. They relay that the housewife is understood to enjoy sports because "they enjoy watching sporting events with family" (Galyon & Wann 586), while men are understood to be motivated as sports fans due to the "eustress, self-esteem, and aesthetics" of the sport (585). In all aspects of life, patriarchy demands that women identify as either homemakers, whose livelihood is found only in their family, or professionals, whose livelihood is defined by their career. In "Smother," Oates illustrates these gender norms, namely patriarchy's expectation of the female as emotional, and this dichotomy, through Lydia Ulrich and her encounters with detectives.

The audience is introduced to Lydia Ulrich in "Smother" when she receives a phone call from a male detective seeking to set up an interview with her. The detective only vaguely reveals his motivation, but Lydia assumes the reason is somehow related to her daughter, Alva, who Lydia describes as "sick" (112) and has a history of drug problems. In the initial phone call, the detective begins establishing an unbalanced power relationship with Lydia. He addresses her as "Mrs. Ulrich," stripping her of any authority the prefix "Dr." may warrant, refuses to directly answer her questions, sometimes changing the subject completely by responding with a question, and speaks with "an insinuating authority" (93). As the detectives enter Lydia's home for the interview the power remains unbalanced. The narrator explains the actions of the detectives as "choreographed." She says, "...the detectives took seats in chairs facing her but a little distance from each other...while Hahn questioned her, Panov studied her profile" (100). Before the questions even

begin, Lydia has begun to feel the weight of the detectives' authority over her so heavily that the narrator describes her as "[w]anting to cry" (101). The detectives ask Lydia accusatory questions suggesting that she in some way played a part in the murder of a young child in a park near Lydia's her former home decades ago. When Lydia inquires why the detectives are interested in speaking with her about this incident, their answers remain vague and manipulative. The narrator says,

Detectives' questions are circular, tricky...Lydia was asked if she'd adopted a child, any child, and Lydia explained no, never. And another time she was asked if she'd had any other children apart from Alva and she said no. Any other children apart from Alva who had died. (109)

Lydia experiences such feelings of inferiority that the narrator describes her as "grateful for the interruption" of a mere phone call in the other room (111). Through this illustration of unbalanced power between Lydia and the detectives, Oates depicts patriarchy's presumption of female emotional instability. The male detectives assume that as a female, Lydia is emotionally unstable. Their behavior is a response to this assumption. In short, the detectives work to manipulate Lydia's emotions by usurping her authority, intimidating, and withholding information from her. As Lydia suffers through the detectives' questions and her emotional stability is manipulated, the detectives seem to gain suspicion of Lydia.

In addition to the detectives' preying on her emotions, Lydia is also condemned for her inability to fit nicely into the mother/professional woman dichotomy. Unlike what one might expect, the detective's suspicion of Lydia is not founded on Lydia's nervousness or her response to intimidation as one would expect, but rather on what is revealed as Lydia tries to answer the detectives' questions. Lydia never implicates herself in any type of crime when she answers the detectives, but she reveals personal failures. The detectives' questions force Lydia to admit that she has extremely limited contact with her daughter. One of the detectives ask, "When is the last time you spoke with her, Mrs. Ulrich?" (94). The narrator tells us, "Lydia could not answer. She was being humiliated, eviscerated" (94). Lydia must admit that she does not even have a street address for her daughter and that she is not even sure of what college Alva is attending. As Lydia reveals her failure as a mother, the detective's questions become more accusatory and authoritarian. After learning that Alva is essentially a stranger to Lydia to whom she sends money regularly, the detectives pepper her with questions such as "In all those years [you lived in Upper Darby] you'd never been to that part of Rock Basin Park? Yet you could recognize it from the newspaper?" (105). The detectives' questions become suggestive as if they assume that Lydia is the child-murderer they are looking for. Their growing suspicion that follows Lydia's reveal that she is not the poster-woman for mother of the year suggests that because Lydia fails to meet the patriarchal expectations of the nurturing mother, the detectives assume she suffers from the insanity necessary to kill her own child.

Not only does Lydia fail to fit the patriarchal model of mother, Lydia also does not securely fit in the category of professional woman. Lydia's professional capacity is destroyed through the detectives' refusal to acknowledge her as a professional and their subsequent break down of her authority. The detectives address of Lydia as "Mrs. Ulrich" immediately acts to strip Lydia of her professional identity as "Dr. Ulrich." Lydia recognizes this from the onset. During Lydia's first contact with the detectives when she answers the phone and the detective addresses her as "Mrs. Ulrich?" Lydia is struck. The narrator relays, "Here was the wrong note. To her students and

younger colleagues at the institute she was Dr. Ulrich. To her friends and acquaintances she was, Lydia. No one called her Mrs. Ulrich” (91). The detectives’ continual intimidation and refusal to acknowledge Lydia’s professional identity breaks her. It causes her to abandon the identity all together. This is illustrated when the narrator describes Lydia answering a question asked by the detective, “Lydia’s voice was weak now, faltering. Not the self-assured voice of Dr. Ulrich, director of the Pratt Institute for Research in Cognitive and Social Psychology at George Mason University, but the broken, defeated, bewildered voice of Hans Ulrich’s wife” (95).

The detectives’ refusal to acknowledge Lydia’s professional identity is a result of their discomfort over Lydia’s blurring of the lines of the dichotomy. First, Lydia had a child (and she reveals to the detectives that by patriarchy’s standards she epically failed on that end of the dichotomy), but while remaining a mother (although below patriarchy’s standards) Lydia attempted to embark on the path of career woman. The audience sees evidence of Lydia’s blurring of the dichotomy throughout the story. When Lydia is introduced, the narrator gives her a brief introduction, saying, “By the age of sixty-one she’d acquired a social personality that was warm, easy, welcoming. You might call it a maternal personality...She was a professional woman of several decades” (91). The narrator describes Lydia as both “maternal” and “professional,” a taboo of patriarchy. Later, the narrator uses this same technique when describing Lydia’s career and women like her, she says, “The women clung to their work, at which they excelled, with a maternal possessiveness” (96). Patriarchy does not allow women to be both mother and professional and still be perceived as sane, so the detectives refuse to give Lydia any credit for fulfilling patriarchal expectations. They obliterate her identity as a mother and as a professional, forcing Lydia to be perceived as a failure of patriarchy’s expectations.

When the detectives’ interview of Lydia has concluded, Lydia is left in her apartment devastated. Her loss over her stripped identities and failure as a woman in patriarchal society, is outdone only by her discovery that she is being investigated for a murder her daughter has accused her of committing. The detectives leave convinced that Lydia is the murderer of “Pink Bunny Baby.” They gathered little evidence, but developed a strong hunch on Lydia’s capability as a murderer. The detectives assume that Lydia’s failure to meet patriarchy’s expectation of the female is indicative of her instability and moreover, her insanity, and therefore, indicative of the likelihood that she is the murderer they are searching for. In this sense, Oates reiterates Sylvia Plath’s assertion in *The Bell Jar* and illustrates that society’s response to women’s failure to meet patriarchal expectations, which Plath describes as “put...[them] into an asylum” (178) is that they are not only “inadequate” (Abd-ur-Rahman 189), but also pathological.

Through her depiction of the detectives’ preying on Lydia, and their rising suspicion of her as a murderer as she reveals her failure to meet patriarchy’s expectations of the female, Oates exposes and challenges patriarchal constructions. “Smother” discloses the extreme insanity patriarchy associates with the failure of a woman to meet the patriarchal expectations of women. The story exposes the dangers of such expectations and challenges their place in society. While “Smother’s” unique and complex story line speaks to its literary value, its profound stand against patriarchy speaks to its social and political value. “Smother” certainly has a place in academic settings, but further critical analysis should be paid to “Smother’s” feminist impulses and, their participation in vibrant American feminist literary tradition; which includes work such as Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*—a novel Cutter describes as an illustration of the way “a patriarchal

society censors and erases women's voices" (162). Like *The Color Purple*, "Smother" exposes the ills of patriarchy in a creative, nontraditional, and praiseworthy manor, and should be acknowledged for its contributions to the American feminist movement.

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CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Samantha Davis graduated from Lindsey Wilson College in 2013 with a BA in History and minors in Political Science and Women's Studies. She is currently a graduate student at Morehead State University pursuing a Master's of Public Administration.

Tara Lawson is a graduate of Lindsey Wilson College. She now attends the University of Louisville and is pursuing her Masters Degree in English. She is a Graduate Teaching Assistant and works as a consultant in the University Writing Center.

Rachel Johnson is a senior at Lindsey Wilson College. She will graduate in May 2015 with a degree in Middle Grades Education with emphases in English Language Arts and science. After graduation, she plans to marry Dillon Embry and pursue a career in middle grades education.

Bethany Oakes is currently a senior at Lindsey Wilson College. She is pursuing a major in English, with an emphasis in secondary and middle grades education. After graduation she plans to teach in the classroom, and eventually pursue a Master's degree in Library Science.

Casey McGowan is a first-year student at Emory University School of Law. She graduated summa cum laude from Lindsey Wilson College in 2014, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in English and Criminal Justice.

Brandon Girdley is a senior at Lindsey Wilson College. He is pursuing a major in English, with a minor in Women's Studies. After graduation, he plans to attend law school.

Aaron Goode is a junior at Lindsey Wilson College. He is an English Major with a focus on secondary education. He will be applying for admission to the Education Department in December. After graduation, Aaron intends to begin teaching in a high school.

Chelsea Dermody is a senior at Lindsey Wilson College, where she majors in English. She is involved in various organizations on campus and serves as the President of the Women's Student Union, and Vice-President of the Young Democrats Club. Chelsea currently works in a law office and plans to attend law school after graduation.