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FRIGHTENING MASCU LINITY: GOTHIC AFFECT AND ANTEBELLUM MANHOOD

A Dissertation in

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by

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ABSTRACT

This project engages novels and short stories written by Herman Melville, Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, George Thompson, Theodore Winthrop and Julia Ward Howe. It elucidates the ways that these authors addressed changing notions of masculine anxiety during the antebellum period. As several factors challenged contemporary notions of masculinity, including the violent rejection of patriarchy in the Revolutionary War, the changing position of the father in the family, and the pressures of the rising market economy, the inability to successfully adapt to gender conventions became a source of intense anxiety for people struggling to be masculine. Recognizing the efficacy of Gothic rhetoric for understanding and explaining this anxiety by translating it into fear, these authors used Gothic literature to critique masculine structures and the relationship between masculinity, the body, and desire. More generally, the project brings together discussions of gender formation, antebellum male affect, and Gothic literature to argue that in order to understand fully the role of affect in the formation of masculinity, we need also to understand the importance of negative affects common to Gothic literature. Of particular importance is the way that these authors recognized that fear, instead of being simply debilitating, could be a productive source of masculine identity. Ultimately, this project argues for the centrality of gender to American Gothic literature while expanding our understanding of the role emotion played in the antebellum period and suggesting the importance of all gender practices—normative and non-normative—in the formation of the canon.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: “cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance”: Masculinity and</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic Affect in Antebellum America</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Patriarchal Gothic and Affective Masculinity in Brockden</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown’s <em>Memoirs of Stephen Calvert</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: “covering me with its loathsome caresses”: Edgar Allan Poe’s</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictions of Masculine Desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: A City of Men: George Thompson’s Gothic Masculinities</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Beautiful Monsters</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda: Domesticating Poe</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Introduction

“cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance”: Masculinity and Gothic Affect in Antebellum America

One Sunday morning, the narrator of Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-street” has some extra time and decides to stop by his office. When he tries to unlock the door, the narrator is “[q]uite surprised” to find something inside prevents him from unlocking it. He calls out and the door is unlocked from within, “and thrusting his lean visage at me, and holding the door ajar, the apparition of Bartleby appeared, in his shirt sleeves, and otherwise in a strangely tattered dishabille” (16). With this encounter, fraught with masculine anxiety, “Bartleby, The Scrivener” shifts from a tale of business into a Gothic tale of masculine affect, culminating with a funeral procession—“Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent procession filed its ways through all the noise and heat, and the joy of the roaring thoroughfares at noon” (31)—and Bartleby’s live burial in the Tombs. The shift in the story reflects the fear felt by the narrator when confronted by Bartleby’s Gothic disruption of the barriers between the public and private, boss and employee, the well-regulated masculine façade of Wall-street and the slovenly “dishabille” of a man on his own free time.¹ More interesting than

¹ One of the key points that Eve Sedgwick makes in her study of the Gothic is the fear involved in the breakdown of boundaries of all sorts, including the boundaries represented by bodies. In her analysis of the conventions of Gothic literature, Sedgwick argues that “The worst violence, the most potent magic, and the most paralyzing instances of the uncanny in these novels […] are evoked in the very breach of the
the causes of this shift is the way it registers on the narrator’s body in the form of intense affect. The Gothic language is crucial here: “the apparition” Bartleby’s “cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance” has “such a strange effect” on the narrator that he finds himself “not only disarmed, but unmanned” (16). Shortly thereafter the narrator describes this “strange effect” as “a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy,” a melancholy that shortly “merge[s] into fear” (17, 19). This after the narrator is afflicted with unsettling Gothic visions of “The scrivener’s pale form […] laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shivering winding sheet” (18). The narrator eventually vows to “for ever rid [himself] of this intolerable incubus” (27).

The narrator’s description of Bartleby as an “incubus,” defined by the OED as “A feigned evil spirit or demon […] supposed to descend upon persons in their sleep, and especially to seek carnal intercourse with women,” suggests that it is the Gothic aspect of the encounter that unsettles the narrator’s masculinity. As Elizabeth Barnes has noted about this scene, “the image of Bartleby as an ‘incubus,’ […] feminizes the narrator in relation to the oppressive male spirit that figuratively lies atop him” (“Fraternal” 240). For Barnes the story registers the dangers of sympathy between men. But what Barnes’ account stops short of considering is the importance of not just sympathy in the story, but of Gothic affect and the fear associated with the breakdown of masculinity. The narrator’s description of Bartleby’s “cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance” suggests that the range of reference that the narrator draws on to explain Bartleby’s masculinity comes out of Gothic rhetoric. Throughout the story, while the other employees in the narrator’s office bear playful nicknames based on their eating habits, the narrator

imprisoning wall” (Coherence 13). The terror of the Gothic occurs when the boundaries between self and other, between bodies, become porous and mutable.
describes Bartleby as “cadaverous” (16, 20, 24) and like a “ghost” (15, 27) “haunting the building” (29). While sympathy may be one of the causes of the narrator’s problems, it is through the language of the Gothic that the he tries to understand them.

The narrator’s struggles with masculinity, and his recourse to the Gothic for a way to decipher someone who challenges previous conceptions of masculinity, gets to the heart of this project. I explore the relationship between manhood and fear in the antebellum United States, focusing on those moments when fear becomes the dominant affect of antebellum masculinities. Recognizing the efficacy of Gothic rhetoric for understanding and explaining the frightful changing structures of masculinity, authors such as Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, George Thompson, Theodore Winthrop, and Julia Ward Howe crafted texts around the Gothic nature of masculinity. But these authors did more than just recognize the Gothic nature of masculinity; they also recognized that this Gothicness opened the way for a productive critique of masculine structures and of the relationship between masculinity, the body, and desire. By engaging with the frightening side of masculine gender formations, these authors document that while it could be scary to be a man, this fear could be a powerfully productive. Thus, while Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Brockden Brown adapt Gothic tropes to American environments, they also use these tropes to critique and revise cultural constructions of masculinity. Similarly, George Thompson, Julia Ward Howe, and Theodore Winthrop recognize the haunting presence of monstrous masculine bodies in the antebellum world, but use this recognition to challenge our understanding of both monstrosity and masculinity.
As the period when many current gender categories were first being codified, the
nineteenth century presents an important entry point for understanding the way that
gender has been historically constructed. By stating that gender formations were being
codified during this period, I do not want to suggest that this means gender somehow
became less fluid during the antebellum period. In fact, as I will argue throughout this
project, the opposite was often true: the authors in this study used the fact that gender was
changing to suggest that these changes made visible the fluidity of gender such that new
gender formations could be constructed where old ones failed to encompass the range of
desires, identifications, and struggles of being a man or women in the antebellum United
States.

Although often overlooked, there is an implicit connection between fear and
gender behind the work of many gender critics. Influenced by feminist reconsiderations
of the ways in which assumptions about gender inflect literature and society, much work
has been done articulating theories of how genders come to be understood and identified.
In her “Preface (1999),” Judith Butler, one of the driving forces behind these
reconsiderations of gender, connects her work with the real-world violent reactions that
alternative gender practices often encounter. (The narrator’s reaction to Bartleby, while
not intrinsically violent, would be an example of such a reaction.) While refraining from
arguing that all gendered practices should be equally valued, Butler suggests that it is fear
that often prevents people from considering alternative practices. Butler asks, “‘Is the
breakdown of gender binaries, for instance, so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be
held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think
gender?’” (viii). Butler suggests that what has prevented the thorough understanding and
analysis of gender is the fear that is associated with the breakdown of the divisions between male and female. It is important to note the similarities between Sedgwick’s claim in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* that what makes the Gothic frightening is the breakdown of boundaries and Butler’s language about the terror of alternative gender practices. In both instances it is the breakdown of boundaries that leads to potential debilitating fear. When “male” and “female” lose their vividness as distinguishable categories, what is left is a monstrosity, which evokes a fearful and often violent reaction from anyone encountering such a “creature.” Yet the breakdown of binaries is not the only source of fear when it comes to gender. In fact, masculinity depends on a relationship with fear for its very existence. In this project I argue that encounters with fear shaped the way masculinity was constructed in the nineteenth century, and how writers during the period used fear to understand masculinity. Much like Melville’s narrator, it is through fear that we often come face to face with the gendered reality of our world.

Such an investigation is made possible by the rise of masculinity as an appropriate and important object of analysis. For several decades, feminist critics of nineteenth-century US literature have broadened the scope of critical analysis and worked towards an understanding of non-normative sociality. Early on, this meant isolating women and analyzing their positions independently of men. More recently, feminist scholars have extended their analysis by considering the role of women alongside and against the roles of men, while adding categories of race and class to the analysis. As a result, scholars have been able to move beyond a simple understanding of “sexual difference” and towards an understanding of identity as a multidimensional, multifaceted and fluctuating
discourse. In many ways, masculinity studies has followed the path set forth by feminist scholars. Although masculinity studies began by analyzing men in isolation from their complex social roles, scholarship has advanced to the point where critics are beginning to come to a greater understanding of masculinity by looking at masculinities in dialogue with other social constructions. Inherent in this move is the desire to see masculinity as “always ambivalent, always complicated, always dependent on the exigencies of personal and institutional power” (Berger, et al 3). Now critics understand that masculinity does not just exist in regards to men, and that to better understand masculinity, we need to investigate the construction and role of masculinity among men and women, as well as among different racial and socioeconomic groups.

Gothic literature, as “the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis” (Haggerty 3), and as one of the dominant antebellum literary genres, naturally lends itself to an attempt to understand antebellum America through the lens of masculinity criticism. As a genre, Gothic fiction opens possibilities for depicting gender and sexual transgressions not available in other, more “respectable” genres. Often these transgressions involve complex same-sex desires that defy normativity. As scholars of the later-nineteenth and twentieth and twenty-first centuries have noted, masculinity takes on a fearful, Gothic tinge when confronted with challenges to its dominant structures.

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2 Recent scholarship by critics such as Judith Halberstam in her study Female Masculinity have shown the fruitfulness of seeing masculinity in places where scholars before the rise of feminism would not have thought to look.
3 The same holds true for many of the descendants of Gothic literature, most notably the contemporary horror film. See, for example Barry Keith Grant, ed., The Dread of Difference, Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws, and Judith Halberstam, Skin Shows.
While I will argue that masculinity was fraught with pressures and anxieties long before the late nineteenth-century codification of homosexuality as an identity category, the new pressures put on masculinity with advent of homosexuality as a category towards the end of the century offers an example of the fear and anxiety that emerges around masculinity through the Gothic’s engagement with non-normative desires and behavior. For men trying to navigate their gender roles, homosexuality presented a difficult problem; it now became necessary to demonstrate an internal difference, sexual preference, externally; or, at the very least, it became necessary for men to be able to discern the sexuality of other men in order to properly navigate their relationships. As Lee Edelman has argued, “The historical positing of the category of ‘the homosexual’ textualizes male identity as such, subjecting it to the alienating requirement that it be ‘read,’ and threatening, in consequence, to strip ‘masculinity’ of its privileged status as the self-authenticating paradigm of the natural or the self-evident” (12). Masculinity was no longer a “safe” category; it could no longer be the self-assured norm against which all difference was defined. It was no longer enough to be “not-female,” now a man had to be “not-the wrong type of man,” and if one could not properly identify this new difference, it wouldn’t be possible to avoid becoming the wrong type of man.

This new challenge to masculinity presented a fearful prospect to men. Not only did one have to constantly prove one’s masculinity, but one also faced the constant threat of becoming what was seen as monstrous. One of the central elements of homophobia is the fear of possibly “becoming gay.” As Leo Bersani has argued, “to let gays be open about their gayness, to give them equal rights, to allow them to say who they are and

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4 Michel Foucault famously dates the birth of homosexuality to 1870 (History 43).
what they want, is to risk being recruited” (27). Thus the advent of homosexuality as an identity created new requirements for men. First, men had to be able to identify the homosexual and, second, men had to resist the possibility of becoming a homosexual. The ability to identify and “other” the feared homosexual was tied to a man’s success as a masculine man: to be a man’s man, without running the risk of becoming a man’s man. As Sedgwick puts it, “For a man to be a man’s man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being ‘interested in men’” (Between Men 89). Homophobia, then, is inherently a fear of other men, of the illegibility of masculinity, and of not being appropriately masculine. The fear is “that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, are not real men” (Kimmel 5).

In her work on the Gothic, Eve Sedgwick makes explicit the connections between masculine fear, such as that brought about by homosexuality, and Gothic literature. Sedgwick argues that much Gothic, and in particular the literature of male paranoia—when men “labor […] to forestall being overtaken by the feared/desired other” (vi)—revolves around “the tableau that is seen as embodying primal human essence or originary truth: the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape” (ix). This pattern shows up in a number of the most famous Gothic novels, from Frankenstein to Dracula to Poe’s “William Wilson.” What makes this tableau so important is its

5 In her influential study, Between Men, Eve Sedgwick expands on this idea to show the power that could be wrought from such a tenuous hold on masculinity. This power could be used to “control men who were not part of the distinctly homosexual subculture. Not only must homosexual men be unable to ascertain whether they are to be the objects of ‘random’ homophobic violence, but no man must be able to ascertain that he is not (that his bonds are not) homosexual” (88-9). The result of this power is what Sedgwick calls the “blackmailability […] of Western maleness through the leverage of homophobia” (89).
indecipherability. While fear is an important element of this relationship, there is equal possibility, as Sedgwick says, that the relationship “is murderous or amorous” (ix). In essence, this indecipherability raises the possibility that the relationship is both murderous and amorous. Desire can be a terrifying thing in these situations. By paying attention to the fear involved in these structures of desire we can come to a greater understanding of how masculinity is constructed through such complex relationships.

As I have been arguing, like Melville, many authors in the nineteenth century adapted the Gothic to their particular socio-cultural moment and used the fear associated with gender to create texts that drew on and challenged contemporary views of masculinity. By turning to the nineteenth century, the current study suggests that these authors who were engaged in questions about the nature of gender and masculinity turned to the Gothic and its descendants in order to draw on a long historical association between genre and gender. While the term “homosexuality” was unavailable to these authors, the lessons taught by the pressures homosexuality put on masculinity are just as relevant to antebellum America as they are to turn-of-the-century America. For many of these authors, it was impossible to talk about the fear associated with gender without considering sex and sexuality. Whereas the twentieth century saw a correlation between the advent of homosexuality as an identity and new challenges to masculinity, as elucidated above, the nineteenth century was the period during which many of these changes were first taking place. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that many of the texts in this study engage with alternative sexual practices.

The frequency with which non-normative sexuality is present in the texts under consideration suggests that even as early as the opening years of the nineteenth century
many people viewed non-normative sexuality as something to fear. Sexuality has long played an important role in America’s national literature. As Valerie Rohy notes,

> Like other fictions, early US fiction is a space of fantasy, which is always to say, a space of sexual fantasy. But fantasy never wholly escapes the law, whose management of desire proceeds not only through prohibition but also through invention. Instead, American fiction works both to incite and to police desire; it calls into being the forms of love it purports merely to describe; and if it exerts hegemonic control over sexuality, it may also, as the *Knickerbocker* wrote in 1838, inflame the reader with “uncontrollable sympathies.” (85)

At the same time that massive changes were occurring across the urban landscape, Americans became increasingly concerned about matters related to sex and gender. In the nineteenth century, both men and women became more self-conscious about sex as a personal choice; sex became more associated with emotional intimacy in the middle class, and both men and women saw a separation of sex from reproduction. However, men and women experienced these changes differently, in part because of the important role in the burgeoning market economy of the increasing commercialization of sex, as

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6 In *Primers for Prudery*, Ronald G. Walters notes that the discourse related to sex “assumed great vigor in the 1830s” (2). Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz identifies a number of different conversations, or frameworks, around sex in the nineteenth century, including a vernacular tradition that dated to a much earlier time period. Important to my study is Horowitz’s argument that what people say and what people do are not necessarily the same thing. Instead, there was more “disjuncture and internal conflict, possibilities allowed by imagining a conversation in which participants expressed competing sexual frameworks and perhaps accepted into their own lives and practice messages from more than one” (*Rereading* 5).

7 For more on the changes to sex, see John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters* and Horowitz *Rereading Sex*. 
seen in the rise of prostitution, abortion, and birth control.\(^8\) In other words, while sex and sexuality underwent significant changes during the period, these changes were experienced along gendered lines. The authors in my study, I argue, drew on these conflicts and conversations in order to offer alternate possibilities for masculinity and to challenge the ways masculinity was constructed in the nineteenth century. That so many of these texts involve sexual deviance as well as gender deviance suggests that in the nineteenth century, as now, sexuality was one of the dominant factors in understanding the construction and meaning of gender. One of the factors, but by no means the only or most important one.

Ever since Leslie Fiedler’s influential article “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!” and the expansion of the article into *Love and Death in the American Novel*, critics have associated American literature with death and sexuality.\(^9\) According to Fiedler, “[i]n our most enduring books, the cheapjack machinery of the gothic novel is called on to represent the hidden blackness of the human soul and human society” (*Love* 27). Furthermore, “horror is essential to our literature. It is not merely a matter of terror filling the vacuum left by the suppression of sex in our novels, of Thanatos standing in for Eros. Through these gothic images are projected certain obsessive concerns of our

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\(^9\) For an important critique of Fiedler’s thesis and the problematic logic behind his claims in “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!” see Looby, who argues that “[t]he implication” behind Fielder’s claims “is that healthy suspicion rather than guileless innocence will help us to stop breeding inverts and consequently, enable us to preserve the ‘good clean fun’ of male homosociality” (“Innocent Homosexuality” 540). In other words, Fiedler’s argument is based on a fear of homosexuality similar to that describe above by Bersani and others.
national life” (*Love* 27). Elsewhere Fiedler explains that these “obsessive concerns” are based on a crisis in masculinity, and that men flee from civilization to avoid facing the responsibilities of civilized manhood (26). Thus, when Rohy claims that “American fiction does not repress perversity but produces perversity; it does not exclude deviance but is structured by deviance; it does not avoid horror but seeks horror and speaks horror” (78), for Fielder the horror that American fiction speaks is the horror of masculinity.

Fiedler’s thesis has been widely influential, yet the implications of his claims about masculinity and horror have yet to be fully reckoned with. As Melville’s story indicates, the fear associated with masculinity permeated the economic relationships between men.¹⁰ The story also makes clear the importance of fiction for explorations of masculinity and fear. That “Bartleby” is a story about scriveners—“mere copyist[s]” (7)—cannot hide the fact that the narrator’s encounter with Bartleby is mediated by texts. Similarly, the narrator’s justification for telling the story—“nothing that I know of has ever been written” (3)—suggests that men and masculinity require texts. The story must be told because the reader needs to know about these men. If fear is a powerful tool for understanding masculinity, this understanding comes through the textual delineation of male relationships and masculine identities. The narrator uses tropes from the Gothic to understand Bartleby, and this understanding produces new tropes.

Authors throughout the antebellum period used the correlation between fear and masculinity to address the role of gender and gender construction to everyday life. A great amount of what I am calling the Gothic literature of the period was engaged in debates over gender that seemed particularly pressing in the face of growing urban

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¹⁰ For more on the economics of masculinity, see Anthony *Paper Money Men* and Sandage *Born Losers*. 
populations and the rise of the middle class.\textsuperscript{11} Much of the early work on masculinity historically focused on the role of men and their relationship to the market. As the market economy expanded, the ideal of masculinity changed as well. Whereas in the late eighteenth century dominant masculinity was tied to property and a man’s patriarchal participation in the community through benevolent actions, the market added new possibilities, and perils, for men. This patriarchal masculinity existed alongside an artisan class that emphasized independence and hard work and a self-made man manhood that came to dominate antebellum America. Dependent on public relationships, self-made manhood was from the start in a precarious position. While the rise of the middle class showed that fortunes could be made, it also proved that they just as easily could be lost.\textsuperscript{12}

The aggressiveness required by the market economy helps us to understand the relationship between manhood and the Gothic in nineteenth-century America. In his work on the uncanny, Freud identifies an affect common to much Gothic literature, and

\textsuperscript{11} For the rise of the middle class, see Gunter Barth, \textit{City People}; Stuart M. Blumin, \textit{The Emergence of the Middle Class}; Charles Sellers, \textit{The Market Revolution}; and Sean Wilentz, \textit{Chants Democratic}.

\textsuperscript{12} For more on nineteenth-century masculinities in relation to the market, see Michael S. Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America} and E. Anthony Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}. For the ways that an “imagined fraternity” of white national manhood was used to displace the false rhetoric of chaos after the Revolutionary War, see Dana D. Nelson, \textit{National Manhood}. Nelson argues that the ideology of national manhood prepared citizens for the market. David Anthony traces a form of masculinity related to financial panic and the market in the work of George Lippard, as well as contemporary newspapers and true crime accounts in “Banking on Emotion: Financial Panic and the Logic of Male Submission in the Jacksonian Gothic.” See also his \textit{Paper Money Men}. For more on the gendered economics of failure in the nineteenth-century, see Scott Sandage’s \textit{Born Losers}. Finally, David Leverenz argues that American Renaissance authors were distanced enough from contemporary culture that they could discuss manhood when to others it was invisible. In a world where everyone was increasingly focused on business and making money, the male authors of the American Renaissance “sought alternative states of manly creativity” (\textit{Manhood} 14).
his discussion of the uncanny raises some interesting questions about gender and sexuality. For Freud, “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (*The Uncanny* 124). Given the power of normative gender roles, alternative gender and sexual identities can quickly lead to uncanny effects, particularly when we consider Freud’s argument in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that there is something inside each of us, whether it surfaces or not, that has the potential to cause perverse behavior. Freud claims “there is something innate lying behind the perversions but […] it is something innate in *everyone*” (37, emphasis in the original). Thus encounters with alternative sexual practices or perversions can be potentially uncanny. Freud also provides us with a connection between sexual practices and fear on the one hand, and masculinity on the other. According to Freud, “The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness*—a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than wooing” (*Three Essays* 24). This same aggression that Freud ties to masculine sexual practices has long been seen as a necessary quality in the market as well, where to be appropriately male, a man must be aggressive at work.

At the same time that men demonstrated their masculinity through aggression, they also had to demonstrate their manhood through independence. Yet discourses of sympathy stemming from the work of philosophers such as Adam Smith complicated notions of independence by emphasizing the importance of an emotional identification with other men: men had to feel without desiring. As conceived by Smith in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), sympathy functions by an imaginative projection in
which we attempt to put ourselves into the position of the object of sympathy. Sympathy thus requires an abridgment of independence. As Smith explains, when we sympathize, we experience emotions imaginatively through identification with the object of sympathy: “by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (9). With sympathy we can never be fully independent. But sympathy is always imperfect, and as described by Smith can never encompass the Gothic experiences associated with masculinity in antebellum America. While we can attempt to feel the horror experienced by others, “the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned” (21). Sympathy is unable to account for the full range of affects experienced by men as they negotiate their masculinity.

To gain a more complete understanding of masculinity we must look to other affective experiences. A number of recent critics have demonstrated the centrality of emotion to the constructions of identity, including gender. As Julie Ellison argues, there is a complex relationship between emotion and sociality. “Emotion takes on the defining attributes of social life: it is gendered; it is old or young; it is associated with experienced individual and group identities; it partakes of national character; it assimilates landscapes, architectures, and other geographies. Never univocal or transparent, feeling inhere
the shapes and conventions of social and cultural life” (6). Emotions are not simple and uniform; instead, they reflect the complexities of human interactions and a variety of social constructions. Much of the recent focus on nineteenth-century masculine affect has centered on sentimentality and the so-called “sentimental man.” In an attempt to trace the genealogy of sentimental manhood still present today as well as demonstrate the importance of masculine sympathy and the sentimental to constructions of antebellum manhood, the editors of one recent collection argue that we need to move beyond an entrenched critical focus on “masculine types such as the anti-domestic American Adam or the individual loner / revolutionary” (Chapman and Hendler 5). These types, they argue, were too long considered the dominant masculine form of the period. Many of the critics working on male affect have in common a belief in the need to deconstruct the binaries that have long structured our understanding of the nineteenth century. In particular, these critics challenge the gendered notion of the separate spheres, noting, “the same cluster of tropes normally associated with female sentimentality [are] present in the male cult of sentimentality” (Chapman and Hendler 9). This critical work has done much to broaden our understanding of masculinity and affect in the nineteenth century, including the role of sentimentality in politics and citizenship. As Bruce Burgett has noted, sentiment was a defining factor in the construction of masculinity along lines of public life, citizenship, and authority. He argues that sentimentality played a key role in “the boundaries that divide private from public life, civil from state authority, subjection from citizenship” (4).

Yet, as I have argued, Melville’s “Bartleby” suggests that such a

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13 Citing a series of anecdotes the help prove the importance of sentimentality and male sympathy to politics, Marianne Noble argues that “[m]ale readers of Uncle Tom’s Cabin […] indulged the pleasures of unmaking […] of hegemonic norms of manhood” (143).
focus on sentimental affects fails to account completely for the way men understood their own experiences. It is the Gothic and fear that the narrator uses to understand his experiences with Bartleby.

In this project I focus on Gothic stories about men and masculinity told during the antebellum period. I begin, therefore, with the author often credited with adapting the genre to an American setting, Charles Brockden Brown. In chapter one, “Patriarchal Gothic and Affective Masculinity in Brockden Brown’s Memoirs of Stephen Calvert,” I argue that at the same time that Brown left behind many of the more outrageous tropes of the British Gothic—bleeding statues, haunted castles, and the like—he was simultaneously willing to adapt many of them to his American subjects. Recognizing the inherently Gothic nature of patriarchy, which depends on the death of one generation for the perpetuation of its authority, Brown crafted Gothic novels about the relationships between men. In Stephen Calvert, Brown most explicitly describes the haunting affect masculinity had on young men trying to make their way in the new country. Against the backdrop of patriarchy’s Gothic nature, Stephen Calvert struggles to find his own masculinity. Torn between his desires for a woman whose status as an outsider makes her culturally suspect and the rational belief in the patriarchal power that comes from male property ownership, Stephen Calvert faces a crisis in masculinity that has haunted his family for generations. However, Calvert eventually rejects masculinities based on reason and male authority and turns instead to affect. Told to an unidentified listener on

She notes that “Horace Greeley’s tears were so uncontrollable that he had to interrupt a trip from Boston to Washington to spend the night in a hotel and, presumably, weep in private” (143). Noble also quotes William Lloyd Garrison, who describes “frequent moistening of our eyes, and the making of our heart grow liquid as water, and the trembling of every nerve within us” (qtd. in Noble 143).
the shores of Lake Michigan, Calvert offers his narrative, I argue, as a model of affective masculinity that can lead to new intimate relations.

While Brown recognized the connection between the Gothic and masculinity, it is Edgar Allan Poe who in the nineteenth-century tried to theorize this connection. Poe’s essay “The Philosophy of Composition” is the most explicit articulation of the relationship between text and gender in the antebellum period. Frequently cited for the claim that “the death […] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (19), Poe’s claims about masculinity in the same essay are often overlooked. By beginning the essay with a reference to William Godwin’s novel *Caleb Williams*, Poe establishes his work in a tradition of male Gothic literature. Fiction, Poe suggests, is the class of literature particularly attuned to masculinity. In chapter two, “‘covering me with its loathsome caresses’: Edgar Allan Poe’s Fictions of Masculine Desire,” I begin with Poe’s claims about masculinity and fiction in order to demonstrate the important textuality of antebellum engagements with masculinity and fear. Poe’s claims about the place of masculinity in the Gothic, particularly in Gothic short stories, suggests a need to reconsider our understanding of gender in Poe’s work. While much attention has been paid to Poe’s women, the men are too often overlooked. I then turn to his story of marriage and murder, “The Black Cat,” as the story that most exemplifies Poe’s theories. In this story, Poe suggests that the new requirements for masculinity brought about by changes to the urban landscape and the market economy could be powerfully disruptive forces. When complicated by male-male desire, these forces can lead to violent rejections of normativity. As various social forces were troubling the relationship between the public and the private, the combination of intimate desires and
normative pressures prove too much for the narrator, and he violently rejects both in one murderous moment. Frustrated with his attempts to navigate masculinity, Poe’s narrator, like the narrator of “Bartleby,” ultimately turns to the one thing he has left after murdering his wife, the power of text, to reassert his masculine identity in the face of his impending execution.

Both Brockden Brown and Poe attempted to articulate theories of the Gothic that could account for the frightening and haunting experiences of men in the antebellum period. The authors in the second half of this project turn to one particular Gothic element—monstrosity—to challenge and undermine the fears associated with masculinity and to offer productive reconsiderations of the way masculinity is constructed. Chapter three, “A City of Men: George Thompson’s Gothic Masculinities,” argues that in his city mystery City Crimes, Thompson constructs a narrative dependent on the powerful relationships between men, and the fear of the monstrous other that structures masculinity. The city, for Thompson, was a place where men could experience a wide range of relationships, and the wide range of masculine personas that make such relationships possible. In one of the only texts to explicitly discuss the role of the sodomite in the city, Thompson undermines the fear associated with the sodomite by demonstrating the affective parallels between sodomites and other manly relationships. Frequently described as a Gothic monster in the Flash Press and elsewhere, the sodomite haunted the antebellum city. Yet Thompson’s novel suggests that to be afraid of the sodomite is to be afraid of all male-male intimacies. Thompson’s cities are spaces where a wide range of masculinities is possible, which by extension makes possible a wide range of manly relationships. By creating a Gothic narrative of masculine city life
Thompson suggests that the fear associated with the sodomite is central to any understanding of masculinity. But the sodomite is not the only monstrous figure in the novel. The so-called Gothic villain of the novel is the Dead Man, the most visibly monstrous character in all nineteenth-century American literature. Embodying and making visible monstrosity, the Dead Man is also the most traditionally masculine character. By affectively focusing on the Dead Man and the sodomite, Thompson draws attention to the performative nature of gender in the text. Thompson demonstrates how frightening masculinity can be, but uses this fear to open up new possibilities for masculine intimacy. *City Crimes* is a narrative dependent on the powerful relationship between men, and the fear of the monstrous other that structures masculinity.

In the final chapter, “Beautiful Monsters,” I turn to three texts that challenge the embodied nature of gender. John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel *Let Me In* and the film based on the novel, *Let The Right One In*, provide an entry point for my analysis of Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite* and Theodore Winthrop’s *Cecil Dreeme*. As a Gothic vampire novel featuring a main character who was born biologically male but lives as a girl after being castrated and turned into a vampire at the same time, *Let Me In* suggests that the gap between body and gender can be a powerful source of Gothic terror. Eli’s monstrous body and her manipulation of gender are the basis of much of the Gothic affect in the novel. As a castrated boy living as a girl, Eli exists as a sort of midway point between Laurence, the titular hermaphrodite in Julia Ward Howe’s novel, and Cecil Dreeme, who was born as Clara Denman but cross-dresses in order to live as a man. Laurence is raised as a man by his parents for the financial and social benefits that accrue to masculinity, but his attempts to live a normal masculine life become the source of
intense violence and Gothic affect when those around him discover the gap between his body and his gender. In *Let The Right One In* and *The Hermaphrodite*, the Gothic erupts out of the gap between biology and gender, but in *Cecil Dreeme* the relationship between Robert Byng and Cecil Dreeme suggests that by embracing and moving past the Gothic nature of gender, new possibilities for masculinity and intimacy are born.

Like any monsters, the monsters discussed in this project say more about constructions of normality as they do about the monstrous. By focusing on the monstrous nature of masculinity, we are able to see just how masculinity is constructed, and how constructions of masculinity serve the dominant discourse of heteronormativity. But Gothic engagement with masculinity was not just a textual practice. Just as Poe recognized that fiction could be a productive place for challenging expectations and understandings of gender, his legacy suggests that masculinity plays a key role in the publishing world. In a brief coda, “Domesticating Poe,” I trace the way that Poe’s detractors and defenders used masculinity to attack and defend his reputation. Poe’s afterlife best exemplifies the relationship between masculinity, popularity, and publication. I argue that attention to Poe’s legacy suggests that we need to pay more attention to the way gender is portrayed in the canon and the way certain gendered behaviors are canonized.

As we continue to expand the canon, it is important to remember the lessons taught to us by Poe’s legacy. Many of the understudied authors of the nineteenth century are languishing in anonymity because they lived lives that did not conform to conventional practices. As critics we must constantly remember how our understanding of gender affects our reading practices. Whereas Poe was finally recuperated and his
legacy secured, Bartleby dies alone in the Tombs, unable to fully enter into sympathy with the narrator. Perhaps if the narrator had embraced the Gothic affect generated by Bartleby’s non-normative gender practices, as suggested by the texts discussed here, the outcome of the story might have been different. Instead of allowing his fear to come between himself and Bartleby, perhaps the narrator should have used that fear to bridge the gap and come to a greater understanding of how masculinity functions. If he had, perhaps he would have finally learned that the fear generated by masculinity is not necessarily something to be afraid of.
Chapter One

Patriarchal Gothic and Affective Masculinity in Brockden Brown’s Memoirs of Stephen Calvert

Often credited with inventing the American incarnation of Gothic fiction, Charles Brockden Brown used his novels to engage with issues facing his contemporary moment: everything from the rise of the city, to Enlightenment philosophy, the gender roles of women, and the changing notions of selfhood brought about by the post-revolutionary rise of the market. While Brown advocated for a particularly American form of Gothic literature, he still utilized themes from the European tradition, most notably the metaphorical function of patriarchy and the relations between fathers and sons. Wieland most famously illustrates the Gothic affect of patriarchy, but it is in his understudied novel Memoirs of Stephen Calvert that Brown offers the most explicit critique of the gender structures behind patriarchy. Recognizing the inherently Gothic nature of [14]

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[14] As Bryan Waterman has recently stated, “[t]he claim for Brown’s centrality to the literary culture of post-Revolutionary America has, in recent criticism, been less grounded in assessments of the quality of his writing than in the quality and range of his engagements with early US culture—including sexuality, politics, nationalism, and race” (236). Such claims are born out by recent collections such as Revising Charles Brockden Brown. One need not look further than the titles of several works of Brown criticism to get a sense of critical assumptions about Brown’s importance to American Gothic literature. Some examples include Peter Kafer’s Charles Brockden Brown’s Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic and Stephen Watts’ The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture.

[15] One of the more oddly Gothic aspects of Brown’s Stephen Calvert is the fear it seems to generate among critics, who almost never discuss the novel, even when it would be appropriate to do so. In his description of previous editions of the novel Hans Borchers notes that for some it is the explicit reference to homosexuality in the novel that scared people in the past. In 1822 Henry Colburn published an edition of the novel that included “serious editorial interference” (xiv). Colburn excised several paragraphs, and as Borchers notes, all the “omissions” involve “the details of Belgrave’s conduct as described by Clelia, especially her allusions to his voluptuousness and his homosexuality, vague as they are” (xiv). Borchers concludes that these omissions “throw[] light on the
patriarchy, in this novel Brown presents alternative formulations of masculine identity dependent not on reason and male authority (as represented by Sydney Carlton), but on affect and passion. In *Stephen Calvert*, instead of representing a valid political and differences with respect to taste and tolerance in the American and the English reading public at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (xiv-xv). Borchers explains his own reasons for publishing an edition of Brown’s novel: “this new and for the first time independent edition is meant to lay the groundwork for a fresh and more thorough evaluation of the *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert*” (ix). Unfortunately, despite his edition, and the 1987 publication of the novel as part of *The Novels and Related Works of Charles Brockden Brown*, very little critical attention has been paid to the novel.

Among the vast numbers of articles and book chapters written about Brown, very few have focused at any length on *Stephen Calvert*. W. B. Berthoff, in his “Adventures of the Young Man: An Approach to Charles Brockden Brown,” describes the novel as a “general failure” (423) but also as a “sketch of a romantic egoist” (424). Maurice J. Bennett, in one of the only full length considerations of Brown’s novel, reads it as a coming-of-age tale that “dramatizes what has since been perceived as the nearly inevitable conflict between the American aesthetic sensibility and its social context” (492-3). Steven Watts also reads the novel as a coming-of-age tale, arguing that the novel is about “Stephen’s clumsy, frustrated attempts to find his way in the world” (185). More recently, Scott Slawinski argues that Brown uses the novel to “confront stereotypes surrounding men and marriage, breaking them down in order to establish a space for the bachelor-hero” (15). Several other considerations of Brown’s life and work relegate the novel to passing mentions or brief discussions focusing largely on plot summary (Clark, Crain, Fleischmann, Kafer, Grabo, Ringe *Charles Brockden Brown*) or ignore the novel altogether (Hinds). Perhaps most surprising is the fact that in the recent collection *Revising Charles Brockden Brown*, in which the editors argue that “[t]he ideological and discursive diversity of Brown’s writing […] invites critical questions about a very impressive range of political and social issues in the 1790s and the early 1800s” (xv), and which features essays on everything from Brown’s novels to his political writings, including his “representations of patriarchal structures of feeling and polity” (xvii), almost no mention is made of *Stephen Calvert*. In fact, only Stephen Shapiro’s essay takes up the novel at all, and even then it only garners two pages of commentary: Shapiro seems most interested in the novel for what it can tell us about *Edgar Huntly* (233-5). So far, it would seem, Borcher’s call for more attention to the novel has not been answered.

It has been argued that Brown was well aware of the cultural construction of gender. Working with Brown’s novel *Ormond*, Paul Lewis argues that Brown comes “as close as an American writing around 1800 could have gotten to the core idea of gender ambiguity” and that he “suggests that the characteristics generally associated with male and female bodies are learned or inculcated, that gender roles and attributes are practiced and performed, that the distinctions between male and female are arbitrary” (51). Much of the analysis of this chapter assumes Brown’s recognition of gender’s performative
social form, patriarchy represents a crisis in masculinity. Rather than offering proper
economic and social models, the men in Stephen Calvert’s family tend to be either weak
and ineffective, or violent and ineffective. In response, Stephen Calvert articulates a non-
normative affective masculinity built on sympathetic identification, an identification that
he hopes to use to found a new society on the American frontier. Born out of the struggle
between rational masculinity and passionate and sensual interactions, Stephen Calvert’s
model of masculinity offers a vision for a society not dependent on the Gothic (and
misogynist) patriarchal structure modeled on British antecedents.

What sets Stephen Calvert apart from those around him is his realization of the
mutability of gender through affect. That the forms that gender often takes are not
immediately recognizable to modern readers should not preclude consideration of
gender’s importance in the novel. Stephen Shapiro argues that “[b]efore the modern
intrinsication of sexuality through stark binaries of the normal and the perverse, gendered
sentiment, with its lack of standard calibration, offered a wide range of different positions
within an externally defined spectrum. For this reason, the eighteenth century presents a
multitude of what are for us difficult to discern and categorize modes of masculinity and
femininity” (221). Moving away from a rational approach to masculinity—the belief that
men should, as Shapiro puts it, “balance a stoic command of the passions against the
sympathetic reception of communal signs” (220)—Stephen Calvert struggles to embrace
a passionate approach to masculinity. Most successfully masculine when he stops
thinking and starts feeling, Stephen Calvert at first attempts to quell his passions in order
to follow Sydney Carlton and Louisa Calvert’s admonitions that he act rationally.

As I will argue, *Stephen Calvert* is about the performance of new masculinities in
the wake of patriarchy’s collapse.
Calvert works to modulate his passions in order to live what might be called heterosensual masculinity—masculinity that values reason over passions, and sees sensuality only within normative confines of rational behavior. What Calvert comes to realize is that rationality does not work for him, and at the end of the book (which we only see in the opening pages before his narrative begins), Calvert flees from normative masculinity to the American frontier. Living on the shores of Lake Michigan, Calvert seemingly has abandoned his passionate masculinity. Yet, the very existence of the narrative suggests a hopeful belief in the possibilities of successfully embracing his version of masculinity.

Told on the shores of Lake Michigan to a listener who Calvert describes as having similar “taste” (72), Calvert’s story is a coming-of-age tale about his struggles to find a masculine identity acceptable to the world while simultaneously satisfying his own passions and desires. Calvert tells his tale in order to convince his listener to stay with him and create a new community in the wilderness; he may flee from patriarchal and rational masculinity, but Calvert does not flee from intimate relations. Over the course of his tale, however, Calvert reveals a much larger goal: claiming that it is from books that he learned how to be a gendered being, Calvert suggests that by reading the story of his life the reader can learn new structures of masculinity. The entire novel thus becomes a model for understanding and constructing new forms of masculinity born of affect and sympathy. In adapting British Gothic models to the American landscape, Brown created a new American Gothic. What Stephen Calvert shows, is that at the heart of this Gothic project are the relationships between men.
In the famous preface to his 1799 novel *Edgar Huntly*, Charles Brockden Brown articulates a vision of an American Gothic. Such a project was inherently difficult: the Gothic as a genre had a decidedly European and historical focus. Writing in America, a country that had fought to divorce itself from Britain and lacking the long history common to the Gothic novel, Brown attempts in this brief preface to create a genre that will “differ essentially from those which exist in Europe” while still acknowledging his debts to European models (3). Brown acknowledges the newness of his project: “America has opened new views to the naturalist and politician, but has seldom furnished themes to the moral painter” (3).

America, as Brown sees it, has a wealth of “sources of amusement to the fancy and instructions to the heart, that are particular to ourselves,” and that can be used to “call forth the passions and engage the sympathy of the reader” (3). This can be done, Brown claims, without recourse to the traditional Gothic tropes of “[p]uerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras” (4). Instead, Brown argues that “[t]he incidents of Indian hostility, and the perils of the western wilderness, are far more suitable; and for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no apology” (4).

17 For more on the influence of European Gothic literature on Brown’s work, see Ringe *American Gothic* 36-57.

18 In the 1798 “Advertisement for Sky Walk,” published in the *Weekly Magazine*, Brown expresses a similar point: “To the story-telling moralist the United States is a new and untrodden field. He who shall examine objects with his own eyes, who shall employ the European models merely for the improvement of his taste, and adapt his fiction to all that is genuine and peculiar in the sense before him, will be entitled at least to the praise of originality” (135). It is worth noting that here Brown makes more allowance for European models than he does in the preface to *Edgar Huntly*.

19 In his urban novels—*Arthur Mervyn* in particular—the yellow fever took on many of the tropes of the Gothic, especially the fear of the unknown. As Brown once said to his brother, “[p]lague operates by invisible agents. We know not in what quarter it is about to attack us. No shield, therefore can be lifted up against it” (qtd. in Crain 116). The
and “native of America” helps elucidate much of the tension in the plot and structure of *Edgar Huntly*, Brown’s preface does more than just describe the novel that follows it. Implicit in Brown’s preface, and born out by much of his fiction, is a willingness to incorporate many of the themes of British and European Gothic fiction into his work while rejecting many of its settings and tropes.

Widely considered the first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) features many of the elements derided by Brown: supernatural phenomena including a giant helmet that falls from the sky, ancient castles, living portraits, and walking corpses. Yet while much of its overdramatic claptrap quickly becomes the subject of ridicule, and while it is quite possible that Brown was thinking of Walpole’s novel when he wrote his preface to *Edgar Huntly*, it is important not to overlook the influence this novel had on Gothic fiction and Brown’s own vision of the genre. As Leonard Tennenhouse points out, “[t]he social body that Walpole imagines is made up of members all of whom share some degree of noble blood. Arranged in vertical chains of dependency, […] [a]ll matter only insofar as they maintain the integrity of the family, and guaranteeing its perpetuity trumps all other forms of motivation” (99).

The social structure in which the Gothic functions is inherently patriarchal; blood holds the family group together, and the family is the central social unit. The moral of *The Castle of Otranto*, as identified by Walpole in the “Preface to the First Edition,” is “that inability to know where the yellow fever might strike left it an unknown quantity, something terrifying because of its indistinguishability. The fear of the unknown that Brown describes here parallels the fear that brings down Stephen Calvert’s father: it is the unknown that is most unbearable.

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20 As early as 1778, Clara Reeve, the author of the Gothic novel *The Old English Baron*, noted that many of the more ridiculous “circumstances […] destroy the work of imagination, and instead of attention, excite laughter” (3), a complaint many modern readers of Walpole’s novel have also made.
the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation” (6, emphasis in the original). Drawing on a biblical precedent, Walpole situates the relationship between men at the center of the Gothic.

When Brown adapted British antecedents into an American context, he avoided “[p]uerile superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras,” but he maintained the Gothic’s interest in patriarchy. While on one level the emphasis on fathers and sons “complicate[s] the already charged relation between metaphorical ‘fathers’ and ‘sons’ during the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods” as noted by Elizabeth Barnes (“Loving” 47), Brown used patriarchal structures to organize his Gothic novels and to generate the affective responses central to Gothic literature. Many of Brown’s most famous novels, including Wieland and Edgar Huntly, are structured around patriarchal society and patrimonial descent. In the opening chapter of Wieland, Clara

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21 For more on the relationship between Britain and America as a relationship between fathers and sons, see Fliegelman. While critics have widely noted the role of patriarchy in Brown’s work—Paul Lewis, for example, argues that “Ormond inadvertently exposes the narcissism that underpins patriarchy […]” (48)—much of the focus on patriarchy in Brown’s novels has been on Wieland. Anita Vickers describes Wieland as “a scathing critical examination of political and patriarchal authority (or misuse of that authority) in the new republic” in general (1), and an examination of “Federalist/Anti-Federalist policies and the subsequent victimization of women by patriarchal authority” in particular (2). Andrew J. Scheiber focuses more specifically on patriarchy’s effect on Clara, noting that “[a]s the daughter of the family, she is excluded from the line of authority and identity” (174). In the end, Scheiber argues, Clara “embraces the ideology that has been the source of her torment” (191), and it is “only by aligning herself totally with the typology of patriarchal force, and inverting the true implication of her experience” that Clara is able to find “closure” (187).

22 As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds argues, “[b]eyond the necessity of work, both ‘families’ of Wieland and Edgar Huntly enact dramas of indebtedness; both exist on the patrimony of previous generations whose long-standing debts have come due” (24). Hinds formulation, based on her argument that “[…] Brown was, like many, exploring the gender-defined roles a new U.S. economic model might produce” (12), positions Walpole’s model at the center of Brown’s novels. In other words, Brown rewrites “the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation” in
puts particular emphasis on the males in her family, noting, “[m]y father’s ancestry was
noble on the paternal side; but his mother was the daughter of a merchant” (6). The
problem with patriarchal societies, Clara notes, is the problem with younger brothers.
Her grandfather, she states, “was a younger brother” who eventually “mortally offend[s]
his relations” by marrying the daughter of a merchant, “in spite of parental menaces and
prohibitions” (6-7). Clara’s description of her family focuses entirely on her male
ancestors to the point that the only mention of her mother prior to her marriage to Clara’s
father is to say that she was “a woman of meek and quiet disposition, and of slender
acquirements” (12). The novel’s Gothic horror is thus situated in a history of patriarchy
and patrimonial descent. In fact, much of the Gothic affect in the novel emerges out of
the ambiguous nature of the younger Wieland’s murderous impulses, ambiguity that is in
turn born out of the similarities between the younger Wieland and his father.23 The
unsettling and frightening affect of Wieland is due to the inherent ambiguity of the novel.
Crucial to understanding the life of the younger Wieland, the events leading up to the
death of the elder Wieland remain, for both the narrator Clara and the reader, shrouded in
mystery. The reader never learns the nature of the command that the elder Wieland has
ignored, but given the events that befall Wieland’s son, it is hard not to question whether
the imperative was the same request that eventually leads to the son’s downfall. It is
possible that because he has ignored the command, the father’s duty has been transferred
to the son, and that there really is a supernatural basis for the murders that become central

economic terms, where sins are replaced by debts. What’s useful about this formulation
is that it emphasizes the gender component of Walpole’s model. What Hinds reminds us
is that the Gothic, even in Brown’s American version, is all about gender.

23 The fact that Clara calls both her brother and her father Wieland increases the
ambiguity of the novel and suggests the patrimonial descent of the younger Wieland’s
murderous impulse.
to the novel’s plot. Wieland, then, is a novel about patriarchy’s ill effects, and the dangerous legacy fathers pass on to their sons.

While Clara Wieland situates the violent murder of her brother’s family in patriarchy, the novel most obsessed with the relations of patriarchal structures is Brown’s Memoirs of Stephen Calvert. Calvert, which I will argue is a novel fascinated with constructions of masculinity, situates patriarchy at the heart of all the masculine relationships in the novel. It is no surprise, then, that nearly one tenth of Calvert’s story is about his family history and the men in his past. Calvert tells his listener, “[…] I can number, in the founders of my line, some of those who aided the achievements of Rollo in France, and Bohemond in Syria. A younger branch of my family owes the dignity of baronet to the profusion of James the First, and the English usurpations in Ireland” (73). After Calvert’s great-grandfather, the first to acquire “the dignity of baronet,” dies, the problems of patriarchy first begin to manifest. As Stephen Watts has noted, “Brown persistently use[s] the early sections of Stephen Calvert to metaphorically portray a crumbling of patriarchal authority” (186). What first causes this crumbling is that while patriarchy dictates that fathers pass on their land and property to their eldest son, character is not likewise passed on. When Calvert’s grandfather dies, “[h]is estate passed to his son, whose character was, in many respects, the reverse of that of his parent” (73-4). While the parent “conceived that all merit was comprised in the profession of arms” (73) and thus enlists, the son (Calvert’s grandfather) “carried the pride of birth to a ridiculous excess” (74). In the space of one generation from the founding of the dignified...

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24 Elizabeth Barnes offers a compelling reading of familicide in Wieland in which she comes to the conclusion that “[w]hat we learn from this moral tale is that, however much sons need fathers, fathers inevitably betray their sons, either wittingly or unwittingly” (54).
lineage, pride in name and status has replaced any deeds. Patriarchy shifts from a focus on masculinity and title earned through action to one earned through birth.

Brown pinpoints the self-corrupting mechanisms of patriarchy as the beginning of a crisis in masculinity that haunts Calvert’s family. After spurning his wife and raising their two sons without her (an act that leads to his wife’s early death), Calvert’s grandfather decides that the younger son will join “the military service of Austria or Spain” (74). Unfortunately, character gets in the way again. While the older son is “a thoughtless and generous youth, who was willing that his conduct and opinions should be moulded [sic] by convenience” (74-5)—in other words the perfect man for patriarchy—the younger son is “fraught with different sentiments and principles” (75). This younger son, Calvert’s father, disrupts the functioning of patriarchy. Before sending him off to Austria or Spain, Sir Stephen Porter (Calvert’s grandfather) has other plans for his youngest son: Sir Stephen is the leader of a plot to kill “the king, his ministers, and three hundred of those whose opulence, and talents, and birth, rendered them obnoxious” (80). Even as the plot is centered on a symbolic strike against patriarchal hierarchy, Sir Stephen maintains his faith in patriarchal authority in his own family: he “acknowledged no bounds to paternal prerogatives” (81). What makes this plot even more galling to Calvert’s father is the fact that he has secretly married a Protestant and converted. Thus, while Sir Stephen wants to strike at the king in the name of Catholicism, Calvert’s father has already made a more powerful strike against authority by denouncing the “paternal prerogatives” that his father believes so strongly in and rejecting his father’s religion.

While the back story about Calvert’s grandfather’s plot establishes an important struggle within patriarchy that is born out through the rest of the novel, the more lasting
effect of the plot on the main action of the novel is its effect on the masculinity of the
males in Calvert’s family. While Calvert’s father views the plot with “horror” as
“treason,” Sir Stephen believes that “[t]he long triumph of heresy and usurpation”
precludes any “effeminate scruples” (80). What on the surface seems a political plot to
overthrow a government in the name of religion becomes for Calvert’s father a crisis over
his own masculine identity: Sir Stephen implies that Calvert’s father’s fear makes him
less than masculine. In order to be a man, Sir Stephen suggests, Calvert’s father must
overcome his fear and take part in the plot. While he still believes in the need to protect
his “father’s honour and life,” this belief becomes for Calvert’s father a “source of
anxiety” (81-2). After his wife gives birth to twins, Calvert’s father determines that they
must flee to America. Unfortunately, they are unable to take both of the twins with them,
and Calvert’s brother, Felix is left behind, with the plan that he will join them in America
shortly after they arrive. But Sir Stephen kidnaps Felix, and holds him as ransom in order
to ensure Calvert’s father’s secrecy.

The move to America by Calvert’s parents in many ways replicates Brown’s
arguments in the preface to Edgar Huntly. Terrified at the power of patriarchal authority,
and the persecution that comes with it, the Calverts flee to America with the hopes of
leaving Gothic terror behind, believing that in America they will be safe. Yet what
Stephen Calvert suggests is that the Gothic cannot be escaped by coming to America.
While America might not have castles or supernatural beings, what does translate is fear.
Calvert’s father is “haunted by fears” (89), and when the plot is revealed and Sir Stephen
vows that “[v]engeance […] is now preparing to crush you!” (91), the fear begins to
overwhelm Calvert’s father. In contrast to Calvert’s mother, who is “endowed with a
masculine and daring spirit,” Calvert’s father’s “mind [is] distinguished by some degree of imbecility” (92). Terrified of the unknown persecution that he is certain can happen at any time or place, Calvert’s father goes missing after traveling to help a dying wealthy man write his will. Six weeks later, a body is found “on the left shore of League Island” (94). Although the body is unidentifiable, presumably from spending six weeks in the water, clothes suggest the body is Calvert’s father, and that he has drowned.25

It is never clear who or what killed Calvert’s father, and his mother “admitted a doubt whether he had not been the author of his own destruction” (94). While she often imagines that he was attacked, the fact that “[h]e had often expressed his impatience of existence, linked as it was with incessant and excruciating fears,” leaves her unsure (94). Struggling with masculinity, Calvert’s father lets his life be overcome with fear. Thus the crisis in patriarchal masculinity that has plagued Calvert’s ancestors culminates in the death and possible suicide of its first American member. Calvert’s father, like Brown, tries to leave the traditional Gothic across the Atlantic, but it follows him and he cannot escape it. The Gothic, then, precipitates the crisis in masculinity that culminates with Calvert’s father’s suicide. And, even as Calvert’s father rejects the old-world patriarchy of his father’s authority, he cannot escape patriarchy. His fears exacerbated by the “uncertainty” of the threat he faces, uncertainty that “only aggravated his terrors” (91),

25 The death of the father is a common theme in Brown’s fiction. As Fritz Fleischmann notes, “[w]hereas Wieland and Ormond assume a woman’s perspective, Stephen Calvert, Edgar Huntly and Arthur Mervyn have male narrators and deal with problems of young men seeking to establish a place for themselves in the world. This was a theme already developed in the ‘Carwin’ sequel to Wieland. The common starting point of these stories is the death or failure of a father […]; in each, the young man’s path to success lies through a woman’s fortune” (26). As I argue, the death of the father puts particular emphasis on characters’ attempts to enact masculinity. This is one lesson of Brown’s American Gothic.
Calvert’s father is terrified of “venturing abroad at night” (92). The only reason he is willing to leave on the night of his disappearance is because the man whose will he is helping to write is “[a] man of large fortune,” and “[i]t was probable, that in the disposal of his estate, this person would not forget my father, whom he had always distinguished by marks of peculiar regard” (92-3). Thus in rejecting one father, Calvert’s father has only taken on a different one. Not man enough to care for his family, Calvert’s father relies on other men to support him, and his death very well might have been a result of the realization that “[a] trifling legacy […] was all that was bequeathed him” (94).

In marked contrast to his father’s weakness and inability to embrace a masculine identity, Calvert’s “mother was endowed with a masculine and daring spirit” (92), and it is through the combination of these two forces that Calvert initially develops his affective identity and his crisis of masculinity. Even though Calvert’s mother shares in his father’s fears, she is better able to handle them productively. Calvert’s father dies when he is three, and it is through his mother’s “fortitude” that they are able to survive. It should be no surprise, then, that Calvert begins his narrative about his ancestors by declaiming that he has “long since dismissed the folly of annexing dignity to birth” (73). With no father and dependent on his mother’s fortitude for their survival, Calvert seemingly epitomizes his father’s rejection of patriarchy, a rejection pronounced in the fact that Calvert is raised as a Calvert, his mother’s family name, instead of as a Porter, his paternal name. As part of his father’s attempt to escape from old-world persecution, he “assumed his wife’s name” on their arrival in Philadelphia (85). Yet, Calvert does not fully escape his patrimonial legacy, as he is a Stephen, just like his father, and just like his father’s father. His full name is thus hermaphroditic, recalling the rejection of patriarchy through his
father’s rejection of his family name, but also the inability to escape patriarchy, as suggested by his first name. But the fracturing of identity gets even more pronounced for Stephen Calvert when his brother is taken. As Calvert explains, his parents’ “affection was now concerned in me, on whom they bestowed the name of my brother. My original appellation was Stephen, but henceforth I was called Felix” (88). Against this background, Calvert’s identity is hard to pinpoint, even for him. Split between conflicting factions, Calvert’s past could seemingly break a man down, much like it did to his father. But Calvert, though he struggles with his gender and his sense of self, turns this chaos of identity into a source of productive reconstruction. By the end of the novel, Calvert has reconfigured his masculinity in his own terms, and succeeded where his father failed: he moves west to escape the past, and seemingly is able to begin anew, not by forgetting his past, but by using it to affectively construct new notions of self.

In his articulation of a new American genre, Brown recognized that patriarchy is inherently Gothic, and it is against the struggles of patriarchy that Stephen Calvert enacts his reconfiguration of manly affect and masculine identity. Because patriarchal inheritance is so often dependent on death, it creates a social structure in which a younger generation actively begins to desire the death of the father: without death, patriarchy cannot function. In his novels, Brown repeatedly depicted patriarchy’s dependence on

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26 One interesting aspect of this complex sequence of names and Stephen Calvert’s rejection of patriarchy is that throughout his narrative he describes his mother as “my mother” but calls his father “Stephen.” He also describes himself as “her son” and not “their son” (85).

27 I will continue to refer to Stephen Calvert as Stephen Calvert because it makes it easier to distinguish him from his twin brother Felix, but also because, as I will argue, in the end it is the identity within which the narrator is able to come to the full sense of his affectively masculine identity. Robert D. Arner suggests that “the novel retain[s] [the title Stephen Calvert] to hint that the book is really about the grandfather and the father as much as it is about the son, at least in symbolic and psychological terms” (310).
death and fear. For example, in *Wieland*, the son inherits more than just property from his father. As a result, a whole family is murdered. Brown makes explicit this connection between the Gothic and patriarchy in Clara’s interaction with Carwin. Late one night, “sensible of no inclination to sleep” (70), Clara decides to go to her closet to find her father’s memoir so that she can read it. Warned against opening the closet, and with visions of assassins lurking within (including her brother), Clara persists, and discovers Carwin within. In order to justify his presence, Carwin inexplicably explains that he had intended to “[bear] away the spoils of [her] honor” (74). Thus, desiring a textual connection with her father, Clara finds instead Carwin, whom she has previously spent whole days obsessively desiring. Fathers, desire, and death are brought together in this one scene, which reenacts the desiring and Gothic nature of patriarchy.28

While *Wieland* enacts the Gothic nature of patriarchy, it is in *Stephen Calvert* that Brown demonstrates that the affect generated by such relationships is structured by masculine failure and the struggle for masculine identity.29 Two events, and the relationships that enable them, define Calvert as he struggles to come to terms with his

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28 This scene is made even more complex by Clara’s prescient belief that it is her brother, who shares her father’s name, who is hiding in the closet waiting to rape and murder her. Caleb Crain notes the importance of this scene in *American Sympathy* (110). This scene could also be read to suggest that the authority incumbent to patriarchy lacks any real backing: Carwin’s voice, like patriarchal authority, is all a trick.

29 To the degree that it is subject to critical commentary, *Stephen Calvert* is often read alongside *Edgar Huntly* (See Shapiro). However, as Donald Ringe notes, and as I have been describing, there are thematic similarities between *Calvert* and *Wieland*: “[In *Calvert*] Brown is […] using the ancient device of unrecognized twins to ring a variation upon the theme of *Wieland*: the ease with which the sense may be deluded to lead even the best disposed persons, like Sydney Carlton, to erroneous conclusions; but in *Stephen Calvert* it is sight, not hearing, which is deceived” (Charles Brockden Brown 91). While Ringe identifies an importantly Gothic element of *Calvert*, I argue that the critical supposition that Carlton is “the best disposed person[]” reflects support of normative masculinity, the very structures Calvert challenges.
masculinity, each of which presents a model for masculine behavior. From a distant relative of his mother, Calvert inherits “three hundred fertile acres, in a commodious and healthful situation, a spacious and well furnished mansion, and fifteen negroes” (106). This inheritance, which results from the structures of patriarchy that have haunted his family’s masculinity, confronts Calvert with an old-world masculine authority that must be reckoned with in the formation of his own masculine identity. The other major event faced by Calvert occurs when fire breaks out in the city. When calls of fire go up, Calvert, “nearly passive” (123), runs to the blaze and bravely climbs into a burning building and rescues the sleeping occupant, who we later learn is Clelia Neville. These two events, one tied to external structures of masculinity and male authority, the other emotive, generate much conversation and much anxiety. It is his reaction to these events that become the source of commentary and scorn by those around Calvert, and it is through the relationships that come to be defined by these events that Calvert tests out alternate versions of masculinity, before eventually fleeing the city to institute a new community on the American frontier.

Calvert’s experience of these events is not the only thing that brings them into a relationship with one another. A number of parallels between these two events suggest their importance to both the plot of the novel and any understanding of how masculinities function in our understanding of the world. One of the most important similarities is also the most obvious: Calvert understands these two events through the desire he feels for their main actors. Louisa Calvert, the daughter of Ambrose Calvert, who leaves Calvert the farm, and Clelia Neville, the woman Calvert rescues from the fire, are the focus of much of Calvert’s attention throughout the novel. It is his attempts to
understand his feelings for these women, and his attempts to negotiate what these feelings mean for his own understanding of masculinity, that drive much of the novel forward. Both of these relationships require a particular engagement with masculinity, and it is through his attempts to properly understand his own gender that Calvert begins to understand how masculinity is constructed and can be productively reconstituted along new lines. Calvert approaches his relationship with Louisa rationally, convincing himself that he should love her for the virtuous qualities that society tells him are important to femininity as the locus of masculine desire. In this relationship, Calvert believes that he can make himself love Louisa because he knows he should. By contrast, with Clelia the relationship is based entirely on passion. By ignoring reason (or at least trying to use reason in support of passion instead of in contrast to passion) Calvert believes that he has found a proper focus for his masculine desire and a proper outlet for his passionate masculine behavior. It is only at the end of the book that Calvert realizes that his previous attempts at masculinity have failed and that he must reconsider the basis of masculinity if he is to successfully form affective bonds with those around him.

One of the things that likely makes these two women attractive to him are the similarities between their pasts and his own family history. Much like Calvert’s father, Louisa and Neville have each fled tyrannical male figures in order to escape the grasp of patriarchal authority. Louisa’s father is a “domestic tyrant, and exercised the sternest cruelty in the government of his family and slaves” (99). Clearly meant to be seen as a monster, Ambrose Calvert makes visible the inherent misalignment of authority with patriarchal position that is behind much of the problem with patriarchy’s version of manhood. Ambrose Calvert’s perversion of authority knows no bounds, and Louisa is
exposed to constant (possibly sexual) “excesses”: Calvert tells us that “pain and fear were almost the perpetual companions of Louisa Calvert” (100). Ambrose Calvert also abuses his slaves, and fathers at least one, a girl name Althea. Eventually, Ambrose kills Althea and forces Louisa out of the house. At this point Louisa goes to live with Calvert’s mother, a fact that enrages Ambrose Calvert and, “[b]eing at length informed of her condition, his jealousy of paternal authority […] made him desire her return” (104). Much like Calvert’s mother, however, Louisa is able to summon up the “firmness […] required to resist the authority and menaces of Calvert” (104). Brought face to face with Calvert’s mother’s fortitude, and unable to successfully wield male authority, Ambrose Calvert has recourse to the threat of inheritance: he avers that he will “punish [Louisa’s] disobedience by excluding her from all share in his estate after his decease” (104-5). Despite Louisa’s ability to escape from her father’s patriarchal authority during his life, he continues to wield it after his death, haunting the rest of the novel through his choice of an heir. By leaving Calvert the money and property that should have gone to Louisa, Ambrose also seemingly fulfills Calvert’s father’s destiny. After fleeing from his own father, Calvert’s father hoped to reap some financial benefit from his relationship with a wealthy man. Left without the money he had hoped for, Calvert’s father quite possibly resorted to suicide. In a set of circumstances that mirrors his father’s fate, Calvert inherits money from an unexpected source.

Clelia Neville’s past also carries within it traces of Calvert’s father. A young widow, who according to local gossip “lives a very strange life” in a house she inherited from her aunt, there is something mysterious about Neville that attracts those around her. Calvert eventually learns that at the age of eighteen, Neville attracted many suitors, in
large part because she was “an only child, and the heiress of both my father and his sister, and both were deemed rich” (201). Self-aware and conscious of what these suitors are really interested in, Neville “erected a standard by which to judge of their sincerity, that none of them could endure” (201). Eventually a wealthy young man named Belgrave is able to ingratiate himself to Neville by “[making] himself, as nearly as possible, a copy of that model which my fancy had most delighted to contemplate” (202). It is through the performance of a particular identity that Belgrave is able to gain access to Neville’s approval, but there is something about the performance that does not ring true. Neville approves, but she does not love him: “there was a nameless something in his countenance and carriage, which I could not prevail upon my heart to love” (202). What Belgrave lacks is hard to articulate because he has so closely performed that part of a desirable man. The problem for Belgrave is that his manhood is all external: he plays the part of the man very well, but he lacks proper masculinity. Belgrave is eloquent, educated, and graceful, and his “external circumstances were liable to no exception” (202). Yet beneath this charming exterior, he lacks “the look of true benevolence” (202). Belgrave is able to wear the appearances of a good man, but Neville is able to see through the performance. She is able to see the face behind the mask, or at least that there is a face behind the mask.

Much like Louisa’s father, when Belgrave’s importunities are unsuccessful, he has recourse to patriarchal structures of authority. Already facing pressure from her father and aunt, who only see the surface version of Belgrave’s masculinity, Neville becomes resigned to her fate when “[her] father, at length, disclosed obligations under which Belgrave had laid him […]” (203). Unfortunately, Neville tells Calvert, the nature
of her father’s obligations to Belgrave “demanded every grateful service; and my refusal to become Belgrave’s wife, would offend my father and my aunt beyond forgiveness” (203). Once again, a character in Calvert’s narration is caught up and forced into difficult situations by traditional forms of masculine authority. Belgrave, who is unable to hide his insufficient masculinity from Neville, still can wield the authority that comes from being wealthy, and more particularly, a wealthy man. As a daughter, Neville can attempt to make her own choice of a mate, but this attempt cannot escape the structures of authority to which her family is beholden. Here patriarchy trumps desire, forcing Neville into a marriage she does not want. It is important to note that in this instance it is the financial relationships between two men that forces her hand: it is strictly male relationships that operate on Neville. Because Belgrave manipulates her father—Neville tells Calvert that “[Belgrave] did not strive to conceal from me […] that the pecuniary assistance which he had given to my father, was merely designed to benefit himself” (203-4)—Neville has no choice but to acquiesce to the manipulations of the men around her.

Clelia is subjected to male tyranny and forced to flee from her husband, much like Louisa was forced to flee from her tyrannical father. While Calvert’s narration raises the possibility that the tyranny she faced from her father may have included incestuous rape, for Neville the tyranny is explicitly sexual: “[u]nder the veil of darkness, propensities were indulged by my husband, that have not a name which I can utter. They cannot be thought of without horror. They cannot be related” (204). Neville goes on to affirm that “various circumstances set the depravity of my husband in a new light. […] I could not readily believe what yet appeared to be true, that his associates were wholly of his own
sex” (205). I will have more to say about Belgrave’s male-male sexuality later, but for now I want to focus on Neville’s reaction to this information. Her father dead, Neville confesses the truth to her aunt, only to be told that it is her duty to remain with Belgrave, which Neville dutifully does. Eventually, though, Neville’s aunt moves to America, and Neville concocts a plan to follow her, to “seek[] deliverance from the tyranny under which [she] suffer[ed], by flying to a distant land” (207). Neville’s decision is important in a number of ways, not the least of which is its reconfiguration of the Revolutionary impulse as a strike not against a father, but against corrupting Gothic sexuality. America, viewed by Neville as “a remote land of tranquility and innocence” (207), is constructed in contrast to the Gothic old world. Neville’s move, then, replicates Brown’s own claim about the Gothic, rejecting as inappropriate to America certain aspects of the old world, while maintaining the threat of patriarchy.

The Gothic haunts the pasts of Calvert’s father, Louisa Calvert, and Clelia Neville, giving Calvert’s struggles over masculinity a Gothic air. All of these figures are victims of the patriarchal structures of the previous generation, so it is no surprise that they are trying to navigate new forms of social structures and gender. Calvert struggles most fully through these issues, and comes to a new understanding of masculinity through his engagement with each of these figures. What makes the past so essential to

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30 As Stephen Shapiro notes, this may be “the first U.S. literary indication of the ‘open secret’ about what cannot be declared” (234).

31 Scott Slawinski argues for reading Clelia Neville as a “patriot” because she flees a corrupt aristocratic tyrant (92-3). Of Belgrave he claims, “[c]oupling his sexuality with his treatment of Clelia, eighteenth-century Americans would have viewed Belgrave only as depraved and immoral. He would have appeared to them as a vice-ridden aristocrat submerged in luxury and as a tyrant” (93). While I am skeptical that readers would have viewed Belgrave as “only” a corrupt aristocrat, I agree with Slawinski to the extent that Belgrave’s sexuality functions rhetorically as a marker of aristocratic otherness.
the formation of these characters’ identities is that they all navigate a world without many examples of properly gendered behavior, much like *Wieland*’s Clara, who struggles with her obsession with Carwin and her love for Pleyel in part because she has no real exposure to men: raised in relative isolation, Clara only regularly interacts with her brother and Pleyel. Thus, when Carwin arrives at her farm, Clara is drawn to him in part because he presents a version of masculinity different from Pleyel’s rationality and her family’s patriarchal fanaticism. Similarly, the models of masculinity available to Calvert are essentially limited to the patriarchal models of the past. Raised by his mother, and only given a small amount of education when sent to school in New Jersey, Calvert spends his time with his mother, “manag[ing] […] domestic concerns” and “cultivat[ing] […] the garden which appended to the mansion” (95-6). Calvert lives this life for several years, having seemingly escaped the Gothic past that haunted his father: “nothing,” Calvert tells us, “disturb[ed] [his] repose” (96).

But if the Gothic teaches us anything, it is that we cannot live in the security of the present; just like Carwin’s entrance on the scene disrupts Clara’s daily life and initiates a chain of events that culminates in her brother’s murder of his family, Calvert’s assertion that he “was molested by no gloomy anticipations of the future” immediately signals the encroachment of the Gothic into his pastoral retreat (96). These changes challenge the “immoveable calm” Calvert knows (96). While an offer by his cousin to come to Europe “delight[s]” Calvert’s “youthful and untutored imagination” (97), it is only when he inherits the property from Louisa’s father that Calvert begins to struggle with a masculine identity. Calvert’s sudden good fortune unexpectedly places him in a position of masculine authority. It is important to note, however, that this new fortune
does not change his financial position very much. Already counting on the beneficence of his English cousin, Calvert acknowledges that “[w]ith relation to myself, […] this event was no topic of congratulation” (106). What the inheritance does change is his ability to enact a masculine persona based on benevolence and fellow feeling. The inheritance also returns him to the world of patriarchy and masculine authority that his father had tried to escape. Thus, the inheritance serves as proof of the maxim about the sins of the fathers: Calvert’s father tried to escape from patriarchal authority by fleeing to America, but was unable to make his way, succumbing to a crisis in masculinity that has haunted his family for generations. This crisis in masculinity now makes an uncanny return into the life of his child, Stephen Calvert, in the form of an inheritance that puts him in control of land and slaves.

While Calvert’s inheritance appeals to his desire to act the role of benevolent patriarch—he claims that “[h]is slaves would henceforth receive the treatment that was due to men” (106)—Calvert simultaneously acknowledges the injustice of the system of inheritance that led to his newfound position and finds himself caught up in the masculine identity and authority that come with ownership. Calvert’s immediate thought after he learns of his inheritance is “the superiority of Louisa’s claim to [the] property, both as the daughter of Calvert, and as a being of uncommon worth” (106). Perhaps aware of the trouble patrimony has caused his family in the past, Calvert is quick to denounce it. It helps, too, that his inheritance of Calverton coincides almost exactly with the invitation from his cousin, making any financial considerations unnecessary.

It does not take long, however, for Calvert’s feelings to change, and his comments on his ownership of Calverton reveal his deep ambiguity over the role of patriarchy. On
the one hand he acknowledges that patriarchy is a corrupt system that rewards those who
do not deserve to be rewarded, but on the other hand he takes pleasure in the material and
social benefits conferred on him through patriarchy. Ultimately, Calvert concocts a plan
to maintain the material benefits of patriarchy while simultaneously acting with
benevolent disinterest. Through this combination of actions, Calvert attempts to assert
his masculine identity. As he begins to feel reluctant to hand over the property to Louisa,
Calvert explains his reasoning: “[m]y reluctance did not flow from any single source.
Power and property are intrinsically valuable, and I loved them for their own sake, as
well as for the sake of the good which they would enable me to confer on others” (117).
Despite the long history in his family of patriarchy and a crisis in masculinity, Calvert
values the estate because it helps him to assert his masculinity in multiple ways. In
addition to the value of power and property, power that to a degree comes from
ownership of slaves, Calvert recognizes that the cultural imperative behind manly
benevolence requires access to money and property. Thus, owning the property gives
him the ability to act like a man. While Calvert originally aspired to benevolence through
his decision to pass the property on to Louisa—as he says, “I had desired, by bestowing
this benefit, to advance myself in her esteem” (114)—he now convinces himself that he
can still act benevolently towards her while maintaining his own position in relation to
the property. Calvert acknowledges that he “[is] willing to obviate all the necessities of
this woman, but desire[s] to retain the means in my own hands” (117). In other words,
Calvert begins to believe that he can have the best of both worlds.

At the same time that Calvert begins to be caught up in the masculine authority
that comes from his newfound patriarchal status, he still remains critical of patriarchy,
and in particular of patriarchy’s affects on women. One of the most powerful reasons Calvert finds to not give the property to Louisa is that upon marriage the property would pass out of the family. Just like Belgrave becomes the rightful owner of Neville’s father’s wealth and property when her father dies, effectively forcing her to flee to America because she has no ability to support herself, if Louisa were to marry someone, Calverton would become his property. Calvert condemns this state of affairs because of the effect it would have on Louisa, but it also justifies his own desire to own the property. Thus he can couch his desire to enact patriarchal masculinity in a condemnation of the very structure of patriarchy and male legal authority.

The possibility of Calverton passing to Louisa’s husband is only a problem because of Calvert’s inability to convince himself to marry Louisa. Originally convinced that he will love Louisa after hearing “eulogiums on her character, pronounced by [his] mother” (108), and fascinated with her letters and the description of her person, Calvert is filled with “intense musing, and a tremulous impatience” to meet his cousin, convinced that he loves her (112). An imaginative emotional investment with the idea of Louisa—he has never met her, after all—drives Calvert in his desire to know her.\(^{32}\) It does not take long, however, for Calvert to realize that his imagination, buoyed by the descriptions of those who know Louisa, has been led astray: “One glance, however, was sufficient to dissolve my dream and quiet my emotion. I was restored, in a moment, to myself, and could scarcely persuade myself that this was the being whom my fancy had so luxuriously and vividly pourtrayed \[sic\]” (113). The reality of his cousin’s appearance fails to meet his imaginative expectations and puts a quick end to his

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\(^{32}\) As I will discuss later, this emotional investment is based on his experience with books.
emotional attachment. Yet this change in his feelings does not change his desires in regards to Calverton, a fact that exacerbates his already complicated relationship to the property. As Calvert explains, “I did not love her, but I drew pain from thinking of her as belonging to another. I did not wish her to be mine, but I believed that no human being was so worthy to possess her as myself […]” (117). Calvert’s affection for his cousin is directly tied to his possession of Calverton, and the masculine identity and authority that comes with owning the property. Louisa becomes, then, a marker of his own masculine self-possession: to possess her becomes in his mind synonymous with masculine authority. Calvert combines the idea of Calverton with the idea of Louisa, and his desire for one becomes synonymous with his desire for the other.

Subsumed into his own masculine self-identity as his conceptions of Calverton and Louisa are, it is not surprising that Calvert would rationalize his love for Louisa in much the same way that he rationalizes his decision to maintain ownership of Calverton. Brought face to face with the reality of his cousin’s appearance—her pockmarked skin, her “inelegance” (113)—Calvert can no long support the fantasy of love, so instead of acting on emotion, he acts on reason. Realizing that he does not want Calverton to pass into other hands, Calvert begins “to reflect upon the scheme of seeking [Louisa himself]” (117). Essentially, in his relationship with Louisa Calvert replaces passion with reason as part of his attempt to maintain his own newfound masculine identity. Recognizing that “[s]he is destitute of beauty,” Calvert reminds himself that beauty “is transient and perishable. Time or indisposition destroys it, and its power over the senses depends upon its novelty” (117). In place of beauty, Calvert focuses on “moral character, and the assurance of being requited with affection,” as “[t]he true foundation of love” (117). As
Calvert attempts to rationalize his way into an affective bond with Louisa, he continues to struggle with his ownership of Calverton. But Calvert’s willingness to objectify Louisa as something to be possessed alongside Calverton is part and parcel of the patriarchal masculinity that owning Calverton brings in the first place, a connection made explicit through Calvert’s realization that to propose marriage while at the same time offering her Calverton would “be equivalent to taking back with one hand what we bestow with the other” (118). But Calvert’s hand is somewhat forced when Louisa learns that Calvert had planned on giving her Calverton but has yet to do so, a fact that Louisa ascribes to either “blameable [sic] fickleness or a laudable sagacity” (116).

Calvert’s rationalization of the world around him is compounded by the emphasis on rational masculinity articulated by those around him, most notably Sydney Carlton and Louisa. Louisa learns about Calvert’s original intentions with regards to Calverton from Carlton, a young lawyer who is also pursuing Louisa. Although Carlton is the same age as Calvert, Calvert admits that he is “eminently my superior in wisdom” (109). Carlton quickly becomes a central figure in Calvert’s quest for a masculine identity, in part because, like Clara Wieland, Calvert’s “social intercourse was limited to a small circle” (109). Besides his family, all of whom are either dead or in Europe, Carlton is the only man with whom Calvert spends any amount of time. For living models of masculinity, the emphasis on rationality and authority would be critical in establishing Calvert’s identity.

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33 As Scott Slawinski notes, Sydney’s “profession is significant for multiple reasons. […] [T]he legal profession was one of the best ways to rise to prominence, respectability, and authority in the early republic. His profession bespeaks stability, rationality, and good citizenship. Moreover, as a member of a recognized and respectable profession, he contributes and has important ties to the community” (94). While later moments seem to contradict Calvert’s claims that he and Carlton are the same age, perhaps Sydney’s culturally accepted masculinity explains why some critics claim that he is older than Calvert, including Stephen Watts, who describes Carlton as “a stern male figure who demands self-control” and “the older man[]” (189).
masculinity, he is in effect all that Calvert has. Therefore, Carlton’s criticism of Calvert’s behavior is influential, particularly because much of Carlton’s criticism is about Calvert’s masculinity. After Calvert proposes to Louisa—something that Calvert feels with “near approaches to indifference” (120), proving once again that he does not love Louisa—Carlton steps in and breaks up the relationship. Carlton’s rationalization for his actions suggests how Calvert’s masculinity is viewed by those around him. Despite his claims that his “objections relate chiefly to [Louisa],” Carlton explains that it is Calvert’s insufficiently developed masculinity that forced him to step in and stop the marriage: he tells Calvert that Louisa is “unfitted for an indissoluble alliance with a youth, raw, unexperienced, with principles untried and unsettled” (138). Calvert, Carlton claims, has “no practical acquaintance with [himself], or with the nature of the beings around you” (141). By contrast, Carlton claims to be fully self-aware: Carlton admits the possibility of ulterior motives—“I am far from supposing myself raised above the frailties of my nature, that my conduct is exempt from all sinister and selfish biasses [sic]” (140). Yet the very recognition of his feelings and the ability to still act with disinterested benevolence is meant to be a model of masculinity that Calvert can copy. Carlton demonstrates to Calvert that he embodies a masculinity that should be emulated.

The model of masculinity that Carlton proffers is that of the typical late-eighteenth-century man of feeling. As succinctly described by a reviewer of William Godwin’s novel Fleetwood: Or, the New Man of Feeling, “[b]y ‘A Man of Feeling,’ is generally understood a man of warm and active benevolence whose heart is exquisitely sensible to the distresses of every being around him, and whose hand is ever ready, as far as his influence extends, to alleviate or relieve them […]” (qtd. in Tennenhouse 84). Like
the man of feeling, Carlton constantly attempts to reconfigure Calvert’s behavior because it is, as he puts it, part of his “conceptions of duty” (138). To do this, Carlton applies his reason to Calvert’s situation: Carlton tells Calvert that his conclusions are “founded on an accurate examination of [his] character” (141), suggesting that his reason grants him insight into Calvert’s motivations. The main criticism that Carlton makes is that Calvert is too young, too inexperienced, and too unaware of the world around him. Louisa parrots Carlton’s criticism, telling Calvert that their marriage must be postponed “till his character is matured by […] age and experience” (144). Calvert must learn, they maintain, and only when he has become a man of feeling, rational and self-aware, can he and Louisa fulfill the wedding contract.

Carlton and Louisa’s advocacy of rationality and reason makes no allowances for non-normative passions or desires. Suspicious about Neville’s past and her unusual habits, Louisa suggests that even though Calvert reacts to Neville’s story with “compassion” (219), an admirable quality, he should also approach her with suspicion and use reason to find out the truth. Telling Calvert that “numberless and irresistible are the inducements to conceal what, if known, would redound to our shame!” (222), Louisa suggests that he should “[make] inquiries among [Neville’s associates] respecting [Neville]” (222). As part of their attempt to make Calvert a rational man, Louisa and Sydney advocate that instead of acting on his emotions and desires, he should spend his time “enlarging the number of [his] friends, and in supplying [himself] with materials of observation and reflection” (222-3). It is better to spend your time constructing

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34 This claim is rather strange if Calvert is to be believed when he states that they are the same age.
relationships based on rationality than on just pure desire.\(^{35}\) What Louisa and Carlton claim to have learned when they put their theory into practice is that Belgrave is not such a monster, instead, “[h]is reputation has fewer blemishes than are incident to most men of the same riches and rank” (223). The one who has acted improperly, they claim, is not Belgrave, but Neville. While this information does nothing to really settle the matter—after all, not even Neville claims to have known about Belgrave’s habits until admitted into an intimate relationship with him—what it does suggest is that Louisa and Carlton’s attempts to make Calvert a man rely entirely on public perception. Reputation is a powerful thing. The problem with this logic is that Louisa and Carlton’s own plan is both cause and diagnosis of the problems with what they see to be Neville’s problem.

Dependent on both openness and cynical suspicion, the model of masculinity put forth by Louisa and Carlton requires a trust in reason, but distrust in the reason of others. Hence, because Calvert’s and Belgrave’s actions do not fit into their definition of reason, despite the fact that Calvert is commonly seen using his reason, they see them as less than men.

It is against this background of patriarchal pressure and rational, benevolent masculinity that Calvert attempts to articulate a form of masculinity that embraces passion and desires outside of the rational as defined by Louisa and Carlton. Calvert first starts to act on his emotions in his relationship with Clelia Neville, and it is through his engagements with her and the masculinity that results from this relationship that Calvert begins to understand the possibilities of affective masculinity. Caught up in the power of patriarchal masculinity and male authority that comes from ownership of Calverton,

\[^{35}\text{And Calvert at times seems to think he is doing a good job conforming to their desires, telling the reader, “I learned to contemn the vagaries of my fancy, and to place more reliance on experience. My secret struggles and fantastic regrets, which my reason had been unable to subdue, were now at an end” (127).}^\]
Calvert has attempted to rationalize his decision to keep the property. Yet, when confronted with Louisa and Carlton’s attempts to mold him into a proper man, Calvert runs into trouble: they accuse him of not using his mind, but if he were to explain the rationalization behind his decision to marry Louisa he would receive even more scorn and condemnation. Trying to rationalize, while at the same time stuck unable to explain his rationality, Calvert’s only recourse is to admit to the accusations made by Louisa and Carlton. Accused by Sydney of things he did not do, Calvert is left with no choice, and he becomes passive in the face of the accusations. “I had no power to confess my misdeeds,” he explains, “I merely acknowledged the truth of his suspicions in general, and admitted that I had been very faulty, faulty to a degree for which inexperience, and youth, and a sanguine temper, afforded no apology” (246). Unable to conform to the strictures of masculinity around him, Calvert succumbs to their accusations. Accused of not being the right kind of man, Calvert admits to not being a man at all.

What makes Calvert’s admissions to failure so surprising is that he has participated in the construction of masculinity through his relationship with Clelia Neville. What distinguishes this relationship, however, is that it is born out of affect, not reason, and it is when he attempts to apply reason to the relationship that he runs into the most trouble. In this way, the relationship between Neville and Calvert runs counter to what is advocated by Louisa and Carlton, which is not surprising given that it is through an irrational act of masculine prowess that Calvert first encounters Neville. In the middle of his marriage proposal (timing that suggests the ways in which Calvert’s affective masculinity will disrupt the rational and patriarchal marriage to his cousin), cries of “Fire! Fire!” are heard and Calvert rushes off to the scene (121). For Calvert, the
sequence of events that follows is notable for its utter lack of reason: he tells us “I knew not the place or the limits of the danger” (121), and that “[h]ad I deliberately consulted my reason, I should, doubtless, have continued to hover at a cowardly distance from the scene of peril” (122). But, because he does not consult his reason, Calvert’s passions take over; Calvert is passive and “the impulse that governed me was headlong and irresistible: It pushed me forward” (122). Calvert’s impulses push him to climb a ladder into the burning house, despite the crowd’s cries that the house is going to collapse. Dramatically, Calvert rescues a sleeping woman from the bedroom immediately before the roof collapses.

Throughout the rescue, Calvert is “nearly passive” and it is only afterwards that he begins to “collect [his] thoughts” and the “tumult of [his] spirits subsided” (123). It is at this moment of impulsive masculinity that Calvert begins to acknowledge the productive possibilities of impulse and affect. While asserting that “[m]y mind was fertile in reasoning and invention, and my theory was not incorrect,” Calvert admits that “[t]he idol which [his] heart secretly worshipped, and to which [he] habitually annexed every excellent and splendid attribute, was love” (125). This admission that passion supplants reason is made only in retrospect: Calvert does not admit this at the time, but only afterwards, as he relates the tale to his listener, a fact that is important to remember when considering the development of his affective identity. But more important in the moments after the rescue is what his mind focuses on instead of the “transient” “glimpses

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36 As Scott Slawinski notes, “[Calvert’s] willingness to risk his life to save the person, if not the property, would have displayed both his civic identity and his manliness” (94). In other words, at this moment Calvert innately acts according to culturally sanctioned models of masculinity. As I am arguing, what is important about this moment is that Calvert acts in the absence of reason: it is when he does not reason that he becomes most masculine.
of a better devotion […] to science, to ambition, to the happiness of mankind” (125).

After rescuing Neville from the fire, Calvert begins to turn away from ambition, finding instead “pleasure […] in […] reveries” about “the emotions which the lady, on recovering from her swoon, and obtaining a knowledge of the means of her rescue, might admit into her bosom” (125). Calvert fantasizes, in other words, about an affective reward for his masculine actions. It is only when Calvert starts to reason again, remembering his engagement to Louisa, and the patriarchal structures that might prevent his fantasies from becoming reality—“those obstacles which fortune, or parents, or a previous marriage, might raise between my and this new acquaintance” (1250)—that Calvert abandons his emotional fantasy. Consulting his reason, Calvert determines to “decline all intercourse with this female” and to focus solely on generating feelings for his cousin (125). When Neville contacts Calvert and requests a meeting, however, his masculine act is rewarded in a way that emphasizes many of the desirable masculine qualities that Calvert has sought. Neville notes her deep obligation to Calvert and states that his “benevolence and intrepidity entitle [him] […] to know that she whom [he has] rescued from the worst of deaths, is not ungrateful for the benefit” (158-9). Neville’s language answers directly what Calvert hoped to achieve by conferring Calverton on Louisa: his action is seen as benevolent, and Neville is deeply obligated to him. Calvert, therefore, begins to see that the same masculine benefits that he had hoped to realize through patriarchal reason can be realized through impulsive and affective actions.

Calvert recognizes his passionate side early on in the narrative, before he tries to suppress his passions in his pursuit of Louisa. Reflecting on his own character while contemplating the proper course to pursue with regards to Calverton, Calvert notes that
he “mused on ideal forms, and glowed with visionary ardours [sic],” and that “my character contained no small portion of enthusiasm” (108). In his relationship with Neville, Calvert finds someone remarkably similar to himself, further suggesting the productive possibility of affect. Describing her reading habits, Neville tells Calvert about her early interest in “[a]musing and frivolous productions” (160), from which she quickly moves into more “refined” taste. What is remarkable for Calvert is that “[f]rom seeing and feeling, [Neville] had long since proceeded to investigate, select, and arrange” (161). Calvert has something of an epiphany: “[t]o me this spectacle was wholly new” (161). Shocked by Neville’s eloquence, and, one suspects, by the new model of a productive use of affect, Calvert finds that conversation with Neville “awakened, in the highest degree, my juvenile enthusiasm” (162). Neville offers a model of affective living that Louisa and Carlton argue should be suppressed and supplanted by reason. What is remarkable about Neville, though, is that far from suppressing her early passions, she channels them into “inexhaustible stores of sentiment and language” (160). Confronted with Neville, Calvert finds himself undergoing “[a] deep and thorough revolution,” as “a tumult of delicious feelings was awakened, which I cherished with diligence” (163). Awakening powerful affect as well as feelings of benevolent masculinity, Neville quickly distracts Calvert from his “contract” with his cousin, in response to which Calvert learns one of his most important lessons: he would have been better off had he followed his emotions with regards to Louisa, instead of acting on reason. By following a rational approach to matters of love, Calvert realizes he “acted with the blind impetuosity of a lunatic” (163). As a result, instead of finding “happiness” with one “who is governed by sentiments and
principles harmonious and congenial with [his],” Calvert has proposed to one “who is
[…] the slave of the ambiguous and cold-blooded scruples of another” (164).

The novel is a coming-of-age story about Calvert’s journey to manhood. And, through much of the novel, Calvert continues to struggle, noting that “[l]ove is an ambiguous and capricious principle” (109), and that he is himself a “versatile, romantic, and ambiguous being” (138-9). Calvert is, in “[his] own eyes, a paradox, a miracle, a subject of incessant curiosity and speculation” (247). What gets Calvert into the most trouble, however, is when he tries to apply the dictates of reason, as learned from Sydney and Louisa, to his relationship with Neville. Torn between the two halves of his world, Calvert often tries to bridge the gap by using reason in place of affect, as when he rationalizes his way into proposing marriage to Louisa. Similarly, when he decides to propose to Neville after she has already confessed her love for him, Calvert unfortunately falls back the on older models of patriarchal masculinity that Neville otherwise helps him to move beyond. Told that certain obstacles prevent them from marrying, Calvert tells Neville, “Thou art mine. It will be vain to refuse or hesitate. […] No power of others or yourself, shall stop my way to the possession of your hand” (188). Calvert claims the authority of a male when his affective relationship with Neville is disrupted; while it is through his relationships that Calvert begins to articulate an affective alternative to normative masculinity, over the course of the novel he is still developing as a man. Torn between different models of masculinity, models made more difficult to follow by their complicity in major relationships in his life, Calvert looks for ways to express his own masculinity and for models of masculinity that will help him understand how to be a man.
One of the primary sources for Calvert’s difficulty finding a model of masculinity that suits him is the lack of options and models around him. As I have mentioned, Calvert’s “social intercourse was limited to a small circle” (109). As a result, during his early years Calvert develops a “romantic disposition” from a “literary and bookish education” (97). As a result of his closeted life, Calvert finds that “those sympathies which are always ardent at my age wasted themselves on visionary objects” (97). This romantic disposition, criticized by Louisa and Carlton, is one of the things that draws him so strongly to Neville. Like him, she has from an early age found amusement in books, the main difference being, as I have suggested, that she is able to productively channel her romantic disposition, whereas Calvert is constantly told that his character is a defect to be mastered. Without many options for masculinity, and wanting to know himself, Calvert does have one option available to him: his brother. And it is to his brother who his imaginative flights of fancy often turn. Calvert tells the reader, “[f]or want of experience I imagined that there was something peculiarly sacred and tender in the bond of brotherhood, and that this tie was unspeakably enhanced by the circumstance of being ushered into being together; of being coeval in age, and alike in constitution and figure: these resemblances being supposed by me to exist, in those cases in an eminent degree” (97). Calvert has no father, has very few males in his life, and so lacks any clear model for masculinity. But, the existence of a twin provides him with something better, an identical version of himself whom he can sympathetically identify with such that he will come to better understand himself. Calvert views his brother as a mirror through which to understand his identity, including his gender. Yet, the risk of knowing himself raises
the possibility that he will not like what he sees. As such, he tells the reader, “[t]he sensations that flowed from the ideas were not always pleasurable” (97).

When given, therefore, a chance to meet his brother at the end of the book—the “inestimable brother who partakes existence with me in this intimate and wonderful degree” (271)—Calvert goes through a revolution of feeling similar to those he has gone through before. Calvert describes the intense emotions that the meetings bring forth: “[e]very fibre in my frame was tremulous. My heart throbbed as if I were on the eve of some fatal revolution” (272). Finally, Calvert hopes, he will know himself, and he views the moment as momentously important: he describes it as feeling like “passage into a new state of being” (272). Unfortunately for those seeking an easy explanation, the novel cuts off abruptly as Sydney leads Calvert’s brother into the room. All that comes afterward is a brief postscript, stating that the reader knows all they need to know to understand what takes place from there on out. For many critics, the novel is deeply dissatisfying because it is “incomplete,” but viewed as a coming-of-age quest to find an appropriate form of masculinity, it becomes clear that the novel is, in fact, complete. After all, the end is not really the end: Calvert begins the novel by describing his current situation on the shores of Lake Michigan, where he has found a new life. Thus, there is more to the text, but it comes at the beginning of the novel. By abruptly stopping the story at the moment of

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37 Critics commented on the incomplete nature of *Stephen Calvert* as early as 1824. In an article printed in the *European Magazine* in January of that year, the anonymous reviewer bemoans the incomplete nature of many of Brown’s works, and notes about *Stephen Calvert*, “Stephen Calvert, it is true, explains at the conclusion, a considerable portion, though not the entire mystery through which precedes; but in all other respects, it is as imperfect as the rest; for the story is a five act drama, of which only the first act is given here” (“Carwin” 43). Of interest to my argument, this same reviewer notes that “Calvert is the slave of passion, Sidney [sic] the stern, unbending disciple of reason” and that “Calvert, therefore, with all his imperfections, is infinitely more interesting than Sidney [sic]” (46).
intense affect, Calvert forces the reader to consider the material as presented to him as a complete story. Therefore, I want to conclude by talking about the opening of the novel and what it tells us about the form of masculinity advocated by Calvert.

One of the questions left seemingly unanswered by the ending of the novel is why Calvert flees society and travels to the shores of Lake Michigan, a move that mirrors several other escapes made throughout the novel, but that also hints at the importance of masculinity to Calvert. While the timing of the break suggests that it his meeting with his brother that triggers his escape, it is unclear how much time elapses between that meeting and Calvert’s decision to leave. Therefore, to answer this question, we must turn to the rest of the text, as well as Calvert’s own retrospective comments about his life, for answers. On one level, Calvert’s decision to flee to Lake Michigan has its antecedents in the story of his father. Afraid of his own knowledge and the threat of his father, Calvert’s father left Europe to come to America, an action that is replicated by both Louisa’s escape from her father, and Neville’s decision to leave Belgrave and join her aunt in America. What is common to all these escapes is the fear of tyrannical males, whether they are fathers or husbands selected by fathers. Each of these escapes can thus be read as an attempt to reject patriarchy and the violence that goes along with it. The question that remains, then, is just whom Calvert is fleeing from. Because of the abrupt nature of the novel’s end, it is impossible to say conclusively whether Brown intended to make Calvert’s reasoning explicit, but at several moments throughout his narrative Calvert

38 Robert Arner notes many of the questions left unanswered at the end of the novel: “Who […] is the person to whom Calvert relates his story? What is his relationship to Calvert and to other events in the plot? How does Calvert end up in the wilds of Michigan?” As I have been arguing, many of these questions are answered by considering the role of gender in the novel.
hints at his reasoning. When he first introduces Sydney Carlton to the reader, Calvert makes a brief narratorial aside, something relatively rare in the novel. Describing how he first came to know Carlton, Calvert remarks, “It was this man whose existence was the source of the first uneasiness which I had ever known, and who was indirectly the author of all my subsequent calamities” (110). Calvert thus attributes to Carlton the major “calamities” in his life. While on one level the comment could refer either to Carlton’s role in bringing the brother in Calvert’s life or his role in disrupting Calvert’s relationship with Louisa, given that the predominant role Carlton plays in Calvert’s life is his attempt to form Calvert into a proper man, I argue that it is Carlton’s attention to his masculinity that Calvert refers to.

Calvert himself recognizes the importance of books and stories to the development of his identity, suggesting that his own narrative serves much the same purpose. Not only does Calvert spend much of his narrative detailing the story of his family’s past, but he also explicitly points to books as a key source of his own gender identity. While Calvert blames in general his “literary and bookish education” for his “romantic disposition” (97), he specifically points to a work by “Mademoiselle Scuderi” as the root of his gender identity. Seeing Louisa reading, Calvert notes of the book,

[i]f I ever grow old and reflect upon the events that formed my character, I shall mark out this book as the most powerful of all agents who made me what I am. If I am fickle and fantastic, not a moral or rational, or a political being, but a thing of mere sex, this it was that fashioned me. I almost predict that I shall owe an ignominious life, and a shameless end, to this book. (192)
Described retroactively in the midst of his narration of his life, this passage in many ways holds the key to the rest of the narrative. Most important is that although he uses the word “sex,” given that the subject of the comment is his behavior—whether he is “fickle and fantastic, not a moral or rational, or a political being”—what Calvert is describing is much closer to what we would now term gender. Therefore, Calvert identifies “this book” as the source of his own gender identity. And, read as part of his own coming-of-age story, the semantic slippage in the phrase “this book” suggests he is alluding not just to Scuderi’s novel, but his own story, the book of his life. What Calvert here suggests is that *Memoirs of Stephen Calvert* is a story of how he became a gendered being, a story which, like the other stories in the novels, is meant to instruct and explain. Calvert suggests, therefore, that readers of his novel can learn how to be a man by reading it.

But the opening of the novel reminds us that despite its characterization as a memoir, the text is not meant as a written text; instead, Calvert *tells* his story to a listener, identified only as “my friend” (71). What the opening of the books makes explicit is that Calvert has not fled from society—after all, he tells his story in order to generate sympathetic and emotional identification with his listener, identification based on his explanation of the development of his masculinity. The text is an attempt to create a new society. Calvert points to his “uninterrupted enjoyment of health and tranquility” (71), and offers to “assist” his listener, who he notes has “a taste not wholly incongenial [sic] with mine” “in making a plantation, and erecting an house” (72). Calvert tells his listener that “I am indebted for this visit, and wish you would prolong it sufficiently to discover all the advantages of my condition” (72). Calvert then narrates his own struggles with masculinity. What we are left with is a tale of masculine struggles, meant to create and
foster intimacy and society. While Calvert acknowledges that his plan “can be recommended only by calamities similar to those which I have endured” (73), the experience of listening to (or reading) his story allows the reader to sympathetically and affectively experience those same calamities.

If it is in the pages of Edgar Huntly that Brown most specifically articulated a theory of the American Gothic, it is in Stephen Calvert that Brown tested the implications of his theory. What we learn through this novel is that relationships between males are at the heart of Brown’s Gothic project, specifically the frightening implications of patriarchy and its descendents. By fleeing from patriarchy and rational manhood, Calvert attempts to articulate a new form of masculinity based not just on reason, but sympathy and affect. By blaming Sydney Carlton and what he represents for his troubles, Calvert suggests that what he is fleeing from is patriarchal and rational masculinity. Seeing in affective connections the possibility for new communal interactions and gender identity, Calvert starts over, not to be alone, but to be with the right sorts of people. In his articulation of a new Gothic literature, Brown faced a choice of what to leave behind and what to adapt to the new American setting. While many of his Gothic novels incorporate the traditional patriarchal structure, in Stephen Calvert Brown most fully attempts to move beyond the old and into the new. In this sense, Memoirs of Stephen Calvert is Brown’s most important novel. That this novel is about Calvert’s struggle to be a man suggests that while we can move beyond patriarchy, there is still something Gothic about manhood.
Chapter Two

“covering me with its loathsome caresses”: Edgar Allan Poe’s Fictions of Masculine Desire

On July 18, 1842, Edgar Allan Poe wrote to J. and H. G. Langley, the editors of the *Democratic Review*, with the hope that they would publish his article, “The Landscape Garden.” If they will agree, he asks that they send him whatever amount they normally pay for “similar contributions” by “the 21st, on which day I shall need it.” He ends the brief letter with a discussion of “The Review of Dawes which [he previously] offered [the editors].” Yet in the middle of these fairly standard literary negotiations, Poe includes an aside about his recent visit. He asks the Langleys if they “Will […] be kind enough to put the best possible interpretation upon my behavior while in N. York? You must have conceived a queer idea of me – but the simple truth is that Wallace would insist upon the juleps, and I knew not what I was either doing or saying” (emphasis in original). Poe’s anxiety over his actions speaks to pressing issues facing men in antebellum America: what appropriate masculine behavior should look like in the expanding urban environment, and the need to balance one’s image between competing worlds of male camaraderie and business-like professionalism. Poe’s language suggests the powerful affect attached to issues of masculine behavior: his fear that the Langleys will “have conceived a queer idea of [him]”; his attempt to place blame on his friend, the poet William Ross Wallace; and his concern that his behavior will disrupt the potential sale of his work all speak to the intense pressure and anxiety Poe experienced as he
attempted to navigate the urban literary market. That this is a specifically urban encounter stands as a reminder of just how misguided it can be to think of Poe in terms of Southern aristocracy. The working class men Poe would have encountered in New York lived lives very different from those of the Southern aristocrats with whom critics often associate Poe. Drinking with men of one’s class, and particularly men who worked in the same jobs, provided a sense of camaraderie central to male life in antebellum urban spaces. In Poe’s world, fiction, criticism, and social life all depended on men hanging out together. Poe’s letter to the Langleyes reminds us of an often overlooked element of Poe’s writing: his deep interest in urban spaces and the encounters and relationships these spaces fostered—relationships that often reflected the gendered nature of the city’s environment.

Despite the common critical tendency to associate Poe with the South, Poe’s work provides a useful and productive point of entry into an investigation of the relationship between fear and forms of urban masculinity. As changing market conditions presented new challenges to accepted forms of masculinity, Poe responded by creating stories about men and their fears. Similarly, Poe’s theories of fiction, particularly in “The Philosophy of Composition,” demonstrate a correlation between fiction and masculinity that made

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39 That Poe also recognized the marketability of such behavior is clear from his emphasis in the letter. While he claims to be fully ashamed by his behavior, he also re-performs that same behavior by including it in the letter and mentioning specific details. In other words, Poe presents his own bad behavior in order to position himself as a member of a boisterous urban space. It is also quite likely that Poe saw an economic motive for including this information, suggesting again the importance of particular masculinities to market success. For more on Poe’s own performance of masculinity, see the coda, “Domesticating Poe.”

40 Citing John Ward Ostrom’s calculations, Sandra Tomc notes that Poe’s estimated yearly salary while he was working for The Southern Literary Messenger was $624.00. This sum, adjusted for inflation, would put Poe below the poverty line of the early 1980’s, when Ostrom did the calculations (Tomc 23).
the Gothic short story the proper venue for investigating masculinity. In his short stories, especially “The Black Cat,” Poe connects concerns about how the economic market affects working men with the complex desires brought about by male sociality in the city. In doing so, he crafts a Gothic tale of fear that attempts to create from the affective response of the reader a powerful critique of normative manhood. What “The Black Cat” demonstrates is that during a time when male-male intimacy and domesticity were codified as separately gendered social constructions, attempts to bring the two worlds together often led to violence. Poe’s story “The Black Cat” shows us that one unpredictable product of the market revolution is an irrevocable chaining of masculinity and fear. In order to navigate these increasingly separate worlds, men had to embody multiple masculinities, a task that became almost impossible, according to Poe, when male-male desire went beyond mere sociality. Poe’s narrator, caught between his desire for male-male intimacy and his attempt to embrace normative masculinity through marriage, violently erupts, rejecting both in a shocking act of murder. The only thing left to men in this situation is to tell their stories, and it is through the affective response to narration that readers are made to feel the narrator’s fear and understand the gender struggles associated with being a man in antebellum America.41

41 All of Poe’s stories have generated a wide range of critical responses and arguments. For example, there are a variety of theories about “The Black Cat,” including many that attempt to deconstruct the emotional power of the story. Critics have at times focused on the role of alcohol in the story. T. J. Matheson has argued that Poe conceived “The Black Cat” as a critique of and “a response to […] new attitudes” about temperance that were circulating during the time, particularly the tendency to sympathize with drunkards (70). Similarly, David Reynolds sees the story as an exemplary piece in the “dark temperance tradition,” wherein Poe “converts a popular reform formula into an intriguing study of disintegration of the Conventional sensibility through the Subversive forces unleashed by alcohol” (70). Other critics have focused on the nature of the criminal in relation to the story. John Cleman argues for Poe’s engagement with the insanity defense as proof that
Before turning to “The Black Cat,” I want to first suggest that Poe’s theories of fiction anticipate by almost two hundred years current theories about the relationship between masculinity and affect. Recently, a resurgence in the study of masculine affect has changed our understanding of the relationship between male emotion and masculinity. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler’s collection *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* set out to resurrect the role of the sentimental man in American culture from the entrenched critical focus on “masculine types such as the anti-domestic American Adam or the individual loner / revolutionary” (5). In the face of such critical tendencies, the editors of the volume assert the importance of the sentimental to constructions of masculinity, both during the

Poe was interested in the moral and legal debates of his day (625). Christopher Benfey sees in “The Black Cat” a similar engagement in madness, only in his view the story is about epistemology; specifically, he argues that Poe is interested in “the ways in which people are themselves enigmas to one another” (28). Jonathan Elmer notes that “The Black Cat” the monstrous nature of the cat resides in the way it represents the blurring of boundaries: “The tale […] organizes itself around a series of oppositions—particularity and universality, law and crime, attraction and repulsion, victim and victimizer, state and individual—which annihilate themselves in the other” (159).

Recently, much of the attention to Poe’s fiction in general, and “The Black Cat” in particular, has focused on race and the relationship between racial fears and the American Gothic. Beginning with Toni Morrison’s claim that “No early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe” (32), race has become one of the main critical focuses in Poe scholarship. The 2001 collection *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* was written in order to “unsettle traditional understandings of Poe while foregrounding the historical problem of race (and racism) in America” (xvi). In this collection, Leland Person argues that several of Poe’s tales, including “The Black Cat” “reveal complicated patterns of racism and antiracist sympathy, a recognition on Poe’s part that racial signifiers are inherently unstable, while racism and racist efforts to ascribe fixed racial identities lead inevitably to revenge” (“Poe’s Philosophy” 220). Similarly, Teresa Goddu argues in her *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* that “the Gothic offers Poe a complex and complementary notation with which to explore the racial discourse of his period, a discourse concerned as much with perfect whiteness as terrifying blackness” (76). Finally, Lesley Ginsberg sees “The Black Cat” as a critique of the “cultural work of the American Gothic” in its linking of “the psychological machinery of the American Gothic to the political machinations of American racism” (124, 123).
antebellum period and today. In this context, contributors to the collection deconstruct many of the binaries previously used to characterize the antebellum period, most importantly the notion of the separate spheres. Instead, Hendler and Chapman note that many of “the same cluster of tropes normally associated with female sentimentality [are] present in the male cult of sentimentality” (9). Recognizing sentiment’s vital role in constructing masculinity challenges long-held assumptions about the antebellum period and broadens our understanding of both masculinity and the antebellum period. In his own work, Glenn Hendler elaborates on how sentiment and sympathetic identification play important roles in constructions of masculinity and our understanding of the public sphere. Hendler notes that, despite the power of categorizations such as “the separate spheres,” “Sentimentality in the nineteenth century was never as feminine nor as private an affective structure as we assume it was” (20, 43). Although not focused exclusively on men, Julie Ellison, in her study of Anglo-American emotion makes a similar argument for the complex relationship between emotion and sociality: “Emotion takes on the defining attributes of social life: it is gendered; it is old or young; it is associated with experienced individual and group identities; it partakes of national character; it assimilates landscapes, architectures, and other geographies. Never univocal or transparent, feeling inheres in the shapes and conventions of social and cultural life” (6). Other critics have noted the importance of male affect and emotion to our understanding of gender. Bruce Burgett has argued for the political importance of sentimental literature, which he shows relied on the affective bodily response of readers to achieve its political potential.\(^{42}\) For Burgett, sentiment was central to early America because of the roles it

\(^{42}\) Even when he turns to Charles Brockden Brown, traditionally viewed as a Gothic
played in “the boundaries that divide private from public life, civil from state authority, subjection from citizenship” (4). In this sense, then, sentiment was central to the defining factors of masculinity: public life, citizenship, and authority.

Each of these studies has worked to broaden our previous understanding of the role of sentimental affect in constructions of citizenship, publicity, and gender. Sentimentality played a more defining role in constructions of masculinity than previously accounted for. Yet, as Jonathan Elmer notes, the sentimental itself is an unstable category. Quite often, he argues, “the sensational—the moment of shock, or horror, or revulsion—erupts from within the sentimental” (93). Many of the so-called classics of sentimental literature follow this pattern and feature decidedly unsentimental moments: from the violence of the horse-whipping scenes in Susan Warner’s sentimental classic The Wide, Wide World (see for example, 396-400) to the Gothic world of Simon Legree’s plantation in Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, sentimental literature is rife with sensational moments. While this recent work on male sentimentality adds a crucial element to our conception of masculinity, it only addresses part of the picture. As we have seen in Poe’s letter to the Langleys, being a man in antebellum America was also very much defined by Gothic affects. Sentiment was an important marker of masculinity, but so were fear, panic, anxiety, and terror. What Poe demonstrates is that for many men, the affect most important to daily life was fear.

writer, Burgett focuses on Brown’s later, “sentimental” novel Clara Howard. See 112-133. For more on the place of masculine affect in Brockden Brown’s Memoirs of Stephen Calvert, see Chapter Two: Patriarchal Gothic and Affective Masculinity in Brockden Brown’s Memoirs of Stephen Calvert.
Poe’s claims in his essays about the productive relationship between Gothic fiction and masculinity suggest that recent focus on sentimental men as the bearers of man’s affective burden only reveals part of the picture. In a recent collection of American supernatural short stories, S. T. Joshi argues that “Poe […] is the central figure in the entire history of American—and, indeed, British and European—supernatural fiction” (xiii). The result of Poe’s influence, he claims, is an emotional and psychological investment in fear and a change in the way Gothic literature is structured: “No longer could such entities as the vampire or the ghost […] be manifested without proper emotional preparation or the provision of at least a quasilogical rational” (xiii). According to this formulation, Poe changed the way the Gothic functioned by emphasizing the emotional aspect of the genre. Poe has long been associated with this sort of emotional power.\footnote{43 Few authors have reached the popular status that Poe long ago attained. In Jonathan Elmer’s term, “Poe is a mass-cultural writer,” by which he means that Poe uniquely bridges the gap between popular culture and “higher” literary culture (4). Mark Neimeyer discusses the way that Poe’s popularity exists as what he calls “meta-popular culture” (206). Neimeyer’s point is that Poe’s popularity and the sheer wealth of Poe material in existence—from a professional football team named after “The Raven” to Poe’s appearance on the cover of The Beatles’ \textit{Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band}—don’t require any direct knowledge of Poe’s work. At the same time, the wealth of film adaptations of Poe’s work suggests the powerful affect generated by Poe’s stories. While it would be difficult to pinpoint a single cause for Poe’s widespread recognizability, the range of references to Poe’s work gives proof to the important role of affect to literature.} Much of the recent critical work on his fiction has attempted to identify the various sources of fear Poe uses to create such powerful affective responses in his readers. While a wide variety of topics have been identified as the source of fear in Poe’s tales, ever since Poe wrote in the “Philosophy of Composition” that “the death […] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (19), it has been assumed that women are the bearers of affect in Poe’s fiction.
However, as I will argue, in the “Philosophy of Composition” Poe articulates a theory of specifically masculine affect central to our understanding of fear in his fiction.  

Poe articulates the important role of masculine affect in Gothic literature in “The Philosophy of Composition.” Ostensibly an account of the composition of “The Raven,” “The Philosophy of Composition” presents a gendered genealogy of genre and text wherein relationships between men, as well as bodily desires, are aligned with fiction and the short story, while beauty is aligned with poetry. Poetry, Poe argues, should be

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44 Ever since Poe wrote in “The Philosophy of Composition” that “the death […] of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (19), there has been a tendency among scholars to apply this statement to Poe’s stories, especially stories like “Ligeia” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” in order to explain the role of gender in Poe’s fiction. When men are the focus of criticism, it is their relationship with these women that garners critical attention: as Joan Dayan argues, “Poe’s tales about women—‘Morella,’ ‘Ligeia,’ ‘Berenice,’ ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ and ‘Eleonora’—are about the men who narrate the unspeakable remembrance” (244). Not surprisingly, this tendency has played a key role in the emphasis on women as the bearers of the affective burden in Poe’s fiction, and a general neglect of Poe’s male characters. Thus, even when Leland Person focuses specifically on gender and masculinity in Poe’s fiction, the tales that predominately feature female characters are grouped under the heading “Poe’s Portraits of Women” (“Gender” 132). In this categorization, even a tale like “The Black Cat,” which I will argue focuses almost exclusively on the relationships between men, is discussed as being about women. Because of Poe’s sensational claim about women and death, critics tend to forget his men whenever the women show up, despite the fact that, as Person notes, Poe’s men often seemed to be more fleshed out than his women (“Gender” 149).

45 Poe argued, as he often did, for a clear distinction between poetry and prose. Thus, in his late essay “The Poetic Principle,” Poe claims, “I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, ‘a long poem,’ is simply a flat contradiction in terms” (71). This claim is a later version of his statement in “The Philosophy of Composition” that “What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects” (15). For Poe, then, there is a clear distinction between poetry and prose, and, to apply Poe’s statements about poetry to his stories is to miss the point. As Barbara Johnson has noted, “Poe aims to maximize the difference between prose and poetry, excluding for that reason the long poem from the canon of true poetry” (39). The importance of not conflating Poe’s claims about poetry with his claims about prose is borne out by many of the critical attempts to do just that. In her influential essay “Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves” Dayan writes, “Many of the dissolutions and decays so marked in Poe’s tales about women subvert the status of women as a
concerned with Beauty: “Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem” (16).

Beauty, however, is not something that is simply identified in an object—the beauty of an object does not fully adhere to the object; instead, beauty is defined, much like any work of art, by its effect on a reader. Poe’s definition of beauty, and by extension, poetry, becomes tautological as he further explains what he means by beauty: “That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul—not of intellect, or of the heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating ‘the beautiful’” (16). Through a dense rhetorical hedging, Poe defines beauty by avoiding definition. Beauty, in this passage, is something you will know by the way it makes your soul feel, but that feeling is only definable as the feeling associated with viewing beauty.

Poe defines poetry through reference to an affective response that cannot be defined, which allows Poe great latitude for his criticism and his own poetry. Poe’s tautology continues when he describes “the obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that object should be attained through means best adapted for
their attainment” (16). By avoiding any clear and direct claims about poetry, Poe is able to portray it as something nebulous, even as he claims that the purpose of the essay is to demystify the process of writing poetry.

By contrast, Poe is comparatively specific about what prose should look like. Poe contrasts the Beauty central to poetry to truth and passion, which he argues are the stuff of prose. Poe’s claims about prose follow a similar “those-in-the-know” kind of logic as his claims about beauty and poetry. Poe writes, “the object, Truth, or the satisfaction of the intellect, and the object Passion, or the excitement of the heart, are, although attainable, to a certain extent, in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose” (16). Poe clearly chose his words carefully here. While the intellect can be “satisfied”—hence Poe’s stories of ratiocination—the heart, the passions, the bodily desires, can only be excited. The emphasis on the bodily in prose—passions, specifically—makes the short story the most appropriate genre for dealing with physical desires. Poe turns his discussion of passion and desire into a discussion about subject matter when he states that “Passion [demands] a homeliness (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which [is] absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul” (16).

Given the Gothic themes of much of Poe’s writing, his use of the term “homeliness” registers a number of important details about Poe’s philosophy of prose. While “homeliness” means both something domestic and something lacking beauty, a definition that explains the genealogy Poe is articulating, it also suggests secrecy and privacy, and, as Freud has demonstrated, through its ambiguity, calls up notions of the

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46 The OED defines “homeliness” as “The quality or condition of being homely,” as well as “simplicity, plainness; lack of beauty.”
uncanny: “that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (*The Uncanny* 124). Poe argues that the short story is the appropriate genre for dealing with issues of passion, secrecy, and fear: an author hoping to engage with affect and masculinity need look no further than the short story.\(^{47}\) Affect is an important part of Poe’s definition of prose because it allows him to bring together the bodily desires and passions of his readers with the bodily passions and desires depicted in the stories in a way that plays on the productive power of fear to deconstruct and reconstruct gendered bodies.

Whereas much of “The Philosophy of Composition” explicitly deals with poetry, Poe begins the essay with a novel. In the opening lines of his essay, Poe offers William Godwin’s 1794 novel *Things as They Are; or, the Adventures of Caleb Williams* as an example of a properly composed literary work.\(^ {48}\) Poe loosely quotes a letter he received

\(^{47}\) In his discussion of psychoanalysis and the Dupin tales, Shawn Rosenheim comes to a similar conclusion about the importance of a reader’s affect to Poe’s short stories: “To rouse a mind, a text must also arouse the body: only through the symptomatic commitment of the reader’s flesh can the text realize its transferential effects” (173). The relationship with the reader’s body is similar, in this analysis, to Dupin’s relationship with his own body: because he understands his own “embodiment” he is able to solve crimes (173). While Rosenheim works through the lens of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to reach his conclusion about the centrality of affect to Poe’s tales of ratiocination, we are able to demonstrate the importance of affect to the Gothic tales based solely on Poe’s arguments in the “Philosophy of Composition.”

\(^{48}\) Godwin’s novel is a first person confessional narrative told by Caleb Williams, who describes the persecution he faces from Ferdinando Falkland, his employer at the beginning of the book. Despite his clear admiration for Falkland, and despite the fact that Williams, who has no family, is treated well by Falkland, Williams becomes convinced that Falkland has some hidden secret. Eventually learning that Falkland is guilty of a murder for which he was acquitted, Williams spends the rest of the novel trying to escape the persecution that this knowledge brings. Aside from its centrality to the Gothic canon, Godwin’s novel is important to understanding Poe’s “The Philosophy of Composition” because as much as it is about issues of class and persecution, the novel explicitly deals with masculinity and male desire. Falkland— “[l]earned without ostentation, refined without foppery, elegant without effeminacy!” — models a romantic and chivalrous version
from Charles Dickens, claiming, “Godwin wrote his ‘Caleb William’ backwards […]” (13). By choosing *Caleb Williams* as the starting example of “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe demarcates a gendered taxonomy of prose, one in which prose serves as the appropriate medium for articulating the complex system of fears and desires that serve to construct and delimit masculinity. Godwin’s “Preface” to the 1832 ‘Standard of masculinity that continues to entrance Williams even as he is persecuted (23). Godwin’s novel is deeply invested in examining the relationship between men and the impact of these relationships on issues of politics, class, and narrative.

Dickens’s letter to Poe read, “Apropos of the ‘construction’ of Caleb Williams. Do you know that Godwin wrote it backwards—the last Volume first—and that when he had produced the hunting-down of Caleb, and the Catastrophe, he waited for months, casting about for a means of accounting for what he had done” (qtd. In Thomas and Jackson 362). Poe often quoted from memory, so many of his quotations are not exact. Dickens was writing in response to Poe’s comment at the end of his review of *Barnaby Rudge* in the February 1842 edition of *Graham’s Magazine*. Poe ends the review with a discussion of the narrative style of Dickens’s novel, claiming that “‘Caleb Williams’ is a far less noble work than ‘The Old Curiosity-Shop;’ but Mr. Dickens could no more have constructed the one than Mr. Godwin could have dreamed of the other” (244). This is only one of many references to Godwin’s novel in Poe’s reviews.

In doing so, Poe draws on a long tradition in Gothic literature of novels about men’s violent desires and interactions with other men. Gothic literature has long been one of the most productive genres for authors interested in issues of gender and sexuality. As George Haggerty has argued, the possibility of articulating transgressive desires and passions made the Gothic “the one semirespectable area of literary endeavor in which modes of sexual and social transgression were discursively addressed on a regular basis” (3). Gothic fiction presents possibilities for transgression not available in other, more “respectable” genres. The literary genre most closely associated with fear is also the genre that presents possibilities for transgressing normative sex and gender roles. (The same holds true for many of the descendants of Gothic literature, most notably the contemporary horror film. See, for example Barry Keith Grant, ed., Carol J. Clover, and Judith Halberstam.) The Gothic is particularly apt to deal with issues of masculinity, in part because many Gothic tropes depend on the relationships between men for their effectiveness. Just as *Caleb Williams* is essentially about the conflict between two men and their masculinity, the central conflict in many Gothic novels revolves around men. As Eve Sedgwick has argued, much Gothic, and in particular the literature of male paranoia—when men “labor […] to forestall being overtaken by the feared/desired other” (*Coherence* vi)—revolves around “the tableau that is seen as embodying primal human essence or originary truth: the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape” (*Coherence* ix). This pattern shows up in a number of the most famous Gothic novels, from *Frankenstein* to *Dracula*. What makes this tableau so important is
Novels” edition of Fleetwood suggests why Poe chose Godwin’s novel out as an example of successful fiction. In this brief essay, a document that might easily have been called his “Philosophy of Composition,” (and given the thematic similarities with Poe’s essay very well might have served as an inspiration for Poe) Godwin describes the process of writing Caleb Williams. While both Dickens and Poe focused on the fact the Godwin wrote the novel backwards, or as Godwin describes it “I invented first the third volume of my tale, then the second, and last of all the first” (349), a number of other elements of the essay would have resonated with Poe’s ideas. Both authors believed in the importance of unity of effect, and the power a text can have on the reader. More important for understanding Poe’s use of Caleb Williams in “The Philosophy of Composition” is the role of masculinity in the creation of affect. Caleb Williams’ central motivating theme is the pursuit of one man by another. The paranoia and fear created by the novel (those “high excitements” described by Poe in his May 1842 review of Hawthorne’s Twice-Told Tales [571]) are all dependent on the complex relationship between Williams and

its indecipherability. While fear is an important element of this relationship, there is equal possibility, as Sedgwick says, that the relationship “is murderous or amorous” (Coherence ix). In essence, this indecipherability raises the possibility that the relationship is both murderous and amorous. Desire can be a terrifying thing in these situations. By drawing on this tradition in “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe makes explicit the connection between prose, bodily passions, and issues of gender. Therefore, it should be no surprise that stories like “The Black Cat” explicitly draw on these issues for their plots and narrative structures. These stories deal not just with the struggle between men and women in order to challenge a notion of separate spheres, but with a deep questioning of the economic background of gender and an investigation of the role that relationships between men play in economic, domestic, professional, and especially gendered identity and selfhood. For Poe, the genre of the short story was especially appropriate for investigations of passions, and the relationship between passion and the home, which by extension means an investigation of how the passions infect the home and challenge the normal mode of gendered identity associated with domestic spaces.
Falkland, which serves as the source of the novel’s affect while simultaneously troubling normative gender roles. Godwin acknowledges the nature of the relationship between Williams and Falkland in his account of writing the novel, and Godwin accounts for the gendered relationship between his two main characters.

Godwin closes his discussion of the book’s composition by describing the pleasure he feels in comparing his novel to other similar stories. Much like Poe’s use of *Caleb Williams* suggests the gendered nature of Poe’s literary genealogy, the comparison Godwin uses for his own novel suggests just what was at stake in *Caleb Williams*.

Godwin writes,

> I rather amused myself with tracing a certain similitude between the story of Caleb Williams and the tale of Bluebeard, than derived hints from that admirable specimen of the terrific. Falkland was my Bluebeard, who had perpetrated atrocious crimes, which if discovered, he might expect to have all the world roused to revenge against him. Caleb Williams was the wife, who in spite of warning persisted in his attempts to discover the forbidden secret; and, when he had succeeded, struggled as fruitlessly to escape the consequences as the wife of Bluebeard in washing the key of the ensanguined chamber, who, as often as she cleared the stain of blood from the one side, found it showing itself with frightful distinctness on the other” (352-3).

In this densely suggestive passage, Godwin describes the intricate relationship between gender, affect, and literary production that fits so well with Poe’s arguments in “The Philosophy of Composition.” Here, Williams becomes not just the persecuted young man, but also the persecuted wife, a relationship made more complex by the confusion of pronouns—Williams is both a “he” and a female. Furthermore, the stain of blood

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51 In their introduction to Gothic literature, David Punter and Glennis Byron note that “it has […] been suggested that *Caleb Williams* is the first novel in the language without an overt love interest” (191). Aside from the murky logic of this claim, the idea that Godwin’s novel lacks a romantic plot is only partially true. If one means only heterosexual love then the novel does indeed lack a love story: the novel features few
suggests guilt and sexual violation as well as female sexuality. Yet, as both male and
female, Williams is both victim and oppressor, a double position that is reflected at the
end of the novel when he becomes responsible for Falkland’s death. To be a man is to be
both the cause and the victim of fear.

Poe’s “Philosophy of Composition” further explains the importance of historical
context for stories like “The Black Cat.” Murder always has a context; it exists within a
particular time and place and reflects the historical particularity of its occurrence. As
Roger Lane has argued, “Homicide […] always reflects in some way the society in which
it occurs, as does its treatment by the law, the courts, and the press” (Violent Death 55).
Considering a murder outside of its context creates the potential for anachronistic
assumptions about what the murder means. Therefore, to understand a murder, it is
crucial to first understand the situation of its occurrence. And, aside from everything
else, Poe’s “The Black Cat” is a story of a murder. The importance of historical context
was not lost on Poe, who argued in “The Philosophy of Composition” that in order to
write a story, an author draws his ideas from his environment and then builds on these
ideas in order to create an effect.53 “The Black Cat” draws from the events in antebellum
female characters, and those either serve to foster relationships between men or are
narratively excluded from romantic associations with male characters. However, as
Godwin’s comments suggest, just because there is no heterosexual romantic plot, and just
because other than a few brief scenes there are almost no women in the text, does not
mean, however, that there is no love interest in the novel, and in many ways the love that
Williams feels for Falkland is the driving force of the text.

52 For example, it is easy for a twenty-first century viewer to look at the amount of unrest
in antebellum cities and assume that murder was increasingly prevalent over the course of
the century. In fact, just the opposite is true. The rate of homicide in Philadelphia, for
example, decreased over the course of the nineteenth century. See Lane, Violent Death
53-76.
53 Poe writes, “Either history affords a thesis—or one is suggested by an incident of the
day—or, at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to
urban America in order to create a picture of masculinity struggling between the constraints of urban existence in antebellum America, and the desires and conflicts of men hanging out with men.⁵⁴

In the 1830s and 1840s, life in urban spaces underwent drastic changes, and living in a city like Philadelphia, where Poe lived when he wrote “The Black Cat,” meant both economic invisibility and increasing urban violence. With the advent of the market revolution, the ties between economic success or failure and selfhood changed. To be a man one had to be successful in the market, because to fail or to be dependent on others meant one was impotent, effeminate, and less than a man (Sandage 1-98; Kimmel 11-29).⁵⁵ Those who were unable to “make a name” for themselves risked becoming nameless. One of the most distinctive characteristics of Poe’s men is their utter lack of names. Few of the narrators ever have a name, and those few who do often give aliases

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⁵⁴ As with all Poe stories, critics have valiantly searched magazine and newspaper archives in order to attempt to pinpoint specific events Poe may have drawn on for his tales. See, for example, Reilly. While this is important work, I am less interested in determining sources of specific events for the details in Poe’s stories than I am in determining the larger social milieu of the tale, which will hopefully lead to a wider understanding of gender and masculinity in antebellum America, as well as the role of men in Poe’s fiction.

⁵⁵ Similarly, in “Philadelphia in Slices,” (1848-1849) George G. Foster noted the antagonism and struggle of those who were unable to get ahead in the market. He wrote, “failures are what the Bourgeoisie particularly detest” (27). He defined bourgeoisie as “a man who keeps a shop or lives by making a profit from the product of the labors of others” (26).
instead of their true names.\textsuperscript{56} These narrators, who are often only identifiable by their crimes and their economic trappings, lack names because they are unable to successfully navigate manhood. To identify them is only to associate them with their crimes. By positioning many of his nameless narrators in situations of intense affect, Poe creates models of masculinity that are dependent not just on market success, but on the responses to intensely fearful situations and the language men use to describe and delimit these situations. However, since they narrate their own stories in an attempt to situate oneself in a position of masculine control, the narrators often deny the association with criminality and endeavor to control their own identity. If to exist outside of the market is to remain nameless, these narrators are perfect representations of alternative modes of living not tied to market identity.\textsuperscript{57} To understand these gendered identities it is necessary to focus, much like Poe does in many of his stories, on the relationships between men in a specific historical context—the burgeoning market economy and the expanding urban centers in antebellum America, and the accompanying changes to

\textsuperscript{56} For example, William Wilson, the narrator of the story of the same name, admits to using an alias, claiming that “The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation” (426).

\textsuperscript{57} This is not to say that Poe was by any means aristocratic, as many critics including David Leverenz have argued. Leverenz connects Poe’s life to his fiction in order to argue that “the southern ideal of the gentleman plays a crucial role in his writings as well as in his life” (“Poe” 211). In Leverenz’s analysis Poe shows the category of the gentleman to be both contradictory and a fictional construction. Poe’s gentlemen are fraught with the tension between public mastery and private and inward alienation. Poe, Leverenz argues, “negates a progressive ideology of individualism by emptying out the meaningfulness of the self as a social construct. He exposes subjectivity as a collage of derivative literary conventions and a chaos of senseless, self-destructive desires” (212). While this analysis is rather convincing, the focus on the gentleman as the model for masculinity in Poe’s fiction is too limiting. Instead I argue that Poe’s narrators put forth alternate models of gendered identity that do not fully depend on the market and offer new possibilities of gendered existence.
heteronormative domesticity—and the powerful affect and fear associated with these relationships.\textsuperscript{58}

Out of all the stories that he wrote during his lifetime, it is in “The Black Cat” that Poe most explicitly puts his theories on gender and the short story into practice. The narrator of “The Black Cat” tells us that he has struggled his entire life with preconceived notions of masculinity: his failure to meet the expectations of manly behavior has made him subject to scorn and ridicule, and is the basis for much of his fear. The most explicit example of his inability to meet expectations of manhood is tied to his effeminate love of animals, and the mothering care he provides for them. He tells the reader, “From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them” (850). The narrator understands that this behavior is not normal: his use of the word “indulged” to describe his parent’s reactions suggests that his relationship with animals was something that caught their attention, and that they went out of their way to attend to.\textsuperscript{59} The narrator’s parents clearly must have been aware that their son’s behavior was outside the norm. The reaction of other boys, however, was much less indulging. As the narrator notes, his peers mocked him for his love of animals. In the decade after Poe wrote his story, this sort of behavior was still so anomalous that “Mrs. Manners” was led to ask, “Why is a gentle, polite boy such a rarity?” (qtd. in Rotundo

\textsuperscript{58} The phrase “between men” comes from Eve Sedgwick’s important study, \textit{Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire}.

\textsuperscript{59} This phrase also carries potential class connotations, suggesting as it does an activity that is somehow luxurious.
31). In contrast, the standard practice for young boys was to violently hunt, trap, and kill small animals (Rotundo 35-6, 45).

Already, from a young age, the narrator has failed to properly meet the expectations for men in his society. Other boys were likely participating in normal, often violent, activities for a young man, activities that helped to prepare them for the world of work by teaching them to be independent, masterful, and self-reliant (Rotundo 41-6). Instead he spends his time nurturing, suggesting a mothering demeanor. In her *Letters to Mothers* (1838), Lydia H. Sigourney warned mothers to deter the violent behavior against animals so common among young boys. Describing the care of animals as a way to instruct children in “kindness to all around,” Sigourney wrote, “If it [an infant] seizes a kitten by the back, or pulls its hair, show immediately by your own example, how it may be held properly, and soothed into confidence” (qtd. in Grier 127). Sigourney viewed animals as a way to teach about the proper relationships between all creatures, including humans. Animals, in this instance, also became a way to help young children learn to properly care for others, to mother. In contrast to mothers, who, as the Sigourney example demonstrates, were tasked with teaching kindness and care, fathers became the source of discipline (Rotundo 48-9). Both because of the increasing demands of the market and the increasing importance of the mother, it is during this period that “[f]or the

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60 In one sense, then, the narrator’s parents’ willingness to indulge him in his love for animals would fall under the category of what Richard Brodhead describes as a middle-class “disciplinary intimacy, or simply discipline through love” (17-8). His description of his childhood marks the narrator as part of a middle-class world where authority was tied to domesticity through texts like Sigourney’s (Brodhead 22). This would especially have been the case during the advent of the market revolution when the familial roles of parents changed. During this time, the workplace became much more the center of a man’s life, and he simultaneously became more frequently absent from the home (Kimmel 39; Rotundo 48).
first time in American history, the mother became the primary parent” (Rotundo 28). As such, the narrator’s violent actions later in life can be read as a critique of the sort of domestic upbringing put forth by middle-class advice manuals—an upbringing that, combined with the narrator’s desires, left him not properly gendered according to normative definitions of masculinity. This puts the narrator in both an awkward and frightening place.

Even after the narrator’s attempts to embrace normative life through marriage, he is still unable to detach himself from the stigma of his kindness. He tells the reader that he “married early” a wife with “a disposition not uncongenial with my own,” yet his effeminate love of animals, what he calls his “peculiarity of character,” continues to define him. In fact, instead of replacing his affectionate caresses of animals with caresses of his wife, his “peculiarity grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure” (850). The narrator never mentions that he loves his wife, and there is never any indication that he desires his wife, the narrator’s love for animals is his defining characteristic. Instead of forming a strong attachment to his wife, who would be the culturally sanctioned focus of his desire and sexuality, the narrator instead maintains his attachment to his pets, and most specifically his cats, who are always male.

Yet, as the narrator becomes increasingly dissipated through alcohol, what he calls “the Fiend Intemperance” (851), he turns away from his wife and pets and begins to seek out the companionship of men. Like much of the story, this is only clear if we situate the story in its specific urban context. Antebellum Philadelphia was a violent place. One historian argues, “By any measure, the period from 1835 to 1850 was the
most violent in Philadelphia’s history” (Feldberg 56). Drinking, along with male violence, was widespread in antebellum Philadelphia, with taverns playing a central part in male culture. When the narrator of “The Black Cat” begins to drink with greater and greater frequency, he does so at the types of working-class taverns that figured so prominently in male-male relationships in the city. He first describes his place of drinking as “one of my haunts about town” (851). The language that the narrator uses here is quite telling: throughout the nineteenth century, journalists and advice writers warned about the dangers of such places, particularly the way they took men away from their families. Later in the century, J. H. Kellogg used similar language to describe “the haunts of vice” found in cities all over the country (qtd. in Walters 50). Writing closer to Poe’s time, journalist George G. Foster described “loathsome haunts of infamy and wretchedness,” including “Dandy Hall” (38), and “vile, filthy dens” that “absorb the days, evenings and pocket-money of a large class of young men,” and are “visited by cleanly and respectable citizens, who spend here the money and time which belong to their wives and families” (48). A pamphlet published in 1853 reprinted an article by Casper Souter, Jr., a local reporter who describes “the chosen haunts of vice and misery” in Philadelphia, where the inhabitants “indulge[e] the most vile and brutish appetites” (Mysteries and Miseries 12-13). The similar language employed by each text suggests the intricate connection between Gothic literature, affect, and the role of men in society. It is particularly interesting to note the use of the word “haunts” in this context and the semantic slippage between the different meanings of the term. These places visited by men, including the narrator of “The Black Cat,” had a haunting and fearful effect on society: they existed as the dark, masculine side of the world, the ghostly Gothic double
of the bright domestic space. What the narrator would find in these haunts explains how his drinking, in addition to leading to violence, increasingly offered him a replacement for the domestic intimacy he failed to find at home, and how the desire for male-male relationships began to displace the normal heterosexual life he sought through marriage. The narrator’s struggles with gender lead him into a violent world of male sociality where he is able to find new, competing outlets for his desires.

What much of this language suggests is that the possibility for male sociality is what made these spaces so threatening. Taverns and saloons were places where men could socialize with other men and create strong, affective relationships with each other. Elliot Gorn argues that in saloons, “Cliques of men created informal but stable brotherhoods” (Manly 133). These cliques were often based on intense loyalty, and violent codes of masculinity that required constant bravado: to be a man required recognition from other men, which was earned through violent acts and proved through a willingness to stand up to other men. Identity, for these men, was entirely dependent on other men, and, for lower class men, to be able to take pain and suffer through violence with a manly self-possession was a part of life (Gorn “Good-Bye Boys” 403, 409).

When they went to these “haunts,” men could drink, share stories, partake in gambling or watch a cockfight. Most tavern visitors went “for the sake of camaraderie” (Laurie, “Nothing” 347). The tavern became a surrogate home for many of the men working in cities; instead of spending time with their families at night, men would head to the tavern where they could find strong male interactions that provided a home away from home. Men who did not have middle-class parlors to spend their evenings in often found

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61 Gorn argues that particularly in bachelor culture “maleness [was] most emphatically confirmed in the company not of women, but of other men” (Manly 142).
company not in their wives, but in other men (Kingsdale 476). The tavern was a direct threat to the formation of domesticity.

Given the violent nature of tavern culture, the many incidents of violence in “The Black Cat” become consistent with a larger social pattern. While middle-class male identity was often based on a man’s work, this was less true for the poor and working class (Rotundo 68-9; Kaplan 595). Instead, the tavern provided social opportunities, as well as a place for business and political activity (Kaplan 598-9). Perhaps most importantly for men like the anonymous and invisible narrator of Poe’s story, the tavern “provided a social space of warmth, security, and the mutuality of fellow country-men, away from the growing anonymity of city streets and the squalor of the tenements” (Kaplan 600). But in order for the men to maintain a sense of male authority, they were dependent on the violent suppression of women. As Michael Kaplan describes it, “male pretensions to authority in the market-driven nineteenth century could only be maintained if women internalized a sense of inferiority and dependence. As the economic basis of gender deference disintegrated, working-class men often turned to violence, especially wife-beating and rape, to command the ‘respect’ they considered their due” (610).

The narrator’s murder of Pluto, the first black cat, coincides with a shameful recognition of the narrator’s own desires as well as a violent turn in the his economic status: his “peculiarity” is tied to both facets of his masculinity. The narrator describes being overcome by “the spirit of PERVERSENESS,” by the “unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself,” which leads him to murder the cat, not because it was cruel or rejected his affection, but because as he puts it, “I knew that it loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence” (852). The murder of the cat is a direct result of the
narrator’s own relationship with his desire. This passage logically brings to mind Poe’s 1845 story “The Imp of the Perverse,” which takes as its central theme the idea that in each of us there is “a paradoxical something” that causes us to “act, for the reason that we should not” (1220). We often act, Poe argues, in direct contradiction to what we know is right. What distinguishes perverseness, according to Poe, is the way that it acts counter to normative productive and reproductive desires. Poe compares perverseness to the concept of self-defense resulting from “the combativeness of phrenology” (1221). What separates combativeness from perversity is “the desire to be well [that] is excited simultaneously with [combativeness’] development” (1221). Combativeness acts out desires in the body that are tied, ultimately, to our own love of self: our desire to protect ourselves from harm. With perverseness, by contrast, “the desire to be well is not only not aroused, but a strongly antagonistical sentiment exists” (1221). The distinction between combativeness and perverseness comes down to a question of our relationship to our desires. To act in accordance with these desires is to be combative, which is productive both of self-preservation and the desires and affect associated with self-preservation; to act against these desires is perverse, which rouses contrary affects and

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62 In light of what I have argued about the importance of Godwin’s Caleb Williams to understanding the men in Poe’s fiction, it is not surprising that Poe connected “The Imp of the Perverse” to Godwin’s novel. In the second installment of his “Marginalia,” published in the United States Magazine, and Democratic Review in December 1844, Poe discusses Georgiana Fullerton’s novel Ellen Middleton. Thomas Ollive Mabbott has argued that this novel was the source for the title and the theme of Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse” (Poe “Imp,” 1218). Whether this was truly the source for Poe’s story or not, he did connect Ellen Middleton with Godwin’s novel when he claimed in his “Marginalia” that “There is much, in the whole manner of [Ellen Middleton], which puts me in mind of ‘Caleb Williams’” (37). Given that “The Imp of the Perverse,” like Caleb Williams, is a story about the violent relationship between two men, couched in philosophical enquiries into the nature of man, a brief look at “The Imp of the Perverse” demonstrates the importance of male desire to “The Black Cat.”
actions. Yet despite this differing relationship with desire, to act according to the
perverse is to act very much in accordance with other desires, which is clear in the way
that Poe describes the affective response during a perverse action. Beginning with the
example of a speaker who realizes that his speech is angering a listener, Poe demonstrates
that to act perversely is to follow a chain of actions culminating with a realization that our
actions will be productive of negative affect. In the example Poe gives, the realization
that we can make someone angry begins a chain of events that leads to the indulgence of
powerful desires: “The impulse increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an
uncontrollable longing, and the longing […] is indulged” (1222). Indulging the desire to
create an affective response leads to a powerfully affective response in the person acting
perversely: the perverse action creates an affective bridge between the actor (in this case
someone speaking) and the person acted upon (in this case, the listener).

That this bridge is both fearful and powerfully desirous helps to explain the use of
perversity to describe the actions of the narrator in “The Black Cat.” In “Imp,” Poe gives
as another example of a perverse action the chain of emotions and actions that begin
when “We stand upon the brink of a precipice” and “peer into the abyss” (1222). This
experience leads to the imaginative construction of Gothic fear: according to Poe, as we
stand on the brink, out of a “cloud of unnameable feeling” we imagine “a shape, far more
terrible than […] any demon of a tale” (1222-3). Our feelings, which cannot be named,
and are thus clearly non-normative in the sense that they are not the common emotions of
everyday life, lead us to create Gothic monsters. Yet, while this imaginative construction
is “a fearful one” it is because of this very fear that we take “delight of its horror”
(1223). Unnamable feelings and non-productive desires work through fear to create
pleasure. The pleasure we feel in fear is a productive one: we “desire it” (1223). It is easy for a modern reader to read these passages from Poe’s story and see clear sexual meaning in the descriptions and allusions. The idea that something creates a powerful affective response, which leads to wish fulfillment and we “tremble” while “craving” action, sounds very much like the desires and affects associated with sexual longing and fulfillment (1222). To read Poe’s story this way, however, does not require much of an anachronistic leap: I argue, in fact, that Poe’s story has clear sexual overtones, which explains the role of perversity in “The Black Cat.”

Amidst all the talk of the nature of man, and of perversion, the central scene in “The Imp of the Perverse,” much like “The Black Cat,” is a murder. And, much like “The Black Cat,” the murder results from a relationship between two men and carries strong overtones of desires, which are manifested in the murder taking place in a bed.⁶³ The fact that so many of Poe’s tales about men murdering other men take place in bedrooms and beds suggests that the range of desires associated with male-male relationships was, at the least, productive of powerful affect, and at the most, deeply

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⁶³ The narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” uses his intimate knowledge of his victim’s bedroom in order to plant a poisoned candle next to the victim’s bed. For a reading of Poe’s stories and their relations to “violent homophobic repressions of erotic identification between men” (9), see Person “Queer Poe.” Christopher Benfey notes the frequent use of beds in Poe’s stories, pointing to the multiple uses of a bed as a source of literary utility: “We see immediately the attraction of beds as the site of many interrelated activities: sleep and dreaming; making love and conceiving children; dying” (38). Perhaps because he groups “making love” with “conceiving children,” Benfey does not trace out the full spectrum of sexual possibilities and desires behind his own argument. But, as George Haggerty notes, many famous Gothic texts contain “bed scenes” that are part of their emotional and affective centers, and are an important part of the relationship between Gothic literature and discourses of sexuality (11).
terrifying. In “The Black Cat,” the narrator’s murder of the first cat, Pluto, registers the complexities of his desires, the fear associated with desire, and the economic struggles that the narrator faces. The scene, then, is central to these challenges to his masculinity, and it becomes associated in his mind with the exposure of his own failings to be properly masculine. The first murder victim in the story is Pluto, the cat that had symbolized the narrator’s less than masculine attachment to animals as a child, and even after his marriage. That this cat is the only character in the story who has a name suggests that the scene of the murder, as well as the name of the cat, bear some significant weight in the narrator’s understanding of his own experiences. This murder, in which the narrator clearly acts out a violent rejection of the object of his gender difference, can also be read as a violent rejection of the economic system of masculinity. When the narrator murders the Pluto cat, a name that seems a clear pun on “plutocrat,” he strikes out against the gendered market expectations that antebellum men constantly faced. By killing the “Pluto-cat,” however, the narrator begins on the path towards his ruin. The night that he kills the cat, the narrator awakens to find his house on fire: “My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair” (852). It is not his drinking that leads to his downfall; it is his attempt to reject a gendered system of economic hierarchy, symbolized by the murder of Pluto and the

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64 As I will argue about “The Black Cat,” Poe’s narratives deny us the ability to identify the stakes of such a relationship. In other words, we cannot simply label these texts as homophobic or non-homophobic because the structures of the narratives deny any form of certainty. Instead, a text like “The Black Cat” allows Poe to demonstrate the fear associated with new and changing forms of masculinity, and the uncertainty that men felt when faced with the complexities of their own desires; which is why Poe’s notion of perversion, dependent as it is on complex notions of fear, desire, and pleasure, plays such an important role in “The Black Cat.” What is clear in both of these tales is that perversity is connected to non-normative desires, and that these desires lead to impulsive actions with and against other men.
burning of his house. In this way the murder shows that to be a man meant balancing economic status and position with acceptable desires and behavior: to be a man meant working with and competing against men, but not allowing one’s affection for men to displace appropriate domestic behavior. The murder brings together his economic anxieties and his uncertainty about the appropriateness of his desires. In the narrator’s mind, his economic downfall attaches to the fear of exposing what goes on in the most private part of the home, the bedroom.

In one of the more unusual passages in all of Poe’s fiction, the narrator returns to the house on the morning after the fire only to find a crowd of people pointing at the remains and talking excitedly. What has created such a public spectacle is the fact that the only wall in the house still standing has an image of a cat “graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface” (853). In response to this spectacle, the narrator ludicrously concludes that someone had thrown the cat into the house to wake him. While this explanation makes little sense, it does demonstrate the narrator’s fear. The fact that it is the wall above his bed that is exposed, and that he goes to such a length to explain away the public and visual reminder of his own complex desires, suggests that the scorn that the narrator faced as a child is still a central part of his thinking. The attempt to explain away the image of the cat is part of the narrator’s larger struggles with his own masculinity. Because the image brings before the world a tangible reminder of the narrator’s “peculiarity,” he is exposed, once again, to the derision that he tried to displace through marriage. Much like he was mocked as a child for his love for his pets, the public’s focus on the cat above his bed becomes a marker of his nonnormativity. But, the fact that this image is tied to his bed suggests that the attempt to act the part of a “good man” has
failed the narrator. This failure in turn becomes a moment of powerful affect for the narrator: he tells the reader, “my wonder and my terror were extreme” (853). The public outing of his failed attempts at normative masculine behavior, which in turn is tied to his violent rejection of his own desires and the economic system behind some of those very desires, is a source of fear for the narrator. Through the retelling of his story the narrator attempts to transfer this fear to the body of the reader. The reading experience depends on the reader’s replication of the narrator’s affect: the Gothic nature of the story boils down to the affective response to a crisis in masculinity.

When the narrator, who has already struggled to form properly gendered attachments, determines to find a replacement for the cat he has killed, he seeks a replacement for his “friend” “among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented” (853). The narrator, who has spent increasing amounts of time away from home in the company of other men, thus turns to an almost exclusively male culture to find companionship. Even more remarkable is the way that the narrator describes his first encounter with the new cat: at the very least it is a pick-up, and the language suggests something much more sexual in nature. While sitting “in a den of more than infamy,” he catches sight of something he had not seen before. He then describes “approach[ing] it, and touch[ing] it with my hand.” He goes on to further describe a series of almost coded gestures that signal to him mutual interest. “Upon my touching him,” he writes, “he immediately arose, […] rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice.” Now that the narrator is certain that the interest goes both ways, in other words, that the object of his attention has reciprocated his suggestive touching, the narrator determines that no one else has any claims on the creature. Clearly satisfied at the
availability of the object of his attention, he goes on: “I continued my caresses, and when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me” (854). If you did not know that this scene was taking place between a man and a cat, the sexual implications would be obvious; as it is, the scene is fairly blatant.65

The narrator of “The Black Cat,” who has struggled with masculinity both in his complete invisibility in the market-driven society and in his effeminate love for animals, which leads him to seek out male relationships when marriage fails to satisfy his needs for companionship, finally resorts to the most violent expression of his manhood, something that he could easily have picked up in the masculine world of the tavern, the same place where he picked up his cat. After all, while murder was relatively rare in antebellum Philadelphia, “The model homicide in nineteenth-century Philadelphia resulted from a brawl or quarrel originating in a saloon but reaching a climax in the street. Drink was an important part of the culture of the city, enormously so among those sub-groups in which most killings occurred” (Lane, Violent Death 59). When the new cat who the narrator has so graphically described picking up, gets home with him, and immediately becomes “a great favorite with [his] wife,” the narrator is unable to balance the conflicting desires of the two worlds he lives in (854). The cat, whose caresses at the tavern had become productive of such pleasure, now becomes an object of disgust and a cause for shame: they become “loathsome” (855). As the result of this disgust and

65 While acknowledging that specific evidence is difficult to find, Christopher Looby notes that “[p]rovisionally one can say that there seem to have been emergent homosexual subcultures in the streets and taverns of various metropolitan areas; these subcultures often overlapped considerably with communities of sailors and other socially marginal working-class groups, some of which were distinctly racially diverse” (“Innocent Homosexuality” 544). Without attempting to place anachronistic labels on the narrator’s desires, it is clear that this scene reflects an awareness of the subcultures describes by Looby.
shame, which the narrator associates with his childhood, the narrator strikes out violently at his wife and the cat, killing one while attempting to kill the other. The narrator claims that in the moment of the act he is able to “forget[…] the childish dread” which had previously held him back (856). Thus the murder is an act of violent assertion of masculinity, and a rejection, much like the murder of the first cat was, of the shame associated with his desires. Yet on one level, the murder of the wife and the disposal of the bodies (he unknowingly entombs the cat with his wife’s corpse) is for the narrator an act of economic recovery. Nameless and invisible because of his lack of economic success in the urban environment, the narrator describes the aftermath of his crime—the depositing of the corpse into a wall—in terms of economic satisfaction: “Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain” (857). Clearly stymied in his attempts to compete in the marketplace, the narrator feels satisfaction in seeing positive and practical results of his labor. By successfully translating his labor into results, the narrator is ecstatic: any fear or negative affects are gone, and instead, his “happiness [is] supreme” and he “look[s] upon [his] future felicity as secured” (858). As a result of his labor, he finds himself able to “Once again […] breathe[] as a freeman” (858). By walling up his wife’s corpse the narrator in a sense returns to an earlier artisan tradition of work, outside of the terrors of the marketplace, where one’s work meant economic and social freedom.

66 Although the narrator at times blames alcohol for his violent acts, the narrator’s language suggests something much more deliberate and constructive. Other textual evidence also suggests that alcohol is not to blame for this violent crime, instead pointing to something much deeper and more complicated. As T. J. Matheson has argued, speaking of the moment in the text where the narrator cuts out the first cat’s eye, “Though alcohol doubtless played a role in releasing his inhibitions, it was not the sole cause of the cruelty; a desire to inflict pain in response to the cat’s behavior had to be there in the first place” (77). Alcohol does not explain the cruelty of the narrator’s acts, both against the cat and against his wife.
The violent act at the end of the story has two main objects: the narrator literally walls off the supposed object of his normative desire (although it is important to remember that he never explicitly expresses any desire for his wife) with the sometime object of his male-male desire. The narrator’s attempt to bring the world of male sociality and male-male desire into the domestic space fails. He cannot handle it when these two worlds come into contact. As the two are violently walled off together, it shows just how unclear the nature of the narrator’s desire for the male cat is. I argue that the text, by commingling the two facets of the narrator’s life, and by grouping the rejection of both sides in one violent act, ultimately denies any certainty about the nature of male-male desire. The powerful affect generated by the story is generated as much by the uncertainty of the story as it is by anything else. To not know the meaning of desire, and for men to try to balance different types of desires, is a scary thing. If the notion of the separate spheres was the dominant paradigm of the time, then for men trying to balance new desires born out of increasingly intense male sociality against the more accepted desires of the domestic, the changes in the world became a terrifying thing. Poe used this Gothic tale of domestic and social violence to elucidate the forms these terrors often took. I do not, however, want to argue that the text is ultimately a conservative critique of these desires and their affects. Instead, I see the tales as more along the lines of what Christopher Looby has described as “complicitous tensions”: the tensions between the normative and the non-normative are essential to the make-up of the story (“George Thompson” 666).

Much of the ambiguity about whether “The Black Cat” is, in the end, a story about homosocial desire or homosexual desire, whether it is a critique of domesticity or a
violent argument for the need to stay within the confines of the domestic, are the result of
the construction of the story as a confession. The narrator rejects all forms of desire—it
is the pressure to be normal that leads to his violent outbursts. The violence leads to a
危机 in masculinity, which he tries to maintain through his control of language and
grammar and narration. Ultimately, the narrator is the cause of his own undoing, and all
he is left with to maintain his masculinity is his ability to narrate, which ironically is what
leads to his downfall in the first place. In antebellum America’s violent male tavern
culture, in order to shape their lives and their actions, men often relied on their abilities to
narrate, bragging to others of their exploits, even when this bragging led to arrests (Gorn
“Good-Bye Boys” 409). The perverse impulse that pushes the narrator to reveal his
crime is also tied to his ability to narrate. He impulsively tells his tale to the police, just
like he confesses his crime to the reader. Denied any semblance of security in his
masculinity after he fails at escaping the police, the narrator falls back on the only thing
he has left: his ability to control the world around him through language. Thus, like
many of Poe’s tales, narration is tied to a masculine attempt to assert a gendered identity
in a world where lack of economic success meant invisibility. “The Black Cat” is really
a narration about narration: the real fear for the narrator is the possibility that the silence
and invisibility that I have described as economically imposed will never end. The
narrator’s greatest fear, and constant perverse struggle, is all about coming to terms with
the balance of public and private: he fears the possibility of the private becoming public,

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67 As Michael Kaplan writes, “Glorification gave meaning to the deed” (602).
68 As Christopher Benfey has noted, “Poe is less interested in the commission of crimes
than in the confession of them” (36).
while at the same time grasping desperately at the public for perpetuation of a voice.\textsuperscript{69} This fear, and the nature of the confessional tale, explains why the story is never specific about the desires at play, and why the story must remain ambiguous.

The narrator’s confession is calculated to ensure his version of events is both the version remembered, and a powerfully affective experience for him, much like the relationship with the cat once was.\textsuperscript{70} In an act of violence, in this case the moment in which he cuts out the first cat’s eye, the narrator describes the affective power of the moment: “I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity” (851). As Christopher Benfey has pointed out, the narrator does not feel this way during the crime, only during the writing of the confession (36). The confession relies on an affective interaction with the text, seeking a connection with the reader while at the same time denying the possibility of the social. As Jonathan Elmer describes it, “the tales are finally about an elusive social exigency demanding communication in the face of that communication’s doubtfulness, undecipherability, or futility” (126-7). Confessional narratives have “deeply ambivalent effects” on an audience (127). One of the most ambivalent facets of the confessional tale is that it often involves communication from beyond the grave, something that clearly appealed to Poe. We know by the end of “The Black Cat” that the narrator is about to be hanged for his crime, so the narrative exists in its present form only because of the death of the narrator: without his death the powerful affective response created by the narration would not exist. The power of the confession,

\textsuperscript{69} As discussed earlier, the fear associated with the breakdown of a public/private divide was at issue in the murder of the first cat, and the events surrounding it.

\textsuperscript{70} It is important to keep in mind that the narrator isn’t trying to protest his innocence. After all, he very clearly admits to killing his wife. Therefore the narrative serves a much different, and in many ways more important, function. The power of narrative is about masculine survival.
and its ambivalent nature, are tied to the Gothic affect that comes from communication across what Eve Sedgwick has termed “the ontological crack between the living and the dead” (“White Glasses” 257). In creating a narrative that is deeply ambivalent about the nature of desire present to men in antebellum cities, Poe draws on a form of writing that is Gothic in its ability to cross from the realm of the undead into the world of the living, and powerfully dependent on affect. The ambivalence of the narrator’s desires, reproduced by the structure of the confessional tale, adds to the affective response created in the heart and soul of the reader—the “high excitements” described by Poe.71 The ambivalence, because of its Gothic nature, adds to the fear of the story and heightens its affect. Yet, this is in the end a productive affect, because the uncertainty allows for possibility. By leaving the question of desire undetermined, the story requires the reader to rely on an affective understanding of the events described to reconstruct a vision of masculinity. Fear becomes the basis of a reconstruction of a readerly understanding of masculinity that allows for the possibility of new visions of masculinity: the critique of masculinity is embodied in the feelings of the reader—those “high excitements” that were so important to Poe’s theories of fiction.

While we do not ever get to hear the narrator’s name, we do get his story, a story that is full of the violent attempts of a man in antebellum America trying to come to terms with his masculinity. In Poe’s tales, gender becomes a productive source of fear, and Poe used fearful events in order to engage issues men faced in antebellum urban

71 It is interesting to note that most of Poe’s stories that are identified by scholars as containing male-male relationships are confessional tales. These include the stories identified by Person: “William Wilson,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Cask of Amontillado”; and the story that is the focus of both Person and Gustavus Sadler in his essay “Poe and Queer Studies.”
America. While not every man in the city turned to murder, or struggled with the conflicting desires of male-male relationships and heterosexual marriage, many did struggle to make their voice heard in difficult economic times. Poe, recognizing the struggles men went through, used these struggles as the basis of his Gothic stories. And, as he argued in “The Philosophy of Composition,” his tales often dealt with issues of masculinity. While the “death of a beautiful woman” may have been the most appropriate topic for poetry, Poe’s tales dealt with the men behind those deaths, and the struggles with gender that often led to such violent results.
Chapter Three

A City of Men: George Thompson’s Gothic Masculinities

“The moment the inexperienced youth sets his foot on the side-walk of the city, he is marked and watched by eyes that he never dreamed of. The boy who cries his penny-paper, and the old woman at her table professedly selling a few apples and a little gingerbread, are not all who watch him. There is the seducer in the shape of the young man who came before him, and who has already lost the last remains of shame. There is the hardened pander to vice who has as little remorse at the ruin of innocence as the alligator has in crushing the bones of the infant that is thrown into his jaws from the banks of the Ganges: and there is she—who was once the pride and the hope of her parents—who now makes war upon virtue and exults in being a successful recruiting-officer of hell.”

The Dead Man
George Thompson’s City Crimes (1849)72

The prolific author of numerous nineteenth-century city mysteries, George Thompson portrays the city as a place of sexual excitement and titillation. Critics have often noted the connection between his work and the burgeoning antebellum pornography industry, with its rampant masculine heterosexual structure of desire.74

72 The quote appears on pages 301-2.
73 Quoted in David M. Stewart “Cultural Work” 688.
74 Thompson’s work is often read as part of burgeoning antebellum sex industries, including prostitution (Gilfoyle 143-160) and pornography (Dennis 109-111). Any attempt to discuss the history of sexuality runs into a problem with terminology. While
critical focus on the heterosexualized elements of Thompson’s work occludes his complex use of sexuality to investigate the place of gender in the city. In fact, while George Thompson had a lot to say about sex and sexuality, he also had a lot to say about gender. In this chapter I argue that in his 1849 novel City Crimes, Thompson depicts monstrous sexuality in the form of the sodomite as a threat to the privileges of male heterosexuality and masculinity, only to undermine that fear by linking the relationship between sodomites to the other male-male relationships in the novel.\textsuperscript{75} Thompson further troubles assumptions behind normative masculinity through the figure of the Dead Man, the most visibly monstrous character in the novel, but also the most masculine. Sydney

heterosexuality/homosexuality has become in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the organizing binary in Western culture (See Sedgwick Epistemology I and passim, and Halperin 3), these terms are relatively recent constructions. Foucault famously dates the “birth” of “the homosexual [as] a species” to an 1870 article by Carl Westphal (History 43). Jonathan Ned Katz notes that it was not until just over twenty years later that the term “heterosexual” made its first appearance in print in the United States (Invention 18). Therefore, any attempt to describe antebellum sexuality using modern terms is always inherently anachronistic and runs the risk of de-historicizing (and thus universalizing) modern sexual identities. In this universalizing maneuver, homosexuality, as the secondary term in the binary, is too often made to carry the burden of deviance. Much of the anxiety about using these terms to identities prior to the invention of the term elides the heterogeneous nature of sexuality in contemporary culture. As David Halperin points out, “the task of understanding our contemporaries is not necessarily more straightforward than that of understanding our predecessors” (20). And, it is worth remembering, as Halperin notes, the claim “that before the cultural constitution of homosexuality and heterosexuality in the modern period there were no such thing as sexual identities, only sexual acts” is “false” (8-9), a point that is essential to my argument here. There is no simple answer as to how to discuss sexual identity prior to the invention of these terms. Therefore, I use the terms heterosexual and homosexual with an awareness of the fraught nature of this terminology, and in part because this terminology so explicitly reminds us of the fraught nature of such a project.

\textsuperscript{75} David Reynolds and Kimberly Gladman identify “an undercurrent of ambiguity” running through Thompson’s novels (xlix), which functions to serve Thompson’s class commentary. Thompson’s novels, they note, often depict “arbitrary and unfair but also unstable” class hierarchies (xlix). While a sense of ambiguity plays an important role in much of Thompson’s social commentary, I would argue that his portrayals of gender and sexuality rely instead on the way he constructs parallels between different identities, for example, the sodomite and Sydney’s benevolent and philanthropic masculinity.
may have the privileges of wealth and whiteness, but the Dead Man, whose violently disruptive body challenges the role of the abject in the formation of a national identity, proves a much more masculine force for justice in the novel. The abjected other, these monstrous figures haunt the urban landscape. By demonstrating the parallels between Sydney and sodomites, and then contrasting Sydney’s masculinity with the more effective masculinity of the Dead Man, Thompson destabilizes the authority of normative masculinity. Thompson worked within a Gothic tradition of monstrosity in order to represent the complex masculine fluency necessary to succeed in the urban environment.

The two epigrams above illustrate the complexities and horrors of urban masculinity. Appearing as they do in the second to last chapter of Thompson’s *City Crimes*, the sins and crimes described by the Dead Man are not so surprising. After all, over the course of the previous twenty-eight chapters, the reader has been exposed to many of these crimes, and many more that do not make the Dead Man’s list. However, a close look at what the Dead Man includes in the list does raise some interesting questions about the appeal of this knowledge, especially since he offers this information to the Doctor in a failed bid to save his own life. While the appeal of “twenty thousand dollars in gold and silver” is clear, and while it might be useful to know how to commit murder without leaving a trace, or even touching the victim, the Dead Man adds a series

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76 Like many of the city mysteries published before the Civil War, the plot of *City Crimes* is quite complex. The novel follows Frank Sydney, a wealthy orphan who decides that he will no longer spend his money entertaining his vapid friends. Instead, he plans on traveling the city (at times in disguise) in order to find opportunities for philanthropy. Over the course of his adventures sleeps with prostitutes, is accused of murder, gets tortured, leaves his wife after learning about her affair with a black servant, battles a super-criminal named the Dead Man for the affection of the Doctor, and eventually finds heterosexual satisfaction when he marries Sophia Franklin, the most decent character in the book.
of offers that play upon the tensions between different forms of male interactions, including hetero and homo, normal and queer, and accepted and illicit. What sort of desire does this knowledge address?

The answer to this question can be found in reformer John Todd’s warning about urban dangers in *The Young Man: Hints Addressed to the Young Men of the United States*. Like the Dead Man, Todd offers a list of possible dangers in the city, but here the motivation is cautionary: as David M. Steward notes, “[b]y characterizing the temptations of city life as pitiless and bone crushing, [Todd] used fear to construct an emotional basis for self-regulation in an environment where traditional controls were no longer viable” (“Cultural Work” 688). For Todd, the city is a place of fear, and young men would be wise to exercise caution as they navigate its streets. A closer examination of the passage suggests the sexual nature of these fears. The young man entering the city is cautioned about a monstrous presence, hiding in plain sight: “the seducer in the shape of the young man who came before him.” The sexual connotations of the threat are clear—the seducer “has already lost the last remains of shame”—the threat for the young man is the threat of violation. Todd acknowledges the “dangerous” presence of sodomites in the city. And like the victim of a vampire, the real threat is the possibility of becoming like those before him, of being turned into that which he encounters. That this is a threat apart from heterosexual temptation is made clear by Todd’s warning about women “who [make] war upon virtue” alike. (This is similar to the Dead Man’s mention of both “beastly licentiousness” and the ability to make women “wild with desire.”) Both temptations exist, and are to be feared. Yet there is something exciting in these temptations: they
titillate as well as caution. Todd’s warning carries within it a desire to know the very things he warns against.

The Dead Man exhibits less ambiguity or anxiety about the knowledge he offers. To fully understand the Dead Man’s meaning, we must understand his offer as part of the novel’s engagement with monstrous bodies and monstrous acts. Sodomites, described as “beasts in human shape” and “beastly wretches” (246), and the Dead Man, with his corpse-like face and remarkably strong skeletal body, are both Gothic monsters in Thompson’s novel, but in the end Thompson undermines the very basis of their monstrosity. By examining the various male-male relationships in the novel through the context of the novel’s portrayal of the sodomite, we can see how Thompson recognized the interconnected nature of all male relationships in the city: without the monstrous other, the normal cannot exist; without the monstrous sodomite, there can be no heroic male.

If there is a hero in City Crimes, it is Frank Sydney, whose actions drive the novel’s plot and who late in the book, in the guise of the stereotypical hero, rescues the noble Sophia Franklin from seduction and wins her hand. The novel opens with Sydney, “[a] Young Gentleman of Wealth and Fashion” (107), in a traditional bachelor pose of revery: he sits with his “slippered feet upon the fender” while sipping wine and contemplating his future. Sydney is “handsome,” the owner of “an ample fortune,” “an orphan,” and the “perfect master of his own actions” (107). Yet, despite all these advantages, he is unhappy. Readers of antebellum fiction, in which the bachelor was a common trope, will likely recognize that Sydney’s revery represents a moment of possibility, and that as a bachelor, he is positioned in “a transitional state within proper
masculine development” (Bertolini 21). From this moment of revery, Sydney can follow any number of courses, both threatening and non-threatening to normative discourses of masculinity. And while this is a moment of possibility, it also a moment of bodily stasis: the bachelor sits physically inactive. The action exists entirely in a mental plane: whereas the bachelor is physically inactive, he is imaginatively alive. And it is in this imaginative capacity that Sydney’s unhappiness exists.77

Sydney is unhappy both despite and because of his wealth. As the reader understands, and as Sydney acknowledges, all his privileges should make him happy: Sydney’s class position, gender, and personal mastery are all culturally admirable traits. It is what he has been doing with his money that makes him unhappy. Sydney has been spending his time with other young men, who laud him with insincere flattery because he spends freely for their entertainment. Fed up with these sycophants, Sydney realizes that the best use of his funds would be to act benevolently towards those less fortunate than him. Sydney concludes, “[t]o benefit one’s fellow creatures is the noblest and most exalted of enjoyments—far superior to the gratification of the senses” (107). By placing sensual gratification in opposition to benevolence, Sydney follows a bifurcation of body and mind and belief in the rational ability to overcome bodily desires that was an

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77 The image of the bachelor was a prominent feature of nineteenth-century American culture. In September, 1849, the same year that Thompson published City Crimes, Donald Grant Mitchell published “A Bachelor’s Reverie, In Three Parts” in the Southern Literary Messenger. Writing under the pseudonym Ik Marvel, Mitchell published the expanded book version, Reveries of a Bachelor, the following December. By March 1852, Reveries of a Bachelor had sold 20,000 copies, and it would go on to sell a million copies by the end of the century, making it one of Scribner’s best selling titles in the nineteenth century (the book also appeared in over fifty pirated editions in the United States and around the world) (Spiro 4-8; Snyder 48).
essential tenet of much of the antebellum reform movement’s approach to masculinity.\textsuperscript{78}

At this point, at least on the surface, the bachelor Sydney embraces the dominant narratives of his era: while the bachelor embodied multiple possible masculinities, Sydney is on the right path. Sydney personifies the potential of white masculinity, and unlike the scores of young men entering the city at this time, he is wealthy and without debt.\textsuperscript{79} What this path leads to, however, would surprise similarly minded reformers like John Todd. As Vincent Bertolini notes, “[b]y transforming young white males into self-interpellating subjects of sexual ideology, the reformers aimed to keep them out of prostitutes’, their own, and each other’s hands, and oriented towards infrequent, productive, and what was thought of as socially stabilizing sexuality” (20). In the face of less institutional control over young men in the city, reform’s goal was for young men to internalize discipline as part of a march towards normative domesticity. In contrast, by the end of the first night, Sydney has slept with a sixteen year old prostitute named Maria Archer, purchased a man (or at least his life-long loyalty) at a noted homosexual cruising ground, and opened the door to multiple, conflicting masculine personas that he will wear like costumes.

That we are supposed to revel in Sydney’s masculinity is clear from the language Thompson uses to describe his philanthropic mission. After Sydney’s assertion that he will carry out his philanthropy by “ventur[ing] into the vilest dens of sin and iniquity, fearing no danger, and shrinking not from the duty which I have assumed” (107-8), the

\textsuperscript{78} The ability to control one’s body was central to many nineteenth-century reform movements, including the anti-onanism and temperance movements, and as seen in the epigram by John Todd, reformers often pointed to the power of fear to motivate self-control.

\textsuperscript{79} For more on the particularly Gothic identity attributed to young, indebted men, see Anthony “Banking on Emotion” especially 723.
narrator uses one of his frequent asides to honor Sydney’s “Noble resolve!” (108). The narrator goes on to prophesy that Sydney will become “the advocate of deserving poverty, and the foe to the oppressor, who sets his heel upon the neck of his brother man” (108). The narrator confirms and elaborates what is likely the reader’s own interpretation of Sydney’s resolve, thus positioning Sydney as a masculine force for good, while simultaneously strengthening our identification with the narrative voice of the text.80

Thompson’s portrayals of masculinity in *City Crimes* move beyond any mere bachelor sentimentality to encompass a much broader understanding of gender and male sexuality. Sydney’s first encounter on his benevolent mission blends masculine sentimental identification with desire to create an “in the know” portrayal of the economic and sexual relationship between two men. Philip Howell uses the phrase “in the know” to describe the ways in which nineteenth-century urban guidebooks functioned as prescriptive introductions to “properly urban epistemologies, privileged knowledges of the city construction through the discourses of sex and gender” (28). In this formulation, sporting guides operated much like the work of the reformers: they functioned to create specific masculine identities through interpellation, but instead of working to install self-discipline, they worked to create a new urban identity, based on what Howell elsewhere calls “knowingness – the desire not so much to know, but to be one of those who are in the know, who are wise to the world” (41). Thompson’s novel, which plays on the reader’s awareness of urban life, rewards knowingness. By gradually revealing facts that certain readers can recognize from the beginning of the novel, Thompson presents the

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80 As I will discuss, over the course of the novel the narratorial asides become an important source of information on the way the narrator intends the novel to be read. Many of these asides specifically address issues of gender in the novel and the way Sydney’s, the Doctor’s, and the Dead Man’s masculinities are constructed.
parallels between sodomites and other men in the book. It is through this gradual revelation that Thompson challenges assumptions behind normative masculinity.

The reader’s understanding of Sydney’s first act of benevolent philanthropy depends on how much the reader knows about the urban environment. Of his many trips into the underworld of the city, the first night stands out because unlike many of his other adventures, here Sydney goes without a costume. On this excursion, Sydney buys companionship from two people: a female prostitute and a destitute man known only as the Doctor. After dismissing his sycophantic friends, Sydney ventures into the city. Upon leaving the house, Sydney travels “at a rapid pace,” eventually arriving at City Hall Park (109). It is here that Sydney first encounters the Doctor, who becomes one of the main figures in Sydney’s negotiation of his desires and his masculinity. However, without knowledge of City Hall Park’s significance to the geography of sexuality in New York, the meaning of this encounter is easily lost on the reader. Sydney’s rapid pace, in contrast, suggests he knows exactly where he is going. Thompson describes the pickup in the park in terms that emphasizes Sydney’s and the Doctor’s masculinity. Sydney, “brave and dauntless,” encounters the Doctor, who is “large and powerful” (109). When the Doctor attempts to rob Sydney out of hunger and desperation, Sydney overcomes him with an appeal to the Doctor’s emotional desire for male attachment. Sydney tells the Doctor, “in accents of deep pity [,] ‘I feel for you, on my soul I do. Want and wretchedness have made you desperate. Throw down your weapon, and listen to me; he who now addresses you is a man, possessing a heart that beats in sympathy for your misfortunes’” (110). While Sydney’s words have a powerful impact on the Doctor, it is the emotions behind them that powerfully affect the Doctor: he tells Sydney, “You pity
me, and that pity subdues me.’”(110). It is not Sydney’s masculine bravado that affects
the Doctor, nor is it the sword cane that he brandishes, but Sydney’s ability to stand up in
the face of violence, suppressing any fear and replacing it with pity. The connection with
the Doctor is an emotional one, and it is strong enough that Sydney vows lifelong
friendship. After Sydney disarms the Doctor with his sympathy, he pays the Doctor
fifty dollars and promises that if he should ever want to “find a friend” he can find
Sydney at the “------------ Hotel” (110). Sydney learns later that fifty dollars is the same
amount of money that the young prostitute Maria Archer’s husband sells her for,
suggesting an equivalence between Sydney’s benevolence in the Park and his night with
Archer. His benevolent philanthropy takes on sexual connotations, and as the text
progresses, it becomes clear that, in his exchange with the Doctor, Sydney purchases for
fifty dollars male companionship and affection.

81 It is quite easy to view this scene of emotional connection between men, mediated by
sympathy and pity, in the context of Enlightenment political thought. Furthermore,
Sydney’s ability to muster his emotions in service of philanthropy harkens back to the
benevolent manhood common during the early republic and the early nineteenth century.
Michael Kimmel uses the term “Genteel Patriarch” to describe this particular version of
manhood. Characteristics of the Genteel Patriarch include “property ownership and a
benevolent patriarchal authority at home, including the moral instructions of his sons. A
Christian gentleman, the Genteel Patriarch embodied love, kindness, duty, and
compassion, exhibited through philanthropic work, church activities, and deep
involvement with his family” (13). While Sydney clearly lacks many of these
characteristics, it seems just as clear that Thompson is playing on similar notions of
manhood. For more on the relationship between manhood and public virtue at the end of
the eighteenth century, see Dorsey 11-28. Yet enough parallels exist between this
encounter and Sydney’s next encounter—with the sixteen year old prostitute Maria
Archer—to suggest that Thompson is making a much more interesting comment on
masculinity than simply suggesting that benevolence was still an important part of
manliness by mid-century.

82 The essential difference between the relationship between Sydney and the Doctor and
the relationship between Sydney and the so-called friends that Sydney decides to drop in
his opening revery is sympathy, an important factor in the novel’s economics of male
relationships.
What makes this transaction more remarkable is that *City Crimes* is one of few antebellum novels to deal explicitly with the presence of sodomites in American cities. By placing *City Crimes* in the context of antebellum portrayals of sodomites, Sydney’s encounter with the Doctor becomes part of a much larger engagement with the possible relationships between men in urban America. If we read *City Crimes* as a Gothic novel, one of the easiest ways to read the figure of the sodomite in the book is as a monster, and indeed much of the attention to the novel has been about its monstrous depictions of sodomites. Often this work is done by putting Thompson’s novel in the context of depictions of sodomites in the flash press, men’s sporting papers published in New York during the 1840’s. Precursors of the *National Police Gazette*, the *Whip*, the *Flash*, the *Rake*, and the *Libertine* embraced a male subculture that emphasized rampant heterosexuality in all its forms (Cohen, Gilfoyle and Horowitz 9). Hitting their peak in 1842, these papers advocated what Cohen, Gilfoyle and Horowitz call “libertine republicanism,” a political and sexual worldview involving a blending of male heterosexuality with a republican critique of hierarchy: “The flash press and its associated subculture was a strange mixture of Tom Paine’s revolutionary politics infused with aspects of the sexual ideology of the Marquis de Sade” (57). What this political position amounts to is the use of sexual language to critique the cultural and political advantages associated with wealth and position in antebellum America. Combined with this political stance is the belief that sexuality is natural, and hence true freedom involves “the right to

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83 For an explanation of using the term “flash press” to denote this specific group of “racy” sporting weeklies, see Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz 2.
84 For more on the flash press, see Horowitz *Rereading* 149-93, and *Attitudes* 130-141; Dennis 43-93; and Katz *Love Stories* 45-59.
satisfy one’s own individual pleasure” (57). The editors of the flash press believed that sexuality was not something to be ashamed of.

Yet there is one important exception to this rule: the sodomite. In what Jonathan Ned Katz has described as “the earliest-known American crusade against sodomites” (Love Stories 45), the editors of the Whip and Satirist of New-York and Brooklyn, the Flash, and the Rake identified the sodomite as a particularly monstrous threat to heterosexual privilege. Descriptions in the papers often stressed the monstrous appearances of sodomites, suggesting that sodomy is an affront not just to heterosexuality but also to the human body. An editorial response to a letter written by “F. Justice” and published in the August 7, 1842, edition of the Flash describes sodomites as “human monsters” that “[walk] abroad in the form of an American citizen” (qtd. in Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz 196). The title of this article, “A Man-Monster,” emphasizes the monstrous nature of the sodomite. Like mainstays of Gothic fiction, these men were portrayed as objects to be feared: in the February 5, 1842 edition of the Whip and Satirist of New-York and Brooklyn, the editors describe one as a “monster who wears the human form, and yet carries the soul of a hell-engendered Sodomite” (qtd. in Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz 195). The “monsters,” the editors claim, “make the honest heart shudder” in fear (194). Sodomites were also often described as vampires, who drained the

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85 Many historians have pointed out that in early and antebellum America, “the crime of sodomy was not equivalent to the modern concept of homosexuality. Sodomy referred to ‘unnatural’—that is, nonprocreative—sexual acts, which could be performed between two men, a man and an animal (technically considered buggery or bestiality), or between a man and a woman” (D’Emilio and Freedman 30). While this is an important distinction to make, by the time Thompson was writing, the characteristics of the sodomite were coalescing into a distinct identity category. One of the arguments I am trying to make is that Thompson recognized the sodomite as an identity category, but that he also recognized the similarities between so-called monstrous acts, and other relationships between men.
essential vitality out of their victims, leaving them “with tottering limbs and pallid
countenance” and thus unable to fulfill their masculine duties (qtd. in Katz, Love Stories
51).

One impetus for positing the sodomite as monstrous is that it makes it possible to
clearly identify that which is different: one basis of homophobia is, after all, the fear
among men “that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world
that we do not measure up, are not real men” (Kimmel 5). As Leo Bersani states it,
“homophobia [...] is entirely a response to an internal possibility. [...] to let gays be open
about their gayness, to give them equal rights, to allow them to say who they are and
what they want, is to risk being recruited” (27). Portraying sodomites as vampires who
drain out of young men the energy needed to survive in the city is as much a fear that
one’s own energy could be drained—and that it might be okay. Behind much of the fear
of sodomites articulated in the flash press is a simultaneous attraction to the sodomite and
recognition that he is alluring. This blend of fear and desire manifests itself in the article
entitled “A Man-Monster” described above. In his letter, F. Justice describes his
encounter with a particular “hoary headed old villain” who “attempted to fool with me as
if I were of the sex feminine” (195). When the man attempts to pick him up, the author
decides to “see how far he would go,” and agrees to walk with him, “It being the way to
[his] residence” (195-6).86 Despite his seeming willingness to comply with the old man’s

86 Leland Person uses this same letter in a discussion of Poe’s short story, “The Man of
the Crowd.” According to Person, the letter, which he calls an “account of male cruising
behavior,” provides a cultural context that, for “readers familiar with such accounts
through either reading or personal observation” suggests a range of possible
interpretations of Poe’s story (“Queer Poe” 11). I am similarly trying to argue that the
flash press provides an important cultural context for reading much antebellum city
fiction. It is easy to assume, given the emphasis since Foucault’s History of Sexuality on
wishes, the author claims to be shocked when the old man makes a move. As Katz notes, quoting from the *Whip*, “[t]he ‘diabolic enticements’ of sodomites exert a powerful ‘allure,’ […] It was not unusual […] for a ‘man’ to feel attracted to a ‘sodomite’” (*Love Stories* 53). This blend of horror and desire, functioning much like the epigram from John Todd that began this chapter, characterizes much of the flash press’s relationship with the sodomite, and, as we will see, the same is true of Thompson’s *City Crimes*.87

The editors of the flash press even go so far as to tell their readers where sodomites like to do their cruising: City Hall Park, the very place where Sydney encounters the Doctor. In “The Sodomites,” published in the *Whip and Satirist of New-York and Brooklyn* on January 29, 1842, the author describes sodomites in the usually gothic way: sodomites are “a set of fiends bearing the form of men” who “are nightly in

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1870 as homosexuality’s “date of birth” (430), that previous to this point, no such identity existed. Yet, as Christopher Nealon and others have pointed out, the focus on 1870 as the birth of homosexuality has become “a historical master code itself,” which is diametrically opposed to the impetus behind much of Foucault’s work (20). One of the points I am trying to make about *City Crimes* is that in it Thompson acknowledges the complexity of identity and identity categorizes, specifically the complex nature of sexuality and gender.

87 On another level, the very presence of the sodomite in the flash press serves a dual purpose. Ever since John R. McDowall was accused of being attracted to the world of prostitution, anyone writing about sex had to be aware that to expose elements of the sexual underworld was also to advertise them and make them appealing. McDowall, a young Princeton student who went to New York to work with the American Tract Society, published *The Magdalen Report* in 1831. Ostensibly an attempt to protect the young men who risked being seduced by the thousands of prostitutes in New York, the report was viewed by critics as offering access to the very things it denounced: the report could easily be used to guide men to prostitutes, much like sporting guides did (Horowitz, *Rereading* 145-50). After McDowall’s supporters dropped him, it became clear that to describe the seedy underworld of New York was also to make that same underworld possible: condemnation simultaneously provides access, to publish on a topic is to disseminate knowledge of that topic. Thus while the editors of the flash press often explicitly condemned sodomy and characterized sodomites as monsters, they “simultaneously advertised the very behavior [they] condemned” (Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz 192).
the habit of disgusting nature with their monstrous and wicked acts” (qtd. in Cohen, Gilfoyle, and Horowitz 192). The author also describes a “youth of our acquaintance” who was “murdered” by the sodomites: “he fell into a decline which so emaciated his form that when his body was raised from his bed to be placed within the grave, that the stiffness and coldness of the dead gave place to the shrunken and disjointed corpse” (193). Once again the sodomite is characterized as a vampire who sucks the essential energies out of young men. That these gothic monsters should be feared is clear by the author’s claim that “Fear seizes the mind of the moral man when he is […] accosted and his first impulse is to escape” (193). According to the author, there is no shame in running from these creatures: to be a man and to be terrified are both acceptable. But, as Katz notes about this passage, if the first impulse is escape, “his second impulse apparently made escape difficult” (*Love Stories* 53). Further, sodomites have economic power over their victims through blackmail because “death is preferable to the remotest connection with such a charge” (194). Amidst all this Gothic horror, however, the allure of the sodomite breaks through. Despite protestations that no one would want to be associated with the sodomites, the author claims a remarkable amount of familiarity, stating, “We know them all by sight, and most of them by name” (192). This familiarity extends to knowledge of the common cruising grounds for sodomites: “within the vicinity of the Park will become a second Palais Royale” (193). The suggestion is that the author knows sodomites because he has been hanging out in the same locations, specifically City Hall Park.88

88 Katz notes the existence of City Hall Park as “evidence of an emerging, urban, American sodomite subculture” (*Love Stories* 54).
On first glance, placing Thompson’s novel in the context of the flash press demonstrates numerous similarities between the two, and it is not surprising that critics have had a tendency to see the two as ideologically consistent: both advocate male heterosexual privilege based on natural desires. Katz uses *City Crimes* to make the argument that the novel, featuring “scenes echoing the […] attack on sodomites” in the flash press, becomes the point at which “Nineteenth-century city lore was starting to include sodomites among it [sic] stock characters. Sodomites were joining the titillating figures that sold urban exposés” (*Love Stories* 57). Besides the relative scarcity of city mysteries featuring sodomites, Katz’s claim overlooks the rather complex role the sodomite plays in *City Crimes*. Close attention to the sodomite characters in the book shows that, even more than was the case with the flash press, Thompson’s novel intentionally portrays the sodomite as monstrous while simultaneously advocating his appeal. By first examining the two most explicit examples of the sodomite in the book, and then returning to the opening encounter between Sydney and the Doctor, we can begin to understand how Thompson uses male-male relationships to demonstrate how masculinity is structured around homosexual alterity, and how all such relationships depend upon cultural scripts of Gothic fear.

Sodomites appear twice in Thompson’s novel. In the first instance, a Spanish ambassador named Don Jose Velasquez propositions Josephine Franklin while she is dressed in male costume as the “Royal Middy.” In this scene, Thompson never uses the word sodomite, and it is left to the reader to interpret the meaning of the encounter. By allowing the scene to be read as heterosexual, and only later making explicit the sodomitical nature of the encounter, makes it possible for the reader to participate in the desire for Franklin, desire that is only later made queer and illicit. On the look out for
The second appearance of a sodomite in *City Crimes*, which takes place on the boat to Boston, most explicitly fits with the descriptions of sodomites found in the flash press.

The language Thompson uses closely mirrors the January 29, 1842 article “The Sodomites” from the *Whip and Satirist of New-York and Brooklyn*. In his comments about the incident on the boat, Thompson retroactively explains and further defines the interaction between Don Jose Velasquez and Josephine Franklin. On the boat to Boston, “a tall gentlemen, of distinguished bearing” with a “very dark” “complexion” is drawn to

amorous intrigues, Franklin notices “a tall, finely formed person in the costume of a Spanish cavalier” who is watching her (168). Despite her masculine costume, Franklin is not wearing her mask, “and her superb countenance was fully revealed” (168). Recognizing her gender, the cavalier addresses her as a female. Franklin, however, decides to play with him and welcomes his attentions, but asserts that she is, in fact, a boy. The cavalier is even more intrigued by Franklin as a male, telling her, “Were you a lady, you would be beautiful, but as a boy you are doubly charming. Be not surprised when I assure you that you please me ten times—aye, ten thousand times more, as a boy, than as a woman. By heaven, I must kiss those ripe lips!” (169). At this point, it is hard to discern just how serious the cavalier is, and whether he recognizes Franklin as female. He has seen her face, as well as “pass[ed] his hands over the swelling outlines of her bosom, which no disguise could entirely conceal” (169), and Franklin’s mother has already asserted that “men will all run distracted after a pretty woman in male attire” because “such a costume will display [Franklin’s] shape so admirably” (158).

Furthermore, the scene draws on notions of class as much as it does on gender. Franklin explains the smoothness of her hands by stating, “I have been brought up as a gentleman, and it has never become soiled or hardened by labor” (169). The markers of class and the markers of gender overlap, making each indistinguishable. The cavalier, who soon reveals himself to be Don Jose Velasquez, a Spanish ambassador, acknowledges that he has “strange, unaccountable, and absurd” passions, but blames them on the fact that he is from Spain, “a country whose ardent souls confine not their affections to the fairest portion of the human race alone” (169). Because he whispers it in her ear, the reader is never privy to what Velasquez asks Franklin to do, but we know that she reacts with “horror and disgust” (170). Thompson blurs the possibility that Velasquez is a sodomite by suggesting that Franklin’s true gender is recognizable—within minutes another possible suitor identifies Franklin as a “Lady” because her “graceful figure and gait betray [her]” (170). I am not suggesting that we are not supposed to read Velasquez as a sodomite. Instead, I would argue that the reader’s ability to comprehend this scene, and whether the reader will respond with horror or some other appropriate emotion, depends on his or her knowledge or disposition. Thompson provides enough clues for the scene to be read either way, but specifically denies any certainty.
a “handsome lad, twelve or fourteen years of age” (246). While earlier in the text that might have been sufficient information, here Thompson does not hold back at all, and in a long aside he discusses the presence of sodomites in New York in language mirroring the language of the flash press. Thompson tells us that the man is a “[beast] in human shape” with “perverted appetites” (246). Thompson then distinguishes between Velasquez and this second sodomite, reminding the reader that “Once before, in the tenth chapter of this narrative, we took occasion to introduce one of those fiends to the notice of the reader” before explicitly mentioning Velasquez (246). By drawing clear parallels between the now explicitly mentioned “sodomite” (247) and Velasquez, Thompson rewards the reader who had a full understanding of the earlier situation. Thompson also establishes a pattern of retroactive revision and explanation that suggests a reconsideration of the initial encounter between Sydney and the Doctor. And, just as Thompson uses this aside to make explicit the nature of Velasquez’s “diabolical proposal to Josephine Franklin” (246), he also points to City Hall Park as an important cruising ground for sodomites.

When Sydney embarked on his initial benevolent mission, he headed to City Hall Park, where he encountered the Doctor, paid him fifty dollars, and gained a “friend.” At the time, Thompson left any further interpretation of the location’s significance to those readers “in the know,” but in his discussion of sodomites he not only explains the meaning, but asserts the commonplace nature of his claims: “[T]here are,” he writes, “boys who prostitute themselves from motives of gain; and they are liberally patronized by the tribe of genteel foreign vagabonds who infest the city. It was well known that the principal promenade for such cattle was in the Park, where they might be seen nightly;
and the circumstance had been more than once commented upon by the newspapers.—

*Any person who has resided in New York for two or three years knows that we are speaking the truth*” (246, emphasis added). Like the editors of the flash press, Thompson points to City Hall Park as a notorious market place for male prostitutes. The earlier analogies between Sydney’s encounter with the Doctor and his encounter with Archer are now made explicit. One wonders, then, what would have happened if the Doctor had not tried to rob Sydney, or if Sydney had not “conceive[ed] the man’s intentions to be hostile” (109).

What Thompson seems to recognize is that the sodomite relationship allows for a masculine gender dynamics that mirrors the standard economic relationship in the city, but allowed more fluidity of gender. Because of this fluidity, Sydney is able to embrace standard forms of masculinity based on chivalrous and benevolent philanthropy, but also to take full advantage of the masculine relationships available to him. In other words, Sydney navigates through a number of different masculinities throughout the book, playing the proper role for each situation. By positing the sodomite as the monstrous other, Thompson makes possible Sydney’s seemingly innocent masculine relationships. Thompson uses fear to delimit boundaries for properly gendered behavior, but, once those boundaries are established, Thompson retroactively revises the meaning of the behavior he depicts. Fear becomes a tool for establishing and critiquing accepted masculine behavior.

The key to Thompson’s portrayals of gender is his use of monstrosity. Yet, the sodomite is not even the most monstrous character in the book; that honor goes to the Dead Man. The Dead Man stands alone as perhaps the most visibly monstrous character
in all of antebellum American literature, and his role in the text plays on that visibility. As the Dead Man competes with Sydney for the Doctor’s affections, he mirrors Sydney’s philanthropic motives, but whereas Sydney uses his fortune in order to access the criminal underworld with the hopes of doing good, the Dead Man uses his criminal abilities in order to achieve actual results. And, while Sydney’s effectiveness is debatable, and while the Dead Man commits a number of horrific acts of violence, the Dead Man is also the only visible social force in the novel. I will return to the Dead Man’s social motivations in a moment, but first I want to discuss how the Dead Man serves as a visible emblem of the gender and social positions articulated in the novel.

The Dead Man’s monstrous actions throughout the book leave little doubt that he is a man to be feared. Described as a “ghastly monster,” he murders and mutilates those around him. Clinton Romaine, a former associate of the Dead Man, comes to fear him after playing a role in getting the Dead Man arrested. As Romaine expresses his fear of the Dead Man he acts as a stand in for the reader: “Oh, if he were at large,” he says, “my life would be in continued danger; I should not sleep at night, for terror; I should tremble lest his corpse-like face should appear at my bedside, and his bony fingers grapple me by the throat” (164). The Dead Man, in other words, is a nightmare creature, a spook or specter who haunts the nighttime: a nightmare projection of the masculine imagination. Thompson plays with the idea of the Dead Man as something out of a Gothic story later in the book when the Franklins’ servants, left alone in the Franklin house, begin to tell ghost stories. In one of his asides, Thompson asks, “Reader, have you ever, at the solemn hour of midnight, while listening to the recital of some fearful visitation from the land of spirits, felt your hair to bristle, and your flesh to creep, and your blood to chill with
horror, as you imagined that some terrible being was at that moment standing outside the
doors, ready to glide into the room and stand beside your chair?” (269). That Thompson
uses this aside to describe the affective response generated by a well-told ghost story,
right before the Dead Man enters the room, suggests that, as readers, we are supposed to
react to the presence of the Dead Man with the same affect. Like the men and women in
the room, who, in reaction to the Dead Man’s entry, “recoiled from its presence with
horror and fright,” the reader is supposed to react with fear to the Dead Man’s presence in
*City Crimes.*

Sydney first encounters the Dead Man on the second night of philanthropic
slumming described in the novel. While wearing a disguise, Sydney is led into the dark
vaults, the underground world inhabited by the poor and criminal. Clinton Romaine,
Sydney’s guide, leads him into the Infernal Regions, the lair of a group of criminals who
go by the name “the knights of the Round Table” (134), and function as a dark mirror of
the above ground society. Inverting many of the expectations of the common criminals,
including the drunks and thieves Sydney encounters in Five Points, the knights are
“dressed richly and expensively” (134). Despite their nice clothing, “there [is] no
mistaking their true characters, for villain was written in their faces” (134). None of the
knights are so visibly criminal, and visibly monstrous, as their leader, the Dead Man.
The Dead Man, whose history we learn later in the novel, has built a reputation based on
his appearance. When Sydney first encounters the Dead Man, he experiences the very
opposite of the sympathy and desire he feels for the Doctor: “Seated upon a stool in the

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90 The physiognomy of crime is a fairly standard trope in antebellum city mysteries. See,
for example. George Lippard’s *The Quaker City; or, The Monks of Monks Hall*, where
Devil-Bug’s distorted body reflects a history of criminality.
centre of the table was a man of frightful appearance: his long, tangled hair hung over two eyes that gleamed with savage ferocity; his face was the most awful that can be imagined—long, lean, cadaverous and livid, it resembled that of a corpse. [...] His form was tall and bony, and he was gifted with prodigious strength” (1340). The Dead Man’s appearance as a living corpse combines the image of the sodomite from elsewhere in the book with a masculine bravado that is at times admirable, and appears to be the natural extension of the other Knights’ visible markers of criminality. While the other Knights are recognized as criminals despite being “dressed richly and expensively” because it “was written on their face,” no mention is made of the Dead Man’s clothes because it is impossible to see beyond his face.

Although on first glance the Dead Man’s body appears to naturalize criminality by manifesting it in the flesh, on closer inspection his body denies any clear assumptions. The Dead Man’s monstrosity crosses the boundary of criminality and moves into something much more queer, troubling the dominant narratives of the time. Shelly Streeby has identified a strain of uncanny bodies present in American Gothic and sensational literature dating back to Charles Brockden Brown and lasting through the American Renaissance (“Haunted” 450). In traditionally Gothic ways, these bodies are uncanny in that they represent “the return of what was repressed or abjected by republican constructions of personhood and citizenship” (45). Much like the creation of a “national identity” requires, in the words of Dana Nelson, “[t]he recognizing, diagnosing, and managing of ‘difference’ (the differences of democracy’s Others)” (11), the creation of abstract liberal citizens requires the repression of difference. Yet, in true gothic fashion, this repression bursts out in frightening ways, often through the disruptive
forces of non-white, non-male bodies. One goal of this national abjection is that it has the result of seemingly naturalizing the dominant body. White men become the norm that everything else is defined against when white males become the natural standard of all identity. Nelson refers to this naturalization as white men’s “occultation of the Self” (10), describing, like Streeby, how white men depend on “altero-referentiality” to create a stable “abstract identity of white / national manhood” (“Haunted” 17). In the Gothic in particular, the creation of normality depends on the creation of the monstrous other: “Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known” (Halberstam, *Skin Shows* 2). What the Gothic brings to this account is the return of the repressed: the other becomes present.

Because of the massively important role of slavery and racial repression in the creation of the antebellum national narrative, much of the repressed that returns in the Gothic is the racial other. For this reason, American Gothic literature often centers on the connections between America’s terrifying racial history and dominant national narratives. As Teresa Goddu puts it, “the American gothic is haunted by race”: “American gothic literature criticizes America’s national myth of new-world innocence by voicing the cultural contradictions that undermine the nation’s claim to purity and equality” (7, 10). Toni Morrison makes a similar claim in her study of race and American literature, *Playing in the Dark*. Arguing for the importance of the African presence in American literature, Morrison points to the centrality of this presence to creating a national identity: “Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful, not history-less,
but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny” (52). That the “Other” that most critics focus on is a racial other makes a lot of sense; after all, it is hard to argue that there were any defining historical events more important to the development of America than slavery and the long history of racial violence. And it is hard to argue with the notion that by abjecting the other, white males have been able to create a naturalized American self that is both white and male.

But, on closer inspection the use of race *City Crimes* is more complicated than this paradigm allows for, even though on first glance, Thompson’s portrayal of race seems to fit the paradigm: blacks, like other racial minorities, are often portrayed in a manner fitting with the common stereotypes of the time. The most prominent African American character in the novel is Nero, one of Julia Fairfield’s servants. Fairfield is Sydney’s fiancée, but we quickly learn that her relationship with Nero is something other than a standard employer/employee relationship. After rejecting Sydney’s advances early in the book because they are not yet married, Fairfield immediately sleeps with Nero, whose baby we learn she is carrying. Fairfield’s sexual relationship with Nero inspires many of Thompson’s longest asides in the book, in which he claims that he must assert that authenticity of his account, as if no reader could believe that a wealthy white woman could desire a black servant. In the first of these asides, Thompson connects the interracial and interclass sex he describes to his larger Gothic project: he writes, “We have undertaken a difficult and painful task, and we shall accomplish it; unrestrained by a false delicacy, we shall drag forth from the dark and mysterious labyrinths of great cities, the hidden iniquities which taint the moral atmosphere, and assimilate human nature to...
the brute creation” (126). Situating this particular “crime” among “crimes of a much deeper dye” (126), Thompson acknowledges the racialized nature of much American Gothic. But Thompson’s portrayals of race are not as simple as they might appear. As David Reynolds and Kimberly Gladman note, Thompson’s “black characters are often described in degrading and brutish terms, but on closer consideration are seen to embody the justified rage of an oppressed minority” (xlii). Even in the case of Nero and Fairfield, Thompson’s description registers as much horror that a wealthy woman would sleep with a servant, as it registers horror at interracial love.

We have already seen how Thompson portrays the sodomite as a monstrous other, and it is obvious that the Dead Man, with his visual markers of criminality, is also meant to be monstrously other. Yet Streeby offers an important point that helps us understand how the Dead Man functions in Thompson’s novel. She writes, “Although an emphasis on the body can work at times to naturalize distinctions of class, race, sexuality, and gender or to provide footholds for normalizing projects, an in-your-face body politics can also unsettle such distinctions and provoke perverse sensations which stimulate different constructions of collective identity” (“Haunted” 451). Far from naturalizing any national liberal identity, the Dead Man’s sensational body opens the possibility for new understandings of such identities. The affective nature of the Gothic relies on the genre’s tendency to deny a single understanding of meaning. Here I am following Judith Halberstam’s assertion that “Within Gothic novels […] multiple interpretations are embedded in the text and part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot” (Skin Shows 2). This chaos of interpretation is embodied in monstrosity (2). The Dead Man, whose body denies any racial identity, is still notable for
his masculinity: particularly a bodily masculinity dependent on his “prodigious strength” (134). If the Dead Man’s monstrous body represents the abject, but explosively sensational, in the construction of identity, what it represents more than anything is a chaos of class-based gender. The Dead Man, visibly monstrous, represents the monstrous and terrifying masculine body, and he is the most explicitly heterosexual male character in the novel, as well as the locus of righteous class-based anger and vengeance. In this way, then, the Dead Man functions as the dark, gothic, mirror image of Sydney, and his relationship with Sydney and the Doctor, as well as his analogous relationship with the sodomites in the text, helps Thompson to show that the construction of oppositional masculinities necessarily generates a deconstructive instability. Masculinity’s dependence on male-male interactions and desires necessitates the construction of fearful, contrasting masculinities, but these masculinities always carry within them the traces of the other.

As the monster figure in the novel, the Dead Man’s indecipherable body is replicated in his relationship with Sydney. The Dead Man’s goal in the novel—indeed, it is one of the driving forces in the narrative—is to torture and murder Sydney. After the Dead Man is arrested for breaking into Sydney’s house, he claims to be “dead in everything save vengeance!” (146). Certain that he will break out of prison, the Dead Man tells Sydney:

I will be your evil genius; I swear to follow you thro’ life, and cling to you in death; yes—I will torture you in hell! Look for me at midnight, when you deem yourself most secure; I shall be in your chamber. Think of me in the halls of mirth and pleasure, for I shall be at your elbow. In the
lonely forest, on the boundless sea, in far distant lands, I shall be ever near you, to tempt, to torture, and to drive you mad! Form this hour you are blasted by my eternal curse! (146)

The Dead Man’s threat not only replicates the idea of the Dead Man as nightmare put forth in Thompson’s aside, but also bears a distinct resemblance to Frankenstein’s monster’s threat of vengeance against Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s novel: “Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict. […] I shall be with you on your wedding-night” (146).91 The explicitly sexual nature of the monster’s threat to Frankenstein—the threat of violation on his wedding night—while only implied by the Dead Man, still carries significant importance to understanding just what is scary about the Dead Man.

In her seminal work, The Coherence of Gothic Conventions, Eve Sedgwick describes the “paranoid reading of maternity” in Frankenstein (ix). Because the “male paranoid plot” is intertwined with the “maternal or monstrous plot”—in other words, because the male plot blends into, and is intermixed with, the female plot—male development takes on a sense of the uncanny (ix). The family is secondary in this development of male bodies, leaving instead “a tableau that is seen as embodying primal human essence or originary truth: the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape” (ix). Similar to Judith Halberstam’s understanding of the Gothic mentioned earlier, what makes this tableau particularly Gothic is its indecipherability. While fear is an essential factor in this relationship, there is equal possibility, as Sedgwick says, that the relationship “is murderous or amorous” (ix). Because the relationship is indecipherable, like much of the Gothic, the possibility exists that the relationship is both

91 It is worth remembering that Romaine’s fear of the Dead Man is tied to the possibility that “his corpse-like face should appear at my bedside” (164).
murderous and amorous. Desire and fear commingle in the name of monstrosity and masculine bodies.

Fear and desire drive the relationship between the Dead Man and Sydney, and their relationship drives much of the book’s narrative. After the Dead Man vows vengeance against Sydney, he spends the rest of the novel trying to capture and torture him. When the Dead Man finally does capture him, his earlier threat’s aura of sexual violation is made explicit. Held in the Chamber of Death, surrounded by the skeletons of the Dead Man’s murder victims, Sydney struggles to fight off “feelings of keenest horror and despair,” and resist “the idea of suicide” (255). The device that the Dead Man plans to torture Sydney with is called “The Bed of Ease,” in which Sydney, “entirely naked,” is forced to lie while “[t]he points of nails penetrated his flesh, causing the most excruciating torture; blood started profusely from all parts of his body” (256). When Sydney passes out after being treated for his wounds (so as to prolong the torture), the Dead Man stumbles in drunk, claiming that he has come “to feast upon [Sydney’s] heart, and drink [his] blood” (256). He tells Sydney, “My heart is a coal of fire; it burns me, and blood alone can quench it!” (257). The Dead Man’s violent desire for blood, combined with Sydney’s torture in the Bed of Ease, brings fruition to the Dead Man’s earlier threat of vengeance, and once again calls to mind the threat made by Frankenstein’s monster (as well as the characterization of sodomites as vampires). The Dead Man’s violent penetration of the naked Sydney’s flesh, and his burning desire to feast on Sydney’s body and blood mark him as both monstrous and desiring.92 The

92 It is worth remembering that the instrument of the Dead Man’s torturous desire, “The Bed of Ease,” is hyperactively phallic and penetrating, designed to multiply the points of
Dead Man wants Sydney, wants to consume his body, but also wants to murder him. The Gothic nature of this relationship relies on the question of what drives the Dead Man—his desire or his hatred.

The relationship between Sydney and the Dead Man is informed by their characterization as opposing forces in the novel. Sydney is clearly the hero of the book. As I have noted, the novel opens with Sydney’s noble philanthropic mission, and it roughly follows Sydney’s journeys through the cities’ dangerous nighttimes and criminal underworlds. For all his admirable philanthropic goals and sexually aberrant detours, what marks Sydney as a heroically masculine male is his chivalrous rescue of Sophia Franklin. The younger sister of Josephine Franklin, Sophia shares none of her sister’s seductive ways. Sophia’s absence (she is essentially a non-presence in the book) is explained by her very goodness. Whereas “all the characters introduced have been more or less tainted with crime,” a group that includes “Even Sydney, good, generous and noble as he was,” only Sophia Franklin can “redeem [the novel] from the imputation of total depravity” (274-5). Sophia Franklin’s inestimable goodness marks Sydney’s rescue of her from the clutches of a seducer as clearly heroic. Compare this, for example, to his interactions with Maria Archer. While he aims to help both women, he sleeps with Archer while she is still a prostitute, and is unable to prevent her murder. By contrast, his relationship with Franklin remains chaste until they are able to marry. In the stereotypical structures of city mysteries, the best clue to Sydney’s noble manliness is his marriage to Franklin. Yet, this deed only comes in the closing pages of the novel, and up to this point, as Thompson is so quick to remind us, Sydney has been anything but chaste entry into Sydney’s body. This desire to multiply penetrate aligns with The Dead Man’s masculinity, as discussed below.
and pure. By the standards of the masculine structure to which he aspires at the beginning of the novel, it is only at the novel’s close that Sydney fully becomes a “man.”

By contrast, the Dead Man never aspires to such lofty goals, yet he achieves a much more admirably masculine persona throughout much of the book; for all of the ways that he is the most monstrous character in the book, and for all the fear he is supposed to inspire, throughout the book the Dead Man is the most traditionally masculine character, in part because he is often the admirable voice of class rage and justice. The Dead Man’s story, told late in the book, follows the standard progression of a coming-of-age tale, with the addition of crime. Born to parents he never knew, the Dead Man is raised in an Alms House in Boston. As a young man, he tells us, “my constitution was iron—my sinews were steel, and my heart a lion’s” (227). By the time the Dead Man mutilates his face in order to escape the authorities, he has put on so many costumes—gentleman, doctor, priest, temperance reformer, counterfeiter, murderer—that surfaces can no longer be trusted. Underneath all these surfaces that the Dead Man wears, his masculine body and devotion to crime remain the only constants.

In a text seemingly unconcerned with class struggles, the Dead Man is the lone voice of class justice. While Sydney’s attempts to help the poor consistently fail—especially his attempt to save Maria Archer—the Dead Man successfully strikes back against the aristocratic abuse of wage labor. After Sydney has the Dead Man arrested and taken to prison, the Dead Man manages to escape by hiding in a crate shipped to the warehouse of a man by the name of Mr. Hartless, and we quickly learn about Hartless’s anti-labor practices. By using prison labor, Hartless expands his profit, but at a great cost to the workers below him: “This system of convict labor is a glorious thing for us master
mechanics, though it plays the devil with the journeymen. Why, I formerly employed fifty workmen, who earned on an average two dollars a day; but since I contracted with the State to employ its convicts, the work which cost me one hundred dollars a day I now get for fifteen dollars” (182). Hartless goes on to state that the best way for an honest man to get work is to go to prison (183). As if Hartless’s name is not enough to signal how the reader should respond to this man, Thompson goes out of his way to tell us. When Hartless refuses to help the wife of a former employee, Thompson describes Hartless as “a d----d scoundrel” (183).

Thompson spurs the reader’s dislike of Hartless, but the Dead Man is the one who acts on those feelings. Angry after hearing Hartless’s regret at his escape from prison—because the Dead Man was a great worker—the Dead Man vows vengeance. While Thompson does suggest that Hartless’s comments are a primary motivating factor for the Dead Man, it is clear that he wants the reader to see the Dead Man’s actions as part of a larger revolt by the lower classes against aristocratic oppression. In response to the Dead Man’s decision to burn the warehouse down (after overhearing Hartless say that his insurance coverage has lapsed) because, as he says, “I hate the aristocrat who expressed his regret at my escape, because, forsooth! my services were valuable to him!”, Thompson addresses Hartless to say, “Your abominable treatment of that poor man is about to meet with a terrible retribution” (185). The slippage around the phrase “that poor man” in Thompson’s statement makes it unclear whether the sympathy Thompson expresses is with the Dead Man or the former worker whose wife came to Hartless for help. Grammatically, the statement suggests sympathy with the Dead Man, which raises an interesting question about the novel. If we are supposed to read Sydney as the hero of
the novel, as I have suggested, as well as manly and noble for his philanthropic goals, what we are left with after this encounter between the Dead Man and Hartless is the notion that the Dead Man is more admirable and manly than Sydney: through his moments of class vengeance, the Dead Man surpasses Sydney’s masculinity, suggesting, in turn, that masculinity depends on more than just surface looks and affects, and is more dependent on actions.

The two trends I have been discussing—the parallels between Sydney’s relationship with the Doctor and the depictions of the monstrous sodomite, and the importance of the Dead Man’s class-based masculinity—coalesce in the relationship between Sydney, the Dead Man, and the Doctor. As I have described it, the relationship between Sydney and the Doctor follows is one of sodomitical philanthropy, while the Dead Man’s relationship with Sydney exists as a Gothic pursuit combining feelings both murderous and amorous. When looked at as a whole, the relationship between these three men fits the paradigm of the erotic triangle, as described by Eve Sedgwick. As Sedgwick notes about the construction of an erotic triangle, when in the case of a rivalry, “the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: […] the bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love,’ differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent” (Between Men 21). In City Crimes, Sydney and the Dead Man are constantly vying for the attention and affection of the Doctor. After Sydney helps the Doctor in City Hall Park, the Doctor vows to return the favor, stating that it is “the only wish of my heart” (135). In contrast, the Dead Man, who competes with Sydney for the Doctor’s affections, vows to “eat [Sydney’s] heart” (211). That this is a contest for masculinity becomes clear when the
Dead Man fights the Doctor to assert authority over Sydney. The battle, described as a fight between “a large, dark-complexioned, handsome man—an Apollo in beauty and a Hercules in strength” and a “hideous, misshapen being,” ends with the Doctor’s victory and the Dead Man’s emasculation. While the Dead Man eventually captures Sydney, the Doctor emerges victorious, carrying the effeminized Sydney to safety in a scene that clearly draws on the conventions of chivalry: “the gallant man raised [Sydney’s] sinking form in his powerful arms, and struggled bravely on” (259). The Dead Man, cowered by the Doctor’s masculinity, tells him, “crippled as I am, I fear you. […] That escape of yours through the sewers was done in masterly style. Doctor, you are a brave fellow, and your courage inspires me with admiration, you are worthy to follow my reckless fortunes” (280). Through their mutual desire for Sydney, the Doctor’s and the Dead Man’s masculinities become the place for respect, if not admiration.

While both the Dead Man and Sydney fight over the Doctor, the real connection is between Sydney and the Dead Man, and, in the end, Sydney is only able to take on the appearance of the sentimental hero of the novel after the Doctor violently removes the Dead Man from the novel by inserting gunpowder under the Dead Man’s skin and blowing him up. After the Doctor destroys the Dead Man, making possible Sydney’s ascension to the ranks of chivalric hero, Thompson wraps the many plotlines up in a neat summary. The Doctor, we learn, has once again become a successful physician, and is rewarded with a wife, a protégé in Clinton Romaine, and a child, whom he names Sydney. Through this child, and through Romaine, Sydney’s legacy is secured. While Thompson rewards those who know the urban landscape by allowing them to see the full implications of Sydney’s relationship with the Doctor, he also suggests that there is
reason to be afraid of what goes on between men. Despite the correlations between the sodomite and Sydney, the difference is one of degrees: if the sodomite is the gothic and monstrous version of male sociality, Sydney represents the daylight opposite. Without monstrosity, there cannot be normality.

Thompson’s novel is quite progressive in its recognition of the complexities of male relationships—more so than Thompson is often credited with being. While he does portray the sodomite as the monstrous other, he also recognizes and acknowledges that the sodomite is not that far removed from less terrifying male relationships. By gradually revealing the parallels between his hero and the sodomite, and between accepted urban male-male relationships and the relationship between sodomites, Thompson slowly aligns all males with the sodomite, rewarding those readers who know the city with a greater degree of understanding. By the end of the novel, even characters who embrace heterosexuality become the source of productive male-male relationships. The Dead Man, with his wife, may produce the ghastly Image, but Sydney and the Doctor produce a new generation of males who will conceivably grow up as productive members of the antebellum economy.

In an important assessment of the political elements of Thompson’s fiction, Christopher Looby argues that Thompson’s novels, despite all appearances to the contrary, are at times “more slavishly affirmative of the values of sentimental domestic culture in its most politically regressive form than many of the well-known sentimental novels of the day” (“George Thompson” 654-5). As Looby notes, many of the so-called subversive novels ultimately end by restoring the primacy of the domestic over the transgressive. Discussing Thompson’s novel The House Breaker, Looby identifies what
he calls a “complicitious tension[]” central to Thompson’s work: a balance between “transgression and taboo” that is part of the novel’s “essence” (“George Thompson” 666). Looby adds an important caution about the desire on the part of critics to see sensational fiction for its transgressive appeal, while simultaneously overlooking the more normative elements of the same texts. As I have discussed, Sydney’s reward for his chivalrous rescue of Sophia Franklin is domestic tranquility, a tranquility that conveniently takes him away from the city to a “new home among the majestic mountains of Vermont” (308). Sydney, who begins the novel as a bachelor in the midst of revery—an imaginative moment of possibility—ends it in marriage. Yet I would be cautious about saying that the novel thus reinforces domestic notions. Two things are important here. First, while I agree with Looby that it is important to recognize the structural tensions present in Thompson’s novels, there can be little doubt where the balance lies. The novel ends with domestic tranquility, but this tranquility is only present in the final pages of the novel. As the quote from the Dead Man with which I began this chapter reminds us, up until this point we have been exposed to just about every crime and sin possible. The ending of the novel, as Thompson himself notes, serves only to “dispose of the dramatis personae who have figured in the various scenes” (309).

Second, it is important to note that in a novel titled City Crimes, domestic tranquility can occur only outside of the city, in Vermont, described by Thompson as “one of the most romantic spots to be found in all New England” (309). By placing the domestic outside of the city, as well as outside of the text, Thompson maintains a focus on the male-male relationships that drive the narrative.
In *City Crimes*, Thompson constructs a narrative dependent on the powerful relationship between men, and the fear of the monstrous other that structures masculinity. It is the relationships between men, and the affect behind them, that Thompson dwells on so thoroughly. The city, for Thompson, was a place where men could experience a wide range of relationships, and the wide range of masculine personas that make such relationships possible. The final answer to the question of the novel’s transgressive nature lies in the presence of the monstrous in the novel. By affectively focusing on the sodomite and the Dead Man as the monstrous figures in the text, Thompson draws the readers’ attention to the performances of masculinity. And, as I have been arguing, it is in these performances that Thompson’s novel is at its most progressive. By creating a Gothic novel out of the relationships between men in the city, Thompson demonstrated just how frightening masculinity could be. Ironically, it is through this fear that the reader is able to come to a new understanding of the relationships between men, and that masculinity is not necessarily all that frightening in the end. If Sydney’s reward for navigating the multiple masculine relationships he encounters is domestic tranquility, the reader’s reward is the knowledge that sodomites and other monstrous males exist in the city, and that their relationships mirror the relationships between other men. As a result, what was once terrifying and monstrous, because unknown, is no longer quite so scary.
Chapter Four

Beautiful Monsters

When the Swedish vampire movie, *Let The Right One In*, was released in the United States in October 2008, the critical response was almost unanimously positive. Many critics agreed with Elena Oumano that “Right One returns to the archetype of the immortal its poetic cohesiveness and the power of myth.”

The film, based on John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel *Let Me In*, tells the story of Oskar, a lonely boy who is tormented by bullies at school and spends his nights alone in the snowy courtyard of his apartment building in the Stockholm suburbs. Oskar collects news clippings about murder and fantasizes about getting revenge on his tormentors with a knife. Oskar’s life changes when he meets a young girl, Eli, who lives next door to him. The intense relationship that forms between Oskar and Eli is only briefly shaken when Oskar learns that Eli is a vampire who must feed on blood to survive. (Eli lives with an older man named Håkan who kills to gather blood for Eli, and who Oskar and the viewer at first suspect might be her father, although it later becomes clear that he is not.

The question of their relationship is one of the more haunting aspects of the film, in part because it plays on notions of monstrous child sexuality.) While Oskar seems somewhat torn about his feelings for her after learning that Eli is a vampire, he hardly pauses at all when he

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93 As of March 2010, on the movie review metasite *Rotten Tomatoes*, the movie has a 97% rating. Of the 147 reviews logged by the website, 143 have been positive, and only four have been negative. Among the “Top Critics” tracked by the website, twenty-seven reviewed the film positively and only one gave the film a negative review.

94 Interestingly, in the novel, when Oskar asks whether Eli is a vampire, she tells him, “I … live on blood. But I am not … that” (271). The distinction is based on the fact that Eli never died and returned from the dead. I would argue that this fact makes her gender play all the more important, as it makes her more closely human, but strangely more monstrous.
learns, later in the film, that in addition to being a vampire, Eli is a boy. As a film that is on the one hand Gothic and on the other hand a careful study of the relationship between monstrous bodies and gender, *Let The Right One In* serves as a useful opening to begin thinking about the two novels that are the subject of this chapter: Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite* and Theodore Winthrop’s *Cecil Dreeme*. I will read both these novels as meditations on the meaning of masculinity and the relationship between monstrosity, masculinity, the body, and sexuality. In both *Let The Right One In* and *The Hermaphrodite* Gothic horror erupts out of the gap between body and gender, often with terrifying results. *Cecil Dreeme*, by contrast, demonstrates that embracing the gap and living past the moments of Gothic horror opens the hopeful possibility that gender might not turn out to be an insurmountable horror. Each of these texts rhetorically severs gender from sex, producing horror that is knowable through Gothic tropes. For Eli and Laurence this severance is also destructive, and they wallow in the self-negation that results from their complex monstrosity. The Gothic, for them, is inescapable. Cecil Dreeme escapes from the Gothic and embraces self-negation’s productive value: what *Cecil Dreeme* suggests is that these moments of self-negation are opportunities for a new beginning, and what Robert Byng finds in Cecil Dreeme are new forms of masculinity and new possibilities for male intimacy.

Each of these texts centers on a body that is in some way made monstrous, and that thus serves as a figure through which other characters and the reader can understand their own bodies. That this monstrosity is often tied to gender makes these figures productive focal points for an attempt to understand the way that gender is born out of...

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95 By “boy” I mean that Eli was born as a biological male. As I will discuss, the novel and the film raise serious questions about the connection between biology and gender.
fear of the monstrous. Elizabeth Grosz argues, “[t]he freak is an object of simultaneous horror and fascination because [...] the freak is an ambiguous being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life” (57). Like “freaks,” these monsters exist in a special place on the continuum of humanity that makes visible how so-called normal gender is constructed, and what “normal” gender fears. All of the characters discussed in what follows—Eli in Let The Right One In, Laurence in The Hermaphrodite, and Cecil Dreeme in Cecil Dreeme—are defined as much by their ambiguity as they are by their humanity. As a central trope in the Gothic, ambiguity connects the representations of monstrous genders with an understanding of what makes gender so frightening. One source of the fright is, as Grosz argues, the fact that freaks and the monstrous “occupy the impossible middle ground,” a position that challenges our attempt to classify identities using neat binaries (57). However, as Leslie Fiedler has argued, the affective response to “real” monsters is more powerful than fabulous ones: “[t]he true Freak [...] stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious” (Freaks 24). Because each of the monstrous figures that I discuss in this chapter are recognizably human, their ambiguity takes on a metaphorical power that makes them particularly useful for understanding how gender is created out of fear.

Although the book and film in which Eli plays such an important role were created over a hundred years after the other texts under consideration in this chapter, thinking about the fear associated with her vampiric body and gender in Let The Right One In provides a useful entry into understanding two things: first, why these texts
introduce Gothic elements as the main characters struggle with masculinity—struggles that are brought about by the distance between their genders and their bodies—and, second, why much of the powerful affect in the texts, both positive and negative, emerges out of the ontological gap between their bodies and their genders. I am borrowing the notion of “ontological gap” from Eve Sedgwick’s essay “White Glasses,” where she describes the possibilities of identifications “across gender, […] across sexualities, across ‘perversions.’ And across the ontological gap between the living and the dead” (257). The notion of an identification across the gap of mortality is central to Let The Right One In, in which Eli and Oskar’s relationship is defined by this gap: while unlike most vampires, Eli is not undead (a fact made clear in the book, but left uncertain in the movie), Eli and Oskar’s relationship is defined by death and the desire for death. The gap between the living and the dead is important in both The Hermaphrodite and Cecil Dreeme as well, as I will discuss.

This chapter also follows Judith Halberstam’s assertion that “masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects” (Female Masculinity 1).96 A focus only on masculinity as it adheres to the biologically male body, risks reasserting biology and reaffirming the primacy of maleness in general, and white maleness in particular. By looking at the way masculinity functions among a diverse group of bodies, I hope to demonstrate in this chapter how the relationship between fear, the Gothic, and masculinity affects not just biological males, but all sorts of bodies and

96 The study of masculinity also has the potential to have a positive impact on feminist studies as well. As Kaja Silverman notes, “[t]o effect a large-scale reconfiguration of male identification and desire would, at the very lest, permit female subjectivity to be lived differently than it is at present. […] The theoretical articulation of some-non-phallic masculinities would consequently seem to be an urgent feminist project” (3).
all sorts of masculinities. Yet while I agree with Halberstam’s claim that masculinity often “becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body” (2), I am less certain that we already know the white male body “intimately and ad nauseam” (3). My concern is that statements like Halberstam’s risk doing the very thing that she accuses studies of white middle-class male masculinity of doing: that is, “recenter[ing] [the] white male body” (2). In other words, by identifying white middle-class male masculinity as the known quantity in this equation, and thus moving outward as if from the known into the unknown, we risk undoing decades of work done by feminist theory, queer theory, critical race studies, and any number of other academic movements. We risk creating a foundational identity compared to which all other identities become imperfect repetitions. Instead, I argue that we should recognize the ways in which studies of masculinity are haunted by white middle-class masculinity, and that one important area of inquiry should be to understand this haunting masculine presence.97

97 By arguing that we should not neglect white middle-class male masculinity, my point is that there is always a risk of myopia that comes with placing limits on an investigation before the investigation has begun. All intellectual inquiry is by its nature limited, but it is important to avoid allowing arbitrary limits to foreclose our understandings of a text. I would argue that this is particularly important in discussions of gender, which continues to be a highly contentious issue, as demonstrated by several contemporary political developments. During recent debates over textbook standards in Texas, standards that could very well impact curricula across the country, one board member expressed concern over teaching high school students the differences between gender and sex out of fear that exposing students to these concepts would “lead students into the world of ‘transvestites, transsexuals, and who knows what else’” (Alexander). The curriculum that inspired such fear in this board member had asked students to “examine how the traditional roles of men and women had changed since the 1950’s” (Binckes). That the objection passed by a vote of 9-6, eliminating the discussion of gender from the curriculum, suggests just how terrifying gender play can still be for some people. An example of this sort of fear that strikes closer to home for many academics is the recent founding of the Foundation for Male Studies at Wagner College in New York.
The relationship between Eli and Oskar in *Let the Right One In* is a perfect example of the way that the workings of gender are made visible when gender adheres to a non-normative body. Midway through the film, Oskar hugs Eli after she becomes sick from eating candy (the suggestion being that while she can only consume blood, she tries to be normal because of her affection for Oskar). Eli asks Oskar whether he likes her. When he replies, “Yeah, a lot,” Eli asks, “If I wasn’t a girl would you like me anyway?” Oskar’s response, “I suppose so. Why do you ask?”, demonstrates the distance between his affection and a specific gendered object. Later, after feeding on the man who we originally thought was her father, Eli knocks at Oskar’s window and asks to come in, telling him not to look at her. Naked, and with a mouth covered with dried blood, Eli climbs into Oskar’s bed. Oskar, after struggling to overcome his hesitation, asks Eli, “Want to go steady?” Because Eli does not understand the question, Oskar clarifies: “Do you want to be my girlfriend?” Eli’s response, “Oskar…I’m not a girl,” is the most explicit clue we have to this point about the true nature of her body and her gender.98 While on one level her answer could suggest that she means that she is a vampire, nothing in the film suggests that one could not be a vampire and a girl at the same time;

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According to Lionel Tiger, a anthropologist at Rutgers, “It’s not men’s studies as contrasted to women’s studies. It’s a study of males without all the ideology and self-righteousness of feminists about turning over patriarchy” (qtd. in Goudreau). While there are many things about this statement that should be troubling to anyone studying the social constructions of masculinity—the patriarchal dismissiveness of feminism that disproves his own point, for example—not the least of those things is the willful blindness behind the assertion that we can possibly understand masculinity without understanding patriarchy.

in the world of the film, vampirism does not preclude gender. When Eli tells Oskar that she is not a girl, what she means is that she was born biologically male. Oskar’s response, then, is telling. Uncertain what Eli’s comment means for their relationship, Oskar pauses briefly before asking again, “But do you want to go steady or not?”

Later in the film, any remaining uncertainty that Oskar might have is destroyed in a shocking moment of onscreen adolescent nudity, during which we see, along with Oskar, the scars on Eli’s body from castration. Eli was once a young boy who was castrated: he became a vampire and took on the role of a girl the same time. In Let The Right One In, the horrors associated with vampirism are born out of the gap between body and gender. Oskar hardly hesitates to cross this gap, as demonstrated by his decision at the end of the movie to leave his home and family and go with Eli. The viewer is left with the suggestion that Oskar will take on the role left open by the death of Eli’s “father”: he will eventually agree to kill for Eli, who wields a power over the men in her life.

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99 Much like the members of the Texas school board willfully turned a blind eye to the importance of gender, critics writing about Let The Right One In have a tendency to overlook or misread it. David Ansen’s review for Newsweek is symptomatic of a general tendency of many critics. Describing an encounter between Eli and Oskar, he writes “‘I’m not a girl,’ she warns him, skittish of starting a friendship. Indeed she’s not—she’s a vampire, eternally frozen at age 12, and dependent on an older man who's not a vampire (perhaps her father, perhaps not) who kills for her, and brings her the blood of his victims to sustain her eternal life” (Ansen). For Ansen, Eli’s defining characteristic is her vampirism, despite the fact that he notes that for a vampire movie, Let The Right One In does not feature much death. In a brief summary of the film, the anonymous reviewer for NY Magazine recognizes the complexities of Eli’s gender, but misreads it as sexuality: “A lonely, beleaguered-by-bullies blond boy has a new neighbor in his apartment complex, a darkish girl of rather ambiguous sexuality and even more ambiguous humanity.” These comments reflect the way the movie plays with the uncertainty around Eli’s gender and her vampirism.

100 As I will discuss, the book is much clearer about both the origins of Eli’s vampirism and violence done to her body.
In part because of the differences between the representational potential in a novel and in a film, in *Let Me In*, Oskar’s psychological uncertainty surrounding his feelings for Eli is much clearer. It is also clearer that the existence of vampires is easier for Oskar to handle than the complexity of gender suggested by Eli. Not surprisingly, for a young boy new to sexuality, much of this complexity centers on the nature of desire and the implications of Eli’s gender deviance for their relationship. Shortly after learning that Eli’s true name is Elias, Oskar has a moment of realization:

> when he said her name aloud he remembered that it was wrong. That was the last thing she had said as they lay together on the couch. That her real name was … Elias. *Elias*. A boy’s name. Was Eli a boy? They had … kissed and slept in the same bed and … […] He tried hard to think. Hard. And he didn’t get it. That he could somehow accept that she was a *vampire*, but the idea that she was somehow a *boy*, that that could be … *harder*.\(^{101}\) (307)

What spawns Oskar’s fear is what Eli’s ambiguous gender says about himself, and how it might change what he thought were stable markers of his own identity—he worries that his affection for Eli will make him a “Fucking fag” in the eyes of his tormenters (307).\(^{102}\) Oskar’s concern about his sexuality is tied to the potential violence it might bring him, violence that Eli has helped him to overcome by teaching him to fight back. By convincing him to stand up for himself, Eli has been paramount in Oskar’s developing

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\(^{101}\) It is important to note that, as in the film, in the novel Oskar overcomes this uncertainty and abandons his life to be with Eli. Gender trouble and vampirism are less important that companionship.

\(^{102}\) Both the film and the book also imply that Oskar’s parents are divorced because his father might be gay, which could also play a role in Oskar’s fear about the public perception of his sexuality.
masculinity. Constantly picked on by bullies before Eli’s arrival, Oskar comes into his own as a confident young man only after Eli suggests that he fight back. Oskar’s confusion over Eli’s gender (and his own sexuality) manifests an uncertainty in his own masculinity, and his concern that his relationship will challenge his newfound manhood. In the novel, when Oskar first sees Eli naked, he impulsively reverts back to an earlier stage in his masculine development. The most startling aspect of Eli’s prepubescent body is its lack of genitalia:

The small nipples looked almost black against her pale white skin. Her upper body was slender, straight, and without much in the way of contours. Only the ribs stood out clearly in the sharp overhead light. Her thin arms and legs appeared unnaturally long the way they grew out of her body: a young sapling covered with human skin. Between the legs she had … nothing. No slit, no penis. Just a smooth surface (347).

Gender neutral because arrested before puberty, Eli’s body could easily pass as either male or female, if she had genitalia. This detail is not lost on Oskar, who looks to the genitalia to provide answers. “But you don’t have a … willie,” he says, unable to avoid using a “ridiculous mommy-word” (347). Oskar is unable to act as nonchalantly masculine as he would like when confronted with Eli’s body.¹⁰³

In these texts, sexuality plays a central role in awakening the affective response to Eli’s gender. That Eli’s kiss allows Oskar to experience the literal emasculation suffered

¹⁰³ At this point in the novel, the pronouns used to describe Eli shift from feminine to masculine as if the narrative cannot contain the space opened up by Eli’s complex gender and therefore must return to biological determinacy. It is as if biology overpowers the narrative. I continue to use the feminine pronoun to describe Eli in order to reflect the gender she performs in the text.
by Eli as he was both castrated and turned into a vampire attests to the importance of gender to Oskar’s dilemma about his own sexuality. One of Eli’s more unusual powers is her ability to suck Oskar into her memories by kissing him. While she holds her lips pressed to his, Oskar experiences first-hand the trauma in Eli’s past. In this moment of transubstantiation, Oskar (as Eli) has been brought with his mother to a ceremony at the home of an odd man with painted nails and a wig. Several other children have been brought as well. This man, whose painted nails and wig mark his gender deviance, selects Oskar from the group and takes him into a dark chamber, where his limbs are bound and a rope is placed in his mouth. Oskar is laid upon a table with a hole that lets his “willie”104 hang through. In a moment of blinding pain, Oskar is castrated and his blood is gathered in a bowl. Oskar “[s]ees the bowl the man is holding in his hands, the bowl he brings to his mouth and how he drinks. […] The man bites. And drinks. Bites. And drinks” (353-4). Castration and vampirism are one, connected through Eli’s past. Eli as Gothic monster is born alongside Eli’s gender play.

It is worth noting that there is no reason that Eli could not have continued to live as a male, despite being castrated. Halted in prepubescence, Eli’s body is indeterminate, particularly when she is dressed. Thus the onset of monstrosity is tied to a fear of being inappropriately masculine—she could be a boy, but to what degree could she be masculine? Further, as much as the novel and film are about vampirism, they are also about the spread of gender trouble. To use the vampire metaphor, Eli is bitten by the strange man in the wig and infected, and then she infects Oskar, only this time there is no biting. Gender deviance spreads like vampirism. Oskar worries that his contact with Eli

104 The use of this word for a second time connects Eli’s castration to Oskar’s own concerns about masculinity.
has made him a vampire; he even goes so far as to tell his mom, “I’m infected. [...] I’m going to be a vampire” (374-5). When he begins to fear that he has been “infected” Oskar’s first decision is to help Eli and take care of her: “I’ll kill someone. I’ll go and get the knife and then I’ll go out and kill someone. Jonny. I’ll slit his throat and gather up his blood and then I’ll bring it home for Eli because what does it matter now that I’m infected and soon I will” (365, emphasis in the original). As evidenced by Oskar’s readiness to embrace violence, *Let the Right One In* and *Let Me In* suggest that monstrosity breeds monstrosity. Oskar’s desires foster a willingness to murder when exposed to Eli’s monstrosity. What makes Eli monstrous is not her vampirism, but that she has the ability to control others and induce their help. This ability is tied to her gender performance and her ability to inspire a desiring masculinity in those around her.

While on one level the novel and film seem to suggest that femininity is monstrous by connecting Eli’s femininity with her becoming a vampire and the desire she inspires in those who she comes in contact with, Eli seems to have chosen to live as a young girl because it allows her to be disassociated from monstrosity. Eli recognizes the power of abandoning masculinity. Those who encounter Eli are less likely to fear her because she is not masculine. In other words, Eli takes advantage of an association between fear and masculinity in order to appear less monstrous. Vampirism and monstrosity thus become more associated with masculinity than with femininity. Oskar, who sees Eli as both beautiful and a monster (female and male), recognizes as much. Playing with Eli, Oskar is torn between two images of Eli: “Oskar took his knife out of the bag, held it out, and proclaimed that he was the Knight of Ängby Maybe. Wanted Eli to be the Beautiful Maiden he would rescue from the Dragon. […] But Eli was a terrible
monster who ate beautiful maidens for lunch and she was the one he would have to fight” (211). Not surprisingly, Håkan, the man at first confused with Eli’s father, sees Eli in the same way. On first meeting Eli, “[h]e had done everything without wondering whether Eli was ‘evil’ or ‘good’ or anything else. Eli was beautiful and Eli had given him back his dignity. And in rare moments … tenderness” (215-6). Eli, recognizing her ability to spread monstrous desires preys upon males who are already struggling with masculinity: they are insecure and troubled. Eli takes advantage of this insecurity by teaching them to be masculine, but then uses the intimacy born out of this process to bend the men to her will. What allows Eli to navigate the line between beauty and monstrosity is her recognition of the way gender can be exploited in the service of survival. Eli knows when to be beautiful, and when to be a monster.

In *Let The Right One In* and *Let Me In* Gothic horror erupts out of the desexing/gendering of the body, and out of the gap between gender and sex, a conclusion shared by Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite*. Yet whereas in *Let The Right One In* the struggle involves making a desexed body gendered, in *The Hermaphrodite*, horror arises out of attempting to make a multiple body manifest masculinity. Much like Eli, Laurence, the narrator of Julia Ward Howe’s *The Hermaphrodite*, knows something about beautiful monsters. Late in the novel, after struggling with his masculinity and the affection of both a woman, Emma, who wants him to be a man for her, and a boy, Ronald, who wants him to be a woman for him, Laurence encounters Ronald, now

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105 Early on in their acquaintance Laurence says of Ronald, “he could scarce have outnumbered sixteen summers” (50). As he says later, the reason Laurence describes Ronald as a “child” despite only being “half a luster” older is that “the distance which experience had placed between us seemed to me more than that of many years” (66).
grown into his masculine inheritance. Ronald relates how after Laurence left him, he grew sick and eventually left the University where he had been studying. Wandering aimlessly, Ronald suffers from Gothic visions (Laurence has a tendency to inspire such things in people, just like Eli inspired visions of murder and the fulfillment of murderous desires): “all things in [the world] seemed to me unreal shifting phantoms, and my life, one restless dream. Spirits now seized hold upon me, and claimed me as their prey, they mocked at me, and made to themselves cruel sport with my sorrow. Devils have led me up into mountain tops, and have told me: ‘she is there’” (191). Yet Ronald has overcome his visions and adopted “the duties of [his] birth and station” (192). In other words, Ronald has accepted the masculine role dictated him both by birth and society, a destiny that was disrupted by Laurence’s presence. Now, encountering Laurence again for the first time since they separated, Ronald confesses the feelings Laurence has inspired in him. He kisses Laurence “on cheek, brow, lip, and said musingly to himself: ‘by day perhaps again, but by night, never, never!’” (193). Ronald’s admission of the desire he still feels for Laurence awakens in Laurence shame, and then agony, and he grasps Ronald to him. Laurence narrates, “One long gaze of tearless anguish, one mute appeal to heaven, and Ronald was gone, and the beautiful monster sat as before on the heap of stones, in the ancient forum, himself as mute and dead as any thing there” (193). I will have more to say later about Laurence’s assertion that at this moment he is “as mute and

106 Because the novel was never published and now only exists in manuscript fragments, it is difficult to say with certainty the order of events Howe intended. Gary Williams, the editor of the modern edition, has ordered the fragments in the form that seems most logical. For more on the arrangement of the text, see Williams “A Note on the Text” xlv-xlvi. See also Williams Hungry Heart 80-105.

107 Ronald notes of his sorrow and newfound masculinity, “The weak among men are crushed by sorrow—the trivial fling it from them—the strong bear it” (193). Laurence’s role in helping Ronald become a man is clear.
dead as anything there,” especially in connection with his use of the masculine pronoun. For now I want to concentrate on Laurence’s use of the phrase “beautiful monster” to describe himself.\(^{108}\)

In many ways, Ronald serves as a mirror image of Laurence, and a reminder of what could have been had Laurence’s body matched his gender. As the privileged heir to his father’s fortune, Ronald inhabits the typical masculinity that Laurence performs, especially during his early years. Because the first page of the manuscript is missing, the novel begins in the middle of a paragraph describing Laurence’s parents’ decision to raise him as a male, despite the biological indeterminacy of his body. By focusing on the socio-economic reasons behind his parents’ decisions, Laurence acknowledges what it would be hard for someone in his position to deny: masculinity has no inherent core, and is instead based on appearances and acts. Laurence explains that his parents “resolved to invest me with the dignity and insignia of manhood” (3).\(^{109}\) The use of the market term

\(^{108}\) Williams reads the novel autobiographically. Specifically, he sees Laurence as “an embodiment of the ‘beautiful monster’ Julia Howe discovered she had married” (Intro xxvii). Williams points to the relationship between Samuel Gridley Howe and Charles Sumner as the source of much of the ambiguous gender in the novel. While the biographical source is convincing, I am more interested in understanding the way that masculinity functions in the novel, and what it can tell us about Gothic masculinity in antebellum America. See also Williams Hungry Heart 80-105.

\(^{109}\) At various times in history, and particularly in the eighteenth century, the more obvious solution would be to raise Laurence as a female because of a “popular tendency to think of all hermaphrodites as female” (Trumbach 117). As The Hermaphrodite shows, by the nineteenth century there are clear economic as well as social reasons for raising an ambiguous child as a male. The economic and social differences between masculinity and femininity and the privileges of each gender has lent an air of suspicion to attempts at selecting the true “sex” of an ambiguous individual. As Alice Dreger argues, “[b]ecause the roles allotted men and women were so different, actions in cases of mistaken sex were sometimes suspected of being motivated by profit, and it was true that some hermaphrodites sought a revision of their sexual status from female to male precisely because their earning potential would immediately increase. One supposed English ‘woman,’ for instance, tried to claim she was ‘the rightful heir to a title’ because
“invest” is key here: Laurence’s parents see assigning Laurence a masculine gender as a good investment both literally and metaphorically. There is social and economic value to masculinity: masculinity will “permit [Laurence] to choose [his] own terms in associating with the world” (3). While the novel is entirely set in Europe, the language of economic opportunity reflects the economic changes in America during the period surrounding the novel’s composition. Laurence, by being raised as a man, will be able to navigate the market in ways not available to females. There is an economic investment for the parents as well, as raising Laurence as a man provides them with a male heir. Shortly before Laurence’s birth, his father falls ill, “and death appeared to him doubly formidable from the thought that his cherished lands and title must pass from his own family” (29). The potential independence for males is doubly important for Laurence, “who could never hope to become the half of another” (3).

Laurence is sent to a boys’ boarding school in order to learn masculinity: so that he “might become robust and manly, and haply learn to seem that which [he] could never be” (3). The attempt to masculinize Laurence at school is both too successful and, on the surface, a failure. Laurence notes, “my career was more prosperous than could have been anticipated,” and his father soon learns that by initiating his son into masculinity he has

of what she said was her ‘true male’ sex. Her claim failed, and instead the ‘woman’ landed in an asylum, her penis-like organ suspected of actually having grown from her delusions of malehood” (57-8). Clearly, Laurence’s parents hope to avoid just such an incident. Cases like this emphasize the way that the hermaphroditic body can become the most visible marker of the implications of a society’s sex/gender system by making manifest the gendered impact of supposedly biological differences. For more on the sex/gender system see Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women.”

110 Williams suggests that Howe began working on the novel sometime in 1846-7. See Hungry Heart 80. For more on the economic changes during the antebellum period, see Sellers The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 and Kimmel Manhood in America, especially 11-79. For the dark side of the new economy, see Sandage Born Losers.
lost the ability to control him. When his father comes to school to tell him that his brother has been born and his mother has died, Paternus (the father) finds “an indifference and pride which might have seemed the reflection of his own” (4). It is in his relationship with his father that Laurence demonstrates many of the most typical characteristics of masculinity: pride, will, independence.\textsuperscript{111}

Laurence’s independence is most pronounced in his confrontations with his father, particularly those about Laurence’s position as the eldest “male” son. In these confrontations we see Laurence embracing the cultural and institutional support for masculinity. Laurence’s father’s lack of regard for his son is clearly tied to Laurence’s ambiguous gender: the attention Laurence does receive is entirely due to his “rights of primogeniture” (23); all “paternal tenderness” is focused on Laurence’s younger brother Philip.\textsuperscript{112} When Laurence returns home from school, he learns that Paternus has decided to redirect his patrimony to Philip. To do so, Paternus threatens Laurence with the institutional power behind gender, telling Laurence, “You stand there, and dictate terms

\textsuperscript{111} As historian Michael Kimmel has argued, as early as the American Revolution, “[b]eing a man meant […] not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control” (14). Seen through this lens, even the Declaration of Independence “was a declaration of manly adulthood” (14). Similarly, Bruce Dorsey notes the importance of the “language of independence” for “true manliness” among “the middling ranks of white men” (19). This discourse of independent manliness carried through the antebellum period, informing everything from discussion of poverty to arguments for temperance (Dorsey 35-6; 122-3).

\textsuperscript{112} Laurence does have sisters, but not surprisingly in a text so concerned with the appearances of masculinity, they are hardly mentioned. All Laurence tells us about the sisters is that “[t]he elder of them had married money, the younger had married love. Money was of course stupid and tedious, Love was a pretty man, but had probably seen his best days. Lady Money was cold and haughty, and iced me with a glittering smile. Lady Love was shy and timid, yet she glanced kindly at me […]” (25). It is worth noting that Laurence identifies these men by characteristics that also define their available models of masculinity for Laurence: they have taken on the attributes of their respective markers. For Laurence money is “stupid and tedious,” while love is “pretty” but in the past.
to me, presuming yourself the heir to my fortunes and estates. You know not, young sir, that I have power to disinherit you, *if the inclination should not be wanting.* [...] Yes, the power to strip you of name, fortune, and position, and to hold up your assumed manhood to the scorn of society” (28). Laurence’s ambiguity, which had originally provided his parents with the ability to dictate his gender, and thus maintain the family legacy, now becomes a way to disempower Laurence. Presumably, Paternus’s plan would involve exposing Laurence’s body to the prying gaze of institutionalized medicine. Paternus’s power, and his masculinity, depends on his ability to wield the institutional authority of the law, medicine, and title and to impose his will on those around him. By christening Laurence as a man at birth, Paternus has not only given Laurence a masculine identity, he has invested him with a similar masculine authority based on title. Paternus tells Laurence that he was “born imperfect” and that “[i]t was difficult to determine [his] sex with precision, it was in fact impossible” (29). But this impossible ambiguity is a source for possibility: “[...] the exigency of the case decided for us. Under the circumstances we deemed it most expedient to bestow on you the name and rights of a man” (29).

While Paternus is right to note that they have given Laurence both the name and rights of a man, what he does not mention is that by gendering Laurence as a man, they also bestow on him the institutional power of manly independence, as indicated by his status as an heir.

Laurence understands the institutional power of masculinity, and he wields it as powerfully as his father. In response to Paternus’s threat, Laurence puts forth a similarly institutionalized defense of gender, telling his father “I shall take legal and medical

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113 I will discuss the medicalization of the hermaphrodite more fully later.
advice upon the subject” (28). In the face of institutional manhood, Laurence brings to bear his own institutional manhood, and successfully stands his ground: “My father’s coup d’état had failed. He had hoped to astonish and overwhelm me, but he had not found me unarmed” (28). While his father threatens him with disinherition, Laurence understands his fight to inherit his father’s title, and the “danger and disgrace” that would come from his father’s attempt to make public his knowledge. Laurence knows that while Paternus could feasibly out him, doing so would rebound back on his father, particularly for his complicity in the original act of gendering. Ironicaly, what was originally considered a wise investment—raising Laurence as a man—has not earned Paternus the return hoped for, and the main impetus for exposing the discrepancy between Laurence’s body and gender is his desire to reinvest his title in his youngest son, Philip. Laurence gives up his inheritance in favor of his brother, but he does so by choice. Masculinity acts as a power to be wielded, and, because the law and the institutional power of inheritance back it, it invests Laurence’s ambiguous body with a manly independence and will that he is able to use to his advantage. While he does relinquish his patrimony, it is on his terms, and it is through the masculine power that he wields that he is able to empower his brother with a similar masculinity.

While I am arguing that Laurence is invested in a familiar form of masculinity, I do not want to argue that his masculinity is “normal.” As I suggested earlier, Laurence’s parents’ attempt to masculinize him by sending him to a boy’s school is both a success and a failure. I want to now point to the ways in which Laurence’s attempts to fully embrace a masculine identity are disrupted by his ambiguous body, and the Gothic horror that often results from this disruption. It is important to note, though, that the ways his
body disrupts his masculinity are not always what we would expect. While he does suffer from his lack of brawn, the ambiguity of his body makes him simultaneously more appealing to females, and thus a threat to men around him. When Laurence is at school, he excels academically, and despite his parents’ hope that he will “become robust and manly,” instead his “comrades learned to play more gently with me than with each other” (3). Intellectually, he is marked by “a more vivid imagination, and a feebler power of reasoning” (3). As he develops, Laurence’s increasingly ambiguous body makes it difficult to maintain his masculinity. When his body “threaten[s] to take a strongly feminine development,” he has recourse to his intellectual superiority (4). Perhaps surprisingly, the ambiguous duality of Laurence’s nature serves his masculinity by giving his social behavior a distinct focal point. By taking advantage of the attraction females feel towards him, attraction resulting from the more feminine aspects of his nature (including his “physical modesty” and “sensitiveness to kindness” [3]), Laurence is more able to demonstrate his masculinity. Utilizing the proximity to women generated by his feminine characteristics (and his “rare beauty” and “classic grace” [4]), Laurence gains an object for the chivalric demonstration of his masculinity.

Laurence’s ambiguous duality serves his masculinity in a way that a “normal” male body would not. Because of the characteristics that might on the surface qualify him as effeminate, “[w]omen often [give him] proofs of a stronger interest than any inspired by mere benevolence” (4). While other men must resort to various acts in order to win the attention of women, Laurence’s very duality becomes a source of attraction. Building on this feminine attraction, Laurence uses his superior intellect to recognize the role he needs to play: “It was sufficiently easy for me to vie with my fellow-students in
rendering every courtesy to these fair creatures. [...] and though of warmer blood and more generous nature than most of my fellows, I yet in comparison with them seemed cold and statue-like” (5). Laurence’s body exists in a complex relation to the socio-cultural expectations of gender. By recognizing these expectations, Laurence uses the duality of his body to enact masculinity—acting chivalrous, pursuing girls—while taking advantage of the increased access granted to him. Because the ambiguities about his body manifest themselves in cultural ways, Laurence is able to get exactly what he wants from each gender. What Laurence wants from each gender fits with the social expectations for masculinity and femininity, and plays an important role in his ability to exist as a man. Laurence’s body suggests a dual nature, but his attitudes towards the world reflect his masculinity (and masculine assumptions about gender roles): “For man or woman, as such, I felt an entire indifference—when I wished to trifle, I preferred the latter, when I wished to reason gravely, I chose the former. I sought sympathy from women, advice from men, but love from neither” (5). Of all people, Laurence is uniquely positioned to recognize the cultural expectations of gender. Because his body serves him as a constant reminder of the gap between sex and gender, Laurence, more than others, must rely on the cultural expectations of gendered behavior to navigate the social world without drawing unwanted attention. Hence, his chivalry towards women. And while when confronted with the ambiguous nature of his body by his father Laurence asserts the naturalness of his gender, claiming, “It was expedient [to raise him as a man] only because it was right” (29), his descriptions of males and females around him suggest that Laurence is also clearly aware of the nature of his masculine performance. Further,
Laurence’s awareness allows him to exist in a sort of harmonious balance between the two genders, while maintaining his masculinity.

Two encounters threaten to unsettle Laurence’s masculine persona: his early encounter with Emma von P, a rich widow who becomes the center of attention for all the young men at Laurence’s school, and his later encounter with Ronald, the young man who becomes Laurence’s protégé after Laurence undergoes a self-imposed religious exile. Both of these encounters are defined by the gender of the subjects, and the way that gender dictates relationships. Therefore, these two encounters become the moments in the text that Laurence’s gender is made most explicit. Circulating through these encounters are notions of the way genders relate and create one another, and as such they make visible the performance of Laurence’s gender in ways that the rest of Laurence’s narrative tries to obscure. Both these encounters turn on queerly Gothic affective eruptions, eruptions that signify the powerful discourse around gender, and that demonstrate the affectively productive nature of the gap between Laurence’s body and his gender. That the affect in both instances is built on notions of horror and death should come as no surprise: as we saw with *Let the Right One In*, the gap between the body and gender becomes an affectively charged source of disruption when made visible. *The Hermaphrodite*, like *Let the Right One In*, suggests that the attempts to create a gender distinct from biological determinants can be a terrifying thing for those who come into contact with the reality of the performance.

Emma Von P. represents the tantalizing unknown for the young men at the school. As a “handsome and sprightly widow” and a “fully developed woman” (6, 7), Emma has access to a wealth of sexual knowledge that heightens her appeal and sets her
apart from the women to whom these young men are normally exposed. Further, as an outsider “from a gay metropolis, where her life had been embellished by station and wealth” (6), Emma represents sophistication, wealth, and urban sexuality, all appealing qualities to the young men at the college. It should be no surprise then that Emma becomes the focal point for the young students’ chivalry.

Laurence, however, again sits in a unique position with regards to the others. While they ply Emma with flowers and affection and “vie[] with each other in their adoration of her,” Laurence abstains (7). It is his unique position, his “occupying a middle ground” between the young men who desire Emma and the young women who envy her, that allows him to read the situation and understand the gender conventions at play. His unique masculinity makes Laurence a perfect observer of the ways masculinity functions among those around him, and enables him to demonstrate his masculine mastery of the situation. Watching his classmates vie for Emma’s attention, Laurence notes the errors of their ways. As young men, Emma’s suitors attempt to outdo each other in their gifts and their attention: “[f]or such is the generous ambition of youth, it is who shall give most, and its day dream is to deserve affection of one beloved by devotion and true service” (7). Laurence contrasts this fawning attention with a more maturely masculine approach to courtship: “[m]en of a riper age are better calculators—it is their business to receive as much, and give as little as possible, and the vision with which they delight themselves is one of fond, beautiful women, driven to distraction by their indifference, and vying with each other in their endeavors to win the worthless love of one who loves himself” (7). As courtship advice, Laurence’s claim is dubious, but as recognition of the various manifestations of masculinity, his claim is quite astute. By
applying masculine rationality to romance, Laurence states, men are more successful at garnering the attention of females, a clear marker of masculinity. Laurence’s observation is proven correct when Emma “turn[s] from the crowd of her admirers to look upon the unapproachable Laurence, whose greatest merit may have been that he seemed to trouble himself very little about her” (7-8). By earning Emma’s attention and affection Laurence is able to establish his masculinity through one of the standard markers of masculine prowess: the love of a desired and desirable woman.\(^{114}\)

The same middle ground that makes Laurence particularly well suited to navigate the gendered world creates an alarming source of Gothic horror, exposing the affectively productive nature of Laurence’s gender. As many hermaphrodites have discovered, Laurence is walking a fine line. Often, it is when a hermaphrodite becomes physically involved with someone else that the bodily reality of the hermaphrodite is first discovered. Frequently it is only at this point that the hermaphrodite him- or herself first

\(^{114}\) Emma appeals to Laurence’s pride and sense of self, the same sense of pride so powerfully affected later by his father’s attempt to discredit his masculinity. As Laurence notes, “[t]here is something of coquetry in all human beings, and mine could not but experience a certain elation when Emma repulsed for my sake a crowd of suitors” (8). But Laurence also points out that “mak[ing] love to her” is “advantageous to [him]” (8). One of the most straightforward ways for Laurence to demonstrate his masculinity is to get Emma to fall in love with him. While Laurence never explicitly states that this is his purpose, his description of proper chivalry and his adherence to this plan suggest that Laurence is not being entirely honest with the reader. And, more importantly, while Laurence acts the part of the chivalric male alongside his classmates, prior to Emma’s arrival he is still set apart, even in the eyes of the females. While he may give them the same attention as the other young men around him, Laurence stands apart in the minds of the women “for he never makes love” (6). Emma, who as a widow is sexually aware, and as someone from the city is socially aware, becomes the perfect tool for Laurence to demonstrate his masculinity. Laurence’s purposes with Emma are strategic: through her he can become a man in the eyes of those around him. To use Laurence’s own language, Emma is an investment in his masculinity.
learns of their dual nature. What Laurence hopes to do is to take advantage of the gendering associated with romantic and sexual interactions without having to become physically or romantically involved. The danger for Laurence is that he plays the part too well. Through his attempt to masculinize himself, Laurence exposes the truth of his nature, which leads to intense moments of Gothic horror. In order to avoid any unwanted exposure, while still earning the benefits of feminine attraction, Laurence draws Emma’s attention, but tells her that he wants “relations of pure spirit” with her (15). As Axel Nissen has noted, “[w]hile sexual relations between couples were clearly less freighted with significance than they are today, Victorians loved to love and reflected at length on what love was and how it could be used as a force for good in human life. The love was not defined primarily by the gender of its object, but rather by its spiritual or ‘fleshly’ nature. In brief […] spiritual love was good […], fleshly love was bad” (6). The cult of true love described by Nissen was dependent on notions of manhood and womanhood, so while we may be tempted to read Laurence’s desire for a “spiritual” relationship with Emma as emasculating, the opposite could be true as well. His desire fits within culturally accepted norms for gendered behavior, having the added advantage of protecting his body from any unwanted attention.

That the gender of object choice is secondary to a gendered reading of the cult of true love is clear in *The Hermaphrodite*. Much like his relationship with Emma, Laurence’s relationship with Ronald has the benefit of being structured in such a way as to allow Laurence to take on a masculine role. As with the early sections of the book, by

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115 Alice Dreger documents numerous instances where a doctor discovers that a patient is hermaphroditic only when the patient comes in to learn why they have been unable to reproduce or why their body has not gone through normal sexual development. See Dreger *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* passim.
the time that Laurence encounters Ronald, he is still trying to demonstrate publicly that his gender fits within the culturally accepted rules for masculinity. The relationship is originally fraught because when Ronald first meets Laurence, he thinks Laurence is female. With long hair and loose clothing, Laurence appears feminine. Ronald’s attention to visual markers reflects his valuation of sex over gender: without any other basis for understanding Laurence, Ronald looks for the bodily markers of identity.\footnote{It should be noted that as Laurence ages, his body takes on more feminine characteristics, including breasts. On first getting dressed after his exile, Laurence describes the process as “submitting myself once more to the tyranny of coat, vest, and breeches,” a clear reference to the constraint he places on his body to hide its biological characteristics (61). This makes his performance of masculinity increasingly challenging. I will talk more about this later. In \textit{Epistemology of the Closet} Eve Sedgwick provides one of the clearest articulations of the differences between sex, sexuality, and gender. She defines sex as “a certain group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species Homo sapiens who have XX and those who have XY chromosomes (27). Sexuality she defines as “the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity-formations, and knowledges, in both women and men, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them” (29). Finally, gender, according to Sedgwick, is the far more elaborated, more fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors – of male and female \textit{persons} – in a cultural system for which ‘male/female’ functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many, many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex will often be exiguous or nonexistent” (27-8). For more on the relationship between sex (what Sedgwick demarcates “chromosomal sex” [27]) and gender, see Rubin.}

Confronted with Ronald’s biological determinism, Laurence has recourse to cultural constructions of gender to assert his identity, and when that fails, he simply states his “nature” outright. Walking to Ronald’s father’s castle for the first time, Ronald “seize[s] a stone of some size, and hurl[s] it at a rude target that stood near the house,” an act that Laurence describes as “boyish” so that he can offer his own masculinity in contrast (61). Laurence tells us, “I took up one of a double size, and hurled it to a double distance. ‘That’s no woman’s throw,’ I said, and Ronald could not contradict me” (61). This feat
of strength gives Laurence a simple way to contradict Ronald’s bodily understanding of
gender; Laurence counters body with body. It is clear, however, that Laurence is still
nervous about his perceived gender. When he arrives at the castle and is introduced to
Ronald’s father and tutors, Laurence asserts, “my name […] is Laurence, my nature,
masculine […]” (63). Laurence’s unusual assertion of his gender suggests that he is still
aware of the possibility of his body being misread, especially after Ronald assumes
Laurence is a woman.

As someone trying to embody a masculine identity, it would be logical for
Laurence to avoid such situations and uncertainties as Ronald presents. However, as a
protégé, Ronald allows Laurence to assert masculinity through authority and intelligence,
just like Emma allows Laurence to assert masculinity through the love of a woman.
Ronald seems perfectly willing to play the feminine to Laurence’s masculinity.
Laurence, “glad […] of the sympathy and companionship of one younger and feebler
than myself,” tells how Ronald “attached himself to me with almost feminine fondness”
(66). But Ronald offers something even more important to Laurence, the opportunity to
embrace his ambiguous multiplicity and revise his masculinity to encompass new
possibilities. As Ronald welcomes Laurence’s distaste of being around women, a distaste
he develops after the events surrounding his relationship with Emma, Laurence finds a
freedom being around only males. While he teaches Ronald “reason” (a masculine
quality during his time at school), Laurence finds “pleasure” in “show[ing] myself gentle
and tractable with Ronald, and to obey his innocent caprices as if he had been stronger,
and I the weaker of the twain” (68). When Laurence is unable fully to adapt masculinity
to suit his body in all situations, he has recourse to the masculine privacy of his
relationship with Ronald, in which masculinity takes on many forms. What Laurence hopes to realize in Ronald is the sort of spiritual love that he first sought with Emma, suggesting that for Laurence the gender of the object choice is secondary to the affective nature of the relationship. In a moment of Romantic desire, Laurence admits that his goal with Ronald is to help him progress “[f]rom childish love to manly knowledge, from manly knowledge to illuminated love” (69) by teaching him that the beauty of art can be born out of science. Laurence’s use of the phrase “illuminated love” is eerily reminiscent of his attempt to find “relations of pure spirit” with Emma.

Whether his intentions with Ronald and Emma are the same or not, the trouble Laurence runs into in both relationships is that while he can to a degree control his own performance of masculinity, he is unable to control the affective response of those around him. When the gap between Laurence’s ambiguous biology and his gender is rendered visible, the result is an eruption of Gothic affect. With Ronald, what Laurence fails to realize is that “[s]ome seeds were ripening there which I had never desired to sow, and Nature was slowly arousing in his breast some impulses with which I could not sympathize” (69). Things come to a head when Laurence agrees to take on the role of Juliet in a performance of Shakespeare’s play, and people in the audience begin to see the possibility that Laurence might be female. Ronald is infuriated by the assertion, and agrees to fight a duel with Frieherr Von ---------. Shortly thereafter, Ronald comes stumbling home, drunk after having fought. Laurence’s shock at seeing a Ronald who has lost his innocence is tempered by the attraction Laurence feels towards Ronald’s

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117 Read in the context of Laurence’s own education, this too suggests Laurence’s ambiguous nature. If we take at his word Laurence’s gendering of mental processes, the move from manly rationality to feminine art is especially the province of the hermaphrodite.
newfound masculine adulthood: “even in that evil moment, in that evil mood, how beautiful was he!” (86). Laurence’s attraction to Ronald in this moment serves as a reflection of Ronald’s own attraction to Laurence. Ronald tells Laurence that he has been fighting for “a lie,” a response that fires Laurence’s own emotions: “I had no words to express my terror, my surprise” (86).

This moment, replete with horror and beauty, turns on an understanding of Laurence’s gender. The “lie” that Ronald has fought for is the lie of manhood. Through violence, Ronald has asserted the truth of Laurence’s masculinity: “I have made it true to others—that lie, would you ask what it is?—your manhood” (86). This violence mirrors the violence associated with gender throughout Gothic literature. It is at moments like this that *The Hermaphrodite* is most clearly Gothic, and it is at moments like these that the ambiguous nature of Laurence’s body moves beyond sex and into notions of gendered monstrosity; to use Ronald’s phrase, which carries in it the trace of Laurence’s later description of himself as a “beautiful monster,” Laurence is an “angel-fiend” (86). That Ronald is willing to participate in Laurence’s duality suggests the power of gender in the Gothic. Overcome with the certainty of Laurence’s “true” nature, Ronald first begs Laurence to live a dual life with him: “You shall be a man to all the world, if you will, but a woman, a sweet, warm, living woman to me—you must love me, Laurence” (86).118 What Ronald does not realize is that even this arrangement would require doing violence to Laurence’s masculinity. As I have discussed, one of the appeals for Laurence of his relationship with Ronald is that it allows him to embrace masculinity while still

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118 It is worth noting that while Ronald asserts that the “lie” is Laurence’s “manhood,” the lie is equally Ronald’s own desire, and his seeming need to fix that desire on a female object. Even this desire, though, is born out of the ambiguous nature of Laurence’s body and his decision to exist as a male.
embracing his ambiguous nature. But Laurence is willing to embrace his ambiguity only so much, and such a bifurcation of gender as suggested by Ronald would violently destroy Laurence’s masculinity.

Because the scene is so rhetorically violent, violence, not surprisingly, is the outcome. For Laurence, the violence he turns to is suicide, and he grabs his pistols in order to kill himself, an action that suggests that for Laurence, the violence that Ronald suggests doing to Laurence’s masculinity is akin to death. Ronald resorts to violence of another sort. When Laurence refuses to go along with his plan, Ronald attempts violently to assert Laurence’s gender the only way he knows how: rape. Ronald grabs Laurence, and in a “hushed” and “terrible whisper” tells him,

Do not curse, do not pray, do not struggle—it is all in vain. I fear no curse but that of losing you—God himself, if there be a God, will not come between me and my right. I bear in my bosom a wondrous fire, a strange alchemy, that can turn marble itself to molten flame. You are mine by fate, mine by the power of my will, and my first crime is also yours, for it is born of the union of your soul and mine. (87)

Asserting his “right,” Ronald hopes to mold Laurence’s “marble” body into what he wants it to be.119 Through violence, Ronald hopes to gender Laurence feminine, forcing him into the subordinate, weak position that Laurence has tried to avoid through manly acts of strength and intellectual control. Ronald’s violence suggests that he hopes to

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119 Throughout the novel, Laurence is compared to marble. Emma, for example, tells Laurence that he is “like this marble against which I lean my head […], it is all marble, only marble” (12).
naturalize his desire on Laurence’s body. Erupting out of the gap between body and gender, the Gothic violence of this scene—attempted suicide, rape, assault on gender—is a reflection of the violence associated with any attempt to naturalize gender. Laurence’s ambiguous body, Gothic in its ambiguity, makes visible the violence of gender. As a result, the only option left for Laurence is more violence: to escape Ronald Laurence drugs him, and flees.

Much of the scene with Ronald has its correlation in the final encounter between Laurence and Emma, and the scenes are clearly meant to reflect one another. When Laurence drugs Ronald, his “arm [is] paralyzed, a tremor [shakes] his whole frame, […] and then, as if felled by a mighty blow from some unseen hand, he [sinks] upon the floor, heavy and senseless as a corpse” (88). The violence done to Ronald’s body is only temporary: as we have already seen, Laurence and Ronald are reunited at the end of the novel. Emma is not so fortunate. The main difference between the encounter with Ronald and the fatal encounter with Emma is that while Ronald begs Laurence to remove his confining clothing, when Emma encounters Laurence he has already taken off his clothing. Emma, then, is exposed to the actual ambiguity of Laurence’s body, and the violence associated with Emma’s realization is significantly greater.

Like the encounter with Ronald, this scene is saturated with death. Emma’s justification for her presence in Laurence’s room, a presence that if known would immediately draw the shameful scorn of those at the school, is that she is torn by the metaphoric death born of her desire for Laurence. This desire, a result of Laurence’s successful performance of masculinity, leaves her with few options as she sees it. While

In a way, Ronald succeeds: Laurence spends a large portion of the end of the book living as a female with the sisters of his mentor Berto.
all roads lead to death—“two deaths were before me. If I sought you not, I died of longing, if I came to you, I died of shame” (17)—the only choice available to her is to decide what form of death she will face. What Emma wants from Laurence is far from the spiritual love he has hoped for; she wants to spend the night with him. Laurence knows this cannot happen because of the “deep, mysterious gulf” that “lies between [them]” (18). Once again the gulf between body and gender stands in the way of desire, and from this gulf Gothic violence erupts, overcoming Emma. What gives Laurence away is not some failing in his masculinity; it is his body: undressed, and away from public scrutiny, Laurence’s body cannot escape Emma’s desiring gaze, which penetrates Laurence’s gender and sees his biology: “she surveyed me from head to foot, the disordered habiliments revealing to her every outline of the equivocal form before her. She saw the bearded lip and earnest brow, but she saw also the falling shoulders, slender neck, and rounded bosom—then with a look like that of the Medusa, and a hoarse utterance, she murmured: ‘monster!’” (19). While the accusation of monstrosity is caused by Emma’s realization of Laurence’s ambiguous biology—his particular blend of male and female characteristics—what makes this body so monstrous is that she was previously unable to recognize that ambiguity. The success of Laurence’s masculinity, and the desire that Emma feels as a result, are the sources of monstrosity in this scene.

121 In a way, the scene of Emma’s death seems to suggest that the answer “yes” to Judith Butler’s question “Is the breakdown of gender binaries […] so monstrous, so frightening, that it must be held to be definitionally impossible and heuristically precluded from any effort to think gender?” (viii). Emma’s inability to think through the form of gender practice exemplified by Laurence leaves her to attempt to articulate the inarticulatable: she falls back on the Gothic practice of identifying the unspeakable with monstrosity. Alice Dreger notes that “[s]ome hermaphrodites in Roman and medieval times may have been put to death, as apparently were all kinds of ‘monstrous’ beings,” suggesting that a tradition of associating hermaphroditism with monstrosity dates to long before the composition of The Hermaphrodite (32).
The monstrosity resides in the “deep, mysterious gulf” between Emma and Laurence, and Emma’s realization of what it would mean to cross that gulf. Emma’s claim that death is her only option with regards to Laurence turns out to be prescient. Her realization of Laurence’s beautiful monstrosity is her undoing: “[a] shriek, fearful to hear, and thrice fearful to give, followed by another, and another, and a maniac lay foaming and writing on the floor at my feet” (19). Emma eventually dies as a result of her encounter with Laurence. And Laurence is haunted by the memory of Emma, and the ghost of her desire from him becomes “monstrous phantoms” that follow him as he flees (32).

These two eruptions of Gothic hauntings, inspiring fear, violence, and frustrated desire, have important connections. If both of these scenes are notable for the violence in them, it is important to note that in both cases the violence is against “women.” Ronald tries to violently assert Laurence’s womanness through rape, and Emma is violently killed. In this way The Hermaphrodite suggests that much of the violence associated with gender is the burden of female and feminine bodies: masculinity may be the source, but femininity feels the effects. The violence of gender weighs unevenly on women. Laurence’s parents recognize the power associated with masculinity, and so they raise Laurence as a man. What they might not have recognized is that even when not visibly so, the object of this power is frequently the female body.

Even as it focuses our attention on the affective burden of the female body—the object of power—The Hermaphrodite also suggests that wielding this power comes with a cost to masculinity, the subject of power. After Emma’s death, Laurence is haunted by the violent affects of his masculinity to the degree that he goes into self-imposed exile. This exile involves a form of living death that he must go through in order to be able to
reenter society. There is a gendered aspect of this exile as well, for when Ronald first
finds Laurence on the verge of death, Laurence refuses the society of women: “No
woman shall tend me, […] I cannot suffer the presence of a woman. […] I will rather die
here, than look upon a woman” (52). For Laurence, his masculinity and its relation to his
ambiguous body, which was once a source of power, has now become “[t]he curse of my
nature” (19). Laurence is terrified that his masculinity will have the power to overtake
and destroy others, just as it overtook and destroyed Emma. Laurence has a similar
reaction after he parts with Ronald. Feeling that his “curse” will force him to live like the
Wandering Jew, Laurence determines that he must “shun [men] even as women. They
are too full of evil and danger—the purest heart among them contains a criminal thought,
a wish unblest” (89). Laurence’s masculinity, and the success with which he wields it,
has terrifying implications for his ability to succeed in the world. No matter how much
of a man he is, the distance between body and gender will always betray him, and he will
always face the Gothic horror arising from that gap.

While Laurence is able at times to overcome his fear of associating with others,
and he does successfully embrace a gendered existence (most notably during a brief
period living as a woman as part of “research” under his mentor Berto), in the end,
Laurence suffers a queerly Gothic death that evacuates any possibility of his success in
life. Laurence’s fate mirrors that of many hermaphrodites in the nineteenth century, a
century that, as Foucault has noted, “was so powerfully haunted by the theme of the
hermaphrodite […]” (Herculine xvii). The hermaphrodite was a Gothic figure in the
nineteenth century for the very reasons seen in Howe’s novel. The gap between body and
gender had terrifying implications for a society still figuring out what these terms meant.
After Ronald leaves Laurence for a second time, Laurence sits, a “beautiful monster,” and slowly “even the desire to make an effort subsided, and the last spark of life seemed frozen out of me” (193). Laurence awakens to find himself the object of medical scrutiny. As Berto and Briseida, one of Berto’s sisters, look on, Laurence’s “anomalous humanity” is examined by a “confidential physician” (194). Unable to “pronounce Laurent either man or woman,” the physician asks Berto and Briseida what they think. Each explains, in heavily gendered terms, their impressions of Laurence: Berto sees “nothing distinctly feminine in the intellectual nature of Laurent,” and Briseida “recognize[s] in Laurent much that is strictly feminine” (194-5). In other words, while both speak in gendered terms, they also are able to recognize in Laurence only their own gender identification. While many of the commentators on the novel suggest that Laurence has fallen ill in this scene, I want to suggest something else. I argue that keeping in line with the Gothic nature of Laurence’s gendered existence as well as with the history of hermaphroditism in the nineteenth century, Laurence does die and he witnesses and experiences the closing scenes across the gap between the living and the dead identified by Sedgwick. After a lifetime of trying to repress the reality of the body, only to see it continually come back in an uncanny return, Laurence is freed from his body in a queer death through which he is able to “commune[]” with both sides of the ontological gap between life and death such that the “dead and living were so mingled and confused, that the one became to me as the other” (196). With this reading, it becomes appropriate that the novel ends mid sentence, without the closure of clarity, or even punctuation.

122 See, for example, Williams *Hungry Heart* 94-5.
Through the examination by Berto, Briseida, and the physician, Laurence’s body is forced to serve as the marker through which other bodies and genders are understood, much like it was throughout the novel. As Alice Dreger has argued, “[t]he demands put on the hermaphroditic body [...] are many, as many agendas—scientific, medical, personal, national, professional, moral, and political meet. This is perhaps inevitable, for in any human culture, a body is never a body unto itself, and bodies that openly challenge significant boundaries are particularly prone to being caught in the struggles over those boundaries” (44). Laurence’s body has been forced throughout the novel to patrol the boundaries between masculinity and femininity, gender and sex, fear and desire. It is only fitting, then, that as a border figure, Laurence is able to cross one more border, the border between life and death. Herculine Barbin, the French hermaphrodite famous for being the author of the only known first-person memoir by a hermaphrodite in the nineteenth century, envisions this kind of crossing as he imagines what death will be like:

> When that day comes a few doctors will make a little stir around my corpse; they will shatter all the extinct mechanisms of its impulses, will draw new information from it, will analyze all the mysterious sufferings that were heaped up on a single human being. O princes of science, enlightened chemists, whose names resound throughout the world, analyze then, if that is possible, all the sorrows that have burned, devoured this heart down to its last fibers; all the scalding tears that have drowned it, squeezed it dry in their savage grasp! (103)

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123 One could also add to the list the border of textuality and narrative itself, thus incorporating the fragmented and incomplete nature of Howe’s novel.
Barbin’s vision of the making canny of his uncanny body comes true after his suicide at the age of 29.\textsuperscript{124} As Alice Dreger notes, the physician brought to the scene of Barbin’s death examines his genitalia, suspecting syphilis. What he finds is much more frightening: “a strange mélange of sexual anatomy” (16). The medical intervention in the afterlife of the hermaphrodite has the unfortunate consequence of robbing the hermaphrodite of agency by forcing their death to become the most important point in the life of the ambiguous body. As Roger Porter has argued about Barbin, “[d]eath is the sole healing of the fragmentation of identity that marks this many-named life […]. Death is the only permanence for the hermaphroditic ego, that eternally divided consciousness” (133). Yet even death puts demands on the hermaphroditic body, which must go on producing text—as it produced the text of gender—even post mortem. Fortunately for Laurence, because the text is incomplete, we never learn the “true” nature of his biology, which leaves the epistemological uncertainty in place. While speculation abounds, on the part of the characters around him as well as the reader, the denial of certainty at the end of the book leaves the focus of the novel on gender, and not sex. Laurence is therefore able to escape the fate of hermaphrodites such as Barbin.

Behind this scientific dissection of the hermaphroditic identity is a fear of what the hermaphrodite might reveal about other bodies, including the idea that gender and desire are not inherently tied to bodily structures. Doctors feared that if they misidentified the “true” sex of an individual, dangerous and horrifying things could

\textsuperscript{124} One of the important impacts of the hermaphrodite is the challenge they make to language. It is difficult to know the proper pronoun to describe a hermaphrodite, although in most cases it is preferable to use the gendered pronoun with which the hermaphrodite himself or herself identified. In this case I use the masculine set of pronouns because, although he lived most of his life as a female, at the time he wrote his memoirs and at the time of his suicide, Barbin was living as a male.
occur. By the end of the nineteenth century, one of the prominent fears behind the impetus to assign all children a “true” sex was the access to the other sex that a mistake could provide. Living as a woman, Barbin successfully seduced a female friend, which would have been impossible had Barbin been identified as a man at birth. However, as Dreger notes, “seduction was not the only form of sexual chaos at issue; mistaken sex could also lead to accidental ‘homosexuality’” (76). To put it another way, behind the fear of misidentifying the “true” sex of an ambiguous individual is a fear of exposing the constructed nature of gender and sexuality: the desire to pinpoint the “true” sex of an individual is a desire to normalize gender and sexuality and impose heteronormativity on ambiguity.125

I want to conclude by looking at a novel that plays with the fear of accidental homosexuality by raising the specter of accidental heterosexuality. In Theodore Winthrop’s Gothic city novel Cecil Dreeme, the young narrator Robert Byng, freshly returned to the United States after traveling abroad, describes his relationships with the men he encounters in New York City. Most interesting among these men are Densdeth, whom he first meets on his voyage home and whose persecuting pursuit of Byng provides one directional force to the novel, and Cecil Dreeme, a young painter with whom Byng forms an unusually strong attachment. As argued by Alex Nissen, “[t]he central questions Cecil Dreeme deals with are how to become a man, how best to make the passage from innocent youth into adulthood, how to deal with the ‘temptations of the

125 In their “Sex in Public,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner note that “[h]eteronormativity is […] a concept distinct from heterosexuality.” They define heteronormativity as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (548n2).
flesh,’ and how to form your character so as to be able to resist them for the rest of your earthly existence” (70-1).\footnote{For example, Nissen notes that Byng compares Densdeth to his friend Churm based on their masculinity (66). Byng describes Churm as “sturdy and vigorous; well built, on would say, not well made; built for use, not for show. […] he wore his hair and thick brown beard cut short. His features were all strongly marked and finished somewhat in the rough, not weakened by chiseling and mending. His eyes were blue, frank, and earnest. He looked his man fair and square in the face, and never swerved until each had had his fair say” (73). By contrast, Densdeth is “a man of slight, elegant, active figure, and of clear, colorless, olive complexion. His hair was black and studiously arranged. He was shaven, except a long drooping mustache,—that he could not have spared; […] His nose was a delicate aquiline, and his other fine-cut features corresponded. His eyes were yellow, feline, and restless,—the only restless thing about him” (72-3). What sets the admirable Churm apart from the villainous Densdeth is their respective masculinities. Churm represents the admirable, hearty, American, while Densdeth is the effeminate foreign presence that threatens from within.} The answers to these questions become available only through a consideration of the Gothic nature of the novel. In the novel, Byng returns to New York in order to make a way for himself. Arriving home after his voyage, Byng goes through the motions of finding a place to live, finding a job as a chemist, and reconnecting to the friends he has not seen in years. Byng finds a home in Chrysalis College where he first encounters Dreeme, who becomes the object of his affection, and his most prized relationship. We ultimately learn, however, that Cecil Dreeme is Clara Denman, a childhood friend of Byng’s who has faked suicide to escape from Densdeth and begun a new life as a reclusive painter.

Byng’s first encounter with Dreeme is entirely imaginative, presenting him with the opportunity to reflect on the nature of manhood and the type of man he would most desire to associate himself with. Dreeme is particularly desirable to Byng for the way that he might serve as a counterforce to Densdeth. Imaginatively constructing Dreeme as perhaps “the true Artist, a refined and spiritualized being, Raphael in look, Fra Angelico in life, a man in force, but with the feminine insight,” Byng “[begins] to long to be
acquainted with this gentleman above me” (58). What Byng hopes for is someone who combines masculinity and femininity, much like *The Hermaphrodite*’s Laurence: in his mind, Dreeme will combine all the force of masculinity, with the sympathetic potential of feminine incisiveness. This imaginative encounter offers us a view of what masculinity means for Byng. Mutable, and able to encompass qualities often associated with femininity, this utopic masculinity draws on the Gothic association with gender ambiguity. Purely imaginative (it’s not coincidental that Dreeme is a painter), this masculinity functions for Byng as the desired antithesis of the persecutorial masculinity represented by Densdeth. As Robert Martin argues, “[w]hat Byng ascribes to Densdeth is the power and the maliciousness of the Gothic villain, in a manner that shifts the focus of the victim from the female to male” (177). The appeal of Byng’s vision of Dreeme’s masculinity is its possible function as a “counterblast to Densdeth” (58) and hence as a resolution to Gothic terror.

Byng first meets Dreeme when Locksley, the landlord, knocks on his door late one night, panicked because Dreeme has not been seen or heard from in some time, leading Locksley to fear suicide. The first encounter with Dreeme is couched in Gothic language, preparing the reader for Dreeme’s ambiguous, mutable masculinity. In a room filled with “ghostly light” that “show[s] the form, but not the expression of objects; and form without expression is death” (129), Byng and Locksley find “a shadowy figure. A man? Yes; dim form and deathly face,—a man!” (132). Byng is filled with “deep […]

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127 Martin goes on to argue that what makes Densdeth particularly frightening for Byng is his feminizing power, which brings about a “loss of male autonomy and power” (178). While I agree with the notion of Densdeth as the frightening Gothic villain, I argue that Byng’s imaginative construction of Dreeme clearly demonstrates that feminizing masculinity is not something to be feared. By contrast, Byng desires the feminine within the masculine.
horror” at the thought the Dreeme is dead, but he is still barely alive (133). Left alone with Dreeme, Byng’s fascination deepens: by encountering Dreeme’s unconscious form, Byng is able to continue to imaginatively construct Dreeme’s masculinity, and Byng is thrilled when his imaginative vision of Dreeme is matched by what he sees on Dreeme’s face: “[t]here was force, energy, passion, and no lack of sweetness. […] This was a man of another order, not easy to classify” (138). Dreeme represents a masculine ideal for Byng, which makes him irresistibly attractive. After awakening, Dreeme reciprocates Byng’s affection and they become loving—even desiring—friends.

Even as Byng convinces himself that he is in love with Emma Denman, Clara’s sister, he “love[s] [Dreeme] too much, and with too peculiar a tenderness, to tell him that I had fancied I loved even a woman better than him” (281). Byng’s use of the phrase “even a woman,” with its emphasis on the unlikelihood that a woman could be more worthy of affection than a man, suggests the powerful attraction Byng feels for Dreeme’s masculinity. Like Laurence, by blending the feminine with the masculine, Dreeme offers an appealing alternative to the world of traditionally masculine men or feminine women. The power of his masculinity is in its encompassing nature, which draws forth from Byng a “peculiar” tenderness and love, which makes Dreeme “dearer to [Byng] than a brother” (296): Byng claims that Dreeme “has been blue sky to me” (295). In a novel obsessed with the variety of masculinities available in the antebellum city, the version that most attracts Byng is Dreeme’s, and this attraction conquers Byng in a way that the villain Densdeth can only hope to achieve. If, as Martin argues, Densdeth is the Gothic seducer, it is Dreeme that seduces Byng. In a Gothic novel that is, according to Michael Millner, “utterly obsessed by […] the unspeakable terrors males might inflict on males” (30), it is
not fear that drives Byng to Dreeme, but the powerfully attractive ambiguity of Dreeme’s masculinity.

Even more remarkable than the appeal of Dreeme’s masculinity is that we learn at the end of the novel that Dreeme is a female—he is Clara Denman, who faked a suicide in order to escape Densdeth and was figuratively reborn as Cecil Dreeme. That his masculinity is so appealing, and that this masculinity is born out of the ambiguity that presented so many frightful consequences in *Let the Right One In* and *The Hermaphrodite*, signals the main difference between *Cecil Dreeme* and the other texts. In *The Hermaphrodite* and *Let the Right One In* the realization that masculinity is a performance distinct from biology becomes a source of Gothic fear. In *Cecil Dreeme*, which depends on Gothic affect to drive the narrative, and which is a more obviously Gothic text than *The Hermaphrodite*, masculinity born out of ambiguity is a powerful source of hope and desire. By embracing the Gothic, Dreeme is able to move beyond it. However, this does not mean that there is anything less Gothic about Dreeme’s masculinity; in fact, Dreeme’s identity as a man carries within it powerful traces of violence and death. But, whereas Laurence’s text must close with his queerly Gothic death, a death that finally fixes his gender as masculine by denying the reader the opportunity to ever understand his biology, Dreeme survives past, and is in fact born out of, Clara Denman’s death. It is through her death that Dreeme’s powerfully attractive masculinity is born.

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128 In describing his early days as Dreeme in Chrysalis College, Dreeme states “I felt like one dead, as the world supposed me,—like one murdered,—one walled up in a living grave” (345).
129 It is important to note that even in this text it is women that bear the affective burden of the Gothic. However, Dreeme is able productively turn that burden into an advantage.
The realization that Dreeme is Denman does raise serious questions about the possibilities of male-male friendships and the productive power of masculinity. After learning the truth of her sex, Byng attempts to explain the “peculiar” nature of his attraction for Dreeme: “In the guise of man, you were thorough woman still. I talked to you and thought of you, although I was not conscious of it, as man does to woman only” (338). The ending of the novel has led to quite disparate understandings of the novel’s gender politics. On one hand, Michael Millner claims that “[d]isaster management is complete in the novel’s final obliteration of any sexual desire” as “[t]he novel ends with Byng and ‘Cecil’ (for Byng can never bear to call Clara anything but Cecil Dreeme, even after her disclosure) pledging to live as brother and sister rather than husband and wife” (30). On the other hand, Alex Nissen argues that the novel is “a paradigmatic example of romantic friendship fiction” (58).

Millner’s claim does not hold up to the scrutiny of the text. His argument that Byng and Dreeme’s pledge “to live as brother and sister rather than husband and wife” is both based on very little textual evidence and extremely limiting in the assumption that the only option available for Dreeme and Byng is to either marry or live as siblings. The heteronormativity behind this assumption goes against the rest of the text, which has presented the range of possible relationships available to two people. In the closing pages of the novel, after Emma Denman commits suicide, Byng whispers to Dreeme, “She is our sister, Cecil,” to which Dreeme replies “Our sister, Robert,—our sister, forgiven and beloved” (360). Clearly there is a form of intimacy that has developed between Dreeme and Byng, an intimacy that can encompass any number of relationships. But, what Millner reads as evidence of a limited heteronormativity as the only possible
future for Dreeme and Byng is proven false by Millner’s own parenthetical note: the very fact that “Byng can never bear to call Clara anything but Cecil Dreeme” suggests that despite learning Dreeme’s “true” sex, the gender issues are anything but resolved. As I will argue, Byng’s insistence on calling Dreeme Dreeme, and Dreeme’s tacit acceptance of this designation, suggests that their intimacy is both adaptable and resilient. The power of this intimacy results from their willingness to live as neither brother and sister nor husband and wife.

Similarly, while the novel does include many of the tropes of romantic friendship fiction as identified by Alex Nissen—including a “cataclysmic first meeting, the testing of the bond, the element of heroism, the mutuality and complementarity of the union, the intimacy and sympathy of the relationship, the mutual admiration and idealization, the element of physical (if not sexual) attraction, the disruptive role of women, the motif of the hand, and the sister motif” (58)—to group the relationship between Dreeme and Byng among other examples of romantic friendship is to miss the radical possibility inherent in their intimacy. On first learning that Dreeme is Clara Denman, Byng writes, “[a]nd now that the friend proved a woman, a great gulf opened between us” (348). The gulf here is that same gulf that became central to Let the Right One In and The Hermaphrodite. Nothing has changed about Dreeme: Dreeme is the same man that Byng first imagined him to be and he is the same man that has so powerfully drawn forth Byng’s affection. What has changed, as signified by this gulf, is that Byng now realizes that the man he has so fallen for is not a man, by which I mean the masculinity that has proven so attractive is not attached to a male body. But that this is so insignificant (as I

130 For a full discussion of these tropes, see Nissen 11-57.
have noted, Byng immediately overcomes this gulf and is able to continue to call Dreeme Dreeme) suggests that what was so terrifying in *Let the Right One In* and *The Hermaphrodite* is a productive source of powerful intimacy in *Cecil Dreeme*. The possibility arising from the gap between the body and gender, so often associated with Gothic horror, is what makes the ending of *Cecil Dreeme* so hopeful. Therefore, Byng’s explanation that he became so affectively attached to Dreeme because he secretly and unconsciously knew that he was really a woman proves unconvincing. If anything, he attempts to vocalize this sentiment so that he can maintain the relationship he has had with Dreeme, because he realizes that continuing that relationship after the intrusion of biology would be socially untenable. For this reason alone, we should avoid characterizing their relationship as a romantic friendship: Byng’s vocalized anxiety suggests that, unlike romantic friendship, his relationship with Dreeme is not a “noninstitutionalized, socially sanctioned, (often) temporally limited and premarital, (ostensibly) platonic, nonexclusive yet primary emotional relationship[] […] between young, coeval, coequal white men of the middle and upper classes” (Nissen 14-15).

Byng and Dreeme forge a new type of intimate relationship, born out of Gothic horror and death, yet defined by its joyful hopefulness, a hopefulness that emerges out of the realization that gender can be made a work of creative imagination rather than of biological determinism.

It is important to remember, though, that the gulf that opens between Dreeme and Byng is also the gap between the living and the dead that was so central to the other texts I have discussed in this chapter. Dreeme’s masculinity is born out of Clara Denman’s suicide, while the relationship at the end of the book is only made possible by Emma
Denman’s suicide. It is through this double death, one metaphorical and one real, that Cecil Dreeme’s masculinity is finalized. Emma Denman’s suicide replicates the scene earlier in the book when Byng and Locksley break into Dreeme’s room only now, it is Dreeme and Byng who break into Densdeth’s dark room after learning from her own hand that Denman has committed suicide. When Byng first finds a letter in his letter-box and realizes it is from Emma Denman, he is struck with “a miserable terror, lest the sister should come between me and Cecil Dreeme, blighting both” (354). Byng is afraid that Denman’s presence will disrupt the “quiet domestic feeling [that is] grow[ing] up between” himself and Dreeme (353). The disruptive power of Denman’s letter is made more dangerous by the fact that “[n]either [Byng nor Dreeme] was yet at home in our new relation” (353). The first stages of the relationship are developing, but they have yet to come to fruition. At the same time that Byng can “smile[] to notice the masculine effect of [Dreeme’s] crisp curling black hair,” he describes Dreeme’s response using a feminine pronoun: “[s]he perceived my feeling, and smiled also” (353). It is only after discovering Denman’s suicide letter and finding her corpse in Densdeth’s dark room that Dreeme and Byng can finally find a domestic future based on masculinity: from this point forth, Byng no longer describes Dreeme using feminine pronouns, but refers to him simply as “Dreeme” or “Cecil Dreeme.” Just like it is through Clara Denman’s death that Dreeme’s masculinity is born, it is through Emma Denman’s death that Byng and Dreeme are able to bridge the gulf thrown between them and finally imagine a “life together” (360) that will no doubt be based on their mutual masculine affection. Like The Hermaphrodite, Cecil Dreeme suggests that the violence of gender is the burden of female bodies, even when those bodies are masculine.
As Elizabeth Grosz has argued about freaks, characters like Eli, Laurence, and Dreeme “cross the borders that divide the subject from all ambiguities, interconnections, and reciprocal classifications, outside of or beyond the human. They imperil the very definitions we rely on to classify humans, identities, and sexes—our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness” (57). Each of these three characters struggle with an attempt to define themselves in the language of those around them, and while Dreeme is able to find some ontological certainty through his relationship with Byng, Eli and Laurence continue to struggle to define themselves. After Emma’s violent reaction to his ambiguity, Laurence determines to take her back to her own lodgings so as to help her avoid the shame of being caught in a man’s room. On his way he is stopped by Wilhelm, another of Emma’s suitors, who after helping Laurence get Emma home, challenges him, demanding that he explain himself. They fight, and Laurence subdues Wilhelm, but refuses to finish the task and kill him. To prove Emma’s innocence Laurence is forced to confess his “secret” (22). What follows is Laurence’s frankest admission of what makes him a man: he says to Wilhelm, “Tell me now […], have I fought like a man? […] Have I treated you like a man? […] Have I, in all my college life maintained the integrity, the courage, the honour of a man? […] Wilhelm, in all save these, I am none” (22). The admission of the true nature of his masculinity, that it is based entirely on his deeds and has no basis in biology, leaves Wilhelm confused. “You are no woman” he says (22). “No,” Laurence replies, “I am no man, no woman, nothing” (22). This nothingness, this identity that fails to fit into neat categories of male and female, defines Laurence’s struggles throughout the novel. It is
his attempt to make this nothingness into a masculine identity that motivates Laurence.\footnote{Ironically, the very admission that he is not “male” masculinizes him in Wilhelm’s eyes. Wilhelm tells Laurence, “the sacrifice you have just made is heroic” (22). In this sense then, perhaps the most masculine act that Laurence commits is narrating his own tale. As Roger Porter has argued about Barbin’s memoirs, “[s]ocial conventions of female silence suggest that Barbin would not readily turn to serious written self-analysis. When ‘she’ becomes a ‘he,’ Barbin gains the power and cultural authority to write the inappropriate gender” (126).}

In the novel Let Me In, Eli makes a similar claim to nothingness while trying to explain herself to Oskar. When Eli initially rejects Oskar after he asks her out, he accuses her of having another guy. She tells him, “No, I don’t … but Oskar, I can’t. I’m not a girl” (170). Pressed by Oskar, Eli explains, “I’m nothing. Not a child. Not old. Not a boy. Not a girl. Nothing” (171). By attempting to hold on to the epistemological certainty of accepted categories, Eli and Laurence doom themselves to monstrosity. What Eli and Laurence fail to realize is that nothing can be something.

The lesson to be learned from Cecil Dreeme is therefore that by moving beyond the monstrous, by moving beyond death and the Gothic, and ultimately by moving beyond epistemological certainty, there opens a place where gender can take on new, ambiguous meanings, but without the fear associated with monstrosity. By moving beyond the gap between male and female, masculine and feminine, living and the dead, new social possibilities present themselves, and we can come to realize and accept masculinity as possibility. And, like any discussion of monstrosity, the discussion of monstrous genders is really about defining normality. What Cecil Dreeme teaches us is that by removing the monstrous stigma of ambiguous gender, the normal loses its meaning as well, and new possibilities come to light.
Coda

Domesticating Poe

One of the more remarkable aspects of Poe’s legacy is the vehemence with which people either attack or defend him. More than any other antebellum author, Poe’s personality and his life are subject of critical commentary: almost everyone who writes about him feels the need to stake their claim about his personality, his drinking, his relationship with his wife, and other aspects of his life that rarely make it into critical accounts of other antebellum authors. In this brief Coda, I will outline some of these accusations, and the responses they engendered, in order to argue that much of the debate about Poe’s life and his place in the literary canon is really a debate about the appropriate forms of masculinity for a literary icon. Specifically, I will discuss how Poe’s friends and later defenders responded to attacks on his supposed outlandish, anti-sentimental, and

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133 As Alice Cooke has noted about the early days of Poe criticism, “For the first decade following Poe’s death practically all criticism began, and as a rule ended, with a consideration of the life and character of the man” (146). Many nineteenth century commentators also noted the way that an interest in Poe’s fiction blurred into an interest in Poe’s life. One representative commentator, in a letter published by N. P. Willis, begins by stating “I have been strangely attracted, as so many are, you know, by the reading of the works of EDGAR POE, and his life seemed to me far more interesting even than his productions” (“Tribute”). The author goes on to speculate that he (not sure of the gender, but I speculate it is male) was “charmed so strongly” by “reading of [Poe’s] works when I was so very young” (“Tribute”). Similarly, a brief 1874 notice about efforts to raise founds for a Poe monument in Baltimore notes “Poe has a tenacious hold upon the imagination of the younger generation of readers” (“A Monument to Poe”), and Thomas Wentworth Higginson states that Poe’s “prose-writings had been eagerly read, at least among college students” (68).
at times, gothic behavior, by characterizing Poe as homely and domestic, emphasizing his relationships with women. Whereas to Poe’s detractors he was a bad man who hated men, to his defenders he was a good man, as exhibited by his love of women. By rhetorically domesticating Poe, those who came to Poe’s defense placed special emphasis on the role of gendered behavior in determining an author’s legacy. Finally, by contrasting his place in the home to his foreign success, Poe’s defenders put forth an argument for his place in American letters by politicizing the home as a symbol for the nation.

During his lifetime, Poe demonstrated that he was aware of the importance of masculinity to literary success, suggesting again that he might have known what he was doing when selecting Griswold as his literary executor. For example, Poe was not beyond bragging about physical feats: in an 1835 letter to Thomas W. White, founder of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and soon to be Poe’s boss, Poe compared his own masculine feats to those of Lord Byron. In regard to a previous mention of the feat, Poe writes:

> [t]he writer seems to compare my swim with that of Lord Byron, whereas there can be no comparison between them. Any swimmer ‘in the falls’ in my days, would have swum the Hellespont, and thought nothing of the matter. I swam from Ludlam’s wharf to Warwick, (six miles,) in a hot June sun, against one of the strongest tides ever known in the river. (57)

As Kenneth Silverman notes, Poe “tried in different ways to advance his reputation” (196). One of Poe’s most explicit efforts to advance a literary masculinity came in the form of fake biographies that he circulated, most notably in the Philadelphia *Saturday
Museum. Among other things, this biography claimed that he attempted to fight for Greek independence, before traveling “to St. Petersburg, in Russia, where he became involved in difficulties, from which he was extricated by . . . the American consul” (qtd. in Silverman 197). Poe clearly was not above manipulating the truth to further his own reputation, but it was after his death that his reputation came under the most fire.

Because of its central role in establishing the conversation about Poe, it is worth remembering some of the claims Griswold makes in his “Ludwig” article, published in the New York Daily Tribune on October 9, 1849. Rhetorically, Griswold is quite crafty: asserting that Poe “was well known personally” and “had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe,” but that “he had few or no friends” (28, emphasis in the original), in order to suggest that Poe’s personality precluded an appreciation of his work. When it comes to describing Poe as a person, the impression Griswold leaves is that Poe, while brilliant, failed to live up to his potential as a man. By focusing our attention on Poe’s patrimony—Griswold notes that Poe’s grandfather played an important role in the Revolutionary cause—and his adoption by “a wealthy gentleman of Richmond” (29), Griswold establishes Poe as part of a tradition of gentlemanliness, which valued dignity and honor, and dates to earlier aristocratic British traditions (Kimmel 13): in Poe’s case, his great-grandfather’s wife: “a daughter of Admiral James McBride, noted in British naval history, and claiming kindred with some of the most illustrious English families” (28). That Poe embodied this potential, yet failed to live up to it, is clear when Poe leaves the University of Virginia, where he “took first honors” but from whence he left with “debts of honor” (29, emphasis in the original).
Turning away from Poe’s failure to live up to his ancestry, Griswold focuses on the way Poe’s body prevented his chances at economic stability. Griswold recounts how all it takes for Poe to be transformed from “Thin, and pale even to ghastliness” to “a gentleman” is a bath and some new clothes (30-1). While the ease with which money sets off this transformation suggests how close he is to being a gentleman, Poe quickly fails to maintain the performance. Instead of living up to his “regained bearing of a gentleman” (31), by achieving financial stability, he loses himself, and “with characteristic recklessness of consequence, he was hurriedly married to a girl as poor as himself” (31). Unlike later critics who focus on Virginia’s youth (itself an attempt to deny Poe masculine virility), Griswold’s focus is on the financial limitations she places on Poe’s pretensions to gentility. Griswold’s most damning accusation is that Poe simply could not control himself: in the era of masculine self-control, Poe was a wild-man, who “walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, […] with drenched garments and arms wildly beating the wind and rain” (32-3). Combine this with his distaste for society (33-4), and you have a picture of a man rejecting the rules men had to live by in the antebellum period. Poe failed to live up to his aristocratic and gentile background, failed in the market due to his lack of bodily control, and was unable to focus his desire on a partner who would allow him to succeed in the antebellum economy.

In this brief article Griswold changed the way we think of Poe’s manhood, and ultimately the role of manhood in literary canonization. While it is debatable whether
Griswold ultimately helped Poe become the well-known figure he is today, or whether “The damage this article did to Poe’s reputation is incalculable,” as Arthur Hobson Quinn claims (647), it is clear that Griswold’s influence is still widely felt. Yet, Griswold was not the only critic of Poe’s masculinity: no one takes up the critique of Poe’s masculinity more decisively than George Gilfillan. In an 1854 article from *Littell’s Living Age*, Gilfillan rehashes many of the issues raised by Griswold, but he adds a particularly impressive degree of venom to his claims. Gilfillan’s article also serves as a bridge between Griswold and later attacks on Poe’s masculinity, for while he argues that Poe was terrible as a man, he also argues that Poe hated men. Like Griswold, Gilfillan portrays Poe as singularly unable to control himself, claiming Poe “died as he lived, a raving, cursing, self-condemned, conscious cross between the fiend and the genius” (166). Poe’s lack of proper masculinity manifested itself in his utter lack of sympathetic identification with those around him. Unlike other “anomalies in the history of mankind,” Poe was “no more a gentleman than he was a saint. His heart was as rotten as his conduct was infamous. He knew not what the terms honour and honourable meant” (166). The most violent illustration of Poe’s improper masculinity is his relationship with Virginia, which in Griswold’s account is barely mentioned, but in Gilfillan’s article becomes the grounds for the most pointed attack against Poe. While many of Poe’s detractors use Virginia’s age to deny the possibility of a healthy marriage between the

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134 Scott Peeples argues that “Griswold did more good than harm to Poe’s long-term popularity by stimulating a character debate that kept people writing about Poe fro decades, keeping prospective readers curious and thereby keeping Poe very much in print” (5). The number of pages of Poe criticism and commentary generated since Poe’s death suggests that Peeples’s assessment is correct. Peeples makes another point that is important to any consideration of Poe’s masculinity: he notes, “[Griswold] also helped to separate—just two days after Poe’s death—the posthumous, pop-culture Poe from the actual, flesh-and-blood Poe” (5).
two, Gilfillan famously claims that “A large heart has often beat in the bosom of a debauchee; but Poe had not one spark of genuine tenderness, unless it were for his wife, whose heart, nevertheless, and constitution, he broke—hurrying her to a premature grave, that he might write *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven!*” (166). Like Griswold’s version of Poe, Gilfillan’s Poe is unable to balance his own interests against his desires. Here, however, his love for his wife crumbles in the face of his inherent cruelty and lack of honor. The very qualities that would make one man love his wife directly leads to Virginia’s death. Poe, Gilfillan claims, was more interested in literary fame than his wife’s health.

One other point in Gilfillan’s article that is picked up by other commentators is his claim that Poe was unable to relate to men. Similar in their writing styles, Poe and Brockden Brown differ in personality: “Brown was a virtuous and amiable man, and his works, although darkened by unsettled religious views, breathe a fine spirit of humanity. Poe wonders at, and hates man—Browne [*sic*] wonders at, but at the same time pities, loves, and hopes in him. Brown mingled among men like a bewildered angel—Poe like a prying fiend” (170). Others agree with Gilfillan about Poe’s distrust of men. John Moncure Daniel claims that Poe “could not paint men well because he did not understand them; and he did not understand them because he was not at all like them” (qtd. in Peeples 16). Robert D’Unger, in a letter about Poe written to Chevalier Elmer Robert Reynolds in 1899, ends his comments about Poe by saying “The only thing Poe ever sympathized with, or pitied, was woman. He had no sympathy for men” (D’Unger). This despite the fact that much of the letter recounts drinking with Poe in Baltimore during 1846. Poe’s inability to relate to the men around him remains a constant theme through Poe criticism, and often surfaces in reminiscences about him.
Whereas Gilfillan and Griswold had focused on Poe’s own dangerous masculinity, increasing attention to Poe’s effects on young readers, and specifically young male readers, led later critics to focus on Poe’s dangerous effects on other people’s masculinity. Most famously, Henry James’s stated that “With all due respect to the very original genius of the author of the ‘Tales of Mystery,’ it seems to us that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one’s self. An enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection” (65-6). James’s intimation that a mature man can’t have an interest in Poe suggests that he saw Poe as something less than masculine. Similarly, D. H. Lawrence noted in Poe’s work “an absence of manly virtue” (87). Yvor Winters goes so far as to suggest that not only can a real man not like Poe, but if you like Poe you must be low class as well. After quoting from Poe’s poetry, Winters writes, “This is an art to delight the soul of a servant girl; it is a matter for astonishment that mature men can be found to take this kind of thing seriously” (200). Given the blurring between attacks on Poe’s masculinity and attacks on the masculinity of Poe’s readers, it is not surprising many people have felt the need to come to his defense.

One of the first people to counter Griswold’s version of Poe’s life, N. P. Willis drew on the authority of first-hand knowledge in order to express a much different account of Poe’s masculine behavior. In his “Death of Edgar Allan Poe,” published in the *Home Journal* on October 20, 1849, Willis quotes long passages from Griswold’s “Ludwig” article, including the portions that depict Poe as a wild-man, raging and unable to control his body as he wanders the streets. To contradict this portrayal, Willis moves Poe inside, and focuses on his gentlemanly behavior and demeanor: he describes Poe “at
his desk in the office, from nine in the morning till the evening paper went to press”
(“Death” 36). In contrast to the reports of Poe as “occasionally […] violen[t] and
difficult[],” Willis describes him as “a quiet, patient, industrious, and most gentlemanly
person, commanding the utmost respect and good feeling by his unvarying deportment
and ability” (“Death” 37). Willis goes on to say that, yes, Poe might have drank too
much at times, but that whenever he encountered Poe “in the street” he always found him
“the same sad-mannered, winning, and refined gentleman” (“Death” 37). By moving
from Griswold’s account of Poe raging through the streets into interior spaces and then
back into those same streets, Willis’s rebuttal emphasizes most forcibly Poe’s restrained
masculine behavior.

While Willis was one of the first to focus to use masculinity to defend Poe, many
of Poe’s other defenders focus on his manly, and specifically gentlemanly, behavior.
Elmira Royster Shelton recounts, in a conversation with Edward Valentine, that Poe
“Hated anything coarse and unrefined” and that when he came back into her life shortly
before his death Poe was “a perfect gentleman in every sense of the word” (Valentine).
Poe was also “one the most fascinating refined men in his manners” (Valentine).
Similarly, Charles J. Peterson, who knew both Griswold and Poe asserted that “Griswold
was a coward,” but “Mr Poe was, what, conventionally at least, you would call a
gentleman” (Peterson). And, while Peterson acknowledges that Poe occasionally drank,
and that it didn’t take much to get him drunk, “At all other times, he was honorable, &
singularly gentleman-like. His manners, at their best, were as gentle as those of a houri”
(Peterson). For Peterson, what set Poe apart was his exceptional gentlemanliness, and it
is for this that he should be most remembered. George Graham makes a similar point in
his 1850 “The Late Edgar Allan Poe,” in which he claims that, after knowing Poe “intimately, […] knowing all his hopes, his fears, and little annoyances of life, as well as his high-hearted struggle with adverse fate—yet he was always the same polished gentleman—the quiet, unobtrusive, thoughtful scholar—the devoted husband—frugal in his personal expenses—punctual and unwearied in his industry—and the soul of honor, in all his transactions. This, of course, was in his better days, and by them we judge the man” (225). In other words, Poe was the model man, able to overcome the trials he faced in his life, which Graham describes as “fate” in order to turn blame away from Poe. In the face of all this, Poe is able to maintain his honor and dignity. The man described here sounds nothing like the man described by Griswold and Gilfillan.

At the same time that some of Poe’s defenders acknowledged his drinking, often situating it in male sociality—for example describing Poe’s time spent in taverns with his “boon companions” (“Poe’s Last Days” 371) or in oyster houses, where “His drinking was that of a gentleman” (D’Unger)—others focused on his beautiful appearance, gentlemanly conversation, and engaging behavior in parlors and other domestic spaces. Often this meant describing Poe’s manly interactions with women. While some argued that Poe’s “remarkable personal beauty, the fascination of his manners and conversation, and his chivalrous deference and devotion to women, gave him a dangerous power over the sex” (Browne), many others averred that Poe “did not affect the society of men, choosing rather that of highly intellectual women, with whom he liked to fall into a sort of eloquent monologue, half dream, half poetry” (Smith). In his account of Poe, Mayne Reid remembers time spent with Poe in his home the Spring Garden section of Philadelphia: “In this humble domicile I can say, that I have spent some of the pleasantest
hours of my life” (306). Despite its lack of finery, Poe’s home is a “picture of tranquil domestic happiness” and the location for “two years of intimate personal associate with Edgar Poe,” which leads Reid to conclude that Poe was “a generous host, an affectionate son-in-law and husband—in short, a respectable gentleman” (Reid 307, 308).

Some followers of Poe testified to the powerful lure Poe’s home held over his readers. John Preston Beecher, writing about the “little cottage” at Fordham claims that “Everybody who has read enough to become interested in his life & literary career has at some time or other made a sentimental journey thither to stand & gaze with admiration upon the house” (Beecher). It is only after talking about Poe’s houses that Beecher turns to talk about Poe himself. Perhaps no one drew on this power more strongly than Susan Archer Weiss in her 1907 book The Home Life of Poe. Weiss describes her book not as a traditional biography of an author, but instead as a study of Poe’s “private home-life, domestic and social,” allowing readers “to form a correct judgment of his character” (“To The Reader”). Weiss claims that we can only see “Poe himself” when we look at “Poe the man, shut in from the eyes of the world in the privacy of his home life and the companionship of his own family” (112). While acknowledging Poe’s faults and his “unnatural marriage,” Weiss maintains Poe was a gentleman, claiming “howsoever he might at times go astray, no word or act of unkindness toward the wife and mother who loved him was ever known to escape from him” (224, 225). For Weiss Poe’s true character is that of a self-restrained gentleman, and we can only know this if we know him in the privacy of his own home.

Others took up this connection between knowing Poe in a domestic setting and a full understanding of his character. Among the other facets of Poe’s life and work
chronicled in Sarah Helen Whitman’s long defense of Poe, *Edgar Poe and His Critics*, is the “unrivalled neatness and the quaint simplicity of [the Fordham cottage’s] interior and surroundings” (46). The house is particularly important in Whitman’s account because elsewhere she claims that Poe’s “habitual courtesy and good nature” is “noticeable to all who best knew him in domestic and social life” (41). Many of the critics Whitman draws on fit in this category of domestic and social acquaintances of Poe, including Elizabeth Oakes Smith, who notes that Poe’s “manners were […] refined and pleasing, and his style and scope of conversation that of a gentleman and a scholar. […] He delighted in the society of superior women, and had an exquisite perception of all graces of manner and shades of expression” (qtd. in Whitman 39-40). By focusing on Poe’s restrained and articulate conversation, which often occurred in interior domestic spaces, Whitman and others emphasized a gentle, chivalrous masculinity greatly in contrast to the Gothic wild man described by his early critics. As a measured and careful conversationalist, this version of Poe is clearly in control of his self.

John Moran paints a picture of domestic tranquility between Poe and Virginia, who among all women was the one best “calculated to make his life a happy one” (39). Once again Moran, like those before him, turns to the domestic as proof of Poe’s character. Giving the true love between Poe and Virginia extra merit in Moran’s defense is the fact that “If there is any place where a man can be seen in his true light and where his true character is fully displayed, it is at his own home” (42).135 The home, the domestic, and the sentimental: these are the terms that Moran uses to characterize Poe. As an account of Poe’s death, the deathbed scenes take on special importance in Moran’s

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135 As I have noted, many of Poe’s defenders argue for the importance of the home for discerning an accurate picture of Poe’s masculinity.
book. In each of the two deathbed scenes in the book, Poe’s and Virginia’s, Moran draws on the antebellum notion of Good Death in the *ars moriendi*. The notion of Good Death, as most famously seen in the death of little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, places emphasis on dying in the home, with family and God. When Moran turns to Virginia’s death he inserts himself into the text, displacing Virginia: he writes, “The dear wife of his bosom had passed away and in some slight degree I did realize his distress of mind and sorrow of heart in his own dying word as I held his hand at his death-bed” (46). Moran uses Virginia’s death to emphasize both Poe’s and his own middle-class gentility and emotional manliness: he is a good husband who cares for his wife till the very end. At the same time, through the slippage between the moment of Virginia’s death and the moment of Poe’s death, Moran establishes Poe’s noble end, effectively doubling the rhetorical possibilities of the scene. When it comes to the scene of Poe’s actual death, Moran once again emphasizes Poe’s manly gentility. In the midst of a discussion of Poe’s religious faith—key to the notion of Good Death—Moran moves over Poe’s actual dying moments by inserting in their place excerpts from “The Raven,” “Tamerlane,” and then “The Bells” (73-5). Because Moran has earlier argued that Poe’s poetry is the best evidence of his goodness, the use of the poetry to describe the death allows Poe to live on forever—he never fully dies—and always be remembered as a wonderfully talented man.

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136 Drew Gilpin Faust argues that “[t]he concept of the Good Death was central to mid-nineteenth-century America, as it had long been at the core of Christian practice” (6). However, during the nineteenth century, Good Death became associated with class as well as (or even more-so than) religion: “By the 1860s many elements of the Good Death had been to a considerable degree separated from their explicitly theological roots and had becomes as much as part of respectable middle-class behavior and expectation in North and South as they were the product or emblem of any particular religious affiliation” (7). As I am arguing, Moran understood the metaphorical power of Good Death and used it to situate Poe as gentile.
Moran closes his book with an appeal to “the impartial verdict of all fair-minded men, and […] the sober and dispassionate judgment of eminent scholars and critics in both hemispheres” (84). This attention to the international comes as a response to frequent accusations that Poe was not very American, but the political implications are more wide ranging. When someone like John Moncure Daniel claimed that “One would scarcely deem him American at all” (174), to some of Poe’s defenders this was not just an attack on Poe, it was an attack on American literature and its place in the world. After the well-known embrace of Poe by Baudelaire and other French authors, the constant discussion of Poe “at home” took on a double meaning. By emphasizing Poe’s place in the home, and at home, his defenders used their portrayals of Poe as a sentimental gentleman to argue for his place in the American literary canon. The constant references to Poe as domestic suggest his status as a man, but also his status as an American. In the face of vicious attacks by people like Griswold and Gilfillan, Poe’s friends and admirers came to his defense. Not only was Poe a man, his defenders claimed, he was a good man, and a man that should be admired and remembered. By domesticating Poe, Poe’s defenders worked to establish his reputation as a gentleman and as an American author.

The question of how a canon is formed is a complex one, encompassing as it does issues including race, gender, class, region, and so-called “literariness.” As I have argued, for many of Poe’s early critics and defenders, one of the issues that resonated most strongly was Poe’s masculinity. As we continue to look at the ways that the canon is constructed and as we continue to look for ways to expand the canon, the lesson of Poe’s critics and defenders is an important one. Many of the popular antebellum authors

\[137\] For more on the French response to Poe’s life and work, see Patrick F. Quinn *The French Face of Edgar Poe.*
that are still languishing in the slough of critical ignorance lived lives outside of gender norms—whether they were urban dandies or tavern drunks. As Poe’s critics demonstrate, one of the most effective ways to castigate a literary figure is through gender. As critics, it is up to us to understand how the rhetoric of gender affects our understanding of an author and his work.
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CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS


“‘covering me with its loathsome caresses’: Men, Masculinity, and Desire in Poe’s ‘The Black Cat,’” Third International Edgar Allan Poe Conference: The Bicentennial, Philadelphia, PA, October 2009

“Hermaphrodites and Hybrids: Intersections of Race and Masculinity in Poe’s *Pym,*” The American Literature Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, May 2009

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

The University of Virginia
The Lillian Gary Taylor Visiting Fellowship in American Literature, Summer 2009

The Pennsylvania State University
The Center for American Literary Studies Humanities Initiative Dissertation Support Award, College of the Liberal Arts, 2009-2010

The George and Barbara Kelly Graduate Fellowship in Nineteenth Century English and American Literature, 2008-2009, 2009-2010

The Center for American Literary Studies Graduate Award for Research or Training Seminars, for attending the Futures of American Studies Institute, 2009

The Philip Young Memorial Endowment in American Literature, Spring 2008