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“An authentic ghost story”: manipulating the gothic in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

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ABSTRACT Perhaps the most memorable—and almost certainly the most harrowing—portions of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* occur during Tom’s time at the Legree plantation: a narrative plunge into the horrors of slavery in the Deep South, and a stylistic plunge into the realm of the Gothic. This study seeks to engage this section of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* within the context of the Gothic genre, and, in so doing, reveal Stowe’s Gothic turn to be not, as some scholars have suggested, merely superficial appropriation, but rather a sophisticated manipulation of genre that culminates in a Christianization of the Gothic. By exploring Stowe’s use of Gothic figures and devices—the setting of the crumbling Louisiana plantation, the threefold Gothic female represented by Cassy, and the “haunting” of Legree—in the light of both European and American Gothic fiction, this study demonstrates how the trappings of the Gothic genre can be used to refresh and further Stowe’s progressive Christian narrative, one which ultimately refutes the Gothic by seeding it in a universe where peace, freedom, and Christian redemption are possible. This article is published as part of a collection on Gothic and horror.

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Introduction

It comes as no surprise that Harriet Beecher Stowe's great sentimental novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, originally published as a forty-week serial in *The National Era*, should at times exhibit tonal or stylistic shifts between instalments, temporarily departing from the established narrative and voice to engage another character or even another genre. The longest of these departures—the nine instalments from Chapters 32 to 41 encompassing Tom's time at the Legree plantation—plunges into a seemingly incongruous collection of inflated Gothic tropes and vocabulary: “ghostly” garrets (Stowe, 1994: 346), a demoniacal madwoman, and even sheeted apparitions that go bump in the night. At first glance, Stowe's “digression” into the Gothic may easily be read as a superficial “borrowing” of popular tropes in order to intensify and add variety to her narrative; later, when Cassie's entirely transparent “haunting” of Legree occurs, Stowe's words even take on a tinge of genre-conscious irony. However, when examined within the context of Gothic literature, the events at the Legree plantation take on a previously unexamined significance, particularly with regards to Stowe's more progressive Christian worldview, so at odds with the traditional Gothic aesthetic.

Previous studies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have focused primarily on contextualizing it within its culture and time, rather than within the literary canon. As the nineteenth century's best-selling novel, and perhaps one of the world's most successful propaganda pieces, Stowe's sentimental novel occupies an ambiguous space between commercial and literary fiction, between a historical phenomenon and an artwork in its own right. As such, there is tendency to ignore its occasionally doubtful literary merit in favour of acknowledging its cultural impact or indebtedness. Stowe's presence within literary criticism is limited primarily to the scholarship of feminism or of race and ethnicity, and recent academic studies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have trended towards historical contextualization: David S. Reynolds's *Mightier than the Sword* (2011), Nancy Koester's *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Spiritual Life* (2014), and Jim O'Loughlin's study ‘Articulating “Uncle Tom's Cabin”’ (2000) all treat Stowe's work as a cultural phenomenon, examining the political and religious elements that influenced it, or that it helped to create. Feminist and religious studies of Stowe's work—most notably Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000)—have identified *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a progressive Christian work, promoting social justice through a Christian lens. Rarely, if ever, are literary contexts beyond sentimental or abolitionist literature appealed to, and although Stowe's “borrowing” from the Gothic mode has been noted by a handful of authors, few have considered her as consciously engaging or refuting the principles of Gothic literature, many of which are antithetical to Stowe's own.

By considering Stowe's use of Gothic tropes not as “borrowing” but as an active engagement with the genre itself, one discovers not only a sophisticated manipulation of the Gothic genre, but also a deeper amplification of Stowe's progressive Christian project regarding slavery, redemption, and feminine identity. Using the contexts provided by Gothic works during and before Stowe's time, with special attention paid to its American variants, this study examines three distinct Gothic figures or devices within Stowe's work: the Gothic setting of the Louisiana plantation, the threefold Gothic female as represented by Cassy, and the “haunting” of Legree. In each, one finds a manipulation of Gothic tradition and themes that, ultimately, serves to refute the Gothic altogether: taking the helplessness and inescapable dark of Gothicism and Christianizing it with the light of redemption.

The Gothic Canon and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

When examining the sentimental nature and dark subject matter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's drawing from the Gothic genre seems an understandable, even inevitable, move. As stories built on the evocation of heightened emotions, Gothic tales bear a close relationship with the sentimental novel, and Stowe would not be the first to utilize Gothic devices to intensify a work of sentimental fiction. Sentimental novels such as Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1851) commonly exploited Gothic terror in a way that was nearly masochistic, supplying readers with the thrill of transgressive pleasure through the safe channels of sympathetic identification.¹ More generally, Stowe's triumph of sentiment over rational convention is itself a Gothic theme. The Gothic protagonist's weakness, his inability to overcome perversity through rational thought, becomes a Stowe protagonist's strength. In *Wieland* (1798), Brown's (2011) seminal work of American Gothic fiction, the idyllic, removed intellectualism of the Wielands and their friends, when brought up against the power of irrational sentiment, proves no match. The protagonist Clara Wieland, upon first seeing a mysterious, unkempt stranger from a distance, muses detachedly on “the alliance which commonly subsists between ignorance and the practice of agriculture,” and “airy speculations as to the influence of progressive knowledge in dissolving this alliance” (42). However, upon hearing the stranger speak, she falls into paroxysms of emotion “altogether involuntary and uncontrollable” (42), dropping her handkerchief and dissolving into tears at the eloquence and passion of the man who, ultimately, will bring about the downfall of the entire Wieland family. The tears that Clara weeps are the same as those shed by Senator Bird, by Augustine St. Clare, or by Miss Ophelia: the melting away of justifications, logical defenses, and rational thought into compassion and sympathy, the bread and butter of sentimental literature. This movement against rationalism expresses itself as a common theme within the Gothic: Crow (2009) notes in his survey *American Gothic* the rise, driven by the Romantic movement, of a type of Gothic villain representing “obsessive rationalism combined with authority” (4), a sort of anti-sentimental antagonist that quickly becomes Stowe's hard-hearted slavers, content in their rationalizations of their peculiar institution and impervious to the cries of their victims.

As narratives commonly concerned with guilt, oppression, and female victimization, the Gothic also easily lends itself to Stowe's argument against slavery. As Goddu (1997) notes in *Gothic America*, slavery is America's unique “historical haunting” (10). Slavery's stories are inherently Gothic in their nature,² tales which, as Stowe's character Cassy recalls, “could make any one's hair rise, and their teeth chatter, if I should only tell what I've seen and been knowing to, here” (312). Gothic fiction before Stowe had already touched upon slavery and unjust subjugation—from Godwin's persecuted servant in *Caleb Williams* (1794) to Poe's racially charged fears in *Hop-Frog* (1849) and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838)—and the Gothic obsession with innocent victims, revisited guilt, cursed bloodlines, and haunted spaces make it particularly fertile ground for the African-American slave narrative. By invoking the Gothic, Stowe drives home the horrors of slavery—torture, subjugation, and powerlessness, particularly in the case of women—themes which her readers may have experienced only through Gothic fictions.

However, allusions to the Gothic also present significant problems for Stowe when one considers the worldview she both owned and presented within her work: a sort of “Christocentric liberalism,” as identified by Caskey (1978), which “brought God down from heaven and installed him by the hearth” (363). Throughout the rest of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe promotes a

progressive, liberal Christian vision, uniting her quest for social justice with a Christianity that is distinctly feminine, domestic, and based upon human action rather than divine judgment. Redemption from sin and the slave trade, offered at every turn, is presented almost exclusively through female or feminine figures (Uncle Tom being a prime example), while damnation is nearly always a hell of one's own making.³ Stowe rejected even the liberal, modified Calvinism of her father as too unrelenting,⁴ and wrote in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of redemption available to all, even Simon Legree himself, without mention of a traditional hell, the roots of the American Gothic are sunk deep into traditional Puritan and Calvinist theologies of original sin and total depravity, and, going even further back, the mysteries and ritual of the Roman Catholic tradition in Europe. Never do any of Nathaniel Hawthorne's protagonists, haunted as they are by Hawthorne's own Puritan past, find the peace or confidence in Christ that Stowe preaches as readily available to all who choose to accept—the eponymous hero of *Young Goodman Brown* (1835), after discovering the deep depravities that lie in everyone's hearts, including his own, ends his days not with repentance but with embittered loss of faith. For Gothic characters, there can be no true escape through repentance, renewal, or any other means: though they may be allowed to escape the haunted space, they may never escape being haunted. Suppressed trauma, ancestral guilt, and hidden depravities may be unearthed, but never fully done away with, in oneself or in others.

This presents a significant problem for the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: she cannot lift the tropes of the Gothic from their places without also lifting their accompanying darkness, a darkness whose inescapable nature directly contradicts her Christian vision. It is only through careful manipulation—a Christianization, as it were, of Gothic tropes—that Stowe is able to tackle the inescapable dark of the Gothic and find a true escape through the light of Christian redemption.

The Gothic setting: Legree's estate

Uncle Tom's Cabin notably takes place on a series of “stages”, interior spaces ranging from Tom's cabin to St. Clare's mansion, each with their own distinct ambience and character-like qualities. Legree's plantation, separated from civilization by ten miles of swamp in every direction, is a uniquely remote, isolated space within which the drama of the novel may be performed, falling under the Gothic convention of the “dream landscape”, identified by MacAndrew (1979) as “a closed world separated from that of the everyday” (47). By setting a Gothic novel within a unique, isolated dream world, the author opens the door for impossible characters and phenomena: in *Wieland*, it is only within the confines of Brown's isolated “transcendentalist utopia” of an estate—itsself the site of Johannes Kelpius's Saxon radical pietists⁵—that one might accept the elder Wieland's immolation and the younger Wieland's madness. Closer in nature to Stowe's Gothic space are the houses of bondage in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), places where tyrants rather than just rule hold sway. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this effect is achieved by the plantation's isolation. As Cassy tells Tom, there is “not a white person here, who could testify, if you were burned alive”, and thus, “no law here, of God or man, that can do you, or any one of us, the least good” (312). With isolation from society comes the freedom to abandon moral and social norms with impunity, and Legree, by doing so creates a nightmarish world within the world.

Like Edgar Allan Poe's House of Usher, Stowe translates the crumbling castles of the European Gothic into the analogous American architectural fall from glory: namely, the decaying mansions of the American South, formerly grand abodes fallen

into disrepair and decrepitude. Stowe's initial description of Legree's estate consists of sentences beginning with variations upon “what was once” or “what had been” (298), describing how its former grandeur has come to ruin, desecrated by Legree's presence. Some of Stowe's most atmospheric language is used in these chapters to create an environment reminiscent of Gothic decay, referring to damp walls covered in moldering wallpaper, “unwholesome” air (320), and moonlight through shattered windows. But while most Gothic spaces are singular, unparalleled by other spaces within the work, Stowe has two castles instead of one: she spends nearly as much time describing the beautiful New Orleans home of Augustine St. Clare. While the two spaces are admittedly different in many ways, Stowe's detailed descriptions of two Louisiana plantations connotes a connection between them: regardless of their outward appearance, they are both houses of bondage, and the decadent Oriental-style trappings of the St. Clare mansion could very quickly degenerate into the hedonistic decay of Legree's nightmare landscape.

Likewise, for the black characters in Stowe's novel, the Gothic distinction between nightmare landscape and wholesome reality simply doesn't exist: for a slave, the world outside a plantation is hardly any better, and could easily be far worse. While the white protagonists of Gothic fiction can find some semblance of freedom outside of the haunted space, no such joys await the escaped slave; rather, the bounds of their haunted space extend as far as the institution of slavery itself. Thus, Cassy, in her aforementioned description of the Legree estate, says “not a white person here, who could testify,” signalling her awareness that, even outside of the plantation, only a white man's word can bring justice. The Gothic genre's distinction between the unjust dream world and the just reality is here blurred, for Stowe is aware that no just reality exists for the slave—the only true escape lies solely in the security of heaven.

Stowe, like many other Gothic authors, steeps her plantation stage-setting with the language of hell, in keeping with its owner's blasphemous claim in his introductory scene: “I'm your church now!” (293). However, in keeping with her more progressive Christian vision, in which feminine domesticity attains almost spiritual qualities, Stowe's damnation of the Legree plantation occurs not through evocations of the demonic, but rather through violations of sacred domesticity. The approach to the Legree plantation, “up the red, muddy, turbid current, through the abrupt, tortuous windings of the Red river”, with its “steep red-clay banks” (296), evokes with its threefold repetition of the word “red” within a single sentence a vision of a path paved in blood. Images of death and decay recur throughout this section: “funereal black moss” (296), air “like that of a vault” (323) and so on, and in Legree's “three or four ferocious-looking dogs roused by the sound of the wagon-wheels” (299) there lies a faint suggestion of Hades' three-headed Cerberus and Ixion's fiery wheel—a pagan rather than a Christian hell.

However, the deepest horror, the truly Gothic transgression, lies in the description of Legree's living room, where Stowe deliberately inserts the hellish in place of the homely: the room's central feature, the fireplace representing the “sacred hearth” of a household, is occupied not by crackling logs, but by a metal brazier of burning charcoal whose “ruddy glare” (320) tinges the rest of the room in red. Instead of domestic accessories and furniture, the room is littered with horse tack and whips—discomfiting accessories here connoting ownership, subjugation, and abuse. As Halttunen (1986) points out, by setting these props in the living room, Stowe reveals further Legree's blasphemy in violating what Halttunen identifies as the “central tenet of the cult of domesticity: the separation of the home from the market” (121). Legree's home is hellish precisely because it is not truly a home: in a novel where Christian morality is linked to

domesticity, femininity, and kitchens, Legree's abode, which appears to lack all three, is the very model of hell on earth.

Unfortunately, this is a hell from which there is no escape, and to that end, where many Gothic novels create a grand resolution via destruction or conversion of their haunted space, Stowe refuses her readers this catharsis, providing only a single paragraph regarding the demise of Legree, with barely half a sentence devoted to his death. In so doing, she redefines the Gothic space as both far grander, and far more intimate, than traditional Gothic fiction allows: a space that encompasses both whole societies and individual minds.

The haunted spaces of traditional Gothic literature are places of spectacular evil, and so must be dispatched with in a spectacular fashion. Some Gothic authors chose to convert their haunted castles under the hand of a new, more benevolent ruler, as in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, while many others chose wholesale destruction. Indeed, some of the most striking and terrifying images in Gothic literature stem from these cathartic annihilations: Poe's moon shining through the crack splitting Usher's house in two, or Brown's fire which consumes Clara Wieland's home—and nearly Clara herself—in yet another echoing of her father's spontaneous combustion. However, Stowe markedly avoids the paths of conversion or destruction for the Legree plantation, leaving it “unresolved” precisely because in that moment, no resolution can be achieved, and no escape can be made. Legree's plantation, and plantations like his, will continue to exist long after Tom has died and Cassy has escaped—their resolution requires a reordering of society, and is thus outside the scope of Stowe's novel. For Stowe, the Gothic space is widened to include the whole of the United States and anywhere that slavery exists; therefore, in order to achieve the prototypical Gothic ending of an “escape” to the “normal” world outside of the dream landscape, Stowe's characters must either die and reach heaven, or flee to France. Stowe thus withholds from her readers the “resolution” of their Gothic space through a pat ending—its ultimate resolution would be found only in civil war, a destruction perhaps more terrible than any catharsis Stowe or the Gothic writers could have dreamed.

Though Stowe refuses to resolve the Gothic space, she does end the Legree plantation portion of her novel with the demise of its owner in a comeuppance that exemplifies her Christian vision. While Gothic authors have a tendency to conflate character with cursed locales—Poe's *Usher* and Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), to name a few—Stowe leaves completely unambiguous who is truly to blame. It is Simon Legree, and Simon Legree alone, who has created this Gothic space, and thus it is he alone who deserves punishment. By thus condensing the Gothic space into the mind of a single person, Stowe is able to mete out unambiguous Christian justice in accordance with her progressive Christian views. Evil, for Stowe, lies entirely in man and in his refusal to repent, and while the larger Gothic space of a slavery-tolerant society must remain unresolved, the more intimate Gothic space of Legree's sinful soul can be successfully punished by a divine conflation of his own guilt and the vengeance of the woman he has wronged.

The Gothic woman: Cassy

Stowe's depiction of Cassy, Legree's sex slave, immediately sets her apart from the other women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: in a novel that praises the virtues of piety, femininity, and domesticity—where female characters lacking in one quality nearly always compensate with another—Cassy appears to exemplify none of these virtues. Ammons (1997), in her essay on “Heroines in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,” defines the qualities of Stowe's ideal woman as

“unshakable allegiance to the Christian virtues of faith, hope, charity, mercy, and self-sacrifice; purity in body and mind; ethical dependence more on emotion than on reason; submission to mundane authority except when it violates higher laws; and protection of the home as a sacred and inviolable institution” (164). Cassy, while still remaining an ennobled character, defies many of these principles: she is “proud and bitter” (Stowe, 1994: 304); sexually impure, though not by choice; rebellious; vengeful; violent; and, perhaps most importantly, in violation of the central tenet of motherhood as the murderer of her own child. She lacks any of the domesticity displayed by the novel's other female characters, and her initial godlessness extends to her playing the part of Job's wife to Uncle Tom, encouraging him towards despair and cursing against God.

However, if it appears that Cassy does not fit within Stowe's feminine aesthetic, it is more than clear that she fits within the feminine aesthetic of the Gothic novel. Cassy's first appearance within the novel—as a “dark, wild face” (300) seen through a window—immediately brings to mind a Gothic madwoman in the style of Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason or Poe's Madeline Usher: trapped women, hidden away from the world, who exercise untold power over their keepers. However, Stowe also uses Cassy in the capacity of several other Gothic types, and it is through Cassy that Stowe begins to openly demonstrate a manipulation, rather than mere appropriation, of the Gothic narrative.

The dangerous Gothic madwoman is already present in Stowe's first description of Cassy's face—“one of those that, at a glance, seem to convey to us an idea of a wild, painful, and romantic history” (304)—almost a textbook definition of the archetype. Like Bertha Mason or the female vampires in *Dracula*, the “mad” women of Victorian Gothic literature are dangerous thanks to their connection with passion or sex. In Cassy's case, her position as a sex slave, and her personal history involving a murder of passion, have combined to make her that paradox of power and powerlessness⁶ that Stowe simply calls “wild”—a descriptor which Stowe will repeatedly use to describe Cassy more, it seems, than any other adjective. The amount of agency that Cassy possessed in her past and continues to exercise in her present is disproportionate in a novel where Christian love is marked by, or perhaps even demands, powerlessness. And what makes Cassy particularly a madwoman in Stowe's eyes is the fact that she violates the very idea of woman entirely in the aforementioned murder of her own child, the violent severing of the mother-child bond. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their landmark work of feminist criticism *The Madwoman in the Attic* note that “all the characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [are] judged by their attitude towards this bond” between mother and child (482), and, if that is so, then surely Cassy must be deemed insane.

However, Cassy also fits into two other types within Gothic fiction: the innocent female protagonist, oppressed or preyed upon by a tyrannical male, and the ghost, forever rooted to a traumatic event from her past. Throughout her novel, Stowe points to black and/or mulatto women as a particularly victimized subset of the slave class, and nowhere is this seen clearer than in the case of Cassy and Emmeline. Both have fallen victim to Legree's sexual predations under his ownership, and, while Emmeline more nearly approximates the innocence of the Gothic female protagonist, her delicate damsel-in-distress nature give her a distinctly Victorian air. Meanwhile, Cassy performs, albeit in a strange inversion, the work of a Gothic female protagonist: like Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, she boldly charges ahead, imprisoned yet determined to explore possible avenues of discovery and escape. However, while most Gothic heroines seek escape through the discovery of truth, Cassy seeks it through

deception, becoming the author, rather than the recipient, of Gothic terror. Meanwhile, the innocent, Emmeline, begins to take on some of Cassy's characteristics in her new captivity, as if to say that the victimized innocent under the yoke of slavery inevitably becomes the madwoman. At one point, Legree, in searching for Emmeline, hears her singing in a "wild, pathetic voice" (324), "wild" being, until now, a descriptor nearly wholly dedicated to Cassy.

Stowe in this moment also describes Emmeline's voice as "strange and ghostlike" (324), thereby bringing in the third, supernatural Gothic character that Emmeline, in following Cassy's path, embodies. Cassy's history of grief haunts her as perhaps the most defining element of her character, and her appearance is likewise haunted, a former beauty now emaciated, hollowed out by tragedy. Stowe also connects her to the supernatural, saying that she has a glare "like sheet-lightning" (306), an ability to "work like magic" (307), and a "wild and doleful laugh, that rung, with a strange, supernatural sound" (312). In her first true conversation with Legree in the novel, she appears as a disembodied voice from behind his chair: Stowe presents her words come first, followed by "said a voice, behind his chair" (320), only afterwards identifying it as Cassy. Cassy's disembodied voice, and her ambiguous relationship with the supernatural, contains echoes of Carwin, the antagonist of *Wieland*, whose powers of ventriloquism are at first mistaken for the supernatural. Though both Cassy and Carwin are repeatedly asserted to be no more than human, events transpire which render their actions reminiscent of the supernatural, and the enormous amounts of personal charisma they exercise over those around them make them peculiarly powerful characters.

In addition to the descriptive attributions provided by the narrator, Cassy is ghostly, too, in her character, identifying herself as under a curse: the subjection, body and soul, to hereditary slavery, from mother to child to grandchild. And, unlike many ghostly curses, this is not one that can be so easily put to rest by holy water or by moving a body—it is the colour of her skin, and the institution that condemns it, that so doom her. As she laments in her conversation with Emmeline, "There's no end to the curse—forever!" (326).

The self-aware Gothic: Legree's haunting

Stowe, while greatly enriching the character of Cassy through this image of the threefold Gothic woman, tempers it with an awareness of the genre that borders on mockery. While Stowe may utilize Gothic elements, she in no way desires her readers to succumb to all of them; rather, by the end, she will have subverted or inverted the stereotypes she has conjured. Though she has built up Cassy's wildness to a near-supernatural level, Stowe's narrator makes clear that Legree fears Cassy with "that superstitious horror of insane persons which is common to coarse and uninstructed minds" (321)—in other words, only the uneducated or unenlightened would view Cassy as a truly supernatural figure. Legree, as a "coarse and uninstructed" person, gives in to the sort of terror that the Gothic inspires, but Stowe expects her reader to read the transpiring events at a higher level, as a manipulation of the Gothic.

Indeed, once Cassy's escape plan is set into motion, Stowe allows the reader "behind the scenes" to view the mechanics of what is truly happening. While Stowe could have allowed the reader to remain ignorant for a time, experiencing each terrifying event along with Legree, she chooses instead to pull back the curtain and reveal the falsity of the Gothic story-within-the-story. In this way, scenes can be played for knowing laughs rather than shudders, as Cassy puts the Gothic elements around her and within herself to good use. In this sense, she resonates less with

Wieland or *Udolpho*, both of whom reveal the mechanics of their horror only after the fact, and more with the winking "horror" of Washington Irving, consistently undercutting the terror of Ichabod Crane by the somewhat ridiculous pumpkin that stands in place of the Horseman's head.

As Cassy carries out her plan, the reader becomes aware of how Cassy upends the three Gothic female roles she has previously fulfilled, and, in doing so, begins her journey to free herself from them completely—not through strength or violence, but in a way that affirms Stowe's domestic feminine vision. Cassy's recreation of her own Gothic horror story presents itself as a uniquely feminine mode of liberation and retribution: without feats of strength or violation of Christian virtue, Cassy demonstrates, in the words of Gilbert and Gubar (2000), "the possibility of women enacting their rage without being consumed by it" (533). Her revenge need not, as it has in the past, drive her to violence and insanity; rather, by enacting a uniquely feminine story of haunting, Cassy punishes her master without incurring punishment upon herself.

In doing so, Cassy takes advantage of each of the three Gothic female types she previously fulfilled. The "wild women" of Gothic fiction exercised enormous emotional power over their keepers—Bertha Mason over her husband, Madeline Usher over her brother—but rarely were they in a state of mind to appreciate or utilize that power. Cassy, utilizing her own power over Legree as a "wild woman," deliberately builds his fear of the attic; if she, who is already an object of fear, avoids the attic, how much more should Legree fear it? Then, by doubling back to hide in the attic of Legree's house, she turns the "madwoman in the attic" idea upon its head: the "madwoman" does indeed now live in the attic, but she only does so in accordance with her ingenious bid for freedom. In doing so, she reveals her potential for not only sanity but also domesticity, turning a formerly ominous space within a Gothic setting into a domestic one for herself and Emmeline. Far from being an innocent protagonist, seeking the truth while being terrorized by a tyrannical master, Cassy manufactures her own salvation through terror, masking the truth to torment her master with the guilt of what he's done. And finally, in the chapter titled "An Authentic Ghost Story" (365), Cassy, the haunted woman, haunts back, and Stowe humorously notes that her tactic of wearing a white sheet is itself an invention of another author: Shakespeare (365). Each of these impersonations is distinctly feminine—either the spirit of the woman Legree killed in the attic years ago, or the spirit of Legree's own mother—in contrast to the novel's other female slave protagonist, Eliza, who mimics masculinity in order to gain protection. Cassy, by utilizing what she has and who she is, makes the stronger escape, one that severely punishes her jailer.⁷

Although Cassy appears to take a far more active role than many Gothic protagonists in escaping from the Gothic space, perhaps what is most striking is how neatly Cassy's actions, more often by accident than on purpose, become a moral indictment of Simon Legree, one which ultimately leads to his death. It is precisely the accidental nature of this punishment that affirms Stowe's progressive Christian vision—rather than having Cassy exact full vengeance, the narrative leaves ambiguous how much of Legree's haunting is done by Cassy, and how much is done by Legree's own conscience. His unrepentant soul indicts itself. In a twist upon the traditional Gothic trope of a cursed bloodline, wherein the sins of fathers are visited upon their children, Stowe appears to do the same with grace: the appearance of Legree's Christian mother very nearly softens the heart of this hardened sinner. However, as in progressive Christian theology, it is Legree's choice to refuse repentance, even after this offering of grace, that ultimately dooms him to the predations of his own mind.

The Gothic refuted: Cassy's restoration

Since the ghost that terrorizes Legree's household is fabricated by Cassy, the question remains: what, then, is the "authentic" ghost story of this chapter, and can it be answered or set to rest by Stowe's Christian vision? The answer lies in the chapter's second half, in the coincidence and happy ending that falls upon Cassy when she discovers her kinship with Eliza, George, and Madam de Thoux. Cassy's escape may have made her appear, as Gilbert and Gubar assert, simply an ironic example of a Gothic archetype; however, not all of the Gothic elements within *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be taken ironically—Stowe's depiction of the Gothicism of the African-American slave narrative, and her expansion upon the Gothic setting to encompass the whole of American society, cannot be resolved in as simple a manner as Cassy's parody of the Gothic ghost tale. There lies in slavery a deeper despair than any that Gothic fiction can provide, for the Gothic space, though perhaps not the Gothic mind, is escapable: the dream landscape has borders that the protagonist may cross into the light of wholesome reality. For the slave, no wholesome reality exists—the oppression of the dream landscape is no isolated incident, but rather the norm. Even Stowe's characters who escape to freedom in France must then contend with the realities of slavery back in their home country—a Gothic space that remains stubbornly unconverted and therefore unresolved.

In Christianizing the Gothic, then, Stowe creates an opposite sort of resolution: since, in her construction, the Gothic space is unresolvable, she instead resolves the Gothic mind, setting it at rest through its conformation to Christian ideals. Though Cassy has escaped from the clutches of Simon Legree, she still retains her Gothic mind and threefold Gothic nature. Her losses cannot be unwritten, and she remains a haunted Gothic figure, a ghost lost within and utterly defined by her past. In this state, she is unable to "escape" the Gothic mind and be restored to Stowe's ideal of true Christian womanhood.

However, by reuniting her with her lost family and bringing her into the realm of Christianity, Stowe puts that ghost to rest and neatly ties together the remaining loose threads of the novel. For a while after their reunion, Cassy retains elements of "hauntedness": Stowe describes her mind as "shattered and wearied" (373) still, loving her granddaughter, the image of the child she lost, "more naturally" (373) than her own daughter. The restoration of her family alone cannot restore Cassy's Gothic mind. However, in one final nod to the Gothic, Stowe uses the reading of Scripture to banish the ghost: Eliza's "steady, consistent piety, regulated by the constant reading of the sacred word" guides her mother to healing and a transformation into a "devout and tender Christian" (373). Only through the balm of Christianity can the shattered Gothic mind be redeemed—though the Gothic space may continue to haunt, though the horror-filled past can never be unwritten, the love of family and the light of Christianity offer a renewal that ultimately allows Cassy to escape the Gothic mind and be restored unto new life. Thus, at the end of the novel, Stowe reveals that the unendurably tragic, bitter life of a slave mother can find its end in hope and peace. Each of Stowe's Gothic tropes can finally be put to rest: the madwoman has regained her sanity, the victimized woman has conquered over her oppressor, and the ghost tied to her past has found rest in her future.

Notes

- 1 Noble's (1998) examination of *The Wide, Wide World* in her essay 'An Ecstasy of Apprehension: The Gothic Pleasures of Sentimental Fiction' argues strongly for the presence of Gothic horror within the core of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, arguing that sentimental fiction deliberately derives masochistic pleasure from the

terror of tortured victims, and through sympathy allows readers "a fantasized transcendence of coherent identity" (165).

- 2 Goddu also asserts that Stowe's amplification of the slavery narrative through Gothic convention has a two-fold purpose: to both bring the reader closer to slavery's horrific realities, and to pull away from it by viewing it through the protective lens of fiction. Stowe here gives the victims of terror a voice with which to 'haunt back' (143), but also provides the reader an avenue of escape by incorporating known genre conventions. By doing so, she utilizes the Gothic to both "resurrect or dematerialize history by turning it into a fiction" (144).
- 3 Stowe's unwillingness to damn her characters to a more traditional Calvinist hell may also be seen within her own personal life. In response to her son Charley's assertion that he no longer believed in hell, Stowe does not contradict him, but merely redefines hell, saying, "When you say ... you do not believe in any Hell I do not understand you for first you must see in this life that there is suffering mysterious and unalterable, awful, and fruitful of sin. There is before our eyes the hell of the drunkard, the murderer, the dishonest ..." (quoted in Wagenknecht, 1965: 205).
- 4 Though Lyman Beecher's brand of Calvinism was remarkably liberal, Karen Halttunen points out in her study of the Beecher family's literary relationship with Calvinism that both Beecher children—Harriet and Henry Ward—were "repelled and distressed by what they perceived to be the Calvinist double bind: though depraved by nature, they were expected to exercise moral ability in conversion" (126).
- 5 The historical significance of this location – northwest of Philadelphia, where the Wissahickon Creek joins the Schuylkill River—is pointed out by Kafer (2004) in his book *Charles Brockden Brown's Revolution and the Birth of American Gothic*, p. 114.
- 6 Auerbach (1982) identifies this archetype within Victorian literature as the "demonic" woman: "an explosively mobile, magic woman" (1) who is both victim and queen.
- 7 Wolstenholme (1993) notes that Eliza, by dressing as a man, "literalizes, even parodies, the notion that woman's self-representation must express itself in male terms" (93); however, while Eliza loses her hair to play the boy, Eva's hair, in the form of the lock given to Uncle Tom, lives on to terrorize Legree with a uniquely female presence. Cassy, like Eva's lock, proves the power inherent to woman within Stowe's narrative—they may alter their self-representation to some degree, but their femininity is a source of power and not a hindrance.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

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