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# A Monster of Virtues:

# Female Ideality, (Dis)ability, and Nineteenth-Century Womanhood

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Jessica Christina Horvath Williams

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Monster of Virtues:

Female Ideality, (Dis)ability, and Nineteenth-Century Womanhood

by

Jessica Christina Horvath Williams

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Helen E. Deutsch, Co-Chair

Professor Richard A. Yarborough, Co-Chair

My dissertation, *A Monster of Virtues: Female Ideality, (Dis)ability, and Nineteenth-Century Womanhood*, investigates how female ideality served as a precursor for the development of three ideologies commonly critiqued by critical disability studies: the individual responsibility for health, the absence of futurity for disabled people, and the role of wage labor in the construction of (dis)ability. Combining the theories and methods of feminist disability studies, history, and literary study, I revise the history of (dis)ability in the U.S., particularly the its rootedness in the concept of normalcy, through an exploration of lives and writings of nineteenth-century women. I argue that, instead of normalcy, many of current ideas of (dis)ability originate in a prescriptive ideal Womanhood—unachievable, but not imagined as such —which I name "female ideality." I turn to diaries, letters, and fictional works written by

nineteenth-century U.S. women to explore how female ideality not only shaped ideologies of (dis)ability today, but, as these authors show, had material effects *then*. These authors link illness, invalidism, ill-health, and debility to the wear-and-tear of the conflicting responsibilities of wife, mother, and community member, each defined by their own rubrics of the ideal.

The dissertation of Jessica Christina Horvath Williams is approved.

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For my grandmothers, Pernell Noon and Gabriella Horvath

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## Introduction

In the nineteenth-century United States, professionals and the general public almost ubiquitously considered female bodies and minds to be broken—impaired, disabled, debilitated, hysterical—and yet simultaneously perfect—ideal, superlative creations without physical or moral flaw. Since the publication of Barbara Welter's 1966 mainspring, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," scholars in fields ranging from gender studies to the history of technology have interrogated portions of this puzzling dichotomy. Much of this scholarship is excellent—both robust and prescient, exploring nineteenth-century heteropatriarchal culture and tracing its vestiges to the lives of women today; however, it also treats the invalid woman and the ideal woman as distinct phenomena, either analyzing evolving models of womanhood and the rise of feminism, or examining the impaired women as physicians, authors, and health reformers understood her. Yet understanding female ideality and debility as comorbidities of an emergent liberal subjecthood affords us a clear genealogy of ableism rooted in heteropatriarchy—a gendered assemblage of health, physical and moral perfection, idealized labor, and self-reliance that, later in the century, would be translocated to other vulnerable, impaired bodyminds and named (dis)ability.[1]

My dissertation, *A Monster of Virtues: Female Ideality, (Dis)ability, and Nineteenth-Century Womanhood*, investigates how female ideality served as a precursor for the development of three ideologies commonly critiqued by critical disability studies: the individual responsibility for health, the absence of futurity for disabled people, and the role of wage labor in the construction of (dis)ability. Combining the theories and methods of feminist disability studies, history, and literary study, I revise the history of (dis)ability in the U.S., particularly the its rootedness in the concept of normalcy, through an

[1] Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 6. I maintain Schalk's distinction between *(dis)ability* as a system of oppression and *disability* as an impairment, or set of impairments. "Bodymind" refers to the "enmeshment of the mind and body, which are typically understood as interacting and connected, yet distinct entities due to Cartesian dualism in Western philosophy," Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined*, 5. See also, Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 268–84, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12127.

exploration of lives and writings of nineteenth-century women. I argue that, instead of normalcy, many of current ideas of (dis)ability originate in a prescriptive ideal Womanhood—unachievable, but not imagined as such —which I name "female ideality." I turn to diaries, letters, and fictional works written by nineteenth-century U.S. women to explore how female ideality not only shaped ideologies of (dis)ability today, but, as these authors show, had material effects *then*. These authors link illness, invalidism, ill-health, and debility to the wear-and-tear of the conflicting responsibilities of wife, mother, and community member, each defined by their own rubrics of the ideal.

***Structure and Methodologies***

*A Monster of Virtues* is divided into four chapters, each of which focuses on aspects of female ideality as it defined and challenged by white women in the nineteenth century. Each chapter pairs a robust sampling of historical documents—including newspaper columns and magazine articles, letters and diary entries, medical and labor reports, advice manuals on domestic labor, guidebooks, exposés, and reform pamphlets—with critical disability theory and feminist historical and cultural scholarship. By bringing the insights of these knowledge fields together, I remap the ideological terrain of women and (dis)ability. Using feminist historical and cultural methodologies, I explore, on the one hand, how key concepts of (dis)ability emerge from heteropatriarchy and "domestic individualism."[2] Simultaneously, I use feminist disability theory to revise historical arguments around nineteenth-century women's ill health, showing how material concerns—such as the rise in wage labor and the increased task load on white women—provide a race- and gender-dependent, class-independent etiology of female debility.[3]

[2] Gillian Brown coined this phrase in her eponymous work, *Domestic Individualism*. I expand this concept beyond "domesticity" as centered in "values of interiority, privacy, and psychology" to include material concerns. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1.
[3] This is not to say that class is irrelevant to women's historical health outcomes. Rather, material elements, like the increased domestic labor expected of women despite class, provided a baseline debility that was then exacerbated by class hierarchies. For the similarities of domestic tasks type and load across classes, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Undergirding each of these insights is the concept of "female ideality," a composite of contradictory ideal traits and demands which remained largely unchanged from the early republic to the late nineteenth century. Female ideality is, in essence, the racial and gendered ideological conditions out of which both sociocultural (dis)ability today and some modes of material debility then emerge.

Finally, I mine the concepts of various scientific disciplines throughout this dissertation—virology, quantum physics, population genetics, among others—for use as metaphors to map relationality, causality, and change over time ($\Delta T$), and other discursive and material formations, differently. Science, and the scientific method, provides us resources for understanding and explaining complex phenomena that function non-intuitively, and it allows us to reimagine the possible relationships between the emergence and development of social concepts, across historical events, and within texts. I use these scientific concepts to expand my understanding of what it is possible for texts to be doing and for culture and individuals to interact. However, natural and social phenomena are in many ways distinct, and the metaphors I use are just that—figurative structures that allow one thing to be understood in terms of a thing which it is not. If we fully extended the logic of the science metaphors I use, there would be a point where the metaphors break down—some sooner, rather than later—but they are a beginning, a way to map relationality and progression differently. Away from imbrication and toward probability clouds (atomic orbitals). Away from space and time and toward the relativistic effects of spacetime, where different observers perceive the same phenomena with different causalities. Away from the determinism of teleologies and toward the evolutionary "mess" of culture. Away from cause and effect (sequence) and toward simultaneity (parallel). Thus, science can help provide knowledge structures for feminist practice which is predicated on understanding "the simultaneous, multiple, overlapping, and contradictory systems of power that shape our lives and political options" and maps conflicting, paradoxical, and incompatible directives.[4]

[4] Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, "Introduction: Theorizing Feminist Spaces and Times," in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 25.

Critical disability studies primarily locates the emergence of our contemporary, Western notions of (dis)ability in three historical events: the invention of normalcy and its proliferation as a governing social concept; the rise of industrial capitalism and wage labor; and the shift from community-care to state-funded institutionalization for mentally ill and mentally disabled people.[5] Each of these events, our field argues, begins in the nineteenth century and, thus, emerged in tandem with liberalism and individualism as their core philosophies. As such, patriarchalism, heterosexism, racism, and xenophobia infuse (dis)ability, while simultaneously borrowing its explanatory ideologies and justifying discourses that pin human worth to markers of presumed health.[6] This genealogy, while vital, assumes male-centric experiences and male-produced knowledge as the default, universal conditions of the nineteenth century out of which (dis)ability necessarily emerged.[7] The "normal" or "average" was specifically the normal or average *man* in scientific discourse, throughout both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8] Wage-earning was ideologically, and percentage-wise, a male activity in the nineteenth century, and Marxist feminists have struggled with the same elision of domestic, unwaged labor in *Capital* that disability studies scholars now must struggle with in tracing (dis)ability's historical origins. Finally, while our focus on institutionalization and medical professionalization—whose gates, remedies, theories, and justifications were dominated by male experts—is both necessary and apt, it cannot be our exclusive referent for nineteenth-century health discourse. Throughout the century, public opinion held women responsible for the reproductive labor of the nation and the health of all members of their households.

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[5] On (dis)ability and normalcy, see, Lennard Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso Books, 1995); On (dis)ability and the rise of industrial capitalism, see, Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). On the history of institutionalization, see Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[6] Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33-34.

[7] In this dissertation, I address the specific ways that histories of (dis)ability are male-centric, and I revise these claims accordingly. For historical revisions of (dis)ability considering race, see Dea H. Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property and Power in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[8] For twentieth-century medical and other data-based scholarship on "male" as the default human, see: Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (New York: Abrams, 2019).

Two decades before the founding of the American Medical Association in 1847, the health reform movement targeted—and was championed by—women. This campaign deployed the political philosophy of individualism in order to name "the physical debility of American women" and hold women individually responsible for repairing their presumed ill health in order to perpetuate democracy by birthing and training enfranchised sons.[9] Because critical disability studies is missing a crucial part of the story of health and embodiment in the nineteenth century, we have not only overlooked the explicit historical link between heteropatriarchy and ableism (we have, despite our best intentions, perpetuated it), we have developed strategies of resistance and reform that are incomplete.

But the intersection of women and (dis)ability in the nineteenth century cannot fully be explored without the imaginative engagements of women with their subject-positions; thus, in my last two chapters, I close read literary texts that highlight the ways the women understood and wrestled with female ideality and its production of discursive and material impairments. While authors such as Harriet Prescott Spofford, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Mary Wilkins Freeman focus on female ideality as an impossible, devitalizing standard of womanhood, they often explore its contradictions and its debilitating effects through impaired female protagonists, reimagining the causal relationships between debility and ideal womanhood in ways that center, rather than dictate, women's experiences.

This project recovers the other part of (dis)ability's story, tracing how some of our current stigmas of and correctives for bodymind variability originate in the discursive and material conditions of nineteenth-century women's lives. This revised tale centers on a key concept: female ideality. This project uncovers a very different set of gendered meanings, based on the nineteenth-century construction of female ideality, for what we have come to take for granted as "normal." By doing the historical work of reexamining normalcy and ideality in relation to nineteenth-century constructions of women and

[9] I take this phrase from Catharine Beecher's article by the same name published in *Lady's Pearl* magazine in 1842. This, however, is a later writing. Beecher's crusade against women's debility was institutionalized in the curriculum of Hartford Female Seminary, which she founded with her sister Mary in 1823.

Womanhood that we can better "historicize" our understanding of (dis)ability today.

### *Definitions*

#### *Female Ideality*

I coin "female ideality" as an intentionally awkward neologism meant to create pause, to evoke an impression of something at once familiar and strange; it borrows the cachet and history of "ideal womanhood" while remaining distant from it. Female ideality encompasses two constitutive historical characteristics: it drew from a composite of ideal traits I call Womanhood, and it was prescriptive and imagined as achievable. First, in moving from "ideal" to "ideality," we move from types and definitions of womanhood—classificatory sets of characteristics—to Womanhood as an umbrella category, an input, or independent variable, that establishes a defining relationship between Womanhood conceptually and its outputs, or dependent variables: individual, contiguous, mutable instances of womanhood.[10] Second, moving from the Ideal—a classical/neoclassical concept, where an amalgam of perfect traits form a composite imagined as deific, mythological, and ultimately impossible for humans to embody—to ideality foregrounds the shift from the Ideal as unattainable to the ideal as prescriptive and feasible for all women to accomplish.[11] Female ideality names idealized qualities as inherent in all women, and thus, the ideal woman is also everywoman—the mathematical "mode" of women. In addition, in the nineteenth century, embedded in female ideality are cultural assumptions about women's health, their domestic and household responsibilities, their responsibilities for reproducing healthy children, and their role in educating children to reproduce a healthy nation. Each of these assumptions lay the groundwork for and become inextricable from what would become (dis)ability in the U.S. and other nations, according to

[10] Mathematically, this is what is called a function, which, relevant to this discussion, scientists, statisticians, and others use to model both periodicity and parity (among other operations). For a brief summary, see "Mathematical Functions," WolframAlpha, https://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/mathematics/mathematical-functions/.
[11] For a description of the neoclassical Ideal, see Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 24.

Western ideology.

### *(Dis)ability and Debility*

Critical disability studies defines (dis)ability as "the overarching social system of bodily and mental norms that includes ability and disability."[12] Based on ableist, idealized notions of bodymind functionality, these norms imagine themselves to be "at [their] simplest the preference for able-bodiedness" (and able-mindedness).[13] In reality, however, they index the "ideas, practices, institutions, and social relations that presume able-bodiedness" (and able-mindedness), and thus, "construct persons with disabilities as marginalized and oppressed."[14] These "norms" perpetuate a cultural understanding that abled-ness is preferred, presumed, and superior, and thus that the opposite is equally true— that whatever we mark as disabled is less than, devalued, not preferred, and ultimately stigmatized. This is how disabled people come to be marginalized and oppressed. Disability (sans parentheses) indicates the physical or mental impairments that society constructs as lack of ability or lack of possible achievement and through which it justifies (dis)ability as a social system. It is also the relationship between bodymind experience and society, wherein society (at a given time/place/context) determines said bodymind to be less than the mythical able-bodyminded norm, which may or may not correspond with an impairment.[15]

(Dis)ability also indicates the pathways by which disabilities and impairments come to be recognized legally, through which disabled people can (sometimes) be given access to institutions and jobs through accommodations, approved medical treatments or devices, and/or government stipends and benefits. Scarcity models of resources control entry into these systems, and thus, disability and

[12] Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined*, 6.
[13] Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 9.
[14] Vera Chouinard, "Making Space for Disabling Differences: Challenging Ablcist Geographies: Introduction: Situating Disabling Differences," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15, no. 4 (2016): 380, https://doi.org/10.1068/d150379.
[15] These nuanced definitions have grown out of many conversations, email exchanges, and co-presentations with Dr. Angela M. Carter.

impairment must be diagnosed and actively performed by the disabled person. Because diagnosis depends on access to medical professionals and treatment, (dis)ability bizarrely can operate sometimes as a system of privilege, where those who are able to attain diagnosis and treatment are those who have financial resources and access to healthcare. In addition, a tension in the (dis)ability-disability system is the distinction between disability pride, disability as difference, disability as oppressed minority, and disabilities and impairments acquired, for example, through unequal access to healthcare or nutritious food, or by laboring in dangerous working-class jobs (e.g., mines, factories, chemical plants), or by living in war zones or in environments replete with environmental pollution. In the latter, physical and mental impairments are a sign of a structure of oppression to be fought rather than an identity to be embraced. Critical disability studies, and feminist disability studies in particular, nuances this conflict, and attempts to hold both truths at once.

I build on and add to feminist disability studies scholarship with my exploration of impairment and oppression as "debility." The intersection between oppression and impairment has been theorized in several different ways—as endemics by Michel Foucault, as "slow death" by Lauren Berlant, and recently, as debilitation by Jasbir Puar.[16] "Debility" combines "endemics" as Foucault argues for it and Berlant's concept of "slow death." Foucault's endemics are a population problem to be solved by biopolitical management. They foreground the move of fear from "sudden death" to possible death as constant. Thus, problems that always existed—disease, for instance—become problems to prevented in order to preserve life, to "make live," in Foucauldian terms. In short, for Foucault, the problem—here, disease—is the same as we move from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the approaches to the problem change under biopolitical regimes; indeed, the very conceptualization of disease as a population problem, one solvable via institutional management, emerges. Berlant's concept of "slow death," which

[16] Michel Foucault, "17 March 1976," in *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003); Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 754–80, https://doi.org/10.1086/521568; Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

she defines as "the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence," looks at the material and ideological conditions that create an endemic condition in a given population; "slow death" points to the ways the power disparities affect the ordinary lives of those society views as disposable.[17] Her analysis—like Puar's assessment of debilitation and its opposite, capacitation—centers on "slow death" as a product of neoliberalism and late capitalism. While I believe that slow death as Berlant defines it encompasses certain nineteenth-century populations, like the middle-class white women this dissertation primarily engages with, I want to respect the context in which she names and explores the concept. As such, I expand Puar's concept of debility and define debility as the wearing down of a population, or the impairments, medical conditions, or disabilities acquired by populations, that stem from the ideological, material, and social conditions that define that population and their access to resources. I continue to use the term debility, first, because it is a known, if variously defined term, in critical disability studies; second, because it was a term used consistently throughout the nineteenth-century U.S. and before—and was often coupled with disability; and finally, because it enables me to differentiate (dis)ability as a system from physical and mental impairments caused by power disparities, especially during a time period in the U.S. prior to the emergence of the legal and social system of (dis)ability where disability becomes a category for public aid.[18]

### *Chapter Summaries*

My first chapter, "A Teratology of Nineteenth-Century Womanhood," defines female ideality, argues for its prevalence, and then traces its emergence and continuity through numerous primary and

[17] Berlant, "Slow Death," 754.
[18] The use of debility in critical disability studies is largely circumscribed by an engagement with Puar's *Right to Maim*, which is contentious within the field. See also Greta Lafleur, "'Defective in One of the Principle Parts of Virility': Impotence, Generation, and Defining Disability in Early North America," *Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (March 18, 2017): 81, https://doi.org/10.1353/eal.2017.0003.

secondary sources. Critical disability studies points to the inherent contradictions in the term "normalcy": "'If it is hard to deny something called normality exists,' Robert McRuer aptly observes, 'it is even harder to pinpoint what that is.' In part, this is because there is a slippage in the idea itself. The word "normal" often suggests something more than simply conformity to a standard or type: it also implies what is correct or good, something so perfect in its exemplarity that it constitutes an ideal."[19] In addition, Talia Lewis defines "ableism" as a "system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and 'behave.'"[20] I reposition these concepts in relation to female ideality, specifically exploring how the contradictions in normalcy can be resolved if we understand female ideality as a prescriptive and (un)achievable concept that predated normalcy, was ubiquitous in the U.S. throughout the nineteenth-century, and from which normalcy borrowed heavily.

I argue that female ideality has two defining features. First, it was a composite of idealized traits viewed as inherent in women, which persisted throughout the nineteenth century despite multiple reconfigurations of competing models (e.g., "true woman" versus "new woman"). I name this composite Womanhood, explore its construction, and show how first order characteristics (e.g., "nurturing" or "virtuous") and higher order, more complex configurations (e.g., "wife" and "mother") stem from an imagined mathematical mode, Womanhood, which nineteenth-century culture used to create models of ideal womanhood and to police women's adherence to Womanhood as a social rubric. Because Womanhood draws on multiple idealized characteristics that are often antithetical to one another (e.g., sexual purity versus motherhood) or demands that time be allocated perfectly across conflicting tasks

[19] Peter M. Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1.
[20] Talia Lewis, "Ableism 2020: An Updated Definition," Talia A. Lewis, January 25, 2020, http://www.talilalewis.com/1/post/2020/01/ableism-2020-an-updated-definition.html.

(e.g., helpmeet to husband versus mother to children versus housewife managing a household and performing domestic tasks), Womanhood is inherently self-contradictory. I finally position scholarship on nineteenth-century ideal womanhood alongside female ideality to show how Womanhood was conserved across multiple models of ideal womanhood until well into the twentieth century.

I then turn to the second defining feature of female ideality—that it was prescriptive and imagined to be achievable. I look at the classical/neoclassical Ideal—where the Ideal is a composite of perfect characteristics specifically presented as unattainable for humans, and often used to depict gods or other forms of perfection, like the myth of Helen of Troy—and trace the shift from this configuration of the Ideal to its nineteenth-century version, female ideality, where the ideal is imagined as simultaneously inherent in all women by virtue of their sex and as a condition that all women can achieve through their individual efforts. It thus becomes incumbent upon women to become and to perform ideal womanhood—ideality becomes prescriptive. Finally, I turn to my first key concept of modern (dis)ability—the individual responsibility for health—and explore through multiple nineteenth-century advice texts how this concept emerges through female ideality.

In my second chapter, "To Rend and Render," I argue that female ideality highlights a crucial distinction that histories of (dis)ability collapse: the difference between the discursive traditions of "ideal womanhood" and the "average man." In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis argues that the seventeenth-century neoclassical "ideal" was the precursor to the nineteenth-century "norm."[21] This ideal was a composite—an amalgam of perfect characteristics which were then combined to form a gestalt, mythopoetic *Ideal* unattainable by humans—and Davis's "text" is François-André Vincent's 1789 painting, *Zeuxis Choosing as Models for the Image of Helen the Most Beautiful Girls of the Town of Croto*n, which depicts an artist "lining up all the beautiful women of Crotona in order select in each her ideal feature or body part and combine these into a the ideal figure of [Helen], herself an ideal of

[21] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 24.

beauty."[22] According to Davis, the ideal shifted to the "hegemony of normalcy" in the nineteenth century, in which "all the qualities of the average man would represent at once all the greatness, beauty and goodness of that being."[23] By contrast, "deviations more or less great from the mean have constituted ugliness in body as well as vice in morals and a state of sickness with regards to constitution"—namely, any early picture of what we now call (dis)ability.[24]

Davis's history of normalcy and (dis)ability is thought-provoking and has been highly influential; however, there are two historical problems with it. First, and most obviously, by arguing the "norm" replaced the "ideal" in nineteenth-century discourse, Davis effaces the entire nineteenth-century history of ideal womanhood—one of the century's defining features in the U.S. His history moves between an artistic rendering of the ideal (female) to "the average man," without taking gender or race into account. Yet the female ideal as a composite existed well into the early twentieth century and intersected—even merged—with discourses of health and debility. Second, there was no "hegemony" of normalcy in the nineteenth century. The term "normal" emerges in 1820s France; sixty years later, in Francis Galton's eugenicist work, we find the convergence of "the mathematical concept of the average and the medical concept of the healthy"—a defining characteristic of what would become "normal."[25] However, prior to Galton—and for a good many years after him—"normal" as a metric for human faculties, appearance, and health was a largely haphazard and, in areas of medicine, vehemently contested concept. Rather than a pervasive public concept, it remained, even among experts, "an unstable set of concerns and practices subject to questioning for a century and a half." It is only in the mid-twentieth century that it solidifies into the "normal" critiqued by disability studies: the familiar system of compulsory conformity institutionalized in medical practice, legal discourse, and self-improvement and consumer culture in

[22] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 25.
[23] Adolphe Quetelet, *Sur L'homme et Le Développement de Ses Facultés Ou, Essai de Physique Sociale* (Paris: Bachelier, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1835), quoted in Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 27.
[24] Adolphe Quetelet, *Recherches Sur La Penchant Au Crime Aux Différens Ages* (Bruxelles: L'Académie Royale, 1832), 6.
[25] Peter M. Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 13.

operation today.[26]

I model the relationship of female ideality as a precursor to normalcy through the metaphor of mosaicism. Mosaicism, in medical genetics, specifically refers to a condition where a person has two or more genetically different cells in their body. However, it also used generally to refer to intermediary states of viral infections, where two different cells types—infected and non-infected—coexist. It is this latter definition that I draw on to explore the proliferation of normalcy as a kind of infection of female ideality—to model the instability and slow emergence of a concept imagined as omnipresent throughout the nineteenth century. Finally, I explore the link between female ideality and normalcy through texts which foreground the absence of futurity for impaired women. In the nineteenth-century U.S., women were imagined as reproductive agents for democracy; they physically reproduced the nation by birthing future citizens and ideologically reproduced the nation by educating their children in democratic principles. I show how Republican Motherhood borrowed heavily from classical models of motherhood—especially Spartan and Greek cultures—that equated the health of the populace with the health of the nation. I then turn to the works of Catharine Beecher, a nineteenth-century domesticity and health reformer to show how the health and futurity of the nation was predicated on the health of its women as reproductive agents.

My third chapter, "The Disabled Superwoman," explores the third and final concept of modern (dis)ability: the role of wage labor in the construction of (dis)ability. I argue for the connection between female ideality, nineteenth-century women's ill-health, and the rise of industrial capitalism. Histories of (dis)ability in the United States, or scholarly engagements with the emergence of (dis)ability—specifically those charting its historical continuity with contemporary (dis)ability in the West—frequently locate its origin in the rise of industrial capitalism and the wage labor economy, especially in the mechanization of the workplace that led employers to prefer able-bodied workers because they "could be

[26] Cryle and Stephens, *Normality*, 10, 14.

used as interchangeable parts."[27] These analyses draw on Marxist critiques of capitalism; they emphasize how under capitalism, "sickness (or of any kind of pathology) gets defined . . . as [the] inability . . . to work"—a key element of (dis)ability.[28] However, they also reproduce capitalist and Marxist definitions of work as waged labor and do not differentiate between the history of waged labor—which became a cornerstone of the U.S. economy in the mid-eighteenth-century—and the history of industrialization, which coupled with the market economy in the 1820s. By focusing on waged labor and industrialization, these analyses by default leave out unwaged domestic labor in their histories of (dis)ability.

In addition, the relationship between domestic labor and physical or mental impairment that writers like Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe explicate is largely absent in critical disability studies' analyses of the emergence of (dis)ability in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, in feminist studies, both ideal womanhood and domestic labor in the nineteenth-century are well-trodden ground—yet, if these studies address the ill-health of women, they often link women's illness and debility to the psychic stress of cultural ideals or explore how ill-health and frailty were coextensive with nineteenth-century models of ideal womanhood. This chapter intervenes in both histories. First, I trace the emergence of modern, Western constructions of (dis)ability through unwaged domestic labor, opposite to current trends which link the origins of contemporary ideologies that define (dis)ability and ability to the rise of waged labor in the market economy. Second, I argue that the debility so associated with nineteenth-century white women was due, in part, to the overwhelming nature of, and wear and tear associated with, domestic labor. I reframe "debility" as it is understood by Jasbir Puar and Julie Livingston alongside Michel Foucault's theory of endemics and Lauren Berlant's ideas of slow death, in order to redefine debility in ways that are both more expansive and inclusive of (dis)ability, but also applicable to the

[27] Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 122. See also, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 41, Kindle.
[28] David Harvey, "The Body as an Accumulation Strategy," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 408, https://doi.org/10.1068/d160401; for disability and debility engagements with Harvey's claim, see Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 83-98; and Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 754.

heteropatriarchy, capitalism, industrialism, and liberalism of the nineteenth century. I redefine debility in order to explore how women were worn out not only by the *impossibility* of the tasks—the psychic stress of trying to be all things to all people that ideal womanhood says they should—but they are also worn out, physically, mentally, and emotionally, by *doing the tasks*.

As men moved shifted their labor from the home and into wage-earning jobs, women were required to perform "labor that had either been wholly men's or shared by the husband and wife."[29] I pair histories of domestic labor with self-reported household tasks in women's diaries and letters, then augment this documentation with labor reports on the work and hours of domestic servants. Taken together, these documents indicate that, for all but the most wealthy, housewives weekly performed between 70 and 90 hours of physical labor in order to maintain households. I then link the amount and type of work to contemporaneous medical treatises detailing the symptoms of "wear-and-tear"— the nineteenth-century name for a condition we now call burnout—to argue that the material conditions of women's labor, alongside the ideological conditions that made such labor invisible to historical records, was a likely cause of women's ill health. I then turn to two short stories, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' "No News" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Luella Miller," both of which foreground the relationship between female ideality and overwhelming, invisible domestic labor. I explore both texts not only through the lens of a revised history of (dis)ability and domestic labor, but also through their generic conventions—the sentimental for the former, and the Gothic for the latter—to show how both Phelps and Freeman critique the idealization and impossibility of domestic labor and link it specifically to the debilitation of nineteenth-century housewives.

My final chapter, "I am as much myself as you are," looks at the historical and literary interplay between madness and female ideality in Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Her Story." "Her Story" is a first-person short story, published in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine in 1872 and written in the style of an

[29] Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 103.

asylum captivity narrative. In it, an unnamed narrator details the backstory of her (supposed) madness that has (perhaps) caused her institutionalization in a place that she calls, "this Retreat." The narrator describes her marriage to a local minister, Spencer, the birth of her two daughters, the arrival of Spencer's also unnamed ward, and the disturbance the ward causes in their previously happy marriage. The central "mystery" of the story, to the narrator, is whether or not her husband has committed adultery with the ward, though she couches this mystery in her conflict over whether her institutionalization was warranted. On the one hand, she states that after the ward's arrival, she hallucinated demons who tell her to murder her children and to commit suicide; on the other hand, she argues that her institutionalization had little to do with erratic behavior: if her husband wished her gone to continue a relationship with his ward, he would have committed her, mad or not. Fairly or unfairly—the narrative leaves this up to the reader to decide—the narrator has remained in an asylum for ten years, despite having no hallucinations since her arrival. Her story is told to a childhood friend, Elizabeth, who has come to visit, and who is the only named female in the story, and the existence of whom provides the only evidence of the narrator's life not circumscribed by her marriage.

"Her Story" deploys the (possible) madness of the narrator strategically, in order to investigate both the impact of female ideality on women and the impact of discourses of womanhood on madness. The narrator does detail an episode of psychosis—including insomnia, visual, aural, and command hallucinations, coupled with suicidal, homicidal, and filicidal ideation. However, she describes the episode as acute, brought on by a period of overwhelming stress and insomnia while caring for her sick daughter. The narrator's assertion of the acuteness of her psychosis and, thus, her current mental health conflicts with her continued institutionalization—she has been in "this Retreat" for ten years—and Spofford uses this space of uncertainty, the "mystery" of "Her Story," coupled with the suspicion that madness evokes in readers encountering it, in order to generate awareness of the impossibilities of ideal womanhood and of the interplay between discourses of madness and discourses of womanhood. Spofford discerns her world as one where feminine recourse is always already circumscribed by patriarchal values.

Her oscillations between different, conflicting notions of female value are calculated, and she strategically deploys one rhetoric or another to achieve her ends. These tactics, I argue, form Spofford's feminist critique: her embrace of the vicissitudes of patriarchal definitions of womanhood, and her setting of them against each other, rather than any blanket resistance. When coupled with the affordances of literary madness—namely insight, instability, and incoherency—as in her short story, "Her Story," Spofford's knowledge gives rise to the awareness of these conflicting notions in a consumable form.

First, madness structures the text formally, and as the reader searches the narrator's story for possible causes of madness, they necessarily hold in parallel the various requirements of female ideality and explore both the physical and psychic stresses of these demands and the futility of achieving them. The story provides multiple possible causes—infidelity, exhaustion, trauma, powerlessness, contrivance on the part of her husband, and more—for the effect of possible madness. The numerous possibilities of causes paired with the uncertainty of the diagnosis serves to uncouple cause from effect, creating a narrative superposition in which the simultaneous demands of womanhood are finally made apparent and evaluated as impossible. In short, "Her Story" uses the causality implicit in both narrative and disease processes in order to make visible, or make apparent, the invisible or non-apparent contradictions and impracticability of the conflicting demands of female ideality. Spofford combines the conventions of diagnosis and mystery to create a formal superposition— a simultaneity of ideal traits and story elements that interrupts narrative causality. Her formal innovation creates flux, where "madness" as the incoherency of female ideality, "madness" as a material effect of female ideality, and "madness" as the discursive interplay between female ideality and individual women are all simultaneously true. Second, Spofford's text makes a claim for madness—suspected or confirmed—as impasse and cultural impotence. "Her Story" pushes back against contemporaneous asylum captivity narratives and exposés—such as Elizabeth Ware Packard's *The Prisoners' Hidden Life, or Insane Asylums Unveiled* or Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White.* The critiques of both stories depend on the certainty of the female protagonist's sanity, and they juxtapose other insane or mentally disabled inmates in order to make the mental health of

their protagonists clear. By contrast, “Her Story” explores how the same idealized female traits—maternal instincts or emotional sensitivity, for instance—are read differently within the space of the home and the space of the asylum.

## Chapter 1

## A Teratology of Nineteenth-Century Womanhood:

## Female Ideality and the Uneven Formation of (Dis)ability

"The ideal woman is a monster of virtues." —Dorothy Dix[1]

Critical disability studies argues that the structures of normalcy are the preconditions for the system of meaning-making that we now understand as (dis)ability; it is through the concept of normalcy that "other" bodyminds[2] become marked as inferior, invalid, and abnormal. The nineteenth century is commonly understood as the historical era in which normalcy, and thus (dis)ability, emerged. However, normalcy, as we know it today—defined as a combination of medical and mathematical concepts of "normal" which function as a "hidden system of compulsory conformity"—was not fully concretized until the mid-twentieth century, and its categorization of impaired humans cannot be retroactively applied to the nineteenth century.[3] Instead, we need to understand normalcy as an emerging concept that began in France in the 1820s and then proliferated virally in fits and starts, throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, before it settled into the form currently analyzed by critical disability studies. Moreover, normalcy, especially at its advent, was gendered and racialized—it only applied to the normal or average white *man*.

Women grappled with a different tradition: that of the ideal. In the United States, ideal womanhood coupled with liberalism and individualism—and yes, *eventually*, the viral concept of the

[1] Dorothy Dix [Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer], "The 1897 Girl," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Dec. 27, 1896, Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers.
[2] "Bodymind" refers to the "enmeshment of the mind and body, which are typically understood as interacting and connected, yet distinct entities due to Cartesian dualism in Western philosophy," Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018), 5. See also, Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 268–84, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12127.
[3] Peter M. Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 6 10, 14, Kindle.

norm[4]—to produce a variable mosaic state of female ideality, as prescriptive and (imagined to be) achievable ideal, the composition of which varied not only spatially but temporally as the century went on. I argue that there was, in fact, not *a* female ideal, but a heterogeneity of female *ideals*—single woman, wife, mother, community member, to say nothing of the various groupings of "True," "Real," and "New" woman—all of which were different, in small and large ways, from each other, but each of which were predicated on the nineteenth-century's unexpurgated, singular category of Woman/Womanhood. These ideals—read as ideality, singular—colonized with various Western ideals of womanhood, created self-contradictory and often conflicting demands on women but also grappled with impairment in different ways. The results of many of these grapplings would eventually be folded into eugenicist and scientific ideas of the norm—and thus, would be folded into the rhetoric of what would become (dis)ability. As Cryle and Stephens summarize, inherent in our current ideas of normalcy are two antithetical connotations—standardization/typicality and perfection. We imagine the norm to be both the mathematical mode of humans and the pinnacle of their possible achievement:

> "If it is hard to deny something called normality exists," Robert McRuer aptly observes, "it is even harder to pinpoint what that is." In part, this is because there is a slippage in the idea itself. The word "normal" often suggests something more than simply conformity to a standard or type: it also implies what is correct or good, something so perfect in its exemplarity that it constitutes an ideal. The meaning of the normal encompasses both the norm, understood as a descriptive (or positive) fact, and normativity, understood as the affirmation of cultural values.[5]

If we understand female ideality as the prescriptive social rubric that predated normalcy—and from which normalcy borrows heavily, or even overtakes—we can see how the contradictory characteristics of the norm came to be. However, to do this, we must also understand that retroactively applying the teleology, even the genealogy, of normalcy-(dis)ability to the nineteenth century distorts the role that female ideality

[4] I explore normalcy as through the metaphor of virality, specifically mosaicism, in Chapter 2.
[5] Cryle and Stephens, *Normality*, 1.

played in what would become the normalcy-(dis)ability framework.

Female ideality served as a precursor for the development of three ideologies commonly critiqued by critical disability studies: the individual responsibility for health and ability, the absence of futurity for disabled people, and the role of wage labor in the construction of (dis)ability. In this chapter and in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, I look at how nineteenth-century women authors wrestle with the beginning formations of these three ideologies through narratives that couple female ideality with illness and impairment.

In this chapter, I explore the ways that ideal womanhood is more operative in the nineteenth century than normalcy as a way of regulating female bodyminds. I argue that "Womanhood" was an "everybody knows" set of characteristics, applied to multiple iterations of individual formulations of the ideal woman (wife, mother, but also "republican mother" "true woman," "new woman," "real woman," etc.). Then I turn to female ideality, which I explore as the conditional if-and-only-if construction of Womanhood—female ideality as unexpurgated Womanhood. Embedded in female ideality is the notion of Womanhood that is both inherent in all women, but simultaneously a prescriptive rubric, consistently represented as achievable, that it is incumbent upon individual women to achieve. Because the characteristics of Womanhood form a composite of multiple and conflicting ideal characteristics (e.g., woman as sexually pure v. woman as mother; woman as helpmeet to husband v. woman as caregiver to children), where resources, such as time, are not infinite—are in fact a zero-sum game—nineteenth-century women constantly wrestled with female ideality. However, I show that even as some women writers clearly identify and even resent the contradictions inherent in creating an ideal from incompatible characteristics, they often still embrace ideal womanhood and imagine it as attainable or even as already attained.

***Female Ideality***

I coin the term "female ideality" as an intentionally awkward neologism meant to create pause, to evoke an impression of something at once familiar and strange; it borrows the cachet and history of "ideal womanhood" while remaining distant from it. Female ideality encompasses two constitutive historical characteristics: it drew from a composite of ideal traits I call Womanhood, and it was prescriptive and imaged as achievable. First, in moving from "ideal" to "ideality," we move from types and definitions of womanhood—classificatory sets of characteristics—to Womanhood as an umbrella category, an input, or independent variable, that establishes a defining relationship between Womanhood conceptually and its outputs, or dependent variables: individual, contiguous, mutable instances of womanhood.[6] Second, moving from the Ideal—a neoclassical concept, where an amalgam of perfect traits form a composite imagined as deific, mythological, and ultimately impossible for humans to embody—to ideality foregrounds the shift from ideal as unattainable to the ideal as prescriptive and feasible for all women to accomplish.[7] Barbara Welter pithily describes this collation as "the complex of virtues . . . by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society."[8] Taken together, these defining features of female ideality emphasize Womanhood's requisite nature and its continuity throughout the century.

### *Womanhood as Assemblage*

Female ideality indicates a base-level composite of first-order ideals (e.g., nurturing or virtuous), grounded in perceived gender and race that remained constant across political and discursive revisions (as say, the "True Woman" becomes the "New Woman") until at least the early twentieth century.[9] These

[6] Mathematically, this is what is called a function, which, relevant to this discussion, scientists, statisticians, and others use to model both periodicity and parity (among other operations). For a brief summary, see "Mathematical Functions," WolframAlpha, https://www.wolframalpha.com/examples/mathematics/mathematical-functions/.
[7] For a description of the neoclassical Ideal, see Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995), 24.
[8] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 152, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179. Welter's formulation, here, is of True Womanhood, which I argue, like for all other nineteenth-century models, is predicated on the complex assemblage Womanhood.
[9] Susan M. Cruea, "Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement," *The American Transcendental Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (2005): 187–204, ProQuest. Note: these ideals were formulated around and directed at white women in the nineteenth-century U.S. However, due to their grounding in the category

characteristics, which in the nineteenth century index "woman" so strongly as to be constitutive, form higher order categories—more complex aggregations of ideal traits, such as the familial categories of "wife" and "mother"—to produce the even more complex assemblage called Womanhood, often Ideal Womanhood or the Ideal Woman (from which "models of womanhood" are derived). In this way, the contradictions of lower order categories become subsumed under, and implicit in, the higher order Womanhood: for instance, the antithetical traits of sexual purity and the reproductive labor of motherhood; or the helpmeet wife, whose primary focus is the husband, and the mother's primary focus of the child, and the housewife's primary focus of providing food and maintaining the house, the space or "sphere" that ideologically becomes the "home," which contains all of these operations.[10]

Womanhood—the composite, or body, of ideal traits and social categories considered inherent or intuitive in the nineteenth-century idea of "woman"—is largely conserved across each individual instance/output/configuration of ideal womanhood—for instance, women as inherently "virtuous," "maternal," or "responsible for public and private morality, via education of children" remains constant from Republican motherhood to the New Woman. Each individual output often configures the purpose, application, or relevance of these "womanhood" characteristics differently—as when women would use virtues figured for the domestic sphere to gain entrée to public spaces as reformers and abolitionists—but surprisingly many configurations remained exactly the same. For instance, Elizabeth Blackwell, an early female physician, justifies women as medical professionals "on the God-given force of their maternal natures" and, morally, as alleviating the "horrible exposure" of women to male physicians during examinations, arguing that it was "indecent for any poor woman to be subjected such a torture" of the male gaze.[11] We find similar claims forty years earlier in the works of self-educated health-reformers

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of "woman," they also formed behavioral expectations for women of color, despite the fact that, because of their non-whiteness, they could never achieve ideal womanhood. See, Beth Maclay Doriani, "Black Womanhood in Nineteenth-Century America: Subversion and Self-Construction in Two Women's Autobiographies," *American Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1991): 203-204, 205, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712924.

[10] There is a robust scholarly history for the home as the (separate) sphere of Womanhood, beginning with Barbara Welter's mainspring article,

[11] Elizabeth Blackwell, *Pioneer Work in Opening the Medical Profession to Women: Autobiographical Sketches*. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895), 72., Google Books

Harriot Kezia Hunt and Mary Gove Nichols.[12] Twenty years later, in 1916, another female physician, Eliza Mosher, would argue much the same in an article explicitly about the history and value of women organizing, from the Sanitary Commission to the proliferation of women's colleges: "Educated medical women touch humanity in a manner different from men; by virtue of their womanhood, their interests in girls and young women, both moral and otherwise; in homes and society."[13] This becomes important in a few different ways. First, we can think of different models of womanhood as *in situ* arguments—as continual, historical refigurations and contestations—over who has the "best" or "most accurate" engagement with and entitlement to Womanhood. Second, if we view Womanhood as a kind of constant, we understand, for instance, why the focus on health as a measure of the ability to reproduce, and to reproduce non-impaired children, remains consistent, while depictions, for instance, of frailty as feminine beauty fluctuates.

### *Female Ideality: Womanhood as a Conserved Category*

Women's histories tend to focus on the "point mutations" of womanhood, in order to delineate a progressive form of ideological speciation—for example, how Republican motherhood became, but was distinct from, True Womanhood/Real Womanhood/the New Woman.[14] However, not only did these models of feminine perfection coexist throughout the nineteenth century, they also borrowed heavily from one another, strategically utilizing "womanhood" as an "everyone knows" premise reinterpreted in light of shifting political goals. Thus, historically speaking, it is not until Kate Chopin's 1899 publication of

[12] For more on Harriot Kezia Hunt, see, Ann Douglas (Wood), "'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (1973): 25–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/202356. For a brief biography of Mary Gove Nichols, see John B. Blake, "Mary Gove Nichols, Prophetess of Health," in *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings*, edited by Judith W. Leavitt (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 359–375.

[13] Eliza Mosher, "The Value of Organization—What Has It Done for Women?" *Woman's Medical Journal* 26, no. 6 (June 1916): 141, Google Books.

[14] In genetics, a point mutation "is a type of mutation in DNA or RNA, the cell's genetic material, in which one single nucleotide base is added, deleted or changed [ . . . ] A point mutation is specifically when only one nucleotide base is changed in some way, although multiple point mutations can occur in one strand of DNA or RNA," Biology Dictionary Editors, "Point Mutation," *Biology Dictionary* (blog), October 4, 2019, https://biologydictionary.net/point-mutation/.

*The Awakening*—and perhaps even not until 1912, with the public dismay and disdain of the "illiberalism" of Ida M. Tarbell's *The Business of Being a Woman*—that we begin to see a kind of frameshift.[15] After this frameshift, older models of womanhood co-exist with but are non-ubiquitous in common-sense life.[16]

Scholars of nineteenth-century women distinguish between different "types" and models of Womanhood by, first, classifying them according to characteristics; and second, singling out point mutations—for instance, the swapping of domestic labor (the "True Woman") for professional, wage-based labor in middle-class women (the "New Woman")—and linking those point mutations to social and historical events (e.g., industrialization or the Civil War). From such historical ruptures, they argue, entirely new models emerged, which challenged previous and coeval models of Womanhood. I argue, however, that many of these point mutations were ultimately "silent"—insomuch as the single point mutation did not demonstrably change the category of Womanhood or the composite ideal it indicated in the nineteenth century.[17] Take for example, the fact that, in the late nineteenth century, writers affirming the New Woman would characterize her traits and functions in the same terms that previous models of

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[15] Robert Stinson, "Ida M. Tarbell and the Ambiguities of Feminism," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 2 (1977): 219, JSTOR. Many women, including many suffragists, sent letters to Tarbell after her publication of *Business* in support of the text. It is their relief at feeling that Tarbell has spoken for them—that they have a voice that they felt was being silenced—as much as accusations against and bad reviews of *Business* that I am using to construct this as frameshift. *On Frameshift*: I'm mixing metaphors and jumping back and forth between mathematical concepts, genetics, and population evolution—and later in Chapter 2, I'll use virology. The concepts needed to describe particular kinds of changes over time are only just emerging in the humanities, and I borrow somewhat catholically from science to model certain types of periodicity and parity more accurately. For emerging ways of thinking through "messiness" and "unsettledness," particularly of history and with specific relations to understanding space/time and sequence, within the humanities, see: Dana Luciano, "Introduction: On Moving Ground," in *Unsettled States: Nineteenth-Century American Literary Studies*, edited by Dana Luciano and Ivy G. Wilson (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 1-28, JSTOR; Therí A. Pickens, "Blue Blackness, Black Blueness: Making Sense of Blackness and Disability," *African American Review* 50, no. 2 (July 21, 2017): 93–103, https://doi.org/10.1353/afa.2017.0015.

[16] Though we can model Womanhood as a mathematical function, its application is hardly singular place and person-wise. At the beginning of the twentieth-century, we see what was a complete absorption of "Womanhood" as given become more various — the "function" begins to be altered in some places by some people, and "womanhood" becomes less intuitive in its application. However, "Womanhood" as it was understood in nineteenth-century terms continued to exist into the twentieth century, as the Tarbell's publication indicates.

[17] A silent mutation is "a change in the sequence of nucleotide bases which constitutes DNA, without a subsequent change in the amino acid or the function of the overall protein. Sometimes a single amino acid will change, but if it has the same properties as the amino acid it replaced, little to no change will happen," Biology Dictionary Editors, "Silent Mutation," *Biology Dictionary* (blog), June 20, 2018, https://biologydictionary.net/silent-mutation/.

Republican motherhood or True Womanhood used. A crux of Republican Motherhood is, according to Linda K. Kerber, Benjamin Rush's argument that women in the new U.S. should be educated in order instruct their sons in principles of the new Republic and thereby ensure its preservation:

> From the numerous avocations to which a professional life exposes gentlemen in America from their families, a principal share of the instruction of children naturally devolves upon the women. It becomes us therefore to prepare them, by a suitable education, for the discharge of this most important duty of mothers. The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty and the possible share he may have in the government of our country make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree, by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government.[18]

This principle was also the crux of "True Womanhood." In *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Catherine Beecher insists that

> the success of democratic institutions . . . depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people . . . the mother forms the character of the future man; the sister bends the fibres that are hereafter to be the forest tree; the wife sways the heart, whose energies may turn for turn for good or for evil the destinies of a nation . . . educate a woman, and the interests of the whole family are secured.[19]

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[18] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 210-11; Benjamin Rush, *Thoughts Upon Female Education, Accomodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, in the United States of America. Addressed to the Visitors of the Young Ladies' Academy in Philadelphia, 28 July, 1787, at the Close of the Quarterly Examination. By Benjamin Rush, M.D. Professor of Chemistry in the University of Pennsylvania.; to Which Is Added, a Prayer, by Samuel Magaw, D.D. Rector of St. Paul's Church, and Vice-Provost of the University of Pennsylvania; Delivered Upon the Same Occasion* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1787), 6, Evans Early American Imprint Collection.

[19] Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 2nd edition (Boston: Thomas H. Webb & Co., 1843), 36-37, Google Books.

This characteristic is also, finally, conserved in New Womanhood as well. Winnifred Harper Cooley would argue in her 1904 tract, *The New Womanhood*, that

> The new woman, in the sense of the best woman, the flower of all the womanhood of past ages, has come to stay — if civilization is to endure. The sufferings of the past have but strengthened her, maternity has deepened her, education is broadening her — and she now knows that she must perfect herself if she would perfect the race, and leave her imprint upon immortality, through her offspring or her works.[20]

I am not the first scholar to note this coherency. In *Women of the Republic*, Kerber asserts that "from the time of the Revolution until our own day, the language of Republican Motherhood remains the most readily accepted [. . .] justification for women's political behavior."[21] Through this, we see an instance of the stable composite Womanhood that maintained—despite shifting social, political, and economic concerns—across multiple models of ideal womanhood.[22]

The scholarly treatment which highlights differences between models arises, I believe, from both historical integrity and the awareness of political power dynamics. Kerber grounds her model of Republican Motherhood in post-revolutionary political events, and Welter and others connect "True Womanhood" to the Second Great Awakening, industrialization, and the embrace of democracy as an organizing sociopolitical principle. "True Womanhood" gives way, progress-narrative-wise, to "New Womanhood," a term popularized by authors like Henry James in the postbellum period, connected to the postbellum "Woman Movement"; the term New Woman would remain in circulation through the 1920s.[23]

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[20] Winnifred Harper Cooley, *The New Womanhood* (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1904), 35, Google Books.
[21] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*,12.
[22] There are many other traits that form the content of this composite. However, my intention here is to present Womanhood as an umbrella term from which models of womanhood are derived—one of my primary intervention. I will enumerate its multitudinous constitutive and conserved traits in the larger project.
[23] Susan M. Cruea, "Changing Ideals of Womanhood," 187–204; Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (1988): 9–39, https://doi.org/10.2307/1889653.

Within this rough genealogy, scholars delineate less mainstream subcategories and offshoots of Womanhood—"the cult of female frailty," "real womanhood," "the New England woman," "Public Womanhood," "the Outdoors Girl," "the Southern Belle," and "the All-American girl."[24] To take a representative example of this historicization, Tracy Anne Sachjten explicates the shift in models of womanhood, particularly around the coincidence of beauty and virtue, through the lens of the Civil War:

> At the same time, the antebellum Cult of True Womanhood that had, for elite women, defined beauty as the external morality, began to falter. The broadening of women's public roles, the visibility of working women, women's political agitation in abolition and suffrage campaigns, and an emergent secularization of society in post-Civil War decades challenged the dictates of True Womanhood. These changes flummoxed elements of the native-born, Angelo-American population of the native-born population who rightly perceived a gradual liberalization of the ideas about beauty and proper womanhood.[25]

However, I would argue that while the liberalization of ideas about beauty and virtue did gradually occur—specifically around what counted as beauty and what counted as virtue—the discourse that bound beauty and virtue together remained largely unchanged. We see this, for instance, in 1912, when Ida B. Tarbell argues that an American woman is "a woman strong, capable, severely beautiful, a creature who

[24] See, for instance, Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty: A Social History...Through Two Centuries of the American Idea, Ideal, and Image of the Beautiful Woman* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2006). See also, Rufus Dawes, "Woman," *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier*, March 3, 1838, no. 53, Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers; Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, "New England Women," *Atlantic Monthly* 42, no. 250 (August 1878): 230–37, Hathi Trust; Bernard O'Reilly, *The Mirror of True Womanhood: A Book of Instruction for Women in the World*, 17th edition (New York: P.J. Kenedy, Excelsior Catholic Publishing House, 1892), Hathi Trust; Kate Stephens, "The New England Woman," *Atlantic Monthly* 88, no. 525 (July 1901): 60–66; Ella Hutchison Ellwanger, "Sallie Ward: The Celebrated Kentucky Beauty," *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society* 16, no. 46 (1918): 7–14, JSTOR.

[25] Tracy Anne Sachtjen, "American Ugly: Appearance and Aesthetics in Cultures of U.S. Nationalism, 1848-1915" (PhD Diss., Irvine, University of California, Irvine, 2009), 87, ProQuest.

had all of the virtues and none of the follies of [old-world] femininity."[26] What we gain, first by subsuming "True Womanhood" under the aegis of Womanhood and, second, by taking a bird's eye view of ideality—by viewing it as largely conserved throughout the century—is that we see that though the specific label of "True Womanhood" began to go out of fashion in the post-bellum period, its tenants were conserved, such that in 1865 and 1912, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Ida Tarbell can talk about the duties of mistresses to servants in similar ways, or that 1846 and 1912 Catharine Beecher and Scott and Nellie Nearing can talk about the duty of a mother to children's education similarly.[27] There is a shift in the *justification* of components of female ideality (religion versus science, for example) or the components are explored in new ways, but the traits themselves are conserved.

The nineteenth-century materials that we study treat these point mutations, such as women's entry into professional fields, as cataclysmic. Women's suffrage and women professionals, for instance, were talked about in magazines and speeches as social revolution and an upending of the status quo, generating hundreds of speeches and opinion pieces for and against these social changes. Bloomers were abandoned; contraception was framed in terms of wifely duties and distanced from "free love"; and "free love" advocates would argue that love-based marriages produced healthy (non-deformed, non-mentally ill) children better able to perpetuate democracy and "the race." Recent scholars of nineteenth-century womanhood highlight such upheavals and shifts as, essentially, the battleground of womanhood. No matter how such issues were framed or debated, however, they still drew on and extended Womanhood. They speak of these women as both more liberal and more conservative, and they attempt to find models for them that satisfy our twentieth- and twenty-first century perspectives; in particular, they point to

[26] "Virtues and follies" here are moral characteristics, specifically the elimination of "parasitism . . . willfulness, frivolity, and helplessness." Ida B. Tarbell, *The Business of Being a Woman* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 10, Google Books.

[27] Harriet Beecher Stowe [pseud. Christopher Crowfield], *House and Home Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Felds, 1865), 196-224; Tarbell, *The Business of Being a Woman*, 154-160; Catharine Esther Beecher, *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children: The Causes and the Remedy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), Google Books; Scott Nearing and Nellie Marguerite Seeds Nearing, *Woman and Social Progress: A Discussion of the Biologic, Domestic, Industrial and Social Possibilities of American Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 196-204, Google Books.

differences between our current notions of feminism and its nineteenth-century precursor, which they name "domestic feminism"—defined as "the eruption of women into the public sphere through various forms of culturally acceptable womanly activity"—and they use discourse theory to argue how nineteenth-century women could not imagine otherwise.[28] Just as today, when the fight to see different women's bodies—sizes, shapes, and colors—as beautiful does nothing to shift the underlying notion that women should be beautiful; the shifts in nineteenth-century culture did little to shift the notion of ideal woman—claiming a version of "Womanhood" for each position was, in fact, a large part of the battle.

Accumulated point mutations over time did cause a kind of cataclysmic shift, yes—hence the range of this study from roughly 1830 to 1900 (with heralds from as early as 1750 and eulogies through at least 1921). This span begins roughly with the rise of the health reform movement and ends roughly with publication of *The Awakening*. The 1830 start-date may seem non-intuitive, as I, in a later chapter, begin with Republican Motherhood, a late-eighteen-century phenomenon, to interrogate domestic labor's relationship to disability as early as the 1750s. Republican Motherhood provided many important traits to Womanhood—virtue, responsibility for familial education, dependence on women for the political and physical futurity of the state. However, it is in a) the production of True Womanhood as the successor to Republican Motherhood, and b) the combination of which with the individualism of the health reform movement, that we see the largest number of continuous traits for a core function of Womanhood and, ultimately, the idea of female ideality as prescriptive and achievable. To be frank, the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, and even the first fifty years of the new republic, are a kind of primordial sea of ideas. It is not that causality didn't exist in this moment; rather, in studying the 1800-30, there is, for me,

[28] Nina Baym, "Revisiting Hawthorne's Feminism," *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review* 30, no. 1/2 (2004): 49, JSTOR. See also, Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Revised edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 41-42; Baym calls this also a "moderate, limited, or pragmatic feminism [. . .] a feminism constrained by certain kinds of beliefs that are less operative today," Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 18. See also, Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997), 20.

a strong sense of choose-your-own-adventure—of possibility, if you will—where, for instance, Republican Motherhood could have created the conditions for something other than True Womanhood.

For the later marker, *The Awakening* explicates the battle for a particular kind of self-made womanhood distinct from even "the New Woman" professionals who predated Chopin and her narrator. Woman professionals like Elizabeth Blackwell would argue that they were most suited for their profession because of the inherent characteristics of Womanhood. Chopin's Edna Pontillier does not necessarily represent a departure from this—or from the many suffragists who argue for this kind of self-realization. Rather, nineteenth-century suffragists, reformists, and other proto-feminists thought through enfranchisement and other legal issues as "The Rights of Women"; by contrast, Pontillier struggles for a kind of unmarked personhood as an artist. We could interpret Pontillier's striving for unmarkedness as a kind of rejection of the category of women—and argue that she is ultimately striving for rights granted to men, as the unmarked gender—and this is compelling. Yet I believe that Pontillier is reaching for a selfhood *inclusive* of her femaleness but not defined by it: a selfhood only granted to men, yes, but not the selfhood *of* men. There are certainly many instances of this sort of consciousness prior to *The Awakening*—the works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps are easy to point to, and I have already cited many examples of the texts after 1900 that borrow heavily from nineteenth-century concepts of Womanhood.[29] Yet I mark *The Awakening* as a kind of watershed, not because of what came before, but because of its similarity to the trajectory of what came after—a distinction that Phelps and many earlier writers do not share.

Female ideality requires that we not take nineteenth-century writers at their word, at their own perception of reality. Diane Price Herndl, in outlining her method in *Invalid Women*, puts it best: "To lose distance is to miss the opportunity to observe illness," and for this study, ideality, "as an outsider, that is *not* as an 'objective' viewer (I make no claims to objectivity) but as someone who can watch the

[29] Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevline, "Editors' Introduction," in *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), ix–xxxix.

operations of power without the specific attitude of those directly involved."[30] To be clear, it is historically accurate (and obvious) to say that as the century progressed, so, too, did the possible roles for women outside the home. Suffrage gained popularity and divisiveness, as did other reform and early feminist movements. This study does not invalidate the work of tracking important historical shifts, nor does it label those shifts as meaningless (after all, they accumulate to produce a cataclysmic shift). Rather, it argues that *despite* these point mutations, the bulk of female ideality remained the same—that the shifts, major and minor, did not ultimately change female ideality until well after the turn of the century, when, as we will see in the next chapter, normalcy begins to become the governing social principle.

### *Female Ideality: The Construction of the Composite*

In the move from prior construction of the classical/neoclassical Ideal to nineteenth-century ideality in the U.S., the composite nature of the Ideal carries forwards but becomes prescriptive—a type of social rubric by which one's w*omanhood* rather than one's *ideal characteristics* are determined. The ideal woman becomes everywoman, and women who do not possess, or choose not to pursue, traits idealized in Womanhood become to some writers "masculine women," "no longer women," or "the Third Sex"; to others, such women are still women but simply less so. Implicit in the frequently prescriptive representations of ideal Womanhood—in its "shoulds"—is the imagination that ideal Womanhood is *attainable* or *achievable*, which is completely opposite from classical and neoclassical constructions. As Catharine Clinton states, "the model woman was a cultural myth, bearing little resemblance to women's daily experience. Although few could embody her, most women were judged by this unattainable standard and thousands of women were socialized to this ideal through the widespread dissemination of periodical literature."[31] It is the prescriptiveness and imagined achievability that distinguish ideality from the Ideal, and these characteristics also make Womanhood incoherent and contradictory. Scholars of nineteenth-century women—including Ann Douglas, Nina Baym, Elaine Showalter, Jeanne Boydston,

[30] Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 3.
[31] Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 40.

Linda K. Kerber, Diane Price Herndl, Regina Markell Morantz, Susan M. Cruea, Lora Romero, and many others—all identify Womanhood's incoherent, internally inconsistent, and downright contradictory nature. However, scholars often gravitate toward explaining the models rather than exploring the inconsistencies. The *effects* of the incoherence of female ideality are left largely untheorized, beyond naming them as a likely source of psychological stress somaticized into feigned or real ill-health.

But perhaps this elision occurs because the mechanism by which Womanhood becomes prescriptive and achievable—and, thus, incoherent and contradictory—is fairly straightforward. The issue, which appears frequently in the socializing advice articles and manuals Clinton cites, is that characteristics considered the most desirable seem to have been culled from a variety of sources and simply mashed together to create, as Richard Le Gallienne and Dorothy Dix name it, a monster of virtues.[32] This process imitates the classical, and later neoclassical, method of creating the Ideal, particularly in visual art. Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme's retelling of the Zeuxis myth details how the artist created the Ideal image of female physical beauty as an aggregate of sundry, beautiful female body parts:

> Thus do we find it recorded of Zeuxis, the famous painter, how that being asked by sundry honourable ladies and damsels of his acquaintance to make them a portrait of the fair Helen of Troy and depict her to them as beautiful as folk say she was, he was loath to refuse their prayer. But, before painting the portrait, he did gaze at them all and each steadfastly, and choosing from one or the other whatever he did find in each severally most beautiful, he did make out the portrait of these fragments brought together and combined, and by this means did portray Helen so beautiful no exception could be taken to any feature. This portrait did stir the admiration of all, but above all of them which had by their several beauties and separate features helped to create the same no less than Zeuxis himself had with his brush. Now this was as good as saying that in

[32] Richard Le Gallienne, *The Quest of the Golden Girl: A Romance* (London, New York: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1896), 19, Google Books; Dix, "The 1897 Girl.

> one Helen 'twas impossible to find all perfections of beauty combined, albeit she may have been most exceeding fair above all women.[33]

Brantôme's conclusion dwells explicitly on a moment of acceptance: "in one Helen 'twas impossible to find all the perfections of beauty combined." He links the Ideal to the imagination through its fictionality; though grounded in the bodies of real women, it is an act of creation to visualize a myth, and thus, exceeds any one woman's ability or need to embody it. Indeed, Brantôme leads us to this conclusion by pointing out the awe of the women who had modeled for Zeuxis; unlike Womanhood as a nineteenth-century "cultural myth," Zeuxis's rendering of Helen brings into stark focus the myth as *myth*, engendering admiration and wonder, rather than incrimination and onus. By contrast, consider Richard Le Gallienne's process for creating the ideal woman in *The Quest of the Golden Girl*, the title of which invokes the classical tradition of both Zeuxis and Helen. Le Gallienne's method mirrors Brantôme's rendition of Zeuxis's process, but to very different ends:

> I began scientifically to consider in detail the attributes of the supposititious paragon [of womanhood], —attributes of body and mind and heart. This was soon done; but again, as I thus conned all those virtues which I was to expect united in one unhappy woman, the result was still unsatisfying, for I began to perceive that it was really not perfection that I was in search of. As I added virtue after virtue to the female monster in my mind, and the result remained still inanimate and unalluring, I realised that the lack I was conscious of was not any new perfection, but just one or two honest human imperfections. And this, try as I would, was just what I could not imagine.[34]

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[33] Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme, *Lives of Fair and Gallant Ladies* Vol. 1., trans. A.R. Allinson (New York: The Alexandria Society, [1665-66]; 1922), 236, Google Books. I use the Zeuxis myth to illustrate my point because this is where Lennard Davis begins his discussion of the ideal and the normal—with François-André Vincent's 1789 neoclassical painting of the selfsame myth. See Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 25. For the original classical recounting of the Zeuxis myth, see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. Harry Mortimer Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 167-168, Digital Loeb Classical Library.

[34] Le Gallienne, *The Quest of the Golden Girl*, 19. For the American context of this text, we know that *The Quest of the Golden Girl* was published in both England and the U.S., and that it was wildly popular. From 1896 to 1899, it went through at least twelve editions. From Dorothy Dix's offhand reference in "The 1897 Girl" to *The Quest of the Golden Girl* that she expects her nineteenth-century readers to be intimately familiar with the text. In her column,

Despite their similarities in composition, Le Gallienne's "woman" and Zeuxis's Helen have stark differences. Zeuxis draws, from the bodies of real women, perfect parts that he then combines into a rendition of a mythological woman known for her beauty; Le Gallienne draws from the cultural imaginary of virtues of the paragon Woman in order to imagine *a human woman*. By aggregating perfect characteristics, he attempts to understand what a real "perfect" woman look like, and how she would act. He is unsatisfied with his rendition because it is, in fact, like a painting—"inanimate"—rather than the flesh and blood woman he sought to create, yet he founders on adding "one or two honest human imperfections" to her. In short, opposite to Zeuxis's Helen, it is *imperfection* rather than perfection which is imagined as impossible. Le Gallienne's imagination stalls because of self-contradictory nature of the ideal human woman —he "could not imagine" her as having human imperfections, but he cannot incarnate the Ideal. Thus, also opposite to Zeuxis's Helen, he creates an image that fills him with horror rather than awe—a female monster (but also, appropriately, an unhappy woman).

Le Gallienne foregrounds the incongruity between the "paragon" of Womanhood and its earthly, living counterpart, woman, by exposing the method of her production as the true impossibility. In his conclusion, he negates this aggregation process of composing women by returning his reader's attention away from the composite perfect woman, created from a collage of virtues, and toward real women. He redefines female perfection as "nothing more or less than [a woman's] unique, individual, charming imperfection, and that she is simply the woman we love and who is fool enough to love us."[35] Yet the revelatory nature of Le Gallienne's critique stems from its opposition to an entire century's literature which held women accountable to the cultural myth of Womanhood, composed exactly as its classical Ideal counterpart was.

Consider the case of "The American Ideal Woman," published in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1853. It begins by vitiating with amazing sarcasm the idea of the Ideal woman, critiquing her as Le Gallienne

she cites on the last name of its author, and corrupts the quotation into a summary, yet his claim is the central premise of her article.

[35] Le Gallienne, *The Quest of the Golden Girl*, 24.

does, as impossible. Yet, further into the text, we see that article's central problem is not the method of her composition, which creates a self-contradictory Woman; rather, the author is impressed with the limited number of traits used to create her. To remedy this oversight, the author reconstructs their ideal real woman like Frankenstein's monster—by the same methodology by which the previous ideal was created to the same ends. The only difference is the anonymous author, democratically, they claim, puts together his *American* ideal woman from a larger and more diverse sample set of women. The article combines America's perception of itself as less homogenous than other nations—particularly with regards to class mobility—with the principles of "e pluribus unum" to create a better, more American ideal woman.[36] The article's opening is worth quoting in full:

> The ideal woman has often been described; we have known all about her from boyhood. That was a being born destitute of will, desire, or aim of her own. That she lived and breathed, acted and suffered, in and for her husband and children, the former particularly. That she was "fragile" in form, with "tiny" hands, and "fairy" feet, and a "silvery" voice. That she found her chief glory in making a shirt—her highest pleasure in compounding a pudding. That she watched her husband's looks, anticipating his every wish, without the smallest expectation of any attention or sacrifice from him, in return. That she was utterly unable to frown, or say no. That she waited for her lord and master till all hours of the night, cheerfully sewing at his buttons, and never reproaching him for being late, or asking where he had been. That she "soothed his troubled brow," "consoled him by her sympathy," "cheered him by her smiles," "divided his cares and sorrows," and bore with entire satisfaction any amount of exclusion from his pleasures. In short, she was born to be the humble contributor to man; to bear with his tempers, follow his fortunes, humor his whims, cater for his wants, watch over his illness, bring up his children, economize his means, promote his enjoyments,—be wholly lost and swallowed up with him while he lived, and, if she survived him,

[36] It is worth reiterating that it is *class* diversity rather than racial diversity that the author privileges in their invocation of democratic principles. The ideal woman they recreate in America's image is implicitly but necessarily a white woman.

> be content with the pittance of his estate, or a condition of dependence, if it proved his sovereign will and pleasure to leave the fortune she helped to accumulate to posterity or the public. All this has formed the staple material for the use of magazine writers and others, when they show up the ideal woman, and the world has hailed the picture with complacency. It was nice to think that so convenient a class had been created for the good of the higher; and if the gentlemen were pleased with it, why the ladies must be, of course, or they could not claim to be ideal women.[37]

This article goes on to expose, ridicule, and discard as impossible multiple derivations of this ideal of womanhood—the author is especially condescending toward the well-dressed, ever-silent business-wife—before attending to what it views to be the central issue. "We insist that Ideal American woman of our day must be one with every faculty cultivated, every power in use . . . but the world has seen a great variety of women." The article proceeds to detail these women—"learned" women, "fashionable ladies," and "sentimental" ones, "drudging good souls," focused on domestic duties, and "refined" women, not "of any earthly use to others"; "delicate" women and "masculine" ones; "nervous and strong-minded"; "coquettes and prudes"; "devotees and (pah!) freethinkers," and the list goes on.[38] The correction, the article decides, is not that the ideal that it has spent pages ridiculing is incoherent (it is), or that the women it so carefully differentiates are defined by a single characteristic (they are), but rather American women must create a more perfect composite, derived from a wider selection of sources: "the American women being of no class, needs *all the qualities that up to our day have been divided among various classes*."[39] The adjustment to the masculine woman is to borrow qualities from the delicate one, the domestic range from the refined, society woman, and every one vice versa. "Why should one power," it asks, "cripple or smother another?" Ultimately, this composite ideal, made up as it is from a "truer" and wider selection of women's virtues, returns us to that ideal that the article painted as so thoroughly contemptible at its beginning: a woman of "household skill" who will "cheer harassing occupations, soothe and elevate the

[37] "The American Ideal Woman," *Putnam's Monthly* (November 1853): 527, Hathi Trust.
[38] "The American Ideal Woman," 529.
[39] Ibid. [emphasis mine].

mind, and afford innocent amusement for thoughts and hands, [and] protect virtue by leaving no vacant and weary hours for vicious wishes."[40]

Despite the emphasis of "The American Ideal Woman" on the necessity of drawing from diverse types of women to create a more perfect ideal womanhood reflective of its American sources, specific attributes of race and class are assumed inherent in the ideal woman. The ideal woman was white, specifically what would be called of Anglo-Saxon race, middle- or upper-class, feminine-appearing, Protestant, and oriented to marriage to a man.[41] She was not always assumed to be able-bodied or -minded, but her health—good or poor—could not impact her ability to bear children (though it may impact her ability to nurse them); and, indeed, many treatises and articles addressed to her assume that, with proper intervention, good health is the future for her and her children. Women who already possessed these characteristics still had to contend with the impossibility of being simultaneously "a paragon of domesticity, an ornament in society, a wonder in finance, and a light in [her] literary circle,"[42] of bearing children and pleasing husbands while being chaste, of obtaining education to better educate her sons—America's future—but not doing so between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, so as to not become ill and thus become unable to bear children after marriage in her late teens or early twenties; of taking on extra labor to support the family's finances, but to focus her life on domestic tasks first; in short, to be frail, weak, delicate, and dependent, but also healthy, robust, and a "perfect and equal [companion] . . . and a shrewd business partner besides."[43]

For women who did not already possess the assumed race, class, religion, femininity, marriageability and so forth, these characteristics became another set of impossibles that had to be

[40] Ibid.
[41] This history of this term in the nineteenth-century U.S. is somewhat muddy, as its ideology in events like Manifest Destiny and in evangelism and missionary work occur earlier than any consistent U.S. use of the designation. However, by 1885, Josiah Strong could say in *Our Country*, "In 1700 this race numbered less than 6,000,000 souls. In 1800, Anglo-Saxons (I use the term somewhat broadly to include all English-speaking peoples) had increased to about 20,500,000, and in 1880, they number nearly 100,000,00, having multiplied almost five-fold in eighty years," *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1885), 161, Google Books.
[42] Dorothy Dix, "The American Wife," *Daily Picayune*, January 23, 1898, Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers.
[43] Ibid.

contended with and navigated for social value and, if desired, social voice. Let me be clear—few, if any, women could meet the standard of ideal womanhood; its requirements presented a smooth, perfect, reasonable, natural, and practicable exterior that belied its underbelly of a roiling mass of incommensurate parts. Black women, working-class women, Catholic women, masculine women, "incurable" women (e.g., blind or deaf), old maids, and women who could not and would not countenance sex and/or men were still subject to the omnipresent composite ideal. However, in order (possibly) be considered of value, they had to exemplify perfection in other idealized categories. This may look like former slave's perfect motherhood, or a spinster aunt's perfect domesticity, or a working-class woman's perfect morality, or a young, unmarried woman's perfect "industry."

Adding to the confusing and contradictory nature of the composite ideal are two implicit beliefs that frequently shape the arguments of authors engaging with the idea of Womanhood. First, they assume the simultaneous perfection and *perfectibility* of women, where the standard of ideal womanhood, though represented as an aggregation of virtues, coincides with a stripping of flaws, and second, they assume that American women have already, writ large, achieved ideal status. As argued, in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, authors, artists, and magazine writers imagine a social rubric for a flawless composite ideal that is particularly American, but also depict it as already achieved or its achievement as determined and imminent. [44] These assumptions structure Ida B. Tarbell's exploration of the "uneasiness" of early twentieth-century U.S. women:

> The peculiar forms of uneasiness in the American woman of to-day come naturally from the Revolution of 1776. That movement upset theoretically everything which had been expected of [the American woman] before . . . She was no longer to be a woman of class; she was a woman of

[44] The composite ideal of womanhood—especially that of the "true" woman—was *not* particularly American. In fact, several U.S. newspapers reprinted excerpts from, for instance, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women," *Household Words*, April 1, 1854, Google Books; and "Ideal Women.," *Saturday Register*, May 9, 1868, Hathi Trust. Ironically, both pieces argue that American women did not fulfill the requirements for ideal womanhood. In fact, *Household Words*' article uses women from what it calls the "American Utopia" or "Transatlantic Utopia" as the foil for its formulation of true women.

> the people . . . Unquestionably there came with the Revolution a vision of a new woman—a woman from whom all of the willfulness and frivolity and helplessness of the "Lady" of the old régime should be stripped, while all her qualities of gentleness and charm should be preserved. The old-world lady was to be merged into a woman strong, capable, severely beautiful, a creature who had all of the virtues and none of the follies of femininity.[45]

In a different context, Michael North examines perfectibility around nineteenth- and early twentieth-century projects to standardize the English language, and he emphasizes that, as with Womanhood, the imagined "standard" is constructed of an elimination of flaws and a kind of common-sense, "everyone knows," assumed ordinariness and achievement that is, in fact, not only highly exclusive but impossible. He explicates George Sampson's *English for the English*—"There is no need to define Standard English speech. We know what it is, and there's an end on't, Or, to put it another way, we know what is not standard English, and that is a sufficiently practical guide"—highlighting how views like Sampson's explain "why the campaign for standardization became a chorus of complaint and censure, why, even today, virtually all popular linguistic criticism focuses obsessively on minor errors and why grammar, in the popular mind, consists entirely of prohibitions."[46] He then concludes that "the standard is not standard, that is to say, but rather the very opposite. Like Sampson and like the early twentieth-century American art critic Irving Babbitt, whose ideal is one of "selected truth . . . *purged* of all that is abnormal and eccentric," Tarbell arrives at a composite ideal type by eliminating flaws—here, from a previous type, "the Lady."[47] She constructs a perfected, pre-existent American Woman who arose from the shift from aristocracy to democracy in the post-Revolutionary period, and whose duties spring from the inflection of her composite nature by her nationality. Further, because Tarbell situates the emergence of this ideal American woman in the transition from colonial to democratic regimes, she retrospectively invokes a

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[45] Tarbell, *The Business of Being a Woman*, 9-10.
[46] Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.
[47] Irving Babbitt, *The New Lakoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 10 [emphasis mine].

progress narrative also familiar from statistical and eugenics models. The Revolution of 1776, Tarbell argues, produced the composite ideal, and the attendant responsibilities of this perfected American woman—to further democratic ideals through her roles as wife and mother—are naturalized as deterministic. In short, we have another iteration of Le Gallienne and Dix's "monster of virtues," or as Michael North calls its linguistic counterpart, "whatever shapeless thing is left when all the most common errors are removed."[48]

Relatedly, Dorothy Dix's article "The American Wife," from her column *Dorothy Dix Talks,* shows the politics, problems, ideologies, and contradictions inherent in the composite American female ideal as social rubric, and Dix's work both critiques and epitomizes its vagaries. Dix takes issue with two different registers of the female "ideal"—women's evaluation of themselves and her society's evaluation of women—by exposing, on the one hand, the moral obligations the rubric obscures, and on the other, the impossibility of achieving its inherently contradictory list of expectations. Yet even as Dix draws attention to these conflicts, she also perpetuates them. In "The American Wife," Dix embraces and takes pride in aggregate virtues as a defining feature of particularly *American* women, even as she expresses frustration at the contradictions inherent in composite virtues. Ultimately, Dix insists on a paradox: that this ideal is impossible to achieve but that, like Tarbell also suggests, American wives have already achieved it.

In "The American Wife," Dix explores the contradictory expectations required of "model wives" much more directly, and with far less good humor, than she does in previous articles on the topic. She details how American women's numerous and conflicting obligations, coupled with a "curious" (read: unequal) division of household labor, has led to the "cheapening [of] the popular ideal of the American wife" in national and international assessments. While Dix limits her exploration (mostly) to the domestic

[48] North, *The Dialect of Modernism*, 15.

sphere, that sphere contains many public elements she gently ribs in earlier articles.[49] She begins with a contrast with European women, this time with their idealized "racial" characteristics, and her appraisal is tinged with frustration and reproach.[50] In international representations, "the American woman . . . in one relation, and that the most important in life, [has] received far less than her just need of appreciation . . . In whatever else she might excel she was not a conspicuous success, or a shining example of as a wife."[51] She continues, "When people talk of model wives we hear a great deal of the many and admirable virtues of the British matron, the industry of the German hausfrau and the frugality of the French bourgeois woman. Nobody rises to say a word about the American woman, though nine times out of ten she could give either one points on her specialty and beat her at her own game." For Dix, the complement of European fictional heroines being defined by one great flaw or sin seems to be their "real," national counterparts being defined by one great and coveted virtue. (Clearly, they are not real, but Dix, according to the logic of racial and national types, treats them as such). There is no such shorthand for an American wife, Dix insists, because her ideality in her own nation is a composite, an aggregate of virtues; that is, her milieu requires that she be an expert across many, often conflicting social roles.

> It always seems to the American woman that the wives of other countries, who are held up for her admiration and imitation, have rather the easiest time of it. It would be comparatively simple to make yourself a decorative object [. . . or] to accomplish the marvels of cooking and housekeeping if that were all that was expected of you. It is when one attempts to combine the useful and the ornamental—to be a Dresden statuette in the parlor and a reliable range in the kitchen—that the situation becomes trying and calls for genuine ability. Yet this is what we expect of the average American wife, merely as a matter of course. She must be a paragon of

[49] If wives make their husbands successful as "judges, senators, merchant princes, and or even president," then Dix says that a woman is allowed to trade her "calico gowns and the cooking stove" for "diamonds and point lace" to "take her place beside him," Dix, "The American Wife."
[50] For an explicit example of the coupling of national personifications and racial types, see Gertrude Lynch, "Racial and Ideal Types of Beauty," *The Cosmopolitan* 38, no. 2 (December 1905): 223–33, Google Books.
[51] Dix, "The American Wife."

> domesticity, an ornament in society, a wonder in finance and a light in the literary circle to which she belongs.

In exploring these contradictions, Dix herself is again contradictory. She is simultaneously frustrated at the unfair, conflicting, unachievable expectations of American wives that act as a lien on her value and proud of their "genuine ability" to achieve them. A woman is no longer a "monster of virtues" for her attempt at aggregate perfection across both public and private spheres, as she names her in "The 1897 Girl," because the components of the composite are particularly *American*, and Dix insists that such composites lead to "a country . . . where the relations between husbands and wives is . . . . ideal," where American husbands nearly always acquire in their wives "perfect and equal companionship . . . and a shrewd business partner thrown into the bargain besides."[52] Thus, Dix claims for the American woman what Horace idealizes in poetry—beauty or perfection achieved through (moral) usefulness and delight, "[A poet] has achieved true beauty who has blended profit and pleasure"—and, for Dix, this perfection is particularly constructed through an aggregation of virtues privileged in other nations.[53] Gertrude Lynch would argue for a similar construction of physical American beauty in "Racial and Ideal Types of Beauty," detailing national characteristics of beauty and then argue for an American ideal that aggregated the best features of the types and eliminated their flaws.[54] She concludes, as Dix does with the American novel, with the hope that American visual art will reflect this already commonplace American ideal as a recognizable type.

### *Female Ideality as Prescriptive and Unachievable*

The ideal woman as composite, like (dis)ability as a socially constructed meaning-making apparatus grounded in bodymind difference, is nothing new. Brantôme draws his explication of the

[52] Dix, "The American Wife."
[53] For this translation of Horace's famous dictum, see Giovanna Siedina, *Horace in the Kyiv Mohylanian Poetics (17th-First Half of the 18th Century): Poetic Theory, Metrics, Lyric Poetry* (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2017), 48.
[54] Lynch, "Racial and Ideal Types of Beauty," 223–33.

Zeuxis myth, which is called "The Five Maidens of Croton," from both Cicero's *De Inventione* (85 BCE) and Pliny's *Natural History* (79 CE). In the Proverbs of Solomon, the untitled acrostic poem of the virtuous wife, which details the many traits of an ideal woman—referenced often as "the Proverbs 31 woman" or the "woman of substance"—is most commonly dated to 935 BCE.[55] As I've gestured to throughout my exploration of the first core component of female ideality—the composite and conserved nature of Womanhood—this essential characteristic is inextricable from the second core component: female ideality as both prescriptive and unachievable. Indeed, using nineteenth-century archival materials to draw distinctions between female ideality's two defining characteristics is difficult, because nearly every text which indexes the composite and conserved nature of Womanhood almost always indexes, simultaneously, its prescriptiveness and falsely imagined achievability.

While I have largely dealt with American Ideal Womanhood thus far, it is worth noting that the ideal woman, as she was depicted in magazine articles, novels and other fiction, advice columns, and medical tracts, was, in the Western world, a transatlantic phenomenon. A brisk traffic occurred between Britain and its empire and the United States especially, and U.S. newspapers often reprinted excerpts on ideal womanhood from British sources (though this happened much more rarely, the other way around).[56] In addition, monographs such as Alexander Walker's "trilogy," the names of which are suggestive and worth citing in full—*Beauty: Illustrated Chiefly by an Analysis and Classification of Beauty in Women* (1836); *Intermarriage; or, the Mode in which, and Causes Why, Beauty, Health, and Intellect Result from Certain Unions, and Deformity, Disease, and Insanity from Others* (1838); and *Women Physiologically*

[55] Harold L Willmington, "What You Need to Know About the Book of Proverbs," *Digital Commons at Liberty University* 51 (2009): 3, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1049&context=will_know I use the first example because it is Davis's, and the second, because it was an extremely common example of womanhood in the nineteenth-century U.S.. However, while both examples have arcs in Western culture, the ideal as composite, and particularly the ideal woman as composite, is a common pattern across many cultures and many historical periods. Examining the why of the configuration ideal as gestalt and as particularly related to gender is well beyond the scope of this project. In addition, while we could easily compile robust, cross-cultural documentation of the phenomenon, I'm not certain a "why" should be investigated; it opens us up to delusions of "a grand theory of everything" for the human that, ethically, we have no business trafficking in.

[56] See, for instance, the compilation of *Saturday Review* articles on (ideal) Womanhood published as a book in the United States in 1868, *Modern Women and What Is Said of Them: A Reprint of A Series of Articles in the Saturday Review, with an Introduction by Mrs. Lucia Gilbert Calhoun* (New York: J.S. Redfield, 1868), Project Gutenberg.

*Considered as to Mind, Morals, Marriage, Matrimonial Slavery, Infidelity, and Divorce* (1839)—were extremely popular in the United States. *Intermarriage*, for instance, went through six U.S. editions in less than eighteen months.[57] In the nineteenth-century U.S, however, the vast majority of texts written on ideal womanhood—including those which quote British sources—construct their composites of ideal traits according to an "if and only if" restrictive matrix, or "conditional perfection," to borrow an apt and evocative term from linguistics: the conditions of the list must be fulfilled, or the woman is not ideal.[58] I highlight this "conditional" form of ideal womanhood in the U.S. because in general nineteenth-century British publications were more variable in presenting ideal womanhood as prescriptive. For instance, "The Rights and Wrongs of Women" published in *Household Words* in 1854 and "La Femme Passée" published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868 are both highly prescriptive.[59] However, "Ideal Woman," also published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868, argues, "it is impossible to write of one absolute womanly ideal—one single type that shall satisfy every man's fancy; for, naturally, what would be perfection to one is imperfection to another, according to the special bent of the individual mind."[60] Each of these articles were excerpted and reprinted in numerous U.S. newspapers, yet in every reprint I could find, only the most prescriptive parts were published. For instance, in its reprinting of "Ideal Women," the *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco) reduces the *Saturday Review*'s cosmopolitan exploration of the ideal womanhood as highly individualized according to taste to its ending critical paragraph, focusing on how "the defiant attitude which women have lately assumed, and their indifference to the wishes and remonstrances of men, cannot lead to any good results whatever," and that "the ideal woman of truth and modesty and simple love and homely living has somehow faded away under the paint and tinsel of this

[57] Robyn Cooper, "Definition and Control: Alexander Walker's Trilogy on Woman, *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 3 (1992): 343, n. 2, JSTOR.
[58] Elena Herburger, "Conditional Perfection: The Truth and the Whole Truth," *Semantics and Linguistic Theory* 25 (2016): 615, https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v25i0.3079.
[59] "The Rights and Wrongs of Women," *Household Words*, no. 210 (April 1, 1854), Google Books; "La Femme Passée," *Saturday Review*, July 11, 1968, Google Books.
[60] "Ideal Women.," *Saturday Review* (May 9, 1868): 609, Hathi Trust.

modern reality."[61] For the purpose of this study, I'll briefly begin my analysis of female ideality as prescriptive and (imagined as) achievable in the latter half of the eighteenth-century in Britain, before moving to a U.S. context, for two reasons. First, to acknowledge the transatlantic traffic of concepts of ideal womanhood, and second, and more importantly, to begin resituating early critical disability studies scholarship in light of female ideality. Lennard Davis argues in *Enforcing Normalcy* that the neoclassical Ideal of the late eighteenth-century shifted to normalcy as a governing social concept in the 1820s. Davis begins with a 1789 European painting and moves to scientific articles published in France in the late 1820s. I use texts from the same context to show, instead, how the neoclassical Ideal shifted into female ideality over the same time period, and that in this shift, we can see the compulsory nature in a still-present ideal that Davis ascribes to normalcy.

The shift to the prescriptive and attainable nineteenth-century ideal is predicated on a conceptual transition between general concepts of womanhood individually tailored and general concepts of womanhood generally applied—a list of possibilities versus a restrictive population description. An illustrative example of this shift, as well as the turn to prescriptiveness, can be seen in two British publications: J. Bell's 1787 *A Dictionary of Love*, specifically his entry on "Beauty," and anonymous piece, "Criticism on Female Beauty" published in *New Monthly Magazine* in 1825. Both *Dictionary* and "Criticism" subdivide desirable or idealized female physical characteristics, though Bell presents both qualities and body parts (e.g., "neither too old or young) and "Criticism," like Zeuxis's painting, presents only physical characteristics—in fact, after twenty-six pages of detailed analysis and decided preferences, "Criticism" runs out of steam, but not out of body parts: the article ends with the line "Item, a hip." Yet Bell's subtitle explains that the contents of his book provide "the description of *a* Perfect Beauty," and the description itself is prefaced with a strong caveat: "An author, without considering how arbitrary the idea

[61] "Ideal Women," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco), no. 69 (June 25, 1868), Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers.

of beauty is, has given the following detail of the capital points of it; in which every one will make what alterations his own taste may suggest to him."[62]

In contrast to *Dictionary*'s emphasis on individual preference, and similarly to Le Gallienne's text, "Criticism" attempts to build a *human* woman from ideal parts—and then names this gestalt as "woman" rather than ideal. It does this despite specifically rejecting defining "woman" as its the article's aim. The author states, "I was about to give a specimen of another article, by the same reviewer, on the subject of our present paper [beauty]: 'WOMAN, being a companion to MAN' &c. But the tone of it would be intolerable. I shall therefore proceed with a more becoming and grateful criticism, such as the contemplation of my subject naturally produces."[63] "Criticism" is, in essence, a marriage between an opinion piece and an annotated bibliography, whose major citations are works of literature (mainly poetry and some plays). As with the Zeuxis myth, "Criticism" presents classical examples of individual body parts—for instance, regarding hair, the author argues, "The Greeks and other poets' [privileged] hyacinthine locks . . . Apuleius says, that Venus herself, if she were bald would not be Venus." But each of these citations of the ideal is framed with a prescriptive moment. For hair, the author waxes on the prescription—and by extension, the attainability—of beautiful hair, before turning, as justification, to examples from the classics:

> HAIR should be abundant, soft, flexible, growing in long locks, of a colour suitable to the skin, thick in the mass, delicate and distinct in the particular. The mode of wearing it should differ. Those who have it growing low in the nape of the neck, should prefer wearing it in locks hanging down, rather than turned up with a comb. The gathering it however in that manner is delicate and feminine, and suits many. In general the mode of wearing the hair is to be regulated according to

[62] J. Bell, *A Dictionary of Love. Or the Language of Gallantry Explained* (London: printed under the direction of J. Bell, British Library, Strand, Bookseller to His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, 1787), 12, Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.
[63] "Criticism on Female Beauty," *New Monthly Magazine* (1825): 71, Hathi Trust.

the shape of the head.[64]

It is the "should" and the "is to be regulated" that distinguish "Criticism" from Bell's *Dictionary*. "Criticism," in its own words, seeks to "reconcile particulars [of ideal female beauty] with generals," and the author equates the "I" of his preference with the "we" of the assumed preferences of the male populace, and then provides rules for achieving the feminine ideal for "a woman of taste."[65] Bell's entry reads as a composite *list* of particularly ideal female characteristics, among which one can choose. "Criticism" reads like a composite *ideal*—an imagined person, rather than a list of possibles—made up of ideal characteristics. For Bell, the ideality of the individual parts is considered universal; in "Criticism," the ideality of the composite, constructed from *regulated* parts, is considered to be universal, where regulation implies both prescriptiveness and individual responsibility for achievement.

In an American context, Dorothy Dix's "The 1897 Girl" rejects classical poetry and novelistic portrayals of the female ideal, and rejects aggregate perfection as a "monster of virtues" when the composite ideal is drawn from "epic" sources, or from public performance.[66] She instead directs women's attention back to the "commonplace," namely the domestic sphere—but her formula is still predicated on the ideal as both prescriptive and achievable, and by extension, places the responsibility for the fulfillment of these domestic virtues on the individual woman.

In "The 1897 Girl," Dix addresses the lack of new year's resolutions among women, a trend that she attributes in part to social etiquette—"it has never been expedient to point out her shortcomings to even the best of women"—but mainly to conventions that foreground "epic" virtues and flaws and obscure their "commonplace" counterparts. Epic virtues and flaws, drawn from "prose and verse," denote both the type and the extent of the characteristic in question. Women, Dix insists, are "apt to find they are

[64] "Criticism on Female Beauty," 73.
[65] "Criticism on Female Beauty," 72, 74
[66] Dorothy Dix [Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer], "The 1897 Girl," *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), Dec. 27, 1896, Nineteenth-Century U.S Newspapers. All subsequent citations are taken from this one-page article.

discouragingly good" because they "have no great temptation to combat, or dreadful evil to overcome." Specifically, this is because "no one wants to elope with them," because "the world is full of beautiful tributes in prose and verse to the unselfishness of women," because the average woman does not need to "repent a murder or a bank robbery" however "romantic and thrilling," and because their lives do not demand a "heroic sacrifice" or to "go on a pilgrimage to right the evils of the world" (which Dix insists they would prefer). Similarly, women do not view themselves as "gossips" since they don't have "tongues like a firebrand," even though the results are much the same: a "slanderous story" told to "two or three friends" did "a world of harm, but heavens knows how it got out!" Because of these epic standards for virtues and flaws, "there isn't a woman among us who wouldn't bitterly resent the insinuation that [they] are not model wives."

Dix is of course (and famously) being tongue-in-cheek and hyperbolic, but her critique argues that women construct their (mis-)perceptions of themselves as "model wives" and "discouragingly good" from the presence of epic virtues (e.g., they are unselfish because "the world is full of beautiful tributes in prose and verse to the unselfishness of women") and the absence of epic flaws depicted in novels, classic literature, and headlines (e.g., elopements, heroic sacrifices, and murders and robberies). What epic virtues they do not possess are unattainable because the situations required to exercise them are not a part of mundane life—being extreme and often fictional—though women imagine that they would exhibit virtuous ideals, if the opportunity to do so ever presented itself. Dix, however, evaluates her female audience according to a logic wherein the elimination of flaws produces the ideal—and importantly displaces the female from literature and public service and returns her to the home. She invokes the idea of aggregate perfection, an ideal woman as a "monster of virtues." However, Dix uses the idea of monstrous femininity not (only) to critique women's evaluation of themselves as "model wives" through their possession of epic virtues and lack of epic flaws (that critique she levels primarily through irony and hyperbole). Instead, Dix implies that this monstrosity stems from women's public, visible, virtuous actions, which leads them to ignore domestic and interpersonal ones: a model wife can imagine herself so

because she "a member of the church, and the president of the missionary board," when she could "improve [. . .] common, homely, every-day things with no glamor of romance in their doing and yet they might flood the world with new sweetness and life for those about [her]." Dix eschews the "glamor of romance," in keeping with her criticism of the epic, but even more importantly she takes the larger "world" of women and returns it "those about [her]"—specifically, her husband, children, servants, and her housekeeping.

Dix attempts to make the "general woman" into a more perfect "model" by removing her from the (epic) literary and public spheres and situating her in the home, insisting that said woman employ the logic of perfectibility in order to eliminate her "commonplace" flaws and achieve the feminine ideal. In enumerating the flaws of women, and providing direction toward a taken-for-granted notion of "commonplace" virtues, Dix simply adheres to the formula of the anonymous author of "Criticism"—a series of "shoulds" and regulations *in order to achieve*. Dix represents this achievement as an exchange—the epic and public spheres for the domestic one—but, as in "Criticism," the process is in fact merely additive. Thus, Dix unintentionally supports the contradictory requirements of female ideality by trying to simplify them to common-sense ideals of Womanhood, and her article models, however inadvertently, the ways that women were held accountable for conflicting epic, public, and domestic characteristics. This inconsistency becomes exponential when we consider that Dix, a paid staff writer for *The Daily Picayune*, inhabited the public sphere she advocated against.[67]

[67] In *The Other Civil War*, Catherine Clinton explores this paradox arguing that, "Because 'true women' needed advice and refinement, an entire retinue of domesticity professionals (writers, educators, and lecturers) sprang up in response. Ironically, these women spent time and energy in pursuit of careers which were bound up with the celebration of the home . . .[and] earned a living promoting women's dependency on men and a female's sole occupation as housewife," 46-47. While Clinton's analysis of women writers is specifically anchored in the antebellum period, the contradiction she notes carried on well into the postbellum period and into the new century. For instance, Ida M. Tarbell's 1912 book *The Business of Being a Woman*, which advocated to the modern "uneasy woman" that business of womanhood was still motherhood and the making of a home in order to disseminate democracy, was poorly received yet reprinted three years running. For more on Tarbell's complicated, ambiguous feminism see, Robert Stinson, "Ida M. Tarbell and the Ambiguities of Feminism," 217–39; and Robert C. Kochersberger, "Introduction," in *More Than A Muckraker: Ida Tarbell's Lifetime Journalism*, by Ida M. Tarbell, ed. Robert C. Kochersberger (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), xxxiv.

In sum, nineteenth-century female ideality often functioned as a social rubric that entailed both a collection of (inherently contradictory) virtues and perfections and the absence of particularities, deficiencies, and flaws (especially physical, mental, and moral). Like its Ideal predecessor, it created a composite Womanhood out of "female" characteristics (like motherhood, nurturing, etc.) to create a prescription for female ideality that functioned as a tool for evaluation, valuation, and restriction (even as it sometimes was strategically manipulated for certain autonomies).[68] If we liken the characteristics and roles of feminine ideality to quantum states, we can understand the crucial paradox: ideal characteristics, being often mutually exclusive, exist in flux, only one of which states can *become*—can be, that is, realized and concrete.[69] Yet the social rubric imagines *that all states can become,* holding women accountable for inhabiting them simultaneously, and according them worth and value to extent that they achieve this impossibility.[70] Thus, the "ideal" did not give way to the "norm" in a progressive sense, but instead messily coexisted with it, and its slippages were reified into prescriptive models that were imagined as attainable; the individual becomes responsible for both accruing virtues and eradicating flaws; the characteristics consolidated into the model were often contradictory, in part because they were drawn from incompatible sources. When this logical error was spotted in the nineteenth century, it was often dismissed—because, of course, the ideal is unattainable. Thus, ideality was glossed as both impossible and possible, but the individual must achieve it or was deemed a failure.

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[68] For nineteenth-century women's strategic manipulation of womanly ideals, see Clinton, *The Other Civil War*, 54-55.

[69] The quantum metaphor is the most useful metaphor I have found for this concept, but it is inexact. Quantum states cannot be incompletely realized. They are either/or (or more exactly, "a quantum state [stops] being a non-trivial linear combination of states, each of which resembles different classical states," called a state space, "and instead [has] a unique classical description." — and yes, occasionally Wikipedia has most succinct, most practical descriptions of things). Women writers, however, described constantly their imperfect realizations of multiple categories of womanhood and multiple ideal characteristics. The metaphor works better if we imagine that in humans, if one state becomes *perfectly*, it is likely that no other possible states can exist.
For more on quantum states, see, See also, J.D. Cresser, *Quantum Physics Notes* (North Ryde: Macquarie University, 2009), especially "Vector Spaces in Quantum Mechanics"; or, for a more accessible introduction, see, Marianne Freiberger, "A Ridiculously Short Introduction to Some Very Basic Quantum Mechanics," *Plus Magazine,* Accessed August 10, 2019. https://plus.maths.org/content/ridiculously-brief-introduction-quantum-mechanics.

[70] I will deal with this metaphor more directly in Chapter 2.

***Female Ideality, (Dis)ability, and the Individual Responsibility for Health***

Critical disability studies defines the individual model of (dis)ability as the way that (dis)ability is "seen as primarily a personal problem afflicting individual people"; it locates the "'problem' of (dis)ability within the individual . . . and it sees the causes of [the problems of (dis)ability] as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses" assumed to arise from illness or impairment rather than from built environments that privilege the interaction and access of certain configurations of bodyminds deemed "normal" or "typical"—the imagined mathematical mode of humans.[71] The individual model of (dis)ability is closely related to the medical or medicalization model of (dis)ability. The latter takes from the individual model the location of the problem in the person with a disease, trauma, impairment, or other health condition, and then attaches to that the necessity of medical or health intervention aimed at cure, or "the individual's adjustment and behavioral change that would lead to an 'almost cure.'"[72] Early defining qualities of Womanhood included a requisite "frailty,"[73] yet, the new Republic also linked the perpetuation of democracy to the reproductive labor of *healthy* women. Advice columns on women's health, housework and beauty, as well as proponents of the health reform movement, attempted to resolve this contradiction by identifying women as inherently ill, or otherwise defined by physical and mental lack, but also by asserting that they were individually and morally responsible for repairing their health to better embody ideality; that is, to become better women, daughters, and wives to current and mothers of future citizens.

Dr. Benjamin Rush's *Thoughts Upon Female Education* (1787), which Linda K. Kerber argues was the origin of "Republican Motherhood" (perhaps the earliest form of female ideality in the new

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[71] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 5; Mike Oliver, "The Individual and Social Models of Disability," in *People with Established Locomotor Disabilities in Hospitals* (Joint Workshop of the Living Options Group and the Research Unit of the Royal College of Physicians, Leeds, 1990), 1, https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Oliver-in-soc-dis.pdf.
[72] "Models of Disability: Types and Definitions," *Disabled World*.
[73] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

United States), established the education of women as crucial to the reproduction of democracy. The health reform movement in the 1820s combined "female education," "health as a moral responsibility," and "women as the moral center of the home" to create a doctrine in which women, who were imagined as inherently debilitated for multifarious reasons, had an individual moral and political responsibility to educate themselves on domestic matters in order to be healthy enough to reproduce democracy by birthing and educating children. We see this most strongly in Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, the preface of which opens with explicit reason for writing—"the deplorable sufferings of multitudes of young wives and mothers, from the combined influence of *poor health, poor domestics, and a defective domestic education*," for which the solution is an education by which women will be "rightly taught to appreciate and learn the most convenient and economical modes of performing family duties [. . .] the healthiness of different foods and drink, the proper modes of cooking, and the rules in reference to the modes and times for taking them"; then, "the grand cause of this evil will be removed. Women will be trained to secure, as of first importance, a strong and healthy constitution, and all those rules of thrift and economy that make domestic duty easy and pleasant."[74] Women's health through re-education is necessary to Beecher for explicitly political reasons:

> The success of democratic institutions, as is conceded by all, depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people. If they are intelligent and virtuous, democracy is a blessing; but if they are ignorant and wicked, it is only a curse, and as much more dreadful than any other form of civil government [. . .] It is equally conceded, that the formation of the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand. The mother forms the character of the future man; the sister bends the fibres that are hereafter to be the forest tree; the wife sways the heart, whose energies may turn for good or for evil the destinies of a nation. Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent, and the men will certainly be the

[74] Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic* Economy, 5, 6-7. Note: I quote primarily from the second and third editions of Beecher's *Treatise*. The text went through thirteen reprintings and remained popular through the end of the century.

same. The proper education of a man decides the welfare of an individual; but educate a woman, and the interests of a whole family are secured.[75]

While Beecher is perhaps the most famous—or at least the most consistent and most cited—writer on women's individual responsibility for improving health (this section alone could be composed of nothing but her arguments on combating ill-health through proper domestic labor, exercise, and dress), the intersection between individualism and health was a fairly ubiquitous stance, particularly with regards to the health reform movement. The effects of her doctrine, and the doctrine of the health reform movement generally, were long-lasting. In 1890, fifty years after Beecher's first publication of *A Treatise*, *The Ladies' Home Journal* would position the "great beauties who take all the social prizes in marriage" against the "sick anemic woman, unused and unable to care for herself and all others"; the latter is "the most pitiable, repugnant object on earth" while the former becomes beautiful through her individual maintenance of her body: of women with "lasting beauty," the author asserts, "you don't find them growing up with calisthenics, health lifts, and a massage-use to do their exercise *for them.*"[76] Morantz also points out that "implicit in [Enlightenment philosophy's] theory of sickness was a concept of self-help and a conviction that disease could be prevented by teaching people the 'laws' of physiology and hygiene" and that with this, "health reformers insisted upon the efficacy of individual action."[77] In this assumption we see early roots of the individual model of (dis)ability and its offspring, the medical model of (dis)ability:

> Disability continues to be seen primarily as a personal problem afflicting individual people, a problem best solved through strength of character and resolve [. . .] disability is depoliticized, presented more as nature than culture [. . .] This individual model is very closely aligned with what is commonly termed the medical model of disability; both form the framework for dominant

[75] Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 36-37.
[76] *Ladies' Home Journal* 7, no. 10 (September 1889): 24. Quoted in, "Where Beauties Are Bred," *Galveston Daily News*, February 23, 1890, no. 302, Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers.
[77] Regina Markell Morantz, "Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19th Century America," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (1977): 491, 498, JSTOR.

> understandings of disability and disabled people. The medical model of disability frames atypical bodies and minds as deviant, pathological, and defective, best understood and addressed in medical terms. In this framework, the proper approach to disability is to "treat" the condition and the person with the condition rather than "treating" the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people's lives [. . .] Thus, in both the individual and medical models, disability is cast as a problematic characteristic inherent in particular bodies and minds.[78]

In the early nineteenth century, the "particular bodies and minds" in which ill health is "inherent" are specifically women's bodyminds. For instance, Catharine Beecher would argue that "peculiar to American women, is a delicacy of constitution which renders them early victims to disease and decay."[79] In *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, a beauty advice column that appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*, S.D. Power took for granted women's innate sickliness and understood physical characteristics as "symptoms" for categorical underlying disease: "the brunette is usually built up of too much iron, and the bilious secretion is sluggish, [while] the blonde is apt to be dyspeptic and subject to disturbances in the blood."[80] Articles, monographs, schools, and reform campaigns throughout the 1830s and 1840s focused primarily on the problem of women's health, and this became a predominant discourse throughout the century.

In addition, we see the early heralds of the medical model specifically in the discourse around women's health. Again, women are still deemed individually responsible for maintaining their health, but one of the dictums directed at them was to see an expert, namely a doctor, in order to fix themselves. One exemplary instance comes from an 1891 article in the *Morning Oregonian* (Portland). Its extensive title includes connections to both the individual and medical models of (dis)ability—"A Warning to Women. Doctors Tell Unwelcome Truths about the Fair Sex. High-Heels, Corsets and Love-Sickness—Warnings

[78] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 5-6.
[79] Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 42.
[80] S.D. Power, *The Ugly-Girl Papers; or, Hints for the Toilet* (New York, Harpers & Brothers: 1874), 12, Google Books.

to Romantic Girls—Causes of Anemia in Women."[81] From there, the article proceeds to assert the expertise of the doctor, claim the inherency of illness in women, and blend morality, health, and physical functionality indiscriminately in service of dethroning women as the "superior sex":

> [D]octors are the only class of men who understand women [. . .] the stress of scientific accuracy compels a man to a habit of truth, and the more he knows of a woman's brain, nerves, and the organs which balance them, the less possible it is to prostrate himself before her physically or mentally. You can't induce a clear-headed doctor to subscribe to the superiority of a sex he sees demoralized by hysteria, headaches, and indigestion to the point of telling outrageous tarradiddles about themselves which his own eyes contradict and whose elemental scraps of morality get mixed in with the slightest jar to those exceedingly ticklish nerves and prepossessions.

The article, then, by sections, links medical theories to the inherent illness of women, and asserts their individual and moral responsibilities for fixing their health. It begins with "the causes of extreme thinness" which "Dr. Johnson of Washington, says an impoverished blood supply to the heart leads to feeble heartbeat, and if chronic, the heart and vessels undergo a reduction in size" which "becomes a permanent obstacle to the cure of wasting and anemia."[82] "Here" the author asserts, "will be found the cause of the extreme thinness for which women insistently demand cure."[83] Yet, as with S.D. Power, the medical condition becomes inextricable from female ideality:

> the American woman is too apt to extremes. A prominent physician and writer, who has given the subject of looks much thought, pays the consolation that it is better to be thin as a rail than to descend to the commonplaceness of fat, destructive to every line of beauty. Still women have a prejudice against thinness, from the idea that men demand plumpness as indispensable to beauty,

[81] "A Warning to Women. Doctors Tell Unwelcome Truths about the Fair Sex. High-Heels, Corsets and Love-Sickness—Warnings to Romantic Girls—Causes of Anemia in Women," *Morning Oregonian*, no. 36 (August 16, 1891), Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

> quite shutting out the fascination which exceedingly slender creatures assert. There is a fine condition, where nervous activity, with its incessant scourge, keeps the flesh under which is one of the highest conditions of humanity? But wasting emaciation with loss of strength and force is repellent to both sexes, and we must study its cure before the habit becomes hopeless and fixed upon the race.[84]

The article then proceeds with the same formula—medical knowledge from experts; identification of women with particular impairments, diseases, or symptoms of illnesses; an explication of the interrelatedness of beauty and illness; a final assertion that women should seek cures, or otherwise change their behaviors to be healthy—particularly to maintain the American nation and race. Even though the article repeatedly incriminates the social conditions that lead to women's (perceived) ill-heath, it also names many of these conditions as inherent in women, enjoining women to seek cures from doctors but only in ways that maintain their appeal and desirability to the male sex, and thus, maintain the oppressive social conditions to which women were responding.

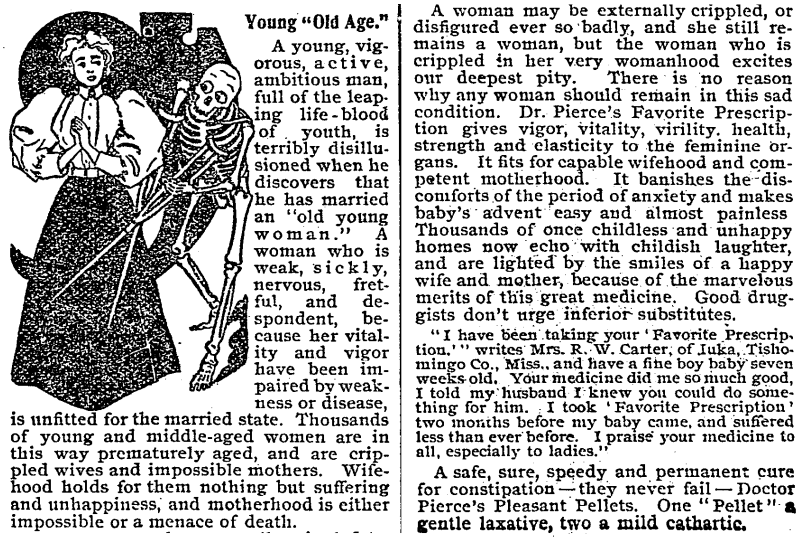
Even writers and correspondents who included men in their assessments would still focus on women as individually responsible for maintaining not only their own health, but the health of men and the nation, and as the author of "A Warning to Women" gestures to, the health of the race. In 1870, in the *American Agriculturalist*, Faith Rochester would begin by pointing to the ill-health of both sexes, "How many healthy men and women can you count on your fingers?—grown persons who have no dyspepsia, rheumatism, bowel diseases, headaches, nervousness, nor any of the long list of ills that flesh is heir to."[85] However, she quickly shifts her focus only to women:

> It would be ludicrous if it were less sad,—the idea of such a set of feeble and nervous creatures as American women generally are, setting themselves up as the guardians of health! But all must

[84] Ibid.
[85] Faith Rochester, "Sleeping and Eating as Related to Health," *American Agriculturalist*, no. 29 (July 1870), 265, Hathi Trust.

> agree that this properly falls within the natural 'sphere' of women. It is a household matter. For, you see, we women almost have it in our power to make or ruin the health and usefulness of the best and wisest of citizens by our management or mismanagement of our homes [. . .] Dear *American Agriculturist* girls, if you could for a moment realize your power to help this nation, and save its people from sickness and suffering, I'm sure you would henceforth do your best to become strong and healthy, and try to learn every way of promoting the real benefit of comfort of those associated with you. Don't think of getting married, or of going to house-keeping, until you have studied physiology and household chemistry.[86]

Rochester's analysis is one of the many nineteenth-century advice articles that echo, cite, or recommend the works of Catherine Beecher, especially *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (referenced in the last sentence recommending the study of physiology and household chemistry).



**Young "Old Age."**

A young, vigorous, active, ambitious man, full of the leaping life-blood of youth, is terribly disillusioned when he discovers that he has married an "old young woman." A woman who is weak, sickly, nervous, fretful, and despondent, because her vitality and vigor have been impaired by weakness or disease, is unfitted for the married state. Thousands of young and middle-aged women are in this way prematurely aged, and are crippled wives and impossible mothers. Wifehood holds for them nothing but suffering and unhappiness, and motherhood is either impossible or a menace of death.

A woman may be externally crippled, or disfigured ever so badly, and she still remains a woman, but the woman who is crippled in her very womanhood excites our deepest pity. There is no reason why any woman should remain in this sad condition. Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription gives vigor, vitality, virility, health, strength and elasticity to the feminine organs. It fits for capable wifehood and competent motherhood. It banishes the discomforts of the period of anxiety and makes baby's advent easy and almost painless Thousands of once childless and unhappy homes now echo with childish laughter, and are lighted by the smiles of a happy wife and mother, because of the marvelous merits of this great medicine. Good druggists don't urge inferior substitutes.

"I have been taking your 'Favorite Prescription.'" writes Mrs. R. W. Carter, of Iuka, Tishomingo Co., Miss., and have a fine boy baby seven weeks old. Your medicine did me so much good, I told my husband I knew you could do something for him. I took 'Favorite Prescription' two months before my baby came, and suffered less than ever before. I praise your medicine to all, especially to ladies."

A safe, sure, speedy and permanent cure for constipation—they never fail—Doctor Pierce's Pleasant Pellets. One "Pellet" a gentle laxative, two a mild cathartic.

FIG 1. Advertisement published in multiple U.S. newspapers from 1897-98, including, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 22, 1897; and *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), January 23, 1898 .

We also see ill-health inherent in the well-known nineteenth-century ideal of woman as frail, as "weak, sickly, dependent, and ornamental." As late as 1898, we see conflicting op-eds, published in the same section—on the same page!—arguing against female frailty but proceeding from very different assumptions. One, a medical piece written by a physician, repudiates what it sees as the omnipresent

[86] Rochester, "Sleeping and Eating as Related to Health," 265, 266.

"anemic" model of beauty, because it prevents bearing children. It was published directly across an article called "The 1897 Woman" which takes for granted that the anemic model of womanhood is gone, replaced by the robust athletic woman.[87] In this, we can see how female ideality's prescriptiveness and attainability is predicated on the idea that health and beauty are under one's individual control.

Domestic advice manuals throughout the nineteenth century differ in the causes they identify of American women's debility. For instance, Catherine Beecher's *Treatise* and S.D. Power's *The Ugly-Girl Papers* focus, in part, on diet and exercise; Harriet Beecher Stowe's Christopher Crowfield series points to the use of coffee, alcohol, and tobacco; many medical professionals locate the origin in city-living and female education; and various magazine editorials and suffragette pamphlets decry fashionable attire.[88] The etiologies suggested by these publications tend to overlap in two places, however: debility as a condition of contemporary American life, generationally acquired, such that colonial goodwives were imagined as largely healthy, with the vitality fading from each successive generation (for various reasons); and housework as both a cause and solution for contemporaneous American women's ill health. The first iteration of ill health is what Julie Livingston calls the "moral imagination"—the way that people "make sense of their experiential crises by remembering a past in which such suffering was hardly possible," particularly, "a nostalgic past where a clear moral order protected individual and community vitality for the common good."[89] In the U.S., domestic advice manuals portray this past "moral order" variously—as physical labor versus mental, regardless of gender (e.g., S. Weir Mitchell); as a thorough education in domestic tasks and the absence of "book learning" for women (e.g., Sylvester Graham, Catharine Beecher, and water-cure advocates); and as rural versus urban living (e.g., Margaret Fuller).

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[87] Both pieces were published in the "Woman's Way" section of *The Daily Picayune*, January 23, 1898.

[88] Many of these publications also borrowed from each other, such that, for instance, later publications of Beecher's *Treatise* contain advice on healthful attire, Power's revisions for the monograph version of *Ugly-Girl* contains medical advice, and magazines targeting rural women's lives adapt Beecher's advice, which was primarily targeted at urban, middle-class women, for domestic concerns in agricultural households.

[89] Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1, 2. Livingston argues that moral imagination is the result of anxieties over a tumultuous economic present, and tracks its emergence in Botswana from a shift from agricultural, barter economies grounded in communal life to the rise of industrialization, capitalism and wage-labor, and individualism—a shift which mirrors conditions in the nineteenth-century U.S.

Regina Markell Morantz argues as well that "many individuals looked nostalgically backward to an idealized 'republic of virtue' where the mutual interdependency of family members and society at large promoted 'good health' in the form of physical and spiritual unity."[90] It is moral imagination that undergirds, for instance, Stowe's novels, which romanticize the seventeenth-century when women were robust in health and perfectly domestic while effortlessly maintaining ideal beauty. It is through this moral imagination that, in *every* domestic advice manual, debility and the "nervous" American temperament is cast as moral failure, whether individually or as a communal "sins of the father" (or mother).

To return to *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, Power could use the consumptive as an ideal of beauty, while deploying stringent recommendations for achieving the ultimate goal of beautiful health/healthy beauty:

> The fairest skins belong to people in the earliest stages of consumption, or those of a scrofulous nature. This miraculous clearness and brilliance is due to the constant purgation of the blood which wastes the consumptive, or to the issue which relieves the system of impurities by one outlet. We must secure the purity of the blood by less exhaustive methods. The diet should be regulated according to the habit of the person . . . Nervous people, and sanguine ones, should adopt a diet of eggs, fish, soups, and salads, with fruit. This cools the blood [. . .] Lymphatic people should especially prefer such lively salads as cress, pepper-grass, horseradish, and mustard. These are nature's correctives [. . .] They stir the blood, clear the eye and brain [. . .] To clear the complexion or reduce the size, the blood must be carefully cleansed.[91]

As we see, nineteenth-century advice to women often dictated this prescriptive, imagined-as-attainable, Goldilocks approach of just-rightness, the alternative to which was impairment, hysteria, or death. Whereas in classical literature—exegeses of which were often performed by nineteenth-century medical

[90] Morantz, "Making Women Modern," 499.
[91] Power, *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, 13-17.

professionals—imbalance of the humors produced illness, in nineteenth-century treatises and advice columns, illness, impairment, and failures to obtain beauty proceeded from imbalanced actions. Power urges readers to "never eat too much; never go hungry," coupled with an appropriate diet for one's set nature (e.g., "nervous" or "lymphatic") and adding to this medications, specifically a "carbonate of ammonia and powdered charcoal," will "clear the complex [and] reduce the size" by "carefully cleans[ing]" the blood. Indeed, Power refuses to distinguish between beauty advice and medical advice, arguing, "The science of the toilet is well-nigh as delicate as that of medicine . . . I would wish for this book the good-will and consideration of physicians, under whose advice it may be hoped its suggestions will approve themselves of wide service."[92] Similarly, in *Female Beauty, as Preserved and Improved by Regimen*, Mrs. A. Walker insists that "Cold ablutions . . . are also very liable to bring on headache, inflammation of the throat . . . [and] especially destroys the freshness of the skin and face"; however, "hot baths relax and weaken the fibres and render the individual liable to colds. Nothing is more likely to awaken many irritations than baths taken at too high temperature. The effects of a hot bath are evidently debilitating. The body loses too much in such a bath. Baths heated to above 110 degrees have lately in several instances been known to produce immediate insanity."[93] Walker provides no correct or perfect temperature for baths, only the consequence of illness, madness, or a loss of beauty—viewed as equivalent evils—for falling outside of the Goldilocks zone.

Health becomes inextricable from ideal womanhood; the ideal, in effect, becomes not only the *presence* of ideal traits, as in the neo/classical model, but simultaneously, the *absence* of "deviant, pathological, and defective traits." Or as S.D. Power puts it, with regards to the physical ideal, "the essence of beauty is health; but all apparently healthy people are not fair."[94] This delineation arrays

[92] Power, "Preface," *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, para. 2.
[93] Scholars argue that Alexander Walker, Mrs. A. Walker, and Donald Walker who all wrote monographs on female beauty—and whose works were wildly popular in the United States, going through multiple reprintings—were all likely the same person: Alexander Walker. Mrs. A. Walker, *Female Beauty, as Preserved and Improved by Regimen, Cleanliness and Dress: And Especially by the Adaptation, Colour and Arrangement of Dress, as Variously Influencing the Forms, Complexion, and Expression of Each Individual, and Rendering Cosmetic Impositions Unnecessary (*New York: Scofield and Voorhies, 1840), 41-42, Google Books.
[94] Power, *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, 12.

health, beauty, education, and perfected domestic labor against disease, madness, debility, ugliness, deformity, stupidity, ignorance, laziness, and a lack of productivity. The move from the latter to the former is facilitated by individual action. This holds true for fixing "acquired" debilities—such as being "ruined in health," possessing "enfeebled . . . constitutions" or succumbing to "disease" and invalidism—by enacting a "system and regularity" for housekeeping and an exercise regiment, but also for presumably congenital issues, co-morbid with womanhood itself—as in the case of the dyspeptic blonde repairing herself through diet.[95]

The crux of the dissertation is a revision of the history of disability, an examination of how three key insights of disability studies emerge from female ideality—that is, from how womanhood existed in the nineteenth-century U.S. imaginary and how it impacted and was present in women's experiences. Before I move into a deeper engagement of female ideality and normalcy, I want to take a moment to draw attention to the fact that the "ideal" as a composite of impossible traits and as a governing concept for achievement or a standard of progress continues its work today. While "the ideal" has shifted, split, reformed, and its particulars have been redefined, it persists as unnamed but crucial concept in discussions around women's invisible and emotional labor at their careers and at home, the continued gendered divisions of domestic labor and parenting, the politics of maternity and paternity leave, and the frustrations of the impossibility of being worker, wife, and mother, to name only a few. The ideal persists as much, or more so, in our ideas of physical beauty, and, correspondingly, in our ideas of desirable bodily capacities. We, in turn, normalize these characteristics as both preferable and achievable traits, as I discuss in my next chapter.

[95] Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 41-42.

## Chapter 2

## To Rend and Render:

## Normalcy, Mosaicism, and (Dis)ability's Dependency on Female Ideality

> I wished to assert the individuality of Woman; I wished to regard her as a being, entire, with her own laws, her own rights, stamped and guaranteed by the hand of the Eternal Father . . . I wished the average standard of our sex to be judged not by puppets of fashion, the sickly sentimentalists, or the large class of the weak, degraded, and blind that swell the dregs of our society.
>
> —Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Women and Her Needs*[1]

At the end of my previous chapter, I explored how female ideality throughout the nineteenth century contained constitutive components of the individual and medical models of (dis)ability, particularly in the figurations of women as inherently ill and in the social demand that women be individually responsible for curing themselves, either through behavioral changes or by seeking expert medical advice. Critical disability studies links these models to the "hidden system of compulsory conformity"—termed "normalcy"—and (dis)ability histories mark the nineteenth-century as the emergence of normalcy as a controlling social category in the West.[2] However, implicit in our modern connotation of normalcy is an inherent contradiction. Normal both means "conformity to standard or

[1] Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Woman and Her Needs* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1851), 38, Google Books.
[2] Peter M. Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 6.

type" and also "what is correct and good, something so perfect in its exemplarity that it constitutes an ideal."[3] Indeed, as Cryle and Stephens assert,

> One of the remarkable features of contemporary views of the normal is that the middle point in a range of qualities and characters should ever have come to be invested with such great value. After all, middling qualities might on the face of things have been considered mediocre or nondescript, as they indeed have been and continue to be in certain cultural contexts. However, this privileging of middleness might also be seen as an important source of the power of the normal, facilitating its conceptual slide from the descriptive to the prescriptive, from norms to normativity.[4]

We can resolve some of the contradictions in the rise of normalcy if we locate the advent of its compulsory conformity, its prescriptiveness, and its assertion that such qualities are the "mode" of human in the discourse of female ideality. Again, when I use the term *ideality*, here, I mean *the ideal as a composite of often contradictory parts commonly perceived or agreed upon as ideal*—both its individual parts and its gestalt, Womanhood—but *which is characterized by the ideal as prescriptive and the imagination or insistence that it is achievable* (a nineteenth-century innovation). Female ideality names idealized qualities as inherent in all women, and thus, the ideal woman is also everywoman—the "mode" of women. In addition, in the nineteenth century, embedded in female ideality are cultural assumptions about women's health, their domestic and household responsibilities, their responsibilities for reproducing healthy children, and their role in educating children to reproduce a healthy nation. Each of these assumptions lay the groundwork for and are inextricable from what would become (dis)ability in the U.S. and other nations, according to Western ideology. Later in the century, especially with emergence of eugenics, normalcy would borrow ideality's prescriptiveness and its assumptions about an individual's ability to achieve ideal characteristics, and then stratify its descriptions of "ideal" and "inferior" traits into

[3] Cryle and Stephens, *Normality*, 1.
[4] Ibid.

"good/normal" and "bad/abnormal" in its aims to standardize populations and reproduce an able-bodied and able-minded white race. But eugenicists and, later, medical professionals could perform this transposition—and in some cases, this amounted to a simple relabeling of traits from ideal to normal—because ideality had already created many of these frameworks.

Indeed, "ideal," "natural," and "normal" were already lexical equivalents in the nineteenth-century U.S., though these terms come to mean something very different in our contemporary moment than they meant to one of the first U.S. adopters of the term, proto-eugenicist Orson Squire Fowler. For Fowler, natural and normal signaled moral ideals as virtues and physical ideals as health, particularly the absence of illness His critiques were largely directed at women and their ability to produced sane, able-bodied, non-deformed children. Yet it is easy to see the lexical slippages between "normal" as Fowler uses the term and "normal" as we use the term today, when this network of word associations is firmly in place—in fact, embedded in our current usage are many of the ideals of its precursor. In this way, it is not "paradoxical" as Lennard Davis argues, that "the average man . . . becomes a kind of ideal, a position to be devoutly wished," that, "Zeuxis's notion of physical beauty as an exceptional ideal"—which Davis names as exemplary of the pre-nineteenth-century Ideal—"becomes transformed into beauty as the average."[5] Rather, we see how ideal Womanhood specifically, and female ideality generally, served as a necessary intermediary and primer for normalcy. In short, what concepts of normalcy proliferated among nineteenth-century U.S. society did so incompletely, existing in a mosaic state with female ideality first before moving, in fits and starts, into other public discourses. Thus, for any given cross-section of historical documents, we can see a messy coexistence of normal and ideal, with the two becoming more analogous, and less gender dependent, toward the end of the century.

In the chapter that follows, I argue that, in fact, normalcy was a highly variable, highly contested term in the nineteenth century, and that when normalcy cohered in eugenicists' works into our modern

[5] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso Books, 1995), 27, 28.

"normalcy," it borrowed heavily from the discourse of the female ideality. The influence of female ideality on normalcy persists to today in the meaning-making surrounding, for instance, in "cure" narratives and in the "good life" and "futurity" as the absence of disability. I then model the slow proliferation of normalcy, and the exchanges between normalcy and ideal womanhood throughout the century, as normalcy becomes a more prevalent concept toward the end of the century. I call this proliferation "mosaicism," borrowing from virology's mapping of disease spread within the cells of a body. Here, I explore how normalcy not only borrows heavily from ideality to construct its goals, but how it depends on the discourse of ideality for its intuitiveness. Lastly, I briefly explore how the absence of futurity for (dis)abled people, a key component of (dis)ability that is commonly linked to normalcy, originates in nineteenth-century discussions around the reproductive labor of women with regards to the perpetuation of the nation and the (white) race.

***Normalcy and Ideal Womanhood***

In *Enforcing Normalcy*, Lennard Davis argues that the seventeenth-century neoclassical "ideal" was the precursor to the nineteenth-century "norm," and that the latter is the concept from which (dis)ability emerges. This ideal was a composite—an amalgam of perfect characteristics which were then combined to form a gestalt, mythopoetic *Ideal* unattainable by humans.

> This divine body, this ideal body, is not attainable by a human. The notion of the ideal implies that [. . .] the human body as visualized in art or imagination must be composed from the ideal parts of living models. These models individually can never embody the ideal since an ideal, by definition, can never be found in this world. When ideal human bodies occur, they do so in mythology.[6]

[6] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 24.

Davis's "text" is François-André Vincent's 1789 painting, *Zeuxis et la filles de Crotone*, the translation of which is often glossed as *Zeuxis Choosing as Models for the Image of Helen the Most Beautiful Girls of the Town of Croton*, in order to allude to the myth that Vincent paints.[7] Vincent depicts Zeuxis "lining up all the beautiful women of Crotona in order select in each her ideal feature or body part and combine these into a the ideal figure of [Helen], herself an ideal of beauty."[8] Davis posits the rise of (dis)ability from the norm in statistical thinking, arguing that shift from the seventeenth-century ideal as composite of perfect parts—taken for granted as unattainable because "there is in such societies no demand that populations have bodies that conform to the ideal"—to the "hegemony of normalcy" in the nineteenth century, in which "all the qualities of the average man would represent at once all the greatness, beauty and goodness of that being."[9] By contrast, "deviations more or less great from the mean have constituted ugliness in body as well as vice in morals and a state of sickness with regards to constitution"—namely, an early picture of what we now call (dis)ability.[10] While Davis's history of normalcy and (dis)ability is thought-provoking and has been highly influential, there are two historical problems with it. First, there was no "hegemony" of normalcy in the nineteenth century. The second, and perhaps most obvious, issue is that by arguing the "norm" replaced the "ideal" in nineteenth-century discourse, Davis effaces the entire nineteenth-century history of ideal womanhood—one of the century's defining features in the U.S.

*Normalcy as Non-hegemonic in the Nineteenth-Century*

[7] Brantôme's retelling of the Zeuxis myth captures the impossibility of the ideal that Davis highlights, Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme, *Lives of Fair and Gallant Ladies* Vol. 1., trans. A.R. Allinson (New York: The Alexandria Society, 1922 [1665-1666]), 236, Google Books.
[8] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 25. Davis cites Aphrodite as the ideal beauty that Zeuxis was attempting to replicate, and gives a mistranslation of the painting's name. This is not correct. Zeuxis's painting was of Helen of Troy, though Davis's argument stands either way. For the original myth, see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. Harry Mortimer Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 167-168, Digital Loeb Classical Library; Elizabeth Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 7.
[9] Adolphe Quetelet, *Sur L'homme et le Développement de ses Facultés ou, Essai de Physique Sociale* (Paris: Bachelier, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1835). Qtd. in Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 27.
[10] Adolphe Quetelet, *Recherches Sur La Penchant Au Crime Aux Différens Ages* (Bruxelles: L'Académie Royale, 1832). 6, Google Books.

In their comprehensive work on the subject, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy*, Peter Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens carefully trace the emergence and proliferation of both the word and the concept of "normal" from the nineteenth century to today. In particular, they situate its meanings, the historical contexts in which "normal" was read and understood, the arguments for and against it in both statistical and medical communities, and especially how both the word and concept changed over time as it incompletely penetrated various discourses. *Normality* is a culmination of Cryle's work on the topic, and, in an earlier work he argues that "the notions of 'norm', 'normal' and normativity were not historically stable, and the use of those terms in modern theoretical talk stands to gain in precision by taking account of their troubled genealogy."[11] Cryle here takes particular issue with Foucault's understanding of Georges Canguilhem's *On the Normal and the Pathological*—which is also Davis's entry point in the discussion on normalcy. He engages in a deconstructive reading of the French medical professionals Canguilhem cites, to show how "fraught and sometimes how vacuous the concept of normal could be in nineteenth-century French medical thought," and highlights Canguilhem's conclusion and agenda—to correct both nineteenth-century and modern understandings of "average" and "norm."[12] As Cryle argues, "[Canguilhem's] work can be considered a demonstration of error or failure, rather than an explication of unresolved contradiction. One of the most general errors that he finds in the nineteenth century is the confusion of norm and average: 'To sum up, I consider that the concepts of norm and mean should be taken as different. It seems pointless to attempt to reduce them to unity by voiding the originality of the first term.'"[13]

In *Normality*, Cryle and Stephens go further, tracing the emergence of the term normal to 1820s France, but then meticulously documenting its appearances, meanings, and differences from our current understandings. They carefully trace how it is not until sixty years after the term first appears, in French

[11] Peter M. Cryle, "The Average and the Normal in Nineteenth-Century French Medical Discourse," *Psychology & Sexuality* 1, no. 3 (2010): 214, https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2010.494893.
[12] Cryle, "The Normal and the Average," 222.
[13] Georges Canguilhem, *Le Normal Et Le Pathologique* (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 1966), 116. Qtd in Cryle, "The Normal and the Average," 222.

medical and then teratological texts, that we find, in Francis Galton's eugenicist work, the convergence of "the mathematical concept of the average and the medical concept of the healthy"—a, and perhaps *the*, defining characteristic of our modern usage of "normal."[14] However, prior to Galton—and for a good many years after him—"normal" as a metric for human faculties, appearance, and health was a largely haphazard and, in areas of medicine, vehemently contested concept. For instance in the U.S., Orson Squire Fowler, an antebellum phrenologist who wrote widely on race, virtue, and hereditary deformities—and who, in histories of eugenics, is often cited as a pre- or proto-eugenicist—has a very different understanding of normal than Galton. In one of his earliest works, *Self-Culture and the Perfection of Character*, Fowler details what he calls "the normality of function" which describes as such:

> Every physical, and mental function of man, is capable of two-fold action, the one natural or normal, and therefore pleasurable,—and the other unnatural or abnormal, and therefore painful. The normal action of various physical faculties constitutes health, and bestows its pleasures; their abnormal action causes disease in all its forms, and occasions all its pains.[15]

In this work—and all of Fowler's other works, which are largely about preventing illness, deformity, madness, idiocy, and other forms of impairment in order to improve "the race"—"normal" and "natural" are measures of virtuous *actions*. He goes to argue that "each of the mental faculties are capable of this dual action. The natural, and therefore pleasurable exercise of Conscientiousness confers that happy state of mind consequent on the consciousness of having done RIGHT, or the approbation of a clear conscience; while its abnormal or painful action begets the upbraidings and compunctions of a guilty conscience."[16] He details virtue after virtue—the appreciation of beauty, honorable conduct, friendship, and more—where normal is the pleasure one experiences through moral action, deemed "natural," and

[14] Peter M. Cryle and Elizabeth Stephens, *Normality: A Critical Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017): 13.
[15] Orson Squire Fowler, *Self-Culture and the Perfection of Character: Including the Management of Youth* (New York: Samuel R. Wells, 1847), 39, Google Books.
[16] Fowler, *Self-Culture*, 39.

abnormal is the pain of wrong, or unnatural action. In his most famous work, *Hereditary Descent*, Fowler maintains this definition of "normal" even when speaking of hereditary insanity: "Nor is derangement confined to one form of mental alienation, but distorts and perverts every faculty of the human mind, from its normal to abnormal or deranged action."[17] In Fowler's assessment, we have an equation that is familiar to female ideality, where the highest and most socially privileged forms of behavior both *are* and *should be* fundamental to the human, as such. And we can certainly connect Fowler's description of "normal" to the injunction of a contemporary idiom that we "act normal"—that is, behave in ways deemed moral and socially appropriate and be met with approbation. However, despite the proto-eugenicist framework, and unlike "normal" today, Fowler's notion of normalcy is not connected to essentialist notions of (dis)ability, race, and sexuality, except slightly, tangentially, as a method of policing the behavior of white women, such that men can recognize the type of partner who can produce perfect, non-impaired children.

I use Fowler in particular to illustrate how in proto-eugenicist works explicitly about the prevention of what would come to be known as (dis)ability—where ideas of "disease," "health," "derangement," "heredity," and "race" all cluster around "normal" and "abnormal"—"normal" is not compatible, and in fact barely contiguous, with "normal" as we know it today, and as Davis describes it in his work. Even as "normal" in Fowler's work highlights virtues he wishes to be conserved in the white race, normal is not about the mathematical and medical standards we apply to humans to denote lack or the necessity for interventions to bring them up to par. In addition, while Fowler's use of the term is denotatively consistent in his works, it is a term he uses rarely, and the outcomes to which he applies it vary. Thus, even limiting ourselves to the oeuvre of one author, who was actively engaged in the eradicating physical and mental impairments, we can see how, instead of a pervasive public concept in the nineteenth century, "normal" remained, even among experts, "an unstable set of concerns and practices

[17] Orson Squire Fowler, *Hereditary Descent, Its Laws and Facts Applied to Human Improvement* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1848), 102, Google Books.

subject to questioning for a century and a half."[18] It is only in the mid-twentieth century, Cryle and Stephens argue, that it solidifies into the "normal" critiqued by critical disability studies: the familiar system of compulsory conformity institutionalized in medical practice, legal discourse, and self-improvement and consumer culture.[19]

### *Ideal Women, Average Men*

Davis's history in which the normal replaces the ideal in the early nineteenth century discounts a hundred years or more of the ideology of ideal womanhood, and he also moves between an artistic rendering of the ideal (female) to "the average man," without taking gender (or race) into account. Yet the female ideal as a composite existed well into the early twentieth century and intersected—even merged—with discourses of race, health, and debility. In addition, female ideality delineates the roles and goals of womanhood in the nineteenth century, and in this way we can see how Davis's argument that "the concept of the norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be a part of the norm," is incorrect when applied to nineteenth-century women.[20] As shown in chapter one, ideal womanhood for nineteenth-century women was both prescriptive and imagined as achievable; it was tied to characteristics thought to be innate or inherent in women, where the "ideal" for both womanly traits, health, and morality were considered to be "natural" and deviations from these ideals were "unnatural." While "natural" and "normal" and "unnatural" and "abnormal" were considered to be denotatively equivalent, as I showed above, "normal" and "abnormal" meant very different things when applied to the traits of female ideality.

The concept of ideality is not inherently gendered female—for example, William A. Alcott wrote *The Young Man's Guide* on what is in essence a rubric for ideal manhood, though he never once uses the

[18] Cryle and Stephens, *Normality*, 10.
[19] Cryle and Stephens, *Normality*, 14.
[20] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 29.

term "ideal" in any of its twelve editions.[21] In *Manhood in America*, Michael Kimmel states that his cultural history of manhood engages with what men were "told that they were supposed to do, feel, and think and what happened in response to those prescriptions."[22] However, the core tenets of masculinity were, Kimmel argues, frequently "contested" throughout the nineteenth century, whereas Womanhood remained constant at its core, even if models differ in their particularities. "Ideal womanhood" is a set phrase with attendant constants throughout the nineteenth century; "ideal manhood" is perhaps invoked conceptually but not frequently (if ever) talked about in such terms.[23] Thus, ideality for women was hegemonic, and for men, it was not. In addition, in disability history, these tenets of masculinity—say, in Kimmel's delineation of the "Self-Made Man" as predicated on wage labor—are well-established in critical disability studies even if they are not framed as "masculine" per se —for instance, in disability history's yoking of wage labor to social value, and its equation of (dis)ability with the inability to work a wage-earning job. The core tenants of female ideality have merited no such inclusion in critical disability studies, despite the similarities and heavy borrowing of (dis)ability from discourses of nineteenth-century womanhood. And I do not mean "similarities" as though "women" and "(dis)ability" were analogous or comparable in certain respects—I mean Woman and (dis)ability were spoken of in the *same terms* and defined by strikingly similar criteria. For instance, in *The Young Man's Guide*, Alcott argues, "No person possessing a sound mind in a healthy body has the right to live without labor."[24] Yet Alcott's use of the non-gendered term *person* should be glossed as *man*, because "labor" in Alcott's formulation (and in most

[21] To be fair, Alcott never uses the term "ideal" in *The Young Woman's Guide*, *The Young Housekeeper*, and *The Young Mother, or Management of Children with Regard to Health*—all of which were written for female audiences. However, the very fact that Alcott wrote three guides for women at different life stages, and one (with a later supplement) suggests that the masculine ideal was less varied and also, by the numbers, less policed in publications, at least, if not socially as well.

[22] Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10. See also, E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

[23] One clear exception might be Benarr A. Macfadden's *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood: How Developed, How Lost: How Regained*. Macfadden speaks specifically about how his text "will help [men] to be *men*—strong, virile, superb—the first duty of male adult is to be a man." Though even in this text, Macfadden speaks at length on women and moves between concepts of ideality and concepts of normalcy. (New York: Physical Culture Publishing Co, 1900), 5-6; 99, 102; 100; 90, Google Books.

[24] William Andrus Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide*, 2nd edition (Boston: Lilly, Wait, Colman, and Holden., 1834), 28, Google Books.

of the nineteenth-century explications of the term) is explicitly waged or land-owning labor: profitable labor. By contrast, women were deemed as "unproductive" because they most commonly worked in the home and did not earn wages. Thus, non-wage earning (women) and unhealthy (also designated woman) become even more tightly clustered together. Finally, the health of the nation, the health of the household, and the health of individuals were specifically women's work. Advice literature prescribing methods for avoiding producing "mad," "idiot," or "deformed" children, such as Henry C. Wright's *The Empire of the Mother*, were grounded in female ideality and contain some of the clearest instances of the standardization of good health as a reproducible quality in the nineteenth-century U.S. It is through women, and women fulfilling the ideal function Womanhood, that the future of the nation is imagined as non-disabled. Thus, while we can and should account for male ideality when thinking through ideality generally, we can most clearly map the proliferation of normalcy and what would become disability through *female* ideality.

To this end, I want to return to Cryle and Stephen's assertion that normalcy remained "an unstable set of concerns and practices subject to questioning for a century and a half'—until roughly the mid-twentieth century. If we look at Fowler's text above, we see how "normal/natural" and "abnormal/unnatural" are divided according to idealized, virtuous traits and abject, sinful traits. While Fowler is most famous for his pre-eugenic ideas, recorded in *Hereditary Descent*, many of his other, less well-known texts deal with this normal/virtuous and abnormal/sinful distinction and with women being virtuous and choosing virtuous partners to avoid reproducing mentally and physically impaired children—"idiot," "mad," "deformed," and "ill" progeny. Henry C. Wright, who draws from Fowler and uses his causal relationship between abnormal/sinful person and impaired children, argues that his advice in service of creating a "perfect and perfectible race." So we see that, while "normal" here invokes "perfect" and the ideal, rather than an average or standardized human, the word maps that associate normal and (dis)ability begin to emerge through prescriptive methods for reproducing "perfect" or ideal

humans. Here, we can see how (dis)ability and race are tied together through the construction of female ideality, first, before normalcy becomes a socially pervasive concept.

*Mosaicism*

In order to model the rise of normal, to understand its incomplete penetration throughout the nineteenth century, and to think through the slippages between ideality and normalcy—and the lingering characteristics of the ideal and ideality that continue to persist in the discourse of normalcy—I want to treat "normal" as a kind of concept- or language-virus to which the Ideal (and especially its nineteenth-century reformulation as ideality) was particularly vulnerable. Davis is correct in pointing out that the neoclassical Ideal underwent significant revisions in the early nineteenth century, specifically with regards to individualism and the assumed individual responsibility for one's health and the health of one's children. We can speculate on the reasons for this—for instance borrowing "Spartan motherhood," which equated the health of the nation with the health of its populace—as a model for "Republican motherhood," one of the early forms of ideal womanhood I will discuss in my "absence of futurity" section. Others have discussed the effects of Enlightenment philosophies, representational government, settler-colonial and frontier life, and Christian perfectionism as likely contributors to the conditions out of which individualism, and its relationship to health, arose. Whatever the etiology—and I'm not sure it can be known perfectly—the Ideal transformed into ideality, which in its prescriptiveness and achievability is predicated on individual responsibility. I believe that this transformation from "unattainable" to "attainable and required" made ideality vulnerable to normalcy, as we see in the proliferation of the *word*, and eventually, the *concept* in the nineteenth century. The best conceptual model for this, I believe, is to treat normalcy as an opportunistic entity (like a virus) to which ideality is vulnerable. A system in flux is a vulnerable one—its defenses are down—and, to continue the metaphor, normalcy infects ideality, using pathways and receptors not meant for it in order to gain access to the "organism." Then, like a virus, it begins hijacking the system and making changes.

This metaphor may seem a stretch, yet a disease is a self-replicating process that requires a host and then spreads from host to host. For any process that adheres to this definition—and I argue that normalcy does—one can use epidemiological frameworks to examine it. The metaphor of normalcy-as-virus affords us several things. Mosaicism—a way of modeling the progress of viral and bacterial infections in bodies—closely correlates with the unnevenness, the slippages, and the presence and absence of normalcy throughout the nineteenth century, and also how it comes to be a more dominant discourse as the century wears on (and into the twentieth century, where it stabilizes into the form we know it as today). Mosaicism, that is, provides us a way of conceptualizing "intermediate states," where, for any given moment, any given document, any given location, normalcy may be more or less active.

In addition, reading normalcy-as-virus allows us to reconcile the persistence of ideal traits in the current iterations of normalcy, something Davis and Cryle and Stephens also wrestle with when they call attention to how many traits depicted as "normal"—like high intelligence or beauty—are actually ideals. Instead of the presence of ideal characteristics being "anomalies," or ways in which the idea of normalcy is internally contradictory, their presence instead becomes implicit in the method of how normalcy, as an infection of ideality, came to be. This helps explain the slippages between the normal and ideal that still exist—say, in prenatal testing that seeks to abort disabled babies to produce a "normal," read: ideal or perfected, populace. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for our understanding of (dis)ability, normalcy borrows ideality's rejection of physical and mental impairment. To create "perfect and perfectible humans" through ideal, virtuous womanhood, or to think through health as a prescriptive, achievable ideal that particularly surrounded discourses of Womanhood (women's broad responsibility for it, and, more variably, their embodiment of it—though less varied as the century wears on) allows us to not only historicize the phenomenon of (dis)ability, but also to understand the persistence of the "feminization" and the presumed sexlessness of disabled people.

Mosaicism is the idea that, from the time of infection, the cells of an organism vulnerable to the virus exist in a mosaic state. For any given time post-infection, if a cross-section of cells is examined,

some cells may be infected, some may not—it is a mosaic. In fact, even once the organism dies, all cells aren't infected—death simply means that the organism has a higher percentage of infected cells than non-infected. This means that if ideality was "infected" with normalcy as soon as the term was created—in the late 1820s in France—from *then on* ideality is in a mosaic state, even if it's 1% normalcy, 99% ideality. When scholars of (dis)ability look back at the nineteenth century, the intermediate states between ideality, or even the Ideal, and normalcy are rarely accounted for, nor is the idea that different pockets of, say, the U.S. population, have different prevalences of normalcy/ideality (e.g., differences in gendered or racial ideas/ideals). How do we access or quantify intermediate states? How do we quantify, for instance, asymptomatic organisms (which might correlate to early usages of the *word* normal), if the organism as a whole is not exhibiting symptoms (no recognizable *meanings* or *concepts* of normal)? The short answer is that we can't. The point where we say that the "infection" of normalcy (or any virus) accelerates is impossible to define, and any line we draw is arbitrary.

For instance, in medicine, this acceleration point was defined for a long period of time as the "macroscopic being" showing symptoms of illness. Research, and frankly our subject experience with COVID-19[25], has thoroughly disproven this: by the time an organism shows symptoms, the illness is well progressed (e.g., by the time a person with HIV shows symptoms, their immune systems are functioning at 5% of their capacity; by the time children with Type 1 diabetes show symptoms, they often only have 10% of insulin-producing cells remaining). In examining normalcy in the nineteenth century, I believe it is necessary to understand that we're engaging with an earlier time period in the infection process, when normalcy was spreading and before it became, as we know it today, an entity that has moved past infecting ideality and now pervades our society.[26] While we could take the metaphor in different directions, or ask our ourselves, if ideality is the organism, which of its "cells" were targeted ("health" is

[25] I finished this dissertation during spring of 2020 and this context makes my interrogation of health, ability, and normalcy perhaps even more poignant.
[26] My partner argues normalcy might be a kind of zombie disease mobilizing the corpse of ideality. This is highly suggestive but is likely a product of his tastes in fiction and perhaps a bridge too far.

an easy one), ultimately I only wish to argue that mosaicism is a vital framework for capturing or understanding the highly variable nature of what normalcy was and wasn't in the nineteenth century.

Mosacism also helps us understand certain features of the scholarly history of normalcy, especially within disability studies (and queer studies, though less so). First, mosaicism helps model variability in scholarship on normalcy which investigates similar archives (even taking interpretative variance as a given); second, it helps us understand the presentism of historical investigations of normalcy.[27] First, variability of scholarship on similar archives beyond interpretive differences. We can view individual studies as sampling individual cells. One scholar's sample is a cell [say, nineteenth-century historical documents or author's oeuvre] that is overrun with the virus, and that scholar concludes that the organism is dead (read: completely overtaken by the infection); another scholar can have a cell with trace amounts; and another scholar can have a cell with no infection. To restate more straightforwardly, Scholar A says the organism is overrun (with normalcy), Scholar B says there's a mild infection, and Scholar C finds none.

Yet all scholars are sampling the same organism. How can this be true? The answer: this organism has different populations of cells composing it, and it is still functioning as an organism. Thus, I can't assume all the cells are uninfected (that doesn't explain how my organism is behaving); I also can't assume all the cells are infected (that doesn't explain how my organism is behaving). I can only assume that the organism has some combination of different cell lines (mosaicism) and is still managing to function (the coexistence of ideality and normalcy). Cryle and Stephens explore this concept by looking at places where normalcy appears in texts (and in what forms, including early ideas of normalcy that concur more with current ideas); places where normalcy appears but is highly contested; and places where one would expect to find normalcy but don't (e.g., in many medical monographs or texts on teratology), and

[27] In general, I'm precisely ambivalent about presentism. I believe that sometimes it is helpful, and sometimes it is not. With the history of normalcy, I believe presentism has been productive for theorizing (dis)ability as a complex discursive and material formation, but problematically, presentism also has obscured other trajectories crucial to understanding the emergence of (dis)ability that would help us more accurately understand the construction of (dis)ability and normalcy today.

they obviate the problem of sampling bias by taking a large sample set of "cells."[28] As, perhaps, a codicil to this point, mosaicism allows us to understand complex outputs and unpredictable results, in a way that, if it doesn't resolve this paradox, is at least paradox-friendly. Systems under stress often behave in unpredictable ways, and we have a better way to analyze outcomes if we assume that a system was in a mosaic state to begin with. For example, to move this metaphor into bacteriology, if we have a colony of bacteria that we assume are all the same, and we introduce an antibiotic to the colony, we would assume that either all the bacteria would die (because they're all vulnerable), or that all the bacteria would live (because they're resistant). We would be at a loss to explain how 99% of the bacteria died, but 1% lived and then proliferated. By assuming that the population is heterogeneous, even though they appear the same (all bacteria, all the same species, but not genetically exactly the same), we can better explain our results. In short, we can analyze nineteenth-century works on female ideality within non-binary (paradox-friendly) frameworks, because we're looking at how an organism functions in a state of simultaneity — by which I mean, multiple things being simultaneously true, simultaneously existent, which previously we've viewed as one or another.

Second—and this is Cryle and Stephens' argument about both disability studies and queer theory's engagement with normalcy—scholars in each of these fields have taken what normalcy *became*, or is now, as a telos, which is then read back on normalcy in its early, asymptomatic phase by focusing on specific "cell lines" (Davis's engagement with Quetelet, for example) to identify the presence of normalcy, and by extension, (dis)ability. This is problematic because, in terms of mosacism, we can track the *infection* of normalcy further back than we can track its social symptoms. Thus, scholars attribute social and environmental reactions to it long before ideality (in my argument) and "society" (in theirs) started showing "symptoms" of normalcy. Even when those symptoms did manifest, they were mild and, in some cases, negligible. For example, it is difficult, even in retrospect, to determine the specific

[28] One could argue that despite Fowler's use of "normal" as unrecognizable according to current definitions, his impulse is a *normalizing* one, inasmuch as it seeks a reproducible (if ideal) standard of humanity.

relationship between normalcy and the emergence of "health" as a prescriptive, attainable characteristic, both because of the slippages in the concept of "normal" and because of the multitude of circulating ideas that likely created the conditions for the ideal of health. Scholars studying topics as various as philosophy in the early Republic, the history of medicine and the history of health reform, and the prevalence of the "invalid woman" trope in literature often only say that the shift to health as attainable and necessary does occur, and that it is distinct from colonial ideas of typical life experiences.[29] For my own concept of ideality and its links to (dis)ability, this retrospective application of normalcy is troublesome because merely finding threads of "normalcy" doesn't explain how ideality behaves at any given historical moment. If, to use our example above, normalcy has infected 1% of ideality in the 1820s-1830s U.S., ideality is asymptomatic even though it is infected (every moment between asymptomatic and dead is a mosaic state). Logically, then, I must draw correlations between, say, the health reform movement in the 1830s to (dis)ability, or domestic labor to (dis)ability, via ideality, even if normalcy is provably present, because it is ideality rather than normalcy that has the most discernible impact at that moment.

Put bluntly, while the co-location of female, ideal, composite, and prescriptive-achievable persists today, nineteenth-century female ideality—which gave rise to key characteristics of (dis)ability—is in a completely different state now than it was 200 years ago. This is not to say that vestiges of past formations of ideality don't remain in contemporary understandings of normalcy—they do—but we now struggle with them as incoherent characteristics of normalcy, rather than having an immediate referent of ideality. Thus, for the purpose of this study, to a large extent, what normalcy *became* doesn't matter, as such. Only once something becomes symptomatic can you study its effect on the things around it. Instead, we need models for asymptomatic or mild symptoms, and when something is symptomatic (and again the "when" is somewhat arbitrary), we can only study it as a mosaic. As such, I argue that we can't study

[29] See for instance, Regina Markell Morantz, "Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19th Century America," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (1977): 490; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3; and Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 24.

(dis)ability in isolation, as some things only arise from the interplay between two entities: a cell and a virus; ideality and normality— a combination of what was before and whatever its end state is.[30]

Earlier in this chapter, I looked at Fowler's usage of normal/abnormal and natural/unnatural in the 1840s to explore how his concepts of the terms contributed to the cloud of possible affinities and connotations of normal in the nineteenth-century, but that to link his concept of normal to ours today we would have to engage in an act of free-association.[31] I want to turn now to the other end of the century from Fowler, to explore texts that exhibit clearly a mosaicism of a female ideality infected by normalcy.

Ideality, normativity, (dis)ability, and woman form a particularly conflicted knot, naturalized through the language of aesthetics. In the introduction to the 1891 U.S. reprinting of Sir Joshua Reynold's *Discourses on Art* (1769-1790)—a foundational text for classicism—Edward Gilpin Johnson highlights Reynold's formulation of the production of "perfect beauty": the "suppression of all incident and detail in favor of general harmony . . . perfect beauty only exists so far as the individual conforms to the type."[32] This beauty was created when a painter could "distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things from their general figures," and, thus, "[make] out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any original.[33]" However, Johnson quickly expands Reynold's concept from the realm of classical art to the hearth of nineteenth-century femininity.

It may, perhaps, be argued in support of Reynolds's views that the greatest examples of great art

[30] This is not to say that normalcy didn't infect other nineteenth-century concepts that led to the emergence of (dis)ability. Considering its virulence, it very likely did. This study however focuses only on ideality.
[31] I am very much for free-association as an initial step in navigating the messy potentialities of history by positing new possible patterns. Also, I am equally wary of most configurations of causality as overdeterminations. However, I find it necessary to nuance one causality in critical disability studies—the Ideal to the normal—by invoking another one—Ideal to ideality to normalcy. I feel I must do this, rather than simply restoring to Davis's thesis the messy potentiality of history, because Davis elides race and gender in his analysis—two strong determinants in the history of (dis)ability.
[32] Edward Gilpin Johnson, "Introduction," in *Sir Joshua Reynold's Discourses on Art*. Edited by Edward G. Johnson (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1891), 48.
[33] Joshua Reynolds, qtd in Johnson, "Introduction," 48.

> have been wrought out upon principles identical with or analogous to those he advances [. . .] Compare, for example, the Venus de Milo, that highly artificial synthesis in marble of womanly perfections, with the coquettishly beautiful Queen of the Tribuna, the Venus die Medicis. There can be no doubt in which of these two cases the sculptor has held to the rule that "nature herself is not to be too closely imitated." In the former work one sees, not portraiture, but the result of a deliberate selective process, the material embodiment of an ideal; it is not the wanton Aphrodite whom Vulcan snared in his net amid the laughter of high Olympus, but a goddess divinely unconscious of the passions over which she presides, — the ideal of Lucretius, "the desired of men and gods, the universal mother, who beneath the circling stars gives increase to the ship-bearing sea, gives increase to the earth the mother of harvests, and favors the conception of every living creature, and their birth into the light of day." (49-50)

The opening lines of Lucretius's invocation to Venus in *On the Nature of Things* are translated many ways—as "mother of Rome," "mother of Aeneas' sons," "mother of the Aeneadae," and "mother of Romans"—but not as Johnson does here, as "the universal mother" opposite of "wanton Aphrodite," an "artificial synthesis [. . .] of womanly perfections," supposedly without "deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities," but importantly, missing her arms. Johnson's feminine ideal (because it is not, quite, Reynold's) clusters around both the presence and absence of impairment. Venus de Milo's Schrödinger's arms invoke an equally uncertain and conflicted standard of femininity, grounded in (dis)ability, that Johnson views as inextricable from the nineteenth-century concept of motherhood and as literally set in stone. This ideal is unachievable not, as Davis argues, because its society views aggregate perfection as beyond reach, but because it is impossible to be two contradictory things at once.

In 1900, Bernarr A. Macfadden's *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood* also presents us very familiar ideas of "average" or "normal" littered with admixtures of "ideal" characteristics, as its title suggests—but female ideality is particularly present when the text addresses impaired women. In his preface, Macfadden explicitly addresses the "average reader," and he speaks throughout the text of the

"average young man," the "average human," the "average physical condition," the "average woman," and the "average individual." He provides normalcy's familiar intersection between statistics and health when he argues, "as to the proportion of women diseased sexually . . . it exceeds twenty-nine in every thirty. My own average is, that not one woman in every hundred has a fair amount of sexual vigor, and at least nine in every ten, if not nineteen in every twenty, are more or less prostrated, or else actually diseased sexually."[34] To this end, he also frames many of his chapter subsections, including his statistical interpretations, with long quotations from physicians and other "experts," and he notes explicitly on the title page that his book is written by him "with the assistance of Medical and Other Authorities." Macfadden's book is a polemical exploration of an (assumed) medico-social problem (the sexual availability of wives and their virtuous, yet enthusiastic, participation in penetrative intercourse as a necessary precursor to the exercise of male virility), and his thesis uses both statistics and medical advice speciously. Yet we can see in his pairing of statistics and medical expertise and in what he considers a viable argument structure—through which he creates an artificial history and trajectory to his present era in order to explore what he denotes as a health problem—small tremors of Francis Bisset Hawkins' definition of medical statistics thirty years later—as "the application of numbers to illustrate the natural history of man in health and disease."[35]

Yet Macfadeen moves between—even equates—these ideas of "average" and "normal" with the ideal and with perfection, and many of these moments rest on an invocation (and avoidance) of impairment. He cites statistics in service of pursuing ideal, and rejecting impaired, women: "Perhaps it is

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[34] Macfadden, *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood*, 96.

[35] Francis Bisset Hawkins, *Elements of Medical Statistics; Containing the Substance of the Gulstonian Lectures: With Numerous Additions, Illustrative of the Comparative Salubrity, Longevity, Mortality, and Prevalence of Diseases in the Principal Countries and Cities of the Civilized World* (London: Longmans, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829), 2, Google Books. Note: Hawkins argument for the efficacy of medical statistics is very different from Macfadden's slapdash use of the statistics themselves. In particular, Hawkins argues that medical statistics justifies medicine as a profession: "medical statistics affords the most convincing proofs of the efficacy of medicine: it is one of the easiest arguments that can be employed to refute the vulgar notion [ . . .] that nature is alone sufficient for the cure of the disease, and that art as frequently impedes as accelerates her course" (3). What I mean to map here is not the history of medical statistics in the field of medicine, but show the mosaic state ideality and normalcy through the work of laymen, such as Macfadden, who would use historically charted tools of normalcy interchangeably with social ideals, particularly ideals of women.

not putting it too strongly when we say that one-third of the greatness of young women are unqualified to ever become wives and mothers, because of false education and inherited or acquired infirmities."[36] Macfadden also explicitly implores men to marry "a girl who has sufficient stamina to be normal [. . .] Never marry a weak, sickly girl. Such women have not the slightest right to marry. They become *in every case* a curse to themselves and to the man who marries them. Marriage is first and foremost a physical union, and unless there is that stamina, that vigor . . . [women] have not the slightest right to enter such a condition."[37] From such invocations of normalcy as health, Macfadden continually toggles to the ideal. He encourages men to "marry a real woman—not a wreck," "marry a woman in possession of vigorous, wholesome, well-shaped body," and to "avoid corset-crushed waists or prepare for marital miseries that will torture your soul like an animal that is being goaded with hot irons."[38]

Ten years later, in 1910, Irving Babbitt would equate "ideal imitation" and "outer norm" in his work *The New Laokoon*.[39] Babbitt amalgamates statistical concepts with Aristotelean allusions; he rejects the ideal/norm as average, defining it as "not of the ordinary facts of life, but of those facts selected and arranged"—as in a composite ideal—but adds that these facts are arranged "as Aristotle would say [. . .] according to probability or necessity."[40] As with his merging of ideal and norm, "probability" is Babbitt's collapsing of a classical idea (that narrative events must flow from character) into a nineteenth-century idea (the distribution of characteristics). This ideal/norm, antiquity/seventeenth-century/nineteenth-century mash-up remains as Babbitt invokes (dis)ability to contrast perfection; the ideal/norm, he argues, is "selected truth, raised above all that is local and accidental" (Aristotle), "[and] *purged* of all that is abnormal and eccentric," (disability) "so as to be in the *highest* sense *representative*" (ideal/normal).[41]

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[36] Macfadden, *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood*, 90.
[37] Macfadden, *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood*, 25, 37
[38] Macfadden, *The Virile Powers of Superb Manhood*, 92.
[39] Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts*, 3rd edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910), 10, 12.
[40] Babbitt, *The New Laokoon*, 13.
[41] Ibid, 10, emphasis mine. I could continue this analysis by further breaking down "representative" into Babbitt's unconscious blending of Aristotelean and statistical concepts, but I think you get the point by now. For more on Irving Babbitt as a founder of New Humanism, a school of thought that had much to say on ideal humans, see, J.

Babbitt's slippage points to the demotic rather than artistic and scientific uses of these concepts; in his popular usage, "ideal" roughly translates to "collection of perfections; absence of flaws" (always-already unattainable) and "norm" to the "*elimination* of flaws and 'abnormalities'" (attainable, as the human is perfectible); though the concepts are distinct, the terms, as seen, were used interchangeably, especially as the century went on. Further, as we see with Fowler, both aesthetic "perfections" and "abnormalities" have their own slippages into morality, appearance, ability, health, and social behavior and overlap with race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality.[42]

### *Absence of Futurity*

Many disability studies investigations into the past of reproductive futurity, especially those which recognize the cross-linkages between the rejection of impairment and the ideology of "the nation," begin with post-bellum, especially early twentieth-century, eugenics.[43] This is true of Douglas C. Baynton's *Defectives in the Land*, and in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer argues that "eugenic

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David Hoeveler, *The New Humanism: A Critique of Modern America, 1900-1940*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977).

[42] If we take the long view of the nineteenth century, we can see the blend of these concepts (not yet an iterable theory in the case of the norm) functioning around human classification from—to take two comparative examples—Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, especially "Query XIV" (1781) to Gertrude Lynch's "Racial and Ideal Types of Beauty" published in *The Cosmopolitan* in 1905. My inclusion of Jefferson may seem somewhat specious considering Theodore M. Porter only dates the rise of statistical thinking to 1820, and Francis Galton's major works another fifty years beyond that. However, while Jefferson uses ethnographic observations and (pseudo-) biological data rather than mathematics and genetics, he continually grounds his theory in ideas of "more" and "less," "equal," "superior," and "inferior" when contrasting what he sees as common black/slave and white characteristics. In short, he uses quantitative concepts to assign racial characteristics and then ranks said characteristics according to their racial identification. While his study is bipolar—black and white humans—rather encompassing all humans as later statistical thinking does, we can see the beginning of a classification system of human beings that is divided by characteristics, organized by prevalence and other quantitative characteristics, and assigned valuation. See, Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[43] The term "eugenics" names a specific movement, and the term "eugenics"—which means "well-born"—was only first used in 1883 by Francis Galton. However, Christine Ferguson asserts that "modern eugenics," as proposed by Darwin and Galton was "less a paradigm innovation than a statistical consolidation and professional authorisation of a set of folk beliefs that were already endemic to the nineteenth-century cultural imagination" (22). Thus, eugenics as a paradigm has a longer history, rooted in antebellum and early post-bellum arguments about heredity and the future and progress of the nation and the "race." I will discuss this in detail below. See, Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 22.

histories certainly bear the mark of reproductive futurity [. . .] examples abound of how concerns about the future of the 'race' and the futures of the nation (futures so often depicted as intertwined) have been wrapped up in fears and anxieties about disability."[44] Part of this localization of origins stems from the fact that (dis)ability—here, a social category which names a collection of impaired people imagined as a national *problem*, as non-contributors to society and thus recipients of public aid—did not come fully into existence until the post-bellum period in the U.S.[45] What was previously understood as debility, mental or physical illness, or impairment became a named object for aid, cure, sterilization, and other forms of isolation and eradication as eugenics entered the public discourse.[46] In short, the history of the category of (dis)ability as "undesirables" and "defectives," and the history of eugenics, which named them as such, are both co-emergent and intertwined. Another part stems from our teleological historical narratives in which the past serves to explain the present. While we currently see vestiges of "impairment as a national threat" in political arguments over welfare, legal "capacity" required for consent and enfranchisement, and abortion rights (both for and against), these arguments largely focus on the specter of the disabled person themselves. The threat of debilitated women as unable to reproduce democracy did not *become*, in a historical-genealogical sense; it is a discourse that mostly terminated in the early twentieth-century, when the wombs of the nineteenth-century "invalid women" as white unhealthy woman were

[44] Alison Kafer, *Feminst, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 30. See also, Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[45] For a more in-depth discussion of my definitions of (dis)ability, disability, debility, and illness/impairment, see my introduction.

[46] With this definition of (dis)ability, I distinguish between (dis)ability as the government recognized it, and (dis)ability in literature as a narrative prosthesis—as a shortcut for characterization or a metaphor through which texts route their social and political critiques, which emerged earlier. For more on the former definition of (dis)ability in Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s-1930s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). For the latter, see David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); c.f., Sari Altschuler, "'Ain't One Limb Enough?' Historicizing Disability in the American Novel," *American Literature* 86, no. 2 (2014): 245–74, https://doi.org/10.1215/00029831-2646991.

differentiated from the wombs of "disabled" women and women of color as potential objects of sterilization, the latter who continued to be imagined as unable to produce (a healthy) democracy.

Yet while investigating the past of reproductive futurity as located in women requires a "messy" approach to history, that investigation remains important for two reasons. First, the coupling of individual/family health and national health began in the bodyminds of nineteenth-century women, creating both a discourse and a set of stakes which was later folded into (or even co-opted by) eugenics. Second, while many current medical technologies and therapies seek the normalization of the disabled person, *ideality,* not normalcy, remains the goal of medical-genetic interventions with regards to the future human race. When, for instance, prenatal genetic testing identifies a fetus that carries an "abnormality" or a "mutation," associated with a disease or impairment, for which abortion is often seen as a solution; such tests reify an implicit value structure where "flawed" children have no or limited rights to exist, and by contrast, "normal" children, where normal is non-disabled, are imagined to have the best possible chance at life.[47] This is the more subtle side of what is, in essence, selection for traits that are deemed valuable to society—which traits should be kept in the genetic pool, which traits produce good, better, best humans. At the core of ideology of parenthood is the idea(l) that a parent is responsible for creating the conditions for *bestness* not only for the child, but also for the world, by producing children who do not begin life as potential burdens to society (prescriptive), and prenatal genetic testing and selective abortion serve as tools for aid them in doing so (achievability). Kafer argues that

> if disability is conceptualized as a terrible tragedy, then any future that includes disability can only be a future to avoid. A better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very *absence* of disability that signals this better future. The *presence* of disability, then, signals something else: a future that bears too many traces of the ills

[47] Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch, "Special Supplement: The Disability Rights Critique of Prenatal Genetic Testing Reflections and Recommendations," *The Hastings Center Report* 29, no. 5 (1999): S1, S13, https://doi.org/10.2307/3527746; see also, Stefanija Giric, "Strange Bedfellows: Anti-Abortion and Disability Rights Advocacy," *Journal of Law and the Biosciences* 3, no. 3 (2016): 736–42, https://doi.org/10.1093/jlb/lsw056.

> of the present to be desirable. In this framework, a future with disability is a future no one wants, and the figure of the disabled person, especially the disabled fetus or child, becomes the symbol of this undesired future.[48]

While "normal" is often argued to be the opposite of disability, "better" in this passage is actually "ideal." Part of Kafer's project is the push for "recognizing illness and disability as part of what makes us human," and for recognition that its eradication would make us differently human, more than human.[49] Put another way, the implicit goal of our current ideology of normalcy—where the human is perfectible and disability is eradicable—is, to borrow a nineteenth-century phrase, *perfect and perfected* humans. Curing disability and aborting disabled fetuses does not lead to a more "normal" population, it leads to an ideal one. Understanding intersections between ideality, reproductive futurity, and health begins with understanding its roots and its parallels in nineteenth-century womanhood.

In the analysis that follows, I explore how, in the early U.S., the future of the nation and of democracy was grounded in the idealized reproductive labor of women—both physically, where healthy women produced healthy children (either daughters who could also reproduce or sons who became citizens), and ideologically, where virtuous women reproduce democracy through educating their children. This trend begins with Republican Motherhood, which was modeled in part on Spartan Motherhood, in which the health of the populace and the health of the nation were seen as equivalent. In the 1830s and 1840s, the imagination of futurity splits into two main camps, both predicated on female ideality. Both camps are similar in that they use the language, metaphors, and knowledge frameworks of Christian perfectionism, creating a bastardized earthly version where deviations from the ideal indicate a fallen state. Within this framework, health and morality became linked, wherein imperfect embodiment of culturally prescribed virtues was imagined to produce ill-health and deformed or impaired children.

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[48] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 2-3 (author's emphasis).
[49] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 4.

However, this bastardized perfectionism replaces Christian perfectionism's "striving," which is always moving toward but never achieving telos (perfection), with a secular "obtaining" or "possessing" an implicitly achievable ideal.

These mid-nineteenth-century frameworks of futurity differ, however, in key ways. In the first, which grew out of the health reform movement, proponents such as Catharine Beecher argue that education—that is, physical education through exercise training; domestic education through professional training for housework; and education about health, anatomy, and physiology—produces healthy women who in turn produce healthy children and perpetuate the nation. The health reform movement and advice columnists like Beecher collapse classical models of mother (generalized as "Greek education"), nationhood, and ability; the health and futurity of the nation and the health and futurity of individuals became identical. I explore this trajectory in full below. The second framework, the analysis of which I will leave to the larger project, is the proto-eugenicist camp of Orson Squire Fowler, Lorenzo Niles Fowler, Mary Gove Nichols, and Henry C. Wright. The proponents of this latter trajectory believe that virtue is reproducible as health—that virtuous couples who love each other produce non-insane, non-deformed children—and the explicit focus for Fowler, Fowler, and Wright is the perpetuation and perfection of the race, though they disagree on what constitutes "the race"—white or human—and by extension, whether the health of "the race" constitutes the health of U.S. as a nation, or whether their principles are generalizable to all mothers of the world (though this is still a reproduction of national values globally, given that Wright's second book was entitled *The Empire of Mother*). They eschew education as a reparative for health; rather, the goal of education should focus on women's understanding of the science of reproduction in order to better choose virtuous partners (or become more virtuous themselves, if necessary). Even Nichols, who was more interested in women's broader education than her colleagues, would still emphasize the inherent viability of her English and Welsh roots and argue that women's knowledge of their bodies was better able to conserve ideal characteristics through children born of love matches with virtuous, honorable men.

In essence, women became imbued with the idea of "virtue" through Republican Motherhood, a very different concept of "woman" than had existed during colonial America, in which the man or husband was the moral center of the household. However, the model of Republican motherhood, modeled on the idea of the health of the nation from classical Greek and Spartan models, simultaneously imported the idea of healthy citizens. There is no easy causality to understand how this version of health became focused on healthy women, and yet the concept carried forward in the ideology, splitting into the various rhetorics of health reform, where health is both "natural"—as in, to be unhealthy was to violate the laws of "nature—and an individual responsibility of women. The stakes split according to the rhetorical causes. Where education was viewed as the corrective for health, the nation is viewed as the ultimate beneficiary. By contrast, proto-eugenicists view health as correctible only to the extent that a woman—and in Wright's texts, also men—individually embodied idealized virtues. In the latter case, both the health and the virtue of the parents becomes the health of the children, which education is not able to correct. Instead, women have to become the most healthy, most virtuous versions of themselves as the purpose of procreation is "the perpetuation and perfection of *the race,*" not merely the nation. These texts take for granted that the ideal is not only attainable—iis, in fact, the expected outcome when women follow correct advice—but also women's "natural" or innate state. Each philosophy of health is predicated on women's health and virtue in order to reproduce futurity as each school of thought imagines it. And moreover, embedded in each school of thought, is not *normalcy*, but rather ideality: the perfection of a transmissible self as future ideal product for the good of whatever version of futurity—the nation or the race (to the extent that these are differentiated in nineteenth-century thought)—that the writer views as most pressing.

Linda K. Kerber's articulation of Republican Motherhood provides the foundations on which the house of feminine civic responsibility as health was built. In Republican Motherhood's original post-revolutionary formulation, "health" is an ideological concept that linked the futurity of the nation to women's education and domestic responsibilities. Kerber argues that "righteous mothers were asked raise

the virtuous male citizen on whom the health of the Republic depended [. . .] in postwar America the ideology of female education came to be tied to ideas about the sort of woman who would be of greatest service to the Republic, [and it] called for a sensibly educated female citizenry to educate future generations of sensible republicans."[50] To mark, again, the continuity of ideal womanhood—of ideality as a function—in 1912, Ida Tarbell would publish *The Business of Being a Woman*, which mirrors the principles of Republican Motherhood and holds up "woman" as responsible for the health and future of the nation:

> The mass of [American] women believe in their task [. . .] To bear and to rear, to feel the dependence of man and child—the necessity for themselves—to know that upon them depend the health, the character, the happiness, the future of certain human beings—to see themselves laying and preserving the foundations of so imposing a thing as a family—to build so that this family shall become a strong stone in the state—to feel themselves through this family *perpetuating and perfecting* church, society, republic,—this is their destiny,—this is worth while.[51].

The metaphorical futurity of the "health of the nation" was somaticized in two ways—one straightforward and one inadvertent—and both linked to the classical Greek ideas of the reproductive roles of mothers in the *polis.* This migration from and overlapping of figurative national health to health of as it pertains women's bodies—both grounded in classical models of the health and perpetuation of the nation through healthy children—is difficult to spot on casual readings. As such, I cite several passages at length below to illustrate how American ideas of national futurity is mapped onto women's physical and cultural reproduction of the state, and how in borrowing models of motherhood from antiquity—or at least how antiquity was perceived in the national imaginary—they necessarily, though perhaps not intentionally, also imported its structures of generating and generational health as fundamental to national futurity.

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[50] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10.
[51] Ida M. Tarbell, *The Business of Being a Woman* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 18-19, Google Books.

Kerber argues that Republican Motherhood "made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves for the good of the *polis,*" and Nina Baym points out that "a rhetoric of Sparta [was] common in American republican discourse, [and] Spartan motherhood was particularly recommended as a model for American women."[52] Indeed, in an essay to her students, Sarah Pierce, who founded the Litchfield Female Academy in 1792, argues

> A free government like ours can only be supported by the virtue of its citizens. The ancient governments were destroyed by the vices of their subjects. Greece and Rome ceased to rule the world when their citizens became corrupted by luxury and sloth. It is indispensable to the existence of a republic to be moral and religious. Who then can calculate the beneficial effects resulting from the early habits of piety and morality planted by maternal wisdom upon the rising generation? And may we not hope that the daughters of America will imitate the example of the Spartan and Roman matrons in the day of their glory, who taught their children to love their country beyond every earthly object, even their own lives.[53]

In Sparta, however, the health of the *polis* began with the health of its individuals. Plutarch famously records the Spartan's ritual infanticide of impaired and ill babies:

> Offspring was not reared at the will of the father, but was taken and carried by him to a place called Lesche, where the elders of the tribes officially examined the infant, and if it was well-built and sturdy, they ordered the father to rear it, and assigned it one of the nine thousand lots of land; but if it was ill-born and deformed, they sent it to the so-called Apothetae, a chasm-like place at the foot of Mount Taÿgetus, in the conviction that the life of that which nature had not well

[52] Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1976): 188, https://doi.org/10.2307/2712349; See also, Nina Baym, "The Ann Sisters: Elizabeth Peabody's Gendered Millennialism," in *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 251, n. 16.
[53] Emily Noyes Vanderpoel, comp. *Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833, Being the History of Miss Sarah Pierce and Her Litchfield School*, edited by Elizabeth C. B. Buel (Cambridge: The University Press, 1908): 218, Hathi Trust.

> equipped at the very beginning for health and strength, was of no advantage either to itself or the state. On the same principle, the women used to bathe their new-born babes not with water, but with wine, thus making a sort of test of their constitutions. For it is said that epileptic and sickly infants are thrown into convulsions by the strong wine and lose their senses, while the healthy ones are rather tempered by it, like steel, and given a firm habit of the body.[54]

The direct link between classical models of motherhood, nationhood, and ability are collapsed later in the century, particularly during the health reform movement where the health and futurity of the nation and the health and futurity of individuals became identical.

In the context of the ready circulation of Spartan and Greek cultures as models for role of women in the new Republic, Catherine Beecher's frequent emphasis on the importance of a "Greek education" for health seems less surprising and certainly less adventitious that the structures of her books would suggest to the casual reader. Building on circulating impressions of classic civilizations, Beecher proposes a new antecedent to "the health, the character, the happiness, the future of certain human beings [. . .] to build a strong stone in the state" as the character and happiness, but particularly the health of women. She employs the ideals of the true woman in order to argue that women's responsibilities to her family, and her ability to reproduce the nation physically and ideologically, depend especially on her health. *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* begins by contrasting the Greeks of antiquity and nineteenth-century Americans. She argues,

> You have read often of the Greeks. Some twenty centuries ago they were a small people, in a small country; and yet they became the wisest and most powerful of all nations, and thus conquered nearly the whole world. And they were remarkable, not only for their wisdom and

[54] Plutarch, "Lycurgus," in *Lives: Theseus and Romulus. Lycurgus and Numa. Solon and Publicola*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005): 255, Digital Loeb Classical Library. Details of passage questioned by historians/anthropologists. They argue that the meat of the story is true—infanticide happened for these and other reasons in other places in antiquity—but the means of death was likely exposure.

> strength, but for their great beauty, so that the statues they made to resemble their own men and women have, ever since, been regarded as, the most perfect forms of human beauty. The chief reason why they excelled all nations in these respects was the great care they took in educating their children [. . .] In the family, too, although the higher classes took care that their children should improve the mind, all, from the highest to the lowest, were earnest in efforts to train the rising generation to have healthy, strong, and beautiful bodies. [. . .] But the American people have pursued a very different course. It is true that a large portion of them have provided schools for educating the minds of their children; but instead of providing teachers to train the bodies of their offspring, most of them have not only entirely neglected it, but have done almost every thing they could do to train their children to become feeble, sickly, and ugly [. . .] In consequence of this dreadful neglect and mismanagement, the children of this country are every year becoming less and less healthful and good-looking.[55]

Beecher quickly moves from education to the *heredity* of health, particularly as its linked to the past and future of the nation:

> Every year I hear more and more complaints of the poor health that is so very common among grown people, especially among women. And physicians say, that this is an evil that is constantly increasing, so that they fear, ere long, there will be no healthy women in the country. At the same time, among all classes of our land, we are constantly hearing of the superior health and activity of our ancestors. Their physical health and strength, and their power of labor and endurance, was altogether beyond any thing witnessed in the present generation. [ . . .] Now it is a fact, that the health of children depends very much on the health of their parents. Feeble and sickly fathers and mothers seldom have strong and healthy children. And when one parent is well and the other sickly, then a part of the children will be sickly and a part healthy. Thus the more parents become

[55] Catharine Esther Beecher, *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), 9, Google Books.

> unhealthy the more feeble children will be born. And when these feeble children grow up and become parents, they will have a still more puny and degenerate offspring. So the case will go on, from bad to worse, with every generation. What then, if what I state be true, are the prospects of this nation, unless some great and radical change is effected.[56]

Beecher concludes, "it is woman, to whom, as wife, mother, educator, nurse, and house-keeper, the training of the human body in infancy and the ministries of the sick-room are specially committed, who has the most direct and immediate interest and responsibility in this effort. Woman is the Heaven-appointed guardian of health in the family, as the physician is in the community."[57]

Beecher's analysis points to a tension between heredity and education—which the proto-eugenicists would later foreground—but for both, she leverages ideal womanhood to hold mothers most responsible for futurity. In *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, as in many advice manuals and columns directed at women audiences, Beecher begins even-handedly identifying both father and mother as origins of "sickly" children, yet fathers are never mentioned in this capacity again. Instead, Beecher repeatedly refers to how impairments in the mother linked immediately to unhealthy children and have long-standing consequences; such impairments "thus achieved by the mother [are] often transmitted to her deformed offspring," or are "transmitted to her offspring as a hereditary misfortune, to be perpetuated from generation to generation."[58] Throughout the book, it is women, as mothers and moral and reproductive agents, that are imagined first, as the egregious and direct cause of illness and, second, in their office as "Woman," the solution which will repair health and restore the family and the nation to a healthy future.

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[56] Beecher, *Letters to the People*, 9-10.
[57] Beecher, *Letters to the People*, 186.
[58] Beecher, *Letters to the People*, 89; 57. Beecher protest here is against how fashionable clothing effects women's bodies and imagines, in Lamarkian fashion, that the ways that corsets distort the shape of women's bodies will produce children with similar traits. I use the term "impairments" to this phenomenon because, for Beecher, fashionable clothing causes stable, transmissible "deformities" in women. Thus, she imagines the relationship between clothing and debility how we would imagine the relationship between bacteria or viruses contracted during pregnancy as affecting, perhaps permanently, the health of both mother and child.

Beecher makes this connection even more explicit in *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. After her preface directs her readers to the problem (women's ill-health) and its solution (systematized and ordered household labor and physical education), her first chapter furnishes the stakes: democracy itself. She provides an extended meditation on democracy and Christianity, quoting heavily from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, before concluding with an echo of Benjamin Rush, "[T]he success of democratic institutions, as is conceded by all, depends upon the intellectual and moral character of its people [. . .] it is equally conceded, that the formation of the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand [. . .] The proper education of a man decides the welfare of an individual; but educate a woman [in domestic matters] and the interests of a whole family are secure."[59] Linda J. Borish summarizes the position of early health reformers like Beecher best:

> Health advocates expressed an intimate connection between females' health and the preservation of American culture. Only vigorous females could fulfill their vital duties as wife, mother, moral guardian, and social reproducer. In other word, individual, familial, and national decay went hand in hand with females' ill health.[60]

To understand this further, we need to move forward and explore what futurity is *not* or at least is not entirely—that is, futurity as figured by "the Child." Despite the heavy overlap in rhetoric between the discourse of women's idealized health and the nation's future and discourse of children *as* the nation's future, that is, health reformers did not figure the Child *as* the figure of futurity.

In Lee Edelman's polemic on queer ethics, *No Future*, he argues that the sentimental illusions and moral imperatives of "reproductive futurism"—our belief in and desire to create better futures for our children—dominate our contemporary political culture. Edelman investigates sentimentalism in two

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[59] Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 2nd edition (Boston: Thomas H. Webb & Co., 1843), 37-38, Google Books.
[60] Linda J. Borish, "Farm Females, Fitness, and the Ideology of Physical Health in Antebellum New England," *Agricultural History* 64, no. 3 (1990): 19, JSTOR.

nineteenth-century texts, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Elliot's *Silas Marner*, and concludes that, in the political imaginary, "though the Child be as helpless as Eppie, as delicate as Tiny Tim, it *must* be the hand of a 'little child' that lifts us into the future and thereby saves us."[61] In a different engagement with Edelman, I would sit with and build on his close readings, nuancing the ways that if queerness is silent, "implicit," "the crime that was named as not to be named," then bodily difference—and in these stories, *(dis)ability*—is loud, explicit, unavoidable and complicates in a productive way his argument for role of the Child in nineteenth-century imaginings of futurity. Instead, I want to come at a similar point differently. In his chapter, "No Future," Edelman begins with an op-ed piece published in the *Boston Globe* in 1998, which I will quote in full:

> It is time to join together and acknowledge that the work that parents do is indispensable—that by nourishing those small bodies and growing those small souls, they create the store of social and human capital that is so essential to the health and wealth of our nation. Simply put, by creating the conditions that allow parents to cherish their children, we will ensure our collective future.[62]

This piece evokes a familiar nineteenth-century U.S. equation between reproductive labor and the "health and wealth of our nation." Yet the solution, "creating the conditions that allow parents to cherish their children," the "silent" specter of queerness, and the "ideology invoked to naturalize and promote these suggestions" is markedly different.[63] If in the twentieth century, queerness was implicitly figured as a menace to futurity of the nation, in the nineteenth-century U.S., it was *explicitly* the inherent and acquired impairments of women that threatened the national and cultural health of the nation. This discourse prefigures and produces the intersection between queerness, (dis)ability, and race as impairment/abnormality/deviation for a socially privileged "norm" through its medical essentialization of

[61] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 66.
[62] Sylvia Ann Hewitt and Cornel West, "For Mothers, It's No Paradise," *Boston Sunday Globe*, May 10, 1998, quoted in Edelman, *No Future*, 111-112.
[63] Edelman, *No Future*, 171 n. 1.

understandings of ideals of the female bodymind rooted in reproduction and behavior.[64] Women's reproductive labor was both their ability to reproduce, but also their role as educators of future democratic citizens; both of these roles, in the cultural imaginary, could only be performed by healthy women.

While "the Child" did figure in medical professionals and domesticity educators' analyses, children were not the reason for or the named beneficiary of these analyses of reproductive futurity, either of the nation or the race. Or put another way, many health advocates like Beecher, pre- or proto-eugenicists like Henry C. Wright and Orson S. Fowler, and medical professionals writ large, equated unhealthy and "deformed" children with an absence of national futurity. The social and medical frameworks of the nineteenth century justified linking children specifically to women's political responsibilities to be physically and morally healthy through the doctrine of "like follows like." While never named as such when discussing white women, this idea borrows from enslavement laws, where with regards to heredity of traits, the indoctrination of culture, and racial status (as white or black), the child follows the condition of the mother. Indeed, the medical tracts in particular excoriated what they perceived as women's poor health explicitly because they believed that it left women unable to reproduce, or made reproduction difficult, or that they bore sickly children which, in turn, reduced the national vitality. Thus, democracy, and the future of the United States, a democratic nation, were linked primarily to the (idealized) robustness of its women.[65]

[64] Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 154-58.

[65] "Democracy" and "the Republic" or "republicanism" were used interchangeably in literature on health reform or the heredity of health. While democracy and republicanism are different political models and were recognized as such in many articles throughout the antebellum period, when the topic is national or racial futurity, differences seem to have been often elided. See, Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 26-38; Orson Squire Fowler, and Lorenzo Niles Fowler, "Article XI. Republicanism, and Its Improvement—The Fourth of July and Its Proper Observance," *The American Phrenological Journal and Miscellany* 11 (1849): 208–15, Hathi Trust.

## Chapter 3

## The Disabled Superwoman:
## The Wear and Tear of Domestic Labor

Depend upon it, that if you are totally ignorant of domestic affairs,
you are nearly as unfit to be an American wife and mother,
as if you were lame in both feet and hands.
—Catharine M. Sedgwick[1]

In 1842, Catharine Beecher published *A Treatise on Domestic Economy,* which went through thirteen reprintings and served as the basis for Beecher's many other monographs and articles—including several which she wrote with her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe. *A Treatise* had a viral effect on the discourse of domesticity and defined the relationship between domestic labor, health, and women until the early twentieth century. Much like S.D. Power's *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, Beecher's text is a medical one as much as it is a manual for housewifery. It begins with a diagnosis of American women as *ill*, in large part because of cultural ideals that preclude women from exercising, but also because of the "hard labor" of housework:

> There is nothing which so much demands system and regularity, as the affairs of a housekeeper, made up, as they are, of ten thousand desultory and minute items; and yet, this perpetually fluctuating state of society seems forever to bar any such system and regularity. The anxieties, vexations, perplexities, and even hard labor, which come upon American women, from this state of domestic service, are endless; and many a woman has, in consequence, been disheartened,

[1] Catharine M. Sedgwick, "The Puzzled Housewife," *Pennsylvania Inquirer and National Gazette*, June 24, 1842, vol. 150. 19th Century U.S. Newspapers. Reprints include, Miss Sedgwick, "The Puzzled Housewife," *Cleveland Daily Herald,* 27 August 1842; Mrs. Sedgwick. "The Puzzled Housewife." *Scioto Gazette*, 13 October 1842. The reprint in the *Scioto Gazette* identifies the author, who is Miss Sedgwick and Mrs. Sedgwick alternatively, as the "authoress of 'Hope Leslie' and 'Poor Rich Man.'"

> discouraged, and ruined in health. But the second, and still greater difficulty, peculiar to American women, is, a delicacy of constitution which renders them early victims to disease and decay [. . .] In consequence of this enfeebled state of their constitutions, induced by the neglect of their physical education, as soon as they are called to the responsibilities and the trials of domestic life, their constitution fails, and their whole existence is rendered a burden. For no woman can enjoy existence, when disease throws a dark cloud over the mind, and incapacitates her for the proper discharge of every duty.[2]

In *The Minister's Wooing*, set in the seventeenth-century, Harriet Beecher Stowe joins together physical female perfection and perfected female labor, representing ideal women like Katy Scudder, who have perfected Yankee "faculty," as also perfecting housework— she "shall scrub floors, wash, wring, bake, brew, and yet her hands shall be small and white."[3] In *House and Home Papers*, Stowe goes further, making physical and mental impairment the opposite of idealized domestic labor:

> The race of strong, hardy, cheerful girls, that used to grow up in country places, and made the bright, neat, New England kitchens of old times,—the girls that could wash, iron, brew, back, harness a horse and drive him, no less than braid straw, embroider, draw, paint, and read innumerable books,—this race of women, pride of olden times, is daily lessening; and in their stead come the fragile, easily fatigued, languid girls of a modern age, drilled in book-learning, ignorant of common things.[4]

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[2] Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 2nd edition (Boston: Thomas H. Webb & Co., 1843), 41-42, Google Books. This passage is an early iteration of Beecher's argument on the connection between household labor and female debility. It collapses together the high turnover rate of domestic servants (and their own variable training) with housewives inability to create regularly in their own tasks (a product of their own poor training) with ideals of womanhood that preclude women from exercising. In later works, Beecher would separate these variables and address them individually.
[3] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Minister's Wooing* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 2, Google Books.
[4] Harriet Beecher Stowe [Christopher Crowfield, pseud.], "Servants," in *House and Home Papers* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865), 205-206, Google Books.

In both passages, Stowe's depiction of the colonial goodwife stems from what Julie Livingston calls the "moral imagination": the way that many people "made sense of their experiential crises by remembering a past in which such suffering was hardly possible."[5] While Livingston links this phenomenon in Botswana to its industrialization—and a similar moment is happening in the U.S. during Stowe's lifetime—Stowe's "experiential crises" were also less abstract, located in her own neuralgia, which prevented her from performing many household tasks.[6] Both Beecher and Stowe's "diagnoses" are ableist ones, not only because they privilege able-bodiedness and able-mindedness—which, to be fair, many of the works explored in this chapter do—but because they make individual women responsible for fixing the health problems caused by social ideals. These works set up a causal relationship between debility, ideality, and unskilled domestic labor—of housework *improperly done*.

The relationship between domestic labor and physical or mental impairment that Beecher explicates is largely absent in critical disability studies' analyses of the emergence of (dis)ability in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, in feminist studies, both ideal womanhood and domestic labor in the nineteenth-century are well-trodden ground—yet, if these studies address the ill health of women, they often link women's illness and debility to the psychic stress of cultural ideals or explore how ill health and frailty were coextensive with nineteenth-century models of ideal womanhood. This chapter intervenes in both histories. First, I trace the emergence of modern, Western constructions of (dis)ability through unwaged domestic labor, opposite to current trends which link the origins of contemporary ideologies that define (dis)ability and ability to the rise of waged labor in the market economy. Second, I argue that the debility so associated with nineteenth-century white women was due, in part, to the overwhelming nature of, and wear and tear associated with, domestic labor. I reframe "debility" as it is understood by Jasbir Puar and Julie Livingston alongside Michel Foucault's theory of endemics and Lauren Berlant's concept

[5] Julie Livingston*, Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.
[6] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from Her Letters and Journals*, compiled by Charles Edward Stowe (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1889), 37, 101. Google Books.

of slow death, in order to redefine debility in ways that are both more expansive and inclusive of (dis)ability, but also applicable to the capitalism, industrialism, and liberalism of the nineteenth century.

I redefine debility in order to explore how women were worn out not only because of the *impossibility* of the tasks—the psychic stress of trying to be all things to all people that ideal womanhood says they should—but they are also worn out, physically, mentally, and emotionally, by *doing the tasks*. Nineteenth-century writers of domestic advice—like Beecher and Stowe—as well more recent women's historians, such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, argue that women's poor mental and physical health stem from inadequate preparation for mother, wife, and community roles. Other women, writing both for publication and privately in letters and journals, present the overwhelming nature of, and inherent role conflict in, domestic task lists set by female ideality—especially given that, because of the division between waged and unwaged labor, domestic tasks fell almost solely on women, and given that technological innovations that were imagined to make women's work easier (e.g., artificial lighting, cast iron stoves, water cisterns) often increased rather than decreased workloads. From there, I briefly explore the twentieth- and twenty-first century diagnosis "burnout" alongside S. Weir Mitchell's ideas of "wear and tear" and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's exploration of hysteria in nineteenth-century women for five reasons. First, to bridge our contemporary understanding of "burnout" with the nineteenth-century diagnosis of wear and tear, not only show the parity between both symptoms and etiologies, but also to allow for current knowledge to provide new ways to analyze past occurrences. Second, to show that in the nineteenth century, as early as 1869, the medical community endorsed an etiological link between overwork and ill health. Third, to show how, because the link was made between *mental* labor and ill health, such discourses upheld gender oppression on two fronts—by justifying the exclusion of women from educational opportunities, and, more significantly for this chapter, by separating domestic overwork from its health effects, despite symptomologies that were exactly the same. The symptomology of wear and tear would, instead, be viewed as health problems inherent to female bodyminds, which they were individually responsible for correcting, and which were used as evidence for their unfitness for

enfranchisement and for education and professional opportunities. Fourth, to join the research of three fields in nineteenth-century women's history: domestic labor, women's health, and ideologies of womanhood. And finally, to create space to bring to bear critical disability studies' tools of analysis—specifically the frameworks of debility, slow death, and endemics—to nineteenth-century women's health.

Fiction, however, gives us a different perspective, presenting an explicit causal link between housework and debility, and a larger critique of the impossible ideological systems that make it so. For the remainder of this chapter, I turn to two short stories—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' "No News" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Luella Miller"—to explore their critiques of ideal womanhood, domestic labor, and debility. These stories reject the premise that a woman can, of her own effort, correct the impairment stemming from power disparities; instead, they locate the debility as a result of domestic labor, addressing each of Beecher's "causes" above: debilitation happens whether housework is properly or improperly done, with female community and/or servants or without it. Both stories highlight the trajectory of debility, through which inequality turns to death —they make visible the inevitable ways power disparities produce impairment and eventually death, even as they focus on ideology in different ways. "No News" tracks a woman from the moment of marriage to her being worn to "a skeleton" in a realistic way, and it focuses on how the idealization of "wife" and "mother" create an impossible, gendered task list. In "Luella Miller," household labor is independent of gender—the labor itself produces illness and death, no matter the gender of the doer. However, both stories interrogate debility and ableism by thinking through labor as an absolute value. In "No News," Harrie, the main character, has some help from family and friends, and "Luella Miller" centers on the community assistance provided to a widow—yet even with help, even with community effort, there is no way to eliminate the inherent deteriorating effect of domestic labor.

Each story argues against Beecher's idea that perfect housework is the solution to women's ill health, that separate spheres can solve debility. Instead they foreground the explicit connection between

housework and debility, and in doing so, deny Beecher's solution of "true womanhood." Instead, female ideality becomes the problem that cannot be solved by more perfect female ideality. The stories do not so much offer solutions but rather question the efficacy of the solutions that have come before, and argue that debility is produced by, and therefore cannot be fixed by, female ideality. The goal of these stories is not reform, but rather to expose the connection between female ideality and debility and to expose the illogic of solutions offered out of the same ideology that created them.

### *(Dis)ability History and the History of Domestic Labor*

Histories of (dis)ability in the United States, or scholarly engagements with the emergence of (dis)ability—specifically those charting its historiolinguistic continuity with contemporary (dis)ability in the West—frequently locate its origin in the rise of industrial capitalism and the wage-labor economy, especially in the mechanization of the workplace that led employers to prefer able-bodied workers because they "could be used as interchangeable parts."[7] These analyses draw on Marxist critiques of

[7] Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 122. See also, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 41, Kindle. In this chapter, I explore specifically the trajectory historians and critical disability studies scholars have traced backward from contemporary (dis)ability—as it is defined and how it operates, socially and legally, in our Western modern era—to industrialization. Certainly, impaired bodyminds existed before industrialization and were laden with social stigmas and legal repercussions, and otherwise took on extraphysical meanings in their immediate cultural imaginaries. Even in the context of "work" there were many connections between labor and impairment that predate the nineteenth-century. Gregory P. Guyton, for instance, details the history of worker's compensation for injuries from as early as ancient Sumer, 2050 BCE ["A Brief History of Workers' Compensation," *The Iowa Orthopaedic Journal* 19 (1999): 106–10, PubMed]. For other historical investigations of (dis)ability, especially ones that engage with (dis)ability in colonial U.S. and British histories and texts, see, the special issue of *Early American Literature* on (dis)ability in the early U.S. [*Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017), ProjectMUSE]. In particular, Altschuler and Cristobal Silva's "Early American Disability Studies" explores "tension between the language, the idea, and the history of disability" in the colonial period and early Republic. [*Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017): 2, ProjectMUSE. Greta Lafleur's "'Defective in One of the Principle Parts of Virility': Impotence, Generation, and Defining Disability in Early North America" also provides a cogent history of the linguistic and material reality of (dis)ability in colonial period, and summarizes scholarly tensions that surround the language and ideas of monstrosity, (dis)ability and debility, and how physical or cognitive "lack" could be read as (dis)ability within the social, legal, and religious structures of the colonial period [*Early American Literature* 52, no. 1 (2017): 81-84, ProjectMUSE. For an investigation of "anomaly" and disability in the eighteenth-century British empire, see Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

capitalism; they emphasize how under capitalism, "sickness (or of any kind of pathology) gets defined . . . as [the] inability . . . to work"—a key element of (dis)ability.[8] However, they also reproduce capitalist and Marxist definitions of work as waged labor and do not differentiate between the history of waged labor—which became a cornerstone of the U.S. economy in the mid-eighteenth-century—and the history of industrialization, which coupled with the market economy in the 1820s.[9] For instance, in arguing that able-bodiedness means "being capable of the normal physical exertions required in a particular system of labor," Robert McRuer characterizes it as a mandatory requirement of nineteenth-century industrialization: "It is here [in the nineteenth century with the rise of industrial capitalism] that we can begin to understand the compulsory nature of able-bodiedness: in the emergent industrial capitalist system, free to sell one's labor but not free to do anything else effectively meant free to have an able body but not particularly free to have anything else."[10]

By focusing on waged labor and industrialization, these analyses by default leave out unwaged domestic labor in their histories of (dis)ability. Kim E. Nielson in *A Disability History of the United States* argues that the increased impairments caused by the proliferation of industrialization "had significant consequences in which (dis)ability was defined with respect to the lack of ability to be economically productive."[11] Yet, "For the northeastern United States at least, evidence suggests that the denial of the economic worth of housework was a historical process integral to the development of industrial capitalism."[12] Viable economic productivity, where said productivity is defined as waged labor,

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[8] David Harvey, "The Body as an Accumulation Strategy," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 408, https://doi.org/10.1068/d160401; for disability and debility engagements with Harvey's claim, see Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 83-98; and Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 754.

[9] For feminist critiques of Marxist elisions of unwaged domestic and reproductive labor, see Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 157-59. For the distinction in the history of waged labor versus the history of industrialization, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[10] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 10.

[11] Kim E. Nielsen, *A Disability History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 75.

[12] Jeanne Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence," *Radical History Review* 35 (1986): 10, Duke UP.

was first rooted in a gendered division of labor. While Hall argues above that (dis)ability was defined as the absence of economic productivity, economic productivity shifted to valuing only waged labor as *labor* in the 1750s—seventy years prior to industrialization.[13] Over the course of the eighteenth century, as the importance of cash-markets increased, women, whose unwaged domestic labor had previously been viewed as necessary to sustaining the household in a barter economy, began to be represented as lazy, idle, parasitic, and silly—all concepts that either have ableist roots or would later attach themselves to disabled people. Housework became *devalued* with the rise of waged labor (as monetarily-valued labor), and this shift in perception occurred despite no parallel change occurring in the amount or type of women's domestic tasks.[14] In short, by focusing only on the history of waged labor and (dis)ability, we problematically make a male-centric history the default (dis)ability history. We reproduce the invisibility of women's domestic labor in our scholarship, and we miss that the discourses and languages that would later become associated with (dis)ability have a longer genealogy that links them to women and domestic labor—that the society that devalued bodymind differences vis-a-vis waged labor had a ready-made discourse with which to do so. There *is* a link between industrialization/wage-economy and what would become (dis)ability in the nineteenth-century U.S., but its effects, both material and cultural, first proliferated in the home long before it reached a critical mass in the wage-earning populace. By recognizing this elongated history, we can more thoroughly capture the gendered and raced dimensions of (dis)ability.

In their 1869 co-authored work, *American Woman's Home*, Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe deliver a "state-of-the-union," arguing that the lack of health in American women stems directly from the invisibility of domestic labor:

> The authors of this volume, while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the

[13] Nancy Folbre places the date of the devaluation of women's labor in light of a market economy fifty years after Boydston does, after 1800, though this is still twenty years before industrialization. See, "The Unproductive Housewife: Her Evolution in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought," *Signs* 16, no. 3 (1991): 464, JSTOR.
[14] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 11.

> disabilities and sufferings of their sex, are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not duly appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as a consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful.[15]

Beecher and Stowe use the language of wage labor, and the capitalist equation of "sickness" with "an inability to work (well)," and they also emphasize the invisibility of women's domestic labor, noting that "the honor and duties of the family state are not duly appreciated." But here also is an implied ideality—if women's labor is "poorly done," that is, not performed to the standard, then the corollary is that if women were well-trained, their work would be well-done, and they would not suffer. As we saw (and will see), many women authors disagree that better training and domestic education would solve a problem that they believed stemmed from overwork, because, they argued, systemic issues could not be fixed by individual efforts. However, these critics, like Beecher and Stowe, make domestic labor *visible* by locating a causal relationship between domestic labor and "disabilities and sufferings," where ill health indexes labor done—even if for Beecher and Stowe, the labor is done in an inappropriate, untrained fashion. To understand the persistence of this cause-effect relationship, however, we first have to understand why the labor was invisible, why it was work, and why the idealized work caused women to be, as one author puts it, "worn to a shadow."

In her book *Home and Work*, Jeanne Boydston details the emergence of waged labor as the *sine qua non* of the discourse of "work" in the late colonial economy, and how, as a result, domestic labor became invisible as work, first in the economy and later in the culture broadly. She focuses in particular

[15] Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 13. Beecher and Stowe's argument here is eerily similar to the "capacity building" language of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014). The latter in particular focuses on training and support services for "youth and those with significant barriers to employment" so that they can obtain "high-quality jobs." This quintessential respectability politics move is critiqued in Taylor, "The Right Not to Work." See, Employment & Training Administration, "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act," U.S. Department of Labor, accessed July 23, 2020, https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa; and, Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi and Philip Pauli, "RespectAbility – Public Testimony Submission: The Department of Labor Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive, Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities," § Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities (2016).

on the economic, political, and ideological shifts in mid-eighteenth-century colonial America that led to changing attitudes toward women's labor. Nancy Folbre, in her article "The Unproductive Housewife," tracks the same ideological shift, arguing that "the growth of wage labor, which separated individuals from family-based productive units, almost inevitably wrought new concepts of productive labor. Goods that could be bought and sold, quantities that could be expressed in dollar terms, became the new arbiters of value [. . . and] deflected attention from activities that could not be easily reduced to a money metric."[16] In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, domestic labor was integral to a colonial economy based primarily on a barter system. In this system, women were equal, and sometimes superior, producers of products that could be sold or bartered for services and household goods. Boydston carefully shows how this economic system, which was dependent on domestic labor, did not, contrary to earlier arguments, grant women political equality or undermine patriarchal ideas of women as morally inferior; however, she also proves that women's labor was visible and valued, socially and monetarily, both in the early colonial period and during the Revolutionary War, when a barter system temporarily reemerged. She then presents in parallel the emergence of men's wage-earning outside of the home, and the increasing importance of cash to the economy, and charts this emergence against mid-eighteenth-century newspaper articles and sermons which described women as "foolish" and "idle," "frivolous," and "self-indulgent child[ren] who would quickly become a parasite on the household economy."[17] These descriptions are exactly opposite to descriptions of women and their labor less than a century before, and, Boydston notes, "What is particularly puzzling about these changing attitudes toward women's labor contributions is that they were not paralleled by changes in the work itself."[18]

Women, too, in this new system, would sometimes show reluctance to claim their domestic labors as real "work." This is certainly not true of *all* women in the late colonial and early Republic periods—

[16] Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 465.
[17] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 10.
[18] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 11.

nor is it true that all women in the early colonial period esteemed their labors.[19] In fact, as with most historical trajectories, there is a great deal of complicated self-contradictions that make the paths from historical point to historical point muddled. For instance, while Glenna Matthews, writing in the 1980s and 90s, maintains that men from this period and throughout the nineteenth-century (and, Matthews argues, until today) believed that housework was not "work," she simultaneously emphasizes the pride that *women* took in housewifery as a designation of womanhood that superseded class.[20] The nineteenth century in particular attached "political, religious, and moral significance to women's domestic roles and activities."[21] Yet, as Folbre argues, "the moral elevation of the home was accompanied by the economic devaluation of the work performed there."[22] What I mean to track here, through the transition from a barter economy to a wage-earning economy, is the connection between women's *devaluing* of their own labor in the late-colonial period and Beecher's and Stowe's argument, which was addressed to women, that household labor is not honored such that it is not trained as a "profession." Take, for instance, Esther Burr, who recorded her journal as a series of letters to Sarah Prince, a friend, between 1754–1757. Despite being a middle-class woman who had some household help via her sisters, at least one slave, Harry, and occasional hired help, she depicted days sewing, regular cleaning, ironing, white-washing, rubbing tables, cleaning silver, china, and glass, procuring and selling food in nearby rural communities, preserving food, manufacturing necessary household items like yarn and linens, and traveling to New York to obtain furniture and heavy clothing. She was also the primary childcare and nurse for her home. These tasks were in addition to being required to attend the "widow, the fatherless, and the sick" in her husband's congregation and to periodically entertain thirty or more guests as a necessary part of her husband's profession. These two latter set of tasks she describes as "tedious," exhausting labor, noting

[19] See, for instance evidence of early colonial women depreciating their labors by calling them "my little Domestick affairs" or "my humble duties"—though I believe these statements are more in keeping with legalism of the early U.S. colonies, given that boasting is proscribed in the Bible. For citations, see Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 4.
[20] Matthews, *"Just a Housewife"*, 4.
[21] Steven Mintz, "Housework Demystified," *Reviews in American History* 19, no. 3 (1991): 361, https://doi.org/10.2307/2703179.
[22] Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 465.

that "visiting" in particular, is "the heardest [hardest] work I do."[23] Despite detailing labors that make her "so very busy that I cant [sic] get time to write," she also states at the end of one very busy day in 1755 that she felt "*as if* she had been heard [hard] at work all day."[24] Through Burr's diary we see that though there were minimal changes in the labor that women performed, the perception of housewifery *as labor* had begun to change in the late colonial period.

Over a century later, the division between women's unproductive labor and men's economically viable labor still held, extending even to wages earned, or money otherwise brought into the house, by women. In 1878, the Association for the Advancement of Women criticized the U.S. Census's designation of women as "homekeepers" and not workers, beginning, "We pray your honorable body to make provision for the more careful and just enumeration of women as laborers and producers," and accusing the body of overlooking how domestic labor contributed to the economy, where their work was "not even incidentally named as in any wise affecting the causes of increase or decrease of population or wealth."[25] Investigating the legal separation between domestic and market labor, Reva B. Siegel argues that

> as it became more common for men to exchange their labor for money wages, production for use came to be identified as a distinctly female activity, associated with the social, but not economic, maintenance of family life. The first census measures of the economy that appeared in the aftermath of the Civil War characterized such labor as "unproductive" and, consistent with this gendered valuation of family labor, excluded women engaged in income-producing household work from the count of those "gainfully employed."[26]

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[23] Quoted in Boydston, *Home and Work*, 15-16.
[24] Qtd in. Boydston, *Home and Work*, 18 [emphasis mine].
[25] Mary T. Eastman, Henrietta L.T. Woolcott, and others, "Memorial of Mary F. Eastman, Henrietta L. T. Woolcott, and Others, Officers of the Association for the Advancement of Women, Praying That the Tenth Census May Contain a Just Enumeration of Women as Laborers and Producers," 45th Congress, 2nd session, 2, no. 84, (1878). Quoted in Folbre, "The Unproductive Housewife," 463.
[26] Reva B. Siegel, "Valuing Housework: Nineteenth-Century Anxieties About the Commodification of Domestic Labor," *American Behavioral Scientist* 41, no. 10 (1998): 1438-39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764298041010005..

Siegal's juridical history of women's labor as "unproductive"—which she begins, as Boydston does, in the late colonial U.S.—closely mirrors the ideological trajectory that Brendan Gleeson deploys to explain the devaluation of disabled people's labor in *Geographies of Disability*, with one exception. Gleeson, like Siegel and Boydston, charts the discursive shift from disabled people as "contributors" to disabled people as unproductive in the transition from feudalism, or otherwise predominately agricultural economies, to capitalism. However, Gleeson, like other critical disability scholars, locates this shift specifically in industrialization logics that accompanied the rise of the market economy, which political and labor historians date to the Jacksonian era after the War of 1812, and which truly came into its own in the 1830s and 1840s.[27] Such logics "devalorized the work potential of anyone who could not produce as socially necessary rates" such that:

> impaired people became unproductive members of society and thus disabled. The rise of commodity relations profoundly changed those processes of social embodiment that originated in work patterns. In particular this political-economic shift lessened the ability of impaired people to make meaningful contributions to their family and households. Markets introduced into peasant households an abstract social evaluation of work potential based upon the law of value; that is to say, the competition of labor-powers revealed as average socially necessary labor times.[28]

The rhetoric that stems from the designation of women's labor as non-productive—as I cited earlier, the late colonial era's descriptions of women as idle, lazy, and parasitic—would be further codified in the theories of U.S. economist Francis Amasa Walker. In his book, *Political Economy*, Walker makes a stark distinction between men's and women's labor, with regards to consumption. Of men, he states, "Men produce only because they desire to consume. They produce *only so much as* they desire to consume."[29]

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[27] Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[28] Brendan Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 57-126. Summarized by Sunny Taylor, "The Right Not to Work: Power and Disability," *Monthly Review*, March 1, 2004, para. 15.
[29] Francis Amasa Walker, *Political Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1883), 323 [emphasis mine].

When he turns to women however, he begins by listing the prodigious amount of household tasks of "the wife"—"she will spin and weave . . . she will, in various ways, prepare the flesh, the fish, or the vegetable food . . . she will bring water . . . she will keep the hut or tent in a certain order and decency." But he concludes, "while, thus, the female, in an early stage of industrial society, adds something to the family means . . . we may assume, speaking broadly, *she does not produce nearly as much as she consumes.*"[30] Walker's assessment of women as economically net-negative heralds language later used to justify the sterilization of disabled people according to the logic of eugenics, and to bar disabled immigrants from entering the United States, as they "may become a burden on the taxpayer" due to their perceived inability to "earn a living at ordinary work."[31] Even more so, Walker's assessment of women in an almost exact rhetorical precursor to the designation of disabled people in Nazi Germany as Unnütze Esser—literally "useless eaters"—as people who, due to serious medical conditions and/or physical and mental disabilities, were unable to "work," and thus, the Nazis argued, consumed more than they contributed to society.[32]

### ***Debility and Debilitating Domestic Labor***

#### *Debility*

The presumed ill health of nineteenth-century U.S. women is a puzzle. Scholars from disciplines ranging from literary studies to the history of technology have, from numerous and wide-ranging historical sources, pieced together both discursive and material models to map the phenomenon. Yet, and Diane Price Herndel puts it best, "In many ways, our understanding of the history of women's health is

[30] Walker, *Political Economy*, 302 [emphasis mine].
[31] Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics*, 1 edition (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 71, 81. Baynton also argues that women immigrants were also barred because the logic of (dis)ability undergirded the perception of women as dependent (81-86). I am arguing the inverse of this claim.
[32] Mark P. Mostert, "Useless Eaters: Disability as Genocidal Marker in Nazi Germany," *The Journal of Special Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 155–68, https://doi.org/10.1177002246690203600306O1.

just as conflicted and contradictory as were nineteenth-century theories."[33] Historians, literary, gender and women's studies, and critical disability studies scholars have explored nineteenth-century women's illness, madness, invalidism, and disability from a range of perspective, marshaling hundreds of historical documents, including medical tracts, advice columns, asylum records, fiction, biographies, letters, journals, and reform pamphlets. Women's ill-heath subtends scholarly investigations into the pathologization of femininity and the view of women as "the weaker sex," and into the communicative properties between illness/impairment and cultural assumptions and idealizations of female frailty and emotionality.[34] They also compare eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women's perceptions of health and argue that in colonial America and the early Republic "sickness had been understood as inevitable and was expected," but in the nineteenth century, "good health, rather than bad, should be seen as the normal condition"; thus, "antebellum women" may have "[seen] themselves as unhealthier than their eighteenth-century counterparts."[35] Or as Regina Markell Morantz puts it: "We cannot know for sure whether or not this generation of women was sicker than their grandmothers. What is certain, however, is that they thought they were."[36] Many scholars explore the way ill health could have been a mode of resistance and feminine empowerment, or how it may have helped women exercise control over their bodies, regulating both sexual access and energy expended during on domestic tasks.[37] Finally, scholars also detail

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[33] Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 24.

[34] See, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (1973): 332–56, JSTOR; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 27-28; Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," in *The New Disability History*, ed. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*, 2nd ed, (New York: Feminist Press, 2011); Harilyn Rousso, "Disability Stereotypes," in *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*, ed. Marysa Navarro et al. (Boston: Mariner Books, 1999), 567–68; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 3-5. See also, Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 159, https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179. Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 419-432.

[35] Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 24. See also, Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood*, 3-4.

[36] Regina Markell Morantz, "Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in 19th Century America," *Journal of Social History* 10, no. 4 (1977): 494, JSTOR.

[37] For instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's infamous rendering of the madwoman as rebel, or a similar exploration of mental illness as form of escape from heterosexual norms in Phyllis Chesler's *Women and Madness*.

psychosomatic, psychogenic, and material-cultural causes—for the latter, especially corsets and tight-lacing, lack of exercise, and poor ventilation, and dangerous childbirth.[38] To this last material-cultural category, I would like to add another possible source: debility caused by overwork—or as it was known in the nineteenth-century, wear and tear.

Debility, as a term used alongside and in contrast to (dis)ability, is defined multiple ways. In her study of Botswana, Julie Livingston defines it as "impairment, lack, or loss of certain bodily abilities" which "encompasses experiences of chronic illness and senescence, as well as disability per se."[39] Livingston draws a parallel between "debility" and "impairment," and distinguishing both from disability, as the latter term "has special meanings in terms of identity and capacity," especially with regards to "the

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These reading have been challenging by both feminist scholars and critical disability studies scholars, such as Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Nina Baym, and Elizabeth Donaldson. See, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, [1972] 2018), 76, 98; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 200; Elizabeth J. Donaldson, "Revisiting the Corpus of the Madwoman: Further Notes Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Mental Illness," in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 91–113; Nina Baym, "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3, no. 1/2 (1984): 45–59, https://doi.org/10.2307/463824; and Marta Caminero-Santangelo, *The Madwoman Can't Speak: Or Why Insanity Is Not Subversive* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For more on women's physical impairment, see Ann Douglas (Wood), "'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (1973): 27, https://doi.org/10.2307/202356; and Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 28-29.

[38] For more on the psychosomatic, see Edward Shorter, *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 69-94; Douglas (Wood), "'The Fashionable Diseases'," 25-52. For more on material-cultural causes, see Vern Bullough and Martha Voght, "Women, Menstruation, and Nineteenth-Century Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 47, no. 1 (1973): 79-80; Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Patricia Anne Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century*, International Studies in the History of Sport (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1982), 57-58, Kindle; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America 1750 to 1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For primary sources on similar topics, see Helen Gilbert Ecob, *The Well-Dressed Woman: A Study in the Practical Application to Dress of the Laws of Health, Art, and Morals* (New York: Fowler & Wells Company, 1892), Google Books; Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 2nd edition (Boston: Thomas H. Webb & Co., 1843), Google Books; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, 3rd edition (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Company, 1898), Google Books.

[39] Julie Livingston, "Insights from an African History of Disability," *Radical History Review* 2006, no. 94 (2006): 113, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2006-94-111.

social challenges that stem from particular forms of bodily configuration."[40] She concludes that disability is a "biosocial identity that is at once both biologically grounded and socially parsed, an umbrella term that denotes different things in different places and at different times" (ibid). Thus, for Livingston, (dis)ability and impairment can exist alongside one another as subsets of debility. Jasbir Puar, as well as other scholars of neoliberalism and late capitalism who engage with Puar, argues instead that "'debilitation' is distinct from the term 'disablement' because [debilitation] foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled. While the latter concept creates and hinges on a narrative of before and after for individuals who will eventually be identified as disabled, the former comprehends those bodies that are sustained in a perpetual state of debilitation precisely through foreclosing the social, cultural, and political translation to disability."[41] There are two issues in applying Puar's analysis to nineteenth-century white women, however. First, Puar's definitions emerge from an engagement with neoliberalism, particularly as it interrogates risk assessment and capacitation central to late-twentieth century economies and healthcare systems.[42] Second, as with Lauren Berlant's analysis of "slow death," which I discuss below, there is an intentionality implicit in twentieth- and twenty-first century debilitation; what Puar calls "targeting to debilitate" isn't applicable to nineteenth-century ideologies of domesticity that sought the *preservation* of white womanhood, especially with regards to white women's biological and cultural reproductive labor.[43] There are elements of Puar's analysis of debility that lend themselves well to a nineteenth-century analysis. Her idea that bodies are always in a "debilitated state in relation to what one's bodily capacity is imagined to be" maps neatly onto the

[40] Julie Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 7.
[41] Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), xiii-xvi. For more, see Kelly Fritsch, "Gradations of Debility and Capacity: Biocapitalism and the Neoliberalization of Disability Relations," *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 4, no. 2 (2015): 12–48, https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v4i2.208; Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies*, 83-98; David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).
[42] For a detailed analysis, see, Fritsch, "Gradations of Debility and Capacity."
[43] There is, however, a targeting to debilitate with regards to other slave, native, and immigrant populations. The intersections between these forms of debility and female ideality will be discussed in a later book chapter.

discourse of nineteenth-century women's health.[44] However, this claim is specifically in relation to the way that "neoliberal regimes of biocapital produce bodies that are never healthy enough"; thus, while her theory may be transposable in part, its most central terms are inextricable from the matrix of neoliberalism and late capitalism which they critique.

Because Livingston's use of debility is too general and Puar's too specific for nineteenth-century analysis, I instead turn to Lauren Berlant's concept of "slow death," predicated on and expanded from Foucault's idea of "endemics." In his 1975-76 lectures, *"Society Must Be Defended,"* Foucault details a shift in the location of a governing body's fear, from epidemic to endemic. Epidemics were a "threat which had haunted political powers since the Middle Ages [. . .] These famous epidemics were temporary disasters that caused multiple deaths, times when everyone seemed to be in danger of imminent death."[45] In the late eighteenth century, Foucault argues, this fear relocates from contingency, emergency, *crisis*—events of short duration causing potentially massive destruction—to "endemics," which Foucault defines as:

> The form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population. These were illness that were difficult to eradicate and that were not regarded as epidemics that caused more frequent deaths, but as *permanent factors* which—sapped the population's strength, shortened the working week, wasted energy, and cost money, both because they led to a fall in productions and because treating them was expensive. In a word, illness as phenomena affecting a population. Death was no longer something that suddenly swooped down on life—as in a epidemic. Death was no something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.[46]

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[44] Jasbir K. Puar, "Prognosis Time: Towards a Geopolitics of Affect, Debility and Capacity," *Women & Performance* 19, no. 2 (2009): 167, https://doi.org/10.1080/07407700903034147.
[45] Michel Foucault, "17 March 1976," in *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 243.
[46] Foucault, "17 March 1976," 243-244 [emphasis mine].

Lauren Berlant combines Foucault's concept of the endemic—of illness affecting a population that saps its vitality—with concepts from Achille Mbembé's "Necropolitics" to theorize what she calls "slow death": "the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence."[47] Like Puar, Berlant focuses on debilitation as a product of late capitalism, as the "mass physical attenuation under global/national regimes of capitalist structural subordination and governmentality." Her case study explores how food insecurity and food deserts, coupled with exploitative governmental food policies and racial oppression, lead to obesity and Type II diabetes in poor, black communities. While Berlant's archive is contemporary, I believe her ideas of slow death can also apply to early capitalism and its own oppressive regimes. Mbembé makes the argument for slave plantations as "death worlds," and slave narratives would easily support readings for the "slow death" of enslaved black people. I would argue that nineteenth-century women—in diaries, articles, fiction, monographs, and exposés—too, detailed domestic, wifely, and reproductive labors, defined and demanded by the womanly ideals, that physically depleted women, as a population, unto death. I want to be clear—I am not arguing that women and enslaved people were analogous in their social positions, a common argument by suffragists and other nineteenth-century reformists, largely based on the paternalistic ideal of slavery propagated by slave-owners and slavery defenders, and not at all in keeping with the reality of enslaved people's lives. In fact, one of the great ironies of nineteenth-century white womanhood is that—wholly unlike its attitudes toward black people, freed and enslaved alike— society *in toto* revered white women; it actively sought their preservation, speaking of their illnesses as, in essence, a national health crisis. And yet, the cultural norms, medical and feminine discourses, and material conditions of their lives meant that, as a population, their lives were still defined by "physical wearing out [. . .] as a defining condition of their experience and historical existence." On the whole, a nineteenth-century housewife worked longer hours and had more

[47] Achille Mbembé, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40, ProjectMUSE; Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 754, https://doi.org/10.1086/521568.

responsibilities than her eighteenth-century counterpart. She labored under different ideological and political systems, which simultaneously vested her with greater significance and made her labor invisible, and, in liberalism, provided her a broader conceptual base to understand rights—and her lack of them. She was individually, politically, and morally responsible for preserving her own life, while simultaneously laboring in conditions in which a woman "devoted to housekeeping [. . .] gave her health, her strength, and her life," was worn to death.[48]

My application of the lens of "debility" to my frame of female ideality combines Foucault's "endemics" and Berlant's "slow death." Foucault's endemics are a population problem to be solved by biopolitical management. They foreground the move of fear of "sudden death" to possible death as constant. Thus, problems that always existed—disease, for instance—become problems to be prevented in order to preserve life, to "make live," in Foucauldian terms. In short, for Foucault, the problem—here, disease—is the same as we move from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the approaches to the problem change under biopolitical regimes; indeed, the very conceptualization of disease as a population problem, one solvable via institutional management, emerges. Berlant's concept of "slow death" looks at the material and ideological conditions that create an endemic condition in a given population; "slow death" points to the ways that power disparities affect the ordinary lives of groups of people who society considers necessary but not important. This framework of "debility" reveals how nineteenth-century women emerge as the sum of both concepts, but that sum is a paradox in which two seemingly mutually exclusive things are true: that nineteenth-century women *were and were not* more ill than their predecessors. On the one hand, my use of debility acknowledges that, as modes of biopolitical governance shifted from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, "health" become the goal, rather than "survival." Thus, again, nineteenth-century women "saw themselves as unhealthier than their eighteenth-century counterparts," despite improved medical interventions and public hygiene, because the goal of the

[48] Caroline Clapp Briggs, *Reminiscences and Letters of Caroline C. Briggs*, ed. George S. Merriam (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), 21-22, Google Books.

nineteenth-century woman was health in a way that did not exist in the eighteenth century.[49] In this way, health became an individual responsibility for national good; it required that women be healthy enough to reproduce citizens, which meant birthing them, training them, and maintaining the household (all women's jobs). To this end, Catharine Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* opens with a meditation on de Tocqueville and democracy, and on women's necessary role in maintaining the democratic state, before turning to descriptions of the causes and solutions for women's impairments (such that they can continue to perform their duties, and perform them well). Yet the same rhetoric also denied women access to birth control and demanded the "self-sacrifice" of women to motherhood.[50] Anti-abortion rhetoric and policies, informed by proto-eugenicist and eugenicist stances on women as necessary to the "preservation and perfection of the race," enforced white women's exposure to death and lifelong impairment, which were by no means rare effects of pregnancy, to prevent what Edward A. Ross would name, and Theodore Roosevelt would make famous as, "race suicide." [51] While Roosevelt in particular would bring this issue to a head, insisting in a letter to Maria Van Vorst that "'race suicide' [. . . was] fundamentally infinitely more important than any other question in this country [. . .] complete or partial. An easy good-natured kindliness, and a desire to be 'independent' [. . .] are in no sense substitutes for the fundamental virtues, for the practice of strong, racial qualities—the qualities of courage and resolution [. . .] of scorn of what is mean, base and selfish, of eager desire to work or fight or suffer provided the end to be gained is enough."[52] He continues,

> If a man or woman, through no fault of his or hers, goes throughout life denied those highest of all joys which spring only from home life, from the having and bringing up of many healthy

[49] Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 24.
[50] Theodore Roosevelt, "Address by President Roosevelt before the National Congress of Mothers," March 2, 1905, Theodore Roosevelt Collection. MS Am 1541 (315), Harvard College Library.
[51] Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 77-108.
[52] Theodore Roosevelt, "Prefatory Letter from Theodore Roosevelt, October 18, 1902," in *The Woman Who Toils: Being the Experiences of Two Gentlewomen as Factory Girls* by Mrs. John Van Vorst and Maria Van Vorst (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1903), vii, Google Books.

> children, I feel for them deep and respectful sympathy the sympathy one extends to the gallant fellow killed at the beginning of a campaign, or the man who toils hard and is brought to ruin by the fault of others. But the man or woman who deliberately avoids marriage, and has a heart so cold as to know no passion and a brain so shallow and selfish as to dislike having children, is in effect a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people.
>
> Of course no one quality makes a good citizen, and no one quality will save a nation. But there are certain great qualities for the lack of which no amount of intellectual brilliancy or of material prosperity or of easiness of life can atone [. . .] if the women do not recognize that the greatest thing for any woman is to be a good wife and mother, why, that nation has cause to be alarmed about its future.[53]

Roosevelt's comparisons, of women who cannot have children to soldiers who die in battle, and of women who refuse to have children committing crimes against "healthy people," and his instance on the necessary willingness to "suffer" to prevent "race suicide," invoke yet deny the life and death nature of reproductive labor. While many scholars view Roosevelt's language as reflective of eugenics—and it is—it is also a culmination and embodiment of anti-abortion policies, ideal motherhood, and works of Orson Squire Fowler, Henry C. Clarke, and even health reformer Mary Gove Nichols, which would all place the futurity of the race and the nation above the individual health of women.

While both "endemics" and "slow death" are useful concepts and can apply somewhat more directly to the material and ideological conditions of nineteenth-century womanhood, I want to preserve the term debility for a few reasons. First, debility was a common term in the U.S., from the colonial period through the nineteenth-century, and it was coupled often with "disability": "*disability*—a term that circulated prolifically in the eighteenth-century English [. . .] appeared alongside *debility* fairly frequently

[53] Ibid.

in North American publications."[54] In particular, *debility* was used liberally in the nineteenth-century as a population descriptor for women (for instance, Catherine Beecher's article, "Physical Debility of American Women").[55] Second, while other terms, such as "frailty," are gendered nineteenth-century terms, and describe exactly the sort of attrition I'm foregrounding—Atul Gawande, for instance, defines "frailty" as "we wear down until we can't wear down anymore"—the term also comes with a host of additional nineteenth-century ideological and contextual baggage that makes it less useful.[56] Instead, for my analysis, debility is the wearing down of a population that stems from the ideological and social conditions that define that population. This form of debility can, and often does, come to be associated with that population, to the extent that it comes to be viewed as inherent (white womanhood as "frail," "invalid," and "silly" for instance), but is an effect for which we can trace a cause. Female ideality in the nineteenth century—whether "true womanhood," "real womanhood," "new womanhood," and/or the ambiguous, internally contradictory gestalt of all them that found their way into essays on ideal womanhood—is typically defined as the *presence* of idealized traits. For instance, returning to Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing*, in Katy Scudder, the absence of "laziness" is positively defined as the presence of "Yankee faculty." In short, the indication that a woman does not have non-ideal traits is that she possesses ideal traits that are understood to be antithetical—Yankee faculty, in our example, cancels out laziness, like the presence of light indicates an absence of darkness. However, the conditions necessary to achieve ideality, as I showed earlier in this chapter, creates debility by making domestic labor invisible as labor. While this is far from the only factor in creating debilitated female bodyminds in the nineteenth-century, it is a large one, and one that has largely not factored in our theories of these women's reports of ill health. However, it was something that many nineteenth-century women understood and wrote about.

*Debilitating Domestic Labor*

[54] Lafleur, "'Defective in One of the Principle Parts of Virility'," 81.
[55] Catharine Esther Beecher, "Physical Debility of American Women," *Lady's Pearl*, 1842, Google Books.
[56] Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (New York: Picador, 2017), 34.

The histories of domestic labor that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s attempted in part to correct a misconception that still lingers today—namely, how historians of women "tend to discount the possibility that antebellum housework was either time-consuming or particularly taxing [. . . they] have implied both that housework was of little importance to working-class family survival" (instead focusing primarily on wage labor), "and that activities like cooking, cleaning, and mending occupied little time in the daily lives of working class women [. . .] The secondary literature on antebellum America portrays a society in which middle-class wives were amply supplied with help and spent their own days entertaining guests and taking up the voluntary work of reform."[57] This misconception essentially reproduces nineteenth-century attitudes towards domestic labor and concretizes its invisibility in our studies. In this way, as with disability studies' focus on wage labor, we've taken the specific attitudes, values, and ideals of the nineteenth century, to which we are heir, and viewed the operations of power through them, giving up the one advantage of time's passage: distance, specifically in our formulation of new first premises. As a representative example of nineteenth-century attitudes, consider this exchange published in *New Northwest*, a suffrage journal in Portland, Oregon. Matilda Hindman recounts the story of a man who taunted her, "Who will support you when you get your rights?" bragging that he had supported his wife and five children with his wages, and even "laid up money enough to buy a little house."[58] As Siegel argues, "The author's rejoinder analyzed the relation of waged and unwaged labor with . . . critical sophistication,"[59]

> "Suppose your wife had done nothing, as would have been the case if you had supported her, could you, out of your fifteen dollars a week, have kept your family? If you had paid for the cooking, baking, washing, ironing, sweeping, dusting, making and mending of clothes, would

[57] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 76. Cf. Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985). Dudden argues that servants freed middle-class wives from the most arduous of household tasks. While this argument is to some extent true, it is more true that domestics freed middle-class housewives from performing arduous tasks, like laundry and child-care, *alone*.
[58] Matilda Hindman, "Who Will Support You?" *New Northwest* (Portland, OR), October 10, 1878, 4, Hathi Trust.
[59] Reva B. Siegel, "Home as Work: The First Women's Rights Claims Concerning Wives' Household Labor, 1850-1880." *The Yale Law Journal* 103 (1994): 1156.

> your wages have kept you, your wife, and your five children as comfortably as you have live, and enabled you to lay by a little each year?"
>
> "Certainly not, certainly not; thirty dollars a week would not have done it."
>
> "Then your wife made the extra fifteen dollars by her hard work and economy. She came almost as near supporting you as you did her supporting her, did she not?"[60]

Like Beecher and Stowe, Hindman seeks to make the invisible visible, though she does so by attaching a value to domestic labor in ways that are salient to wage-earning mindsets. In short, she seeks to make domestic labor recognized as *work*, and hard work at that. This is why, embedded throughout much of Boydston's book, the time period of which spans from the colonial period to about 1850, are lists of women's domestic tasks detailed in their diaries and letters. Importantly, these tasks which women record doing in their diaries and letters are the same tasks that Stowe, along with her sister Catharine Beecher, argue that "modern" women no longer know how to do, which their foremothers did. This points to a romanticization of the past in their evaluation of their present, coupled with the political-ideological shift to individualism, that led to an unattainable idealization of domestic labor with which the colonial goodwife never wrestled. However, it also confirms Boydston's argument: that while the work of the average housewife remain largely unchanged—and Boydston addresses labor across class differences to prove that, for all but the most wealthy, this was true—the perception of domestic labor and of the inherent characteristics of the female gender shifted in the late colonial era and solidified as ordinary knowledge—even truth—in the early republic.[61] Some of these ideological shifts benefited women. In particular, scholars of women's history argue that, during the rise of Republican Motherhood, early American culture paid unprecedented attention to female education, as the role of primary educator of

[60] Hindman, "Who Will Support You?", 4.
[61] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 16-17. See also, Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, [1982] 2000), 1-10; and Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread."

children shifted from fathers to mothers.[62] However, at the level of the material world, rather than its ideological counterpart, "childcare was just one duty, no more or less important, among many."[63]

In women's journals and letters, the link between their labors and ill health is occasionally theorized as causal, more often written as oppressively concurrent. Sarah Smith Browne details in her diary the physical toll that domestic labor exacted on housewives during activities such as spring cleaning. Her entries begin with optimism and humor—and note, she has a friend to assist her with the labor—but over the course of a week's work, her entries shift to expressions of the physical toll that the labor takes on her health:

> [April 19] . . . I . . .begin to turn my thoughts towards the *"spring cleaning"*. . .
>
> [April 21] . . .I have commenced operations in regard to Spring Cleaning. In the upper chamber I overhaul all bags, boxes & bundles, in pursuit of Moths. I find a few & am answerable for their extermination. . .
>
> [April 22] . . . Mrs Cody, my pillar in the Spring overturn comes. We take up six carpets in one day . . .
>
> [April 23] The Panorama of the Spring Cleaning readers the Closet scene. Amid Crockery and Glass the tangible overpowers. At night the shining inmates give a grand triumph to the tableau of table furniture.

[62] See, Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 265-88; Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815." *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978): 101–27; and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1980] 1996).

[63] Lisa Norling, "'How Frought with Sorrow and Heartpangs': Mariners' Wives and the Ideology of Domesticity in New England, 1790-1880," *The New England Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1992): 426, https://doi.org/10.2307/366326.

> [April 24] Chilly, discouraging! the marble ornaments & engravings accompanied by multitudinous books are to shake off the soil of the past year.
>
> [April 25] I am tired and sick with a headache . . .
>
> [April 26] . . . I am too feeble to arrange the prodigious quantity of disarrangement.[64]

Historians of women's labor carefully detail the overwhelming amount of work required of women in order to maintain a nineteenth-century household. This work was not only tasks which had historically been done by women, but, with the rise of the cash market, there was also a "devolution onto women . . . labor that had either been wholly men's or shared by the husband and wife."[65] Ruth Schwartz Cohen, in evaluating our modern era, traces the patterns of women's assumptions of household duties to the late Republic and the nineteenth century. Her book investigates how "how the wife became the type of figure she is today: the single provider of domestic services for all members of the household. The whole family lives in the home, and yet the trajectory of the last two-hundred years is one of household responsibilities devolving ever more onto one person: the wife."[66] In addition, despite differences in types of labor by class, and despite technological innovations supposed to make housewifery easier, the nineteenth-century woman had *more* work to do than her predecessors.[67] In fact, Cowen argues that, ironically, new inventions such as stoves made less work for *men*, while increasing the labor of women. She highlights how transitioning, for instance, from a wood-burning stove to a coal-burning stove freed men from the heavy labor of cutting, hauling, and splitting wood, though necessitating that he take on at least some paid

[64] Sarah Smith Browne, "Diaries of Sarah Smith Browne, April 19, 21-26, 1858," Browne Family Papers. Quoted in Boydston, *Home and Work*, 86.
[65] Boydston, *Home and Work*, 103. Both Ruth Schwartz Cowen and Susan Strasser argue this as well, and they trace how middle-class wives had to take on task previously performed by multiple family members, as well as performing new tasks—like maintaining cast-iron stoves and kerosene lanterns—that resulted from supposedly labor-saving technologies. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Susan Strasser, *Never Done*.
[66] Cohen, *More Work for Mother*, 4.
[67] Cowen, *More Work for Mother*, 8.

labor in order to buy coal. The same stove for women, however, increased the complexity of cooking chores and meals produced and required additional cleaning that had to be done daily to prevent rusting and cracking.[68] Strasser notes a related irony around women's hauling of water:

> A North Carolina Farmer's Alliance organizer . . . in 1886, calculated one wife's mileage [for hauling water]. She and her husband [Janet and Ben] . . . had a good spring . . . sixty yards from the house . . . Water had to be brought to the house eight or ten times on an average day. "Well, suppose we figure a little," said the organizer, producing a pencil, "and we will put it at six instead of eight or ten times a day. Sixty yards at six times a day is 720 yards—in one year it amounts to 148 miles and during the forty-one years that you have been living there it amounts to 6,068 miles—Remember too that half the distance is up hill with the water." The organizer's questions suggest that, although men might help, water tasks were considered primarily women's work; getting others in the household to help could cut down on the labor, but not on the responsibility. "When Ben and the hired men are round see that they fill up the tank," [one man advised], but this advice applied only to the heaviest work, filling the main tank, which would serve both kitchen and laundry. Janet still had to lug water from the tank to the hot-water reservoir on the stove, and from there to the dishpan or laundry tubs; a bath was still a major production.[69]

Strasser concludes, that despite the Alliance's good intentions, their solution was largely impractical for farmwives whose husbands and hired hands would be busy during much of the year, or for wives whose husbands worked in factories. The work of these scholars matches Julie Livingston's research in Botswana on the effects of developing industrialization and global capitalism on Tswana health and domestic labor. As in the United States, with the shift to developing industrialization and wage-economy, "those left behind by migrant men"—who went to work in factories and mines—"women, siblings, and

[68] Cowen, *More Work for Mother,* 62-63.
[69] Strasser, *Never Done*, 86-87.

children found themselves increasingly overburdened by the loss of domestic and agricultural labor. At the same time, their nursing responsibilities increased amid a rising tide of debility."[70] The nineteenth-century U.S. and twentieth-century Botswana are culturally and historically distinct—not only with regards to the latter's colonial history and forced shift to a global economy and Western value system, but also in their sociocultural discourses about labor, gender, and (dis)ability that predate and arise from industrialization. However, there are similar material consequences in both places as developing nations shifting from agricultural and barter economies to wage-earning economies, where divisions in labor coupled with technological innovations make *more* work for those at home rather than less.

The aim of historical studies of women's domestic labors, like Boydston's, Cowen's, and Strasser's, is to detail the types of work that women did and the economic and ideological conditions which allowed them, promoted them, and assigned them value (or not). A critical disability studies perspective on nineteenth-century women, however, must look at the effects of the labor on women and their health, and to do that, we must account not only for the type of labor, but also its extent or duration—the time spent doing the labor. I add to these variables a further ideological condition, which was implicit in Beecher's and Stowe's claim that disability and suffering arises from housework "poorly done"—namely, the idealized perspective on women's labor, in amount and type, as achievable and prescriptive. However, with domestic labor, there is a material dimension to ideality. The work *did* have to be done in order turn raw materials into comestibles and clothing, to tend children, and to maintain shelters. However, as historians of housework have proved, the work devolved onto *the wife*, and the self-contradictory standards of ideal womanhood demanded excellence simultaneously across conflicting responsibilities. In her letters home to Norway, immigrant Gro Svendsen reveals her disillusionment regarding domestic labor in America, both in the amount and idealization of women's work. In 1862, she writes to her mother and brother: "We are told that the women of America have much leisure time, but I haven't yet met any woman who thought so! Here the mistress of the house must do all the work that the

[70] Livingston, *Debility and the Moral Imagination in Botswana*, 17.

cook, the maid, and the housekeeper would do in an upper-class family at home [in Norway]. Moreover she must do all her *as well as* these three do it Norway."[71] Yet Svendsen's letters also reflect her gradual assimilation to American ideals. As the years pass, she writes home to Norway less often, which reflects "her absorption in the job of mothering . . . and her own gradual adjustment to life in the New World."[72] Certainly the tenor of her letters changes from surprise at the amount of work that American women to justifying the hours and labor spent being the "best" mother to her children. Seven years later, she would write:

> It is really a pity that so many days have passed since I began to write this letter. I had hoped to get it finished and mailed long ago, but truly it is not so easy—I have so much to do—so many little cares. As soon as I am able, I promise I shall do better. I have a flock of boys who need care and attention. Perhaps I am too concerned about my children. If I were more indifferent, I could spare myself much work. There is no doubt of that, but I cannot live that way. I would rather do my best in spite of the work.[73]

Yet even here, we see the zero-sum game of female ideality, where time and energy spent achieving one ideal is necessarily taken from another responsibility—here, being a good daughter. A farmer's wife, whose personal pleasures include reading and writing, details emotions that mirror Svendsen's. After describing in detail her daily routine as a housewife, in addition to the work she does to help her husband with his labors ("fully half my time is devoted to helping my husband, more than half during the active work season, and not that much during the winter months"), the nameless woman laments:

> I suppose it is impossible for a woman to do her best at every which she would like to do, but I really would like to. I almost cut sleep out of my routine in trying to keep up all the rows [of

[71] Gro Svendsen, *Frontier Mother; the Letters of Gro Svendsen*, ed. and trans. Pauline Farseth and Theodore C. Blegen (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1950), 28 [emphasis mine].
[72] Theodore C. Blegen, "Introduction," in *Frontier Mother; the Letters of Gro Svendsen*, ed. and trans. Pauline Farseth and Theodore C. Blegen (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1950), vii.
[73] Svendsen, *Frontier Mother*, 99.

> writing] which I have started on; in the short winter days I just get the cooking and the house straightening done in addition to looking after the stock and poultry, and make a garment occasionally, and wash and iron the clothes; all the other work is done after night by lamp light, and when the work for the day is over, or at least the most pressing part of it, and the family are all asleep and no one to forbid it, I spend a few hours writing or reading.[74]

Similarly, Svendsen would identify another common complaint among women—their responsibilities, because they are women, to their community. She would write in the following year, "Most of the time I have so much to do that in spite of my best intentions I can't find the time to write. Then, too, I have to help others write their letters, so that the time for writing my own letters is short. I cannot avoid helping my neighbors, and I should not resent giving them my time."[75] It is Svendsen use of *cannot* in the penultimate clause, indicating an impossibility to do otherwise, followed by the conditional *should not* that point to the prescriptive nature of female ideality in the nineteenth-century U.S.

Svendsen is by her own assessment middle-class: "We are by no means rich, but we cannot be called poor; that's just as certain."[76] Yet despite her family's ability to hire out its most arduous tasks, she is still left with what Catharine Beecher calls the "ten thousand desultory items" that comprise the "affairs of a housekeeper"—items that eat up all her "leisure" time.[77] We can make some assumptions that the workday was longer for the average nineteenth-century women than her predecessors, as simple technological innovations such as brighter artificial lighting increased the amount of labor that could be done in a day by increasing the length of the day for which there was light to do it by.[78] Yet, likely due to the ideological conditions that made women's work invisible, we have very few records of the duration of a housewife's typical workday, rather than ideal, workday. Indeed, in 1905, the editor' of *The*

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[74] "One Farmer's Wife," *The Independent*, February 9, 1905: 296, 298, Hathi Trust
[75] Svendsen, *Frontier Mother*, 102.
[76] Svendsen, *Frontier Mother*, 53.
[77] Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, 2nd edition (Boston: Thomas H. Webb & Co., 1843), 41, Google Books.
[78] Strasser, *Never Done*, 67-84.

*Independent*, in their headnote to "One Farmer's Wife," point out that "the champions of most of our industrial classes, coal miners, factory girls, garment workers and household servants, are numerous and voluble, but the hardships of farmer's wives rarely appear in print."[79] While "One Farmer's Wife" does lay out the author's daily, weekly, and seasonal routine in great detail, this only occurred after *The Independent* requested a less literary and romanticized representation of the wife's life (and more in keeping with records of, say, factory workers' days). Some women recorded in their diaries the dreary regularity of tasks in many households. For instance, in 1864 diary entry, 62-year old Lydia Maria Child summarized her year by type of task, with intellectual tasks above a line (left column) and domestic tasks below (middle and right columns). The list seems to largely proceed from tasks she finds most enjoyable to tasks she finds most burdensome, divided by section lines; even her list of domestic tasks is subdivided by another line separating charitable tasks and tangible accomplishments (middle column, e.g., creating clothing) from routine drudgery (right column)—in this latter section, she pithily begins an entry "innumerable jobs too small to be mentioned."[80] Her diary "illustrates convincingly how great a share of a woman's life was taken up by domestic occupations even in the most favorable of circumstances . . . the dramatic discrepancy in the quantity between the two sets of tasks [intellectual and domestic] makes its own . . . ironic and somewhat bitter comment."[81]

[79] C.f., "Hours of Domestic Service," a study performed by the Committee on Domestic Reform of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, reported by the Massachusetts Department of Labor. Their survey seeks to define the scope of what they consider a problem with unknown characteristics—the tasks, time, and routine—of household servants: "the Committee found it necessary to study the present domestic situation for the purpose of bringing to light its defects and inharmonies in order that needed and practical reforms might be suggested." "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service," *Massachusetts Labor Bulletin* 8 (Boston: Massachusetts Department of Labor, 1898), 1, Hathi Trust.
[80] Lydia Maria Child, "Employments in 1864: Lydia Maria Child," in *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, ed. Gerda Lerner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126.
[81] Gerda Lerner, "Headnote to Employments in 1864: Lydia Maria Child," in *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, ed. Gerda Lerner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 124.

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|---|---|---|
| Wrote 235 letters. | Made 25 needle books for Freedwomen. | Spent 4 days collecting and sorting papers & pamphlets scattered by the fire. |
| Wrote 6 articles for newspapers. | 2 Bivouac caps for soldiers. | Mended five pairs of drawers. |
| Wrote 47 autograph articles for Fairs. | Knit 2 pairs of hospital socks. | Mended 70 pairs of stockings. |
| Wrote my Will. | Gathered and made peck of pickles for hospitals. | Cooked 360 dinners. |
| Read aloud 6 pamphlets and 21 volumes. | Knit 1 pair of socks for David. | Cooked 363 breakfasts. |
| Read to myself 7 volumes. | Knit and made up 2 pairs of suspenders for D. | Swept and dusted sitting-room & kitchen 350 times. |
| | Knit six baby shirts for friends. | Filled lamps 362 times. |
| | Knit 1 large Affghan [!] & made the fringe. | Swept and dusted chamber and stairs 40 times. |
| | Made 1 spectacle case for David. | Besides innumerable jobs too small to be mentioned, preserved half a peck of barberries. |
| | Made 1 Door mat. | Made 5 visits to aged women. |

Made 1 lined woolen cape.

Made 3 pair of corsets.

2 shirts for D.

1 Chemise.

2 flannel shirts for D.

Cut and made three gowns.

1 shirt with waist.

1 thick cotton petticoat.

1 quilted petticoat.

made 1 silk gown.

Cut and made 1Sac for myself.

Made double woolen dressing-gown for D.

1 pair of carpet-slippers for D.

made 4 towels.

3 large lined curtains. 3 small ditto.

4 pillow cases.

Tended upon invalid friend two days.

Made one day's visit to Medford and 3 visits to Boston; 2 of the for one day, the other for two days.

Made 7 calls upon neighbors.

Cut and dried a half peck of dried apples.

New collars & wristbands to 6

shirts.

1 night cap.

1 pair of summer pantaloons.

Made a starred crib quilt, and [82]

quilted it; one fortnight's work.

But we also know from the same diaries and letters, as well as advice texts such as Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, and Cassell's that these tasks accounted for a fraction of the daily or weekly tasks that occupied most women's days.[83]

What we do know, however, are the hours of domestic servants—though even then, reports find the exact numbers of hours spent working difficult to calculate. In 1898, the Massachusetts Department of Labor published a report entitled "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service." They begin by detailing the work week of the average factory worker, where "[t]he woman who is employed in the store or factory usually works during a fixed number of hours per day, running from a regular hour in the morning to a definite hour in the afternoon [. . .] there is an increasing tendency toward an eight-hour day in factory employments, in which the hours are already limited by law to 58 hours per week for women and minors."[84] They then proceed to their main question, which they answer in a tongue-in-cheek fashion: "How do the hours of the domestic worker compare to these? It is, of course, generally understood that the daily period of service is much longer. In fact, the nature of domestic employment makes it difficult to

[82] Child, "Employments in 1864: Lydia Maria Child," 126-27.
[83] *Cassell's Household Guide*, for instance, went through four volumes and multiple editions of each, which detailed advice for the numerous domestic tasks that made up a housewife's daily life. *Cassell's Household Guide to Every Department of Practical Life: Being a Complete Encyclopædia of Domestic and Social Economy*, vol. Vol. 1 (New York: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1869), Google Books.
[84] "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service," 1.

fix definite limits to each and every day's work."[85] Their glib response, however, reflects not only the nature of housework as simultaneously regular and predictable, yet highly variable from day to day, but also the systemic difficulty of assigning value and time to activities that "could not easily be reduced to a money metric." They eventually conclude that the average time of service for a domestic, including time that they must be on-call, was 84 hours and 26 minutes, per week, with 72-73 hours of this time being actively engaged in work, with the work day beginning most often at 7 a.m. and ending anywhere from 7 p.m. to midnight, for those whose work was general (such as nursery maids and maids of all work) and not task-specific (such as laundresses and seamtresses).[86] "Call time," however, for most domestics was still active, though not classified as arduous, labor and included tasks such as "answering the door or telephone, taking care of children, waiting upon invalids, assisting other domestics, serving tea or lunches, taking charge in absence of other employés [sic], attending to fires or lights, doing errands, or performing other occasional or temporary duties."[87] Domestics involved in child-care (nursery maids and governesses) worked 5-10 hours beyond the average, totaling 78 hours per week of active work and 93 hours per week, combined work and call. In addition, most of the households interviewed had more than one domestic servant. The surveyors concluded their report by interviewing women working in factories and shops as to why they chose not to work in domestic service, as the main goal of the survey was to increase the supply of domestic workers. Their objections mirror Beecher and Stowe's determination of the lack of esteem accorded to housework specifically, and to women generally. In particular, the women interviewed avoided domestic service because of "stigma, by which term is meant all objections based on feelings of social pride or possible ostracism or loss of caste; isolation, due to working alone; lack of independence; women employers; too hard work, even with the laundry work done out; housework distasteful; less pay; and housework not more healthful."[88]

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[85] "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service," 2.
[86] These start and end times are largely for domestic servants in Boston and the surrounding areas. The hours of rural housewives were just as long, but began and ended earlier. In "One Farmer's Wife," the anonymous author—an Illinois farmer's wife—detailed her day as beginning at 4:00 a.m. and ending at 9 p.m. (295-96).
[87] "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service," 22.
[88] "Hours of Labor in Domestic Service," 27.

If we couple a regular 70-90 hour work week for housewives, even those with some hired help, with the amount and type of labor that we have detailed records of women being responsible for, we arrive at a different possible cause for the ill health of the nineteenth-century woman: burnout. Burnout is generally considered a "job-induced syndrome,"[89] and is defined as "to fail, to wear out, or to become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength, and resources."[90] To argue that nineteenth-century women experienced this condition, I position myself against scholars like Faye E. Dudden and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, who argue that, with the employment of domestic servants and the accessibility of ready-made goods, middle-class women had little or less work to do.[91] Dudden and Ehrenreich and English make their case based on advice documents and editorial letters that emphasize stereotypes of an idle lady. Indeed, as Morantz summarizes, in contemporaneous, public-facing documents, "Over and over again the reformers identified poor female health with under-employment and idleness."[92] Instead of treating women's work as fabricated due to idleness, as Ehrenreich and English do when they present nineteenth-century domestic labor as "the manufacture of new tasks" to fill a "domestic void," I, instead, privilege the preponderance of evidence provided by Boydston, Strasser, Matthews, and Cowen, and the voices of the women in their letters and journals, and argue that not only did middle-class women work, they worked *hard*, and our non-recognition of their labor as *labor* is an extension of the invisibility of women's domestic labor which persists even today.[93]

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[89] Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter, "Job Burnout," *Annual Review of Psychology* 52, no. 1 (2001): 397–422, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397; and Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout: How Organizations Cause Personal Stress and What to Do About It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013). Cf. Renzo Bianchi and Romain Brisson, "Burnout and Depression: Causal Attributions and Construct Overlap," *Journal of Health Psychology* 24, no. 11 (2017): 1574–80, https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105317740415; and Renzo Bianchi, Irvin Sam Schonfeld, and Eric Laurent, "Is It Time to Consider the 'Burnout Syndrome' a Distinct Illness?," *Frontiers in Public Health* 3, no. 158 (2015), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2015.00158.

[90] Herbert J. Freudenberger, "Staff Burn-Out," *Journal of Social Issues* 30, no. 1 (1974): 159.

[91] Dudden, *Serving Women*, and Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Anchor Books (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979), 142-45.

[92] Morantz, "Making Modern Women," 500. For primary sources supporting this, see, for instance, Frances D. Gage, "A Letter from the West," *The Water-Cure Journal*, February 1854, Hathi Trust; Fanny Perry Gay, *Women's Journal*, November 12, 1889: 365 Hathi Trust; Caroline Louisa Hunt, *The Life of Ellen H. Richards* (Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows, 1912), 288-289, Google Books; Beecher and Stowe, *American Woman's Home*, 259-260.

[93] Ehrenreich and English, *For Her Own Good*, 161, 142. Edward Shorter also provides a great deal of evidence to support the connection between women's health and overwork. I do not include his work among my sources because

American psychologist Herbert Freudenberger coined the term "burnout"—variously called "job burnout" or "staff burnout"—in 1974 to describe "the consequences of severe stress and high ideals in 'helping professions' . . . [those] who sacrifice themselves for others would often end up being 'burned out'—exhausted, listless, unable to cope."[94] While the term is used more generally today—it can effect anyone—it is still most studied and most prevalent in the "the helping professions," especially those defined by high ideals of service—doctors, nurses, social workers, educators—and there represents "the dark side of self-sacrifice."[95] Mayo Clinic addresses job burnout as resulting from various factors, including: lack of control, defined as the inability influence decisions that affect work or a lack of resources needed to perform work; unclear job expectations, especially conflicting expectations; extremes of activity where work is either monotonous, chaotic, or alternates between the two, and requires constant energy to stay focused; lack of social support, especially if one's job is isolating; work-life imbalance, where there is either a lack of separation between home life and work life, or work life takes up so much time that personal time becomes limited.[96] They then provide a brief risk assessment for job burnout:

> You might be more likely to experience job burnout if:
>
> - You identify so strongly with work that you lack balance between your work life and your personal life
> - You have a high workload, including overtime work

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while his evidence is good, the argument for which he uses it has been completely invalidated by historians. Edward Shorter, *Women's Bodies: A Social History of Women's Encounter with Health, Ill-Health, and Medicine* (New Brunswick: Routledge, 1990).

[94] Linda V. Heinemann and Torsten Heinemann, "Burnout Research: Emergence and Scientific Investigation of a Contested Diagnosis," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 1 (2017): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017697154; "Depression: What is Burnout?" (Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care, June 18, 2020), 3. https://www.informedhealth.org/what-is-burnout.2125.en.html?part=symptome-5i.

[95] Ibid. See also, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the most commonly used assessment tool for researchers, and its accompanying Areas of Worklife Survey, both of which have separate, specific tests for medical personnel, human services workers, and educators, and a non-specific test for "general use." Later Maslach added an assessment for burnout in students, which mirrors S. Weir Mitchell's assessment "nervous exhaustion" or "neural exhaustion" of male students and "scholars . . . and overtasked men of science," especially during "seasons of excessive anxiety or grave responsibility" in S. Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear: Or, Hints for the Overworked* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1871), 13, 46, Hathi Trust.

[96] Mayo Clinic Staff, "Know the Signs of Job Burnout," Mayo Clinic, November 21, 2018, https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642.

- You try to be everything to everyone
- You work in a helping profession [ . . .]
- You feel you have little or no control over your work
- Your job is monotonous[.][97]

The symptoms of burnout—including fatigue, insomnia, impaired concentration and a "wandering mind," unexplained frequent headaches, depression, unexplained stomach and bowel pain, dizziness, fainting, heart palpitations and chest pain, drug use, emotional lability, and increased susceptibility to illness.[98] Freudenberger also provides an extended description of symptoms that, in the nineteenth-century, would likely be called hysteria: "The burn-out candidate finds it just too difficult to hold in feelings. He cries too easily, the slightest pressure makes him feel overburdened and he yells and screams."[99]

Both the risk assessment detailed above and the symptoms of burnout match the cultural conditions in which nineteenth-century women worked, medical descriptions of women's ill health, and the anecdotes found in women's diaries and letters, as well as in woman-authored fiction, like Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Her Story" (discussed in Chapter 4). While burnout is the condition's modern name, it also had a nineteenth-century diagnostic counterpart—wear and tear. [100] S. Weir Mitchell describes "wear and tear" first in an 1869 article in *Lippincott's Magazine*, and later, more fully in a monograph of the same name that went through numerous reprints.[101] His description and list of symptoms of "wear and tear" is one of the few cases, particularly of "nervous diseases," where the nineteenth-century diagnosis closely matches its twentieth-/twenty-first-century counterpart. His two presenting symptoms, for men,

[97] Ibid.
[98] Freudenberger, "Staff Burn-Out," 160. Sherrie Bourg Carter, "The Tell Tale Signs of Burnout ... Do You Have Them?," Psychology Today, November 26, 2013, http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/high-octane-women/201311/the-tell-tale-signs-burnout-do-you-have-them.
[99] Freudenberger, "Staff Burn-Out," 160.
[100] Burnout is listed as a diagnosable condition in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Related Problems (ICD-11), which goes into effect in 2022. It is not listed in the DSM-5, though related conditions are classed under "adjustment disorders." See, World Health Organization, "QD85: Burn-Out," ICD-11: Mortality and Morbidity Statistics, accessed July 25, 2020, http://id.who.int/icd/entity/129180281.
[101] S. Weir Mitchell, "Wear and Tear.," *Lippincott's Magazine of Literature, Science, and Education* 4, November 1869: 493-502, Hathi Trust.

are first that "work gets to be a little less facile" which may "astonish the subject, especially if he has been . . . doing his tasks with ease."[102] Second, "he discovers he sleeps badly" and begins to use "stimulants." Finally, the patient may experience "giddiness, dimness of sight, neuralgia of the face and scalp, with entire nights of insomnia and a growing difficulty in the use of the mental powers . . . and distress in the head [headache]."[103] Mitchell also adds that "wear and tear" not only produces symptoms of the nervous system, such as the ones described above, but also "are fertile parents of dyspepsia, consumption, and maladies of the heart."[104]

Mitchell argues that the source of wear and tear is excessive mental labor, especially in the absence of physical exercises (though some consideration is given to working conditions, such as poor ventilation). But his descriptions of causes and effects of mental labor fall along gendered lines. For women, he argues that the increase in women's education, and the absence of exercise, produces wear and tear in them, and limits his examples of wear and tear in women to girls in the schoolroom. He concludes that "it were better not to educate girls at all between the ages of fourteen and eighteen"—when they're undergoing puberty, and thus, he argues here and elsewhere, most susceptible to permanent physical, mental, and especially reproductive damage—"unless it can be done with absolute and careful reference to their physical health. To-day, the American woman is, to speak plainly, physically unfit for her duties as a woman," which for Mitchell are first and foremost reproductive (498).

One way to address this gendered mismatch is to reconsider how hysteria—itself a gendered diagnosis, though one that was recognized in men toward the end of the nineteenth-century—could be a form of burnout, and, thus, wear and tear. Given the wide range of symptoms of hysteria—including anxiety, fainting, insomnia, shortness of breath, chronic fatigue, nervousness, a tendency to tears, melancholy, and disabling pain, as well as seizures, hallucinations, and paralysis—and many of these symptoms similarity to those of burnout, one could make the case that hysteria and burnout might have a

[102] Mitchell, "Wear and Tear.," 502.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Mitchell, "Wear and Tear.," 501.

great deal of overlap. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that hysteria "serves as a valuable indicator of . . . domestic stress," and details how "frequently women, especially married women with children, complained of isolation, loneliness, and depression."[105] In addition, we know from historical analysis on the emergence of the True Woman that in the nineteenth century, women's "job" completely overlapped with her "sphere"—and that many authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Ward) would protest this. Stowe's letters detail her process of making a room of her own to write in, separate from her duties, and Phelps would write essay after essay excoriating how the responsibilities of the true woman left little time for women's artistic engagements. Even in the article above, "One Farmer's Wife," the author laments her inability to read and write as she wants. She writes after she has completed her duties for the day, after everyone has gone to bed, and reads, if she can, while performing stationary tasks like sewing. In addition, Smith-Rosenberg details how "significant inconsistencies characterized the bourgeois ideal of proper womanhood. Painful discontinuities existed between the ideal and the real world [. . . and] the tensions that existed between the two central roles that the bourgeois matron was expected to assume—that of the True Woman and that of the Ideal Mother—exemplify these disjointures, which were simultaneously social and psychological."[106] Role conflict appears again and again in nineteenth-century women's writings, which would align with the above burnout risk factor of "being everything to everyone." Important here is that all forms of ideal Womanhood characterize women by a service-oriented status—what burnout researchers name "a helping profession"—and that their labors were set not only by the exigencies of nineteenth-century life, but by cultural ideals above and beyond necessity for living on. Thus, women had little control over what work they did and, to some extent, how they did it.

[105] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-Century America," *Social Research* 39, no. 4 (1972): 655, 657. Note, there are several differences between Smith-Rosenberg's original article, cited here, and her later chapter of the same name in *Disorderly Conduct*. I will move between the two, as needed, and designate them by date—1972 for the article, and 1986 for the chapter.
[106] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman" (1986), 198.

Smith-Rosenberg's analysis, however, contends that nineteenth-century hysteria was likely psychogenic in nature, stemming from the psychological pressure of "role conflict." She cites that "physicians reported a high incidence of nervous disease and hysteria among women who felt overwhelmed by the burdens of frequent pregnancies, the demands of children, the daily exertions of housekeeping and family management," but posits the origin of this overwhelm as "middle-class American girls [who] seemed ill-prepared to assume the responsibilities and trials of marriage [and] motherhood," and concludes that, "The realities of adult life no longer permitted [married women] to elaborate and exploit the role of fragile, sensitive, and dependent child."[107] The implication here is that, if women were well-prepared for household labor, then they would not be overwhelmed by their duties, and thus, would not exhibit hysteria—a position identical to Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's argument in *American Woman's Home*.[108] Stories like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' "No News" and Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Luella Miller" push back against these stances, linking overwhelming domestic labor directly to wear and tear, and, thus, "the disabilities and sufferings of their sex," and they highlight role conflict as a zero-sum game of *resources*—such as time or physical and emotional energy—rather than as, or only as, an emotional response to the psychological pressures of their lives. In depicting the causal relationship between domestic labor and impairment or illness, these stories repudiate romanticizations of housewifery that create expectations, in both husbands and wives, that with proper education the ideal is achievable without overwork.

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[107] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman" (1986), 199.
[108] Catharine E. Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home: Or, Principles of Domestic Service; Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful, Beautiful, and Christian Homes* (New York: J.B. Ford & Company, 1869), 13, Google Books. Smith-Rosenberg's essay is much more nuanced than the passage I've cited suggests. It examines hysteria as a historical and gendered phenomenon through a robust engagement with historical sources. I do not believe that Smith-Rosenberg's argument for the psychogenic/psychosomatic nature of hysteria is incorrect, only incomplete. Thus, this chapter thinks *with* her analysis rather arguing against it.

Both “No News” and “Luella Miller” foreground impairment stemming from being “worn out” as a product of female ideality, but to different ends and *with* different ends—that is, different denouements. While the stories both feature a frame narrative and a cast of contrasting female ideals, their differences largely stem from each story’s specific genre. Phelps’ “No News,” though written in a realist/local color style, has many of the hallmarks of a sentimentalist story. It explores through its protagonist, Harrie Sharpe, how the impossible demands of female ideality create the expectations of her husband, Dr. Myron Sharpe, and how the role conflict of ideal wife, ideal mother, and ideal housewife lead to Harrie’s debilitating illness. In particular, “No News,” a story of marital infidelity, contrasts the sexual labor of the ideal woman—to maintain physical beauty and desirability, while also cultivating her mind, and to engage the mental interests of the man, while also supporting him emotionally through constant availability for conversation and emotional connection—with the reproductive labor of ideal mothers—who must birth, teach, tend, clothe, nourish, and nurture children *first*. Throughout the text, Harrie experiences again and again physical symptoms associated with wear and tear—exhaustion, headaches, bouts of sickness, insomnia—but it is her final illness, a brain fever, that her preoccupied husband, who is a doctor, misses, that sets up a familiar sentimental scene, wherein female illness provokes male moral transformation. Yet, strangely, Myron Sharpe’s moral transformation remains suspended. Because the formal peculiarities of Harrie and Myron’s final encounter, “No News” denies to us the conventional closure that we would obtain from the certainty that Harrie’s illness did, indeed, change Myron. Instead, the prevarication of the ending leaves us with some hope that the tomorrows of the Sharpes may be different, but also forces us to question the efficacy of sentimental solutions for patriarchal problems.

If the ending of “No News” allows us some chance of seeing illness as socially transformative, Freeman’s “Luella Miller,” written thirty years later, utterly obliterates that hope. “Luella Miller” is a Gothic tale, specifically in the vein of the female or domestic Gothic, and it leverages the resonances of consumption (now known as tuberculosis) to index ideal womanhood—consumption was the disease most commonly associated with fragile, female beauty and purity because its most prominent symptom

was the constant purgation of the blood—but also to invoke the Gothic and explore the relationship between female ideality, domestic labor, and illness and death. Consumption is connected not only to New England vampire mythology; it also figures the invalid woman who drains households of their resources as the dark side of ideal, fragile femininity. Finally, through germ theory—Robert Koch had recently discovered and described the bacteria *M. Tuberculosis* in 1882— consumption also allows Freeman to represent the scope of the problem as omnipresent and likely unsolvable by natural means (note: we still haven't cured tuberculosis, and it remains the number one cause of death by infectious disease worldwide).[109]

Luella Miller, the eponymous main character, is the focus of the story and likely the disease vector. However, it is labor—specifically domestic labor or other work typically coded as feminine by the end of the century, like school-teaching—that is the immediate cause of death in story. And to be clear—everyone who works in "Luella Miller," for Luella Miller, dies, and this includes Luella herself, when no one will help her. The story provides a parade of female ideals—the New Woman, True Woman, Real Woman; single, married, widowed, spinster; young, old, robust, frail; blond, dark; beautiful, less so; helpless, self-sufficient, and everywhere in between. It makes no difference, they all die. To drive its point home, the story also includes men who perform teaching and domestic tasks for Luella—they die, too, or go insane. They die in fewer numbers of course, but they do die, and thus, the story indicates that the problem it explores is greater than any individual, man or woman. Unlike the possibility of men's affective transformation in "No News," the problem that "Luella Miller" explores cannot be repaired by such transformations. It is out of this grimness that the denouement of the story occurs. The Gothic is often, though certainly not always, an ultimately conservative genre: it transgresses order to restore order; it poses questions, explored through supernatural means, in order to reveal causality and restore the world to a better status quo; and it extends to us possible futures, often through domestication, marriage, and

[109] "Global Tuberculosis Report 2019" (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2019), http://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/en/.

love, figured as redemption, or at least, a tomorrow beyond the horror of today. For "Luella Miller," hope is not an appropriate response to such an entrenched system of the wearing out of women through domestic labor. In its ending, after the death of the story's other protagonist, Lydia, the story closes on the following two sentences:

> The next night there was a red gleam of fire athwart the moonlight and the hold house of Luella Miller was burned to the ground. Nothing is now left except a few old cellar stones and a lilac bush, and in the summer a helpless trail of morning glories among the weeds, which might be considered emblematic of Luella herself.[110]

Luella's home—the symbol of domesticity and the place of domestic labor—is burned by no agent, and thus, the story leaves us in a suspended state similar to the end of "No News." If the village burned Luella's house, then perhaps the solution is within the grasp of the community. But if the house was burned by supernatural means, then the solution is beyond us all. Either way, the text leaves the ashes of the house to return us to Luella herself and her failed bid at survival as a reminder of the human cost of the wearing out of women.

### *"No News"*

"No News" is the story of Harrie Sharpe, narrated by her spinster friend, Miss Hannah. The story begins with Harrie's marriage to Dr. Myron Sharpe and details the early happy years of their marriage, when Harrie—who though not an artist possesses a sensual, curiosity driven sensibility—spends her leisure time exploring the beauty of her world through her senses and pursuing knowledge and learning through books, newspapers, and discussions with her husband. Dr. Sharpe, too, enjoys a relaxed existence—his work as a doctor occupies only a portion of his days, and he spends their remainders

[110] Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, "Luella Miller," in *American Fantastic Tales: Terror and the Uncanny from Poe to the Pulps*, ed. Peter Straub (New York: Library of America, 2009), 268.

enjoying Harrie and, according to the narrator, loving her well. This idyllic state of existence ends abruptly with the birth of their first child, and continues to devolve after the birth of two more children, as Harrie's domestic responsibilities increase and become overwhelming, while Dr. Sharpe's remain much the same. Overworked and increasingly isolated in a marriage in which her husband cannot and will not engage with or understand Harrie's domestic responsibilities, Harrie invites friends to come stay with her, to help her and to provide community. One of these friends is Pauline Dallas, a single woman with no desire to be married, in large part because she has no desire to perform the kind of domestic labor that is the married woman's lot. Pauline Dallas, who is continually well-dressed and able to keep up new knowledge and current events because she is not a wife and mother, acts as a foil for Harrie—and Dr. Sharpe, who sees nothing but his wife's shortcomings in her presence, forms an emotional attachment to her. In fact, the text makes explicit that their bond is predicated on their equal lack of engagement with the domestic labor that defines Harrie's life: "Miss Dallas had never cut a shirt, nor, I believe, had Dr. Sharpe."[111] As Harrie continues to be overworked, worn out, and increasingly dissatisfied with her life (Miss Dallas, too, is a foil for her, for her life before and after her marriage), Dr. Sharpe and Miss Dallas's attachment deepens, veering firmly into emotional infidelity when he proclaims that his marriage to Harrie is a marriage "for this world," but his friendship with Pauline is "a marriage for eternity,—a marriage of souls."[112] Meanwhile, Harrie burns with a brain-fever of which Dr. Sharpe missed the signs in his pursuit of Miss Dallas. Deliriously, Harrie wanders out into the rain, is lost for hours, and nearly dies of exposure before somehow finding her way home. She is near death for weeks, watched over by Miss Hannah and her husband, until one day, finally she comes to, exhausted but lucid. In the final scene, a confrontation between Harrie and Dr. Sharpe, Harrie explains that she could never be both wife and mother, that it was only possible for Miss Dallas to be a companion because "*she* didn't have three babies

[111] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Ward), "No News," in *The Other Woman: Stories of Two Women and a Man*, ed. Susan Koppelman (Old Westbury, N.Y: Feminist Press, 1984), 24.
[112] Phelps, "No News," 34.

to look after" and explains frantically that she had been worn out to "SUCH a little skeleton!"[113] The story ends with Dr. Sharpe and Harrie holding each other and crying together in her sick room.

"No News" begins and sustains its investigation of ideality by setting up, at nearly every point in the story, through each of its main characters, a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the ideal and the real. This tension begins in the title itself, "No News." While there are several different ways that "no news" is used in common parlance—including "no news is good news" and Wilbur F. Storey's famous demand, "When there's no news, send rumor"—in this story, "no news" has a much more straightforward meaning: this story will be no news. It is a story about nothing new, about something quite commonplace that will be immediately familiar to anyone reading it. This particular interpretation is, in fact, the only way to make sense of the story's opening lines—as a continuation of the title, "No News": "None at all. Understand that, please, to begin with."[114] The narrator, Miss Hannah, then grounds the commonplaceness of the story's themes in a local narrative: "That you will at once, and distinctly recall Mr. Sharpe—and his wife, I make no doubt. Indeed, it is because the history is a familiar one, some of the unfamiliar incidents of which have come into my possession, that I undertake to tell it."[115] However, while on a first reading, these two sentences seem to indicate that "no news" indicates the familiarity points to the reader's implied preexisting knowledge of the story of Dr. Sharpe and Harrie, on rereading we find that this is a red herring. The narrator never at any point in the story identifies which elements of the story are "familiar" and "unfamiliar" in its focus on Dr. Sharpe and Harrie. Rather, it continually foregrounds competing epistemologies grounded, on the one hand, in interpretative frames produced by the discourse of ideal femininity and, on the other, the experiential knowledge, even *reality*, of the exigencies of domestic labor. Even Harrie's eventual physical debility, mental breakdown, and near death cannot be "unfamiliar" (insomuch as they might be considered extraordinary outcomes) because the narrator marks specifically that the "unfamiliar" knowledge is something that has come into her

[113] Phelps, "No News," 40.
[114] Phelps, "No News," 15.
[115] Ibid.

possession *after* the events of the story, and Miss Hannah/the narrator was present for all of the story-events around Harrie's "extraordinary" outcomes. Instead, this opening can and should be read much more generally: the story of the wear-and-tear of marriage on women as a familiar one, and unfamiliar bits—the story of Dr. Sharpe and Harrie—can be interpreted as extraordinary instance of a common theme: an unusual version of a familiar tale.

"No News" continues to support this reading through its "old maid" narrator's framing, who speaks as the voice of gender experience throughout the narrative, especially at the story's beginning. Her asides point to the universality, the "no news," of married women's experiences. After detailing the events of Harrie and Myron Sharpe's wedding day, Miss Hannah briefly comments in two sustained asides:

> Weddings are almost always very sad things to me; as much sadder than burials as the beginning of life should be sadder that the end of it. The readiness with which young girls will flit out of a tried, proved, happy home into the sole care and keeping of a man whom they have known three months, six, twelve, I do not profess to understand. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. But that may be because I am fifty-five, an old maid, and have spent twenty years in boarding houses.[116]

> Well, I believe they got along very well till the first baby came. As far as my observation goes, young people usually get along very well till the first baby comes. These particular young people had a clear conscious,—as young people go,—fair health, a comfortable income for two, and a very pleasant home . . . It is surprising what vague ideas young people in general, and young men in particular, have of the rubs and jars of domestic life; especially domestic life on an income of eighteen hundred, American constitutions and country servants thrown in.[117]

[116] Phelps, "No News," 17.
[117] Phelps, "No News," 19, 21.

"No News" makes female ideality its central problem by contrasting what single women who have observed marriage *know*, and what wives and their husbands (and future wives and future husbands) *believe*. The passages themselves set up marriage as a death—a death which becomes nearly literal as the story continues—that centers around female ideality, which the narrator names as "the vague ideas that young people in general, and young men in particular, have of the rubs and jars of domestic life." Even moreso, the story foregrounds how the ideal wife—who maintains a pleasing appearance in visage as well as dress, who is a companion to her husband, focusing her time and attention on him, obtaining knowledge to improve conversation, and makes her home a peaceful and pleasant place for his rest after work—is diametrically opposed to the ideal mother—who is industrious about her domestic tasks and the care of her children. Pauline Dallas, in particular, becomes the embodiment of the "before" of domestic labor and the birth of children. The story carefully contrasts Pauline's appearance with Harrie's in the minds of both Sharpes. Pauline dresses beautifully, and, despite a middle-class income, Harrie is "old fashioned and dowdy," wearing unflattering calicoes she made herself "to save expense," limiting herself to one skirt, "because she could not afford two" and foregoing gloves as a "child would have spoiled them."[118] Myron Sharpe, who the narrator insists knows nothing of clothing, still understands that "Miss Dallas had a pleasant air, like a soft brown picture with crimson lights let in, and that it was an air which his wife lacked."[119] The story, however, continually ties the differences between these two to their single and motherly status. "Pauline is so pretty and bright!" Harrie bemoans in a letter to Miss Hannah, "I always knew I was a little fool. You can be a fool before you're married, just as well as not. Then, when you have three babies to look after, it is too late to make yourself over."[120]

As the story proceeds, Myron's favorable comparison of Miss Dallas to his wife are tied again and again to a "philosophical" and "in theory" ideal of womanhood—a holistic womanhood, where all the characteristics of the roles "wife" and "mother" are maximized and blend into a harmonious whole. This

[118] Phelps, "No News," 25, 26.
[119] Phelps, "No News," 26.
[120] Phelps, "No News," 27.

ideal is a wife, first, who happens to have children—but the children are as invisible as the wife's domestic labor. He views ordinary life as extraordinary (and bad), and the ideal as normal and preferable, and the story insistently marks him as one of the "young men in particular" who have no epistemological frameworks for shifting from a wifely focus on him to a motherly focus on her children. Shortly after the births of his children, the narrator spends two full paragraphs explicating his bewildered thoughts:

> Dr. Sharpe knew something of illness and babies and worry and watching; that his own individual baby should deliberately lie and scream till two o'clock in the morning, was a source of perpetual astonishment to him [. . .] And that it should *invariably* feel called upon to have the colic just has he had fallen into a nap [. . .] Was a phenomenon of the infant mind for which he was, to the say the least, unprepared. It was a long time a mystery to his masculine understanding that Biddy [the servant] could not be a nursery-maid as well as cook. "Why, what has she to do now? Nothing but broil steaks and may tea for two people!" That whenever he had Harrie quietly to himself [. . .] the house should resound with sudden shrieks from the nursery, and there was *always* a pin in that baby, was forever a fresh surprise; and why, when the had a house full of company, and no "girl," and Harrie down with a sick-headache, his son and heir should of *necessity* be threatened with scarlatina, was a philosophical problem over which he speculated long and profoundly. So gradually, in the old way, the old sweets habits of the long honeymoon were broken.[121]

Each event that puzzles the doctor pivots on a measure of time, temporal incident, or duration: "two o'clock," "perpetual," "invariably," "phenomenon," "a long time," "now," "whenever," "always," "surprise," "long," "gradually," "habits." These moments in the text mark the temporality of Harrie's labor—the continuous duration of "ordinary time"—and temporality of Myron's ideal of Harrie's labor—the continual present of "crisis.[122]" Thus, the baby that she must tend till "two o'clock in the morning" is, for every two o'clock, a new and catastrophic "phenomenon"—a "perpetual astonishment"—requiring an

[121] Phelps, "No News," 21.
[122] Berlant, "Slow Death," 760.

impossible reassignment of available resources (Biddy as nursery-maid) to return the household to its ideal state (his normal), when he can have Harrie "quietly to himself."

Berlant reminds us that "crisis" is often a misrepresentation of "a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives it as a fact in ordinary time."[123] While Berlant's argument attributes active and deliberate judgment to the representers—they "choose"—Phelps' depiction of Myron Sharpe is equally insidious, stemming from a self-centered "masculine understanding" and its unexpurgated rendering of female ideality as the natural, achievable set-point of ordinary life. Time, however, is also the not only the hinge of competing ideological constructions of the ordinary, but is the crux of female ideality's incoherence vis-à-vis resources. Better said, the competition between contradictory idealities, here of wife and mother, is simultaneously an ideological problem and resource problem, where the resource in question is not only money, as with Harrie's clothing budget, but time. "No News" presents this as an issue of simultaneity—in this story, unlike "Her Story," simultaneity is the problem itself, rather than a method of exposing the problem.

"No News" also uses a classic trope—white female hands—to reveal the problems inherent in female ideality. Unlike in Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing*, where the Widow Scudder famously performs all domestic labor and maintains "small white hands," "No News" uses the same symbol to show explicitly how the simultaneous achievement of wife and mother ideals is impossible:

> The next day Miss Dallas and Mrs. Sharpe sat sewing together; Harrie cramping her shoulders and blackening her hands over a patch on Rocko's [her son] black trousers; Pauline playing idly with purple and orange wools,—her fingers were white, and she sank with grace in to the warm colors of the arm-chair [. . .] "Your husband is a very intelligent man, Harrie," observed Miss Dallas [. . .] "I was much interested in what he said about pre-Adamic man, last evening." "Yes," said Harrie, "He knows a great deal, I always thoughts so." The little trousers slipped from her

[123] Berlant, "Slow Death," ibid.

> black fingers [. . .] *She* did not know anything of pre-Adamic man [. . .] "How should I know anything tied to the children all day?"[124]

Not only is this passage likely an invocation of the nineteenth-century reformist argument that marriage for women was analogous to chattel slavery, it is also a stark representation of the irreconcilability, even the total opposition, of wife and mother. For "No News," female ideality is impossible because to achieve simultaneous ideals within the limit of ordinary time, the units of which are both time, one must have overlap in tasks—occasional moments of "two birds, one stone." Because there is no overlap, because Harrie can't *be* both at the table and in the nursery, but is still held to ideal standards in both places, ideality becomes oppressive.

In many ways, the content of "No News" is an edited form of a diary, in the style of "The Life and Letters" biographies common throughout the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Miss Hannah quotes Harrie's letters and other's reminiscences about the Sharpes and the story events throughout the tale. On one level, "No News" unsubtly proselytizes its viewpoint through a straightforward narrated case-study on marriage, labor, ideal womanhood(s), and ill health. The story's "moral emphasis," central to Phelps' construction of short stories, is evident in both its content and its ending, in which both Harrie and Myron Sharpe have an emotional breakdown typical of sentimentalism, where illness often brings about an affective response that leads to moral transformation.[125] In her biography, Phelps argues, "the province of the artist is to portray life as it is, and life *is* moral responsibility," and as Duquette and Tevlin note, Phelps "explicitly rejects the idea of the 'the true woman,' arguing pointedly that women can be 'true,' fulfilled in themselves and fulfilling their divine purposes, only when allowed to explore a potential that is not linked in any necessary way to domesticity or maternity."[126] Yet, while the much of

[124] Phelps, "No News," 25-26, 27.
[125] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Ward), "The Short Story," in *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems*. Edited by Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 216.
[126] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Ward), *Chapters from a Life,* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), 263; Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin, "Editor's Introduction." In *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems*. Edited by Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), xxxii.

the story's content can and should be read according to Phelps's moral emphasis and purposive aims of fiction—and, thus, can be interpreted as an imaginative rendering of "familiar" historical marriage conditions—the formal elements in the story's final scene create doubt as to whether Harrie's illness created a sustained transformation in the Sharpes.

In the story's denouement, Myron enters his wife's bedroom/sickroom after seeing Miss Dallas off for the final confrontation-resolution,

> Well, they made no fuss about it, after all. Her husband came and stood beside her; a cricket on which one of the baby's dresses had been thrown lay between them; it seemed, for a moment, as if he dared not cross that tiny barrier. Something of that old fancy of the lights upon the altar may have crossed his mind.[127]

In this short paragraph, Myron, who has for nearly the entire text been either "the Doctor" or "Dr. Sharpe," shifts to being Harrie's "husband" in her "sphere"—and both the shift in designation and the barrier of the child's clothes symbolize the crux of their marital problems and foreshadow the possible resolution allowed by sentimentalism: the home as the space of feeling and moral education, the sickroom in the home as the place of affective transformation. Thus, when "the Doctor knock[s] away the cricket, [and folds] his wife's two shadowy hands into his own," we should, narratively speaking, be on the path to a fairly typical sentimentalist conclusion.[128] Yet, the text demurs, introducing doubt in the efficacy of feeling to create lasting change.

First, Miss Hannah is a paraleptic narrator: a "first-person [narrator] in fictional narratives whose quantitative and qualitative knowledge about events, other characters, etc., clearly exceeds what one could expect of a human consciousness and would thus make them prone to being labeled omniscient.[129]"

[127] Phelps, "No News," 39.
[128] Phelps, "No News," 40.
[129] Ruediger Heinze, "Violations of Mimetic Epistemology in First-Person Narrative Fiction," *Narrative* 16, no. 4 (2008): 280, JSTOR.

Throughout "No News," Miss Hannah as narrator consistently provides access to the thoughts and feelings of characters that she, as a character, would have no way of knowing. In this scene, however, the narrator equivocates. The narrator evokes an early scene in the story, when Myron encounters Harrie on the day before their wedding, and narrator details explicitly, "Dr. Sharpe had spasms of distrusting himself [. . .] That little girl's clear eyes shone upon him like lights upon an altar. In a very unworthiness of soul he would have put the shoes from off his feet. The ground on which he trod was holy."[130] There and throughout the story, Miss Hannah provides the reader access to Myron's private emotions and thoughts, yet, in the final scene, when she could have confirmed his moral transformation by providing continued transparent access to his mind, she hedges: something of the old fancy *may* have crossed his mind. Both Myron's humility and his view of his wife as holy are in flux, and that instability is magnified by the fact that this paragraph encapsulates a "moment" of time. After that moment ends, it is "the Doctor" who knocks over the cricket and cradles his wife. Transformation both does and does not happen—the symbolic barrier is cast aside, but by "the Doctor," not "her husband."

This sense of flux is created not only by the silence of Miss Hannah at a crucial moment, but also by the blurred lines of the denouement's setting. Previously, as Myron Sharpe contemplates Miss Dallas's departure, he describes the division between himself and his home in stark terms. At the thought her absence, "the days close[d] down before him like a granite wall," collapsing all sense of possibilities. Importantly, this scene takes place in his home—while he looks out of the parlor window, to be exact—lending a sense of being trapped in his own home while being barred from its sphere. The final scene restores a sense of possibilities, both positive and negative, at the expense of closure. Prior to the story's close, Myron, despite his profession, had continually been unable to recognize signs of both debility due to housework and acute brain fever in his wife in the space of the *home*. Multiple times throughout the story, the narrator pairs household labor with headaches, exhaustion, back aches, mental fatigues, sallowness, and paleness; yet, Myron cannot reconcile his professional knowledge of "illness and babies"

[130] Phelps, "No News," 18-19.

and his "individual" home experience—it was, as the text says, "a source of perpetual astonishment to him."[131] As Harrie's brain fever develops and worsens, Myron notices that "her eyes had brightened of late, and . . . there was such a pretty color on her cheeks," mistaking the initial symptoms of illness for signs of female beauty. When Harrie's symptoms become full-blown, the narrator points out that "if Harrie had been one of the Doctor's patients, he would have sent her to bed and prescribed for brain-fever. As she was not a patient, but only his wife, he had not found out that anything ailed her."[132] With the semiotic space of the home, the ideological opposite of his professional domain, signifiers of illness become incomprehensible as such, because the home has different signifiers and the doctor-as-professional does not exist there.

With Harrie's near-death and multi-week recovery, however, the home becomes a "sick-room," both a private and public space given Myron's profession, breaking the granite wall and restoring a sense of possibilities via flux. However, among the possibilities that exist are for things to continue as they were. Myron is both "the Doctor" and Harrie's "husband"; Harrie calls herself a "silly little goose," invoking stereotypical femininity, but also draws her husband's attention to the fact that Pauline's beauty was only possible because "*she* didn't have three babies," but adds "nor a snubbed nose either," before closing that she was "SUCH a little skeleton," pointing to her wear from her illness, but also her wear from her domestic labors. It is in this flux that "Dr. Sharpe gathered the little skeleton all into a heap in his arms . . . [and] cried just about as hard as she did."[133] While this scene should indicate moral transformation, the last lines of the story are puzzling. For a story leaning toward the pow*f*er of affect, we have no collapse of the possibilities generated into a new and better state. The only hint that we have of resolution is the story's beginning—that Miss Hannah will tell us a tale of "Mr. Sharpe—and his wife."[134] Myron is, perhaps, no longer a doctor—indicating change—but Harrie is a visualized by the text as a

[131] Phelps, "No News," 21
[132] Phelps, "No News," 32-33.
[133] Phelps, "No News," 40.
[134] Phelps, "No News," 15.

nameless appendage, "—and his wife," which indicates sameness. Thus, despite purposive aims of its author, "No News" uncouples moral problem from sentimental solution. Rather, the text leaves the efficacy of affective responses for political change in as much flux as the Sharpe's future.

## *"Luella Miller"*

> Most obviously, of course, any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, and self-lessness as in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained to ill-health, since the human animal's first and strongest urge is to his/her own survival.
>
> —Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*

If my reading of the ending of "No News" restores a sense of indeterminacy to the outcome of Harrie's illness—where the final scene is a combination of possible futures held in flux in which Myron Sharpe's affective transformation both may and may not occur—one of the possibilities remaining is still the sentimentalist's optimistic reading, where a woman's wasting illness gives rise to man's moral change. Mary Wilkins Freeman's short story "Luella Miller" offers us no such hope. "Luella Miller" foregrounds the omnipresent background of "No News"—the wear and tear of domestic labor—and in exploring effects of the labor itself, alongside female ideality, the story does frightful things to causality and conventional knowledge along the way. "Luella Miller" isn't meant to provide its readers any answers; as a story, its narrative causality is implied, seductively so, but hangs together only with a bird's-eye view. On any closer look, we find only loose connections around the nucleus of the story's eponymous main character and around debility and death arising from domestic labor. Beyond this,

"Luella Miller" is a story of interrupted logics that bring into focus the incoherency and deadliness of female ideality.

Scholars almost universally see the character of Luella Miller as the epitome of idealized fragile, helpless, white womanhood (which is occasionally, inaccurately identified "True Womanhood") and because of the events of the story—everyone who helps Luella with her work dies—their ultimate interpretation is invariably that Freeman's story critiques this ideal as parasitic. There are many issues with this. First, Luella is often read as a member of the "useless upper class of women whose job is was to be beautiful and consume," women whose "husbands fully able to support them and a house full of servants and nannies that would enable them to essentially never lift a finger."[135] Auerbach describes her as "a perfectly idle Victorian lady who exists to be helped, [. . .] the exemplar of her class and time, the epitome of her age, not an outcast in it."[136] In short, for these scholars, Luella's representation as a certain kind of ideal women pulls in class and womanhood designators that the story explicitly denies. Luella comes to the village as a single woman and a school teacher, and while she does little to none of the actual work of teaching, she is still dependent upon the salary, as she has no other way of supporting herself. She marries, but her household has no servants—her husband does all of the labor—and when he dies, she has no money to hire anyone. She is dependent on the community of women who volunteer their labor. Yi Zheng pushes back on these readings, arguing that "although Luella actually belonged to a class in which a woman must work [. . .] it did not stop her from being *de facto* an ideal lady from [the] upper class, because according to Freeman's setting, this helpless ideal is so powerful that once you fulfilled it,

[135] Lynda L. Hinkle, "Bloodsucking Structures: American Female Vampires as Class Structure Critique," *MP: An Online Feminist Journal* 2, no. 2 (July 2008): 25, 24, http://academinist.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/hinkle1.pdf.
[136] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 108. For similar descriptions of Luella Miller, see, Catherine A. Lundie, ed., *Restless Spirits: Ghost Stories by American Women, 1872-1926* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 21-22; Allan Lloyd Smith, "American Gothic," in *The Handbook of the Gothic*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 2nd edition (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 273. For readings which focus on Luella Miller's fragility as an exemplar of white womanhood, see: Alfred Bendixen, "Afterword," in *The Wind in the Rose Bush: And Other Stories of the Supernatural* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1986), 251-52.

people would volunteer to help regardless of your class."[137] While Zheng's revision misreads an important historical point—that women helping Luella was not atypical, was in fact a fairly common communal tradition of shared labor among women[138]—her analysis tries to answer the other question that plagues scholars of the text—why do townspeople *continue* to help despite the grim example of the people who have helped her before?

Some scholars, especially of folklore and the Gothic, argue that Luella has a supernatural power, but cultural studies scholars tend to read Luella as an allegory for the malignancy of a certain kind of ideal womanhood, and her power as simply the power of helplessness and dependency to inspire care unto death. However, I would argue that instead of Luella Miller being *the* ideal of womanhood in the story, she is only one of at least four. In Lydia Anderson, there is the ideal of the self-reliant, robustly healthy woman, which Frances B. Cogan names "real womanhood."[139] In Lottie Henderson, we have a nascent New Woman, "a real smart girl, a splendid scholar," who taught Luella's class for a year. And in all the townswomen who help Luella, we have models of "true womanhood," of "domestic self-denial," who were virtuous, submissive, and domestic, who also exemplify the community of women, called the "female world of love and ritual," or, more practically, "a support system for women" of women, bound together by "collective behavior they fostered . . . out of [their] basic and shared experiences."[140] The

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[137] Yi Zheng, "Writing about Women in Ghost Stories: Subversive Representations of Ideal Femininity in 'Nie Xiaoqian' and 'Luella Miller,'" *Neohelicon* (2020): 12, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-020-00524-3.

[138] There are many examples of women sharing domestic labor, in diaries, letters, and fiction. For instance, within this study, in Phelps's "No News," Harrie invites friends and relatives to her home, and they help with sewing and childcare. In Boydston's *Home and Work*, many of the diaries and letters she cites speak of neighbors and friends coming to help on with sewing, laundry, and childcare. Other scholarly sources investigate women's communities, including Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's lauded text, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," addresses the community aspect of female relationships via passionate friendships, though not communal work. Judith Walzer Leavitt discusses women's communities around reproductive labor.Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1–29, JSTOR; Judith Walzer Leavitt, "Under the Shadow of Maternity: American Women's Responses to Death and Debility Fears in Nineteenth-Century Childbirth," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 129-154; and Boydston, *Home and Work*, 1-76.

[139] Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

[140] Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," 1; Judith Walzer Leavitt, "Under the Shadow of Maternity: American Women's Responses to Death and Debility Fears in Nineteenth-Century Childbirth," *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 131, https://doi.org/10.2307/3177988.

juxtaposition of helpless, fragile, frail ideal, often of a consumptive woman, and a robust, healthy woman has its own literary tradition that isn't novel to this text. For instance, in the story, "Winifred's Vow," published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1855, Grace, a woman described very much like Luella, is dying of consumption, pregnant with an illegitimate child. The story contrasts Grace with her best friend, Winifred, whose "robust good health, denoted by rosy cheeks and a splendid energy, mark her immediately as a good woman," while Grace's "paleness and languidness stand in this story as objective correlates for moral and physical malaise."[141] Yet in "Luella Miller," *all* the women (and men), no matter which ideal they correlate to, die—and they die in much the same ways. Thus, despite Luella Miller's "evil name" in the village, which allows for a straightforward, almost fairy tale-like reading where the morality of good and bad, heroine and villain are easily sorted, I believe we must look to other interpretations of the text.

One option, which I mentioned above, is to read "Luella Miller" as a straightforward supernatural tale, where Luella Miller is a psychic vampire preying on the townsfolk. This interpretation has a robust scholarly history, and it points to several critical elements in the story's setting and themes. First, the vampire mythology in New England is tied directly to consumption. Charles M. Skinner and George Stetson, writing in 1896, detailed the connection between psychic vampires and tuberculosis in New England, particularly with regards to the "vampire panics," the last documented case of which occurred in Rhode Island in 1892:[142]

> In New England the vampire superstition is unknown by its proper name. It is believed that consumption is not a physical but a spiritual disease, obsession, or visitation; that

[141] "Winifred's Vow," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, December 1855, 81-83, Hathi Trust; Cogan, *All-American Girl*, 35, 34. While "Luella Miller" vitiates all models of womanhood, Cogan's analysis provides a possible woman-authored genealogy for Lydia Anderson, rather than reading her as the heir of Ralph Waldo Emerson as Bendixen does when he describes "Luella Miller" as placing "the American doctrine of self-reliance into a feminist context" Alfred Bendixen, ed., "Introduction," in *Haunted Women: The Best Supernatural Tales by American Women Writers* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1985), 6.
[142] Michael E. Bell, "Vampires and Death in New England, 1784 to 1892," *Anthropology and Humanism* 31, no. 2 (2006): 129, https://doi.org/10.1525/ahu.2006.31.2.124.

> as long as the body of a dead consumptive relative has blood in its heart it is proof that an occult influence steals from it for death and is at work draining the blood of the living into the heart of the dead and causing his rapid decline.[143]
>
> In northern Rhode Island those who die of consumption are believed to be victims of vampires who work by charm, draining the blood by slow draughts as they lie in their graves. . . . If he died with blood in his heart he has this power of nightly resurrection.[144]

As a remedy for this, the body of the presumed vampire was exhumed, examined, and if still found to be preserved, then the heart was cut out and burned—for, so long as the heart had blood in it, the vampire was thought to still be able to drain its victims. Yet in the story's denouement, it is Luella's *house* that is burned, not a dead Luella's heart, which redirects us to the home as the source of illness. In addition, in New England mythology, the vampire is always dead, and Luella Miller is very much alive for most of the story. Thus, Freeman links Luella to two other traditions—the beautiful consumptive woman and the parasitic, invalid wife, pointing us to female ideality and domestic labor as the story's ultimate critical focus.

The story of "Winifred's Vow" aside, the consumptive as an ideal of beauty had a robust history throughout the nineteenth-century U.S. As S.D. Power argues in her beauty manual, *The Ugly-Girl Papers*, "the fairest of skins belong to people in the earliest stages of consumption [. . .] This miraculous clearness and brilliance is due to the constant purgation which wastes the consumptive, or to the issue which relieves the system of impurities by one outlet. We must secure the purity of the blood by less exhaustive measures."[145] In this way, "Luella Miller" speaks back to the tradition of redemptive and idealized consumptives. The story invokes the female consumptive as an ideal, but unlike "No News,"

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[143] George R. Stetson, "The Animistic Vampire in New England," *American Anthropologist* 9, no. 1 (1896): 3, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1896.9.1.02a00020.
[144] Charles M. Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1896), 76-77.
[145] S.D. Power, *The Ugly-Girl Papers, or Hints for the Toilet*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 13, Google Books.

which allows for the possibility of a sentimental redemption through illness, in "Luella Miller," idealized feminine virtues, whether physical or ideological, marks a character for death. At virtually the same time, S. Weir Mitchell describes the invalid woman, unable to do domestic labor as such:

> Multitudes of our young girls are merely pretty to look at, or not that—that their destiny is the shawl and the sofa, neuralgia, weak backs, and the varied forms of hysteria [. . .] My phrase may seem outrageously strong, but only a doctor knows what these self-made invalids can do to make a household wretched. Mrs. Gradgrind is, in fiction, the only successful portrait of this type of misery, of the woman who wears out and destroys generations of nursing women, and who [. . .] is like a vampire, sucking slowly the blood of every healthy, helpful creature within reach of her demands.[146]

Freeman draws on the conceptual miasma of these three elements—vampire mythos, consumption, and the invalid woman—to create the particular thematic setting of "Luella Miller" as Gothic, but as a female or domestic Gothic: a Gothic mode which is an "expression of women's fears of entrapment within the domestic and [. . .] articulate[s] women's dissatisfaction with patriarchal society."[147] But "Luella Miller" is an odd sort of Gothic tale. It is within the American Gothic tradition, but only halfway. Jay Fliegelman asserts that the American Gothic (opposed to its European counterpart) is less interested in "the demystifying and secularizing of agenda of the Gothic novels [that] . . . often invoke the mysterious in order to explain them away as being caused by human agency," but instead represents "the intractably conflicted view of accountability at the heart of [. . .] humanitarian liberalism."[148] It is not that these things are not true of "Luella Miller"—they are—but that the tale invokes the Gothic tradition to both shorten the time of infection to death supernaturally, but also to take a very common trope of Freeman's

[146] Mitchell, *Wear and Tear*, 29-30.
[147] Andrew Smith and Diana Wallace, "The Female Gothic Then and Now," *Gothic Studies* 6 (2004): 1, https://doi.org/10.7227/GS.6.1.1.
[148] Jay Fliegelman, "Introduction," in *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*, by Charles Brockden Brown, ed. Jay Fliegelman (New York: Penguin Classics, 1991), x.

short stories to their Gothic limit: survival of the self at expense of others, a Gothic form of individualism which privileges the continuance of the self over the community. "Luella Miller" pointedly frames domestic labor itself as deadly—it is not that everyone who comes into contact with Luella dies. It is that everyone who performs Luella's *work* dies. And when Luella is forced to perform her own labor, she begins to die (and ultimately does). In this way, Luella Miller as a character is no different from Freeman's other heroines. Kate Gardner argues that Freeman's heroines are "not devoted to a cause, save that of self-preservation, and they are often torn—both insistent and apologetic."[149] With this, Luella Miller is the heroine of her own story, but in a way that is uncomfortable for most readers, because her survival is not moral. She is, in this way, the exact *opposite* of Bendixen's reading. Bendixen argues that with Luella, "Freeman places the American doctrine of self-reliance into a feminist context by converting the ideal of the helpless woman into the incarnation of evil."[150] Rather, Freeman's story uncouples "individualism" from "self-reliance" for women and articulates that the self-abnegation at the heart of female ideality is opposite to goal of living on.

According to Nina Auerbach, "[Luella's] allure is her helplessness, which entices strapping men and women to do her housework until they wane and die. The vital fluid in 'Luella Miller' is not blood, but work."[151] In the vein of vampire mythology, but also disability history, Luella Miller is represented as "a useless eater"—a designation in later Nazi Germany of a person with a chronic illness or serious impairment who requires help from society but gives nothing back. "Luella Miller," from beginning to end, details the numerous townspeople who do work for Luella, and then die of an accelerated form of consumption. Lottie Henderson, who taught class for her. "The big boy" who helped her teach after Lottie died "took crazy that year" who "folks said he overstudied"—bringing both S. Weir Mitchell's critique of wear-and-tear into the text alongside the racial medical analysis which coupled insanity and consumption

[149] Kate Gardner, "The Subversion of Genre in the Short Stories of Mary Wilkins Freeman," *The New England Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1992): 467, https://doi.org/10.2307/366327.
[150] Bendixen, "Introduction," 4.
[151] Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, 108.

predominantly in Black populations.[152] Erastus Miller, who married Luella, who "worked terrible hard" performing all the domestic labor of the household until he went "into a consumption of the blood."[153] Lily Miller, her sister-in-law, Aunt Abby Mixter, Doctor Park, Maria Brown—all who did the typical domestic chores "sewing," and "washing, ironing, and baking," "chopping wood," "getting supper," "dishes"—the story lingers of all the domestic tasks required to run a household—all "fade away" and die. Even Lydia Anderson, who vows not help Luella herself, performing work for her by proxy by helping the fading women, ultimately dies stretched out over Luella's threshold. However, and significantly, Luella herself also fades away when forced to perform labor. Lydia, who is the internal narrator of the story, states:

> Folks said the days of witchcraft had come again, and we pretty shy of Luella [. . .] I wouldn't go in there and offer to help her—not because I was afraid of dyin' like the rest, but I thought she was just as well able to do her own work I was to do it for her, and I thought it was about time that did it and stopped killin' other folks. But it wa'n't very long before folks began to say that that Luella herself was goin' into a decline *jest the way her husband, and Lily, and Aunt Abby and the others had*, and I saw myself that she looked pretty bad. I used to see her goin' past from the store with a bundle as if she could hardly crawl, but I remembered how Erastus used to wait and 'tend when he couldn't hardly put one foot before the other, and I didn't go out to help her.[154]

With this scene, the story puts starvation and domestic labor into competition, with domestic labor just triumphing over starvation for shortest death. But more importantly, this moment in the text, we are introduced to Luellla's knowledge—she, unlike the other women in the story, knows that "women's

[152] Freeman, "Luella Miller," 257; see Theophilus O. Powell, "A Brief History of Insanity and Tuberculosis in the Southern Negro since 1860, and Its Alliance, and Some of the Supposed Causes," *Journal of the American Medical Association* XXVII, no. 23 (December 5, 1896): 1185–88, https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1896.02431010013002f; and T.J. McKie, "A Brief History of Insanity and Tuberculosis in the Southern Negro," *Journal of the American Medical Association* XXVIII, no. 12 (March 20, 1897): 537–38, https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1897.02440120011002c.
[153] Freeman, "Luella Miller," 257.
[154] Freeman, "Luella Miller," 265 [emphasis mine].

work" leads to a slow death, and so her "selfishness" is in fact an act of "self-preservation" in line with Freeman's other heroines. Luella is the only person in the story who seems to know that domestic labor is deadly, and that labor is also a zero-sum game. Susan Oaks argues that Luella "blooms physically when others take care of her; she wilts when she has to take care of herself," yet even this acknowledgment focuses on the self and not of the toxicity of the material conditions.[155] Work must be done, but to do it is a "slow death." The difference between Luella and others, then, is that she is aware of the cost of domestic labor and others are not. In which case, Auerbach is exactly wrong. Domestic labor is the opposite of the vital fluid. It is a slow poison, one which, in an effort to survive, Luella asks and manipulates others into taking for her. Is this ethical? Perhaps not. But survival is nearly always selfish, and as said "Luella Miller" takes survival to its Gothic limit. Thus, Luella is not "self-destructively passive" but instead extend her life by capitalizing on the miasma of female ideality, invoking an ideal self in order to maximize the equivalent ideal response.

[155] Susan Oaks, "The Haunting Will: The Ghost Stories of Mary Wilkins Freeman," *Colby Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (1985): 214. Digital Commons @ Colby.

## Chapter 4

### "I am as much myself as you are":
### A Superposition of Madness and Ideal Womanhood in Spofford's "Her Story"

In 1898, Harriet Prescott Spofford wrote an introduction to a reprinting of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.[1] *Jane Eyre* is a central text for feminist critics investigating the intersection between female bodyminds,[2] and/or female authorship, and madness.[3] *Jane Eyre*, particularly its representation of the "madness" of Bertha Rochester, provides the premise and the title for Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, and scholars across feminist literary studies center this text in arguments both for and against female madness as revolutionary: a rebellion against the institutions and oppressions of patriarchy.[4] Spofford's introduction, however, speaks to none of these things. Instead, it is

[1] For the publication notice, see Albert Shaw, ed., *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, vol. 17 (New York: A Review of Reviews Company, 1898), 759. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000526079. Spofford likely undertook this job on behalf of her husband's cousin, Ainsworth Rand Spofford. A.R. Spofford was a librarian for the Congressional Library and was on the selection committee for *The World's Greatest Book* series, and *Jane Eyre* was selected as the one of the series' first five books. The series' purpose—providing readers "the world's greatest books"—structures Spofford's arguments about Brontë's novel and life.

[2] "Bodymind" refers to the "enmeshment of the mind and body, which are typically understood as interacting and connected, yet distinct entities due to Cartesian dualism in Western philosophy," Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2018), 5. See also, Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 268–84, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12127. Cartesian dualism is also the lens of narrative theory, where mind = narrative or text, which is the other of the body. While this chapter uses this division to explore the functions of insanity in a fictional, first-person story—and to resist the cultural truism where "female" properties and "mad" properties are commutative— it ultimately views bodies and minds as inextricable from each other.

[3] I use madness or insanity when referring to literary representation and/or historical medical concepts/diagnoses of disorderly minds. I use mental illness, mental disability, or psychosocial disability when referring to concepts contemporary to our current moment. While I do this to avoid presentism and to engage with critical disability studies scholarship on atypical minds, I'm aware that no term that designates mental atypicality is free of pejorative connotations.

[4] Below is a sampling of scholars who investigate madness and feminism in *Jane Eyre*. Nina Baym, "The Madwoman and Her Languages: Why I Don't Do Feminist Literary Theory," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 3, no. 1/2 (1984): 45–59, https://doi.org/10.2307/463824; Valerie Beattie, "The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in Jane Eyre," *Studies in the Novel* 28, no. 4 (1996): 493–505, JSTOR. Elizabeth J. Donaldson, "Revisiting the Corpus of the Madwoman: Further Notes Toward a Feminist Disability Studies Theory of Mental Illness," in *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 91–113; Michele Cammers Goodwin, "The Black Woman in the Attic: Law, Metaphor and Madness in Jane Eyre,"

a pre-New Criticism paean to the text itself: part-biographical interpretation of its major themes, part-hagiography of its author. Spofford never mentions Bertha Rochester's madness, but she does mention Jane's, in one of the only passages from the text that she quotes at length:

> "The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am," Jane exclaims, "the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God, sanctioned by man. I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad,—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation; they are for moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigor; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be."[5]

This passage, which Spofford considers to be one of the most exemplary moments in the text, comes directly after Rochester's infamous depiction of Bertha Rochester's "madness," during which he attempts, in turn, to cajole, reason, and bully Jane into marriage. Jane responds by claiming her own madness and locating the Bible as an external referent for moral, and hence sane, action. Whether Jane truly has an episode or madness in this moment, or whether her phrasing is simply a hyperbole that immediately contrasts her with Bertha, she implies that sanity, or at least its performance, is rooted in acting in the role that culture and religion has circumscribed as the appropriate space for womanhood. These are, in Jane's and Spofford's mind, "inviolate." This passage is often read as a moment of the triumph of the female voice, in which Jane resists Rochester's attempt at compulsion, even though Jane must refigure herself as Bertha, that is, as mad. Her madness leads her moral action, rather than immoral action as it does with her counterpart, and it is morality—a submission to "the law given by God, sanctioned by man"—rather than madness that forms the backbone of her defense to Rochester's pleading.

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*Rutgers Law Journal* 30 (1999): 597-682, Hein Online. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 66-69.

[5] Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford, "Introduction," in *Jane Eyre*, The World's Great Books (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), xxv, Hathi Trust.

Feminist readings of Spofford's oeuvre—especially her short stories "The Amber Gods" and "Circumstance"—point to similar moments of what they call "resistance" in order to claim Spofford's work as forerunner to their own readings. Yet what we see in this passage is Jane's strategic use of the contradictions of ideal womanhood, where she deploys one ideal—the greater virtuousness of women—against another—the submission of women to men. This mirrors Spofford's own tactics throughout her introduction, and throughout her work generally, as she leverages the ambiguities of Womanhood both to defend women and to explore the patriarchal conditions in which they live. Throughout her introduction to *Jane Eyre*, Spofford moves between conflicting registers, and at times, seems to explicitly contradict herself. Early on, she praises Brontë's reserve and argues that her solitary nature lent power to her work, especially her portrayals of nature. Later, however, when she explores Brontë's resistance to marriage, Spofford briefly condemns her "cold temperament" in order to frame her eventual acceptance of Arthur Bell Nicholls's suit as a moment of spiritual growth and womanly submission, which allowed her "[to] find the brief and tender happiness of her marriage."[6] She lauds Brontë's "feminine charm" where necessary to protect her from charges of unwomanliness, and in particular dwells on her desirability: namely, that she received "the proposals of four men for her companionship in marriage."[7] Yet when she needs to defend Brontë against the charge of homewrecking—of having developed an "unfortunate passion" for her married tutor, M. Hérger—Spofford defends Brontë on two fronts. She first argues that "there would have been nothing wrong in such a passion, strangled at its birth as it must have been if it ever even existed," but then continues, "but it is entirely unnecessary to suppose that there was ever any passion to strangle."[8] Spofford then turns to the language of the innate probity and naiveté of virginal *English* and Protestant (and, by extension, American) women. She contrasts Madame Hérger, who she claims had "a certain habit of the foreign mind [that] may have felt some jealousy concerning a perfectly simple friendship, [and] it is not unlikely . . . that, being Catholic . . . she was seriously offended by

[6] Spofford, "Introduction," xii.
[7] Spofford, "Introduction," vi.
[8] Spofford, "Introduction, x.

Charlotte's . . . Protestantism, and habits of thought and life so diametrically opposed to her own."[9] After setting up Madame Hérger as a particular kind of woman—an outsider, apt to see sordidness where it does not exist—Spofford continues on, depicting Brontë as a much more familiar and comforting ideal: the "innocent" modest woman (though she also states this strongly at points, calling Brontë "stiff and bigoted" to drive her rectitude home) and, simultaneously, a childlike pupil.[10] Finally, with regards to Brontë's representations of humanity, Spofford continues, on the one hand, to draw on the language of purity—her "genius did not require experience . . . This woman of pure and fiery genius needed no personal familiarity with any emotion in order to depict it perfectly."[11] On the other hand, when Spofford needs to argue for the parity of Brontë's work with men's, she uses a language of worldliness, but specifically of knowledge acquired through suffering, produces an even greater purity: "her work remains; and, like everything born of profound experience, it has the ring of true metal."[12]

Spofford thus discerns her world as one where feminine recourse is always already circumscribed by patriarchal values. Her oscillations between different, conflicting notions of female value are calculated, and she strategically deploys one rhetoric or another to achieve her ends: to defend Brontë and make her legible as "woman" by bringing her under the aegis of ideal womanhood. These tactics, I argue, form Spofford's feminist critique: her embrace of the vicissitudes of patriarchal definitions of womanhood, and her setting of them against each other, rather than any blanket resistance. When coupled with the affordances of literary madness—namely insight, instability, and incoherency—as in her short story, "Her Story," Spofford's knowledge gives rise to the awareness of these conflicting notions in a more easily consumable form.[13]

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[9] Spofford, "Introduction," xi.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Spofford, "Introduction," xix.
[12] Spofford, "Introduction," xvii.
[13] My use of *affordance* and *form* comes from Caroline Levine's *Forms*. Levine defines *affordance* as "a term used to describe the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs [ . . . ] Affordances point us both to what all forms are capable of—to the range of uses each could be put to, even if no one has yet taken advantage of those possibilities—and also to their limits, the restrictions intrinsic to particular materials and organizing principles" (5,10). She defines *form* as "'Form' always indicates an arrangement of elements—an ordering, pattering, or

This study draws on the implicit questions at the heart of Shoshanna Felman's *Writing and Madness,* with its theoretical register, on the one hand, and Margaret Price's *Mad at School*, with its emphasis on the materiality of madness, on the other. Namely, in literary texts, what does madness *do*, and what is the cost of doing it? When encountering disability in literature, there is little "inside" and "outside" to the text. The pages of a book form a permeable membrane with the world, across which imaginations leak profligately each way, and a cornerstone of critical disability theory is the negative effects of simplistic, and often demeaning, fictional representations on the lives of real disabled people. The effects of media representations of mental illness on both the public and medical professionals also has a long and sustained scholarly history.[14] While psychosocial disabilities and physical disabilities do have a considerable amount of overlap both in the extent to which they are stigmatized and in their narrative functions (as metaphors, etc.), there is a key difference in how they interact with texts. For physical disability, as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder famously argue, the body is the "other" of the text—literary narratives often "deploy the mutable or 'deviant' body as an 'unbearable weight' . . . in order to counterbalance the 'meaning-laden' and ethereal projections of the mind. The body's weighty materiality functions as a textual and cultural other—an object with its own undisciplined language that exceeds the text's ability to control it."[15] However, this argument depends on the "representational split between body and mind/text," and, by contrast, a fundamental characteristic of fiction is the access that we, as readers, have to the minds of the characters;[16] fictive minds are always potentially, as Dorrit Cohn

shaping. Here, there in where my own argument begins: with a definition of form that is much broader than its ordinary usage in literary studies. Form, for our purposes, will mean all shapes and configurations, all ordering principles, all patterns of repetition and difference" (2). *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), Kindle.

[14] For an excellent overview of research on media and mental health, 1957-2003, see Dara Roth Edney, "Mass Media and Mental Illness: A Literature Review" (Ontario, Canada: Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, n.d.), https://ontario.cmha.ca/wp-content/files/2012/07/mass_media.pdf. For the impact of media representations on people with psychosocial disabilities, see Jane Pirkis et al., "On-Screen Portrayals of Mental Illness: Extent, Nature, and Impacts," *Journal of Health Communication* 11, no. 5 (2006): 523–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730600755889.

[15] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 49.

[16] Ibid.

says, transparent.[17] The mental disabilities of mad protagonists, especially first-person narrators or those who are narrated in third-person omniscient, produce the text as much as they are produced by it; they become a way of telling rather than being told. Thus, the boundaries between impairment, mind, and text blur.[18]

"Her Story" is a first-person short story, published in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1872 and written in the style of an asylum captivity narrative. In it, an unnamed narrator details the backstory of her (supposed) madness that has (perhaps) caused her institutionalization in a place that she calls, "this Retreat." The narrator describes her marriage to a local minister, Spencer, the birth of her two daughters, the arrival of Spencer's also unnamed ward, and the disturbance the ward causes in their previously happy marriage. The central "mystery" of the story, to the narrator, is whether or not her husband has committed adultery with the ward, though she couches this mystery in her conflict over whether her institutionalization was warranted. On the one hand, she states that after the ward's arrival, she hallucinated demons who tell her to murder her children and to commit suicide; on the other hand, she argues that her institutionalization had little to do with erratic behavior: if her husband wished her gone to continue a relationship with his ward, he would have committed her, mad or not. Fairly or unfairly—the narrative leaves this up to the reader to decide—the narrator has remained in an asylum for ten years, despite having no hallucinations since her arrival. Her story is told to a childhood friend, Elizabeth, who has come to visit, and who is the only named female in the story, and the existence of whom provides the only evidence of the narrator's life not circumscribed by her marriage.

"Her Story" deploys the (possible) madness of the narrator strategically, in order to investigate both the impact of female ideality on women and the impact of discourses of womanhood on madness. The narrator does detail an episode of psychosis—including insomnia, visual, aural, and command

[17] Dorrit Claire Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984). E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Mariner Books, 1956), 69-75.
[18] A similar though distinct phenomenon has also been studied in poetry by physically disabled authors whose meter can embody or mimic some aspects of their disabilities. See, Jim Ferris, "The Enjambed Body: A Step Toward a Crippled Poetics," *The Georgia Review* 58, no. 2 (2004): 219–33, JSTOR.

hallucinations, coupled with suicidal, homicidal, and filicidal ideation. However, she describes the episode as acute, brought on by a period of overwhelming stress and insomnia while caring for her sick daughter, which she then supports with a doctor's report: "[the doctor] said I was ill—excitement and sleeplessness had surcharged my nerves with that strange magnetic fluid that has worked so much mischief in the world. There was no organic disease, you see . . . And after a while I did not see [the bat-like hallucinations]. And in a little while longer they ceased to come altogether. And I have had no more of them."[19] The narrator's assertion of the acuteness of her psychosis and, thus, her current mental health conflicts with her continued institutionalization—she has been in "this Retreat" for ten years—and Spofford uses this space of uncertainty, the "mystery" of "Her Story," coupled with the suspicion that madness often evokes in those who encounter it (in fiction and in the real world), in order to generate awareness of the impossibilities of ideal womanhood and of the interplay between discourses of madness and discourses of womanhood. In the first instance, madness structures the text formally, and as the reader searches the narrator's story for possible causes of madness, they necessarily hold in parallel the various requirements of female ideality and explore both the physical and psychic stresses of these demands and the futility of achieving them. The story provides multiple possible causes—infidelity, exhaustion, trauma, powerlessness, contrivance on the part of her husband, and more—for the effect of *possible* madness. The numerous possibilities of causes paired with the uncertainty of the diagnosis serves to uncouple cause from effect, creating a narrative superposition in which the simultaneous demands of womanhood are finally made apparent and evaluated as impossible.[20] In short, "Her Story" uses the causality implicit in both narrative and disease processes in order to make *visible*, or make apparent, the

[19] Harriet Prescott Spofford, "Her Story," in *"The Amber Gods" and Other Stories by Harriet Prescott Spofford*, ed. Alfred Bendixen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 165.
[20] Cf. Debra Bernardi and Rita Bode who each argue that the complexity of Spofford's form throughout her oeuvre stems from her layering of genres. Debra Bernardi, "'A Bit Sensational' or 'Simple and True': Domestic Horror and the Politics of Genre," *Legacy* 16, no. 2 (1999): 135–53, JSTOR; Rita Bode, "Lost and Found: Harriet Prescott Spofford's Telling of Her Story," in *Neglected American Women Writers of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Verena Laschinger and Sirpa Salenius (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 143, Kindle.

invisible or non-apparent contradictions and impracticability of the conflicting demands of female ideality.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Frederic Jameson explores the way that "real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic" and argues that "the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions."[21] I think of this as the "Hansel-and-Gretel" paradigm, in which "a narrative . . . offers magical," or formal, "solutions to real-life problems."[22] Similar to Jameson, Diane Price Herndl examines nineteenth-century literary representations of ill and insane women in women's fiction and argues that illness, as a literary trope, reconciles or collapses the contradictory discourses of nineteenth-century womanhood. Throughout her work, Herndl meticulously explores the social, political, and medical context of the rise of both ill or frail women and ill or frail women characters in the nineteenth-century U.S., and she shows how contemporaneous ideologies split womanhood into two camps: "domestic self-denial" and "feminist self-seeking." However, rather than simply engaging one ideology or another—"a 'pragmatic feminism' or a uniform 'cult of true womanhood'"—domestic fiction likely "advocated all of these positions—independence as well as dependence, otherworldliness as well as a deep concern with day-to-day comforts and pleasures, self-interest as well as self-denial."[23] That,

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[21] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 79.

[22] Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, *Reading, Translating, Rewriting: Angela Carter's Translational Poetics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 167. I call it the "Hansel-and-Gretel paradigm" not to dismiss it—I don't fully agree with Jameson, but I do deeply respect folklore—but rather to highlight similarities in how narrative is thought to imagine solutions to class problems. La Dutheil de Rochère is summarizing Angela Carter's translation notes on Perrault's "Puss in Boots," in which she comments: "Plain narrative recounts real facts, or at least facts typical of reality . . . [but] problems are solved according to the logic of the extraordinary or the marvelous." My persistence in calling this the Hansel-and-Gretel paradigm, rather than the Puss-in-Boots paradigm, stems from the fact that I, as an undergraduate folklorist in 2004, argued that Hansel-and-Gretel was exemplary of a common folklore narrative trope which offers "magical solutions to real problems." I have identified it frequently as such since, in teaching both fairy-tales and some short stories, and I'm irritated at having, for the sake of academic writing conventions, to attribute the phrase to someone else. So it goes. For the phrase, "magical solutions" see, Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Vintage books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 191-92.

[23] Diane Price Herndl, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 49.

deliberately or unconsciously, domestic fiction stages conflicts between these conflicting and seemingly mutually exclusive registers. However, she concludes by collapsing literature and history together and states that, "because it resolves the conflict between self-denial and self-interest, illness became one of the only *coherent* models of behavior for women and certainly one of the most often used figures in women's fiction."[24] Her close readings assert this coherency by exploring novels that feature several representations of ill or frail women, in which characters only embody one or the other ideology. Herndl's intervention brilliantly explicates how these discrete, near-allegories of social mores often fail to achieve the critiques their authors seem to intend. However, she does not explore the way that the incoherency of illness produces these discrete-though-contradictory explanations, informed by political and social mores, that the women's fiction she examines then deploys as coherent models. Yet it is the incoherency of illness, specifically insanity, that Spofford's "Her Story" mines for its narrative structure, its political critique, and its embrace of a complex simultaneity of social forms over an either/or binary model of women's experiences.

In contrast, I read "Her Story" as offering a different relation between the aesthetic and social problems than those outlined by Jameson and Herndl. The story explores the ways that the logics of madness, (dis)ability, and ideal womanhood contradict each other, but rather than the narrative formally resolving contradiction, it instead holds the contradictions in suspension, offering us discernment without closure. Caroline Levine calls this suspension a "superimposition of iterable processes" or "superimposition of social institutions," though Levine is specifically referencing layered temporalities in poetry that necessarily occur simultaneously because the poem, as an artistic work, forms a set instant in time.[25] I, borrowing from quantum physics, instead call the phenomenon in "Her Story"—of a system (female ideality) existing in multiple conformations simultaneously—a "superposition." In quantum

[24] Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 49.
[25] Levine, *Forms*, 67, 74. In another, but related, context, Zakiyyak Iman Jackson also uses the concept of superposition to "[stress] the virtuality and indeterminacy" of black womanhood—specifically how "black femininity is figured as a superposition or the state of occupying two distinct and seemingly contradictory genders simultaneously." Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, "'Theorizing in a Void': Sublimity, Matter, and Physics in Black Feminist Poetics," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117, no. 3 (2018): 635, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-6942195.

physics, superposition describes a feature of quantum systems, where the system exists in several distinct quantum states at the same time, and where the system as a general state is defined as a combination of all possible configurations. I use this term to highlight the coexistence of multiple possible states of ideal womanhood, to foreground the impossibility of all states becoming (the collapse of system of possible eigenstates into known and describable quantity/quality), and to model the social critique that "Her Story" performs by resisting easy or intuitive causal narratives. Instead, the construction of ideal womanhood as superposition in "Her Story"foregrounds uncertainty, which hinges on the possibility of madness, and creates a probability cloud of possible causes, derived from female ideality under a patriarchal culture, which could cause the narrator to go mad.

But narratively suspending multiple states of reality is not the only function of madness in "Her Story." In *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Chris Wiesenthal argues, "to the extent that literary signs of disorder involve the reader's active participation in the very forms and modes of madness presented by the text, they ultimately call into question the commonplace assumption that . . . the madness we analyze in literature is indeed a phenomenon in effect actually containable to the text, as though an event somehow intrinsically separate or apart from the reader 'outside' of it."[26] Wiesenthal's assertion is to a large extent true of most literary representations of disability.[27] However, "Her Story" exploits a specific cultural belief in reality as a shared, mutually verifiable experience; the story depends on readers who privilege the signs of reason and whose mistrust of mad people's ability to tell their stories in ways that correlate with "reality"—readers who need to locate "truth" and figure out "what really happened"—to level its critique of the irreconcilability of patriarchal demands of and idealizations

[26] Chris Wiesenthal, *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 3.
[27] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Ato Quayson, and David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder each argue that disability, in literature and society, is often a sign and a symptom of social disorder, of the body's resistance to signification, and of the vulnerability of the individual to contingency. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

of women. Rhetorically-enabled subjecthood[28] is often a zero-sum game when sanity and insanity are in play, and "Her Story" exploits the belief in this either/or-ness to draw the reader into story as detective; in their search for "truth," they find and examine each possible "symptom" and "cause," and in doing so, interrogate patriarchal structures that affect nineteenth-century U.S. female bodyminds. In this way, madness indexes female oppression. As an indexical, it points back to and makes visible the oppression *without being a metaphor for it* or necessarily "resolving" or resisting that oppression. What criticism exists on Spofford's short story primarily focuses on this feminist or proto-feminist dimension. Though scholars have almost without exception labeled the narrator as mad, and viewed her madness as a tragic consequence of patriarchy, they have carefully excavated what they view as the oppressive conditions that lead to her "decline."

In addition, "Her Story" deploys its institutional setting to investigate the powerlessness of madness, heralding critics like Shoshana Felman, who argues:

> Depressed and terrified women are not about to seize the means of production and reproduction: quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation. Far from being a form of contestation, "mental illness" is a request for help, a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration.[29]

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[28] I borrow the concept "rhetoricity" and term "rhetorically enabled subject" from Catherine Prendergast, "On the Rhetorics of Mental Disability," in *Towards a Rhetoric of Everyday Life: New Directions in Research on Writing, Text, and Discourse*, ed. Martin Nystrand and John Duffy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 202, 200. See also, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, "Rethinking Rhetoric through Mental Disabilities," *Rhetoric Review* 22, no. 2 (2003): 157, JSTOR

[29] Shoshana Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," *Diacritics* 5, no. 4 (1975): 2–10, JSTOR. There are several issues with Felman's framing of madness as she does, which I detail below; however, I use this passage for it similarity to Spofford's exploration of powerlessness of mad people within the context of the nineteenth-century medical and legal systems. Felman's argument has two main issues. First, madness is not Felman's subject—"women" is—and this is why "mental illness" is in scare quotes. She is arguing explicitly against madness as a way to escape cultural conditioning, and instead argues that madness becomes a further impasse for *women*, essentially a doubling down on that cultural conditioning. Second, she argues that madness is a cry for help and "a manifestation of cultural impotence." In essence, madness is not a thing in and of itself—a claim Mad Pride advocates would argue stringently against—but is simply an index for or manifestation of women's subjection. While certainly mental health is impacted by marginalization and oppression (see, for instance, Meri Nana-Ama

Here, Felman is explicitly arguing against scholars who romanticize madness as a way for women to rebel and operate outside of their socialization; Spofford's text makes a very similar claim for madness—suspected or confirmed—as impasse and cultural impotence. "Her Story" pushes back against contemporaneous asylum captivity narratives and exposés—such as Elizabeth Ware Packard's *The Prisoners' Hidden Life, or Insane Asylums Unveiled* or Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White.*[30] The critiques of both stories depend on the certainty of the female protagonist's sanity, and they juxtapose other insane or mentally disabled inmates in order to make the mental health of their protagonists clear. By contrast, "Her Story" explores how the same idealized female traits—maternal instincts or emotional sensitivity, for instance—are read differently within the space of the home and the space of the asylum.

***Madness Structures Femaleness***

"Her Story" is both explicit mystery and implicit diagnosis, and it merges two genres that most associated with her contemporary, Edgar Allan Poe: that of the unreliable narrator narrating their own madness and that of the detective story.[31] Yet in medicine, diagnoses often are structured narratively as mysteries; a doctor begins with the symptom, similar to a crime committed, and works backward to the

Danquah's *Willow Weep for Me: A Black Woman's Journey Through Depression*), Felman implicitly privileges normalcy, implying that if help is obtained madness abates. In addition, Felman's claim becomes further problematic for critical disability studies scholars when she argues that seeking help is a product of women's socialization, and thus implicitly, when we repair female conditioning, we eradicate this worrisome help-seeking characteristic: "This socially defined help-needing and help-seeking behavior is itself part of female conditioning, ideologically inherent in the behavioral pattern and in the dependent and helpless role assigned to the woman as such" (2-3).

[30] *The Woman in White*, Collins' most popular novel, was published concurrently in *All the Year Around* in Britain and in *Harper's Weekly* in the United States from 1859-60. It was issued in multiple book editions in both nations beginning in 1860. For more on this novel's publication history, see: Andrew Gasson, "The Woman in White – A Chronological Study," *The Wilkie Collins Society* (blog), 2010, https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/the-woman-in-white-a-chronological-study/.

[31] For scholars who argue Poe as a model for Spofford, see: Bode, "Lost and Found," 145-46; and Gianna Carroni, "The Madwoman by the Fireplace: A Comparative Survey of Gothic Horror by Edgar Allan Poe and Harriet Prescott Spofford," in *Poe, Grabiński, Ray, Lovecraft. Visions, Correspondences, Transitions*, ed. Katarzyna Gadomska, Agnieszka Loska, and Anna Swoboda (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2017), 77-90.

agent—a "whatdunit" instead of a "whodunit," if you will.[32] In this way, "Her Story" instigates a search for causality/etiology prompted by the questioned madness of its narrator. Like the autopathographies that Margaret Price reads in "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane,'" "Her Story" "draw[s] power from the shape-shifting nature of counter-diagnosis"— accepting, rejecting, mimicking, and contesting the diagnostic urge in various ways. To use even stronger language, Spofford's text *exploits* the diagnostic urge in order to force the reader to discover the incoherence of—and negative material effects produced by—gender norms.[33] Opposite of the texts Price reads—though still in line with her argument—"Her Story" embraces the diagnostic urge, rather than its explicit counter-diagnosis, where "the autobiographical narrator uses language . . . to subvert the diagnostic urge to 'explain' a disabled mind," and thus, "ruins [the conventional diagnostic story] altogether, attacks its foundations, queers it."[34] "Her Story" uses the reader's need to search for narrative causes of disability—and this is especially true for madness—and, by providing multiple possible causes for possible madness, effectively uncouples cause and effect, making any pathway the reader draws between story event, symptom, and diagnosis one where the reader must implicate both patriarchy and institutionalization.

"Her Story" begins with a puzzle: "Well-nigh the worst of it all is the mystery." The text pulls the reader through multiple possible iterations of "the mystery" before articulating, at the story's end, what the narrator feels is the true mystery—whether or not the narrator saw her husband *in flagrante delicto* with his ward. The form of "Her Story," however, is opposite of the teleology of its narrative. Like any detective story, "the mystery" draws the reader in as investigator, searching for clues to the "real" story,

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[32] Lisa Sanders, *Every Patient Tells a Story: Medical Mysteries and the Art of Diagnosis* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), ii. See also, Kathryn Montgomery Hunter, *Doctors' Stories: The Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Frank Davidoff, "Murder, Mystery, and Medicine: Reading the Clues," in *Who Has Seen a Blood Sugar? Reflections on Medical Education* (Philadelphia: American College of Physicians, 1996), 91-95; and Ronald Schleifer and Jerry Vannatta, "The Logic of Diagnosis: Peirce, Literary Narrative, and the History of Present Illness," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 31, no. 4 (2006): 363–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/03605310600860809.
[33] Margaret Price, "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane': Psychosocial Disability, Autobiography, and Counter-Diagnosis," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3 (March 1, 2009): 17, https://doi.org/10.1353/jlc.0.0010.
[34] Ibid.

while simultaneously pointing to multiple possible stories. Because of the requirements of genre, "Her Story" also begins with a set of facts—the narrator is in an asylum, she has been committed to the asylum by her husband, the narrator suspects her husband of adultery with another woman. The easy solution, a family history of madness, is immediately denied to the reader: "Mad! There was never a drop of crazy blood in the Ridgleys or the Bruces!"[35] This denial suggests to the reader that the origin of the narrator's (possible) madness can be found somewhere in the story she is about to tell, and a search for etiology structures one of the story's mysteries. The narrator's puzzle, and her uncertainty over the cause of her commitment—insanity on her part or expediency on her husband's—structures the other mystery. The story suggests via a *sum hoc ergo propter hoc* logic that the two mysteries are linked.[36] Yet these mysteries are not exactly as they seem on first reading. While the narrator only gives two possible states for her own puzzle, adultery or hallucination—"Was it true that I saw Spencer, my white, clean lover . . . so, or was it only some it only some wild, vile conjuration of disease?"[37]—the actual possibilities of her condition number at least four: sane + adultery; mad + adultery; sane + fidelity; mad + fidelity (Admittedly, the sane + fidelity state is least probable, given the genre of the story. But perhaps we're in a tragic sort of farce, where narrator is sane and simply has misunderstood the embrace she saw). However, because each possible state is either/or madness, and because a possible mad state calls into question the rhetoricity of the speaker, the actual number of possible states—and the causes for those states—is much greater than four. To be clear, it is the uncertainty of whether or not madness *and* the uncertainty inherent in madness *and* the uncertainty that madness causes in readers that uncouples cause from effect and proliferates many possible causes and many possible effects in "Her Story."[38] These possible causes and effects, however, are many but not infinite, as they are bounded by the subject matter: heteronormative

[35] Spofford, "Her Story," 148.
[36] This trait is not unique to "Her Story." Story logic seduces us into approaching coincidence, correlation, or even mere sequence as causation. See, H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41-44.
[37] Spofford, "Her Story," 164.
[38] While I suspect that madness functions in a similar (though not exactly the same) way in stories of mad protagonists narrated in third-person, or in stories where the madness is definite rather than supposed, that question is beyond the scope of this study.

marriage. Thus, the narrative sends us in search of evidence for both signs of madness and gender dynamics, which ultimately provides us more possible causes than narrator presents or (seems to) imagine.

As with Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' "No News," "Her Story" presents the conflicting ideals of womanhood in two ways. First, both texts foreground the contradictions of gender roles through representations of domestic labor. "Her Story" contrasts the duties of Spencer, the narrator's husband, and the narrator herself, detailing the stress and strain of the latter in order to set up the acute episode of psychosis that the narrator experiences. Second, each text explores the impossibility of female ideality through representations of how husbandly expectations are produced by idealizations of women. In these idealizations, wives can attend to all the needs of their husbands, their household, and their children simultaneously. Both texts distribute these idealized characteristics between multiple women, both to critique how these demands are in excess of a single woman's capacity, and to show the frustration, anger, and infidelity of men whose expectations have been conditioned by the belief that, through self-will, a woman can maximize what can only ever be optimized.

Throughout "Her Story," the unnamed narrator mentions domestic labor multiple times. From her perspective, domestic tasks, community tasks, and motherhood necessarily supersede attention toward to her husband, partly because without her attention to these tasks, she would not be a "good" woman, but, more practically, without her labor, the household and church would cease to function. The narrator details how, with regards to time, domestic/mother-work is a zero-sum game with wifely duties—there are not sufficient hours to do both—and this leaves a vacuum of time and attention toward her husband into which the ward steps. She laments the "hours, while I was busied with servants and accounts or with children, when [the ward] was closeted with Spencer in the study," working together on the architectural designs for the church, with which the narrator had been involved in the early (pre-children) days of their

marriage.[39] We get an immediate sense of the resource limitation, of the gain and corresponding loss of time-energy, as the narrator attempts to move rapidly between roles to approximate simultaneous task-achievement:

> I was wrong to leave him with [the ward] but what else was there for me to do? And as for those duties of mine, as I followed them I grew restive; I abridged them, I hastened home. I was impatient even with the detentions the children caused. I could not leave them to their nurses, for all that; but they kept me away from him, and he was alone with her.[40]

In addition to her household tasks, the narrator details the additional labor burdens of being a minister's wife that took up what remained of her scarce time:

> Well, I had my duties, you know. I never felt my husband's wealth was a reason I should neglect them any more than any other wife should neglect her duties. I was wanted in the parish, sent for here and waited for there: the dying liked to see me comfort their living, the living liked to see me touch their dead; some wanted help, and others wanted consolation . . . Perhaps I was more called upon for such detail of duty because Spencer was busy with the greater things, the church-building and the sermons.[41]

In both passages above, the narrator's frustration hinges on prescriptive nature of ideality that makes the duties of "any wife" (ideal) the duties of every wife, regardless of context. It is this that the narrator questions as she asks, "what was I to do?" Her modification of "was impatient" with the adverb "even" ("I was impatient even […] with the children") and her claim that she "could not leave the children with their nurses," invokes the characteristics of ideal motherhood and True Womanhood and contests them at the same time. In the first passage, *time* is the limited resource, which the narrator attempts to optimize by

[39] Spofford, "Her Story," 156.
[40] Spofford, "Her Story," 159.
[41] Spofford, "Her Story," 158.

"hastening" and "abridging" and otherwise modifying ideal motherhood while still performing it, but to no avail. Even moving more quickly and truncating responsibilities, the children are a time barrier that become a space barrier. Wifely duties and motherly duties each have their own ideal, non-intersecting spacetimes and cannot, according to the ideal, occur in simultaneous spaces (nursery v. parlor) and times (a resource which becomes limited by the absence of non-simultaneous space). Thus, tasks, performed however rapidly, can only ever be sequential, and yet their imperfect achievement still devolves onto the narrator, who holds herself (and likely *is held*) responsible for her non-ideality: "I was wrong to leave him with her" (blame and responsibility) and "he was alone with her" (she is responsible for creating the conditions that could lead to infidelity).

In the latter passage, Spofford also represents the difference in the stress and strain on the narrator and Spencer in the terms of almost mechanical or material properties. The stress/strain on the narrator's system has multiple vectors— what the living want, what the dying want, help, consolation—and in stating these duties as opposite, we get a visceral sense of how the narrator's responsibilities pull her in diametrically opposed directions along multiple axes: pulling her apart. By contrast, Spencer's responsibilities are set off by definite articles: *the* church-building and *the* sermons. These are "things," as the narrator calls them—there is no sense of push-pull, of material stress and strain, and thus there is no sense that Spencer's tasks cause this type of wear.

In addition, Spofford contrasts the ideal state demanded of the narrator—and the marital problems that come with not achieving it—with absence of consequences for Spencer's non-achievement of his own duties. The narrator claims that Spencer's sermons "once on a time lifted you and held on their strong wings. But of late Spencer had been preaching old sermons."[42] This, too, becomes the narrator's responsibility; once she discerns the heart of the issue—Spencer's "suspicion that his marriage was a mistake . . . [that] a priest should have the Church only for his bride," an idea the narrator claims that the

[42] Ibid.

Catholic ward put in his head—she responds with boilerplate language from the canon of True Womanhood, arguing that marriage and fatherhood support his duties (rather than *are* his duties, as with his wife): "for an answer I brought my children and put them in his arms. I was white and cold and shaking, but I asked him if they were not justification enough. And I told him that he did his duty better abroad for the heartening of a wife at home, and that he know better how to interpret God's love to men through his own love for his children."[43] As with the conclusion of "No News," husband and wife embrace and cry together, but this sentimentalist moment which should affect a moral transformation does not. In the next sentence, the narrator claims, "But that was not enough, I found," and we are returned to the sense that, for all of its acclaim, True Womanhood, even when performed according to the exact template of its Ideal, does not fulfill masculine or husbandly expectations.

The stress and strain on the narrator manifest symptomatically in her encounter with Spencer—"I was white and cold and shaking"—even as she continues to perform ideal emotional labor. This visible indication continues when additional, unexpected, demanding labor causes "wear" to become "worn out," and we see how the narrator's conception of "duties" above, as *mandatory* tasks believed to be achievable, are predicated on idealization of her roles (wife, mother, minister's wife). Idealizations are not meant to be achievable, yet the "duties" (as necessary, achievable responsibilities) are set by these ideals, creating both stress and strain at baseline and acute *breakdown*, in both senses of the word, when more idealized labor is required than the narrator has capacity for. When the narrator recalls how she was "worn to a shadow" caring for her sick daughter, she explains specifically how it was not only love for a child she "dared not trust with anyone" that caused her to "hardly [leave] the room by night or day" for weeks, but also but her husband's insistence that, although they had "nurses aplenty, . . . no one could take such care of [their daughter] as her mother could do so[44]:

But I was worn to a shadow when all was done—worn with anxiety for her [daughter], with

[43] Spofford, "Her Story," 159.
[44] Spofford, "Her Story," 160.

> alternate fevers of hope and fear, with the weight of my responsibility as to her life; and with anxiety for Spencer too, with a despairing sense that the end of peace had come, and with the total sleeplessness of many nights . . . I could not sleep if I would. The doctor gave me anodynes, but to no purpose: they only nerved me wide awake. My eyes ache[d], and my brain ached, and my body ached, but it was of no use: I could not sleep.[45]

The narrator was worn out, in a mechanical sense, because of an exacerbation of the same push-pull forces causing stress and strain. She lists "alternate hopes and fears"—evoking rapid repetitive stress—and "weight"—indicating increased pressure of an external load, and the "total sleeplessness of many nights"—extended exposure without options for recovery, literal "fatigue stress."[46] However, the narrator also uses the same word, "anxiety," for both her daughter and her husband—a visual indicator of opposing pulls in another zero-sum game, where the gain or loss is of the narrator's focused care. In a narrative that largely uncouples cause and effect, this passage contains an unusually unambiguous moment of direct causality; as a result of being worn out, the narrator "could not sleep." From there, we have a very clear before and after of the narrator's mental state; before: operating according to expected social and moral behaviors; afterward: suicidal ideation, homicidal rage, fantasies of filicide, visual and auditory hallucinations, command hallucinations, and unrelieved insomnia.

"Her Story" sets up the narrator's duties as competing, opposing forces inherent to female ideality and then puts a system strained at baseline into a high-stress situation, where "wear" rapidly becomes acute "breakdown." By comparison, Spencer at one point becomes "moody and morose too [and] seemed oppressed with melancholy," due to his concern that he, as a minister, should not have married. But unlike the narrator's, Spencer's duties are steady and dispersed, and so when his mental state requires time to recover, he has time for "solitary strolls" and quiet time in his study, and time to spend with the

[45] Spofford, "Her Story," 160-61.
[46] "Mechanics of Materials: Stress - Strength (Mechanics) of Materials," Engineer's Edge, accessed May 17, 2020, https://www.engineersedge.com/material_science/stress_definition.htm.

ward, who distracts him with church architecture or intellectual problems. He is allowed the life and narrative space and time to recover, and as a result, "soon he was himself again."[47] The cure the narrative provides to Spencer mirrors physician's advice to the narrator when she is institutionalized— the time and space to have "her nerves rested and right."[48] Yet because "home" is idealized as a space of rest for men and work for women, the narrator's restoration, such as it is, must take place outside of it.

In depicting the causal relationship between domestic labor and, explicitly, insomnia (implicitly, mental breakdown), "Her Story" repudiates romanticizations of housewifery that create expectations, in both husbands and wives, that the ideal is achievable without overwork. Yet the "female ideality → overwork → insomnia → madness" pathway is only one of several possible cause-effect avenues for the relationship between insanity that "Her Story" explores. As I've argued, because of the narrator's continued confinement in an institution, we as readers read the narrator's story suspiciously, with an eye to possible symptoms that antedate or linger after her acute breakdown—symptoms that would justify her prolonged incarceration as signs of either an original if latent illness or as indicators of its persistence or recurrence, despite the narrator's claims to health.[49]

We ask, is the narrator's description of herself as "white and cold and shaking," when addressing Spencer's concern that he should not have married, a sign of preexisting madness, fear that her husband will leave her and her children, or both?[50] The narrator describes her initial encounter with Spencer in church, when she was "singing like one possessed," and, when Spencer locks eyes with her while searching for the singer, she carries the idea of demonic possession forward by making ambiguous the

[47] Spofford, "Her Story," 159.
[48] Spofford, "Her Story," 165.
[49] In addition to known cases where husbands institutionalized sane wives, or kept wives in asylums despite being cured, Packard argues that doctors also kept women they knew were not insane for lack of the moral courage to stand up to husbands, and for profit. Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life, Or, Insane Asylums Unveiled As Demonstrated by the Report of the Investigating Committee of the Legislature of Illinois, Together with Mrs. Packard's Coadjutors' Testimony* (Chicago: A.B. Case, Printer, 1868), 80-84, 154-57; 157-61, Google Books.
[50] Spofford, "Her Story," 159.

origin of her song: "Oh, it was a fresh young voice, let it be mine or whose."[51] One manifestation of the narrator's madness is her visual and auditory hallucination of demonic, bat-like creatures who are specifically associated with the voice. When the ward speaks to the narrator and Spencer, the narrator recalls, "I saw one of those bat-like things perched on her ear, and when she opened her mouth to speak I saw them flying in and out."[52] For herself, the narrator recollects, the "evil spirits . . . whispering in my ear. Oh what loathsomeness the obscene creatures whispered! Foul quips and evil words I have never heard before, ribald songs and oaths; and I would clap my hands over my mouth to keep from crying out at them."[53] We ask, is the narrator's description of herself "like one possessed" an early indication of latent madness, her re-reading of herself and her courtship through the lens of her later hallucinations, or simply a simile? In addition, on hearing Spencer's first sermon at her church, the narrator details, by diagnostic measures, an excessive emotional response:

> I was fairly crying. Oh, nervous tears, I dare say. The doctor here would tell you so, at any rate. And that is what I complain of here: they give a physiological reason for every emotion—they could give you a chemical formula for your very soul, I have no doubt. Well, perhaps they were nervous tears, for certainly there was nothing to cry for, and the mood went as suddenly as it came—changed to a sort of exaltation, I suppose.[54]

Taken together with her "singing as one possessed," which occurs directly before, does this moment signal an early, if brief, episode of a latent madness which later is defined also through changeable, labile emotions? Or it rather a moment of religious rapture (though this, too, is sometimes cited by nineteenth-century physicians as a cause or symptom of madness)? Or, much more banally, is it a rendition of the overflowing, overwhelming feelings of love at first sight?

[51] Spofford, "Her Story," 151.
[52] Spofford, "Her Story," 162.
[53] Spofford, "Her Story," 163.
[54] Spofford, "Her Story," 151.

Finally, "Her Story" also offers us heresy as a potential sign of insanity, especially to the nineteenth-century reader, but then complicates this heresy by depicting the narrator's confession of it, which could serve as a sign of sanity where the narrator comes to view the world rightly. The narrator's visitor is named Elizabeth, which brings to mind Elizabeth Ware Packard,[55] who "contraven[ed] two societal norms: her husband's marital authority and her church's dogma."[56] Even more to the point, Benjamin Reiss contends that "nearly every former patient who published a memoir protested that his or her incarceration in an asylum was a matter of disciplining deviant political and/or religious views."[57] Thus, when we encounter the narrator's assertion that, "perhaps I deserve it all, for I saw God only through him: it was he that waked me to worship. I had no faith but Spencer's faith; if he had been a heathen, I should have been the same, and creeds and systems might have perished for me had he only been spared from the wreck," we must question her sanity as a nineteenth-century reader would have.[58] And when we read her reluctant epiphany, that "I have feared, since I have been here, that Spencer's piety was less piety than partisanship: I have doubted if faith were so much alive in him as the love of a great perfect system, and the pride in it I know he always felt," we must question her continued insanity.[59] Christine Palumbo-Desimone identifies the narrator's tale as "a declaration of personal sinfulness"[60] in keeping the tradition of the New England witch trials in which "women's guilt over their perceived spiritual inadequacies could even lead them to confess"—and women were even required to confess "to specific transgressions they apparently had not committed" in order to be allowed to live.[61] Indeed, one of Packard's arguments for asylum reform was an essentially conservative one, and one that was also

[55] Cf., Rita Bode who reads Elizabeth as a reference to the biblical Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, in order to argue for Spofford's focus on motherhood in "Her Story." Bode, "Lost and Found," 151.
[56] Linda V. Carlisle, "'New Notions and Wild Vagaries': Elizabeth Packard's Quest for Personal Liberty," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1998-)* 93, no. 1 (2000): 43, JSTOR.
[57] Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 169.
[58] Spofford, "Her Story," 152,
[59] Spofford, "Her Story," 153.
[60] Christine Palumbo-Desimone, "Conjuring Salem: Identity and Authority in Nineteenth-Century Women's Storytelling," *Women's Studies* 47, no. 4 (May 19, 2018): 408, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2018.1455053.
[61] Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), xv, quoted in, Palumbo-Desimone, "Conjuring Salem," 409.

made by abolitionists: that the system as such allowed for husbands/masters to supplant God-as-master, and so reform was necessary to bring earthly political systems back into accordance with Biblical truth. "Married woman," she argues, "has as good a right to her moral accountability as married man; and God is her sovereign as well as he is man's sovereign. Man has no right to interfere with her allegiance to Christ's government, than she has to interfere with his."[62] As such, for Packard, it is violation of Christian principles that "the husband must have all the power to ignore all [woman's] rights, or he cannot be 'lord over all' in his family!"[63] Packard's lowercase 'lord' in citing Psalms 97:9 and Ephesians 4:6 (and invoking strongly Colossians 1:15-20) indicates that husbands have usurped the place of God who is the "LORD . . . over all the Earth" (KVJ). In its Biblical sense/translation, "repentance" is a confession and "return" to the proper Christian form and in "right-standing" with God. Yet, even though the narrator has, within the space of the asylum, "since [she] has been in [this Retreat]," confessed her idolatry of her husband—"I made an idol of my piece of clay"—she still speaks of Spencer in idolatrous terms (though she places some of her thoughts in the ward's mouth), comparing him to "the Apollo of Rhodes," "the portrait of the Spencer of two hundred years ago," and things that could easily be classified as the kinds of graven images forbade in the Ten Commandments. Thus, even when the rites of confession are invoked, readers continue to be left with the same impression of suspension, of either/or madness, that pervades the rest the text.

Each of the above passages indicates a possible latent madness, which is in turn further complicated by the continued possible present madness of the narrator. Beyond the narrator's location in an asylum, the first feature we encounter of the either/or of present madness is the narrator's disorienting pronoun usage. In the first two paragraphs of the story, the narrator uses the pronoun *it* twenty-two times and in at least three distinct ways: 1) as a way of indicating "these circumstances that I have experienced"—"Wellnigh the worst of it all is the mystery"; 2) as a referent for the possible adultery—"If

[62] Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, 163.
[63] Ibid.

it were true, that accounts for me being here"; 3) as a referent for madness—"There was never a drop of crazy blood in the Ridgleys or the Bruces, and why should it suddenly break out like a smothered fire in me? That is one of the things that puzzle me—why should it come to light all at once in me if it were not true?"—and this last question contains both #2 and #3 (148). This preponderance of its—even a perseveration of its—with their unclear referents—referents that can only be parsed by multiple re-readings of both the paragraphs and the story—serve initially as a language-symptom of disordered thought. In the third paragraph, however, pronoun disorientation—here, a confusion between the narrator and her visitor, Elizabeth—points the reader toward gender concerns:

> Don't be afraid of me: I am as much myself, I tell you, as you are! What an absurdity! Certainly anyone who heard me make such a speech would think I was insane and without benefit of clergy. To ask you to not be afraid of me because I am myself. Isn't it what they call a vicious circle? And then to cap the climax the climax by adding that I am as much myself as you are myself! But no matter—you know better. (149)

The conventional construction of the narrator's phrase would be "I am as much myself as you are yourself." This construction would have been implied by the first iteration with its absent reflexive: "I am as much myself as you are." Yet the narrator clarifies that she had intended the inversion—"I am as much myself as you are *myself*"—and she then interprets here for her listener, Elizabeth (and by extension, us as readers) what we have assumed from her repetition of *it* in the first two paragraphs—that disorienting pronoun usage is considered a sign or symptom of madness. In autobiographies written by authors with mental disabilities, Margaret Price argues that pronouns "can take on extraordinary meanings when used by [those with] psychosocial disabilities. What we mean by *I* is not necessarily normative; neither is what we mean by *you, she, or we.*"[64] In particular, Price argues for "creative incoherence", distinct from "the conventional *I* of autobiography where the *I* is unified, and tends to progress through a linear narrative,"

[64] Price, "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane,'" 15 (author's emphasis). Price deploys *we* to identify herself as having psychosocial disabilities.

and instead, "the *I*'s these narratives"—both true and, I argue, fictional autobiographies, such as "Her Story"—"are strategically disorganized and incoherent . . . [where] incoherent may be used colloquially to mean completely lacking in understandable meaning [or] . . . in a sense that draws on its etymological roots, which translate loosely as 'not sticking together.'"[65] Spofford—because it is, I suspect, not quite the narrator in this case—deploys all of these signs in these passage, but prefaces them with the narrator's claim that she "is not going to be incoherent."[66] In this way, she creates tension between signs of madness and signs of sanity, while simultaneously using those signs of madness, here atypical pronoun usage, in order identify both Elizabeth and the reader as "myself," and extend her situation to the situation of all women. Yet, embedded in this pronoun confusion is also another sign of sanity, which keeps the diagnosis in flux. The narrator's pronoun usage is not only a sign of insanity but an absence of religious structure— "without benefit of clergy." The narrator's later profession that she had no faith's but Spencer's—and perhaps even more so, that the narrator "believed in him as [she] would an apostle," is a sign of heresy. Thus, being "without benefit of clergy," namely without Spencer (who other than an offhand mention of a bishop is the only clergy in the story), could be another sign of the renunciation, or confession, of heresy. Thus, this passage becomes a tangle of simultaneous signs of both madness and sanity—the madness of disorienting pronouns, the sanity of repentance.

"Her Story" presents several more signs of the narrator's potential continued madness but also potential present sanity, including event and person confusion; labile emotions, especially spontaneous anger; wandering prose replete with deviations and tangents; and perhaps the most troublesome Catch-22, the narrator's continued insistence of her sanity. Each characteristic can be read for or against a case for sanity, depending on the causal relationships one draws between the reported story events, her mental health, and her presence in the institution. But it is the narrator's fixation on, even obsession with, the ward that proves most damaging for her protestation of sanity. The fixation, in and of itself, could be read

[65] Price, "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane'," 18 (author's emphasis).
[66] Spofford, "Her Story," 148.

as either a mad obsession or a sane response, given Spencer's possible infidelity. Throughout the story, the narrator provides several detailed physical descriptions of the ward, and, in her opening invective, the narrator insists, "If she [the ward] had come with us [to the asylum], doubtless I should have found reason enough to say to the physician at once that she was the mad woman, not I—she."[67] Yet the story's denouement winks at the reader, as the narrator provides a description of a new inmate that mirrors *exactly* the defining features of the ward. Early in the text, the narrator describes the ward as "a little thing . . . dark as an Egyptian."[68] She provides an extended meditation in two places on the ward's hair: "such hair! When she let it down the backward curling ends lay on the ground" and, during her (possible) seduction of Spencer, the ward "shook down all her hair, till the great snake like coils unrolled upon the floor."[69] At the end of "Her Story," the narrator describes a woman recently institutionalized who is "a little woman, swarthy as a Malay, but her hair . . . grows rapidly as a fungus grows in the night."[70] This woman seems to have a special orientation to the narrator—"she seems to want something from me, to propitiate me. All she ever says is to be me to do her no harm."[71] The narrator's non-recognition of a woman who the text strongly indicates is the ward, on whose person and physicality the narrator who has been especially focused for almost the entirety of her story, who has only changed in hair color—black to "white as leprosy"—and the loss of two front teeth in an accident, poses a question to the narrator's ability to recognize reality as such. At the same time, because the text only suggests and never confirms the ward's identity, the narrator could unknowingly be transposing the ward's features on the woman who has recently arrived—an echo of her early claim in the story that "she," the ward, "was the mad woman, and not I"—and living out a fantasy of the ward's humbling and penitence, which would serve as further evidence of her obsession.

[67] Spofford, "Her Story," 148.
[68] Spofford, "Her Story," 149.
[69] Spofford, "Her Story," 157.
[70] Spofford, "Her Story," 166.
[71] Ibid.

The multiple potential stresses and strains on the narrator, coupled with the multiple possible signs of madness (which can also read as reasonable responses to the stresses, that is, as sanity) destabilize causality in the text. This destabilization, resulting from a superposition of possible causes for insanity and/or for the narrator's continued institutionalization, makes incoherent the sanity-insanity binary in the context of idealized womanhood. Indeed, though most of the scholars who interpret "Her Story" argue for the narrator's insanity—and importantly, all scholars read diagnostically and show how Spofford's text elicits a "diagnostic urge" in its readers— each scholar focuses on a different etiology. Carroni highlights Spencer's infidelity and on "the vampire-like woman that took away [Spencer's] love and led [the narrator] to madness."[72] Bendixen argues that Spofford uses "a mad narrator to depict feminist themes," namely, "the way that women lose their identities . . . [and] often sacrifice their sense of selfhood to men."[73] Combining both Caronni and Bendixen, Susan Koppelman uses "Her Story" as an example of how "madness is the most persistent metaphor for the fate of the woman who has given over responsibility for her inner self to a man who proves a deceiver."[74]

By contrast, for Eva Gold and Thomas H. Fick, the narrator's signs of "mental instability" suggest the ways "women's rivalry obscure a fundamental identity of condition and interest" and how the binaries that women are divided into, that the text splits between the narrator and the ward, "proceed from the categorical oppositions of patriarchal authority."[75] For Cynthia Murillo, madness creates the ward as the narrator's "ghostly double," highlighting the duality that Fick and Gold explores but more specifically between the "True Woman" narrator and the "New Woman" ward.[76] Finally, Rita Bode's and Christine Palumbo-Desimone's recent articles explore the narrator's relationship with both madness and the ward

[72] Carroni, "The Madwoman by the Fireplace," 77.
[73] Alfred Bendixen, "Introduction," in *"The Amber Gods" and Other Stories by Harriet Prescott Spofford*, ed. Alfred Bendixen (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), xxxi.
[74] Susan Koppelman, "Introduction," in *The Other Woman: Stories of Two Women and a Man*, ed. Susan Koppelman (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1984), xxvii.
[75] Eva Gold and Thomas H. Fick, "A 'Masterpiece' of the 'The Educated Eye': Convention, Gaze, and Gender in Spofford's 'Her Story,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 30, no. 4 (1993): 514, Gale Academic OneFile.
[76] Cynthia Murillo, "The Spirit of Rebellion: The Transformative Power of the Ghostly Double in Gilman, Spofford, and Wharton," *Women's Studies* 42, no. 7 (2013): 756, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2013.820612.

very differently than previous scholarship. Bode thinks through the ward as an additional dependent who thereby increases the narrator's motherly responsibilities. In keeping with this, she argues that "Spofford does not baldly assert that motherhood leads to insanity; her subtle telling, rather, prompts readers to an awareness of an array of maternal circumstances that threaten the psychological well-being of mothers."[77] Palumbo-Desimone reads "Her Story" with an eye to its engagement with religion, and specifically how it invokes the Salem witch trials, in which the narrator is both penitent of idolatry and accuser of the ward, and the ward is an accused witch who ensorcells both the narrator and Spencer. Threaded throughout this reading is the narrator's possible madness which makes possible "a twofold narrative, with the 'realistic' version of a madwoman far more frightening than a witch's tale. Indeed, if the Wife conjures the entire episode, the story she tells Elizabeth taps into the desperation and powerlessness that many scholars suggest underpinned Salem's accused/accuser doubling."[78]

When the unknowability of the narrator's madness is acknowledged—as it is, eventually, by both Koppelman and Bode—they present further possibilities, predicated on gender dynamics, that would account for the narrator's presence in the asylum. Bode points us to fictional and true accounts of husbands who consign sane wives to institutions for selfish reasons, and Koppelman, too, evokes the allusion when she argues, "we cannot know for sure whether we are reading the ravings of a madwoman, or an account of victimization by an unscrupulous husband permitted by a patriarchal legal and medical system to abuse his wife for his own convenience."[79] However, she alludes to another possible understanding of the narrator's excessive emotions as reasonable and even intuitive, when she calls "Her Story" "a story of chronic grief. The narrator seems to be caught in a perpetual loop, from grief, to denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then back to grief."[80] In reading the narrator's madness and/institutionalization in light of gender dynamics, ideal womanhood, and patriarchy, the scholars above

[77] Bode, "Lost and Found," 154.
[78] Palumbo-Desimone, "Conjuring Salem," 411.
[79] Bode, "Lost and Found," 145-146; Koppelman (ed), *The Other Woman*, 70.
[80] Koppelman (ed), *The Other Woman*, 70.

not only provide different interpretations of the text, but also provide very different etiologies of madness, based on different story events and different symptoms. The simultaneous possibility of each etiology as a *valid* cause, set of causes, or manner of causation of madness or imprisonment is predicated on the narrative superposition of "Her Story" which presents all causes and all effects in tandem and in flux—which themselves are complicated by the narrator's claims of a lack of family history of madness and "organic disease," and her assertions of her sanity. This allows scholars and other readers to trace equally logical paths from symptom to outcome, even while all conditions they explore ultimately point them toward role conflict, power disparities, and other gendered concerns.

This narrative superposition, engendered by the possibility of madness, serves another function in the text. Madness affords flux; the narrator's moments of confusion and pronoun inversions, alongside both Elizabeth and the ward's (possible) presence in the institution, delocalizes the traits of the narrator's situation and brings *all* women in the text into a relationship with insanity, female ideality, and patriarchy.[81] First, and most easily, "Her Story" locates all the women it examines in-depth in the asylum, and with the narrator's pronoun inversion, the narrator's story, the ward's story, and Elizabeth's possible story (as either character or invocation of Packard) overlay at a common point: "just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads lead me" *and you* "to this Retreat." Price argues that pronouns are "a rich feature . . . [that] offer a significant window onto the ways that that power dynamics of disability are maintained. The 'us- them' binary, often invoked in [disability studies] literature, is a ready example."[82] But Price, who close-reads autopathographies written by authors with mental and psychological disabilities, argues that the texts she investigates "purposefully open a large gap between . . . 'speaker' and 'addressee'; they invite (even demand) negotiation, often remarking directly on the space between the narrator's consciousness and the reader's."[83] Instead, the narrator of "Her Story" collapses these distinctions,

[81] To some extent, literary madness also can also *be* flux, insomuch as flux indicates a state that is multi-directional and unstable.
[82] Price, "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane,'" 15.
[83] Price, "'Her Pronouns Wax and Wane,'" 18-19.

equating narrator as speaker with Elizabeth as addressee (and extending to the reader). At the same time, the text keeps with Price's argument that, when used by mentally disabled narrators, pronouns can explore the power dynamics of (dis)ability.

"Her Story" draws on contemporaneous discourses of women *as* disabled. As discussed above, the narrator's madness represents the instability of True Womanhood and its ideas of female frailty. The text also invokes discourses of hereditary or acquired (dis)ability, both of which are encapsulated by various arguments of Catharine Beecher, where either the narrator is mother or daughter of "the present generation of parents, then, [who] have given their children, so far as the mother has hereditary influence, feebler constitutions than the former generation received, so that most of our young girls have started in life with a more delicate organization than their mothers,"[84] or among those impaired by dress, lack of physical and mental exercise, and especially lack of training in domestic labor as profession. Thus, Price's exploration of the power dynamics of (dis)ability is an umbrella that includes, however unintentionally, nineteenth-century white womanhood.

Both Gold and Fick and Bendixen read the narrator's inversion of pronouns—I am as much myself as you are myself—as a moment that simultaneously indexes madness and gender dynamics. Gold and Fick argue that her inversion "may certainly be taken to denote disordered thinking; but it also points to the fact that Elizabeth and the narrator are both women and thus to an intersection of interest and identity that the narrator does not acknowledge,"[85] and Bendixen makes a very similar claim when he argues that the pronoun inversion "dramatiz[es] the narrator's confusion and extend[s] her tale of suffering not only to Elizabeth, but to the reader, and perhaps to all women."[86] Thus both scholars highlight how, regardless of narrator's mental status, her vulnerability to institutionalization by her husband occurs because of her gender, and, with the twist of a pronoun, the circumstances of the narrator

[84] Beecher, *Letters to the People*, 132.
[85] Gold and Fick, "A 'Masterpiece of the Educated Eye,'" 514.
[86] Bendixen, "Introduction," xxxiii.

become applicable to all women. Indeed, the story makes the inversion incarnate in the ward's story arc. The knowledge that all the female characters in "Her Story" wind up in the asylum can only be gained by re-reading, but by the end of the story, the "I" also becomes the "she" of the ward, as the narrator's pronoun inversion heralds. The distinction between the narrator and the ward collapses, as the ward sustains a traumatic brain injury and is also institutionalized in the same asylum as the narrator—in the place of the narrator; in the narrator's place.

Thus, "Her Story" delocalizes the condition of the narrator into all women in the text, and it achieves this both through a translocation of personhood which occurs several times in the text, and through the narrative superposition created by (possible) madness, which blurs causality and gender dynamics. Addressing a translocation between the narrator and the ward that occurs early in "Her Story," where the narrator mis-remembers the ward—"She was a little thing—a little thing, but wondrous fair. Fair did I say? No: she was dark as an Egyptian"—Bode argues, "in attempting to describe the ward to her listening friend, the narrator first says that she is 'wondrous fair,' but immediately changes her mind to identify her as 'dark.' Her confusion suggests the ward's capacity to be both like and unlike the narrator,"[87] who later describes her skin as "pale . . . clear with a pearly clearness." Gold and Fick provide a similar reading of this scene, where narrator's confusion serves as both a sign of "mental instability" and also "suggests . . . a fundamental identity and interest" among otherwise disparate women under the aegis of "patriarchal authority."[88] Murillo argues that the ward is the narrator's "dark double," a "portrayal of the New Woman, the triumphant alter-ego to the slowly fading 'True Woman'" that the narrator represents, and "the brief confusion and conflation of identities unmask society's fear of the emerging New Woman who would replace the antiquated Angel of the House."[89] Thus, a moment of mental confusion, which could be read as a symptom of madness, points us to the interchangeability of idealizations of womanhood with regards to their relative powerlessness under patriarchal norms. Both

[87] Bode, "Lost and Found," 149-150.
[88] Gold and Fick, "A 'Masterpiece of the Educated Eye,'" 514.
[89] Cynthia Murillo, "The Spirit of Rebellion." 756, 765.

the narrator and the ward, as allegories of separate ideal womanhoods, wind up institutionalized by Spencer; thus, given patriarchy, the various forms of womanhood become, for Spofford, a distinction without a difference. Similarly, the narrator claims that, in the presence of Spencer, the ward dances with and otherwise engages with the narrator's children, but "only when [he] was there to see: at other times, I saw she pushed the little hindering things aside without a glance."[90] This mirrors the narrator's frustration with "the detentions the children caused . . . they kept me from [Spencer], and he was alone with [the ward]."[91] The narrator's feelings may be a correct reading of the ward's, and indeed in other woman-authored texts which feature old maids or rival, single woman characters, these women nearly always claim, at some point, that the responsibilities of motherhood are not for them. While the specific identification of the children as "hindering" her capacity to pay attention to the husband is the narrator's feelings translocated onto the ward, both instances are undergirded by idealizations of maternal instincts as inherent to women.

But "Her Story" goes even further to foreground the incoherency of female ideality, particularly the continuity between otherwise categorical and classificatory models of womanhood, by making ideal womanhood performative.[92] The narrator marks several instances where the "New Woman" ward enacts the narrator's own behaviors as "True Woman" in both wifely and motherly capacities. The narrator "never had face to praise [Spencer]"—indicating the innate modesty of a "True Woman"—but the ward "could exclaim how like ivory [his] forehead was . . . How keen that aquiline nose was to be found in the portrait of the Spencer of two hundred years ago . . . she knew how, by silent flattery, as she shrank away and looked up at him, to admire his haughty stature, and make him feel the strength and glory of his manhood and the delicacy of her womanhood."[93] Yet despite the narrator's demurring, what the narrator

[90] Spofford, "Her Story," 155.
[91] Spofford, "Her Story," 159.
[92] This is a loaded word, but I do use it here to mean it as Judith Butler does. See, Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893.
[93] Spofford, "Her Story," 149.

imagines to be the ward's *performance* is exactly how she describes her own *true* encounters with her husband. In conversations where he asks her perspective on verses, she claims that she responded "timidly indeed. I could not think my thoughts were worth his hearing till I forgot myself and thought only of him," paralleling the ward's demureness toward Spencer with her own humility evoked also by his presence: "I was humble . . . it was so blessed to be allowed to minister one delight to him."[94] The ward's idolatry, for the narrator, points to her ability to dissemble, and Spofford's use of "glory" in the narrator's description of ward's worshipful comparison of Spencer to "the portrait of the Spencer of two hundred years" (read: the exact definition of an idol) can only be read as "shekinah glory"—in Judaism and Christianity, the glory of the divine presence. Yet the ward's idolatry mirrors the narrator's own response to Spencer, a heretical rendering of the relationship of the "True Woman" to her husband: "I had a little print of the angel of the Lord appearing to Mary with a lily of annunciation in his hand, and I thought—I dare not tell you what I thought. I made an idol of my piece of clay."[95]

Like the narrator, the ward performs the cornerstones of "True Womanhood"—religious rectitude, motherhood, and community service. The ward "unveiled a new phase of her character: she was devout. She had a little altar in her room; she knew all about the albs and chasubles . . . She was full of small church sentimentalities, and as one after another she uttered them, it seemed to me that her belief was no sound fruit of any system."[96] The is "the soul of domestic life"—a phrase which invokes the true woman's place as spiritual and moral center of the home—who both attends to Spencer "sitting at night beneath the light and embossing on her own weblike muslin designs . . . Listen[s] to Spencer as he read," and also "would dance with the children"[97] She interprets the narrator's visits with the living and the dying church members, telling "the ailments of half the old women in the parish who came to [the narrator] with them."[98] Unlike the narrator, however, she does not actually visit with the church-members,

[94] Spofford, "Her Story," 152.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Spofford, "Her Story," 156.
[97] Spofford, "Her Story," 154-55.
[98] Spofford, "Her Story," 155

but through her "strange dramatic power," she could "personate them as vividly as if she did it by necromancy."[99] Thus, "true womanhood" in the hands of a "new woman" becomes more a more legible as an ideal to men *because* of its performance. The narrator grapples with the exigencies of *doing* true womanhood—which she can never execute to ideal standards—but the ward's performance is—to narrator's superimposition of her figuration of the masculine eye—superior to the narrator's incarnation. Mary Louise Roberts argues that "theater encouraged a kind of subversive 'acting up' that allowed [women performers] to resite true womanhood" where women could "[praise] motherhood as women's highest role [but] reiterated domestic ideals in an unlikely, even ironic context, defamiliarizing them and implicitly subverting them.[100]" She claims that, in essence, "the histrionics required . . . of the stage threatened the essentialized nature of gender norms. Sometimes such acts were strategic; sometimes they were unintentional. In the latter case, they owed their disruptive power to the instabilities inherent in the domestic ideal."[101] The ward's performance of "true womanhood" is perhaps Spofford's own skepticism of the New Woman, but the fact remains that, even in this representation, new womanhood incorporated the true woman's fundamental characteristics as hallmarks of "womanhood." Thus though the New Woman provided a different, and perhaps less old-fashioned, setting, the jewel of ideal womanhood at the center remained unchanged, and the New Woman in "Her Story" proves an prescriptive and achievable iteration of the "function" of womanhood.

The "incoherent" signs of madness combined with the "instabilities inherent in the domestic ideal" form the basis of the narrative superposition of "Her Story," and its critique—such as it is—come through this formal structure. This incoherency of madness was recognized in contemporaneous accounts of institutionalization. In *Marital Power Exemplified in Mrs. Packard's Trial, and Self-Defence from the Charge of Insanity*—Elizabeth Ware Packard's autobiographical rendition of her trial for sanity—Packard

[99] Ibid.
[100] Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 153, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2002.0025.
[101] Ibid.

cites to her readers the statute regarding the institutionalization of insanity found in common law: "No person shall be imprisoned, and treated as an insane person, except for *irregularities of conduct*, such as indicate that the individual is so lost to reason, as to render him an unaccountable moral agent." Packard follows with a report of her own experience: "Multitudes are now imprisoned, without the least evidence that reason is dethroned, as indicated by this test. And I am a representative of this class of prisoners; for, when Dr. McFarland [her medical evaluator] was driven to give his reasons for regarding me as insane, on *this* basis, the only reason which he could name, after closely inspecting my conduct for three years, was, that I once '*fell down stairs!*'"[102] Too, the fiction of mid-nineteenth-century frequently engaged with either disparities of power or signifiers of womanhood and insanity as communication properties. For the former, Reiss points out that "in the so-called sentimental novels so popular among middle-class women, the entrance of the asylum into the plot line almost inevitably signaled the oppression of a strong-willed woman by a scheming husband or other male villain," and fictional pieces such as Metta Victor's little-known "The Skeleton at the Banquet" provided extended meditation on how a prescriptive, idealized femininity could be, and was, read as insanity.[103] "Her Story," capitalizing on each of these trends, provides its readers multiple signs/symptoms of either/or madness within the context of nineteenth-century gender norms. How we read those symptoms and how we determine the narrator's mental state is dependent upon a thorough investigation of heterosexual power dynamics in the text, specifically with regards to ideal womanhood. We, as readers, are forced to consider *in tandem* the impossibility of achieving all the tasks associated with maintenance of a household while simultaneously achieving the tasks associated with motherhood while simultaneously being an attentive wife while simultaneously being responsible to a larger community—here identified as the work of a minister's wife, but elsewhere

[102] Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard, *Marital Power Exemplified in Mrs. Packard's Trial: And Self-Defence from the Charge of Insanity - Three Years' Imprisonment for Religious Belief, by the Arbitrary Will of a Husband* (Chicago: Clark & Co., Publishers, 1870), 56-57, Google Books (author's emphasis).
[103] Reiss, *Theaters of Madness*, 180; Metta Victor [pseud. Seeley Regester], "The Skeleton at the Banquet," in *Stories and Sketches by Our Best Authors* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), 9–36, Google Books.

generalized as serving "as a member of the church, and the president of the missionary board."[104] These issues, coupled with the precarity of the narrator's role as wife to Spencer—and, the ward as under the control of Spencer as guardian, and both as ultimately institutionalized—make apparent the narrator's initial claim that her commitment to the asylum (and the ward's commitment as well) could realistically be an act of expediency allowed under laws that privilege patriarchal power. Indeed, the narrator's depiction of the ward as "dark as an Egyptian" invokes the specter of slavery—a commonly used analog for women's oppression in the nineteenth century—where the wife perceived her position as threatened by extramarital relations with enslaved women. Packard argues, "this married servitude exposes the wife to as great suffering as negro servitude did."[105] The narrator invokes Thomas Jefferson's abstraction of black characteristics in the ward, particularly their absence of true depth of emotion, when she describes the ward as "a being of infinite variety—to-day glad, to-morrow sad, freakish, and always exciting you by curiosity."[106] "Her Story" continues in Packard's vein, particularly with regards the narrator's emphasis on motherhood as a divine womanly right vis-à-vis slavery, pointing to Packard's own postbellum claim:

> It is my candid opinion, that no Southern slave ever suffered more spiritual agony than I have suffered; as I am more developed in my moral and spiritual nature than they are, therefore more capable of suffering. I think no slave mother ever endured more keen anguish by being deprived of her own offspring than I have in being legally separated from mine. God grant that married woman's emancipation may quickly follow in the wake of negro emancipation![107]

The ward thus serves as a surrogate for well-known, but safely defunct, trope: the dark outsider as threat to the sanctity of idealized white womanhood. Yet all these potential causes, taken together, point the reader away from easy biological causes of madness—from the doctors who "could give you a chemical

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[104] Dorothy Dix [Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer], "The 1897 Girl," *The Daily Picayune*, December 27, 1896, Nineteenth-Century U.S. Newspapers.
[105] Packard, *Marital Power Exemplified*, 61.
[106] Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIV," in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Richard and Hall, 1788), 147-54, Google Books; Spofford, "Her Story," 154.
[107] Packard, *Marital Power Exemplified*, 61.

formula for your very soul"—toward gendered power dynamics, while also forcing one to investigate a simultaneity of possibilities, grounded in ideal womanhood, that cause a woman to go mad, while, also simultaneously, forcing one to reconcile the patriarchal power that could have woman declared insane "without the evidence of insanity required in other cases."[108]

By narrating the story from the perspective of a woman who was mad—or was not—or is still mad—or is not—"Her Story" resists the collapse of the patriarchal forms it explores into a narrative of cause-and-effect. Easy solutions—for example, that her husband's adultery drove the narrator mad—are denied to the reader by the simple expedient of a double unreliability: we do not know whether the narrator is mad for certain, but because it is possible, and because that possibility hinges on madness, the relationship between all causes that "Her Story" explores and all effects that it names is one of corresponding probabilities rather than definite events. Madness affords flux, and the result of madness as *narrative* form in "Her Story" is a superposition of *social* forms, where each possible state of patriarchal definitions of female bodies is held in tension with every other state without collapsing into narrative cause and effect, or actually, into simplistic social allegories as characterization (*the* wife, *the* mother, *the* other woman). In short, by narrating the story from the perspective of a woman who is unsure whether she is sane, "Her Story" mines a cultural suspicion of mentally ill and mentally disabled people stories for political ends. Because the narrative neither confirms nor refutes the narrator's sanity, the narrative remains in flux, and these facts must in turn shape any arguments we make about its content, feminist or otherwise. At the level of discourse, it is probable that the patriarchal definitions will inhabit one state or another with regard to a specific female body—domesticity or unreason or hypersexuality, for instance. Madness, therefore, becomes narrative logic—it becomes a way to structure the (il)logic of competing or colliding social forms that require contradictory things of female bodies.

[108] Elizabeth Parsons Ware Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life, Or, Insane Asylums Unveiled As Demonstrated by the Report of the Investigating Committee of the Legislature of Illinois, Together with Mrs. Packard's Coadjutors' Testimony* (Chicago: A.B. Case, Printer, 1868), 37, Google Books.

***"Isn't it what they call a vicious circle?"***

From its title to its primary actors to the tale it tells, "Her Story" seems to center solely on proto-feminist critique, where (possible) madness makes apparent the social structures that define the successes and failures, workload and responsibilities, life and liberties of female bodyminds. Yet "Her Story" supports another reading, one that interrogates the material conditions of madness. A near-legion of feminist scholars have explored the intersection between female bodyminds and mental illness, and more specifically have argued how "female" properties and "insanity" properties are commutative. But "Her Story" separates femaleness and madness into distinct semiotic systems, similar to Diane Price Herndl's distinction between "woman" and "invalid": "Whereas women in general are characterized as weak and lacking power, better off staying quiet at home, the invalid is specifically recognized as even weaker and more powerless than most women and is required to stay at home.[109]" In "Her Story," femaleness may have similar or overlapping properties with madness, but female properties are only read as symptoms of madness post-diagnosis (or suspicion of diagnosis) or in the space of the asylum. Once this mad semiotic system has been invoked, however, there is no outside to it: all communication can be, and often is, read through the discourse of madness, and its stigmatization ensures the perpetuation of its effects—the loss of freedom, the loss of one's children, the continued mistrust of the communication of those who have, or who are suspected to have, a mental illness. Thus, if Spofford's tale uses madness to point to the patriarchal conditions surrounding femaleness, it simultaneously uses femaleness to point to the material conditions of madness, particularly to the effects of its stigmatization.

Other scholars, such as Elaine Showalter and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have argued for the material effects on women that arose when mental illness and women were conflated through

[109] Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 2.

diseases such as hysteria.[110] On the other hand, Diane Price Herndl, Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, Ann Douglas (Wood) and others argue that nineteenth-century women may have devised ways to manifest illness as control over their bodies and choices—as a way to resolve the contradictory physical and psychological demands placed on them.[111] Spofford's work engages with none of these positions. Rather "Her Story" critiques the diagnostic urge—of readers, doctors, main and tertiary characters—that it so artfully deploys, and, in doing so, investigates the consequences of diagnosis on a bodymind, as a rhetorically enabled subject, when it is read through the discourse of madness. In one of the most poignant scenes in the story, the narrator, convinced that she is well and deeply missing her two daughters, sets out on foot in the dead of winter to return to home for Christmas:

> And it came Christmas time. A terrible longing for home overcame me—for my children [. . .] I forgot all about my word of honor. It seemed to me that I should die, that I might as well die, if I could not see my little darlings, and hold them on my knees, and sing to them [. . .] And winter was here and there was so much to do for them. And I walked down to the garden, and looked out the gate, and opened it and went through. And I slept that night in a barn [. . .] And the next day an old farmer and his sons, who thought they did me a service, brought me back, and of course I shrieked and raved. And so would you.[112]

Here, an act of maternal self-sacrifice, which would otherwise indicate female virtue and true womanhood, instead is read by those surrounding her as further evidence of insanity. The text juxtaposes

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[110] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). For a brief but robust overview of the history of women and hysteria, see, Cecilia Tasca et al., "Women and Hysteria in the History of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (2012): 110-19.

[111] While I believe that epistemology can, does, and should arise from ontology, and that these ways of knowing can be both life-saving for ourselves and others and transformative of our culture, I'm also wary when anyone conflates survival techniques with power. Cf., Ann Douglas (Wood), "'The Fashionable Diseases': Women's Complaints and Their Treatment in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (1973): 27; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 198; and Herndl, *Invalid Women*, 47.

[112] Spofford, "Her Story," 165.

a semiotic system of *madness*—invoked by the space of the asylum—where maternal duty signifies madness, with a semiotic system of *womanhood*—invoked by the space of the home and by the children that the narrator-as-mother seeks to return to—where shrieking and raving signify sanity. Throughout the story, the narrator vacillates between believing she was sane and falsely imprisoned, or was mad and appropriately committed (for an acute episode, though she believes herself sane at the time of her present recounting). The text models this ambiguity formally by punctuating complete thoughts with paired dashes and semi-colons: the dashes which signal fragmentation (of mind), and the semi-colons which signal cohesion. This scene, however, pairs commas with the conjunction "and," which evinces coherent and sequential thought.

In formally indicating the narrator's actions as sane, "Her Story" borrows a technique, used by Packard, for a different end. For Packard, and other asylum exposé writers, the first premise of their work is their sanity. Reiss argues that asylum reformers who were former inmates

> primarily argued [. . .] on behalf of themselves. They were motivated at least as much by efforts to reclaim their social standing as by any sympathy for their brothers and sisters in bondage. They did not want to want to eradicate the social distinction between sanity and insanity [. . .] but simply wanted to prove to the world that they were sane. That distinction, of course, depended on the notion that others truly *were* insane; and so the pages of these memoirs are filled with descriptions of the delusional, bizarre, and sometimes frightening behavior of fellow patients.[113]

Packard deploys her sanity as first premise, and contrasts herself with the "truly" insane, to argue against marital power's abrogation of a higher maternal duty.[114] She argues how her husband's wrongful "branding of [her] as insane . . . defam[ation] of her virtue" is allowed under laws that make her a

[113] Reiss, *Theaters of Madness*, 171-72.
[114] For Packard's contrast of herself with those she considers truly and dangerously insane, see *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, 127-32.

"nonentity after marriage."[115] However, Packard holds to a higher law, specifically that of the divine charge of women to be mothers and primary caregivers for their children: "If God regarded me as the law does, in this respect, I could willingly yield my conscience to get my children. But he does not."[116] For Packard, then, "therefore, I cannot do wrong to get my children. While this sacred right of my nature is ignored by our government, I protest against this usurpation, and claim my children are *mine*, by the first right of nature."[117] Like the unnamed narrator, Packard, too, experiences the "tithe of the anguish my spirit has already suffered by this unnatural separation" and "has felt that [she] could echo the wailings of a mother here, who, with streaming eyes exclaimed, 'Oh, I would willingly give this house full of gold if I had it, to be with my children!'"[118] In "Her Story," however, while Spencer's control over her body may have placed the narrator in the asylum, it is the stigma of madness that supersedes her motherhood and prevents her return home. Thus, in this passage, "Her Story" swaps "marital power" for "the stigma of madness" in Packard's equation and shows how the latter is as powerful as the former for separating a mother from her children.

In her classic and much-cited text, *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter summarizes the prevailing view of feminist scholars which identifies "the existence of a fundamental alliance between 'woman' and 'madness' [. . .] Women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and the body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and the mind."[119] While Price's *Mad at School* does not specifically take up the female/mad intersection, it does interrogate the way that commonplace beliefs are used to "reinforce dominant values" and must be contended with when presenting oneself "as a credible and persuasive person."[120] "Her Story," however, uses the social division between "male" and "female"

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[115] Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, 192, 193.
[116] Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, 193.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 3-4.
[120] Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 5.

rhetorics *not* to critique the cultural conjunction of insanity and femaleness, but rather to show how the discourse of madness deprives those labeled as mentally ill of rhetoricity, where nearly all communication, rational or emotional, serves as evidence of the standing diagnosis.[121] The narrator of "Her Story" begins by insisting on the soundness of her mind and points out the markers of masculine "reason" that she will use to narrate her tale: "I am perfectly calm . . . I am not going to be incoherent . . . I will not cry out once: I will just tell you the story of it all exactly as it was, and you shall judge."[122] However, she immediately follows this assertion with an emotion-laden aside: "If I can, that is—oh, if I can! For sometimes, when I think of it, it seems as Heaven itself would fail to take my part if I did not lift my own voice. And I cry, and I tear my hair and flesh, till I know my anguish weighs down their joy, and the little scale that holds that joy flies up under the scorching of the sun, and God see the festering thing for what it is! Ah, it is not injured reason that cries out in that way: it is a breaking heart!"[123] As with her shrieking and raving when she is brought back to the asylum after attempting to visit her children, the narrator knows that her emotions will be read, not as a stereotype of femininity, and not as the anger and despair of a person betrayed by their life partner, but as symptoms of a disordered mind. So she attempts to redefine her emotions in a "female" system rather than a "mad" one: "not injured reason . . .[but] a breaking heart." In essence, the narrator is caught in a rhetorical Catch-22. She must narrate her story outside of her gender's norms, in a detached, impartial, and sequential fashion according to the conventions of masculine reason in order to be considered sane. But acting outside of gender norms would be considered a sign of madness, so she must display traits of femininity—spontaneous deviations from the orderly narrative, emotional tirades against her husband and his ward, excitement at seeing her friend, longing for her children—even though these will be read, in the space of the asylum, as symptoms of an underlying disorder. Again, there is almost no outside to the discourse of madness, and "Her Story"

[121] Catherine Prendergast, "On the Rhetorics of Mental Disability," 191; Price, *Mad at School*, 26.
[122] Spofford, "Her Story," 148-49.
[123] Spofford, "Her Story," 149.

explores how gender designations, especially rhetorical ones, flatten out into symptoms within its walls, even as those designations must be performed for freedom.

Finally, "Her Story" criticizes Elizabeth Ware Packard's methods in her asylum narrative *The Prisoner's Hidden Life, or, Insane Asylums Unveiled*. The narrator's visitor's name, Elizabeth, while a common name in the nineteenth century, calls to mind another Elizabeth—Elizabeth Ware Packard—who in 1868 and 1870 wrote her famous exposés—*The Prisoner's Hidden Life, or, Insane Asylums Unveiled* and *Marital Power Exemplified in Mrs. Packard's Trial and Self-Defense from the Charge of Insanity*—which detailed her institutionalization by her husband for her disbelief in total depravity. "Her Story" is in conversation with Packard, in some ways almost literally. Interspersed throughout *The Prisoner's Hidden Life* are stories of other institutionalized women, the most famous of whom is Sophie Olsen, who Packard includes both as witness to their suffering and as evidence of the corruption of the ideal state of male-female relations, marriage, in which the husband honors his custodianship of his wife. Spofford writes "Her Story" as a confession to "Elizabeth," and the narrative both affirms Packard's conclusions and explore their limitations. As mentioned, the narrator, like Packard, argues that her mental state may have been inconsequential to her institutionalization: "If it were true"—her husband's infidelity—"then that accounts for my being here. If it were not true"—if she were a danger to herself and her children—"then the best thing they could do with me was to bring me here. Then, too, if it were true, they would save themselves by hurrying me away; and if it were not true—You see, just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads led me to this Retreat."[124] Reiss argues that Packard's success as a reformer depended on her defense of traditional gender roles rather than any opposition to them: "For Elizabeth Packard, freeing herself from the institutional matrix of authoritarian marriage laws and a patriarchal asylum regime allowed her to fulfill her roles as a wife and a mother."[125] This maneuver resembles Spofford's more subtle narrative strategy—both how she deploys dissonant hierarchies of female value in her account of

[124] Spofford, "Her Story," 148.
[125] Reiss, *Theaters of Madness*, 176.

Charlotte Brontë's life and how "Her Story" stages collisions between the near insoluble discourses, idealized as miscible, of model femininity: wife, mother, sexual object. She deftly sets these discourses against each other and reveals the contradictions in their cumulative demands. With dissembling earnestness, Spofford offers critique without protest, hurt without anger, confusion without conclusion, and exposes injustice without triggering the defensiveness that often comes with judgment. Yet even beyond the subtlety of their implementation, Packard and Spofford's approaches—especially Spofford's method in "Her Story"— differ in a critical way. Packard wields the maternal aspect of true womanhood against "marital power" from the position of the wrongly convicted; the first premise of her argument is her sanity, and Packard depends on the human compulsion for absolution to exact restitution in the form of legal change. Spofford explores the limits of Packard's technique, dependent as it is on the stigmatization of insanity, through a narrator who does not have the luxury of an unequivocal mental health status.

In her exposé, Packard argues strongly for her own sanity, and, as I said, she largely distances herself from the "maniacs" with whom she was imprisoned in order to elicit sympathy for her plight by arguing that her life was unfairly imperiled by other residents.[126] After detailing instances of assault to her doctor, she concludes by saying "I think a sane person is in more danger than the maniacs, for they will fight back, while I will not."[127] "Her Story" ends with the unnamed narrator rejecting a woman with a traumatic brain injury—the ward, who she does not recognize—and wonders if Elizabeth is there on behalf of her husband to free her:

> I sit and picture to myself that some time Spencer will come for me . . .Or if he will not dare to trust himself, I picture to myself how he will send another—some old friend who knew me before my trouble—who will see me and judge, and care back report that I am all I used to be—some

[126] Packard does occasionally "[call] into question the distinction between sanity and insanity that is integral to nineteenth-century American discourse on the human mind," but this is not her primary approach. Douglas (Wood), "The Fashionable Diseases," 42.
[127] Packard, *The Prisoners' Hidden Life*, 131.

> fried who will open the gates of heaven to me, or close the gates of hell upon me—who will hold my life and my fate. If—oh if it should be you, Elizabeth![128]

Like Packard, the unnamed narrator distances herself from those who she views as truly insane and entreats a woman who she views as empowered because she is considered sane and because she would be authorized by man, Spencer, to hold a male position—that of judge. However, the narrative locates each of its female characters, including Elizabeth, physically in the asylum. The unnamed narrator tells her story to Elizabeth in "*this* Retreat," the demonstrative pronoun indicating an immediate shared space. The ward, who is also unnamed, is institutionalized with a traumatic brain injury sustained during a riding accident. Though the narrator doesn't recognize her—the ward's injury altered her mental function, her speech, and her facial features—the text "winks" at the reader by providing a physical description for a new inmate that is almost identical to the ward's. Here, the narrator creates a hierarchy of female bodies—Elizabeth, who the narrator imagines as imbued with a male voice, the narrator who speaks "her story" for herself, and the ward, who cannot speak at all—that the story itself belies: "Just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads led me," and every other woman in the narrative, "to this Retreat."[129] If "Her Story," as in Packard's narrative, interrogates the problems of marital power, it is marital power's ability to declare a woman insane and affect a transfer of guardianship. The stigmatization of madness, however, ensures that a man can put aside his wife—madness is both cause and means. Thus, "Her Story" critiques Packard's premise of sanity, established by contrast to true "maniacs," to leverage her cause; in fact, it relocates Packard, via "Elizabeth," in the asylum, implying that despite her reforms, the positions of women remain precarious. So long as madness is stigmatized, the story implies, it can be weaponized for patriarchal ends.

[128] Spofford, "Her Story," 166.
[129] Spofford, "Her Story," 148.

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