

LILITH RISING: AMERICAN GOTHIC FICTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE  
FEMALE HERO IN SARAH WOOD'S *JULIA AND THE ILLUMINATED BARON*,  
E.D.E.N. SOUTHWORTH'S *THE HIDDEN HAND*, AND JOSS WHEDON'S  
*BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

by

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## ABSTRACT

LILITH RISING: AMERICAN GOTHIC FICTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE FEMALE HERO IN SARAH WOOD'S *JULIA AND THE ILLUMINATED BARON*, E.D.E.N. SOUTHWORTH'S *THE HIDDEN HAND*, AND JOSS WHEDON'S *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*

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The construction and gendered identity of the female hero has long been a pressing concern of feminist criticism. A female hero capable of sustaining a role as a central protagonist in terms of complexity of character and credibility of action is a character who has evolved in literature over the last two centuries. While many discussions of the female hero have centered around the sentimental heroine within domestic space, more attention is due the unique, and one might argue radical, evolution of the female heroine, specifically in Gothic texts.

My thesis considers the role of the central female character in such works as Sarah Wood's eighteenth-century novel *Julia*, E.D.E.N Southworth's nineteenth-century work *The Hidden Hand* and Joss Whedon's popular modern drama *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I examine a pattern of gradually increasing strength and assertive agency that emerges from the sentimental heroine of the 1800s to the action heroine of the modern era and that is linked at every stage with a conscious and deliberate femininity. By tracing the gradual development and increasing credibility of the agency of female characters, I identify the roots of such modern heroines as

Buffy in preceding literary works which led not to a female version of the masculine hero but rather to a distinctly feminine heroic protagonist.

My thesis argues that the development of the strong, self-reliant and yet decidedly feminine heroine observed in Whedon's *Buffy* has direct antecedents in previous works and that an understanding of those works can inform our reading and critical understanding of modern popular culture as well as providing insight into the way femininity is constructed and maintained within these heroic figures.

Further, I demonstrate how the Gothic genre of all three texts facilitates the progression and unconventionality of the female heroine by placing her into an ill-defined and often transgressive space of possibility, the clearest instance of which is the haunting/graveyard scenes which occur in all three of the works that this thesis examines. In essence, the Gothic genre creates opportunities for the heroine to be heroic where such opportunities might not exist in other literary genres, both providing the impetus for heroism and a permissive sense of urgency which facilitates the maintenance of femininity in these characters by providing an outside justification for their physical agency. In a thorough exploration of the interrelation between the Gothic setting and feminine gender roles, my thesis argues that the Gothic offers a distinct and complex female archetype very different from female protagonists of action found elsewhere, an archetype that builds upon the gender performance ideas of Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam yet functions in a unique fashion to carefully maintain rather than defy normative femininity.

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## CHAPTER 1

### GRAVEYARDS AND HEROINES

My thesis places an eighteenth-century sentimental novel (*Julia*), a nineteenth-century popular sensational novel (*The Hidden Hand*) and a twentieth-century television series (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) into a contiguous literary tradition. All three texts can be read as Gothic and it is this framework which reveals the historical ties between them. Reading these texts as explicitly Gothic allows for an appreciation of the way in which the central characters transcend the conventions of the genres to which they have traditionally been relegated – the seduction narrative, the sensational novel and television drama/horror, respectively. The unconventional settings and circumstances of a Gothic framework allow for the unorthodox performance of gender roles, evoking and complicating the idea that gender is a performance. Masculine and feminine gender roles are often very circumscribed, with some traits habitually or entirely ascribed to a masculine gender role and others to a feminine role. The Gothic framework permits transgression of these roles, allowing female characters to perform masculine gender roles simultaneously with feminine gender roles. This transgression is the essential characteristic of the female hero as I define it here, setting her apart from heroines who must adopt a masculine gender role in order to attain agency and instead allowing the female hero of the Gothic to perform differing and even opposing gender roles.

The central focus of the thesis is the respective protagonists of three texts, each of whom demonstrates the ability to transgress her feminine gender role and perform traditionally masculine actions, including combat, while at the same time preserving her characterization as feminine, often extremely so. Julia, the eponymous hero of *Julia and the Illuminated Baron* (1800), is in most respects a typical seduction heroine, and yet she digs up a dead body in a graveyard and holds her ground against a lecherous suitor. Capitola, the protagonist of

Southworth's *Hidden Hand* (1859), is an adventurer with many exaggerated exploits typical of sensational writing — going so far as to subvert a wedding to rescue an unfortunate bride -- and yet she is extremely concerned with maintaining her honor in a distinctly feminine sense. Finally, Whedon's Buffy Summers of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is a champion destined from birth to fight the forces of evil and yet her most pressing concerns are often her relationships, her romances or even her hair. This is not to minimize the agency or the power which these female heroes evidence, which is significant, but rather to point out the great lengths to which each Gothic text goes in order to emphasize the essential femininity of these heroes. These three Gothic female heroes are remarkable precisely because they are capable of such puissance while maintaining a heightened, almost exaggerated, female gender role.

My analysis contributes to the body of literary criticism in several important ways. First and foremost, this thesis argues that the literary phenomenon of the female hero as defined here can be traced across three centuries and a variety of texts, offering a new framework for the understanding and appreciation of female heroes. Additionally, Wood's *Julia* is currently out of print and boasts no current criticism of any kind. My thesis demonstrates the remarkable elements of this lost eighteenth-century text and places those elements within the larger context of a Gothic literary tradition. Its hero, Julia, is prime example of a character apparently bound to a feminine gender role and yet capable of acts typical of a masculine gender role within the context of the Gothic. The inclusion of *Julia* establishes the scope of this thesis, arguing that the Gothic genre has been capably complicating the portrayal of gender for more than two hundred years. By reading *Julia* together with Southworth's nineteenth-century blockbuster serial novel *The Hidden Hand* and Whedon's twentieth-century popular television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I will demonstrate a common defiance of circumscribed gender roles. All three main characters evidence a remarkable ability not to reject masculine and feminine gender roles but rather to transcend them, or to perform aspects of both roles simultaneously. Furthermore, as the Gothic has often been marginalized and seen as a popular genre, my thesis provides critical



attention to texts overlooked or dismissed as popular media, discussing their characters and themes with fresh, and for some texts, entirely new critical attention, validating these marginalized works as worthy of and capable of sustaining formal study.

Although all three of my primary texts are not necessarily classified as Gothic on first glance, all three contain classic Gothic motifs and elements and a Gothic reading of each grants new insights into their significance as part of the larger canvas of Gothic studies. *Julia*, while on the surface having many of the elements defining a seduction narrative, contains a striking graveyard scene and a mysterious orphan, both of which are classic elements of the Gothic. *The Hidden Hand* is ostensibly a sensational text, a genre which Karen Haltunnen describes as characterized by “dramatic violence, strong emotions, illicit relationships and other titillating transgressions” (3), essentially a thrill-seeking guilty pleasure form of literature wildly popular in the nineteenth-century. However, *The Hidden Hand* also contains strong Gothic elements – among them a wedding in which the “bride” is the heroine disguised in order to defeat her foe, the groom. While *Buffy* has many obvious Gothic elements, it has often been discussed in terms of popular culture studies or television/film studies rather than as part of a Gothic literary tradition. Yet, *Buffy* makes numerous allusions and thematic connections not only to the Gothic tradition but also to literature. Finally, all these texts are non-canonical, marginalized due to their relegated status as “popular” or “low-brow” culture. This has limited the amount of scholarly criticism and investigation that all three texts support and deserve. My thesis examines these texts within an established critical framework in order to demonstrate that while they are popular, they are also utilizing a space (the Gothic) to present a different type of hero, the female hero.

My thesis traces the evolution of this specific type of hero across three centuries, demonstrating an increasingly radical capacity to unite apparently contradictory gender roles within the same character. The evolution of these female heroes traces back incrementally to precursor texts, all with Gothic elements, which gradually expand the credibility of a self-

assured and strong female hero who refuses to sacrifice her feminine characteristics to win that credibility. An examination of her literary history shows that the female hero manages to evolve a strength that coexists with her distinct femininity, in stark contrast to the heroines of pulp media who are recognizably identical to their masculine counterparts with little more than pronouns transposed, abdicating their female gender roles. The female hero of these Gothic texts boasts all of the agency of her masculine counterparts and the feminine allure to match: she is not marginalized, masculinized or ostracized and, while the female hero often struggles with her dual roles as a force to be reckoned with and a respectable beauty, she is not forced to compromise the one to achieve the other.

### 1.1 A Gothic Foundation

An understanding of the Gothic framework is critical to an interpretation of the female hero not only because all three primary texts under study here contain prominent Gothic elements, but moreover because it is my argument that the Gothic genre by its very nature makes possible and promotes the female hero by creating opportunities for female characters that do not exist outside of Gothic texts. In order to explain how the Gothic creates these opportunities, it is first necessary to define the Gothic, no small task in itself.

While some patterns and recurring elements are recognizably Gothic, a review of criticism on the Gothic fails to generate any consensus on precisely what constitutes the Gothic genre. Noted critics of the Gothic genre such as Punter, Botting and Spooner all acknowledge the challenge of defining the genre in a specific manner. Instead, it is often characterized as a hybrid genre that addresses cultural anxieties through a combination of horror, titillation, and psychoanalytic terror. This lack of consensus makes establishing defining characteristics for the Gothic very difficult, if not impossible; however within the context of this thesis I will outline the specific elements by which I define the Gothic and which I will emphasize within my reading of these three distinct texts.

Fred Botting presents a history of the Gothic from its origins with Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe to the point he claims represents the end of the history of the Gothic, the film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, though many other Gothic historians disagree with this position. Botting describes the Gothic as “a hybrid form from its inception, the Gothic blend of medieval and historical romance with the novel of life and manners was framed in supernatural, sentimental, or sensational terms” (44). This view of the Gothic as a form that is by its very nature a hybrid is a telling insight not only to explain the difficulty many critics find in precisely defining the genre, but also to address the Gothic genre's ability to adapt to changing historical and cultural contexts over time. Botting frames the Gothic in supernatural, sentimental or sensational terms, arguing that the Gothic genre incorporates elements from various genres and utilizing them to its own purpose. Botting's approach differs from other major critics in that he attempts to narrowly define the Gothic as a historical phenomenon that has come to its conclusion. While Botting's work helps to establish the long history of the Gothic as a literary genre, his focus is largely on European works while my thesis takes American works as its focus. In addition, Botting's contention that the Gothic is dead in the modern era is in conflict with several other critics and with my own position. Whedon's *Buffy*, one of my primary texts, was produced several years after Botting's endpoint for the Gothic and much of its success has been credited to its status as a Gothic work.

David Punter describes the Gothic in different terms, as a genre which “seems to enact for us a continuing psychic balancing act whereby the explicit and the contemporary can in some way be put into relation with the most archaic – of forms, but also of psychic materials” (xii). This approach to the Gothic genre focuses on its connection to and use of images of the past, which is indeed a common motif for Gothic spaces: graveyards, castles, haunted places. All of these are explicitly tied to past, a point Catherine Spooner also makes. Spooner expands on this by noting that the Gothic is profoundly concerned with its own past and often is self-referential; that is, the Gothic is concerned not just with the historical past, but with the literary

past (Spooner 10). While the Gothic is preoccupied with the past, it also functions to destabilize traditional established mores; that is, although the Gothic often presents images and reflections of the past, those representations are not necessarily designed to support or celebrate traditional values. In fact, they are often critical or subversive. Jerrold Hogle addresses this phenomenon in his description of the genre as “malleable,” taking on and blurring such distinctions as low and high culture, serious and popular studies, gender, race, class, and/or sexual orientation (11-12), while Chris Baldick highlights the combination of “a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration” (xix) as the hallmark of the Gothic. In short, both Hogle and Baldick put forth the theory that the Gothic serves as a form of exploratory social critique.

In contemporary popular fiction, the Gothic has enjoyed a strong presence despite Botting’s contention that the genre had played out, although much popular Gothic fiction today is marginalized just as the works I reference in this thesis were in their own historical periods due to their status as popular rather than “serious” works. Much of the modern-day Gothic shares the same qualities that made the Gothic historically such a fertile setting for the development of the female hero: the unique space created by this literature of the strange and taboo. Catherine Spooner, author of *Contemporary Gothic*, explains that the Gothic’s popularity in academic circles has to do with its potential as a tool for subversion, noting “Gothic has become an idealized space for textual disruption; yet again, it is the means through which we reify our own enlightenment” (25). The Gothic genre thus continues to be relevant today, but for the purposes of this discussion it is necessary to identify the specific aspects of the Gothic that are most vital to the female hero. Why is it that this particular brand of female hero – neither helpless, dainty damsel nor hardened, masculine warrior but retaining aspects of both – has evolved and thrived in Gothic settings? What is it about the Gothic genre that produces and encourages such a character?

As my own argument is grounded in a historical analysis of three texts over two centuries, I will give a brief overview of the Gothic genre in order to provide the context into which my analysis fits and to bridge these historical moments, arguing that they are three points in an unbroken line. Botting cites Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as the origin of Gothic genre literature, and recognizes Walpole and Radcliffe as being established "founders of the Gothic tradition" (21). Botting also notes that while Walpole is credited as first, Ann Radcliffe was undoubtedly the more successful, and Radcliffe's heroines merit special attention. The most famous of Radcliffe's works is *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, published in 1794. Kate Ferguson Ellis makes the point that Radcliffe's heroines "succeed in their struggles to find explanations which ... were essential to the idea of a rational heroine whose suffering is temporary" (261), a contribution that is critical to my own arguments about the evolution of the female hero in the Gothic.

The British Gothic tradition informs much of the structure and themes utilized by American authors, including those of the three primary texts examined here, and therefore it is vital to briefly address the conventions established by the earliest Gothic texts. As mentioned, the progenitors of this tradition are usually credited as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which form the foundation of what critic Neil Cornwell refers to as "classical Gothic" and which have become the connotation of the Gothic today. Cornwell describes this foundation thusly: "dynastic disorders, set at some temporal and spatial distance in a castle or manorial locale; defence, or usurpation, of an inheritance will threaten (and not infrequently inflict) violence upon hapless (usually female) victims amid a supernatural ambience. Often (but not always) the heroine will be saved, the villain unmasked and the supernatural phenomena dispersed (explained or confirmed, as the case may be)" (29). This essential structure forms a loose set of expectations that the Gothic genre is free to complicate, fulfill or frustrate as befits the needs of the narrative.

The structure originated by Radcliffe and Walpole gained popularity and underwent significant changes over the ensuing decades leading into the nineteenth-century Victorian age. Robert Miles takes note of the powerful and pervasive influence Radcliffe especially wielded over the Gothic as he cites the persistence of the romance structure in Gothic literature throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century (48). Alison Milibank traces Radcliffe's influence further into the nineteenth century, describing "a bifurcation of the Radcliffe tradition: the occurrence of the liberated heroine became separated from the motif of release from the prison of the past" (Milbank 145). With the idea of enclosed space and the Gothic heroine no longer explicitly linked elements, the Gothic was afforded greater flexibility in terms of its plot and the devices it might draw upon. These changes enabled the Gothic to continue to be employed to reflect upon the cultural anxieties of a new historical moment, as Milibank points out in her analysis of the role of the Victorian woman who found herself relegated to the domestic sphere: "the very circumstances that encouraged female psychological introspection were also those that opened up a critical perspective on social and gender roles in the construction of the trapped woman as one focus of a new generation of fictions" (155). The modern anxieties surrounding women's role in the nineteenth-century form the impetus for a new Gothic social critique, and key aspects of the Gothic were adapted to better address these concerns. Among the most obvious and significant of these shifts is the change from the castle to the haunted, decrepit or otherwise flawed home, a shift Milibank remarks on as "a repositioning of the woman to fix her in an architectural and political space" (146). This type of house would continue to be widely utilized throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

Despite being commonly historicized as an eighteenth-century phenomenon, the enduring popularity of the Gothic through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggests that as a genre it possesses remarkable flexibility, adapting to modern media such as television and film with notable success. While clearly these various media involve substantial differences in

terms of presentation and form from their literary counterparts, a full discussion of these technical aspects is beyond the scope of this analysis, which instead works to identify the links between modern Gothic texts and the longstanding literary tradition. As Helen Wheatley asserts that the Gothic television features “a mood of dread and/or terror inclined to evoke fear or disgust in the viewer” and “highly stereotyped characters and plots, often derived from Gothic literary fiction,” linking Gothic visual media very closely with the Gothic prose tradition. Wheatley goes on to characterize Gothic television as “visually dark,” with shadows, drab color schemes and a tendency towards subjective camerawork, which combine to give Gothic television a “heavily impressionistic” character (3). Although visual media offers opportunities to present the spectacle of the Gothic in a new and immersive fashion, the elements of the Gothic narrative remain essentially unchanged even between the disparate media of prose and screen. Both rely on the creation of a certain anxiety on the part of the audience, and Gothic criticism can be readily and fruitfully applied to each of these media. We can “read” our Gothic visual media in much the same way as we do our Gothic prose.

Just as many of the most popular Gothic literary novels were produced in serial format, notably *The Hidden Hand*, so Wheatley argues that the most effective utilization of the Gothic in television is in the long-term serial in which the full potential of Gothic fiction can be explored (17). Botting furthers this idea in his discussion of a sense of ambivalence or duplicity often noted in both Gothic film and Gothic fiction, which he describes thusly: “things are not only not what they seem: what they seem is what they are, not a unity of word or image and thing, but words and images and nothing else” (171). This concern with the nature of things touches on issues of identity. When the focus of this uncertainty is a character rather than an object, Botting’s impressions instruct the reader to anticipate a certain complexity of characters within a Gothic narrative: we are to expect more than what we see, which contributes directly to my analysis of the female hero and her roots in the Gothic tradition.

Heidi Kaye observes a preservation of the essential qualities of the Gothic from novels to film and remarks, "Gothic in film, like Gothic in fiction, has responded to the concerns of its day" (181) and implies the continuing presence of controversy and transgression in Gothic film. Furthermore, Kaye asserts that "Gothic films created spectacles and excited audiences' emotional responses, just as Gothic novels had always done" (180). Wheatley draws further connections between Gothic film and Gothic literature with a return to the particular image of the castle as a darkened domestic space. Specifically, she notes that "bringing the narrative of domestic fear and paranoia back into the home from the late 1940s onwards, the closeness between the threatened heroine and the viewer of the text is reestablished or intensified on television, as a domestic medium" (Wheatley 94).

Donna Heiland states that "gothic novels are above all about the creation of fear" (5), a statement that encompasses more than the simple use of spectacle to titillate readers. What often makes the Gothic tale unnerving or frightening is its treatment of cultural anxieties. Botting expounds on this considerably, noting that "certain stock features provide the principal embodiments and evocations of cultural anxieties" (2) and that, via identification with the protagonist, the reader can reaffirm his or her own cultural identity as these obstacles are overcome (7). Although the Gothic often makes use of settings and situations drawn from the past such as castles, this function of the Gothic allows it to address the concerns of any present crisis via metaphor, a point Botting emphasizes: "'Gothic' thus resonates as much with anxieties and fears concerning the crises and changes in the present as with any terrors of the past" (3).

My analysis of the Gothic looks at recurring devices (e.g. the graveyard) and the history of a specific character type (the female hero) to demonstrate how this hero has evolved. A short discussion of the most prominent of these devices is called for here in order to make clear precisely which Gothic elements I am identifying as characteristic of these female hero narratives. There are three very commonly observed motifs that I will discuss here: wit, enclosed spaces, and the Gothic villain. These are characteristics of what Cornwell called



“classical Gothic,” the Gothic that has its roots in the British tradition and that I argue remains well-represented in many American works, including the three I examine in this thesis.

Perhaps the most important of the three is wit, a vital characteristic of the female hero. Robert Kiely makes note of this quality as early as 1794 with Ann Radcliffe’s Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, remarking “What we marvel about is not her virginity, but her ingenuity under stress” (73). This characteristic carries forward even into contemporary Gothic film, as critic Linda Seger makes a similar observation about Gothic film heroines: “She wasn’t taking a passive role, just letting whatever happened happen and being a victim. She was always trying to think of creative ways to overcome the situation, even within the interaction and conversation with the bad guy” (Seger 168). Of course, wit is also a commonly remarked-upon staple of *Buffy*, specifically Buffy’s frequent puns uttered during battle with her foes, an action that Overbey contends “places Buffy in a long tradition of sardonic heroes: from Hamlet to Sherlock Holmes, from James Bond to Jackie Chan. Not only does it ‘throw vampires off’ and make them ‘frightened,’ the joke disarms, making the foe witless. And in this witlessness, they are vulnerable” (76). Although the gothic female hero may not always be physically armed, her wits are her greatest weapon, and she makes good use of them.

Another recurring Gothic element is enclosed space, archetypically a castle. Botting describes the castle as a link to “a feudal past associated with barbarity, superstition and fear” (3), but further explains that the enclosed space functions as more than simply a historical reference. Enclosed spaces such as the castle or labyrinth offer a divorce from the conventional world that is at once horrific and liberating. Botting discusses the labyrinth’s function in terms of Horsley-Curties’s *The Monk of Udolpho*, citing the imprisonment of the lady Antonia by the monk: “In the labyrinth, hidden and separate from the laws of the outside world, he is, as he makes clear to Antonia, absolute master. Imprisoned in the labyrinth, she is cut off from all aid and society, dead to the world” (81). While this hardly seems empowering, Botting describes the heroine’s recoil from the horrors of the enclosed space noting that this recoil need not be

produced by a direct threat but can also be produced "either in the form of a decaying corpse or as her own alienation from the world of conventions and normality" (85). This makes the enclosed space a paradoxically versatile space, capable of representing whatever anxieties the cultural moment demands. Although these spaces create images of claustrophobia and trade on fears of darkness and confinement, the sense of separation these spaces create from the ordered, civilized world has a certain liberating quality. Because the protagonist is cut off from society in the enclosed space, the rules of that society are held temporarily in abeyance and the protagonist is free to act in ways that would otherwise be reprehensible if not unthinkable; in the darkness of the castle, the heroine can do things she could never do in the bower's light. This function of the enclosed space as a place of possibility is a critical part of the function of the Gothic genre in the evolution of the female hero.

Lastly, Gothic villainy is an important element because of the essential traits found in the Gothic villain. Botting, in his history of the Gothic, describes the archetypal Gothic villain in detail:

By nefarious means Gothic villains usurp rightful heirs, rob reputable families of property and reputation while threatening the honor of their wives and orphaned daughters. Illegitimate power and violence is not only put on display but threatens to consume the world of civilized and domestic values. In the skeletons that leap from family closets and the erotic and often incestuous tendencies of Gothic villains there emerges the awful spectre of complete social disintegration in which virtue cedes to vice, reason to desire, and law to tyranny (Botting 4).

The Gothic villain thus is capable of embodying the transgression that is so much at the center of the Gothic genre. While Botting notes that the aristocratic Gothic villain has been overused to the point of cliché, he goes on comment that the "disturbing and demonic villain, however, retains a darkly attractive, if ambivalent allure as a defiant rebel against the constraints of social

mores” (92). This attractive or compelling quality of the Gothic villain complicates what might otherwise be a simple morality tale of a virtuous, orthodox protagonist defeating a deviant foe and reaffirming social mores. The transgressive villain is powerful and must be fought on his own terms and on his own ground, forcing the heroine into the Gothic space rather than combating the villain in a more civilized locale. In combination with the requisite wit of the hero, this enables the reader to confront the issues of cultural anxiety represented by the villain through the vehicle of the hero’s journey.

### 1.2 American Gothic

While the British tradition of the Gothic has exerted a strong influence over American authors of Gothic fiction, some have posited a distinct American Gothic genre, which utilizes different recurring elements and themes from that of the British tradition. Teresa Goddu, for instance, has argued that this sense of distinction emerges in part because of “the national and critical myths that America and its literature have no history” (9). Goddu and others have worked to reconstruct a history of the American Gothic, that both acknowledges the British roots of the genre and the ways that it was adapted to address particularly American concerns such as race, slavery, and imperialism. Yet, many critical studies of the American Gothic are still characterized by an absence of non-canonical or popular works, which number among the most widely read novels of their day. With the inclusion of marginalized texts such as *Julia* and *The Hidden Hand*, we can begin to form a more complete picture of the American Gothic as a genre.

Towards this end, it is important to lay out in broad strokes the history of the American Gothic. The constructed mythology of the American Dream and the dramatic differences in American landscape, history and cultural experience brought about a distinct variety of the Gothic to address the anxieties surrounding these issues. Botting explains the inadequacy of the established Gothic motifs to these particular topics: “The malevolent aristocrats, ruined castles and abbeys and chivalric codes dominating a gloomy and Gothic European tradition were highly inappropriate to the new world of North America” (114). Lloyd-Smith extends this

further by citing some of the ideas which arose to take the place of the familiar British tradition elements, including the concept of “Gothic realism,” an approach “using the resources of the wilderness and the primitive emotions of the rough settlers for its effect” (113).

Nineteenth-century American Gothic literature, while often associated with prominent canonical authors such as Hawthorne and Poe, was also a decidedly popular genre, with many of the novels of the period written in serial form, including Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*. The inclusion of Gothic works in the commonly accepted canon during this period cannot be overlooked, especially Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables* and Poe’s body of work in general. Hawthorne’s work perhaps best showcases the distinction between the British and American Gothic traditions with his own rendition of the Gothic edifice. Botting describes this shift: “Though the grand gloom of European Gothic was inappropriate, the commonplace of American culture was full of little mysteries and guilty secrets from communal and family pasts” (Botting 115), emphasizing secrets and mysteries within less arch or aristocratic settings, within the house rather than the castle or ruin. Botting credits Hawthorne with demystifying the Gothic for the nineteenth century, changing the focus to “the play of sunshine and shadow in family and society” (117).

The work of Poe also directly engages many of the most urgent cultural anxieties of the day. Savoy discusses Poe’s treatment of one of the most obvious, the issue of race and slavery in America. Savoy theorizes that much of Poe’s work transforms the oppression and violence of America’s racial issues into a Gothic representation of his own culture’s conception of the white man in an attempt to “transform America’s normative race into the most monstrous of them all” (182). Botting also argues that Poe utilized the “gloom, decay and extravagance” of eighteenth-century Gothic and turned those trappings inward to create psychodrama (119-20). Naming Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne as “the three great originators of American fiction,” Allan Lloyd-Smith asserts that all three were “much influenced by Gothic fashion” (109).

Goddu makes the distinction that while the European Gothic had largely been concerned with class and economic issues, American Gothic “has traditionally been defined through gender” (95). While Goddu’s primary focus is on questions of national identity in American Gothic literature, her observations serve to characterize the differences in the American iteration of the genre, an important distinction as all three of the texts in my analysis are American.

Cathy Davidson, in her criticism of American popular literature, discusses the Gothic as part of her treatment of marginalized and otherwise overlooked popular culture. In an explanation of how the Gothic differs from popular forms that preceded it historically, Davidson explains the Gothic in terms of a shift from the domestic setting of the sentimental novel to something quite different:

The Gothic, however, transforms home into castle, and that is a different iconography entirely. The castle is not *her* home, nor is it her dream of home. It is a nightmare domesticity, a house with doors locked shut from the outside to enclose a perverted sexuality within. It is a would-be whore/horror house in an empty social setting. The Gothic heroine has no surrounding community to support her or to tell her just what she ought and ought not to do. (Davidson 222)

As part of Davidson’s ongoing efforts to bring attention to popular but critically unknown early American literature, she discusses the role of the Gothic within the historical context of American literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and brings to light relatively unstudied texts such as Wood’s *Julia* and comparatively forgotten works like Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*, giving them their proper due as the wildly popular novels they were. Davidson establishes a body of early American popular literature, from which it is possible to trace the influence of the Gothic in American writing for over two centuries, particularly as relates to the narrative of the Gothic heroine.

Goddu refers to the American Gothic a regional form dealing with the South as America's other, "able to support the irrational impulses of Gothic that the nation as a whole, born of Enlightenment ideals, cannot. America's self-mythologization as a nation of hope and harmony directly contradicts the Gothic's most basic impulses" (4). The Gothic genre thus specifically adapts to this idealized America, taking up the strongest anxieties surrounding the American myth and forming from those motifs the American Gothic. Charles Brockden Brown, credited as one of the first American Gothic authors, makes use of distinctly different motifs than those of the British tradition, such as hostile Indians and what he termed "the western wilderness." Studied primarily as a regional genre, Teresa Goddu analyzes the American Gothic in terms of the cultural contradictions between the mythologized origins of America and the more unsavory portions of its history (10-11). Allan Lloyd-Smith distills these characteristics more simply into four overarching features of the American Gothic: "the frontier, the Puritan legacy, race and political utopianism" (Lloyd-Smith 109).

Works of American Gothic in general address American cultural anxieties and make use of distinctly American elements in that pursuit. Nevertheless, the motifs of the British tradition remain influential in the Gothic as a whole and in the American Gothic; in other words, not all American Gothic works eschewed British themes and many continued to make heavy use of them, including the American works under discussion in this thesis. Those essential characteristics of the Gothic as established by the British tradition remain strongly influential on Gothic texts of all kinds, the American Gothic included.

It is important to recognize this variant of the Gothic genre because, although all three of my primary texts have American origins, they do not properly belong within the genre of American Gothic as defined here. Despite being the creations of American authors, these texts continue to make use of motifs very closely associated with the British tradition, namely wit, enclosed space and Gothic villainy, complicating the conventional reading of American Gothic

fiction. These elements are essentially unchanged on both sides of the Atlantic when applied to the narrative of the female hero, though naturally they evolve in context and application.

Eric Savoy, in his treatise on the rise of the American Gothic, recognizes the furtherance of these elements and cites the inevitability of the adoption of popular British elements on the other side of the Atlantic and remarks that “the perverse pleasures that acquired conventional status in the Gothic by the early nineteenth century – claustrophobia, atmospheric gloom, the imminence of violence – were generated in early American literature too, and by such standard architectural locales as the haunted house, the prison, the tomb, and by such familiar plot elements as the paternal curse and the vengeful ghost” (167-68). Transplanted to a new land and a new context, these motifs nevertheless remained recognizable and prevalent. Lloyd-Smith further demonstrates this in his discussion of the castle, perhaps the most archetypal element of the Gothic, likening the incomprehensibility and twisted nature of the Gothic castle to the maze of the urban landscape (115). While the specifics of the setting may change, each of the narratives under discussion here makes use of a recognizably Gothic setting as originally seen within the British tradition.

At the risk of being redundant, it is nevertheless worthwhile to reiterate that my analysis is a historical examination of three marginalized texts that map a distinctly feminine heroine. The remarkable thing about the history I uncover is that it establishes a connection between feminine heroines in gothic settings and their capacity to remain feminine without abdicating their action-based heroic status. In essence, I argue that specific elements of the Gothic create opportunities for feminine heroism that would not be otherwise sustainable. Far more than backdrops, these settings have profound effects on the characters who inhabit them. Hogle catalogues a variety of such spaces and notes that, “within this space, or combination of such spaces, are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story” (2). This haunting, while it may serve the primary Gothic purpose of manufacturing horror, also effects

significant changes in the characters who come into contact with it, and it is my argument that these changes enable the feminine hero to perform a complex and at first glance contradictory gender performance.

Critic Donna Heiland deals specifically with the intersection of the Gothic with gender studies, and discusses the transgressive nature of the Gothic in terms of the sublime. In Heiland's view, the gothic often presents a struggle of two sublime forces – one good, one evil – but both equally destructive to the heroine trapped between them. Heiland notes that, "In all these readings of the story, though, one thing is constant. The woman in the scene is impossibly positioned, and would be much better off if she could fashion yet a third way out" (171). It is my contention that the Gothic female hero represents this third path and that, while the Gothic does set up this hostile structure for the heroine, it is that very structure which generates the necessity that drives her heroics.

Heiland reinforces the central theme of transgression in the Gothic and applies it in terms of gender, stating that "the stories of gothic novels are always stories of transgression. The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the countries political life and its family life, and gender roles within those structures come in for particular scrutiny" (4). Establishing that the Gothic has a role in challenging or complicating gender roles, Heiland goes on to discuss Gothic transgression in terms of horror, what she terms "the creation of fear," a central concern for any Gothic text in order to tap the "disruptive, irregular, transgressive energies" which form the heart of the Gothic. Heiland relates the creation of fear with an engagement with the sublime and it is in that engagement that she observes the social transgression that is a hallmark of Gothic fiction (4-5). I argue that this engagement with and resistance to the sublime, and more importantly the transgressive power it generates, is vital for the development of the female hero both in her capacity as a hero and in her successful performance of her complex gender role.



The Gothic female hero retains the appearance of the feminine and adheres to many aspects of the feminine gender role, and yet she performs actions and demonstrates a physical form of agency conventionally reserved for men; under the terms of gender theory, her behavior and her appearance seem to contradict one another. In Judith Halberstam's terms, such a character's performance would occupy multiple different categories of gender simultaneously. This apparent contradiction is maintained, often with considerable tension, by the unique nature of the Gothic setting and the peculiar demands of that setting upon its hero. Nevertheless, the fact of that successful performance calls the framework of performative gender into question, and this performance must be placed in context with the ongoing critical work in gender studies to be properly appreciated. A further discussion of gender roles and the performative nature of gender will be presented in a brief review of gender studies criticism in the following section.

### 1.3 A Feminine Performance

I have discussed in general terms the Gothic's paradoxical ability to enable characters to occupy multiple and apparently conflicting roles simultaneously. In order to understand this in terms of the female hero, it is necessary to discuss these roles in the context of gender studies. More specifically, it is necessary to discuss what is being accomplished by the Gothic female hero in terms of these roles and the significance of those accomplishments in the larger context of gender studies.

The work of Judith Butler forms the foundation for much of this overview with her groundbreaking concept of gender as a performance rather than an objective reality based on sex. Her work suggests that gender has no objective or essential truth based on biological sex but is rather an entirely arbitrary concept; otherwise it would presumably not require the constant reaffirmation of performance. This is not to say that gender roles do not have an external source, merely that this source is determined not by absolute genetics but by established social expectations. Butler asserts that “‘being a man’ and thus ‘being a woman’ are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely” (Butler “Bodies” 126-27). Butler’s idea of cost is key here because it posits these gender roles as mutually exclusive – to perform one is perforce to relinquish the other.

An important aspect of the performative gender roles Butler describes is that, in order to be successful, the performance must work on a level that is accepted by an observer as unalterable fact. If the performance can be interpreted as a performance, then it has failed.

Butler notes:

For a performance to work, then, means that a reading is no longer possible, or that a reading, an interpretation, appears to be a kind of transparent seeing,

where what appears and what it means coincide. On the contrary, when what appears and how it is 'read' diverge, the artifice of the performance can be read as artifice; the ideal splits off from its appropriation. But the impossibility of reading means that the artifice works, the approximation of realness appears to be achieved, the body performing and the ideal performed appear indistinguishable (Butler, "Bodies" 129).

This point is critical because it means that a gender performance cannot diverge from expected norms to the extent that observers become conscious of it as a performance, or else it ceases to function as a credible performance and becomes a failed artifice. However, this poses a dilemma: if deviance from the feminine gender role constitutes a failure of that role, how then is a female character to take on credible conventionally masculine power, except by abdicating to some extent her feminine gender role for a more masculine one?

Further complicating this question is the nature of the gender performance itself, which is understood not as a moment in time but as a work in progress requiring constant effort and maintenance. Butler suggests "the term '*strategy*' better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs" (Butler, "Performative" 903). Butler summarizes this point:

Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. (Butler, "Performative" 907)

While Butler recognizes the potential for performances which challenge the expected gender roles, she also points out that this performance must act "*in accord with* certain sanctions and prescriptions," thus limiting the amount of individual variance a character can display from the expected role before stepping too far outside the realm of an expected performance of

“masculine” or “feminine” normative ranges. Too great a divergence would expose the artificiality of the performance and therefore destroy its credibility. Butler talks about nuanced and individual ways of performing one’s role, but these terms clearly suggest that while small variations might be permissible within a normative gender role, large variances are not. This means that performance is a significant limiting factor in the characterization of female heroes if they are to maintain their ostensibly non-performative feminine gender roles.

While Butler constructs her argument in terms of gender performances that deviate from the norm, my thesis uses Butler’s criterion of credible performance as a standard to evaluate the efficacy of *normative* gender performance, particularly femininity. If the performance is successful, i.e. is read as non-performative, then it is a viable gender performance regardless of its apparent variance from the normative. This is the standard by which my analysis judges the performance of the Gothic female hero, who I argue accomplishes the performance of several traditionally dichotomous gender roles and yet maintains a normative feminine gender role.

Butler’s argument uses the masculine as a normative baseline from which to describe deviance, while Judith Halberstam adds an additional layer of complexity by discussing masculinity itself as a constructed gender performance. Halberstam’s treatment of clothing and the ways in which it complicates the performance of gender builds upon this concept, exploring how masculine gender roles can be performed by various actors who need not be biological males. Halberstam discusses cross-dressing and clothing in general as coexisting with an underlying gender performance, producing the final gender role. In appropriating traditionally masculine attire and trappings, the female character challenges the normative performance of masculinity and thus brings its status as performance into sharp relief. By performing a pseudo-masculine role, the cross-dressing woman gains some of the conventional agencies of the masculine – notably physical prowess – but at the same time assumes into her gender performance a type of masculine role, which Halberstam terms “female masculinity.”

Halberstam analyzes the constructs of conventional masculinity and female masculinity, noting that “far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity. In other words, female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing” (1). Halberstam takes the discussion of performative gender to another level with the suggestion that the clothed self could be representative of the constructed gender role, stating her focus on “an elaborate construction of gender, sexuality, and self that takes place through a dressing that is not exactly cross-dressing and that positions itself against an aesthetic of nakedness” (99). This suggests that, with a change in costume, a character may literally effect a change in gender role. This concept of the function of clothing in constructing gender performance allows for a much wider range of possible performances, although characters remain limited by the necessity that their performance be “read” as fact by the audience rather than the performance it is if they are to be perceived as normative.

This standard of credibility not only seems to be a limiting factor not only for female characters who are performing traditional gender roles but also acts as a restriction on more active tomboyish figures who may be barred by their attire from assuming the roles of their gowned counterparts. Halberstam asserts that many women have felt that their masculine clothing represented their identities, which suggests an issue of cost reminiscent of Butler’s arguments, the compromise of one role for the sake of another (107). These tomboyish women are able to attain some masculine agency while still being read and perceived as women, but nevertheless their perceived identities have been altered and the tomboy has given up something in her performance to get where she is.

Halberstam makes careful note of this limitation, pointing out that tolerance for the tomboy’s variance from feminine gender roles only extends so far, accepted “only within a narrative blossoming of womanhood; within such a narrative, tomboyism represents a resistance to adulthood itself rather than to adult femininity” (6). Halberstam maintains that the

masculine woman is “a historical fixture, a character who has challenged gender systems for at least two centuries” (45), and without question an important one, despite her limitations. To a certain extent, by altering her manner and style of dress, the tomboy is able to take on masculine agency and yet retain a recognizably female identity, if not a feminine gender role. Halberstam’s “perverse presentist” method of historical analysis, used in her work for the identification of the multiple forms of female masculinity, may also be a suitable framework for the understanding of the historical expressions of femininity within the Gothic genre.

This analysis, although it deals directly and primarily with Gothic and gender studies, touches on a number of other topics which by virtue of their being tangential to the argument at hand will not be discussed in any great detail. Sexuality is clearly an often discussed topic within the context of the Gothic and as such its relation to the Gothic must be recognized and briefly examined. Michelle Massé argues that “the Gothic’s central concern is the enactment of subordination and domination, an enactment that traces the attempted fusion of power and eroticism, and whose goal is the delegation of individual will to another in the name of love” (157). There is a long history of reading the Gothic as implicitly sexual – Elaine Showalter claims that the Gothic as a genre expresses the dark side of women’s sexuality, mixing sexual fears and fantasies. Along these same lines, critics such as Diane Long Hoeveler and Helene Meyers discuss “victim feminism” and its connections to the Gothic, essentially theorizing that the Gothic heroine placed in sexual danger by the Gothic is in fact seeking her own defeat/victimization. Conversely, Kelly Hurley puts forth a reading of woman as sexual monster, a subhuman construction with an animalistic lust which must be externally controlled.

Clearly, the Gothic offers a complex treatment of issues of sexuality and many of these issues may overlap or complicate the arguments of gender studies I utilize in my analysis. However, as the primary critical framework of my argument lies in gender studies and the crux of my thesis is a unique gender performance, issues of sexuality within the Gothic are necessarily outside the scope of this thesis.

Queer studies, especially lesbian studies, has significant overlap with this discussion and many female heroes may have viable alternate readings as lesbian characters. However, my analysis will suspend this question in favor of addressing the complex issue of gender identity as portrayed by heterosexual female characters. Judith Halberstam makes note that "...there is probably a lively history of the masculine heterosexual woman to be told, a history, moreover, that must be buried by the bundling of all female masculinities into lesbian identity" (57). The focus of this thesis is placed squarely on just such a lively history, highlighting three heterosexual women over a period of two centuries in order to explore Butler in a direction not investigated previously. Julia, Capitola and Buffy take a significantly different approach to adopt masculine agency than that described by Butler. Rather than compromise the feminine role, the female heroes of the Gothic are able to exert traditionally masculine agency from within a feminine gender role because of the extenuating circumstances of the Gothic setting. While Halberstam's female masculine tomboy is able to achieve much of the same freedoms and masculine agency as the Gothic female hero, the Gothic female hero comes by her power another way, from the demands of her Gothic surroundings. She is able to sustain that performance for as long as the Gothic setting which enables it persists. Rather than changing her performance, she changes the rules that govern it.

The typical female hero of the Gothic is not only feminine in dress but often exaggeratedly so. She makes use of costume not to enable her to act outside her traditional gender role, but rather to reaffirm that role. The Gothic female hero wears fine dresses, wedding gowns, and cheerleading outfits to assert her femininity and often is very much concerned with the preservation of this identity. However, she remains capable of physical prowess, conventionally a trait of masculine agency, when Gothic circumstances demand it of her. She fights her own battles but wishes to be viewed as an object of desire, evidences passion but is very much concerned with others' perception of her virtue, traverses castles and graveyards yet remains at home on the ballroom floor.

Halberstam expands on Butler with the proposition of an arbitrary, socially constructed and performed masculinity; my argument focuses on the obvious corollary. If masculinity is performative, then logically so too is femininity, and while Halberstam deconstructs masculinity and explores the various deviations and aberrations from the socially constructed norm, it is the normative feminine gender performance that is the focus of my thesis. To say that the Gothic female hero maintains a normative feminine gender role is not to say that the performance of the female hero does not also require the same constant maintenance of her gendered identity demanded by other gender role performances, but as the Gothic serves to excuse transgressions, most of the work of the Gothic female hero's performance lies in maintaining the boundaries between roles which the Gothic's influence constantly erodes. Thus, the female hero is concerned less with legitimizing the masculine aspects of her physical prowess and more with persistently reinforcing her performance of the normative feminine role despite her displays of masculine power. My thesis explores the performance of this role under Gothic conditions over the course of two hundred years in an attempt to draw significant conclusions about the way in which the normative feminine gender role is constructed and how the Gothic affects and alters that construction.



## CHAPTER 2

### WHEN SHE REFUSES TO FAINT

The first of the three primary texts discussed in this thesis is Sarah Wood's *Julia and the Illuminated Baron*, a sentimental novel published in 1800. There has been relatively little scholarship on or critical attention to this remarkable text despite its surprising complexity, which this analysis will demonstrate. Although *Julia* adheres to many of the conventions of the sentimental novel, it also features significant departures from those conventions and a number of explicitly Gothic elements including a wicked aristocrat, a castle and a graveyard. The novel is unusual not only for the inclusion of these elements, but also for Julia's surprisingly assertive and forthright response to them in opposition to the expectations set up by the sentimental paradigm seen in the majority of the narrative.

#### 2.1 A Sentimental Moment in Early American Literature

*Julia* is generally considered a sentimental novel and while I focus on the Gothic elements within the narrative and argue that these elements actually subvert the paradigm of the sentimental novel, it is nevertheless important to discuss that paradigm. One important characteristic of the sentimental novel is its focus on women, with the central protagonist usually a young heroine. Cathy Davidson describes the concerns of the sentimental novel in this way: "the heroine was bound by home and hearth; her plight officially centered almost exclusively in her physical self, in the preservation of her virginity" (222). In a certain sense, the sentimental novel offered a new avenue for the portrayal of women. Although still limited by an external value structure with circumscribed expectations for the performance of women's gender roles, the sentimental novel nonetheless revolved around its female protagonist and thus offered a venue for the expression of women's issues and interests.

Alfred Habegger speculates that the sentimental novel may have served as a forum for the expression of “women’s interest in and fear of... the eighteenth century’s offering of heretofore unlikely opportunities to women... of their desire for greater freedom but apprehension of what this change might cost them” (201). On the subject of the heroines themselves, Habegger observes “a young woman facing ‘exemplary trials’ and struggling against them, all the while careful to avoid compromising her ‘extremely high moral standards’” (201). The heroine of the sentimental novel is tasked with reaffirming the identity expected of her in the face of challenges to that persona; to compromise her virtue or to allow that virtue to be compromised would mean failure of the heroine’s task and the end of her life – figuratively if not literally.

In general, the plot of the sentimental novel proceeds as follows: faced with challenges to her virtue, the heroine flees or faints and is rescued by an outside agent. Julia, the protagonist of Wood’s *Julia and the Illuminated Baron*, is presented as a sentimental heroine who is engaged to be married and concerned with her virtue and with others’ perception of it. The preservation of her “high moral standards,” as Habegger terms it, remains of paramount importance to the character throughout the novel. Failing this, the heroine’s virtue is undone, ending her story in tragedy. Julia, while possessing the same priorities and concerns as the typical sentimental novel heroine, acts in an unexpected fashion in contrast with this general plotline.

### 2.2 Recipe for Gothic: A Corpse, Scissors, and Lock of Hair

Although the novel is undeniably a sentimental text with only a few Gothic moments, these Gothic scenes constitute pivotal plot points around which the narrative turns. Julia’s assertiveness, strength and relatively broad interests make her an unusual sentimental heroine, but it is the Gothic sequences in the novel that move her beyond the scope of the typical sentimental heroine and into another class altogether. There are three distinct moments in the novel that I contend can be read as Gothic based on the recurring elements I outlined previously, namely the Gothic villain, wit, and the castle or enclosed space.

At the beginning of the novel, Julia is established as an orphan and has the good fortune to be adopted by the Countess de Launa. On her journey to the Countess's home, Julia and the Countess are saved by M. Francis Colwort from drowning in an overturned carriage, and Colwort agrees to stay with them for a time. In that brief time he and Julia develop feelings for each other, but he must journey to America and leaves Julia with the promise that he will marry her upon his return to France. The nephew of the benevolent Countess, the wicked Count de Launa, abducts Julia to his castle, where she is held captive and propositioned by the Count despite her engagement to the absent Colwort. Julia is left alone to fend off the improper advances of Count de Launa, a secret member of the Illuminati associated with the French Revolution. Based on the sentimental novel formula, one might expect Julia to run away or else to panic, but instead she rallies, standing up to her would-be ravager in the following startling display of wit:

I rejoice, my Lord, (relied she, almost smiling from the complacency of the idea,) I rejoice that your power is not adequate to your will, and that my fate is in the hands of one, who can controul [sic] both you and I at pleasure; who with one thought can bid this whirlwind of the passions cease, who will never put it in the power of a vain mortal, to say what shall, or what shall not be done; there is no situation, my Lord, above his reach, nor no one so humble as to be below his condescending care and kindness; he has promised to protect the orphan, and as such my Lord, I will depend upon him: Let me go, said she, firmly, I insist upon passing, and she passed him with a spirit that amazed him; leaving him astonished at her fortitude, and his mind a prey to conflicting passions. (Wood 91)

Julia repeatedly makes reference to God in her defiance of the wicked Count, but nevertheless she does defy him, to his face, with temerity one would not expect of a sentimental novel heroine. She speaks to him from a position of power and authority, denying him rather than fleeing his advances or fainting under the overwhelming horror of his lechery, and she

does so without any support beyond that granted by her faith. Wood is however careful to place conditions on this assertiveness, as in the scene immediately following this exchange: “But the fortitude of JULIA forsook her; as soon as she had left him, a kind of indignant desperation had supported her in his presence, but she hurried to her chamber, burst into tears” (91). While the tears are a typical response of a sentimental heroine to hardship and dire circumstances, Wood does not directly retract or contradict Julia’s assertiveness. This moment establishes the foundation for the remarkable self-possession Julia displays in the graveyard scene later in the novel. The Count, of all the Gothic villains within these three texts, is perhaps the most archetypal, and the reaction he produces from a character who heretofore had appeared to be a classic sentimental novel heroine is remarkable.

Not only is Julia assertive, she is also educated, a quality that is endorsed albeit conditionally by the narrator and the novel. Julia’s education consists of needlework, music and dance, but also of reading and more classical schooling, which Julia’s benefactor the Countess remarks on with approval: “I admire your sentiments, approve your conduct and am glad that your education has been such as to enlarge your mind and cultivate your ideas” (19). While this approval falls on the traditionally domestic pursuits as well as more progressive ones, it is nevertheless an endorsement, and the endorsement of Julia “enlarging her mind” and “cultivating her ideas” lays the foundation for further exercise of wit and courage such as the confrontation of horrors, carving a more permissive space in which Julia may perform her gendered role.

In another significant scene, Julia has had no contact with her fiancé, her benefactress and friend the Countess, or indeed anyone outside the castle, and realizes that she may well have to save herself if she is to be rescued from this enclosed space:

The day, however, was long and tiresome, and when at length the dreaded night came, and no news from the Countess, no release from the Count, not one glimmer of hope entered her gloomy abode to cheer it from without; all her resources were from within. (210)

This moment can be read as Gothic in that it presents a heroine in a clearly Gothic enclosed space, the aforementioned castle, with all of her ties to society apparently severed. This is very reminiscent of Cathy Davidson's description of American Gothic heroines "with no surrounding community to support her or tell her just what she ought or ought not to do" (222) and in stark contrast to the typical sentimental heroine for whom the loss of those ties is tantamount to tragedy. While Julia does in fact end up being rescued by her fiancé Colwort, in this preceding moment she ceases to look outward for rescue and instead chooses to place her confidence in her own wits, thus moving away from the sentimental novel heroine and towards the Gothic female hero.

The final overtly Gothic sequence in the pages of *Julia* is the graveyard scene. Like the castle of the Count, the graveyard is an enclosed space already associated with the Gothic genre, but unlike the castle, Julia enters the graveyard of her own free will. Accompanied by the servant Philada and her son Jaques, Julia ventures out to visit the grave of a woman named Leonora whom she had befriended during her captivity in the castle. When Philada expresses the desire for a lock of Leonora's hair, it is Julia who procures the hair from the corpse in this remarkable passage:

Julia produced her scissors, but Jaques could not use them; and anxious to gratify Philada, assumed courage to do it herself; Jaques took the candle, and Philada held the lanthorn [sic]; and Julia stooped to cut off the lock of hair, she looked around the tomb, she asked her heart if it was sacrilege, if she was doing wrong? but conscience answered in the negative, and she was proceeding; she had just touched the hair, when the stillness that pervaded the gloomy mansion was interrupted by a deep sigh; and Julia started, touched the face, to her horror it sunk into ashes, and mouldered into dust; not a feature remained; it was all an horrid chasm, for the affrighted imagination to fill up.  
(192)

The inclusion of a graveyard by candlelight and a decomposing corpse are obvious hallmarks of horror, much more at home in the Gothic genre than the sentimental novel, but what is perhaps more noteworthy in this passage is that, despite the presence of the male character Jacques, it is Julia who “assumes the courage” to approach the corpse and procure the lock of hair.

The taking of a talisman, the lock of hair, can be read as analogous to a masculine claiming of a token from a lover. Furthermore, Julia wields a weapon in the scissors and engages in a great deal of physical action in general in the act of taking the hair from the corpse, all of which would conventionally be conceived as masculine action. Julia’s company in this endeavor, a pair of servants, also adds to the transgressive nature of this scene. Their status as passive onlookers and as servants places them in a conventionally feminine position, creating a significant role reversal that is compounded by the fact that one of the servants is in fact male.

The novel, in addition to these overtly Gothic elements, also complicates the typical sentimental novel format in several other ways. For example, the novel takes the opportunity to comment on Julia’s performance as a sentimental heroine, especially via the mentor character of the Countess. At one point, the Countess says “I never supposed Julia what she appeared” (40), an interesting observation because the sentimental heroine is supposed to be precisely what she appears to be: a good woman of high moral standards tasked with emerging from her trials and tribulations unblemished. Nor do the Countess’s observations of Julia end there. Julia refuses to wear a mask to a masquerade ball, on the grounds that her good nature will not allow her to appear disguised. This, by contrast, would seem to be very much a sentimental moment in which Julia can display the extremes of her morality, and yet the Countess rebukes her for it, saying “I have but one fault, to find with you, said she, you are too good, and too submissive; I wish you were not half so faultless” (144). This seems a very strange criticism indeed for the heroine of a sentimental novel, as it suggests she should be less virtuous or less submissive, when the central concern of the sentimental novel heroine are those very qualities. The

Countess's comments here can be read as a critique of Julia's performance of her feminine gender role, but an interesting critique in that it addresses the issue of over-performance. The successful performance of normative gender roles, as presented by Butler, hinges on the performance being read as non-performative, so the criticism that a player is performing too well has interesting and paradoxical implications. There is the suggestion here that over-performance of the gender role can be as hazardous to the success of the performance as an inadequate performance, as the Countess seems to be critiquing Julia's performance (and thus must be conscious of it as a performance, meaning the performance has failed in this instance, but by excess rather than by variance or shortfall).

This ability to occupy two apparently contradictory roles – in Julia's case, confident adventuress and virtuous maiden – without compromising either is particular to the Gothic female hero and represents the defining characteristic of this character type. Because she was held against her will in a Gothic castle by a wicked Count, Julia is free to act outside of her proscribed role without compromising it: the Gothic setting is permissive, providing the extenuating circumstances the character requires to act in an extraordinary way, as in the graveyard scene.

Julia's often conflicted role as both adventurous maiden and proper lady reflects the cultural anxiety of the late eighteenth century, during which the role of the women in the new Republic was in question. Critical authorities on the period such as Linda Kerber, Mary Beth Norton and Jan Lewis note that while the Revolutionary War was premised on new concepts of individual rights and freedoms, there was considerable division in the new nation as to whether women ought to share these rights. Kerber describes the idealized Republican woman: "competent and confident. She could resist the vagaries of fashion; she was rational, benevolent, independent, self-reliant... Such women were rumored to exist in America; they were given fictional form by [Judith Sargent] Murray and Charles Brockden Brown" (206-07). Despite these portrayals, the place of women in reality remained uncertain and precarious, as questions arose of not only what women could or could not do, but what they should do. Norton

notes that, in the aftermath of the Revolution, “both men and women in America began to rethink the hitherto unchallenged negative characterizations of woman’s nature and role” (228). As *Julia* is clearly placed in a recently post-Revolution context by the frequent references to George Washington and the new nation, it is not difficult to see many of these anxieties within the trials and tribulations Julia undergoes.

Ultimately, Julia retains many of the characteristics of a sentimental heroine, but it is this very retention that makes her remarkable, since the circumstances of her story would normally be sufficient to undo her virtue and guarantee an unpleasant end to her tale. This does not happen in Julia’s case. Instead, her bold actions are somehow excused and she continues to be received as a sentimental heroine, complete with happy ending. It is my contention that the explanation for her extraordinary behavior lies in the Gothic elements of the narrative; because she is a Gothic female hero, she can be assertive and dainty, virtuous and valiant. If we read *Julia* as a Gothic text, then Julia’s departure from the Gothic setting naturally causes her to revert to her status as a sentimental heroine. Julia’s marriage and otherwise typical sentimental conclusion to her story following her extraction from the Gothic seem to support this reading. Though Julia displays the characteristics of a female hero, she displays no sign of maintaining that complex performance by the end of the novel.

Nevertheless, Julia’s deviations from the standard formula of the sentimental novel, combined with the overtly Gothic elements, form the foundation for reading *Julia* as a Gothic text. Cathy Davidson contrasts the sentimental novel with the Gothic, noting that “the typical early American sentimental heroine severs her bonds with community once she fails her test; but in early American Gothic novels, those bonds are severed long before the test begins ...” (222). While this is not wholly true of *Julia* as she is ultimately rescued and returned to her community, the Gothic scene referenced earlier could be read as such a severance at that moment in time. Julia does not end up being truly alone, but in that instant it is true for Julia and informs her actions. Normally in a sentimental novel such a divorce from the community would mean the end of the tale but, in Julia’s case she continues on and is ultimately rescued by her



true love. In a situation in which we might expect a typical sentimental novel heroine to meet a tragic end, either in death or in shame, Julia effectively saves herself while marking time until her rescue and yet is rescued and grafted back into the sentimental novel structure by the story's end.

CHAPTER 3  
THE RAPIER BRIDE

Published serially some sixty years after Wood's *Julia* in 1859, E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* is a sensational novel, one of the most popular novels of its day. *The Hidden Hand* follows the exploits of Capitola, a scrappy orphan girl who holds her own against such formidable Gothic villains as the powerful rogue Black Donald and the scoundrel Craven, dressing in men's clothing and engaging in combat yet winning many of her victories by wit or guile. Cap is introduced as a "ragamuffin" mistaken for a young boy because of her male clothing, with a "countenance full of fun, frolic, spirit, and courage" (Southworth 33). But it is her "girl's wit" (49) that is called upon to put her back into her female attire, and the feminine behavior associated with that attire. Throughout the novel, Capitola moves back and forth between masculine and feminine identities in terms both of literal clothing and in terms of the functional gender roles she occupies, making use of Gothic settings such as a haunted bedroom and a subverted wedding as strong pivotal points.

3.1 All the Sensation

*The Hidden Hand* has not conventionally been read as a Gothic text but rather as a sensational novel, although these two genres are not so far removed from one another as the Gothic and the sentimental. Southworth not only makes use of Gothic elements for the purposes of titillation to serve the interests of the sensational themes, but also makes use of cultural anxieties of the day concerning women's roles. The serial publication of *The Hidden Hand* in *The New York Ledger* over the course of 1859 served not only to heighten suspense but also to allow the Gothic elements to adapt much more readily to the concerns of the day. Further, by the very nature of its format the serial novel aids the author in creating the necessary Gothic atmosphere of suspense simply by structuring the novel to strategically utilize

the periods between publications as a method of creating such suspense (Looby 184), much the same way scene breaks work to build suspense or tension prior to commercials in television programs. Furthermore, the protracted length of time the serial novel is read allows for greater length and depth in the content of the novel since the audience is not asked to assimilate the novel all at once. This can make for a remarkably complex and rich final text. In a comment on the Southworth serial novel, Christopher Looby notes that it “promiscuously deploys literary conventions and allusions drawn from a tremendously wide variety of genres, resulting in a complex hybrid narrative” (185). Of course, the serial format also allows for and indeed encourages the shocking and titillating nature of Gothic fiction, what Looby terms “dark conspiracies,” a series of “outrageous, improbable, and erotically tantalizing plot developments that moralizing critics of popular fiction would have found improper were exciting to readers’ minds” (194-95). That these plot developments are scandalous or transgressive is the essence of their popularity and thus helps to guarantee their inclusion in serial installments to ensure that readers continue to follow the novel, adding an economic incentive for the publishing of Gothic serial novels. Yet, despite the fragmentation resultant from its serial publication, *The Hidden Hand* is more consistently Gothic in overall tone and plot than early Gothic texts such as *Julia*. Unlike *Julia*, *The Hidden Hand* integrates the Gothic into its overall narrative as opposed to only using a few key scenes, and Gothic elements are integral to the character and development of Capitola in the narrative. Once more, the ideas of wit, the enclosed space and the Gothic villain come into play, albeit in altered forms for a sensational text.

As a serially published sensational text, *The Hidden Hand* conforms to many of the expectations of the sensational genre, particularly the emphasis on titillation through spectacle and grand display – not a dissimilar goal to that of the Gothic, although accomplished by very different means. Shelley Streeby contrasts the sensational novel with the sentimental novel, focusing her comments on the sensational novel’s use of spectacle: “sentimentalism generally emphasizes refinement and transcendence, whereas sensationalism emphasizes materiality and corporeality, even or especially to the point of thrilling and horrifying readers” (31). This

emphasis on shocking the reader, especially in terms of transgression, is very much associated with the Gothic, helping to explain the inclusion of Gothic elements in sensational works that would seem on the surface to be adventure stories. Streeby also points out that female sensational writers such as Southworth and Louisa May Alcott made use of sites of international conflict as settings for their sensational tales. Referencing Amy Kaplan's work, Streeby points out that *The Hidden Hand* specifically "traces connections among the slums of New York City, a plantation in Virginia, and the battlefields of the U.S.-Mexican War" (33-34). Streeby also makes the point that *The Hidden Hand* was "certainly one of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century," making its relative obscurity today curious. The focus of the sensational on spectacle – these many exotic locales – is reminiscent of the Gothic genre's reliance on the castle and the graveyard, since both genres place great importance on setting. The setting in both genres, aside from adding to the expected atmosphere of terror in the case of the Gothic or adventure in the case of the sensational, interacts with and informs the characters who inhabit it, creating circumstances as part of the intrinsic nature of the setting to which the characters must respond.

The sensational genre is also noteworthy for its treatment of women, as Anne French Dalke discusses. She notes in a comparison of the sensational to the sentimental that while the latter offered women "an alternative vision of themselves, not as reactive agents, but as actors in the world at large. It did not offer them, however, a vision of themselves as sensual beings" (Dalke 291). To a certain extent, sensuality works against the arbitrary patriarchy-imposed feminine "virtue" which was the standard by which the gender performance of femininity was measured. As that standard changes over time – or is altered by the conditions of the Gothic – greater expression of sensuality is possible without breaking the integrity of the gender performance.

### 3.2 The Madcap's Closet: Suit or Dress, What's the Difference?

When compared to her sentimental novel predecessors, *Capitola* clearly represents a major shift in the characterization of the heroine. Habegger points out that Southworth's true genius is to begin *The Hidden Hand* in typical Gothic fashion: "a beautiful blonde victim, a group

of malign men, a setting redolent of ancient abuses, sacrifices, and superstitions – and then to subvert the genre by introducing this streetwise and self-reliant female prankster” (199). This technique of at once using conventions and then twisting or subverting them from within provides what Habegger terms “an invigorating anarchic comedy and a thematic coherence rare in popular fiction” and compares to *Capitola* favorably to Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, describing her as “our other innocent orphan whose inability to see any sense in social contracts most people take for granted generates a life-giving, liberating comedy” (200). While the particular focus of this reading is not on the comedic aspects of *Capitola*’s character, her subversion of expectations, whether social or those set up by the conventions of the Gothic genre itself, is a feature of the Gothic. This, combined with several explicitly Gothic scenes within the text, establishes the validity of a Gothic reading.

Perhaps the most striking of the aforementioned Gothic scenes is the wedding scene. In the pages leading up to this scene, *Capitola* has found the Hidden House, a house filled with mysteries and ghosts, and determined to explore it. Inside she meets fellow orphan Clara, who has recently been given into the hands of Colonel Le Noir by the Orphan’s Court. As Colonel Le Noir is now her guardian, he insists that Clara marry his son, Count Craven. After hearing of Clara’s plight, *Capitola* devises a plan to switch places with Clara, and each girl assumes the posture and imitation of the other. The female hero *Capitola* disguises herself as the bride Clara in order to save Clara from the villainous Craven and to arrange a confrontation with him, as depicted below:

The priest then turning towards the bride, inquired:

‘Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband,’ etc., etc., etc., “so long as you both shall live?’ To which the bride, throwing aside her veil, answered firmly: ‘No! not if he were the last man and I the last woman on the face of the earth, and the human race were about to become extinct, and the angel Gabriel came down from above to ask it of me as a personal favor.’ The effect of this

outburst, this revelation, this explosion, may be imagined but can never be adequately described. (315)

To term this scene transgressive is something of an understatement, as Capitola, in the guise of a bride, categorically rejects the villainous suitor in a striking display of wit. Furthermore, Cap's use of the wedding gown as disguise could be viewed according to Halberstam's theories as it is here clothing that enables her to perform a specifically gendered role. Marriage was often the ultimate goal of the sentimental heroine, the safety and security which would bring the novel to its happy conclusion as occurs in *Julia*, Cap's assumption of the role of the bride and subsequent, indignant denial to be wed at the height of the ceremony (corrupt or no) represents a significant act on the part of a woman. In confronting Craven, Capitola waits for the ceremonial marriage questions to be asked before repudiating Craven – rejecting him not as the tomboyish Capitola seen in much of *The Hidden Hand* but as a woman in a wedding dress, standing in a church at his side. The framing of Capitola's outburst allows her to step into a very specific gender role and utilize that role in a novel way. It is not Capitola the fighter who defeats Craven in this scene, but Capitola the bride, wielding only the rapier of her wit. That Capitola can accomplish this victory in this way further reinforces her ability to credibly perform conventional women's gender roles despite her preferred style of dress and apparent disregard for social mores that seem at odds with such roles.

In addition to her audacity, Southworth also showcases Capitola's keen wit in a subsequent scene. As those in attendance at the wedding demand an explanation for her disruption. Capitola replies:

It means that you have been outwitted by a girl; it means that your proposed victim has fled, and is by this time in safety. It means that you two, precious father and son would be a pair of knaves if you had sense enough; but, failing in that, you are only a pair of fools (316).

In this summation Capitola not only faces off with the villains of the piece, but also makes it clear that she has rescued Clara from their clutches and outmaneuvered them; in short, she

claims that she is the equal to these men and a great deal more. That she makes this speech in a wedding dress rather than in her usual attire makes it all the more powerful as the dress codes Capitola as a feminine rather than as a masculine heroine.

While the wedding scene may be among the most striking scenes in *The Hidden Hand*, the most overtly Gothic element is likely Capitola's haunted bedroom with the trapdoor leading down to the location of a supposed murder, a locale that utilizes several variations on the enclosed space all at once – the haunted room, the cramped space and the odd/twisted architecture in the mode of entry to the chamber, the trapdoor. Serving much the same function as the classic Gothic setting of the graveyard, Capitola's reaction to the room is telling. She declares "I am not afraid. I have been in too much deadly perils from the *living* ever to fear the *dead*. No, I like the room, with its strange legend" (Southworth 74). Though it quickly becomes apparent that Capitola is indeed bothered by the room, her determination overcomes her agitation in a very telling moment of self-definition:

Then, with an awful shudder Capitola pulled up and fastened the trap-door, laid down the rug and said her prayers, and went to bed by the firelight, - with little Pitapat sleeping on a pallet. The last thought of Cap, before falling to sleep, was: 'It is awful to go to bed over such a horrible mystery; but I *will* be a hero!' (Southworth 77)

One of the more noteworthy elements of this scene is the way in which Capitola's identity seems to be mutable in this Gothic space. She enters into the haunted room, makes the choice to be a hero and thus she is one. This mutability naturally invites an exploration of gender roles within the novel. Especially for a novel within a genre predicated on action and spectacle, the role of the hero is very much a masculine one. Southworth even goes so far as provide just such a masculine hero in the character of Black Donald to contrast with Capitola. While Black Donald relies on his great strength to carry the day, Southworth describes Capitola's heroism differently: "a naturally strong constitution and adventurous disposition, and inured from infancy to danger, [she] possessed a high degree of courage, self-control, and presence of mind" (114).

While these are heroic qualities, brute strength or even skill with weapons are not explicitly named among them. Capitola overcomes her archenemy Craven with a series of tricks and clever ruses rather than besting him in single combat or overcoming him by force of arms.

The most telling exploration of gender roles in the novel may be found in the conflict between Black Donald and Capitola. She cannot match Black Donald's sheer strength, and yet faces him down just the same:

'All your former acts,' continued Capitola, in the same voice of awful calmness  
'have been those of a bold, bad man! This act would be that of a *base one!*'  
'Take care, girl! No bad names! You are in my power! At my mercy!'  
'I know my position; but I must continue. Hitherto you have robbed mail-coaches and broken into rich men's houses. In doing this, you have always boldly risked your life, often at such fearful odds that men trembled at their firesides to hear of it. And even women, while deploring your crimes, have admired your courage' (390).

Capitola does not defeat Black Donald in combat, neither is she defeated by him, though she recognizes his superiority in physical combat. Instead, she rebukes him for his behavior and reminds him of the proper responsibilities of his heroism, intimating that Capitola, despite her lack of reverence for social conventions, is herself a moral and virtuous figure. In this scene Capitola demonstrates possession of the archetypal qualities of a good woman, specifically a strong concern for virtue and an appreciation of the courage of men. This combined with the rage she displays when she is slandered by her nemesis Craven suggests that the Capitola has many of the same priorities and concerns of any sentimental heroine despite the great physical prowess she employs.

While both Black Donald and Craven display elements of Gothic villainy, including a flair for the dramatic, a penchant for placing the heroine in jeopardy and a certain degree of corruption and defiance of social mores, Craven is clearly the more archetypically villainous,



even down to his name, which means “cowardly.” While Capitola engages both men with her wit, it is Craven she must overcome while Black Donald she is able to turn into an ally.

Capitola’s confrontation with Craven following slanderous rumors of her promiscuity serves an interesting double function in this respect. From one perspective, the battle confirms Capitola’s interest in protecting her good name and perceived virtue, and the vehemence of her response suggests she values these qualities very highly. This in turn implies that her masculine style of dress and disobedient pattern of behavior have not been a threat to those ideals, as presumably Capitola would not have been willing to compromise her virtue. By presenting Capitola as outraged and indignant, Southworth creates a subtle but strong case that Capitola’s previous actions and patterns of behavior can co-exist with the conventional values Capitola so zealously defends.

Conversely, the confrontation itself is a physical one, a battle in which Capitola calls out her foe to an honor duel, a task usually undertaken by the lady’s champion rather than the lady herself. Like Julia, Capitola comes to the realization that no outside agent is going to come to her rescue and, if she is to be saved, she must do so herself. Although Southworth informs us that Capitola has been unable to get any man to make the challenge, the fact that Capitola takes it upon herself to do so suggests that she feels capable of assuming this role. In her challenge, Capitola attacks Craven’s masculinity just as he threatened her feminine virtue:

The MEN are all dead! if any ever really lived!’ cried Cap, in a fury. ‘Heaven knows I am inclined to believe them to have been a fabulous race like that of the mastodon or the centaur! / certainly never saw a creature that deserved the name of man! The very first of your race was the meanest fellow that ever was heard of! eat the stolen apple, and when found out, laid one half of the blame on his wife, and the other on his maker – ‘the WOMAN whom THOU gavest me’ did so and so! Pah! I don’t wonder the Lord took a dislike to the race and sent a flood to sweep them all off the face of the earth! – I will give you one

more chance to retrieve your honor! In one word, now – will you fight that man?

(366)

Capitola employs physical means to best Craven, but forces his confession by making him believe that he is dying, another use of guile rather than brawn to achieve her objectives. At this point, like Julia in the graveyard, Capitola steps forward because – as we are explicitly told – there is no man who can do what is necessary. While this caveat certainly implies that a male agent would be preferable should a suitable one be available, the fact that the female hero is not only capable of stepping into the role but executes it with great success holds another meaning altogether. Capitola, a female hero forged in the Gothic, proves herself capable of besting her enemy in combat and yet still remains attractive and feminine, capable of addressing all the concerns necessary to maintain the performance of that gender role.

This is not to say, however, that Capitola completely or exclusively embraces the feminine gender role any more than she absolutely adopts the masculine. Capitola's guardian, Old Hurricane, exerts pressure on her over most of the novel to conform to more conservative standards of femininity and on many occasions he attempts to discourage her more tomboyish activities and suggest more "appropriate" pastimes in their place. On the subject of embroidery, an activity emblematic of compliant and conservative femininity, Southworth gives us this passage from Capitola in response to Hurricane's effort: "'No; no better than I do a quiet country grave-yard. I don't want to return to dust before my time, I tell you,' said Cap, yawning dismally over her work" (151). The message that Capitola finds these activities boring and of little value is not difficult to appreciate. While Capitola remains concerned with issues of her reputation, standing and virtue, she nonetheless has little patience with the stereotypical refinement of the sentimental heroine. She takes care to maintain aspects of her feminine gender role but abandons or disdains other activities and interests conventionally associated with that role.

Capitola faces the threat of Craven in her heroic persona, remaining feminine while performing a role usually coded masculine, but she also faces another threat in Old Hurricane. Her guardian's attempts to pressure her into a more conservative lifestyle challenge Capitola's

commitment to and ability to engage in a conventionally feminine rather than traditionally masculine arena. Fought in the sewing room rather than dueling ground, the conflict is clear in both cases. In this instance, Capitola is asked to perform a role usually coded feminine but retains enough of her heroic, masculine side to be dissatisfied with the tedium of the task and refuse. Habegger recognizes Old Hurricane as “another grave threat to her freedom” (203). Capitola’s opponent on the dueling ground, Craven, is defeated not by brute strength but by cunning. Capitola wins, but not in the fashion a conventional male hero might use in her position. Conversely, Capitola chooses to act rather than attempt to placate, coerce or convince Old Hurricane as a conventionally female protagonist might, eventually causing him to exclaim: “You deserve to have been a man, Cap! Indeed you do, my girl!” (319).

As we observed in *Julia*, *The Hidden Hand* is also concerned with the prevailing cultural anxieties of its day. Capitola’s outrageous and provocative character can be seen as once again reflecting the changing role of women in American society. Although the nineteenth-century was dominated by the cult of true womanhood that relegated women to the domestic sphere and associated them with sentimental ideals, Southworth and other writers challenged the ideology of domesticity defining women’s identities. Other events such as the international conflict of the U.S./Mexican War (which figures briefly in *The Hidden Hand*) and antebellum tensions that would eventually lead to the Civil War underscored the shifting dynamics of the era. As scholars of nineteenth-century literature have argued, popular texts were designed as social commentary on these issues and events; Jane Tompkins, for example describes novels’ “plots and characters as providing society with the means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions” (200).

Capitola has utilized a conventionally masculine dynamic to solve her conventionally feminine dilemma and vice versa, again demonstrating her proficiency in navigating both roles or, indeed, occupying them simultaneously. Capitola proves herself a hero and a good woman, transgressing boundaries in one scene and upholding values in another, making it difficult to

define her performance into one circumscribed role. As a Gothic heroine, Capitola defies easy categorization or understanding and repeatedly demonstrates her ability to perform aspects of whatever gender role is best suited to the situation at hand. Equally credible in walking into a haunted room or down the aisle in a bridal gown, Capitola embodies the extremes of which the Gothic female hero is capable.

## CHAPTER 4

### JUST A GIRL

Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was a critically-acclaimed television series which spanned seven seasons from 1997 to 2003 and features the eponymous protagonist, one singular girl destined from birth to be the Slayer and oppose vampires and other monsters. Buffy Summers is the Slayer, the child of a working single mother and the protégée of Watcher and school librarian Rupert Giles, although as the series progresses the character of Giles transforms more to the role of surrogate father while the role of advisor increasingly falls on the character of Buffy's best friend Willow Rosenberg. Critic Rhonda Wilcox points out this fact as a significant divergence from expected Gothic archetypes: "Instead of a patriarchal Van Helsing, *Buffy* provides a short, slight, teenage girl" (20). Buffy quickly forms attachments with fellow high school students Xander Harris and Willow Rosenberg, whom she meets and subsequently rescues from vampires on her first day of school, and these four characters form the core of the series for seven years. Buffy arrives in the town of Sunnydale, California in the first episode to begin her sophomore year of high school. This is an apparently quiet middle-class and largely suburban town which sits on a doorway to Hell. Called a Hellmouth, it is positioned directly beneath the high school, and the metaphor of high school as hellish persists for the first three seasons until Buffy graduates at the conclusion of the third season and the school (not the gateway) is destroyed.

#### 4.1 Life of a Slayer

The series contains many obvious Gothic elements, some of the most prominent being the inclusion of vampiric and other monsters, the establishment of a patriarchal and British society that controls the Slayer, and the employment of numerous enclosed spaces as settings such as an underground church, sewer lines, caves, a plethora of graveyards and mausoleums

and a subterranean military complex to name but a few. However, *Buffy* makes many deliberate efforts to subvert the expectations created by the Gothic genre, expanding the destabilizing effect of the Gothic on established structures to include those of the Gothic itself. A hybrid genre from its inception, the Gothic here hybridizes itself with other genres while at the same time subverting the conventions of those genres, with the end result of a unique and often unpredictable work which borrows conventions from multiple genres and violates them with impunity. One such moment occurs in the opening scene of the pilot episode: a pensive young schoolgirl and a young man break into the school at night apparently for a tryst and pause to look around the deserted building, only to have the nervous schoolgirl rather than the young man be revealed at the scene's conclusion as the aggressor and monster (Whedon, "Welcome to the Hellmouth"). This subversion is a recurring Gothic theme, and Buffy herself in many ways fits closely with Cathy Davidson's definition of the Gothic heroine in that she seldom has outside help to assist or to rescue her. While she is invested with considerable power, she is not invincible and she is very much aware of the possibility that she may die. This is particularly true early in the series when Buffy is still relatively new to her calling and has yet to establish many of the relationships which stabilize, at least in part, the tension between the two sides of her character. Later Buffy establishes complex ties with several classmates, engages in a romantic relationship with a reformed vampire, and forms a familial relationship with the Watcher Rupert Giles. Giles' dual role as Slayer's Watcher and high school librarian is far less strained than Buffy's own (as the two roles are often remarkably similar) but nevertheless he helps to sustain Buffy's character by his ubiquitous presence in both graveyard and schoolyard.

Over the course of the series, Buffy dates two vampires, three schoolboys and a soldier, attends college, loses her mother to cancer, becomes the guardian of her younger sister Dawn, sacrifices herself to save her friends, returns from the dead, slowly recovers from a kind of post-traumatic stress as a result of resurrection and ultimately becomes responsible for dozens of young Potential Slayers as a combination of role model, field trainer and general by

the final season. Throughout the series, Buffy maintains her femininity in attitude, interests and style of dress despite her steadily increasing heroic responsibilities as the Slayer and the complications in her mundane life. Catherine Spooner, speaking in general terms of the series, declares that “*Buffy* is a text that perhaps more than any other embodies the possibilities of contemporary Gothic: not only does it constantly interrogate the stories and generic conventions from which it springs ... but it also plays games with other genres” (Spooner 114-15).

Although *Buffy* ostensibly takes place in a world of Gothic horror, the show is noted for its incorporation of other elements and tones such as action, comedy and drama. These contrasting styles enable the show to develop tension between Buffy Summers’ life as a high school student with friends, extracurricular interests and schoolwork and her nocturnal duties as slayer of the undead and defender of the innocent. In fact, Elyce Helford argues that “*Buffy*, the white, middle-class protagonist, carefully controls, redirects, and uses humor to diffuse her anger in order to maintain heroic power while upholding a ‘ladylike’ identity” (21). Helford is describing the qualities I have defined for the Gothic female hero – heroic power coupled with the maintenance of an effective feminine gender performance. She credits *Buffy*’s contrasting tones of drama and comedy with a role in the sustenance of that balance, making use of humor as a release for excess masculine energies which might otherwise upset the balance between *Buffy*’s power and her gender performance (Helford 21).

In a scene which creator Joss Whedon has described as a microcosm of the entire series, a typical nighttime encounter for *Buffy* is presented. *Buffy* steps out into an alleyway where a vampire is attacking an unidentified teenage boy, attacking her foe first with her wit before finally defeating him with her supernatural Slayer physical prowess:

BUFFY. (*innocently*) Hey, what's going on?

KID. Help me! Call the police!

VAMP. Get outta here, girl. (turns back to the Kid)

BUFFY. (*emerging from the doorway*) You guys havin' a fight? 'Cause, you know, fighting's not cool.

KID. Get out of here!

VAMP. No. (*turns fully toward Buffy*) No, she wants to stay. I don't mind a little appetizer.

BUFFY. (*small frown, walks forward*) Have you ever heard the expression, 'biting off more than you can chew'?

*The Vamp frowns, shakes his head.*

BUFFY. Okay. Um ... how about the expression, 'Vampire slayer'?

VAMP. What the hell you talkin' about?

BUFFY. Wow. Never heard that one. Okay. How about, 'Oh god, my leg, my leg'?

*The Vampire growls and lunges at her. She ducks his grab, punches him in the face and kicks his leg. His knee buckles and he falls to the ground.*

VAMP. Oh god! My leg! Uhh...

BUFFY. See? Now we're communicating.

*The Vamp surges up, grabs Buffy and throws her against the wall. He grabs her again but she pushes his arms away, punches him in the face, knees him, then goes around behind him and kicks him into the wall. He lands against a dumpster, turns and backhands Buffy, who stumbles forward toward the boy. The boy leaps out of the way. The Vamp punches Buffy again, picks her up and slams her down on top of another dumpster.*

*Shot of the Kid cowering in the corner.*

*Buffy kicks the Vamp, cartwheels off the dumpster and kicks him again, then again, and then yet again. On the final kick he lands on his back among a pile of wooden boxes. They all shatter.*



*One of the shards of wood flies toward Buffy and she catches it. As the Vampire lunges up out of the boxes, she stakes him with the piece of wood. The boy watches in shock.*

*The Vamp turns to dust. Buffy drops the makeshift stake and stares at the pile of dust as the boy continues to cower in the background.*

BUFFY. Wow. Been a long while since I met one who didn't know me.

*She turns to go, pauses and looks at the Kid.*

BUFFY. You should get home.

*She begins walking back toward the door she came out of.*

KID. H-how'd you do that?

*Angle on Buffy's back as she walks toward the door. She doesn't turn or stop as she replies.*

BUFFY. It's what I do.

KID. But you're ... you're just a girl.

*Buffy pauses in the doorway.*

BUFFY. That's what \*I\* keep saying.

*She walks through the door. (Whedon, "The Gift")*

Buffy deliberately presents herself as a potential victim, then subverts the expectation of the vampire and defeats him. Perhaps the most telling exchange occurs at the end of the scene between the victim and Buffy, when he says "you're just a girl," At various points in the series, Buffy wishes very much to be "just a girl," to have the luxury to indulge in feminine pursuits without the responsibilities attendant on her heroics. Although she ultimately accepts the mantle of her responsibilities, the tension between Buffy the girl and Buffy the Slayer is maintained throughout the series. Helford comments on this emphasis, stating that Buffy repeatedly reaffirms norms with the observation that "Buffy perfectly fits the program's self-fashioned standards of normalcy. There is no danger of emotional excessiveness from Buffy, unless it is to

portray normative (hetero) romantic anguish or to demonstrate the 'normal' tendency to err in judgment from time to time as a teen" (23). In essence, Helford is arguing that Buffy's normative performance is assisted by the fact that her environment holds its own peculiar standards to which she must conform, a phenomenon I argue represents the key enabling element of the Gothic for the female hero's complex gender performance.

#### 4.2 Buffy's Performance

Buffy is the most fully manifested example of the Gothic female hero under discussion in this thesis, maintaining the complex gender performance of the normative feminine role in spite of ever-increasing demand for masculine-style physical heroics and leadership. While Buffy does not lead in a stereotypically masculine fashion, she is nevertheless the single undisputed and autocratic leader of the show's core group of characters and routinely makes unilateral decisions that the others abide by, respecting her authority. As a Gothic female hero, Buffy's remarkable success is attributable to the extent to which she is immersed in Gothic settings. Buffy attends school over a gateway to Hell, spends her nights in graveyards or surrounded by arcane books, and regularly engages in battle with vampires and various demonic forces; it is fair to say that Buffy is almost constantly surrounded by the Gothic. Not only is a Buffy a strong example of a Gothic female in her own right, but her narrative forms strong connections with historical Gothic genres.

Tying *Buffy* to *Julia* is the episode "Hallowe'en" in the show's second season, which makes a direct link between *Buffy* and the sentimental novel when Buffy makes an idle wish to be an eighteenth-century girl, concerned that her own femininity is lacking in comparison with that represented by the eighteenth-century girl. Buffy inadvertently purchases an enchanted costume and is consequently transformed into a sentimental heroine for much of the course of the episode. In one telling scene, the eighteenth-century sentimental version of Buffy discovers a photograph of her contemporary self and her friends, which prompts the following exchange:

BUFFY: This... this could be me.

WILLOW: It *\*is\** you. Buffy, can't you remember at all?

BUFFY: No! I, I don't understand any of this! Uh, uh, th... This is some other girl! (*puts the picture back*) I would never wear this, that low apparel, and I don't like this place, and I don't like you, and I just wanna go home!

WILLOW: You *\*are\** home!

*Buffy is practically in tears. Willow turns back to Xander.*

WILLOW: She couldn't've dressed up like Xena?

(Whedon, "Hallowe'en")

While Buffy sheds this persona by the episode's end, the series clearly establishes her desire for, if not this precise and anachronistic ideal of femininity, at least something similar. While Julia's narrative was remarkable for her possible over-exaggeration of the feminine, it is this very quality which attracts Buffy. Lorna Jewett, author of *Sex and the Slayer*, makes the observation that "the show's self-conscious play with generic and gender conventions means that Buffy is marked by excess in contradictory ways: she is hyperfeminine as well as exceptionally strong and heroic" (23). This hyperfemininity may very well be a point of affinity between Buffy Summers and sentimental heroines such as Julia.

One of Buffy's overriding concerns throughout the series is the anxiety that her role of the Slayer will in some way compromise her femininity, which leads her into procuring the costume in order to indulge in her fantasy of an even more exaggerated hyperfemininity. However, the level of Gothic threat is considerably higher in Buffy's world than in Julia's world, and the sentimental heroine is not prepared to offer a heroic response commiserate with the need. Buffy's transformation therefore leaves her vulnerable and very nearly results in her death. Nevertheless, Buffy's anxiety surrounding her femininity is established very clearly via this device, and remains a major theme throughout all seven years of the series.

Having already presented an extreme archetype at one end of this central tension in Buffy's character with the eighteenth century girl in the second season, the series provides a

example at the opposite end of the spectrum with the character of The Primitive in the fourth season. A dream representation of the primal First Slayer, The Primitive is a warrior figure who abandons all connection to society, let alone femininity. The Primitive refuses even to speak at first, instead communicating through the image of Tara, who at this point in the series is an ancillary character. Buffy's encounter with The Primitive is transcribed below:

TARA: *(offscreen)* I have no speech. No name. I live in the action of death, the blood cry, the penetrating wound. *(The woman straightens up and looks Buffy in the eye.)*

TARA: I am destruction. Absolute ... alone. *(Buffy frowns.)*

BUFFY: The Slayer. *(The other woman looks at her.)*

TARA: *(offscreen)* The first. *(Shot of Buffy's hand, holding a bunch of Tarot-shaped cards. In the one on top we see a scene of Giles, Buffy, Willow, and Xander in Joyce's living room watching TV.)*

*(Shot of Buffy looking at the card in her hand, with the mountains behind her.)*

BUFFY: I am not alone. *(Shot of Tara in the background, the First Slayer in the middle ground, and Buffy's back in the foreground.)*

TARA: The Slayer does not walk in this world.

BUFFY: I walk. *(Side shot of the three of them.)*

BUFFY: I talk. I shop, I sneeze. I'm gonna be a fireman when the floods roll back. *(Shot of the First Slayer lifting her chin in anger.)*

BUFFY: *(offscreen)* There's trees in the desert since you moved out. *(The First Slayer shakes her head)* And I don't sleep on a bed of bones. *(Shot of Buffy's face.)*

BUFFY: *(firmly)* Now give me back my friends. *(The First Slayer speaks in a very low, hoarse voice.)*

FIRST SLAYER: No ... friends! Just the kill. *(Shot of Buffy watching her.)*

(Whedon "Restless")

This scene makes the tension presented throughout the series explicit, the idea that the character of Buffy Summers must either compromise her identity as a woman to maintain her identity as the Slayer, or else compromise her power as the Slayer to safeguard her femininity. The First Slayer speaks in just those absolute terms, but Buffy rejects them with the claim that the Gothic female hero can be both at once, that she need not cease being either one in order to be the other. Buffy's victory over the First Slayer in the dreamscape would seem to endorse her side of the argument over that voiced by The First Slayer; in other words, Buffy's triumph not only reaffirms her role as the Gothic female hero capable of performing the roles of both normative femininity and masculine heroism, but also establishes the primacy of the former over the latter. Buffy is first a normative feminine performer who engages in heroic action, rather than an action hero who is occasionally feminine.

Lorna Jewett addresses this issue directly with the observation that Buffy "cannot entirely escape the masculinization of the female action hero or the exceptionalism of the female protagonist" (21). By assuming both the traditionally male horror role of the vampire fighter and the traditionally male action role of the hero, Buffy very clearly engages in behaviors which would conventionally be read as masculine much as Capitola does when she engages in pistol dueling, complicating her struggle to uphold her feminine gender performance, although this is a more prominent concern in Buffy's narrative than in that of Capitola.

In addition to being a masculine warrior persona, the responsibilities incumbent on the Slayer also form a large part of the character of Buffy Summers; Buffy is compelled by a destiny and, moreover, by a moral obligation to protect others from monsters because she has the power to do so. This aspect of the character is best summarized in the first season of the series, in which Buffy learns that her role as the Slayer will result in her imminent death and subsequently makes the decision to abdicate that role. In the final episode of that season, "Prophecy Girl," there is a vampire attack on Buffy's school and Buffy's best friend Willow

discovers the bodies. Tearful, she explains, "it wasn't our world anymore. They made it theirs. And they had fun... What are we gonna do?" Buffy replies simply, "What we have to" (Whedon, "Prophecy Girl"). Willow describes entering a Gothic setting – a room full of victims savagely murdered by vampires – and confronted by the necessity created by the Gothic villainy of the vampire threat, Buffy realizes she has no alternative but to reassume her heroic role. If she does not, no one will.

This is an extension of theme of necessity driving the heroine to transgression seen in *Julia* and *The Hidden Hand*; in the two previously discussed Gothic texts, the necessity was the protection of the character's own life, while in *Buffy* it is the lives of others that rely on the heroics of the central heroine. This elevates Buffy's heroic status from self-defense to something akin to a defender of the realm. That Buffy's character is capable of exercising such a degree of conventionally masculine methods of action while preserving her feminine gender role is testament to the strength of her construction as a modern gothic female hero and to the considerable maintenance the series invests in reinforcing those performances.

Frances Early comments on the construction of Buffy's dual roles as part of her discussion of feminine just warriors, asserting that "Buffy's calling as a special kind of just warrior who is honor bound to protect humanity and to sacrifice for the greater cause of fighting evil exists in tension with her own desires, including erotic desires, and with her longing to enjoy a normal life" (58-59). Early notes that plot structures, action and dialogue all act to reinforce this duality within Buffy, and asserts that Buffy's body and capacity for heroism are inseparably tied to her sense of self. Buffy's character not only succeeds in performing this complex dual role but is actually incapable of *not* performing as a female gothic hero if her sense of self is to remain intact. Given the dire consequences Buffy experiences whenever either her heroic power or her feminine gender role is weakened or over-expressed, it seems likely that the stability of Buffy's sense of self is directly tied to her successful navigation of the tensions between her duties as the Slayer and her desires as Buffy Summers.

Having rejected the idea of abandoning her femininity completely for her Slayer persona in her dialogue with the Primitive, Buffy rejected the opposite choice because she cannot ignore the horrific necessity that compels her into action. This dynamic is expanded in the seventh and final season of the series, in which additional Potential Slayers are introduced. These characters further explain the underlying mythology of the series by their arrival, as each is a potential slayer candidate. The structure of the Slayer mythos is such that there can be only one current Slayer, but a replacement Slayer is mystically anointed on the occasion of the previous Slayer's death. Now under threat of extermination by a force of elemental evil called The First and its agents, the Potential Slayers are brought under Buffy's protection.

Buffy's relationship with the Potential Slayers as possible peers could be viewed as an externalization of Buffy's inner conflict, as the series presents an array of characters who can effectively be read as Slayers with whom Buffy can be contrasted. This change of one slayer to many also forces a transition in Buffy's role from warrior to general, as exemplified in this speech:

BUFFY: (*resolute*) I'm beyond tired. I'm beyond scared. I'm standing on the mouth of hell, and it is gonna swallow me whole. And it'll choke on me. We're not ready? They're not ready. They think we're gonna wait for the end to come, like we always do. I'm done waiting. They want an apocalypse? Oh, we'll give 'em one. Anyone else who wants to run, do it now. 'Cause we just became an army. We just declared war. From now on, we won't just face our worst fears, we will seek them out. We will find them, and cut out their hearts one by one, until The First shows itself for what it really is. And I'll kill it myself. There is only one thing on this earth more powerful than evil, and that's us. Any questions?

(Whedon, "Bring on the Night")

In the final episode of the series, the established laws of the Gothic universe in which Buffy resides are fundamentally changed. Faced with an army of vampires gathering underground within perhaps the ultimate Gothic enclosed space, a Hellmouth, Buffy concocts a plan to rewrite the rules of her own story, transforming all the Potential Slayers into full Slayers like herself, effectively creating an army of her own and going from a unique destined hero to one among many equal Slayers. This is a unique change in the Gothic genre in that it actually decentralizes the focus of the battle between heroine and villain by creating multiple female heroes rather than one central protagonist.

#### 4.3 When In Gothic

Buffy remains the ostensible general and the most experienced of the Slayers, but is no longer uniquely suited to battle the Gothic forces of darkness and thus is able to share the burden of her duties with many other women. Buffy retains all of her essential qualities including the power of the Slayer, the attendant concerns for her femininity and the energy which comes from the constant transgression of that normative femininity with masculine action. Yet, in one action Buffy goes from a solitary figure to the head of a community of similar women, creating her own peer group. I have argued that the Gothic enables the female hero's gender performance to be successful by changing the underlying conditions and enabling exercises of power that would likely otherwise be extremely disruptive to the normative feminine gender performance. In this instance Buffy takes this action an extraordinary step further. A character within a Gothic narrative, Buffy transgresses against underlying laws of her own lore and as a result further enables her own performance of femininity.

While it still seems clear that Buffy retains a duty to exercise her power for the protection of others, the argument from the first season which persuaded Buffy to accept her Slayer calling seems to hold less force in this context. Willow's plea implies that if Buffy did not act, there would be no other recourse. Now, as one among many, Buffy is free to allow fellow Slayers to act in her stead. Despite the obvious benefits to Buffy herself, she does not make this



decision unilaterally but rather shares the plan with the entire group and asks for their consent, in the following scene:

BUFFY: So here's the part where you make a choice. What if you could have that power... now? In every generation one Slayer is born because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men.

*She points at Willow, who smiles nervously.*

BUFFY: This woman is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rule. I say my power should be our power.

(Whedon, "Chosen")

As the spell is cast, the scene depicts not only the various Potential Slayers coming into their full power, but also numerous other, as yet undiscovered, women receiving the mantle of the Slayer. While not explicitly identified in the scene except by visual cues, they are described in the episode's transcript and include a girl up to bat on a softball field, a teenage schoolgirl, a café waitress in India, a Japanese girl sitting at her family dinner table and an abused daughter being struck by her father who catches his blow as she becomes a Slayer. Buffy's voice over concludes the scene with the words "Can stand up, will stand up. Slayers... every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?" (Whedon, "Chosen").

The series makes extensive use of Gothic settings and elements, up to and including this magic spell, cast over a doorway to Hell, which transforms all of the Potential Slayers into full Vampire Slayers. There are many dramatic implications to the changes to the Slayer mythos Buffy effects in the final episode, the most obvious and critical of which is the elimination of what had been a defining quality of the Slayer: isolation. Buffy has transformed herself from a lone warrior, uniquely equipped to protect others from the forces of darkness and forced by Gothic necessity to assume the role of the hero, to the head of an all-female army dedicated to the same goal. This serves as a stark contrast not only to the solitary heroics of Buffy in the earlier

seasons of the series, but also to the heroics of Julia and Capitola in the previous texts. Not only would this presumably reduce or even eliminate the Gothic necessity for Buffy (as there would now be other Slayers to fulfill her duties if she did not or could not attend to them herself), but it represents a paradigm shift from a Gothic world in which an unlikely heroine faces monsters alone to a world in which an army of powerful women oppose the darkness as a unified force. This could be read as an extension of Gothic necessity to cover a much larger contingent of female heroes – altering the laws of one’s reality is after all a massively transgressive act. Since this event takes place during the final episode, an analysis of the repercussions can be based only upon speculation and what information is provided in the episode “Chosen.” Buffy’s speech emphasizes not only that each Slayer will have power, but that they will share that power. She makes no mention of a hierarchy and although she is the most experienced of the Slayers, the assumption remains that all Slayers will be equal following the spell – a model for an army that does not match a conventionally regimented and masculine structure. This represents a departure from the narratives of Julia and Capitola in that, by the conclusion of her story, Buffy is no longer a singular female hero but one of many.

It is, however, reasonable to assume that Buffy is likely to be the role model for the emergent Slayers, so an understanding of her character may well be applicable to the other Slayers, with allowances made for their respective histories and the nature of their characters. Despite the great power she wields, Buffy does not fit into Halberstam’s concept of female masculinity in that she is not in the least tomboyish. In fact, at one point in the fourth season she refuses for fashion reasons to wear combat fatigues (“The “I” in Team”). Buffy’s attire varies considerably, from a white dress during her battle with the Master Vampire in the first season to a halter during regular campus patrols in the fourth season. While the aspects of Halberstam dealing with masculine clothing do not seem to apply to the character of Buffy, Halberstam’s conception of masculinity as a performance that must be perceived as non-performative remains applicable as issues of femininity and masculinity run throughout the series. Although

in my case it is the assertion of normative femininity which is the overriding concern rather than variances from normative masculinity, my argument owes a great deal to Halberstam in its construction, as Halberstam established the concept of an arbitrary, socially determined and performative masculinity that would necessarily need to be constantly affirmed and maintained. Halberstam investigated female masculinity, the adoption of aspects of masculinity by females often associated with masculine clothing or behaviors. However, my argument focuses less on the constructed forms of masculinity than on the construction and maintenance of femininity. The female heroes of the Gothic do exercise power in the conventionally masculine sphere of physical action, but unlike Halberstam's female men they do not take on the appearance or attributes of men in the process. Indeed, quite the opposite. Gothic female heroes often display episodes of hyperfemininity, preserving their recognizable normative feminine gender roles as a paramount concern. Buffy's explicit rejection of male clothing in "The I in Team" and her frequent wearing of very feminine clothing even when in combat (a white prom dress for her battle with the Master Vampire in the first season, for instance) argue against her classification as one of Halberstam's female men. She is a Gothic female hero, a related but distinctly separate character type.

While many aspects of Buffy's character may be explicitly or even exaggeratedly feminine, the technical aspects of her presentation within the series are very much consistent with a typical male action hero. Wheatley notes that Gothic television makes use of shared subjective positioning and a narrative point of view, placing the viewer in the position of the female protagonist in terms of what is seen, heard and known of the plot, which predictably increases the viewer's sympathy with the female protagonist's situation (111). Expanding on this, Wheatley remarks that while on one hand such subjectivity can place the viewer in a space of potential victimhood within the dangerous setting of the Gothic, "the extent of subjective narration within the female Gothic television drama may be read as evidence of female empowerment and agency" (114). Although clearly a detailed treatment of Whedon's technical

approach to conveying these Gothic themes in terms of visual media could be included as part of this analysis, it is plain that the presentation of Buffy is effective at least to some degree in encouraging audience identification with *Buffy's* narrative and with Buffy herself, making Buffy at once a very powerful and a very sympathetic character. This also contributes to her credibility as the central hero of the piece.

While the character of Buffy is frequently preoccupied with the possibility that her performance of femininity may be compromised by her obligations as the Slayer, it is important to realize that, in stark contrast to the work performed by Butler and Halberstam, it is *femininity* that is portrayed in the series as a non-performative essential identity, a state of being that Buffy fears she is losing. Buffy does not articulate this fear as a fear of becoming less feminine, but rather of becoming less human or becoming monstrous; that is, she consistently states it in terms of a loss of self. Where Halberstam argued that masculinity was a performance that must be read as non-performative to be effective, in *Buffy* the converse is true – it is the feminine which must seem inherent while masculinity is portrayed quite transparently as performance. This is most clearly observed in the character of Xander Harries, who frequently voices concerns over his performance of masculinity. The episode “Hallowe’en,” an important episode for issues of identity, explores this issue in a scene between Xander and the school bully Larry.

Xander is threatened by Larry, but Buffy intervenes and drives the bully off before Xander can mount a reaction. While Xander was clearly outclassed, he nevertheless resents her interference and grows angry with her for publicly compromising his masculinity, snapping that he will now have a reputation as a “sissy man” and leaving the scene. Buffy then commiserates with Willow over her gaffe, saying, “I think I just violated the Guy Code, big time,” to which Willow remarks, “Poor Xander. Boys are so fragile” (Whedon, “Hallowe’en”). This suggests both the performative nature of masculine gender and the precarious nature of that performance. There is, however, no corresponding recognition of performed femininity. Willow and Buffy’s mention of “the Guy Code” can be read as an explicit reference to the artifice in the

performance of masculinity, and that fact that they can appreciate this artifice annuls the performance according to the criteria set forth by Judith Butler.

Buffy Summers is a female character capable of the type of free action Halberstam describes in masculine heroines without the need to be tomboyish or to don masculine clothing. While a case could be made that The Slayer represents a kind of metaphorical clothing which Buffy wraps about herself, and read this way she is consistent with a Halberstam masculine heroine in that she tends to define herself based on her costume and requires it for her exercise of masculine agency, Buffy maintains a distinct separation between herself and The Slayer not observed in Halberstam's female men and in fact goes to great lengths to reaffirm herself outside of her identity as the Slayer. Metaphorically speaking, she takes care to remove this clothing and to distance herself from it while never entirely repudiating it. In the third season episode "Helpless," Buffy is deprived of her Slayer abilities and hunted by a psychotic vampire. Though she does manage to prevail by means of a cunning trick similar to Capitola, she is clearly lost and terrified without the ethos of the Slayer around her, actually screaming and calling out for help. In this episode she more closely resembles earlier permutations of the Gothic heroine, especially Julia, in that she does not approach the Gothic threat from a position of strength yet manages to engage in heroic action regardless.

Buffy is presented not only as a fusion of two apparently contradictory gender and character roles, but as a character who absolutely requires both of these disparate elements in order to function. Buffy Summers is defined by her occasionally extravagant femininity and by her Slayer prowess in roughly equal measure and the character evidences great distress whenever one element is emphasized at the expense of the other. In this sense she is much like the female heroes already discussed, concerned with her own status, appearance and virtue. Although Buffy is not as overtly concerned with reputation and virtue as are Julia and Capitola, she nevertheless is mindful of how she appears to others. She voices concerns about both gaining a reputation for promiscuity and remaining an attractive feminine beauty at various

points in the series, perhaps best summarized by the comedic line in the pilot episode as Buffy is dressing before a mirror to go out to a local nightclub. Holding one outfit before her mirror, she says “Hi! I’m an enormous slut!” and then, holding up another dress, quips “Would you like a copy of *The Watchtower*?” before lowering the dress and muttering “I used to be so good at this” (Whedon, “Welcome to the Hellmouth”). As a Gothic female hero, Buffy straddles several boundaries, not only the dual identities of high school girl and Vampire Slayer, but also subtler tensions within each of those roles as the series explores both what it means to be a warrior and the difficulties inherent in being a girl. Ultimately, however, Buffy’s central concern is not only justifying herself as a hero but as a woman and a part of society, as she expresses when her rival for homecoming queen Cordelia asks her why she has entered the contest in the first place:

CORDELIA: I don't even get why you care about Homecoming when you're doing stuff like this.

BUFFY: Because this is all I do. This is what my life is. You couldn't understand.

I just thought... Homecoming Queen. I could pick up a yearbook someday and say, I was there. I went to high school, I had friends, and... for one moment, I got to live in the world. And there'd be proof. Proof that I was chosen for something other than this. Besides... (*pumps the rifle*) I look cute in a tiara. (Whedon, “Homecoming”)

Buffy’s desire for a normative feminine gender role, a “normal life,” is of paramount importance and is often what’s at stake for Buffy in a typical episode. Her Slayer duties are a necessity, but the true danger of the plot often lies in threats to Buffy’s social or romantic life with the physical threat little more than incidental. It is worth noting here that an unremarkable normative existence is not sufficient for Buffy – she strives to be a success in both aspects of her dual persona and is passionately invested in that struggle.

This focus on femininity is predicted by Halberstam, who notes that “even women who are involved in the most masculine of activities, such as boxing or weightlifting, attempt to turn the gaze away from their own potential masculinity” (270), and this statement certainly appears to hold true for Buffy Summers, as well, as she attempts to refocus herself on several stereotypically feminine pursuits, including cheerleading and campaigning for homecoming queen. These efforts are necessary as part of Buffy’s ongoing maintenance of the balance between her feminine and Slayer personas; while it is clearly a matter of importance to Buffy that she do well in these pursuits, it seems that the effort itself is the critical factor. As a female hero engaging in conventionally masculine physical-prowess-centered heroism, it is likely that Buffy’s character requires these frequent and often exaggerated expressions of femininity in order to maintain her gender performance.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The characters of Julia, Capitola and Buffy share an active concern with their own femininity, a capacity for physical action of a kind conventionally performed by masculine agents, strong Gothic and transgressive narrative elements, and a demonstrable passion arising from the potent energies created by the Gothic's erosion of boundaries. These elements – heroism, carefully maintained femininity and passion – comprise a structure for an active and versatile femininity under the auspices of the Gothic setting. The transgressive horror of the Gothic creates the energy and the necessity which drive these elements, and the work of each of these characters is to maintain the balance between heroism and femininity – too much of the former strains the non-performative veneer of the gender performance and threatens femininity, while too much of the latter reduces the female hero's ability to react effectively to the threat posed by the Gothic and may force a withdrawal from the Gothic space.

The complex gender performance of these female heroes reflects the theories of Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, but rather than portraying deviance from the normative as Butler does or focusing on masculinity as Halberstam does, the focus of my analysis is on normative femininity. This femininity is carefully constructed and maintained, just as Halberstam demonstrates in the case of both normative masculinity and feminine masculinity, yet the unique contributions of the Gothic allow the construction of femininity to be inclusive so long as the performance remains within the enabling Gothic setting. Rather than establishing a myriad of very specific subtypes of masculinity, Gothic femininity is permissive of transgressions to a remarkable extent. So long as the essential bounds of normative femininity are carefully maintained, the female hero is free to wander beyond those bounds and make use of masculine power with impunity.



In much the same way that *Julia* and *The Hidden Hand* can be seen to address the relevant cultural anxieties of their respective eras, *Buffy* also responds to its historical moment. Yet, as a contemporary text produced in the late twentieth century, it has not yet become clear precisely what historical moments or salient events *Buffy* might be commenting on, as we do not yet have sufficient scholarly distance for a clear consensus to have emerged. Nevertheless, speculation on the subject suggests that such issues as the rise of feminism, the role of the modern woman especially as relates to the workplace and other broad socio-cultural changes in America may inform the overarching text of *Buffy*. *Buffy's* struggles to reconcile her strength and her violent calling with her desire for a normative feminine identity might reflect the tensions contemporary women face in their efforts to balance the numerous and often conflicting responsibilities they are called upon to shoulder.

The female hero represents a character type in gothic fiction distinct from stock damsels in distress or masculinized woman warriors out of place in a dress. The Gothic female hero exists as a fusion of many traditionally exclusive traits, a character able to don radically different masks and play the role of the mighty hero and the delicate lover in the same breath. The contribution of the Gothic to this fusion is not mutability of identity, not becoming one thing or relinquishing another, but rather a complex form of identity that has no need to change, because it is by the nature of its construction capable of being filling multiple roles at once. In the context of the Gothic, the female hero has no need to become. She merely is.

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