

2019

Sleight of Hand: Gender, Performance, and (In)sincerity in E. D. E. N. Southworth's The Hidden Hand

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Recommended Citation

Martin, Samantha, "Sleight of Hand: Gender, Performance, and (In)sincerity in E. D. E. N. Southworth's The Hidden Hand" (2019).
Scripps Senior Theses. 1360.
https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1360

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**SLEIGHT OF HAND: GENDER, PERFORMANCE, AND (IN)SINCERITY IN
E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH'S *THE HIDDEN HAND***

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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APRIL 26, 2019

Be cool, firm and alert, and all will be well!

— E. D. E. N. Southworth, *The Hidden Hand*

*Look into his angel eyes:
One look and you're hypnotized,
He'll take your heart and you must pay the price.
Look into his angel eyes:
You'll think you're in paradise,
And one day you'll find out he wears a disguise.*

— ABBA, “Angel Eyes”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people who belong to the “without whom” category (i.e. “without whom this would be possible”), and I shall do my best to include them all.

To Professors Thomas Koenigs, Tessie Prakas, Aaron Matz, Warren Liu, Michelle Decker, and Leila Mansouri: I am forever thankful for your guidance, wisdom, validation, and banter. A huge shout-out to the entire Scripps College English Department for being my home these past four years—long live the Miller Wing!

To Mom and Dad: growing up, I remember both of you saying, “You can lose everything, but the one thing people can never take from you is your education.” I am so thankful for your ongoing support in all of my endeavors: you encourage me to pursue what I love, you believe in its value, and you challenge me to do my best. Now, at the conclusion of my formal schooling, I can only hope that I’ve made you proud. I couldn’t have asked for better parents. I love you to the edge of the universe and back! (And thanks for enabling my bibliophilic tendencies all these years—my personal library wouldn’t exist without you!)

To Matthew: thanks for being the family’s STEM kid so I could be the humanities kid. We love an equitable distribution of academic interests! Love ya!

To Marina Grigorian: Nana jana, մոլորակներ!

To my friends: my heart is bursting with love. Thank you for pushing me to be the best version of myself and for always staying by my side. Thank you for the conversations, the laughter, the joy, and the support. You all inspire me. Every moment has been one of grace.

Another special thanks to Professor Koenigs: you have my endless thanks and eternal gratitude for all of your support, encouragement, and insights not only for this thesis, but also during my entire time at Scripps. I did the math (shocking!), and one-fifth (20%) of my college courses have been with you—not insignificant!

To anyone reading this: wow—thanks!

I’d also like to acknowledge the following musicians for providing the soundtrack to my thesis: Harry Styles, Hozier, Gang of Youths, The Rolling Stones, Maggie Rogers, Mt. Joy, King Princess, The 1975, ABBA, Laura Marling, Arkells, Phoebe Bridgers, Fleetwood Mac, Bleachers, and Kacey Musgraves. Thanks for the music, y’all!

INTRODUCTION

One of the many cultural anxieties that existed during the nineteenth century in antebellum America centered on the dubious status of authenticity of one's emotions, gender expression, or socioeconomic class. If the self is no longer stable but something malleable that can be altered to adapt to different situations, questions of what is real versus performed begin to arise. That a person could create and inhabit different selves concerned members of the United States, some of whom took it upon themselves to warn against the dangers of confidence men and other figures of questionable repute by writing novels and etiquette guides (Halttunen xvi). In a move that runs contrary to the cautionary tales of the time, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte (E. D. N.) Southworth explores instead of censures the transformative properties of the self—specifically regarding gender and class—in her novel *The Hidden Hand, or, Capitola the Madcap*. Southworth embraces the possibilities of tricking and outwitting others, an attitude which sprung from the cultural move away from middle-class sentimental gentility in the 1850s. By the time *The Hidden Hand* was written, “what had happened within middle-class culture by mid-century was this: the sentimental demand for sincerity that had given rise to the complex code of genteel conduct had fallen away, leaving behind the social forms themselves” (196). Once this shift occurred, the social forms were “accepted for what they were, a theatrical performance of gentility” (196). Southworth, in extolling performance and transformation, validates the utility of such practices when navigating antebellum society.

Previous scholarship on *The Hidden Hand* has focused on gender, race, and class relations as they pertain to Capitola. This paper aims to fill the gap in scholarship to examine the roles of male characters, as well as constructions of masculinity and femininity, in *The Hidden*

Hand. When *The Hidden Hand* resurfaced in the 1980s as an object of critical study, scholars “insisted that Southworth’s subversiveness lay in her championing of women’s masculinity and criticism of sentimental fiction as well as normative femininity” (Landry 32). Other scholars have studied the constructions of race and gender in the novel, with particular regard to how blackness is used to uphold and reinforce white femininity. Kristen Pond has written on Capitola’s use of language as a tool of subversion and reform, commenting on how Capitola’s “use of unacceptable language...demonstrates that women can speak in bold and public ways and yet still carry out their important cultural functions” of shaping a moral society (Pond 142). *The Hidden Hand*’s bewildering amalgamation of genres has also been a subject of study: Sari Edelstein and H. Jordan Landry have examined the relationship between the novel’s plot and the antebellum story papers in which it appeared, as well as the revision of the seduction plot through the novel’s use of the trickster archetype, respectively. That being said, while scholarship has predominantly covered how Southworth’s female characters have taken on masculine traits, there has been little to no conversation about male characters who have taken on feminine traits. While contributing to existing conversations on constructions of gender in *The Hidden Hand*, this paper also intends to address the paucity of scholarship on Southworth’s male characters. Enter Traverse Rocke, the male character in *The Hidden Hand* whom Southworth offers up as another character besides Capitola who embodies a healthy androgyny.

Southworth’s interest in this lack of authenticity, or transparency regarding one’s self and intentions, is reflected by several characters in the novel who regularly engage in performance. Southworth codes manipulation, inauthenticity, and performance as distinctly masculine traits, whereas honesty, transparency, and guilelessness are coded as feminine. With these distinctions, Southworth accomplishes two things: first, she condemns the masculinities embodied by the

male villains; second, she demonstrates that traditional femininity is a dead end for women without socioeconomic means or protective male figures. The male villains use performance and manipulation to fulfill their desires for increased socioeconomic status and sexual domination over women. In order for her female characters to escape entrapment by men or cease being dependent on men, they must assume masculine behavior, such as manipulation and outspokenness. For antebellum women who subscribe to conventional norms of femininity, Southworth implies that a switch in behavior is necessary to operate as independent, autonomous beings. This point inversely comments on how traditional femininity stymies independence, which translates into a lack of agency over their bodies, finances, and lives.

It is imperative to detangle the different depictions of male and female characters in *The Hidden Hand* to understand Southworth's disavowal of masculine manipulation and feminine passivity. The male characters who embody the devious qualities Southworth seeks to condemn are the following: Black Donald, "the chief of a band of ruthless desperadoes" (Southworth 111); Colonel Gabriel Le Noir, a "caitiff" guilty of fratricide who is "ruthless, and without remorse" (463); and Craven Le Noir, the resident "votary of vice" and callow son of Colonel Le Noir (349). For these men, manipulation is grounded in the immediate self; they misrepresent their own internal feelings and external appearances to influence others' perceptions of them. Black Donald and the Le Noirs use manipulation and performance—particularly falsified emotional affect and external physical modifications—to serve themselves at the expense of others. On the other end of this spectrum, Southworth poses Marah Rocke and Clara Day as ideal figures of conventional antebellum femininity. They conduct themselves with "gentle dignity" (235) as women "of truth in thought, word, and deed" (238). These descriptors all underscore the passivity and honesty indicative of feminine virtue, as well as the inherent authenticity denoted

by these traits. Marah and Clara's feelings translate directly to their countenance and their actions—here, a *lack* of performance defines these female characters' behavior. Pitting the villainous men against the passive women allows Southworth to claim that men are the manipulators and women the manipulated. This juxtaposition permits Southworth to set up the binary about how women wield manipulation to shield, whereas men wield it to wound; the intention which motivates manipulation is either an act of defense or offense, and it is determined by gender. Through this, Southworth exposes the inefficacy of Marah and Clara's modes of femininity when subject to exertions of patriarchal power.

While these aforementioned characters and gendered qualities are not necessarily set in opposition, Southworth draws on these idealized depictions to make a point about the limiting nature of such codified standards before going on to complicate these binaries through Capitola Le Noir and Traverse Rocke. The implicit ideological thrust of *The Hidden Hand* points to the unstable, performative nature of gender as a construct. The fluctuating socioeconomic landscape of antebellum America destabilized the logic of categorization, rendering it an ineffectual means by which to evaluate others' identities. The inability to place someone within a neat category was symptomatic of the collapse of hierarchical social structures and affected how people perceived one other. Antebellum society could be overrun with pretenders and counterfeits, and none would be the wiser. Therefore, the cultural conditions of antebellum America reflected and reinforced the performativity of social class and gender. The elasticity of gender and genre in *The Hidden Hand* points outward to the grand scheme of antebellum society: in pursuing various avenues of discourse via characters, storylines, and generic frameworks, Southworth outlines the potentialities and pitfalls of an increasingly democratized nation. This experience of placelessness and disorganization is mediated through the failure of Capitola and Traverse to

adhere to prevailing gender norms. These two characters stage the confrontation between the reality of one's body and the antebellum ideologies of femininity and masculinity. Capitola and Traverse are held up as ideal figures of femininity and masculinity, respectively, because their synthesis of traits produces an androgyny valorized by Southworth.

BACKGROUND & HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To undertake this analysis, it is necessary to use Karen Halttunen's *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. Halttunen's landmark study provides context for the historical underpinnings of *The Hidden Hand*, and her arguments are useful when examining portrayals and characterizations of middle-class masculinity and femininity during the antebellum period. She unpacks the historical anxieties present in antebellum America and illustrates the motivating factors behind those concerns, specifically with regard to middle-class gender roles, class mobility, and modes of behavior. Halttunen's mode of inquiry utilizes etiquette manuals (specifically *Godey's*, the foremost handbook of the time), stories that appeared in antebellum periodicals, fashion guides, and historical scholarship. Throughout of all of the critical work and ephemera "published in the antebellum period ran one central dictum: proper conduct was to demonstrate above all a perfect sincerity or 'transparency' of character" (Halttunen xvi). Authenticity was prized above all as not only a virtue but as a sign of one's moral integrity. Halttunen diagnoses hypocrisy as the social ill plaguing antebellum America—those who practiced hypocrisy threatened to destabilize the status quo of social hierarchies and the quality of relationships among American citizens.

"Sincerity" and "hypocrisy"—the latter synonymous with inauthenticity—function as the key terms in Halttunen's argument that are positioned as direct opposites. Hypocrisy was gauged in terms of interpersonal interactions and how one presented their self to others, and could be found in three main arenas: etiquette, fashion, and the social ritual of mourning. The sentimentalists believed that to "be middle-class in antebellum America...was to be sincere and to demonstrate one's sincerity through the proper forms of dress, courtesy and social ritual"

(197). Rules governing genteel society focused on how “[c]ostume, manner, body markings, and linguistic patterns could indicate status or rank, occupation, nationality, and because of the practice of punitive mutilation, even moral character” (36). Rules of etiquette, fashion, and mourning proved inherently contradictory: while providing a system by which those in the middle-class could measure their behavior, outsiders (those not of the middle-class) could take advantage of such modes of behavior and dress to insinuate themselves into genteel society. Anxieties about class mobility and “unworthy” interlopers manifested in the tensions that emerged between the prescriptiveness of social ritual and the translation of authentic feeling into action. Halttunen concludes her study by noting how middle-class society departed from the demand of sincerity to instead embrace the theatricality and performance of social interaction. In a society “of geographical and social movers, of men and women who are constantly assuming new identities and struggling to be convincing in new social roles”, the cultural response reveals a deep anxiety about placelessness and the uncategorizable (190). Southworth populates *The Hidden Hand* with a cast of characters who exemplify and capitalize upon the cultural anxieties and social rituals that Halttunen identifies. Using this frame allows us to read *The Hidden Hand* and understand the historical and cultural resonances that shape the characters and the narrative to which they belong.

Before delving into *The Hidden Hand* itself, it is worth spending some time getting to know the author behind the text: E. D. E. N. Southworth. Southworth’s popularity as one of the most prolific and beloved novelists of the nineteenth century cannot be overstated. Southworth cut an impressive figure as she stormed the literary scene with her unconventional heroines and bombastic plotlines. Her literary career began after she separated from her husband—though they never divorced—and moved to Washington D.C. with her two children. On the verge of

destitution and struggling to make ends meet as a single woman in the city, Southworth turned to writing as a means to make money. Noted as the lowest point in her life, this struggle proved to be the impetus for what would become a commercially successful authorial career. In a study of critical and popular reception of Southworth's fiction at the time she was being published, Linda Naranjo-Huebl writes that in 1874, several journals reported on "statistics from public libraries in New England, New York and Michigan" which revealed that "of the books in circulation, 75 percent were fiction", and "Southworth led the list of authors" (Naranjo-Huebl 140). According to Southworth, her narratives "were based...on her own experiences, from which she drew the story lines, characters, and scenes of her fiction" (131). Though critical reviews often denounced Southworth on the grounds that her novels were overwrought, lacked coherent plotlines, and were littered with improbable coincidences, she was "arguably nineteenth-century America's most popular novelist and was considered a national treasure by a large class of readers" (142). This is in part due to the enthralling, escapist nature of her stories, which were written for a predominantly female audience about female experiences. Because of the semi-autobiographical constitution of her work, "one message does animate her fiction—do not be afraid. Her fearless heroines, and the fearless author behind them, conveyed this message to many hundreds of thousands of feminine readers" (Baym 112).

Arguably Southworth's most popular work, *The Hidden Hand* was serialized in 1852, published as a complete book in 1889, reprinted multiple times, and translated into several languages, including Icelandic (Baym 125). Most of the narrative proves to be a romp through the Virginian countryside, with short narrative pit stops in New York and Mexico. The main plot follows Capitola Le Noir, the heiress to a great fortune, who is spirited away at birth by the attending midwife to escape the murderous intent of her uncle, Colonel Gabriel Le Noir, as he

seeks to acquire her wealth for himself. Her genealogy a mystery, she is raised in the slums of New York City as Capitola Black, where she must survive by her wits when she is inadvertently abandoned. She dresses up as a boy to make money and to protect herself from “bad boys and bad men” (Southworth 45). Shortly thereafter, Capitola is arrested for her inappropriate garb and is brought to court, where her path crosses with Old Hurricane, a retired army major and Virginia plantation owner who then becomes her guardian. Not resigned to life as a southern belle, Capitola instead takes the countryside by storm and has such adventures such as capturing an outlaw, rescuing a young woman from a forced marriage, and fighting a mock duel. Despite being described by Nina Baym as “[p]art melodrama, part action story, part satire, part serious investigation of gender roles,” *The Hidden Hand* still ends predictably with Capitola’s marriage to Herbert Greyson (Baym 126).

Set alongside Capitola’s escapades, the subplot of *The Hidden Hand* chronicles the trials and travails of Marah Rocke, Old Hurricane’s estranged wife; her son, Traverse Rocke; and Clara Day, Traverse’s betrothed and the daughter of a deceased physician. Abandoned by Old Hurricane after a series of misconstrued events, Marah raises Traverse in genteel poverty, assuming the occupation of a seamstress to make money. Marah and Traverse later befriend Dr. Day, the local physician, who offers Traverse a medical apprenticeship. This education brings Traverse into contact with Clara, Dr. Day’s daughter, and the two proceed to fall in love and become engaged. This domestic idyll is plunged into chaos upon Dr. Day’s sudden death: Clara is named the ward of Colonel Le Noir, who refuses to acknowledge her betrothal to Traverse and keeps her isolated in his home, banned from seeing either Marah or Traverse. The resolution of this plot comes after Capitola rescues Clara from the Le Noirs—an intersection of the main plot and the subplot—and allows Clara to reunite with Marah. Traverse, who serves in the military

with Herbert to fight in the Mexican-American War, eventually returns home, becomes a practicing physician, and marries Clara. As Sari Edelstein observes, “The multiple narratives each conclude by restoring the family and returning to conventional gender norms” (Edelstein 44).

Ultimately, considering *The Hidden Hand* through Halttunen’s historical framework reveals the ways in which antebellum social scripts have been replicated in the novel itself. Because *Confidence Men and Painted Women* has a vested interest in the middle-class behavior of antebellum America, there is critical value in putting it in conversation with *The Hidden Hand*, which critiques the very middle-class scripts that Halttunen describes. Understanding the importance of certain social scripts, for example, allows us to uncover the significance of Capitola’s cross-dressing or Black Donald’s confidence games. Halttunen’s findings regarding sincerity and hypocrisy illuminate the cultural norms that propel the characters and the plot, proving conducive for additional avenues of interpretation surrounding antebellum social structures and gender norms.

ASSUME FORM, LADS!

SOUTHWORTH'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY

Southworth's characterizations of male characters have seldom been analyzed by critics with specific attention to their redeeming personality traits—more specifically, male characters in *The Hidden Hand* have not been subjects of in-depth analysis. More often than not, their portrayals will be glossed over in broad strokes; Nina Baym observes that Southworth has “only two basic representations of the male, both unamiable: the tyrannical and hypocritical father or father-surrogate and the impetuous, self-centered suitor” (Baym 115). Joanne Dobson corroborates this claim when she explains how “brutality and stupidity characterize a majority of the male characters in the Southworth opus” (Dobson 234). A majority of the male characters may be brutal, yes, sometimes with an added dollop of stupidity (see: Old Hurricane and Craven Le Noir), but these traits characterize the men who already possess power and sway within the world of the narrative. Yet such analysis is facile and reductive in its refusal to even attempt to explore the nuances of such characterizations. For an author inspired by personal experience and whose characters all serve to further her subtle project of social reform, it is absolutely necessary to look beneath the surface of Southworth's male characters to uncover what functions they serve within the narrative. While the men have been condemned across the board, there has not been a concerted effort to unravel the logic of their villainy.

This section will analyze masculinity as it is embodied by Black Donald, Colonel Le Noir, and Craven Le Noir, the text's three main antagonists. All three embody different types of perfidious masculinities, and their villainy is motivated by the three qualities of greed, selfishness, and dominance over others. They all serve the self, and they invoke the behavior of the confidence man—an anxiety-inducing figure of antebellum society—to manipulate, lie, and

cheat to achieve their own ends. Karen Halttunen defines the confidence man as “a man without principle, a man whose art it is to deceive others through false appearances” and whose object is “not simply to corrupt [others], but to achieve total mastery over [them]” (Halttunen 2, 5-6).

Anxieties surrounding the confidence man emerged from the disintegration of a hierarchical social structure into one that was horizontal to create a new paradigm for social organization:

“America was giving way to the more tenuous authority possible within the egalitarian social organizations of the nineteenth century. In the emerging social system, authority could be seized by any charismatic figure who emerged from the masses as a man of magnetic personal powers. The most compelling heroes and antiheroes, both real and fictional, of antebellum American culture were just such charismatic men.” (23-24)

Thus, the confidence man offended genteel class sensibilities because he usurped power from those deemed the “legitimate” authorities of American society. The “illegitimacy of his own power was conveyed symbolically in his nature as a trickster” who exists as “a marginal man, without fixed place in the social structure” (24). His refusal to fit into any social category indicates that the confidence man “represents the threat of social disorder, the dangers of formlessness”, and becomes “a source of contamination because he dwells in the less structured or inarticulated areas of the social system” (24). In essence, the confidence man is someone who seeks to obtain total possession and dominance over others through different modes of manipulation in order to throw any semblance of social organization into disarray. He represents anxieties surrounding urbanization, class mobility, and the disintegration of intimate social networks. His presence underlines the importance of sincerity—and the fear of inauthenticity which underwrites every social dictum—to the sentimentalism characteristic of the time.

Halttunen identifies two main iterations of the confidence man: 1) the chameleon-like trickster, a man who adopts different personas to deceive others and infiltrate social arenas to which he does not belong; 2) the urbane politician type, a smooth criminal who depends on

reputation and equivocation to insinuate himself in positions of power. Both types of confidence men are marked by movement, charisma, and mobility—they display “superior wit, skill in the use of resources, [and] adaptability and enthusiasm” to enact enterprises grounded in subterfuge (31). More importantly, they do not subscribe to what Halttunen calls “the sentimental typology of conduct”, or “the belief that every aspect of social behavior should transparently display the contents of the heart” (60). The confidence man’s performance of sincerity “destroyed the sentimental typology of conduct by severing the link between surface appearances and inner moral nature” (42). Implicit in this explanation is the element of performance, which proves to be a necessary component of any confidence scheme. To convince others of their persona, confidence men needed to perform—to act—as if they were completely honest while lying through their teeth. Without “any fixed social nexus of community, family, or permanent friends”, the confidence man could negotiate different guises and personas without being recognized and therefore held accountable for taking advantage of others. Given the rise of urbanization and the increasing populations in cities, the close-knit communities of small towns and villages were exchanged for bustling hubs of strangers from all walks of life. Movement to the city was predicated upon the American promise of upward social mobility; naïve, inexperienced youths flocked to the city to make their fortunes and were warned against falling prey to the machinations of confidence men. The dissolution of intimate social ties in urban centers exacerbated the threat of stranger danger.

Black Donald exemplifies the first definition of the confidence man and occupies this marginal position as a floater who traverses class lines; he is placeless within the social framework and therefore cannot be categorized. Of the three men, Black Donald is the one who takes advantage of external disguise the most in order to manipulate those around him. He best

embodies the trickster iteration of the confidence man that relies on charisma and altered appearances. At different times masquerading as a traveling peddler, a smuggler, and a minister named Father Gray, Black Donald utilizes dialect, deportment, and clothing to assume alternate personas. After tricking the local sheriff when dressed as a traveling peddler, he comments on his disguise: “And when I bury my black beard and chin deep down in this drab neckcloth, and pull the broad brim low over my black hair and eyes, I look as mild and respectable as William Penn” (143). Conscious of how others can be deceived by appearances alone, Black Donald plays off others’ superficial perceptions. When disguised as a smuggler to gain entrance to Hurricane Hall, he looked like “a stout, jolly-looking tar, dressed in a wide pea-jacket, duck trousers and tarpaulin hat, and carrying in his hand a large pack” (152). There is perhaps an outsized reliance on external aesthetics that nonetheless succeeds in duping others. He only reveals himself after Capitola has called him out for attempting to turn a profit on others’ naïveté, saying, “Even the devil is not so black as he is painted” (156). A double entendre, this comment could reference the exaggerated stories surrounding Black Donald’s exploits, as well as the possibility that the devil is “painted,” or putting on a mask to conceal his true self. If the latter interpretation is to be taken, then the devil as “painted” implies that paint can be washed off and reapplied. The comparison between Black Donald and the devil—a figure representative of sin, trickery, and temptation—conflates performance and evil, underlining the sinister nature of manipulative behavior. There exists limitless potential to don different guises, which renders the devil as a type of confidence man who resorts to sin to propagate sin.

His final deception—and most dedicated performance—as Father Gray brings him into the social fold of Old Hurricane, Mrs. Condiment, and Capitola. Perhaps the most explicit instance of a performed role, Father Gray captures the essence of the confidence man through the

change in physical appearance, altered speech patterns, and deception of a large group of people. This role forced Black Donald to “[sacrifice] all [his] good looks, transmogrifying [himself] into a frightful old field preacher” (339). He put on “a gray wig, a black suit, assumed a feeble voice, stooping gait, and a devout manner, and—became a popular preacher at the camp-meeting” (218). All of Father Gray is performance: the piety, the asceticism, the physical appearance. Black Donald steps into the role of a traveling preacher and therefore enters a social role that does not accurately reflect his real occupation as a bandit. This circles back to his comment about the devil being painted, leaning on the notion that one’s true intentions and self can be easily concealed. In each of his guises—the peddler, the smuggler, Father Gray—Black Donald attempts to help himself either financially or personally since his stint as Father Gray was meant to both kill Capitola and free his comrades from prison. Each performance benefits him in some way while taking advantage of others; he set out to kill Cap to earn the monetary reward offered by Colonel Le Noir, and he becomes Father Gray to free his subordinates from jail so they remain loyal and assist with his schemes. Looking at Black Donald as an evocation of the figure of the confidence man underscores how Southworth configures manipulation—and selfishness, to an extent—as a masculine trait.

The ease with which Black Donald can slip into and perform another identity is found only in Capitola, who also adopts a different manner of speech, behavior, and dress to assume a male guise when searching for work in New York. Such similarities between the two indicate that gender can be performed. Capitola transgresses gender norms, but Black Donald cannot conceive of doing so; rather, his disguises traverse socioeconomic classes without crossing racial or gendered lines. To dress as a woman is the ultimate form of emasculation, an act that Black Donald will not or cannot conceive of undergoing. Black Donald’s physique also renders

dressing as a woman impossible because he could not plausibly fool others: “He stood six feet eight inches in his boots, and was stout and muscular in proportion...with long, curling black hair and a heart that would have driven to despair a Broadway beau” (143). This suggests that the body is the primary site of manipulation and performance. Because he already benefits from the freedom and independence conferred upon him by virtue of his gender, it is counterintuitive to dress as a woman since that would, in fact, inhibit his ability to move freely in public. The lack of reciprocal gender exchange is telling in that Southworth suggests that women cannot effectively wield power as themselves and must adopt masculine characteristics. While men already have access to public socioeconomic realms, women must cross gender before they can access them at all.

Colonel Le Noir and Craven Le Noir embody the second type of confidence man that Halttunen describes: they occupy the role of the politician who uses equivocation and cultivated outward social appearances to deceive, manipulate, and control others. While Black Donald commits his whole body and personality to his performance with the verve of a theater player, the Le Noirs use physical intimidation and exertions of institutional and economic power to exploit others. Colonel Le Noir can enact his schemes precisely because he possesses the financial and social means to do so—as a wealthy landowner and renowned military officer, anyone would be hard-pressed to contradict his word lest they incur the full force of his powerful connections. He specifically capitalizes upon the social ritual of courtship to achieve sexual domination over his first victim, Marah Rocke, Old Hurricane’s wife. When carrying out his scheme, Le Noir relies on social niceties to insinuate himself into Marah’s life, “stopping at the door to beg a cup of water, which of course was never denied,” or else to offer “the sports of his gun” (95). His pursuit of Marah, a married woman, is driven by his “bold admiration” of her and

a desire to gloat about “the intimate terms of [his] friendly acquaintance” to other men in the military (95). Plainly stated, he wants what he cannot have: another man’s wife. Colonel Le Noir continues his advances such that he “venture[s] unbidden across [Marah’s] threshold”, which results in a duel between Le Noir and Old Hurricane (95). Despite being wounded, Le Noir persists. Thwarted by Old Hurricane and failing to claim Marah as his own, “Le Noir had resolved upon [their] ruin” after the duel (96). The climax occurs when Old Hurricane stands “in the door in full military uniform...[with] the aspect of an avenging demon on his brow” only to see a “half-undressed man in [Marah’s] chamber”: Colonel Le Noir (97). Appearing to be in a compromising position with Colonel Le Noir, Marah is subsequently repudiated by Old Hurricane. When conforming to etiquette does not allow Colonel Le Noir to win Marah’s affections, he encroaches upon Marah’s space to the point where he infiltrates her home at night. Le Noir deliberately creates a scenario with the potential to be misconstrued, and in turn alters the course of Marah’s future, with the implications of his manipulations have far-reaching consequences that adversely affect others. Up until he breaks into Marah’s house, Colonel Le Noir follows social protocols to achieve his goals and takes aim at Old Hurricane’s insecurities regarding his marriage with Marah. By attempting to supplant Old Hurricane as the role of patriarch, Le Noir destabilizes Old Hurricane’s claim to Marah and endangers the sacrosanct institution of marriage. Colonel Le Noir relies on traditional structures of courtship to achieve sexual domination, and in doing so ruins Marah’s marriage as well as the trajectory of her life. Disrupting the relationship between Old Hurricane and Marah confirms the confidence man’s threat to the integrity of relationships among American citizens.

In a similar approach to his father, Craven Le Noir navigates existing social structures and scripts to execute his confidence schemes. Craven’s approach, however, differs from his

father's because sexual domination is not his primary object; instead, he intends to inherit money to satisfy his greed and appeals to ideas of class hierarchies as a means to do so. Craven proves to be an utter poltroon who disregards women's wishes and consistently affects an attitude at odds with his true inner state. Twice over he presses an unwelcome suit to two women, Clara and Capitola, who repeatedly refuse his advances. Craven focuses his attention on these women because he deems them worthy of his time and attention—that is, they can satisfy his avarice. When it becomes apparent that “Craven Le Noir had never abated his unacceptable attentions to the orphan heiress” and intends to entrap Clara in marriage, Capitola concocts a plan to help Clara escape the Le Noirs' clutches (297). Craven couches his proposals in socioeconomic terms, appealing to class sensibilities that uphold the social respectability of the prevailing status quo. When proposing to Clara, he calls Traverse a “low-born young man” and asks Clara to “prepare [her]self to listen to a suit more worthy of [her] social position” (298). Moreover, he dismisses Clara's feelings and choices concerning her betrothal by calling it “child's play” and “a schoolgirl's romantic whim”, infantilizing Clara through his patronizing tone (298). This type of rhetoric is reiterated when Craven proposes to Capitola:

You will really understand, Miss Black, that the vague engagement of which you speak, where there is want of fortune on *both* sides, is no more prudent than it is binding. On the contrary, the position which it is my pride to offer you, is considered an enviable one, even apart from the devoted love that goes with it. You are aware that I am the sole heir of the Hidden House estate, which with all its dependencies is considered the largest proprietary, as my wife would be the most important lady in the county. (357)

Behold the glory of sheer male hubris. He believes that others share his desire for social and monetary capital, and cannot fathom why anyone would want to refuse such a catch as him. Capitola rebukes his offers, finally reaching a point when she calls him “Craven by name and craven by nature” (359). Craven refuses to take Clara and Capitola seriously as human beings

with autonomy. Southworth argues that equal social and financial exchange does not a happy marriage make—in fact, Craven’s argument is rendered all the more inappropriate for his gauche mention of finances and socioeconomic status. Instead of an appeal to feeling, he mistakenly calls attention to the faux pas of marrying outside and below one’s social class. Doing so confirms his elitism and supercilious attitude towards those he deems inferior, serving to lower his esteem in Clara and Capitola’s eyes. Craven would not speak to Clara nor Capitola were they not heiresses to great fortunes and properties. Therefore, the people that Craven seeks to dominate need to be of a specific class in order to be worthy of his time and energy, which exposes his insincere approach to courtship. He performs respect and affection to engender sympathy, and perhaps to elicit stronger emotions from the women he wants to possess. At the same time, he acknowledges the instability of class categorization in antebellum America’s shifting social landscape by striving to reassert stratified social hierarchies.

Southworth suggests that masculinity, as embodied by Black Donald and the Le Noirs, poses an inherent threat to the well-being of women. All of their actions are motivated by the desire for possession, be it money or another person, and dominance. This logic invokes the specter of the confidence man, too, since Halttunen notes that “the confidence man had one ultimate purpose: the total enslavement of his victim” (Halttunen 6). When Marah rejects Colonel Le Noir years after he engineers her ruin, he exclaims, “Insolent beggar...years ago I swore to possess that woman, and I will do it, if it be only to keep my oath and humble her insolence. She is *very* handsome still; she shall be my slave” (Southworth 236). Colonel Le Noir wants to own and dominate Marah; his use of “slave” implies that he sees Marah—and, by extension, women—as an object to be owned. “Slave” assumes even greater significance when one recalls that *The Hidden Hand* takes place in a plantation-era American South, wherein the

institution of slavery is still in practice and slaves are indeed present. Similarly, when referring to Capitola, Black Donald swears that he would “not sell [his] prospect of possessing her for double [Colonel Le Noir’s] bribe” (339). Once again, Black Donald sees Capitola, a woman, as a thing to be owned and lorded over. No matter her thoughts, he wishes to assert his dominance over her. Similarly, Craven’s resolutions to marry Clara and Capitola are motivated by money: he “had not loved Clara; though, for the sake of her money, he had courted her so assiduously” (349), and his suit towards Capitola was “urged by another motive almost as strong as love—namely, avarice” (350). These villains’ motives subscribe to the guiding ideology of confidence men, which is to assert and exert power over others by whatever means necessary. The men’s actions are governed by ulterior motives unbeknownst to the recipients of said actions, concealing the truth of the matter. The central “characteristic of power was its aggressiveness; it preyed on liberty, which was fundamentally passive, vulnerable” (Halttunen 8). This dynamic plays out in the coded gender traits in Southworth’s characters, with the men as aggressive and women as passive and vulnerable. The villains’ reasons for taking advantage of Marah, Clara, and Cap—money, material assets, and sexual domination—are all ways to methodically deprive women of liberty and agency, ultimately subjugating them to the men.

Though not discussed at length in this section, it is worth mentioning Old Hurricane in addition to the other three men as another male character who has a domineering bent to his personality. He is “arrogant, domineering and violent—equally loved and feared by his faithful old family servants at home—disliked and dreaded by his neighbors and acquaintances abroad” (Southworth 8). Uncompromising, stubborn, and cantankerous, Old Hurricane cannot stand challenges to his authority. As a result, he often berates the inhabitants, servants, and slaves of Hurricane Hall. When Capitola disobeys him, he exclaims, “How dare *you*, you little beggar,

disobey your benefactor!—a man of my age, character, and position?” (121). He immediately turns to traditional structures of patriarchal power, chastising Capitola for not respecting his status as the home’s patriarch. Capitola ought to defer to his authority because he provides her with financial security, and his “age, character, and position” mean that she must regard him with reverence. The expectation that others will always heed his orders speaks to a masculine conception of one’s place in the world, one that renders him familiar with exerting control over others. Old Hurricane belongs to a broader category of men who aren’t used to being challenged because their positionality grants them the privileges of being heard, respected, and obeyed. Yet Old Hurricane does not fall among the ranks of Black Donald and the Le Noirs because he does not possess the traits necessary to be a confidence man. Namely, he cannot master his emotions—he is utterly transparent with how he feels, at one point seizing “the chair upon which he had sat, and [striking] it upon the ground with such force as to shatter it to pieces” (82). His emotions are clearly displayed through his behavior, which disqualifies him from being named a confidence man—the art of deception is utterly unfamiliar to his way of being.

Upon the conclusion of *The Hidden Hand*, Colonel Le Noir repents and seeks absolution before his death and Black Donald forswears his life of crime; these men are changed upon realizing that they have adversely affected others in their lives, with specific regard to how they have treated Capitola. While Black Donald and Colonel Le Noir repent and reform to varying extents, Craven eschews redemption in favor of living up to his name. Craven makes his narrative exit by joining “a party of explorers bound for the recently discovered gold mines of California” (459). His convenient disappearance from the plot signals an inability of Craven, and other invocations of the confidence man, to take accountability for their actions. They must evade exposure, and thus the responsibility that comes with being caught and held culpable. But

Southworth ultimately “found men so invariably inadequate to the responsibilities of patriarchy that she had to imagine a different system altogether—sometimes a matriarchy, sometimes a western democracy. Her novels are at once much more enthusiastic in their romanticism, and much more cynical about the patriarchal ideal” (Baym 139). Their extreme portrayals allow Southworth to make explicit the dangers they pose to women and the social order, from attempts to confiscate agency from women to the threat they posed to the social ties binding American citizens together. In using the existing structures for their own gain, these men acknowledge the arbitrariness and corruption inherent to the structures themselves.

All of this points to Southworth’s overarching belief that patriarchy is untenable despite the novel’s ultimate recuperation of positive—or perhaps pious—masculine embodiment. Black Donald, Colonel Le Noir, and Craven Le Noir leverage existing social scripts and structures for personal gain. They put on false appearances and carry out their plans by stratagem and deceit: their “language and conduct do not proceed from fixed principle and open hearted sincerity; but from a spirit of duplicity and management” (Halttunen 33). If these are the men who wield power and constitute the patriarchy, then the entire system is unstable because it is founded upon insincerity. Because the confidence man can finesse his way into any social arena, the integrity of American social order is compromised—scoundrels like Black Donald can achieve their aspirations of being elected “to Congress, then to the Senate, then to the Cabinet, then to the White House” (Southworth 150). Despite being born to a low class, Black Donald can ascend the social ladder by virtue of his charisma and manipulation. These villains prop up the patriarchal status quo of antebellum America; such confiscation of authority from the “legitimate” leaders of America speaks to the shaky façade of social order and patriarchy writ large.

MAN! I FEEL LIKE A WOMAN!
SOUTHWORTH'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMININITY

Diametrically opposed these constructions of masculinity is Southworth's construction of ideal femininity, which is posited as the honest communication of one's feelings and intentions. This ideal is embodied by the paragons of virtuous sentimental femininity: Marah Rocke and Clara Day. Southworth's depictions of Marah and Clara align with the societal "ethos of domestic femininity" during the antebellum period, which dictated that American women be "ideally pious, pure, submissive, and domestic" (Dobson 224). While restrictive, these traits were part of a greater feminine ideal during the nineteenth century that saw women as having central roles "in redeeming society from what was perceived as a crass and destructive, but economically and politically necessary, masculine competitive ruthlessness" (224). Women would influence others and reform society from the domestic sphere, compensating for "the deficiencies of male culture" and "providing necessary moral ballast for American society" (224). Sentimental fiction of the time also reflected the idea that women "could change others by changing themselves", transforming the phrase "the woman's sphere is in the home" to mean that women's roles are to reform society by using the domestic space as an analog for the world beyond (Showalter 84). The parlor "provided the woman of the house with a 'cultural podium' from which she was to exert her moral influence over American society" (Halttunen 59). With this position came the responsibility to enforce the rules of propriety—central to this "body of social legislation was the sentimental ideal of sincerity" because "parlor sentimentalism...was a prescriptive norm that shaped all aspects of dress, etiquette, and social ritual" (59-60). Women proved to be bastions of authenticity and moral authority, defending the home and the world from the ills of hypocrisy and sin alike.

Both Marah and Clara act as the guiding figures of morality and sensibility, conducting themselves with genteel dignity and utmost sincerity. More importantly, they subscribe to the sentimental typology of conduct, the translation of one's honest feelings and intentions to their countenance. This belief upholds the cultural understanding that virtuous women were innately incapable of hypocrisy, or deceit:

Because she was endowed with superior sensibility, according to the sentimentalists, woman was naturally more sincere than man. For sensibility meant not merely the intense feelings of the private heart; it referred as well to the body's sympathetic response to those affections, to the outward physical manifestations of the heart's contents. The woman of sensibility involuntarily expressed her feelings in swoons, illness, trances, ecstasies, and, most important, tears....Sentimentalists thus insisted that true women were constitutionally transparent, incapable of disguising their feelings....Even her complexion offered evidence of her inner emotions as she reddened or grew pale in the intensity of her sensibility. (57)

Southworth's portrayals of Marah and Clara locate them within recognizable societal roles for women because of their conformity to accepted feminine behavior. Their emotional and physical reactions are uninhibited by false affect—their internal feelings translate directly to their countenances in perfect sentimental transparency. This kind of physical reaction and how they abide by the rules of etiquette situates these women within middle-class gentility, specifically marking them with traits of middle-class femininity. Southworth thereby conflates authenticity with femininity and codes the transparent expression of emotions as distinctly feminine.

By subscribing to Halttunen's "sentimental typology," Marah and Clara become counterpoints to Black Donald and the Le Noirs. The strand of logic that Southworth trots out is as follows: performance and inauthenticity are ascribed to male characters, whereas female characters are virtually incapable of performing or lying; therefore, the ideologies of masculinity and femininity are set in opposition to one another. For now, these binary terms are useful to

recognize how Southworth codes certain traits as masculine or feminine and then uses this understanding to critique the constraints gender roles imposed on men and women. Southworth portrays Marah and Clara as women who embody versions of ideal genteel white femininity who cannot dupe others by manipulating or falsifying their physical appearances and emotional responses. Demands of the sentimental code insisted that verbal truth-telling was not enough to prove one's virtuous character: "[s]incerity meant not just integrity but candor—the perfect outward revelation of all inward truth" (Halttunen 52). When both women interact with the Le Noirs, for example, they respond "with coldness and reserve" (Southworth 283) and "freezing politeness that was consistent with [their positions] as hostess[es]" (238). As women of the house, Marah and Clara must maintain a meager amount of politeness to keep up appearances and must treat the Le Noirs as honored guests. Despite this, the two women still manage to convey their disapproval of this situation through their "cold" and reserved behavior—the truth of their feelings still manages to bleed into their interactions. Their inability to conceal their distaste upholds the sentimental typology of conduct, affirming that their inward state will translate to their faces even while adhering to scripts of social etiquette.

Marah Rocke occupies the role of the long-suffering, but virtuous, widow who belongs to an older generation. Married to Old Hurricane when she was young and naïve, she still finds herself sexually and economically vulnerable to the nefarious advances of Colonel Le Noir. Upon her marriage, she describes herself as "a young, slight, pale girl...with no learning, but such [she] had picked up from a country school; with no love" because she "was a friendless orphan, without either parents or relatives" (Southworth 94). When married to Old Hurricane, she communicates in whispers and rarely speaks out of turn—even "though [her] heart was so full, [she] had so little power of utterance" (96). At times, Marah "wept to think how poor [she]

was in resources to make [Old Hurricane] happy” (95). In *Marah*, Southworth depicts the extreme of a woman in the role of wife: she is completely subservient, dependent, and deferential to her husband to the point where she cannot articulate the true strength of her feelings to him. Her anguish at not being able to satisfy her husband’s needs manifests in the physical reaction of sobbing—her internal state provokes a reciprocal external reaction, proving the truth of her deep feelings for her husband. Moreover, this characterization serves to establish *Marah* as an ideal example of sentimental femininity and sincerity. *Marah* notes that Old Hurricane’s “presence seemed to protect [her]”, yet her dependence on her husband for protection renders her unable to defend herself from abuse or exploitation (94). Because of her socialized passivity and submission, she is susceptible to Colonel Le Noir’s machinations and helpless when Old Hurricane abandons her afterwards, forcing her to support her newborn son, *Traverse*, as a single mother. Although rejected by Old Hurricane, *Marah* remembers “wasting all [her] young years of womanhood in loving, hoping, longing” (88). Without a social or familial network for her to lean on, *Marah* has no recourse when she must suddenly face raising a child on her own. For fifteen years, she works as a seamstress to make ends meet, remaining true to her husband and secretly carrying the hope that he will take her back. It is this situation, *Marah*’s inability to speak up at a crucial moment and her subsequent desertion, that Southworth seeks to portray in a sympathetic light while also critiquing the gender norms that were, in theory, supposed to ensure *Marah* a happy and fulfilling domestic existence. Her story illustrates that adhering to the expectations of her gender role is not enough to protect her, and has, in fact, failed to instill traits that allow her to stand up for herself and claim agency over her narrative.

This feminine passivity that Southworth disdains in *Marah* is disrupted through *Clara*’s narrative arc. *Clara*, the only child of an aging physician and a generation younger than *Marah*,

enters the narrative as “a vague, dazzling vision of a golden-haired girl in floating white raiment, wafting the fragrance of violets as she moved, and with a voice sweeter than the notes of the cushat dove as she spoke” (Southworth 130). Presented as the supreme image of refined womanhood and wreathed in language of divinity, Clara is described as positively angelic. Known for a “more heavenly” smile and a “roseate face...soft and bright with feeling and intelligence”, she embodies the ideal virtues of young womanhood (130). Of a polite and calm disposition most of the time, Clara’s feelings typically manifest in some sort of physical reaction; even when angry at Colonel Le Noir “her gentle blue eyes flash[ed] with indignation through their tears” (238). Because she is “involuntarily transparent, she serve[s] as a natural foil to the villainous confidence man, who [is] dangerous insofar as he contrive[s] to be emotionally opaque” (Halttunen 58). With his dashing looks and suave manners, the confidence man “artfully disguised the illicit passions, hatreds, and torments of a fiend and thus severed the natural connection between outward appearances and inner emotional realities, the sentimental typology of conduct on which social confidence rested” (58). Set against Colonel Le Noir, Clara is all the more susceptible to his machinations due to her emotional transparency. Thus, when Clara finds herself about to be married against her will, she has no idea how to handle the situation because “her upbringing in the white middle-class has immured [her] in passivity and reliance on white males as rescuers” (Landry 38). The white men she has been taught to depend upon for safety are in fact the ones threatening it, and Capitola enters the narrative as a new example of heroism. To escape the Le Noirs, Capitola essentially asks Clara to “re-imagine both her own bodily possibilities and her rescuer” when they swap outfits to trade places (Landry 38). Capitola dreams up a scheme that Clara cannot—and could not—conceive of because she had

not been socialized to be anything but sincere and passive. Because of Capitola's timely intervention, Merah's fate is not reproduced with Clara.

Clara's combination of emotional authenticity and socialized passivity produce the conditions by which she finds herself powerless to resist being forced into marrying Craven Le Noir. Incapable of feigning emotions she does not feel and unpracticed at directly opposing authority, Southworth underlines how Clara's brand of femininity poses a very real threat to her happiness and independence. Capitola's entrance into the narrative acts as the impetus for Clara's extraction from her grim prospects. When enacting her plan, Capitola advises Clara that it "requires on [her] part great courage, self-control and presence of mind" (Southworth 306). Capitola demonstrates all of these three traits when she instructs Clara on how to act:

"There, Clara, tuck your light hair out of the way; pull your cap over your eyes; gather your veil down close; draw up your figure, throw back your head; walk with a little springy sway and swagger, as if you didn't care a damson for anybody, and—there! I declare, nobody could tell you from me," exclaimed Capitola, in delight, as she completed the disguise and the instructions of Clara. (307)

Here Southworth stages the costuming and direction of Clara in a new persona, one that forces her to act in ways that are not germane to her usual style of deportment. Having manipulated surface appearances with clothing before when dressing as a newsboy, Capitola is no stranger to this method of manipulation, one that is unfamiliar to Clara. Clara's transformation is almost instantaneous, with the narrator noting how "[n]early all girls are clever imitators, and Clara readily adopted Capitola's light, springy, swaying walk" (308). Later, once Clara is reunited with Merah far from the Le Noirs, Merah notes that Clara "must have contracted some of [her] eccentric little friend Capitola's ways" (326). As soon as Capitola tells Clara how to act, Clara alters her behavior; the narrator's interjection that "girls are clever imitators" reinforces that the skill of performance is available to women, and perhaps one that is intrinsic given the "nearly

all” qualifier. Once Capitola equips Clara with the necessary clothing and guidance to successfully affect Capitola’s demeanor and thwart the Le Noirs, Clara appears to absorb this behavior. Fleeing allows Clara the opportunity to exercise a small amount of manipulation—the first instance in which she engages in inauthentic expression—as well as assume agency over her own life. It is Capitola’s influence that effects this change in Clara and proves that femininity can be performed. But the underlying reasons for Clara’s performance differ greatly from those of the male villains: while Clara dons a disguise to protect herself from treacherous men, the male villains use performance to trick others. The distinction that Southworth makes here is that women wield manipulation to protect themselves whereas men manipulate to hurt others.

These women’s socialized passivity, Southworth implies, works to their detriment because they end up in situations that place them at the mercy of men without the proper tools to stand up for themselves. Southworth presents Merah and Clara’s “self-sacrifice and passivity as the factors that originally caused and then perpetuated their suffering, as such, not admirable but old, outworn patterns of behavior” which could lead to prolonged pain (Hudock). The “ethos of female self-abnegation as it appeared in women’s popular novels, although sincere, was often shot through with indications of dissatisfaction and dissent” (Dobson 226). Because female characters in popular novels were portrayed to subtly chafe against norms of femininity, the “popularity of these novels with the public suggests that readers may well have found this dual literary mix of affirmation and apostasy attractive” (226). Merah and Clara’s respective plotlines also nod to the generic framework of gothic fiction, which positions the female body and the domestic space as inherently suspect, both landscapes that remain under threat. The precarity of Merah’s marital conflicts, as well as Clara being subject to the whims of Colonel Le Noir, lend credibility to the instability of domestic tranquility. But Merah’s fate is not replicated for Clara

because of generational differences, Southworth suggests: the older generation of women taught to be victims has transformed into a new generation “which challenges the assumption that they must accept injustice with grace and dignity” (Hudock). Yet it remains relevant to note that both Clara and Marah are held up as icons of middle-class white femininity. Questions of class and race are neither asked nor answered in *The Hidden Hand* in this regard, with only mentions of other black women to be Nancy Grewell, a freed slave and Capitola’s caretaker while in New York, and Pitapat, Capitola’s maid. Both Nancy and Pitapat are reduced to stock characters that “repeat stereotypes of blacks as ignorant, servile, and superstitious” primarily through the use of dialect and comic caricature (Landry 36).

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS CAPITOLA AND TRAVERSE EXPLODE THE BINARY!

Most scholarship on *The Hidden Hand* has centered on Capitola's "masculine femininity," or the way she possesses a blend of masculine and feminine traits, and the implications of her troubling identity categories. As outlined in the previous two sections, manipulation, inauthenticity, and selfishness constitute masculinity; in contrast, transparency, sincerity, and selflessness constitute femininity. Southworth disrupts this neat binary through Capitola and Traverse, both of whom possess a blend of masculine and feminine traits. They occupy an in-between space that complicates notions of gender norms, of which the willful transgression—or subconscious transgression in Traverse's case—often throws other characters into disarray. For the purpose of this section, it is most apt to describe the combination of masculine and feminine characteristics as androgyny.

Capitola's brand of androgyny harnesses the manipulative tendencies coded as masculine and the moral heart coded as feminine. The narrator takes pains to note that she is of "a naturally strong constitution and adventurous disposition, and inured from infancy to danger, Capitola possessed a high degree of courage, self-control, and presence of mind" (Southworth 114). The word "naturally" is of particular import because it denotes that these traits are innate to Capitola—they are not affected nor contrived, but organic constituents of her personality. The conditions of Capitola's childhood set the stage for the main thrust of the novel: "the trivialization not only of woman's autonomy, but of woman's very existence, by men" (Dobson, *THH* xxxi). Cap learns to take care of herself, and her "masculine socialization—her education on the streets where she works as a newsboy—allows her to develop the saving characteristics of self-reliance, irreverence, and active, rather than passive, courage" (Dobson 233). Capitola's

“escape from feminine socialization—an escape not shared by her readers or her creator—allows her the peculiar freedom to be her full untrammelled self. Other women in this book exist in precarious dependency on the whims of men” (235). Her upbringing prevents her from accessing or learning the gender and social norms expected of her when she arrives at Hurricane Hall.

Without altogether departing from the status quo which dictated deportment and social scripts, Capitola still navigates within the existing societal and social frameworks to shift perceptions of how women ought to behave. In this way, Cap “demonstrates that a woman can still maintain her feminine role as moral center of the home without restricting her freedom to speak [and act] how and where she pleases” (Pond 142). In Capitola, Southworth has the opportunity to critique the limits of codified gender roles, firing at the practices of domineering men and submissive women. Yet Capitola remains an anomaly: other characters decry her singularity, perceiving her as “an individual of the animal kingdom whom neither Buffon nor any other natural philosopher had ever classified, and who, as a creature of unknown habits, might sometimes be dangerous” (Southworth 376). Comparing Capitola to an unpredictable animal places her outside the realms of the human and of the known—her very existence bewilders those who attempt to fit her into recognizable paradigms of femininity. Capitola is so effective as a character precisely because she is a fabricated entity who inhabits a fictionalized world. Her function is to fulfill an extreme escapist fantasy that, in all her pomp and flair, both shocks and enthralls readers: the more rules she explodes, the more normal it becomes for women to behave in certain ways, all while commenting on what constrains women in the first place.

Capitola sidesteps the sincerity required of sentimental etiquette to instead take advantage of the social code to suit her own needs in a way that is decidedly sly and manipulative. As noted through Black Donald's deceptions, *The Hidden Hand* reflects the American cultural phenomenon of people relying on sartorial signifiers to categorize others within a social hierarchy. When she gives her explanation for dressing up as a boy in New York, Capitola says: "I thought to myself *if I were only a boy*, I might...do lots of jobs by day, and sleep without terror by night...And then, all of a sudden, a bright thought struck me: *and I made up my mind to be a boy*" (Southworth 47). Dressing up as a man affords Capitola the same safety, privilege, and economic access given to men. Altering her external appearance, too, is impossibly simple; all she does is "swap [her] suit of girl's clothes" for "the raggedest suit of boy's clothes" (46). Switching her manner of dress enables Cap to affect a masculine appearance. She negates the common method of using clothing to determine one's gender by severing the relationship between her "true" gender and its corresponding outward signifiers. When Capitola dresses as a boy, it is so she can survive and achieve a semblance of economic independence; while "all the ragged boys [she] knew could get little jobs to earn bread," she could not "because [she] was a girl" and "there seemed to be nothing but starvation or beggary before [her]" (44). Recognizing the systemic and cultural biases stacked against her, Capitola affects a masculine look to accrue social and economic capital to allow more freedom of movement, agency, and autonomy within society—she gains all the benefits of being a man. She gains fraudulent entry to a world that is not her own. Southworth lauds Capitola for departing from feminine gender norms in order to survive and discarding femininity to evade the threat of sexual assault. The act of putting on clothes belonging to another gender is a violation of outward gender norms, but the violation is

not of Capitola's womanhood so much as it is of what the clothes *signify*: a masculine affectation and disguise that has duped others through false presentation, an act of hypocrisy against others.

At once demonstrating the limits to agency as a woman in society and the transgressive nature of Capitola's personality, the cross-dressing further becomes a commentary on what masculinity is supposed to be vis-à-vis this performance. The version of masculinity that Capitola demonstrates is one that rests upon mental facility, wit, and bravado. In New York, Cap acts as a "saucy young tatterdemalion" (39) to sell newspapers, and in Virginia, Cap shifts methods to trick people "by stratagem...[and] not by force" (111). The manifestations of her masculine traits—once she must put her newsboy persona to rest, that is—appear through her speech and her mind rather than through her body. She acknowledges her physical weakness in comparison to a man's and understands that she can beat him with cunning, misdirection, and savvy. These traits that evoke the image of the confidence man are also found in Black Donald, who serves as Capitola's male double. Capitola and Black Donald's "outsider status grants them awareness that gender...and class markers are masks to be manipulated at will" (Landry 32). Capitola's upbringing on the streets of New York and Black Donald's lack of social categorization confers an amount of distance that gives them new eyes with which to re-vision antebellum society: "Their alienation from the bourgeoisie afford them insight into its workings, the ability to see its values and perceptions as constructed rather than natural" (32). Capitola perceives the value of becoming a boy in New York to do "everything an honest lad could turn his hand to" and then enacts the external physical transformation to achieve those ends (Southworth 47). Capitola rejects the logic of the categorical to embrace a more fluid type of movement unrestricted by arbitrary boundaries. Expressions of these masculine traits are most

prominent in the church scene—when Cap is disguised as Clara while the Le Noirs attempt to force a marriage—and the scene wherein Cap challenges Craven to a duel.

Disguised as Clara, Capitola calls upon the confidence man's tool of disguise to expose the Le Noirs for their perfidy in front of witnesses, undercutting the social etiquette expected of churchgoers. In the 1850s, there was a growing concern for church etiquette; to "the sentimentalists, any outward demeanor of reverence that did not spring from a pious heart would be hypocrisy of the deepest dye" (Halttunen 165). Church etiquette required "a demeanor of restrained piety, a genteel performance of religious reverence" (165). The church scene draws on this cultural norm, as well as the social ritual of marriage. At the pivotal juncture during the ceremony when the bride-to-be is supposed to say, "I do," Cap instead throws off her veil and declares, "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" (Southworth 315). Caution—and etiquette—is thrown to the wind as Cap reveals herself. She grounds the terms of her rejection in the procreative and the pious. Her refusal to marry Craven in the face of human extinction foregrounds his undesirability as a sexual and domestic partner. The added mention of the angel Gabriel, the biblical messenger who informed Mary of her immaculate conception, at once emphasizes Cap's irreverence as well as Craven's unsuitability as a spiritual partner. The scripts dictating polite behavior in church, and during marriage ceremonies, are tossed aside. Cap flouts these social rules on several counts: first, dressing in disguise; second, thwarting the sacrament of marriage with uncouth vigor; and third, acting inappropriately by putting "her thumb to the side of her nose and whirling her four fingers" (316). Sentimental etiquette was "based on the insistence that Christianity and politeness were one and the same", and Capitola is neither reverent nor polite in

this scene (Halttunen 165). The overstated theatricality of her actions indicates the sheer amount of performance that Capitola enacts, and the problem of Clara's disappearance is put on hold to address Cap's revelation. This allows Clara ample time to make her escape and enables Capitola's manipulative scheme to succeed. She successfully manipulates her external appearance to shock everyone and subvert the Le Noirs' exertion of patriarchal power.

While the church scene depended more on an altered physical state, Cap's duel with Craven relies more on mental maneuvers. When none of her male relatives will challenge Craven to defend her honor after he slanders her publicly, she adheres to the gentleman's code and "did the most astounding thing that ever a woman of the nineteenth century or any former century attempted—she wrote a challenge to Craven Le Noir" (Southworth 367). The stress placed on the singularity of Capitola's challenge indicates its anomalous nature, especially because a woman is the one issuing it. In antebellum culture, "writing a letter was an act of emotional self-expression" that "demanded above all a *controlled* communication of *proper* sentiments" (Halttunen 121). Therefore, Cap's missive to Craven can be read as her sincere wish, albeit one that is neither controlled nor proper. She simultaneously follows the existing rules regarding the initiation of duels and breaks them simply because she is a woman challenging a man. When Craven refuses her, Capitola confronts him in the street and fires "[s]ix times without an instant's intermission, until her revolver [is] spent" (Southworth 371). After Craven confesses to his misdeeds, under the impression that his death is imminent, Capitola reveals that she had replaced the bullets with "poor powder and dried peas" (375). No longer at death's door, Craven is at humiliated at "finding himself in the ridiculous position in which the address of Capitola and his own weak nerves, cowardice, and credulity had placed him" (375). In addition, all "the rules enforcing physical self-restraint, so important in the

parlor, were doubly important in the street, and chapters [in etiquette manuals] on street etiquette repeated injunctions against” acting improperly in any way (Halttunen 114-115). Women are especially subject to scrutiny by others in public, and the rules of civility are enforced in the street because it is supremely public. Thus, Cap commits an egregious transgression of gender norms when she challenges Craven to a duel in the street. This encounter demonstrates the depth of Capitola’s mental acuity, as well as the lengths she will go to execute a scheme. Capitola triumphs by virtue of her courage and wit, not through violence.

Capitola embodies the shift of the 1850s onwards towards embracing theatricality and performance in the social realm; she is figured as the modern woman who reflects the burgeoning evolution of culture. But Capitola’s marriage to Herbert at the end of the novel recuperates the abiding status quo—her return to the domestic sphere via marriage allays anxieties and concerns about her behavior. This implies that there is a universal order that is held stable within the conditions put forth by the narrative, no matter how outrageous the plot or the characters’ actions, precisely because *The Hidden Hand* is not meant to be a realist work but an escapist one. So “long as she was not represented seriously but remained safely in the realm of comic fantasy, Capitola fascinated her contemporaries” (Dobson 235). Capitola “violates all of the restrictions placed upon...women but still ends up, thanks to her unflagging ingenuity and overall capability, safe at home again” (Davidson 273). She “saw the world, proved her mastery of it by triumphing over a whole host of designing men, and then returned [to the domestic sphere]...to enter a marriage” (273). This marital plot point reflects a “compromise about women, independence, and marriage as well; women were supported and protected” (Showalter 93). Many heroines in domestic fiction of the time gave up the radical ambition of independence or agency in favor of domestic tranquility, ultimately finding “their rewards in submission and

sacrifice” (99). Yet this precedent is not necessarily held stable in *The Hidden Hand* since Southworth alludes to the domestic states of Capitola and Clara’s homes with both women unafraid to keep their husbands in check:

I wish I could say “they all lived happily ever after.” But the truth is, I have reason to suppose that even Clara had sometimes occasion to administer to Doctor Rocke dignified curtain lectures; which no doubt did him good. And I know for a positive fact, that our Cap sometimes gives her ‘dear, darling, sweet Herbert,’ the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue, which of course he deserves. (Southworth 485)

The next generation of women will remain the moral centers of the home and shall conduct their business of influence more vocally and without reserve. In spite of resolving the narrative through marriage, Southworth hints that the domestic spaces of Clara and Capitola will not always be placid—the lingering image of domestic tranquility is jostled to account for these heroines’ personalities. Other woman’s fiction written at the same time as *The Hidden Hand* “isolates passion and emotionality as flaws in the feminine nature that must be corrected or controlled”, but Southworth, among other authors such as Caroline Lee Henz and Susan Warner, “accepted passion as a virtue, sign of an intense involvement in the world” (Baym 199). Capitola’s passion spills over to affect the other women around her for the better.

Alongside Capitola, Traverse ought to be examined for his blend of masculine and feminine traits because he is a male character that Southworth appears to hold up as an ideal version of masculinity. Southworth, to a point, challenges notions of gender essentialism. Just as Capitola’s masculine socialization has been attributed to her childhood in Rag Alley, Traverse is noted to have absorbed feminine traits because he was raised by a single mother. Alfred Habegger writes, “If masculinization is the remedy for women, then this good young man, Traverse Rocke, reveals Southworth’s remedy for men—desexualization. Traverse is obviously a sissy” (Habegger 207-208). I object to Habegger’s use of “sissy” and “milksoy” when

describing Traverse because those terms are pejorative, ungenerous, and bogus (208). It is precisely because he is “brought up solely by the long-suffering Marah” that “he understands women and other victims” (208). Southworth puts forth Traverse as an emotionally intelligent man who sees women as autonomous human beings worthy of respect, which contrasts with his male counterparts of Black Donald and the Le Noirs. When Traverse first enters the narrative, he is known for “his true and affectionate heart” (Southworth 64). He possesses “a good deal of manly strength of mind” and “had all his mother’s tenderness of heart” (132). This quality of emotional openness aligns with the sentimental typology of conduct characteristic to sentimental femininity. Traverse fulfills “the sentimental ideal of politeness by expressing his morals and feelings in every word and deed”—indeed, his “manners were easy and natural because they sprang from a right heart” (Halttunen 101). Such emotional transparency is demonstrated when Dr. Day offers to apprentice Traverse, and it “was with difficulty that he could keep back his tears or control his voice” (Southworth 132). There are several other instances over the course of the novel that “caused the tears to rush to his eyes”, proving to be the most prominent physical reaction that Traverse experiences in response to his feelings (407). Traverse has difficulty concealing his emotions—the very fact that he must struggle indicates that he is used to showing his emotions at all times, and thus falls in line with the feminine trait of internal feelings manifesting in physical reactions. He may have “manly strength of mind”, but he also has an innate “tenderness of heart” (132). There exists a tension between Traverse’s competing sensibilities; the masculine mind at odds with a feminine heart, both somehow needing to be reconciled within the reality of his male body. This portrayal of Traverse allows Southworth to model an example of feminized masculinity, to present a man with empathy, moral integrity, and emotional responsiveness.

These traits come to the fore through his interactions with women in the novel. He openly demonstrates his love for Marah, for his instinctual reaction when seeing her is “to run to his mother, fling his arms around her neck, and kiss her” (135). His emotional expressiveness emerges through physical displays of affection, as well as verbal defenses. When Colonel Le Noir accuses Traverse and Marah of attempting to entrap Clara in marriage to improve their social status, “Traverse stood with kindling eyes and blazing cheeks, barely able to master his indignation; yet, to his credit be it spoken, he did ‘rule his own spirit’ and reply with dignity and calmness” (242). Later on, Colonel Le Noir again dares to malign Mrs. Rocke’s character and Traverse speaks in her favor: “But, sir, I am here to defend my mother’s rights and to protect her from insult” (251). His countenance betrays his indignation, but he manages to contain his fury and measure his response. This contrasts with Old Hurricane’s indiscriminate eruptions of emotion that manifest completely through physical reactions—whether through “bending and snapping his own cane” or his “whole huge frame...quivering from head to foot”, others will always be privy to the state of his feelings (83). Old Hurricane falls in line with Traverse because the two cannot, or struggle to, keep their emotions under wraps. Yet Traverse ultimately possesses more control than Old Hurricane: his emotion is evident, but his mastery gestures to a knowledge of how a man ought to react to earn respect and credibility from other men. In this self-discipline “lay the moral meaning of the ‘*self*-made man’: by exercising self-possession, self-government, and, above all, self-reliance, he placed himself beyond evil influences and became a law unto himself” (Halttunen 25). Since control over one’s self is the marking of a moral man, Traverse’s status as one is confirmed. He sees it as his duty to protect his mother—stepping into the traditionally male role as head of the family—and recognizes the respect she deserves as a woman, as a mother, and as a person. Furthermore, while serving in the army,

Traverse, upon thinking of his mother and Clara's reactions if he were to be shot for dereliction of duty, exclaims, "Oh! the thought of them at this moment quite unmans me" (Southworth 410). His actions are motivated not by a desire to possess or to control, but rather by love. The use of "unmans" connotes the unraveling of his stoic masculine façade, further emphasizing the difficult feat of mastering his emotions and restraining them from outward displays. To be unmanned is to be deprived of one's status as a man, to no longer demonstrate the qualities of self-control or courage. Traverse is used to expressing feelings in any way, which suggests that Traverse does not fully subscribe, or conform, to the masculinity as conceived of by society at large. Traverse, familiar with expressions of emotions, must recalibrate his reactions to better suit the socially acceptable model of masculinity. In spite of this, he retains his tender heart and remains easily affected to the point of betraying his internal emotional state.

This characterization provides a stark contrast to the Le Noirs, especially given that Traverse's particular storyline is most entangled with those men. Traverse is positioned as the "self-reliant youth who cultivated firm principles [and stands] as a fixed point of moral certainty in a chaotic world roamed by tricksters who worked to contaminate the unwary with their social formlessness" (Halttunen 26). Like the sentimental conception of women as governors of moral order, Traverse is located among their ranks because of his self-reliance and staunch morals. With the Le Noirs as the men against whom he is compared, Traverse is posited as the "least manly" of the men in the novel: a scholar more than a fighter, he finds himself better suited as a physician than as a soldier. He admits that he does not possess the disposition or personality to succeed in the army; Traverse complains to Herbert that "his coarse, ill-fitting uniform, cow-hide shoes, etc." and "the drilling, [the] close quarters, coarse food, and mixed company, is enough to take the military ardor out of anyone" (Southworth 343). Herbert's response was to tell Traverse

that he “talk[ed] like a dandy” (343). Opposing the military lifestyle is construed as unmanly—Traverse’s dislike of rough conditions is viewed as effeminate, a compromise of his masculinity. Yet this all goes back to Southworth’s ethos that unnecessary violence or conflict ought to be avoided. The national body of the United States is worth fighting for, and the bodies of its citizens should receive similar care and respect. Like Capitola, Traverse values human life and mercy; the two characters that demonstrate a blend of masculine and feminine traits are the ones who move the plot forward, either with panache or small acts of grace. Capitola catches Black Donald with the trick of her trapdoor, but her loathing of capital punishment pushes her to provide Black Donald with the tools necessary for him to free himself. Similarly, Traverse listens to Madame Le Noir’s story in the asylum and believes her instead of being dismissive, thereby facilitating her discharge and reunion with Capitola, her daughter. Though the ending hangs upon slender threads of overlapping coincidences—which come across as too convenient and rushed to be entirely plausible—Southworth manages to pull together all the narrative threads.

Southworth’s depictions of Capitola and Traverse are successful because they exist within an escapist fiction that contains overlapping generic frameworks. Regarding genre, *The Hidden Hand* combines different generic frameworks to create what is ostensibly a transgressive novel in terms of its characters and sociopolitical projects yet ultimately ends with the recuperation of the status quo. The different generic conventions woven throughout *The Hidden Hand* are as follows: the comedy (a romantic subplot, misunderstandings and miscommunications, a marriage at the end), the sentimental novel, the gothic novel, the seduction narrative, and the picaresque. The overlap and interplay of these seemingly disparate forms allow Southworth to “disguise any social stand...by hiding behind [the novel’s] comic

business” such that she evades “both censure and censorship through its indeterminacy” (Davidson 248). Anything transgressive is disguised by satirical or comic energy—the narrative disavows seriousness or potential controversy because of its airtight absurdity. The overall escapist bent of *The Hidden Hand* “allows the reader a temporary reprieve from her own situation but never requires her to question its governing assumptions” (273). The blending of genres mimics the blending of masculinity and femininity in Capitola and Traverse, acting as “a hybridizing, roving force that complicates boundaries and blurs distinctions” (Edelstein 36). Sari Edelstein argues how Capitola’s “unstable gender identity proves to have a rippling effect, as she incites other characters to participate in cross-dressing, disguise, and the disruption of social norms” (36). This analysis extends to Traverse, too, if only to a lesser extent: by virtue of him possessing traits that are coded as feminine, he disrupts the gender norm of men as stoic, angry, and manipulative. These two characters reconcile the polarities of masculinity and femininity to reconfigure the novel’s economy of gender.

CONCLUSION

Southworth destabilizes identity categories through Capitola and Traverse to comment on the arbitrary nature of gender and the harmful constraints of gender roles. Through the portrayals of Black Donald, Colonel Le Noir, and Craven Le Noir, Southworth codes manipulation, inauthenticity, and performance as distinctly masculine traits; on the flip side, Southworth's portrayals of Marah Rocke and Clara Day as honest, transparent, and genuine allow her to code these traits as feminine. Black Donald and the Le Noirs are placed in contradistinction to Marah and Clara to portray the extremes of masculinity and femininity, respectively, in antebellum America. Black Donald, Old Hurricane, and the Le Noirs "are the men whose actions shape the lives of the female characters and thus determine the flow of the narrative. Masculine rage, greed, and desire are the imperative forces of Southworth's fictional world, and it is against these that she pits Cap's autonomy and city savvy" (Dobson, *THH* xxxv). Black Donald, Colonel Le Noir, and Craven Le Noir represent similar visions of masculinity, and Southworth highlights the drawbacks of these men's masculinities specifically in how they treat and relate to women. Yet Traverse is set up as the man who must defend the women in his life. Craven Le Noir, Colonel Le Noir, and Black Donald, until the latter two have changes of heart, never consider how their actions could adversely affect others. These men—and Southworth makes a point to *only* portray men in this way—gestures to the untenable conditions women faced under patriarchy.

Southworth does not assign culpability to women but rather to the patriarchal system to which they belong. She refuses to condemn Marah and Clara for their adherence to sentimental femininity just as she refuses to condemn Cap for her failure to adhere. Instead of keeping men

and women siloed in domestic and public spaces, Capitola enacts a way of being that allows for a shift in cultural expectations to merge distinct or disparate behaviors. Capitola displays the permeability of gender norms and behavior, serving as an interlocutor for gender in an odd sort of ventriloquism via her speech and her assumption of different guises. Setting up Black Donald as Capitola's double allows Southworth to draw parallels between the two characters, especially how both circumvent class stratification through disguises to expose the arbitrariness of social paradigms. While Black Donald becomes a feared outlaw, Capitola chafes against the rules of genteel white femininity that apply to her. This shows how delineations between genders are not fixed—Capitola collapses these binary distinctions to demonstrate the benefits of blending the “masculine” and the “feminine.” When she says, “[Women] like men of strength, courage, and spirit—but those qualities do not come from the Evil One, but from the Lord, who is the giver of all good,” Capitola acknowledges that while those traits may be assigned to men, they can also apply to women since God has created those traits to begin (Southworth 390). However, existing scholarship has not acknowledged that Capitola can get away with her nonconformist behavior precisely because she is afforded protection by a male legal guardian, as well as her genteel socioeconomic status. She is shielded by male presence and financial means, both of which render circumstances and reactions more forgiving. Had Old Hurricane not come to save her at the trial in New York, she would have been sent to “the Refuge”, a “prison [for] juvenile delinquents” (Southworth 48).

When considering the broader scope of the novel, Southworth's portrayals of conventional masculinity and femininity suggest that the former is defined by aggression and violence, whereas the latter is defined by passivity and obedience. Neither of these modes of existence—perpetuated by patriarchal norms and systems—have proven productive for either

men or women, as evidenced through the male villains and Marah and Clara. Because men are too aggressive, they promote gratuitous violence. Because women are too passive, they cannot take active stances to enact meaningful change. Southworth points out that these ways of existing are beneficial to neither men nor women, which is why she presents two characters who collapse this binary to produce a new option that falls somewhere in the middle. Southworth proffers Capitola and Traverse as the ideal figures of androgyny; they model new ways of being that do not subscribe to either extreme. Whereas Capitola exists as a lone woman among a crowd of aggressive men, Traverse often finds himself in the company of women, his stint in the military being one of the glaring exceptions. They must learn to advocate for themselves and navigate a patriarchal society that is not kind to those who fail to conform. They disavow unnecessary aggression as well as passivity, allowing them to take action without resorting to violence—their androgyny speaks to the novel's moral center.

The novel's overarching moral economy comes to light through this understanding of androgyny. It is not one based in acts of gratuitous violence, nor is it one based on apathy and complacency—this androgynous subjectivity constructs a moral economy that applauds a non-violent approach to resolving conflict. Capitola and Traverse possess moral integrity that values the individual over the law; both characters are guided by a moral code grounded in the fair and respectful treatment of others. More often than not, Capitola and Traverse meet malice with mercy—their treatment of others and disapproval of corporal punishment attest to Southworth's rejection of gratuitous violence. Capitola merely humiliates Craven during the duel rather than actually shooting to kill, and she saves Black Donald from being hanged for his crimes. Similarly, Traverse advocates for Capitola's mother, who is wrongfully imprisoned in a mental asylum, does not believe in the utility of duels, and never resorts to physical violence against

others. Instead of applauding violence, Southworth “teaches a morality which claims goals can be reached and...performed without separation, death, and destruction” (Hudock). This once again points back to the idea of “influence” and how women reformed society from the domestic space. In the broader cultural understanding, women disproportionately bear the burden of reforming the nation’s moral economy—men are not expected to share this task with women, nor are they figured into this moral equation. Southworth counters this notion with Traverse to suggest that the distribution of moral work can be balanced between men and women. Through this Southworth implies that men, too, possess the means to engage in societal reform just as women do.

Capitola and Traverse’s marriages further prove that embodying androgyny does not upend the status quo. The very fact of their marriages suggests that they are still desirable as partners, and that they will participate in more equitable relationships between husband and wife. This allows Southworth to afford women more authority under the patriarchy, especially during a time when women were often completely subjugated to their husbands. Capitola, by adopting masculine characteristics, is able to leave the domestic sphere and mete out justice in public. Neither Capitola nor Traverse set out to conquer the world, but to change it through truth, justice, and mercy. Capitola proves that women can conduct moral change in public arenas and not simply be confined to the home. In addition, Traverse, by adopting more feminine characteristics, is able to empathize and extend help to others as a physician. Neither of them engage in any true overt violence; though Traverse is in the military, he is truly not cut out for that profession. Instead, he chooses to be a doctor and help others, a job that hinges upon basic care and respect for others. Above all, Southworth puts forth these characters to model the virtues that are at the heart of the novel.

As an exploration of gender roles, cultural criticism, and generic frameworks, *The Hidden Hand* brims with rich content prime for further study. More recently, *The Hidden Hand* has become familiar within academic circles, and the emerging scholarship has pursued arguments on gender, race, and genre, and language. Capitola is often the central figure in these pieces, with other characters analyzed in relation to her centrality. While Capitola is certainly one of the most compelling characters—indeed, the novel’s titles are both in reference to her—it could be worthwhile to begin conversations surrounding minor characters. An examination of Wool and Pitapat, for instance, could prove especially fruitful in unpacking the racial politics of Hurricane Hall or attempting to discern the novel’s stance on slavery. Even more, given my discussion of men and their masculinities, there is still much to say about the male characters. My claim linking masculinity and performance could be applied to Southworth’s other works to determine if this is a trend in her work. Southworth is known for her condemnations of the patriarchy, but little has been published on the male characters who populate her oeuvre and the narrative functions they serve. Overall, there is ample room for critics to maneuver in conversations surrounding Southworth and her corpus.

It is unfortunate that Southworth and *The Hidden Hand* have suffered critical neglect for so long. In Alfred Habegger’s “A Well-Hidden Hand”, he notes that members of “the Serious Literature Profession” have determined “what books get remembered by everyone else” (Habegger 200). The literati, or the people who arbitrate what is worth studying and reading, dismissed *The Hidden Hand* by virtue of its popularity, its extravagant narrative, and, maybe subconsciously, its female author. At the end of Southworth’s career, even “a writer for *The North American Review* expresse[d] regret at the tendency of the literary elite to denounce Southworth” (Naranjo-Huebl 141). That action and adventure are not deserving of serious

literary study is absurd; after all, we still read James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which are just as much tales of swashbuckling heroism as in *The Hidden Hand*. This dismissal reeks of a more insidious, or perhaps biased, consideration of what ought to be considered and studied as Real Literature. The lens, as Habegger points out, was filtered through a very white, very male academy. It was not until Nina Baym's exhaustive survey of American women's writing—*Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70*—that *The Hidden Hand* as a text, or even E. D. E. N. Southworth as an author, was treated as worthy of scholarship. Despite being one of the most popular fictions of its time, *The Hidden Hand* fell to the wayside as critics and scholars alike flocked towards Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, and others of that ilk. While professional critics have begun producing more scholarship on *The Hidden Hand*, Habegger writes, "This is the book that no *student* of American literature has ever taken seriously" (Habegger 209, emphasis mine). Well, Alfred, my good man, the time has come: a student of American literature answered your call to take this book seriously.

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