

Representations of home in mid-nineteenth-century  
sentimental fiction and cemetery sculpture

by

Margaret Sherve

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## Dedication

CRD — for listening to nineteenth century plots, not letting the truck run us over, and taking most of the photos

Greg — for all the technical assistance.

*Thank you.*

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## PROLOGUE

Mid-nineteenth-century women's roles were tumultuously changing. These changes, along with society's concerns about the changing roles and their effects on the home, are reflected in the popular literature and cemeteries of the day. Although literature and cemeteries do not usually appear together in a discussion, close examination reveals that they do reflect similarities. Cemeteries and the sentimental literature form an intertextual construct of women's roles both in the home and in society.

During the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century, the American home was not merely a place to sleep, eat, and live, but was also a center of industry. Rather than spending money to purchase goods made elsewhere, people, especially women, made their own durable goods. They tended flocks and cultivated crops for their families' consumption; they made homespun cloth and sewed their clothes; they spun yarn and knitted winter clothing; they put up vegetables, made butter and preserved meat; they made shoes, candles, rugs, quilts, and soap; and they performed other tasks within the domestic sphere. Mothers bore their children, then raised and educated them at home. As the century progressed, industrialization blossomed into businesses away from the home. In her chapter on "Feminine Disestablishment," Ann Douglas cites many sources which document that during the first half of the nineteenth century factories took over what had been home industries (Douglas, *Feminization* 50-51). As this occurred, "women's work remained centered on household management and family care, although the growing ramifications of a market economy diminished the importance of household manufacture and enlarged families' reliance on money to purchase basic commodities" (Cott 43). No longer

were families primarily dependent upon wives and mothers for survival. Men took additional jobs outside the home, and received wages that could buy goods either imported or made in northeastern factories. Improved transportation facilities enabled goods produced in one area to be sold cheaply in far distant places.

The American Industrial Revolution had a profound effect on women. Women's work was perceived as less and less exalted; their sphere, the home, was no longer the center of their husbands' lives. Women's self-images became unsettled; whereas in the past mothers had maintained homes as the center of life for the entire family, nineteenth-century women were tied to the home in a new and different way. Purchasing goods rather than creating goods freed up some of their time, but this very leisure caused some women to question their roles and self-worth. Earlier women had defined themselves entirely by their tasks at home; later women lost some of this secure identification as housework required less effort. Because of these factors—men earning wages, women purchasing rather than producing, more leisure time for the women and a feeling of lessened self-worth—many women were ready both to be a part of and to promote the idealized Cult of Domesticity.

In *The Bonds of Womanhood*, Nancy Cott introduces domesticity:

Within this 'cult' (it might almost be called a social ethic), mother, father, and children grouped together in the private household ruled the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of happiness; the family's influence reached outward, underlying success or failure in church and state, and inward, creating individual character. Not the understanding of families as cells making up the body of society but the emphasis placed on and agencies attributed to the family unit were new, and the importance given to women's role as wives, mothers, and mistresses of households was unprecedented. The ministers, educators, and pious and educated women in the northern United States whose published writings principally documented this ethic made women's presence the essence of successful homes and families.

Conversely, the 'cult' both observed and prescribed specific behavior for women in the enactment of domestic life. (1-2)

Society in the early nineteenth century venerated both women and the roles they were expected to play; both were idealized. As the century progressed, the cult of domesticity came to include additional gender specific roles such as child rearing and motherhood (now called parenting); it established a sharp contrast between the "world" and the "home"; it idealized women as selfless and "nice"; it located women's happiness in the service of others and allowed the women little chance of escape.

Nancy Cott devotes an entire chapter to "Domesticity," and elucidates facets of the transcendent ideal: selflessness (71), self-abnegation (78), and self-denial (91). She states that the concept of domesticity had crystallized by the 1830s (8) and its central convention was the "contrast between the home and the world" (64). This contrast polarized men and women into gender-specific roles and created gender asymmetry. Women no longer were responsible for domestic manufacturing; the canon of domesticity "encouraged people to assimilate such change by linking it to a specific set of sex-roles" (67). Child rearing became a specialized domestic process and was considered one of women's occupations (87). Wives' economic dependence led to an imposed posture of selflessness and Cott points out that "only by giving up all self-interest did women achieve the purity of motive that enabled them to establish moral reference points in the home" (71). Thus, women's self-denial established them as moral leaders, educators, and critics of not just their homes but of society as a whole. The self-denial theme was also intrinsically linked to a woman's happiness: her happiness was to be found in serving others.

The cult informed women that their tasks were once again to be both identifying and valuable. Though they were no longer allowed to be midwives (the fledgling AMA said it was "doctor's work"), nor encouraged to sit at a loom (weaving could be

more efficiently done in factories), the canon of domesticity “made woman’s household occupation her vocation” (Cott 74). As a vocation, it was similar to a man’s occupation but without respite and without rewards. The man went to work and came home to rest. She afforded his relief. He, in turn, reaped the rewards of earning pecuniary remuneration and holding a job outside the home. Since his leisure was spent at home, concepts of home and leisure became linked. Male cycles of work/home which equated work/leisure quickly led to the idea that home was leisure. This, of course, left women’s domestic occupation muddled in concepts of leisure. Her work was at home and she could not escape her sphere.

Because this cult included *all* women, “the domestic vocation gained enormous, persuasive strength. It gave many women a sense of satisfaction as well as a solidarity” with other women (Cott 99). The cult of domesticity offered women a place in which they could feel important and needed, and yet, at the same time, it trapped those who needed more freedom. Although domestic work was confused with leisure due to location, women’s worthiness was to be earned by the faithful performance of domestic duties. The message was clearly understood as an ideal, and to this message dutiful women dedicated their lives: keep the family together, and keep the house ever presentable and ready for family and friends.

Daughters in privileged families were encouraged to have enough education to attract a well-educated young man and to be sufficiently cultured to be worthy to run his home and entertain his guests. A man had to deal with the world, with different trades, different cultures, different products; a woman was educated to ensnare a young man and to run his home. A man was identified by his occupation, and so was she identified by *his* occupation. He was known for what he had accomplished, she also was known for what *he* had accomplished. Her identity, then, was as his wife, his

mother, his daughter, the mother of his children, the mistress of his household. Her education was designed to prepare her in the way of domesticity.

As society began to place increasing importance on factory-produced goods, the value of those same goods produced at home began to fall. With the waning of value attached to home-made goods, the value of the person who had traditionally produced them also fell. Yet, as these values fell, the arena did not change. Women were still, for the most part, “home workers.” The only change was in the value of their *efforts*, and the direction of that change was downward.

Mary Kelley, in *Private Woman, Public Stage*, notes two exceptions to women’s waning economic value: the literary domestic and the school teacher. The term “literary domestic” identifies those writers whose sphere of operation is the domestic one; that is, women. Literary domestics<sup>1</sup> took advantage of a social status that allowed them greater educational opportunities than other women (greater also than many of their male compatriots), even though there was no promise of a life beyond the domestic sphere. The education of these women was generally a random one, usually self-motivated, but “integral to their learning was the sense that cultural acquisition was their right and the transmission of culture their responsibility” (Kelley 73). These

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis will discuss nine literary domestics from the dozen which Mary Kelley promotes as those “who were among the most commercially successful of the literary domestics, [and] came to dominate a substantial literary marketplace” (7). The nine and their novels are: Maria Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (1854); Sara Willis Parton (pseud. Fanny Fern), *Ruth Hall* (1855); Mary Virginia Hawes Terhune (pseud. Marion Harland), *Alone* (1854); Caroline Lee Hentz, *Ernest Linwood* (1856); Mary Jane Hawes Holmes, *Meadow Brook* (1857); Maria McIntosh, *Ellen Leslie* (1856); Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (1868); Elizabeth Wetherall (pseud. Susan Warner), *The Wide, Wide World* (1851); and Augusta Evans Wilson, *St. Elmo* (1867).

educated women, living in a world that allotted second-class citizenship to women, relegated to a life with a domestic focus, wrote.

Industrialization developed a market for mass-produced goods and the side effect was a decrease in value of home-made goods. A few women still created home-made goods and it followed that their work—and thus their worth—was also lessened. This lessened worth transferred to the classroom. Before the industrial revolution, men were classroom educators; after the industrial revolution, women moved into the classroom to replace the men who had taught at primary levels and who now had begun to teach more advanced students. The value of women as teachers followed the same trend as the value of women as producers: it decreased. Female teachers were more prevalent in classrooms, but were looked upon as surrogate mothers, and the “vocation of teaching represented *de facto* preparation for the role of motherhood in the household” (Kelley 143). The niche filled by female teachers in primary schools evolved into a new role fraught with gender-specific expectations.

The literary domestics filled a similar niche. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler states that before 1820 one-third of American novels had been written by women (83). Over the next sixty years, however, women increasingly wrote. By 1871, almost three-fourths of the novels published were written by women (Kelley 26). Most of the literary domestics had pieces printed in a variety of magazines and newspapers before they published a book, and often their books first appeared in serialized form. Some (Fanny Fern, for example) later published collections of their newspaper essays in book form. Although women’s writing had its own well-respected place in society, male writers and the established intelligentsia continued to deny it the respect that the public offered.

It is not surprising then that women, who had been trained both overtly and covertly that their proper place was within the domestic sphere, and who had extraordinary education, chose to write. It is also not surprising the writers chose domestic outlines to present their plots and characters, and that they presented images from the homes which surrounded them. It is remarkable that women who were not in close communication with each other concurrently chose to represent similar ideas in similar ways. In eight of the nine texts examined, the authors' choice of protagonist is an orphaned girl who matures during the novel. Orphaned girls are ultimate examples of powerlessness; their lack of family leaves them without mentor, protector, or guide. That the authors all chose powerless protagonists indicates that the only way they could deal with the dominant culture was first to erase all vestiges of power and then empower only within the confines of death, domesticity, and religion.

The cultural hegemony of domestic ideas and ideals was "derived and promulgated" from the middle to upper classes but "created constraints or opportunities for all women" (Cott 10). These ideals were simultaneously approved of and scorned by their culture. "To be idealized yet rejected by men—the object of yearning, and yet of scorn—was the fate of the home-as-workplace. Women's work (indeed women's very character, viewed as essentially conditioned by the home) shared in that simultaneous glorification and devaluation" (Cott 62).

The power of dominant cultural ideas influenced the literature of the day, and in turn, the power of dominant literary ideas led to changes in the culture of the day.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DOMINANT CONCEPTIONS OF HOME

Victorian cemeteries<sup>2</sup> present strong representations of home, many of which are precisely described in the literary domestics' texts. These cemeteries and texts form an intertextual network displaying the power of dominant cultural ideas; both present (and perpetuate) idealized concepts of home. While the cemeteries present visual reminders of homes, the texts describe cemeteries. The most common elements of nineteenth-century home include an idealized woman, the cult of domesticity, and the cult of the child (discussed further in chapter three). Representations of home are similarly manifested in sentimental literature<sup>3</sup> and in Victorian cemetery statuary found in New England rural cemeteries.

The rural cemetery movement began in America when Boston's Mt. Auburn Cemetery was established in 1831 and replaced urban cemeteries that were crowded and not organized into family lots. Ruth Bohan, discussing both the rural cemetery movement and the first rural cemetery west of the Mississippi River, points out that

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<sup>2</sup> Cemeteries explored and photographed for this thesis include Mt. Auburn in Cambridge, MA, New Burying Ground in New Haven, CT, Green-Wood in Brooklyn, NY, Woodlawn in the Bronx, NY, Laurel Hill in Philadelphia, PA, West Laurel Hill in Cynwyd, PA, Swan Point in Providence, RI, and Forest Hill in West Roxbury, MA. All photographs included in this paper were taken during the summer of 1990; however, some of these same statues were photographed 20 years ago and published in *Victorian Cemetery Art* by Edmund Gillon, Jr. These statues have severely eroded over the past 20 years and in many cases have broken or are crumbling. Facial expressions could often be fully appreciated only by studying past photos and by examining what now remains of the statuary.

<sup>3</sup> The sentimental novel, written during the second half of the nineteenth century, emphasized teary responses by virtuous protagonists to either sorrow or sublimity, their own or that of friends. This thesis will discuss texts written between 1850 and 1870.

before the movement little effort was made to keep family members together in burying grounds. Burying areas were designated, filled, and then abandoned; sometimes bodies were moved to new sites, but often, especially if the family was no longer part of the community, graves were simply left to the new owners or developers of the land (137). There was no outcry if families were not kept together in graveyards because living members of families were secure in their relationships with the church, the community, and with each other; or, they had migrated west. Rural cemeteries abandoned the helter-skelter crowded graves which marked earlier cemeteries and replaced them with park-like settings, well-manicured lawns and neatly swept walks; one could wander through wooded dells and carefully landscaped hills dotted with imposing groups of funerary statues. The same societal forces which devalued the domestic sphere while keeping women bound within that sphere were inversely at work in the country's graveyards; in graveyards people began to value and venerate domestic unity and domesticity.

When people felt their jobs and roles within their families were important, whether the family was kept together in the graveyard was inconsequential. But, when women's work lost its importance and an ideal was raised to which women compared themselves, keeping the family together on earth, in death, and in heaven became compulsively important. The bonds that had held the family together throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were loosening. No longer were sustaining goods produced by women and children within the home-as-workplace; no longer did children spend most of their time at home (they left to attend school or work elsewhere for wages); no longer was the man's occupation whether in agriculture or in a craft based at home. During the previous centuries men and women shared similar work patterns and workplaces (the home), but by mid-nineteenth century men's work took them away

from the home (Cott 58). The home was no longer the focus of everyone's productive life; the church no longer the prime empowerer; the community no longer the enforcer. Church, community, and families drifted apart as the population boomed.<sup>4</sup> Through all this turmoil the home became a retreat—a romanticized, isolated sanctuary from the chaotic world. From the 1600s through the Civil War, “the overriding national treatment of death was shaped by a reaction to the dual forces of social and commercial expansion and specialization and cultural romanticism. In large measure, if not entirely in response to the growing individual anonymity brought on by changes in their social world, Americans sought a return to their lost sense of community in the graveyard and the heavenly world of the dead; in the process, paradoxically, they effectively banished the reality of death from their lives by a spiritualistic and sentimentalized embracing of it” (Stannard, *Puritan* 185). By sentimentalizing death and creating ideal images in cemeteries which families regularly patronized, the home was both domesticated and glorified. Bohan states that by the Civil War this “domestication and glorification of the home front had become the norm. . .” (138).

Stannard's “Rural Cemetery” discussion specifically addresses changing roles within the family and the juxtaposition of families and cemeteries:

As the world of work became increasingly dominated by adult males who performed their occupational tasks in quarters far removed from hearth and home, the realm of women and children—and the romanticized family in general—grew equally confined to the worlds of the household . . . and the graveyard (46). . . . For the cemetery had become, in many ways, the refuge of the psychologically overburdened family; it was, at last, the place where peace and calm would be the

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<sup>4</sup> Stannard, in his epilogue to *The Puritan Way of Death*, states that “Between 1790 and 1860 the rural population of America enjoyed an almost seven-fold increase in size; but during the same time period America's urban population experienced a 31-fold increase” (184).

rule, where the dissolving bonds of consanguinity would be ever strong. . . . In the permanence of the graveyard, traditions could be maintained—indeed, maintained, exaggerated, and sentimentalized—if not for those still living, at least for posterity, and for posterity’s remembrance of the dead. (49)

Judge Joseph Story explains his concept of cemeteries in “Judge Story’s Address” found in *The Picturesque Pocket Companion, and Visitor’s Guide Through Mt. Auburn* and quoted by Bohan: the cemetery was a temporary home to be occupied between “the family’s earthly home and its long-awaited heavenly home” (Bohan 139). Remembering the dead and depositing them in temporary homes (cemeteries) while waiting for heavenly placement was a social construct that evolved to ease the burdens of grief and separation.

During the endeavor to make the graveyard a transitional home, sentimental literature gained full force. It was culturally constructed and approved that women authors should include Americans’ preoccupation with homely death in their writings. It was also culturally approved that wealthy families engage familial lots in rural cemeteries and dress them up to represent a home (photo 1). Hence, we have family burial lots enclosed, as homes were, by a variety of types of fences (photos 2 and 3): some made of wrought iron or granite, some hedged, some enclosed with posts and horizontal bars, some boundaries merely marked with corner posts. Lots which are not so richly endowed are simply surrounded by curbstones. Many enclosures have gates, often ajar; carved dogs stand guard next to steps leading up to the burial plots; often at the top of steps are urns<sup>5</sup> in which flowers were once planted and carefully tended

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<sup>5</sup> James Deetz, in discussing eighteenth-century archaeology and gravestones, claims that the willow-and-urn motif is not representative of “mortal components” of the person buried, but a “symbol of commemoration” (72). Assuming that an urn continued to symbolize the same, commemorations were made both in the “Garden of Graves” and the gardens of nineteenth-century homes. *The Garden of Graves* by John

“much the same as commonly flanked the entrances to private homes” (Bohan 148). In her study of a St. Louis, MO, rural cemetery, Ruth Bohan matched family burial plots with the original St. Louis homes of the owners and found that remarkable effort had been made to create, in the graveyard, a close representation of the family’s home (141). Kenneth Ames, in discussing “meanings” in Victorian graveyards, claims that the nineteenth-century cemetery was built as a “compelling and tangible diagram of the stratified society” (651) and that the “Victorian city of the dead . . . recalls the Victorian city of the living” (652). The effort made by families to recreate their burial sites in the likeness of their homes was an effort to domesticate the afterlife and establish death in the image of their ideal earthly life.

In the same way, literary domestics created an ideal tradition; like the graveyard tradition it was “maintained, exaggerated, and sentimentalized.” And they created it in their own image—an ideal woman.

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Pierpont (Dedham, MA: H. Mann, 1841) is quoted in Stannard’s *The Puritan Way of Death*, page 228, note 20.

## Chapter Two

### FICTIONAL REPRESENTATIONS

Fictional representations of the ideal woman had many facets, but all revolved around domesticity. This ideal woman had an endless capacity for domestic chores and duties, had conquered her temper, developed self-discipline, and learned the joys of submission and self-sacrifice. She knew the folly of desiring too much education and the danger of becoming a blue-stocking or *literate*, yet she understood the practicality of getting enough education to become a teacher so she could support herself if necessary. She knew, as did the women who created her, that if only providence would work in her favor, this life and the next would come to a satisfying conclusion.

But before this ideal life came to a close there were endless chores to take care of. For young Gerty in *The Lamplighter* there had never been a proper home nor a tender mother to teach domesticity; yet, soon after Trueman Flint took her in, Gerty is able to tend him through a stroke, lend a feminine touch to an erstwhile masculine apartment, care for crazed Mr. Cooper, learn from blind Miss Emily, assist ailing Mrs. Sullivan, and save a few moments for her new friend Willie. Author Maria Cummins writes of Gerty's care for Uncle True:

From morning till night, the faithful little nurse and housekeeper labors untiringly in the service of her first, her best friend. Ever at his side, ever attending to his wants, and yet most wonderfully accomplishing many things which he never sees her do, she seems, indeed, to the fond old man, what he once prophesied she would become, —God's embodied blessing to his latter years, making light his closing days, and cheering even the pathway to the grave. (113)

After having learned domestic duties from Uncle True and Mrs. Sullivan, Gerty matures and is ever at the ready to turn havoc and confusion into harmony. In the final pages of the text Gerty, the calm and competent housekeeper, quietly steps in to assist

the domestic servants who are not able to handle the unexpected return of Mrs. Graham and her companions, and through her efforts creates a neat and pleasant tea-time (515).

Another child domestic is Ellen Montgomery in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*. Torn from the side of her loving mother who is taken to Europe to die, ten-year-old Ellen moves in with her spinster aunt, Miss Fortune. Never having seen tea prepared, let alone actually having done any cooking, Ellen is at a loss when Miss Fortune becomes ill and insists that only Ellen can work in the house, although previously Miss Fortune would not teach her domestic skills. Miss Fortune had always taken pride in doing for herself, single-handedly, all domestic chores, including putting up vegetables, making sausage from her livestock, making butter, cheese, and quilts and doing all her washing, ironing, and cleaning. Now Ellen, with help from another child, manages the house, takes care of her sick aunt, pleases Mr. Van Brunt as she makes strenuous efforts to learn and perform domestic duties, and makes her senile grandmother comfortable. While performing these domestic duties, Ellen continues her private studying and is deferred to, even by other children. "Mamma," exclaimed another child, "She beats me entirely in speaking French, and she knows all about English history; and arithmetic! and did you ever hear her sing, mamma?" (vol. II, 148). In the same novel Alice, a neighbor in her 20s, shows Ellen how to make tea-cakes and how to dust a room. Often waiting for her traveling family to return, Alice's domestic duties include keeping a hospitable hearth (vol. I, 259). The message to Ellen, further discussed later, is that one should always be ready.

Caroline Lee Hentz's *Ernest Linwood* carries the same theme of endless domestic duties and shows these same duties assumed by two generations. Twelve-year-old Gabriella lives in a cottage in the woods with her mother Rosalie, and servant, Peggy. It is Peggy's plain sewing, augmented by Rosalie's elegant needlework, which

supports the family of three. Peggy also “delved” in the garden at sunrise and twilight and “without ever seeming hurried or overtaken, she accomplished everything” (21). In addition to delivering surplus garden goods to town and taking charge of all business matters, Peggy protects Miss Rosalie from the prying questions of neighbors and daughter and guards Rosalie’s delicate health.

Peggy is not the only character busy with domestic chores. After her mother and Peggy die, Gabriella lives with wealthy Mrs. Linwood who articulates her idea of domestic duties: “Sit down by me, Gabriella; draw up your work table; for one can listen best when their hands are busy” (222). The ensuing conversation entwines *domestic happiness* (Is it a “houseless wanderer? Has it no home on earth?”) with *God* (domestic happiness is found “in the heart of the woman whose highest aim is the glory of God. . .”). For true domestic happiness, a woman’s priority list must begin with the glory of God, followed by the happiness of her husband, and finally the sanctification of her home; no mention is made of the woman’s own happiness which comes from self-abnegation and service to others (all references 225).

Augusta Evan’s *St. Elmo* also has an orphaned child who is taken in by a wealthy woman with older children. After Edna is educated and goes out into the world to make her way, she returns to St. Elmo’s parish to ease the pain of the minister. Although her health is slipping, she keeps Mr. Hammond company. After recovering from another fainting spell, Edna rests at the parsonage, “sitting on the chintz-covered lounge, mending a basketful of the old man’s [Mr. Hammond’s] clothes that needed numerous stitches and buttons” (421). She too, at a younger age, when St. Elmo’s wealthy mother, Mrs. Murray, was busy and Hagar the housekeeper ill, stepped in to supervise preparations for guests (142-43). Both Edna and Gabriella have little difficulty in assuming the role of housekeeper, or of supervising the housekeeper.

With little or no experience, they make the troubled places smooth in such a way that those who would have been upset or put out at the appearance of turmoil are not only unaware of potential trouble, but also unaware who poured the oil over the troubled waters.

It is not domestic chores alone which represent the ideal woman to our authors and their readers; both also agree that the ideal woman must conquer her own temper and become self-disciplined. The sentimental writers portray their young orphans as ill-behaving or ill-looking in combination with an unruly temper. In *Meadow Brook*, Mary J. Holmes introduces Rosa Lee as an 11-year-old who borrows without asking and then accidentally breaks her sister's shell comb, snoops in her grandmother's dresser drawers, upsets a pan of milk, and romps in the barn until, hair flying over her face and pantalet split, she is reprimanded. She then flies into tears wishing she had never been born, or at least that "the ban of ugliness were not upon [her]" (11). Little Rosa concludes the day's activities certain that no one loves her.

In *Alone*, Marion Harland presents Josephine as a counterpoint to the orphan Ida. Miss Josephine, fashion-conscious and contemptuous of clergy, has a temper that negates her beauty (9). One wonders if the title *Alone* refers to the orphaned heroine or to Miss Josephine who was alone in crowds because of her shallowness and rude behavior.

Twelve-year-old Ellen Leslie, in Maria McIntosh's book by the same name, confesses that, because of her bad temper, people don't love her as much as they do her 16-year-old sister Mary (143). Her aunt Herbert instructs that a bad temper is a sign of evil, and only God will help you "conquer all evil" (149). By the final chapter, which is "A Pleasant Conclusion," McIntosh tells her readers that *control* of passion is the key:

One such uncontrolled temper as Ellen's will spread sorrow and gloom. This temper was no longer *uncontrolled*, and what has since passed of her life is in beautiful and delightful contrast with its earlier portion. I say her temper was no longer uncontrolled. Her nature was as sensitive as ever—as quick to feel joy or pain, pleasure or displeasure; but Ellen had learned to rule these feelings, and not to be ruled by them. . . .  
(171)

Little street urchin Gerty in *The Lamplighter* begins her life even more wretchedly. We are introduced to her as she hides from Nan Grant, but “was dragged from her hiding-place, and, with one blow for her ugliness and another for her impudence (for she was making up faces at Nan Grant with all her might)” she is sent on her way. When the lamplighter, Trueman Flint, first sees her he exclaims, “My! What an odd-faced child!—She looks like a witch!” and later calls her “a lonesome sort of a looking thing” (7). Even later, after Uncle True took her in, she still occasionally succumbs to temptation, but her development, guided by True Flint and Miss Emily, focuses on learning self-control which Cummins equates with “learning religion.” As a 10-year-old she sometimes turns aside from the “path which is lit by a holy light, and leads to rest,” and, “impatient of the narrow way, gives rein to her old irritability and ill-temper. . .” (93).

Gerty's introduction to God and to religion produces changes in her demeanor. Blind Miss Emily instructs Gerty to “learn to bear even injustice, without losing . . . self-control” (127). Gerty's new-found self-discipline helps establish her as an ideal woman who can contend with a less than ideal world around her. Emily tells Gerty that self-discipline is worthless if done only for another person's sake, do it “for your own sake; for the sake of duty and for God” (128). This slender thread connects the principles of self-discipline to those of submission and self-sacrifice. Emily goes on to tell Gerty that the only people who can be happy are those “who have learned submission; those who, in the severest afflictions, see the hand of a loving Father, and,

obedient to his will, kiss the chastening rod" (134). Society's attitudes toward submission are radically different today than they were mid-nineteenth century. These words of advice which Maria Cummins offered her readers in 1854 would be cause for concern today, and might well be read as words of a co-dependent in an abusive situation. The thread of submission runs through all the sentimental novels in one form or another. Little Ellen Montgomery must learn submission to Miss Fortune against whom she rebels. In the end, after learning religion and being transplanted to Scotland, she chafes against her Scottish relatives, but is submissive, obedient, and humble. When John finally appears it is not to take her away, but to bid her to be submissive to God's will until she is old enough to return to America as an independent adult (317).

Although we think of submission in terms of women submitting to men, Harland's *Alone* makes it clear her type of submission is not to other people, but to God. Old Dr. Carleton declares: "I never tasted real happiness, until I learned to bear grief, by submitting to the will of Providence" (71).<sup>6</sup>

Submission is the only inheritance Rosalie gives to her daughter Gabriella from her death bed in Hentz's *Ernest Linwood*:

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<sup>6</sup> This example does not weaken the representation of ideal women as submissive; rather, it points out a relationship between women and religion which is not exclusive. Literary domestics reflect the dominant cultural ideas. In that culture, accepting God into a person's life meant that person must be submissive to God's will. In these novels, many more women accepted this ideal than did men. In no way do I mean to imply that women are inherently closer to God than are men, merely that the literary domestics presented more women in such a position.

There are religious men in each novel, Rev. Humphreys and his son John in *The Wide, Wide World*, Mr. Lacy in *Alone*, Mr. Hunt, Mr. Hammond, and eventually Mr. Murray in *St. Elmo*, to name but a few.

Gabriella, it is an awful thing to resist the Almighty God. Submission is the heritage of dust and ashes. I have been proud and rebellious, smarting under a sense of unmerited chastisement and wrong. Because man was false, I thought God unjust,—but now, on this dying bed, the illusion of passion is dispelled, and I see Him as He is, longsuffering, compassionate, and indulgent, in all His loving-kindness and tender mercy, strong to deliver and mighty to save. I feel that I needed all the discipline of sorrow through which I have passed, to bring my proud and troubled soul, a sin-sick, life-weary wanderer, to my Father's footstool. . . . Oh, beloved child, bow to the hand that smites thee, for the stubborn will must be broken. Wait not, like me, till it be ground into dust. (57)

Her fervent plea is that Gabriella avoid the pain she herself has endured because she did not accept submission to God's will. Years later, before Gabriella weds Ernest Linwood, Ernest's mother warns Gabriella in a fashion that might be understood as preordaining or predestining. Mrs. Linwood warns that, because Gabriella knows Ernest's shortcomings, yet chooses to marry him in spite of these defects, she will have "no right to upbraid him" (223). Later, when the shortcomings and defects chafe and rub raw the love in her heart, her conscience offers no balm for the wounds but merely chides her to "be the forbearing, gentle wife, who promised to *endure all*. . . . You dare not murmur" (327). When confiding in Mrs. Linwood, her mother-in-law's compassionate response is that "if happiness in this world be not your reward, immortality and glory in the next will be yours" (330). Thus, the ideal woman would be submissive and sacrificial and endure all in this world to gain a heavenly home in the next.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It might be inferred from the passage that bad treatment of women by men is the will of God. John Cosens Ogden described the hierarchy of obeisance in *The Female Guide, or Thoughts on the Education of that Sex Accomodated [sic] to the State of Society, Manners, and Government in the United States* (Concord, NH: George Hough, 1783). Ogden writes that women's first duty is "piety to God," followed by "reverence to parents, love and obedience to their husbands, [and] tenderness and watchfulness over their children" (qtd. in Cott 22). If this hierarchy is a blueprint for

By placing responsibility for men's behavior onto God and accepting Calvinistic predestination, Hentz has effectively written men out of the picture and only then can Hentz write about life. This text, like most of the others, constructs a literature which banishes men and although it is domestic literature, it is anti-domestic. The desired construct, that of domesticity, is created only in the negative. In *Ruth Hall*, love and warmth is denied Ruth in her parent's and in-law's homes. The lack of money makes her own home physically cold and causes much anguish as Ruth tries to support herself and children. In *Alone*, orphaned Ida has no home save that of her callous guardian. Hentz's *Ernest Linwood* presents domesticity in its rudest garb. Spiteful, controlling, violent Ernest tries to control not just Gabriella's actions, but also her thoughts. Even Gerty in *The Lamplighter* is uncomfortable when a second marriage disrupts harmony in the home. The literature becomes one which preordains unhappiness and struggle and repeats anti-domestic themes.

The theme of women's education in sentimental fiction walks an interesting tightrope. Mary Kelley points out that these authors had much more education than other women of the day, even more than most men. Reared in privileged homes with

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power, then whatever is given a woman from parents or husband is the direct will of God, whether it be joy or grief.

A case could be developed using this schema to explain why so few married couples are presented in the texts. If a woman's relationship with God is the true focus of sentimental literature, then men are just intermediators, and relationships with men are reflections of the woman's relationship with God. In all of the texts, the only "smooth" marital relationship is found in *Ruth Hall*; Ruth's in-laws are horrid, spiteful people, but they are well suited to each other. All other marriages either have glaring problems, suffer the death of a child, or are just begun as the texts close. The central protagonist is invariably a female as is the voice of the author. The male voice is absent.

access to books, each of them was self-motivated, and for each her education was more random than plotted. However, in their literature the authors often cautioned readers of the dangers of becoming a “blue-stocking” or a “literatus.” Edna Earl in *St. Elmo* becomes both.

As Edna recovers from a train accident she strikes a deal with her new guardian, Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray will educate 12-year-old Edna and provide for her until she is 18, but Edna stipulates that the debt will be repaid when she is able. Edna wants to study Greek; the pastor, Mr. Hammond, warns her against becoming a blue-stocking. A blue-stocking, he says, is:

supposed to be a lady, neither young, pleasant, nor pretty (and in most instances unmarried); who is unamiable, ungraceful, and untidy; ignorant of all domestic accomplishments and truly feminine acquirements, and ambitious of appearing very learned; a woman whose fingers are more frequently adorned with ink-spots than thimble, who holds housekeeping in detestation, and talks loudly about politics, science, and philosophy; who is ugly, and learned, and cross; whose hair is never smooth and whose ruffles are never fluted. (69-70)

Edna responds, “I do not quite understand why ladies have not as good a right to be learned and wise as gentlemen.” Mr. Hammond will be her teacher.

Edna defies St. Elmo Murray and his mother when they insist she need not honor her side of the bargain and repay her debt; while looking for a position she secretly writes pieces for a well-respected magazine. At 18, she accepts a position as a governess and travels to the city, intending to continue writing. St. Elmo declares his love for her and begs her to reconsider both her position and her writing, stating that to become a literatus literally means to be branded with “a burning brand of fame!” (289). She persists in her plan and eventually loses her health over late nights spent writing after a long day’s work. Although men warn her against becoming educated and pursuing a profession, she is thankful to have the opportunity and endurance to

become educated and then write. Although their warnings threaten social stigma and her fate actually is to lose her health, she gladly pays the price to reap the rewards.

Women who became literate threatened nineteenth-century social norms. To be able to support oneself not only removed financial dependency but vested the woman with power over her own life and broke from approved social attitudes. The chain of consciousness from home-manufacture to negative social reactions regarding financial independence travels an interesting road. Cott explains that when women first lost domestic industry to factories and money gained prominence over the earlier bartering, society informed women that they should be uninterested in economic affairs. Money belonged in the realm of men. The uninterestedness, combined with state laws which declared that a woman's property and earnings legally belonged to her husband, led to a marital dictate that striving for wealth was irrelevant to wives (70). Cott goes on to reveal that the canon of domesticity took these social statutes one step further and "prescribed women's appropriate attitude to be selflessness" (71). If women attained an education and financial independence, it follows that money was no longer irrelevant and laws of marriage were broken. If a woman was working for money the canon of domesticity was also cracked and the woman was no longer appropriately selfless. These extrapolations were what the Murrays warned Edna about—if she struck out on her own and achieved financial independence she would forfeit the appropriate attitude of selflessness and become a social pariah among the middle and upper classes. Edna understands the price of independence, and willingly pays with her health.

Gerty, like Edna, also has a keen intelligence; she studies with her new friend Willie and quickly surpasses him in translating lines of French (92-93). With remarkably little effort, many protagonists become teachers. Ellen Leslie and her sister Mary are both teachers in *Ellen Leslie*, as is Rosa in *Meadow Brook* and Gabriella in

*Ernest Linwood*. Both Alice Humphreys and Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide, Wide World* are educated although the only teaching they do is Sunday School. Yet all the authors tacitly agree that additional education is wrong, that an educated woman is something of a pariah, that the ideal woman should not be excessively “book smart.”

The final fictional representation is actually more of a pastoral pictorial. All the texts examined include deaths, and many of them describe the cemeteries. Evans paints a picture identical to sites seen today. On a hillside was a “shining marble shaft, standing in the centre of a neatly arranged square, around which ran a handsome iron railing” (296). The 20-foot high, polished, white marble obelisk rose from a square pedestal, or base, which had on each corner “beautifully carved vases, from which drooped glossy tendrils of ivy” (296) (photos 4, 5, and 6).

Miss Patty Pace describes her family’s grave as “a piece of grassy ground, belted around with an iron railing, and in the centre a beautiful white marble monument. . .” (Cummins 265-66). Gertrude paints a serene, tranquil picture of Uncle True’s graveyard in much the same terms.

In *The Gates Ajar*, Mary makes a diary entry describing a visit to her brother Roy’s grave:

The low arbor-vitæ hedge and knots of Norway spruce, that father planted long ago for mother, drop cool, green shadows that stir with the wind. My English ivy has crept about and about the cross. Roy used to say that he should fancy a cross to mark the spot where he might lie; I think he would like this pure, unveined marble. Mayflowers cover the grave now, and steal out among the cloverleaves with a flush like sunrise. By and by there will be roses, and in August, Augusts own white lilies. (58)

Each author portrays the graveyard as a peaceful, restful place. This image reflected, as did other images they presented, the world around them. They were not

consciously trying to alter society yet their work led to (and mirrored) a subtle refocusing of societal attitudes toward death.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### SOCIALLY APPROVED ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH

Nineteenth-century sentimental fiction created an ideal woman and placed her within the context of home, thereby helping to standardize societal attitudes toward death. It portrayed cemeteries as rural, peaceful extensions of home. Until recently, cultural historians believed that nineteenth-century children died in great numbers from natural causes and assumed that mortality rates were higher than they had been in the eighteenth century; this assumption helped explain the omnipresence of death in sentimental literature. Ann Douglas notes however that, contrary to beliefs of the time, current studies suggest that mortality rates in the nineteenth century were actually lower than the rates in the eighteenth century. Analysis of the literature then, must consider not just the facts as we see them today, but must include nineteenth-century perceptions of mortality rates and of demographic data; it also must consider expectations. Nineteenth-century citizenry welcomed advances in science and medicine and expected medicine to perform well beyond its actual ability (Douglas, *Feminization* 371-72, n. 6). Possibly because of these perceptions and expectations, nineteenth-century society allowed death to take on glorified proportions and authors couched death (and life) in images of stylized children, quiet but sincere conversions, and divine providence.

As the culture became obsessive about reunification of loved ones after death, religion became more important. Idealization gave death and funerary arrangements new focus. Ames notes that the secularization of western society made death an issue that could not be “understood or confronted in traditional terms” (654). Therefore, nineteenth-century citizens had to create new, socially functional answers to questions regarding death. After all, it was in heaven they would be reunited; what would happen if a family member didn’t *get* to heaven? As a result of the secularization

which occurred as a backlash to advances in science and medicine, predestination was once again a forceful aspect of religion. The culture's attitudes toward death were shaped by science and religion. Science was supposed to forestall death, and religion was needed to save people when science failed.

If heaven was, as Elizabeth Phelps described throughout *The Gates Ajar*, a physical, tangible place complete with flowers, grass, cookies, pianos, and tools for people who enjoyed fixing things, where one was as secure as in one's own home on earth, then cemeteries were a temporary home. Phelps is not the only author to posit heaven as a continuation and glorification of the domestic sphere, but her descriptions are more detailed than others.

The sentimental novelists placed "faith in natural virtue and virtuous simplicity [that] gave a new significance to childhood" (Brown 300). Brown writes of the "cult of the child" which taught parents to regard children as "angel visitants" and depicts them as purer and more virtuous in their unadorned simplicity than adults. Sara Parton exalted children and wrote, "Blessed childhood! the pupil and yet the teacher; half infant, half sage, and whole angel! what a desert were earth without thee!" (49).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ruth Hall* is the exception. The elder child, Katy, suffered at the hands of her paternal grandparents when Ruth could not afford to support all three of them. When reunited and the stories were told, little Nettie "clenched her little fists" and asked why Katy hadn't struck grandma. It was young Katy who told little Nettie that they must *forgive* grandma. Rather than the "angel visitant" instructing her elders, it is they, Katy and Ruth, who instruct her. Ruth philosophizes: "your grandmother is an unhappy, miserable old woman. She has punished herself worse than anybody else could punish her. She is more miserable than ever now, because I have earned money to support you and Katy. She *might* have made us all love her, and help to make her old age cheerful; but now, unless she repents, she will live miserably, and die forsaken, for nobody can love her with such a temper" (192). Because of the cruelty grandma and grandpa inflicted upon Katy, it might be argued that Little Nettie is indeed an angel as it is she who expresses righteous and moral indignation at her grandparents' cruel behavior.

Often these angel visitants (sometimes even as infants) consciously or unconsciously led their elders to religious faith. “And so, by her child’s cradle, Ruth first learned to pray . . . and, with the baptism of holy tears, mother and child were consecrated” (29). In *Ernest Linwood*, rowdy Madge’s brow has been “womanized” by “the chastening touch of sorrow. She has given a lovely infant back to the God who gave it, and is thus linked to the world of angels” (466). Her attitude toward death reflects no concern that the infant might *not* be in heaven; it is posited that children who die automatically go to heaven. Once children are dead it is further assumed that while on earth, they were angels merely visiting those people with whom they came in contact. Although no text overtly declares that the visitants came for a declared purpose (such as to effect a conversion, or teach truth) they all covertly assume that those left on earth are better people because of the little angel’s visit.

The fictional infants are stylized in that they lead their parents to God and are gifts from God. They are also stylized in cemetery statuary, and their graves are often designated by sculptures of lambs. Another common image carved in statuary and painted in texts is that of the “bed of Death” (Parton 45) (photos 7 and 8). Both mediums reflect a child (or children) who is or has been languishing in bed before death and not a child whose death was sudden or accidental. In cemeteries, representations of children are often winged, often rising toward the heavens, and always angelic.

Older children also heighten their elders’ sensitivity toward religion. Edna Earl left her well-marked Bible with St. Elmo, praying he would “look into it sometimes” (Evans 290); and Mrs. Murray later spoke to Edna of her son: “How he revered your purity of character; how your influence, your example, had first called him back to his early faith. . .” (405). In chapter 39 of *The Wide, Wide World* Ellen still

receives religious training from John Humphreys, visits Mr. Van Brunt daily as he recuperates from a broken leg, and reads to him both *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible (vol. 2, 140). Her acknowledged goal is for him to become a Christian, and again the angel visitant succeeds. Gabriella and her cousin Richard offer Christ to their dying uncle/father imprisoned in the Tombs who, after many visits, repents, accepts Jesus as Savior, and then dies (446-47).<sup>9</sup> These conversions appear in one form or another in each novel.

Infants and sensitive older children are not the only stylized groups presented in the texts. Young people in ill health or in some fashion crippled are also given angelic roles. Alice, age 24, was watched over by *The Wide, Wide World* community although nothing was directly said of her failing health. When she finally dies (vol. II, chap. 62), there had been only one previous mention of a weakened condition (vol. II, chap. 61). In fact, in volume one, chapters 19-21, Alice and Ellen are caught in a terrible snowstorm and barely survive. Yet Alice remains in perfect health while it is robust Ellen who becomes ill and spends two weeks in bed recovering. Still, it is Alice who is initially angelic and devotes all her efforts toward keeping a receptive hearth for her family. After Alice dies, Ellen moves into her place both within the community and in the Humphreys family, she assumes Alice's role of teaching Sunday School, and John Humphreys repeatedly refers to her as his "little sister." When Ellen is forced to move to Scotland and live with an overbearing uncle and grandmother, it is her turn to become angelic and gracefully bear the tribulations of living by their rules. First Alice and then Ellen adopt the mantle of sainthood and with that mantle they represent not

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<sup>9</sup> Although all of the sentimental novels discussed promote religion and offer examples of its importance in our lives, only one, *The Gates Ajar*, specifies a denomination (112).

only religion, but death; Alice's death was physical, Ellen's more temporal and reversible. Each, by her presence and then absence, influenced others to accept religion and, with religion, an expectation of life after death.

Divine providence is found in many novels and as a religious attitude, it speaks not only of Godly presence directing lives in the present and future on earth, but also the future in heaven. This again leads to reunification potential and encourages people to expect divine intervention; it also is often used to create or motivate the plot. However, characters speak of divine providence even when it is not crucial to the text. Ruth Hall's horrid mother-in-law believes Daisy is "better off dead" and the old doctor agrees: "The Lord generally sends afflictions where they are *needed*" (sic) (46). These comments about a healthy child who then suddenly got the croup and died, may seem unduly callous to us; but they reveal more than insight into those characters. They represent a society in which both good and bad events are directly attributable to divine intervention and providence. More traditional appearances of divine providence are found: in *The Lamplighter*, True Flint happens to be going by, lighting the lamps, as Nan Grant throws little Gerty out of the house, after which he takes her home with him (chapter 4); in *St. Elmo*, Dr. Rodney entrusts Edna to the nursing care of Mrs. Murray (chapter 4); and in *The Gates Ajar* and *Ellen Leslie*, Aunt Winifred and Aunt Herbert each arrive on the scene and radically alter the current of events in Mary's and Ellen's lives.

Assumptions of higher mortality rates influenced all the texts—as does the feeling of helplessness toward avoiding the deaths. The redeeming factor was that those affected by the deaths (either their own or their parents') were somehow special people. Vulnerable orphans suffered, yet rose above their problems to become

religious adults who would, in turn, pass the torch of goodness and religion on to the next generation. Those who die are almost always guiltless and are, in death, glorified.

## CHAPTER FOUR CEMETERY ART

Stylized representations of home, of the “ideal” woman, and of angelic children are to be found not only in the literature of the nineteenth-century but also in cemeteries of that era. Joy S. Kasson quotes Sarah Hale, editor of the nineteenth-century *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, as Hale rouses her readers to cheer for the veracity of the home and glorification of domesticity. “ ‘Home!’ [Hale] exclaimed. ‘Where in our language shall we find a word of four letters that stirs all the sweet pulses of life like this of home, —Our Home?’ ” (185) As discussed earlier, this idealized concept of home developed in the wake of a new economy in which the home was no longer the center of production. As both economy and culture were shifting in New England, the necessity of being a part of a traditional home waned, and women’s control over the manufacture of goods and the lives of their family members also waned; this “domestic dislocation” gave birth to a literature that idealized both homes and women. Kasson, author of *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture*, cites these same changes as the cause of the rise of ideal sculpture (19).

Idealized sculpture representing homes includes not only the enclosures, gates, and urns discussed in chapter one, but also things found within the home. Photos 9 and 10 show examples of chairs found frequently in Victorian cemeteries. Often made of wrought iron, they are also sculpted in marble or granite and carved to look like seats made from tree limbs. This form incorporated not only an image found in homes, but also incorporated a motif (usually of tree stumps) which symbolized a life cut short by

death.<sup>10</sup> The Alter Mausoleum in West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, PA, has realistic representations of overstuffed chairs, life-sized, and sitting adjacent to a family mausoleum (photo 12). Though these chairs are made of granite, I did not find them uncomfortable.

Another sculptural subject, although less common than chairs, is the family pet. Little Gerty in *The Lamplighter* feels her first loyalty and support from the kitten which Uncle True gave her. As Edna leaves home to seek an education she takes along Grip, the family dog; before Edna meets St. Elmo, she observes his wolf-dog Ali who is vicious, yet loyal to his master. Dogs represent faithfulness not only in literature but also in Victorian cemeteries. Photos 13 and 14 exhibit dogs guarding the family enclosure, faithfully awaiting their masters' return.

The most common representation is that of a stylized woman, barefoot if her feet are showing (photo 15), often wearing a light Greek or Roman toga, usually with her hair pulled back loosely to her nape. This generic woman is sculpted most often in one of two poses: standing, she is both mother/wife and angel as she points to the heavens as if leading the way (photo 16); or sitting, with elbow resting on knee and disconsolate head in one hand, her other hand limply holding a laurel wreath (photo 17). The laurel wreath leitmotif, signifying the "'victory' of the soul" (Stannard 181), is in people's hands, on obelisks, above mausoleum doorways, and near crosses (photos 18, 19, and 20). Augusta Evans explains the significance of the wreath as she repeats Michael Angelo's (sic) portrayal of fortune: "A lovely woman seated on a revolving

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<sup>10</sup> The tree-stump motif was also extended to obelisks. A tall, full obelisk represented a long and full life while one cut off represented a life cut short. Photos 4 and 5 exhibit both representations. Sheaves of wheat (photo 11), cut and tied off, were another representation of long and full life, harvested when ripe.

wheel, throwing crowns and laurel wreaths from her right hand, while only thorns dropped in a sharp, stinging shower from the other. . .” (468). These emblems of victory and wreaths of honor are held by the woman, whatever her pose.

Nancy Cott points out gender asymmetry within the culture; in Victorian cemeteries the asymmetry is cast in stone. While the preponderance of adult female statuary is generic, almost all the adult male statuary is specific either to the individual or to his occupation. Thus, there are male busts, life-sized carvings of specific men, and representations of firemen, sailors, soldiers, and ministers (photos 21, 22, and 23). Photo 24 shows a stony John P. Bowman visiting his dead wife and daughters in their mausoleum in Cuttingsville, VT.

Just as John Bowman is sculpted forever visiting his dead family, the mausoleum represents the same desire to reunite the family. Familial reunification is perhaps best evidenced by the bas relief carving for Jane Trowbridge in the New Haven Burying Ground, New Haven, CT (photos 25 and 26). Mrs. Trowbridge is being carried to heaven by an angel; sitting in heaven waiting to be reunited into a family unit are her twin daughters, who died a year earlier, and her infant son, who preceded her by a few hours. The epitaph reads in part: “Parting and sorrow they shall know no more.” Thus death and heaven meant that families would meet again, and the most familiar and secure way to meet was within a heavenly home—or, in a graveyard, within a family enclosure surrounded by familiar people and objects.

Not all Victorian cemetery art represents calm and joyful reunification of families, however. Images of distraught women are also found. Some, shaken uncontrollably by the death of a loved one—as in *St. Elmo* when Edna Earl is upset first by the dueling death of Mr. Dent, then later by the death of little Felix—are portrayed desolate and disconsolate and draped over the grave (photo 27). Others, with a more

religious theme (photos 28 and 29), drape the disconsolate woman over a cross twined with lilies or ivy. Less dramatically, the disconsolate woman is posed either with a pensive, bent head (photos 30 and 31) or with a heavenward plea (photo 32).

Just as women are idealized, so are children. Children are represented by carvings of lambs, child statues (both generic and specific), and angels. Usually placed atop small bases, lambs are invariably carved with their legs bent under them and could mark the grave of one or more children (photos 33 and 34). If we are the sheep, and Christ the shepherd, then the infant innocents are lambs, and so they are depicted upon thousands of graves (photos 33 and 34).

Children's statues take many forms. Both generic and specific statues depict children reposing in Parton's "bed of death," (45) often with a pillow and bed clothes (photos 35, 36, and 37).<sup>11</sup> Death that occurs at home and in bed is more domesticated than an accidental or sudden death which occurs elsewhere; it also suggests that the child suffered and the family's attempt to relieve the suffering was in vain. Although the novels discussed herein offer young male children only tangentially, their statuary is seen more frequently than female children's in cemeteries. This higher frequency reflects a cultural preference for male offspring and their absence in the texts underscores the authors' tendency to write boys out of the plot as they had also written out adult male characters. The stylized male child is that of a young boy kneeling, one knee down and the other up, hands folded and face looking toward heaven (photos 38 and 39). His pleading look becomes even more pitiable as erosion softens the features.

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<sup>11</sup> Acid rain erosion has destroyed many of the East Coast sculptures; photo 49 is a prime example. A child lying beside a tree stump represents a life cut short too soon, but erosion of the soft marble makes the sleeping child look emaciated and skeletal.

The stylized female child is standing, looking down, wearing petticoats and holding flowers which, in this iconography, symbolize immortality (Aries 252) (photo 40). Some sculptures of specific children are incredibly detailed, and surprisingly, a few are protected by glass cases. The graves of Gracie, Louis, Little Sarah, and Annie (photos 41-44) had individual statues sculpted in each child's likeness; because the graves are scattered between Boston, New York, and Providence and not merely one isolated occurrence, it seems that the wealthy, who could afford both the plot and the commissioned sculpture, chose to commemorate their children when possible.

Nineteenth-century children (and adults) were encouraged to contemplate death not in negative Puritan terms but as a time of "eternal and heavenly *reunion*" (sic) in the "sweet glory of salvation" (Stannard 174); hence statues, and visitors, are permitted to enjoy the lovely, pastoral grounds. Angel visitants reunite the recently departed with those in heaven and are represented grieving on graves (photo 45), distributing flowers (photo 46), and gambolling on crosses (photo 47). These representations reflect differing attitudes of families regarding death: grieving statues suggest a family's grief at separation, while angels gambolling on crosses and statues with flowers (symbols of resurrection) suggest an attitude of joy that the dead have rejoined others in heaven.

"Sentimentalization and the locating of heaven as the real 'home' for all men was one way of recreating the sense of community that was thus lost, and of reestablishing meaning in the experience of death that waned with the lessened cohesiveness of the social structure" (Stannard, *Death in America* xiv, qtd. in Ames 654). As the socio-cultural construct of home and domesticity became idealized and glorified, and as homelife was both yearned for and scorned, graveyards evolved into the home in which ideals were attainable and all yearnings answered.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CLOSURE

Historians tell us that it is very difficult to affix a date to the beginning or end of an era, and so it is with women's sentimental, consolation literature. Society's attitudes toward death changed. Kasson cites a "leading art historian" who suggested that by 1850 "a squeamishness had grown up around" the subject of death (140). Stannard says that "Instead of confusion and terror, however, or even sentimentalization or desire, the twentieth-century adult moves into a world of death avoidance and denial" (189). Culturally constructed as it is, literature changed about the same time as early twentieth-century attitudes toward death.

Before discussing changes in society, let us first examine the endings, the closures, of nineteenth-century texts. *The Gates Ajar* offered no male-female relationships; the only two men included were Mary's brother Roy and a local minister. Roy's death in the Civil War was the impetus Mary needed to begin thinking about death and heaven. The local minister was introduced as a framework for Aunt Winifred's discussion of heaven. The text closes with Mary guiding and teaching her small, orphaned cousin in religious matters, just as Aunt Winifred had gently led her.

*Ruth Hall* is another text that offers no male-female relationship as a resolution. Ruth has proved to herself and to the world that she can support her family, and has at last reunited her two living children. Again, there is no mention of marriage or unification with a male. This is the one unique text from among those discussed that argues against submissiveness. Within self-imposed boundaries, Ruth is actively trying to break out of her socially ordained mold. The plot is such that for her family's survival and unity she must overstep the roles traditionally adopted by women.

The remaining five texts conclude with affirming male-female relationships. Ida and Mr. Morton Lacy wed in *Alone* as do Edna and St. Elmo in *St. Elmo*, Gerty and Willie in *The Lamplighter*, and Rosa and Richard in *Meadow Brook*, which also offers the reader the pleasantness of Dr. Clayton's second marriage (he had to accept that Rosa would not marry him) and the christening of his first daughter after Rosa. In *Ernest Linwood*, Ernest and Ellen have a baby which strengthens their marriage; they focus their "purified affections" on the child, thereby reducing the "idolatrous" love they had previously focused upon each other (467). Madge and Mr. Regulus marry; even crippled Edith marries Julian. *The Wide, Wide World* is the only text with an ambiguous closure. Ellen is in Scotland waiting until she reaches the age of majority to return to America. John Humphreys is similarly waiting so he can bring her home, but no mention is made of marriage and John continually refers to her as "little sister." In *Alone*, Josephine has learned her lesson and will never again selfishly use people nor play with their heartstrings. Richard's sister, in *Meadow Brook*, gladly accepts Rosa as her sister-in-law, albeit until the end of the text she did not accept either Rosa or Rosa's relationship with Richard. Only *The Gates Ajar* closes with thoughts of death; those thoughts, however, are peaceful and calm as Mary looks forward to reunification with her brother Roy and Aunt Winifred in heaven. For the present, Mary will be busy raising and instructing her cousin, little Faith.

Most of the texts close with loving relationships and promises of future bliss. For the most part, scenes of future happiness are already tainted with real experiences of death. Richard and Rosa in *Meadow Brook* name their first born after Richard's niece, Jessie, the "angel of the pines," who first nursed Rosa when she contracted cholera. Jessie died of the same. We see, then, that closures distribute happiness but do not negate past sorrows. Tomorrow's happiness is tempered by yesterday's death

and grieving. Yet all nine of these texts, whether conventional or not, end with a promise for a better tomorrow.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct* states that by 1870 a "new bourgeois woman had emerged" who demanded "equality in education, in employment, and in wages" (175). Our authors are examples of the "New Woman" who showed their society that women could write, and read, and think. They encouraged co-education even though a "college woman might be brilliant but she forfeited her right to a place in fashionable society" (251). As women's role in society continued to change, and as society became less fascinated with the nature of heaven, the literature women produced also changed.

Smith-Rosenberg also discusses the role of women's colleges in the 1870s and 1880s. The colleges created an environment "which violated virtually every late-Victorian norm." Collegiate life placed women outside domestic settings, taught them to both think and deal with the world as men did, and encouraged them "to succeed at a career, indeed to place a career before marriage." College education, especially at women's colleges where women ran the school, "became an agency for social change rather than for social cohesion" (252-53). Changes in social attitudes were captured by the authors who included them within the texts but omitted them from their closures. Thus, texts which repeatedly display anti-domestic sentiments close on a domestic, happy-ever-after note. Inversely, independent and strong female characters give up their independence in order to marry and accept identification as a wife.

If endings are contrary to the messages presented in the hundreds of pages of the texts, it is necessary to raise questions. Are the endings a facade? Are they a guise used to distract readers who don't pay attention to the central message? The message throughout each text is anti-domestic, and intelligent female readers would catch the

message and realize how different their own lives were from those of the protagonists. Were happy endings wishful dreams of authors who reinforced the concept of idealized homes, women, and endings? I contend they were not. The authors found their lives different from their mothers' and created texts that both represent those differences and speculated on developing differences. But when it was time to close the text and put the pen away, the authors simply could not conceive of a world that was, as time has proven, a logical conclusion to the fictional works and therefore fell back on conventional wisdom and conventional closures. *Ruth Hall*, the unconventional text, concludes with Ruth successfully dealing with the world around her as a single woman; she did not remarry.

Colleges and collegiate women broke from the socio-cultural mold that averred all women share the same "natural" vocation—that of motherhood and identification primarily through self-abnegating interpersonal relations. The canon of domesticity classed all women together and "enshrined the unifying, leveling, common identity of the domestic woman" for all (Cott 98). The literature left behind by these nineteenth-century women is itself a manifestation of broken and changing social constructs and offers itself as a window through which we can look at the roots of our twentieth-century gender asymmetry. The three generations from the time of these texts to the present is a relatively short time; it is not difficult to understand our parents' discomfort with the idea of women working outside the home and our grandparents' discomfort with women's financial and familial independence. The author's foci, those of idealized women, angelic children, and veneration of the home, are a reflection of the dominant ideology of the day. This idealization is an ideology preserved intertextually, both in literature and in the accompanying funerary statuary. By

examining both texts and statues, we get a clearer picture not just of life in that period, but of the roots of our present-day society.

## PHOTOS



Photo 1. The Titus House, inscribed "In mansions above" is a striking image representing the "dwelling place of the dead." (Springfield Cemetery, Springfield, MA)



Photo 2.

Photos 2 and 3. Photos 2 and 3 are examples of enclosures and gates setting apart family plots in the "city of the dead." (Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY; New Haven Burial Ground, New Haven, CT, respectively)



Photo 3.



Photo 4.

Photos 4 and 5. White marble obelisks (a common sight in nineteenth-century cemeteries) usually rise from simple bases, but are often enclosed within a railing or flanked by urns. Photo 4 matches the obelisk raised in memory of Aaron Hunt in *St. Elmo*. (Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA) Obelisks cut off represent lives cut down before full maturity. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church Cemetery, Hebron, CT)



Photo 5.



Photo 6. Wrought iron or carved urns border family lots and stairs. Few still have flowers or ivy that once graced them. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)



Photo 7.

Photos 7 and 8. Albert Noll died at 18 months in 1859. His "bed of death" is watched over by an angel. (Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Boston, MA) The picture on the right is a likeness of a child's crib. Flowers may have been planted in the urn-like cavity between the head- and footboard. (Glenwood Cemetery, Washington, DC)



Photo 8.



Photo 9.



Photo 10.

Photos 9 and 10. Chairs placed near urns offered visiting families a place to sit and contemplate the beyond. Some chairs are carved to look like a seat made from branches. The one above has two birds entwined in a thicket which forms the back of the chair. (above, Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY; left, Cooperstown Cemetery, Cooperstown, NY)



Photo 11. A sheaf of wheat represents a life harvested in its maturity. (Forest Hill Cemetery, Boston, MA)



Photo 12. Granite chairs grace the Alter Mausoleum. Sized for an adult to sit in, they are not at all uncomfortable. (West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Cynwyd, PA)



Photo 13.

Photos 13 and 14. Dogs, made of granite (left), or marble (below), loyally guard graves or family enclosures as they stonily wait for a reunion. (left, Forest Hill Cemetery, Boston, MA; below, Mt. Auburn, Boston, MA)

Photo  
14.



Photo 15. It is not uncommon to find a woman's foot, a Bible, or a child's knee resting upon a pillow. This female statue was at the grave of a man who committed suicide. Her marble cheek was so smooth that an elderly cemetery attendant stretched to kiss her every time he mowed around her. (Dellwoods Cemetery, Manchester Village, VT)

Photo 16. This generic female statue points the way to heaven from atop a pedestal which has a bust of a former governor of the state of Connecticut. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church Cemetery, Hebron, CT)





Photo 17. A pensive woman hold a laurel wreath which implies a contemplation of heaven and "the victory of the soul." This is a very common sculpture. (Springfield Cemetery, Springfield, MA)



Photo 18.



Photo 19.



Photo 20.

Photos 18, 19, 20. These photos exhibit the omnipresence of laurel wreaths and classical garb. (Photo 18, West Laurel Hill Cemetery, Cynwyd, PA; Photos 19 and 20, Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY)



Photo 21.



Photo 22.

Photos 21, 22, and 23. Statues of men were created to represent both the specific men and their occupations. Although women's statues are generic, men's are specific to the individual. Photo 21 has an anchor behind him and appears to have once been holding something (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY); Photo 22 represents a young man who had been studying for the clergy (Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY); Photo 23 was evidently carved to recreate the man buried therein. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)



Photo 23.



Photo 24. John Bowman visits the mausoleum containing his infant daughter, 23-year-old daughter, and wife who outlived the elder daughter by seven months. It has a tiled floor made to look like a rich carpet, wall brackets to hold candles, and a life-sized sculpture of an infant reaching out her arms. A visitor, peering in the door of the mausoleum, sees mirrors reflecting the infant who then appears to be reaching out toward a bust of the mother. (The Laurel Glen Mausoleum, Cuttingsville, VT)



Photo 25.

Photos 25 and 26. The epitaph on this marble bas relief reads: "Her twin daughters preceded her but a single year. Her infant son but a few hours. Parting and sorrow they shall know no more." A recently painted black wrought iron railing with granite corner- and side-posts encloses the 1850 family plot. (New Haven Burial Ground, also called Grove Street Cemetery, New Haven, CT)

Photo 26.  
Detail of  
photo  
above.





Photo 27. This slightly larger-than-life representation of a disconsolate woman is carrying the ever-present laurel wreath symbolizing the "victory of the soul." (Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY)



Photo 28.

Photo 29.

Photo 28 and 29. This life-sized woman clings to a six-foot cross carved with ivy and lilies and inscribed with the words "Simply to thy Cross I Cling" from Augustus Toplady's eighteenth-century hymn *Rock of Ages*. Many locations have sculptures of this type. (Woodlawn Cemetery, the Bronx, NY) Photo 29 is a detail of a similar sculpture. (Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Hoboken, NJ)





Photo 30.

Photo 31.



Photo 30 and 31. The woman in photo 30 is carved in granite and therefore better able to withstand erosion (West Laurel Hill, Cynwyd, PA); photo 31 is older and carved in marble. Both are common poses for the idealized woman who pensively contemplates the hereafter. (Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA)



Photo 32. This 1866 sculpture bids the woman interred to "Rest, . . . thy sufferings are ended." She sleeps eternally at the New Haven Burial Ground. (New Haven, CT)



Photo 33.

Photo 34.



Photos 33 and 34. The lamb motif was a common way of marking children's graves.  
(New Haven Burial Ground, New Haven, CT; Glenwood Cemetery, Washington, DC)



Photo 35.

Photos 35 and 36. These are children who died, went to an "eternal rest," and "slept in Christ." Photo 35 represents a common sculpture found throughout Victorian cemeteries, and marks the grave of an 10-month-old child who died in 1856. (Glenwood Cemetery, Washington, DC) Photo 36 is less generic and more specific to the child; it marks "darling Jennie's" 1875 grave. (Swan Point Cemetery, Providence, RI)



Photo 36.



Photo 37. This life-sized statue is specific to the brother and sister who died three months apart at ages ten and three in 1860. The admonition inscribed bids them to "Sleep, dear ones, in thy quiet bed. . . ." (Swan Point Cemetery, Providence, RI)



Photo 38.

Photos 38 and 39. A common representation, this boy-child is usually kneeling on a pillow and sometimes surrounded by lambs. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY; Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Boston, MA)



Photo 39.



Photo 40. This stylization depicts a female child holding flowers and standing adjacent to a tree stump which symbolizes a life cut short. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)



Photo 41. Gracie and Louis (photo 42) are both enclosed in bevelled glass cases. Gracie's pose is much the same as the generic girl above. (Forest Hill Cemetery, Boston, MA)



Photo 42. Statues of the deceased were carved to mark some children's graves. Louis, an only child, was carved holding a tennis racquet and sitting in a marble boat inscribed with his name. (Forest Hill Cemetery, Boston, MA)



Photo 43. This re-creation of a marble statue for "Little Sarah" was made in memory of the same who died in 1866 at the age of seven. The original statue was stolen in 1978; the Swan Point Cemetery Board replaced it in 1980. (Providence, RI)



Photo 44 "Annie," who died in 1877, is reading a book and sitting next to a tree stump with lilies. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)



Photo 45. This statue marks the grave of a nine-year-old. An identical sculpture was found atop a 30-foot pedestal in Woodlawn Cemetery, Brooklyn. (Oak Hill Cemetery, Washington, DC)



Photo 46. This little angel is about to scatter flowers. (Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Hoboken, NJ)



Photo 47. Gambolling angels mark the grave of an infant and mother who died in 1869. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)



Photo 48. Two children in the bed of death are about to be raised by an angel, but there are no dates nor explanation. This is an unusual marker as it was found in a public lot with no family plot and revealed no story. (Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY)

Photo 49. "Little Edwin" died in 1876 at the age of three. The east-coast pollution has severely eroded the soft white marble. The tree stump symbolizes a life cut short. (New Haven Burial Ground, CT)



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