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Tragic Race in *The Prince of Darkness*: Southworth's Call for Social Change

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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes popular nineteenth century female novelist E.D.E.N. Southworth's 1890 novel *Hickory Hall or The Outcast: A Romance of the Blue Ridge*, which is also referred to as *The Prince of Darkness*, in terms of race and class relations. As a contemporary of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Southworth attempts to navigate the racial and political tensions of her pre-Civil War era society in her serialized novel. This essay employs close readings of character descriptions, interactions, and instances of moral insanity, to examine Southworth's antislavery perspective. It will also demonstrate the political engagement of an important author whom many wrongfully perceived as simplistic and frivolous because of the serialized medium of her narratives. This essay will formulate the argument that Southworth advocates for necessary social change and, through the tragic consequences of the antiquated racial relations exhibited by her characters, cautions her readers against the inevitable decline of society should the status quo remain unexamined. The research conducted here draws upon the primary source of the novel as well as scholarly articles by Dale Bauer, Julia Deane Freeman, Eric Lott, and Vicki Martin to support its claims.

KEYWORDS

antislavery, class, nineteenth century, *Prince of Darkness*, race, serialized novel, Southworth

Written in 1861, E.D.E.N. Southworth's twentieth work, entitled *Hickory Hall; or The Outcast: A Romance of the Blue Ridge*, which was also printed under the title *The Prince of Darkness,* comes fairly early in her extensive career, which spanned from1844 to 1899. Scholar Vicki L. Martin notes the important proto-abolitionist work done by E.D.E.N Southworth's serialized writings in her early publications, alongside more famous works like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Southworth "began serializing short fiction in the [publication] *National Era* in the first year of its existence (1847) and had serialized...*Hickory Hall* in the abolitionist newspaper before the serial appearance of Harriet Beecher Stowe's first novel." Martin laments that though Stowe's work became "the most famous antislavery novel ever written... Southworth's [novels] are mostly unread, especially as they appear in the context of the pages of *Era*" (1-2). Martin discusses Southworth's long tradition of antislavery writings in asserting that Southworth "did not write proslavery fiction for the *Era*, as some have claimed; instead, drawing on materials that appeared in the *Era* and similar periodicals of the time, she began, with her first novel, introducing antislavery arguments into her fiction." According to Martin, recent critics of Southworth have a tendency to "largely ignore the antislavery nature of Southworth's *Era* novels and write them off as being overly sensational or sentimental, as having no social or political merit, and even as being proslavery." Martin also denotes that while modern critics devalue the politicized message of Southworth's novels, many readers of Southworth's time did perceive the antislavery message in her works (Martin, 1-2). Further analysis reveals that Southworth's novels do in fact make great strides in trying to unravel the racial issues faced by her society.

The Prince of Darkness features a frame narrative of a woman journeying to stay with her friend, Mrs. Fairfield, in Virginia. While approaching the Fairfield home, the women pass a dilapidated, though still stately, old house with an air of mystery, which prompts the narrator to theorize about all of the horrors that must have occurred in the house, despite Mrs. Fairfield's assertion that the "murdered home" (3) belongs to a respectable and wealthy family, the Wallravens. Later that evening, Mrs. Fairfield and her husband are called away by the urgent summons of Mr. Wallraven, leaving the narrator

with a letter containing Mr. Fairfield's account of his introduction to young Wolfgang Wallraven and his subsequent interactions with the family. In summary, Fairfield becomes fascinated by Wolfgang and strives to befriend him, despite Wallraven's aloof nature. Eventually he succeeds, and he arranges for Wallraven to make the acquaintance of his sister. The two fall in love and arrange to marry. Wallraven presses for the nuptials to occur in France, while his bride, Regina, presses for the ceremony to take place at the ancestral Wallraven home. Before the two can be granted a happy ending, however, Southworth reveals to the audience that Wallraven Sr. married his mother's slave girl, and that all of the Wallraven children have been passing as white despite the quadroon blood they received from their enslaved mother. They are legally considered to be the property of Wallraven Sr., having inherited their mother's status. This revelation, imparted by an old, black hag, Old Nell, claiming to be the sister of old Wallraven's wife, and reminiscent of the Jane Eyre-esque madwoman in the attic who escapes captivity to taunt her new niece, drives Regina to insanity. Upon Old Nell's disclosure of Wolfgang's polluted bloodline, Regina murders Wolfgang Wallraven in a fit of rage before deteriorating into an animalistic state of foaming at the mouth and screaming incoherently. He accepts his fate in repentance, and with his dying breath, declares that she is not to blame.

Southworth's narrative depicts a complex racial and social stratum and challenges the concept of the time of black inferiority as an excuse for whites to exert mastery over them. Through her characterization, her alignment strategies for manipulating reader sympathies, the ambiguity of victimhood, and the demonstration of misplaced guilt, Southworth points to a cultural malady afflicting the South during the pre-Civil War period. Though Southworth does not assign a particular time when setting the story, the reader can understand it as her reaction to the racial politics of her society. While Martin advocates Southworth's historical importance as an antislavery novelist, Dale Bauer further supports Southworth's agenda of social reform in her article "Why Read E.D.E.N Southworth?" in the assertion of Southworth's "characteristic way, insanity or mania, as a way to challenge American norms" (1). Southworth uses race as a plot device to derail the otherwise marital bliss of Regina and Wallraven, but this story also offers a cautionary tale both for those

hoping to pass and for those who might have unwittingly been duped and contaminated by a deceptive spouse.

Though distinctions are made between a servant and a "colored" servant (16) (both unnamed) in the plot, these details are written off as a product of the Deep South culture surrounding the Civil War. Southworth chooses to place her novel in this particular setting to draw attention to the tenuous race relations in which this culture was deeply invested. Southworth is reacting to the call for change in racial and social relations in the pre-Civil War era, which she perpetuates through this story. Often, Regina Fairfield's brother praises her fair, blonde, pale beauty, but in a romance when outer colors are used to describe inner traits (i.e. white demonstrates purity, black denotes evil, and red passion, etc.), these praises are hardly unexpected or extreme. Most often, colors implying race are employed as a foil between the two women of interest to the narrator: his sister and Constantina Wallraven, his friend's sister. Though at the time, they seem to simply differentiate the women, statements such as, "by comparing these two young girls, Constantina and Regina, both so perfectly beautiful, yet so opposite in their forms, features, and complexion; yes, and style—though both were of the queenly order. Constantina's was a natural dignity, Regina's a conventional stateliness," become much more important in context with the revelation at the end of the letter (Southworth 163). While Regina's goodness is reaffirmed by her fairness, the descriptions of Constantina's regal darkness do not hint at a tainted nature until the end. Southworth complicates the basic dichotomies of white as good and black as bad when she allows Constantina to be depicted as Regina's equal in loveliness.

Southworth allows Fairfield to repeat moments such as this in which he praises both women on equal footing. "Again, I was struck by the contrast presented by these two young women—the blonde and the brunette—both so dazzling, beautiful, yet so unlike. One, clear, bright, morning sunshine—the other, resplendent starlight" (172). Perhaps the reason for Fairfield's repetition is that Constantina's beauty tempts the narrator, who stands to fall victim to the same deception of racial passing as his sister without the intervention of those who know the truth. Southworth employs Constantina's beauty as an alignment strategy, not only between her and the narrator, but also her and the audience. Her treachery in

passing, for Southworth is all the more striking when revealed; if an observant and educated man such as Fairfield fails to comprehend her nature immediately, what chance does anyone else stand at retaining their own purity? Just like Fairfield, readers might feel upset with themselves for failing to pick up on Southworth's color coding and thinking one step ahead of Fairfield. Conversely, Southworth begs the question of whether or not Constantina can truly merit less than Regina if she is her equal in every way in terms of beauty and carriage. Although it may seem that Southworth questions the need for a racial history in determining the quality of people in comparisons between Regina and Constantina, she definitively takes a stance that this behavior of concealing one's genealogy is deplorable in Wallraven's vindication of Regina's actions.

Opposite the regal beauty and demure comportment of Regina and Constantina, Southworth gives us the character of the hag, Old Nell, who reveals the secret of the Wallravens to Regina and sets the final tragic moments in motion. By allowing Fairfield to refer to her as "the hag" with a "demon grin," Southworth guides the reader to understand Nell not as a human being, but as a supernatural social force that exists largely within the unconscious of the characters (187). Fairfield attempts to rationalize his experience with the hag, demonstrating her function as a nightmare: "My mind sometimes naturally connected the midnight apparition of Wolfgang and the malign hag to the bed-chamber with the terrible secret of the family; and at other times I entertained a rational doubt as to whether the dread apparition were a dream or a reality" (119). The hag can be understood in terms of Eric Lott's concept of a racial unconscious, or "a structured formation, combining through and feeling, tone and impulse, and at the very edge of semantic availability, whose symptoms and anxieties make it just legible," (23) since she appears in moments when white characters are at risk of acting upon their dangerous attraction for characters who pass.

The initial manifestation of the hag occurs after Wolfgang converses with Fairfield about Constantina. Wolfgang asks Fairfield's opinion of Constantina and Fairfield replies that he believes her to be the most beautiful woman in the world, equal to Cleopatra. Wolfgang becomes offended since he perceives Fairfield's remark as a jest, despite

Fairfield's assurances of his sincerity. Fairfield has opened himself to the risk of desiring a woman who can never be his social or racial equal; he risks committing the same social transgression as Mr. Wallraven, though we are yet unaware of Wallraven's plight. Shortly after this conversation, Fairfield falls asleep admiring the beauty of Constantia, Wolfgang Wallraven's mother, in her portrait. He awakes to see flames flickering over the portrait, giving the woman depicted the appearance of sobbing from great suffering. Fairfield first sees the hag in his dreams alongside the image of the sobbing Constantia, "with her moved another being — a perfect spectre, that might have been the consort of Death on the Pale Horse — an old, decrepit, livid hag, with a malign countenance and gibbering laugh, whose look chilled and whose touch froze my blood with horror" (111). He awakes to find that the hag is real and present in his bedroom; Wolfgang Wallraven is grappling physically with the hag to constrain her. Fairfield notes that in this moment of struggle, Wallraven resembles Typhon, the largest and deadliest of the Greek monsters, a half-viper, half-dragon beast who attempted to bring down Zeus, and succeeded in tearing out Zeus's sinews before being imprisoned below Mount Etna (Graves). Wallraven acts as a bestial danger to the ruling authority. He tries to restrain the hag and, in the process, to keep the racial unconscious hidden. The figure of the hag intervenes on the romances of both Fairfield and Regina to prevent a continuation of the social abomination of racial mixing.

Old Nell appears once more to the Fairfields, on the eve of Regina's wedding to Wolfgang Wallraven. Regina ignores Constantina's advice to bolt her bedroom door out of laziness, and as a result, Old Nell sneaks in with the intent to "kiss [her] pretty niece" and to deliver a warning (187). Southworth depicts Old Nell as monstrous in order to scandalize her white audience, who are invited to recognize that members of their own class and race who pretend to be of pristine bloodlines might be concealing their own monstrous past, and thus subject to a similar figure of the racial unconscious. Regina describes Old Nell to Fairfield as "the most diabolical-looking old hag that ever my nightmare created stooping over me, gazing into my opened eyes with a grin of malignity that seemed to freeze all the blood in my veins" (186). Old Nell truly is a manifestation of Regina's nightmare, a physical representation of the cruelty that white society has inflicted

upon blacks through slavery. Old Nell has been transformed from a human woman into a monster to embody how white society represents their social hierarchies.

Old Nell's scrutiny repulses Regina, who has become vulnerable to Old Nell's physical threat as well as her psychic influence. Her gaze communicates to Regina the loathing that lies bubbling under the social surface tension and also indicates the ease with which white power can be confused. Regina describes the incident in facing Old Nell as "the most loathsome specimen of humanity I had ever seen, as she stood there some seconds, examining us with the same leer of insult and malignity. There she stood, chuckling with a fiendish grin at the very loathing she excited—repaying the extreme of disgust with the extreme of hatred" (186). Old Nell inverts the hierarchy of authority over Regina by assuming a position of dominance and moral judgment over her social superior. She warns Regina: "You are very fair and very proud! But pride goeth before a fall, and a haughty temper before destruction," which demonstrates the fragility of the social order and the erroneous mentality of the white position of security within society (188). Her warning also indicates the ease with which white power can be confused. In her work chronicling the serialization of Southworth, Martin comments that Southworth identifies pride as "the parent sin of slavery," which reinforces the conception of Regina's pride in her racial superiority as a mortal sin that has contributed to a host of social evils imparted against blacks and will lead to the downfall of white society if left unchecked (14). In this moment, Southworth uses Old Nell to speak to the shifting relations between whites and blacks in the South before the onset of the Civil War. Old Nell's taunting must be extended to Southworth's readers, she warns, lest they fall victim to the same sense of vulnerability and instability when the blacks escape their bonds to seize power and wreak havoc on their white masters, as Old Nell has done as a manifestation of the racial unconscious.

Mr. Wallraven exhibits this mentality of white superiority, which Southworth undermines as flawed and fundamentally false throughout the novel. Though he has married a black woman and attempted to elevate her socially, he clings to the notion that the whiteness of their children masks any of the undesirable black qualities they possess. Though their

bloodline is less than pure, Mr. Wallraven is quick to reassure Fairfield that his descendants have not been tainted by the unfavorable characteristics that Nell exhibits, "You asked me the cause of Nell's malignity, and expressed astonishment at the idea of her relationship to Constance. She is, really, no blood-relation to Constance or my children" (202). Wallraven continues to offer a logical explanation for her monstrous appearance and her motive for revealing the family's secret: "She was the step daughter of Constance's father, and hence the claim to relationship, hence her presumption to a high degree of notice and favor, even while her extreme deformity and her disgusting habits and vices, made her very presence in the meanest capacity insufferable; and hence her envy, hatred, and demonic malignity"(202). Though Southworth allows Mr. Wallraven to distance his family from the impurity of Old Nell, Southworth employs Old Nell's character in a larger allegorical role which renders her integral to understanding the tension resulting from the race/class disparity in the novel. The problem of Old Nell still exists, though she is brushed out of the spotlight of attention. Old Nell fulfills her role as a plot device and promptly disappears from the story. While we receive epilogues detailing the lives of the rest of the characters, we do not receive one for her. This fluidity emphasizes her function as the embodiment of the racial unconscious, which can muster a manifestation only for a moment before being suppressed. The mindset of the white reader is focused in self-absorption, caring more for a simple conclusion of the fates of the white characters than for a solution to the racial problems that exist within society. The problem of Old Nell still exists, though she is brushed out of the spotlight of attention. Perhaps Southworth dismisses her to keep readers aware that this threat constantly lies just out of our attention, and that society cannot be so neatly wrapped up. To provide Nell with a satisfying ending through conformity would undo her position of power, and to punish her for her actions would undo her social work by reestablishing and reinforcing the existing status quo. Southworth, in fact, fulfills the same role as Old Nell in her crafting of the plot of this story. She reveals to white audiences the flawed nature of race relations within their society, but her disruption of the reader's confidence at the dominance of white society flares up only for a moment. Rather than propose a new direction for society by indicating a way to

negotiate race relations, Southworth allows the social turbulence to neatly conclude in the deaths of both Wallraven and Regina. With the removal of all of the offending parties from society, Old Nell's political allegory falls short in order to pacify Southworth's readers.

While Old Nell is more effective as a plot device than a political allegory, Southworth employs Regina as a second allegorical figure. Upon her realization of the truth, Regina descends into a "mad majesty," actualizing her regal name to project the personality of a monarch threatened by treason (191). She sheds her previous identity, claiming that "already one of the ladies of our bedchamber—our beloved Regina Fairfield—lies dead before us" (190). Since she lacks a specific identity, Regina can be understood as an allegorical figure for the state of white society. After Regina's descent into madness, Southworth employs this transformed persona to recall images of monarchy and white social authority. Southworth depicts Regina with royal imagery; even her name — Latin for queen – is used in many nations' royal titles. She adopts the royal "we" in her speech, extends her right hand "in a gesture of high command," and arranges her dressing gown around her "as though it were the ermine purple" (191). This power is undermined, however, with the image of the "fallen glory" that is Regina's unbound hair, which invokes a sense of disorder and impropriety in her appearance that translates to the state of white authority in society that cannot maintain itself. The phrase "fallen glory" also connotes an imperial tone, as if the power and glory of Regina's authority lies in the past and has been overtaken by a new authority, understood here as an authority invested in racial mixing. Regina proclaims Wolfgang a traitor, and when he approaches her, she seizes an "antique dagger that lay [on the table as an article of rare *vertu*" (191). While "an article of *vertu*" can be understood simply as an artful adornment, Southworth's choice of words is not coincidental, and doubles for the English word: virtue. The ideas of French philosophers Voltaire and Francois de la Rochefoucauld can be applied to add depth to Southworth's verbal duality. Voltaire proposed that *"La vertu s'avilit à se justifier,"* which translates to "Virtue debases in justifying itself" ("Voltaire"). By wielding this dagger as an enforcement of justice onto a traitor to the white social authority, Regina reveals how the concept of justice has become debased and convoluted within white aristocratic society. Southworth

makes a comment here that Regina's justice is anything but just in this moment, which reinforces her anti-slavery message. François de la Rochefoucauld also writes on the subject of virtue in his *Reflections*: "*Nos vertus ne sont, le plus souvent, que de vices déguisés*" which translates to "our virtues are most often only vices in disguise" (*Réflexions*). While Regina believes herself to be enacting justice upon Wolfgang with the dagger, she succeeds only in enacting her own vices of vanity and pride. Just as Old Nell cautioned Regina, her pride led to her downfall. Southworth extends this adage to caution white society in the pre-Civil War era that the desire for, and pride in belonging to a class comprised by racial purity must be understood as a vice rather than a virtue, a weakness rather than a strength, and that society must be open to restructuring in order to avoid the chaotic and violent fate faced by Regina.

Mr. Wallraven acts as an example of this restructuring when he dared to rupture polite social customs and marry his mother's slave. As a result, however, his children are branded and disbarred from their aristocratic rights, defined and marginalized by their mother's position rather than becoming liberated through their father's standing. Through Wallraven's progressive though unsuccessful attempt to deviate from flawed social norms, Southworth generates sympathy for his plight—condemning society for failing to accept his actions instead of condemning him for his social divergence. Wallraven recounts the disastrous affair to Fairfield:

> She was a quadroon girl, brought up at my mother's knee; a simple, gentle child, whose life of chamber seclusion had kept her unspotted from the world...she had been taught in her childhood almost to worship her 'young master'—the mother's spoiled and wilful boy—the idol of the household. She learned in girlhood to love him with all the bind and passionate devotion of her race. I had the power of life and death over her—yea, of eternal life and death—for her life hung upon my love—her integrity upon my honor. The alternative for her was a ruined frame, a broken heart, and the grave; or the marriage ring and benediction. The alternative for me was sin without infamy or infamy without sin—or so it seemed to me in my passionate youth. I chose the latter. I loved her, I married her,

> and lost caste, I and my children forever! The whole community recoiled in loathing from us. The minister who united us was ungowned and degraded from his pulpit. Our marriage was declared illegal, and my mother, to oblige me to break the connection, made a will, just before her death, by which she left me Constance and her children upon condition only of my never freeing them. Upon my attempting to break this condition, they were to become the property of a distant relative. (196-7)

Wallraven recognizes his transgression and attempts to atone for his actions morally by sacrificing his own reputation in order that his wife should not be condemned by society for her association with him. He reveals to Fairfield the toll his actions have taken upon him and his descendants: "If I have sinned against the conventional usages of the society in which I was born and lived, my whole life has been one long and terrible expiation" (203). Society rejects any attempt for the Wallravens to recover their honor and instead condemns them to a liminal identity and marks them as marginal characters. Wallraven submits himself to our moral judgment in recounting his relationship with his mother's slave. He invites us to see his abuse of power in taking advantage of a disadvantaged girl who had been raised to fulfill his every desire, and further subjected to his amorous intents by the preexisting condition of her race's passionate nature. Whereas this assertion of her natural weakness could be used as an argument against Wallraven's natural superior position according to racial hierarchies in this era, Wallraven condemns himself further for entrapping her in his deviance and inability to deprive himself of inappropriate erotic desires. Rather than cast her aside, as was acceptable in this time for someone of his status, his guilt and morality cause him personally to require redemption for them both by sacrificing his own caste for her honor. While this pre-Civil War era society would have viewed his sacrifice of honor as the real sin rather than his illicit romance with a slave that was technically his property to use as he wished, Southworth twists this concept of morality to condemn him for his predatory actions against a helpless girl and his covetous inability to deny himself from acting upon inappropriate feelings. In attempting to break social traditions and appease his conscience, Wallraven inflicted injury upon the lives of several

people, including the misery and shame in which his children must live. Wallraven openly accepts responsibility for the fate of his family; however this does not promise him forgiveness. Even though he does all in his power to right the situation and suffers perpetual guilt, readers from any time period will not be reluctant to shame him for his actions. Rather, his son – Wolfgang Wallraven -- emerges as a sympathetic character who has been victimized by a cruel and morally skewed society.

Before Wolfgang Wallraven even appears in the plot, Southworth paints him as a sympathetic figure. The closing lines of Barry Cornwall's poem, which Southworth uses as the epigraph in the chapter in which Wolfgang is introduced, reads, "He is shadowed by his dream / But 'twill pass away" (Cornwall 42). Wolfgang Wallraven seems completely to internalize the sins of his father, and the son incorporates this socially-ascribed guilt into his identity, which keeps him from achieving his dream of fully participating in white society. As a boy, Wallraven seems fully to comprehend himself as a social abomination and restricts his participation in society by self-imposed isolation. Though he is able to pass racially for a white aristocrat, he shrouds his pain through aristocratic airs to which he would be entitled if not for the transgression of his father. By distancing himself from other characters, Wolfgang's sympathetic nature strongly encourages both readers of Southworth's time and contemporary readers to become more attached to him since they recognize that his self-inflicted castigation is undeserved and incorrect. We understand that these are not his sins to bear, though he internalizes them from his own sense of moral propriety. Unwilling to perpetuate his father's sins by aligning himself with his peers through feigned equality, he fears society's total dismissal based on his racial impurity, and instead choose to occupy a position of social liminality. Despite his best intentions to extricate himself from a society that spurns his existence, Southworth demonstrates how, as in many cases in history, white males enact a responsibility to interfere in the affairs of those who they deem disadvantaged. Fairfield's fascination with Wallraven's self-imposed liminality disallows Wallraven to rest in his safe solitary alienation. Though Fairfield perceives his actions as a rescue mission to open the reclusive Wallraven to popular society, he damns his friend to an extraordinarily unhappy fate and deprives him of any

chance at happiness or belonging. Southworth repeats the pattern of white males being attracted to slaves of mixed blood in this relationship, though the reader cannot perceive this cycle until the revelation of Mr. Wallraven's transgressions in the conclusion of the novel. While the other boys mistake Wolfgang Wallraven's existential shame for pride, Fairfield claims to possess a singular ability to improve Wolfgang in his supposed insight into his character:

> I do not know what was the power that attracted me so strongly, so inevitably, so fatally to Wolfgang Wallraven: whether it was magnetism, sorcery, or destiny—or whether it was the gloom and mystery of his manner and appearance. Certain it is that there was a glamor in his dark and locked-up countenance and in the smoldering fierceness of his hollow eyes that irresistibly drew me on to my fate. He did not seek my acquaintance—he sought the society of no one. On the contrary, he withdrew himself into solitude—into surliness. This was unusual in a schoolboy, and it made him very unpopular. To me, however, his sullen reserve and surly manner had more interest, more fascination, than the openest and blandest demonstrations of social affection from any of the other boys could have. There was evidently something behind and under it. He was not at all outside. (42-3)

Southworth repeats the same language of misplaced passion used in Mr. Wallraven's confession in Fairfield's recounting of his magnetic desire for Wolfgang's approval and friendship:

> My attraction to, my affection for that strange boy was rising almost to the height of a passion. Never did a lover desire the affections of his sweetheart more than I did the friendship and confidence of my queer outlandish classmate. Never did a lover scheme interviews with his mistress more adroitly than I planned opportunities of conversing with Wolfgang, without seeming to obtrude myself upon him. (48)

Southworth illustrates that the real social danger is not that marginalized individuals deceive others about their racial identities. Instead, the true peril stems from the colonial white

assertion of their own moral and intellectual superiority, which they believe allows them the right or the responsibility to interfere in the affairs of other supposedly inferior races. One could understand Southworth's depiction of Fairfield's undue fascination with and desire to re-socialize Wallraven as an advocate that white society lacks the foundation for the supremacy it asserts and as a call for a more independent black society, free from the impositions of whites who cannot fully comprehend or appreciate black society.

Upon Wolfgang Wallraven's realization that his hopes for a covert interracial marriage have been denied when he was so near to their successful realization, Wallraven experiences turbulent emotions that actualize in physical violence upon Old Nell, who rendered his future untenable. Fairfield accounts how Wallraven attacks Old Nell after she reveals the truth of his bloodline: "Rage, grief, and despair stormed in his face. With the bound of an unchained demon he sprang upon the hag, and with his hands round her throat, bore her down to the floor, placed his knee upon her chest, and nearly strangled her before I could prevent him" (191). Even in this moment of monstrosity, Wallraven retains the reader's sympathies. Though he is dehumanized by intense emotions, he transcends the threat to his morality by submitting to the hopelessness of the situation. Immediately after this display of violence, Fairfield softens his presentation of Wallraven: "Rising, he spurned the beldame with his foot, turned toward us. His typhoon of anger had subsided; despair, sorrow, tenderness, were all to be seen now as he approached Regina" (191-2). When Wallraven finally refuses to allow society to further limit him from his aspirations, white society cruelly punishes him. Southworth depicts Wallraven as a martyr, dying for his sins against an unjust society. She stresses that the real tragedy is not Wallraven's death, but instead his intense repression that eliminates Wallraven's options for a social existence. White racial pride refuses to allow him happiness through social integration through marriage because of his tainted nature. However, white society also refuses to leave him in a prolonged position of his self-imposed liminal isolation, which is demonstrated by Fairfield's childhood ambition to break him from his withdrawn nature. He welcomes death as the only liberty still allowed to him by white society because of his tainted blood. Embodying a new form of the "deployment of the tragic mulatta" (Martin 9).

Wolfgang Wallraven must constantly be degraded by his father's sins without hope of escape or completing sufficient penance for redemption in the eyes of society to alleviate his suffering.

It is surprising that there are not more reviews of E.D.E.N. Southworth's works available today given her high level of popularity while she was writing. Her works clearly had a large effect on the popular culture of the time; however, it seems that few people expended the effort to critique her novels for the periodicals of the time. In order to avoid a reading of *Prince of Darkness* tainted by modern social constructions of race and gender, I seek to demonstrate how the books were received in addition to the reactions they engendered in order to determine whether Southworth's writings conformed to social ideologies of the time or whether she was revolutionary in the relationships she constructed. In 1861, Julia Deane Freeman catalogues female authors of this era in her book *Women of the South Distinguished in Literature*. Though she largely discusses Southworth from a biographical standpoint, Freeman does offer some criticism of her works that allow for one to glimpse a limited perspective on Southworth's reception. Freeman states, "Voluminous as her writings are, embracing a wide personal and emotional range, we are told that she has never yet drawn upon her imagination for the basis of a single character. To this fact may be attributed her power of portraiture" (228). From this assertion, one can gather that her readership regarded her characters as true and accurate, and thus the possibility of a passing gentleman of repute or an old, mad slave aunt hiding in the attic are extraordinarily real to at least some in this era. Indeed, one is led to believe that these characters are based in truth, and thus reflect the social ideologies of the time.

Freeman continues to praise Southworth's writing, but does cast a negative image on her characters: "In bringing veritable men and women from the extremes of her observation, and allowing them full scope for self-assertion, [Southworth] has laid her stories open to the charge of unnaturalness" (228). This reference to "unnaturalness" challenges the idea that her characters are all pure representations of the true state of the nineteenth century South. It seems as if Freeman qualifies her original statement of authenticity by expressing that Southworth's encourages her characters into a state of full

"self-assertion," which implies a certain sense of creative license in fulfilling an archetype. Freeman returns to praising Southworth in a confirmation of her accuracy towards the end of the section: "She excels in her delineation of negro character, and her descriptions of southern life and scenery are, some of them, inimitable" (229). According to this statement, Southworth alone possesses the ability to capture and represent the Southern negro spirit of the time. It is slightly confusing that Freeman even chooses to include Southworth as an example of a distinguished southern woman, considering that Southworth fought for the Union in the Civil War. While many southerners would perceive this allegiance as a betrayal and invalidate Southworth's depictions of black characters by instilling them with certain favorable characteristics or liberties, Freeman chooses to ignore these tendencies in favor of her accuracy.

Freeman further confuses the strict delineation between Southern and Northern mindsets in her evaluation of Southworth's portrayal of her antagonists. Freeman states, "even the 'villain of the plot' does his devoir with an unmalicious, deprecating grace, that excites in us only a desire to win him from his evil way, and make a taking little saint of him" (236). In a novel such as *Prince of Darkness,* this trend is particularly evident if one chooses to read the ending in a way that vindicates Wallraven for his social crime. Wallraven forgives his mad bride of her crime of passion and places all of the blame on himself for attempting to deceive such a pure beauty with his last dying breaths. He does not blame society for his unjust position and misguided morality that necessitated his passing. In a contemporary sense, we do not feel that his deception requires an explanation or justifies his murder at the hand of his enraged bride, and are more eager to ascribe the culpability to a morally corrupt society with incorrect perceptions of racial equality. It seems that according to Freeman, Southworth constructs her villains in a way that indicates the larger sin lies with society than within them. One could guess from Freeman's piece that the nineteenth century society had more sympathy for Wallraven than for his insane bride who had been corrupted by his hidden blackness, and would be more willing to damn her in support of this wronged man than to support her vigilante social justice.

The antislavery work done by Southworth's novels is most evident when Dale Bauer's concept of "moral insanity" from her article "Why Read E.D.E.N Southworth?" is applied. Bauer expresses that Southworth discusses moral insanity, particularly mania, "in order to expand it from some individual complaint into a national pandemic. Southworth's 'moral insanities'—a chronic impairment of one's ethical register—suggest how trapped her characters are in their confrontation over legal and moral issues" (2). Bauer discusses Southworth's use of moral insanity as an instrument of discussing moral duty:

> Unlike mental insanity, moral insanities could be eventually dismissed once moral duty prevailed. Such moral responsibilities point to the rituals in U.S. culture that needed to be changed—from women's legal roles to national laws, like the immorality of death penalties. The idea of 'moral insanity'—whether about maternal power, racial justice, or legal rights—repeats in Southworth, over and over, to remind us why moral values exceed intellectual depth. (18-19)

The use of moral insanity through mania in her plot most likely resonated with her readers more easily than her use of complex political allegory and the racial unconscious. If the reader feels challenged by inconsistencies within their alignment to characters of varying racial backgrounds, the instances of moral insanities help to suggest social perspective and secure the reader's sympathies. It is because of these moments of moral insanity that Southworth's writing can be interpreted as a vehicle for social change.

Bauer's theory is most applicable to the characters of Regina and Old Nell. Bauer suggests that for Southworth "mania often brings with it overestimation of one's social worth, or uncontrollable desires" (7). Bauer's claim recalls Old Nell's admonishment of Regina's pride and her warning of her downfall, which occurs due to an "overestimation" of her own social superiority. Regina must be subject to mania because of her inability to sacrifice her erroneously elevated position within the racial hierarchy and to accept Wolfgang with compassion for his torment over his social repression, and instead condemning him for his father's sins. Bauer also indicates that "'moral insanity' occurs, for Southworth, as a result of failed or skewed judgment" (4). Southworth indicates Regina's

"mad majesty" as an incarnation of this moral insanity rooted in poor judgment (191). While on the surface, one might perceive this failed judgment as Regina's inability to foresee Wolfgang's deception in passing. However, by aligning the readers' sympathies with Wolfgang at the moment of his death, Southworth indicates that Regina's entire understanding of racial hierarchies as a basis for justifying the murder to be the real occurrence of failed judgment. By inflicting Regina with moral insanity, Southworth comments on the "skewed" condition of the South's racial construction.

Bauer suggests that Southworth used moral insanities as a way to indicate necessary social change and explore possible resolutions of complex social problems:

> Re-inscribing the value of moral order and familial duty resolves almost all of Southworth's manias, especially about domestic commitment and national values. While mania disrupts family relations, it also shows their reconfiguration in order to ascertain the nature of citizenship in the U.S. The moral capability of the brain—the inner self, or the soul—must be saved. (3)

While the resolution of these insanities in *Prince of Darkness* seems to offer a clear and simple morality, Southworth inscribes the resolutions as a reflection of the social complexity. In her moral mania, Regina murders Wolfgang as an attempt to rid society of his contamination and restore the order racial hierarchy. However, Wolfgang's death proves to be a greater tragedy than a triumph since his crime stemmed not from maliciousness but from desperation caused by wrongful oppression, and the normal order of society cannot in good conscience return to its original state. Regina's false justice and flawed morality regarding race has permanently damaged the status quo. Thus, Regina cannot overcome her moral insanity to become sane again. Southworth can find no other way to rectify the social rift than through Regina's death.

When comparing instances of moral insanity and moral duty in Southworth's writing, Bauer notes the trend that "These repetitions of 'moral insanity' as personal codifications of a national affliction keep fueling Southworth's plots" (16). Bauer explains

that Southworth preferred to repeat moral insanities in her narratives because "they enabled her to experiment with the narrative means for overcoming them" (16). Southworth often contrasted "unruly passion" and "cherished duty," the virtue she found most important, though Bauer notes that, "In almost every case, the hero or heroine chooses a lover to feel for, even when that love is different enough from the American norm to cause anxiety or disaster" (16). Southworth does not allow Regina to follow this pattern, however, and this deviance from her prescribed formula would most likely have caught the attention of avid readers of her serial works. For Regina, the choice between her duty to her position of social and racial superiority and duty to her lover is clear. She chooses to enforce this racial norm of condemning passing, though it is the affirmation of the norm, rather than its dismissal in favor of compassion, that is troubling for readers.

Bauer also asserts that in Southworth's novels, "mental illness—whether it means becoming an incarnate fiend...— suggests a range of possible identities affected by cultural change" (5). This claim recalls Southworth's description of mad Old Nell with her "fiendish grin" (186). While Old Nell could be considered morally insane instead of mentally ill because of her association with and the social and racial breach committed by Wallraven Sr., her delusions as to her exact relationship to Wallraven's wife give the reader an impression of mental instability. Old Nell is indeed an identity "affected by cultural change," since she only appears in the plot at moments when Wallraven's racial transgression comes to light. One can divine from Southworth's story that if society does not embrace cultural change and lessen racial repression, figures like Old Nell stand to become more common. This assumption is supported by Southworth's failure to offer plot resolution for Old Nell, instead allowing her to slip back into the social unconscious. Regina, too, exhibits mania that develops from temporary moral insanity to permanent mental illness when her actions cannot return order to society. Southworth suggests that if society does not change, many more people will find themselves violently impaired like Regina when they cannot reconcile their morality to the changing status quo. Even the figure of Wolfgang Wallraven risks the possibility of becoming reality, (though he sacrifices himself before he can become insane) when members of this society face "the necessary

juggling of identity to fix the gap between private desire and public duty" (18). Through the characterization and the intersection of two families, the Wallravens and the Fairfields, Southworth points to broader social consequences that she foresees as resulting from the oppressive racial hierarchy in the pre-Civil War South.

Bauer claims that "justice for Southworth results from resolving the mania and passion as dangers to U.S. culture" (17). The conclusion of *Prince of Darkness* demonstrates Southworth's discomfort with the status quo of her current society and her call for change, since the justice enacted by Regina is hollow. Even Regina's death cannot erase the impact of the events on this society, since the story will continue to be told, as it has been to the frame narrator. Southworth's flat ending demonstrates a deviation from her usual pattern of resolving mania, since removing the cause of the social problem does not negate the effect of the racial danger. Society cannot simply return to the way things have always been, but must make changes to prevent further tragedies stemming from racial repression.

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