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Kellie-Sue Martinucci
Syracuse University

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis explores the genre of sentimental elegy within Antebellum Victorian America, drawing on affect studies, American religious history, and Black critical theory in order to contextualize the particular socio-political and religious influences that shaped the medium of the sentimental elegy and its role within Victorian America. This is punctuated by a close reading of six personal elegies written by Black and white women in the years 1855-1865. By attending to the differential application of sentimental norms about human bodies and their capacities for thought and feeling, this paper identifies the personal sentimental elegy as a technology of the self that was uniquely accessible to middle- and upper-class Victorian Americans, especially women, through which they mediated and navigated changing ideas about Christian cosmology, embodiment, and sentiment alongside their own personal and existential griefs. Although sentimental elegy is often reduced to one single and comprehensive genre, this project's comparison of the different themes and motives that undergird elegies written by Black and white Victorian women complicates this tendentious categorization and encourages a re-examination of the medium.

Finding “A Self to Speak Of”: Affective Enactments of the Self in Black and White Victorian
Women’s Elegies

by

Kellie-Sue Martinucci

B.A., Allegheny College, 2018

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Religion.

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I extend my eternal gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Gail Hamner, for her ceaseless guidance and support throughout the thesis-writing process and a very challenging two years and a half years, without which I would never have arrived at this point. Many thanks are also owed to my first reader, Dr. Shannon Novak, whose work and wisdom have time and again brought me back to the joy and curiosity that first brought me to study death. My thanks go out to each professor whose compassion and encouragement helped me find the strength and courage to continue the work—especially to Dr. Timur Hammond, whose kindness and understanding helped me make space for gratitude in the midst of grief and frustration.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my own “beloved shade”, the inimitable Daniel Blaise Gray, who left us on January 17th, 2022; to his brother, David Robert Gray, who preceded him in death on July 5th, 2007; to their sister, Karen Marie Gray, who followed Dan and David to the other side on December 5th, 2022; and, beyond all else, to their mother Mary Golba, who survives them with incomparable grace and strength. We’ll see you, Space Cowboys—someday, somewhere.

The quoted portion of my thesis’ title, “A Self to Speak Of”, comes from page 23 of Joycelyn Moody’s *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*, a book that was instrumental in my conception of this project.

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Introduction

The sentimental genre—and especially the sentimental elegy—has had a bad reputation for over 300 years. As early as 1722, Benjamin Franklin used a letter from his satirical character “Silence Dogood” to publicly condemn the sentimental style of the elegy as provincial and formulaic by prescribing a “Receipt”, or recipe, for their composition. For an excellent elegy, one need simply extol (or fabricate) the virtues of a deceased neighbor, add in his “last Words, dying Expressions,” etc., and season them with “a Handful or two of Melancholy Expressions” about mortal condition to be printed and displayed broadly (Cavitch 3-4). In the introduction to his book *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*, author Max Cavitch includes Silence Dogood’s recipe to caution his readers against allowing satire like Franklin’s to prevent them from taking seriously the cultural and literary significance of the elegy; yet only pages earlier, Cavitch flippantly gestures to sentimental elegies as “dull repositories of borrowed affect” (Cavitch 1). Nonetheless, for the commoner of the eighteenth century, to die without being elegized was almost like being buried in an unmarked grave, and since the turn of the twenty-first century theorists in affect studies¹ have been returning to sentimentalism to better understand America’s current social and political climate. This thesis draws on affect studies, Black critical theory, and American religious history to explore the religious, social, scientific, and political situations of the nineteenth century in which the sentimental elegy experienced its greatest popularity and cultural significance, punctuated by a close reading of six personal elegies written by Black and white women in the years 1855-1865.

¹To name a few working in specifically American contexts, see Lauren Berlant (especially 1991 and 2008), Mary Chapman & Glenn Hendler (1999), Kyla Schuller (2018), Lisa Mendelman (2019), and Xine Yao (2021).

As a literary mode, sentimentalism has experienced over a century of profound dismissal, in large part because the expressive mode that once dominated and exemplified the (normative, dominant, though not exclusively white) American psyche became nearly unintelligible to the public (or at least to its critics) by the early twentieth century even as it continued to inform what it meant to *be* an American subject. For instance, the poet Lydia H. Sigourney was considered the foremost in the field of sentimental poetry, something of a female Henry Wadsworth Longfellow by the measure of many nineteenth century critics, and her poems could be found in the parlors of upper- and middle-class (primarily white) households across the entirety of the nation. But by the time Gordon S. Haight looked to write her biography in 1930, titled *Mrs. Sigourney, The Sweet Singer of Hartford*, the merit and intrigue of her work had (allegedly) become inscrutable, and the forms of social and cultural exchange of which they were a hallmark fell out of fashion (Kete 12-13). The purposes served by the writing and exchanging of sentimental verses by Victorians were embedded in intricate customs of communal exchange that, though they may have seemed quite obvious and timeless to many of their contemporary authors and collaborators, were relatively short-lived and particular to nineteenth century ways of social relation, mediated through an expressive but similarly dated form of material culture.

Although the genre of sentimentalism is long considered outdated in American public opinion, it has continued to determine dominant relational models for American social and political contexts. To reflect this, one of my central goals in this project is to broaden our perception of sentimentalism in literature. Although the term sentimentalism is largely used to refer to nineteenth century American literature, especially grief or consolation literature written by women, many contemporary scholars have defined it more holistically as a social-relational model defined by a "desire for union... a manifestation of the belief in or yearning for

consonance—or even unity—of principle and purpose" (Barnes 1996, 598). Building from Barnes' definition, Joycelyn Moody characterizes sentimental writing as "literature that paradoxically both assumes and seeks to bring about an emotional and moral alliance between reader and text (an alliance at once so mystical and material that critics generally read it as excessive), an intimacy that is rooted in common cultural assumptions about virtue and piety" (9). These common cultural assumptions point also to the lingering tensions that arise when the relational model of sentiment fails; although it still asserts itself as universal, as Schuller and Yao demonstrate, the language of sentiment is deeply embedded in the racial and scientific projects of the nineteenth century, and so it often fails to account for the social, political, and ontological differences between America's sentiments subjects and its "unfeeling", marginalized others.

I chose the sentimental spiritual elegy as the medium for exploring this topic because it remains central to American culture even if contemporary Americans have largely distanced it from its more formal, religious, funerary functions. For example, popular American music across many genres continues to imagine eventual reunions with loved ones in heaven²; in the era of social media, the Facebook pages of dead loved ones become sites for sentimental collaboration, eulogies have become increasingly more free-form and creative, while shifts in material culture make it possible to make mourning sites out of bumper stickers and air-brushed T-shirts. In the wake of COVID-19; of the incessant, incremental rise in violent and systemic deaths caused by racism, misogyny, homophobia, and gun violence; and in the encroachment of global climate disaster, death is on America's doorstep. People are looking for meaningful practices by which to signify their lives and the lives of their own beloved dead, so it feels pertinent to look back to

² To name a few demonstratively disparate examples: "If Heaven Wasn't So Far Away", by Justin Moore; "I Will Follow You into the Dark", by Death Cab for Cutie; "See You Again (feat. Charlie Puth)", by Wiz Khalifa; "In The Arms of an Angel", By Sarah McLachlan.

one of the earliest forms of commemorative funerary writing that has been practiced on the continent.

Outline

My first chapter provides the historical and religious context necessary for understanding the phenomena of the sentimental spiritualist elegy and its near ubiquity across bourgeois mourning practices in nineteenth century America. I first explore the theological and cosmological development of spiritualism across American Protestant sects from the mid-eighteenth century onward, as well as the sensational pop-culture performances and rituals that would come to be known as Modern Spiritualism after 1848, which were notoriously popular among young women. Next, I explore sentimentalism, both as a literary mode and as a form of social relation among bourgeois communities that was especially facilitated by or defined by its literary expressions. Finally, I end by exploring the history of the elegy as a funerary custom among American Protestants from the colonial era onward, and contextualize the way both spiritualism and sentimentalism converge in the nineteenth century elegy's defining characteristics.

In the second chapter, I situate white bourgeois women's labor in the affective and material care for the dead in mid-nineteenth century America within the context of white women's sentimental literature. I explore three themes in particular: the scientific and ontological construction of the white female body and its literary parallels; the liberal progressive project of temporal navigations through domestic literature; and lastly, the role of the imagined community of lady's magazine readership in nineteenth century nation-building discourse. I then end on a selection of three white women's elegies from *Godey's Lady's*

Magazine from 1855-1865, each of which corresponds with at least one of the chapter's central themes.

My third chapter is structured similarly, but shifts to attend to elegiac works by Black women in the nineteenth century. In it, I explore the particular history and significance of elegies by Black women in the North American context, drawing on Christina Sharpe to situate Black women's grief work in the literal and figurative wake of the Atlantic slave trade. I then draw on scholars in African American literary studies and American religions to explore how sentimental literary conventions and Christian theology and ontology were employed by Black women poets to assert themselves as fully human persons who played an instrumental role in the enactment of God's cosmological plan. I finish this chapter again by exploring how these themes are enacted in a selection of three elegies authored by Black women and published in *The Christian Recorder* between 1855-1865, with a brief conclusion of the themes consistent across them.

Literature Review

In this project I draw on a broad variety of scholars across topics of American religion, race, nineteenth-century American literature, and affect theory as my primary theoretical lenses—an amalgam that is fairly representative of the project's themes, as I have sought to contextualize the contemporaneous changes in funerary practice, Protestant cosmology, and women's print culture up to 1865 that coalesced to produce the unique world of the sentimental elegy. Although there have been many projects that individually explore Black or white women's sentimental and spiritualist literature, most projects on Black women authors focus on the novel or autobiography, while most studies of sentimentalism and Victorian gender construction attend specifically to white women. Additionally, other scholarly works on elegy or sentimentalism often do not situate the two within the context of the rapid changes in religion—and especially in

Christian cosmology—that took place from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, so I have sought to ground the entire project in the context of American spiritualism.

For the historical grounding of funerary practices in the nineteenth century, I have drawn on Gary Laderman's *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* for a detailed lineage of mainstream religious and cultural practices among white Protestants, attending to material culture as well as religious and philosophical doctrine. Laderman's project is, however, limited in its attention to experiences of and practices relating to death across divides of gender, class, and race. To supplement it, I have drawn on Michael Sappol's work, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*, which is instrumental for tracing the ways religious, social, and medical ideas about the body changed over the course of the nineteenth century. In particular, Sappol's work informs historical background on material and cultural practices of medical science as they intersected with the world of burial, and tracks the unique position of Black and other marginalized Americans in the social and political battles fought over the sanctity of graves and bodies. For additional information on Black funeral culture, I have drawn on Erik Seeman's book *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800*, which provides valuable historical context for the progression of Black funeral culture across the Americas and traces some of the material and social customs that made it distinct and the racially motivated legal proscriptions that sought to limit it.

I have also relied on Erik Seeman's *Speaking with the Dead in Early America*, which explores the ways Americans related to the dead through prayer, elegy, and popular customs from the colonial era through the Victorian period. For additional information on the genre of elegy in historical Protestant American funerary practice, I have drawn on Max Cavitch's

American Elegy. There are several limitations to Cavitch's project, which fails to take seriously the importance of women's sentimental elegies and offers a rather reductive view of Black elegiac traditions; however, the historical lineage he provides for the development of the elegy from the colonial era through the nineteenth century is incredibly detailed and thus invaluable to my project.

I have drawn on Mary Louise Kete's work in *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth Century America* to explore the ways the sentimental elegy was deployed within a model of social relation and exchange particular to middle-class Victorian families. Because her work primarily focused on the white families whose personal archives she had access to, I have also drawn on Jasmine Nichole Cobb's work in her article "'Forget Me Not': Free Black Women and Sentimentality" to contextualize the same practices of material-social culture among middle-class Black families in the Victorian era.

One of my primary sources for situating white women's elegies is American literary scholar Marianne Noble. Noble's work in *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* draws from feminist historians like Ann Douglas and on feminist literary criticism with the intention of reading sentimental literature as agential, both within and against nineteenth century norms. She draws on a number of theorists—including Kristeva, for theories on abjection; Lacan and Freud for theories of mother-child attachment and psycho-sexual relation; and Cvetkovich—for models of reading trauma and affect. Together these theories create an analytical framework that explores how affects that were culturally tied to masochistic experience were mobilized by sentimental authors to trigger certain feelings, mirrored between themselves and their readers.

For both historical grounding and theoretical concepts regarding the racial science of women's bodies and affects in nineteenth century America, I have drawn on Kyla Schuller's

work in *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*. Schuller provides a reading of 19th century sentimentalism as a productive force of biopower in its use of evolutionary race science to bolster and protect Victorian American womanhood (3).

Challenging older readings of 19th century women's literature as "apolitical", informed by scholars like Ann Douglas, Schuller traces how the biopolitical logics that constructed the (white) human as an "impressable" body relied upon a "sentimental politics of life" (4), through which science and sentimentalism combined to establish race and sex as biological determinants of the human subject. I additionally draw on Xine Yao's *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America*, which builds from Schuller's and similar projects on race and literature in nineteenth century America to explore how the others of Victorian America experienced differential access to the language and authority of sentimentalism. Her work contextualizes the way that racialized subjects' modes of modes of expression and feeling resist, reject, and exceed the norms set by sentimentalism through works of nineteenth century fiction.

My third chapter uses Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* for its theoretical grounding. Because so little scholarly work has been done specifically on personal elegies by Black women, I turn to Sharpe's polysemic concept of "Wake Work", which indexes the varied labors of attending to the social, political, and ontological aftermaths of the Atlantic slave trade in the past and present. I also draw on Judith Butler's *Frames of War* for theorizing the way defiant acts of grief and mourning can work to identify and authorize modes of life that do not conform to hegemonic norms of the human, and from Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics* in order to authorize Black women's literature as a medium for communicating culturally specific ethics and virtues that reflect the social, political, and material situation of the Black woman in nineteenth century America.

In the final chapter, I draw especially on Joycelyn Moody's work in *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women* for historical and theoretical methods of reading Victorian Black women's agency and dissent in their seemingly conventional works of sentimental literature. Moody's work provides a detailed analysis of several Black women's works, reading their self-representation as an expression not only of political and cultural agency, but specifically as an ontological authorization of Black beings' full humanity. Moody's analysis uproots earlier scholars' perceptions of Black women's sentimental literature as normative and apolitical performances of femininity and provides a framework for engaging with Black sentimental literature as a form of protest and resistance against white sentimental norms of the human.

Methods

In undertaking a comparative literary project that dealt with race, gender, and religion, I was guided by my committee toward several sources as more nuanced models of comparative projects. One of these was C. Nadia Seremetakis' *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*, which explores women's mourning performances in the Greek Mani peninsula. Her work locates practices of situated emotional expression as working as a Foucauldian "technique of the self", especially insofar as it relies on the production and performance of pain as "a semiotic practice that objectifies and synthesizes institutional norms and individual sensibility" (4). Her project has informed my own as a model for exploring the ways embodied, material, political, and social forces are woven into a single ritual within a work of lamentation, and manifest themselves therein. Seremetakis' *The Last Word* facilitates a reading of the elegy as a performative discursive space in which the display of pain synthesizes emotional force and body symbolism to construct "an affective enclave" in which alternative

constructions of the self and relations to social order can be formalized “as biographical testimony and oral history” alike (5). Although her focus is primarily on gendered divisions of experience, her framework is especially instructive for reading Black women’s poetry as a space where “the dissonance between self and society” is acted out.

Saba Mahmood’s *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* offers a complementary model. Her work on Egyptian women’s participation in Islamic life and their use of social, doctrinal, and embodied practices for cultivating an “ideal virtuous self” offers a framework for interrogating & complicating ideas of resistance and subversion that so often emerge in liberal feminist projects (2, 14). Mahmood’s project has informed a critical approach to sentimental women’s literature, in which I have sought to ask what white women authors had to gain by adhering to and constructing traditions that ultimately subordinate women to male authority (3).

In order to bridge the differences between the former authors’ approaches, I have used Annemarie Mol’s *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (2002) as a model for a comparative project that takes into account how “objects come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated” (5), which means by extension that “ontologies”, too, “are brought into being, sustained, or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, sociomaterial practices” (6). Mol frames this as attending to “enactment” rather than to knowledge, which allows us to explore how enactments are coordinated as plural and multiple *without* framing them as fragmentary parts of a singular whole (61). Mol’s concept of enactment allows me to compare the ways Black and white women made claims to humanity through sentimentalism as equally, but not singularly, sentimental, despite the fact that white sentimentalism sought to frame Blackness as irreconcilable with the norm of the human. Mol’s

model allows for comparisons that are not only disparate, but sometimes assert themselves as mutually exclusive, and thereby makes space to read how normative enactments of race or resistant enactments of Christian humanity coincide within the ritual project the personal elegy and the grief indexed therein.

I chose *Godey's Lady's Book* and *The Christian Recorder* for several reasons. Founded by Louis A. Godey in 1830, *Godey's Lady's Book* was at one time America's most popular monthly periodical. *The Christian Recorder*, though enjoying a significantly smaller readership, was the official periodical of African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, established in 1852 (Gardner 2006, 814). It was among the earliest African American newspapers in the United States, but more importantly it was one of the largest, most successful, and influential Black operated organizations in the United States, whose central goals were Christian proselytization and improving the literary and historical formation of Black persons in the nation (Kachun 651). Both periodicals were instrumental in publishing and circulating women-authored works in the nineteenth century, and though the scales of their production and distribution differed broadly, each was considered preeminent within their genres, enjoyed subscribers across a wide geographic spread, and prided themselves on disseminating information on science, world cultures, fashion, socially desirable comportment, and morality for the purpose of enriching their readerships.

In order to increase the grounds for comparison between poems and authors, I have limited my selections to the genre of "personal elegy"—elegies written regarding the death of a specific individual, rather than on the general facts of death and mortality—and have chosen poems by authors who were not primarily employed in writing novels or poetry at the time of the poem's publication. This is partly because many of the women professionally employed as

writers in the nineteenth century have already been written about exhaustively, but also because the elegy offers a mundane and quotidian window through which we can explore the ways spiritualism and sentimentalism permeated the average Victorian American's ideas about the self, life, and the afterlife.

Chapter One

It is difficult (futile) to demarcate spiritualism from sentimentalism in the culture of Victorian America. Each was a religious project to some extent, each navigated new social and scientific taxonomies and biological essentialisms, and each worked from an elaborate network of social and expressive frameworks. Although both are often characterized as “movements”, their function more closely resembled a cultural sensibility; each provided implicit rules for arranging beings and ideas and structuring their patterns of relation with one another, but without the steady figureheads or institutions that typically establish cultural ‘movements’. While both spiritualism and sentimentalism effected certain social, ontological, and political ends, and were explicitly held up by many contemporary activists as ideologies of reform and renewal, a closer look at their existence in the lives of less exceptional Victorian Americans reveals a more mundane dispersal through the fabric of nineteenth century society. For all that some of the most remembered champions of spiritualism and sentimentalism would structure and outline their tenets as distinct political and religious ideologies, there were thousands more who engaged with them casually, hosting mediumship parties in their parlor rooms and exchanging sentimental verses in the “books” of their friends and families in remembrance of bygone loved ones. While the two sensibilities intermingled in many parts of Victorian culture, I have found elegy to be one medium where spiritualist and sentimental ideologies are most easily discernable/traceable.

This chapter provides a (brief, abridged) historical context for spiritualism, sentimentalism, and the medium of the American elegy as a particularly fruitful locus of intersection between spiritualism and sentimentalism within the Victorian American context. Many topics touched upon here will be revisited in greater detail during later chapters. My intention is not to provide an exhaustive account, but rather to provide a foundation in the

knowledge necessary to situate each subject within the rapidly changing cultural and political contexts of its time, and structure and contextualize the analysis of Black and white women's sentimental elegies in the second and third chapters.

Spiritualism

Although countless sources have detailed the history of the spiritualist movement and ideology, Brett Carroll's account of its establishment in *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (1997) provides a particularly succinct and accessible genealogy of spiritualism's forebears. At its broadest, spiritualism can be described as a religious orientation that identified the soul as an enduring locus of the human personality, which did not disappear or cease after death but endured, retained a human agency, and could be communicated with through a number of rituals and practices. Spiritualism was not tied to one singular core doctrine, but rather spread rapidly in the public consciousness, effecting widespread changes in beliefs about the cosmological arrangement of the worlds of the living and the dead across religious denominations from its formal inception during the eighteenth century. While this section will deal with those individuals who have been given the most formal credit for shaping spiritualism, it is worth noting that Protestants in America were imagining the souls of the dead and their otherworldly homes nearly 100 years before Swedenborg would become a household name in the oral and printed narratives of "visionaries". Visions of the dead appear in personal narratives as early as the English Civil War and Interregnum period in mid-seventeenth century England, and regained popularity in the Americas starting around the Whitefieldian revivals of the 1740s. They were told or written from the perspective of an individual who "takes ill, appears to die, travels to heaven and hell with an angel, sees familiar people, and revives to tell the tale" (Seeman 125). These accounts were distinct from earlier and other contemporary Protestant images of heaven in

that the deceased were understood as extant in a describable (embodied, if not corporeal) shape and condition, imagining the possibilities of an eventual reunion with them in the world to come and presenting the possibility that the living could feasibly communicate with the deceased in some form. Likewise, many historians consider the Shakers and Mormons to both be precursors of (the capital-S) Spiritualism of 1848-onward, as the founders of each religion (in the 1740s and 1820s, respectively) claimed to be influenced in the formation of their religions by spirits and spirit-like beings with whom they could communicate (Carroll 22; Hardinge-Britton, 233). All this to say that, while the names of the learned men in the next paragraphs continue to claim some historical ownership of spiritualism, it may be more accurate to understand them as having informed and given specificity to a *Geist* that was already shaping American ontological sensibilities.

Credit for spiritualism's central principles is often attributed to historians to Franz Mesmer, Charles Fourier, and especially to Emmanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's writings—based on a series of mystical trances, visions, and dreams he experienced and recorded between the 1740s and his death in the 1770s—outlined a metaphysical system in which physical matter and spirit were no longer mutually exclusive, but instead were “complementary and inseparable dimensions of a single and universal whole” (Carroll 17). This world was not discoverable through sensory and empirical observation as with Enlightenment era sciences, but was supposed to be intuited, revealed to the inner eye by the spirits. The afterlife as he imagined it in his most influential work, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell* (1758), was intricately complex, composed of a hierarchy of heavenly and hellish spheres within which earth was centrally situated, and as such a place of order and balance. This form of afterlife served as a source of certainty and security for those who believed in it and notably more earthlike and familiar than earlier

Christian doctrines had envisioned (17-18). Although some of the finer details of Swedenborg's intricate cosmology did not carry over into the nineteenth century, most of the beliefs that came to be identified as central to spiritualism—belief in an intrinsic divinity at the core of each human individual (the soul/spirit), interaction/interpenetration between the spirit and material worlds, a spirit-centered cosmic order, and practices for direct communication with spirits—originated in his writing. As such, he is considered spiritualism's most important source.

In addition to Swedenborg's cosmological configuration, ideas that derived (loosely) from the works of Franz Mesmer—situated somewhere between science and mysticism—provided spiritualists not only with a framework for a universe bound together by invisible spiritual matter, but also provided a method for entering a trance-like state through the effects of magnets, which could be transmitted to other beings. Charles Fourier's contributions to spiritualism were markedly less metaphysical than the other formative spiritualist thinkers, but offered a more tangible social formation for the earthly participants of spiritualism. Fourier was a philosopher and early socialist thinker whose utopian vision under the doctrine of "Association" saw humans as parts of a larger, "socio-spiritual whole", exemplified by small cooperative communities (Carroll 18). Fourier's utopianism bled together with Swedenborgian and Mesmerist ideas in the works of Andrew Jackson Davis, known to some as a visionary and others as a hack after the publication of his *Principles of Nature* in the short-lived but influential religious ideology called "harmonialism" (Seeman 260; Carroll 22). Davis and his fellow harmonialists (a group made up almost exclusively of educated white men) were the earliest group to pursue the form of spiritual communication we call the séance, although they would conduct these as well as induce trances in pursuit of medical and scientific knowledge (Carroll 20). Although harmonialism as such would fade, most of the beliefs upheld by its adherents

would be adopted into the spiritualist movement at the end of the 1840s. In addition to the works of these individual theorists, spiritualism was influenced by several liberal theologies of the century, including Romanticism, Transcendentalism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and some popular Quaker philosophies (Carroll 19-20). These were generally characterized by a turn away from Calvinist determinism toward a belief in a merciful God through whom *all* humans could be saved and preserved for eternal life, and ideas of “natural” religion, an inner “light” intrinsic to the human subject, (19).

Erik Seeman differentiates these participants in the early (lowercase s) spiritualism or “spiritism” of the late 18th and early 19th centuries from the Modern Spiritualists of 1848 and onward, as well as from those spiritualists who participated in “the cult of the dead” (266). His differentiation is grounded in the fact members of this group self-identified *as* Spiritualists, and recognized themselves as distinct—though not wholly divorced—from other contemporary Christian sects, on the basis of their practice of seances, mediumship, spirit rapping, and the like (267). By contrast, the religious observance for spiritist death-cultists would usually take the shape of traditional prayer and doctrine of their chosen Christian sects but augmented by an intentional continued relationship with their dead loved ones through memorial practices. Victorians had many different ways of sustaining the memory of the deceased³ that constituted part of the cult of the dead, but of most relevance to this project is the recording of personalized prayers and prayer-like poems written in the personal “book” or album of a mourner; these could be sung, read aloud, or simply read and re-read, and the careful hand in which they were written suggests that the authors would practice and perfect them on scrap paper before they were finally

³These practices varied widely, but hair trinkets/jewelry and photographs of the dead body with the living family around it are two infamous Victorian examples that operated on the visual and material continuity of the dead body; for more on material and embodied memory practice, see Hallam and Hockey *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (2001) 2020 (136, 152).

copied in a personal album (Seeman 260-261). These were often written in the “self-consciously archaic” style of the King James biblical translation, (245, 260). The cult of the dead was also notably lacking in the expectation that the dead would communicate back by the very nature of their residing in “the land of silance” [sic]; the aim of their prayers was ostensibly not for the dead to intercede or acknowledge their address so much as to continue some social element of their relationship across the rift imposed by death (247).

Although Spiritualism and the spiritist death cult were commonplace across much of North America throughout the nineteenth century, historians identify one particular region as something of a hotspot for Modern Spiritualist sects. In the area known as the “Burnt-Over District” (including mostly the regions of New York State to the west of the Catskill and Adirondack mountains, and along the Mohawk River valley), a period of religious revival and reformation known as “The Great Revival” in the late 18th and early 19th centuries would (ostensibly) sow the seeds for the eccentricity, fervor, and moral intensity that are thought to have facilitated Spiritualism’s rapid development in the middle of the century. These revival efforts were led by primarily Methodist, Baptist, and some Congregationalist ministers who came to Central, Upstate, and Western New York from the more religiously “staid” communities of New England to proselytize to a nearly constant supply of young “Yankee” transplants” (Cross 11). These mostly unmarried young men were allegedly quite engaged in the sins of drinking⁴, cussing, and breaking the sabbath—sins which were largely attributed to a lack of religious social organization at the familial and communal levels. The “Burnt-Over” descriptor referred to places where these revival initiatives had taken hold, and the metaphorical,

⁴ A popular complaint, since the religious revivals moved through the region hand-in-hand with the budding Temperance movement, which was itself a product of revival culture. (Weisberg 37).

spiritual fires they had kindled (Cross 3). The defining characteristic of these regions was their enthusiastic, emotional, idiosyncratic spiritual character—a “congenital characteristic” of the region, where individuals would sometimes undergo many conversions as different ministers cycled through the area, keeping the ideas of some sects and foregoing others as they continuously pursued newer and better ways to express their faith (4).

At the same time that the spiritual or “spiritist” thinkers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries paved the way for spiritualism among more academic groups of younger men, spiritist influence was trickling down into Victorian American pop-culture. Mediumship practices like “spirit-rapping”⁵ and seances had as their precursors popular ghost stories in newspapers, pamphlets, and novels, as well as books instructing the reader in conjuring and parlor tricks for frightening your friends and guests (Weisberg 27). Traveling magic shows and other performers likewise employed optical illusions, sleight of hand, and other relatively teachable tricks of the trade to take advantage of the “credulous” and “superstitious” among the audience. Victorian American pop culture flirted with the idea that spirits could communicate actively with the living, borrowing in nearly equal parts from familiar superstitious traditions and developing spiritualist philosophies and techniques. These ideas were bolstered by developments in technology and material culture like the photograph and the telegram: both produced material traces that facilitated visual and sensory recollections of the dead by the living, and thereby bolstered perceptions of the dead as “accessible entities” (Hallam and Hockey 199).

⁵ It’s worth note that “rapping” or “scratching” by spirits to communicate with the living had been widely and not infrequently publicized in American and British print alike from the 1730s-onward, the most notable of these being the story of the “Cock Lane ghost” of 1762 (Seeman 116-117). The events at Cock Lane were exceedingly popular and strikingly similar to the events at the Fox Sisters’ house in Hydesville.

It is likely the confluence of all the above factors that primed not only the Fox sisters for their encounter/performance in Hydesville, but also their neighbors and, eventually, their national and international audience to entertain the possibility of its truth. While staying in a frame-house in Hydesville, NY, a little town in the Burnt-Over District, during March of 1848, the family continuously heard “rapping” and scratching sounds within the home over a period of several days, and they finally summoned a neighbor to come be witness, after which point more and more members of the community would crowd into the frame-house to hear the rapper stirring (Braude 12-21). The two youngest Fox girls communicated with the source of the rappings with their witness present, asking that it knock a certain number of times to indicate its answers, and from those answers they concluded that they were speaking to the spirit of a traveling peddler who had been wrongfully killed and buried in the cellar. This spurred a nearly instant onslaught of local and international attention that would inadvertently transform the spiritist works of the previous century into “Modern Spiritualism”, as one reporter would come to label it (148).

From the relatively unsophisticated “rappings” of the Fox sisters, many new practices of communication with the dead were discovered, developed, or gained new popularity as Spiritualism became a popular fad (Braude 18). Spirit-rapping quickly unfolded far beyond the incidental scene at the Hydesville house as friends and curious observers provided better and more efficient ways to communicate with the spirits by calling out the letters of the for the spirit to spell whole words (as opposed to the strictly yes-or-no questions posed by the Fox girls (Weisberg 60). Mediumship quickly expanded beyond the “simple” ability to detect and communicate with a present spirit to include “automatic writing”, in which the spirit moved the medium’s hands to write for them; healing mediumship, in which the medium saw into the ailing

body to prescribe its treatment; speaking mediums, who would speak to an audience with the voice a deceased loved one (not their own); and general attempts at mediumship through séance and “spirit circles”, in which groups (ideally alternating man/woman in the circle for maximum harmony) would attempt to manifest a spirit to speak to them through rappings or other similar forms of communication (20-21).

While the mediumship trends inspired by the Fox sisters sparked a fire from the kindling laid by earlier popular and intellectual spiritualist developments, they were not accepted universally. Beyond the denial or decrying as blasphemy by many critics, spiritualist beliefs and practices were feared as spectacles of “miscegenous encounter” by conservative voices of the 19th century, as many spiritualist practices implied a spectral convertibility and permeability that threatened the precarious (ontological) categories of being, gender, and race as they were understood by Victorians (Brooks 15). This “dangerous” capaciousness identified within spiritualist practices and performances is explored by Daphne A. Brooks in her book *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*, which explores in depth the origins of many spiritualist practices and ideas within the religious world of African/trans-Atlantic diasporic practice. Her reading of spiritualism and the many reformers who embraced it engages with the way Anglo-American spiritualism was “haunted” by African religious practices, ways of remembering the bodies of Black folk and other “socially dead characters”, borrowing from Orlando Patterson, of the American imaginary/historical landscape in ways that pushed back at the borders between spirit and flesh (16).

In particular, practices like mediumship and “spirit-rapping” both involved the temporary possession of a body, (usually a white woman’s,) by spirits whose ethnic/racial identity starkly contrasted and undermined the identifiers of the host’s bodies, desegregating the dead within the

body of the host (15, 21). These spiritual performances were understood *especially* by their critics to enact an imaginary “co-mingling of souls” and thereby an imagined “feeling-with” (even “feeling-*as*), albeit to different intended ends depending on what sort of performance was involved; in either case, the “actual” identity of the channeling host was threatened (27-28). Not only was there fear that the “lower spirits” might not exit a body once they had laid claim to in during the séance, trance, or spirit-rapping event, but the body became unintelligible while inhabited: “the spirit of a deceased *gentleman* enters the body of a young *lady*! ... Well, then, which is it...? a lady or a gentleman?” (17). This invisible infiltration of inappropriately raced and sexed bodies was almost directly mirrored in contemporary discourse on the “dangerous” proliferation of almost-indistinguishably mixed-race bodies as a result/evidence of the sexual immorality of Southern slaveowners, especially represented in the figure of the so-called “white mulatta” (20). In other words, Spiritualism was imagined as doing *internally* what miscegenation was already doing *externally*: destabilizing Victorian security in the conclusions they made based on taxonomic and phenotypic evidence.

Brooks’ analysis compares these more “conventional” Anglo-American spiritualist acts practiced by white abolitionists to the more “vulgar” performance traditions of pantomime, minstrelsy, and sensational melodramas that made up the bulk of transatlantic Victorian popular (read: non-elite) theatre (21). In providing a lineage for some of the most popular nineteenth century traditions of phantasmagoria and Spiritualism alike, Brooks illustrates how the ways these practices tested and pushed back against the supposedly hereditary categories of race, gender, and class, as well as how they creatively navigated the boundaries of death, drew heavily on (unacknowledged) African practices, and on the capaciousness of Blackness and Black bodies (20, 25). The performance of this bodily and spiritual co-mingling by privileged white men and

women functioned more for “white self-exploration” than for any meaningful appeal for the humanity of the Black subject (16, 25). Anglo-Spiritualism flirted with the idea of a world uninhibited by the strict boundaries of Victorian society, but where Black bodies and identities remained available as rhetorical and synecdochic devices, emptied and flattened in order to be mobilized by white spiritualists or made caricatures by men in Blackface (25). The second chapter will further explore the precarious construction of the Victorian spirit and body, especially as it pertains to sentimental logics of womanhood and race.

Sentimentalism

As I explored in the introduction to the thesis, sentimentalism is often only understood in relation to its literary expressions—those novels, poems, pamphlets and essays of the 19th century that either extolled moral sense theory or modeled it through their characters’ lives. While these genres do provide the most tangible forms of sentimentalism, insofar as they are materially present and often self-identify as sentimental, the logic of sentimentalism was indebted to Protestant religious dispositions toward the mind, body, and senses, and characterized much of early American social and political discourse. My aim in this section is, first, to illustrate the social economy in which sentimental literature operated among upper- and middle-class white and Black Americans and, second, to provide clarity to the subject of Sentimentalism whose history has been as muddied by its reputation as by the vacillating regard granted it by literary, historical, and feminist scholarship for more than a century.

At its broadest, sentimentalism represented a moral philosophy that situated itself in opposition to older ideals of Protestant interiority, rationalism, and self-control (Cavitch 5). “Moral Sense Theory”, or as Adam’s Smith called it in 1759, the “Theory of Moral Sentiments”, outlined an anti-Enlightenment ethos that identified feeling as the best source of human morality;

as a feeling or passion arose in one person, “an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of any spectator (Smith 10, via Yao 12-13). Adherents, as well as their sentimentalist successors, saw the realm of “sympathetic emotion” and the bodily sensations it triggered as instrumental to the moral development of the human spirit, believing that good deeds were incentivized by the positive affects or feelings they generated—vice versa for bad deeds (Noble 62). Sentimental writing, exemplified by the infamous *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, or Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’ postbellum *The Gates Ajar* (1869), drew specifically on domestic scenes of death, and used scenes of one’s own feelings to trigger the same or similar affect in another (Douglas 513). The emphasis on “true” or “genuine” feeling in the subject was central to establishing “[t]he authority of any particular sentimental expression”, which was “was vested less in the status of [the] author per se as in the “authenticity” of the emotions being expressed” (69 Kete). This authenticity was not meant to be determined by discursive consensus, but was instead meant to be viscerally felt by the reader: successful, authentic sentiment was evidenced when the feelings on the page would, ostensibly, spark true feelings in the audience (Noble 64). The affective porosity between writer and reader or subject and spectator was thought to surpass the scope of normal compassion in force and feeling because it was an embodied experience as well as cognitive one—by apprehending that emotion within themselves as they perceive the other, the spectator authorizes the feeling and recognizes it as legitimate (Yao 12-13).

Sentimentalism relied on the assumption that feelings were something of a universal supra-verbal expression, of which sentimental writing was an approximation or translation (Kete 2). The purported universality of sentiment and its affective power was, however, reliant upon bio-culturally determinist construction of the white, civilized body as the pinnacle toward which

all human progress evolved. The white body as characterized by 19th century logics of sentiment was defined by its capacity to be impressible, “the power of being affected by external agents,” and respond to them with logic and pragmatism; by contrast, Black bodies and the bodies of racial others (such as “the Hebrews of old and the Oriental nations of the present”) were alleged to be overly “susceptible and impressible”, whose bodily systems convey betray the “movements of their minds” (Schuller 7; Yao 5). As Xine Yao describes in *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth Century America*, whether a racial Victorian subject was affirmed in their personal humanity was directly contingent upon whether they assimilated themselves to the conditions of affectability, and upon whether their feelings were recognized/recognizable and thereby authorized by dominant, normative white subjects. The particular repercussions of this construction of sentiment and bodily affectability will be explored at greater length in the two subsequent chapters; suffice it to say that authority was differentially granted to authors of sentimental literature on the basis of their ability to perform or convey bodily affectability by normative Victorian standards.

Although the criticisms most often hurled at works of sentimentalism are on an aesthetic basis—their obvious and formulaic trajectories, their mundane and domestic subject matter, the lack of revision and casualness with which they were written and exchanged, their use of “emotionally excessive” language, etc.—it is arguably the change (cessation) in their social function that most explains this disparity in perceived critical value (Kete 14). The intentions of sentimental poetry were precisely as the word-order presents them—sentimental first, and poetic second.

In *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth Century America*, Mary Louise Kete argues that the sentimental logics that structure these poems

(including, but not limited to elegies) worked to produce “a network of obligations” among family and friends (52). The poems produced by non-elite Americans—by which I mean individuals who were not lauded as poets, rather than an indicator of economic class—were expressions of the author’s subjectivity, produced in material form to be given to and circulated among other participants within this collaborative network as evidence of one’s affections for others in the circle (53). Though many of these poems would be published and circulated in newspaper columns, magazines, and pamphlets, it is their appearance in personal “books” or “albums” that informs Kete’s central project. These were something of a mix between a diary, a devotional, and a scrapbook in their function; they could hold personal prayers, messages and keepsakes from close family and friends, and—most importantly for my project—poems, written sometimes by the owner of the book and other times by their close friends and family, and sometimes adapted or directly copied from the published poem of some other writer. These would be kept in the parlor or else somewhere relatively public, and were intended to be seen and admired by guests (Cobb 28).

While these books and albums were a hallmark of a particular image of white Victorian upper- and middle-class life, their appearance was deceptively decadent; crafty techniques for paper production and binding meant that the books themselves varied widely in cost, and were not overly expensive to produce compared to the prices of bound paper in the centuries prior. At an average price of \$2-\$5, though certainly not an insignificant purchase, they were relatively accessible, and were often given as gifts among Black and white Americans of middle-class or greater wealth (Cobb 28-29). Although Black men and women were often unable to participate openly in many of the white publications where literary sentimentalism was most actively cultivated, there are many extant poems, periodicals, and especially friendship albums belonging

to middle-class Black families that suggest that Black Americans engaged actively in sentimental collaborations of their own, sharing with their white counterparts the same Victorian goal of “develop[ing] their moral, spiritual, intellectual, and artistic selves” communally among their friends and family within the gilded pages of their books (30).

The practice of sentimental collaboration involved in writing and circulating sentimental poetry (including but not limited to elegies) within a social group establishes a “binding economy” that ensured two different types of social continuity for both the deceased and the bereaved in Kete’s analysis. The first is a continuity of association, through which the individual grief of the bereaved (a singular experience of loss by one subject) is transformed into collective mourning (in which the loss is shared by a group, felt by a “we”) among the circle of family and friends (68). Existence within the hierarchy of some culturally authorized group provided perhaps the most important force of subjectivation for the normative woman subject of the mid-nineteenth century. The intelligibility of one’s identity was almost wholly reliant upon one’s status in relation to one’s familial identity as mother, daughter, sister, etc., especially as Victorian Americans became increasingly concerned with the nuclear family. Death thus critically endangered one’s identity, as it threatened to dissolve relationships by which your subjecthood was made intelligible socially. Sharing the loss through collective mourning, and thereby reaffirming the other, unbroken bonds one shared with other members of the group, worked to counteract the ways a death ruptured the identity of the bereaved (81).

The second continuity Kete reads in this form of collaboration is a temporal continuity, in that the production of remembrances link the selves of the mourner(s) in the past (as persons in relation with the then-living, now-deceased one), the present, and the eternal future in a Christian afterlife, shielding all those involved against the discontinuity of bodily death (82). In both, the

normative subject is grounded in the context of their social relation within the group, guarded against dissolution of the self inevitably imposed by death through the collaborative compilation of their remembrances, both by themselves in life and by others in their social unit after their death (48). By continually engaging with the memory of the deceased through exchanged sentimental verse, the group could sustain a social relationship with the dead person well after they were gone; this form of mourning did not necessarily accommodate the grieving persons to the permanence of their loss, but rather re-constituted the deceased through their remembrance to ensure the social body continued to be in relation with them until they could join the dead on the other side of the veil (39, 47).

It is this tendency of sentimentalism toward continual engagement and persistent re-constitution of the dead through writing that most distinctly intersects with the cultural logics of spiritualism, which worked to re-member the dead and to suture them to the social network living through skilled and embodied practices. The promise of the sentimental (religious) imagination was of a utopian spiritual community, where losses in life were restored and wounds to the social fabric healed. The more or less continuous engagement of an individual's entire social circle within their friendship albums provided a material record of their collective relationships, creating a biographical and linear trajectory of the group with an explicit orientation toward their eventual reunion in God's heavenly kingdom.

Elegy

To this point in the chapter, I have explored the development of spiritualism and sentimentalism up to the mid-nineteenth century. Although elegy and sentimental literature are vast genres, this section explores the overlap between them in the context of nineteenth century literary and mourning practices. Because elegies were a common commemorative form among

Puritan colonists, and because elegies have since the early eighteenth century amply been reproduced in newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, and other periodicals, the thousands of extant copies that have been preserved offer a nearly unbroken chain of historical literary practices through which we can track any number of religious and social reformations as they unfolded from the colonial era onward (Cavitch 3-5).

Although archival records are not unbiased in which elegies they have sustained, elegies were actually fairly accessible to early Americans insofar as their production went, since any literate person with a basic familiarity with conventional romantic verse and relevant cultural imagery could compose a few lines collaboratively with friends in a single sitting. These verses were not constructed in the hopes of achieving artistic and aesthetic perfection but were instead intended as materialized prayers, through which they might perform, explore, and hone their relationship with God and the deceased (Kete 25-26). Although there was derision and satire directed at elegy as a genre as early as the 1720s⁶, elegies were commonplace in early American funerary practices from the early colonial era, written in the same fashion of British Protestants of the time as a type of ceremonial, funeral-specific ephemera rather than as an archival record (Cavitch 33-34). In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, mourners would pin elegies to the coffin and/or hearse and circulate copies among the mourners at the funeral itself—for a loved one or respected figure to be buried without an elegy pinned nearby was perceived as a terrible failing (Seeman 55). The relative lack of elegies preserved during the seventeenth century in America contrasts starkly with eighteenth century trends, when elegies became something of a “literary genealogy” for the family and community, preserved with a

⁶ Benjamin Franklin’s notorious satire, published under the name “Mrs. Silence Dogood” in 1722, and Mark Twain’s Emmeline Grangerford in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) constitute some of the genre’s most popular derision (Cavitch 4).

characteristically Puritan focus on a communal responsibility to ensure the memorial and institutional⁷ continuity of worthy forebears (Seeman 3; Cavitch 36-37).

Over the course of its American history, the genre had admittedly borne its share of criticism for its excessive religiosity and emotionality. Secular academic men who extolled Enlightenment values of rationalism and self-control viewed the effusive and plaintive style typical of Harvard clergymen as indicative of their provincialism and “feminine excess” (Cavitch 5). However, this opinion was not especially common, and throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the practice of exchanging elegies and sentimental writings was more a marker of economic and educational status than of gender (Kete 34). A distinction between “high” (elite) and “low” (popular) literary forms would not be formally codified until the last two decades of the nineteenth century, so other forms of writing were not privileged or more critically acclaimed than this genre of poetic verse during the timeframe of this study. This meant that the sentimental elegy was not inherently derided as a low or cheap literary form within popular culture as it would be in the early twentieth century, nor was it as inaccessible as high-art.

Although the Puritan tradition of elegy would slowly lose popularity alongside much else of Puritan doctrine and practice, Americans did not stop writing elegies at large; quite the opposite, as from the mid-eighteenth century onward the elegy would become one of the most prolific literary forms in America, penned and published not only by the religious men who once championed the medium but also by women, Indigenous Americans, and Black Americans of

⁷ Institutions here referring not only to a culturally established practice, but also literally as an institutional product, especially of religious and/or academic establishments like Harvard, where Puritan elegy was archived, studied, and emulated (Cavitch 36, 38)

freed and enslaved statuses (Cavitch 38). Elegies continued to speak both *to* and *for* the dead, even as Puritan Protestantism gave way to other sects of Christian practice, and literacy rates concurrently with more financially and logistically accessible publishing practices for non-elite Americans.

In particular, the more overtly spiritualist, personal elegies⁸ of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries offered to mourners and the members of their social circles a way to carefully navigate grief for the deceased without appearing “blasphemous” (Seeman 141). If the mourner expressed no grief, then there was no evidence of love and care for the deceased, but if they were to state too explicitly their dismay at the death, they might be seen as doubting God’s Providence, or else showing callous disregard for the peaceful rest of the dead, whose earthly and bodily suffering had finally ended (Seeman 62). Through the personal elegy a mourner (or someone sympathizing with the mourning family) could acknowledge and validate the sincerity of those feelings of loss, and then follow them with an assurance that the deceased, having led a good Christian life, was safely situated in heaven, with God and Christ alike, and so any more excessive grieving by the bereaved was unnecessary (63). And, as spiritualism continued to develop in American religious beliefs, this orientation toward the afterlife would gain the additional promise that, in the next life, the bereaved would be reunited with the one they had lost, providing comfort in the idea of a temporary separation rather than a permanent fissure.

Although the particular form of Puritan personal elegy would lose popularity along with the decline of Puritan religion, personal elegies were a mainstay of nineteenth century mourning practices. As I described earlier in this chapter, the personal elegy offered social continuity for

⁸ “Personal” indicating here that the elegy is for a particular deceased individual, as opposed to a general confrontation of grief and loss, although the author of the poem might not have known the deceased personally (Seeman 52).

the mourners in the economy of sentimental collaboration, but in addition to this local-social function it also performed a continuation of culturally authorized literary mourning. The personal elegy offered a means for recovering some of what was lost in the death of the individual, as well as for contributing to “a world of shared meanings” whose continuity upheld the “custom, precedent, ancestry, and history” that Anglo-Americans sought to uphold against the tides of change (Cavitch 109, 111). Likewise, the growing influence of spiritualist beliefs across Christian denominations meant that elegy could serve to bridge the gap between the living and the spirit world, a conduit through which the bereaved were able to offer up their prayers for the deceased, express their grief (that the deceased might know they were missed), and sometimes even pray for their spirit to intercede on their behalf or act as guardian angels (Seeman 237-240). In the genre of elegy, Victorian Americans could engage new(er) sensibilities within well precedented and familiar structures of funerary traditions.

In this chapter I have explored a number of the cultural changes in religion, social relation, and literature that are most important for understanding the importance and ubiquity of the sentimental elegy. Throughout the nineteenth century, elegy provided a discursive arena already familiar to the American public, through which Victorian Americans could navigate their rapidly changing worlds, whether in relation to the ruptures caused by an individual’s bodily death or to the ambiguity and uncertainty posed by new ideologies and political movements (Cavitch 3). In the following chapter, I build from the foundation laid in this chapter to explore the ways sentimental elegies by white women authors worked toward the ends of Nationalist civilizing projects by affirming Victorian norms of gender and race, encouraging a future-orientation through linear-progressive time, and bolstering imagined communities.

Chapter 2

“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth”

In the world of eighteenth-century America, women’s work outside of the home was part of the intricate neighborhood economy of mutual aid within the community (Ulrich 41). This labor was routinely performed by midwives, who handled the sick and dead just as much as they facilitated the “extraction” of life in childbirth⁹ (49). After one’s “expiration” during death, the women would take the body to be bathed (usually to an outdoor bath, or down to the riverside), and sometimes shaved. Cotton or cloth would be packed against bodily orifices to prevent unsavory excretions from spilling out during the vigil (Laderman 29). The body would then be clothed in the deceased’s Sunday best or else wrapped in a shroud or “winding sheet”, then placed in a coffin. Classic European superstitions about paying the ferryman coinciding with the practical necessity of weighing down the eyelids of the dead, and so one coin was placed upon each eye (Davidson 616). Once properly displayed, the body was watched over by family and friends, usually for a period of one to three days; the body would not be left unattended until it was conveyed safely into the dirt (Laderman 31). Of all the labor that went into the preparation of the dead, the only work done primarily by men was building and procuring of the coffin, carrying the coffin from house to hearse to grave, and officiating prayers of a priest or minister during the funeral. In some cases, particularly for the deaths of very old men or very young infants, men would take up the work of laying out the body¹⁰, but care for the dead was by and large the work of women in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

⁹ During a wave of Scarlet Fever in August of 1787 in Maine, the journal of midwife Martha Ballard reports a total of four deliveries and three deaths that she attended, as well as sixteen other medical calls (Ulrich 49).

¹⁰ In some cases, men would prepare the bodies of very old and respectable men to preserve their modesty in death, or in other cases cared for dead young children to spare the women from heartache.

For most rural and lower-class Americans, these practices would remain more or less unchanged until the mid-20th century (Laderman 40). But among the upper- and middle-classes of Victorian America, the mid-19th century brought with it a radical shift in the division of gendered labor around illness and death alike. In the course of a few short decades, traditional women's roles like midwifery, nursing the sick, and care for the dead would be taken over by male doctors, for living patients, and male undertakers, for the dead, both of whom would have been educated in the highly suspect industries of anatomy and medical science (Sappol 87). Bourgeois women were gradually removed from the care of the dead; although they might still help nurse the sick and dying, and often laid out the body for its viewing/vigil, they were no longer granted authority over dead bodies. Some cities and towns would even come to forbid women from walking in funeral processions or attending ceremonies held in the graveyard/cemetery (or at least forbade any women outside of the immediate family)¹¹ (Laderman 43-44, 48).

In the same period as this relatively sudden shift in the role of women in bourgeois American funerary practices we witness a massive explosion in the frequency of women publishing across almost all print forms. Literature purportedly had the capacity to “[substitute] feeling for dogma”, and both men and women sentimentalists relied on print media not only to circulate ideas about moral sense theory/sentimentalism, but to compel their readers through the affectively soothing, persuasive powers of the writings themselves (Douglas 1974, 499). Consolation literature gained particular popularity, and expanded upon the same religious and affective themes that were crystallized in the elegies this project studies. Consolatory writers—

¹¹ This was not a widespread ruling in 19th century American towns, but may have been a racially and ethno-religiously charged prohibition; Irish-Catholic, Indigenous, and Black funeral processions were stereotypically characterized by loud wailing and/or songs, often sung specifically by women mourners and at night (Laderman 47-48; Morgan 138-139)

mostly bourgeois women and liberal northern ministers—tasked themselves with addressing particular, personal grief, providing directions for appropriate comportment for the recently bereaved. As explained by feminist historian Ann Douglas, “Death, province of minister and mother, instead of marking the end of power, had become its source. Spiritualism in its most generalized and most specific sense, was a manifestation of a complex retransfer of force from the living to the dead, from the apparently strong to the apparently weak” (“Heaven our Home” 507).

Civilized Bodies, Civilized Feeling

The disestablishment of Northern white Protestant women incentivized the construction of a viable niche in the domestic, market, and ontological configurations of Victorian America, pursuing “partially feminist goals by largely anti-feminist means” (Douglas 45; Noble 31). Although some suffragists campaigned for the viability of independent life for women, most middle- and upper-class Protestant women rejected what they saw as the isolating agenda of women’s rights advocates. An editorial in opposition to the Seneca Falls Convention appeared in an 1848 Philadelphia paper neatly outlines this stance: “A woman is a nobody. A wife is everything. A pretty girl is equal to ten thousand men, and a mother is, next to God, all powerful... The ladies of Philadelphia therefore ... are resolved to maintain their rights as Wives, Belles, Virgins, and Mothers, and not as Women” (Noble 31). Such positions demonstrated a preference for women’s influence within the structure of the patriarchal family, through which a woman as Wife (or Wife-to-be, for the Belles and Virgins)/Mother/Homemaker allegedly had the power to shape her husband, children, and the economic influence of her household respectively while still obscuring her active role therein (Douglas 46).

This configuration had its precedents in the law of “coverture”, an 18th century British legal theory asserting that women’s “very being”, as well as their legal status, was “suspended”, or at least “consolidated into that of the husband” once they were married (Noble 29). Although this was treated more as a religious, mystical ideal than as an achievable reality, its popularity within 19th century discourse on womanhood reflected an understanding that women’s “essential being” was incomplete without the bond of marriage (and subsequently childbirth), and resided not in her corporeal form but in her interiority (30). The interiority to which white Victorian women aspired is related to, but not wholly synonymous with, the definitions given by Denise Ferreira da Silva in *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, in which she explores how Western philosophy progressively disavowed the body (the exterior, affectable component of the human subject) to assert the primacy of the mind (the interior component) over it (41-43). Interiority will be explored at greater length later in this section; for the time being, suffice it to say that the interiority to which the Victorian women of Noble’s project aspired can be explained as a partial, relative capacity for self-determination, which was available only in relationships where their bodies were subjected to the will of a Man.

The incongruity between the affectable bodily circumstances of the bourgeois Victorian woman that facilitated it. Women’s interiority was made possible by the receptivity of her vagina and the capaciousness of her womb, as only by engaging in the physical subjugation of penetrative sex (and, for the interiority of Mothers, of subsequently bearing and birthing a child) could she gain her partial, relative capacity for interiority. It additionally meant that women’s access to interiority was always precarious because it was contingent not only upon their appropriate behavior, but also could be lost through the death of a husband or child, or upon the

child's departure from the unity of the home (either through disidentification or, for daughters, with her removal from the home upon her marriage).

The contemporary scientific explanations given for women's imperfect and precarious access to interiority inform the project of *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science in the Nineteenth Century*, in which author Kyla Schuller provides a reading of 19th century sentimentalism as a productive force for consolidating and potentiating biopower, especially as sentimental logics worked to codify whiteness and womanhood through projects of evolutionary science (3). Schuller's project offers a discourse analysis that challenges older interpretations of 19th century women's literature as "apolitical", tracing how "sentimental politics of life" (4) informed the pseudo-scientific and epistemological processes by which the white, feminine human purportedly developed an [appropriately] "impressible" body, drawing in particular on the popular Lamarckian theory of evolution that informed popular Victorian bodily logics.

Impressibility referred broadly to a capacity of advanced sensibility within the civilized body, which allowed a subject to "be alive to" and shaped by external impressions and sensations from their environment while always retaining interiority and affirming one's ontological distinctness (Schuller 7). Drawing again on da Silva's work (here via Leibniz), we can operationalize interiority as the combination of inner determinism and inner particularity. Inner particularity would relate in the Victorian context to the idea of biocultural formation, which produces the civilized body throughout the evolutionary time of the race/species to which an individual belonged and through the accumulation of impressions throughout an individual's lifespan (55). By contrast, inner determination then represents the agential operation of the civilized, impressible body-mind to receive impressions and, through sentimental reflections,

create new connections autonomously from the body's preexisting nervous pathways toward the end of perfecting the race/species (Schuller 7, 41).

All life-forms were understood to possess sensibility, defined as the capacity to experience sensation of the external world through bodily sensation. The neo-Lamarckian scholars of Victorian America felt that the capacity for sensibility increased and became more developed within the most intelligent and advanced of the species, and constituted itself in proportion to its ontogenetic and phylogenetic sensory experiences (53-54). By labeling the more advanced form of sensibility as "impressibility", which was thought to subjugate matter and sensation under the mind's will, race scientists occluded the white body from its own sensory processing, leading them to label it as a process of "reflection" instead. This positioned civilized white bodies at the pinnacle of a spectrum of racial hierarchy, in direct proportion to the races' capacities for impressibility (55). Black bodies were situated at the other, lowest end of the spectrum (with the Asian, Near Eastern, and Indigenous racial others of the world strewn in between), whose biocultural formation had tended toward the "over-abundance" of bodily development, rather than toward the development of the mind and will. Racial evolutionary science asserted that within Black bodies, sensibility only reverberated rather than being reflected through the operations of the mind, which thus condemned racialized subjects to a state of "pure corporeality" and denied them the capacity for selfhood (54).

Although this construction of the feeling, civilized white bodies positioned white women in an important position for the continued progress of the species, it also situated them in a precarious balancing act. For one, their access to interiority and their role as complementary citizen-subjects alongside white men through evolutionary race science also brought with it the assertion that women still possessed inferior, less-developed brains and bodies (Bowler 313).

The temperament (which is to say the affective capacities) of a woman was understood as predetermined by her role in the process of reproduction, which expended much of her vital energy and prevented greater intellection formation (314). Women's inclination toward the softer values of moral sensibility and care for the family, rather than the "sterner values" needed to work within the rational world of the market, were correlative with the energy spent developing new children; if a woman prioritized education and business before childbirth, she might lose the feminine qualities which made proper reproduction possible. White women also had to constantly perform affectability and civilized manners in order to affirm their humanity without appearing too corporeal, and therefore uncivilized, appearing to have committed the "contemptable" sin of being unsympathetic (Yao 12). As a result, sentimental womanhood became increasingly characterized by excessive and volatile feelings. The following section will explore some of the ways sentimental elegy is marked by demonstrating the abundance and strength of feelings experienced by women when their sensibilities are triggered, usually by a loved one's death or a reminder thereof, and then carefully redirecting the bereaved toward a more appropriate comportment.

Temporal Projects of Sentimental Writing

*"Heart speaks to heart, and a common sorrow unites him in strong bonds of brotherhood with all of his race, who have mourned like himself."*¹²

Just as sentimental literature affirmed and negotiated 19th century norms of embodied feeling, it also lent itself to nationalist efforts to codify American history and orient democratic subjects toward progress/futurity. Nineteenth century consolation literature imagined grief as opening a temporal rift in the bereaved and sought to direct this rift's effects "both outward to

¹² From *The Mourner's Book*, pp. iii-iv; Boston, Benjamin B. Mussey, 1850, via Luciano pp. 41.

link feeling to all “humanity” and backward to reconstruct human history itself as the repository of sacred exchanges of feelings” (Luciano 41). The mourner could, through grief, gain access to an affective repository of fellow-feeling that was biologically and socially heritable, but this capacious rift precariously positioned the bereaved in time (42). Too much retrospection on the life of the deceased or too great a reliance on the form and message of bygone mourners could threaten to reorient the bereaved toward the past, turning them away from progress/futurity. This precarity necessitated the intervention of consolers, who could comfort the bereaved and help them regulate their grief, and whose social obligation it was to appropriately guide their social peers in accessing expressing this affective “native language” in word and body. Heaven then becomes a timeless futurity in which the past could be preserved until the bereaved could rejoin with their deceased, allowing the surviving mourner to continue an appropriate relationship with progressive time.

This provision of hope was framed as a distinctly Christian affordance—Victorian understandings of “primitive” grief and mourning practices, as modeled contemporaneously by Indigenous Americans, or modeled in the ancient world by the pre-Christian Romans, were marked by unmitigated grief, which was inevitable for the un-saved, because death without the promise of heaven necessarily represented a permanent rupture of social ties (Luciano 46). It is not surprising, following the previous section, that this emphasis on civilized orientations toward time was ethnically and racially divided. Just as the onto- and phylogenetic development of the individual and species dictated a person’s capacity for sympathy and impressibility, it was also understood to be proportionate to their capacity to experience present, past, and future in civilized ways (Luciano 45-46). Throughout the 18th and into the 19th centuries, multiple sources debate the cause of Black and Indigenous peoples’ differential orientations to time, some of

which was ascribed to a lack of religious formation (as referenced above) while others, like Thomas Jefferson, asserted that the sensory capacities of the Black body were the cause of this inability. This meant that the temporal labor of sentimentalism was one that still effected the ends of America's racially motivated civilizing projects by setting apart the propriety of white, Christian grief compared to America's racial others, even as it may have reflected an earnestly felt or imagined cosmology within the Christian spiritualist context (44).

Although the work of consolation fell upon men as well as women, women's consolation literature drew upon the particular position of the mother—the culmination of “True” Victorian womanhood—and employed her with the task of “securing time” for the family, who functioned as the “principal moral and social unit of the nation” (Sanchez-Eppler, via Luciano 121). The mother represented a shared “natural prehistory” to which all civilized American subjects laid claim; a lineage that simultaneously resisted the stasis of ancient bloodlines *and* mitigated the isolation that otherwise loomed over the democratic individual (120-121). The Victorian mother furnished her children (& thereby the nation) with a humanizing affection, an “immediate and yet timeless prehistory of a heart-world, a [maternal] love out of which it grew and to which it perpetually returned” (121).

This transient (and yet timeless) labor of child rearing was entirely relegated to the domestic sphere, spatially sequestered from the rational male sphere of the market economy (Luciano 122). The mother's body and the home were the conduits through which boy children passed (literally, through the womb, and figuratively, from childhood to Manhood) to become democratic progressive subjects, and in which girl children would be brought up as women who would eventually leave to become mothers themselves and continue the natal chain (120, 128). As I discussed in the previous section, this cycle of connection (during the child's gestation and

upbringing) and rupture from the mother (during birth, and again when the child leaves home as an adult) was mirrored in sentimental consolation's prescription for all grief. Although loss tempts the bereaved to turn backward and fixate on a prior, bygone time, a futurity with heaven as its terminus promised an eternity outside of time as the ultimate salve for death's separations (43). Through proper upbringing, mothers set their children on dual temporal trajectories, by which they are educated and refined in order to serve the growth of the race and the nation while likewise moving toward a "perfected celestial time of the redeemed" that awaited them in the afterlife (127).

Because the knowledge and affective capacity of Motherhood was understood to be latent in any "True Woman", white Victorian women writers claimed authority (not without dispute) to do the temporal, cultural, and spiritual labors involved in civilized Christian grieving. The affective world of domestic sentimentality and the temporality within which it was situated was purportedly the "truer" and therefore more natural state of the universal (white, bourgeois) human than the logical rational world of the market economy, and so through its humanizing force sentimentalism was thought to redeem time from modernity (122).

Communities—Local, National, and Otherworldly

Throughout this chapter I have explored how the Victorian construction of womanhood worked to produce the bourgeois white Protestant woman as a civilizing force on biocultural and temporal axes. This third section looks at how these two sentimental projects were mobilized toward specific political ends and circulated throughout the social collective of nineteenth century America in the form of print media.

In the first chapter, the section on sentimentalism explored the nuclear family and close social network of both Black and white bourgeois Victorian Americans as the primary site of sentimental collaboration. This form of voluntary social association within a community provided a framework for subjectivation, especially for women, and personal albums or books offered a medium through which to develop the “moral, spiritual, intellectual, and artistic” qualities to which the community members aspired (Cobb 30). Within these same circles, families and friends would also exchange most other forms of print media; although the printing presses of the nineteenth century were far more advanced than in previous centuries, books, newspapers, and periodicals alike were still printed on a much smaller scale¹³. This meant that, in addition to circulating their own writing, families and friends would share the periodicals and magazines to which they subscribed within their circles, and for most bourgeois Victorian families this would especially include *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, the most popular women’s periodical of the nineteenth century.

Godey’s Lady’s Book provides rich examples of how sentimental literature could be mobilized on a national scale to circulate and assert this form of social unity. Benedict Anderson’s work in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, explores several means by which members of a nation (especially since the Industrial Revolution) come to conceive of themselves as belonging to the same political community (6), and observes that the development of print media especially contributed to the production of this imagined community (24). As a periodical, *Godey’s Lady’s Book* engages in an essentially fictive operation found in all newspapers and similar, cyclical publications, in

¹³ At a circulation of 20,000 editions, the then-budding New York Times was thought to have a very high circulation for a new paper in the autumn of 1851 (Mott 279); at 150,000 in 1860, *Godey’s* was the most highly circulated periodical in the whole country.

which the seeming arbitrary juxtaposition of otherwise unrelated articles and excerpts on disparate topics is consumed without questioning why these have been curated in this way, let alone presented as “news” (33). Anderson asserts that the imagined linkage that makes this assemblage called “news” intelligible to its readers relates first to the fixed temporal situating of the daily newspaper (or, in our case, the monthly periodical), which brings readers ambling “sturdily ahead” in the homogenous time of modernity (Anderson 33). Further, he observes that the newspaper facilitates a sort of ritual that the reader knew was being replicated almost simultaneously by thousands of other readers “of whose existence [they] are confident, yet of whose identity [they have] not the slightest notion”, repeated ad infinitum (Anderson 35). This imagined community would then be affirmed consistently in social visits with peers, whose possession of exact replicas of that month’s volume affirmed that “the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life”, creating a sort of deductive confidence in the facticity of the community (36).

The particular assemblage offered to readers of *Godey’s* each month was not by any means random or arbitrary, nor was it as apolitical as Louis Godey would have liked to acknowledge¹⁴. The curated selections of Sarah Josepha Hale¹⁵, who served as *Godey’s* primary editor¹⁶ from 1838-1877, reflected a carefully orchestrated campaign to unite the nation in the midst of major crises over gender and race in society. Hale was a mother of five who was widowed in her mid-thirties, and wore black as a sign of perpetual mourning until her own death

¹⁴ *Godey’s* was, according to its eponymous founder Louis A. Godey, a staunchly a-political production: “I allow no man’s religion to be attacked or sneered at, or the subject of politics to be mentioned in my magazine. The first is obnoxious to myself and to the latter the ladies object; and it is my business and pleasure to please them, for to them—God bless the fairest portion of his creation—I am indebted for my success” (“Public Dinner to Louis A. Godey”, January 1856, pp. 273).

¹⁵ Her most enduring legacy is arguably the poem “Mary Had a Little Lamb”, originally titled “Mary’s Lamb” and published 1830, though few people acknowledged her as its author even fifty year after her death (Finley 263).

¹⁶ She preferred to be called its “editress”, to preserve her femininity (Howe 608).

at the age of 90 ¹⁷(Rose 1981, 24; Howe 608). She was raised by a family who strongly supported women's education, and was herself a teacher until the time of her marriage in 1813 (Rose 2004, 75). Hale was not a suffragist, but instead sought to increase women's influence within the domestic sphere just as other Victorian women described in this section, for whom women functioned as a bastion of spiritual and civilizing power against the tumultuous changes facing a newly industrious market economy. Throughout her tenure with the magazine, nearly every issue of Godey's would include Hale's selections of other authors' and her own personal addresses on the necessity and righteousness of women's education and increased influence within the domestic sphere, especially as it pertained to bearing and educating children, strengthening Christian morals within the nation, and the essential roles in shaping society as men shaped industry in the trajectory of civilization's progress (Rose 2004, 75).

Parallel to Hale's campaign for women's role in the nation-building project was her fervent support of national unity and compromise in response to growing tensions over the institution of slavery. Hale was a daughter of the American Revolution, born to a patriotic and relatively liberal New England family the same year as George Washington's accession to the presidency and raised up by to idolize him as an emblem of the young country's civic strength (Finley 174). This instilled in her a not uncommon centrist position that, though she was not in support of slavery, opposed the secessionist ideas of southern states just as much as the "good riddance" sentiments among northern abolitionists who would rather be rid of the southern states than tolerate the continuation of slavery (Finley 175). This was not a new development for Hale, who only became an editor after publishing a novel titled *Northwood: Life North and South* in

¹⁷ Although this is my own speculation, it strikes me that the choice to remain in mourning for her husband and thereby visibly signify herself as widow-mother would have performed a degree of feminine interiority that might have been lost to her if she had stopped, at least while she was a younger woman.

1827, which she hoped would reveal the similarities between Northern and Southern whites, and offered the education, emancipation, and relocation of all enslaved Black populations to the colony of Liberia, since she felt “two races who do not intermarry can never live together as equals” (Finley 176). Hale was a staunch opponent of any political position that unsettled the harmony between north and south—an interest not wholly separate from her material and financial interests, since she and Louis Godey both bemoaned that the start of military conflict in 1861 “deprived” Southern subscribers of their beloved *Lady’s Book* (178). Throughout the American Civil War, *Godey’s* remained the most circulated magazine in the nation, and refrained from endorsing calls for Union nurses by both Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and Clara Barton during the course of the war, and neither participated in nor made note of fundraisers or other charitable events for the support of the Union.

Hale was of course far from impartial, and in the decade leading up to the Civil War especially she made countless pleas for the defense of the Union, asserting that woman’s influence was God-given for the purpose of preserving the “fortitude, perseverance, patriotism, and piety” of the independent nation (Finley 180). In an article on the curation of *Godey’s* particular “apolitical” nationalist image, Joseph Michael Sommers argues Hale’s selective emphasis on grief and mourning *unrelated* to the rising conflict that would eventually incite the Civil War worked to appeal to readers’ sense of emotional unity (45). Sommers highlights how Hale’s alternation between scenes of Southern and Northern life often centered around scenes of grief and bereavement, which drew parallels between the personal struggle of a family in the face of loss and death and the state of the nation in the midst of political turmoil (46, 49). Besides essays decrying separatism and unrest, Hale included elegies, poems, and even short stories in which mothers are consoled over the loss of sons in battle (“Lines Inscribed to Mrs. J Russel”,

pp. 255, September 1855), brides-to-be are told of their betrothed's death at war ("The Night Before the Wedding", pp. 131, January 1856), or the deaths of "The Pioneers" (pp. 60, January 1858) are mourned by loving wives and bereaved maidens, who buried their husbands and lovers after battles with Indigenous peoples in the course of westward expansion. None of these directly relate to the conflict between North and South, and related less still to the debate over slavery, but each witnesses women in mourning in relation to violent conflict, situated within a history to which all (white) Americans had *some* claim (Sommers 54).

Although Hale's editorial work had more to do with a virtual, imagined community, the omnipresence of grief in the poems she published increasingly reflected the real experiences of contemporary bereaved Americans from 1860-1865 onward. Victorian Americans were certainly familiar with death long before the Civil War, but the scale and manner of war deaths was quite distinct from the "ordinary deaths" to which they were accustomed (Faust xii). Mass death is disruptive of social norms in any situation, but the Civil War dead were primarily young men—whose deaths came in "the morning of life"—and the geographical positions of the dead meant that the familiar viewing and burial rituals that were so central to Victorian customs could not be performed promptly, if ever (xii-xiii). The affective work of collective grief that is central to Hale's imagined community would become one of the most important facets of "the work of death" during and after the American Civil War era as the bereaved of the nation sought to repair the structure and fabric of their domestic, social, and national lives (xiv).

Poetic Exegesis

This chapter has, to this point, covered a breadth of topics relevant to the construction of Victorian womanhood, the full extent of which are not necessarily evident in each and every sentimental poem and novel ever written. My goal is not to conclusively prove the theoretical

and historical bases of my analysis, nor to definitively identify the intentions of the author. Instead, as I explained in more detail in the introduction, I hope to employ a comparative method modeled by Annemarie Mol in *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*. So, rather than compare and contrast the poems for what each does or does not have, I hope to take the analytic scaffolding of this and the previous chapter and consider how the bodies indexed by the poem are enacted. What capacities must be possessed by the poem's author, subject, and audience in order for the sentimental project to work? Are they the same for each role? Does their enactment contribute to the ends of America's civilizing project—which is to say, does it affirm racial evolutionary science, facilitate a temporal orientation toward future (heaven) away from memory (past), and help constitute an imagined community, whether of the nation as a whole or of bourgeois white women? Alongside these themes, I also explore some of the literary tropes that either authorize or nuance the enactment, and, drawing on Nadia Seremetakis, consider how the construction “of self and sentiment” (3) in the elegiac poem evidences an ongoing social process.

“Lines on a Silken Hat”, by Emmeline

<p>A silken hat, as I ope the drawer, Will meet my glancing eye; With tasseled cord, and border white, And strings of cherry dye.</p> <p>‘Tis a trifling thing, but blinding tears Come ever with my gaze, As I turn to it for a sweet far face I see through the dimming haze.</p> <p>And a rounded arm, and dimpled hand, And witching smile of glee, Gleam always forth entrancingly, As this loved hat I see.</p>	<p>And a prattling tone, and merry laugh, Sweet sounds of earthly bliss, Come as they came ere Jesus claimed My cherished babe for his.</p> <p>Though I murmur not, nor would recall My boy from the blessed skies, Yet I miss him e'er, and round his robes Are twined a thousand ties.</p> <p>But dearer than each treasured one Is the hat with border white; For a fair, sweet face, it ever brings To my eager, longing sight.</p>
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September 1855, vol. 51, pp. 257

This poem represents a relatively conventional work of sentimental poetry, since child elegies were among the most common poetic works of the century and models several norms of

white Victorian motherhood. In it, the mother, speaking in the first person, is triggered into grief when she glances in passing upon a piece of her deceased child's clothing. The titular silken hat is visually catching, even if it is a small item in the midst of other mundane things; our author describes its cherry-colored strings, white border, and tasseled cord in ways that invite the readers to sympathize with the sensory experiences of seeing and touching the hat, and the affective experience of visualizing the baby whose head it would sit upon. Similarly, the "rounded arm, and dimpled hand" ask us to recall the tactile experience of touching the smooth, plump skin of a well-fed baby, and the description of the baby's bewitching smile of glee and joyful laughter offer both auditory and visual stimuli. The relatively generic, accessible nature of the scene described lends authority to the author's affective experience precisely because it prompts the reader to supply their own remembered experiences; the strength of their own affective memory of holding soft and giggling infants—and perhaps of losing them either to death or disidentification in adulthood, too—informs the trust they place in the authenticity of the poet's experience.

As she turns the poem toward the fact of the child's death, our poet does not end on the wishful hope that she will reunite with the baby in heaven. Instead, she meditates gratefully on the bittersweet experience of having her memories triggered by the sight of the dead child's clothing. The description of this visual recollection, in which the speaker's "blinding tears" seem to blend with the "dimming haze", evokes a presumably universal, but uniquely embodied affective experience of juxtaposing the remembered figure of the past into material world through the present; of seeing the past with the mind's eye while one is also literally perceiving with their sight. The enactment of the impressible body is evidenced by the mourning mother's capacity for strong physical sensation and emotional stimulation in response to the painful

memory of the beloved child. Although she “murmur[s] not”, which is to say that she acknowledges the incontrovertible fact of her separation and gestures to her pious Christian acceptance of God’s will, she opts to experience the pain and pleasure of her body’s impressive capacities in grief for her child rather than wait for delayed gratification of their reunion in the afterlife. The idea that her yearning for her child is so strong as to overpower a more appropriate Christian orientation toward heaven authorizes her capacity for impressibility at the expense of her capacity for working toward national goals of progress.

“A Vision of the Past”, by Mrs. Harriet E. Francis

A wave from the tide of memory
Has swept o'er my soul to-night;
And again, by the brookside playing,
I cull the flowerets bright.

A wreath for my Mary twining,
I weave with a busy hand;
While her silken ringlets gently
Are kissed by the breezes bland.

And her eyes, so softly beaming,
In my own are gazing bright;
And her dimpled arm is round me,
With a loving pressure light.

But I weep as memory hastens,
And I gaze on a tiny grave;
Where my Mary low is sleeping,
By the brooklet's chiming wave.

I weep; but not for Mary,
For her home is fair above;
But I miss her gentle accents,
Her pure confiding love.

But one more tie is given
To those cherished ones in bliss,
That my thoughts are ever turning
Away from my home in this.

Away to that pearly river,
Where no mossy grave doth lie;
Where no sister for her Mary,
E'er mourns with tearful eye.

April 1856, vol. 52, pp. 351

Although the relationship between the deceased and the author is not immediately clear, we can deduce by the poem’s end that Mary was Mrs. Harriet E. Francis' sister, and likely died while still in youth if the "tiny grave" is to be any indicator. Mary is depicted in cherubic childlike perfection, as was common in elegies for children. Her "silken ringlets" blowing in the breeze evoke the loose, carefree "sugar" or "barley" curls worn by young white Victorian girls

before puberty (Severa 128, 181). The "dimpled arm" recalls the cherubic chubbiness of baby fat, as we saw in the previous poem, and the description of its "loving pressure" around our narrator asks that we remember the feeling of a soft child's arm with her; although we have no idea of Mary's age, this part of the description especially seems to push us to imagine a child older than infancy, but likely not more than five or six years of age. The scene is relatively romantic in its idealized depiction of nature, punctuated by sensory details of the wind's gentle movement or of the "chiming" sound of the brook, and in doing so made easier to place oneself in (provided one has heard a brook babble, or felt the wind on one's skin).

As memory "hastens" from this angelic recollection of the living Mary to the site of her grave is given a sort of momentum as it brings tears to our poet's eyes, although she mourns for herself rather than for Mary in heaven, indicating her deference to God's will as we saw in the previous poem. Whereas the previous author's memory models a masochistic desire to linger with the pain of her child's loss in order to recall their face, Mrs. Francis instead enacts her appropriately progressive Christian orientation by imagining a future in the afterlife, with the promise that her own grief will be over when she arrives there. Mrs. Francis's encounter with recollection indexes many of the same affective and sensible capacities displayed by Emmeline in "Lines on a Silken Hat"; her woes are not transient, but have lingered with her for what must be many long years since her young sister's death, which evidences a civilized capacity for temporal orientation and memory. Her affective response when grief is triggered—the rushing wave of memory, the subsequent tears, the sensory recollection of her sister's bodily presence—likewise indicates her capacity for appropriately effusive sentiments that are generic enough for the reader to sympathize with by supplying their own memories. The experience of losing a child-sibling works to authorize the poet's affective labor because of its ubiquity; most Victorian

readers would either have lost a sibling themselves or would have been quite close to someone who had, so Mary's death works similarly to invite sympathetic relation for an imagined (but quite realistic) community of others who mourned a child that could not join them in adulthood.

“Our Mother”, by Mrs. Mary N. Kirke Dilworth

Oh, many lips are saying this,
Mid falling tears to-day;
And many hearts are aching sore,
Our mother's passed away;
We watched her fading year by year,
As they went slowly by,
But cast far from us e'en the fear
That she could ever die.

She seemed so good, so pure, so true
To our admiring eyes,
We never dreamed this glorious fruit
Was ripening for the skies;
And when at last the death-stroke came,
So swift, so sure, so true,
The hearts that held her here so fast,
Were almost broken too.

We robed her in familiar dress,
We smoothed her gray hair down,
Gave one last kiss—then laid her 'mid
The autumn leaves so brown:
Then each took up the broken thread
Of life and all its cares,
How sad the heart 'mid daily tasks,
We miss our mother's prayers.

We ne'er shall know from what dark paths
They may have kept our feet;
Yet holy will their influence be
While fond heart shall beat:
And as we tread the thorny way,
Which her dear feet have trod,
Ever shall feel our mother's prayers
Leading us up to God.

And for the one still left to us—
Our *Father*, aged and lone,
Who hears perhaps by night and day
The old familiar tone.
We'll gather closer round him now,
To guard from every ill,
As near the darksome river side,
He waits a higher will.

And when the storms of sorrow come
To each bereav'd heart,
Let Faith glance upward to the home
Where we shall never part:
Where *one* awaits with loving eyes
To see her children come,
As one by one we cross the flood
And reach our heavenly home.

January 1864, vol. 68, pp.65

This works again to enact the figure of the mother as a unifier and guardian over the family, this time framed through the collective identity of bereaved adult children. From the titular "Our", the poem consistently uses personal plural pronouns, which works to invite the reader into to an imagined we. The very first stanza also asserts that "many lips are saying this"—saying that their mothers have "passed away", which allows us to identify as part of the bereaved family or to imagine the other collective sympathizers. The privilege and sadness of living long enough to see one's mother buried indexes the "ordinary" progression of a (white)

citizen-subject's life. The poem's actors participate directly in preparing her body, placing her in "familiar dress" and smoothing down her gray hair—a part that would be played by daughters, not sons. The scene of preparing the mother's body is perhaps the most authorizing by sentimental standards in that it witnesses a dutiful fulfillment of obligation in conveying her to the afterlife. Many Victorian women readers would have lived long enough to perform the same service for their own mothers, expected to do the same someday, or for some would have referenced a now passé but historically significant ritual of their foremothers. The generic description of her familiar clothing and aged body invite readers to supply their own images of a mother's favorite dress and gray hair, couched in the affective resonance of remembering or imagining their own mother being prepared in that familiar and hallowed religious ritual. But, rather than lingering in memory the poem extols the Christian virtues imparted by the mother unto the mourning family as they "tread the thorny path" where she once walked, moving them metaphorically toward a future in heaven where a Godly mother/a motherly God awaits "with loving eyes/To see her children come".

At nearly three years into the civil war, Mrs. Hale's editorial inclusion of "Our Mother" in *Godey's* arguably functions as an allegory to represent the state of the nation in the image of the deceased, aged mother. Mrs. Hale was a staunch unionist, and her characterizations of the Nation always emphasized the role of women in safeguarding and softening civilization, accommodating the cruel and cold logic of the market economy to the natural guidance of the domestic mother. It is not a stretch to imagine that secession represented something like a death of the Nation to Hale and her collaborators, but it also stood for a host of dead loved ones who could not be conveyed so lovingly into the hereafter. In inviting the readers to identify with the imagined community of people who have grieved mothers, Hale's editorial inclusion as well as

the author's affective deployment of familiar funerary scenes may have worked to rally the troops behind the nation-as-mother *and* to simulate the burial rituals many women were denied participation in as their brothers, sons, and husbands were buried en masse by strangers near the battlefield, rather than lovingly prepared by dutiful family members at the end of a long life.

Chapter Three

On March 16th, 1859, a Black man named Francis A. Duterte was interred at Lebanon Cemetery after his sudden and unexpected death at the age of 45 (Keels 79). Duterte was from a prominent middle-class family of carpenters of Afro-Caribbean descent, and was well known in the Philadelphia community as an undertaker (Davies 119; “Large Funeral”, *The Liberator*). But although Duterte’s life was certainly memorable in its own right¹⁸, his legacy is eclipsed by that of his widow, Henriette S. Duterte (née Bower). Mrs. H.S. Duterte would continue to run the mortuary in her own name from 1859 into the 1880s, and was broadly advertised and recommended in *The Christian Recorder*, whose columnists described her as “a person every way worth of their support, and one well qualified for the faithful performance of the duties pertaining to her department as Undertaker” (“Undertaking”, 8 March 1862). She offered “prompt”, “accommodating”, sympathetic services to all people “rich or poor” and had on hand an assortment of ready-made coffins of various sizes, as well as a hearse, carriages, and drivers for hire for the funeral procession.

Mrs. Duterte was the first woman in the United States to own and operate a mortuary, an official title that sets her apart as a member of the new and changing funerary movement of the nineteenth century. That said, her participation in care for the dead was not unprecedented among free Black women in Philadelphia (Walker 166). In 1838, at least 16 freedwomen were self-employed as midwives, nurses, and shroud-makers—all traditional women’s roles that were frequently called upon to prepare dead bodies, whereas the work of mostly-male undertakers

¹⁸ In addition to his successful business works and philanthropy he also served as a secretary and member of the publishing committee for the 1855 National Convention of the Free People of Color of the United States (“Proceedings” 8, 35)

referred more to furnishing a coffin and other accoutrements for funeral processions and burial (Walker 168).

Much of the most cited documentation of Black funerary practice in North America is found in the legal proscriptions against slave funerals and wakes to prevent large gatherings and communal organization, or else in descriptions of violent acts of corpse desecration and humiliation by slaveowners, which greatly limits our access to and understanding of these practices (Seeman 2010, 196). Although there were many eighteenth and nineteenth century legal proscriptions against pallbearing, musical instruments, or wearing black funerary scarves as part of mourning by both enslaved and free Black Americans, historians can only infer how this indicates the adoption of Euro-American practices into the funeral culture of Black populations (198). In free communities in the Antebellum North, nineteenth century Black funerary practices were somewhat less surveilled, but were often limited in style and form by city statutes, (Laderman 48). Recent archaeological and anthropological studies have found evidence of many diverse burial customs that hybridize Afro-Atlantic and traditional European customs¹⁹. In addition to the overrepresentation of accounts of white slave-owners and racist legislators in historical study, care for the dead within free Black communities has often been omitted by technicality. This has often been the case in the Antebellum North when free Black residents, and by extension their burial grounds, were not welcome within municipal limits and therefore were not part of city documentation (nor were they maintained for historical preservation by their nearby cities), or in other cases when records occlude the race of the participants even though they list them by name (Parrington and Roberts 30; Rainville 1999, 565; Walker 148).

¹⁹ For more on Black funerary practices in America before the mid-nineteenth century, see Davidson 2010 and 2012; Parrington and Roberts 1984; and chapter six of Seeman 2010.

Bourgeois Black families were often made to bury their dead in the segregated portions of cemeteries on or near potter's fields, unless there was a Black church yard nearby; even then, Black churchyards and potter's fields both were more likely to be in geologically precarious spots near bodies of water or hilltops where erosion threatened to disrupt the dead (Mullins 112; Sappol 107). Many of the "rural" cemeteries established in the first half of the nineteenth century were not wholly removed from the city center, but were instead situated near enough to be a short, easily traveled distance from the homes of the wealthier white bereaved, and relatively close to the neighborhoods where non-white and immigrant communities were sequestered (Sappol 102). This meant that Black bodies, as well as immigrant others, were especially at risk of intentional defilement in death during the nineteenth century. Increased medical demand in the nineteenth century led to the theft of recently dead corpses for dissection and autopsy, and theft of Black and other racialized bodies was less likely to result in legal repercussions for white anatomists and logistically easier for the culprits, since racialized bodies were nearer to the cities than those of white dead in rural garden cemeteries (Sappol 87; Seeman 205). Additionally, the relative proximity of these burial grounds to the city center meant that they were more likely to be condemned for the sake of urban development from the post-bellum era into the late 20th century (Davidson 2010, 614; Mullins 112).

In the 1850s, most free Black Americans of any financial means would have entrusted the preparation of dead bodies to the women of the family, their close neighbors, or hired professional shrouding women²⁰, while they employed undertakers for furnishing a coffin, hearse, and carriages for the procession. But even among the wealthiest families who hired

²⁰ Mrs. Jane Johnson and Mrs. Ann Wear advertised their shrouding services intermittently in *The Christian Recorder*; they had a business front at 618 South 8th Street, Philadelphia, and prided themselves on serving customers at "the shortest notice possible", on fair and "moderate" financial terms ("Shrouding", March 12, 1864, pp. 4).

undertakers to do all preparations, it was not uncommon for the undertakers' wives to be participate in cleaning and dressing the body, at least up until embalming became commonplace for wealthy families after the Civil War (Laderman 42; Walker 166). Black women's influence was almost omnipresent in practices of caring for the dead, even if their roles were obscured.

As I explored briefly in the first chapter of this project, archival records of Black bourgeois women's lives in the nineteenth century shows us that they were just as engaged in the same—or at least structurally comparable—networks of sentimental collaboration among their peers (Cobb 28-29). Whereas white women in the nineteenth century seemed to shift toward caring for the dead exclusively or mostly through elegiac poetry, Black women's entry into the genre of sentimental elegy came at a time when—at least in mostly freed communities—they experienced increased authority as providers of material care for the dead. However, the period immediately before and during the Civil War saw increased efforts to demonstrate that Black men and women could possess the same intellectual and affective capacities that marked educated whites as civilized (Gardner 2006, 814). As I explored in the previous chapter's section on temporality, culturally appropriate (read: normative & white) mourning rituals and affective responses to death had long been cited as an indication of the lesser development of racialized communities. The increase of elegiac poems written by and for Black folk can then be read alongside projects of developing and modeling an ideal, Christian norm of the civilized Black human, as well as more generally indicating that middle- and upper-class Black communities found meaning and value in the cultural forms that regulated most bourgeois American culture.

Black Elegies in America

Since there is relatively little academic work dealing with the specific history of personal elegies by Black women authors, I explored non-poetic entries in *The Christian Recorder* within the same year range of the poems' publications to explore some of the social, political, and religious discourse on women and women's roles in society, and especially related to death and mourning, to try and trace some of the themes that may have informed the elegiac poems published therein. An entry from "Sallie", or Sarah L. Duffin, whose poem is included later in this chapter, describes "The Mission of Woman" in a column from June 21st, 1862 (*Recorder* pp. 1) (Gardner 2006, 822). This mission is, Sallie says, a "noble and meritorious one; and not one that places her in the position of a menial, as some have asserted... In her creation the Almighty intended her for a messenger of peace, comfort, and happiness to the world." Sallie describes a host of duties fulfilled by womankind, primarily related to the affective and bodily care of the down-trod, the sick, and the sinful, and of furnishing her own intellect with science, literature, and the arts to the benefit of the children whose minds she shapes. But of most interest for this project, Sallie ends by saying that it is woman's mission:

"to be found at the couch of the dying, administering not only to the necessities of the body, but whispering sweet words of hope to the soul, and pointing it to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world;," and to that bright land where joy forever reigns, to close the glassy eyes when the spirit has fled, and to turn to those bereft, with, "Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise Him."
Say not, then, the mission of woman is a trifling one; for all are to some extent indebted to her."

Sallie's letter reflects a variety of expectations for women's behavior that was presumably shared among *some* of the AME community—or else the editor would likely not have published it—but her focus on providing care at the deathbed's side is striking. This letter asserts a fundamentally

sentimental goal of unifying a community through the civilizing force of Christian women's nurturing care, couched in the affectively charged scene of the deathbed so commonly found across sentimental literature. But it is precisely the conventionality of the death bed that makes Sallie's enactment of the Black Christian woman so notable, as it asserts her capacity for performing the affective and civilizing work of caring not only for the dying and dead, but also of orienting the bereaved they leave behind toward the civilizing force of Christian doctrine. In the rest of this section, I explore several other theorists whose works I feel provide important context for understanding the social implications of Sallie's passionate directive for Black Christian women, and by extension inform the weight of all the elegies I read in this chapter.

Although the slave-trade is not the specific, identified subject of any of the Black women's elegies that I explore in this project—many of which were written by Black women whose families had been free for several generations—the context from which Sallie and our other elegists wrote was undeniably formed by it. In his seminal work *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Orlando Patterson explores how the institution of slavery—particularly in the US—creates the conditions of life for enslaved persons as though they were ontologically *not* alive, and thus “socially dead”. This condition comes rather literally from the understanding that enslavement is as a conditional commutation of a violent death sentence: one either exchanges total obedience for a stay of execution, or gives up one's bodily life in exchange for freedom (5). This state of social death further relied on “natal alienation”, in which relationships between individuals are granted no “rights”, claims of birth, or legally binding social contracts between one another²¹. This symbolically severed the enslaved person from their biological families as

²¹ An example Patterson provides of this symbolic alienation is in the assignment of a new master's surname each time an enslaved person was sold (56). This functionally stripped them of any previous identity—their ontogenetic lives were reset with each relocation.

well as their local communities, and ensured that whatever community or relationships they formed were always precarious and subject to the will of their masters (6). In addition to the more symbolic elements of social death, the legal (and ontological) principle of *partus sequitur ventrem* ensured that children born to enslaved women carried on the legal condition of their mother, regardless of whether they were born in the United States (and therefore categorically deserving the rights of citizenship) or born to white fathers (Cannon 36). This absolved white men of legal responsibility if they impregnated an enslaved woman, and in fact made it lucrative to continuously impregnate them, since they could sell the children for profit or else keep them on to work without having had to purchase them. It also further enforced the experience of natal alienation in both directions—biological maternity enforced one’s precarious legal status, while paternal parentage could not grant the rights of citizens regardless of the father’s race.

In Katie Cannon’s seminal *Black Womanist Ethics*, she explores how the dominant ethical systems of the white, Western world inevitably fail to account for the conditions of Black women’s lives because they rely on presumptions of individual freedom and choice (74). Cannon identifies Black women’s writing as “a rich resource and a cohesive commentary that brings into sharp focus the Black community’s central values,” through which Black women writers “authenticate, in an economy of expressions, how Black people creatively strain against the external limits in their lives, how they affirm their humanity by inverting assumptions, and how they balance the continual struggle and interplay of paradoxes” (77). Although the genre of the sentimental elegy has been considered relatively formulaic by most twentieth-century critics, I would suggest that we draw on Cannon’s work to try and explore how Black women’s elegies also provide a resource for and of the Black community that is informed by the experience of social death as a political and ontological condition. Reading through Cannon allows writing by

women like Sallie to emerge not only as participation in a culturally relevant form of mourning, but also as an expression of the values most pertinent to a specific community of Black Victorian Christians, especially during the Civil War period.

In search of a theoretical model for reading Black women's poetry as a performance of grief in response to their differential exposure to and experience of bodily and social death, I turn to Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, in which the polysemy of the word wake— "the keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, and consciousness"(17)— and, by extension, of wake work, offers up a means of thinking what it might look to like to "attend to the physical, social, and figurative death and also the largeness that is Black life, Black life insisted from death" (16). In analyzing Black women's elegies in the following sections, I have drawn on Sharpe's concept of wake work to ground the poems we read in this chapter in the context of the immense and systemic violence, (social) death, and coercion faced by Black communities in the wake of slavery. By situating the elegiac tradition in direct relation to Sharpe and Patterson's arguments suggests that the communal duty of elegizing fellow Black folk represented a mode of symbolical stewardship over and with the dead, and of conveying individuals who were socially dead in life to a home in heaven where they gained spiritual life and escaped the natal alienation imposed by social death through the unification of the family in a spiritualist heaven.

The two themes I explore in this chapter draw heavily from the Joycelyn Moody, who explores Black women authors of the nineteenth century in ways that center the literary conventions of sentimental writing and the theological convictions held by Black women authors as modes of authorizing their humanity. It is worth noting that one of the primary functions of sentimentalism in white literature to determine which subjects were or were not deserving of

sympathy. Xine Yao's work in *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America*, which I've already cited in the first and second chapters, draws on Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva as well as Kyla Schuller to explore how the very basis of Victorian sentimentality upheld and protected whiteness. In their work, Yao identifies that sentiments (like affects) represent a mode of universal expression, and sentimental language worked as a medium for translating that expression (Kete 2; Yao 13). For an author's work to be authorized as "authentic" sentimentality required the author's legibility to other sentimental subjects; this is to say that the reader must have the agency necessary to sympathize and must recognize the author of the sentiments as sympathetic in order for sentimentalism to operate, which meant that racial others had to "displace and efface" themselves in order to be recognized as human by white sentimentalists (Yao 4).

Related to but distinct from Schuller's project, who I cited in the previous chapter, Yao's project explores strategies of "disaffection" and "unfeeling" used by racial and social others of 19th century America, which refuse, escape, and exceed the confines set out by the sentimental politics of life and circumvented the displacement and effacement of the self that was necessary to mark themselves as legible to sentimental logics (5, 10-11). While I acknowledge that Yao's framework would appear to contradict or challenge the sentimental strategies that I draw on in this chapter from Joycelyn Moody's book *Sentimental Confessions*, I would argue that Moody's much earlier project (written 20 years before Yao's) is actually complementary precedent to *Disaffected*. Although Moody firmly identifies her authors as sentimentalists, she does so by acknowledging their differential access to the authorizing power of sentiment and how that positions them in the literary world of the nineteenth century, as well as by exploring older

precedents of sentimental logic in the American political scheme that subvert the norms asserted by white sentimentalists.

Sentimental Conventions in Black Women's Writing

In *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*, Joycelyn Moody explores a number of autobiographical accounts by Black women that, to varying degrees, utilize conventional literary tropes of sentimentalism to tell their stories. Moody cites the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *De/Colonizing the Subject* to argue that the "I" in personal writing is always "rational, agentive, unitary", and thus "the 'I' becomes 'Man', putatively a marker of the universal human subject whose essence remains outside the vagaries of history", gaining an element of transparency through print media that might not be assured in interpersonal speech (Watson and Smith xvii, via Moody 19-20). Moody observes that this "I" was especially effective in the form of spiritual autobiography because it asserted that the Black author possessed "a self to speak of" in the first place, while occupying a literary transparency that invited *all* readers to sympathize with them, regardless of race (13, 23).

Although Moody's work predates Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* by several years, the argument she maps out follows a similar logic. Butler's *Frames* interrogates and explores the techniques by which some lives are made to be recognized *as* life within existing norms, while non-normative others are strategically positioned so as to be unrecognizable as alive, and therefore un-grievable (6-7, 15). Rephrased within the terms of Butler's project, Moody essentially argues that the efforts by white Victorians to delimit and order the instances of the human—in this case through the affective and scientific logics of sentimentalism—made space for "a certain incommensurability [to emerge] between the norm of

the human and the life it seeks to organize" (Butler 95). Sentimental literary conditions not only break apart to allow Black humanity to be apprehended *as* life, but also go as far as to demand that sentimental Victorian readers feel *as* them, or else jeopardize the very framing that protects the norms of white humanity. Admittedly, the breakage of Victorian framing is done by most of these authors in a way that seeks to broaden the existing norms to include more people, rather than to produce a wholly new set of conditions for life and recognition. In the following section, I discuss how the sentimental work these elegists performed was deeply rooted in Christian norms of the human, mediated through culturally specific literary practices.

Christian Convictions of Black Humanity

Although this project has so far focused primarily on the construction of race in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the roots of those logics can be traced back centuries earlier to the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, and are deeply rooted in Christian ontology. Sylvia Wynter explores in *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument* how some of the earliest apologiae for the enslavement of Africans in the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries—and by extension some of the earliest constructions of racial hierarchies of the human—framed African peoples as “Enemies-of-Christ” because apostles of Christ had reached their lands and they had “refused to hear the Word” (291-292), then later declared them “subrational” by nature. This justified the conquest of African land and the enslavement of their people on the bases of religio-cultural *and* phenotypical differences from the white European, and situated African peoples as the most-inferior genre of the human in a Chain of Being that ranked modes of being human based on differential, *natural* capacities for rationality among the populations/religions/cultures of the

world (296, 300). The assertion of *natural* (which is to say in-born, inherent, evolutionary, scientific) difference was used to maintain that Black people were less- or other-than human even if they converted to Christianity (330).

Despite this exclusion, Moody's argument, put in other words, was that the Victorian norm of the human had not yet been fully "deGodded", to borrow the term from Wynter. In other words, although the secularizing project of Victorian nationalism would slowly try to shift the determinants of humanity to scientific rather than religious ones, by the mid-nineteenth century Victorians' social and juridical definitions of the human still relied *enough* on Christianity—at least in forms they recognized as civilized and appropriate—that a Black person's authentic Christianity was felt to sufficiently identify that person *as* human. It's true that some dismissed the piety of Black persons as proof of a "slavish" and un-impressible character, as was the charge against poets like Phillis Wheatley, and that many white sentimental Christians still did not see a contradiction in the enslavement of Black Christians on the scientific assertion of their part- or sub-humanity because of biblical descriptions of slavery (Kete 2017, 56). Nonetheless, the ideas of selfhood and humanity that Black Christians used to authorize their humanity were inherently and recognizably Christian, and emerged right in the midst of the Second and Third Great Awakenings (Moody 21). White and Black Christians alike engaged in the pseudo-confessional practices of keeping and writing diaries, testimonies, pamphlets, and even poems to chart their conversions and observances along the path to salvation, which meant that any literate person who could spare the money for pen and ink could bear witness to their authentic Christian faith (22). The personal writings of many Black Christians often specifically identified the obstacles set out by racism at the systemic and personal levels as unjustly and illegitimately excluding them from participation in God's plan, which allowed them to acknowledge shared miseries with

other Black readers while they used sentimental conventions to appeal to the sympathy of white readers for (21, 23). For many Black women in the AME tradition, Christian scripture specifically authorized their participation in the discursive, communal, and political work of Christianity beyond domestic labor (148-149). The proliferation of Christian education within Northern Black communities also frequently promoted the general advancement of literacy, temperance, and other intellectual pursuits that were discouraged for bourgeois women of any race except as part of proselytizing projects.

Poetic Exegesis

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have sought to identify some of the social and political forces that inform and contextualize the literary choices made by Black women elegists in the mid-nineteenth century, especially as they work to situate Black women's differential experiences of social and bodily death and to explore Black women's strategic uses of sentimental and Christian conventions in literature. I have selected poems that were published in *The Christian Recorder* in order to read them for enactments of the themes I have explored in this chapter. Whether those enactments assert a self on the basis of their performance of impressibility through sentimental literary norms or on the basis of their authentic Christian faith, and thereby their humanity, each one can be understood to represent wake-work in that it defends and conveys the dead through the sentimental affective labor of the poet. Likewise, each one's reliance on Christian norms of the human and conventions of Christian sentimental literature spoke to the authenticity of their affective experiences as fully human, fully feeling subjects. The ways Christian womanhood appears in the elegies I've chosen is understandably a little more doctrinally grounded than some of the elegies by white women we've explored, since they are

published by the *AME Recorder*, written by and for subscribers of a religious periodical and thus reflect the values and norms relevant to their particular religious and ethical contexts.

I read these elegists' wake work to simultaneously represent a mode of conveying or safeguarding the memory of the dead, and of performing and refining in themselves the Christian virtues modeled by the righteous dead whom they elegize. Drawing on Seremetakis' *The Last Word*, the elegies of marginalized communities like the Black Victorian women published in the *Recorder* can work to create affective enclaves in which disruptive and resistant social practices can be expressed (5). Although each elegy here is written in honor of a specific individual, the literary community represented by the *Recorder* was one who sought to "let their enemies know that they are a people that are not brutes; but men and women, possessing intellects as well as themselves"; each enactment of mourning was evidence and insistence upon their people's full humanity (Gardner 2006, 814). I have drawn on work by Eric Gardner, who has worked extensively on the history of *The Christian Recorder* and other early Black print media, to ascertain biographical details of each of the authors I chose to be sure that each one was, in fact, a Black woman, since the *Recorder* reprinted poems from many sources. Gardner's work also provided me with important context about the lives and circumstances of the poets, including any information about known parentage, employment, marriage, and children, and about their geographic location.

An Elegy by Mary, Rachel, and Emma Davis

Dearest Fanny, thou has left us,
in this world of sorrow sure,
But 'tis God that has bereft us,
He can all our sorrows cure.

Yet thy voice, thy childish singing,
Soundeth over in our ears;
And we listen and remember,
Till our eyes will gather tears.

Fair as some sweet flower in Summer,
Till death's hand on thee was laid,

Scorched the beauty from the flower,
Made the tender petals fade.

Nature fain would have us weeping,
Love asserts her mournful rod,
But we answer, holy angels,
Have conveyed thee home to God.

Listening for thy welcome footstep,
And thy childish words of love;
But the angel's trump has sounded
Calling you from us above.

Sweetly sleep, our little sister,
In the grave so dark and drear,
For we know, if we prove faithful,
We will meet another year.

April 2, 1864

The poem was published without title, but with this inscription: “In memory of Francis Ann Davis, daughter of Henry and Eliza Davis, who departed this life on the 5th of March 1864, of Congestion of the Brain, aged 13 years, 3 months, and 12 days.” Gardner’s research on the Davis sisters identifies their father as an ordained AME minister and agent for the *Recorder* in New Jersey, and places Mary, Rachel, and Emma at approximately 23, 22, and 20 years old, respectively, at the time of the poem’s writing. The large age difference between the older girls and their sister might explain some of the emphasis on Fanny’s youth and naïveté in her “childish singing” and “childish words of love”, both aspects that act to assert Fanny’s innocence and purity. The Davis sisters’ elegy draws on almost romantic nature motifs in describing their sister as a flower—a conventional allusion in most Victorian poetry, since the short life of the flower reflects the transience of mortal life, but also another enactment of her sinlessness. Although this is conventional in children’s elegies, at thirteen years old Fanny was on the cusp of adolescence, so her sisters’ assertion insinuates the Fanny is *un-plucked*, so to speak, and not yet privy to the corrupting influence of adulthood. The third stanza acts out a compelling play wherein Nature and Love are responsible for the sorrow felt by the bereaved family, to which the certainty of God’s salvation acts as a salve. But the sisters do not presume this salvation for themselves, each of them being removed enough from childhood that they no longer inherently occupy that innocence. They instead enact themselves as faithful Christians by modeling their

concern for continued, appropriately Christian behavior in their own lives if they may ever hope to be reunited with their little sister. The act of the Davis sisters' collective elegizing of Fanny also models a collective wake-work that acts to restore their now fractured family. Their emulation of Christian piety within the family attests to the civilized, united nature of their family—an indirect credit to a presumably civilizing and Christian mother—and works at the same time to console their bereaved parents by orienting them toward a possibility of future reunion in heaven.

“Thou Art Gone!”, by Mrs. Eliza Nixon

Her form was graceful, and her eyes were bright,
 Like [shining] stars when robed in cloudless light—
 A queenly dignity sat on her mien:
 With pride I speak [if not 'twas] plainly seen
 Her God she loved the most, her husband next.
 From duty naught could turn her. No pretext
 Urged by a friend could lend her from the truth.
 Pure as a sunbeam from her very youth,
 Who did not love her! Who did see her face
 But saw a mirror full of light and grace?
 Hers was an angel's heart, as pure and high
 As the bright sun that gilds the noon-day sky.
 Oh! Hannah, Hannah, thou art gone, my love,
 To see the glories of the world above.

O, holy virtue! Such thy pleasures are,
 They banish sorrow, and they banish fear.
 Thy gifts are crowns; thy palaces are gold,
 Rising in grandeur, glorious to behold;
 Thy gates are precious stones, thy rivers love;
 Thy fruits the glories of the climes above.
 No fang of asp, no scorpion's sting is there,
 No breath of sin pollutes the limpid air.
 There is not heard the voice of stormy strife,
 And death ne'er treads that land of endless life.

December 6, 1862

Although this poem was published without an explicit dedication to the deceased, and I cannot verify the relation between Mrs. Eliza Nixon and the Hannah of the poem, the *Recorder* from the week before noted the death of one “Sister Hannah Cornish” on November 23rd, who was the wife of an AME reverend in Bucks County, slightly northeast of Philadelphia where our (approximately 22-year old) poet Mrs. Eliza Nixon lived, which offers a plausible explanation (“Died”, pp.2 November 29th, 1862; Gardner 2006, 827). Mrs. Nixon’s poem diverges slightly in form in her choice of rhyming couplets, where most nineteenth century elegies were composed of four-line stanzas in alternate rhyme schemes. Nixon emphasizes descriptions of Hannah’s

physical appearance more than is common across the other elegies included here; we are told of the “queenly dignity” of her manner, of her graceful body, and bright eyes.

Hannah’s outer beauty—itsself a sentimental trope insofar as beautiful things are more sympathizable to readers—corresponds directly with her inner Christian virtue; the assertion that “Her God she loved the most, her husband next” models an ideal of pious Victorian femininity through obedience and loyalty. The subjugation of her own will to God and her husband models an impressible and civilized sexuality, tempered by piety to prevent it appearing overly corporeal. References to her purity likewise enact Hannah as being thoroughly civilized by her Christian faith, resistant to the temptation of even her friends to shirk her (perhaps wifely or religious) duties. Her mirroring of “light and grace” might be read as an expression of how her own Christian influence drew out in those who knew her a sense of their own inner divinity. By extension, Nixon’s elegy for a woman who possessed such an important social influence works as wake-work by consoling the social group of the bereaved, impressing upon them Hannah’s virtues and orienting them toward a communal Christian faith.

Although the deceased Hannah was beloved by all who knew her, Nixon does not end her elegy with the tentative hope of reunion with the deceased as we see so often in Victorian elegies. In fact, there is no further mention of Hannah or any individual person in the second stanza. Instead, the poem ends in an enactment of her own deference to God’s will and her affective apprehension of awe at imagining His heavenly kingdom and its perfection, with our only indication of afterlife as unity coming in the promise that death cannot disrupt heaven with its tread.

“Sacred to the Memory of Mrs. M. C. Weaver”, by “Sallie” (Sarah L. Daffin)

Thou art gone hence. From all the cares
Of life, thy happy soul is free;
Triumphantly ascended where
No mortal trials wait for thee.

None knew thee, but to love thee;
For thy winning, graceful [manner],
Drew a host of hearts around thee,
That thy goodness will remember.

In the hour of pain and anguish,
In the time of deep distresses,
We will ever fondly cherish,
The example thou has set us.

And when life's short race is ended,
All our sorrows here are o'er
By angelic guards attended,
May we meet on heaven's bright shore.

April 2nd, 1864

This was only one of several elegies published in memory of Mrs. Mary C. Weaver, the wife of the editor of *The Christian Recorder*, Rev. Elisha Weaver. An elegy appears right below Sallie's on the paper for April 2nd, with the initials ACW in the author line (perhaps another Weaver relative); another without listed author was published March 26th, sent by mail from Georgetown in D.C. Two more are published in April—one in the paper for the 9th, by Susan Paul Vashon, and another in the paper for April 16th, by one Jane E. Thompson (Gardner 822, 829-30). Of Mrs. Weaver's known elegists, Sallie is the only one who was a Philadelphia resident and was an active member of the local AME community (823). Sallie's short but effective elegy emphasizes the example set by Mrs. Weaver's deeds in life, enacting Weaver as a civilized and sensible woman whose influence would remain a blessing until they met again in heaven.

Across all the elegies for Mrs. Weaver, there is particular attention paid to pain, suffering, and struggle, and to her graceful acceptance of death; the acknowledgment of her capacity to experience suffering authorizes her as a feeling, impressible being, but her mortal condition is mediated by a civilized, Christian faith in her own salvation. Common in each elegy is a consolation to the bereaved, that they need not even "mourn her as dead"; Jane Thompson's elegy goes so far as to describe Mary's eyes, which "tho' dimmed" in death, will again sparkle "with holier love" when they someday welcome her husband "home to the mansions above".

Reading Sallie's elegy alongside others for Mary Weaver reveals several contemporaneous enactments of the Black Christian woman as a steward for the dead, conveying her to a spiritual life in eternity. Each elegist enacts herself as a having the affective capacity to console the bereaved widower and the community to whom Mary belonged in precisely the same manner Sallie extolled in her letter on women's mission, appropriately directed toward an ideal, civilized Christian piety rather than expressing inconsolable affect.

Conclusion²²

The contents and structure of this thesis directly reflect the path I took in trying to understand a weird trend in the literature that left me wanting more. As I researched nineteenth century funerary practices in the summer of 2021, I ran time and again into a very specific, pervasive stereotype: that Victorian women were exceedingly, morbidly obsessed with death, but that the things they wrote *about* death were disingenuous and empty. These things seemed contradictory to me, so I set myself to the task of trying to understand and contextualize this very specific genre in its particular cultural context. What I found was that, by writing elegies for their loved ones and for the bereaved of their communities, a great number of bourgeois Victorians—Black and white, men and women—were taking part in a literary form of mourning that affirmed their social continuity in the real world and explored new ideas of a heavenly world to come in which they would eventually be reunited with the dead. The elegy was a familiar medium, having already occupied a centrally important role within American funerary practices since the seventeenth century, in which new Protestant ideas about the afterlife could be navigated in the familiar linguistic conventions of sentimentalism. This combination of affective and religious expression²³ imbued the genre with a particular, popular cultural authority, even as it was decried by many elite male critics.

²² This conclusion was written after the completion of the oral defense of this thesis on September 6th, 2022; it is based mostly on my opening remarks and the notes and suggestions offered to me by committee members in conversation during the defense. In a few spots I have directly cited my committee members, and have credited them in footnotes.

²³ Several authors I've read for this project (Joycelyn Moody and Max Cavitch, especially, but others as well) refer to the Puritanical and Calvinist confessional literature as a precursor to and influencer of the elegy, which often served to witness the last testaments of the deceased (especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). However, a little cursory re-reading of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (Part iii, in Chapter 4, section A. Calvinism, specifically) has suggested to me that the so-called emotionalism, through which the believer is assured of his salvation, latent in texts like this might actually have been a divergence from more Calvinist Puritanical beliefs, which display serious scrutiny of any sensual or bodily experiences (68). The conflation of and discrepancy between Puritan contempt for the body and the bodily-sensory emphasis of emotionalism (and later of moral sense theory and sentimentalism) seems worth further study, especially as it pertains to relationships between religion, morality, and the sensory capacities of human bodies.

Although elegies were more or less ubiquitous within the middle- and upper-classes, regardless of gender or race, women elegists were the most notorious within the nineteenth century. Many second wave feminist scholars have argued that the sudden uptick in women elegists during this period was caused in part by their displacement from their traditional roles in caring for the dead body by male professionals, paired with their increased literacy and access to print media. Victorian women ostensibly retained a maieutic role in the care for the dead through poetry, even if it became increasingly less acceptable for them to care for the dead body. The circulation of poetry nationally through popular publications helped facilitate an imagined collective of fellow-feeling American women that could simulate, if not wholly replace, the localized neighborhood community of more rural, less industrial eighteenth century life. But although this might account for the relative acceptance and popularity of women in the elegizing role, more recent scholarship has consistently critiqued this analysis of the genre for its emphasis on “resistance” and its reductive reading of sentimentalism. As I explored in the second chapter, although white women poets’ use of the genre may have worked to memorialize individual deaths, it also affirmed bio-social norms of white Womanhood that excluded racial others—especially Black people—from the status of “Human”. The use of spiritualist depictions of a future in heaven likewise indexed evolutionary-scientific norms about differential racial abilities for remembrance and temporal orientation, and worked to affirm a linear-progressive model of Time integral to the civilizing project of American capitalism. The imagined “WE” of Victorian American Womanhood was an exclusive one, which affirmed itself by asserting the difference and inferiority of its racial and social others, and the poems I analyzed in this project explore some of the ways these tropes were employed to that end.

This is not to say that the racist projects of sentimentalism actually prevented Black women writers from taking part in it. Sentimentalism was still a common language to the American public, even if the authority it lent to its authors was differentially experienced on the basis of race; fashion is fashion, and gatekeeping can only do so much to dissuade the masses from taking part in popular and trendy practices. Black women did not experience the same shift in material care for the dead in this time period—in fact, there were a fair number of Black women who took up professional roles as shrouding women and morticians in this time. But, as I detailed in the third chapter, the medium of the sentimental elegy offered a culturally relevant and remarkably accessible medium through which Black women could act as stewards for the dead and the bereaved alike, shepherding them toward a reunion in a Christian afterlife. In doing so, and in publishing these works of poetry broadly in print media, Black men and women of the AME church sought to demonstrate how effectively Christian education could form civilized and appropriately sentimental Black subjects who had a place in the progress of a Western, Christian humanity. In hindsight, the third chapter is ultimately about the role of respectability politics (as coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham) and of mid-century Victorian ideals of racial uplift (although the ideas of WEB Du Bois and Booker T. Washington came a little past the timeframe of this project) within the social projects of freed AME communities in the Northern states. Joycelyn Moody's analysis of Christian ontology in Black women's writing and the ubiquity of pious language and stewardship present within the poems I analyzed in the third chapter reflect the prevalence of this social consciousness across most Black owned literary publications in the nineteenth century.

In earlier analyses of the genre, the apparent *indistinction* between Black and white women's elegies in the nineteenth century seem to have belied the differences between them—

differences that reflect the unique ends pursued by their publishers, and the varying degrees of power and authority lent to their authors by the genre of the elegy and the mode of sentimentalism. For the white women whose works were published in *Godey's Lady's Book*, the creative medium of the sentimental elegy offers a site of malpractice, where they might flirt with affective excesses²⁴ or exert influence over others in ways that might have been impermissible elsewhere in white bourgeois society. But for the Black women whose elegies appeared in *The Christian Recorder*, sentimental elegies were not sites of excess, but rather served as a medium through which to model affective restraint in response to grief, and extol the civilizing powers of Christian education through which they purportedly learned that restraint, thereby refuting the social and scientific norms that asserted the emotional dysregulation of Black minds and bodies. (That Black and white sentimentalism has been lumped together so resolutely by twentieth century literary criticism might be a carryover from classic Victorian racial evolutionism; Black women's sentimentalism is continuously grouped with white women's works of affective excess, even when their performance is one of restraint.) The other commonality between them, the subject matter of death and grief, has likewise been used to claim similarity across racial divisions within the genre, but my exploration of Black and white deathways in the Victorian era in all three body chapters gives many examples of how the social, political, and ontological particulars of death and its material effects were actually quite disparate as well.

I would recall again here Annemarie Mol's project in *The Body Multiple* as the model for this comparison. I have not intended with any single poem or analysis thereof to encapsulate the entire possibility of the elegiac form, nor do I wish to insinuate that they make up only parts of a single whole. None of these enactments is a "functional unit nor an antagonistic opposition," but

²⁴ Credit for this and the following sentence is owed to Dr. Shira Schwartz of my defense committee.

neither are they disparate or wholly distinct; they are all “partially connected, more than one, and less than many” (Mol 72). Despite major differences between the means and ends of white and Black women’s sentimental works, I do still earnestly believe they ought to all be understood *as* sentimental, so long as we leave behind the presumption of disingenuous and excessive affect and instead consider the definition I cite from Elizabeth Barnes in the introduction of this thesis: “a manifestation of the belief in or yearning for consonance—or even unity—of principle and purpose” (Barnes 1996, 598). Read with that understanding, the poems this project reads are not mutually exclusive, but rather are all different enactments of sentimentalism, informed by different bodies, different experiences, and different ontologies.

It is worth noting that the elegies I have studied here were distinctly Northern in their political leanings, their understandings of race, their affective language, and their religious orientations. The values and beliefs of nineteenth century Black AME Christians and Northern spiritualist protestants ought not be understood to represent the entirety of American religious belief, and there are many nuanced differences in Black and white women’s labor and affective authority over death and the household between the North and South, which are even further complicated if one considers the lives of free and enslaved Black women. Southern archives of women’s sentimental poetry are much less prevalent, and often less accessible than those of Northern protestants (perhaps because the elegiac tradition was such a long-held custom in the Puritan North). Archives of Black women’s literature are scarcer still, made precarious by the institution of slavery and its aftermaths. It might not be possible to replicate a project like this concerning Black and white Southern women, but perhaps the lack of elegiac archives might point us back toward Daphne Brooks’ project in *Bodies in Dissent* to consider what other

mediums might have been occupying this niche, or how the Pentecostal and Southern Evangelical traditions related differently to practices of memorialization.

There are many themes that I came across in this thesis that I feel are deserving of further study, especially as comparative projects. For instance, my more cursory exploration of Black and white women's poetry within the two publications I studied for this project suggests that different techniques of memory—especially different mnemonics, like methods of loci, or material memorial practices, like the keeping of family/friendship albums, hair ornaments, memento mori, etc.—are likely reflected in the way different authors do or don't create imagined scenes of recollection within their poems, especially ones drawing on certain nature tropes or on images of an essentialized past-time in the sanctity of the domicile. The deployment of certain tropes might relate to the ways white and Black women were differentially authorized by the elegiac genre and their own unique communities to practice (or mis-practice) the normative, progressive temporalities toward which capitalist Victorians were aspiring. The genre of the elegy and its religious, literary, and social significance also seems to demand more extensive study, especially to interrogate the ways its Victorian iterations were so often understood to carry an irrefutable, inherently spiritual, affective truth, conveyed through words from the soul/mind/interior essence of the person themselves, whereas other literary genres were received as suspect and accused of being fabrications.

The elegiac genre occupies a liminality on multiple levels; as a literary mode, it is not wholly fictive, yet it does not describe "plain fact" as in an autobiography or confessional, and involves creative and imaginative creation; and, socially and temporally, it is produced primarily during the liminal period after an individual's death, and often written by a mourning person who is set apart from society in their grieving. As a written, material product, it endures in the real

world, but it also works to materialize an imagined (possible) reality in the afterlife. Further study of the many ways the elegy achieved and occupies these liminalities, as well as study of how this does or does not differ in Black and white communities, might uncover important and different ways of understanding the memorial practices of North American Protestantism. Additional study might also be done concerning the lives of the material forms of the elegies—the ways different published mediums for these poems were circulated among families and communities, how they were read, with whom they were read, how they were preserved, etc.—to better understand how elegies moved throughout Victorian American society, literally and figuratively. Research in this area might challenge dominant assumptions about sentimental literature being relatively limited to bourgeois demographics (a presumption I am guilty of making within this project), if not in its writing, then at least in its popular consumption.

In writing the third chapter especially, it's become apparent to me that there is an important gap in the literature. Although authors like Xine Yao now explore ways Black women refused the language and norms of sentiment, and authors like Schuller demonstrate how sentimentalism worked to exclude Black persons on socio-political and scientific bases, I feel that American literary studies has failed to take seriously the sentimental poems produced by Black women *because* they appear unremarkable. For over 200 years, study of Victorian literature has resoundingly concluded that works of sentimental poetry simply did not matter. Although recently some interest has been renewed in Black women's elegies, there is still precious little written on the subject compared to books written on their white Victorian contemporaries, and most of what has been written is more focused on individual elegists than on the personal elegies written within the close-knit groups of family and friends that made up bourgeois Victorian society.

Performativity need not be read as disingenuousness. Although some elegies written by the likes Lydia Sigourney and Sarah Josepha Hale were contrived in the most literal sense insofar as they were written for strangers, there are thousands more elegies that are at this moment slowly decaying on the pages of old newspapers, in the acid-paper pages of long-kept friendship albums, in the basements and attics of old family estates, probably long forgotten. The vast majority of these were written for *someone* by another who loved them in life. Each poem in this thesis is hardly more trite than most of the obituaries and eulogies given for the deceased of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, nor much more formulaic, and all the clichés in the world do not stop your average American from lovingly cutting them out of newspapers, nor from carefully saving the funeral programs from the church service. Our fashions have changed, but the sentimental elegy represents a commemorative impulse that has pervaded American funerary practice since the colonial era, and which still dominates our practices today. It is my sincere hope that this project has made apparent some of what there might be to learn from a closer study of American memorial practices like these, and that I may have demonstrated that we need not conflate *common* with *empty* in the study of literature.

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VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Kellie-Sue Martinucci

PLACE OF BIRTH: Erie, Pennsylvania

DATE OF BIRTH: September 11, 1995

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio.

Allegheny College, Meadville, Pennsylvania.

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.

DEGREES AWARDED:

Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies, 2018, Allegheny College

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Teaching Assistant, Department of Religious Studies, Syracuse University, 2020-2021.