

**“Not Because My Heart is Hard:” *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, the Gothic, and Companionate Marriage**

by Erin Elizabeth Smith

Halfway through her novel *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, Hannah Crafts states that “marriage can only be filled with profit, and honor, and advantage by the free” (135). While the protagonist seems to be referencing her own bondage in the Southern institution of slavery, the idea of freedom being the key to successful marriage was not only true for slaves in the 1850s, but women as well. In fact, many of the early women’s rights activists used the term “marital bondage” as a way to draw parallels between slavery and a woman’s legal rights within the marriage contract; this analogy was used in hopes of drawing those from the strong abolitionist movement to their own cause (Hartog 152). This notion of marriage as an oppressing force for women – black or white, free or enslaved – continues throughout the course of Craft’s novel, where the only strong marriages are based in love, equality, and the freedom to choose one’s partner.

In February of 2001, editor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. bought a manuscript which he believed to be the first novel written by a fugitive slave and possibly the first written by a female African American slave (Gates xi). The next year was spent authenticating the work through extensive tests on the age of the manuscript – including paper, ink, and binding analysis – as well as exhaustive work into the identity of the supposed author, Hannah Crafts. The former led to the revelation that the novel was indeed written in the 1850s, which would mean that if the author was a former slave then this would be a landmark discovery. The research into the book’s author, however, proved trickier. While census reports show no woman named Hannah Crafts of the appropriate age living in the free states during the 1850s or 60s, Gates believed the name itself to be a pseudonym used to protect the author’s fugitive status.

The one thing that Gates knew for sure, however, was that the author of the novel was intimately familiar with the North Carolina statesman John Hill Wheeler and his wife Ellen. If Crafts was indeed a slave of the Wheeler family, as Gates strongly believed, then she would have had access to a great deal of contemporary literature.<sup>i</sup> In fact, many of the motifs in the novel are directly pilfered from work found in Wheeler’s extensive library, including novels by Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, Walter Scott, and Horace Walpole, the latter of which is likely the inspiration for many of the Gothic motifs of Crafts’ work.<sup>ii</sup>

**Walpole, Crafts, and The Gothic**

Horace Walpole’s novel *The Castle of Otranto* is today considered the prototype for the Gothic novels of the 1800s. As Fred Botting notes in his history of the Gothic novel, “it was Walpole’s text that condensed features from old poetry, drama, and romance and provided the model for future developments” (49). Walpole himself claims that the novel “was an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the an[c]ient and the modern” (1). In fact, Walpole’s iconic use of the portrait as a means of haunting his novel’s central

family is seen again in Crafts' work where the original proprietor of her home, Sir Clifford De Vincent, hung his and his wife's portraits in the great hall and placed a "severe malediction" against anyone who attempted to remove them (16).<sup>iii</sup> Gates himself argues that the Vincent home harkens back to the titular castle in Walpole's work in that "Lindendale seems to be exceedingly aristocratic and antique for a New World setting" (254), and John Stauffer notes in his essay that "Crafts's proclivity for 'fancy pictures' foreshadows her use of the Gothic" (56).

Yet it is less Walpole's "spooky" motifs which resonate in Crafts' work, but more so the ideas and ideals of marriage as viewed through the lens of the Gothic. Since the Gothic was a response to the Enlightenment's progress toward reason and the purely scientific, the natural inclination was to move to a more romantic style of narrative, one where imagination is a salient theme and adventure drives the central conflict. As Botting puts it, "In Gothic productions imagination and emotional effects exceed reason. Passion, excitement and sensation transgress social proprieties and moral laws" (3). Many of these novels are marked by this move against tradition, particularly in the use of marriage; not for property or upward social mobility, but rather for companionate love.

### **Companionate Marriage in *The Castle of Otranto***

According to the OED, the term "companionate marriage" was actually coined to mean "a form of marriage which provides for divorce by mutual consent and in which neither partner has any legal responsibilities towards the other," but most marriage historians define it more broadly as a marriage that is chosen by the children, not the parents, and that is typically based on romantic love (Stone 392). This is seen acutely in *The Castle of Otranto* where the novel's antagonist attempts to forcibly marry his dead son's fiancé, Isabella, in order to produce another male heir, despite the fact that he is already married. In the meanwhile, he is also attempting to marry his own daughter off to Isabella's father as a means to strengthen the family's political ties. The fact that the novel heatedly villanizes these actions seems a means of eschewing the marriage market, particularly with those of the higher classes, and moving more toward an idea of marriage as a process based on choice rather than blind betrothal.

*The Castle of Otranto* opens with a marriage that has been "contracted" by the castle's proprietor between his ailing son Conrad and the princess Isabella, who has been "delivered by her guardians into the hands of Manfred" (3). By the end of the first paragraph, one can already tell that this marriage is based neither on love between the two nor does it bear the marks of free will. The fact that Manfred has drawn up their union as one would a contract for the sale of property implies that this exchange of vows is on par with an exchange of goods. Sure enough we find that most of the wedding guests

attributed this hasty wedding to the Prince's dread of seeing accomplished an ancient prophecy, which was said to have pronounced that the castle and lordship of Otranto 'should pass from the present family, whenever the real owner should be grown too large to inhabit it'.

Thus the reasoning for the marriage resides not in love or a commonality of goals between Conrad and Isabella, but rather in the father's greedy desire to maintain his property rights and male lines of inheritance.

That Conrad is killed by the end of the second page, nullifying the opportunity for this political and economic union, means that Manfred, who is already married, must wed Isabella himself in order to make sure that the rules of primogeniture are held intact. It also sets up the novel's apparent disagreement with the idea of marriage as being used solely as a political or economic means. In fact, Isabella muses that "she felt no concern for the death of young Conrad, except commiseration; and she was not sorry to be delivered from a marriage which had promised her little felicity, either from her destined bridegroom, or the severe temper of Manfred." Conrad's violent death also helps to establish Manfred's own dehumanized sense of purpose. When staring at the enormous helmet which crushed his son, Walpole notes that "nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young Prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him." Here again, it is not compassion or love for his son that he is visualizing, but rather the eventual loss of his fortune for which he sees this – correctly – as an omen.

Manfred's own marriage is also fraught with disaster; his wife, Hippolita, has borne him a daughter and a sickly son, and his patriarchal lineage is now in question. Since Hippolita appears to be out of her child-bearing years, Manfred sees his only way to maintain his political authority is to divorce and enter into a new marriage with Isabella, who, while ambivalent to Conrad, is downright terrified by his father.<sup>iv</sup> In fact, when Manfred lets the princess know his intentions, Walpole notes that she is "half dead with fright and horror." The inequity between himself and Hippolita is likewise commented on, particularly in Manfred's quickness to end their relationship as a means to continue his bloodline. In his attempts to seek divorce, he is uninterested in Hippolita's opinions on the matter, exclaiming to their priest that "I am sovereign here, and will allow no meddling priest to interfere in the affairs of my domestic," and Hippolita confirms this hierarchy later when she states that "It is not our place to make election for ourselves: heaven, our fathers, and our husbands must decide for us."

Here the inequity in the relationship leads directly to the madness of Manfred, the "ruin" of Hippolita, the eventual murder of their daughter, Matilda, and the possibility of the coerced marriage for Isabella, which could be seen on par with rape. By representing the feminine, as Sue Chaplin suggests, as "woman-as-chattel" (187) and disallowing any female strength within the relationship by allowing all affairs (whether they are those of state<sup>v</sup> or the domestic) be conducted by the man, leads to an absolute accumulation of power; this denies the possibility of either mutual love or freedom within a relationship. Thus it is no surprise that Manfred and Hippolita's relationship fails spectacularly, and that each are punished for their roles within this marital construction by their loss of their lineage, the violent death of both of their children, the removal of their property, and the loss of noble status.

In fact, the only relationships here that are marked by strength are those of Matilda and Theodore and, eventually, Theodore and Isabella. What links each of these pairings is

that they are marked by mutual respect and adoration of the other. Each, it is eventually found, is also the social equal of the other, furthering the ideas of total equality between the lovers; each chooses the other as their partner as opposed to having the choice made for them by their parents. While the novel does seem to follow the traditional Gothic tropes of a virtuous heroine in flight and the brave, if not lackluster, man who eventually returns her to the domestic sphere, here Isabella's flight is a form of autonomy unto itself, releasing her from the confines of arranged marriage and allowing the freedom of choice for what can ultimately be seen as a companionate relationship. That Isabella's fleeing from Manfred leads directly to her introduction to her future mate and that in the end, those who promoted the ideas of marriage for social gain are ruined for their push for power over affection, furthers this idea that good marriages are based in romantic love rather than simple struggles for lines of inheritance or other economic considerations.

The idea of companionate marriage was just becoming popular when Walpole was composing *The Castle of Otranto* (Stone 404). Historian Lawrence Stone notes that in Britain at this time it was the "wealthy professional and landed classes" which saw the most significant changes in the way in which marriage was constructed (394). But in the aristocracy, marriage was still controlled tightly by the parents of the couple and "economic, social or political considerations were often still paramount" (392). Thus the choice in partner that Theodore and Isabella exhibit seems to be largely forward thinking, particularly in how strictly the book punishes those parents who attempt to meddle in their children's decision of partner.

### **Marriage in the pre-Civil War South**

While marriage has always been a flawed institution, particularly for women, it did work to procure its practitioners certain rights under law. In Crafts' time period, by marrying, one was protected

through such legal devices as joint property ownership, inheritance rights, support rights, wrongful death and consortium benefits, and so on... [This means that] marriage and family formation can be stimulated; interfamilial exploitation can be minimized; families can be protected from extrafamilial vicissitudes; and society can be protected from marital and familial miscarriages. (O'Donnell and Jones 1)

Unlike Isabella's case, however, the laws concerning slaves in antebellum America were painfully restrictive toward African American woman; so much so, that marriage between slaves was prohibited within the Southern states (Grossberg 129). This denial of matrimony was seen as legally sound as slaves were considered the physical property of their owners and one could not be property as well as have rights under the law, in the same way that cattle or furniture could not. This led directly to a lack of legitimacy in sexual encounters, as that without a contract of marriage, sex was merely a casual connection, and thus children become property rather than "legitimate" offspring. This, Michael Grossberg argues, allowed "southerners [to suppress] the right of their black charges to create families as whites defined them" (130), which advanced

the idea of Africans as being beneath the standards of civilized humanity, which only further legitimized the Southern claim of the African race being somehow less than human.

Legal restrictions on slave marriages were also a result of the concern of white masters for their legitimate rule over black women. Under the law, when a woman marries her first master was her husband, and having a split in allegiance would work to undermine the authority of the white slave owner. Thus without marriage, “a slave wife could not commit herself to her slave husband, nor a husband to his wife. She would never live within his household, for a slave could have no household. He had little capacity, no legal power, to protect her” (Hartog 93). Without legal recognition, issues of inheritance, legitimacy of children, and fidelity were utterly void.

Despite all of this, romantic love was not unknown within slave life. Grossberg argues that “in the little breathing space that blacks created for themselves within the peculiar institution, marriage often became a powerful institution that softened the horrors of bondage” (132). Still these unions were difficult to maintain in the traditional sense. Both partners, and their children, were still property of their master and could be sold at any time to anywhere in the country. Many marital bonds were broken through these sales, and husband and wife never saw one another again.<sup>vi</sup> Likewise, all female slaves were the sexual property of their masters, denying the capacity for fidelity within these unions. These sexual encounters often led to pregnancy, thus the children the two raised might or might not have been born of their coupling. Perhaps most importantly, however, was the fact that neither the husband nor wife could protect the other from any of these actions, leading to a sense of helplessness and lack of control even within one’s own matrimonial bonds.

While the legality of slave marriage was never a question, the reality was the slave unions were fairly commonplace and most adult slaves married (Grossberg 132). In the 1853 North Carolina case of *Howard vs. Howard*, the judge stated that there was “a wide distinction between the cohabitation of slaves as man and wife, and an indiscriminate sexual intercourse; it is recognized among slaves, for as a general rule, they respect the exclusive rights of fellow slaves who are married” (Grossberg 131-132). The judge went on to state that the wedding of slaves should be encouraged by slave owners, as it promoted the happiness of their charges, which would make more productive workers of both his slaves and their children. It was fairly commonplace, in fact, for owners to arrange marriages between their slaves so as to promote a union.

These statements could be read as even more nefarious, however, for promoting the weddings of slaves was also a way in which to encourage procreation and likewise an increase in the master’s slave stock. This intrinsic connection between procreation and marriage can be seen in the rhetoric of marital rape in the 1800s. While slaves were not allowed to be legally married, the same notions of traditional white marriages were held to non-authenticated unions as well. With this being the case, “marrying” two slaves forces that female slave to be sexually active, something which both Crafts’ narrator and Harriet Jacobs, the author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, attempt to avoid for the very reason that sex often led to pregnancy. At this time, sex was seen as something

that was only to happen during wedlock and thus was viewed as the symbol of the union. If one were to deny the other their “right” to this act, then it was seen as an affront on the institution of marriage (O’Donnell and Jones 9). As noted by William J. O’Donnell and David A. Jones in their historical analysis of the institution of marriage in the United States,

refusal to engage in spousal intercourse – the only legitimate use of sex – might be viewed as passive profanation. Consequently, under the rubric of sacred symbolism, if a husband imposes intercourse on an unwilling wife, she, not he, would appear to be the offender. (9)

Even if a female slave were attempting to remain celibate in order to disengage herself from the breeding stock of her master’s house, as Hannah continually states she is doing, requiring the union of slaves would likewise require sexual coupling, thus negating the woman’s attempt at infertility.

Because the law states that the children of slaves must follow the condition of the mother, infants born of indentured woman, regardless of the legal status – or race – of their father, were property of the mother’s owner. Thus not only was the promotion of marriage a means of requiring intercourse, but it also led to a proliferation of the raping of bondwomen. This violation was not only then a means of sexual release, but also a way to increase one’s human stock. These sexual indiscretions between male master and female slave were actually so rampant in the South, that South Carolina actually would not recognize divorce between whites because they were most often granted on the grounds of adultery, and “to allow white women the freedom to divorce for male adultery would have meant placing severe restrictions on men’s sexual behavior” (Salmon 65). This implies that even the courts were aware of the rampant couplings of slaves and owners and their refusal to allow women the rights of divorce for infidelity only furthered to legally enable this institutional rape of slaves.<sup>vii</sup>

### **“Marital Bondage”**

Marriage at the time was not just a restrictive agent for slave women, but for white women as well. In fact, nineteenth century legislation in regards to female rights within the bonds of matrimony led many female activists to draw parallels between slavery and marriage. At the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, the term “marital bondage” became part of the discourse of early feminism and “much of the rhetoric played ... with an analogy between the legal power of the husband and that of the slave master” (Hartog 152). This notion could clearly be seen in the ways in which marriage created a private sphere away from the law of the courts, favoring instead the private law of the husband, which created a shelter for the verbal, physical, or emotional abuse of wives (Hartog 24).

This analogy between white wives and black slaves was eloquently put in a letter that women’s rights activist Lucy Stone wrote to her future sister-in-law Antoinette Brown Blackwell. “It seems to me,” Stone wrote,

that no man who deserved the name of MAN, when he knows what a mere thing, the law makes a married woman, would ever insult a woman, by asking her to marry. It is horrid to live without the intimate companionship, and gentle loving influences which are the constant attendant of a true love marriage—It is a wretchedly unnatural way of living, but nothing is so bad as to be made a thing, as every married woman now is, in the eye of the Law. (Lesser & Merrill 56)

This claim of wife as “thing” was another popular rhetorical tool in the fight for equality within marriage laws. It demonstrated specifically how the law determined the identity of women as nothing more than subservient to their husband “masters.” Hartog argues that Stone was well aware that the “thingness of a wife was a legal metaphor, a fiction,” but that the use of the word held such resonant implications with abolitionist rhetoric that many proclaimed this “fiction” a “social reality” (123).

Still the laws of the nineteenth century did seem very much in line with Stone’s assessments. Women’s desires were often seen as moot if not in line with their husband’s. For example, men could claim legal compensation from anyone who he believed had seduced his wife on the grounds that the wife was his property and the adulterer was seen as a trespasser on his ground. A husband also had absolute authority to reclaim a “runaway” wife from wherever she was being harbored regardless of whether her flight was based in his own abuses. Economically this was also the case, since all property belonging to the woman became the property of the man upon marriage. Her identity was likewise erased both in the taking of the husband’s name, but also in the fact that in the courts and in trade, the wife was always simply seen as the agent of her husband, rather than a singular entity (Hartog 123). Here again, these laws mirror those of the Southern slave system, as that in the eyes of the law, women were seen as the property of their husbands and once married, were only given rights within the context of their marital “master.”

Yet Stone’s claim is not simply that marriage serves to undermine the rights of women – which she clearly did believe – but also that the ideal marriage would rest in one based on “true love.” Like Walpole’s and Crafts’ novels, Stone believes in marriage rooted in the companionate, an idea very much in vogue in the mid-nineteenth century (Stone 404). Historian Lawrence Stone argues that

Once it was doubted that affection could and would naturally develop after marriage, decision-making power had to be transferred to the future spouses themselves, and more and more ... began to put the prospects of emotional satisfaction before the ambition for increased income or status. This in turn also had its effect in equalizing relationships between husband and wife. (325)

This shift in the ideology of marriage did work to change the way in which marriages were formed, yet the ideal of a marriage that worked to “equalize” its partners in this time period seems less likely given the restrictive laws previously discussed. Still this notion was perpetuated within the literary writings of the time, particularly in the Gothic

novel, which rose to popularity almost in unison with the idea of marriage for love over property.

### **Crafting the Companionate in Slave Novels**

It is no surprise that in the construction of her novel, Hannah Crafts too privileges the idea of love within marriage as a means to equality. Just as Walpole – or, after him, Ann Radcliffe – spurned the economic portion of the institution, Crafts likewise pushes marriage as a choice which should be made in freedom.<sup>viii</sup> Here, though, the institution of slavery has negated this freedom, thus disallowing for her to legally marry before her escape to the North. Hannah is also adamant that “the slave, if he or she desires to be content, should always remain in celibacy” (135) as that by risking pregnancy one is also working to help perpetuate the Southern institution in creating more slave stock for the home. In Hannah’s world of slavery, companionate love is an impossible indulgence because it does not come in conjunction with freedom.

Perhaps the best example of this is the union of the Henry slave, Charlotte, to William, a slave of a neighboring household. While the ceremony celebrating their nuptials is joyous and bountiful – particularly for a slave wedding – and the guests are busied with gaieties such as music and dancing, Hannah quietly ponders the possibility for the couple’s long term happiness:

Did the future spread before them bright and cloudless? Did they anticipate domestic felicity and long years of wedded love: when their lives, their limbs, their very souls were subject to the control of another’s will; when the husband could not be at liberty to provide a home for his wife, nor the wife be permitted to attend to the wants of her husband, and when living apart in a state of separate bondage they could only meet occasionally at best, and then might be decreed without a moment’s warning to never meet again. (123)

While this marriage is based in romantic love and the choice to enter into it is made freely by the couple without the coercion of outside forces, the economics of slavery eventually lead to its potential ruin. In fact, it is because William is “proud of his marriage” that his master decides to sell him to a Southern trader, which would in turn separate the young newlyweds forever (146). Without freedom there is no way to actually protect the bonds of matrimony, even if they are based in mutual love. As Mrs. Henry notes, “it is only natural that [Charlotte] should wish to protect and assist her husband” (144), but the laws of slavery directly prevent this.

Yet it is obvious that Crafts’ romantic notions of love are still intact since despite their bondage, the couple decides to attempt elopement to the North. Although they are not mentioned again until the final page of the book, it is eventually noted that their escape was successful and that they were living in a “tiny white cottage half-shaded in summer by rose-vines” with “an exquisite flower garden and ... a dainty orchard of choice fruits” (246). William has become a carpenter and Charlotte a seamstress. This picture of domestic happiness is rooted not only in the couple’s new freedom, but in a marriage

based in love; still, it is only in the pairing of the two – freedom and love – that a successful marriage is possible in this novel.

The Henrys, the white family that takes Hannah in after an accident leaves her physically injured, are one of the only other examples of a happy couple in the novel. In her description of the two, Hannah states that “early in life, [Mr. Henry] found a partner like himself wise, pious, and gentle” and furthers that they are a “lovely family” (128). Much in the same way that Isabella married Theodore despite her father’s betrothal of her to Manfred, Mrs. Henry states that she “married Mr. Henry contrary to [her father’s] will” (130) for she was an heiress and he a lowly clergyman. This provides yet another example of contented marriage based in companionate ideas of love, despite economic disparity. Here the two are bonded in equality not from socioeconomic positions, but rather their equal devotion to Christian ideology.

Mrs. Henry also illustrates her opinions on marriage in allowing Charlotte and William to marry in the first place. While she understands the hardships of slave unions, her belief in their devotion to one another seems to trump even her misgivings about their pairing. After the couple flees for the North, she states to Hannah that “I ought to have foreseen all this, and yet I did not. The language of Scripture is just as true today as it was six thousand years ago. ‘They desire shall be they husband.’ For him Charlotte could abandon her home, and long-trying friends” (148). In this, Mrs. Henry shows her conviction that marriage trumps even the notions of law; by allowing her slave to run off without recompense, she tips her hand to the principle that a husband is a wife’s first true master, and that all others must bow to the couple’s wishes, which is strictly against the laws of the time period. This too shows her belief in slaves as people, not property, and her devotion to the idea of love and betrothal seems in line with Christian philosophy, if not the traditional views of other slaveholders.<sup>ix</sup>

In Priscilla Wald’s essay “Hannah crafts,” she posits that in most abolitionist texts, slavery ruins the marriages of both slave and slaveholder alike (227). While the Henrys are denizens of the South and own their share of slaves, the traditional dichotomy of slave and master is not present in their home; the pair’s Christian notions of kindness and benevolence are noted constantly during Hannah’s stay. In fact, Hannah comments that while she was “not considered a servant, neither was [she] treated exactly as a guest, though with quite as much kindness and consideration. There was a pleasant familiarity in their manner towards [her] that a visitor could scarcely have expected” (128). This likely stems from Mrs. Henry’s promise to her dying father that she would not traffic any further in the slave trade, vowing to neither buy nor sell any other human being in her lifetime, and upon her death, the slaves she did own would be both emancipated and given financial settlements as a means to enter the free world. With this disavowal of the economics both of slavery and marriage, it is no surprise that the Henry marriage is one of contentment. Likewise, they are the only couple in the novel with children, showing that reproduction here is not to maintain the lines of inheritance (their children will not inherit their parents’ expensive human property), but rather to bring children into the world out of love of family rather than a need for lineage.

### **Slave Economics as a Means to Failed Marriage**

By contrast with the marriage the Henrys, however, the novel's first marriage, while founded in mutual love, is fraught with issues of race which prove fatal to its couple. Like *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Bondwoman's Narrative* begins with a wedding. Here, Hannah's master brings to Lindendale a new bride whose racial hybridity is foreshadowed in Hannah's description of her as "a small brown woman, with a profusion of wavy curly hair, large bright eyes, and delicate features with the exception of her lips which were too large, full, and red" (27). Upon the revelation of her concealed racial lineage, Hannah's mistress is forced with the decision to either live her life enslaved by her blackmailer or to be forced into bondage; regardless, because of the miscegenation laws of the period, if her race were made public, her marriage – despite the couple's love for one another – would be nullified.

Much like Walpole's novel, it is economics again which the author shuns as impossible to mix with good marriage. After the couple's union, it is revealed that the only reason the marriage was allowed to come into being was because the mistress's blackmailer, Mr. Trappe, hoped to gain economically through the joining of two fortunes. However, the mistress's inheritance has been reneged by the bank, and after the marriage, Trappe finds that her husband's property "has been mortgaged to its fullest extent, and that notwithstanding his position he is in fact a poor man" (39). Much in the same way that Manfred wanted to marry Matilda off to Frederic in order to gain from social ties, Trappe – who also serves as the mistress's guardian at this point – agrees to hide her secret in order to gain economically. In fact, he bluntly states that "pecuniary interests are too valuable to be set aside because somebody's honor may be compromised" (40), illustrating his desire for his own financial gain over the couple's happiness.<sup>x</sup> Since the mistress decides to flee her marriage instead of risk her sale into slavery, her decision to abandon her vows are linked again to the economic.

Here again, while Crafts' ideal for marriage is based in the companionate, the economics of slavery prohibit this sort of marital happiness for both whites and blacks. As Catherine Keyser comments in an essay on the novel, for Crafts "the only successful marriage . . . is a union between two equals and two companions" (101), yet Crafts herself states that it is not only these two things which define the ideal marriage but also freedom. Hannah even muses at the beginning of Chapter 11 that "If it was my purpose I could bring many reasons to substantiate this view, but plain, practical common sense must teach every observer of mankind that any situation involving such responsibilities as marriage can only be filled with profit, and honor, and advantage by the free" (135). Thus in its current state, the marriage of her master and mistress is impossible within the context of her definition. That her mistress is eventually driven insane because of her situation and that her husband kills himself after having it revealed to him that his wife is of mixed blood, only furthers the notion that happy marriages cannot exist under the umbrella of slavery in the same way that marriage in Walpole's novel could not exist under primogeniture. Ironically, the violence which follows the dissolution of this union also leads to the end of the Lindendale lineage in the same way that Manfred's patriarchy is negated through his use of marriage as economic tool.

The marriage of the new masters of Lindendale does not fare much better. In inheriting the estate, Mr. and Mrs. Cosgrove also seem to inherit a legacy of slavery and failed marriage. Here the impetus for the marriage is never revealed, but because Mrs. Cosgrove is described as “an English woman of aristocratic family and connections, and very high” (177) one could assume that some amount of their union was based in the financial, especially considering the pair’s aristocratic roots. Neither does this relationship seem to be a particularly romantic one as Mr. Cosgrove seems to be more interested in courting his female slaves than he is in spending time with his wife. Crafts also notes that “he would have loved his wife had not her haughtiness so cruelly repulsed him” (180), directly implying that this relationship was not based in a desire for companionship, but rather, most likely, as a means of property exchange.

The marriage does not grow any closer after Mrs. Cosgrove’s discovery of her husband’s infidelity. In fact her rage at being sexually rivaled by his bondwomen leads directly to one of his mistress’s murdering her child and herself in order to escape being traded. Despite this bloody scene, Mr. Cosgrove’s philandering does not cease, but merely becomes more deceptive. Upon finding that he is still cavorting with their slaves, Mrs. Cosgrove confronts him, which results, eventually, in an altercation that leaves her an invalid. At this point, the marriage utterly dissipates except for a brief reconciliation some time later which is quickly followed by her death.

This is another example of not only the effects of slavery on Southern marriages, but also the ways in which marriages based in something other than companionship are marked by failure. It is particularly curious in this case because had this marriage been based in love, as that of the successful Henry marriage, Mr. Cosgrove might not have been inclined toward his sexual dalliances and Mrs. Cosgrove might have been less haughty and cruel, which pushes her husband to what seem to be more emotionally satisfying relationships elsewhere. Not only this, but the couple bore no children together. This, paired with the removal of the portraits of the Clifford line, marks another end of the lineage as Hannah’s master’s death likewise did. This further illustrates how marriage for property in these novels actually leads to the dissolution of one’s wealth not an accumulation of it.

### **Hannah’s Choice**

The novel’s disinterest in marriage for reasons outside of love, freedom, and equality is furthered in Hannah’s own enforced betrothal to the Wheeler field slave. When Mrs. Wheeler becomes irate at Hannah over a misconceived sense of betrayal, she punishes her by promising a marriage between Hannah and a slave who Hannah reviles. She despairs that

Had Mrs. Wheeler condemned me to the severest corporeal punishment, or exposed me to be sold in the public slave market in Wilmington I should probably have resigned myself with apparent composure to her cruel behests. But she sought to force me into a compulsory union with a man whom I could only hate and despise it seemed the rebellion would be a virtue ... nothing could be worse than what threatened my stay. (212)

This unalterable desire for flight largely parallels Isabella, who likewise runs off at the mention of marrying Manfred. For Hannah it is the knowledge that marriage would be synonymous with sex because there was no such thing as marital rape; this meant that this union would force her out of her pledge of celibacy and likely cause her to increase the Wheeler slave stock through pregnancy. Yet for Isabella too, it is the incestuous notions of sex with Manfred – who was nearly her father-in-law – that is one of the many causes for her likewise virtuous escape.<sup>xi</sup> Hannah furthers that it is not from a lack of desire for love that she has spurned marriage, but her “unalterable resolution never to entail slavery on any human being” (213). While this statement harkens back to the idea of procreation, it can also be seen as resonant of the feminist rhetoric of the day, since like Lucy Stone, Hannah did not want to become a slave to not one but two masters.

Hannah’s own eventual marriage, which does not happen until the penultimate paragraph of the novel, ends the work on yet another companionate notion of matrimony. She has married a free Methodist preacher whom she refers to as a “companion” who is “a fond and affectionate husband” that sits beside her as she writes her story (245). Like Walpole, Crafts leaves us at the close of the novel with the brief mention of new marriage which works to restore the female heroine to the domestic space and re-instill proper lineage to the two homes, a common trope in Gothic novels. Yet this would seem to imply that regardless of the circumstances of the marriage, the institution cannot escape its roots in property; thus regardless of the reasons a couple marries, the roles of women and men cannot be thoroughly “equalized” because of the rules of marriage are entrenched in a patriarchal government. If this is indeed the case, then by marrying Hannah off, Crafts only further demonstrates the claims that the women’s rights activists of Crafts’ time were making about the way in which contemporary marriage undermines the rights of women by placing them into an institution that is concerned only with their male counterparts.

So then why does Crafts create a character who escapes one means of slavery only to enter into another? Hannah’s statement early on about her resolution to flee from her arranged marriage seems to answer this question; she claims that she has “spurred domestic ties not because [her] heart was hard,” (213) entailing that it is not the actual institution of marriage that she denies, but rather the same types of relationships that Walpole villanizes in *The Castle of Otranto* – those created solely for the means of economic union. While Hannah fulfills her Gothic destiny as a woman to return to the domestic, like Isabella, it is at least to a home and a man of her choosing.

### **The Impossibility of the Companionate**

While Crafts, like Walpole, does not believe in marriage based in the economic, they both do still fundamentally believe that the institution can be reformed to help equalize the positions of husband and wife. In the move to companionate marriages over those made for economic and political gains, it was hoped, as Lawrence Stone posited, that marriage would help to balance the roles within the family unit. Still the laws of the era made this very notion idyllic; in the eyes of the law, a woman was still considered subordinate to her husband and once married, her identity was more or less stripped

away. While both novels work to push freedom in the choice to whom one bequeaths themselves – with Crafts' use of this potentially inspired directly by Walpole's novel – it is still a romantic notion of marriage, which ushers women into a system that ultimately works to betray them. Yet the avoidance of this social rite of passage is unavoidable for both Isabella and Hannah, whose entry into the "cult of true womanhood" cannot be complete without this final act of matrimony.

While this push for a marriage of companions is central to both these novels, as well as any other number of Gothic texts of the day, it was ultimately an unrealistic idea for marital felicity because the law undermined the fundamental notions of a companionate marriage, and slavery totally nullified them. While pushing for marriages based in love and freedom of choice, these two novels are indeed attempting to progress the ideas of matrimony, but without subsequent changes in the patriarchal arrangement of government, which functioned to advance the white man first and foremost, their notions are merely philosophical. Thus, the most that either of these novels can do is to allow a woman the right to choose to whom they must legally subordinate themselves.

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### Notes

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<sup>i</sup> For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to the author of *The Bondwoman's Narrative* as "Hannah Crafts" or simply "Crafts," while I will refer to the narrator as "Hannah."

<sup>ii</sup> Dickens and Bronte both employed the Gothic in their novels as well, though neither quite as blatantly as Walpole who is considered the father of the genre, whereas the former two are known more for their "literary" rather than "gothic" qualities.

<sup>iii</sup> In fact this curse does come to be when Mr. Cosgrove takes over the halls of Lindendale.

<sup>iv</sup> On page four, Isabella laments that Manfred had "imprinted her mind with terror, from his causeless rigour to such amiable princesses as Hippolita and Matilda."

<sup>v</sup> Manfred states explicitly that the "affairs of the state" are "not within a woman's province."

<sup>vi</sup> After the end of the Civil War, many former slaves "used all available means to reunite and maintain their families. Although some blacks deserted slave marriages, many others wandered across the South searching for lost family members" (Grossberg 133).

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<sup>vii</sup> Salmon furthers, “That South Carolina more than Maryland or Virginia accepted the inevitability of male sexual license and refused to control it through the possibility of legislative (if not judicial) divorce is consistent with what historians know about the diverse cultures of southern slave societies. In *White over Black*, Winthrop D. Jordan pointed to the unusual prevalence of miscegenation in South Carolina during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (65).

<sup>viii</sup> Ann Radcliff’s *The Italian* also villanizes those who seek to use marriage as an economic means; in that novel, the protagonists are kept apart by the wealthier man’s mother, who does not want to see her son marry a woman of a lower socioeconomic class. The novel closes with the happy marriage of the two and the destruction of those whom sought to separate them.

<sup>ix</sup> Of course this is still problematized by the notion that the husband here is still her “master,” continuing the conflation of marriage and slavery.

<sup>x</sup> Again, too, it is the male who is in control of the marriage market. While in *Otranto*, it is Manfred and Frederic who manage the marital affairs of their daughters, in *The Bondwoman’s Narrative*, it is never directly the father who seeks to set up the marriages, but rather the actual or default white master who works to seek economic or political gain through the marriages of their subjects.

<sup>xi</sup> Many authors believe this issue of incest key in the dissolution of Manfred’s power. Sue Chaplin comments in her essay on Law and The Castle of Otranto that “This incestuous design, it might be argued, constitutes one of the greatest sources of anxiety within the text for, if realized, it would constitute an act more fundamentally improper than Manfred’s illegitimate occupation of the throne” (187).