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Linda Naranjo-Huebl

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Linda Naranjo-Huebl

Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Abstract

In E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*, an allusion to the book of Judith points to parallels in its formalist elements—intertextuality, plot features, and genre (comedy)—and in themes—its protagonists’ challenge of gender roles and emphasis on God’s sovereignty. They also share a mixed critical interpretation. The similarities are tempered by Southworth’s rejection of Old Testament-style violence and her New Testament belief in the possibility of redemption for all souls. The resulting tensions manifest in ambiguities that correlate with feminist theologians’ disparate interpretations of Judith, particularly those that note a spiritual progression from Judith to Mary that moves from “righteous” violence to acts of peace.

Keywords

The Hidden Hand, book of Judith, E.D.E.N. Southworth, gender

In E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The Hidden Hand*, the protagonist, Capitola, when faced with her greatest physical threat in the form of the villain Black Donald in her bedroom, invokes an inner monologue of the biblical heroines Jael and Judith: “Now, Cap, my little man, be a woman! don’t you stick at trifles! Think of Jael and Sisera! Think of Judith and Holofernes!” (384–85).¹ Biblical allusions such as these are common in Southworth’s fiction, as they are in most American women authors’ of the 19th century. Her allusions to Jael and Judith, biblical women who deliver Israel by murdering military leaders intent on destroying the Israelites, evince her familiarity with both the Old Testament and the apocryphal texts. While the last twenty years have seen a plethora of scholarship on E.D.E.N. Southworth, including scores of articles and books that have significantly broadened the scope of Southworth research, there has been little sustained focus on Southworth’s

Corresponding author:

Linda Naranjo-Huebl, Calvin College, 1795 Knollcrest Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546-4301, USA.
Email: LN22@calvin.edu

knowledge of the Bible beyond her use of the Hagar figure (see Gabler-Hover). Critics note her Christianity in passing, particularly as it relates to morals in her fiction as well as the sentimental tradition that characterizes her literature in part; but, with the exception of Lynette Carpenter, none have focused specifically on the importance of her knowledge of biblical texts and theology and how they influenced Southworth's most popular novel, *The Hidden Hand*.² While such a study is needed (for any 19th-century fiction), this discussion will focus specifically on the influence of the book of Judith in *The Hidden Hand*.³ A comparison of the stories suggests that Southworth was more than casually familiar with the story of Judith: *The Hidden Hand* echoes Judith in its formalist elements—including its intertextuality, plot features, and genre (comedy)—and in its thematic elements, including the protagonists' challenge of gender roles and emphasis on God's sovereignty. *The Hidden Hand* also shares the book of Judith's mixed critical interpretation and reception. Both stories have enjoyed extraordinary popularity among readers over time and across cultures while at the same time they have been the subject of mixed criticism—the book of Judith by Bible scholars from the 1st century CE to the present, and the *Hidden Hand* (or Southworth's fiction in general) by 19th-century and contemporary literary critics over the last three decades—and ultimate exclusion from the canons.

While scholars' respective explanations for these texts' devaluation and exclusion from canons share many similarities, most often pointing to the challenge they posed to gender roles and their fantastical comedy, the most nuanced criticism notes the mixed messages in (and interpretations of) the two stories. While Bible scholars must make conjectures on the authorship of Judith, we can investigate Southworth's culture, influences, and beliefs in an attempt to understand the ambivalences and equivocations in her book and in her fiction in general. Although similarities between the narratives abound, their differences mark the limits of Southworth's endorsement of the biblical heroine and her story. Southworth's allusion to Judith can be interpreted as an attempt to justify in the strongest (i.e., biblical) terms the assertive and gender-bending behavior of her protagonist Capitola, but Cap's contrasting behavior points to what I interpret as Southworth's rejection of violence as a response to tyranny, her conviction that women's empowerment will be characterized by alternative responses to oppression, and her rejection of the concept of an irredeemable "enemy" in favor of a belief that redeeming grace is offered to all. Her allusion to and appropriation of feminist elements of the Judith story are tempered by her discomfort with Old Testament-style violence as a Christian option—even for self-defense, as a response to oppression, or as socially sanctioned punishment—and in her New Testament (some might say sentimental)⁴ belief in the possibility of redemption for all souls. The tension between her championing the strength of the biblical heroine and her personal rejection of violence manifests in ambiguities that, critics have noted, characterize her fiction in general.⁵ These tensions correlate with contemporary feminist theologians who note a spiritual progression from Judith to Mary, the mother of Christ, that moves from "righteous" violence to acts of peace.

Understanding Southworth's own discomfort with and rejection of violence alongside her endorsement of assertive women, all premised on her Christian beliefs, allows an interpretation of *Capitola* as an empowered new woman who *acts* to usher in an age of peace.

Intertextualities

Intertextualities abound in both *Judith* and *The Hidden Hand*. Biblical commentators and scholars have documented well the allusions in *Judith* to biblical and historical-cultural texts of Second Temple Judaism, the period in which scholars place *Judith*.⁶ Southworth's novels are likewise rich in literary allusions that evince her broad engagement with other writers and texts. Melissa Homestead and Pamela Washington devote a section of their book on Southworth ("Intertextual Southworth") to essays examining her engagement with George Sand, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and even ancient Greek and British Restoration tragedies. C. Bryan Love provides a nice examination of the strong influence of Shakespeare on *The Hidden Hand*. I have commented on what I see as a dialogue between *The Hidden Hand* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* evinced in some strikingly similar, though comically reinterpreted, scenes.⁷ Other writers have noted countless allusions in her work, and her diverse epigraphs alone—including many Bible verses—display her broad reading range and engagement with both historical and contemporary authors and texts. While several scholars have noted biblical allusions, few have dug deeper into the specific stories and contexts of those allusions and the influence they may have had on Southworth's storytelling. As with other 19th-century women's writing, Southworth's fiction displays her, and her characters', thorough familiarity with biblical texts.

The Book of Judith and 19th-Century Readers

The story of *Judith* was well known among 19th-century readers familiar with biblical stories and with popular depictions of *Judith* in European art. *Judith* is assumed to have been written in the 1st or 2nd century BCE in the Hasmonean period possibly by a Palestinian Jew, perhaps a Pharisee (Esler 107; Eckhardt 244–45; Milne 40). It was included in the Septuagint but not the Hebrew canon and is part of the Catholic Deuterocanon and the Protestant Apocrypha. Until the mid-19th century, the Apocrypha was included by publishers in Protestant Bibles.⁸ Southworth's ecumenical background—baptized in her father's Catholic Church, raised in her mother's Episcopalian tradition, and later developing what one critic calls "non-doctrinal Christian views" (Coultrap-McQuin 54)—may have given her additional awareness of interpretations of the book of *Judith*. Educated women of the 19th century were also (perhaps most) familiar with stories of the Apocrypha as subjects of numerous Renaissance and Baroque painters and sculptors, with versions of *Judith* beheading Holofernes prominent among them.⁹ Flemish Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens's depictions of the *Judith* story were among the most

popular, and Southworth, in a Q&A interview published after her death, cites Rubens as one of her favorite visual artists (Huddleson 76).¹⁰ Rubens sketched several studies and painted multiple versions of “Judith with the Head of Holofernes” as well as “Susannah and the Elders,” another heroine of the Apocrypha famous for her struggle against tyranny.¹¹

While the book of Judith references known Jewish history and leaders, its historical inaccuracies, anachronisms, and inconsistencies have led most contemporary scholars to agree that it is fictional, perhaps allegorical, perhaps a retelling of a story contextualized for a specific cultural setting (see Stocker). *The Hidden Hand* is, of course, fiction, but Southworth liked to point out that the events of the narrative, including the orphan girl disguised as a newsboy, were based on actual events she had witnessed or read about (Huddleson 68–69). As fictional narratives with connections to historical events and cultural traditions, they allow the reader to consider both formal elements of the stories, including intertextuality, and connections to historical and cultural aspects and conditions of the writers’ eras.

The widespread fascination of Westerners with the story of Judith can be traced through its multitudinous depictions in European literature and art. Indeed, scholars have written volumes interpreting these depictions, and most agree the fascination is fueled by psychological and cultural reactions to Judith’s daring, unwomanly act, murdering the enemy of her people by a decapitation that can be interpreted as a symbolic castration.¹² The story of Judith involves a rich, beautiful, pious woman who as a widow experiences relative independence from male authority. Her town, Bethulia, has been besieged by the Assyrian army led by Holofernes, and the local leaders prove impotent in resisting the besieging force. Judith, through her clever planning and deceit, aided by her beauty and her faithful servant, makes her way into the enemy camp and gains an invitation to Holofernes’ private party. In the role of a femme fatale, she becomes the target of his lust, and Judith encourages his drinking until he passes out. She then decapitates him with his sword, and she and her servant bring his head back to the leaders of Bethulia who rally their armies into battle, striking fear into and subsequently defeating the Assyrian army.

Judith and Capitola, Gender and Performance

One can see why, in the scene quoted at the beginning of this article, Capitola draws inspiration from Judith, whose story resonates nicely with Southworth’s most gender-bending fictional creation as she faces the threat of powerful males who tyrannize an entire community. Like Judith, Cap is clever and intelligent, rich (or will be, when restored to her rightful fortune), beautiful (as a boy and a girl), and an orphan, which status grants her relative independence from male authority. While *The Hidden Hand* may lack the sensational subtext of sexual seduction and castration anxiety evoked by the book of Judith—Capitola, as a very young woman, cannot be presented in a sexual manner, and she only figuratively

“decapitates” her aggressors—it nevertheless deconstructs gender roles, challenges readers’ notion of the feminine (and the masculine), and effectually emasculates oppressive males. Tapping into something significant in the readers’ psyches, the character of Capitola captivated 19th-century readers. *The Hidden Hand* enjoyed immense popularity in the 19th century, and it continues to delight a new generation of readers today.

But a comparison between *The Hidden Hand* and the book of Judith suggests more than an identification between their two assertive protagonists. The primary points of contact between the books lie with their subversion and subsequent deconstruction of gender roles—presenting gender as performative—justified because their “masculine” behavior protects the protagonists from literal rape and their communities from figurative rape. As early as the 1st century CE, Clement of Rome references Judith’s “manly deeds,” which became a focal point of debates on the book’s canonicity (Wilson 439). Deborah Sawyer, in her discussion of gender roles and subversion in the book of Judith, argues that “inseparable from the history of binary gender construction—with its inherently hierarchical, patriarchal and heterosexual bias—is the history of its subversion” (“Dressing Up” 25). And, certainly, the story of Capitola in *The Hidden Hand* serves as a 19th-century complement in its sustained gender inversions.

Both stories feature nations on the verge of war (Israel and Assyria, the USA and Mexico), and their protagonists’ gender nonconformance and emasculation of oppressive men gain approval inasmuch as they are in the service of national security and personal virtue. The gender inversions serve as a critique on the failure of manhood in their respective cultures. Judith’s astounding actions are manifestly in defense of her nation and secondarily in defense of her virtue, whereas Capitola’s actions are in defense of feminine virtue and, by extension, of her community and nation. Jill Levine argues that, while problematic in its repercussions, Judith herself represents Israel or the “community of faith” (17). In Judith, as Assyria violently defeats town after town, Holofernes, general of the Assyrian army, besieges the town of Bethulia and prepares for another overwhelming victory. The Israelites, while initially trusting in God’s deliverance, find their courage failing “because all their enemies had surrounded them, and there was no way of escape for them” (8:19).¹³ As their cisterns go dry, the townspeople plead with their rulers to give up and save their lives, and Uzziah, the magistrate of Bethulia, agrees to surrender to Holofernes after five days if God has not intervened. When Judith learns of the actions of these magistrates, whom Toni Craven refers to as the “spineless leaders of Bethulia—counter icons of male ineptitude” (187–188), she summons the leaders, sharply criticizes them for their lack of faith and courage, and asserts her own plan. She confidently proclaims, “the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand” (8:33), that is, *she* acts in response to the failure of the (male) rulers of Bethulia. Levine comments on how “[s]uch inversions of male-female leadership patterns are permitted if not necessitated by the extraordinary circumstances of Judith’s deed and Israel’s rescue” (24). After slaying Holofernes in what many interpret as a figurative castration, she then commands the Israeli troops on how to proceed to defeat

the Assyrian armies after the death of their general. Upon their ultimate victory, Bethulia celebrates her leadership and victory. Judith's (own) victory song notes the absence of male agency in her deeds: "For their mighty one did not fall by the hands of the young men, nor did the sons of the Titans strike him down, nor did tall giants set upon him; but Judith daughter of Merari . . . undid him" (16:6).

Capitola's series of victories throughout *The Hidden Hand* is also characterized by courageous action contrasting with failure on the part of men in the community. Megan Griffin, in her discussion of the significance of the US–Mexican War and cultural notions of manhood during the period (relative to *The Hidden Hand*), remarks on how the "declaration of war on Mexico fed women writers' growing and widespread concern for the failures of American manhood" (Griffin 91). In the mid- to late 19th century, American women's concerns over economic and political greed led them to believe they "must step in as the saviors" (Griffin 91–92) and "[r]eferences to historical, literary, and living heroines who could and did save nations were becoming routine in even the most conservative discussions of women and womanhood" (91). Capitola's heroism and popularity can be read within this context (Griffin 92). When the male leaders of her community prove powerless to stop the havoc wreaked by the villainous Le Noirs and the notorious outlaw Black Donald, Capitola defeats them all. She outwits the rapacious Craven Le Noir in the woods, later duels with him—when no man will rise to the occasion—to defend her reputation, captures the kidnappers in her bedroom, ultimately captures Black Donald himself, thwarts the murderous schemes of Gabriel Le Noir, and also saves the gentle Clara from a forced marriage arranged by the Le Noirs. After the latter victory, Cap, like Judith, composes her own version of a victory song with a string of idioms marking the end of a grand performance, concluding with, "It means that you have been outwitted by a girl!" (316). Capitola, like Judith, renders powerless—emasculates—each of the male oppressors in the novel.

The protagonists of both stories traverse gender boundaries through performance, costuming, disguise, and deceit in defense of their, and their community's, virtue. Over the course of the book, Judith transforms from a pious and respected widow to a beautiful and seductive femme fatale, to a deadly warrior, and back to a pious widow. Frustrated at the failure of the male leaders, Judith presents to the Bethulian elders her plan for delivering Israel from the Assyrians. In her prayer, in which she calls on the "God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those with hope" (9:11), she positions herself as the instrument of God's justice. Indeed, she asks God to approve *her* plan: "Give to me, a widow, the strong hand to do what I plan" (9:6) and unabashedly proclaims her intention to fool and deceive the enemy: "By the deceit of my lips strike down the slave with the prince and the prince with his servant; crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman" (9:10). With the help of her maidservant,¹⁴ she assumes the manly role of defending her people against the surrounding Assyrian forces. Ironically, her first step involves costuming herself as a seductive female beauty, or, as Sawyer observes, she puts on drag

("Dressing Up" 27): "She removed the sackcloth she had been wearing, took off her widow's garments, bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment. She combed her hair, put on a tiara, and dressed herself in the festive attire that she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. She put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other jewelry. Thus she made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her" (10:3-4). Sawyer notes, "Judith is not allowed to merely drift from 'non-feminine' to feminine—she consciously 'becomes' feminine. Her change of dress code—and her subsequent change of demeanor (10.23), and change of language (11.5) on entering the presence of Holofernes—achieve this transformation" ("Dressing Up" 28). Judith's performance continues as she is welcomed into Holofernes' camp and is invited to his private party where she eats and drinks with him and charms him until everyone else leaves the tent. When he passes out in a drunken stupor, Judith switches to the role of soldier and beheads him with his own sword. Upon her return to Bethulia, she directs the Israelite troops in battle and later, as Sawyer comments, imitates "a male warrior at the end of battle by loading up her mules with booty!" ("Dressing Up" 23). She then returns to the role of a pious widow and is praised excessively for her feat: "Your praise will never depart from the hearts of those who remember the power of God" (13:19).

In *The Hidden Hand*, Capitola, through costuming and performance, similarly moves fluidly across gender boundaries throughout the narrative as a means of protecting herself and members of her community from the threat of dominating males. Her first gender performance, as a New York newsboy, she explains was adopted because, as an orphan girl on the streets, she was "often in danger from bad boys and bad men" (45). In explaining to the court her transformation, she describes the gender switch as a simple decision—"I made up my mind to be a boy!"—which was effected by a mere costume change: "I went into that little back parlor a girl and I came out a boy" (46).¹⁵ When she is released to Old Hurricane, she, like Judith, puts on the feminine: "She was well and properly attired in a gray silk dress, crimson merino shawl and a black velvet bonnet" (50). And while she is "indeed transfigured. Her bright black hair, parted in the middle, [falling] in ringlets each side her blushing cheeks," we are reminded that this is merely performance: "her dark-gray eyes were cast down in modesty at the very same instant that her ripe red lips were puckered up with mischief" (50). Later in the narrative, when she is accosted in the woods by a dangerous stranger (Craven Le Noir), she again performs the feminine—what Jordan Landry calls putting on "the mask of white middle-class femininity" (37)—adopting the guise of a naïve and helpless girl who seeks his protection: "Oh, sir, . . . I was afraid, as I told you before . . . but now, with a good gentleman like you, I don't feel afraid at all" (115). To give her pony time to recuperate, she manipulates her would-be rapist with various delay tactics. When he gets off his horse, she whips both his and her horses and gallops off to safety. Another caper, in which she describes herself as a knight errant looking for a damsel in distress, culminates in a disguise and performance to rescue Clara

from a forced marriage. Capitola switches clothes with her friend and becomes the delicate, weeping victim, a role she describes as “doing the sentimental” (308), performing all the way to the altar where she throws off her disguise and informs them that their bird has flown the coop. She later enacts the role of a male avenger when she challenges the villainous Craven Le Noir to a duel. She demands satisfaction from him for sullyng her honor and shoots him in the face, albeit with split peas rather than bullets. Capitola’s theatrics culminate in her greatest challenge when—facing the rapacious Black Donald in close quarters—she, like Judith, deceives him by feigning attraction while she is actually positioning him for the kill. And Capitola, again like Judith, was “everywhere lauded for her brave part in the capture of the famous desperado” (399).

Sexual threats loom over both stories in worlds in which women are responsible for preventing their own rape, and death is considered a more honorable outcome, thereby justifying deceit and violence in defense of virtue and honor, particularly inasmuch as that honor extends to the honor of their respective communities and nations. As the women in the narratives face the threat of rape, their stereotypically masculine behavior in defense of their chastity deflects possible objections to their defiance of gender roles. As scholars have noted, Judith, in her pre-battle prayer, references “my ancestor Simeon” (Judith 9:2) who, in Genesis 34, uses deceit and trickery to avenge his sister Dinah’s rape by the Shechemites.¹⁶ Her prayer continues, “By the deceit of my lips strike down the slave with the prince and the prince with his servant; crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman” (9:10), “[a]nd make my speech and deceit to be their wound and stripe, who have purposed cruel things against thy covenant” (9:13). In beheading Holofernes, she saves the oppressed with whom she identifies, but just as importantly, she protects her chastity. When she later recounts the events, Judith swears, “he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me” (13:16).

In *The Hidden Hand*, when Capitola faces multiple threats of rape and invokes stereotypically masculine behavior in protection of her virtue, she repeatedly emphasizes her sexual purity. In court, when she explains how her role as a newsboy protected her from rape, she insists she was not violated: “Capitola looked up, with her whole countenance flashing with spirit, and exclaimed: ‘Oh! but I took care of myself, sir! I did, indeed, your honor!’” (45). When approached by the stranger in the woods, she immediately recognizes her danger—“Capitola stole a glance at his face. Yes, notwithstanding his light tone, he was grimly in earnest; there was no mercy to be expected from that sly, sinister, cruel face” (115)—and puts her clever plan of escape into action. She rescues Clara when Clara’s guardian forces her to marry his son or else face a fate “worse . . . than death,” that is, rape (302). Her (comic) duel with Craven Le Noir results from his lewd attack on her reputation; and her resolute action to defeat Black Donald is in response to the threat of rape. After capturing Black Donald, Cap is still in shock when Old Hurricane comes in and sees “the remains of a bacchanalian supper; a man’s coat and hat and boots upon the floor; in the midst of the room the great, square, black opening; and beyond it standing upon the hearth, the form of

Capitola, with disordered dress, dishevelled hair and wild aspect!” (395). When Old Hurrincane is driven to “an agony of anxiety” imagining her sexual violation, Cap relieves his fear: “I escaped harmless—oh, I did, sir—but at what a fearful price!” (396). After their victories, both Judith and Capitola insist that they have not been sexually violated because their sexual purity is not only personal; it is tied to the honor of their respective communities, and thus, their gender-bending behaviors, including the use of violence, in defense of sexual threats are justified to even the most conservative readers.¹⁷

The bedroom scenes in which both protagonists defeat their formidable opponents share several details highlighting the sexual danger of their respective situations while the women ironically retain ultimate control and power. Both villains are driven by lust for their prospective victims. Holofernes “had been waiting for an opportunity to seduce [Judith] from the day he first saw her” (12:16), and Black Donald, speaking to Gabriel Le Noir, confesses, “I have seen the girl under circumstances that have fired my heart with an uncontrollable desire for her—” (163).¹⁸ Both women perform the role of flattered objects of this desire. When invited into Holofernes’ chamber, Judith replies, “Who am I to refuse my lord? Whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death” (12:14). When Capitola realizes Black Donald has her trapped, she adopts the persona of a young lady surprised by an admirer’s visit. She insists, “I rather like you . . . I liked you long before I saw you!” and coquettishly suggests her earlier attempt to capture him was actually driven by her desire to have him “carry [her] off” (385, 386). Food and drink imagery underscore the objectification of the women and the threat of consumption by their predators, but both women use the victuals to their advantage. Judith eagerly accepts the offer to eat and drink with Holofernes (her servant has brought Judith’s own kosher food), arousing his “passion” and pleasing him so much that he “drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born” (12:20). Capitola, upon realizing she is trapped in her bedroom with Black Donald, observes to herself, “Nothing on earth will save you, Cap, but your own wits! for if ever I saw mischief in any one’s face, it is in that fellow’s that is eating you up with his great eyes at the same time that he is laughing at you with his big mouth!” (384). Donald compares her coolness to a pickled cucumber that would “give one an appetite” and adds, “I think I shall fall to and eat” (385). The sexual innuendo in the food imagery continues to an amusing extent (to the non-Victorian reader): as she prepares a brandied egg nog for her “guest,” he takes the egg whites and begins to “whisk up the whites with all his might and main” (387), removing layers of his clothing as he works up a heat. As she inches away from the fire, complaining of the heat, he assumes she is trying to escape and moves his chair in her direction, not knowing that she is positioning the rapist for *his* demise. The scene culminates in Black Donald’s consumption by the (feminine) pit when she springs the trap door.¹⁹ Both Judith and Capitola are willing to kill for a righteous cause, but Capitola’s subsequent regret has no place in the Judith story, which celebrates Holofernes’ bloody demise. Capitola—arguably reflecting Southworth’s own

views—endorses feminine assertiveness but eschews bloodshed, particularly the taking of human life (discussed below). Extreme violence would also compromise the humor sustained throughout Southworth's narrative.

Comedy

Both narratives can be classified as comedies: their humor delights readers, explains the stories' popularity, helps deflect criticism on moral grounds, and perhaps has played a role in their devaluation by critics and gatekeepers of the canon. Elma Cornelius, in her examination of the comic elements of Judith, observes, "the author chose to avoid a head-on collision with misogynist philosophies of his day, therefore chose to write fiction to entertain and to reach a broader audience" (419). Her assessment could easily apply to the fiction of Southworth. The comic elements of *The Hidden Hand* are obvious, and they effectively disarmed 19th-century readers who might otherwise have objected to its narrative content. It is hard to criticize what one considers inappropriate behavior while one is laughing. Despite the oppression of women, the threat of rape, and the subversion of gender roles ubiquitous in the narrative, readers laugh each time Capitola cleverly turns the tables on her oppressors, her humor itself reflecting masculine authority. As Kristen Pond notes, "Cap's use of humor, associated so closely with masculine agency, automatically takes her out of the passive, sentimental role of female" (150), an observation that also applies to the author's assertive use of humor.²⁰ Capitola's comment, introducing the allusion to Judith—"Now Cap, my little man, be a woman!"—caps the climax (pun intended) of the book's comic gender reversals by turning the gender tables one more time. Bryan Love, in his study of Shakespearean influence on *The Hidden Hand*, notes many shared comic elements including cross-dressing, mistaken identities, plot twists, and an ending featuring resolution of conflicts, union (weddings) and reunion, forgiveness and reconciliation (190–93). Most critics agree that the rich humor and comic elements of *The Hidden Hand* account for its extraordinary popularity.²¹

A bit less obvious is the humor in Judith, but attentive readers recognize it at several turns, and its ironic and comic elements no doubt contribute to its popularity. Cornelius, bringing together the work of biblical and genre scholars, delineates those features of Judith that place it in the genre of comedy, particularly inasmuch as comedy begins with dangers or obstacles to be overcome and ends with their resolution in harmony and reconciliation (424). Several scholars believe many of the numerous "errors," anachronisms, and inconsistencies of Judith (historical, geographical, cultural) are deliberate, intended to entertain. Cornelius observes, "Holofernes' march makes no sense at all; the men covered enormous distances in record time and crossed and recrossed the Euphrates three different times, entered Cilicia twice and approached the Palestinian coast both by way of Damascus and through Arabia" (419). We are told that, at the instruction of Joakim the priest, every individual in Bethulia put on sackcloth—including the animals and the altar. Where did all that sackcloth come from? Outrageous

comments, wordplay, double entendre, and irony make Holofernes' seduction of Judith (that is, Judith's seduction of Holofernes) quite amusing. Holofernes, having met the beautiful Judith, comments to his eunuch Bagaos, "it would be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without having intercourse with her. If we do not seduce her, she will laugh at us" (12:11–12). Wordplay is also ubiquitous: Judith comments to Holofernes, "I will say nothing false to my lord this night" (11:5). As Sawyer points out, "We all know which 'lord' she's *really* talking about—and it's not the Assyrian dupe standing in front of her" ("Dressing Up" 27). Judith uses the same wordplay later, in reply to Holofernes' invitation to join her: "Who am I to refuse my lord? Whatever pleases him I will do at once, and it will be a joy to me until the day of my death" (12:14). Judith allows him to believe he is the "lord" of whom she speaks, while she actually refers to her Lord God and *Holofernes'* imminent death.²² Parts of Judith's song of triumph, which she composes and performs herself (if you want it done right . . .), are comic and even sacrilegious:

Her sandal ravished his eyes,
her beauty captivated his mind,
and the sword severed his neck! (16:9)

One could certainly argue that the author was having fun, much like the reversals, twists, and tongue-in-cheek commentary in *The Hidden Hand* evince Southworth's delight in her story.²³ Cornelius's observation on the book of Judith applies equally to *The Hidden Hand*: "it has the rhetorical power to entertain, to provide an edifying and uplifting message, to create laughter, to proclaim harmony and to bring hope" (424). The features, however, that endear the stories to readers—the comic elements, twists, ultimate happy endings—also engender ambiguities that have attracted critics' attention. Bryan Love, discussing Shakespeare's "ability to deliberately build astonishing amounts of ambiguity into his popular texts, leaving the power of interpretation to audiences," suggests that "this quality of *The Hidden Hand* has spurred the various divergent but reasonable arguments about the novel's politics" (192–93).

Critical Reception

Arguably, the transgression of gender boundaries and the stories' fantastical comedy contribute to both books' characterization by literary gatekeepers as less than serious literature, and their significant ambiguities have led to disputed interpretations by critics. Both have been the target of negative criticism, or at least devaluation, by early as well as modern critics. Many early Jewish and Christian leaders viewed Judith as compromised by Judith's sexuality and deceit as well as its obvious historical and geographical inaccuracies, while others defended it on the basis of Judith's piety.²⁴ While the popularity of Southworth's fiction is well

documented, that popularity did not extend to literary critics. In general, her fiction was the target of negative criticism because of its sensational “excesses” and frank depictions of women’s oppression. Although *The Hidden Hand*, because of its serialization, was never formally reviewed by 19th-century literary critics, the pattern of criticism would undoubtedly have been extended to this story inasmuch as it features those elements most frequently condemned by those critics (see Naranjo-Huebl, “Road to Perdition”). Only recently, with the 1988 republication of *The Hidden Hand*, has Southworth’s fiction received serious critical review. Both books have been the subject of in-depth criticism by contemporary feminist critics over the last few decades, and that criticism runs along similar lines.

Contemporary feminist interpretations of the respective texts sound strikingly similar chords in their mixed opinions but for very different reasons than earlier critics: some view the protagonists of the stories as representing progressive feminist challenges to gender oppression in their cultures while others accuse them of reinscribing masculinist values, particularly in the mixed messages sent by the gender inversions and reinforced by the stories’ conclusions. Indeed, when reading feminist commentary on Judith while writing about *The Hidden Hand*, one can easily confuse which narrative is being discussed. Take, for example, this critic’s observation about the story’s hero: “she endangered hierarchical oppositions of gender, race and class, muddled conventional gender characteristics and dismantled their claims to universality, and so threatened the status quo” (Levine 420). In each story, “traditional male territory has been trespassed by a female: boundaries have been challenged and dislodged” (Sawyer, *God, Gender and the Bible* 29). Certainly, stories of gender inversion have persisted as long as there has been gender polarity: “inseparable from the history of binary gender construction—with its inherently hierarchical, patriarchal and heterosexual bias—is the history of its subversion” (Sawyer, “Dressing Up” 25). Subversion of social rules reveals how the rules have been constructed—and how they can be deconstructed to reveal how individual identities “have been artificially constructed to perform imprisoned within the polarities of ‘male’ and ‘female’ identity” (Sawyer, “Dressing Up” 24). While these critics are speaking of Judith, their comments could easily apply to *The Hidden Hand*. Both protagonists exhibit a gender fluidity, alternating between “masculinity” and “femininity” and thereby undermining gender binaries. Helen Efthimiadis-Keith’s comment that Judith delights her students because the story “clearly empowers powerless women to struggle against oppressive regimes” (2) is complemented by Joanne Dobson’s observation that Capitola in *The Hidden Hand* “is a delightfully irresistible gender-switcher. With the critique of conventional gender definitions implicit in her creation, she fascinated both male and female readers” (Dobson xiv). Nina Baym, Joanne Dobson, and Amy Hudock’s observations on the feminist aspects of *The Hidden Hand*—how they challenge and deconstruct gender roles—set the tone for positive feminist interpretations that echo those of Judith. Alongside these positive interpretations, however, is recognition of the inconsistencies in this progressive message.

Specifically, the stories' resolutions set them up for feminist interpretations today that question the narratives' efficacy in challenging gender conventions. Both protagonists can be viewed as trickster figures who undermine patriarchal authority and power, but the comedies' characteristic happy endings send mixed messages. In the end, both protagonists return to a domesticated, traditional role in the private sphere: Judith, retreating from the public sphere and returning to her role as widow, and Capitola relinquishing the freedom granted by her orphan status and marrying Herbert. In her study of feminist interpretations of Judith, Efthimiadis-Keith sums up contrasting interpretations: "some commentators have either weighed *Judith*/Judith and found her wanting in her usefulness for (a feminist ideal of modern) women, or hailed *Judith* as a feminist triumph with the ancient literature of its time" (93). Several critics have noted that, while *The Hidden Hand* certainly deconstructs gender polarities, Southworth is careful to endorse woman's virtue as defined by her society, as seen in her conventional (white) female characters whose stories end with marriage.²⁵ Some attribute these inconsistencies to Southworth's strong connection to her readers and her desire not to alienate them (Dobson), the insistence on apoliticism by periodical publishers (Looby), and/or her own ambivalent feelings on the possibilities for full social equality (Edelstein; Jones "Her little maid Mandy"). Levine's nuanced reading of inconsistencies in the ending of Judith illustrates how the progressive and traditional elements of the text coexist:

Then, Judith herself must leave the public sphere, and life must return to normalcy... The women, so prominent during the celebration, are completely erased. The inversion of gender roles is ended, and the status quo is reinforced. But even in her return, Judith resists complete domestication... she is not described as reentering the lifestyle described [earlier in the narrative]. (27)

Sawyer similarly notes, "Although by the end of the narrative Judith had retreated from the centre stage of Israeli politics, she remained active and assertive... she distributed her property herself... and she set her maid free" (*God, Gender and the Bible* 111). Southworth's ending is also not quite conventional, leaving the door open to suggestions that Capitola's marriage will not mitigate her assertiveness: "I wish I could say 'they all lived happy ever after' [but] I know for a positive fact, that our Cap sometimes gives her 'dear, darling, sweet Herbert,' the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue, which of course he deserves" (485).

God's Sovereignty

A final, and perhaps most important, connection between Judith and *The Hidden Hand*, is the underlying premise of God's sovereignty and practice of raising up people—including women—to champion the cause of the marginalized and the oppressed. As S. Van den Eynde observes in relation to Judith's prayers, we know that "Judith's prayer will be answered" because "God hears the prayers of

the widow and orphan” (Van den Eynde 222; Exod. 22:22–24). The stories present a widow and orphan, respectively, in seemingly hopeless circumstances, surrounded by malevolent forces, who are used by God to intervene and deliver the victims of the oppressors. Judith declares in her victory song, “For your strength does not depend on numbers, nor your might on the powerful. But you are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those without hope” (9:11). Scriptural examples abound of God’s intervention on behalf of the oppressed when all seems lost. Judith exemplifies such divine intervention while demonstrating God’s choice of a woman to deliver Israel. Sawyer observes how “[t]he shadowy god lurking in the background of the narrative is the key operator—permitting and empowering the character of Judith to act beyond the given boundaries” (*God, Gender and the Bible* 89), that is, Judith acts on her own plan with her own “strong hand” (9:9). Toni Craven explains: “[b]ecause she believed in a God whose success did not depend on might, she was free to act according to a plan of her own making” (59). Margarita Stocker’s observation on the nature of God’s omnipotence displayed in Judith applies equally to both stories: “God . . . possesses the kind of power that requires no great armies and no muscles to exert itself. It just is. Ultimately, the weaker its instrument . . . the more manifest is the *hidden hand* that activates [it] beyond [its] own abilities” (23, emphasis added).

Not so obvious (at least among many contemporary readers) is the faith perspective that propels Southworth’s plot. While her fiction lacks the theological focus of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s, the extended religious musings of August Jane Evans Wilson’s, or the extreme piety characteristic of Susan Warner’s and other sentimental authors’ novels of the period, it is clearly predicated on a Christian worldview. While few critics have focused specifically on this aspect of *The Hidden Hand*, Lynette Carpenter points to the most obvious evidence—the title of the book. Carpenter notes, “the true hidden hand in this novel is ‘His good hand,’ which sends all good and evil and writes the endings of all stories” (28). Southworth expresses this view particularly through the character of Marah Rocke. When Marah, as a struggling widow supporting a son, faces the loss of some of their meager income, we are told, “True, this meek Christian had often in her sad experience proved God’s special providence at her utmost need, and now she believed in His ultimate interference” (65). When receiving crushing news from Herbert, she exclaims, “I also hope for the best, for whatever God wills is sure to happen, and His will is surely the best!” (99). The narrator characterizes Marah’s resignation as having taught her “just to do the duty of each day as it came, and leave the future—where, indeed, it must always remain—in the hands of God” (135). Later, as she comforts Clara as her father lies dying, she says, “Yes, my child; but remember nothing is really evil that comes from His good hand” (227). Carpenter, who quotes Marah here when discussing the novel’s title, remarks that a “more conventionally Christian reading public would probably make this association more quickly, but we should not be surprised to see Southworth’s language doing double duty” (29). Indeed, as Huddleson noted in her 1919

retrospective of Southworth, “the tenor of [*The Hidden Hand*] is the unseen force that nerves and protects an individual in times of deadly danger—that force that enables Right to triumph over Might and to be on the side of victory” (69). In Carpenter’s discussion of the doubles, reversals, paradoxes, and ultimate reconciling of opposites in *The Hidden Hand*²⁶ and their connection to Christianity, she observes how Southworth viewed the reversals of fortune in her own life as evidence of divine intervention. Abandoned by her husband, struggling to raise two small children as she attempted to establish a writing career, Southworth could strongly identify with Marah and many of her other protagonists. She shares repeated stories of being at her lowest when new doors opened, culminating in a successful writing career (see Dobson, Carpenter).

While Marah patiently perseveres, believing that “the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18), Capitola, like Judith (and like Southworth, who pursued a writing career to support her family) devises plans to effect God’s justice. As Van den Eynde observes, rather than “persevering passive resistance, relying on God’s intervention” (exhibited by the leaders of Bethulia), “Judith works out another way of resisting the enemy: the active counter attack, based on the belief that God may act through her hands” (229). Likewise, Capitola forgoes perseverance and instead devises plans to thwart evil, like her assertive foremother. While not a pillar of piety like Marah Rocke (perhaps together they represent Southworth’s model Christian), Cap expresses her Christian faith numerous times. When Dorcas, the housekeeper of the shadowy Hidden House, inquires where she comes from, Capitola responds, “Where I learned to fear God, to speak the truth and to shame the devil!” (279). In another scene, when she realizes kidnappers are hiding under her bed, “it occurred to her that ‘man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.’ Sending up a silent prayer to heaven for help at need, she suddenly thought of a plan” (194). We see Capitola’s faith perspective most obviously in later scenes that illustrate her rejection of violence against others—even when justifiable and/or socially sanctioned—and her genuine concern for their souls. Here, the story of Capitola departs from Judith and reveals Southworth’s more progressive New Testament Christianity.

Nonviolence and Redemption

For all the narrative and interpretive similarities between the stories, Southworth’s protagonist in *The Hidden Hand* differs from Judith in one major aspect: Capitola eschews violence, particularly the taking of human life, because she believes in the redemptive potential of even the most reprobate persons, whereas Judith and her community celebrate the violent demise of Holofernes and the Assyrian troops and rejoice over God’s vengeance. Judith and Capitola’s prayers before encountering their opponents reveal diverse perspectives. Judith prays to the God of her ancestor Simeon “to whom you gave a sword to take revenge” for the rape of his sister Dinah by deceiving and then killing all the men of the village of Shechem (Gen. 34).

She then prays that God will approve her plan to murder Holofernes and “crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman” (9:10). Here she alludes to Jael (Judges 4–5) who deceived the enemy army commander, Sisera, and drove a stake through his temple as he slept (Van den Eynde 222). In her examination of the (many) prayers in *Judith*, S. Van den Eynde argues that by making these connections, “the whole prayer of *Judith* 9 thus functions as implicit religious legitimation of *Judith*’s ensuing actions” (221–22). Capitola’s prayers lead to a much different conclusion. When she decides to duel Craven Le Noir to defend her honor, we later learn that she experienced a moral crisis the night before when she went to pray. She explains, “now the practice of prayer and the purpose of ‘red-handed violence,’ cannot exist in the same person at the same time! I wouldn’t sleep without praying, and I couldn’t pray without giving up my thoughts of fatal vengeance upon Craven Le Noir. So at last I made up my mind to spare his life, and teach him a lesson” (375). Capitola wields only a metaphoric sword: in explaining Capitola’s popularity, Dobson comments, “for Cap took up her *sword* and attacked that great humbug that limited their lives—the cultural ethos of feminine ‘obedience’ and ‘subordination’” (Dobson xiv, emphasis added).

Although both *Judith* and Capitola are celebrated by the community for their heroism, only *Judith* accepts their praise and participates in the celebration over the fallen. She accepts their gift of the “tent of Holofernes and all his silver dinnerware, his beds, his bowls, and all his furniture” (15:11) and distributes “ivy-wreathed wands” to the young women who come to dance in her honor (15:12). She then leads the community in a song of thanksgiving to God that, while duly crediting God with the victory, also outlines her exploits (16:1–17). While Capitola takes personal delight in her multiple defeats over villains, the narrative does not depict her responding to the community’s praise of her heroism. In fact, upon learning that she has not, after all, killed Black Donald, she rejoices: “‘Oh, heaven! He is living! He is living! I have not killed him!’ cried Capitola, clasping her hands” (396). She then scolds Old Hurricane for taunting the fallen villain (397). And after Black Donald’s defeat, when “Capitola was everywhere lauded for her brave part in the capture of the famous desperado,” we are told that “Cap was too sincerely sorry for Black Donald to care for the applause” (399).

When Capitola defends herself presumably at the expense of Black Donald’s life, her horror at taking his life springs from a Christian concern for his soul. Paul Jones (“I put my fingers”) provides a nice close reading of this and later scenes to show how they exemplify Southworth’s anti-gallows and anti-violence positions, which are consistent with sentimental authors of the mid-19th century. He argues that Southworth’s opposition to the death penalty “is firmly grounded in sentimentality”; I would point out that American sentimentalism was firmly grounded in New Testament Christian ethics of love, empathy, nonviolence, and a belief in the extension of God’s grace to—and, thus, the redemptive potential of—all human beings. Jones identifies two primary arguments of the period against the death penalty: logical challenges to its efficacy (noting that it was not a deterrent nor could it guarantee an innocent person would not die) and “sympathetic appeals on

behalf of the condemned” that “asked citizens to think, instead, about the souls of condemned men and women” (Jones, “I put my fingers” 42). Capitola hesitates to defend her own life by taking Black Donald’s because she believes in his potential reform and fears sending an unprepared soul to its spiritual death. In an attempt to dissuade Black Donald from this crime, she says, “however misguided you may have been, there is really something great and good in yourself that might yet be used for the good of man and the glory of God!” (390). When he rejects her appeal to relinquish his plan, she prepares to trip the trap door spring and send him to his death (Jones, “I put my fingers,” aptly connects the trap door to the gallows, 52). In a last desperate plea, Capitola begs him to ask for God’s mercy “[b]ecause I wish not to kill both your body and soul—because I would not send you prayerless into the presence of your Creator!” (392). When Black Donald survives the fall and is later sentenced to hanging, Capitola actively opposes his death sentence and, believing in his possible reformation, she executes a plan for his escape.²⁷ Concern for Black Donald’s soul and the possibility of his repentance and redemption are further evinced in what Jones identifies as Black Donald’s “religious crisis” as he awaits his execution: he “tried to pray, but could form no other petition than that he might be allowed, if possible, a little longer to fit himself to meet his Creator” (477). When Capitola facilitates his escape, he does, indeed, become a “*Reformed Robber*” (484).

Southworth’s faith in the possibility of redemption extends to other “sinners” in the story. Old Hurricane repents of his trespasses against his abandoned wife and child and is “led in his old age to the Saviour’s feet” (485). Even the most unequivocal villains in the story are redeemed. Craven Le Noir confesses, on what he believes to be his deathbed, his trespasses against Capitola and abandons any further evil plots. Likewise, Gabriel Le Noir, struck down on the field of battle, confesses all his evil deeds as he lies dying. Southworth secures his repentance by having him die slowly: “He was spared to experience a more effectual repentance than the spurious one into which he had been frightened by the seeming rapid approach of death . . . Gabriel Le Noir expired a sincere penitent, reconciled to God and man” (431).

Southworth’s aversion to violence can be attributed in part to her (and arguably her publishers’; see Looby) determination to maintain her popularity among her readers by sustaining the lighthearted tone of her story. But her stories also evince an opposition to violence, even as a means of fighting injustice, and a disinclination to condemn even the most reprobate of characters that can be attributed to her Christian principles and beliefs. Christian arguments against violence, including opposition to the death penalty, have been sustained since the time of Christ and have consistently been expressed in the Christian tradition (see Sider, Kalantzis). Christianity comprises an ethic of love articulated in Christ’s summation of God’s law—to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:40)—and teaches that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 4:45). While Capitola calls on Jael and Judith for inspiration in what she believes is a battle for her life, her reluctance toward violence and concern for the soul of her oppressor reflect decidedly New Testament sentiments.

This is not to suggest that Southworth's advocacy of nonviolence, as seen in her fiction, is unambiguous. Similar to her fictions' treatment of slavery, race, class, and gender roles, views of violence are inconsistent and variable. A decade after the Mexican–American war had ended, she wrote it into the plot of *The Hidden Hand* without overt criticism, and she omits any retrospective commentary on its morality, even though the anti-war movements of the period were led primarily by Christian churches and individuals: Congregationalists, the Society of Friends, and Unitarians, as well as the American Anti-Slavery Society and the American Peace Society (whose members were predominantly Christian), strongly opposed the war and influenced public opinion against it, helping to hasten its end.²⁸ Nevertheless, as Griffin points out, Southworth's most esteemed male protagonist in the story, Traverse, questions why the USA is fighting in Mexico and why he enlisted when it was “entirely out of his vocation” (400): “what had I to do with invading another's country?—enlisting for a war of the rights and wrongs of which I know no more than anybody else does!” (345). Griffin further argues that many women of the period believed that men were “infatuated by westward expansion, the conquest of Mexico, and the possibilities of incredible economic wealth” and that women would need to save the nation from masculine aggression (91–92). Traverse, then, “marks a hoped-for new generation” of men that rejects an association between manhood and violence (92).²⁹ And while both Capitola and Traverse *traverse* gender roles, Southworth has the masculinized Capitola reject violence.

Southworth avoids presenting us with an apotheosis of idealized womanhood in her protagonist (although she appears in supporting roles) and instead gives us a gender-bending protagonist who, like Judith and Jael, fights for justice for the oppressed, but in this case, does so without spilling any blood. Brittany Wilson, in her study of what theologians have noted as a progression from Jael and Judith to Mary the mother of Christ, notes a similar discontinuity in the stories of Jael, Judith, and Mary, as presented in the Gospel of Luke. She outlines the long history of biblical interpretation that connects Elizabeth's greeting of the young pregnant Mary to that of Jael (Judges 5:24) and Judith (13:18) and how they are all “initially named ‘blessed’ at the outset of their descriptions” (439): Mary is called blessed among women [Luke 1:42]; Jael is called blessed among tent-dwelling women [Judges 5:24]; and Judith is called blessed above all other women on earth [Judith 13:18]” (440).³⁰ But she points out that scholars who make this connection have failed to notice a significant discontinuity: “Mary is ‘blessed’ because of her fulfillment of God's plan for Israel through nonviolent means in contrast to her ‘blessed’ predecessors, Jael and Judith” (437–38). Wilson acknowledges how “the violence of Jael and Judith is often explained as being in continuity with Mary, since Mary ‘crushes’ the head of Satan” (437) but notes how “Mary's ‘crushing’ symbolizes God's defeat of evil (through Mary), but Jael and Judith kill with their own hands” (438). This interpretation remains consistent with the Gospel of Luke's presentation of Jesus as “consistently preach[ing] a message of peace” (Wilson 453). Whereas the Jael and Judith stories share a motif of the (violent) deliverance

of Israel by “the *hand* of a woman,” in Luke’s story of Mary, God is the deliverer of the victims of oppression, and Mary acts on God’s (nonviolent) direction. In this new dispensation, God’s is the hand that brings about the age of peace through a woman. While Capitola is no Mary, one can read in her depiction Southworth’s own endorsement of an age of peace and equality brought about not by the hand of man or woman, but the *hidden hand* of God.

Obviously, one cannot prove the extent to which Southworth was consciously influenced by details of the story of Judith when she wrote *The Hidden Hand*. The many similarities could be attributed to the intertextuality of all storytelling, the long tradition of stories about cross-dressing and gender inversion, the nature of comedy and humor (and the anxiety they can produce), and a shared belief in God’s providence. Nevertheless, the allusion to Judith establishes that Southworth was familiar with the story, recognized connections between the biblical character of Judith and Capitola, and used that connection to endorse Capitola’s assertive actions in defense of virtue. The limits of the connection between the two protagonists also reveal the limits of her endorsement of Judith’s action and her promotion of an alternative model of empowered womanhood characterized by advocating for justice and equality, rejecting violence, trusting in God’s provision and direction, and believing in the gospel of peace and the hope of redemption for all humans (Titus 2:11).

Notes

1. While most of Southworth’s fiction appeared serially before being published in book form, the publishing history of *The Hidden Hand* was unique in that it appeared three times over 24 years in the *New York Ledger* (1859, 1868–69, 1883–84) before being released in book form in 1888, and it remained in publication (in some form) until the early 20th century. It was republished in 1988 as a project of the American Women Writers series (Rutgers UP). The 1883 serialization followed by the 1888 book publication included some very minor revisions (designed to bring Capitola into every chapter; see Scott and Thomas, 60, EN51), and the Rutgers (1988) and Oxford University Press (1997) versions are based on this latter publication. While the text has remained essentially the same, the historical and cultural context of her audience has changed significantly. This article references both critical and popular reception of the novels’ serial and book publications (see Habegger; Baym; Dobson; and Naranjo-Huebl, “The Road to Perdition,” for the book’s 19th-century reception) as well as contemporary criticism (1981–).
2. Carpenter provides the most extended discussion of Christian elements of *The Hidden Hand* and argues that the paradoxes of the Christian faith help illuminate the doubles, reversals, and paradoxes of her fiction.
3. While the allusion to Jael is also significant, the book of Judges provides much less detail about Jael herself compared to the book of Judith, which is rich in detail and has engendered much more interest and attention among readers. Pamela Milne and other scholars note how the “central motif in this apocryphal text, the killing of an enemy general by a woman, seems to have been modeled on parts of the Jael and Deborah stories in Judges 4–5” (41). Also see Brittany Wilson on significant connections between the stories.

4. Many critics attribute the privileging of empathy among 19th-century women authors as stemming from the sentimental philosophies of the period, neglecting to discuss how empathy is central to orthodox Christian doctrine and faith (with Christ as the ultimate empathic subject). Sentimentalism in America was premised primarily on Christian principles and doctrine and had a lesser secular following (as compared to Britain) (see Naranjo-Huebl, *I's and Thou's*, chapter 1). The writers of sentimental fiction in the USA were overwhelmingly Christian, and any examination of their sentimentalism should consider religious influence.
5. For diverse and opposing views of critics relating to the ambivalences and often contradictory elements of Southworth's fiction, particularly on issues of gender/feminism, race/slavery, and class, see Ings; Okker and Williams; Gabler-Hover; and Jones, "This dainty woman's hand"). Bryan Love, in his examination of the influence of Shakespeare on Southworth's work, points out that such ambiguity is characteristic of Shakespearean comedy (192–93). Christopher Looby, discussing the contrasting critical interpretations of Southworth's views of slavery, gender roles, and US politics, argues that Southworth "had a knack for gathering her disparate readership in" by a "studied ambiguity" born of her effort to be the "universally popular" author mandated by Robert Bonner, editor of *The New York Ledger*, who eschewed controversy in his serial periodical (210–11). While Looby's observation helps explain some of the ambiguous messages in the narratives, Southworth's own ambivalence on these issues must also be considered. Literary critics—certainly those mentioned above—recognize that writers' unconscious assumptions are reflected in their writings.
6. On intertextualities in Judith, see Eckhardt; Wilson; and Nolte and Jordaan.
7. I have previously noted that the similarities between—and comical inversions of—scenes in *Jane Eyre* (1847) convince me that *The Hidden Hand* (1859) is, at least in part, in conscious dialogue with Brontë's text. Correlations include an orphan under tyrannical authority who turns out to be an heiress; a harsh, hard-drinking despot who inherits his estate upon the death of an older brother; a comic confrontation with a local clergyman; a gender ambiguous fortune teller; a traveler in the storm seeking shelter from a housekeeper; a ghostly nighttime visit by a madwoman in the attic; and a midnight attack in an overhead room. Capitola serves as a response to Jane's musing on the roof about the millions of women who are in "silent revolt against their lot."
8. The Apocrypha was included in Protestant Bibles until the mid-19th century when printers started omitting it in an effort to produce cheaper editions of the Bible and also as a result of a rise in anti-Catholic sentiment (see Jenkins).
9. Stone, Bal, and Efthimiadis-Keith ("Text and Interpretation") provide histories of Judith in art (and critical interpretation). Sarudy provides a visual chronology of paintings of Judith and Holofernes in the 1600s that shows the influence of painters' works on successive artists.
10. Southworth also cited as favorite artists Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, a Spanish Baroque painter known for his religious subjects as well as depictions of women in ordinary settings, and her contemporary proto-feminist Rosa Bonheur, 1822–99, whose nontraditional gender expression Southworth perhaps found inspiring.
11. Rubens's two major works on the subject contrast sharply and reflect intertextuality. The 1616 version foregrounds Judith's muscular forearm, bare breast, and direct gaze at the viewer, referencing her (maternal?) strength and sexual role in the story. It also features an aged knife-wielding servant actively involved in the murder. The 1625

- version presents a more modest Judith and a younger, more passive servant. Both works suggest the influence of other artists' versions of Judith.
12. Bal, Stone, and Efthimiadis-Keith ("Judith: Lorena Bobbit of Yesteryear?") each provide documentation of this popular interpretation.
 13. All quotes from Judith are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Apocrypha.
 14. Astute critics of both texts note the relative invisibility of indispensable servants who facilitate the protagonists' actions and, in some cases, challenge cultural prejudices: Achior the Ammonite leader who converts to Judaism, Bagaos the eunuch, and Judith's unnamed maidservant, and in *The Hidden Hand*, the midwife Nancy Grewell. See Eckhardt and Roitman on Judith and Landry on *The Hidden Hand*.
 15. Several critics have observed the performative nature of gender illustrated in this passage. Abate (with a focus on the tomboy), Pond (with emphasis on speech and discourse), and Edelstein (with emphasis on the categories of gender and nation) provide exemplary analyses of gender as performance in this scene and in the story in general.
 16. See, for example, Craven, Milne, Esler, and Efthimiadis-Keith ("Judith, Feminist Ethics"). Interestingly, some feminist critics fault the text for Judith's identification with Simeon instead of Dinah (see Milne).
 17. Through this connection, Southworth cleverly challenges the concept of "true womanhood" and its tenets—piety, chastity, domesticity, and submissiveness (Welter) by showing how submissiveness in Capitola's situations would result in the loss of her chastity.
 18. Both villains are also attracted to these women's assertiveness, but the bedroom scenes foreground the men's lust. Black Donald never specifically expresses sexual desire for Capitola, but, of course, 19th-century women authors were constrained from writing explicitly about sex or rape. While Black Donald later denies ever intending to *kill* Capitola (398), rape was one means of forcing marriage on an unwilling victim, as Craven Le Noir's plot to marry Clara illustrates.
 19. In Jordan Landry's interpretation of this scene, she identifies interlocking oppressions of class, race, and gender. The pit reveals "how conventional cultural associations with race and sex interplay with each other" (39). She argues "the cavern signifies the belief that the vagina, supposedly that which defines women, is nothing but envelope, absence, and lack" (39), and the fact that it is "'black' and full of 'darkness' reveals that race informs the imagery" inasmuch as African Americans were perceived as the unknowable other in white middle-class America (40). Paul Christian Jones compellingly associates the pit with America's oppression of Native Americans and African Americans ("This dainty woman's hand") and the trap door with the gallows ("I put my fingers").
 20. For specific analysis of the comic elements in *The Hidden Hand*, including theory on the empowering use of humor by women, see Pond and Naranjo-Huebl ("Doing the sentimental").
 21. The most popular of Southworth's fiction, *The Hidden Hand* was published in serial form three times, dramatized in countless plays, published as a book in 1888, remained in print into the 20th century (Dobson xiv), and was republished in 1988 as part of the Rutgers UP American Women Writers series. For specific analysis of the comic elements in *The Hidden Hand*, see Pond and Naranjo-Huebl ("Doing the sentimental").
 22. Cragan identifies and discusses several additional instances of irony and wordplay in Judith.
 23. Southworth commented in an interview, "Ah, I loved my work as I wrote that!" (qtd. in Dobson xxvi).

24. Efthimiadis-Keith ("Judith, Feminist Ethics") provides a summary of its critical reception from the time of the early church fathers to the present. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* continues to defend the historicity of Judith.
25. Significantly, most mixed criticism of Southworth's fiction focuses on her treatment of race and makes connections to gender, arguing that Southworth's progressive depictions of gender fluidity and rebellion against restrictive gender roles "drew on various aspects of nonwhiteness" (Abate 42). Ambiguous presentations of gender subversion stand alongside ambivalences about race. These convincing observations do not have an obvious counterpart in the ethno-centric Judith that pits Jews against non-Jewish oppressors, with the exception of the character of Achior, who represents a rare biblical case of a convert to Judaism (see Roitman). Both stories share that characteristic of comedy in which disempowered groups' "exercise of power is not shown to be permanent or even frequent" (Cornelius 420).
26. Efthimiadis-Keith ("Text and Interpretation") addresses similar dichotomies and paradoxes in Judith.
27. See Jones ("I put my fingers") for a careful reading of Cap's actions on behalf of Black Donald and how they constitute an anti-death penalty argument.
28. On religious opposition to (and support for) the Mexican War, see Ellsworth and Pinheiro. One might note that public views of the Mexican War changed over the serial publication of *The Hidden Hand* (1859–88). Christopher Looby and Megan Griffin address these changing views while contextualizing those receptions.
29. The character of Traverse represents an important gender reversal in the text that complements Capitola's. Traverse exhibits the persevering Christian patience of his mother, particularly in his military experience. He finds himself subject to oppressive *martial* (notably, an anagram of *marital*) law, in a position of utter helplessness, much like many women under 19th-century law. While his love interest, Clara, is being rescued by the assertive Capitola, Traverse is being rescued by Herbert.
30. Wilson provides an in-depth discussion on the connections between the Lukan text and Judges and Judith, noting how the latter supplied "recognizable characters within Luke's historical milieu" (438).

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Author biography

Linda Naranjo-Huebl is Associate Professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where she specializes in gender and literature and American ethnic literature.