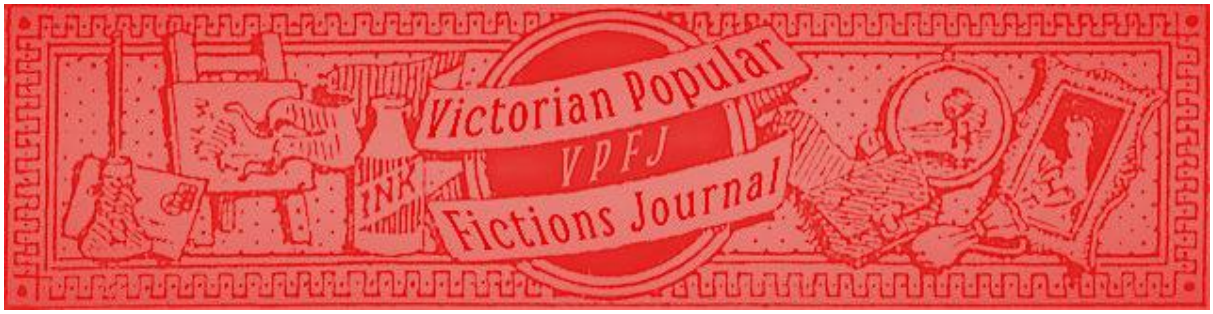

Crossing Borders in Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" (1861) and Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman* (1866): Genre, Nation, and Gender

Linda K. Hughes

Abstract

This article examines Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" (1861) and Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman: A Strange Tale of Texas* (1866) as interventions in sensation and adventure fiction. Both works align with sensation fiction in their shocking crimes, Gothic elements, and domestic conflicts, yet they simultaneously engage adventure fiction in the characters' daring exploits, wandering journeys, and exotic settings that are cross-roads for multiple nationalities and conflicts: the Vosges mountains bordering France and Germany in Gaskell's Franco-German novella, and the wide open spaces of southwest Texas near the Mexican border in Reid's novel. These tales differ from later adventure novels in sidestepping the British empire and its imperial conquests. Their settings, if linked to sensational crimes, also open spaces for gender fluidity to a degree unusual in both sensation and adventure fiction, especially in these two works' secondary female characters: Amante, Gaskell's heroic, cross-dressing Norman servant and Reid's wealthy, fearless Mexican Isidore, who cross-dresses, commands masculine physical prowess, and is heterosexually attractive yet mustachioed. After exploring how these two works cross ostensible borders of genre, nation, and gender, the article concludes in a coda with the authors' ability to extend their reputations beyond their native borders into world literature, including Reid's appeal to Vladimir Nabokov, and their relevance to studies today.

Keywords

Elizabeth Gaskell; Mayne Reid; borders; sensation fiction; adventure fiction; gender fluidity; reputation; Nabokov

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Crossing Borders in Elizabeth Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" (1861) and Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman* (1866): Genre, Nation, and Gender*

Linda K. Hughes

Introduction

Gaskell's novella "The Grey Woman" (1861) and Mayne Reid's little-studied novel *The Headless Horseman: A Strange Tale of Texas* (1866) might seem an unlikely pairing. Not only is Gaskell a major Victorian novelist while Reid is better-known to scholars of American Westerns than to Victorianists, but Gaskell was also the settled wife of a Manchester clergyman and mother of four daughters, while Reid as an adventurous Anglo-Irish youth went to the US, worked various odd jobs, fought in the Mexican-American War, recovered from wounds in Mexico and became bilingual, and eventually found his niche writing Western yarns – even if he ultimately lived in England longer than elsewhere. Placing these two writers in conversation with each other and with the popular genres of sensation and adventure fiction, however, reveals not only the two works' points of convergence but also their larger significance for popular fiction after 1860. These two works intervene in sensation and adventure fiction by demonstrating the permeable boundaries between these genres, qualifying and at times decentring the strong link between adventure fiction and masculinity, including the later boys' imperial fiction, and thus challenging strict genre definitions and the imperative need for flexible scholarly categorisation.

These two tales are aligned with sensation fiction in their shocking crimes, Gothic elements, and domestic plots, yet they resemble adventure fiction in their daring episodes,

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wandering journeys, and exotic settings: the Vosges mountains bordering France and Germany in Gaskell's novella, and the wide open spaces of southwest Texas near the Mexican border in Reid's two-volume novel. Both regions are cross-roads for multiple nationalities and conflicts, yet they differ from later adventure novels in sidestepping the British empire and its imperial conquests. The transnationality of the tales' settings is isomorphic with the secondary female characters' marked gender fluidity, including trans capacity (Getsy, 2014: 47-8) enabled by their liminal settings. Amante is Gaskell's heroic, cross-dressing Norman servant who leads Anna, the protagonist, through terrains of immediate danger; the wealthy Mexican Isidora, the hero's secondary love interest in Reid's novel, is also a fearless cross-dresser with masculine physical prowess and is deemed heterosexually attractive as a mustachioed female. These nonbinary figures demonstrate how adventure fiction can also help answer Lisa Hager's recent call for greater attention to gender diversity and fluidity in Victorian scholarship today (2018: 37). Both Gaskell and Reid, then, despite their divergent places in scholarship today, illustrate how nineteenth-century fiction writers could draw on popular genres in ways that simultaneously crossed boundaries of genre and gender; the new terrain they thereby open calls for further scholarly investigation in future studies. Following a detailed examination of how these works intervene in sensation and adventure fiction by participating in both, thus blurring their boundaries, I discuss the gender fluidity enabled by the tales' settings and conclude with a coda on Gaskell's and Reid's relevance to world literature as well as British popular fiction.

Blurred Boundaries between Genres

Sensation Fiction

In the 1860s adventure fiction was nascent in titles such as Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867), but this decade was the heyday of sensation fiction following upon Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* serialised in Dickens's *All the Year Round* (26 November 1859 – 25 August 1860) and the arrival of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* serialised initially in *Robin Goodfellow* (July-September 1861), then *Six-Penny Magazine* (January-December 1862) (Gilbert 2011: 2, 5). Gaskell's story appeared in three instalments in Dickens's *All the Year Round* (5-19 January 1861), Reid's novel in 20 monthly sixpenny parts, some with illustrations, initially by Chapman and Hall, then Richard Bentley (March 1865 – October 1866), before transatlantic volume publication in 1866. Neither of these two titles, significantly, was classed as sensation fiction at the time, an indication yet again of their deliberate crossing of genre boundaries, although a number of scholars since have recognised Gaskell's overlap with that popular genre (see Hughes 2006: x-xxi). J. G. Sharps in fact suggests that reading Collins's novel may have partly inspired Gaskell's "Grey Woman," since, like Laura Fairlie, Gaskell's heroine Anna Scherer marries an aristocrat, M. de la Tourelle, who leads a double life as a criminal (1970: 338).

Both Gaskell's and Reid's works share sensation novels' characteristic domestic plots (Daly 2011: 227), crimes linked to domesticity, and Gothic elements. Gaskell's central narrative is triggered by the courtship of provincial German miller's daughter Anna by the perfumed, effeminately beautiful French aristocrat Tourelle to whom she is soon married. Reid's courtship plot begins as soon as its hero, the handsome, mustachioed mustanger in Mexican dress (in reality Sir Maurice Gerald in exile from his bankrupt Irish estate), arrives on the scene to save the lost party of Southern plantation-owner Woodley Poindexter from an oncoming dust storm. Louise, Poindexter's daughter, is immediately attracted to Gerald as he is to her; her desiring female gaze is noted by her domineering cousin, Captain Cassius Calhoun, an "ex-officer of volunteers" (Reid 1866: 4) who wants Louise for his own

wife, thus setting up a double courtship plot and love triangle as the chivalric Gerald rivals the villainous Cassius Calhoun, whose given name (as in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*) signals his perfidy. Just as Franklin Blake and Rachel Verinder's courtship is central to *The Moonstone* (serialised in *All the Year Round,* 4 January – 8 August 1868), with Godfrey Ablewhite a villainous rival in its love triangle, so courtship plots are central to "The Grey Woman" and *The Headless Horseman.*

Both tales also feature sensational crimes that take place or originate in the domestic realm. In "The Grey Woman," Anna has unwittingly married the leader of a band of Chauffeurs, thieves notorious for torturing and murdering their victims. Tourelle knows even as he courts Anna that the moment she becomes inconvenient or too knowing he can dispose of her. He forbids Anna access to his private chambers in Les Rochers in the Gothic setting of the remote Vosges Mountains (which border Germany) and deprives her of all contact with her family by withholding letters that arrive for her. When told by her Norman maid Amante that a letter from her family has arrived in Tourelle's absence, Anna enters the forbidden chambers to fetch it. Hearing her husband and his gang entering the room from the window, Anna quickly hides under a cloth-covered table. They are dragging something heavy, and Anna feels the vibration when her husband kicks the burden. Instinctively she puts out her "groping palm upon the clenched and chilly hand of a corpse!" (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 311). Anna is so paralysed by this galvanic Gothic "sensation of the dead man's close presence" after the gang exits that it haunts her: "I almost fancied – I almost fancy still – I heard the arm nearest to me move; lift itself up, as if once more imploring, and fall in dead despair…. I screamed aloud in mad terror" (315). The identity of the criminal murderer is in no doubt, and the tale's second half turns to Anna and Amante's need to escape the castle and elude the Chauffeurs in pursuit, who never allow witnesses of their crimes to survive.

Reid's sensational crime takes place out of doors in the wild Texas landscape, yet the crime, like the Constance Kent Road Hill House murder plot that helped inspire *The Moonstone* (1868), originates in a domestic scene.[1] Louise, like the daring sensational heroine she is, has earlier declared love for Gerald before he does – on horseback no less (Reid 1866: 144). Clearly Gerald has won out over Cassius, but her father's insistence that she not ride out alone due to rumoured violence nearby forces the lovers to meet secretly at midnight in the Poindexter garden. On spying them together, Cassius rouses Louise's gentle brother Henry Poindexter to accuse Gerald of defiling his sister's purity. Henry soon rides in hot haste after Gerald, but not to kill him, as Cassius assumes. For Louise has explained the true situation, and, having always liked Gerald, Henry rides after the mustanger to apologise for accusing Gerald of dishonouring Louise and threatening violent revenge. Gerald readily accepts Henry's apology and the two seal their friendship by sharing cigars and, in a ritual Gerald has learned from the Comanches, exchanging their clothes. Gerald now wears the planter's hat, cloak, and French-style blouse, Henry the mustanger's black glazed hat and serape. Afterwards Gerald decides to rest beneath a tree but is awakened by a shot – from Cassius's rifle, who thinks he has killed Gerald. Discovering his mistake on riding up to his prey, Cassius commits the novel's most grisly act: he takes out his Bowie knife and brutally beheads Henry, hoping to throw blame on Comanches. Yet because the earlier confrontation in the garden precipitates the murder, the novel's sensational crime is likewise inextricable from domesticity and courtship. And Cassius exploits the garden confrontation to throw suspicion onto Gerald.

[1] For details of the Constance Kent murder case, see Steve Farmer's Appendix B in Collins ([1868] 1999: 560-76).

The intersection of both tales with sensation fiction's distinctive Gothic adaptations should already be clear.[2] In Gaskell's novella, Tourelle quickly spirits away his new wife Anna to his forbidding castle, Les Rochers (The Rocks), where her life is entirely confined and under constant surveillance by Tourelle's servants. Tourelle is, Jenny Uglow points out, another Bluebeard figure, the murderous husband in the Charles Perrault tale who forbids his new bride to enter a locked chamber in his castle in which the bloody bodies of his former wives are kept (Uglow 1993: 472).[3] Yet Tourelle is sufficiently charmed by Anna's delicate beauty, innocence, and pliability that he directs a Paris milliner to hire a middle-aged lady's maid for Anna to keep her company during his long absences. His sole generous act as a husband is the means of saving Anna's life.

The very title of *The Headless Horseman* suggests a sensational Gothic tale.[4] The impression deepens in the prologue, which opens with indirect discourse and a non-human percipient subject, a wild stag, as the uncanny rider enters the scene:

> The stag of Texas … is startled from his slumbers by the hoofstroke of a horse…. Springing clear of his couch, and bounding a score of yards across the prairie, he pauses to look back upon the disturber of his dreams…. He recognizes the most ruthless of his enemies – man….
>
> Yielding to instinctive dread, he is about to resume his flight: when something in the appearance of the horseman – some unnatural seeming – holds him transfixed to the spot…. his large brown eyes straining upon the intruder in a mingled expression of fear and bewilderment….
>
> About him there *is* something to cause both – something weird – something *wanting*!
>
> BY HEAVENS! IT IS THE HEAD!
>
> (Reid 1866: 1)[5]

The scene offers up terror in the non-human stag and an anamorphous rider that haunts the subsequent narrative.

When Gerald finds Henry's dissevered corpse and must contrive how to transport the remains, he adopts the gaucho practice of tying a dead comrade upright on a horse and ties the ghastly head securely to his own horse's saddle horn, since his deep-seated Mexican saddle acts as a kind of cradle. Henry Poindexter's grotesque corpse is thus the novel's headless horseman, which terrorises all who witness it, including Cassius Calhoun in an inverted mirage: "When first seen, the spectral form – now more spectre-like than ever – was going at a slow, leisurely walk. In this pace it for some time continued – Calhoun gazing upon it with a heart brimful of horror" (391).

Altogether, Gaskell's and Reid's courtship plots, crimes originating in the domestic realm, and notable Gothic tropes align their works with 1860s sensation fiction. Yet both extend the margins of sensation fiction, which is usually set in British domestic spaces, by exiting

[2] See O'Malley for Gothic fiction's legacy to sensation fiction (2011: 81, 83).

[3] Tourelle has already "disappeared" his former wife Victorine (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 313).

[4] If the obvious precedent is Washington Irving's tale of "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1820), there is an independent Texas tradition. Lou Ann Herda cites Texas historian J. Warren Hunter and the unpublished 1898 manuscript of his friend Creed Taylor, a former Texas Ranger. Taylor reports an 1848 act by his friends William "Bigfoot" Wallace and John McPeters, who, on catching a gang of horse thieves, decided to warn off other horse thieves by beheading the gang leader they shot and placing the body upright on a wild stallion (Herda 2004:103-5). Bratcher augments Herda's Texas sources (2009: 64-5). Naughton and Naughton cite an Irish source, the Irish Dullaghan (2013: 147-8).

[5] By the prologue's end, this uncanny discourse shifts to conventional third-person narrative.

England for Europe in Gaskell's Franco-German tale and the Western US in Reid's novel, and also, as I next elaborate, by merging elements of sensation and adventure fiction.

Adventure Fiction

Both tales can be read as adventure fiction, though they challenge its dominant focus on masculinity from Scott to late-century imperial adventure novels. Daly asserts that adventure fiction "eschews the domestic fiction interior and the family for male-centered adventure in a variety of more or less exotic settings, with treasure rather than love and marriage at the end of the narrative road" (2011: 227). His stance is shared by most scholars of adventure fiction.

Joseph Kestner and Bradley Deane, however, acknowledge exceptions to the genre's relentless focus on masculinity. Kestner, for example, notes that Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesá" (first serialised in the *Illustrated London News*, 2 July – 6 August 1892) "deploys adventure motifs (island, tropical locale, violence) with domestic elements (wife, children, household economy), giving the tale a hybrid identity as both adventure text and domestic narrative" (2010: 150). Though Deane does not go so far in discussing A. E. W. Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902), he argues that this novel's "game of honor," usually exclusive to men, includes protagonist Harry Feversham's fiancée Ethne, who becomes "an active participant in the theater of reputation" in sending Harry the white feather of cowardice (Deane 2014: 64). Gaskell's and Reid's adventure scenarios, which also involve wandering and endurance, are additional exceptions to masculine-centred adventure.

The second half of Gaskell's "Grey Woman" becomes a female-centred adventure story, a kind of Victorian prequel to the late twentieth-century film *Thelma and Louise* (1991), which puts two women at the centre of the buddy movie, contemporary Western, and road trip plots usually reserved for men (Greenberg 1991-2: 20) – though Anna and Amante only escape a crime rather than committing one. Anna mostly resembles the passive, pure women of adventure fiction (Bruzelius 2007: 114) but enters into adventure when she adopts the cross-*class* disguise Amante conceives for her, dying Anna's blonde hair mousy brown with walnut juice and dressing her as a peasant's wife. Anna colludes in undermining adventure fiction's typical beauties as she deliberately breaks a front tooth to complete her disguise (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 323). Notably, disguise and incognitos are endemic in adventure fiction, whether *The Four Feathers* or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901). Later still, Anna will commit the crime of bigamy, though she does so only to find a means to protect her infant daughter and herself. Most strikingly, she writes out her own story – the narrative that the visiting Englishwoman and her German friend "translate" into English in the story's frame – to obstruct and destroy the patriarchal order and patrilineal descent that is the end goal of much adventure fiction (Bruzelius 2007: 24). She achieves this objective by revealing to her daughter that the man Ursula desires to marry is the son of the aristocratic neighbour murdered by Ursula's father on the night Anna escapes the castle, thus putting a stop to the marriage and any descendants of her own union with Tourelle.

In Reid, too, Louise, the novel's heroine, participates in adventurous roles, riding with Gerald across the range and visiting his shack unchaperoned or taking a daring leap across a gulch on the mustang mare Gerald gives her. She is also an expert toxophilist and communicates with Gerald by shooting arrows with notes attached across the stream separating her garden from the outer plains to arrange their midnight meetings. At Gerald's second trial for murder, she additionally risks censure as a fallen woman when she declares her continuing love for him before the assembled judge, witnesses, and neighbours.

Gaskell's and Reid's tales share as well the exotic settings requisite in adventure novels. As Margaret Bruzelius asserts, "the essential constitutive element of the fantasy is the exotic

landscape, an 'elsewhere' that is different from, but close to, the public world" (2007: 24). Yet unlike late-century imperial adventure fiction, each tale takes place on terrain that the British could not and did not seek to control, thereby opening potential new spaces for adventure fiction and allowing increased agency for women.

"The Grey Woman": Setting, Wandering, Feminine Cooperation, Physical Endurance

Gaskell's setting, the Vosges Mountains, represented in the nineteenth century "a highly mobile border in the minds of the Alsatian people" since it "drew its roots from both French and German cultural backgrounds without ever fully merging with either one" (Stumpp and Fuchs 2013: 1-2). As such it was a hybrid, liminal terrain, an apt setting not merely for Anna's Franco-German marriage but also for the tale's troubling of generic boundaries. Even after the Vosges came under French administration after the French Revolution (referenced obliquely in "The Grey Woman"), its traditional language remained a German dialect. Neither a state nor a focal point for clearcut identity, it was a hybrid, ambiguous cultural space that eluded simple definitions of nationhood. The mountains were dotted with medieval castles, churches, and ruins as well as some forbidding landscape. According to a 1911 Baedeker guide, "the Vosges present their steepest side, seamed with picturesque ravines, toward the Rhine" and, in the northern region, "granite is overlaid by a massive layer of variegated sandstone, which determines the long, coffin-shaped form of the heights" (502). This makes it appropriate for a Gothicised exotic setting as well as, in Bruzelius's words, an "'elsewhere' that is different from, but close to, the public world" and thus a kind of "'borderland'" through which the protagonist-hero wanders and returns (2007: 24, 42).

After leaving "the house of blood by stealth in the dead of night" (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 317), Anna and Amante first cower under a bridge on a rainy night as the river rises, then are forced to wade through the river shallows to free themselves. At a nearby mill a "feeble voice[d]" old woman opens as they knock (319), and, since letting them shelter within would not violate the absent master's dictate that no man enter the property, she gives the women a little food and lets them warm themselves, then has them climb into the storeroom loft, cackling as she removes the ladder, leaving them imprisoned again.

After the master arrives home drunk accompanied by Tourelle's chief henchman on the lookout for the fugitives, he repeatedly strikes the old woman for having fallen asleep and sends her to bed. The old woman conveniently dies during the night, perhaps out of general fragility or her master's blows. Amante wastes no time on sympathy, instead welcoming the chance it gives the hidden pair to rest and plan before they set out again. Finding a man's suit she can wear and other old clothes in the loft, as well as a rope that can serve as a ladder at need, Amante transforms herself into a hump-backed peasant with his dowdy wife. Sensation fiction now modulates into a picaresque tale as the women seek to flee the characteristic "demonic male" of adventure fiction (Bruzelius 2007: 24) in hot pursuit, namely Tourelle.

Anna's narrative mentions "many adventures" but for economy's sake (and the weekly format of *All the Year Round*) relates only three. In the first the pair stop at an isolated blacksmith's shop after three weeks of wandering. Amante announces "his" expertise in tailoring (learned in youth from her father in Normandy) and offers to help mend clothes in exchange for food and shelter, with his wife assisting. The sound of horse's hooves signals Tourelle himself in haste to pursue an alleged sighting of his wife who, he claims, has stolen jewels to meet a lover, assisted by her "base, profligate" servant (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 327). Anna masters her terror, her own form of endurance, and Tourelle finds nothing of interest in the peasant workers plying their craft in the shadows. After he leaves and the "tailor" engages the blacksmith and his wife in conversation to cover Anna's trembling, Amante herself

begins to quail as their lowly hosts gossip about the horror inspired by the Chauffeurs and their horrific crimes: "Her eyes grew large and wild, her cheeks blanched, and for once she sought by her looks help from me" (328) – a reminder of the pervasive threats surrounding the fugitives at every moment.

Travelling off the main road leading to Frankfurt, their destination, they stay at an inn in its lowliest room over the stable with money from a ring given to Anna by Tourelle and sold to a travelling jeweller. Tourelle again materialises, for he has heard of a beautiful young woman with luxuriant hair the colour of Anna's and her servant arriving at the same inn. The fugitives must again exert the bravery of endurance amidst danger when they hear Tourelle's voice talking to the ostler on arrival and again in the morning when he quietly departs on horseback. Hours later the inn is in chaos – for the beautiful young woman resembling Anna has been murdered in the night, and attached to the knife plunged into her heart is the note announcing the vengeance of the Chauffeurs: "NUMÉRO UN. / Ainsi les Chauffeurs se vengent" (332).

The final adventure is Amante's more than Anna's. They settle in a sixth-story room in Frankfurt, where Amante supports the couple and the daughter Anna births, to whom Amante becomes a second parent. Amante seizes the opportunity for increased earnings at a "great house" some distance away to make costumes for a private theatrical, and on the way there is spotted by the travelling jeweller. Completing an errand, she too is fatally wounded by a knife to which is attached the same note found on the earlier murder victim, down to the "*Un*" signifying Tourelle's awareness that the first killing was not of his intended victim. Brave and enduring even as she is dying, Amante maintains silence as to the whereabouts of Anna and the baby as she is carried to the hospital, briefly disclosing the circumstances only to the poor young doctor who has also tended Anna. Not long after, Anna looks down from her window and sees Tourelle in the street below; he looks up, but by then her hair is grey from fright, her complexion drained of all colour, a permanent bodily disguise – and Tourelle again fails to recognise her.

Anna's recounting of adventures is brief but manifests the same continuous wandering, sequential rather than organically linked episodes of adventure fiction,[6] and a hero who endures hardship and extreme suffering to deliver an innocent, vulnerable young woman to safety at the tale's end. Only in this adventure narrative, the hero is a woman.

***The Headless Horseman*: Setting, Wandering, Masculine Competition, Endurance**

The exotic setting of *The Headless Horseman* is thousands of miles and an ocean away from the Franco-German setting of "The Grey Woman." It is another liminal space of shifting, unstable borders, in this case the immense open prairie of southwest Texas through which wander Comanches, Mexicans, Irish and German immigrants, unruly white Texas Regulators quick to take justice into their own hands, and US-born settlers moving into the new Texas territory who are protected by the nearby fort's soldiers against the Native Americans whose land the settlers appropriate. As in most wild west tales, law enforcement is contingent at best, enabling new freedoms to those roaming the prairie for good and ill. Spanish words, such as *jacalé*, the term for Gerald's austere shack where he lives attended by his Irish manservant Phelim and keeps his captured mustangs, enhance the setting's exoticism. And the sheer ground covered by the galloping mustangs, or the tracking of animal and human clues, creates an aura

[6] As Jacques Rivière argues, "An adventure novel is the tale of events that are not contained the one within the other…. Each chapter opens as an excess over the preceding … [that] overflow those of the preceding chapter" (1960: 115).

of limitless space, while Reid's meticulous details of the region's flora and fauna enhance this setting's realism, to the point that "one over-enthusiastic authority on the American West went so far as to assert 'no one has ever been able to pick a serious flaw in Mayne Reid's history, geography, ethnology, or Zoology, in fact his local color'" (Don 1993: 103).

That all takes place in 1850 injects politics and race into this setting. The Mexican-American War (1846-48) instigated by US claims to Texan land down to the Rio Grande rather than the Nueces River further north was only recently concluded.[7] Within the novel Mexicans are generally welcomed by Gerald if not by many Anglo-European settlers, and while Native Americans have scant presence in the novel, they are caricatured when they do appear – albeit Gerald himself, as noted above, borrows their friendship custom of exchanging clothes with Henry. Reid's novel began serialisation, moreover, during the last days of the US Civil War, which allowed for abolitionist themes. It is no coincidence that the demonic villain of the novel, Cassius Calhoun, is a racist plantation Southerner, or that it is after Cassius kicks the enslaved servant Pluto that Pluto reveals to frontier huntsman Zeb Stump the key clue linking Cassius to Henry's murder.

Serialisation of *The Headless Horseman* also coincided with Britain's Morant Bay Massacre in Jamaica, in October-November 1865, which Reid overtly excoriates in his text.[8] Reid's narrator first compares the "'border ruffians'" about to hang Gerald for Henry's murder to "the *military murderers* of Jamaica, who have disgraced the English name to the limits of all time" (Reid 1866: 317). Again, after criticising the depredations of some Texans against the Comanches and others, the narrator checks himself: "But, alas! We must now be a little cautious about calling names. Our own story of Jamaica – by heaven! the blackest that has blotted the pages of history – has whitewashed these border *filibusteros* to the seeming purity of snow!" (338).[9]

Reid's novel is thus framed by national politics, colonialism, and racism but sidesteps the binary of British imperial superiority and "savages." Gerald is in fact tricultural: an Irish nobleman in disguise, a lowly Texan mustanger, and a bilingual Spanish-English speaker who adopts Mexican customs to forge a distinctive cultural hybridity. Gerald's clothing anticipates the imperial masculine cultural cross-dressing discussed by Deane (2014: 51-84), since he enters the novel riding out of the horizon garbed like a charro, or expert Mexican horseman (see Figure 1) – so much so that Cassius Calhoun first addresses him in Spanish. Gerald also sports a moustache, in contrast to the clean-shaven Poindexters or bearded Calhoun, likely

[7] Reid himself fought with the New York Volunteers in the Mexican-American War and was seriously wounded after leading a dangerous charge in the US taking of Chapultepec. He then assumed (or was awarded) the rank of Captain before leaving the military in 1848, though he stayed in Mexico learning its culture and language during his slow recovery from a serious thigh wound that returned to plague him in his last years (Sieruta 1996: 230-1).

[8] The Morant Bay Rebellion began on 11 October 1865 when Jamaican-born preacher Paul Bogle led a march to the Jamaican courthouse near Morant Bay to protest plantation workers' insufficient pay and generally poor living conditions among workers of colour. Violence broke out and some white government officials were killed. Governor Edward Eyre responded with extreme brutality, burning houses and executing people of colour, often with no pretence of a fair trial, including the hanging of the former biracial businessman and magistrate George William Gordon. See Rosenberg (2024: 185-8).

[9] Reid is no innocent progressive, however. On the same page Reid refers to Native Americans as "ruthless savages [who] have given to the white man peculiar provocation, by a thousand repetitions of … diabolical crimes." He also advocated settler colonialism, arguing that if the surface of earth belonged to all humanity, only those who developed the land had a right to it, in contrast to nomadic hunters (338).

another borrowing from Mexican horsemen, and again anticipating British adoption of the moustache in later imperial adventure fiction (Deane 2014: 55-6). Even Gerald's saddle is Mexican rather than the conventional western saddle, a detail essential to the plot since it becomes the seat of the headless horseman.

As for wandering, the first encounter of all but three of the novel's principal characters in Figure 1 occurs because the Poindexter household is wandering lost on the burnt prairie that hides the tracks of prior wagon wheels.[10] When Louise's mustang mare darts off after wild mustangs at a picnic hosted by Louise's father, Gerald outrides Cassius Calhoun to reach her first and warns her of the dangers of "a pathless prairie!'" Even could she stay in her saddle, he adds, she could become lost, "'a thing you were like enough to have done among those chapparal copses, where the oldest Texan can scarce find his way'" (Reid 1866: 83). The novel's pervasive wandering needs little elaboration, whether it involves Zeb's tracking the broken horseshoe of Cassius Calhoun's horse across the prairie to the murder scene, Cassius's own attempt to find and kill the horse carrying Henry's headless body to hide evidence of his crime, or the Regulators or Miguel's gang chasing after Gerald to murder him.

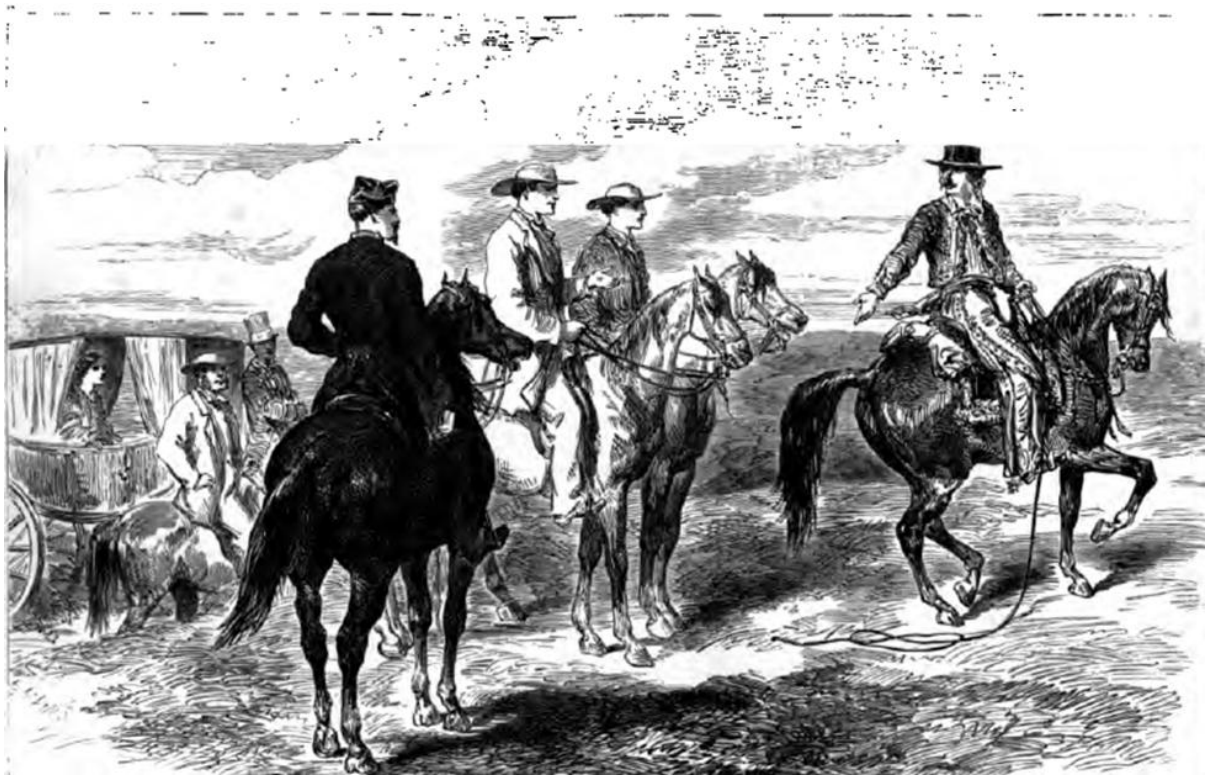

Figure 1: Maurice Gerald Rescues the Poindexter Family
(*The Headless Horseman: A Strange Tale of Texas*, 1866,
Courtesy Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett Library, Texas Christian University)

Like dominant nineteenth-century adventure fiction, masculine competition is central to *The Headless Horseman*, as in Scott's male rivalries or imperial white masculinity pitted against "natives" in H. Rider Haggard's and Rudyard Kipling's novels (Bruzelius 2007: 94-100; Kestner 2010: 63-98). Rather than imperial military contexts, however, *The Headless*

[10] The omitted characters are Zeb Stump, Isidora Covarubio de los Llanos, who vies with Louise for Gerald's love, and the ruthless Mexican Miguel Diaz who wants to possess Isidora as Cassius does Louise and readily accepts Cassius's offer to assassinate Gerald.

Horseman adumbrates later Westerns in successive contests between Gerald and Calhoun. Determined to belittle Gerald in front of others, Cassius Calhoun first insults all Irishmen, then purposely bumps into Gerald, causing drink to spill down Gerald's front. Gerald calmly removes the whiskey with a silk handkerchief, then throws the contents of his whiskey into Calhoun's face. A classic Western gunfight follows, made even more dramatic because they fight inside the bar in the semi-dark after customers clear out. Calhoun fires all his Colt six-shooter bullets without killing his antagonist, though wounding him; the bleeding Gerald has one bullet left, and the fight ends with Gerald holding his revolver to Cassius's head and giving him the choice to apologise or die. Calhoun, never as brave as he likes to imply, chooses life and apologises (Reid 1866: 111-20).

Earlier, the competitive Gerald rides three days to capture a prized wild mare notable for beauty that no other man can capture and takes it to the Poindexter hacienda where Louise's father is entertaining the neighbourhood elite of officers and residents. Refusing generous payment, he instead gifts the valuable mare to Louise in a grand gesture. When the Poindexter father and daughter point out that the mustang is still wild, Gerald responds in a bravado show of horsemanship, declining a saddle and stirrups and leaping on to the bare back of the mare. The mare bucks and kicks, then runs off with him toward the horizon. But after an interval he triumphantly rides back on a tamed mare, in full machismo glory.

A final adventure emphasises Gerald's capacity for sheer endurance. Early on, the narrative refers to his handsome "figure tersely knit [that] told of strength and endurance beyond the ordinary endowment of man" (Reid 1866: 68). Gerald demonstrates both his vulnerability and his endurance after attempting to lead his horse carrying Henry's mutilated body while riding Henry's horse. When the latter shies and runs away with him, Gerald is knocked off by a low tree branch and wakes with a serious knee injury, no water, and no gun, only his Bowie knife. He then faces the ordeal of his life: barely able to walk but finally hearing a little creek nearby that rescues him from thirsting to death in the hot Texas sun, he is attacked by coyotes, which he fights off with his knife. He recovers hope when his Irish staghound Tara finds him and he fixes a message of his location written in his blood around the dog's neck to summon help. Hours later, he spots a Texas jaguar gradually moving toward him against which he is defenceless. He knows he faces death – but (it is popular literature after all) Zeb Stump arrives in the nick of time and shoots the jaguar through the heart mid-leap.

Both Gaskell's "The Grey Woman" and Reid's *The Headless Horseman*, then, share adventure fiction's exotic settings through which characters wander, trials of endurance, and masculine contests in Reid's novel as well as the rarer representation of feminine cooperation in Gaskell's tale. Yet both sideline the imperialist ideology of late nineteenth-century fiction, in Gaskell with women adventurers and liminal Franco-German borders, in Reid with his culturally hybrid protagonist, southwest Texan setting, and abolitionist and anti-British politics. In departing from dominant models of nineteenth-century adventure fiction early and late, both works suggest alternatives rarely pursued but also able to command popular appeal.

Blurred Borders of Gender Fluidity in Gaskell and Reid

Homosociality figures in both Gaskell's "Grey Woman" and Reid's *Headless Horseman*, but in these fictions all-male groups are the tale's villains, whether the vicious Chauffeurs in Gaskell or the Texas Regulators and Mexican allies of Cassius Calhoun. Still, Gaskell and Reid blur conventional borders of normative masculinity even in their principal male figures. Anna's husband Tourelle is violent, fearless, ruthless, which are common traits of male villains; he is also distinctly effeminate. When first introduced to Anna she thinks, "I had never seen any one

so handsome or so elegant. His hair was powdered, of course, but one could see from his complexion that it was fair in its natural state. His features were as delicate as a girl's." By evening's end Anna is rather put off by "the affected softness and effeminacy of his manners" (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 295). Tourelle's crossing of the usual borders between masculinity and femininity obstructs easy categorisation of gender from the start of Gaskell's tale.

In Reid's novel, Gerald retreats from initial hypermasculinity into the passivity and vulnerability associated with femininity. The strain of Henry's murder and horrific beheading, Gerald's own grisly solution to saving Henry's body from carrion, and his sustained ordeal facing predators when he is injured after falling from Henry's horse result in madness and helplessness for days – in effect taking the novel's hero off centre stage for over a hundred pages. At the outset Gerald is handsome, hypermasculine, irresistible to women, and the envy of many men. Reid's handling indicates that such masculinity is vulnerable and contingent, liable to turn into helplessness and lack of agency after injury or extreme trials of masculine hardihood.

Even more than Tourelle and Gerald, however, it is the women of these two fictions that overtly challenge the borders between masculinity and femininity, in effect anticipating representations of nonbinary gender and what art historian and trans theorist David Getsy terms "trans capacity" (2014: 47-8). The two exemplars of gender fluidity are Gaskell's Amante and Reid's Isidora Covarubio de los Llanos.

Gaskell's Amante

Though Gaskell's protagonist Anna Scherer develops agency during her adventures on the road, she resembles far more the conventional heroine of adventure fiction, docile, innocent, and beautiful (Bruzelius 2007: 25). It is Tourelle's pleasure in Anna's beauty and erotic appeal that inspires him to hire a middle-aged female servant for her. Enter Amante.

From the first, Amante's appearance suggests masculine features (Bohata 2017: 344): "She was tall and handsome, though upwards of forty, and somewhat gaunt" (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 302). Gaskell uses the coded masculine word "handsome" rather than "comely," and underscores Amante's absence of female curves with "gaunt." Contemporary language for Amante's gender presentation would be gender fluidity. Just as there is no strict dividing line between the masculine and feminine in Tourelle, so is it with Amante. Moreover, in contrast to Anna, who confesses that "I was afraid of everybody" in Tourelle's chateau, "Amante feared no one" (303). Gaskell then immediately adopts another word associating the servant with masculinity to describe her interactions with Tourelle's henchman: "She would quietly beard Lefebvre, and he respected her all the more for it" (303). At the same time, Amante can be "quite tender" with Anna (303) in the chateau, even maternal (Bohata 2017: 344); when Anna is shaken by hearing of a letter from home, Amante "dictated to me as a nurse does to a child" (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 305). Amante's gender identity, then, is never fixed in a feminine or masculine category but moves fluidly between the two gender expressions.

Once escaped from the chateau, Amante cuts her hair short and, tellingly, finds that the man's suit she finds in the mill's loft fits her. At the same time, even without gender transition drugs that could accomplish the same end today, she suddenly pitches her voice into a lower register that leads no one on the road to question her identity as Anna's husband: "she altered … her voice to a degree which I should not have believed possible" (323). Several scholars have commented on Amante thereafter acting as husband to Anna through the medium of disguise and her assumption of leadership in directing their movements, as well as her economic support of the couple thanks to her tailoring skills acquired at home (Reddy 1985: 190; Uglow 1993: 473; Chavez 2015: 73). If Julia McCord Chavez treats the marriage of the

two women as figurative (2015: 73), Maureen Reddy goes further, suggesting that Amante's carrying Anna to bed when she faints prior to their escape suggests a wedding night and that Amante "really *is* Anna's husband," displacing Tourelle (1985: 189-90). Given that, as Renzo d'Agnillo (2010: 51n.9) and Chavez (2015: 74) point out, "Amante" translates as "lover" and Anna comes genuinely to care for Amante (Gaskell [1861] 2000: 325), other scholars connect their female marriage to homoeroticism (d'Agnillo 2010: 48; Bohata 2017: 344).

In the context of Hager's "A Case for a Trans Studies Turn in Victorian Studies: 'Female Husbands' of the Nineteenth Century," Amante as husband begins to signal rather differently, toward radical gender fluidity including trans possibilities. Notably, like the case studies Hager discusses, Amante is working-class and so widely recognised as a husband once she and Anna settle in Frankfurt and "their" daughter is born, that her biological markers of female sex are discovered only in death in a post-mortem examination (2018: 44-6). Another useful twenty-first theoretical approach for what Amante represents is David Getsy's concept of "trans capacity," which he proffers in discussing Edouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863), unquestionably the representation of a naked female body yet a painting in which many of Manet's contemporaries saw an indelible masculinity – testimony, Getsy adds, to "gender's multiplicity, mobility, non-binarism, contingent visibility, and transformability" (2022: 363).[11]

The border between masculinity and the female body in Amante is thus unstable and mobile, never fully settling into one or the other. Amante, Gaskell's most radical representation of nonbinary gender, does not survive to the story's end. Like adventure fiction's "wild women" (Bruzelius 2007: 114-15), she dies, stabbed by one of Tourelle's assassins. But her representation nonetheless accords with Hager's insistence that scholars

> must fundamentally reconceptualize our understanding of gender to account for the possibility of movement between, across, and among genders; and … we must use this understanding to consider the possibilities of trans narratives within the diversity of gender identities represented in Victorian literary culture.
>
> (2018: 37)

Hager's call underscores both the expanded relevance of "The Grey Woman" today and the bold nonbinarism of Gaskell's treatment.

Reid's Isidora

Louise is a thoroughgoing sensation heroine: bold, desiring, an expert horsewoman and archer, a resisting woman who calls out Cassius when he attempts to dominate or emotionally blackmail her, and a passionate lover who openly declares her love for Gerald privately and publicly. If daring, however, Louise is no "wild woman" of adventure fiction, nor does she depart from normative heterosexuality even if she is unusually forward about her passion.

Her rival, however, in another of the novel's love triangles, is yet more daring and fierce in passion, and adept in another sport that Louise desires to learn once she is assured that it is not unladylike, mastery of the lazo (lasso). As this rival enters the novel, she spots an antelope, quickly takes her lazo from her saddle horn, lassoes it round the neck, and pulls it off its hooves (Reid 1866: 132). It is Isidora Covarubio de los Llanos, the daughter of a wealthy Mexican landowner on the Rio Grande who owns hundreds of horses, and niece to the owner of a hacienda that abuts the Poindexters' Casa del Corvo.

[11] See also Getsy (2014: 47-9).

Isidora may be based on Reid's personal experience. The memoir of his widow Elizabeth Reid cites an 1848 Pittsburgh newspaper report that Captain Reid was "about to be married to Signorina Guadaloupe Rozas, a beautiful lady, daughter of Senator Rozas, and said to be the wealthiest heiress in the Valley of Mexico" (Reid 1890: 108-9). Reid's widow declares it to be untrue, yet she takes care to mention it. Whether or not an engagement took place, it is notable that after a detailed description of Isidora, Mayne Reid's narrator comments, "you may deem the picture overdrawn – perhaps pronounce it unfeminine. And yet it is a copy from real life – true as I can remember it; and more than once had I the opportunity to fix it in my memory" (Reid 1866: 237). After Isidora sends Gerald delicacies to aid his recuperation from his gunfight wounds, Reid takes care to have Gerald remark, "'ever grateful – considerate – kind! But for Louise Poindexter, I might have loved you!'" (126). This prefatory declaration of Isidora's worthiness to be loved is important, for of all the novel's characters, she is the most transgressively gendered.

Readers first glimpse her through Louise's eyes: "a horse … just stepping out from among the trees … was ridden by one, who at first sight, appeared to be a man, clad in a sort of Arab costume" and riding astride (131). Looking again, Louise sees that the rider is "unquestionably" female, "somewhat brownly 'complected,' but with a carmine tinting upon the cheeks," extraordinary sparkling eyes, and a figure as lovely (131). Isadora's merging of male and female traits is, as with Amante, a defining feature of her character; and if this ambiguity occasions some low humour in the confusion of Zeb Stump and Gerald's servant Phelim, it also points to the novel's unusual endorsement of gender ambiguity, "movement between, across, and among genders" to adopt Hager's words, especially in a Western adventure novel.[12] Getsy's concept of "transgender capacity" that underscores "contingent visibility, and transformability" (2022: 363) applies equally to Isidora.

We next see her through the narrator's eyes, still riding astride, and wearing, like Gerald himself at times, a sombrero and serape. To this Reid adds one other memorable detail: "the crayon-like colouring on the upper lip, displayed in the shape of a pair of silken moustaches" (Reid 1866: 234). In Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859–60), Marian Halcombe's hint of a moustache takes her firmly out of the marriage market and sexual selection despite her attractive figure. As Therese Ruud Gordeladze comments, "the only reason she seems to be deemed as ugly by Walter Hartright is due to her 'large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw' and 'dark down on her upper lip [that] was almost a mustache'" (2023: n.p.). Reid's novel is far more open to liminality and hybrid gender expression, and the narrator even argues that Isidora's moustache renders her more, not less, erotically attractive:

> Do not suppose that the dark lining on her lip damages the feminine expression of her face. Rather does it add to its attractiveness. Accustomed to the glowing complexion of the Saxon blonde, you may at first sight deem it a deformity. Do not so pronounce, till you have looked again. A second glance, and – my word for it – you will modify your opinion. A third will do away with your indifference; a fourth change it to admiration!
> Continue the scrutiny, and it will end in your becoming convinced: that a woman wearing a moustache – young, beautiful, and brunette – is one of the grandest sights which a beneficent Nature offers to the eye of man.
>
> (Reid 1866: 234-5)

Reid quickly appropriates this highly unconventional gender border crossing to a heterosexual male gaze. But for twenty-first-century readers it can equally express what we

[12] Both the Irish Phelim and Zeb Stump are flummoxed by Isidora and keep referring to her as the "man-woman" (Reid 1866: 306).

now term nonbinarism, gender fluidity, and transgender capacity. In addition to her masculine physical markers, the narrator endorses her "mental attributes not ordinarily bestowed upon her sex. Firmness, determination, courage – carried to the extreme of reckless daring – are all legible in its lines" (235). This characterisation may be confined to the novel's "foreign" Mexican woman, yet Gerald himself adopts Mexican dress and saddle as well as gaucho custom in creating the novel's headless horseman.

Isidora has earlier, as a young girl, attracted (and briefly responded to) Miguel Diaz, before meeting Gerald. But Diaz resists her change in affection. When Isidora directs a note to Gerald entrusted to a servant actually in the pay of Diaz, who reads it, Diaz rides to the rendezvous site that Isidora intended for the mustanger. Like other possessive men, Diaz insists that, if he cannot have Isidora, no one will, his hand straying to his machete as she continues to spurn him. She smiles, brazening out the moment, reaching for her lazo, and before he knows what has happened, he suffers the same fate as the antelope she earlier brought to the ground, a moment captured in one of the novel's most beguiling images (see Figure 2).

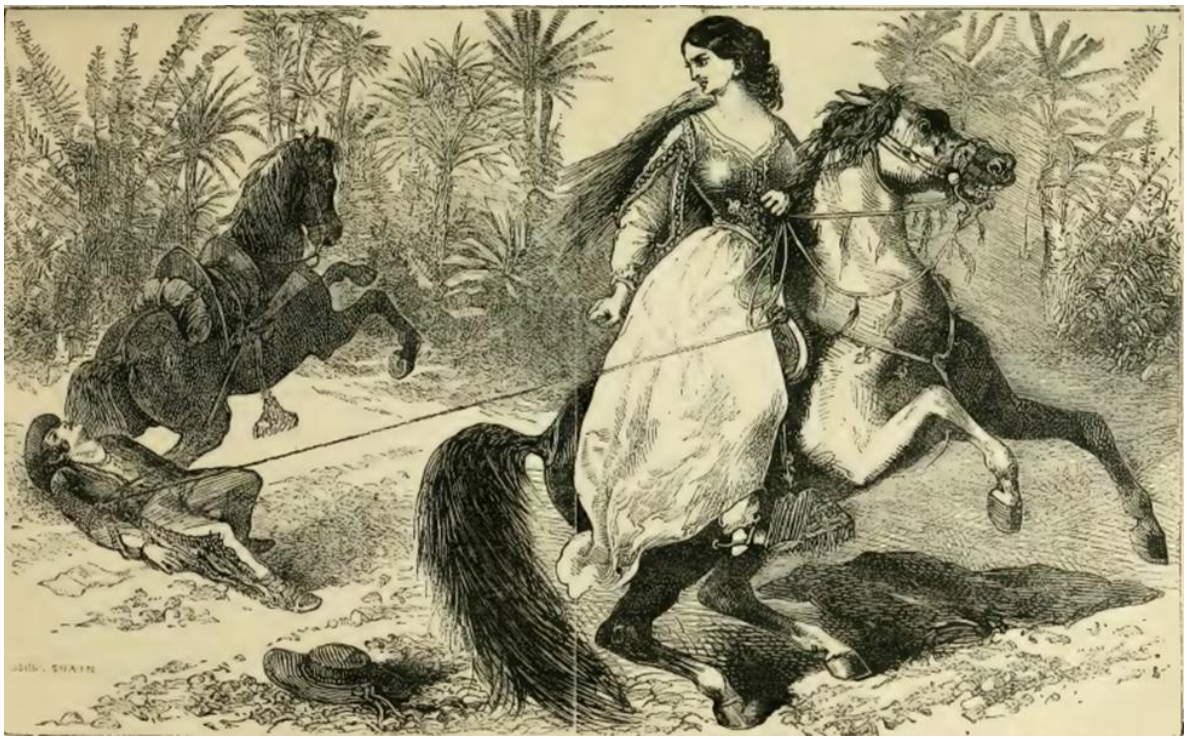

Figure 2: Isidora lassoes Miguel Diaz
*(*The Headless Horseman: A Strange Tale of Texas*, 1866,*
Courtesy Special Collections, Mary Couts Burnett library, Texas Christian University)

Isidora might seem to resemble the wild women of imperial adventure, such as Cigarette, the "camp follower" who is "'foul mouthed'" and promiscuous in Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867), who is heroic only when she dies in the hero's place in front of the firing squad (Gilbert 1997: 147). Isidora, to the contrary, while equally adept in horsemanship and firearms, is never declassé like Cigarette. Rather, she is the respected daughter of a wealthy landowner and rancher. Nor is there any hint of promiscuity that could set her down as an unworthy lover for Gerald had he not seen Louise first.

Yet like Cigarette and Amante, Isidora does not survive to the novel's end. She returns home after Gerald is cleared of murder charges, marries Louise, and with his estate's restored

fortunes, they settle at Casa del Corvo as Sir and Lady Gerald. One day Gerald returns to their hacienda "bearing in his arms the body of a beautiful woman!" (Reid 1866: 468) – Isidora. Isidora lives just long enough to identify Diaz as her murderer, who is quickly rounded up and hung by the Regulators. Without recourse to her lazo or the pistol she pulls on Phelim, she is entirely passive in death to the devouring gazes of men looking on her: "such features as she possessed, owe not everything to the light of life. That voluptuous shape – the true form divine – may be admired in the cold statue. Men stood gazing upon her dead body – long gazing … with thoughts not altogether sacred!" (468, 469). Reifying Isidora, now stripped of agency and gender fluidity, the novel gratuitously reduces her to yet another woman too transgressive to survive.

In "The Grey Woman" and *Headless Horseman,* exotic settings and radical gender transgressions are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. The backdrop of Les Rochers in the rugged Vosges Mountains and constant death threats faced by Amante and Anna on the road make Amante's gender transgressions allowable, even necessary, as they never could be in domestic fiction or even sensation fiction set within a middle-class home. *The Headless Horseman* takes place at the margins of civilisation on a raw new frontier through which very diverse peoples of variant aims wander, generating a mix of languages and mores. The wide open spaces prohibit careful scrutiny, much less surveillance, of "proper" gender expression, while the tale's nonbinary woman imparts added interest and relevance today.

Coda: Gaskell's and Reid's Later Cross-Border Reputations

Gaskell's and Reid's post-publication reputations additionally reach across borders. As Clare Pettitt remarks of *Mary Barton* in *Serial Revolutions 1848*, "Elizabeth Gaskell's work has been persistently misrecognized and underestimated" (2022: 172). Rather than positioning *Mary Barton* in the minor category of industrial novels, Pettitt contends that if *Mary Barton* is positioned "in its full context in 1848 as one of a series of literary representations of the ragged of Europe, we can at last free it from the tedious restrictions of the English 'social problem novel' and see it for what it really is: as serious a contribution to the world literature of 1848 as the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels that was published (in German) the same year" (172). Gaskell's claims to world literature also encompass the relationship between *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters* and the novels of Ivan Turgenev (Uglow 1993: 531), and her transatlantic friendship with Charles Eliot Norton (Whitehill 1932). If neither Pettitt nor Uglow specifically mentions "The Grey Woman," their placing of her on a world stage testifies both to her critical evolution from the late Victorian status of "Mrs. Gaskell" (a minor novelist) and to the seriousness with which we should approach her daring interventions in sensation and adventure fiction as well as gender representation in her Franco-German tale.

In Russia, Reid's *Headless Horseman* remains popular as a "World Classic" and has never gone out of print (Naughton and Naughton 2013:143-5). As Naughton and Naughton argue, the West of unbounded open spaces automatically depoliticised its setting and constructed a floating, sliding signifier of deterritorialised blank space that could easily be appropriated to vast Russian as well as American spaces (145-9). More strikingly, world author Vladimir Nabokov opens chapter 10 of *Speak, Memory*, devoted to the adolescent Nabokov's sexual awakening, with Reid's *Headless Horseman*, which Nabokov read in its original English as a youth, and revisited when he translated chapter 10 of *Speak, Memory* into Russian in 1953.[13] His cousin Yuri had introduced him to Reid over forty years earlier, and Reid's plots

[13] Both Bratcher (2009: 62-7) and Naughton and Naughton (2013: 142, 149) note the connection of Reid and Nabokov.

informed their outdoor games; as young men, they exchanged clothes as Gerald and Henry Poindexter do in the novel. Nabokov praises Reid's scene-painting, moreover, in describing the bar where the gunfight occurs, mixing his own and Reid's language and ending on a purely Nabokovian note:

> The colored decanters (among which a Dutch clock "quaintly ticked") were like "an iris sparkling behind his shoulders," like "an aureole surrounding his perfumed head." From glass to glass, the ice and the wine and the monongahela passed. An odor of musk, absinthe, and lemon peel filled the saloon. The glare of its camphine lamps brought out the dark asterisks produced on the white sand of its floor "by expectoration." In another year of our Lord – namely 1941 – I caught some very good moths at the neon lights of a gasoline station between Dallas and Fort Worth.
>
> (Nabokov 1966: 200-1)

Nabokov then goes on to dramatise the gun fight in his own inimitable prose.[14] In doing so, Nabokov takes Reid's influence and repute across US, Irish, and British borders into a larger world literary context.

Conclusion

Forming an unexpected but significant pairing, Gaskell's and Reid's tales deserve more recognition individually and together as interventions in genre, national boundaries, and gender, with a striking ability to cross borders reputationally as well. On one hand they demonstrate that domestic or courtship plots intrinsic to sensation fiction could merge with adventure fiction, extending the borders of each genre. Simultaneously they grant centrality and agency to female characters, including those manifesting nonbinary gender expression, which gives these works fresh relevance to contemporary gender studies. As such they encourage scholars to seek out other instances that open out rather than narrowing dominant conceptions of adventure fiction that foregrounds masculinity. Their shared transnational scope, furthermore, sidesteps and decentres British dominance in setting and politics. And together they interrogate the value of critical distinctions between "major" and "minor" authors in keeping with this journal's commitment to understudied popular writers and literary genres.[15] Gaskell and Reid may enjoy divergent critical standing today, but this article argues for the importance of thinking about them in tandem – and of pursuing other ostensibly unlikely pairings yet to be examined.

[14] Reid is also credited with influencing Stevenson's and Haggard's boys adventure fiction (Dunae 1983: 247). Nicholas Daly groups Reid, Frederick Marryat, and R. M. Ballantyne as "authors who produced novels of exotic adventure, novels that appealed to boys, though not, one assumes, only to them" (2011: 228), hence as forerunners of imperial adventure novels.

[15] Carl Dawson's mention of Gaskell and Reid on the same page reveals implicit hierarchies of achievement, with Dickens and Thackeray at the top, Gaskell in the second rank, and Mayne Reid in the third: "When we look back to the fiction of the middle years of the nineteenth-century, we remember the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley, Disraeli, and Borrow, along with Dickens and Thackeray." He then mentions a "vast armada of novels," including the best sellers of Mayne Reid (1979: 155).

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