WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S WORK: POLITICS AND PROFESSIONALISM IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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Throughout the nineteenth-century, debates on women's work abounded in American fiction and in the press. While much literature and most advice manuals for women were inclined towards extolling the virtues of domesticity, there exists a body of work devoted to a different viewpoint—namely, that women were working outside of the home and that these women needed guidance, encouragement, and practical advice. While the literature written by American women in the mid-nineteenth century is often characterized as domestic or sentimental fiction, literature during this time also provided critiques of contemporary society that were decidedly unsentimental and concerned with women's movement into the public sphere. This dissertation examines representations of working women in American fiction from 1820-1885, specifically focusing on the rise or the development of the professional woman. In charting the increasing presence of the professional woman in American fiction, I explore the relationships between the women's rights movement and fiction which contained feminist characters. Examining literary works from 1820-1885, I trace the progression of the professional woman from early

representations of women's rights lecturers and schoolteachers to later portrayals of professionals such as writers, artists, and physicians. The authors considered are both male and female, and range from canonical writers to little-known or neglected authors, including Sarah J. Hale, Laura Curtis Bullard, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps among others. I argue that the figure of the professional working woman in literary works of the time reflects working women of the period, but at the same time, also critiques elements of American culture, particularly in relation to restrictions on women's lives, both in domestic matters and in professional capacities outside of the home.

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Introduction

Throughout the nineteenth-century, debates on women's work abounded in American fiction and in the press. The central issues were, first, whether women should be working outside the home at all, and second, what kind of work women were suited for. While much literature and most advice manuals for women were inclined towards extolling the virtues of domesticity, or what Barbara Welter has called "true womanhood," there exists a body of work devoted to a different viewpoint—namely, that women were working outside of the home in a variety of occupations and that these same occupations were fruitful subjects for literary representation. Since more women were receiving education as the century progressed, these women in turn sought professional careers. While the literature written by American women in the mid-nineteenth century is often characterized as domestic or sentimental fiction, literature during this time also often incorporated portraits of working women. This was not only true of women writers, as male authors used images of working women in their novels, to a lesser extent. Depictions of factory girls and seamstresses were common, but concurrently writers were describing women attempting to move into professional fields.

Writers depicted nascent professional women in novels, and as an answer to domestic advice manuals, works appeared to encourage women to work outside the home. In 1861 Virginia Penny in *The Employments of Women: a Cyclopaedia of Women's Work* wrote "It is very easy to obtain book after book on 'The Sphere of Woman,' 'The Mission of Woman,' and 'The Influence of Woman'...But plans need to

be devised, pursuits require to be opened, by which women can earn a respectable livelihood. It is the great want of the day" (v). Penny went on to list over 500 occupations in which women worked along with suggestions on how to enter these professions. Aware that the most common occupations for women remained domestic service, factory work, sewing, and teaching, Penny wished to offer women alternatives to these professions. Her book was designed to fill a need to open up the world of work to educated and middle-class women who might need to earn a living but wanted to do so in a respectable manner. Penny was addressing genteel readers who because of necessity or desire wished to find fulfilling work and were unsure how to achieve this goal.

Certain cultural and political movements affected women seeking work in the nineteenth century. Women moved into teaching because it was a career that was lowly paid causing men to seek other types of work and creating a shortage of teaching. Expansion into the Western states also offered women opportunities. The institution of slavery had an effect on work as women first worked on a professional basis as lecturers in the abolition movement, and then many of these women also became involved in the women's rights movement. After the Civil War, women's clubs emerged, formed by women's rights workers and professional working women that also contributed to the development of professional women.

This dissertation examines representations of working women in American fiction from 1820-1885, specifically focusing on the rise or the development of the professional woman. In charting the increasing presence of the professional woman in American fiction, I explore the relationships between the women's rights movement and fiction which contains women working in a professional capacity. Examining literary works

from 1820-1885, I trace the progression of the professional woman from early representations of women's rights lecturers and schoolteachers to later portrayals of professionals such as artists, and physicians. In examining works that contain professional women, I consider authors who are overwhelmingly but not exclusively female. By treating professional women as a thematic concern, it is possible to analyze texts by both male and female writers; the subject matter weighing more heavily than gender concerns. Some of the works considered are by authors who are well-known such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, while others have received little if any critical attention. I read these works in relation to the progress women made politically in American culture, and consider the relation between these texts and nineteenth-century American culture.

Critical works on American women's writing tend to use the Civil War as a dividing line. A wealth of attention has been devoted to the 1850's and the best-selling domestic novels, starting with Fred Lewis Pattee and Herbert Ross Brown in 1940 and a negative view of the work and continuing to the feminist recovery projects beginning with Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction* in 1978 which focuses on women's novels through 1865. An outpouring of works in the 1970s and 1980s sought to bring women's literature into the mainstream, with seminal works such as Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, Jane P. Tompkins's *Sensational Designs*, Susan K. Harris's *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* among others. Works by authors of the 1860s through the 1880s are alluded to but received little critical attention. The next traditionally defined literary period is the Realist period which tends to begin with writers of the 1890s, leaving writers from the 1860s through the 1880s in the

margins, unless in reference to Regionalist writings. In my readings of the authors selected for this project, I am considering writers that span different periods from 1820 through the 1880s in order to trace the progression of representations of professional women. The time period corresponds to historical steps in the history of wage-earning women from the beginnings of work outside the home to the fully realized professional woman evident by the 1880s which coincided with the rise of professionalism in American society in general.

Critical writings on the theme of work in American writing has either concentrated on works by male writers, as in Nicholas Bromell's *By the Sweat of the Brow,* or focused on the working class, as in Amal Amireh's *The Factory Girl and the Seamstress*, Laura Hapke's *Labor's Text*, Michael Dennings's *Mechanic Accents*, and Judith Ranta's *Women and Children of the Mills*. Works that consider a fuller spectrum of occupations, manual and nonmanual, tend to be historical rather than literary, like Daniel Rodgers *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* and Alice Kessler-Harris's *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*. There are no critical works specifically looking at the rise of professionalism among women in American literature. While domestic novels and the genres of factory worker novels and seamstress novels may be more common than novels concerning professional women, the search for fulfilling and nonmanual labor is a theme that is evident in American literature and a cultural issue that occasioned debate in the press.

In addition, to consider the rise of professional women in literature, it is necessary to place these works against political events concerning the women's rights movement. The emergence of the professional woman is linked to work done by activists in women's

rights. As a subject, little critical work has been done on the influence of women's rights in literature. Bardes and Gossett, in *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction* is the only full-length study and they center their analysis on influence of the Declaration of Independence and the rise of political power for women. David S. Reynolds discusses women's right's novels in *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and* Melville as part of a larger study of writing during the American Renaissance, but most of the works he mentions still have been ignored by literary critics.

An issue that arises when considering women-authored works is the recent development of critics complicating "separate spheres" ideology. Separate spheres, referring to the public sphere as being the male domain and the private sphere, the domain of women, has been used as a concept in many works, but current critics question the viability of the model. Historically, early feminist critics such as Nancy Cott in *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835,* Barbara Welter in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* described the role of women in the home in terms of separatism, and either as being oppressed (Cott, Welter) or empowered (Smith-Rosenberg). Later, critics such as Mary Kelley and Susan Coultrap-McQuinn examined female authors in terms of their movement between the public and private spheres, in considering authors who were successful businesswomen while writing conservative and domestic texts. Recently, Cathy Davidson in a special edition of *American Literature* called for "No more Separate Spheres!" and debated the dissolution of the idea. Following this debate in *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence*

In American Literature, 1830-1930, Monika Elbert describes the aim the work as to "present new ways of revising literary history to show how the separate spheres were not always so separate". She also emphasizes the importance of showing "the connectedness between old male canonical texts and new female or "other" canonical works" (16).

In addition to considering the interrelatedness of texts by male and female authors in order to consider the rise of the professional women in fiction, I will also examine the historical background of working women. For the purposes of this study, "professional" will be defined using Burton Bledstein's definition from *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* which is:

> A profession was a full-time occupation in which a person earned the principal source of an income. During a fairly difficult and time-consuming process, a person mastered an esoteric but useful body of systematic knowledge, completed theoretical training before entering a practice or apprenticeship, and received a degree or license from a recognized institution. A professional person in the role of a practioner insisted upon technical competence, superior skill, and a high quality of performance (86-7).

Bledstein's study of the rise of professionalism is centered around male professionals and starts in the 1870's, but his definition is useful and does apply to women as well. In some professions that will be considered such as lecturer or artist, the definition is not quite an exact match, but in this study professional refers to the divide between manual and non-manual or mental labor, as well as occupations that require education.

The development of the professional woman began early in the nineteenth century, when women first began working as teachers, and continued throughout the century, gaining momentum particularly after the Civil War when women's colleges started to emerge. By the end of the century, more women were employed as professionals but primarily in the social services fields: medicine, social work, and teaching. And throughout the century, professional women generally came from the white middle-class. As immigrants entered the workforce, they ended up working in the factories, where by 1850 it became rare for white native-born women to seek work.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women began working for wages in the factories that arose in the North. In 1840, single women were the majority of women working outside of the home. They constituted about 10% of the labor force and generally worked as servants or in factories (Kessler-Harris 48). The numbers of women working are inexact; for instance, the estimated 10,000 women in New York City who worked in 1845 as seamstresses from their homes wouldn't have been included in labor figures. Women also worked as teachers but were paid at a lower rate than factory workers. At first women were hired as teachers for summer terms only but by the 1830s and 1840s they were hired year-round. Since they were paid at a much lower rate than male teachers (about 1/3 less), schools had a financial incentive to hire women (Kessler-Harris 57).

Teachers were the earliest professional women. By the 1840s, women found that they could earn a respectable living as writers, and many entered the field. By the 1870s, colleges opened for women and brought further changes to the workforce. Women who graduated from these schools wanted to put their education to use and some entered

medical colleges while others went into settlement work or became reformers (Kessler-Harris 114). By the end of the century, women were marrying at a later age and having fewer children, causing their time spent in the workforce to lengthen. Authors in the nineteenth century recognized that these professional women did exist and depictions of them appear in literature starting with teachers and moving into other occupations.

Louisa May Alcott's 1873 novel *Work: A Story of Experience* illustrates the difficulty of finding meaningful and respectable work in the time period. Alcott's heroine, Christie Devon, wants to support herself in the world and tries a variety of different occupations ranging from servant to seamstress. Her class and level of education leave her to ignore factory work which was by the time of the novel mainly a refuge for immigrants. After a time spent doing seamstress work from her home, she loses faith and nearly has a breakdown owing to loneliness and frustration at the starvation wages she is being paid. After help from other women, by the novel's end she is lecturing on the plight of working women, an occupation she recognizes as her life's calling. Alcott in her attempt to define meaningful work for her leading character concludes that only women working together can improve the lot of the working women, and that educated and non-educated women need to join forces. Many of the novels concerning professional women promote this idea in order to remain in the world of work; women need to shape jobs into new forms. The nascent professional woman had no choice, since she might have been one of the first in her occupation. In writing about these early professional women, the authors add their voices to the debate on the place of women in the workplace and offer advice, encouragement and warnings to their readers.

The first chapter contains an overview of the employment status of women in the first half of the nineteenth century, and then considers examples of one of the earliest representations of professional women, teachers. The texts included are from the 1820s through the 1850s. The chapter begins with Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale* (1822), one of the first novels in which a heroine takes up teaching as a means of earning an income, and then move to representations of teachers from the 1830s through the 1850s. The chapter examines the variety of representations of teachers in literature ranging from sentimental reminiscences of female schoolteachers written by male authors to realistic depictions of the hardships of teaching and of the low pay by female writers who worked as teachers. The works are placed in historical context through analysis of how political and cultural events colored the ways teachers were written about, ranging from treatments of teachers working with children of slaves (as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*) to works examining how teaching helps a woman to live independently and support herself in works such as Laura Curtis Bullard's *Now-a-days!* (1854), Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter* (1854), Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1855), and Mary Nichols's *Mary Lyndon* (1848). These works are compared to more sentimentalized versions of teachers evident in the works of male authors including Warren Burton's*The District School* (1833), and F.H. Stauffer's "Rose May, the New School Mistress" (1859). In this discussion of literary representations of teachers, I argue that some trends are evident, namely that the depictions by women writers tend towards a lack of detail and specificity in describing this form of work, apart from details about obtaining the positions. This suggests ambivalence about the work or possibly a sense of frustration over the lack of other viable options for women with education.

The second chapter considers another early form of the professional woman, the lecturer. The earliest example of a lecturer in American fiction is Sarah J. Hale's *The Lecturess: or, Woman's Sphere* (1839). Hale's novel will be read against the writings of female lecturers of the same time period, the Grimke sisters of South Carolina. The Grimkes spoke out on abolitionism, as well as on women's rights, and in their writings discuss some of the same ideas Hale covers—those of the propriety and necessity of women speaking in public forums. Other works included in this chapter which feature either lecturers or characters who aim to become lecturers will be Hannah Creamer Gardner's *Delia's Doctors; or, A Glance behind the Scenes* (1852) and Laura Curtis Bullard's *Christine; or, Woman's Trials and Triumphs* (1856). From a later time period is Bayard Taylor's *Hannah Thurston* (1863) which presents a male-authored view. The novels in this chapter are analyzed in relation to the historical context in which they were written and with an eye to how biographical information about the author affects our understanding. The author seen as the most conservative, Sarah J. Hale, employs various strategies in her depiction of a female lecturer, couching radical discourse within a conservative framework. Authors who identify with the women's rights movement, such as Laura Curtis Bullard, present the lecturer in different, more heroic terms. I argue that the lecturer is used as a powerful symbol to either represent anxieties about women gaining a public voice or to express hope and encouragement about the same phenomenon, women gaining a voice.

The third chapter focuses on another group of professional women in American fiction in the 1850's through the 1870's: artists. Works on female artists include Susanna Paine's *Roses and Thorns* (1854), which dramatizes the struggles of the author to become

a painter. Novels and stories by more well-known authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Louisa May Alcott will be discussed. Ranging in time from the 1850's through the 1870's, literary works by these authors reflect the growing normalization of the position of the female artist in American society. In novels about the female artist, the authors begin to question the sacrifices that must be made in order to balance a career and a personal life. In addition, the relation between high art and the idea of using art to make a living will be considered as the career of the artist undergoes professionalization in the 1850s and 1860s. This professionalization takes on different dimensions for women compared to men, mainly involving women struggling to have their work taken seriously, as well as negotiating within the rules of acceptable behavior for women.

The fourth chapter examines the growth of women's clubs and considers their effect on literature of the 1860s and 1870s. At this time, novels such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner and Louisa May Alcott's Work: A Story of Experience*, featured professional women and working-class women working together to improve the status of women, much in the same way that women's clubs hoped to improve the prospects of their members. Along with the growth of women's clubs, in the same period advice literature for women seeking professional employment appeared, and these works are also discussed. In this chapter I examine works by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Louisa May Alcott, and Harriet Beecher Stowe in relation to the growth of women's clubs. In 1868, two women's clubs were formed: Sorosis in New York City, and the New England Woman's Club in Boston. Both clubs differed from previous women reform societies, in that no particular reform or cause predominated in the clubs, which were designed for

more general meetings and support. The idea of professional women joining together to further their cause, as well as the idea that professional women did exist and were not anomalies, is reflected in different works of the period. Louisa May Alcott's *Work* (1873) addresses the issue of well-born women struggling to find meaningful work. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner* (1871) deals with a woman factory owner and her attempts to join with working-class women to improve women's work. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *We and Our Neighbors* (1873) deals with a married woman's quest to find meaningful work while staying within the domestic sphere. I argue that in each of these novels, a theme is apparent of women struggling to redefine or reconstruct women's work, as the current definitions were not fitting women's lives. The women's clubs were also redefining concepts of what women's organizations should be designed for, and what use they should have. The clubs and the authors discussed, at the same time, consider the same types of questions, as well as bringing social class into view.

The fifth chapter considers the figure of the female physician in novels in the 1880s. Reflecting the growing number of female physicians, two novels appeared at almost exactly the same time: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' *Doctor Zay* (1882), and William Dean Howells's *Doctor Breen's Practice* (1881). These novels feature female physicians as the protagonists, and the different viewpoints in the novels will be examined. These works will be read against non-fictional accounts of female physicians. The literature of this time reflects a growing acceptance and normalization of professional women with a new feature—under-employed men who seek meaning by marrying professional women. In this way, professional careers have an effect on romantic stories and plots and the authors considered employ different strategies in accounting for this change in women's

status and how it affects personal relationships. In the case of a male author like William Dean Howells, the professionalization of his female protagonist is a result of her failures at romantic relationships and she is eager to abandon her career when she finds a husband, although part of what attracts her husband is her career. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's work, her female doctor attracts a husband with her competence and professionalism but then questions whether she will be able to continue her career after marriage. In both the works of Howells and Phelps, the work of the heroine plays a significant role in the story.

Chapter 1

Early Professional Women: Teachers in American Literature

> I did not see anything else for a girl to do who wanted to use her brains as well as her hands.
>
> Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood*

Teaching is a profession that has been represented in American fiction from the early days of the republic. One of the first best-sellers, *Charlotte Temple*, features female teachers. Throughout the nineteenth century, teachers proliferate in literature appearing in various guises, ranging from young objects of male students' attention to single mothers trying to earn a living to radicals breaking laws by teaching children of slaves. The female teacher in literature provides a counterpoint to the strictly domestic, in that the representations of teachers present a possibility to the reader—a possibility of life outside the home and an opportunity for independence. Ultimately, however, the representations of teachers in American literature also reflect the restrictions and boundaries placed on American women since the teaching profession as depicted reveals that for most women it was a brief and markedly underpaid foray into the professional realm. The literary constructions of teachers in the novels discussed present a picture of the disruptions, conflicts, and small successes that characterize American women's

entries into the workplace, while at the same time however, also present a picture of the author's dissatisfaction with the work.

Teaching was the earliest professional work open to women. In fact, almost every well-known woman writer of the mid-nineteenth century worked as a teacher at one point in their careers. The career first became viable in the late eighteenth century, when women taught wealthy girls in their homes or opened private schools for girls. Starting in the 1820s, women began attending secondary schools. Three groundbreaking schools opened at about the same time. Emma Hart Willard opened Troy Female Academy in 1821, Catharine Beecher founded Hartford Female Academy in 1823, and Mary Lyon opened Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1837 (Dexter 25-6). By the 1830's, public schools were opened to girls, and women began teaching in them. At first women were hired for the summer terms only, but by the 1830s and 1840s, women were hired for year-round jobs due to the expanding of the public school system (Kessler-Harris 57). Women were more likely to be hired than men because they were paid lower salaries, a position that some advocates for hiring female teachers supported. Proponents of hiring female teachers realized that women's willingness to work for less than males was a selling point to school boards.

In representations of women in the nineteenth century, there are two main schools of thought on the ideals of womanhood in the first half of the nineteenth century. Barbara Welter presented an ideal that she called True Womanhood, embodied in the "Angel in the House". Welter's definition of True Womanhood is centered on four ideals: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Frances Cogan has recently offered a competing ideal—Real Womanhood. Cogan's Real Woman is physically fit,

seeking higher education, and often working outside the home. Cogan writes, "The ideal of Real Womanhood accurately assessed the obstacles and dangers women faced both at home and in the larger male world…Much of the material in advice books—and indeed, domestic novels—dealt with identifying these obstacles, charting their dimensions, indicating fruitless paths around them, and mapping out successful strategies and trails" (17). Cogan's idea of Real Women can be seen as an opposite to Welter's True Woman. Both types of women can be found in literature.

The female teachers presented in novels of the first half of the nineteenth century tend to share the characteristics of Cogan's Real Women. They are in the workplace, sometimes out of choice and sometimes out of financial necessity. These representations of working women offer their antebellum female readers a glimpse of contemporary reality. The novels that contained teachers still tended to fall into the category of what Nina Baym calls "women's fiction," narratives of women forced to make their way in the world and ending up happily married. On the one hand, these novels offered this comforting ending. At the same time, they pointed toward an alternative future for women readers by detailing what occurs between leaving home and becoming married.

An early example of a female teacher in American literature is the heroine of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale*, (1822). The orphan—Jane, a prototypical heroine of woman's fiction, is forced by circumstance to make her way in the world. As a child, she is reluctantly taken in by an aunt and allowed to attend school. Jane does well in school and wishes to become the assistant to the teacher. However, she is at first unsuccessful, as the local head of a school is looking for a teacher who will pay for a job. It is explained that the school "lacks maps", so it "must get [a teacher] who

could furnish, at least, one hundred dollars" (92). Jane eventually does get a position and keeps teaching even after she becomes engaged. Her fiancé, Edward Erskine, "was surprised, perhaps slightly mortified, that she showed no more joy at having secured a station, to which he knew so many had aspired" (181). Jane breaks off the engagement because Erskine is not serious enough about his religion. By the end, she marries the father of one of her pupils and converts to Quakerism.

Throughout the novel, Sedgwick places an emphasis on the importance of education to residents of New England: "There is nothing in New-England so eagerly sought for, or so highly prized by all classes of people, as the advantages of education. A farmer and his wife will deny themselves all other benefits that might result from the gains that have accrued to them education: from a summer of self-denial and toil, to give their children the privilege of a grammar-school during the winter. The public, or as they are called the town-schools, are open to the children of the poorest labourer" (74). Sedgwick expresses a common theme in educational thought of the time: that education would promote democracy and eliminate differences resulting from class.

In this novel, teaching is shown in three contexts. First, teaching is represented as a profession governed by class. Aspiring schoolteachers must be able to pay money to attain a position. Second, teaching is seen as a means to economic freedom and self-suffiency. Jane is able to live on her own and is not forced to marry to support herself. However, this self-sufficiency can lead to problems. Finally, teaching is seen to be a source of discord, or, a pursuit contrary to what was expected of a woman about to be married. Women who work outside the home receive conflicting messages; that it is

possible to enjoy one's work and earn a living, but that this is not appropriate behavior for a married woman. Jane quickly gives up teaching when she marries.

Contradictions are not as visible in some novels by male authors that describe teachers. A common theme in novels that feature teachers is a young male student's sentimental attachment to his female teacher. A well-known novel in this genre, written in a nostalgic and flowery style, is Warren Burton's *The District School*, published in 1833. Burton celebrates "a pleasant picture of some peculiarities which have prevailed in our country, but are now passing away" (15). Burton gives an account of various teachers he has encountered. First is Mary Smith, young, beautiful and sweet. Burton recalls "When I grew drowsy, and needed but a comfortable position to drop into sleep and forgetfulness of the wary hours, she would gently lay me just falling to slumber, with her sweet smile the last thing beheld or remembered" (24-5). Mary gets married and is replaced by a teacher "once beautiful" but now having an "acidity of temper." Burton does note some of the problems inherent in the district schools, namely improperly trained teachers. He notes having "very young, scarcely sixteen" teachers who would "doubtless have done better, had they been properly educated and disciplined themselves" (40). There is a mention of hiring practices, as Burton's favorite teacher, Mary Smith, was hired by her uncle, as he "preferred her, therefore, to hundreds near by; and for once the partiality of the relative proved profitable to the district" (23).

Although Burton stresses the charm and old-fashioned qualities of the district school, economic factors are evident in the text. Burton's seemingly mythologized past contains hints of turmoil. Burton's school does, however, reflect a trend in public

education toward *hiring* women whether they were skilled or not and at the same time having hundreds of applicants for a single job.

The growing numbers of educated women led to more women seeking employment. Catharine Beecher, an early advocate for training women as teachers, wrote frequently on the topic. Beecher was immersed in the subject of female education. She started the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823 which was designed for girls from the ages of twelve and up and offered a more rigorous education than what was generally available for girls. Beecher had felt that her own education was deficient and that she regretted that she had never been given the chance to study subjects such as geometry, chemistry and philosophy. She attempted to make up for that in her own school, so that other girls would receive a better education (Hedrick 32). Beecher had an all-female staff and used her sister Harriet Beecher as a student-assistant and then a teacher. One of Harriet's friends (and then pupil) was Sara Willis, who would later be known as the writer Fanny Fern (Hedrick 556). Beecher's school became well-known and she used this to her advantage (as well as the considerable reputation of father's name) and started writing on education. She first addressed this situation as early as 1829. In "Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education" she first delineates current problems in the state of the teaching profession by writing, "*Any person* may become a teacher without any definite preparation and without any test of skill or experience" (6). In Beecher's eyes, this was a significant problem concerning teaching, and she offered suggestions. She thought teaching was not as respected or as lucrative as law, divinity, or medicine. She wanted to professionalize the profession, so to speak. Beecher writes, "Most of the defects which are continually discovered and lamented in present systems of education

may be traced, either directly or indirectly, to the fact, that the formation of the minds of children has not been made a profession securing wealth, influence, or honour, to those who enter it" ("Suggestions" 4). She compares it to other professions: "Even the simple business of making a shoe, is deemed of such importance and difficulty as to demand an apprenticeship for years" ("Suggestions" 5). Beecher believed female schools should have female teachers. "And is it not an indication that such is the will of Providence, when we see a profession, offering influence, respectability and independence, thrown open to women?" ("Suggestions" 51). She predicts women will be looking for work: "It is believed that the time is coming, when educated females will not be satisfied with the present objects of their low ambition" ("Suggestions" 54). Since Beecher herself was one of the main educators of women, the problems she described would soon be facing her students. In her writings on teaching, she tried to find a place for them to use their education.

Although Beecher advocated hiring women, she also had a practical argument to give the school systems. She notes that male teachers are generally paid higher wages. Beecher used the salary gap as justification for hiring female teachers. She argued that in order for education to be universal, it must be "moderate in expense," and this was where women came in. Women could teach for half the salary, or less, because they didn't have a family to support. Since Beecher also believed that teaching prepared women to be better wives and mothers, so domesticity factored in her arguments. She thought teaching was a suitable job for women, unlike factory work. Beecher once visited Lowell, Massachusetts to observe the mills and look for teachers. She concluded that the factory girls were being exploited. Beecher wrote, "Work of all kinds is got from poor

women, at prices that will not keep body and soul together, and then the articles thus made are sold for prices that give monstrous profits to the capitalist, who thus grows rich on the hard labors of our sex" (Evils 6-9). Beecher's solution was to propose that women donate their services to teaching. She thought that working-class women should leave the factories to teach, and upper-class women should teach or raise funds for education. In any case, teaching should be elevated into a "noble profession" and it should be the "special profession of women."

Another early advocate of hiring female teachers was Sarah J. Hale. A writer and editor who would become famous for her editorial work on Godey's Lady's Book, Hale published an early essay promoting women as teachers in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1836. She believed that teaching was a suitable profession that utilized women's moral sensibilities. Hale also used the argument that women could be paid less than male teachers, writing "Women can afford to teach for a less reward than men, even should they prove, as they often doubtless would prove, the more capable instructors" (572). Hale continues this dual theme, arguing that women can subsist on a lower salary than men but also more suited for teaching than men. She writes that women are suited for teaching and they do it with their own children, but "important as their influence is in the nursery, the task of education is but commenced there" (571). Hale closes with a warning: "Remember, the culture of the heart, as well as the head, is essentially necessary to make men good citizens of the Republic…A female advocating infidelity, or endeavoring to weaken the bonds of moral and social order, is a phenomenon. Can the same be said for the other sex?" (572). In other words, women had the moral authority.

The campaigns of writers such as Catharine Beecher and Sarah J. Hale that tried to convince schoolboards to hire women and pay them lower salaries were ultimately successful. The teaching population went from a majority of males in 1800 to 70 percent female by 1900. In the North, the period of most rapid change came in the antebellum year. Other educational reforms were going on at the same time, such as longer school terms, the addition of high schools, and campaigns for better supplies and facilities. The use of female teachers was thus promoted as an innovation that could save money (Kaestle 122-3).

Soon after teaching became a common profession for women, writers in woman's rights journals discussed the negative aspects of it. The early woman's rights journals, the *Una* and the *Lily* both questioned various problems concerning teaching. The *Una* was founded by Paulina Wright Davis and ran from 1853-1855. It was considered to be the first journal of the woman's rights movement (since it was the first to be published, edited, and owned by woman). The *Una*'s motto was "Dedicated to the Elevation of Woman."

The Lily was founded by Amelia Bloomer and ran from 1849-1856. Its motto was "Devoted to the Interests of Women." It was started as a temperance paper but shifted to woman's rights. In 1856, the *Lily* purchased the subscription list of the *Una*. In a note to the readers of both journals, an editorial note in the Lily described the aims of both papers: "The two papers have been essentially different in their characteristics, although working for the same grand principles of Truth and Justice. While the *Lily*, with earnest simplicity, has dealt mainly with the practical interdicts of Woman, the living active wrongs that shackle her individuality, an crush her mentality, and depress her best and

strongest being,--the *Una* has dealt more with the principles and policy from which grow her wrongs, and in high-toned scholastic essays, shown the grand basis of her rights" (Lily April 1856 p.60).

In the *Una*, Paulina Wright Davis describes visiting a teacher training (or Normal) school:

> We attended the examination of the normal schools…It is sufficient to say we were delighted with the scholarship and ability displayed to impart instruction, and other evidence of the truth of our theory, that women excel as teachers. But with all this superior ability, the young men of the same class will receive double the salaries as teachers that the most accomplished scholars among the girls can command. A male teacher receives from $50 to $75 per month, while a female can obtain only $15 or $20; and who will say that the duties of one are less arduous than the other" (*Una* May 2 1853, 53).

Continuing in this line of inquiry, a letter from Mrs. H.L. Clarke in Georgia states: "Ladies who engage in teaching here, including all the accomplishments—can get only about $500 annually. Professional gentlemen make fortunes!Those who engage in teaching are obliged to stay several years, incessantly engaged at the round of their duties—and with all possible economy after the expiration of a few years, they are alone enabled to return to the land of their birth with a bare competency" (*Una* April 1 1853 44). Women like the Mrs. Clarke were well aware that female teachers were being underpaid. The *Una* also enlisted well-known male writers to address woman's rights concerns and some mentioned teaching. T.W. Higginson in "Woman and her Wishes" writes about women's problems and remarks on the low status of women teachers. He

describes well-educated women who teach school which is "the one miserably-underpaid occupation left open for graduates of our high-schools—the Procrustes-bed of all young female intellect" (57).

Writers in the *Lily* also remarked on the inequities in pay for teachers. In the April 1, 1855 edition of the *Lily*, Laura Mack addressed the subject: "The small remuneration given for woman's labor produces poverty, ignorance, and crime—thus the female teacher receives eight dollars for discharging the same duties for the same time, for which the male receives fifty" (52). More direct agitation was reported as well. In the July 1, 1856 edition of the *Lily*, a report is given on a State Teacher's Convention in Missouri. Female teachers protested because they paid dues in the union but couldn't vote. The correspondent described the tenor of the meeting. The vice president said that "he loved the ladies" but would "not sit in a committee with a woman." The correspondent continues:

> Therefore he would elevate the ladies above him—keep them pure—and a deal more of such trash. The ladies some of them hissed, which I was very sorry for; yet I did not wonder, for between indignation and scorn they were aroused, and could not well help it. (93)

Evidence of discontent was visible in some works about teachers in the 1850's, although at this time, most writers were still using the profession of teaching as a positive goal for women. Laura Curtis Bullard's *Now-a-days!*, published in 1854, takes this optimistic viewpoint. Teaching provides freedom for her heroine as well as offering a purpose in life. Esther, the heroine of the novel, is orphaned, and must make her way in the world. Esther decides to become a teacher in the backwoods of Maine (she lives in a

more urban area).Having a missionary's enthusiasm for the job, she says, "What a field is open to me here! The minds of these children are as fresh, wild, and unwrought as the country in which they live. It is mine to fell and uproot the strong trees of ignorance, and plant in their stead the precious seeds of knowledge and truth." (77) The country children are compared unfavorably to children from the city in that they are fresh and wild, but ignorant. Esther, as an outsider to the backwoods, will bring in knowledge.

In this novel, an emphasis is placed on the personal satisfactions of teaching. In considering her work, Esther says, "I have found the place to work in! And how much more fortunate am I than many who move wearily about in life, asking sadly to what purpose am I living?" (77). Bullard promotes an active life for women, at least in the first part of the novel. An extremely detailed description of the day-to-day tasks of a schoolteacher follows, and it shows that numerous obstacles arise. Esther's schoolhouse is a log cabin, and the students are of varying ages and possess different textbooks. She learns the previous schoolteacher placed a premium on memorization and rote recital of facts, so Esther intends to teach the children to think for themselves. By delineating these quotidian duties, Bullard makes visible the work of a teacher, and highlights the importance of these duties.

The novel realistically describes Esther's financial condition. We learn that Esther's father had lost his money before he died, so that Esther needs to work to support herself, as well as pay off her father's debts to restore his reputation. Esther's stepmother also had a father who lost his money, causing her to marry for money rather than love. There is a great deal of attention given to the realities of earning a living. Many of the people Esther meets in the Maine backcountry moved there after losing money in urban

locales and being unable to keep up appearances. Lumbermen at a logging mill discuss their wages. However, when Esther starts teaching, the pecuniary concerns are relegated to the background and the foremost matter is the nobility of teaching and the neediness of the students. Bullard moves from the unsentimental to the sentimental. There are discussions, though, of the dignity of labor and the necessity of finding a purpose and meaning through work.

At the end, she resigns her job as teacher for the "narrower but delightful sphere of home" (309). After the descriptions of teaching in the first half of the novel, the plot abruptly switches and becomes the story of a romance, detailing the loves and courtships of Esther's friend. Esther herself ends up marrying a friend's husband after the friend dies. Teaching is seen as a noble and dignified way of earning a living, but in this novel becomes subordinated to the romance plot. Esther is thirty years old by the end of the novel, so she has been working for over ten years as a teacher. But most of those ten years pass without any description from the author. The romance relegates working to the background.

Another novel featuring a teacher as a heroine and taking a positive outlook on the profession is *The Lamplighter* by Maria Cummins. The story is chiefly known for drawing Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous criticism. He wrote, "What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the *Lamplighter*?" And "America is now wholly given over to a dxxxxd mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash" (Hawthorne 304). The novel was hugely successful, and was the second most popular book of its decade; only *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had higher sales (Baym, *Woman's Fiction* 164). It came out after another bestseller,

Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, and resembles it in some ways. Cummins uses the same plot framework as Warner, but gives her heroine more agency. Gerty is much more in control of her fate. Nina Baym writes that Cummins returns to the "Sedgwick camp," meaning that this novel is in the tradition of *A New-England Tale* (xviii). Baym writes, "Each novel has a fairy-tale ending, but in one case (Ellen's) the heroine is rescued from society while in the other (Gerty's) she is firmly within it" (Introduction, xvii).

The Lamplighter draws a picture of urban, working-class life. Set in Boston, it depicts types of characters that are rarely detailed in work of this time. Cummins tells a story of the type Horatio Alger will write a decade later, that of hard work leading to success. It is feminized in this story, as success leads to a happy marriage but also it gives the heroine more choices and she is not forced into a marriage but freely chooses her husband. Gerty's teaching career helps her to achieve these successes and allows her to move into a higher class.

Gerty is raised in a boarding house by a cruel foster mother. Cummins constructs her own definition of what constitutes the truly impoverished. In the eyes of the narrator, Gerty is among the most impoverished in the whole city since she is one who "had nothing at all, and had never known the satisfaction of *helping* anybody" (8). Being poor isn't Gerty's most serious problem; it's the fact that she has no one to help. In Cummins' view, economic conditions are not intrinsically linked to personal fulfillment, that connections to other people are what bring happiness.

Gerty's first instance of being taught is by a neighbor, Mrs. Sullivan, who explains how to run a household. She says, "You have never been taught to do anything,

my child; but a girl eight years old can do a great many things, if she is patient and tries hard to learn. I could teach you a great deal that would be useful" (26-7). Mrs. Sullivan teaches Gerty sweeping, making beds, setting the table, and washing dishes. This form of schooling begins before Gerty's academic schooling. Gerty receives three different types of lessons: first, those taught by Mrs. Sullivan in cooking, cleaning, and making a house pleasing to the eye; second, Emily's lessons to Gerty in humility, keeping her temper, and religion; third, the more traditional academic lessons Gerty receives at a private school. Of all forms of lessons, the most important are her academic ones, although domestic and Christian precepts will influence her as well.

We can see the gender bias also, since Gerty's friend Willy Sullivan is encouraged to go to school. Cummins notes the benefits of the educational system: "The sons of poor parents have, in our large cities, almost every educational advantage that can be obtained by wealth" (37). She suggests that it is an advantage that Willie is poor: "And so it is that those born in honor, wealth, and luxury, seldom achieve greatness. They were not *born* for labor; and without labor, nothing that is worth having can be won" (39).

Gerty eventually goes to school and is encouraged by True to become a teacher. True says after a stroke ,"'I used to think that, if I lived and had my strength spared me, Gerty would be able to go to school and get a sight o'larnin', for she has a nateral lurch for it, and it comes easy to her. She's but a slender child, and I never could bear the thought of her bein' driv to hard work for a livin'; she don't seem made for it somehow. I hoped, when she grew up, to see her schoolmistress'" (91). In True's eyes teaching is easier work than most types of work suitable for someone in Gerty's position. Gerty is

open to suggestions and says, “I’m sure I can do almost any kind of work. Mrs. Sullivan says I sew very well, and I can learn to be a milliner or a dressmaker; that isn’t hard work’ ” (91). In this discussion, teaching is seen as a way to move beyond manual labor, such as sewing. Teaching is also an opportunity for social mobility for Gerty—a way to move up the social scale and assume a higher status than that of her guardian, True.

In order to achieve social mobility, Gerty must rely on others to show her how. Emily encourages Gerty to go to school and arranges for Gerty to read to her everyday. Emily “judged, rightly, that a girl of such keen intelligence as Gerty was naturally endowed with would suffer nothing by occasionally encountering what was beyond her comprehension; but that, on the contrary, the very effort she would be called upon to make would enlarge her capacity, and be an incentive to her genius” (70). Gerty receives education in different ways: “From the time Gerty was admitted, until she was twelve years old, she continued to attend the public schools, and was rapidly advanced and promoted; but what she learned with Miss Graham, and acquired by study of Willie at home, formed nearly as important a part of her education” (71). Gerty transforms herself by availing herself of help from different sources: the public schools, her wealthy patron, and her working-class childhood friend.

Cummins provides clear examples of the distinctions made between different types of work that are open to women. She also problematizes the issue by showing that the distinctions made are dependent on the social class of those making the differentiations. True, a lowly lamplighter, thinks teaching is an easy way to earn a living. Gerty, who knows she cannot rely on a family’s monetary help, thinks being a dressmaker is not hard work. Willie, supporting a widowed mother, needs to earn a

living but knows that coming from a poor background may hurt his chances at finding a job at a prestigious firm. And Emily and her father, who are wealthy, see teaching as a trade. Emily says, "I wish her to be the best teacher I know of, and father makes no objections to the terms. He thinks, as I do, that if we undertake to fit her to instruct others, she must be thoroughly taught herself. I talked with him about it the first night after we came into town for the season, and he agreed with me that we had better put her out to learn a trade at once, than half-educate, make a fine lady of her, and so unfit her for anything" (100-1).

This shifting definition of professional work is reflected in debates on labor at the time. Debates on the Lowell factory girls were common in the 1840's and beyond. Cummins' vision of a teacher is a counterpoint to tales of factory workers, in that the factory worker is the unseen non-professional woman. Although Gerty's guardian True and friends like the Sullivans are barely making ends meet, they do not consider sending Gerty to work in one of the factories. Cummins may not have believed the rhetoric promoting the factory girls. In her landscape, they don't exist, although the story takes place in and around Boston.

When Gerty begins teaching, the description is brief and to the point: "Of Gertrude's school-duties we shall say nothing, save that she was found by Mr. W. fully competent to the performance of them, and that she met with the trials and discouragements only to which all teachers are more or less subjected, from the idleness, obstinacy, or stupidity of their pupils" (152-3). Cummins highlights a theme that will become evident in other works on teachers, that of dissatisfaction with the work itself, and a reluctance to describe it. Cummins instead emphasizes the independence Gerty

gains. While teaching, Gerty lives in a boarding-house until obligations to her friends require her to leave her job and travel to Europe with them. An acquaintance notes, "It is not merely giving up three hundred and fifty dollars a year of her own earning, and as pleasant a home as there is in Boston; it is relinquishing all the independence that she has been striving after" (184). Gerty replies "nothing that I do for Emily's sake can be called a sacrifice" (185). Gerty's obligations outweigh her independence. The novel ends with Gerty marrying her old friend Willy. Cummins has the couple move to the suburbs, as an early middle-class couple. In this scenario, Willy has become successful and moved beyond his humble background. Gerty has become successful by becoming the proper middle-class wife. Being a teacher was one step on the way to upward mobility, which in Gerty's case was to marry well.

Cummins uses teaching to illustrate social mobility as Gerty is trained to be in the middle-class. Sometimes the mobility works in the opposite way, as when a middle-class woman falls on hard times and has to rely on finding a job. *Ruth Hall* by Sara Payson Willis Parton (Fanny Fern) tells this kind of story. The title character struggles to support herself and her children after her beloved husband dies. After weighing various options, she decides to become a teacher since she feels she has received a good education (Parton herself was educated at Catharine Beecher's school). Ruth is unsuccessful in searching for pupils among the wealthy and acquaintances of in-laws. She then hears of "a young girl, who had been taken to the Hospital in a consumption, contracted by teaching a Primary School" (122). Ruth has been described as a kind and gentle woman, but in this case, she is quickly ready to capitalize on another woman's misfortune. She notes "The situation was vacant; perhaps she could get it; certainly her

education ought to qualify her to satisfy any 'School Committee'" (122). She goes to City Hall to take the exam and finds: "The apartment was already crowded with waiting applicants, who regarded, with jealous eye, each addition to their number as so much diminution of their own individual chance for success" (127). Ruth is grilled on her educational background and whether her school used globes or maps to teach geography. She has ten minutes to write an essay on "Was Christopher Columbus standing up, or sitting down, when he discovered America?" (128). Dramatically, Parton compares Ruth's situation to being in purgatory: "The ladies, four-and-twenty, God help them! To dream of a reprieve from starvation, which, not withstanding the six-hours purgatory they had passed through, was destined to elude their eager grasp" (129). Ruth learns that obtaining a teaching position may be a matter of life-and-death for some women; teaching will keep them from starving. But in New York, where Ruth makes her attempt to find a job, the supply of eager would-be teacher significantly outweighs the demand.

In Parton's vision, teaching is not a noble profession but rather a bureaucracy controlled by small-minded civil servants. A horde of desperate women apply in vain for one job. Parton doesn't address the moral benefits of teaching. Her character Ruth teaches school for the money alone, but finds it is an exceedingly poor way of earning it. Parton reinforces the same ideas, advanced in the woman's rights journals that teaching is a poor way to earn a living, and is degrading for women. Ultimately, Ruth will work for herself and become a writer.

Another realistic and unsentimental look at teaching is Mary Nichols's *Mary Lyndon*, published in 1855. Nichols based the novel on her own life, using incidents from her experiences (Stearns 64). She details the problems in the current educational system

from the perspectives of both student and teacher. Nichols first describes the wretched conditions of the schoolhouse where the title character, Mary, is educated. The tone of this reminiscence is decidedly dark and shows deep unhappiness with the education of the heroine. She recalls that her schooling took place in a "desolate-looking" school-house, where the "rising generation" was imprisoned six hours a-day in winter, with the thermometer (if one ever got there) at ninety degrees" (6). She continues to describe the school:

> Here children breathe an atmosphere impure enough to insure scarletina and other juvenile gifts, such as croup, measles, and pneumonia and sit on hard, uncomfortable benches till they are qualified by curved spines for the reclining board of the doctor. 6-7).

Mary attends school for three dollars per quarter and is happy until she finds her teacher isn't good enough: "It was soon evident that the preceptress could not teach me. The questions I asked her regarding my lessons, she was utterly unable to answer. She was in danger of my contempt" (71). Mary is forced to leave the school after being accused of disrespecting the teacher. Her willfulness leaves her ill-suited for the classroom as a student, but her confidence in her own intellectual abilities leads her back to the school-room, as a teacher herself.

While Mary shows disdain for her own teachers, she still decides to become a teacher herself. She enters the profession after passing seemingly arbitrary tests: "The examiners have her make a pen, recite the Ten Commandments, do a spelling exercise and parse "To be, or not to be—that is the question!" (101-2). The examiners end up giving her the certificate, but Mary finds there are difficulties when she starts teaching.

She says: “My first school was a life-long lesson to me. I am not going to write the autobiography of a “School-Ma’am,” though somebody may make a fortune by it” (106). As with most of the novels that describe teachers, the actual work is left undetailed.

Like Maria Cummins did in *The Lamplighter*, Nichols will not describe the work of teaching. Nichols emphatically states that she won’t write about being a “school-ma’am” even though it appears that it might be a saleable piece of writing. The experience of teaching seems to have left Nichols with no interest in describing describe her former profession. Either the work was completely unpleasant or the author does not deem it worthy of literary representation. In Nichols’s case, it seems that a deep dissatisfaction with the profession and possibly the limitations placed on her life led her to denigrate the work of teaching. It allowed her heroine independence, but offered no satisfaction.

Nichols does not end the story with Mary’s marriage but rather describes the unhappy conditions of the marriage itself. Rather than a romantic conclusion to the novel, Mary’s marriage is unhappy from the start. Nichols went through an early divorce, and she uses this experience in the novel. Mary’s husband is “miserably inefficient, and on the proceeds of his labor we must have starved or asked charity” (127). She notes, “I worked night and day with my needle, often sitting up till two or three o’clock at night to finish a piece of work” (127). Tiring of the work, she wants to open school after seven years of marriage, but her husband thinks teaching will not be as profitable as sewing. Mary falls ill—and her husband allows her to teach. By the end of the novel, she leaves him and begins a career lecturing.

Nichols' novel shows teaching to be a means of escape. It allows Mary first to be independent, and then to earn a living after leaving her husband. Nichols' most radical message of course is approving of divorce in the case of an abusive husband. Nichols may not feel confident enough to tell her own story as an autobiography, so she describes it as a novel, but uses the details from her life. In both the novel and in Nichols's own life, teaching allowed her the opportunity to escape an abusive husband. It is not, however, a choice of career that Nichols is interesting in describing in detail. She spends more time discussing the lecturing career of her heroine. While lecturing is vilified by some, it does allow a woman a chance for her voice to be heard, much the same way that being an author allows this chance as well. Teaching tends to enclose a woman and keep her out of the public eye (or at least the view of adults). Nichols is clear in her work of endorsing other means of support, and to only use teaching as a way to earn money that is slightly better than sewing.

Representations of teachers in literature take on elements of the time they were written, and at some points reflect social issues. Mary Nichols enmeshes her heroine's teaching career in the midst of an abusive marriage and divorce. A decidedly lighter view of teaching's relation to social issues comes in Frank H. Stauffer's "Rose-May, The New School Mistress" which offers a romanticized view of a female teacher, in the context of a temperance tale. He writes, "The sweetest recollection of my schoolboy-days is the introduction of the first female teacher into our village" (209). His teacher is a paragon, as "She was young and joyous" and "She won our young hearts by her winning manners, and we would have fought for her with desperation" (215). Her reason for teaching is given as "She was of high birth; her parents were wealthy, and she had by no

means taught school to obtain a livelihood. Some altercation with a lover whom she adored had caused the movement" (221). Her lover turned to drink, and Rose-May left him because of it. However, by the end of the story, she goes to find him in a bar, and the sight of her causes her lover to vow to stop drinking. In this case, the teacher is a woman of such morality and purity that she can reform a man with a drinking problem. This story also reflects a general assumption, that teachers had high moral values.

Most of the novels that featured female teachers take place in New England or the northern states. There were growing divisions between education in the North and South. Free schools were less common in the South since property owners were reluctant to pay more taxes to support public school systems. Private academies predominated (Kaestle 202-3). Poor children were sometimes given scholarships from local benevolent societies but still had less access to education than did children in the North. The poor children who were most affected were children of slaves, since it was illegal to teach them at all. Southern states passed laws in the 1830's prohibiting anyone from teaching slaves to read.

The idea of education for slaves is one issue that Harriet Beecher Stowe addresses in *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, written in 1856. In this radicalized follow-up to Uncle Tom's Cabin which features a fugitive slave as its hero, Stowe is returns to the issue of slavery. As the decade of the 1850s went on, hopes of ending slavery were diminished and violence was more common. Stowe reflected this darker view in the novel of the seeming impossibility of ending slavery. In this story, the profession of teaching takes on a radical, abolitionist cast.

Dred is two stories: that of Nina Gordon, a white woman, and her suitors, and that of Dred a fugitive slave. One of Nina's suitors is Edward Clayton, son of a judge and a plantation owner, who has the radical desire to free his slaves, and then educate them. He is described as an idealist, and has a sister who is his opposite, since she has"not a particle of ideality" (28). His sister, Ann is further delineated : "sense she had, shrewdness, and a pleasant dash of humor, withal; but she was eminently what people call a practical girl." (28) She is the opposite in temperant and habits of her brother; she also serves as the opposite of the heroine, Nina. Although Edward and Ann were raised in the South and own a plantation, Ann has the characteristics of one of Stowe's New England heroines—practicality and efficiency. She is similar to Ophelia, the spinster from Vermont in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Edward and Ann will later combine their forces to better the lives of their slaves by educating them.

The ostensible heroine of the first half of the novel, Nina compares herself unfavorably to Ann and says that Ann "is what folks call highly educated, you know, she understands all about literature and everything." (80) There is a contrast made between the foolish Nina who was educated in a finishing school, and Ann, who was educated in a rigorous and classical tradition. Although poorly educated, Nina makes an effort to learn about her surroundings. The overseer of the plantation, Harry (who is Nina's brother, although she is unaware of this fact), explains to Nina why poor whites don't have schools: "there are no schools for them to go to—there's no work for them to do. In fact, there don't seem to be any place for them in society. Boys generally grow up to drink and swear. And, as for girls, they are not of much account. So it goes on from generation to generation" (106). Nina replies "This is so strange, and so different from

what it is in the Northern states! Why, all the children go to school there—the very poorest people's children!" (108). Nina doesn't seem to realize that her own education was nearly as bad as the poor children because she was educated in a finishing school that didn't educate women fully. At the same time she tries to learn from Harry about inequities in the educational system, her own ignorance points out her own shortcomings. Added to the irony of the situation is that Harry is half-black, half-white and is a slave. He has to teach his mistress about the weakness of education in the South.

Harry is fully informed about education in the South and endeavors to teach Nina as much as her can. He explains why there are few schools in their area in North Carolina, and in the process gives a full picture of the society they live in:

> O, because people are settled in such a scattering way, they can't have schools. All the land that's good for anything is taken up for large estates. And, then, these poor folks that are scattered up and down in between, its nobody's business to attend to them, and they can't attend to themselves; and so they grow up, and nobody knows how they live, and everybody seems to think it a pity they are in the world. (108)

Stowe's portrait of the educational system is designed to illustrate the superiority of the North over the South. The North is able to educate all its children in an egalitarian way, and Nina says, "Why, a great many of the first men, there, were poor children!" (108). In the North, class mobility is a given while in the South, aristocracies and hierarchies rule. Free public education is one of the most important elements of a truly democratic society. The educational system in the South is just one of its failings an contributes to the atmosphere of corruption brought on by slavery.

As mentioned, irony is heavily apparent in the exchanges between Nina and her half-brother Harry, since Harry the slave is educating Nina the white plantation owner. The supposed superiority of whites is reversed in this scenario. There are other instances in the novel of slaves teaching whites, as another slave, Tiff, takes charge of two poor, white orphans and vows to teach them to read. Stowe's efforts to provide a story challenging slavery forces her to create characters who reverse the behavior expected in ordinary situations. Slaves educate whites, and whites break the law to educate slaves. White children are forced to hide in the swamps with fugitive slaves. In the South, it is necessary to challenge conventions to fight against slavery and its effects, and sometimes in order to survive.

To go with the strong antislavery message of the novel, he profession of teaching undergoes a radicalization in *Dred* as slaves teach whites, and whites teach slaves; each of these actions outside the law. Clayton and Ann run a school on their plantation. Ann says, "I teach the children myself two hours every day, because I think this would be less likely to be an offence than if I should hire a teacher. Mr. Smith teaches any of the grown men who are willing to take the trouble to learn" (310). A friend of their family says, "But when it comes to teaching them to read and write,…I think you don't consider what a dangerous weapon you are putting into their hands" (312). This is precisely the reason the laws were made in the first place. Ann chooses not to follow the law and says, " I see myself in the penitentiary for the sin and crime of teaching children to read! I think.. it is time such laws were disregarded. Is not that the only way in which laws are repealed?" (314). Stowe uses the laws against teaching reading in the same way she used the Fugitive Slave Law in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which is as a law that morally upstanding

citizens have a duty to break. In this case, she uses Ann as a pure schoolteacher who illustrates that even respectable women should not obey all unjust laws. Stowe points out the absurdity of arresting women who want to teach children to read.

The teaching of slaves brings ruin to Ann and her brother. A family friend says, "Once educate the negro population, and the whole system of our domestic institutions is at an end" (529). Ann and Clayton end up fleeing to the North after their school-house is set on fire. Ann "perceived that it was her school-house which was in a blaze, crisping and shriveling the foliage of the beautiful trees by which it was surrounded, and filling the air with a lurid light" (536). Ann says "Let us go out of the state then. I will go anywhere; but I will not stop the work that I have begun" (535). Reflecting the darker mood that engulfed the country in 1856, Stowe has no solutions for her white characters sending Ann and Clayton to Canada where they start their own community. However, the novel does end on a more hopeful note. One of the slaves, Aunt Milly, goes to New York and starts a Sunday school for black and white children. Although Stowe seems pessimistic through most of the novel about the idea of the nation solving the slavery issue without a war, she chooses to end the novel with an optimistic vision for the future: that of a black woman teaching children of different races in the North.

Stowe's novel illustrates the most radical possibilities of teaching and shows how it could further the antislavery cause. In *Dred*, teaching requires a heroic amount of resolve and a willingness to break the law, reflecting the time it was written, in 1856 when the country was growing irreparably divided. Most teachers in literature were not quite so radical. What they reflect is something that Harriet Beecher Stowe experienced in her own brief experiences as a teacher at her sister Catharine Beecher's seminary,

which is teaching as a career that filled the space between school and marriage. Teaching was an interim position for women seeking to apply the lessons they had learned in their own education, and indeed, generally the only type of position available for educated women. The authors who describe teaching in novels from the 1820s through the 1850s use it as a step in their heroines' lives to either allow them to gain a measure of independence before marriage, or to support themselves after widowhood or divorce. The authors' reluctance to make the careers of their heroines the main focus of the novels illustrates the ambivalence women felt about working professionally outside the home. This reluctance to describe the actual work of teaching may come from two sources. First, authors who were ambivalent about women working outside of the home would want to spend little time on describing the work itself. Second, authors may have internalized the lack of respect given to teachers and decided that the work itself was not worthy of literary representation since it was of low status. Almost all of the women authors described previously had worked as teachers at one point in their lives. Since it was virtually the only professional career open to women, women may have felt forced into the career and trapped. In either case, it would not make an appealing subject for women to write about.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century, authors would begin to make the professional work of women visible in their novels and explore what new forms the professional woman would take. Career choices began opening up for women and one career that turns up relatively frequently in American literature is that of the lecturer. While the teacher is afforded respect (even though it is not reflected in their income), the lecturer provokes more mixed responses from the American public and works that feature

"lecturesses" reflect these variant reactions. At the same time, however, the career of the lecturer provided an opportunity for complete agency for a woman, and a chance for her voice to be heard. Mary Nichols alludes to this fact in Mary Lyndon. Her heroine after leaving teaching becomes a lecturer, in this case about women's rights and women's health issues. Nichols followed this path in her own life and lecturing allowed her to fully present her views to other women directly. Authors besides Nichols would use the figure of the lecturer in various ways, as will be shown in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

"To Give Voice to the Suffering of Your Sex":

Female Lecturers in Mid-Century American Novels

Starting in the 1830's, a new type of professional woman emerged—the female lecturer. Paradoxically, the career of a lecturer entailed that women behave completely the opposite from the norms of appropriate feminine behavior since it required putting themselves on public display. Women first spoke in public forums on women's rights and against slavery. While the number of lecturers was relatively small, the profession was represented in various works of literature, starting as early as 1839. Lecturers provoked strong responses wherever they went, from inspiring other women to being publicly reviled for violating the codes of respectable behavior for women. The lecturers who appear in literature typify the conflicted response their real-life counterparts received ranging from depictions of noble heroines to misguided failures. The authors of these works use their characters as a commentary on the particular political and social challenges facing women in mid-nineteenth century America. In this chapter, four works will be discussed: Sarah J. Hale's *The Lecturess: or, Woman's Sphere* (1839), Hannah Creamer Gardner's *Delia's Doctors; or, A Glance behind the Scenes* (1852), Laura Curtis Bullard's *Christine; or, Woman's Trials and Triumphs* (1856) and Bayard Taylor's *Hannah Thurston* (1863). These works will be read against non-fictional accounts of female lecturers and their writings, as well as against public discourse of the time in

newspapers and periodicals. Accounts of female lecturers, both in fiction and in history, provide a picture of an important step in the progress of women moving into professional careers. The lecturer is the first instance of women struggling to have their voices heard in the public sphere, and authors of the novels considered offer radical discourse couched in conventional stories.

Before female lecturers made their first public appearances, women attempted to have their voices heard in different ways. In the 1830s and 1840s, reform societies run by women were formed for such causes as moral reform, temperance, and abolition. Reformers often worked for a variety of causes and switched between movements. However, the earliest cases of women speaking in public grew out of the antislavery movement, particularly from women who were associated with William Lloyd Garrison and *The Liberator* (DuBois 21). The first American-born woman who lectured publicly was Maria W. Stewart, an African-American who gave lectures in Boston from 1832-33. She spoke against slavery, sexism, and the particular problems of free blacks in New England in regards to finding work. Stewart stopped lecturing in 1833 after public opposition (Yellin 46-7).

Reaching a wider audience than Stewart were the Angelina and Sarah Grimke of South Carolina. After witnessing the effects of slavery first-hand while growing up in Charleston, they began their activism when Angelina sent a letter to the *Liberator* in 1835. She then published a pamphlet "Appeal to Christian Women of the South" in 1836. The pamphlet caused her to be disowned by her family and banished by the city of Charleston. Angelina and Sarah began a speaking tour through New England, the first women to face promiscuous, or mixed between male and female audiences. Their tour provoked a

response in the Pastoral Letter of the Massachusetts Congregationalist Clergy which condemned women speaking in public. Earlier in 1836, the Congregationalist Clergy had spoken out against antislavery speakers, but the Pastoral Letter of 1837 went farther and specifically attacked female speakers, suggesting but not directly naming the Grimkes. The letter warned that: "if the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis-work and half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and the overshadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall in shame and dishonor into the dust." In other words, women who stepped out of place might not bear children and would be seen as dishonorable.

Besides the church, other well-known voices joined the debate against women speaking out on slavery. Catharine Beecher publishes "An Essay on Slavery and Abolition, addressed to A.E. Grimke" in 1838. In her essay, she argues that women belong in the private sphere and should use their moral influence in the home. In turn, Angelina published her own "Letters to Catharine E. Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolition, Addressed to A. E. Grimke" in which she compares women who are not allowed to voice their opinions to slaves being held in check by their masters. She writes, "The investigation of the rights of the slave has led me to a better understanding of my own" (114). Many feminists came out of the antislavery movement because like Grimke, debates on the rights of slaves led women to consider their own lack of rights.

Angelina's most infamous lecture was given in Philadelphia in Pennsylvania Hall in 1838, the day before she was to marry fellow activist Theodore Weld. Grimke spoke before a mob which interrupted her with shouting and thrown bottles. Grimke persevered

and spoke against violence. She said, in part, "Every man and woman present may do something by showing that we fear not a mob...Women of Philadelphia! Men who hold the rod over slaves, rule in the councils of the nation and they deny our right to petition and to remonstrate against abuses of our sex and of our kind. Only let us exercise them" (qtd in Yellin 49). The hall was burned that night, and Angelina ended her public career.

Angelina Grimke inspired reproach from the church, Catharine Beecher, and public audiences. She also appears to be the inspiration for the earliest work condemning lecturers, Sarah J. Hale's novel *The Lecturess; or, Woman's Sphere* published in 1839. Hale's title character seems to have much in common with Grimke, although the work details the pitfalls of a lecturing career. Hale, like Beecher before her, espouses a traditional view of woman's duties, but Hale also allows ambiguities to emerge. Her tale is not as simple and blatantly anti-feminist as it first may appear.

The Lecturess was published anonymously and only recently has been credited to Sarah J. Hale. At the time, Hale was a well-known figure who had published a successful novel, *Northwood,* and was the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*. Before Hale was asked to be editor, *The Lady's Book* was concerned with primarily fashion and recipes, so Hale was brought in for intellectual and moral content (Okker 45). Even though Hale may have been brought in to lend gravity to the magazine, the focus of the magazine was still fashion, and was known for its colored pictures. The magazine did not, however, cover political or religious issues.

Hale's career is full of contradictions. As the editor of *Godey's*, she espoused traditional sentiments on most issues, but was an early proponent of female education. In fact, in the 1840's *Godey's* was the only periodical to support a woman's quest to study

in a medical school, something that had not been done previously (Finley 100). Still, *Godey's* was not considered a serious publication and most attention was paid to its fashion and poetry. Some of Hale's efforts apart from the magazine were completely radical, such as a campaign to erect model tenements in Boston, along with an unsuccessful effort to pass rent control laws in Boston in 1839 (Findley 79). However, Hale was still considered a spokesperson for conservative and traditional femininity.

Hale may have felt the need to make a statement on the issue of women lecturing, but did not want her name associated with it. In any case, *The Lecturess* speaks about the pitfalls of a career in public speaking. Nina Baym calls *The Lecturess*, the earliest anti-feminist fiction she has discovered (75), but the book is too complex to be categorized as simply pro-feminist or anti-feminist. Like Hale herself, the book is full of contradictions.

The Lecturess, or Woman's Sphere is, as the title states, about a female lecturer. Marian Gayland, the heroine, lectures publicly before mixed audiences. She marries a man who disapproves of her career, and later leaves him. Marian continues lecturing, but falls ill and dies prematurely, an implied punishment for her headstrong ways. In one view, the novel can be seen as a statement against women who lecture. But, in a more radical reading of the novel, the story can be seen as describing the career of a woman speaker who is in demand and whose husband eventually concedes to her point of view. It is as if Sarah J. Hale is expressing her own desires that she is unable or unwilling to act upon.

The novel is framed by Marian's eventual husband, William Forrester. Forrester, a bachelor, sits before a fire and writes. He quickly espouses his views on "lecturesses" and says, "time, I think, for men to turn hermits, when women become preachers" (4).

He presents the conservative viewpoint. Forresterappears to be disconnected from the times, but the author chooses him to open and close the novel. We are first introduced to Marian through Forrester. He attends a lecture expecting a "coarse, masculine-looking woman" with a "harsh, discordant voice" (10). He is surprised to find her "young and lovely" (10). Her lecture attracts him. Although her words are not recorded, we are told that: "Her language was pure and elegant, her voice full and round, but at the same time sweetly toned" (12). Forrester ends up perplexed, since he admires the speaker but condemns the opinions she has. Hale has illustrated the contradictions the figure of the lecturer embodies: her beauty or her style of speaking may attract men in a sexual manner but who have no sympathy for their message.

Forrester assumes that Marian lectures purely for financial reasons, since he believes only poverty could compel a woman to put herself on display in such a manner, as well as an inadequate education. Marian is conscious that she receives derision from both sexes: men whose only interest is "to crush in its germ every feeling of independence and equality in the mind of women" and women who "content with the moral slavery that debased them, were willing to smile away their useless lives, the toys and playthings of their masters" (11). However, after a description of Marian lecturing, there is no evidence of a hostile audience and Marian appears to be in demand as a lecturer, proving that she is appealing to some form of audience.

Marian starts her career from the most traditional inspiration: she wants to make up for hardships her mother has suffered. Marian is raised by an impoverished, widowed mother who sacrificed to educate her and "taught her, too, the value of industry and independence; explained to her the lonely, friendless situation to which poverty consigns

woman" (16). Marian's intellectual capabilities come from her mother's lessons. The mother guides Marian into questioning injustices in society, particularly in the legal system which she claims, "exclude[s] women from honorable and lucrative employments" (16). Marian learns early on from her mother's example and she decidesat the age of thirteen that she would not end up like her mother and be "sewing, sewing all the time" (17). . Rather than planning on marrying into a more leisurely life, Marian attempts to earn her living as a professional. She begins by writing, as Catherine Beecher did in real life, a treatise on female education. Unlike Beecher, Marian decides to start lecturing. Hale herself was an early supporter of women's education, publishing an essay in 1836 on the need for female teachers, so she puts many of her own ideas into Marian's lectures. Hale also tried to support her family with work as a seamstress so she understood the pitfalls of such a way of earning a living. In a sense, Marian is lecturing because of people like Hale herself and so therefore Hale must approve of Marian's career in at least a limited way. Choosing such a motivation for the start of Marian's career ties the character closely to Hale's own experiences.

In an effort to gain sympathy for Marian and to show she is not an outcast, Hale uses a conventionally feminine best friend as a plot device. Marian's friend Sophia follows the traditional standards of behavior set for women. Sophia says, "I would not change my quiet anticipations of domestic comfort for all the public notoriety (26)" and reveals that her highest aspiration is to find love, with a wealthy man if possible. Despite her traditional nature, she supports Marian. Through Sophia's friendship, Marian is shown to be a non-threatening woman in that a conventional and proper woman is not frightened or disgusted by her behavior, but rather still loves Marian.

Although Forrester disapproves of Marian's career, he proposes to her under the condition she stop lecturing. She turns him down and takes a trip to Charleston, South Carolina. Charleston is the worst possible choice for a speaking engagement since the people in the South had "heard much of our societies for the abolition of slavery, and were aware that many ladies had espoused the cause with all the warmth and enthusiasm of woman" (53). Marian starts to give a lecture and the audience assumes she's an abolitionist before she speaks. They hiss and Marian makes the decision to give an antislavery speech, since it is what the crowd is expecting and she does hold abolitionist beliefs. She says, "The curse of God must sooner or later fall heavily upon any country or section of country in which the horrible system is countenanced" (54). Showing their antagonism towards her words, the audience becomes a mob and sets the building on fire. Marian manages to escape but falls ill. During her illness, she decides she was misguided in her career and agrees to marry Forrester. It is only when she is in a weakened state that she relents and decides to marry.

Marian's lecture in South Carolina is the clearest evidence of Hale being influenced by the example of the Grimke sisters, in particular, Angelina Grimke. The Grimkes were raised in Charleston but later banned from returning to the state due to their abolitionist activities. While Hale says the audience is aware of many women speaking out for the anti-slavery cause, in 1839 the numbers of women lecturers were few apart from the Grimkes. In addition, the burning of the lecture hall mirrors the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in 1838. Similar to Hale's heroine, Angelina stops lecturing after her marriage and falls ill. Both Grimke sisters ended their public speaking career with Angelina's marriage and subsequent children. Hale chooses to use the life of

Grimke as material for her novel, perhaps in admiration of Grimke's boldness in speaking out under hostile conditions.

After Marian weds Forrester, she begins to lecture again after a year. Forrester writes to her, "Either you must relinquish all communications with lecturesses and their lectures, or we must separate" (81). Marian agrees to his conditions temporarily. But, when a fellow lecturer comes to town, Marian invites her to dinner. Forrester, in response, begins avoiding Marian by leaving the house for the whole day and returning after she's asleep. They have a child, but Forrestervisits him when Marian is not in the room. She asks her husband's forgiveness, and he relents. Marian had "become so domestic, so devoted as a wife and mother, that her friends confidently thought she had entirely changed her opinions of woman's duties" (91). However, her domestic happiness is short-lived.

The narrator places a warning soon after: "Would that I could say it remained so; would that I might now close my narrative and throw a veil over the unhappy Marian's life; but, alas, truth compels me to proceed" (92). The narrator adds that Marian's story is a warning to women of the "wickedness of a stubborn, unyielding disposition" (92). Marian's marriage becomes a battleground. Caroline Levander argues that after marriage, Forrester is "her sole listener, defining and delimiting the domestic space by determining the speech appropriate to it" (33). Marian chafes at these requirements.

Marian's downward spiral begins with a visit from members of an abolition society. They ask her to join which she accepts. Her mother warns her that it is not proper for a married woman with child to take part in such activities. Forrester calls it "ridiculous proceedings" run by a "silly woman" (97). Marian refuses to yield and states,

"My heart has often bled for the sufferings of the slaves" (97). Marian's friend Sophia provides the traditional view when she says she will give money or food for the slaves, but her time is for her children. Marian begins lecturing again and Forrester leaves. He still supports her financially for years, until he loses his money when his bank fails. Both he and Marian become ill. On her deathbed, she confesses that she was wrong to disobey her husband and that "true independence in a woman, is to fill the place which her God assigns her; to make her husband's happiness her own; and to yield her will to his in all ways" (120). As a coda, twenty years pass and Marian's son marries the daughter of her old friend Sophia. Forrester gives him advice: "If she offend you, reason with her, and lead her gently back by love to the place in your heart she has forfeited" (123). He also states, "Don't let pride make you assume a cold, forbidding manner" (123). Forrester appears to have become a kinder and more reasonable person, but it doesn't negate his earlier objections to his wife's career.

Hale has provided mixed messages in the novel. Her lecturer dies an early death as if being punished, but her conservative husband also suffers. Before her death, Marian appears to be in demand as a lecturer and she is allowed to speak about her strongest convictions. Since Marian speaks in favor of many of the ideals that Hale supports in real life, Hale may be testing out the reception her ideas would have in a public forum. Her lecturer does gain success but at a price. However, in the end, even the conservative husband admits he was wrong and Marian's son suffers no ill-effects from his mother's behavior socially.

Later novelists offered more positive and less conflicted views on lecturers. In the 1840's, more women began speaking out, often on women's issues. However, they

still faced opposition. An early proponent of women's rights, Antoinette Brown, describes the reaction she received from townspeople in Ohio in 1848:

> Sometimes they warn me not to be a Fanny Wright man, sometimes believe I am joking, sometimes stare at me with amazement and sometimes start back with horror. Men and women are about equal and seem to have their mouths opened and their tongues loosed to about the same extent. (qtd in Dubois, 30).

Early women's rights speakers turned to each other for support. They wrote each and organized informal groups to discuss women's rights (DuBois 29). Another form of support can be seen in Hannah Creamer Gardner's *Delia's Doctors; or, A Glance behind the Scenes*, published in 1852. Gardner does not feature any actual lecturers in her novel, but makes an abundance of encouraging statements and has her characters speak positively about female lecturers. Gardner offers support by normalizing the career of a lecturer and presenting it as a viable choice for women. However, Gardner also puts her most radical views in the voice of a teen-ager, which serves as a device to place the career in the future. While characters speak highly of lecturers, Gardner does not describe an actual female lecturer. Surrounding her title character, Delia Thornton, with progressive females, Gardner supports lecturers without having one as the main character.

While *Delia's Doctor's* is a progressive and radical statement on women and their career choices in the nineteenth century, it appears to be the only work by Hannah Creamer Gardner that makes such a statement. Little is known of Gardner's life other than she married at age twenty-six after a brief career teaching. She had children, but records on her life are so scarce, Nina Baym having uncovered these brief details, can not

even determine how many children Gardner had. She published four novels, but *Delia's Doctors* is the only one with a strong women's rights message. Her other novels follow a more traditional romance plot.

As stated, the novel concerns eighteen year old Delia Thornton, and her attempts to find cures for her weak health. Gardner satirizes the current state of medicine with its alternative therapies. Delia considers all the fashionable trends —homeopathy, water cures, mesmerism—but fails to find a solution. While Delia is plagued by a variety of ailments, the two female characters closest to her are strong and sensible. Delia's younger sister Ella and Delia's brother's fiancée Adelaide provide differing examples of young women at that time, and paint an encouraging picture of the fight for women's rights.

Delia and her friend Adelaide are opposites. Delia is "listless and dejected" and "pale, slender, and low-spirited" (7). In comparison, Adelaide, who is the same age as Delia, has a "well-rounded, symmetrical figure, eyes beaming with health and gaiety, and cheeks tinged with the brilliant hues of the carnation" (9). Delia, who is surrounded by a loving middle-class family, has a variety of vague ailments. She says: "My head aches. My food distresses me. I have no strength. I often have palpitations of the heart" (22). She is portrayed as having no direction in her life. In contrast, Adelaide has had to struggle. When she was sixteen, her mother died. Her father is unable to work since he became crippled. Adversity makes Adelaide stronger as takes over her family's financial matters and dismisses their teachers and servants. She earns money by writing which allows her to "extend the hand of relief to those beyond as well as within her circle of her

own immediate household" (38). Although Delia is the purported heroine of the novel, Adelaide has the more interesting story in her efforts to rise above her circumstances.

Besides taking care of her own family, Adelaide offers Delia advice on the merits of such cures as the water treatment and mesmerism, both of which Delia opts not to try after hearing Adelaide's objective opinions. By novel's end, Adelaide takes matters into her own hands and gives Delia the secrets to her own good health. Deceptively simple, it consists of four brief rules: "Rise early; keep the back straight; the head cool; the feet warm" (222).

Adelaide has strong views and the end of the novel concludes her words. She argues with a clergyman over women's rights and women lecturers. She says, "why should not a woman, an educated woman, deliver a lecture as well as hear one" (261). The clergyman looks on with "horror and disgust" on his face (261). Since Gardner has chosen to close her novel with such a statement on women's rights, it shows implicit improval and a desire to highlight the progressive message.

By novel's end, Adelaide has even solved the problem of Delia, something the doctors have failed to do. Delia follows Adelaide's advice, rising early and commencing a study of "music and philanthropic schemes" (236). She says, "I will try to be well…that I may fill some noble sphere" and mentions having dreams of Margaret Fuller. Adelaide cautions her to progress slowly and steadily.

Even more radical than Adelaide, is Delia's younger sister Ella. Ella, fourteen years old, is first introduced with the fact that she is "more bold and hardy" than her fifteen year old brother. Ella has large plans for the future and a career in women's rights. She declares: "I will now do boy's work. Ten years hence, I will do man's work. I will

now collect bills, deliver messages, and cast partial payments for my father. By-and-by, I will go through the country, lecturing on the rights of my sex" (13). Ella's parents, the Thorntons, are divided on her unconventional behavior. Mrs. Thornton thinks, "a woman should be a true woman, exhibiting the grace and beauty of the feminine character" (145). She provides the argument against women lecturers by saying women shouldn't be "a doubtful kind of being, reminding you now of one sex, now of the other" (145). In contrast, Ella's father admires his daughter's spirit, and wishes Delia could be more like Ella. Conflicts between the parents continue as Ella writes an essay entitled "The Female Lecturers of the Present Day." Her father is proud; her mother throws the essay into the fireplace.

Ella speaks continually of her future. On planning her career, she states, "I shall open my mouth, not only for those who are physically poor and needy, but for the countless multitudes who are mentally oppressed and indigent" (16). Her older brother Charles encourages her to teach saying, "teaching is a dignified and honorable profession…both sexes at the present day, engage largely in this work" (49). In fact, he himself is a teacher, although he is often discouraged and fails to see his students' strengths. He continues by quoting Catharine Beecher on teaching, and calls her a "woman of large heart and active brain" (50). Ella is concerned with usefulness. She sees Delia's problem as "Delia merely exists, she does not live" (48). Ella takes the opposite approach; she wants to experience as much as she can and feel as strongly as she is able. When discussing the novels she enjoys, she says, "I like those which excite my whole soul. I want one heart-stirring scene after another, till my heart throbs, and my cheek burns" (74). Ella is strong in areas where Delia is weak, such as having strong

feelings or passion for ideas or things. Ella eventually asks Adelaide for her views on women lecturers. Adelaide is in favor of women lecturers and says, "Every one who has the gift of eloquence should receive an opportunity for its exercise" (182). In Adelaide's view, a female lecturer is no different from a male lecturer and it is an unremarkable fact that people make careers out of it.

Gardner has presented the future of women's rights in the character of Ella, along with the present in Adelaide and her sensible opinions on feminism. The message that the novel gives is that girls with weak health, like Delia, need to find an object in life, and live healthily. Feminist views are associated with the healthy and happy women in the novel, Delia and Adelaide, showing that feminist leanings could be beneficial and would not detract from the woman's appeal. Adelaide has strong views but still has a man who loves her; the same is evident for Delia who appears to be her father's favorite child. Lecturing is a career that is offered as an option, although there are still disbelievers like Ella's mother, who fear femininity will be lost. The question of woman lecturers becoming "unsexed" was a view that was difficult to dislodge.

An even stronger message of support for women lecturers comes in Laura Curtis Bullard's *Christine; or, Woman's Trials and Triumphs* (1856). The heroine Christine lectures and starts a school for girls after marrying a man who is sympathetic to her causes. Her lecturing career is one step in her efforts to make a successful life for herself. Christine is seen as heroic for standing up for her rights and speaking out on women's issues.

It is not surprising that Laura Curtis Bullard delivers a forthright feminist message. She was quite active in the women's rights movement. Apart from publishing two novels

and writing for newspapers, Bullard eventually took over the editor's position at the radical feminist periodical *The Revolution*. Bullard had befriended Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the late 1860's and her writings were read at meetings of the National Woman Suffrage Association (Kohn 76).

Christine, Bullard's second novel has clearly feminist elements. A tale of a woman lecturer, the heroine Christine goes through struggles in the novel as she tries to find her path in life. As a child, she is compared to her traditionally minded and conventionally attractive sister Bessie. Christine bemoans the state of her life saying, "Here I must stay and drag out my life. Get up in the morning, scrub, wash dishes, churn, and do all sorts of drudgery, till night comes, and sleep only to go over the same thing the next day. Oh, it is not *living*, Bessie" (17). Bessie is mystified by Christine's complaints and Christine says she feels as if she were "reaching forward continually for something" (28).

Christine is sent to school by a rich aunt and finds her schooling is meant to prepare her to be a wealthy man's wife learning French and dancing. However, Christine performs at the school and seems to have a talent for lecturing: "Her sweet voice rang out full and clear, or melted to pathos. It thrilled to the heart of every person present, and more than one tear-suffused eye testified to her powerful but unconscious eloquence" (108). Christine's skill for lecturing is something that she was born with since she hasn't trained on how to do it.

When Christine is close to finishing school, she meets an older married woman with radical ideas. Mrs. Warner is considered respectable but holds unorthodox views, saying that women should speak out against injustices. She and Christine are moved by

two elderly acquaintances who take in sewing to earn a precarious living. Mrs. Warner believes women can change public opinion. She believes Christine has a future doing exactly that. However, Christine accepts a marriage proposal from Phillip, who has been described as a male coquet. Mrs. Warner fears Christine will not begin her lecturing career, but Christine replies, "Do not fear, my friend…that I shall forget my duties to my fellows in the narrower circle around me…I will write" (156). Ultimately, Christine calls off the marriage when she learns another girl has committed suicide because she too loves Phillip. Christine blames herself for the girl's death. Mrs. Warner believes it is Christine's destiny to remain unmarried, stating: "God has taken you from that sphere. It is a mysterious thing to you, but I read it distinctly. He destines you for a higher calling" (169). She continues and adds, "it is yours to be the champion of your sex. The pioneer in the march of progress. You are to rouse the indifferent—to give voice to the suffering of your sex" (169). Christine decides to do it after feeling "an indescribable sensation, a pleasure that was not unmingled with pain, a peace that filled her whole being, and yet a vague unrest, a yearning for something more" (171). She believes that lecturing will fill her need for something more.

Christine receives no encouragement apart from Mrs. Warner. Her father throws her out of his house. Her aunt says, "You, with your pale face, now crimsoned with blushes, and your slight figure, trembling with agitation before one auditor, you think of facing an audience and lecturing them? Poor baby!" (175). The aunt gives the standard argument of woman lecturers being unwomanly saying, "Let other women unsex themselves if they will" (175). Unwomanliness was a common warning given to female

lecturers and women's right's activists in general. However, Christine is not cowed by these words and warnings and continues with her plans.

The aunt's objections to Christine's plans coincide with pitfalls that woman lecturers came across in reality. Deciding to lecture was a bold step, and actually doing it took practice. Speaking in Rochester in 1848, one women's rights lecturer Abigail Bush said: "Friends, we present ourselves here before you as an oppressed class, with trembling frames and faltering tongues, and we do not expect to be able to speak as to be heard by all at first, but we trust we shall have the sympathy of the audience, and that you will bear with our weakness now in the infancy of the movement" (qtd in DuBois, 25). Women learned from experience. In Christine, the heroine manages to be successful at lecturing, even when having to face hostile audiences. Similar to what befell Angelina Grimke in Philadelphia, Christine appears before an unruly crowd in Boston. There are "loudest hootings, stamping of feet" (192). In the end, there are "oaths, curses and the coarsest abuse from half-drunken men" (192). However, Christine says she is ready to "die for the cause" and adds, "I have entered on my work, and bravely will I go on with it" (192). Even after her family has her placed in a mental institution, Christine will not give up lecturing. Her aunt offers to have her released if she promises to end her lecturing career, but Christine declines the offer. Eventually her friend Helen helps her escape.

As in *The Lecturess* and *Delia's Doctors*, different views on women's rights are are offered by the female characters. Christine has two married friends—each with completely different lifestyles. Annie, who married for money, lives in luxury, but with "smiles wreathing her face... under it all lurked a restless, dissatisfied, disappointed spirit,

that poisoned all her enjoyments" (198). She tries to escape her marriage, but since her father has become bankrupt she has no place to go. Annie needs the protection of women's rights and needs to be able to earn a living as illustrates the plight of working women who are not paid fair wages. Annie leaves her husband and must find a way of supporting herself and her child. She begins working in a factory sewing which barely allows her to eat. She loses the job and is reduced to begging on the streets. An old friend becomes her lover, but will not marry her. Annie dies, and Christine adopts her daughter.

Christine's other married friend, Helen, married for love, so is poor yet happy. Helen voices the traditional view as she tells Christine that not all women desire the right to work. Helen tells Christine, "You can make better speeches than I, but I can beat you at pie-making" (215). Christine tells her about reform: "All reform movements are slow in their beginnings. They are like the avalanche, which creeps on so gently at first, that its onward course is almost imperceptible, but gathering strength and velocity as it proceeds, it rushes on, bearing before it all that men have deemed most stable and immoveable" (216). Helen points out that women are Christine's biggest challenge and that "the most powerful opponents to your reform, are the very ones you're trying to benefit" (216). She also tells Christine that she's battling imaginary evils when she could fight real ones, "what good will equal political rights do starving wretches?" (217). Christine argues that women will reform politics with their morality. Helen is shown having a happy marriage and that disagreeing with your husband can be positive. Helen and her husband present a modern and enlightened view of marriage.

Christine marries her old suitor Phillip, and both she and Phillip run a home and

employment agency for girls. They both do reform work and "both were absorbed in the enlarging of the Home" (371). Her husband feels as she does and "for into all her plans for the establishment of this Institution, her husband entered with zeal equal to her own" (371). Ironically, Christine's daughter wants nothing more than to be a wife and mother, and Christine gives her blessings on her marriage. In Bullard's view, women should choose to do what makes them happy, whether it be marriage or a career.

A later view of women lecturers comes from Bayard Taylor, in *Hannah Thurston: A Story of American Life* published in 1863. Taylor, a well-known and prolific writer was chiefly categorized as a travel writer and poet. *Hannah Thurston* was his first novel and first foray into social concerns. Taylor, in the Preface, writes: "I do not, therefore, rest the interest of the book on its slender plot, but on the fidelity with which it represents certain types of character and phases of society." He also writes: "I have perceived peculiarities of development in American life which have escaped the notice of novelists" (4). He feels he has found a new type of subject matter. Later in his life, Taylor noted that women appreciated the character of Hannah and that Hannah, the woman, "is a successful creation" (Life 451). Bardes and Gossett note that in 1859, a famous women's rights speaker Anna E. Dickinson gave a lecture in the town Taylor was living in. It is not known if he attended the lecture (170), but it is possible he may have been inspired by this speech.

Hannah is first introduced at a meeting of various sewing circles that support missionary work, repairs on the church, and anti-slavery. Taylor has chosen to set his novel in the recent past, in 1852. Hannah is observed by her eventual husband, Max Woodbury. Woodbury is a former resident of the town who has come back from India

with a fortune that "absolved him from the necessity of labor" (38). Max is surprised to learn that Hannah gives lectures or "public harangues" as he refers to them. Hannah appears and gives a lecture on women's rights, specifically that women should receive equal privileges and be paid equal wages. She ends with the notion that women should be "co-proprietor of the Earth, equally armed to subdue its inequities, and prepare it for a better future" (74). Woodbury is fascinated by her words, and thinks that she must speak out of duty, rather than a desire to be in public or on display. When she finishes, Woodbury wishes she would speak more.

Hannah is not at all reviled for her career, seeming to be popular. She receives a marriage proposal from Seth Wattles, another reformer. Seth says: "You know I believe in the equal rights of Woman, and would never think of subjecting you to the tyranny your sisters groan under" (150). While Wattles holds the same beliefs as Hannah, she refuses to marry him because she is not in love with him.

Hannah's mother encourages her to marry in order to fully understand what women face, telling her "I have agreed with thee in most of thy views about the rights of our sex, but thee can never be entirely wise on this subject so long as thee remains single" (161). In her mother's eyes, Hannah is not yet a fully developed woman, and that marriage would deepen her understanding of women's rights issues.

Hannah is resourceful physically as well as mentally. She meets an anti-slavery couple, the Whitlows, and their daughters Mary Wollstonecraft Whitlow and Phillis Wheatley Whitlow. Phillis falls into the river during a picnic and while Woodbury attempts to save her, Hannah ends up saving them both. Woodbury says, "your coolness and presence of mind saved both of us" (201). Hannah also goes with a neighbor, Mrs.

Waldo to a free love community to rescue a friend who has left her husband, despondent after the deaths of her children. The man who seduced Mrs. Merryfield, Dyce is described as "a strong, unscrupulous man who knows our sex, Hannah, has a vast power which most women don't understand. He picks up a hundred little threads of weakness, each of which is apparently insignificant, and twists them into a chain" (215). It turns out he promised Mrs. Merryfield that she would be closer to her departed children with him. Mrs. Waldo continues by saying that men have influence and "a sort of physical magnetism" (216). Mrs. Waldo also tells Hannah that being unmarried limits her knowledge: "you have taken, without knowing it, a sort of warlike position towards men, and have willfully restricted their natural influence over you" (216). Hannah continually receives speeches on the benefits of marriage.

The villain, Dyce uses the language of women's rights to try to seduce his victim. He tells Mrs. Merryfield that equal rights mean she can leave her husband—thather husband has no control over her. Hannah persuades Mrs.Merryfield to come back by explaining how Dyce's definition of equal rights is misleading and in fact false. Hannah is able to see through the methods of double-talk used by a would-be seducer posing as a women's right's man. She is a keen judge of the words of others, and is not easily fooled by the smooth talk of duplicitous men.

In this novel, even the romance is encircled by arguments and debates on current issues, as when Woodbury and Hannah debate social concerns while falling in love. In considering the question of woman suffrage, Woodbury says, "Woman is too finely organized for the hard, coarse business of the world, and it is for her own sake that man desires to save her from it. He stands between her and human nature in the rough" ((254).

Hannah gives the traditional women's right's view of suffrage and asks "But could she not refine it by her presence" (254). Woodury says it can not happen and he adds that if women start voting, in five years they would be cursing and drinking with men at the polls. Throughout these scenes, their attraction to each other grows, even as they keep uncovering differences of opinion.

Hannah falls in love with Woodbury after much conflicted emotion. After he proposes, she says: "My life was fixed, before I knew you; I was sure of myself and satisfied with the work that was before me: but now I am sure of nothing; You have assailed me until you have discovered my weakness, and you cruelly tear down every prop on which I try to lean!" (400). Woodbury asks if she could ever love him and she replies: "I have felt and struggled against your power, but you have conquered me. If you love me, pity me also, and make a gentle use of your triumph" (403). Hannah has become undone by her love; it seems as if she has lost a battle.

Hannah gives up lecturing. She receives an invitation but can't speak. Woodbury takes her place and advocates private and public respect for women and her moral qualities, but doesn't specifically address women's rights. Hannah has subdued her desire to speak in order to please her husband.

Hannah and Woodbury have a child at the end. Woodbury is filled with emotion and Hannah states that she has learned "the only true freedom for man or woman is reached through the willing submission of love" (468). Taylor ends up using the same sort of closing that Sarah Hale used in *The Lecturess* nearly thirty years earlier; although, in this case the heroine still lives, but with no desire to speak on women's rights. Taylor

proposes an argument that will be repeated nearly twenty years later in Henry James *The Bostonians*, another unsympathetic view of women's rights lecturers.

Taylor's novel is one statement about female lecturers which shows little sympathy for a woman's career. In Taylor's version, lecturing is a profession that can be abandoned after marriage. In his heroine, love changes her mind and silences her. The novel strongly advocates marriage as a woman's destiny.

The lecturers in the four novels discussed have different outcomes to the stories. One thing they share, is that in no case does a character take part in the most common form of lecturing, that of antislavery. The authors may have felt the position was too volatile. The lecturers presented, however, do offer examples to their readers of the pitfalls and pleasures of taking on this most maligned career. In offering these heroines, the authors provide validity to the career and show that it is feasible. And lecturers continue to appear in later novels making stronger suffrage arguments as time goes on. The lecturers end up being a link to social movements in the years ahead, and will play a role in the women's organizations which were being formed.

Chapter 3

"A New Disease Called Art Fever":

Representations of Women Artists

Female artists appear in American literature with some regularity, from lesser known early works such as Susanna Paine's story of her own life to novels and stories by more well-known authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Louisa May Alcott. Ranging in time from the 1850s through the 1870s, literary works by these authors reflect the growing normalization of the position of the female artist in American society. In 1868, art was such a popular pursuit among young women that Louisa May Alcott wrote humorously in a story that a new disease called the "Art Fever" had "attacked the young women of the community with great violence" ("Psyche's Art," 207). The authors mentioned above all in some way comment upon "Art Fever" by choosing to introduce leading characters involved in the profession of art. And by utilizing the figure of the professional female artist, these authors contributed to a widening body of literature—that of examinations of middle-class women seeking recognition and satisfaction outside of the domestic sphere of home and family. The female artist highlights the contradictions and complexities of the professional woman—in the difficulties of achieving success in the workplace while balancing the needs of the domestic sphere.

The career of the artist holds a peculiar place in considering accounts of professional women. It was a career and yet not a career, a calling or vocation but still a method of earning a living for some. It is useful to consider the distinction that a professional woman is mainly doing work of the mind, in contrast to the working-class one whose work centers on the body. Art falls into both categories in some ways but overall would be considered work of the mind. By the end of the nineteenth century, the career of the artist was professionalized. Laura Prieto notes, "By the late nineteenth century, art—like many other fields from library science to medicine—displayed the familiar aspects of specialized training: professional associations, middle-class status and patronage, concern with authorship, reliable income, and a seriousness of purpose that extended beyond mere money-making" (7). The authors in question provide illustrations of the early stages of artists and professionalism.

Having skill with art could be seen as an admirable trait for a woman. Catherine Beecher wrote in *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, "to draw a large landscape in colored crayons, would be deemed very lady-like" as compared to housework because domestic work has "generally been done by vulgar people." According to Beecher, art is respectable while housework is looked down upon. Everyone respects art, while no one respects the domestic duties. Beecher, in an attempt to professionalize the home, draws attention to the fact that art needed no introduction—it was a high status pursuit already. However, Beecher is probably not advocating art as a career but instead sees it as a respected leisure activity that requires some training.

The field of art starts becoming a more viable choice for a career once professionalized training becomes available. Art schools were opened early in the 19th

century at first only to men. Eventually, schools began to become accessible to female students. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts began to admit women in 1844, while The National Academy of Design admitted women in 1846 (Prieto 42). The first art school specifically for women, The Philadelphia School of Design for Women, opened in 1844 (Prieto 27). Within this opening of the art field, restrictions were still placed upon women, such as not being allowed to attend life drawing classes with nude models. Laura Prieto argues that these restrictions may have had an effect on the type of work that women produced and could account for the popularity of portraits and still lifes (Prieto 27).

Still, even with the difficulties encountered, women created art. By 1859, Elizabeth Ellet published *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries*, a comprehensive guide to women artists through history. It was the first book of its kind. In the preface, Ellet states that she hopes book will "inspire with courage and resolution any woman who aspires to overcome difficulties in the achievement of honourable independence or should it lead to a higher general respect for the powers of women and their desired position in the realm of Art" (v). Ellet lists women artists from the past, as well as those currently working in the field of art, such as Harriet Hosmer. In this way, Ellet attempted to show contemporary women that art was a viable career and that women artists had a long and illustrious set of predecessors.

Another form of advice came from a journal for artists, *The Crayon*. An editorial entitled "Woman's Position in Art" stated thatits purpose was to "show what a vast field for employment there is open to women," albeit with the addition of the idea that women were more suited to particular types of art, such as wood-engraving since women's

"nimble fingers" are "accustomed to wield the needle" (28). Even with these disclaimers, it is significant that a professional journal was giving somewhat of a stamp of approval to women artists (although the editorial staff of *The Crayon* was completely male).

And by 1870, Virginia Penny in *How Women can Make Money* provides a clear picture of the variety of specialties an artistic woman might pursue. Listing over 50 categories under the heading of "artist", Penny breaks the field into various classifications such as: portrait painters, landscape painters, and those who work with wood. Penny uses examples from Europe as well and says that in Paris, "painting is considered the most desirable profession by parents for their daughters" in an attempt to convince readers of the prestige and appeal of the career (79). She continually offers accounts of real women who earn money in this way. At that point in time, Penny is able to describe a significant number of successful female artists, and offers a greater number than Ellet had twenty years earlier.

One of the earliest examples of a female artist in literature is Susanna Paine's nonfiction account of her life, *Roses and Thorns, or Recollections of an Artist: A Tale of Truth, For the Grave and the Gay,* published in 1854. Using the conventions and general framework of a domestic novel, Paine describes her life. Her narrative is intriguing since she is exploring new territory in autobiography—that of a professional woman artist, while at the same time downplaying the artistic elements. Her narrative turns inward, seeking to achieve commonalities with her readers. In other words, she aims to emphasize her likenesses to her perceived readers, rather than highlight the unique aspects of her story. Throughout the work, a continual emphasis is apparent on comparing herself that what she envisions as an ideal of proper middle-class behavior.

Her art remains hidden and in unexplored through her story as she chooses to focus on her behavior and the customs of genteel society. The practicalities of her life are interwoven with her beliefs, particularly her religious ideals.

At the time Paine was writing, the publishing industry was thriving. Domestic novels were popular and writers like Maria Cummins, Augusta Jane Evans, and Susan Warner had extremely large audiences (Mott 306). The popular domestic novels of the era told what Nina Baym terms the "woman's story"—heroines who overcome hardships and are rewarded by successful marriages. To some degree, Paine follows these conventions in telling her story, particularly in attempting to portray herself as a respectable and religious woman. But in other aspects, such as the expected happy ending, Paine veers from the standard plot and offers a new type of storyline.

Paine's autobiography begins with a metafictional discourse. She doesn't introduce herself directly; instead, people on street are questioning the identity of a strange woman who goes in early and stays late at the studio. They see she is not married. As the people on the street continue to question the woman's identity, a boy passes carrying a book to subscribers. When asked what the book is about, he replies, "I guess about wim-min folks, and courting,' and all sich" (7). It is a clever play on traditional expectations; the book turns out to be Paine's story which has little to do with romance or courtship. By opening the story in such a manner, Paine displays a sense of humor and a willingness to defy conventions.

While the opening of the text may be unconventional, what follows is a rather traditional listing of hardships faced early on—Paine loses her father and has to work to support her mother. She opens a school and then, marries a man she doesn't love, almost

entirely because her mother accuses her of being a coquette (38). In Paine's social situation, appearances of impropriety govern her decisions. The loveless marriage continues through the birth of a son, but when the child dies Paine is moved to action and seeks a divorce. In this case, grief over the loss of her child spurs her on to better her situation. Using a metaphor that is common throughout the story, as well as in other novels about female artists, that of a bird, she states she feels like a "bird released from the snare" (45). Seeking a way to support herself, Paine says, ""Having, in my earlier days, made some attempts at drawing and painting; but with instruction, and entirely for my own amusement…I thought, in this extremity, to try my hand at painting portraits" (54). And it is with those thoughts that Paine embarks on a career as an artist. Art provides her with a means to make a living. Portrait painting seems to her to be the fastest way of making a profit. She has no romantic aspirations of art, but instead views it as a profitable skill.

Gender has an effect on Paine's ability to sustain herself. Attempting to survive by painting portraits, she advertises as S. Paine—Portrait Painter—perhaps in an attempt to disguise her gender, but receives no orders. Her efforts fail to produce a living wage. She attempts to hide her desperate circumstances, but while living at a boarding-house receives some unexpected help. Her landlady can tell that Paine is running out of money and provides a solution by asking Paine to paint a portrait of her daughter with a kitten. People came to see "to see whither—a *woman could* paint a likeness" (61). Orders result and she was "fairly established" (61). Throughout the text, more often than not, it is a woman who helps Paine, although Paine does not comment on this or consider whether others might be in the same circumstances.

Throughout the work, Paine attributes her successes to her faith in God. In one incident, when moving to another city (probably Philadelphia), she meets a wealthy acquaintance on boat who causes her to reach state of panic. Paine realizes she doesn't have money for fare and doesn't want to appear poor to her friend. She ends up selling a basket to a "colored cabin maid (68)" and sees it as "providence of my Heavenly father". Paine says this lesson will teach her to always keep her faith. Again, a woman has helped her but Paine attributes it to God. In some ways, Paine is blind to the help she receives and tends to give too much credit to her religion. Although, in Paine's case, at times it is difficult to tell her true feelings as compared to the construction of the proper, devout woman that she describes herself as.

Paine reaches some success as she says, "I was enabled, by my constant receipt of money, to dress as I chose, and for once, in my life, indulged my tastes, however expensive; so that I was richly and fashionably attired; I could not desire more attention than I received" (72). In Paine's eyes success is signaled by appearance; however, her appearance can also hurt her. She writes:

> A rumor had risen, and spread in every direction, before coming to my knowledge,--that I had absconded from my native place-leaving behind me a husband, (nearly distracted,) and several young helpless children! This came to me like a 'clap of thunder, in a clear sky.' I had perceived a change of manner in many of my acquaintances-and quite a falling off of professions of regard; this troubled me very much (74).

Paine manages to regain her reputation and doesn't appear to suffer a loss in her income from the rumor, but the incident highlights the extreme precariousness of her position and the unique circumstances of a single woman artist.

Paine continues to comment upon her economic status and the necessity of maintaining an appearance of success and gentility. Each incident she recounts is tied to this concern, whether it is choosing a studio that is "a little more stylish and genteel" (103) because it presents her in a more respectable light to describing her happiest point in life as "sunny" because she is "in receipt of plenty of cash" (90). Paine's career is in a constant state of flux—when she runs low on money she often moves to a new city and puts out her sign. Often, the decision to move is facilitated by her friends and acquaintances growing "cool and distant" when they suspect she may be poor (132). Her social status is difficult to ascertain because she appears to have many wealthy friends, yet at one point complains of a family of treating her like a servant when she stays at their home to paint their portraits.

Being an artist to Paine is secondary to being middle-class. Laura Prieto notes, "Susanna Paine's most powerful claim to middle-class status was her published narrative, which appropriated the tropes of sentimental fiction in order to tell her own life story" (19). Paine's text is valuable for the insights it provides into the life of a working woman. An artist was a considerable rise in status over that of factory workers, seamstresses, or even teachers. It allowed a woman like Paine to travel in wealthy circles, although the cost was a constant concern.

By the end of the text, Paine writes about the dignity of labor and the value of work to the individual, particularly the individual woman. She addresses the question of

whether a woman is “dowdy” because she works (180). Answering in the negative, she writes, “Industrious labor, and high mental endowments, are perfectly consistent with each other, and often combine in the same individual. Idleness, is no mark of a genuine lady or gentleman, nor is the hand an index, either of the head or of the heart” (180). In other words, working for a living does not make someone less of a lady. As is often the case in this narrative, Paine appears to be making a case for her own gentility.

Paine presents a contradictory view of herself. While she often remarks on her good breeding and ladylike qualities, at times a sharper viewpoint emerges as when she criticizes the lack of taste by the public. She speaks of those “who, perhaps, had never seen a dozen good paintings in their whole lives” coming in and criticizing her work “with the same feelings that a cow would tread on a pearl necklace.' (182). Paine’s narrative gives her the chance to comment upon the indignities of relying on the public for her income, but she generally follows any uncharitable comments with religious sentiments or quotes from the Bible, as though she wants to reiterate that she is indeed a proper Christian woman.

Paine’s narrative is a fascinating early look at the day-to-day concerns of an aspiring professional artist, and an example to her readers of the possibility of earning a living in such a manner. Paine’s narrative also appears to give a glimpse into what she thinks the reader might find appealing—methods of dealing with hardships, but literally almost no description of the works of art that she produced. It is one strategy in writing about the life of a female artist. Less than ten years later, Nathaniel Hawthorne would employ a different strategy in his tale involving women artists.

By 1860, the idea of female artists was common enough that Nathaniel Hawthorne used it as a major theme in *The Marble Faun*. While the story is heavily allegorical (the fall of man re-enacted), much of the details reflect the day-to-day life of artists in Rome. The story revolves around the lives of three artists in Rome: a male sculptor, and two female artists: a painter and a copyist. Hawthorne bases much of his detail from his own travels in Rome and visits with artists. A large community of American artists was in Rome at that time, and Hawthorne and his family visited many of them. Real female artists provide material for the book, although Hawthorne makes radical changes in their stories. In particular, Hawthorne deemphasizes any concerns for using art to make a living.

Sections of the story are taken almost without change from his journals and notebooks. In his notebook of Rome in 1858, Hawthorne describes a young American sculptor, Louisa Lander by writing that she "appears to have genuine talent, and spirit and independence enough to give it fair play. She is living quite alone, in delightful freedom" (78). He adds that she is "going fearlessly about these mysterious streets" and "acting with quietness and simplicity" (78). In the *Marble Faun*, a strikingly similar description is used to illustrate Hilda's travels throughout the streets of Rome. He writes that her "purity of heart and life are allowed to assert themselves, and to be their own proof and security, to a degree unknown in the society of other cities" (55).

Hawthorne witnessed the difficulties that female artists had firsthand in the case of Louisa Lander. She came from Salem, Massachusetts to Rome to study. Hawthorne commissioned her to sculpt a bust of himself. She worked on the bust and at first; Hawthorne called the clay study of himself "excellent". Then, it seemed that questions

arose concerning her propriety in whether she is too close to a particular man, and whether she posed nude for other artists. Lander ends up being ostracized by the artistic community in Rome. Hawthorne and his family refuse to communicate with her when they are all back in the United States. His wife Sophia later excises all references to Lander in the edited version of the notebooks (Rubinstein 59-60).

Lander received fewer commissions after the difficulties with Hawthorne. Her cousin, a fellow sculptor, writes her bust of Hawthorne is "very good" but "he does not notice her now" in 1859 (Craven 332). Lander's career appears to go down-hill and she had difficulty selling anything after she returned to the United States (Rubinstein 61). Another sculptor, Harriet Hosmer was also plagued by rumors, but she asked her friends for help to clear her name, and sued a fellow artist for libel (Rubinstein 41). Lander does not appear to have made any effort to clear her name.

Lander's case illustrates the precarious position of a woman artist of the time. Her career derailed by vague rumors of impropriety, Lander presents a daunting example of the instability of the woman artist's position. Whether or not Hawthorne sympathized with Lander's plight is unknown. However, in *Marble Faun*, Hawthorne does address the conventions governing the behavior of female artists, and suggests strategies for overcoming problems—mainly marriage. His two fictional artists Miriam and Hilda both encounter rumors, but only one is able to overcome them.

The two women artists, Miriam and Hilda, are strikingly dissimilar. Hawthorne presents them as opposites--Miriam is dark and passionate, while Hilda is pure and religiously devout. They represent different types of art as well since Miriam is a painter of original scenes while Hilda earns a living as a copyist--that is copying masterpieces.

Both are careers that women of the time did pursue in Rome; however, it is a negative view of women artists as Hawthorne has chosen to highlight the difficulties while ignoring the successes that he himself witnessed. *The Marble Faun* is a cautionary and conservative tale.

Miriam's background is filled with mystery causing people to speculate on her reasons for being in Rome. The view is that she is "daughter of a merchant or financier who had been ruined in a great commercial crisis; and possessing a taste for art, she had attempted to support herself by the pencil, in preference to the alternative of going out as a governess" (25). Speculations also abound concerning her race leading to questions as to whether she is Jewish, German, or African-American with "one burning drop of African blood" (25). Miriam herself does not offer any information to clear up misunderstandings, preferring to remain a mystery.

The descriptions of Miriam's artwork illustrate some of the common attitudes towards women's art. When she begins her career in Rome, her "pictures met with good acceptance among the patrons of modern art" (23). In other words, they are popular. However, her fellow artists fail to show her respect in that they believe her paintings are"well enough for the idle half efforts of an amateur, but lacking both the trained skill and the practice that distinguish the works of a true artist" (23). Still, her pictures are popular because "whatever technical merit they lacked, its absence was more than supplied by a warmth and passionateness" which "all the world could feel" (23).

Miriam's choice of subjects highlights her defects. Her instability and excess of emotions mars her works—either they're too crude depictions of classical scenes with "the idea of woman acting out the part of a revengeful mischief towards man" (45) or in

the case of her private drawings, they are domestic scenes marred by an odd woman lurking in the background. These domestic scenes are described as powerful because since Miriam has no husband or family, she is "idealizing a truer and lovelier picture of the life that belongs to a woman than an actual acquaintance with some of its hard and dusty facts could have inspired" (41). Even in her successes, the narrative voice denigrates her since in this sense, the power of her work comes from her lack of knowledge about her subject matter.

Miriam appears to have some reservations about living an unconventional life. She shows Donatello a dummy that serves as a model and compares it to traditional women in the way that it is a "poor puppet" that "pretends to assume the most varied duties and perform many parts in life" (41). She says, " Would I were like her" (41). She feels that her life would be easier if she could hide her feelings, which turn out to be accurate since the brief expression of disgust seen on her face spurs her lover Donatello to commit a murder. Miriam is doomed to suffer for her part in this crime. An excess of feeling leads to murder in Miriam's case, but it also accounts for the popularity of her art.

The other female artist, Hilda is the opposite of Miriam in a variety of ways. Hilda is completely conventional, although she too is an artist. Hilda comes to Rome because "she has a decided genius for the pictorial art". She is an orphan with some money. Once in Rome, she is awe-struck by the art and unable to conceive of herself as being capable of being an original artist. Losing confidence, she devotes herself to being a copyist. Her specialty is reproducing small sections of masterpieces. Hilda is "no machine" but "she wrought religiously, and therefore wrought a miracle" (51). In describing Hilda, Hawthorne uses the occasion to comment unfavorably on women

writers, by saying, “Would it have been worth Hilda’s while to relinquish this office for the sake of giving the world a picture or two which it would call original; pretty fancies of snow and moonlight; the counterpart of so many feminine achievements in literature!” (51). Hilda instead takes a traditional path and chooses to be a “handmaid of old magicians” (51). Joel Pfister points out that it is surprising that Hilda seems to share many qualities with Hawthorne’s wife Sophia in light of the fact that Hilda is a somewhat disagreeable character. Sophia was also a copyist (mainly before her marriage) and Hawthorne referred to her as a dove in his letters to her (Pfister 173).

Hilda’s unconventional behavior is permitted because of her purity and religious devotion. Living alone in a high tower and surrounded by doves, Hilda is set apart from the realities of Rome. Her purity is a choice, as she refuses to hear about Miriam’s secrets. Her piety closes her off from being a friend to Miriam, although it is seen as goodness by Kenyon. He believes that she is better than all that is around her. At the end, Hilda is “enshrined and worshipped as a household saint, in the light of her husband’s fireside” (330). Meanwhile, Miriam is on the other side from Hilda, across a “fathomless abyss” (330). Miriam inhabits her own world apart from the pure Hilda since her sins cut her off from traditional society.

Hilda and Miriam exist in their own world—they seem unconcerned with economic realities although they are both selling their artwork for profit. Hawthorne chooses to concentrate on other concerns; namely, Miriam and Donatello’s crime, and the existence of sin. What does get illustrated in this novel, however, is a wealth of detail on the women’s art, and on the art masterpieces that they see in Rome. Hawthorne chooses to ignore stories of success he sees in Rome regarding women artists and ends his novel

in the traditional manner: happiness for the domestic and pious Hilda and regrets for the unconventional and apparently single Miriam who is left to pursue her career but has ruined her reputation. Hawthorne also uses these women artists in order to comment on another form of woman artist, that of the woman writer. Miriam's appeal to feeling in the viewer seems to be a statement about women who write the popular bestsellers, or as Hawthorne said, the "scribbling women." Miriam's works as Hawthorne describe them appeal to the viewer, but lack true technical merit. In his statements about Hilda, he also gives her a backhanded compliment in saying she is better off copying, since her original works would only be pretty but lacking in genius in the same way that her feminine counterparts in literature are. Hawthorne's views on women trying to achieve in any form of art are apparent. He believes that women are not capable of true artistic excellence.

The question of whether women are capable of achieving genius in art was addressed in other works of literature. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps would consider the issue in her own story of a woman artist, *The Story of Avis*. Like Hawthorne, Phelps questions whether women can achieve true artistic genius, but she approaches this subject from a different angle. Phelps interrogates the restrictions that society puts on a woman artist. Hawthorne had considered the restrictions that might be placed on a woman's life in terms of whether the woman could find a husband if she broke conventions. Phelps looks at the problem in a different way: whether marriage itself was worth it for a woman and what effect it would have on a successful career.

Phelps, the successful author of *TheGates Ajar* and *TheSilent Partner* , was known for her social criticism and concerns with women's issues. She often addressed

the subject of women and their careers, writing about business owners, factory workers, and in the case of *The Story of Avis*, art. *The Story of Avis* illustrates the difficulties a woman artist has in combining a career and a family. The character of Avis fails to achieve happiness by the end of the story, but Phelps attempts to paint a brighter picture for future generations of women. Even though Avis suffers and is unable to reach a balance between work and family, she sees hope for her daughter's generation. Phelps in later years called Avis her "favorite heroine" (*Chapters* 157).

Phelps continually addressed the subject of working women, both in fiction and nonfiction. One of her earliest successes as a writer was a short story "The Tenth of January" published in 1868. The story aimed to provoke outrage over working conditions in mills. In the same period, she also published a series of essays on the subject of work. An essay of 1867 called "What Shall They Do?" gives practical advice on how to start a career. Part of Phelps' advice is that women would be "better and happier" if they "would go into a telegraph-office" or "stand behind a counter," but women think these jobs are beneath them. Phelps attempts to encourage women to take any type of job (as long as they don't all stay in the same field, like teaching, since that would lower wages). In January 1868, she published a follow-up essay explaining the reasons women should work called "Why Shall they Do It?" She writes:

> We are not put into this world merely to be successful in business, to be educated, to be refined, to be "accomplished," to preside well at a dinner-party and enjoy Ristori or appreciate Dante, nor to gather to ourselves rare culture of literature, art, society. We are not even put here to be happy. We are put here mainly to be disciplined and to be of use (219).

The idea of being "useful" is a concept that Phelps returned to again and again. She emphasizes it also in her autobiography, tying it to her experience of being paid for writing. When she gets her first check for writing, she says, "I felt that I had suddenly acquired value—to myself, to my family, and to the world" (22 Chapters). In *The Story of Avis*, Phelps considers the question of value and puts a twist on it by considering what happens when a wife is able to earn more than her husband, and the difficulties that will ensue. While the title character Avis is engrossed in being a successful artist, Phelps enlarges the context of the story to comment upon careers, marriage, and family.

Phelps witnessed firsthand the difficulties of combining a family and a career. Her mother was a well-known writer who died in childbirth when Phelps was eight. Phelps took her first name in tribute. In writing about her mother's career, Phelps says "Her last book and her last baby came together, and killed her" (*Chapters* 12). It is an experience that will be reflected in *The Story of Avis* as Avis is nearly killed from an illness brought on by too much work. But in the story, Phelps manages to find a solution that wasn't possible for her mother.

Much of *The Story of Avis* is similar to Phelps's own story. Phelps's father Austin Phelps was a professor of theology at Andover Theological Seminary, as is Avis Dobell's father. And the character of Avis is inspired to pursue a career after reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, which is how Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was inspired to start a career in writing. *Aurora Leigh* is about a woman's quest to be a poet and be successful, and it ends in marriage. Phelps also writes about a woman's quest, but the marriage comes in the middle of the story, and hope doesn't come until the next

generation. Phelps seems to be making a statement that the conditions were not yet right for a professional woman with a family.

Avis is the story of a woman embarking on a career as an artist and finding it stifled by marriage and children. The character of Avis Dobell decides early on she wishes to be an artist. She has a revelation when she's 16: "it had all come to her very plainly—why she was alive; what God meant by making her" (32). Avis tells her father: "I have decided this morning that I want to be an artist. I want to be educated as an artist, and paint pictures all my life" (33). Avis is clear on what being an artist entails as her father tries to dissuade her. A clear distinction is made between being a copyist and being an original artist. Her father doesn't take her seriously, saying, "Make yourself happy with your paint-box, if you like. That was a very pretty little copy which you made me of Sir Forrester" (33). Avis says, "I do not want to make pretty little copies," and she quotes from *Aurora Leigh*: "I who love my art would never wish it lower to suit my stature" (34). In Avis's eyes, being a copyist is beneath her and beneath her talents. She strongly desires to be an original painter.

There are similarities between Avis and the character of Hilda in *The Marble Faun*. In fact, Deborah Barker argues that Avis in many ways is "feminist revision of *The Marble Faun*" (31). Like Hilda, Avis is compared to doves, such as when her father writes: "It is the custom in the training of carrier-doves, to let them all loose from their places of confinement into the upper air; but those which do not return readily without interference are cast aside as too dull to be worth the trouble of further education" (35). In *The Marble Faun*, Hilda is compared to a dove because she lives in a high tower, and in some ways, is pure and chaste. Phelps chooses to employ the dove comparison to

show how Avis's father lacks imagination, a charge she may have wished to make on her own father, Austin Phelps, who was well-known for conservative writing.

Throughout the work, Avis is compared to traditional women. Linda Huf notes that woman artists always have foils—a friend that is more frivolous, with a girlish name (8). In this case, Avis has a friend named Coy, who exemplifies traditional womanhood. Coy softens Avis in a way, since she is conventionally feminine, yet loves Avis. This may be a sign to the reader that Avis is not unlovable. Along with Coy, another female counterpart is Avis's Aunt Chloe, an example of the hard-working spinster aunt, similar to characters Harriet Beecher Stowe often describes. In this way, Phelps utilizes three distinctly different types of femininity: the traditional young wife, Coy; the traditional domestic woman, Aunt Chloe, and the new type of woman, Avis. Even though Avis tries to lead a more unusual type of life, Aunt Chloe and Coy still support her.

While Avis is still single, she has an idea for what she believes will be her masterpiece—a painting of the Sphinx. Avis has a vision (after drinking some sort of liquor) and sees various subjects for paintings in her mind. Some subjects she believes are too advanced for her, such as Christ under the crown of thorns, and even suffering laborers with "forms and faces grown gaunt with toil." In her eyes, she hasn't suffered enough or is not worthy enough to paint those types of subjects. What she does end up doing is deciding that she will speak for women after she has a remarkable vision of women walking as if in a parade before her:

> They swept before her in file, in procession, in groups. They blushed at altars; they knelt in convents; they leered in the streets; they sang to their babes; they stopped and stitched in black attics; they trembled beneath

> summer moons; they starved in cellars; they fell by the blow of a man's hand; they sold their souls for bread; they dashed their lives out in swift streams; they wrung their hands in prayer" (82-3)

After the group of women goes by, she has a vision of the Sphinx: "The mystery of womanhood stood before her, and said, "Speak for me," (83). Avis believes that this will be her subject, and it can be seen as what Phelps also is trying to do with her work: speak for the women who can't speak out.

Avis marries Philip and her career is halted. She at first tries to dissuade Philip by saying that her career is her main work. Avis says, "Marriage is a profession to a woman… And I have my work; I have my work!" (71). Avis eventually gives in when Philip comes back from the Civil War wounded. She says, "It was his physical ruin and helplessness which appealed to the strength in her" (99). Only when Philip is weak does he win Avis's love fully.

Philip's weakness may convince Avis to marry him, but his helplessness eventually ends her career. He loses his job and Avis takes more responsibility for supporting the family. She is haunted by the idea of supporting her family: "She could not sleep. The shadow of their disordered future, of her own dishonored aspiration, of bedraggled ideals, of clambering fears set heavily upon her" (178). She tries to become the main breadwinner for the family.

She finishes a portrait for money and falls deathly ill, mirroring what happened to Phelps's own mother who fell ill after finishing a book. But Avis doesn't die–she stops focusing on her career and worries about making her husband happy. Avis's old painting teacher is displeased and believes she's wasting her talents painting portraits for fast

money. The teacher equates portraits with copying and says, "You are to make no more portraits" because "you must create: you cannot copy" (205). Avis compromises her ideals to support her family.

Eventually, she and Philip travel to improve his poor health. They regain some passion but Philip dies. When she returns home, she finds her artistic talents are gone: her fingers are stiff and she paints in a style that is no longer popular. Avis reflects on her career and believes: "…if her feeling for that one man, her husband, had not eaten into and eaten out the core of her life, left her a riddled, withered thing, spent and rent, wasted by the autocracy of a love as imperious as her own nature, and as deathless as her own soul. But she would do it all over again—all, all!" (244). her love outweighs the loss of her career. In fact, Avis thinks "she might have painted better pictures—not worse—for loving Philip and the children, that this was what God meant for her, for all of them, once, long ago" (244). She thinks she could have been a better artist, but somehow didn't have the talent to combine art and a family. She looks to the future and says, "It would be easier for her daughter to be alive, and be a woman, than it had been for her" (247).

Phelps is unable to conceive of a happy ending for Avis. She hints at it by expressing the idea that a family would make Avis's art stronger, but fails to illustrate this idea—instead she believes that the next generation will be stronger. To Phelps, the professional artist could not combine her career and her family—one would have to be eliminated. Phelps's Avis has something in common with Susanna Paine, the idea of making a living by painting portraits. Unfortunately, in Avis's eyes, it's not expressing her artistic ability in an original way. Phelps has Avis consider questions that were not hinted at in earlier works like that of Paine. By 1877 when Avis was published, Phelps

was concerned not with work alone, but with work that was meaningful. It is a subject that Louisa May Alcott will also address in her writings.

Louisa May Alcott, writing in the same time period as Phelps, also uses female artists as characters. Elaine Showalter notes in the introduction to *Alternative Alcott* that Alcott uses this figure frequently in her works. Alcott's use of art and artists in her works reflects a question that she continually refers to—that of the relation of work to the family. As she does in Little Women, Alcott frequently retells stories from her own family's history, and in the case of female artists, Alcott had an example in her own sister May—who lived and worked in Europe as an artist until her death at a fairly young age. A short story "Psyche's Art," examines the qualities that make a true artist. The title character Psyche is torn between caring for brothers, sister, and father and her art. After her young sister dies, Psyche stops working. By the end of the story, she has discovered the secret. She focuses on her household duties and then says, "when my leisure does come I shall know how to use it, for my head is full of ambitious plans, and I feel I can do something *now*" (225). The statement is that trying to divide time between household duties and art is impossible, so it makes more sense to do the household dutiesfirst and the art in the free time. Alcott also indicates that taking care of household duties will free a person's mind—since they won't be worrying about what needs to be taken care of. Psyche originally says, "I love beauty so much that I not only want to possess it myself, but to gain the power to see it in all things, and the art of reproducing it with truth" (213). By the end, she finds that caring for her family makes her better able to produce art because she's happy.

In a story for children, Alcott provides another example of a female artist. In "Sunny Side" a section of the children's novel An *Old Fashioned Girl* published in 1870, Alcott has her heroine visit a boarding house where single women live and work. She writes about a character that sculpts a "beautiful woman, bigger, lovelier, and more imposing than any woman I ever saw" (230). The statue has symbols at her feet of needle, pen, palette, broom, and "ballot-box will show she has earned the right to use them" (231). The artist is completely at peace, living with other single women. In the boarding house, women seem happy and busy. Alcott has given a vision of one way to have a career—leave out family obligations and remain with friends. However, in Alcott's own life, family always came first and this idea is generally reflected in her writing.

Alcott had an example of a female artist in her own family, her sister May. May had a career as an artist and even published a book about her experiences *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do it cheaply* in 1879. May lived and studied in Paris and had some success as a still-life she paints is accepted to the Salon of 1877. She noted that 2000 pieces are chosen out of 8500 works (Ticknor 192). Living in Europe seemed to make the difference for May. In a letter she said she was happy in Europe because "I mean to combine painting and family, and show it's a possibility if let alone…In America this cannot be done, but foreign life is so simple and free, we can live for our own comfort, not for company" (278). Shewas describing the freer social conventions in Europe.

May married and in 1879, in a letter to a family friend, Louisa May Alcott writes, "May says—'to combine art & matrimony is almost too much bliss.' I hope she will find

it so & prove "Avis' in the wrong" (Letters 228). This reference to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis* shows clearly that Alcott was familiar with Phelps's work.

Alcott began a story that appeared to be based on her sister's life, "Diana and Persis" in 1879 and left it unfinished. Aspects of May's life are in the story, as May moved to Paris, married, and had a child. Before her death she combined all aspects of life—she was an artist, wife, and mother. Alcott left the manuscript unfinished but it is clear "Diana and Persis" was inspired by her sister May's life. The two heroines, Persis and Diana are friends who studied art together. Persis orPercy as she is referred to, is a painter and Diana is a sculptor. Percy goes to Paris to paint and ends up getting married and having a child. Diana remains single but meets a widower at the end with a child. Like May, Percy marries and plans to continue creating art.

Alcott changes some aspects of her sister's story. Unlike May, Percy doesn't keep up with her work. Her husband has more ambitions for her than she herself. He is jealous of her "rousing the old ambitions" (419). Even though he seems jealous, Percy's husband delivers a strong statement on women's right's and a woman's ability to combine career and family. He says, "I believe a woman can and ought to have both if she has the power and courage to win them. A man expects them, achieves them, why is not a woman's life to be as full and free as his" (424). Percy realizes that an American husband would be less likely to admit to such sentiments. By the end, Percy and her husband both believe a woman can be a wife and an artist, while the unmarried woman Diana has doubts.

Diana questions whether art and marriage can be combined, and she refuses to believe what is before her. She sees Percy and her husband together but doesn't think it can

continue to work successfully. She is adamantly a believer in the notion that women can not create art if burdened with a family and husband, but experiences change her mind. Diana ends up falling in love with widower and child, and her love makes her art richer.

Alcott chose not to finish the story and have it end in death like her own sister's story. She expresses ambivalence about Percy's happiness through the character of Diana who refuses to believe Percy is as happy as she claims to be. Natania Rosenfeld argues that Alcott found it unbearable to have to keep working while her sister found happiness and that this led to her somewhat weak support of the character of Percy (17). Her limited support is apparent in the fact that Diana continues to question the idea of a married woman with a child continuing to create art, although Percy shows her she is capable of doing it. Percy's career has paused but she believes her art will be even more accomplished.

Diana could be seen as a representation of Alcott herself. Alcott was famously single and continued creating art and supporting her family, including her sister May. Alcott's writing allowed her sister to study in Paris and allowed her to live her life freely. Alcott does have the character of Diana find love at the end, an ending that would not happen in Louisa May Alcott's own life. She would, however, raise a child—her sister May's daughter.

Alcott's unfinished story is a brief examination of the possibility of happiness for female artists. It is a much more nuanced look at the subject than what was evident in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. However, by not finishing the story, Alcott does not have to deal with the after-effects of marriage, the way Phelps does in *The Story of Avis*. Like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Alcott sees the complexities that arise when women attempt

to combine family and a career. And like Phelps, she will continue to interrogate and critique notions of work, women, and families in other works.

CHAPTER 4

"To work out their own objects in their own way": Women's Clubs and Women's Novels of the 1870's

In 1868, the journalist Jane C. Croly was barred from a dinner for journalists at the New York Press Club honoring Charles Dickens on account of her sex. As a result, Croly decided to start a women's club, known as Sorosis. Croly's purpose was not to campaign for the rights of female journalists, but rather to provide an organized meeting place for professional women. Although women did have reform societies for various purposes such as temperance or suffrage, Croly envisioned a need for a non-secular group affiliated with no particular cause. She was at the forefront of an idea that gained great currency. Almost simultaneously, but independent of Croly, a similar group was forming in Boston, the New England Women's Club. Like Sorosis, the New England Women's Club supported no specific cause but instead was aimed at bettering the lives of women.

As Sorosis and the New England Women's Club were forming, women authors were also considering the same types of concern—all centered around women and work—such as the search for meaningful work, and the desire to meet and share ideas with women of different classes. Three authors in particular addressed these questions between 1871 and 1873. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps in *The Silent Partner* (1871) tells the story of two women, a middle-class mill owner and a factory girl, who attempt to bridge class divides and help each other overcome barriers raised by their gender. In *Work: A Story of Experience*, published in 1873, Louisa May Alcott describes the attempts of a

young woman to support herself by her own labor. Alcott's heroine learns from different types of working women and by the novel's end has a goal of bring women together from all walks of life in an effort to improve their situations. And, also in 1873, Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *We and Our Neighbors* which approaches the subject of female empowerment from a different angle—that of a young, married woman. Stowe's heroine seeks to better her life and also further her husband's career. These three novels share a common theme—women searching for meaning in their lives through work and with the help of other women. These novels coincide with the efforts of women's clubs to reach precisely the same goals. What their novels examine is shifting definitions of womanhood and attempts to move into the public sphere—the same types of issues the women's clubs are formed around.

Charitable work had long had its organizations run by women, but Sorosis was the earliest women's club. Its founder, Jane C. Croly was a journalist of some success, writing under the name of Jennie June. She wrote for periodicals such as *Demorest's, Frank Leslie's Weekly*, and *Graham's*. She also published collections of her writings in book form under such titles as *JennieJuneia* and *Talks on Women's Topics*. Early in her career, she showed a concern for women wasting their lives. For example, in an early series "Jennie June's Letters" published in the New York *Democratic Review* in 1858, she addresses the subject of working women by telling the story of a young married woman who is bored and unhappy. The heroine Kate is influenced by the wrong types of people and briefly becomes a spiritualist. Croly writes that Kate is "busy receiving the most flattering message, or 'communications,' from St. John, St. Paul, Daniel Webster, George Washington, and John Jacob Astor" (396). In her case, a lack of meaningful

work leads to frivolous concerns. After her husband loses his money, Kate changes from a "spoiled, petted" woman to someone who is "lively, active, and brave" since she had to assume control over limited household expenses and earn money by writing. Croly's message is repeated throughout and she writes: "Listless inactivity, or living without an object, is the great wrong beneath which our fair countrywomen pine and die" (393). The idea of having an "object" or purpose in life is an idea that will figure prominently in the plans for Sorosis.

Since Croly had an established reputation, she seemed shocked when barred from the New York Press Club. She describes in her history of Sorosis the "somewhat churlish treatment" she received, and that this treatment soon led her to "the idea of a club composed of women only" which would represent the "active interests of women and create a bond of fellowship between them" (15). In describing her ideas to prospective members at a preliminary meeting, Croly stated that many women, herself included, wanted a "more intimate companionship with women," especially with women who were interested in the thought and progress of the day" (16). The women gathered at the meeting felt the club should be "hospitable to women of different minds, degrees, and habits of work and thought" and that the club should not consist solely of "any special class of women" (16). However, the early members were sent invitations to join. Croly selected the well-known poet Alice Cary to be the first president. Croly writes of the importance of the undertaking:

> …at this period no one of those connected with the undertaking had ever heard of a "woman's club" or of any secular organization composed

> entirely of women, for the purpose of bringing together all kinds of women together to work out their own objects in their own way (18)

Croly reiterates a message that Sorosis desired that "women should come together—all together not from one church, or one neighborhood, or one walk of life, but from all quarters, and take counsel together" (18-19). Again, Croly stressed the importance of having different types of women being a part of Sorosis. She recognized that a search for an "object" was not simply confined to one type of woman, that many women shared the same types of uncertainties and questions.

As the group was sending out letters to prospective members, they learned of a similar group forming in Boston, which would become the New England Women's Club. Kate Field wrote to Sorosis, "The Boston women are also forming a club, but they have got men with them, and know better what they want. They will accomplish something definite and practical" (19). Field went on to add that no one would understand the name Sorosis and "you will be laughed at" (19). Even with these concerns, the name was adopted.

While Sorosis's aims were somewhat ambiguous, the name itself signified movement. Sorosis was defined in its certificate of incorporation (obtained December 1868) as "an aggregation" and "a growth to culmination." Its charter defined the purpose of the club as "the promotion of agreeable and useful relations among women of literary, artistic, and scientific tastes" and aimed to "render the female sex helpful to each other, and actively benevolent in the world" (24). While Croly had envisioned different types of women, it was emphatically a middle-class organization. There were no factory workers on its membership roster.

By 1869, Croly listed a wide variety of professions for the members of Sorosis, including artists, authors, editors, philanthropists, physicians, and writers on science. Some of the more famous members were Fanny Fern, Alice and Phoebe Cary, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith. Sorosis met twice a month, and generally lectures were given. Half of the meetings were devoted to business matters. The remaining meetings were divided between four committees: literature, art, music, and drama (Blair 25). The members sought a deeper examination of culture and women's part in culture. Some titles of lectures were, "Women as delineated by the Old Masters"; "Is the woman given us by women novelists more true to life than the woman drawn by men?;" and "In which profession can a woman do the most good: that of the ministry, the law, pedagogy, or medicine?" (Blair 28-9). Sorosis attempted to redefine women's issues and move beyond domestic matters and child-rearing. Although Croly and many of the members of Sorosis were wives and mothers, they were interested in matters beyond these traditional concerns of women, and Sorosis met that need.

Eventually, Croly moved the club towards more direct political action. In response to the growing suffrage movement led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Croly proposed that rather than agitate for the vote, women in all communities should form their own legislative bodies and make decisions on issues concerning women (Blair 40). Croly called the idea the "Women's Parliament." One meeting of the Parliament was held, but the idea lacked support and quickly died out (Blair 43). Sorosis did spread out by creating the nationwide Association for Advancement of Women (AAW) in October 1873. This group was intended to follow the lead of Sorosis, but with a larger membership spread out over the country (Blair 45). The AAW held conferences

annually. At these conferences, called "Congresses," Sorosis members and New England Women's Club members were in attendance. Other prominent women such as Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps attended (Blair 48). Jane Croly eventually disassociated from the AAW, possibly because of president Julia Ward Howe's emphasis on suffrage (Blair 52).

An organization quite similar to Sorosis was the New England Woman's Club, founded at roughly the same time. The New England's Woman's Club, founded by Caroline Severance in Boston in 1868, was quite similar to Sorosis in that it supported women's interests. Severance was a reformer having worked for abolition, temperance, dietary reform, and suffrage. Many of the New England Woman's Club's members came from reform movements (Blair 31). Its first meeting was a month before that of Sorosis. And like Sorosis, its goals were somewhat vague. The founders of the New England Woman's Club wrote, "It's plan involves no special pledge to any one form of activity, but implies only a womanly interest in all the thought and effort on behalf of woman, and of society in general, for which women are so largely responsible" (qtd in Blair 32). Julia Ward Howe was the president from 1871 to 1910. The New England Woman's Club was involved in more practical projects as compared to Sorosis, and set up projects like the Horticultural School which trained women for careers in horticulture. They also worked to elect women to the Boston School Committee (Blair 35). Elizabeth Stuart Phelps gave a lecture to them on dress reform (38). Both Sorosis and New England Woman's Club wanted an association of women's clubs. Blair states that both clubs had "a dual commitment to extending woman's influence and to improving the world by employing women's superior sensibilities" (118). These clubs, Sorosis and New England Woman's

Club encouraged professionalism and women working together to improve themselves. The clubs make forays into working with working-class women, yet mainly remain movements for the middle class.

At roughly the same time that Sorosis and New England Woman's Club were being formed, activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony founded The Revolution, a feminist newspaper in 1868. They then started in 1869 the National Women's Suffrage Association, a suffragist group that met in New York City. The key idea was universal suffrage but they also branched into other areas—such as divorce reform, and equal wages for women. Stanton spoke on sexual liberation, which included such topics as rape laws and the right to refuse one's husband, while Anthony had a special interest in working women.

Sorosis was offered an opportunity to join with Anthony's group, but Croly formally refused to align with the Working Women's Association (Blair 24). The WWA was founded by Anthony in 1868 at the offices of the *Revolution* from typesetters who were fired after strike. Soon, factory workers were made to not feel welcome. Ellen Carol DuBois makes a distinction that while suffragists wanted working women to support their cause; their organizations were encouraging the middle-class, such as authors and businesswomen. The Working Women's Association collapsed in 1869, while the National Women's Suffrage Association remained active (DuBois160).

In the midst of all the public discourse on women, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps added her voice to the debate with the publication of *The Silent Partner* in 1871. Phelps was a well-known author, at the time, mainly due to the success of *The Gates Ajar*, an 1868 novel describing heaven. Phelps was active in reform movements of the 1870's,

particularly dress reform. In fact, she delivered a paper on dress reform to the New England Women's Club. In *The Silent Partner*, however, she is not concerned with dress reform. Instead, *The Silent Partner* addresses the inequities of the industrial system and the hardships imposed on women. And like the emphasis of the women's clubs, Phelps has two female characters who reach out to one another. Phelps describes what exactly happens when women from different backgrounds attempt to work with each other, complicating the ideals the clubs aspired to but had no experience with in real life.

Phelps had been interested in the plight of factory workers earlier and one of her first successes as a writer came from the story "The Tenth of January" published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1868. "The Tenth of January" is a sentimental short story about a factory girl who dies in the collapse of a mill. While Phelps has said she was deeply moved by the real life disaster at a local mill, the story attempts to evoke pity in the reader with a tale of a crippled girl who loses her lover and then dies in a mill collapse.

In *The Silent Partner*, Phelps again details the harsh conditions of a textile mill by describing the specifics of jobs in the mill and the living conditions of the workers. However, in this novel she brings in a middle-class woman to learn from the workers about their lives. Rather than merely showing factory girls to be brave and overworked and thus inspire feelings of sympathy from the reader, Phelps tries to place her reader in the midst of the situation, by having a middle-class woman experience the hardships of factory life from observation and from speaking to the workers themselves.

Perley Kelso and Sip Garth, the two heroines of the novel, at first glance are easily recognizable types of character that appear in novels of the time: the genteel lady or True Woman and the Factory Girl. Although by the 1870's the cult of domesticity was

not as strong as it once was, its strictures for acceptable female behavior still existed. Perley exhibits all of the appropriate markers of a lady: highly educated, devoted to her fiancée and sheltered from the world. She also appears to be the voice of moral reason as she lectures Sip on the evils of the theater. Sip, on the other hands, represents the factory girl: dusty and disheveled in appearance and rude in manner. What is interesting is what Phelps does with these characters, which is an attempt to move beyond the reader's expectations and show the complexity and contradiction that these women face as they question their status in life. Perley and Sip both have distinct voices and provide two completely opposite perspectives on a woman's place in society—but both find common ground in that they suffer injustices specifically because they are women.

Sip is first seen through Perley's eyes, and as the chapter is entitled, from "Across the Gulf." The gulf is the divide in the two women's manner of living. Perley, on the way to the opera, seated on "perfumed cushions" in her carriage watches the "manful struggles of a girl in a plaid dress" out in a storm (17). Their eyes meet, and they talk. Phelps keeps the class distinctions clear, as Perley is always referred to as a "lady" while Sip is a "girl," although both are the same age, twenty-three years old. Perley tells Sip the theater is no place for a young girl. Sip is not intimidated and rebukes Perley for warning her about the theater while she herself was on the way to the opera. Sip rightly points out that there shouldn't be a difference. She also tells Perley that she knows nothing about her life and "I won't be pitied by carriage-folks!" (23). Perley is shaken by her lack of deference and says to her fiancée, "I am not used to such people. She was coarse and hurt me" (31). Despite Perley's good intentions, differences of class raise problems. Even though Perley speaks to Sip because of her interest, her warnings cause

Sip to feel she's being looked down on by someone wealthier and more refined than she. And Sip's honesty in speaking to Perley causes Perley discomfort as she is not used to hearing someone speak bluntly to her, especially another woman. It has already been shown in the novel that Perley and her society friends speak to each other without thinking and do not speak of anything but gossip and frivolities.

Although Perley and Sip are from two distinctly different classes, factory owner and factory worker, they share some similarities. Both lost their mothers when they were young, and more recently, their fathers—both killed in accidents. In effect, Sip and Perley are orphans. However, Perley has her father's money to support her and resides in a mansion. Sip meanwhile has to take care of her sister Catty, who is deaf, mute, and retarded. Sips's father contributed no money to the household since he was an alcoholic, so his death doesn't cause Sip any additional economic hardships. Instead, she no longer has to worry about him beating her and Catty. In this way, his death frees her. In the same way, Perley is allowed the space to explore unconventional life choices since her father is not there to reinforce the rigid rules governing a middle-class woman's life.

Perley's refined background and training as a lady has kept her in the dark about her father's business. She has little knowledge of the world beyond her social circle consisting of well-bred society friends and a wealthy fiancée. Taking care of her fiancée is Perley's main responsibility. She takes a "keen, appreciative enjoyment in having a lazy lover; he gave her something to do; he was an occupation in himself" (12). Other than her fiancée, Perley has no "object" in her life. A curiosity about Sip's life draws in Perley and causes her to spend more time at the mill. Perley's assumptions are continually challenged when she hears the facts or sees the hard truths. She believes that

workers in the mills are treated fairly and get “good prompt pay” and “so much exercise and air” (50-1). Sip matter-of-factly enlightens Perley on the realities of the conditions at the mill and suggests that the long hours worked by her mother caused the disabilities of her sister Catty. Sip’s mother worked for fourteen hours on the day Catty was born, something Sip thinks may account for Catty’s disabilities. Innocently, Perley asks who could need money so badly that they would work for such a long period and Sip replies, “Folks don’t do such things for fun” (53).

Sip is the entry point into the lives of the workers. Perley becomes familiar with the neighborhood of the workers when going to visit Sip, and then learns even more when Sip takes walks with her. Eventually, Perley meets new people on her own. In one of the many scenes in the novel that mirror earlier scenes, Sip tells Perley not to go out at night in the factory town Five Falls, just as Perley had told Sip she was out late and shouldn’t be going to the theater. Perley tells her she has the right to be out as late as the mill girls, but Sip warns her about the young men in the factory town. Perley says, “I supposed they would feel a kind of interest, or respect—“ and Sip asks her, “What reason have you ever given them…to feel any special interest or respect for you?” (126). Perley agrees with her and realizes that her notions of class privilege may not apply in the world of the workers. The young men may not treat her deferentially, but as a sexual object, a fate Sip seems to be trying to shield Perley from.

Perley visits Sip’s room and is surprised by the magnitude of Sip’s responsibilities: washing, cleaning, cooking, and caring for Catty. Again, Perley’s misconceptions are challenged. She hasn’t realized that other women don’t have servants to take care of their houses. Perley asks, “you cannot have all this to do after you have stood eleven hours

and a half at your loom?", although the answer is obvious (96). Taking offense at Perley's pity, Sip lashes out at Perley's class and says she doesn't usually speak to "carriage people" meaning the middle class. In an effort to defend her class, Perley says "her kind of folks have kind hearts." Defiantly, Sip asks "Who wants their pity? And who cares what's in their hearts?" (94). She resists efforts to become an object of sympathy.

After her father's death, Perley attempts to gain influence in the running of the mill. It would seem that she would be able to do so since she is now a part-owner. However, her attempts are fruitless. She wants to take over her father's position as partner in Hayle and Kelso Mills but the current partners Maverick Hayle, Perley's fiancee and Hayles' father say her inherited shares of stock will make her a silent partner only. Perley says, "I do not like to think that a great many people may be affected by the use of my property in ways over which I can have no possible control" (63). She says she doesn't mind entrusting them with the care of her property; it's the people she worries about. When Perley asks point blank for the partnership Maverick says, "If you won't take a gallant dismissal of a foolish subject, then I *do* refuse it to you because you *are* a young lady" (66). She questions the senior partner on the number of hours the operatives will work and her face "changed color slightly" (67) showing that she was upset which she doesn't say to Maverick or his father. Her efforts to run the mill are rejected because the partners can't imagine a woman of their class having an occupation and being on equal footing with them. They are accustomed to seeing Perley at social events. Even though she answers every one of their objections, they refuse to allow her a place in management. She offers to take a position in the accounting room or even on the

factory floor to gain experience, but the partners treat this request as a joke. She has equal footing with the partners due to her inherited stock, but is unable to convince the partners to hear her voice.

Perley's meeting with the partners illustrates how isolated she is within her own class. Her gender sets her apart. It is clear to see why Perley wants to work with the mill-hands. Her position with them is lofty—they care about what she has to say. The partners don't hear a word she says, while the workers at least are more likely to engage in conversation with her. They speak to her about their concerns and are interested in her responses. The workers are willing to teach her about their world. Sip is willing to enlighten Perley on the realities of the mill, unlike the partners. Shut out of management of the mill, she attempts to assist the workers as an unofficial benevolent worker.

Sip, like Perley is limited by her gender in her efforts to find a new occupation. Perley tries to help Sip find other work but Sip fails at a variety of jobs that were traditionally reserved for women: cook, nursemaid, waitress, seamstress, and sales clerk. Something goes wrong at every job and Sip believes she's only fitted for the factory, for "the dirt and the roughness" (200). She assumes she was born to be a factory worker but is not completely bitter about it. She also refuses one of the more traditional ways to advance a career, education, which she feels she is too old for. Sip's background and class position continually separate her from Perley in that Perley has hope for the future, while Sip does not see improvement as possible.

But whenever it seems that Perley and Sip are too far apart to be close to one another, a new similarity between them emerges. For both**,** marriage is seen as a hindrance and undesirable. In Perley's case she turns down proposals from two men:

Maverick the partner at the mill and Stephen Garrick, a former factory worker who has been promoted, in essence, to take the junior partner job Perley was interested in. First, Perley tells Maverick that she doesn't love him and breaks her engagement. Her fiancée, a perfect match for a well-born traditional woman, doesn't fit in with Perley's new purpose in life. She then turns down Stephen Garrick after he professes his love. Garrick is an interesting Horatio Alger type figure. He has worked his way up from the factory floor to management. But in his journey, he tries to bring other worker up with him. He says, "as fast and as far as I got out of the mud myself to bring other people with me" (146). He seems a fitting partner for Perley, as he has seen her work and been impressed. In fact, he does the same type of work himself. But, in her eyes, marriage will end her career. She says, "I have no time to think of love and marriage" and "That is a business, a trade, by itself to women" (260). She believes that marriage will end any kind of freedom she has.

While Perley refuses marriage because of a desire to keep working, Sip refuses because she wants to break a tradition of working in factories in her family. Believing that if she marries her children will become factory workers, Sip turns down a proposal from Dirk, a fellow factory worker saying, "I'll never bring children into this world to be factory children, and to be factory boys and girls, and to be factory men and women, and to see the sights I've seen, and to bear the things I've borne, and to run the risks I've run, and to grow up as I've grown up, and to stop where I've stopped,--never" (287). She compares herself to slaves who choose not to bear children who are not free. Sip believes that if she had children "they'd never get out of the mills. It's from generation to

generation. It couldn't be helped. I know. It's in the blood"(288). Seeing no other possibility, she chooses not to marry the man she loves.

While Sip's work is clearly defined, Perley's work is not so specific. Her career is enough to keep her from marrying, but it is a unique type of career. She is not exactly a businesswoman, since she has no control over the mill. Her projects include building a library for the workers and a passing reference is made to Perley's "model tenements, so it appears that she has improved the workers' housing. Those are the tangible results of her work. Her work also encompasses intangible and more traditional women's work: visiting the sick, comforting those who have lost loved ones. Even though this type of work is usually the province of women, Stephen Garrick performs these duties as well. He falls in love with Perley after he continually sees her in "sick-rooms and in the house of mourning" and "by death-beds and over graves" (255). She also has social gatherings where she invites society friends and workers. Her gatherings are radical in the respect that once the factory workers are dressed up, it is difficult to tell the classes apart.
In trying to explain Perley's work, Sip gives an account of Perley's successes:

> There's those of us here, young girls of us,…that she saved from
> being what you wouldn't see in here to-night. There's little children
> here that would be little devils unless it was for her. There's men of us
> with rum to fight, and boys in prison, and debts to pay, and hearts
> like hell, and never a friend in this world or the other but her. (238-9)

Perley's most significant asset is one that women traditionally used: their moral influence. However, Perley makes it clear that she doesn't consider herself a reformer. She refers herself as a "feeler" since the world is in the dark, and she is groping around, trying to

figure out how to help. In Perley's view, a reformer was someone more radical than herself. Although Perley tries to move beyond gender restrictions, she retains some ideas of what is ladylike and what is not, and to her, being a reformer is not something a cultured woman would engage in.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps had clear ideas on what constituted a reformer. In a biographical essay about an activist, Mary Livermore, Phelps wrote:

> Reform is a hot-headed charger, dragging at its chariot-wheels a hundred eccentricities. Quiet people look on warily at the cranks and quips, the mixed motives, the disorder, the crudeness and rudeness, the ignorance and mischief which often follow the onrush of progress. (Phelps, *Our Famous Women*, 410)

In this piece, Phelps is describing a woman who does reform work and is "sound and sane." If Phelps sees reformers as "crude" and "rude," it would make sense that Perley wants to disassociate herself from the title. Perley still carries the attributes of gentility into her work.

Perley's gentility serves a practical purpose in a chapter on a proposed strike. The owners of the mill believe they must lower wages or will have to close the mill. The workers, hearing of the wage reduction, form a mob and trap the partners inside their offices. The workers plan to strike and threaten the partners with violence. Perley, hearing of the events, goes in to talk to the partners. She excoriates them for failing to listen to their employees and suggests they simply explain the truth—that they feel it is necessary to lower wages or the mill may go out of business, like other nearby businesses have done. Maverick says it's none of the workers' business why they must reduce wages.

Perley suggests sending Stephen Garrick out to speak to the workers. When that fails to appease them, Perley speaks to the workers herself and tells them to go home. Critics have seen this as showing Phelps' limitations regarding sympathy for the working class[1]. But, in essence, the position Perley places herself in makes perfect sense. Perley takes the partner's words at face value, so that when they claim raising wages will shut the factory down, she believes them. She assumes that a closure would be more detrimental to the worker's financial situations than a lowering of wages. Since she has been shut out of the decision-making of the partners, she has no way of knowing if their claims of impending financial ruin are valid; she therefore makes the decision that would seem to cause the least amount of hardship. It may seem naïve, but in her eyes, she is helping the workers. And, because of her reputation among the workers for telling the truth, they accept her decision, although noting that it would cause them hardship.

Perley's response to the strike illustrates the tenuousness of her position. Her position, such as it is, appears to be that of a charity worker, attempting to improve the lives of the workers. She visits the homes of the workers and talks to them. In this way, she determines what they need, but doesn't have the resources to change their situation permanently. She can open a library reading room in the mill or send an overworked girl to a beach house for a week's vacation, but she cannot convince the partners to make significant changes in the operations of the mill. Still, she has a modicum of power and influence that Sip doesn't possess. Sip merely observes the events taking place although it is through her eyes the resolution is revealed.

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[1] Critics have spent more time discussing this section of the novel than any other. Judith Fetterley and Amy Schrager Lang argue that this scene undercuts any feminist message, that class outweighs gender. William Lynn Watson argues that the scene shows the middle-class protecting itself from the contagion of the workers—their moral and physical diseases.

At the end of the novel, there is a “gulf” between Perley and her society friends—an image that reflects the beginning of the novel with the gulf between Sip and Perley. Perley’s travels into the world of the mill have opened her eyes and made her former life seem shallow. But Perley’s working life has not only separated her from her friends and fiancée, but has placed her in a solitary position. She still lives in a mansion and remains apart from the people she helps. She describes to a friend why she doesn’t work with Sip: “I was only among them at best; Sip is of them; she understands them and they understand her; so I left her to her work, and I keep to my own” (293). At the end of the novel, even with the gulf between Perley and her friends, she is happy. Her friend Fly, who is now Maverick’s wife, says, “this dreary work seems to suit you through and through” (302). Phelps adds, “Perley Kelso’s healthy, happy face took the quiver of a smile” (302).

And although Sip thought she was destined for factory life, in the final chapter of the novel becomes a preacher. Catty dies in an accident, in an allegory of the crucifixion, and Sip hears her words in the following days. Through death, Catty has gained a small measure of influence. Sip had never been very religious but now believes she has a message to spread and people respond to her. Sip’s message is Christian, but she distinguishes herself by saying she has a religion for poor people. She speaks of the words of Christ and says: "He won't be hard on you. Don't you suppose he knows how the lives you live are hard enough” (299). The sermon makes some strong points: don’t blame the rich, and don’t complain about your fate. You are responsible for your own actions. It could arguably be seen as a profoundly conservative message, one that the mill owners and middle class could agree with. However, Sip has moved into a better life. A

preacher, even a street preacher, is a much better position to be in than factory worker. And, even with Perley's entire attempt to help Sip, Sip finds her way on her own.

Sip's success isn't a traditionally professional position. It requires that she stay in her own neighborhood and speak to her own kind of people. Perley and a society friend notice that there are all types of people listening, men and women, young and old—but they are all poor. Also, Phelps notes that Sip has to be in a certain place and that her message is not for everyone: "The muddy little court was an appeal, the square of sky above her head, a peroration. In that little court Sip was eloquent. Here on the parlor sofa, in clean cuffs and your slippers, she harangues you" (295).

The work of Perley and Sip is something that the women's clubs would approve of—they have found their "objects," as Jane Croly refers to it, or a purpose in life. But both remain alone. Perley has moved outside the domestic sphere. Once she is in the public sphere, however, she works alone. It seems odd, since she is in Boston, a city at the time well known for its reform-minded women, but as Perley says she is not a reformer. She has carved out a solitary space. Sip too carries out her work alone but receives appreciation from an audience.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps offers a portrayal of women reaching out to other women but still fixed within their own class. Louisa May Alcott covers a similar theme in *Work: A Story of Experience*, yet her depiction provides a different dimension—that of working class women offering valuable advice to middle-class women. The working-class women are not merely objects of benevolence but instead active participants in the novel, women with experience and insights into life. Alcott's portraits of the workers allow their voices to be heard from the midst of a story of a middle-class woman finding her own identity.

Louisa May Alcott may be more sympathetic to the plight of workers based on her own history. While Phelps supported herself through her writing, Alcott took on the burden of supporting her entire family. Although Bronson Alcott was regarded as one of the most well-known and respected of the Transcendentalists, he had difficulty earning any money or little interest in trying to do so. Louisa provided much of the financial support for the family starting when she was in her teens.

In *Work*, she writes about a young woman, Christie, who earns a living through various occupations and searches for meaningful work. Alcott based the character on aspects of her own life and wrote, "Christie's adventures are many of them my own" (qtd in Elbert 243). By the time *Work* was published in 1873, Alcott was no longer struggling financially owing to the success of *Little Women*. Still, money remained a life-long concern as evident in her journals. She kept a constant account of how much she was paid for her work and what bills the money would be used for. This attention to quotidian concerns gives Alcott's novel a specificity and verisimilitude.

Christie is twenty-one when the novel begins and leaves the farm she lives on with her aunt and uncle. She moves from the country to the city of Boston. Although Christie was brought up on the farm, she is refined and educated owing to the influence of her late mother, who was a teacher. Christie's background suits her for various occupations, but as Joy Kasson notes factory work is never considered as an option, even though that was one of the more common jobs for women in the Boston area (xiv). The labors Christie undertakes are based on Alcott's own experiences, with the notable exception that writing or authorship is not a profession undertaken.

Echoing the same type of dissatisfaction that the women's clubs of the 1860's sought to address, Christie not only seeks a means of support but looks for a job that will offer fulfillment. She states, "I am discontented, because I can't help feeling that there is a better sort of life than this dull one made up of everlasting work, with no object but money" (11). She adds, "I'm willing to work, but I want work that I can put my heart into, and feel that it does good, no matter how hard it is" (11). She has no clear idea on what she means to do, but sets out anyway.

As Christie pursues various occupations, she begins to form a definition of the type of work that is meaningful to her. All work is not equally rewarding. Christie had begun her move into the world of work to become independent, but she soon realized the differences in various types of work and the level of satisfaction offered. Each position she takes has a drawback: being a maid places her in a low social position and requires physical and tedious work, being an actress brings her recognition and praise for her skills but she notes, "She had no thought beyond her art, no desire beyond the commendation of those whose opinion was serviceable, no care for anyone but herself" (41). Working as a governess and a companion allows her to be useful, but in each case complications ensue from entanglements with the lives of the families she works for. The governess position brings a proposal from her mistress's brother; the companion position ends when her girl dies. A job as a seamstress brings her to despair as she sees her friend be fired due to being a fallen woman.

Through her progression of employments, Christie receives support from other working women. Her first job as a maid introduces her to Hepsey, a cook who was formerly a slave. Hepsey's situation puts Christie's troubles into perspective, and

Christie realizes she has privileges due to her race and education. When she complains of the degradation of cleaning her master's boots, Hepsey says, "Dere's more 'gradin' works dan dat, chile, and dem dat's bin 'bliged to do um finds dis sort bery easy" (21). Alcott shows that there are levels of work, and that a white woman doesn't reach the lowest depths compared to slaves.

Christie's search reveals that to her, art for art's sake is not appealing. She observes the social gatherings of the family she works for where stories are read, poems recited, and songs performed. Christie states, "Why don't they do or say something new and interesting, and not keep twaddling on, about art, and music, and poetry, and cosmos? The papers are full of appeals for the poor, reforms of all sorts, and splendid work that others are doing" (25). Christie believes that there is more to life than art and that helping others is essential. She adds that Hepsey's stories interest her more. Christie teaches Hepsey to read and also learns from her: "Novels lost their charms now, for Hepsey could give her a comedy and tragedy surpassing anything she found in them, because truth stamped her tales with a power and pathos the most gifted fancy could but poorly imitate" (27). Christie respects realism over romance in works of art.

Christie's employment or lack thereof, leads to a crisis of faith. She befriends a "fallen" woman, Rachel, at a sewing room. When Rachel is fired for her bad moral character, Christie protests and is fired as well. She cannot pay her bills and is on the verge of being evicted. Alcott writes, "Her heart was empty and she could not feed it; life was cold and dark and she could not warm and brighten it, for she knew not where to go" (115). She looks for God, reads books, and goes to church. She is about to jump off a bridge when Rachel miraculously finds her. Christie learns Rachel has been helping

other women since she lost her job. Rachel explains: "It came into my mind to do for others more wretched than I what you had done for me" (125). Helping others helps Rachel as "with every one I helped my power increased, and I felt as if I washed away a little of my own great sin" (126). For Rachel, work is redemptive, a way to atone for her earlier misdeeds.

Rachel sends Christie to Mrs.Wilkins, a laundress. She is a working woman who restores Christie's health and sanity. Mrs. Wilkins believes in the restorative powers of work, as well as the necessity of being around nature. Christie surprised to find that Mrs. Wilkins had a crisis also—she left her family after listening to neighbor who told her she was being treated poorly. Mrs. Wilkins ended up appreciating her family even more: "I try to live up to my light, do my duty cheerful, love my neighbors, and fetch up my family in the fear of God" (152).

Christie meets Mrs. Wilkins's minister, Mr. Power. Although Christie has heard he is a radical, she is encouraged to attend. Mrs. Wilkins equates him with a washerwoman in that he "starts the dirt and gets the stains out," referring to sin (158). Christie is impressed by his sermon and the variety of people there: "a large proportion of young people in the place, of all classes, both sexes, and strongly contrasting faces" (159). Power's message appeals to a wide range of society.

Alcott has said the character is based on Theodore Parker, a well-known reform speaker and minister. Alcott places much power in the church and to those who speak. Power finds another job for Christie—helping an older Quaker woman. Christie ends up falling in love with the woman's son, David Sterling, a character based on Thoreau. Apart from the character of Sterling, some of Thoreau's influences are evident in the

work. A great emphasis is placed on the healing powers of nature and the joys of simplicity.

Sterling's house is "a sort of refuge for many women like herself; a halfway house where they could rest and recover themselves after the wrongs, defeats, and weariness that come to such in the battle of life" (191). It is ironic that a character based on Thoreau runs a type of half-way house for women, although it is explained it is for the love of his sister, who led a sinful life and was sent away. Eventually, Christie and Sterling come to realize that her friend Rachel is his long-lost sister. Christie ends up marrying Sterling, who soon dies during the Civil War. They spend one night together before his death and the result is a daughter.

At the end of the novel, Christie's ideas about work are brought to fruition. She has carried on David's work of helping women, which consists of giving them a place to stay and then finding them employment. Christie goes to "one of the many meetings of working-women, which had made some stir of late" (330).Alcott notes of the meeting, "Any one who chose got up and spoke; and whether wisely or foolishly each proved how great was the ferment now going on, and how difficult it was for the two classes to meet and help one another in spite of the utmost need on one side and the sincerest good will on the other" (330). At first, workers speak "demanding or imploring justice, sympathy, and help" (330). In turn, the ladies "did their part with kindliness, patience, and often unconscious condescension" which Alcott writes shows, "how very narrow a sphere of usefulness they were fitted for in spite of culture and intelligence" (330). The meeting has lectures that sound like topics Sorosis or the New England Woman's Club might offer: women of antiquity, appeals for suffrage, and statistics about working women. The

working women react with confusion, anger, and despair. Christie realizes what her role in life should be: a mediator between these two groups, the workers and the middle-class ladies. She speaks up and says, "I have been and mean to be a working-woman all my life" (332). She refuses to stand at the podium as the other lecturers did but speaks from the audience. Her message is straightforward as "she could tell those who listened that, no matter how hard or humble the task at the beginning, if faithfully and bravely performed, it would surely prove a stepping-stone to something better, and with each honest effort they were fitting themselves for the nobler labor, and larger liberty God meant them to enjoy" (333). At the end of the lecture, the workers saw and felt that a "genuine woman stood down there among them like a sister, ready with head, heart, and hand to help them help themselves" (333). The ladies respond to her as well and invite her to come to more meetings, to act as "a mediator to bridge across the space that now divided them from those they wished to serve" (334).

She says after the event, "Perhaps this is the task my life has been fitting me for" (334). Christie also brings women together in her home. The final scene is of Christie, her daughter, and friends such as Hepsey and Mrs. Wilkins. Also in attendance is Bella, a woman Christie once worked for as a companion. Christie gives Bella a plan to improve her society friends, advising her to "devote yourself and your advantages to quietly insinuating a better state of things into one little circle" (339). She says, "there is a world of grand questions to settle, lovely things to see, wise things to study, and noble things to imitate" (340). Bella approves of the idea and feels "she had found something to do in her own sphere, a sort of charity she was fitted for" (341). In this novel, everyone finds work. At the close, "With an impulsive gesture Christie stretched her hands to the

friends about her, and with one accord they laid theirs on hers, a loving league of sisters, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, each ready to do her part to hasten the coming of the happy end" (442).

Alcott has attempted to show the benefits of finding a purpose in work, and how different types of women would find rewards. Christie spends her life preparing for her work, and it fits in with what women's clubs were trying to do. Indeed, Alcott would have been familiar with the types of issues they raised as she was a member of the New England Woman's Club. Alcott sees the problems they might have in reaching different types of women and proposes a solution—women like Christie who have experience in the world of work. As did the heroines in *The Silent Partner*, Christie too ends up in a profession of her own making: part women's right's lecturer and part owner of a half-way house for women.

Harriet Beecher Stowe also addresses the question of working women and their place in society. While still most well-known for her antislavery work *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she wrote on a variety of topics. She wrote three novels about New York society in the 1870's: *Pink and White Tyranny*, *My Wife and I*, and *We and Our Neighbors*. *We and Our Neighbors* was first published in her brother Henry Ward Beecher's magazine *The Christian Union*. Joan Hedrick argues that the novels were written in response to the radicalized women's movement, or as Stowe referred to it "free divorce & free love" (qtd in Hedrick 373). In the 1870's, Stowe dealt with many of the major figures of the woman's movement. Stowe herself published *Lady Byron Vindicated*, an account of Lord Byron's crimes against Lady Byron, which was praised by women's rights' advocates like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but savaged by the British and American press

(Hedrick 365-8). Also, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony attempted to woo Stowe into working on their journal *The Revolution* in 1869. Anthony wrote to Paulina Wright Davis and said "if Cash will bring Mrs. Stowe to the Revolution with her deepest holiest woman, wife and mother soul struggle—clothed in her inimitable story garb—then it is cash it must be" (qtd in Hedrick 357). Stowe declined. She and Catherine actually asked Stanton and Anthony if name of paper could be changed to something less inflammatory (Hedrick 361). Also, in 1872, Stowe became embroiled in defending her brother Henry Ward Beecher against adultery charges brought on by a radical women's rights advocate, Victoria Woodhull. Beecher was accused of carrying on an affair with a married parishioner. The trial was covered widely in the press and Beecher was exonerated (Hedrick 373).

In the midst of this activity, Stowe published *My Wife and I*, and its sequel *We and Our Neighbors*. Although seen by some critics as conservative, they can also be looked at as representative of their time. They tell the story of a courtship between Eva Van Arsdel and Harry Henderson and of their subsequent marriage. I will discuss *We and Our Neighbors*, which offers a fascinating look at Stowe's vision of a young married woman attempting to find her place in society.

Modern critics find the novels lacking. Ann Douglas uses *We and Our Neighbors* as a central example in *The Feminization of American Culture* of the dangers of sentimentalism and consumerism. She writes of Eva: "Her aim in life is the essentially narcissistic one of multiplying her image by creating little domesticated replicas of her life. She holds her Thursday evening get-togethers to implicate her friends at once in the domestic process; they are to participate, admire, and do likewise" (252). Another critic

Lisa Watt McFarlane argues that "the idealized historical New England community is replaced by one that fractures into separate spheres outside the home and separate spheres within it" (274). While these novels are different from Stowe's earlier New England novels, they paint a complex portrait of urban life and the travails of a young married couple.

Eva and Harry Henderson begin their married lives, and Harry embarks on a career in publishing. There is a great deal of attention to social status. Eva tries to find a place, as she puts it, outside of society. She and Harry live on an "unfashionable street" (8). Her neighbors, who are faded aristocracy, say of Eva's family "the Van Arsdels that failed last spring" and "One of our mushroom aristocracy—up to-day and down to-morrow" (8). The news of the Van Arsdel's fall is common knowledge and apparently not a surprising occurrence. Eva's and Harry's solution is to live within their means, even if that means forgoing the trappings of middle-class life and living in an "unfashionable" part of town.

While Eva believes she can live apart from society, her family questions her choice. Eva's Aunt Maria, one of the most prosperous members of the family, wants her to join society and says, "One cannot go out of the world, you know" and Eva replies, "I don't know about that…we are going to try it" (63). Eva's view of "living without society" is to skip formal parties and entertain small groups at home. She and her husband Harry can't afford the fashionable clothes required for society gatherings. Besides, Harry needs to get up early for work and as Eva says, "you know parties don't begin till near ten o'clock" (62). Eva and Harry find that trying to earn a living sets them apart from their wealthier friends, since they have different types of concerns.

When Eva attempts to run her household, she questions as to whether she is meant to do something else. In a letter to her mother, she ruminates on current events: "In this great fuss about the men's sphere and the women's, isn't the women's ordinary work just as important and great in its way?" (45). She adds, "I can go a good deal further in Harry's sphere than he can in mine" (45). Eva means that she can judge the merits of an essay or the quality of a translation, but that Harry can't decorate a house or sew a dress. She also says, "Not that I am satisfied with mere culinary or housekeeping excellence, or even an artistic and poetic skill in making our home lovely; I do want a sense of something noble and sacred in life—something to satisfy a certain feeling of the heroic that always made me unhappy and disgusted with my aimless fashionable girl career" (45). This "noble and sacred" idea remains undefined. She also says, "It is better to try and fail" and "in that point of view I sympathize with the whole woman movement, though I see no place for myself in it" (45). Eva's discourse illustrates the contradictions of women attempting to redefine work. She realizes that she wants a purpose, but doesn't know what she can do as a married woman. While advocating ideas that seem feminist, she doesn't see herself as a woman's right's supporter.

Eva's ideas on finding a purpose in life crystallize with a plan to have "an informal, quiet, sociable, talking evening" (50). Harry wants to "make the world brighter and better" and "had ideas of what a charming, attractive home might do as a center to many hearts in promoting mutual brotherhood and good fellowship" (154). Eva plans the guest list and puts the house in order. She intends to invite members from all walks of life, and the gathering includes a doctor, minister, rabbi, newspaper writers, Quaker women, and variety of ages, old to young. Once the gathering has started, guests speak of

"humanitarian questions of the day" and the minister rethinks his opposition to female preachers after meeting a female Quaker preacher.

Through these gatherings, Eva feels she is contributing to society. She attempts to work in other ways as well, including venturing outside of her home to help the daughter of her maid. Although accompanied by her minister who does reform work, Eva is shocked by the seamier side of the city:

> I remember one large building with two or three stories, with larger halls below, all lighted up, with dancing and drinking going on, and throngs and throngs of men, old and young, pouring and crowding through it. These tawdrily bedizened, wretched girls and women seemed to me such a sorrow and disgrace to womanhood and Christianity that my very heart sunk, as I walked among them. (379)

The scene is a huge contrast to the happy home of Eva presenting another side of city life. She soon finds Maggie and gives her a home and a job. Eva tries to help individuals: Maggie, her sisters who are looking for husbands, her neighbors who are looking for a way to make ends meet until Eva finds them tenants. Through all, her home is her center of operation. She works from it and tries to be a model to others.

At the same time, there are brief glimpses of other working women. Eva describes her sister Ida who is in medical school in Paris: "how fit it was that a person so sufficient to herself, so equable, so healthfully balanced and poised in all her mental and physical conformation, should have undertaken the pioneering work of opening a new profession for women" (78). She also thinks "I never could do as she does" but "I am thankful that she can" (78). Coincidentally, Harry's cousin Caroline is also attending

medical school in Paris but says she is unhappy and only doing it as a "means of self-support and a refuge from morbid distresses of mind" (79). But these women are on the margins. Eva is the heroine and she finds her way by altering the traditional role of the wife.

Stowe, like Phelps and Alcott, is concerned with the question of woman's nature and women's work. As in all the novels discussed, Stowe's heroine finds a purpose, but she manages to do it from the home. Eva is an old-fashioned domestic heroine in some ways, a new woman in others. As she says, ""A home is a thing that can't be for one's self alone—at least the kind of home we are thinking of ; it reaches out on all sides and helps and shelters and comforts others" (463). In some ways, this is similar to the way Stowe viewed women's work in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In that text, she attempted to solve the problem of slavery by making it an issue that women could address within their homes. They could influence their husbands so they could vote in the proper way or they could also bring the issue home by sheltering fugitive slaves. Eva in *We and Our Neighbors* isn't confronting an issue as overwhelming as slavery, but a more generalized sense that there are problems in society, whether it be lonely people of the upper classes, young people having romantic problems, or fallen women from the servant classes. From her home, Eva tries to work with these different types of people and improve their situations, as well as giving meaning to her own life.

Stowe's heroine is an example of a traditional woman trying to expand the domestic sphere. Eva redefines work from within the confines of marriage. In her view, having a beautiful home isn't enough; she needs to bring in other people and try to help solve their problems. Like the women in Sorosis and the New England Woman's Club,

she wants to reach out to other women, something she shares with the heroines of *The Silent Partner* and *Work*. Eva is not specifically a professional woman, but she illustrates how pervasive the ideas and rhetoric regarding meaningful work are, as she has the same types of longings for a purpose in life. The three novels discussed share a vision with the women's clubs—the need for meaningful work and the need for women to get together. The heroines of Phelps, Alcott, and Stowe negotiate shifting definitions of femininity and cultural conventions in their quest to find meaning in their work.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Can a Woman Physician be Lovable?":

Female Doctors in Novels of the 1870's and 1880's

In 1882, both William Dean Howells and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps published novels with female doctors as the heroines. Female physicians had increasingly become more visible in American society in the second half of the nineteenth century and by 1880 there were over two thousand women doctors practicing (Morantz-Sanchez 49). The fact that Howells and Phelps decided independently to write about female doctors shows the cultural currency of the idea. However, their novels also point out anxieties felt by men and women: men over the women moving into traditionally masculine realms, and women questioning the relation between work, careers, and womanliness. In addition, each novel is less about the doctor's motivations but more about how others view the doctor and the idealizations or prejudices they may have. The novels also address a new trend—men who are searching for direction and find it in a woman.

Throughout the nineteenth century, women made quick progress in the field of medicine. The first woman to attend medical school, Elizabeth Blackwell, graduated in 1849. Soon after, the first medical school for women, The Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania opened (Morantz-Sanchez 49). Women attended female-only medical schools and continual challenges were made to allow entry into the male medical schools.

In 1882, Harvard would not accept women into its medical school. The first co-educational medical school opened forty years after Blackwell's fight to attend school with men, in 1889 (Walsh 177). Even with the questions of where women should train, women's numbers in the profession increased steadily. In 1870, five hundred female physicians were listed in the U.S. Census. By 1880, there were believed to be two thousand female physicians (Morantz-Sanchez 92).

In the nineteenth century, there were different types of training: regular, referring to allopathic, and irregular, which included homeopathy. Irregulars, also known as medical sects, grew out of dissatisfaction with traditional medicine and tended to place a greater emphasis on prevention. Most female physicians tended to be irregulars (More 21). By the 1870s, the irregulars started becoming the smaller percentage and the American Medical Association recommended that homeopaths be removed from the profession (Starr 98).

Homeopathy, one of the most popular of the irregular practices, was founded by a German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1843). Homeopathy was based on the idea of "like" curing "like," and consisted of giving a patient a minute dose of a medicine that causes the same illness in a healthy person. It was believed that the body could get stronger by fighting this weakened form of a disease. More importantly, homeopathy "stressed the need for sympathetic attention by the physician and individualized diagnosis and treatment" (Starr 97). It was especially popular in Boston and New York and among the upper classes (Starr 97). Both William Dean Howells and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps were treated by homeopaths and chose to write about homeopaths in their novels as well.

Apart from the question of choosing to study irregular or traditional medicine, women faced challenges as to their biological suitability for the profession. In the 1870's, female physicians argued against a book *Sex in Education: A Fair Chance for Girls,* published by a Harvard Medical School professor, Dr. E. H. Clarke. Clarke believed changes at puberty made it necessary to educate females separately. He thought somehow the uterus was connected to the central nervous system, so that intellectual activity takes away energy from the uterus. Clarke argued that higher education would produce "monstrous brains and puny bodies." Educated women would not be able to bear children (qtd in Walsh 126). Four books were published in one year in reply: *Sex and Education*, *No Sex in Education*, *Women's Education and Women's Health*, and *The Education of American Girls*. In *Sex and Education* Julia Ward Howe argued that women's education should be more like men's—they needed more fresh air and exercise (Walsh 129). Elizabeth Stuart Phelps contributed an essay to Howe's collection and argued that any woman—from the factory worker to the lecturer—knew that women didn't get sick from studying. Phelps writes, "Women sick because they study? Does it not look a little more as if women were sick because they stopped studying?" (134).

Harvard Medical School had an essay contest asking the question of whether women require mental and bodily rest during menstruation. Female physicians sought to repudiate Clarke's book—they urged Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi to answer his claims in an essay that won the Boylston Essay (Walsh 131). Jacobi sent out questionnaires and 286 responded. Her study proved that education had no ill effects on women's bodies (55). Morantz-Sanchez argues that one of the most important points that female physicians made was "their willingness to challenge on scientific and empirical grounds the somatic

definition of woman's nature and to push toward innovative and less biologically constricting approaches to female health and hygiene" (56).

Public opinion on female physicians was not always favorable. Sara Parton Willis, writing as Fanny Fern, addressed the topic early on, in 1857. Willis, who was generally progressive on women's issues, was quite conservative on the question of "lady doctors." She writes, "Female doctors are prospering" and notes it was a much better profession than needle-work or marrying for money. But the rest of the essay consists of jokes about the possible shortcomings of female doctors. She writes, "Before swallowing her pills (of which she would be the first), I should want to make sure that I had never come between her and a lover, or a new bonnet, or been the innocent recipient of a gracious smile from her husband" (112). She makes further remarks about lady doctors looking at themselves in mirrors too often and concludes with the idea that she would rather keep her "gentlemanly, soft-voiced, soft-stepping, experienced, intelligent, handsome doctor" (112). It is a strong statement about the prejudice a woman may feel towards a female physician.

Not everyone held these sorts of prejudices, as many women physicians did earn a living. As early as 1870, Virginia Penny, in *How Women Can Make Money* was able to recommend medicine as a field for women. She writes that "the practice of medicine is more remunerative than teaching" (25). She argues that women are not too delicate for this profession and that midwifery may be the best choice. Penny addresses what she believes is holding women back from pursuing the profession—the idea that they may have to drive their own carriages and travel at night alone. Penny reassures her readers

that there are ways around the problem, and she interviews some female physicians who say they see their patients during day (26).

One woman who addressed the question of the suitability of women working as doctors had experience with the situation. Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi received her medical degree in 1864. She later went to Paris for more training and lived there until 1871. When she returned to New York, she was recognized for the combination of her clinical skills and her published papers on medicine. She became a professor at the Women's Medical College of New York and remained there from 1873 to 1889. She married a physician Dr. Abraham Jacobi in 1873, and they had three children. Jacobi was able to combine her career with marriage and a family. She considered the question "Shall Women Practice Medicine" in an essay in the *North American Review* in 1882. She notes that professionalization in the medical field started to shut women out. They had practiced "freely" in "dealing with the sick and ministering to their infirmities", but "when universities took charge of it" and systematized the training, women were assumed to be unfit to undergo the rigors of education. Jacobi argues against this idea. She also recognizes that one of the most serious problems is public opinion. She writes of what people say:

> [They] ask not, "Is she capable?" but, "Is this fearfully capable person nice?" Will she upset our ideal of womanhood, and maidenhood, and the social relations of the sexes? Can a woman physician be lovable; can she marry; can she have children; will she take care of them? If she cannot, what is she? (54)

She notes that there is stronger opposition to women in medicine than in other careers; no one objects to female teachers. She recognizes that this is due to special circumstances like dealing with the body. Also, being a physician gives women extraordinary power since "life is a mystery; the attempt to penetrate mysteries is a sacrilege" (56). Social opinion is important—if people disapprove of women doctors, they won't consult them, which in turn will discourage women from entering the profession. Why enter, Jacobi asks, if there is no way to earn a living or to be properly trained? But she realizes that times have changed and notes "they are members of various medical societies, contribute to various medical journals, conduct hospitals, perform surgical operations, build up practice, and in other ways seem to conduct themselves and to be treated like other members of the medical profession" (53). She remarks that there are four hundred female physicians practicing in America, a number that current historians find too low, as they place it at two thousand (Morantz-Sanchez 49).

Female physicians turned up in novels of the 1870's, although generally as minor characters. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *My Wife and I* (1871) and its sequel *We and Our Neighbors* (1873), the sister of the main female character attends medical school in Paris and reports back to her family on the progress she is making. But she is in the background. In another novel, *Fettered for Life; or Lord and Master. A Story of To-Day* (1874) by Lillie Devereux Blake, a female physician is a powerful force. She appears infrequently, but she rights wrongs and protects weaker women. The heroine of the novel, Laura, constantly runs into trouble. Dr. Cornelia D'Arcy, or Mrs. D'Arcy as she prefers to be called, often helps Laura: she finds her a job and protects her from predatory men.

She is described as "one of the leading woman-physicians of New York, a name known and respected throughout the land" (25).

Laura's friend Flora is surprised by the fashionable and elegant appearance of Mrs. D'Arcy, saying, "I thought she would be old-maidish, and wear spectacles and a very short dress" (70). Mrs. D'Arcy is involved in suffrage and often speaks out on women's issues at her social gatherings. Grace Farrell notes that in the novel, Blake "insists that beyond economic necessity, work is a vital activity for women as well as for men, for it brings meaning to life and definition to self" (141). Farrell sees D'Arcy as "the novel's leading suffragist and seemingly the model for what any woman might be, given both freedom and education" (141). Farrell makes the point, however, that D'Arcy represents mainstream suffragist thought and that Blake had a more radical view. D'Arcy says, "Man represents in the world, the element of strength and force; women that of love and spirituality" (258). Farrell argues that Blake's vision is more radical in that Blake believes gender is a social construction, as evidenced by the cross-dressing in the novel and the fact that "men and women are essentially the same" and that "gender itself is a surface detail (140). Thus, a seemingly progressive character represents a softening of the author's views. Still, Mrs. D'Arcy holds power in the novel, from the force of her moral opinion to her refusal to be intimidated by powerful and wealthy men.

The renowned realist William Dean Howells, in an early novel *Doctor Breen's Practice*, treated the subject of female physicians. It is an unusual novel in that seemingly, its only point is to disparage women professionals. One of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's contemporaries, Elizabeth T. Spring, wrote, "Mr. Howells' woman physician has not the 'scientific' mind. She was, after all, only the old sort of woman he knows so well,

masquerading with a medicine-case" (599). Kenneth Eble argues that it was progressive to have a female doctor as a protagonist and says that Howells "debates the place of women in the professions in an energetic way" (71). More recently, Bardes and Gossett call it "the single most negative portrayal of a female physician from the entire period" (137-8).

Howells heard from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps her plans to publish a story about a female physician while his own story was being published in the *Atlantic Monthly*. He was also aware of someone else planning a novel on the same theme and his publisher reported that a real doctor wanted to tell her story (Cady 207). Apparently, Howells was in the forefront of a trend. The public visibility of women physicians made them a topic of interest and a subject worth writing about.

Howells's heroine, Grace Breen, is a "serious-faced girl" who is a homeopathic physician (4). She decides on the field of medicine because of a failed love affair and goes to the New York homeopathic school. She wants to be useful and thinks medicine is a worthy profession but doesn't seem to be particularly skilled at it. She is not in medicine for the money as "she was rich enough to have no need of her profession as a means of support" (12). She has plans to go to a factory town, practice medicine with another female physician and treat children of the factory workers. While waiting for this to start, she goes to a beach resort with an invalid friend and cares for her.

While others may see Grace as a ground-breaker, she doesn't seem to have any feminist leanings. To the contrary: "She would not entertain the vanity that she was serving what is called the cause of women, and she would not assume any duties or

responsibilities towards it" (15). She says, "I wished to be a physician because I was a woman, and because—because—I had failed where—other women's hopes are" (43).

Grace is highly concerned with what other people think of her. Although she has chosen a position of high visibility as a female physician when such women are rare, she continually worries about how she appears to people. She compares herself to her patient and friend Mrs. Maynard, a married woman spending time with a bachelor. Others in the town question Mrs. Maynard's propriety, but Grace believes they question her status even more disapprovingly. She also worries that other women give her more difficulty than men in terms of looking down on her career. Grace says regarding her professional skills: "There isn't a woman in the house that wouldn't sooner trust herself in the hands of the stupidest boy that got his diploma with me than she would in mine" (44). So, in her view no patients would have faith in her.

When Mrs. Maynard becomes more ill, she tells Grace she wants another doctor: "I can't be trifled with any longer. I want a *man* doctor" (64). Grace consults with Dr. Mulbridge, who refuses to work with her since she's a homeopathist and he's an allopath. Grace tells him if he'll take the case, she will merely serve as a nurse. Mulbridge wants to be clear that he respects her as a woman, but it's the homeopathy he distrusts. His objections are "purely professional,--that is technical—I should say disciplinary, entirely disciplinary" (99). Mulbridge is reflecting prejudices of his time against homeopaths, since it was possible for an allopathic physician to be arrested for consulting with a homeopath.

Grace quickly allows Mulbridge to take over the case. She says, "I judge your fitness by my own deficiency. The first time I saw you with Mrs. Maynard, I saw that

you had everything I hadn't (219). She decides to give up medicine, or, "it has given me up. I never liked it, --I told you that before, --and I never took it up from any ambitious motive" (219). Seeing Mulbridge in action causes her to question her career. Although Grace doesn't seem to be a flattering portrait of a homeopath, Howells shows little sympathy for Mulbridge, a traditional physician, as well. Patients seem to trust his judgment, but Mulbridge, like Grace, doesn't appear to be particularly enamored of his chosen profession.

Both Mulbridge and the young, wealthy Walter Libby propose to Grace. Both have shortcomings. Mulbridge is suspected of being interested in Grace for her money. Dr. Mulbridge, is respected for his work but his family history is questionable since his grandfather was a captain of one of the last slave ships. In the town, Mulbridge's family is known for its men who "marry up" by looking for women with property. It is assumed by the gossips in the town that this is what interests him in Grace—her family background and also the fact that she seems capable of being successful and earning a good living. He says, "I haven't done what I might have done with myself, because I've never had an object in life" 227). He tells her: "I never happened to meet a woman doctor before you came to me; but I had imagined them, and I couldn't believe in you when I saw you" (228). He also says, "I might make your plans my own, and that we might carry them out together" (228). He has dreams of starting a practice with her because he believes she will attract business; his interest in her is therefore purely financial.

Mulbridge is painted as a villain, since his wish to marry up and depend on Grace bringing in business reflects unmanly traits. The people in town respect his skills as a

doctor, but his technical skill covers a lack of respect for his patients. He has little regard for women, especially his female patients, as he feels "contemptuous amusement" for his "flatteringly dependent and submissive invalids" (189) He tells his mother: "There isn't one of them…that I don't believe I could have for the turn of my hand, especially if it was doubled into a fist. They like force" (205). His mother says, "Oh, you've only seen the sick married ones. I guess you'll find a well girl is another thing" (205). It is intimated that he may be too old to be living with his mother, but she is his closest companion. She doesn't approve of Grace at all.

Grace's other suitor is Mr. Libby, a "slim, young fellow, whose gay blue eyes looked out of a sunburnt face" (16). He is not terribly ambitious. He says of his career prospects: "I thought of a profession, once. But it wouldn't work. I've been round the world twice, and I've done nothing but enjoy myself since I left college, or try to. When I first saw you, I was hesitating about letting my father make me of use" (147). His father wants to buy him a textile mill and give him a job running it. Walter proposes, although Grace keeps insisting that she's wrong for him. She tells him she can't give up work, and Walter says he would have found a way to work it out. Although she doesn't say no, they both treat it as a refusal. After she tells him that she loves him, he mentions why he didn't propose twice: "I always thought that for a man to offer himself twice was indelicate and unfair" (249). In reality, women did combine marriage and a medical career. Morantz-Sanchez writes that between one-fifth and one-third of female physicians in the nineteenth century were married (135). Grace doesn't know what she wants. She is ready to give up her career when she thought Mulbridge was a more capable physician than her, yet she refuses Walter's proposal on the grounds of her career.

No one supports Grace except Miss Gleason, a foolish girl described as a "heroine worshipper" and "at present, Dr. Breen was her cult" (50).Grace's own mother always seems disappointed in Grace. She is surprised by Grace's two proposals. When Grace was younger, her mother "never actively opposed her studying medicine; that ambition harmonized very well with certain radical tendencies of her own, and it was at least not marriage, which she had found tolerable only in its modified form of widowhood" (14). In other words, Grace is fulfilling her mother's ambitions. Once a physician, her mother criticizes her decisions, such as consulting with Mulbridge. After Grace marries, her mother is disappointed that Grace isn't working and has returned from Europe "materialized and corrupted" (268).

By the novel's end, Grace marries Walter and works on factory children in his mills: "Under the shelter of her husband's name the benevolent use of her skill was no queerer than the charity to which many ladies devote themselves; though they are neither of them people to have felt the anguish which comes from the fear of what other people think" (271). Her marriage has given her permission to work, although she doesn't seem happy. A friend praises her for her work, and Grace "coldly" replies that it was her husband's idea.

Howells's adherence to his realist theories of fiction in painting life as it is may account for his decidedly unromantic depiction of female doctors. Grace is an odd choice for an example of a female physician as she seems to have no aptitude for the profession, takes no pleasure in her work, and earns the respect of no one. Howells delineates the pitfalls of choosing a profession without reason and that being a professional was no guarantee of happiness.

As soon as Howells's novel finished running in the *Atlantic Monthly*Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's novel*Doctor Zay* was serialized. Howells added a disclaimer before Phelps's novel saying, "no one would suppose you to have borrowed any features of your plot from so poor a contriver of such things as I am." But readers would have been unlikely to make that assumption, since Phelps's novel took a completely different view of female physicians. A contemporary reviewer says of *Doctor Zay*: "It is all natural and direct, quite free from morbid or one-sided views" (Spring 579). She adds, "Whoever reads it is apt to be carried on by Miss Phelps' theories in spite of himself, since he finds such a new kind of woman as Dr. Zay proves to be, a very charming and inspiring sort of creature" (580).

At the time the novel was published, Phelps was not as active as she once was. She had given lectures in the 1870s, but by the end of that decade Coultrap-McQuinn notes that because of poor health, Phelps ended her suffrage and temperance work. Phelps never mentioned health problems in her letters of the 1870's, but during the 1880's frequently refers to them. Coultrap-McQuinn writes that Phelps's ailments included, "insomnia, brain fever, sensitive nerves, partial blindness, sprains, laryngitis, and finally heart disease" (175). Carol Farley Kessler suggests that Phelps's bad health might have given her a more positive view of marriage in the 1880s—that a husband could be someone to lean on (64).

Like Howells, Phelps centers her novel on a female physician who is a homeopath. An ardent advocate of homeopathy, Phelps writes in her autobiography: "I am often told by skeptical friends that I hold this belief on a par with the Christian religion" (252). She makes a strong argument for homeopathy in *Doctor Zay*, as her heroine, the title

character, has a positive effect on every patient she treats. And being the only doctor in a rural area in Maine occasions her to see a variety of ailments, which she takes on with ease and professionalism.

Doctor Zay, whose name is a shortened version of her given name, Zaidee Atalanta Lloyd, is twenty-nine years old and practices in rural Maine. She can be seen as the opposite of Howells's heroine Doctor Breen as Zay is competent, skilled, and unquestioning of her own capabilities. In the story, however, she is seen from a distance, as the story is told from the perspective of Walter Yorke, a patient of Zay's. Inverting a traditional romantic plot, in *Doctor Zay*, the man spends the novel pining for a woman, and dreaming for a marriage as a conclusion. The man is also weak and nervous, while the woman is strong, another inversion of stereotypes about gender-specific traits. Phelps's notion of professionalism in this novel consists of trying to prove that professionalism in women can be appealing to men, and perhaps more radically, that new forms of femininity would result from the changing employment status of women in society which led to growing numbers of women turning to professional occupations such as medicine. *Doctor Zay* offers a new type of romantic heroine, one who is beautiful, highly trained, and technically proficient. All of these attributes end up attracting a new type of modern man.

This new type of man, typified by Waldo Yorke in the novel, is young, handsome, and utterly uninterested in working for a living, although he has been certified as a professional himself, a lawyer. For all of the differences between women physicians in the novels of Phelps and Howells, their male love interests share some remarkable similarities. Like Libbey in *Dr. Breen's Practice*, Yorke in *Doctor Zay* has spent his life

up until this point avoiding work. Bachelors sowing their wild oats are not a new type of character in literature, but what is new is how their stories will end, with the traditional love of a woman, but also with a woman who inspires with her own example. In Doctor Zay, Yorke lacks what Zay has, which is purpose or something to give his life meaning.

When Yorke inherits some property in Maine, his mother suggests thathe hire a lawyer to go over the paperwork. Yorke has to remind her that *he* is a lawyer and she replies that she had forgotten. Right from the start, Yorke's professional capabilities are called into question, as he makes so little of an impression in his career that his own mother forgets what his occupation is. We are also told that Yorke has "never been overtasked in his life" (7). He is revealed to be part of a wealthy family in Boston, and throughout the novel he remarks on his mother's reform efforts—something he seems to have little interest in. Yorke, while driving to Maine, has an accident leading to his carriage falling over the side of a bridge. After being rescued, and in a state of delirium, he insists upon being treated by a homeopathist, and he is assured that is the case. He is taken care of by someone who visits in the night. Assuming this female figure to be a nurse, he is shocked to realize that Zay is in fact his doctor. He says, "A woman's hand!" to which Doctor Zay replies, "it is a strong hand. It does not tremble" (42).

Yorke remains as a patient in Zay's house. Bedridden, Yorke spends much time observing the doctor and is fascinated by the details of her work: "She took out a notebook, and began to ask him a series of professional questions…This young lady required his age, his habits, family history and other items not immediately connected in the patients mind with a dislocated ankle" and "She wrote down his answers carefully" (51). In this close gaze of Yorke's, Zay's attention to detail is revealed and display an

utter lack of flirtatious, something Yorke seems to be expecting given the implicitly illicit nature of the beginnings of their relationship. While Zay sees Yorke as an interesting patient with "a beautiful dislocation" (53), Yorke is aware of the fact that he is lying helpless in a strange woman's bed.[2] And through his recuperation, he is forced to take orders from Zay, which at times disturbs him as when she warns, "You will walk, Mr. Yorke, when I allow you." The fact that she is "graceful and gentle and womanly" (60) while taking control leads to Yorke feeling that he should rebel. But he doesn't, and submits to her ministrations.

As Yorke remains weak, he is attracted by Zay's seeming strength and good health. Phelps's descriptions of Zay's physical endowments may be written to counter her own life. She suffered from a "baffling, almost crushing, hindrance of ill health" (Spring 588). This may explain the depth of her focus on Yorke's state of mind as an invalid, and his worship of Zay's "bloom and bounteousness" (66).

Apart from physical ailments, Yorke suffers from a lack of ambition. He jokingly lists what Zay's diagnosis of him would be: "Inherited inertia. Succumbed to his environment. Corrosion of Beacon Street upon what might, in a machine-shop, for instance, or a factory, have been called his brain" (166). Zay agrees partly agrees with this description but offers him hope for the future: "I prognosticate that the next phase of experience will be a healthier and haughtier one. I think you capable of service" (168). Although he has not shown any evidence of being capable for work, she is optimistic.

Yorke remains fascinated by Zay and continues studying her habits. Through his long recuperation, he waits for her visits and is bitterly disappointed when he begins to

[2] Timothy Morris explores the erotic elements of the novel, although also argues that what he sees as an anti-abortion stance in the novel leads to enhancing Zay's womanliness.

heal, which lessens the attention from Zay. In a reversal of the traditional spheres of men and women, Yorke is confined to the domestic sphere while Zay moves through the public space of the town to visit her patients.

While Yorke had a strong desire to be treated by a homeopathist, he had no experience with a female physician and had ignorance of the subject, assuming that female physicians were of the lower class:

> He knew nothing of the history of doctresses. He had thought of them chiefly as a species of higher nurse,--poor women, who wore unbecoming clothes, took the horse-cars, and probably dropped their 'g,'s or said, is that so?" (44).

Doctor Zay changes his class-based assumptions, as it is clear she is middle-class. Her father was a physician. In fact, the first time Yorke sees Zay he notes she has "the dress and carriage of a lady" (44). Yorke soon learns that Zay is of the same social class as his family. She attended Vassar, and Yorke says, "I have seen educated women before…My mother has them at the house sometimes" (77). He learns that they share acquaintances in Boston, and met as children although Zay doesn't remember. Yorke muses, "She had almost a society manner, like any other young lady" (82). He still differentiates her from other women and is surprised when she shares the same traits as his acquaintances. Seeing Zay in the setting of rural Maine, and in an unusual position of authority, leads Yorke to disassociate her from women he knows. His vision of his female acquaintances is limited, and he can't picture what makes a woman want to work, although he appreciates everything about Doctor Zay.

Yorke's illness makes him a better man. He sees that he was "one of—how many? dependent and complaining creatures, draining upon the life of a strong and busy person" (66). He begins to have empathy for others recalling invalid friends he treated poorly in

the past. He was "receiving that enlargement and enlightenment of the imagination" that "endurance" bestows on a person (67). Phelps writes of this learning experience: "Experience may almost be called a faculty of the soul" (67). However, while Yorke is commending himself on his "brave ability" to make the best of things, Doctor Zay looks in on him. Yorke sees "maternal gentleness" but Zay remarks with "beautiful merriment" on her face, "Another fits of the sulks to-day, if you please!" (68). Zay feminizes Yorke's seeming concentration with a comment that generally applies to women or children. At every turn, he is reminded of his lack of power.

Yorke's illness is described in terms generally associated with women's ailments. His diagnosis from Zay is "nervous strain" (69). While York becomes more fragile, Zay takes on more masculine characteristics—professionalism and serious of purpose. Each new piece of information makes Yorke eager to learn more. Zay tells Yorke that even though her given name is Atalanta, "there was something absurd in seeing Atalanta on a Down East's doctor's shingle,--I have known women do such things in that way!" (72) She adds, "I had a classmate who took out her diploma in the name of *Cubbie* Smith, M.D.; and there was one who was let loose upon a defenseless public as Dr. Teasie Trial" (72). Zay's mother called her Zaidee as a nickname, so she used Dr. Z. A. Lloyd and patients called her Doctor Zay. Zay shows she has no sympathy for frivolous names. Even when she shares personal information with Yorke, it all relates back to her seriousness and purpose.

The seriousness of Zay's pursuit of an education is revealed when she tells Yorke she has studied in New York, Vienna, and Zurich. Expressing amazement that she has chosen to stay in this "wilderness," Zay is insulted by his assumptions. Yorke realizes

"he might as well have said point-blank, 'I thought you were a crude, rural agitator" (75). Although Zay differentiates herself from her female colleagues with frivolous names, she does have feminist tendencies. Her reasons for practicing in her rural town are distinctly sympathetic to women:

> …I had learned how terrible the need of a woman by women, in country is towns. One does not forget such things, who ever understands them. There is refinement and suffering and waste of delicate life enough in these desolate places to fill a circle in the Inferno. (75).

She adds, "No one knows, Mr. Yorke, but the woman healer" (75). Phelps chooses not to describe any of these scenes; it remains an intriguing mystery as to what she does for the women in her town. Yorke fails to understand what she tells him and is convinced that she is wasting her youth in such a remote landscape, believing she would be better suited to an urban environment where she could go to the opera and museums. She admits missing the opera but is unwilling to move back to the city.

Zay's motives are unselfish and her professional ambitions were shaped by other women: her dying mother found comfort from women doctors in Paris and Boston. Zay says she thought at the time: "When she is gone, I will do as much for someone else's mother" (77). Yorke finds out he is Zay's first younger male patient, as she has so far only treated old men and children, along with women. Treating Yorke leads to a host of complications. The issue is of the evidence of impropriety in seeing a young man. After Yorke has been moved from Zay's house, he visits her in her office but finds it strange that he has to wait with women. Zay agrees and says, "There are new questions constantly arising for a woman in my position" (122). The new questions lead to social

complications as well as Yorke is forced to come up with a new vocabulary to compliment her. He praises her skills: "You were so thorough. I said, there is a trained woman. She is honest all through. She has the modesty of knowledge. I thought all this while you were tying that artery, before I fainted" (123). Again, the stereotypes of the sexes are reversed—Zay is the strong one, Yorke the weak and hysterical.

In another reversal of behavior, Yorke is confined to the home until Zay takes him on calls with her. He is excited to be out in public again, but appalled by the types of people she visits. Yorke "knew little about people of this sort; he had left the lower orders of society to his mother, with a dim sense of their usefulness in providing an outlet for her superfluous sympathies. Boston women must always have an outlet" (133). Although Yorke thinks he has been enlightened by his illness, he still carries prejudices based on class, and associates charitable work with women.

While Yorke is falling in love with Zay, she seems to have little respect for him. She mocks Yorke for having an "arduous profession," since she knows he is a lawyer. He says, "Instead of being successful, I have been rich." He complains, "If I had to work for a living, I might have been worth something. There is nothing in life so fatal as to be fortunate" (78). Zay has no sympathy and agrees "indifferently." His protests seem less than sincere, since he is still a young man and could change his life. Eventually, Zay's influence will better him.

Yorke's worship of Zay improves his health along with his prospects: "He found himself strengthened—such is the hygienic influence of possessing an object in life" (100). The idea of an object in life is a common cultural sentiment—the same words that

women's clubs used in the 1860s of the need for women to find a purpose in life. In this case, it is the man who is searching for meaning in his life.

Yorke sees again and again the power Zay has—whether it's over life and death, or moral sentiments. But, she does have limits on what she will and will not do for her patients. A young girl appears to be pregnant, and Zay says she can do nothing. She tells Yorke, "And all the women depend on me; they think there is nothing beyond my power. Why, she clings to me as if she thought I could undo it all, --could make her what she used to be again!" (138). Zay wants to help women but she will not do certain things. This would appear to be either a reference to abortion or to a woman's loss of virginity perhaps. In either case, Zay seems unable to do anything. Instead, Phelps has her heroine save the young woman in a much more complicated way—Zay ends up getting the man responsible to marry the woman that day. The man has nearly drowned and Zay revived him after forty-four minutes. His friends see this as evidence of Zay raising the dead. She attempts to make the revived man feel guilty: "Do you suppose you were worth *touching*, except that you had it in your miserable power to right a poor wronged girl?" (147). She also attempts to scare him by asking, "Did I bring back the soul to your senseless, sinful body, after it had gone God knows where, but where you'll never go again till you go to stay?" (146). He relents and marries the girl since Zay has already arranged for the minister to come to the house. This scene shows that Zay has skills of negotiation (or intimidation) as well as her medical skills.

Yorke witnesses the after-effects of the drowning, since he faints in the middle of the rescue efforts. He continues to be impressed with what he sees of Zay and asks to see her socially. When he finally is allowed to call on Zay in a personal way, he sees her in a

different light. Her private quarters show her gentility: "the books, the engravings, few but fine, the bronze Psyche" (157). Yorke sees Zay as "a lady, like other ladies, in a shelter, among lovely little things, quiet and set apart" (158). Her allowing him into her private space emboldens him and he proposes.

Rather than respond with delight to Yorke's proposal, Zay takes a scientific approach, explaining that true marriages are only possible when a man and woman share similar elements. She adds she has only known of three such perfect marriages. In addition to the impossibility of finding a perfectly compatible mate, another objection Zay has is that she knows too much about the hearts of men. In her eyes, she has an advantage, even over the clergy, of knowing human nature. She says, "We stand at an eternal confessional, in which the chance of moral escape or evasion is reduced to a minimum" (161). In an attempt at flattery, Yorke attempts to tell her she is an "exception, not a representative, among women who adopt your vocation" (164). In other words, he feels she will be able to overcome problems other women physicians might face. She still rejects his offer.

When Yorke again begins pressing Zay to marry him, she resists. After Yorke tells Zay he loves her for the first time, she replies that he is not in love but "only nervous" (191). She sees his love as evidence of his unstable condition (and indeed, he has been diagnosed with a nervous condition throughout and admits himself that he is frail mentally). He calls her "unwomanly" for expressing this view (195) and Zay replies, "It is not the first time that a woman has been called unwomanly for saying the truth" (195). She makes no effort to be sensitive about his feelings.

A marriage seems unlikely between Yorke and Zay. Frustrated, she tells him, "Go home to your mother and your own people,--to the kind of women you are used to, and understand" (211-2). Yorke leaves and returns to press her again to marry. She has given him no hope, but her persists and tells her that her career is not an obstacle: "I feel my heart leap over everything you achieve" (238). Eventually, when she is returning home from a visit with a difficult patient and is tired and slightly ill, she gives in. Still having doubts, Zay asks if Yorke is sure he wants to marry her and if eventually he'll be disappointed when he comes home and finds that she is out making a call. He never considers asking her to give up work since "It would undo everything; it would make another woman of you. I want you just as you are" (246). Lacking a conviction for his own career, Yorke is drawn in by Zay's professionalism.

Phelps draws upon mythology for Zay's given name, Atalanta, and Yorke refers to the story during the proposal. Atalanta was a virgin who was the swiftest woman in the world. She promised to marry any man who could beat her in a footrace. A young man, Hippomenes, asks Venus, the Goddess of Love to help him. Venus gives Hippomenes three golden apples which he throws out one at a time during a race and Atalanta slows to pick them up allowing Hippomenes to beat her in the race. The day of the proposal, Zay makes reference to a patient shooting a revolver in his own house, and the patient tires her out. Yorke says the revolver balls have brought her to him and allowed him to catch her. In the myth, of course, the man doesn't achieve love on his own, but is helped by the gods for their own purposes. Phelps was well-acquainted with classical mythology, so she would have known that in the story of Atalanta, Venus was offended by any woman who vowed to stay a virgin and therefore helped bring about

Atalanta's downfall. Indeed, Yorke has done nothing to change his behavior by the end, although he has gotten healthy enough to drive the carriage for both of them. His ability to drive the carriage gives him confidence and seems to reestablish his masculinity. Zay's bout with illness serves to reinforce the frailer aspect of her feminity. Thus, both are closer to traditional gender roles; Zay is weaker, while Yorke is stronger.

Both Phelps and Howells illustrate the challenges faced by women doctors, but end with completely different messages. Howells's heroine is more than happy to give up her career for love, and then reluctantly resumes her career because her husband encourages her. Phelps's heroine only accepts marriage under the condition that she be allowed to retain her profession. Neither novel considers the marriages at length since the main focus was on the courtships. And, both women ended up marrying men who were attracted to them because of their careers. In this new guise, professionalism is seen as an attribute, or one more appealing aspect of a woman's character. The authors end up answering the question Mary Putnam Jacobi put forth, "Can a woman physician be lovable?" In these novels, the answer is resoundingly "yes."

Afterword

After William Dean Howells's and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's portrayals of female doctors, another soon followed. Sarah Orne Jewett in *A Country Doctor* tackles the theme in 1884. Examinations of professional women in literature continued through the end of the nineteenth century and into the beginning of the twentieth century. Henry James used both lecturers and a female doctor in *The Bostonians* in 1886. But more generally, women writers addressed the theme of work as a way of questioning the roles of women, as in the case of *The Awakening* which within its story of a woman's search for self-identity also contains the story of a failed career in art. The figure of the professional woman, or the potential or failed professional as in *The Awakening* reflects shifts in American culture and at the same time often critiques those same aspects of culture, particularly in terms of gender and the place of a career in a woman's life.

Many of the novels that have been discussed throughout this work prefigure novels with the same types of themes that appear near the turn of the century. As mentioned, Henry James uses the figures of female lecturers and doctors in *The Bostonians*, following the leads of Sarah J. Hale and particularly Bayard Taylor in the case of lecturers, and William Dean Howells and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps in the case of doctors. Artists are evident in works from the turn of the century whether it is the female artist as in *The Awakening* or the female as part of the work of art as in Lily Bart's position as a part of a tableau in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* in 1905. Elizabeth Ammons writes that the figure of the woman artist "appears almost obsessively" in writings by women authors at the turn of the century (121). And the type of social reform work that many of the characters do in these mid-century novels, such as

Christine's halfway house in *Christine*, Christie's home for women in *Work*, Eva's desire to help those less fortunate in the city and Perley's social work in *The Silent Partner* anticipate the kind of work that Jane Addams will do in her settlement house in the 1890s and write about in *Twenty Years at Hull House* in 1910. Addams herself experienced in the 1880s the same types of problem many of these women writers addressed much earlier, which was finding a use for her education and her skills. Unwilling to enter a profession such as medicine and uninterested in planning to be married, Addams turned to helping others and founded Hull House (Farrell 22). Bullard, Alcott, Phelps, and Stowe had already written about well-born and well-educated women attempting to put their education to use and at times having to reinvent professions. Addams did precisely what they had anticipated years earlier.

The question of work and what is considered appropriate work for women would continue to appear in the realist period. Questions of class also become stronger at this time and investigations of work naturally are linked with class. Characters use professional work as a way to move into a higher class, or, in some cases, upper class women find they are at a disadvantage in the workplace having no marketable talents. Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in 1905 attempts to address one woman's search for a career and her efforts to find a place in a capitalistic culture. In other words, Carrie Meeber is searching for meaning, finding it first through relationships and then in an acting career. She quickly learns that she is destined for something better than factory work and makes efforts to move beyond this type of work. Carrie's work also involves using men in terms of their financial worth and using herself as a commodity. Only her acting career at the end seems to bring her true satisfaction. At nearly the same time,

Edith Wharton writes about some of the same issues, which are a woman's search for love as well as economic independence in *The House of Mirth*. The heroine Lily Bart has only been trained to be an upper class wife. When she fails to find a husband, her attempts to support herself through her own work fail and she is unable to find a place in society. Lily illustrates the dangers of women who are uneducated and are only prepared to be someone's wife. Wharton highlights the dangers of not having a profession and the desperate circumstances it can lead to.

While texts of the mid-nineteenth century can be seen to anticipate themes that will arise in later novels, it is important to also appreciate these works in their own right and on their literary merits. In "Commentary: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and the Politics of Recovery," Judith Fetterley remarks that from her experience with her own students and from what she hears from her colleagues it is evident that there is a "powerful connection between the contemporary reader and the texts of nineteenth-century American women" (606). However, Fetterley goes on to argue that recent criticism of nineteenth century women writers is "disproportionately negative" as in the case of Shirley Samuels's *The Culture of Sentiment*. While Fetterley sees the value in the arguments made about subjugation of classes and races, she points out the need for a "richer context" with positive assessments of the writers as well to provide balance. In considering the thematic significance of professional work in the texts of American women writers, such a positive assessment is conceivable. The figure of the professional woman as a site of analysis offers an opportunity to read the works of nineteenth century writers in a new way and move beyond categories of the domestic or the sentimental. Most of the writers that have been discussed, including those who appear more than once

such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Laura Curtis Bullard, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Louisa May Alcott do not fit neatly into categories based on opposition such as sentimental/ realist or radical/conservative. Reading how these writers approach the subject of work and working women complicates their texts and allows us a clearer understanding of nineteenth century American culture, as well as how writers of the time critiqued and interrogated the standards of that same culture.

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