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Rereading, Rewriting, and Recovering the Literary Legacy of Susan Warner

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REREADING, REWRITING, AND RECOVERING THE LITERARY LEGACY OF
SUSAN WARNER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Rereading, Rewriting, and Recovering the Literary Legacy of Susan Warner

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Susan Warner, author of the bestselling novel *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), was among the first writers to be recovered by scholars dedicated to restoring to print the work of forgotten women authors. Yet although it has been over two decades since *The Wide, Wide World* was first reprinted, Susan Warner has still only been recovered in part. Though she composed over thirty novels in her lifetime, produced a children's magazine co-authored with her sister, and successfully negotiated the male-dominated publishing industry, the portrait of Warner presented by the majority of scholars is one of a demur and submissive recluse who wrote only didactic religious fiction and was otherwise uninvolved with the social and political issues of her time.

In this study, I question how Warner has been represented by scholars over the last one hundred years. By critically examining several biographies and critical interpretations of Warner and her work composed first by relatives, then by literary historians, and finally by scholars of the recovery movement, I will trace how each effort to recover Warner resulted in a different portrait of her life and work. I will then advance my own biographical interpretation of Warner that stresses her status as a professional author and recognizes her contributions to social reform. In doing so, I hope to move beyond the accepted portrayal of Warner as merely an evangelical writer and to recognize her contributions to social issues such as abolitionism, female patriotism and education, and labor reform.

By noting how she engaged these issues in her novels and periodical fiction, and by examining the rhetorical strategies she employed in order to influence her predominately female readership, I demonstrate that Warner was, like her contemporaries Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Harriet Beecher Stowe, utilizing conventional literary devices such as moral suasion and sentimentalism to bring political issues into the private sphere.

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PREFACE

On July 11, 1819, Susan Bogert Warner was born in a fashionable New York City neighborhood to parents who each could proudly trace their lineage back to the *Mayflower*.¹ Henry Whiting Warner and Anna Marsh Bartlett had just suffered the loss of their first child, and immediately began spoiling the newest addition to the family by providing every possible luxury that the young attorney and his wife could afford. Susan's idyllic childhood was briefly interrupted by the early death of her mother when Susan was four years old, at which point she and her sister Anna began spending the summers at her mother's family estate in Jamaica, New York under the guardianship of their beloved Aunt Fanny. For the rest of her childhood and early adolescence, Susan Warner lived a life befitting a young wealthy woman. She was dressed in the finest silks and satins. She spent her days studying under private tutors and her evenings at practicing dancing and piano. She read histories and studied several languages. She loved to read novels, even though her father and aunt scolded her for it.

In 1837, her life changed dramatically when her father lost nearly all of his fortune speculating on real estate and the family had to relocate to a rural farmhouse on Constitution Island, New York, where they watched helplessly as all of their fine furniture and art were auctioned off to pay off his outstanding debts. For the next decade, Susan, her Aunt Fanny, her sister Anna, and Henry subsisted off what meager income he could generate at his failing law practice, and gradually slipped into poverty. Shunned by their former friends and worn down by poverty, Susan and Anna turned to God for comfort. They joined their local Presbyterian Church. They distributed tracts and attended sewing circles and Bible meetings. Because they desperately needed money, and because Susan was so good at telling stories, she began to write in hopes of earning a little money. She wrote late into the night and awoke before the sun rose, using strips

of linen dipped in fat for light, as they were too poor to afford to burn candles (A. Warner 326). The novel she produced, *The Wide, Wide World*, became a bestseller almost instantly, but the Warners' money troubles were far from over. Forced to sell copyright after copyright to pay her father's debts, both Susan Warner and her sister wrote dozens of novels, short stories, Sunday school fiction, and poetry over the next forty years, but never earned enough to return to the life of luxury that they had once enjoyed. As their popularity faded, so did their income, and by the end of century they were all but penniless again. They lived alone as two spinsters in the family home on Constitution Island for the rest of their lives, where they taught Bible lessons to the cadets at nearby West Point. They are still the only civilians ever to be buried at the West Point cemetery.

That is, in essence, the story of Susan Warner's life, and it so closely resembles the plot of the sentimental and domestic novels that were so popular in the mid-nineteenth century that it is unsurprising that her name has, in the last few decades, become nearly synonymous with the genre itself. And while this admittedly tragic version of Susan Warner's life is undeniably true, there is, of course, more to the story. Less often discussed (though just as true) is the fact that Susan Warner did not just gently slip into obscurity after the publication of her first novel, but enjoyed immense popularity among evangelical Christian readers throughout her life. She and her sister Anna (who authored the famous hymn "Jesus Loves Me") were praised on the pages of *Zion's Herald* and other evangelical publications long after the general public had forgotten their names, and Christian publishing houses like Robert Carter Brothers supplied Susan and Anna's fans with copies of Susan and Anna's latest works, which were eagerly anticipated. In the evangelical community, the author of *The Wide, Wide World* was still a something of a celebrity when she died in 1885. This community, and these works, are the focus of this study.

More than twenty years after her sister's death, Anna Warner was apparently still receiving letters from fans inquiring about Susan's religious beliefs. The creator of *The Wide, Wide World*, they reasoned, must have possessed a "faith worth hearing about" and lived a life "that should be told" (A. Warner xi). Such inquiries were allegedly so numerous that they inspired Anna to write a lengthy biography of her sister in 1909, which she titled *Elizabeth Wetherell*, a short-lived nom de plume that Susan adopted early in her career to preserve her anonymity. Anna Warner's claim that she was awash in fan mail may have been more than slightly exaggerated (Susan's works had not been popular with the general public for decades when she died in 1885), but the sentiment behind Anna's words still rings true over one hundred years later. To read *The Wide, Wide World*, *Melbourne House*, *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel*, *The Gold of Chickaree*, or any of the other dozens of novels in her oeuvre without discussing Warner's lifelong commitment to evangelical Christianity strips these works of the context in which they were written. Susan Warner was a deeply religious writer, and her faith was, and still is, one worth hearing about. In this study, I discuss how changes in Warner's personal religious beliefs shaped her fiction and her politics throughout her long career, especially in regards to the role of Christian women play in the public sphere. Specifically, I will note that her early works like *The Wide, Wide World* and "How May An American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?"—composed while Warner was attending the conservative Mercer Street Presbyterian Church and was engaged in activities like tract distribution and mission fund collection—call for women to embrace conservative political strategies like moral suasion to affect social change, and imagined charity and benevolence as the social to social ills. In the 1860's Warner converted to Methodism, and her views concerning Christianity, women, and politics became decidedly more progressive. In later works like *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel*, and *The Gold of Chickaree*, Warner

advocates for an expansion of Christian women's influence beyond the boundaries of home and hearth, and her heroines begin to actively participate in social reform.

The Wide, Wide World was a thoroughly Christian text, so much so that it became mandatory Sunday School reading for generations of young evangelicals. But the novel's mass market appeal, and its unparalleled commercial success, can be at least partially attributed to the popularity of the sentimental novel. As Jane Tompkins, Nina Baym, Mary Kelley, and others have noted in various studies, sentimental and domestic fiction written by women dominated the literary marketplace in the mid-nineteenth century, and thanks in part to the efforts of these scholars, Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World* have become touchstone texts in the canon of sentimental fiction, and with good reason. Susan Warner was certainly skilled at sentimentality. As I will discuss throughout this study, Susan and her sister Anna were both masters of the form, and frequently relied on the language of sentiment and the ideology of domesticity to communicate their message of religious and social change to their primarily religious, female readership.

Sentimental novels are often criticized by modern readers because they are formulaic and rely heavily on easily recognizable stock characters and plot conventions. But as Nina Baym explains in *Woman's Fiction*, "such adverse judgments" like these are "culture-bound," as they "refuse to assent to the work's conventions" (22). In her study, Baym meticulously outlines what she refers to as the "overplot" of the nineteenth-century women's novel, and explains that "by close plot study and discussion" of the works of Southworth, Sedgwick, Cummins, Warner, and others, modern-day readers can more easily recognize how each of these writers "achieved an individual thematic and temperamental emphasis by her variations within formulaic

constraints” (12). As Baym notes, sentimental novels written by women in the mid-nineteenth century rely on one of two plots:

In one, the heroine begins as a poor and friendless child. Most frequently an orphan, she sometimes only thinks of herself to be one, or has by necessity be separated from her parents for an indefinite time. In the second, the heroine is a pampered heiress who becomes poor and friendless in mid-adolescence through the death or financial failure of her legal protectors. At this point, the two plots merge, for both show how the heroine develops the capacity to survive and surmount her troubles. At the end of the novel, she is no longer an underdog. The purpose of both plots is to deprive the heroine of all external aids to make her success in life entirely a function of her own efforts and character. (35)

It is easy to see how such a plot might appeal to the young Susan Warner, who lost her mother at the age of seven and who turned to writing to support her family after the loss of their fortune following the Panic of 1837. And Baym recognizes that Warner and many of other women writers she discusses in her study “began their careers as a direct result of financial catastrophes in their families” (35). As I will discuss in more detail in my introductory chapter, Baym ultimately dismisses Susan and Anna Warner from the genre of women’s fiction and labels their fiction as “romance” and “juvenile” (149, 163). But because Baym considers only Susan and Anna’s early works like *The Wide, Wide World*, *Queechy*, and *Dollars and Cents* in her discussion of their novels, I believe that it would be useful to briefly map out an alternative “overplot” for the Warners’ fiction that takes their later works into consideration.

Like many of the heroines Baym discusses in her study, nearly all of Susan and Anna Warner’s female protagonists I have encountered are either orphans or are separated from their

families. *The Wide, Wide World*'s Ellen Montgomery is ordered to stay with her Aunt while her parents travel abroad, while Daisy Randolph of the *Daisy* series is sent to live on a southern plantation far from her childhood home in rural, upstate New York, when her father falls off a horse and hits his head, and must travel abroad to recuperate. Wych Hazel, the wealthy young woman of the novel by the same name, has parents who are deceased. Unlike Ellen Montgomery and Fleda Rinnegan, the orphan protagonist of Warner's second novel *Queechy*, both Daisy Randolph and Wych Hazel are incredibly wealthy, and both stand to inherit a vast fortune once they reach a certain age and are no longer under the care of their guardians. Although the reader is first introduced to both Daisy and Wych as children, unlike Ellen Montgomery, these later heroines mature into adult women on the pages of their respective novels, which focus primarily on their mid to late adolescence.² Like Ellen and Fleda, these later heroines are each under the care of a legal guardian who is either a family member or a close friend of their parents tasked with caring for the young woman until she reaches a marriageable age. These guardians are expected to oversee their education and provide them with emotional, intellectual, and social guidance as they mature, and for the most part, they are well-intentioned, if ineffective. Daisy's Aunt Gary hires her tutors and, with the assistance of her cousin Preston, attempts to instruct her in the finer points of southern culture and behavior. Likewise, Mr. Falkirk ensures that Wych Hazel attends school and carefully monitors her social interactions when she reaches Chickaree and begins to mingle with the other members of the upper class who live nearby. Both heroines are rebellious, and constantly buck the authority of their guardians. Daisy Randolph refuses to conform to the behavior her Aunt expects of her, and even makes herself ill in protest. Wych Hazel constantly argues with Mr. Falkirk, disregards any requests he makes of her, and often finds herself in precarious situations, stranded, for example, on the side of road at night or alone

in the forest in the rain, as a result. Unlike Ellen Montgomery or Fleda Rinnegan, neither of these later heroines is submissive.

Their guardians share one crucial feature with Fortune Emerson, Ellen Montgomery's self-reliant aunt—they are not Christians. Neither Mr. Falkirk nor Aunt Gary are the least bit interested in the heroines' spiritual development. In fact, Aunt Gary actively discourages the devout Daisy from sharing her Bible studies with the slaves on the plantation and dismisses her niece's religious beliefs as radical. Mr. Falkirk does not appear to be concerned with religion in the slightest, which helps explain why Wych Hazel is unique among Warner's heroines in that she has little knowledge of the Bible and does not profess any faith at all when she arrives at Chickaree. This lack of spiritual guidance helps explain these heroines' rebelliousness. Susan and Anna Warner would not have approved of an education that lacked religious training, and their readers would have disapproved of Daisy and Wych's lack of obedience. Because they are not being provided with spiritual mentorship, each heroine seeks guidance elsewhere. Daisy Randolph quickly befriends Uncle Darry, the only slave on a plantation who can read the Bible, and turns to him for spiritual comfort when her aunt, cousin, and teacher cause her distress. Wych Hazel is introduced to Christianity by her kindly neighbor Dr. Maryland and discusses the finer points of Christian doctrine with Dane Rollo throughout their courtship. Although Wych Hazel does not embrace Christianity until late in the novel whereas Daisy Randolph is a perfect female Christian exemplar from childhood, both novels can be typed as evangelical bildungsromans because they are concerned primarily with the heroines' spiritual development.

Most of the novels written by Susan Warner and her sister Anna conform to the basic plot structure described above. A heroine who is either an orphan or who has been separated from her parents is placed under the care of an ineffective guardian who is unable to teach her how to

navigate the new circumstances in which she now finds herself. Because her caretaker is not a Christian, she cannot provide the heroine with the moral and spiritual guidance she needs, and she becomes rebellious, and bucks authority. Through happenstance or by design, the heroine encounters a Christian who serves as her new role model, who helps her learn piety, selflessness, and other evangelical virtues, and who instructs the young woman in the finer points of Christian doctrine. At this point, the heroine begins the difficult process of self-discovery and self-evaluation, a process which culminates in her confirming (or reaffirming) her faith. That is, in essence, the story told in *The Wide, Wide World*, *Queechy*, *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel*, and *The Gold of Chickaree*, but what separates the first two of these novels from those written later in the Warners' career is the fact that they do not follow the heroine's development past her early adolescence. As I discuss in greater detail in my introductory chapter, Baym correctly identifies both *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy* as "juvenile" before dismissing Susan Warner from the canon of women's fiction altogether. But had Baym consulted *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel* or its sequel in her study, she would have discovered that these novels more closely conform to the form and ideology of nineteenth-century women's fiction than she realized. Although none of these young, orphaned women begins life as poor only to become wealthy (or vice-versa), the Warners' overplot does demonstrate "how the heroine develops the capacity to survive and surmount her troubles," even if they do not do so entirely without the aid of others (Baym 35). The Warners' heroines are all flawed, and their ability to "triumph in adversity becomes a matter of self-conquest as well as conquest of others" (36). As the Warners' heroine grows into adulthood, she too struggles with an unhappy home where she feel imprisoned but must "endure until she comes of age" and is able to "leave the unfriendly environment and succeed on her own" (37). Like the heroines of Baym's study, she struggles with the fact that she "cannot possess their wealth

directly, but must maneuver with men” (39). In many ways, the plot of the Warners’ novels encourages “the development of feminine self-sufficiency” (40). Susan and Anna Warner, like their contemporaries, wanted to tell what Baym calls “the story of the formation and assertion of a feminine ego” (11). But they also had another agenda. The Warner sisters were thoroughly committed to their faith, and they both genuinely believed that their novels could inspire their readers to live a life in keeping with evangelical values and support evangelical social reforms. And the novels they authored (either together or separately) tell a story that, while it is very similar to the overplot that Baym describes, differs in one, crucial way. It is a female Christian bildungsroman, intended to guide young evangelical women through the often difficult process of establishing an identity for herself as a Christian, as a woman, and as a member of American society.

Both Daisy Randolph and Wych Hazel are flawed women who must learn selflessness. Despite the fact the Daisy is a pious and pure Christian from the moment she arrives at Magnolia, and hence intrinsically knows that the plantation system is incompatible with Christian morality, she has yet to learn the extent to which she herself materially benefits from slave labor. It is not until she compiles a well-intentioned shopping list of items to procure for the slaves she has befriended that she recognizes exactly how many calico dresses, winter coats, warm blankets, and tins of coffee and sugar might be purchased for the price of only one exotic feather that adorns one of her many stylish hats (105). In a similar episode, Wych Hazel is chided by finance Dane Rollo for wearing expensive clothing while the residents of the mill town he recently purchased are forced to go without food, medicine, and proper clothing (173). In each of these scenes, the Warner heroine is taken to task not only for her material excesses, but for her naiveté. She must not only learn that self-sacrifice and self-denial are the highest of

all Christian virtues, she must do so in a way that calls attention to the social issues of her time. In a society that allowed chattel slavery and child labor, that forced some families to starve while others feasted and wore fine clothes, what, Warner wondered, was a Christian woman to do? How could evangelical women like herself combat the great moral injustice without stepping outside their sphere? And tellingly, it was by her ability to address these very questions that earned Susan Warner her first fifty dollars as a professional writer.

In January of 1851, only one month after the first edition of *The Wide, Wide World* was published, the essay “How May An American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” appeared in *The Ladies’ Wreath*, and Susan Warner collected her prize of fifty dollars. Warner’s essay likely won the contest because the prescription for women’s involvement in social and political issues she outlined so neatly conformed to the tenets of true womanhood.³ Her advice was rather conventional, and called on women to “dare” to be “Christians” and “Americans” by properly overseeing their children’s educations, regulating themselves to the “Home Department” and practice “secret prayer” and “self-denying duties” (224-27). But although Warner’s advice was conservative enough to appeal to the editors of *The Ladies’ Wreath*, her formula for women’s engagement in the public sphere contained the roots of what would become a more radical view of women in politics.

As I discuss throughout this study, Warner began her career by advocating charity and philanthropy, and relied heavily on moral suasion as a rhetorical strategy, but she would later embrace more progressive views about how Christian women might best engage issues like slavery, reconstruction, poverty, and labor reform. In *The Little American*, a short-lived magazine for children that she and her sister Anna wrote and published from 1861-1863, Warner began repurposing the reform writings of Henry Mayhew and the missionary writings of Thomas

Williams and James Calvert for children in hopes of successfully transmitting both the ideology of American Exceptionalism and morals and values evangelical Christianity to the next generation. She and her sister hoped that their publication could teach children to apply Christian morals to social problems, and used it as a platform to promote the missionary efforts of the Methodist church. In other words, they were hoping to help raise the next generation of evangelical activists. In *Daisy*, Warner places one of her aspiring young Christian missionaries on a southern cotton plantation, where she attempts to solve the problems of plantation life with Bible verses and clean blankets, only to be confronted by the fact that moral suasion and missionary aid are ineffective strategies for combating an injustice as serious as the southern slave system. In *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*, novels also co-written with her sister Anna, Warner calls for nothing less than the complete reconstruction of Gilded Age capitalism and imagines a society in which Christian men and women work together to ensure that wealth is more evenly distributed, poverty is alleviated, evangelical morality governs both the public and private sphere. Whereas her early novels espouse an ideology of submissiveness and self-denial, her later works grow increasingly more progressive both in their views of women's engagement in the public sphere and in the solutions they pose to social and political problems like poverty and labor reform.

By the end of her career, Warner's writings more closely resemble the sermons of the Social Gospel movement than the tracts distributed by the American Tract Society. As Jane Tompkins discusses at length in *Sensational Designs*, Warner distributed tracts herself during this point in her life, and hence her writing reflects the ideology contained in the pamphlets she carried (159). And yet for many students and scholars of the recovery movement, Susan Warner remains the epitome of submissiveness and self-denial, the conservative counterpoint for more

radical, proto-feminist writers like Fanny Fern. When Susan Warner is remembered at all, it is as a pious and demure recluse who wrote only didactic religious fiction for an ever-shrinking audience of religious radicals and who lived a life of such isolation that she was completely unconcerned with the social and political issues of her time. In this study, I hope to advance a more accurate image of Warner that recognizes her important contributions to the literature of social reform.

I chose *Rereading, Rewriting, and Re-Recovering the Literary Legacy of Susan Warner* as the title for my study because I hope that by re-examining the lesser-known works of this prolific and important writer, I can begin to rewrite her literary legacy so that it more authentically reflects her lifelong commitment to the social and political goals of evangelical Christianity and helps to dispel previously-held notions that Warner lived a life of cultural isolation. By doing so, I hope to begin the process of re-recovering a writer that many students and scholars of nineteenth-century American literature only think they know. But I also hope that this study encourages others to take up similar projects and reread, rewrite, and re-recover the works of other writers with whom they might already be familiar, but whose legacy has been recovered only in part. Harriet Beecher Stowe was once known only as the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but in recent decades, dozens of essays and several full-length scholarly works have been devoted to exploring works like *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862), *Agnes of Sorrento* (1879), and numerous others, and now Stowe's literary legacy extends far beyond her works about slavery. More recently, the literary legacy of Julia Ward Howe, once known only as the author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," was drastically altered in 2004 when Gary Williams published an incomplete novel, which he titled *The Hermaphrodite*, he recovered from a series of fragments he found in Howe's journals. His discovery ensures that Howe's voice will

now be added to the scholarly conversations surrounding the depiction of intersexuality in literature, and has forever altered our perceptions of Howe as a writer, as a wife, and as a woman. There are, of course, many other examples of how recovering specific texts has helped us to reimagine well-known writers and restore the reputations of once-popular writers who were all but lost to history. Such projects were, and continue to be, the primary purpose of periodicals like *Legacy*. In a roundtable discussion about the past, present, and future of that publication, former editors were asked why they believed the sections devoted to archival research were so important to the mission goals of the recovery movement. Martha J. Cutter replied that these features “were developed so that the ‘canon’ of American women’s writing would constantly get fresh infusions of forgotten texts, authors, and ways of writing” (213). I hope that my study helps to contribute to this important project and encourages others to continue to explore the archives in search of other texts that complicate our understanding of writers with whom we are familiar, and to rediscover the work of writers who are forgotten.

“Research,” Zora Neale Hurston wrote in *Dust on the Road*, “is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prodding with a purpose” (143). Recovery, I believe, almost perfectly encapsulates the type of research Hurston describes. When I began this project, I was, unlike Hurston, “poking and prodding” my way through the lesser-known works of Susan Warner with no specific “purpose” in mind. After reading both *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, the only two novels by Warner to be reprinted in the last seventy years, I became curious. What other works, I wondered, had Susan Warner written between 1852, when she published *Queechy*, and her death in 1885? I was shocked to discover that a list compiled by the Constitution Island Association contained dozens of novels with titles I did not recognize, about which no scholarship existed beyond a few footnotes. After countless hours spent on Google books and archive.org perusing

digitized versions of those novels whose titles caught my eye, I stumbled upon a novel about a young white girl who was sent to live on a southern cotton plantation called *Daisy*, and recalled the many studies I had read that insisted that Susan Warner never wrote about social or political issues. And yet here in front of me was evidence to the contrary. If Susan Warner wrote a novel about slavery, I asked myself, what other issues did she address in the dozens of novels that I had yet to read? After scouring the criticism of *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, along with other literary histories and studies by recovery-movement scholars, I compiled a short list of works to read extracted primarily from footnotes and brief summaries in studies which focused on her earlier work. I noted that Baym mentioned *The Hills of the Shatemuc* (1857) in *Women's Fiction*, and quickly obtained a copy (157). I read Joyce Carol Oates' 1987 essay on *Diana* (1877) and was intrigued by her thoughts on Warner, marriage, and nature of submission, and ordered a copy from Abebooks.com the next day. I began to get a fuller picture of Warner as a writer, and was discovering that my own preconceptions about her style, her choice of subject, and her views of women, domesticity, and marriage were misguided because they were based only on a small sample of her larger catalog. Initially, I imagined that this project would focus on these issues, but after reading *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*, particularly the passages near the end when she and Anna imagine their utopian mill community, I knew that this writer was far more aware of social and political reform movements than I (or anyone else) suspected. With this aim in mind, I began to scour the Constitution Island Association digital archives for evidence of Warner's political beliefs, and contacted the archivist for guidance; she pointed me toward *The Little American* and the depictions of poverty it contained. From there, the project took shape rather quickly, and I spent the next two years rediscovering how deeply committed both Susan Warner and her sister Anna were to issues of social justice. But the thought always

haunted me that I had I kept my original focus on marriage, submission, and the role of women in nineteenth-century society; I may have recovered a very different image of Susan Warner than the one I presented on these pages.

In my introduction, “Susan Warner and the Perils (and Problems) of Recovery,” I discuss how Susan Warner’s literary legacy has been shaped by each generation of scholars who attempted to recover her life and work. Beginning with her 1885 obituary in *The New York Times* and continuing through the recovery movement to the present day, I will note how each attempt to rescue Susan Warner and her work from obscurity has resulted in a different version of Susan Warner herself, and that in most cases, the portrait of the writer they present reveals just as much about the trends in criticism and scholarship and the ideologies and personal motivations of the person performing the recovery as it does about the author herself. For Anna Warner, who composed the first (and only) biography of Susan in 1909, her sister was nothing short of a saint to be emulated by legions of adoring readers whom she imagined still longed to hear about her purity and piety. In order to satisfy this perceived demand, Anna crafted a portrait of her sister that more closely resembles a sentimental, religious best-seller than it does a factual biography. Later, Edward Foster wondered how *The Wide, Wide World* became one of the bestselling novels of a generation even though it was written by a woman who lived on an isolated island in rural upstate New York. He finds his answers in the political writing of her father, a staunch Whig, and the sermons of her minister, who was a prominent Presbyterian leader. It was their ideas, he argues, that were so popular. Susan Warner added only a little sentiment and a dash of local color. Decades later, Jane Tompkins, Nina Baym, and other scholars of the recovery movement consider only Warner’s early novels when they portray her as a submissive, pious, reclusive woman whose writings reflected her conservative Christian

beliefs. This leads them to draw many false conclusions about Warner as an intellectual and as an artist, including the assertion that she was not engaged with the social and political issues of her time.

In my second chapter, “Rereading Anna’s Biography,” I examine Anna Warner’s text *Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell* in greater detail, using the tradition of sentimental and religious texts written by nineteenth-century American women as my guide. I discuss how her biography was shaped not only by the genres of sentimental and domestic fiction but also by the perceived expectations of Susan Warner’s fans in the evangelical community, and argue that Anna’s text should be consulted within the appropriate critical and historical contexts.

In “‘Dare To Be a Christian’: Susan Warner and the Evangelical Reform Movement,” I discuss how Warner’s early writings like *The Wide, Wide World* and “How May An American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” relocate social issues like poverty into the women’s sphere and invite Christian women to expand their influence beyond the realm of the home and hearth. Warner believed that Christian women, by performing acts of charity and by engaging in self-denial, could affect social and political change without violating the cultural norms of true womanhood. By denying themselves luxury items and instead using the money to perform charity, I argue, Warner’s fictional women are able to venture outside their own domestic sphere and enter the domestic spaces of less fortunate women, whom they offer material as well as spiritual aid. Although this may appear conventional and conservative, Warner’s imagining of the world as an interconnected realm of private, domestic spaces licenses women to exert their influence outside the home while still retaining their status as true women, and therefore represents an important step toward the expansion of Christian female influence. When Warner would convert to Methodism a decade later, her views would grow decidedly more progressive,

and she would abandon this strategy and call for more direct engagement by women; but these works represent an important early phase of Warner's beliefs concerning the proper role of Christian women in society.

In "Of Minors and Missionaries: *The Little American* and Christian Children's Literature in Nineteenth-Century America," I discuss Susan and Anna Warner's children's periodical within the context of Christian literature aimed at a juvenile audience. I note how Susan and Anna Warner borrowed the writings of British journalist Henry Mayhew and the works of missionaries like Thomas Williams and James Calvert and repurposed them for their young, evangelical audience. By carefully selecting only the portions of those works that prominently feature women, children, and families, Susan and Anna hoped to rouse the sympathies of their young readers for those less fortunate children overseas while emphasizing how lucky they were to be born in a Christian nation. In addition to encouraging the values of evangelical morality and patriotic nationalism in their young readers, Susan and Anna hoped to encourage the next generation of American Christians to support the missionary efforts of the Methodist Church and apply evangelical values to social problems like poverty, which they relocate to the slums of London but suggest could be found on the streets of nearly every American city in the mid to late nineteenth century. Because they were already successful authors of children's fiction, I argue, Susan and Anna Warner believed themselves to be uniquely qualified to transmit evangelical values to the next generation of American Christians, and they did so in hopes to inspire them to continue the social reform projects begun by their parents when they grew up to be "big Americans"

In "'Feeling Right' About Reconstruction: Susan Warner, Evangelical Reform, and the Sentimental Novel" I focus on *Daisy*, a novel that, while written between 1865 and 1868, takes

place on a southern cotton plantation in the years just before the Civil War. In it, Warner's young Christian protagonist uses every weapon in her well-stocked arsenal of sentimental strategies to combat the injustices of slavery: she makes herself ill from sympathy, she engages in charity and benevolence with the money she has saved by practicing self-denial, she hosts missionary-style Bible readings and encourages church attendance, she even helps the slaves learn to read so they benefit from the teachings of Jesus. But all of her efforts are, unsurprisingly, ultimately unsuccessful as the injustices of plantation slavery cannot, Warner's novel shows, be alleviated through charity, self-denial, and moral suasion. I argue that *Daisy* was Warner's attempt to rewrite Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the Reconstruction era. No matter how "right" the young Christian child "feels" about slavery, she is powerless to end the suffering she witnesses at Magnolia. Instead, Warner offers her readers with an alternative strategy for bringing about social and political change. At the end of *Daisy*, her heroine becomes an evangelical Christian activist, loudly proclaims her support for abolitionism, and pledges to devote all the resources she will one day inherit to combating injustice and inequality. Though Daisy never realizes her dream of freeing her slaves and dividing her wealth more equitably (the Civil War accomplishes that), Warner's disjointed and flawed novel offers her readers a model of Christian female activism to emulate that she hopes will succeed when moral suasion, charity, and benevolence fail. It is not until her later novels *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree* that she would allow herself to fully imagine how Christian women could change the world for the better. But *Daisy* is an important novel, I argue, because it represents the beginning of Warner's support for evangelical Christian women's activism.

In my final chapter, "Of Factories and Fairy Tales: Wealth and Poverty in *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*" I focus a pair of novels coauthored by Susan and Anna Warner that

trace the moral and spiritual development of a wealthy young heiress from a materialistic and shallow member of the ruling elite to a pure and pious Christian woman who, alongside her husband Dane Rollo, uses her vast wealth to construct a Christian capitalist utopia in a nearby mill town. Drawing heavily on Susan's journals detailing her life as a bored young lady, Susan and Anna construct a heroine whose faults not only resemble those of the young Susan Warner herself: she reads too many novels, has unrealistic expectations for her own happiness, and most importantly, does not share her authors' belief in the importance of living a life in keeping with Christian virtue and morality. As they set about transforming Wych Hazel into a Christian female exemplar worthy of undertaking the important task of social reform, they also outline a strategy by which nineteenth-century American women do not merely emulate Christian values, but actively participate in the construction of communities that reflect and promote these values. The utopia that Wych Hazel and her husband Rollo construct—where poverty, vice, and suffering are all unheard of, and where the wealthy Christian capitalists are worshipped as near-Gods by their grateful flock of workers—is decidedly paternalistic, but nonetheless represents Susan Warner's hopes for her nation's future. It was a world where no one was poor, where no one was hungry and no one suffered, one where everyone lived their lives in perfect keeping with Christian principles. It was, in short, Warner's answer to the pain and suffering she witnessed during her long life.

When I first began this project, my intention was to focus primarily on the work of Susan Warner, and devote only one chapter to her sister Anna. As my study took shape, it became apparent that it was impossible to tell the story of Susan's life without also discussing the life and work of Anna Warner. As the author of the *Susan Warner, or Elizabeth Wetherell*, the role Anna played in securing a lasting legacy for her more famous sister cannot be overstated. As I

discuss at length in Chapter 1, Anna's portrait of Susan was expertly crafted to resemble the sentimental and domestic novels that were so popular in the early part of the nineteenth-century. It is unsurprising, then, that *Susan Warner, or Elizabeth Wetherell*, and the image of Susan Warner it contained, appealed to Baym, Tompkins, and other scholars of the recovery movement. But Anna Warner should not be remembered merely as a biographer. As I discuss throughout this study, she was a prolific and successful author in her own right, and she composed dozens of novels, essays, short stories, and poems. She also coauthored several works with Susan, including *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*, both of which I discuss in Chapter 5 of this study. In each of these novels, the style, tone, and plot are so uniform that it was impossible for me to tease out Susan and Anna's individual contributions. The fact that these two authors were able to produce so seamless a text speaks to the intimacy of their relationship, both personal and professional. Neither sister ever married, and they lived together as spinsters in the small farmhouse on Constitution Island for their entire lives. They distributed tracts together, collected for the mission fund together, taught Sunday school together, and wrote many of their novels sitting side by side. Unfortunately, Anna Warner has not received the critical attention she deserves, and remains a footnote in literary history. A full-length, critical biography of both Susan and Anna Warner is long overdue, and I hope that this study inspires other scholars to continue to explore their lifelong partnership.

Throughout this study, I rely heavily upon archival materials made available to me by the Constitution Island Association, an organization dedicated to preserving the Warner family home and its contents, which include both Susan and Anna Warner's personal correspondence, Susan's surviving journals, historical newspaper clippings that mention the Warner sisters and their work, memoirs written by friends of the Warner family, and the extensive library of nineteenth-century

books that once lined the shelves of Henry Warner's study, where Susan and Anna did most of their writing. When I began the process of planning this project in the Spring of 2010, the Warner house was open to the public for at least part of the year, and the Warner archives were available online through the Constitution Island Association website and could be physically accessed in person with the help of two full time archivists employed by the Constitution Island Association. During two-and-a half years that passed while I conducted my research and wrote and revised this dissertation, the Warner house has been temporarily closed to the public and the Warners have become inaccessible to researchers, a situation that I can only hope is also temporary. Fortunately, the Constitution Island Association maintained an extensive digital archive that allowed me to perform the research necessary to complete this project. With the help of the two full-time archivists, who generously devoted their time and energy to providing me with digital copies of any piece of archival material that was not available on the site at the time, I was able to complete my project despite the fact that I was unable to visit the Warner house in person. Because access to archival materials is so crucial to any recovery project, I focus my concluding chapter on the both the history of the Constitution Island Association and the controversy that erupted in the small town of Cold Springs, New York when the Warner house was closed to the public and members of that organization scrambled to find a new home for all that remains of Susan and Anna Warner's legacy. As I discuss at length in my conclusion, I believe that these events highlight issues that are critical not only to my own study and to the future recovery work that has yet to be performed on Susan and Anna Warner, but to any student or scholar whose work depends upon the use of archival material, be it physical or digital.

I hope that the following study inspires both scholars currently working in field and students whose academic interests include recovery of long-forgotten texts to take a second look

at the work of a writer whose work they only think they know. As I have discovered after consulting only a small portion of the dozens of novels, essays, poems, and religious writings composed by Susan Warner and her sister Anna over the long course of their careers, there is always more material packed away in the dusty backrooms of libraries, waiting to be uncovered and reinterpreted. If Susan Warner's literary legacy continues to be re-imagined and her work continues to be recovered by the next generation of students and scholars, there is no telling what future insights we might glean about the long nineteenth century by continuing to study one of its most prolific and popular writers.

INTRODUCTION

SUSAN WARNER AND THE PERILS (AND PROBLEMS) OF RECOVERY

In March of 1885, *The New York Times* published an obituary about a woman of whom most of its readers had never even heard. “Perhaps nineteen reading people of twenty,” observes the unnamed author, “upon noticing the simple announcement of the death of Miss Susan Warner, would be moved to inquire who Miss Susan Warner was that her death should be made the subject of a press dispatch” (5). Thirty-five years after her first novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, had enjoyed unprecedented success on the literary marketplace with sales estimated at nearly half a million copies, Susan Warner was all but forgotten at the time of her death.

The fact that a once-bestselling writer could slip into such obscurity after only three decades provided the author of Warner’s obituary occasion to reflect upon the distinction between popularity and literary achievement. “*The Wide, Wide World*,” he notes, “has never been reckoned among the glories of American literature...it appeals to an audience much lower and also much wider than that by which the fame of authors is determined.” Though the novel was immensely popular, he argues, it was popular with the wrong people for the wrong reasons. “It was eagerly read by children and by adults still in the juvenile stage of literary culture,” he states, but was ignored by serious readers and critics with more refined literary tastes. He concludes, “the qualities which make an author famous may be inconsistent with the qualities which make him popular” and asserts that Warner’s lack of literary notoriety served as “gratifying evidence” of the fact that public taste does not determine literary merit (4).

Just as the author of her obituary predicted, Susan Warner’s previous fame did not guarantee her a lasting literary legacy—she disappeared into almost complete obscurity and was

rarely mentioned by scholars of nineteenth-century literature at all, save for a few brief entries in only the thickest literary histories, resurfacing occasionally to be condemned by critics of the sentimental novel. For most of the twentieth century, Susan Warner, like many other women writers of sentimental and domestic fiction, was a mere footnote in the study of American literature.

And she would likely have remained so had it not been for the efforts of Jane Tompkins, Judith Fetterley, Nina Baym, and other scholars of the recovery movement. Their efforts to bring the writings of forgotten women writers like Susan Warner, Catherine Sedgwick, Fanny Fern, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and their contemporaries back into print led to an extensive reshaping of the canon of nineteenth century literature. By doing so, these scholars not only ensured that these neglected writers would continue to be read and studied by generations of students and scholars; they also provided those interested in sentimental and domestic fiction with a critical framework for interpretation that focused on the historical and cultural work of these women writers rather than on abstract notions of literary value or merit such as those assumed by the unnamed author of Warner's obituary.

Such a drastic reconceptualization of literary value was certainly controversial, and the early scholars of the recovery movement drew staunch criticism from the scholarly community as a debate waged about the proper place of sentimental and domestic fiction in the literary canon. When Tompkins devoted an entire chapter of her monograph *Sensational Designs to The Wide, Wide World* in 1985, both Susan Warner and her novel were suddenly at the epicenter of these debates. Among many critical attacks waged against Tompkins was D.G. Meyers' essay "The Canonization of Susan Warner," which identified Warner as "strongest candidate for enshrinement in the new counter canon" because of Tompkins' treatment. Meyers concluded that

Warner had become an important figure only because Tompkins' choice of Warner as the author whose work best illustrated her theory meant that Warner herself was now "symbolic of attempts to redefine the meaning of literature in our time." Tompkins' efforts to rescue Warner from obscurity, Meyers claimed, represented nothing less than a "calculated assault on the very principal of literary and intellectual distinction" (78).

Meyers' condemnation of Tompkins did not banish Susan Warner and her novel from the literary canon, though this was, undoubtedly, his intention. On the contrary, Meyers, along with other scholars who argued that literary merit should continue to serve as the sole criteria for inclusion in the canon, invested Warner's literary reputation with significance far beyond the field of nineteenth-century American literature. If the inclusion of Susan Warner in the literary canon amounts to nothing less than the "calculated assault" on the concept of literary merit as Meyers describes it, then her legacy has lasting implications for the entire field of women's literature. If Susan Warner and her novel continue to be read, studied, and taught in spite of the attacks waged against her by scholars like Meyers, then the next generation of recovery scholars can begin to reevaluate the works of other, less popular women writers using Tompkins' concept of cultural work and continue to challenge the notions of literary value espoused by scholars like Meyers.

The recovery movement has enjoyed much success in recent decades. *The American Women Writers Series* has restored many of the long-forgotten works of writers like Maria Cummins, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and Catherine Maria Sedgwick to print in critical editions that include introductions authored by prominent scholars as well as bibliographic resources that invite further critical inquiry into the lives and works of these important women. Societies dedicated to the study of writers like Catherine Maria Sedgwick and Harriet Beecher Stowe

promote future scholarship through newsletters, message boards, and locally-hosted study groups. The Society for the Study of American Women Writers hosts a semiannual national conference and publishes *Legacy*, a journal dedicated the study of nineteenth-century women writers. Even the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* now includes Fanny Fern, Louisa May Alcott, and some of their contemporaries. It would appear, at least, that the project to recover the writings of these women is all but complete.

Such successes have led scholars to begin to question how to proceed with further recovery efforts. As Sharon Harris notes in her 2009 essay “Across the Gulf: Working in the Post-Recovery Era,” recovery is a “multi-phased process” rather than a singular goal, and scholars of the recovery movement should now focus on “expanding interpretative frameworks” in order to ensure the “regeneration of the field” (285). Though the expansion of interpretative frameworks is certainly an important goal, I argue that such regeneration is, in fact, already occurring in and is being driven not only by scholarship but also by technology.

If recovery is, as Harris claims, not a singular goal but an ongoing process, than the role that the internet and digital media play in this process cannot be understated. Though these technological advancements have certainly affected all areas of academic scholarship, I believe that the Internet is particularly useful to the practice of recovery, and will continue to shape the next phase of the recovery movement. As more and more universities and websites like *Google Books* and *Project Gutenberg* continue expand their databases of easily downloadable (and often free) publications, it seems now that anyone with an interest in Susan Warner or her contemporaries can easily access a large number works, including those unmentioned by recovery scholars. For the first time, one no longer needs to be an expert in recovery, a scholar of nineteenth-century literature, or even a university student, to access rare texts.

As the potential readership for nineteenth century American women's literature continues to grow, recovery movement scholars are only beginning to explore the potentials of this relatively new technology. The Society for the Study of American Women Writers maintains an e-text library of nineteenth-century American women writers that allows students and scholars to access reliable editions that have been reviewed by experts in the field, but their list of authors and texts is still far too brief to be considered representative. The society also provides links to dozens of groups dedicated to individual authors, and includes several biographical and critical essays. But on the whole, the site caters to a small group of experts rather than a broader audience of scholars and students of all disciplines. In order for the recovery movement to continue to generate new interest in the field, the next generation of recovery scholars needs to keep pace with the ever-expanding availability of new texts. This drastic expansion of available texts not only ensures that a work need not be currently in print in order to be critiqued by scholars and enjoyed by students; it also allows current scholarship of the recovery movement to move beyond the issues of accessibility and representation that drove the work of scholars like Harris.

In her 1994 essay "American Women Writers and the Politics of Recovery," Judith Fetterley recognizes the integral role literary history would play in the future of the recovery movement. "We need to find ways to solve the problems of doing literary history," she claims, "because we cannot do without it; it represents an essential stage in the process of integrating women writers into the field of nineteenth-century American literature" (604). Fetterley goes on to lament the fact that Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*, a scathing critique of sentimentalism that completely dismisses Warner and her contemporaries from the literary canon, was not countered by a "critical biography of Warner or a critical study of her work or a

positive assessment of sentimentalism equal in historical scope, intellectual energy, and emotional intensity” (607). While I hope that my project will begin to fill the scholarly gap identified by Fetterley nearly two decades ago, I also argue that before such a project can be attempted, the next generation of recovery scholars should attempt to “solve the problem of literary history” by critically examining the act of recovery itself and beginning to question the ways that we as scholars construct the literary history of the writers we recover.

In *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory*, Cary Nelson suggests that recovery reveals just as much about contemporary moment as it does about the historical past. “Literary history” he claims, “is never an innocent process of recovery. We recover what we are culturally and psychologically prepared to recover and what we ‘recover’ we necessarily rewrite, giving it meanings that are inescapably contemporary, giving it a new discursive life in the present, a life it cannot have had before” (11). If, as Nelson suggests, we as scholars “rewrite” each text we recover according to our own intellectual goals and contemporary values, we need to reexamine the ways that which authors who have already been recovered are portrayed in current scholarship. Because, as I mentioned above, Susan Warner continues to be seen as a central, seminal figure in the recovery movement, it seems only fitting that her legacy be among the first to be reconsidered.

Though Jane Tompkins may have reintroduced Warner to the canon, current scholarship extends far beyond the ideas and interpretations she posed in *Sensational Designs*. *The Wide, Wide World* has received much critical attention in recent years as the subject of dozens of critical articles and dissertations, and scholars have used a rich variety of approaches in their treatments of Warner’s text. Many of these studies focus only on Warner’s novel as a representative work of popular fiction and locate their interpretation strictly within the confines

of nineteenth-century literature and culture, and use her text as window through which to explore nineteenth century attitudes regarding reading, motherhood, domestic labor, and religion. Other scholars, such as Andrea Blair, have taken a less historical approach to Warner's text. Blair's essay "Landscape in Drag: The Paradox of Feminine Space in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*" utilizes a combination of ecocriticism, place studies, and queer theory to discuss how Warner's landscape subverts cultural expectations of gender and sexuality. Similarly, Phong Nguyen's "Naming the Trees: Literary Onomastics in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*" praises Warner's complex use of names and nomenclature and locates her within a theoretical tradition that spans from ancient Greece to the postmodern era. Such studies demonstrate that Warner's text is rich enough to sustain a myriad of critical interpretations. If current trends continue, Susan Warner may well be anthologized more quickly than recovery movement scholars imagined, and her work may be scrutinized by a much broader scholarly audience. As this occurs, we need to examine closely how we, as scholars of the recovery movement who are presumably, to varying degrees, the experts on Susan Warner, have constructed her literary legacy.

That legacy, as it has been formed by the very scholars who sought to restore her literary reputation and rescue her from obscurity, is decidedly unflattering. Baym calls Warner a "powerless" and "restricted" woman who, like her protagonist Ellen Montgomery, "desired only relief and release from all obligation" (150-152). In her profile written for *Legacy*, Tompkins refers to Warner as "imprisoned by the socio-economic conditions that restricted middle class women to parlors, kitchens, and upstairs chambers of the home" (1). Powerless, restricted, and imprisoned, the Susan Warner whom these scholars describe was a demur and submissive recluse who wrote only didactic, religious fiction and was otherwise uninvolved with the social

and political issues of her time. Though they argue that Warner and her novel are crucial to any study of sentimental and domestic fiction, praise her mastery of religious didacticism, and stress that she composed one of the most influential novels of the nineteenth century, nearly all scholars of Warner's work portray her as a woman isolated from her own cultural moment, a woman whose life, like her work, adhered to the "ethic of submission" espoused by the cult of true womanhood (Tompkins 161).

But this portrait of Warner is both incomplete and inaccurate. Though she certainly did not offer the same challenges to dominant culture as did her more radically proto-feminist contemporaries, Susan Warner was neither demur or submissive, nor was she isolated from nineteenth-century culture. Far from being "unconcerned" with the "social and political issues of her time," Susan Warner addressed a variety of social issues including abolitionism, female patriotism and education, and labor reform in her extensive catalog of works. Nor was Warner isolated and imprisoned by the domestic sphere: she was a professional writer who skillfully negotiated the literary marketplace and was a tireless promoter of her own fiction. She composed well over thirty novels in her lifetime, and edited—and distributed—a children's periodical along with her sister Anna. Warner was also a spiritual mentor and teacher whose weekly Bible classes attracted dozens of cadets from neighboring West Point. Warner was, throughout her life, an author, a publisher, and a teacher. Despite these facts, her intellectual contribution to these areas has not yet been fully recognized by scholars of the recovery movement. Perhaps most importantly, the recovery of *The Wide, Wide World* invites the reader to view the novel as a metonym for Warner herself, and therefore to ignore the vast majority of her other work.

If Susan Warner continues to be such an influential figure in nineteenth century literary studies, a more complete, nuanced portrait of her as a writer, a woman, and an intellectual is long

overdue. Clearly, the image of Susan Warner constructed by scholars over the past several decades should be revised to stress her accomplishments in the literary marketplace and to recognize her engagement with social issues. But before such a biographical interpretation can be advanced, we need to investigate how Susan Warner's literary reputation was initially formed. As Fetterley observes, how we as recovery scholars construct writers like Warner "is a choice we make on grounds essentially political" (608). If Fetterley's observation about the political nature of representation is correct, it behooves us to examine more carefully the motivation behind each act of recovery. We should begin to question *how* an author was recovered, by whom, and for what purpose.

Although Baym, Fetterley, and Tompkins can be credited with introducing her novel to an entire generation of students and scholars, they were not the first to recover Susan Warner. As her obituary from *The New York Times* reveals, Susan Warner was long forgotten when she died in 1885, and news of her death prompted the author of her obituary to comment on the nature of popularity and literary merit, to ascribe meaning to her legacy. In many ways, the obituary represents the first effort to recover Warner. Subsequently, Susan Warner has been interpreted differently by each person to approach her life and work, and these interpretations were shaped not only by the personal motivations and ideological assumptions of the person performing the recovery, but also by contemporary trends in criticism and scholarship. First family members, then literary historians, and finally scholars of the recovery movement have approached Warner and her extensive catalog with different aims, and each of these efforts has perpetuated a skewed version of her life and work. In short, each act of recovery recovers a different Susan Warner.

The second attempt to recover Warner's legacy was not performed by a historian or literary critic, but by her sibling. Anna Warner was relatively famous in her own right—she had

coauthored nearly a dozen works with her sister, published more than twenty novels herself, and composed many popular hymnals, the most notable of which was “Jesus Loves Me.” Despite her many accomplishments, Anna was never able to equal her sister’s immense popularity. When Susan died in 1885, Anna was rarely mentioned in her obituaries. Whether or not Anna ever resented her sister’s fame is difficult to determine, but twenty years after Warner’s death, Anna published a 500-page biography of her older sister that praised her literary accomplishments and provided readers with excerpts from Susan’s journals and private letters with the expressed aim of chronicling her sister’s life for posterity.⁴

Like so many women writers of the mid-nineteenth century, Anna Warner begins her text with an apologetic explanation:

If ever this book is printed and read, at two things, I doubt not some people will wonder. First, at our strange, exceptional life, and then that I should be willing to tell it so freely. I was not willing. I am by nature a terribly secretive person, and it goes hard with me to tell anybody what is nobody's business. Furthermore, our home life was so unendingly precious, that it hurts me to have it gazed at by cold and careless eyes. (iii)

Anna was, by her own admission, an unwilling biographer. She was reluctant to share the intimate details of her upbringing, the painful memories of her family’s descent into financial ruin, and the hardships that she and her sister were forced to endure as a result. Doing so violated the sanctity of the domestic sphere—a concept deeply ingrained into the minds of nineteenth-century American women writers. Her struggles to rectify the private sphere of domesticity with the public sphere of publication reflect an anxiety about authorship common to the writers of domestic fiction in the mid-nineteenth century,⁵ and her apologetic preface closely resembles

those which proceed the novels of Tabitha Tenney, Susanna Rowson, Fanny Fern, and other women writers who struggled to overcome what Gilbert and Gubar call “the anxiety of authorship” (49).

Anna assures her readers that she is violating the private sphere and exposing her personal life only under duress, only in order to reveal her sister’s character and how it was shaped by her experiences, and, more importantly, by God. “I could not truly set forth my sister's character,” Anna writes, “without giving the surroundings among which it took shape and strength. For the rest, I have no call to be sensitive. New England blood is never ashamed of any work that ought to be done ; and no believer has cause to cover his face, in any spot where his dear Lord sees fit to bid him dwell; for work, for service, or for the mere polishing attrition” (iv). Anna’s appeals to the New England work ethic would have certainly resounded with her audience of primarily white, middle-class New England women. Her unabashed claim that, as a “true believer,” she composed her text with the utmost humility and reverence to God would likely have endeared both her and her text to the evangelical Christians who cherished her sister’s novels. By claiming that she is performing God’s work by composing the biography, Anna Warner successfully circumvents the doctrine of separate spheres—she “bypasses worldly authority” in order to claim divine authority, a rhetorical move that Tompkins attributes only to her sister in *Sensational Designs* (160). Though Anna Warner’s reluctance to share the private details of her life in a public forum might have been genuine, her expression of these anxieties was carefully crafted so as not to insult the sensibilities of her conservative audience. As Veronica Stewart astutely observes in her 1995 essay “Mothering a Female Saint: Susan Warner’s dialogic role in *The Wide, Wide, World*,” “The savvy rhetorical maneuvers Anna uses in her preface to enhance her own credibility also underscore her remarkably studied control of

approved formulas for women's writing" (60). Like her sister, Anna Warner was clearly a master of such formulas, and her preface, though it may have appeared staunchly conservative at the turn of the century, accurately reflected the cultural constraints placed upon women writers of the previous generation.

So what prompted Anna Warner to "set forth her sister's character" and compose such a lengthy biography? Stewart claims that the biography was composed "to satisfy this desire on the part of readers for detailed information about Susan's spirituality" (59). Stewart supports this claim by referencing Anna's inscription, in which she addresses her sister directly. "My love," she writes, "they want me to tell about you; and if I can, I must. They write to me from England and America and back of such books as yours there must be a faith worth hearing about, a life that should be told..." (xi). Though Stewart correctly identifies one motivation for Anna's biography, her explanation does not consider other factors that may have influenced Anna's act of recovery. By 1885, Susan Warner was no longer popular with the general public, and the primary audience for her work was narrowing. According to the portraits of Warner being circulated in the press in the years just before Anna composed her biography, Susan Warner was, by the end of the century, remembered only by the very old, who sought out her work out of pure nostalgia, or the by very devout, who viewed her as no less than a saint worthy of emulation and adoration. It was with these two audiences in mind that Anna constructed her portrait of her older sister, a portrait that was both an account of a young woman's spiritual and moral development and a masterfully crafted narrative of evangelical conversion.

The New York Times again discussed Warner's legacy several years after it had printed her obituary. In September of 1898, Edgar Mathew Bacon questioned why Warner's novels

continued to sell so long after her death, and imagined that the readers of these long-forgotten novels to be quite antiquated themselves:

But perhaps if we want to get at a still more potent reason for continuing to print these works, when most of their contemporaries have gone out of print, we may find it by watching the old fellow at the book counter. His mood is reminiscent. He recalls stolen hours on the farm, perhaps, and a flavor of lilacs steals up from somewhere...How much is it? Yes, he will take it. It will refresh old memories.

(24)

In Bacon's explanation, Susan Warner's novels could not possibly hold any interest for the young, modern reader at the dawn of the twentieth century. Her work, he assumes, would disappear completely when the bookstores were no longer populated by old men seeking to "refresh old memories." The idea that her sister's work could inspire nothing more than a superficial nostalgia and the threat that she would disappear into obscurity may have prompted Anna Warner to construct a legacy for Warner that would not fade with the passing of time or be altered by changing popular tastes. In light of Bacon's unflattering portrait, Anna Warner may have been concerned that her sister would not be remembered at all.

Though *The New York Times* seemed content to allow Susan Warner to fade into obscurity, the evangelical press was not so unkind. *Zion's Herald*, a prominent Methodist magazine, had been publishing positive reviews of both sisters' works for years, and was the only periodical to review Warner's religious fiction. In October of 1892, Richard Wheatly, a Methodist minister and frequent contributor to the magazine, authored a piece entitled "The Misses Warner" in which he praises both Susan and Anna's dedication to the evangelical mission. As he applauds her instructive religious fiction and commends her acts of charity and

philanthropy, he finds one particular accomplishment especially laudable—the weekly Bible courses that she conducted at her home for the students at West Point Military Academy. “She did it with such cultured intelligence,” he sates, “such sunny gentleness, and such marvelous force that the students came to look up her bent form and rapt face with the reverent chivalry that medieval knights are supposed to have exhibited towards queens (334). In Wheatley’s description, Warner was not merely an instructor; she was a living embodiment of Christian virtue whose primary purpose was to inspire virtue in others. She was a figure for the young soldiers to emulate and revere, a woman who exemplified the values of evangelical Protestantism. Wheatley argues that all Christians should follow Warner’s example and a live a life of service to God. “To live as Susan and Anna have lived,” he states, “lives of purest philanthropy, lives hid with Christ in God, is to live in the highest and only true sense” (42). Such a flattering description of her sister would likely have prompted Anna Warner to construct an image of her sister that made her worthy of such adoration and emulation. In order to construct such an image, Anna Warner would have to employ her talents as an accomplished writer of religious fiction.

Though not nearly as well-known as her sister, Anna Warner was almost as prolific. She was most widely regarded for her religious fiction, especially for narratives of religious conversion. An unnamed reviewer for *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine* was so put off by the overwhelming didacticism of her 1855 novel *My Brother’s Keeper*, which he summarized as the story of “a hunted and baffled sinner” who was converted to Christianity and rescued from a life of sin by the constant urging of his younger sister, that he urged Anna Warner to spare her audience any “views of religious life” that were “so ungenial and aggressive” as those expressed in her novel (661). Though Anna’s conversion narrative may have been condemned as overly

didactic by mainstream literary critics, her work was immensely popular among evangelicals. Readers of *Zion's Herald* were so receptive to her work that the magazine printed dozens of her short stories throughout the latter part of the century and reviewed all her novels favorably. Though the general public was far more familiar with her sister's work, in the evangelical press, Anna Warner was lauded for her didactic narratives of salvation and conversion.

Considering that Anna was skilled at composing the evangelical conversion narrative, it is unsurprising that when she set out to craft the story of her sister's life, she did so according to the conventions of the genre she was most familiar with. Using carefully selected excerpts from Susan's journals, which she supplemented with her own memories and recollections, Anna Warner constructed a biography that traces her sister's spiritual and moral evolution from a thoughtless child to a pious and devout Christian woman. Warner begins life as a bored young woman consumed by materialism whose imagination is overstimulated from too much novel reading, and whose health and nerves were taxed from too much time spent indoors studying. After the loss of her family's wealth, she struggles to adjust to a life of extreme poverty, a life that requires her to engage in strenuous domestic labor and forgo all but the barest necessities. Hardship helps to forge the young Warner's character, as it forces her to embrace domesticity and, eventually, Christianity. Soon after she and her family adjust to their new circumstances, Susan experiences a religious awakening inspired by their financial and social ruin. After being shunned by a former acquaintance on the street, Susan, understandably devastated by the rejection, vows to "put her happiness in a safer place" than the fickle and shallow world of high society, and to immediately join the Presbyterian Church. After her religious awakening, she begins studying and writing with a new, more noble purpose, and composes *The Wide, Wide World*, and dozens of other novels, inspired solely by her newfound reverence for God.

This narrative of spiritual awakening spawned from the loss of wealth and the attainment of virtue was familiar to readers of nineteenth-century women's fiction. Baym identifies the riches to rags story of "an heiress who becomes poor and friendless in mid-adolescence through the death or financial failure of her legal protector" as one of the master plots of all women's fiction of the era, and notes that the heroines of evangelical women's fiction often turned to God to provide the strength necessary to overcome such obstacles. As Baym states, the "influx of what she interprets as divine strength lifts her up in her trials and enables her to survive, to carry out her responsibility, and to bear with deprivation and loss... Thus religion becomes social strategy" (43). Anna's text adheres to Baym's formula for religious women's writing, yet Baym herself does not acknowledge the striking similarities between Anna's biography and her fiction. Instead, Baym quotes from the biography in her chapter devoted to the Warner sisters' without critically examining these important thematic connections, and accepts Anna's portrait of her sister without question. Though Anna was undoubtedly drawing upon real life experiences and facts in the composition of her biography, the form and ideology of her text render her portrait of Susan unreliable. Anna Warner's depiction of her sister more closely resembles the lives of women *in* fiction than the lived experience of an actual nineteenth-century female writer *of* fiction.

I will advance a more detailed and nuanced reading of Anna's biography in subsequent chapters; my point here is that, as an act of recovery, her portrait of her sister was too heavily influenced by the conventions of women's fiction and religious conversion narratives to be read uncritically as a text of pure nonfiction. Anna Warner, like any scholar who attempts recovery, composed an image of her sister that was heavily influenced by her own commitments. This first

biography should no longer be unquestionably accepted by scholars without further critical examination.

Despite Anna's attempt to compose a biography that would rescue her sister from obscurity, no other critical examination of Warner's life was attempted until 1978, when Edward Hasley Foster's study *Susan and Anna Warner* became the first (and only) full-length scholarly work devoted entirely to Warner and her sister. In his study, Foster characterizes Susan as a deeply conservative, religious woman whose didactic style and popular success excludes her from the realm of serious literary study. Her novels are valuable, Foster asserts, only in that they provide insight into the dominant political, religious, and social ideologies of nineteenth century America. Susan's insight, Foster argues, can be directly attributed to two powerful men in her life, whose opinions she accepted unquestionably and whose political and religious philosophies were perfectly encapsulated in her two most popular novels, *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy* (11). Foster devotes most of his study to a discussion of these two novels, as they most neatly fit his theory that Warner's father and minister were the primary sources of Warner's political and religious beliefs, and that the popularity directly resulted in Warner's success on the literary marketplace. Though Foster does discuss other Warner novels such as *Wych Hazel*, *The Gold of Chickaree*, *Daisy*, *Melbourne House*, her religious non-fiction, and her periodical *The Little American*, he does not devote nearly as much critical attention to these important works, despite the fact that many discuss social and political issues like slavery and labor reform. Foster also overlooks other cultural influences such as the cult of true womanhood and the rise in female readership for religious, sentimental, and domestic fiction in his discussion of Warner's popularity. These oversights result in an image of Warner that oversimplifies her views on

politics and religion and reduces her to a mere spokesperson for evangelical Christianity and Whig ideology.

Because he found their works lacking in any literary value in their own right, Foster's portrait of Susan and Anna Warner depicts them as nothing more than mouthpieces for the dominant religious and political ideologies of their time. Foster approaches the work of Warner and her sister as having "historical value" only in as far as it represented the "social and political thinking of their father" and the "evangelical thinking of their minister" (11). Denying the sisters any religious or political beliefs of their own, Foster focuses only on how these prominent men influenced their fiction.

While their father and minister undoubtedly influenced Susan and Anna Warner, Foster is mistaken when he asserts that these men and their ideas alone shaped the sisters' political and religious beliefs. Susan Warner was extremely well educated in history, literature, and philosophy, and was taught by a series of tutors (among them her father) throughout her childhood and adolescence. According to her journals, in which she carefully cataloged her progress in each discipline, she taught herself no less than four languages (French, Italian, Latin, and Greek) and continued to be an avid reader throughout her adult life, frequently expanding her library with the American Tract Society's recommended publications on religion and theology and supplementing those texts with others recommended by Dr. Skinner (A. Warner 112, 232). Rather than extend his focus to include other possible influences in Warner's novels, Foster relies only on the sermons of Dr. Skinner and an obscure text composed by Henry Whiting Warner in 1838, *An Inquiry Into the Moral and Religious Character of American Government*, to discern Susan and Anna Warner's political sympathies.

Using this relatively narrow interpretative lens, Foster reduces *Queechy* to an expression of Whig ideals of society and manners promoted by Henry Whiting Warner in his own writings. Foster writes that “his daughters’ novels, like his books, offer a deeply conservative, patrician view of social order and hierarchy” (25). Though he supplements his interpretation of *Queechy* with a lengthy discussion of the challenge to traditional notions of aristocracy that resulted from unprecedented economic growth in the Jacksonian era, he ultimately concludes that it was not Warner herself who was responsible for including this political ideology in her text, but instead observes that “Whigs like Susan and her father responded by insisting on the importance of traditional morals and manners” (61). Warner’s primary objective in *Queechy*, Foster states, “was to outline the distinction between an aristocracy of virtue and manners” and an “aristocracy of wealth and birth” (60). Though Foster provides the reader with detailed biographical information from Warner’s journals and Anna’s biography that suggest that her interest in aristocracy and manners might have sprung in part from her visit to the home of her publisher George Putnam, he praises Warner only for her ability to accurately record the customs and manners of the New York City elite, and to contrast those values with those of the poor farmers living in rural upstate New York (56-64). Warner’s lived experience, Foster asserts, enabled to her describe the contrast, but it was only the political beliefs she inherited from her father that allowed her to use those contrasts to craft a novel of social critique.

If *Queechy* was primarily an expression her father’s conservative patrician ideals, then her most famous novel, *The Wide, Wide World*, was, for Foster, an articulation of the theology of her minister, Reverend Thomas Hardy Skinner, who presided over the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church. Skinner was a leader of the New School movement and an evangelical who believed that emotion and faith, rather than obedience to doctrine, was the proper path to

conversion. Foster includes several lengthy excerpts from Skinner's 1838 treatise *Religion of the Bible*, in which he outlines Skinner's vision for a new "Spiritual Religion" that privileged emotion over intellect in matters of religious conversion (28-29). Skinner's evangelism, which "insisted on an individual's attention to biblical authority and an absolute submission to divine will," was, according to Foster, the theological premise for *The Wide, Wide World* (39). Though he identifies another potential source for the novel's religious didacticism, Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*, which argued that "lifelong training in Christian principles" rather than "a sudden awareness of awakening to divine grace" was the proper form for religious conversion (39), he does not consult Anna Warner's biography, Susan's journals and letters, or other primary sources to discern what other religious texts may have influenced Warner's novel, nor does he examine other Christian rhetoric contained in *The Wide, Wide World*.⁶ Instead, Foster attempts to assign Warner's faith to a singular source, oversimplifying her religious views and reducing her to merely a spokesperson for New School Presbyterianism. Foster's portrayal of Warner's religious beliefs minimizes her influence as a religious author, diminishes her importance as a teacher, a spiritual mentor, and an avid religious scholar.

In short, rather than focus his critique on Warner's own engagement with the social, political, and religious issues of her era, Foster compares and contrasts the philosophies of Henry Whiting Warner and Reverend Thomas Skinner in order to ascertain her religious and political perspective. "Skinner's theology," Foster states, "like the political and social theories of Henry Whiting Warner—was exceptionally conservative... Both Warner and Skinner felt the need for a complete submission to higher authority; the individual and society had to be guided by a divine purpose" (30). By discussing Warner's complex and complicated treatment of submission only in terms of these men's views, Foster ignores the role that gender plays in Warner's novels and

disregards the influence of the cult of true womanhood—a doctrine that encouraged all women, including Susan and Anna Warner, to emulate the virtues of submission and piety. Foster neglects to mention the vast number of women's magazines, advice books, religious journals, newspapers that also strongly advocated submission and piety likely influenced Warner's writings. By overlooking such an extensive body of cultural and historical artifacts, most of which were composed by women for a primarily female audience, Foster downplays the cultural influence not just of Warner, but of all domestic women writers. Furthermore, Foster falsely assumes that since Warner believed a dutiful Christian woman should submit to the divine authority of God, she should also submit to the worldly authority of men. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, these two forms of submission are drastically different, as one is a spiritual belief and the other a political ideology. Susan Warner may have advocated submission to divine authority in her writings, but in her real life she was relatively unencumbered by the authority of men. She conducted all her own business, managed her own finances, and was actively involved with the publication of all of her novels. Though her father and minister were likely extremely influential, Susan Warner did not bend to their will in the manner that Foster insinuates.

Throughout his study, Foster not only downplays the cultural significance of the sentimental and domestic novel, he also argues that the Warners' were merely reproducing and repackaging the political and religious theories of her father and minister. The primary purpose of their novels was, according to Foster, to "make the various religious, social, and political theories" espoused by Henry Whiting Warner and Reverend Thomas Skinner, "applicable to women's lives" (31). Unfortunately, Foster's devaluation and dismissal of women's fiction was typical of the few literary historians who examined the work of Warner and her contemporaries before the recovery movement.

Had it not been for the efforts of Baym, Tompkins, Fetterley, and their contemporaries, writers like Susan Warner would likely not be remembered at all. Though their work is, of course, central to any discussion of sentimental and domestic literature written by nineteenth-century American women, I will focus my critical attention only on those scholars whom I believe were the most instrumental in shaping the literary legacy of Susan Warner—Baym and Tompkins. Tompkins devoted an entire chapter of her 1985 study *Sensational Designs* to Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World*. In it, she argues that Warner's novel, along with other works of sentimental and domestic fiction, deserve a place in the American literary canon because of the valuable "cultural work" such novels performed (xv). Nina Baym's *Women's Fiction* makes a similar argument for the inclusion of such texts, but unlike Tompkins, Baym concentrates on the similarities in form and ideology that she believes define women's fiction. Because *The Wide, Wide World* does not adhere to Baym's formula, she dismisses Warner and her work from the canon of women's fiction, though she is careful to stress that her work was "relentlessly and deliberately feminine" in both its sentimentality and its subject matter (144). Tompkins makes no such dismissal, but instead invests Warner and her novel with great significance by making *The Wide, Wide World* the focus of her discussion about the function of submission in sentimental fiction. In Tompkins' study, Susan Warner, her novel, and her literary legacy become central to a discussion the sentimental novel.

Both Baym and Tompkins construct an image of Warner as a "powerless" and "restricted" woman who, like her protagonist Ellen Montgomery, "desired only relief and release from all obligation" (Baym 150-152) and whose life, like her work, adhered to "an ethic of submission" espoused by the cult of true womanhood (Tompkins 161). This image of Warner as a conservative and submissive Christian woman has dominated the scholarly conversation

surrounding Warner's work for the last three decades, and few scholars have questioned the conclusions reached by Baym and Tompkins. Yet a closer examination of their respective studies reveals several critical gaps that need to be filled in order for the next generation of recovery scholars to continue to perform important work on Warner. In *Women's Fiction* and in *Sensational Designs*, Baym and Tompkins recover Susan Warner only in part. Neither scholar extends her focus beyond Warner's early novels, nor does either consult any biographical or archival materials beyond Anna Warner's biography and the American Tract Society's tracts. The result is an image of Warner that is incomplete, inaccurate, and skewed to fit the theory of sentimental and domestic fiction they each advocate.

In Baym's theory of sentimental fiction, the sentimental novel achieves its didactic purpose when a moral or social lesson is successfully transmitted to the reader using the heroine as an emotional conduit (17). In her estimation, the author and the heroine are inexorably linked, as the heroine serves the primary function of directly relating the author's message to her audience. Baym then explains the cultural effect of such novels: "...these books are about the psychology of women. They say that the way women perceive themselves is a libel of their own sex, and that this false self-perception more than any other factor accounts for woman's degraded and dependant position in society" (19). These novels, Baym contends, encourage women to take control of and responsibility for how they are perceived by the world. Failure to do so results in a continued state of dependency, which all women's fiction condemns rather than condones. Though Baym admits that the effect of such fiction is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, and though she recognizes that women were challenging the social and political limitations of gender roles in the mid-nineteenth century through means other than the writing of fiction, she

ultimately concludes that these novels and their positive message of female empowerment helped to inspire “a moral revolution” for the young, female readers who consumed them (21).

Because Baym places so much emphasis on the ability of women’s fiction to transform women’s self-perception and inspire cultural change, it is not surprising that she views the works of Susan Warner unfavorably. Neither Ellen Montgomery from *The Wide, Wide World* nor Fleda Ringgen from *Queechy* ever achieves the self-awareness or independence that Baym praises in the works of other novelists. This leads her to conclude that the message being transmitted by Susan Warner to her audience of female readers was one not of empowerment but of powerlessness. Baym begins her discussion of Warner with the assertion that “more than any other woman, Susan Warner dealt with power and the lack of it” (144). Baym portrays Warner as a powerless and poor woman who turned to writing only out of desperation. In her study, Warner becomes the prototype for those women in the nineteenth century who did not achieve independence and autonomy, but were instead confined, submissive, and weak.

Throughout her discussion of Warner, Baym draws questionable parallels between Warner’s fictional heroines and the author’s views on domesticity and marriage to support her claim that Warner advocated female submission and longed to be rescued from life of hardship and poverty by a husband who would provide her with the safety, stability, and affluence she enjoyed in her youth. Because Ellen Montgomery is denied free will in *The Wide, Wide World*, Baym assumes that Susan Warner condoned this subservience for all women and reads Warner’s novel as an expression of Warner’s personal beliefs concerning female autonomy. “Warner’s self-imposed restrictions to the feminine,” Baym states, “to pious orthodoxy, and to a creed of superficial compliance have dated *The Wide, Wide World* for later generations” (146). Because both Ellen Montgomery and Fleda Ringgen are rewarded with happy marriages and financial

stability, Baym asserts that these novels express Warner's own fantasy of escapism, leading her to conclude that "Warner's vision of woman's restricted power allows no space in which their hegemony might be possible, and her sense of woman's need does not include domination over others. What she wants is to be released from all obligation" (150). Baym's analysis may provide her reader with a valuable critical framework for the interpretation of submission and gender issues in *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, but, as I will discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters, Warner's biography does not support such claims, nor do all of her heroines conform to the formula Baym outlines in her discussion. Because Baym consulted only Anna Warner's biography in her discussion of Warner's life, and focused only on certain portions of that biography in her study (likely due to the fact that these were the only resources available to her at the time), she concludes that Warner herself must have held beliefs similar to those of her early heroines. As this study will reveal, Warner's attitudes toward social issues were more complex and nuanced than those contained in both her early work and her sister's biography.

Using only the portions of Anna's biography that discuss Warner's adolescence and early adulthood, Baym describes Warner as a wealthy woman who lost her fortune, whose "vision of independence" was being cared for by men like her father, instead of "toiling away for money" (150). She describes Warner's attitude toward professional life as a burden that she could never overcome, an obligation from which she yearned to free herself. "Even the writing of fiction," Baym claims, "a profession that might be imagined to yield satisfaction, she considered an arduous drudgery in comparison to her earlier life of self-indulgence and self-development." Independence for Susan Warner was, according to Baym, escaping the realm of work and responsibility and returning to the pampered luxury she experienced in adolescence, a desire that Baym calls "extremely self-centered," as it had no potential to affect the lives of other women

but was instead focused solely on Warner's own desires. For Warner, Baym argues, "Freedom for her meant being left alone, protected and comfortable, to pursue one's own interests" (150). Baym argues that since Warner herself was never able to achieve such freedom, her novels all include escapist fantasies and should be categorized as romance rather than women's fiction.

Though Baym correctly identifies submission and escapism as reoccurring themes in both *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, she fails to note that Warner's later novels differ dramatically from these first two in both their treatment of female submission and their portrayals of marriage and domesticity. Both *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree* portray a heroine who, though an orphan like Ellen and Fleda, is a wealthy young lady who requires neither protection nor rescue, who is not submissive but instead constantly defies the wishes of her elder male guardian, and who enters into a marriage in which she not only maintains control of the domestic sphere, but exerts her influence in the public realm of labor relations. Such a heroine complicates Baym's observation that Warner's heroines conform to the ethic of submission or the fantasy of escapism. This is true of her first two novels, but not of her later fiction.

Baym only reads Warner's first two novels and overlooks the nearly thirty others that Warner authored over the course of more than three decades. From these two novels, Baym draws incomplete conclusions about Warner's views of domesticity, marriage, and female submission. Though my readings of Warner's later works will focus on her engagement with social issues like slavery and labor reform, and discuss marriage and domesticity only as it appears in her periodical fiction, I hope that my study will inspire other scholars engage in a more complete analysis of Warner's heroines. Such scholarship would not only expand our

knowledge of Warner's catalog, it would also pave the way for Warner's other novels to be admitted to the canon of nineteenth-century American literature.

Baym might also have consulted more than a six-year span of Warner's life in her discussion of Warner as a professional writer. Though Anna's biography does include several selections from Warner's journals that lament the difficulty she experienced composing *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, it contains many more instances in which Warner marvels at her popularity and relishes in her success on the literary marketplace. Anna devotes an entire chapter of considerable length to describing Susan's reactions to the many pieces of fan mail that she received in the years following the publication of her first novels, and, using Susan's personal correspondence as evidence, chronicles her sister's pleasure and astonishment as editions of her works were printed by the thousands. Skewed and unreliable as Anna's biography might be, it is still useful as a record of Warner's professional success. Although Susan Warner might have expressed frustration with the difficult task of correcting proofs and editing manuscripts, and her diaries reflect anxiety and exhaustion during the act of composition itself, Baym too quickly concludes that Warner viewed her newfound profession as "an arduous drudgery" that she longed to escape. This image of Susan Warner as a reluctant writer needs to be revised and replaced with a portrait of Warner that more accurately reflects her professional accomplishments as an author, an editor, and a promoter of her own work.

Although Baym is quick to dismiss both Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World* from her canon of women's fiction because they fail to conform to the form and ideology that she believes defines the genre, Tompkins locates both Warner and her novel at the center of her argument about the cultural function of sentimental fiction. In the sixth chapter of her landmark study *Sensational Designs*, Tompkins states that *The Wide, Wide World* "represents, in its purest

form, an entire body of work that this century's critical tradition has ignored" (147). Tompkins asserts that sentimental and domestic fiction has been mistakenly excluded from the canon of American literature, and argues that works like *The Wide, Wide World* should be interpreted according to the cultural work they performed and that their popularity can best be explained by examining "cultural context that produced them" (149).

Although there were several cultural forces at work in the mid-nineteenth century that might have influenced the production of sentimental and domestic novels, Tompkins chooses to focus only on religion in her discussion of *The Wide, Wide World*. To Tompkins, all sentimental novels are religious, more closely akin to "religious propaganda" than fiction. Sentimental novelists like Warner, she claims, wrote primarily "to educate their readers in Christian perfection and to move the nation as a whole closer to the city of God," making their novels not only extremely didactic, but also similar to evangelical Christianity, as they shared the same cultural goal (149). Because sentimental fiction and the publications of evangelical Christianity employed similar ideologies, Tompkins states that in order to understand the sentimental novel, "one has to have some familiarity with the cultural discourse of the age for which they spoke" (149). The cultural discourse she identifies is the publications of the American Tract Society, and Tompkins reads the novels of Warner and Stowe as functioning exactly the same way as the Tract Society documents. "They are hortatory and instructional in the same way," Tompkins explains; "they tell the same kinds of stories; they depend upon the same rhetorical conventions; and they take for granted the same relationship between daily activities and the forging of a redeemer nation" (159). Tompkins reads *The Wide, Wide World* as an expression of evangelical commitment to spiritual reform. Warner's text, she argues, functions in the same way as the Tract Society documents and other religious texts in the mid-nineteenth century: it describes

human suffering and misery in emotionally-charged and flowery language, prescribes conversion to Christianity as the remedy to all social and political problems, and stresses submission to Divine authority and the repression of free-will. The novel, Tompkins claims, is an “American-Protestant bildungsroman in which the character of the heroine is shaped by obedience, self-sacrifice, and faith,” and Warner’s readers would have extracted the same religious and moral lessons from *The Wide, Wide World* as they would from other religious literature of the time.

Though the novel’s religious and moral didacticism would likely have resonated with Susan Warner’s audience for the very reasons Tompkins identifies, Tompkins acknowledges that their adherence to an “ethic of submission” alienates modern readers from novels like *The Wide, Wide World*. Tompkins attempts to solve this dilemma by asserting that submission, when examined in the appropriate cultural context, can function as autonomy. Authors like Warner, Tompkins argues, could not “assume a stance of open resistance against the conditions of their lives,” but were instead forced to construct an alternative “basis on which to build a power structure of their own” (161). This power structure, she claims, was founded upon the Christian principles of submission and subservience. Submission in *The Wide, Wide World*, Tompkins argues, “is never submission to the will of a husband or father, though that is what it appears to be on the surface; submission is first of all a self-willed act of conquest of one’s own passions...not capitulation to an external authority, but the mastery of herself, and therefore, paradoxically, an assertion of autonomy” (162). Heroines like Ellen Montgomery, Tompkins claims, could only assert autonomy by embracing the Christian virtues of piety, self-restraint, and passivity, which they strove to emulate in order to achieve the spiritual and moral perfection necessary to be granted salvation. It was this effort to achieve union with God through submission that Tompkins claims enabled women to circumvent male authority. “By ceding

themselves to the source of all power,” she claims, they were able to “bypass worldly (male) authority and, as it were, cancel it out.” Women could then use this submission to claim Divine authority for themselves. “By conquering herself in the name of the highest authority possible,” Tompkins states, the sentimental heroine is able to “merge her own authority with God’s” (163).

Because both evangelicalism and submission are so central to Tompkins’ theory of sentimental fiction, it is unsurprising that she portrays Susan Warner as being submissive, oppressed, and pious herself. In her afterword to the 1985 Feminist Press edition of *The Wide, Wide World*, Tompkins, using only the portions of Anna Warner’s biography that discuss her childhood, adolescence, and conversion to Christianity, finds Warner’s religious beliefs contradictory to her desire for material comfort—a contradiction she supports only by comparing Warner’s real life struggles with those endured by her fictional heroine. She then proceeds to compare Warner’s own position on social issues to those held by the New York City Tract Society, an organization that Warner was a member of for only a short time. Using this scant biographical evidence, along with a critical reading of only her first novel, Tompkins constructs an image of Warner as a woman who was thoroughly conflicted about her religious beliefs, who embraced Christianity partially due to necessity, who was more interested in her own spiritual salvation than the suffering of her fellow man, and who was forced into a life of subservience and submission because of her family’s financial misfortune.

Like Baym, Tompkins draws direct parallels between Warner’s life and her fiction, stating that “the endlessly demanding attempt to achieve self-sacrifice that is the principle of Ellen’s education in *The Wide, Wide World* also governed Susan Warner’s life.” Like Ellen Montgomery, Susan Warner found it difficult to embrace her new circumstances and submit to a life of self-denial, and this “struggle between an imperious desire for luxury and sway and a felt

obligation to submit herself to God's will," Tompkins states, became the "central drama of Susan Warner's life" (586). Tompkins interprets *The Wide, Wide World* as an expression Warner's own conflicting desires to return to the life of material comfort that she once enjoyed while simultaneously devoting her life to the Christian principle of self-sacrifice. This "contradiction between Warner's commitment to a life of selfless service to the Lord and her desire for sensual and intellectual gratification, as well as for power and position conferred by the ownership of expensive commodities" is rectified in the final chapters of *The Wide, Wide World*, when Ellen Montgomery is rewarded for her submission with a life of luxury—a life that Susan Warner desired, but could never attain herself (601). Like Baym's assessment of Warner in *Woman's Fiction*, Tompkins' direct comparison between Warner and her heroine is, no matter how thoughtfully and eloquently constructed, misleading. Though she might have initially experienced such contradictory impulses as those Tompkins' describes, unlike Ellen Montgomery, Susan Warner did not escape her life of hardship by marrying a wealthy minister. Though that may have been, as both Tompkins and Baym observe, a personal fantasy, the fact that Warner would indulge such a fantasy in her fiction does not necessarily indicate that she believed that submission would lead to material gain in the real world. Nor did she spend her entire life conflicted over her religious beliefs and her desire for material wealth and power. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, Susan Warner achieved both cultural influence and financial independence through her career as a professional author. Though she never attained the same financial security life of luxury and ease that she granted her heroine, she was able to support herself and maintain her humble household on Constitution Island through her writing. Her journals contain no record of the desire to escape her circumstances through marriage, but instead chronicle the life of a hardworking and devoted woman who constantly struggled to

achieve and maintain independence and self-sufficiency. I acknowledge that my own study makes use of Anna Warner's biography in my readings of her later heroines, but unlike Tompkins and Baym, I do not draw such neat parallels between the author's life and her works of fiction. While I agree that Warner drew heavily from her own life, which she used as inspiration for many of her novels, I also argue that Warner was influenced by the novels she read as a girl, the writings of other evangelical Christians who shared her commitment to issues of social justice, the lectures she attended, and the many volumes that lined the shelves of her extensive library of books and periodicals.

Tompkins draws parallels between Warner's life and fiction in her discussion of Warner's involvement with The New York City Tract Society—an organization that she claims (in both her afterward to *The Wide, Wide World* and in *Sensational Designs*) directly influenced Warner's fiction as well as her political beliefs. Again using only Anna's biography as evidence, Tompkins claims that Warner's involvement with the New York City Tract Society shaped her view of poverty and other social issues. "Although Warner believed in giving material aid to the poor and in relieving suffering," Tompkins asserts, "the sources of oppression and injustice, as she sees them, do not lie in social arrangements." Tompkins concludes that "Warner's failure to confront questions of property and class directly leads to certain contradictions within her own practice as a Christian writer" because her first novel supports this view (596). What Tompkins does not recognize here is that Susan Warner did engage social and political issues in *The Wide, Wide World*,⁷ and continued to address such issues throughout her fiction. Though Tompkins' 1985 profile of Susan Warner for *Legacy* briefly mentions such novels as *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel*, and *The Gold of Chickaree*, and though she acknowledges that Warner engaged such issues as slavery and labor reform in these later writings, she concludes that Warner used these

contentious political issues only as an “occasion for dramatizing the Christian behavior of her heroines” or for demonstrating “the enlightened benevolence of factory owners” (1-2). As my own critical reading of these novels will reveal, Warner commented on these social and political issues in a manner much more complex and nuanced than Tompkins’ describes in her short summary.

In this study, I hope to rewrite Susan Warner’s literary legacy in order to recognize her contributions to social issues such as abolitionism, female patriotism and education, and labor reform. I acknowledge that, like Foster, Baym, and Tompkins, I examine only a small selection of Warner’s extensive catalog to advance my own biographical and critical interpretations. I selected these texts because they most clearly elucidate the extent of Warner’s engagement with the social and political issues. I recognize that this focus has forced me to ignore other important works by Warner that simply do not fit the critical scope of my study, and that, like Foster, Baym, and Tompkins, I am recovering only a portion of the literary legacy of Susan Warner. That is, as I have ventured to prove, an inescapable pitfall common to all recovery projects. By recognizing that each act of recovery is incomplete, we can invite future scholars to examine the texts we have ignored. By admitting that each recovery project is shaped not only by the contemporary moment, but also by trends in scholarship, literary theory, and the ideological and political beliefs of the person doing the recovering, we can begin to acknowledge that we as scholars play an important role in shaping the literary legacy of the authors we chose to recover.

In celebration of their twenty-fifth year in print, *Legacy* hosted two roundtable discussions in 2009 about the past, present, and future of the recovery movement appropriately titled “Looking Back, Looking Forward.” In the second of these discussions, prominent scholars of the recovery movement were asked to comment about the future of recovery work. In her

response, Judith Fetterley expands the meaning of the term ‘recovery.’ For Fetterley, recovering a text means more than simply restoring the work to print.

“Recovery” is a term with more than one possible meaning. Obviously, the first meaning is simply making texts available to readers who had no previous way of knowing about them. A second meaning of “recovery” includes a “re-understanding” of a recovered text, reading it differently from the way it was perhaps read in the first phase of recovery. This mode of recovery has no end point, any more than it has for so-called major American male writers. Included in this understanding is the shifting ground of whom we consider significant and why... (228)

Like Fetterley, I believe that recovery is a multi-phased process that requires scholars to constantly re-interpret the texts uncovered from the dusty shelves of libraries and archives. But Fetterley’s call for scholars to “re-understand” these texts also invites us to question our presuppositions about the authors we recover. As we continue to recover more of Susan Warner’s works, might we also “read” her literary legacy “differently” now that *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy* are not the only texts we are able to access? Fetterley’s observation that “recovery has no endpoint” is particularly helpful in the case of Susan Warner because it allows us to view the construction (and reconstruction) of her literary legacy as a process that itself contains multiple phases. Though the studies performed by Foster, Tompkins, and Baym are incomplete, and therefore sometimes inaccurate, they are still useful because they represent the “shifting ground” of literary studies that Fetterley describes.

Recovery is an endless process of re-reading, re-envisioning, and re-writing. I hope that my study will expand and enrich the scholarly conversation surrounding Warner and her work. I also hope that future scholars will continue to reexamine Warner’s life and work, and I include

an appendix that accurately catalogs the extent of Warner's writings at the end of my study in order to invite further study of a writer who continues to be a crucial figure to the recovery movement.

CHAPTER 1

REREADING ANNA WARNER'S BIOGRAPHY

When *The Wide, Wide World* was first published in December of 1850, both literary critics and fans suspected that it was highly biographical. “We close it,” a writer for *National Era* declares, “half convinced that we have been reading a genuine biography, so lifelike and wholly natural are its characters, so unaffectedly and accurately does it touch the chords of common life” (166). Fans of Warner’s novel were more than “half-convinced” that she was drawing heavily upon her real life as the inspiration for *The Wide, Wide World*. One her more devout fans, a man who referred to himself only as “Ellen’s Ardent Admirer,” not only confused Susan Warner with Ellen Montgomery, but took on his own imaginary role as Ellen’s suitor, John Humphreys. “You see, I am playing Master John,” he explains, “and you must be, for the time, Ms. I strongly suspect—In reality you are Ellen. But I cannot get Ellen out of my mind, I don’t try very hard, she is sweet, little girl, just such as I should like for a life—at least in most respects. O fear, however, I stand no chance while that Mr. John is alive.” Another fan felt a similar affinity with Warner and her female characters. “I have just finished the perusal of *The Wide, Wide World*,” he writes, “and feel, as if already, its author is a friend.” His object of affection is Alice Humphreys, who he declares has “captured” his heart. “Some of my kind friends” he claims, “wonder why I don’t get married...the matter is now explained. Alice is evidently the lady that was intended for us—her early death, therefore, shuts me up to a single.” Letters like these demonstrate that Warner’s readers, as Susan S. Williams observes, “completely collapsed the distinction between author and character” (572).⁸ In the minds of her fans, Alice Humphreys was a real person and Ellen Montgomery was a thinly veiled self-portrait of her

creator. Beginning in 1850 and continuing throughout her long career, both literary critics and fans were unwilling to separate Susan Warner from her fictional heroines.

Although she composed nearly thirty other novels in her lifetime, to her readers, Warner would always be remembered as the author of *The Wide, Wide World*. According to Jennifer Brady, who performed a study of Warner's fan mail for *Commonplace*, of the sixty pieces of fan mail received by the Warner sisters that Brady consults, roughly half are dated between 1850 and 1860. Despite the fact that Susan and Anna composed dozens of novels, *The Wide, Wide World* was the most popular with fans, even decades after it was published. "Of all the letters," Brady notes, "the book discussed most often was Susan Warner's first novel: more than half of the Warner fan letters mentioned it" (1). Brady's study proves that although Warner did not achieve the same level of popularity in the latter part of the nineteenth century as she had when *The Wide, Wide World* was first released, she did have a dwindling number of ardent fans who continued to write to her throughout her lengthy career. These fans were just as curious about Warner's private life in 1885 as they were in 1850, and, if the letters from Ellen's Ardent Admirer and Alice's Admirer serve as any indication, they continued to confuse her real life with her fiction. It was to these loyal fans that Anna Warner dedicated her biography of her sister.

"My love, they want me to tell about you," Anna Warner declares in her dedication, "and if I can, I must. They write to me from England and America that back of such books as yours there must be a faith worth hearing about, a life that should be told" (ix). Anna had received fan letters from both home and abroad, but they were likely fewer and farther between than she reveals in these opening lines, as the popularity of Susan's novels was waning by 1909. Anna did not choose to provide her readers with actual copies of these letters, and instead included only correspondence from fans received during the 1850's, when *The Wide, Wide World* was still a

bestseller. Anna omitted these latter ones entirely, and her readers must take her at word that these pleas for knowledge of Susan's spiritual life exist at all outside the mind of an adoring sister. Although she cleverly masks her intentions behind the socially permissible veil of a reluctant woman writer, Anna Warner's purpose is clear: she will compose a biography of her sister that, like the letters they both received so many decades before, invites comparison between Susan Warner and the heroines of her novels.

As I noted in the introduction, Anna Warner's *Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell*, originally published in 1909, more closely resembles a female spiritual bildungsroman than it does a biography. The young Susan Warner begins life as a wealthy, bored young woman whose lavish lifestyle is devoid of spiritual or moral purpose. When the family unexpectedly descends into poverty, and Susan is shunned by fashionable society, she turns to God and the Presbyterian Church for salvation and acceptance. Susan's newfound faith empowers her. Financial hardship and domestic labor are no longer stressful, but meaningful and rewarding. God inspires her to write a novel, which is an instant success, and Susan Warner is rewarded for her struggles with a career as a successful novelist. It is a story that would have been familiar to Anna Warner's readers, as it closely resembled the plots of their favorite novels. More importantly, it was a satisfying story befitting the author of *The Wide, Wide World*. It was a story that, Anna Warner hoped, would please her fans and cement her sister's legacy as the author of the most popular female spiritual bildungsroman of the nineteenth century.

Anna's biography continues to appeal to both fans of Warner's novels and literary critics. Edward Hasley Foster consulted it for details about her interactions with her father and minister, whom he argues were the primary sources of her social and political beliefs (24-28). Jane Tompkins used Anna's recollection of her and Susan's interactions with the American Tract

Society to reconstruct Warner's religious beliefs, which she argued represented "the dominant cultural discourse of the age" (*Sensational Designs* 149). Nina Baym drew conclusions about Warner's views of marriage, domesticity, and female submissiveness from Anna's text by using only the portions that deal with her childhood and early adolescence (144-150). As I note in my introduction, each of these scholars advanced a portrait of Susan Warner that was incomplete and inaccurate in part because they relied too heavily upon Anna Warner's biography, which they read uncritically as historical fact. Anna's text is a useful resource, and should be consulted by any student or scholar who performs a study of Susan Warner. But it cannot and should not be the sole source of biographical information now that her journals have been transcribed and her personal papers have been digitized. Because so much of this material is currently available, we can revisit Anna's text with other objectives. We can reread (and rewrite) Anna's biography.

In this chapter, I will read *Susan Warner, or Elizabeth Wetherell* through the tradition of sentimental and religious texts written by nineteenth-century American women. I will begin by exploring how Anna Warner crafted her biography to meet the expectations of her readers. These readers were attracted to stories of self-reliant women, both real and fictional, and most already believed that Susan Warner was as pious and pure as the heroines of her fiction. Anna Warner was attuned to these expectations. After decades in the literary marketplace, she knew how to satisfy her audience. She borrowed the style, form, and ideology of the sentimental novel to construct a portrait of her sister that traced her spiritual and moral development from a selfish and spoiled child to devout Christian woman and, finally, a successful female author. Because Anna Warner was such an accomplished author of sentimental and religious fiction herself, it would be a mistake to read her biography without acknowledging the powerful tropes that helped shape it. In fact, the resulting text is so similar to the female spiritual bildungsroman and so

neatly conforms to the formula for women's fiction that it should not be read as a purely factual biography. Because Anna's portrait of Susan Warner's life is entirely novelistic, it can and should be approached using the interpretative strategies outlined by scholars of the sentimental novel like Susan K. Harris, Nina Baym, and Jane Tompkins. Doing so not only places Anna's text in dialogue with the works of other women writers of the era and provides valuable cultural context for her biography, it also acknowledges these novelistic tropes were a powerful force in nineteenth-century American culture. They shaped not only fiction, but lived experience and memory. For women like Susan and Anna Warner, they shaped how they viewed the world.

By mid-century, the literary marketplace was inundated with women writers who wrote for a primarily female audience. This newly empowered female readership actively sought out strong women role models, both real and fictional. As Sharon K. Harris observes, "one consistent pattern among women who recorded their reading is an intense interest in the biographies of heroic women" (24). Harris notes that women recorded their positive reactions to the biographies of Lydia Sigourney, Madame Guyon, Germaine de Staël, and other influential authors and activists in their private diaries and personal correspondence. According to Harris, women sought personal and professional inspiration from these biographies. By reading about the lives of other women, Harris claims, "they could learn explore what it was like to be extraordinary" (25). As Harris demonstrates, nineteenth-century American women were drawn to biography. Susan Warner was no longer a household name in 1909, but she was still popular among evangelical Christians, who would have approached the biography of Susan Warner with similar aims. Like many women readers of the era, they were seeking a female exemplar whose life would provide them with moral and spiritual inspiration. Anna Warner accommodated them.

Anna's biography begins, as most bildungsromans do, in with a lengthy description of Susan's childhood. Like many young women in the mid-nineteenth century, Susan kept journals during her childhood and early adolescence, and Anna devotes a large amount of narrative space—almost 170 pages—to preserving these journals in their entirety. Beginning with a chapter revealingly titled “The Little Queen” and continuing for the first third of her biography, Anna details Warner's lavish upbringing through letters to and from her parents that discuss the minute details of the young lady's life. When Susan turns twelve and begins keeping a journal at the insistence of her father, Anna uses these entries to tell the story of her sister's childhood. These journals are quite repetitive and mundane: a seemingly endless record of piano practice, lessons of all sorts, flower gathering, doll making, and light reading. Anna uses these early journals to stress that Warner's early life was monotonous, dull, and unfulfilling. As Susan herself admits, “Really, my journal is a collection of nothings. I go out or come in, one day is fair and another foul, it is a great cry and little wool, such as the shearing of pigs” (97). After reading nearly two hundred pages of “nothings,” Anna's readers would sense that something was missing from the young Susan Warner's life, and her primarily evangelical audience would quickly identify the absence. As a child, Susan Warner lacked a spiritual life. She did not know God.

If Anna's readers were eager to learn about Susan Warner's intellectual and spiritual life, they would discover that a privileged childhood does not produce a pious young woman. Susan scarcely mentions church at all in journals from this era, except to record the fact that her family had not attended a church service in over a month (166). Anna rarely mentions God in this section, except when she reads of Susan's childhood illnesses, when she expresses gratitude that “The Lord let nothing hurt her” (163). In her sister's portrayal, the young Susan Warner was not

born a good Christian; she had to become one, and no one was as qualified to write this story as Anna Warner. Both she and her sister had told it before.

The pampered young heiress who lived a life devoid of spiritual or intellectual meaning was a common character in Warner's later fiction. *Daisy* (1868), *Wych Hazel*, and its sequel *The Gold of Chickaree* (1876), all feature heroines who, like Anna's depiction of the young Susan Warner, are concerned only with the material possessions and encounter only trivial obstacles in their otherwise privileged lives. When Daisy Randolph first arrives at the southern plantation she is destined to inherit, her only concerns are fighting with her governess over the length of her lessons (*Daisy* 17-21). When Wych Hazel and her guardian Mr. Falkirk begin their journey to her new mansion, she is troubled about whether or not to purchase a new traveling dress and frets over which earrings to wear before eventually deciding on pearls (*Wych Hazel* 7). Susan Warner was certainly not an heiress, but she did possess some fine dresses in her youth. Anna remembers these dresses so well that she can describe them from memory:

A scarlet satin bodice laced with a scarlet cord; a clear white muslin skirt with rows of inch-wide scarlet satin ribband, spacing it off round the bottom; scarlet satin slippers, white silk stockings, and I believe a wreath of green leaves and scarlet flowers...an India muslin, white, but just toned with bluish lavender, and spotted over with some small pale lavender daisies. Short sleeves, and the neck with its long throat, bare. (87-88)

Anna was, by her own admission, only three years old when her older sister was being adorned in such fine clothing, and it is unlikely that she would be able to recall such vivid details so many years later. Though Anna does not overtly critique Susan's lavish wardrobe, her description would immediately signal to her readers that such costumes were extravagant and unnecessary,

particularly for a child younger than twelve. Like Daisy Randolph, Wych Hazel, and other wealthy heroines of women's fiction, Susan Warner was, in Anna's description, spoiled by materialism and luxury.

Anna's audience would know how to interpret such lavish descriptions of wealth and privilege. Readers familiar with the domestic novel would recognize that Susan's early life was intellectually and spiritually bankrupt. As Richard Brodhead observes in *Culture and Letters*, domestic novels idealize middle class life, and reject the "alien upper class" because its members are "idle, luxuriously wasteful, and devoid of the proper virtues of self-control" (95). Like the heroines of women's fiction, the young Susan Warner is a member of the "alien upper class" that Brodhead describes, and Anna Warner has subtly indicated that her sister's life, as lavish as it was, lacked the moral or spiritual meaning.

Though Anna obviously disproves of her sister's upbringing, she does not critique it directly but instead allows her readers to draw their own conclusions. But when Anna describes another childhood hobby of Susan's, novel reading, her tone shifts dramatically. After an entry in which Susan describes reading a popular novel, *The Betrothed*, Anna comments:

The novel — and the shut windows. She used to call herself a "constitutional coward"; and certainly she had nerves enough for two. Afraid of storms, burglars, steamboats, and horses, and cattle; of worms, snakes, mice, bats, and caterpillars. It was a regular thing in summer, to see her turn a chair up and down and round about before she would sit on it, lest some creeping creature might be there. She would try the bedroom door at intervals through the night to see if it was locked.

(119)

The cause of Susan's nervousness is clear. She had, according to Anna, read too many novels, suffered the physical and mental consequences. Anna condemns Susan's love of novels throughout this section of the biography, and stresses that this dangerous practice was mediated by her father, "as such dreaming was not good" (90). Susan Warner apparently accepted this belief rather reluctantly. She continued to break her father's rule that her novel reading be limited to one hour when she borrowed a copy of *Helen* from her aunt, and was up half the night lost in thought. "Oh, how wretched it is to do so," she admits, "I hate it, and yet scarcely struggle against it" (164). Anna continues to reproach her sister for this practice, noting that it was "amusing to see how a girl" like her sister "can miss her measure" and continue such a dangerous hobby (165).⁹ As Cathy Davidson observes in *Revolution and the Word*, the public had, since the late eighteenth century, accepted the notion that "happiness and novel reading" were "antithetical states," and would have agreed with Anna Warner that Susan's habit of late night reading amounted to nothing less than "self-abuse" (112). Though she is claiming to nothing more than a chronicler of her sister's life, such statements reveal that Anna Warner was using the tone and style of a didactic novel.

Anna's moralizing tone and her adamant disapproval of novels were common features of sentimental fiction. As Davidson notes, the use of novelistic tropes to critique the practice of novel reading began in the late eighteenth century. Tabitha Tenney's picaresque satire *Female Quixotism* (1801) features a heroine who shares the young Susan Warner's passion for novels. Because she naively internalizes the "whole fantasy of love perpetuated in the novels she reads," Tenny's Dorcasina is, according to Davidson, "victimized by both her own delusions and by the men who calculatingly exploit those delusions" by mimicking the overly-romantic language of her favorite fiction in effort to woo her. Because Dorcasina's misadventures in romance are

solely resulting from novel reading, Davidson interprets Tenney's text as an allegorical warning against female reading practices and terms the novel a "how-not-to-read-a-novel-novel" (275). Anna's condemnation of novel reading may have appeared antiquated in 1909, but her conservative and elderly readers would have easily recognized her didactic tone and novelistic style as belonging to the sentimental tradition.

Anna's admonitory tone also allows her to retain interpretative control and regulate how readers extract meaning from her text, making this section more akin to a didactic novel than a biography. Unlike exploratory novels, which provide readers "with the possibility for multiple readings," the didactic novel demands a singular interpretation, which the author achieves by "guiding the narratee through the hermeneutic process" (Harris 40). Like the narrators of early didactic novels, Anna Warner continuously "makes her presence felt" in her sister's biography by "confronting" the young Susan "with her own weaknesses" and "commenting" on the events of her life (Harris 46). Assuming that her reader share her morals and values concerning the proper behavior of a young Christian woman, and, like her, vehemently oppose novel reading, Anna chastises her sister at every opportunity. These didactic intrusions allow Anna Warner to retain interpretive control. Although Anna Warner does not always criticize Susan's behavior so harshly, her didactic tone always dictates when her readers should judge her sister and when they should exercise understanding and forgiveness. At times, Anna apologizes to her readers when Susan's behavior does not meet the high moral standards expected of her. In one such instance, which follows an entry describing a social *faux pas* Susan committed, Anna remarks, "But I think, from what I have heard since, that some of these bits of behavior were not quite all the girl's fault, and that a subtle something in the air startled her instincts, not yet in training except by romances, nor at all full grown" (157). Susan's inappropriate behavior can be easily excused,

Anna argues, because she will, as her reader knows, eventually grow out of it, assuming she discards the “romances” which served as the sole source of her moral “training.”

Anna’s didacticism not only instructs her readers to avoid her sister’s bad habits or apologize for her social shortcomings, it also invites them to compare Susan’s childhood with Ellen Montgomery’s. Following a journal entry in which Susan describes a crying fit she had after finding out that her father, who was apparently aging early, needed spectacles, Anna comments, “Those stormy outbursts in Ellen Montgomery with which the critics found fault, were well known to my sister. Not that Ellen was at all a portrait of herself, but the two had this one point in common” (141-2). Despite her half-hearted reminder that Ellen was not intended to be read as a self-portrait of her author, Anna’s comparison invites the readers to draw such parallels themselves. As Anna continues to demonstrate, the fact that Susan was apt to throw fits as a child is not the only thing that she and her heroines have in common.

If Anna’s description of Warner’s childhood and contained elements common to nineteenth-century women’s fiction, the events which unfolded in the next few years of Susan’s life so strongly resemble a domestic novel that they could have been lifted from the pages of Cummins, Sedgwick, or any of their contemporaries. During the Panic of 1837, Henry Warner lost the majority of his family’s wealth speculating in real estate, and the comforts of upper class life began to disappear. In the ten years that followed, her family was forced to relocate from their relatively well appointed apartment on St. Marks place, a fashionable neighborhood in New York City, to the farmhouse on Constitution Island. The fine silk dresses from her youth were replaced with homespun calicos; the lack of money for servants meant that Susan, Anna, and their Aunt Fanny now performed a variety of physically challenging domestic duties; and there

was little money for the books Susan enjoyed in her youth. By the end of the 1840's, the Warners were living in poverty.

There is little written record of the period between 1839 and 1850. As Jane Weiss notes, these years “are not covered in Warner’s surviving journals, making it “difficult to reconstruct Warner's experiences as she matured” (340). Scholars like Weiss must rely only on Anna Warner’s memories to reconstruct the events of this period, as “the break-up, the moving, the new surroundings, have no word” in Susan’s journals (171). Anna’s memory was hazy at best. “I am grouping the years a little,” Anna admits, “not trying to give precise dates and limits, which indeed I could not, but our affairs were on a steady progress downhill” (176). Perhaps Anna, writing her sister’s biography at the age of 82, had difficulty recalling the events which occurred decades before, though it is improbable that anyone would so easily forget their entire adolescence (she would have been twelve years old in 1839 and twenty three in 1850).

But the length of time that Anna jumbles in her biography suggests that she had an alternative purpose for conflating these crucial years. Since no other record of Susan’s struggles with poverty exists, Anna Warner is able to assign her own meaning to the loss of her family’s wealth. It was poverty, Anna concludes, which led to both Susan’s spiritual awakening and her desire to become a professional author. As she puts it, “the Lord has always his agents prepared and ready to take the lead...and so does he secretly shape and train his humbler servants, for their unseen road, their unguessed life” (196). According to Anna, Susan Warner’s conversion to evangelical Christianity was pre-ordained. The life of luxury she enjoyed as a child and the anguish she suffered as that life slowly slipped away prepared Susan Warner for her new life in service to God. Since her sister was among the most prominent women novelists of her era, Anna

crafts her portrait of Susan's religious conversion in both the style and form of the women's evangelical novel.

According to Anna, it was not meditation, introspection, or any other internal struggle that prompted Susan Warner to convert to Christianity. In Anna's biography, Susan embraced God because she was shunned by high society. According to Anna, the absence of material comforts was accompanied by a far more significant loss: the loss of social standing. "But the banishment of silk dresses entailed a much heavier loss," she recalls, "that of intercourse with other people." Anna goes on to observe that "If you have 'nothing to wear,' few want you; while some think it kind not to invite you, because, of course (in such case) you would not want to come! And for a good while we had little to do with visits or visitors. But I think it tried my sister more than anyone guessed" (177). No longer able to afford fine clothing, Susan experienced the social ostracism that often followed a sudden loss of wealth. And this ostracism prompted Susan's religious conversion. "Walking up Waverly Place one morning," Anna recalls, "she met an acquaintance who just then was counted as a leader of fashion. As they passed, this woman's bow was so slight and cool, that it had almost the air of a rebuff." After this instance, Susan tells Anna that "she would put her happiness in a safer place, beyond the reach of scornful fingers. She would have something that should stand, though the whole world went to pieces." (201). As Anna tells it, Susan would approach her father to join the Dr. Skinner's church shortly after this occurrence.

Susan Warner likely did experience the social isolation and ostracism that her sister describes. It was not uncommon for young women to turn to Christianity for social and economic reasons. As Nancy Cott notes in her essay "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," women like Susan Warner were drawn to Christianity in part because, "as

opposed to the vagaries encountered in social and economic pursuits, the Christian's struggle was comprehensible, its consequences were well-defined, and a supportive community echoed the individual's experience” (22) Christianity provided young women with both an individual sense of purpose and a communal sense of belonging. As Cott explains,

Conversion promised not only a lifetime's work in religious struggle, but also a loyal peer-group with whom to share it. For young women whose growth to adulthood in a period of modernization was marked by disruption and uncertainty, these elements together comprised a persuasive argument for forming a religious identity. While evangelical Christianity confined women to private religious roles, gender-specific propriety, and subordinate public status, it also brought them vital strength and purpose that found confirmation among their peers. (23)

In the mid 1840's, Susan Warner's life was filled with “disruption and uncertainty.” According to Anna, she craved the supportive community that Cott describes, and actively sought it out after being shunned by her former friends. Many of Anna's readers would have empathized with Susan's suffering, and accepted her practical motivation to join the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church. According to Cott, many of them had experienced similar circumstances in their own lives, and had turned to Christianity for similar reasons. For many of Anna's readers, Susan's story was relatable. It echoed real life.

It also resembled the novels they read. A spiritual and moral awakening such as the one experienced by Susan Warner was, according to Nina Baym, a typical ending to a plot that was all too recognizable to readers of evangelical women's fiction. Baym identifies the “pampered heiress who becomes poor and friendless in mid-adolescence due to the death or financial failure of her legal protectors” as a master plot common to many novels of this era (35). Baym notes

that these stories are “stories of spiritual as well as social regeneration,” as the heroines often realize, through poverty, that a life of “wealth and fashion is corrupt and hollow.” The heroines of these novels, Baym observes, often turn to God in times of misfortune. For such heroines, the “influx of what she interprets as divine strength lifts her up in her trials and enables her to survive, to carry out her responsibilities, and to bear with depravation and loss.” Faith, then, “becomes the preliminary to or equivalent of a tact that enables her to deal effectively with others” and “religion becomes social strategy” (44). Baym confines her discussion of the social function of religion to fiction, but writers of sentimental and domestic fiction also drew heavily from their own personal experiences, which they often used as inspiration for their novels. Susan Warner’s own religious awakening resembled the plot of nineteenth-century women’s novels because these novels often reflect the real-life experiences of their authors. Because of this, the tropes that Baym so accurately identifies are not limited to fiction. They can (potentially) shape lives and memories as well. Anna’s account of Susan’s spiritual rebirth is entirely novelistic, but it is also entirely realistic. Though we as scholars should certainly take Anna’s memories with a proverbial grain of salt because she was an author of sentimental and religious fiction, we should also recognize that Anna’s readers would not find this distinction nearly as clear-cut. To them, Anna’s account was believable precisely because it mirrored the experiences of their peers, both real and imaginary.

It was not long after the incident on Waverly Street that both Susan Warner and her sister decided to join the Presbyterian Church and invited Reverend Skinner and Francis Marakoe, a church elder, to their home to interview them as prospective members. As Daniel Shea observes in *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, this was not uncommon: “New England Puritans regularly stipulated a qualification for church membership...Beyond the usual confession of

faith, the applicant was required to give a satisfactory narrative of his experience of grace” (90). Although new members were typically required to make a public pronouncement of their faith before the congregation, Anna Warner explains that “because Dr. Skinner was such a personal friend” of the Warner family, both she and her sister were permitted to fulfill this requirement in their home. But the location was not the only thing that made the Warner sisters’ declaration of faith unconventional. Anna explains to her readers that she and her sister were “put through no stiff formula” of confession in their effort to join the church. They were asked no questions about doctrine, and were only required to give a brief account of their personal beliefs, a method pioneered by evangelicals who, like Skinner, embraced New School Presbyterian theology, and were practicing the reform the Shea describes. This experience was so atypical that Anna recalls her sister commenting that “she could not see how we were admitted, having so little to say” (202).

Perhaps Susan Warner was right to be suspicious. According to Anna’s recollections, neither Susan nor her sister provided any satisfactory answers to even the most general questions about their faith. When asked by Mr. Marakoe if she “knows holiness,” Susan responded “I do not know sir.” When Anna was asked whether she believed religion is “a melancholy thing,” she only replied with a “joyous cry” of “Oh no, Sir!” At times, Anna was unable to answer the men’s questions at all, and remained silent when Dr. Skinner asked her why she wanted to become a Christian, though she claimed to have had the appropriate Bible verse ringing in her head but was simply too shy to recite it (202-203). Because the two sisters were unable to provide Dr. Skinner and Mr. Marakoe with adequate answers to their questions, Anna in her biography must supply alternative forms of evidence in order to convince her readers that she and Susan had satisfied the men’s inquiries, and the proof she gives is emotional rather than logical.

Anna claims that her and her Susan's emotions, which were visible to both Reverend Skinner and Mr. Marakoe, were ample evidence of their faith. Although Susan was unable to answer Mr. Marakoe's questions, Anna assumes that he "must have read the answer in her face." Both Susan and Anna were able to express their faith without using language, and the two men "read" emotions in the absence of words. Susan's "look" was "as powerful as honest truth," and neither Reverend Skinner nor Mr. Marakoe requires any further explanation. The two sisters were granted permission to join the congregation because, Anna claims, "the sagacious, practiced men were at no loss to see what we were in our deepest, most eager earnest" (203).

According to Anna's biography, Susan and Anna were able to convince the church elders of their faith using only the power of sentiment. Like the heroines of their novels, Susan and Anna convey faith through emotion, which is more effective than logic. Ellen Montgomery receives ample training in church doctrine from both John and Alice Humphreys. She can recite Bible verses from memory and can discuss her faith logically and intelligently, even with those that do not share her faith. But when Ellen evangelizes, she discovers that logic and doctrine are less effective than tears. Ellen cries on almost every page of *The Wide, Wide World*, and when she does, she typically gets what she wants. When Mr. Van Brunt falls asleep during one of her many Bible readings, Ellen weeps uncontrollably, which disturbs him so greatly that it convinces him to convert to Christianity (*The Wide, Wide World* 413, 569). Ellen's Scottish relatives never embrace her religious beliefs, despite her constant prosthelytizing. But when her grandfather follows her to church and witnesses her uncontrollable crying, he becomes more sympathetic and eventually accepts her faith, though he does not adapt it himself (*The Wide, Wide, World* 535).¹⁰ Though neither sister cries in the presence of the two men in Anna's description, Susan retreats to her room in an emotional fit shortly after they depart, while a thunderstorm erupts outside (SW

204). Anna's sentimentally-charged description of these events serves not only to convince her readers that emotion, not logic, is the truest form of religious expression, it also proves that her sister exemplified this belief in her life as well as her fiction.

Anna's description of poverty, like her portrayal of her sister's religious conversion, was shaped by the conventions of women's fiction. In this section of her biography, Susan Warner is portrayed as the perfect embodiment of feminine self-sacrifice. When she describes the hard work that she and her sister were forced to perform, she not only romanticizes it, but also invests it with great moral and spiritual significance:

if 'Stone walls do not a prison make,' neither does poverty make one poor.

Looking back, I can guess a little what the fight and struggle were; but through it all, we learned to cling to each other, in a way that made us millionaires... And life was full; not only of work, but of the fine experience which thrives on the stoniest soil. We learned what life means, and that no work is dry which is done with cheery good will, for a loving purpose. What delight to make my father's shirts, and to iron them, as daintily as young hands could... How pleasant to cook up some dainty dish, after a tired day. (198-99)

Anna conveys several lessons to her readers in this passage: hard work and domestic labor enrich the human experience; poverty strengthens family bonds rather than dissolves them; and the true rewards of life are not material, but spiritual. In Anna's description, the sisters are engaging in a type of ritual as they cheerfully perform their household chores, and that ritual enables the family to thrive even in the direst circumstances. As they iron shirts and prepare meals, Susan and Anna are holding their family together by preserving the happiness of the domestic sphere at all costs. As Tompkins points out, when descriptions like these appear in sentimental novels such as those

composed by both Warner sisters, they have religious and cultural significance because they are veiled expressions of female power. When domestic duties become ritual, Tompkins observes, “the routines of the fireside acquire sacramental power” (169). Tompkins terms this “the religion of domesticity” and notes that “by investing the smallest acts with moral significance, the religion of domesticity makes the destinies of the human race hang upon domestic routines” (171). By locating a deeper moral meaning in the household chores she and Susan performed, Anna Warner transforms domestic labor into a sacrificial act that bestows great cultural power on both her sister and their modest home. In Anna’s biography, as in sentimental fiction, the home and the hearth become a sacred space in which women are empowered.

Susan Warner’s journals, in contrast, paint a decidedly more dismal portrait of domestic labor. She hates keeping the house and is frustrated that it leaves her little time to read or write in her journal. “I feel as if I had something less than a mountain on my shoulders,” she writes in one of the few entries Anna includes from this period. “I mean to keep a particular journal while they are gone; for this is the first time I have had the care of a household, and I have been in a quandary three times today already” (183). Anna does not provide an exact date for this entry (though she indicates that it was composed during the month of October), and comments only that her sister was often unable to put “the best face on things” (184). But this entry reveals more than Susan’s personal shortcomings. It serves as a stark contrast to Anna’s memories of those difficult years, which seem to more closely resemble women’s fiction than they do her sister’s journals. When she describes the poverty she and her sister endured using such a didactic tone and sentimental style, it becomes difficult to distinguish her biography from a work of fiction composed in the same era, as the portrait of Susan Warner she paints more closely resembles the

life of a heroine of sentimental and domestic novels than it does the life of one of the nineteenth century's most prominent writers.

When she describes her sister's writing process, she is no more realistic. Anna Warner's description of Susan writing *The Wide, Wide World* is the portion of her biography most often quoted by scholars. Some, like Nina Baym, argue that Warner composed her novel solely for financial purposes, using Anna's memory of Aunt Fanny quipping that Susan might "write a novel that would sell" as evidence that she resorted to writing only out of necessity (Baym 142). Others, like Mary Kelley, insist that Anna's claim that *The Wide, Wide World* "was written in the closest reliance upon God" indicates that Susan believed novel was divinely sanctioned (293). Despite their expertise in sentimental and domestic fiction, both Baym and Kelley accept Anna's account of her sister's writing process without questioning its accuracy. More importantly, they do not recognize Anna's rhetorical skill. Anna's description of her sister's writing process artfully combines two culturally sanctioned images of the nineteenth century woman writer: Susan Warner is depicted as both a pious female exemplar who wrote novels only to inspire religious devotion in others and as a tireless professional author who supported herself and her family through her writing. The result is a portrait of a writer who perfectly encapsulates two dramatically different ideals of nineteenth-century female authorship, a portrait that would appeal to both bluestocking feminists and conservative Christian housewives. It was a portrait of her sister that "would sell."

As Anna recalls, Susan Warner composed *The Wide, Wide World* quickly and effortlessly:

Once beginning she could not stop. She was never a true schemer in her writing; and when she had "hooked" Mr. Van Brunt, or Philetus, knew as little I fancy as

any ‘prentice angler, what sort of a fish she should bring to land. But neither was there any delay or hesitation; characters, incidents, words, came at her call, often stood at her elbow, waiting their chance. (263)

In Anna’s account, Susan’s writing is spontaneous and unstructured; she does not thoughtfully plan her text nor does she meticulously outline the details of plot and character. Anna, an accomplished author herself, was well aware that novel-writing was a difficult and strenuous task. But Anna assigns another meaning to the composition of *The Wide, Wide World*, one that required her to diminish Susan’s role in the writing process.

This is because, according to Anna, it was not Susan Warner, but God that was responsible for *The Wide, Wide World*. As Anna declares, “It was written in closest reliance upon God: for thoughts, for power, and for words. Not the mere vague wish to write a book that should do service to her Master: but a vivid, constant, looking to him for guidance and help: the worker and her work both laid humbly at the Lord's feet. In that sense, the book was written upon her knees: and the Lord's blessing has followed it, down to this day” (264). In this account, God did not merely serve as the inspiration for *The Wide, Wide World*; he was actively engaged in the process, from conception to publication. He guided her thoughts, helped her choose her words, and personally blessed the result of her labors. In Anna’s description, both the author and her text were the thankful recipients of divine grace. As Veronica Stewart observes, Anna “[affirms] Susan's intimacy with God so thoroughly that He seems to play an active role as co-author” (54). Stewart correctly identifies Anna’s rhetorical purpose, explaining that she “draws on all the power traditionally invested in spiritual conversion to establish divine, and therefore unquestionable, authority for Warner and her novel” and notes that “this characterization of Warner and her project functions as a direct response to specific inquiries Anna had received

from her sister's nineteenth-century readers" (55). Stewart's point is well taken, and her analysis accurately identifies Anna's rhetorical purpose and recognizes that she crafted this image of Warner to meet the expectations of her readers.

Of course, *The Wide, Wide World* was not the only nineteenth-century bestseller that was claimed to have been authored by God. Harriet Beecher Stowe often claimed that God had written *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. "I didn't write it," she told a neighbor in 1896, "God wrote it. I merely did his dictation" ("The Story of Uncle Tom's Cabin" 320). Stowe's response, and the active role that God played in the composition of her most famous novel, was well known to nineteenth-century readers, many of whom had read this anecdote in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Like many women writers of the mid-nineteenth century, Stowe frequently deemphasized her role as author when discussing the popularity of her work. In her anonymously authored introduction to the 1879 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she spoke of herself in the third person, remarking that "she did not make the story, that the story made itself, and that she could not stop it till it was done" (xv). Because Stowe was the most well-known author of sentimental fiction in the nineteenth century, and because *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the only novel that eclipsed *The Wide, Wide World* in sales, Anna Warner may have crafted her portrait of Susan's writing process in part with Stowe's remarks in mind. Her primarily evangelical audience would have found such similarities appealing, and would readily draw parallels between the writing processes of these two famous authors, whether Anna intended them to or not. But this is not the only portrait of Susan Warner's writing process that Anna provides in her lengthy text. When she describes the writing of Susan's next novel, *Queechy*, God is conspicuously absent.

Queechy was not dashed off quickly and easily. It was carefully outlined in Susan's journal, which Anna excerpts for her readers' amusement:

And there follows a “brief,” to use the lawyer's word, of the first chapters; covering a page and a half of the journal. A few sentences may amuse the reader. “A. and her grandfather — G. Carleton and nutting Brant's 'Death of the Flowers' — Frank's raillery on what Mr. Carleton had been about — Mr. C.'s reply that Mr. C. would be a better man if he were oftener about the same, &c. Hall and A. and Mr. C.'s interference — the present of birds shot, and A.'s taking of it.” So she runs on, mapping out roughly perhaps a third of the book. I do not know what as her first chosen name for the heroine; only an initial is given here. (323)

Clearly, *Queechy* did not spring to Susan's mind fully formed. Each minute detail of the plot is carefully planned in these “briefs,” and characters develop through a series of calculated social interactions. This entry contradicts Anna's previous claim that Susan Warner “was never a true schemer in her writing,” and it is unlikely that her writing process would change so drastically in less than a year.

In this section of Anna's text, the references to God and the Bible are less frequent, she uses more of Susan's journal entries, and her prose takes a less didactic tone. She stresses Susan's accomplishments in the literary marketplace, portraying her as a successful novelist who was able to earn a modest income through her writing. Anna's purpose has clearly changed as well. Now that she has carefully documented her sister's moral and spiritual development from a spoiled child into a pious and pure servant of Christ, she can shift her focus and concentrate on Susan's success on the literary marketplace as a female Christian author, another standard image of the successful woman writer.

Anna's decision to include Susan's notes for *Queechy* in her biography is also significant because this novel is the only one in Susan's catalog that features a heroine who is also a woman

writer. Like the young Susan Warner, Fleda and her family are living in poverty brought on by the financial failures of their male provider. Like Susan and Anna, Fleda performs a host of demanding household chores and is solely responsible for the maintenance of the domestic sphere. But Fleda has additional responsibilities.¹¹ She oversees the farmhands, plans the planting and the harvesting of crops, and performs a host of other duties typically reserved for men. Like Anna, she is an avid gardener, and her two gardens provide the family with an additional source of income. But most importantly, Fleda is a writer. Like Susan, Fleda submits her work to popular magazines in hopes of earning money to support her family. When she is rewarded for her efforts with her first paycheck of five dollars, her excitement is compounded by the fact that her stories were receiving favorable reviews (306-307). Like Susan herself, Fleda writes under a penname borrowed from a family member, and fears that exposing her true identity would negatively affect her personal relationships (I:307, II: 107). Anna's portrait of Susan as professional writer may have even conjured up images of the young Fleda Rinnegan in the minds of her readers, even though Fleda abandons her writing career when she marries her longtime sweetheart.

Unlike Fleda, Susan Warner did not give up her life as an author to marry a wealthy gentleman. For the rest of her life, Susan Warner wrote for money. While she was outlining *Queechy*, Susan was also busy preparing the manuscript of *The Wide, Wide World* for publication. During this time, she was living temporarily at the Putnam residence on Staten Island. In November of 1850, just two months before *The Wide, Wide World* was published, she writes, "I am correcting proofs of my book—a great pleasure almost over. I began six weeks ago, and three of them have been spent with Mrs. Putnam in Staten Island... I finished today the 267th page of the second volume" (325). Anna includes several such entries in this section, and

supplements them with excerpts from literary reviews and Susan's correspondence with publishers in both the United States and England. Susan's journal entries from this period (1851-1853), which Anna quotes from frequently, also chronicle her daily progress composing her third novel, *The Hills of the Shatemuc*, and express her frustrations with the fact that she is receiving no income from pirated copies of her novels being sold overseas. Anna offers little commentary in this section, other than to remind her readers that the two sisters were always "writing, writing, and correcting proofs" (371). As Anna portrays her, Susan Warner is now a busy and accomplished author.

By the end of the chapter entitled "The Rising Tide," Susan is no longer depicted as the pious and pathetic young woman called upon by God to write a bestseller. She is a professional author, mingling with writers, artists, politicians, and other members of the New York City elite at the home of her publisher. As Anna recalls,

The evenings at Mr. Putnam's were one of our very great pleasures that winter. His position as the leading publisher in New York brought all noted strangers within his reach. So many artists, professors, ministers, and men of science, you would see Thackeray one night, and Lowell another; and you would run the risk of being asked (as I was) by George P. Marsh, just back from his foreign duty, 'what I thought about the state of Europe?' (373)

Both Susan and Anna Warner were, by the end of the 1850's, literary celebrities, and Anna's readers would likely have found such descriptions of Susan's success gratifying. It was, after all, hard earned. After years of suffering, near starvation, and finally, salvation, Susan Warner was permitted to rejoin the cultural elite and Anna allows her readers to share her victory. But, as Anna is careful to stress, such success was short-lived.

The fame that Susan Warner achieved in the 1850's was not accompanied by fortune. Though they earned a modest income from their novels, and were enjoying a much more comfortable lifestyle than they had in previous years, they spent most of their profits paying of the mortgage Henry Warner still owed on Constitution Island. In order to pay household expenses, the sisters continued to write. "So we worked," Anna proudly explains, "big books, little books; now and then an article for some paper or magazine. We corrected compositions for a certain school; we wrote dictation papers for the teacher. We made our own dresses and kept the household bills at the most modest figure" (376). In the last hundred pages of her biography, Anna describes the various means through which she and her sister were able to remain self-sufficient.

For the next thirty years of her life, Susan Warner worked tirelessly as a teacher, a spiritual mentor, an instructor of Bible classes, and as an editor and co-author of a children's magazine. She wrote dozens of other novels as well as religious fiction. But Anna devotes little space to Susan's life after the publication of *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*. The years between 1860 and 1885 (the year of Susan's death) are allotted only one hundred pages in a five hundred page text, and Anna's last chapter is devoted entirely to her sister's slow and sentimentally-described death.

It may be that, because Anna Warner had accomplished her purpose of likening Susan to the heroines of her novels and composing a portrait of her sister that her readers would find appealing, her biography does not chronicle her sister's life post-1850 in much detail. It was during this time that Susan Warner composed the majority of her work. It was also a time of great social and political upheaval. The Civil War and its aftermath brought slavery and race relations into the forefront of the American consciousness during the latter part of the nineteenth

century. At the same time, the rapid industrialization of northern cities and the lamentable living conditions of factory workers made labor reform a prominent social issue, especially in the northern states. As more and more women entered the workforce as laborers, seamstresses, teachers, and the like, a national debate waged as a new generation of women writers and activists began to question the doctrine of separate spheres. Though she was somewhat isolated at her rural home on Constitution Island, Susan Warner was actively engaged in social and political issues throughout her long career.

In light of this fact, critics and biographers of Warner need to extend their focus beyond Anna's biography and consider the full scope of Warner's life in order to fully recognize her engagement labor reform, slavery, and women's rights. Susan Warner wrote *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy* when she was in her early thirties, and she lived a long and productive professional life before she died in 1885 at the age of 66. Though Anna ignores these years, as they do not neatly fit the form or purpose of her biography, scholars can no longer afford to limit their discussion of Susan Warner to only her youth, adolescence, and early adulthood. If Susan Warner is to continue to be a central figure in nineteenth century literature, we need to rewrite Anna's portrait of Susan Warner so that it more accurately reflects the scope of her long career.

In this chapter, I have argued that *Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell* should not be relied upon as the sole source of biographical information on Warner because it relies too heavily upon the conventions of sentimental and domestic fiction to be read uncritically as a purely historical account of Warner's life. But Anna's biography is still a useful resource, as it the only surviving record of these early years. Although Anna's transcriptions of Susan's journals from this era may be unreliable, and though Weiss has identified several gaps and noted many discrepancies between Anna's biography and Susan's surviving journals, *Susan Warner: Or*

Elizabeth Wetherell should be consulted if no other biographical materials are available. I have also noted that several scholars of Warner's life and work have used Anna's text to support their critical interpretations of her novels. Although I will supplement my use of Anna's biography with other, more scholarly accounts of Warner's life (such as Weiss's transcriptions), in certain instances, Anna's text is the only source of information about Warner's early life. In such cases, I will consult Anna's biography, and I encourage other scholars to do so. Weiss's dissertation, *Many Things Take My Time: The Journals of Susan Warner*, is a far more authoritative, scholarly treatment of Warner than Anna Warner's biography, and I encourage other students and scholars interested in Warner's life and work to consult this important source first, as I relied heavily on both her transcriptions of Warner's journals and her biographical sketch for this study.

Unreliable as Anna Warner may be as a scholar or a historian, her text is still useful as a personal biography. Anna allowed her readers to glimpse into Susan's fiercely-guarded private life. She shared with her readers the struggles with poverty, the emotional pain which resulted from social isolation, and the unexpected (and unprecedented) success on the literary marketplace, even though doing so violated the cultural norms of true womanhood she obviously revered. Anna Warner did not write *Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell* for literary critics. She wrote it for Susan's fans, who wrote to her "from England and America" eager for details about the personal life of their favorite author. Anna Warner gave them what they wanted, and her biography should not be treated as a scholarly text or a historical document. *Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell* was written by a skilled author of sentimental and domestic fiction about an older sister whom she genuinely adored and admired. Though it is neither historically accurate nor scholarly, it is invaluable nonetheless.

CHAPTER 2

“DARE TO BE A CHRISTIAN”:

SUSAN WARNER AND THE EVANGELICAL REFORM MOVEMENT

Anna Warner’s attempt to rescue her sister from obscurity and secure her a permanent place in literary history as a female Christian exemplar did not have the effect she anticipated. Reviewers were unimpressed with *Susan Warner: or Elizabeth Wetherell*, as they found it lacking in both style and substance. *The Dial* remarked that “the pages are full of details, interesting only to one with a background of intimate personal knowledge and affection. The letters and extracts from journals are linked by comment sadly lacking in clearness and coherence” (“The Life of an Old-Fashioned Gentlewoman”). *The New York Times* found Susan Warner’s life as thoroughly uninteresting as Anna’s prose. After reprinting one of Susan’s more mundane letters in which she describes the process of packing her bags and the difficulty she faced keeping mice away from her luggage, the reviewer blithely comments, “Such are the thrilling adventures of Susan Warner’s life, participated in, or sympathized in, by her devoted sister. However one’s sense of humor may be stirred by such a narrative, the last thing one could wish would be to seem to scoff at the record of a life so pure, so loving, and so beloved” (“Sympathetic”). Only religious weeklies like *Zion’s Herald* praised Anna’s text, noting that “the incidents connected with her various publications are interesting; so are the glimpses allowed into her heartlife, her spiritual experience” (“Life and Letters”).

Anna’s descriptions of her sister’s “heartlife” and “spiritual experience” may have appealed to the readers of *Zion’s Herald*, but more mainstream, secular publications like *The Nation* interpreted Susan’s religious devotion as evidence of her intellectual limitations. As one reviewer remarked, “A strong and genuinely mystic religious sense sustained her throughout.

Her vision of the world was intense and perhaps correspondingly narrow” (“Warner Writings”). Anna hoped that her biography of Susan would describe “a faith worth hearing about” and “a life that should be told” (ix). But, as these reviews indicate, her text failed to deliver either. Her readers found Anna’s description of Susan’s daily life monotonous and unintentionally dull. Though readers of *Zion’s Herald* found Susan’s faith inspiring, many more interpreted her devotion to religion as naïve and intellectually limiting. For critics and reviewers, Anna’s biography served as evidence that the author of *The Wide, Wide World* lived a narrow, narrow life.

Unfortunately, these misconceptions have persisted for over a century. In her 1985 profile for *Legacy*, Jane Tompkins describes Warner’s life in terms similar to those of Anna’s critics when she observes that “her novels, which were read by hundreds of thousands of people, exerted an influence on the culture that was as great as their author’s experience of the world was narrow” (1). In her afterward to the 1985 Feminist Press edition of *The Wide, Wide World*, Tompkins admits that Warner’s evangelism occasionally provided her the opportunity to venture outside their home on Constitution Island, but her interpretation of these events stresses the isolation and desperation that she believes characterized Warner’s life. “As a Visitor for the New York City Tract Society,” she notes, “she ventured into neighborhoods where no one else would go; as a collector for the mission fund, she waited in the vestibules of socially prominent people who had once been her friends.” Noting that she sometimes denied herself food in order to achieve humility, Tompkins argues that Warner’s religious activities during this period were acts of “self-mortification” that enabled her to more easily “reconcile herself to the depravations” of poverty (592). In short, in Tompkins’ portrait, Susan Warner’s religious life was defined by isolation, imprisonment, and self-denial.

According to Tompkins, Warner's involvement with the evangelical reform movement and her affiliation with organizations like the American Tract Society negatively influenced her views on social issues like poverty. "Although Warner believed in giving material aid to the poor and in relieving suffering," she asserts, "the sources of oppression and injustice, as she sees them, do not lie in social arrangements" (596). Tompkins' observations here are correct, but only to a point. Her portrayal of Warner's religious life is not entirely accurate, and she draws misleading conclusions about both Warner's theological beliefs and her engagement with social and political issues.

In this chapter I will advance a different portrait of Susan Warner as Christian woman writer that more accurately encapsulates her lifelong engagement with social issues like poverty, slavery, and labor reform. I argue that it was Warner's commitment to evangelical Christianity that initially prompted her to address these issues in her fiction. From the earliest point in her career, Warner was not only deeply concerned with the plight of the less fortunate; she was also struggling with the question of how Christian women like herself might best act to alleviate the human suffering she described in her fiction.

In both *The Wide, Wide World* and "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?" Warner relocates social issues like poverty to the women's sphere. By following her husband's advice and "daring" to "be a Christian," St. John's wife Laura in "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?" can drastically expand the sphere of women's influence to include her own home, her community and, potentially, her nation. If, like *The Wide, Wide World's* Ellen Montgomery, Laura practices the "self denying duties" Warner prescribes by denying herself luxuries in order to offer aid to those less fortunate, her charitable work will inevitably lead her to the homes of the poor, where the deplorable living conditions she

encounters will only strengthen her commitment to charitable self-denial. As both “How May An American Women Best Show Her Patriotism?” and the expunged scenes from *The Wide, Wide World* involving Rebecca Richardson reveal, Warner, through her fictional and non-fictional writings, argues that Christian women have the moral obligation to oversee not only their own domestic realms, but also to improve the domestic spaces of others, thereby extending female influence beyond the prescribed boundaries of the individual woman’s home.

Because they do not confine women’s influence solely to their own domestic spaces, Warner’s writings complicate our understanding of both separate spheres ideology and true womanhood.¹² Warner’s fictional and non-fictional women are not confined to the private sphere of their own home and utterly deprived of agency, as Welter implies (159). As I argue throughout this study, Warner does make careful use of the rhetoric of true womanhood in her writings, but she does so in order to expand the scope of female influence, not to contain it. By performing charity, Warner encourages women like St. John’s wife Laura, Ellen Montgomery, to fulfill their moral duties as Christians in a way that does not compromise their identity as true women. Warner’s early writings also reveal that she believed moral suasion was the only means by which women could shape cultural discourse, as Jane Tompkins has shown in *Sensational Designs* (143). Warners does make use moral suasion as a rhetorical strategy in many of her works, but she does so with the hope that women will directly engage these issues themselves rather than relying upon men to do so. Instead, I argue that Warner’s writings offer an alternative solution to the theological and ideological problem concerning proper role of Christian women should play in society. By envisioning the world as a series of private, domestic spaces that Christian women have the moral duty to oversee, Warner offers her readers an opportunity to effect social change by asserting their authority over a series of small, but interrelated domestic

spheres that, taken together, form an alternative, feminine public sphere. Within this realm, Warner's fictional and non-fictional women are free to exert their influence both directly and indirectly. In these early writings, Warner's women can practice their "self-denying duties" within their own domestic realm, and then use the money they have saved from denying themselves luxuries to purchase necessities to improve the domestic spaces of other women, whose homes they are morally obligated to enter.

Warner's views on both religion and social issues changed over time. As Jane Weiss observes in her study of Warner's later writings, Warner converted to Methodism during the 1850's. I argue that this conversion was accompanied by a shift in thinking about Christian women's role in society. Like other proponents of social Christianity, Warner initially believed that it was only through individual acts of charity and benevolence that Christian women could hope to improve the lives of the poor. But like many evangelical women in nineteenth-century America, Warner soon realized that charity alone could not solve the social problem of poverty. In her later life, Warner adopted the stance that it was only through reform that Christian women could hope to fulfill their moral duty to care for the needy, and the fiction she wrote in the latter part of her career reflects this shift in thought. As I discuss in Chapter 4 of this study, in *Daisy* (1868) Warner denounces the immorality of the plantation system and encourages white Christian women of financial means to emulate her protagonist and offer aid to those whose lives had been destroyed by slavery. In *Wych Hazel* and its sequel *The Gold of Chickaree* (1876), Warner encourages her audience to emulate Wych Hazel and use their wealth for reform as well as philanthropy. While her early writings like *The Wide, Wide World* might best be characterized as belonging to the same cultural discourse as The American Tract Society documents in the manner that Tompkins describes, her later fiction more closely resembles the writings produced

by the Social Gospel movement later in the century. By tracing the changes in Warner's theological beliefs alongside her engagement with social and political issues, I hope to begin to explain this shift.

“SELF DENYING DUTIES”: WARNER AND THE EXPANSION OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S INFLUENCE

In January of 1851, only one month after the publication of *The Wide, Wide World*, *The Ladies Wreath* announced that Elizabeth Witherell had won the magazine's essay contest for her response to the question “How May An American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” Susan Warner was grateful to have won and was delighted to see her work in print, even if the editor had misspelled her pseudonym. She desperately needed the fifty dollar prize. Two months earlier, on November 22, 1850, she wrote in her journal: “If I do not get said Fifty Dollar prize, I do not know where A. and I, to say nothing of Aunt Fanny, are to get winter hats and cloaks. We do not know yet either in the least where we shall, if we live, spend the winter” (A. Warner 330). Warner was not being overly dramatic when she worried about her family's survival that winter. It was, by her sister's account, the darkest and most desperate time in her life, and Susan and Anna had been writing nearly around the clock in effort to earn the money necessary to support the family's meager existence. Unbeknownst to the editors and readers of *The Ladies Wreath*, Susan Warner had not composed this essay on female patriotism only to share her thoughts on the subject. When she wrote it, she did so with the knowledge that she absolutely had to win.¹³

Warner knew that in order to win, she must please both the editors of *The Ladies Wreath* and their readers with her response. And because so much was at stake with her entry, it comes as no surprise that, as Sharon Estes observes, the essay “reads almost like an outline of the conventional view of women's role in this period” (216). As Estes notes, *The Ladies Wreath* was a conservative periodical. Its editor, Sarah Towne Smith Martyn, was “a Congregationalist,

temperance activist, and prolific author of religious pamphlets for the American Tract Society.” Perhaps because of this, Warner chose a similarly conservative structure for her text. As Estes observes, “the pedagogical essay as a dialogue sketch within a domestic scene” was often used by writers like Sarah J. Hale and Harriet Beecher Stowe, both of whom enjoyed immense success as writers for women’s periodicals (214). Clearly, Warner chose both the form and content of her essay to appeal to her audience so that she might secure the prize money, and the unprecedented success of her first novel demonstrates that she knew perhaps better than any other writer of her time how to satisfy readers of nineteenth-century women’s writing.

Though her essay is, on the surface, conservative in both structure and content, Warner makes two claims in “How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” that, though they appear conventional, are in fact quite radical. Warner carefully crafted her essay so that it would appeal to even the strictest members of the so-called cult of true womanhood: she relegates both women and children to the “Home Department,” she argues against female suffrage, and she uses a male protagonist to articulate her positions under the guise of offering husbandly advice.¹⁴ But when she calls upon women to “dare” to be “Americans” and Christians,” Warner is arguing for both a drastic reconceptualization of the domestic sphere and a redefinition of the Christian woman’s role in American society.

Warner’s essay begins in a setting familiar to readers of nineteenth-century women’s fiction: a well-appointed parlor. In it, a man, a child, and two women are enjoying their evening. The man’s wife, Laura, notices an essay contest advertised in an unnamed women’s magazine that offered a cash prize to the best answer to the question “How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” Because she is in desperate need of a new “French style hat,” the wife asks her husband if he might provide her with an answer to the question so that she might enter

the contest. St. John's answers begin rather expectedly. He claims that women might raise patriotic sons, or by being patriotic themselves. But these answers do not satisfy either his wife or his sister, who force him to be more specific. He complies by offering two challenges to women in nineteenth-century America. In order to meet these challenges, American women must reconceptualize domesticity and reevaluate the role of the Christian woman in society.

St. John's first piece of advice calls for women to "Dare to Be an American" in the areas that they "can control." He tells his wife and sister not to "ape foreign styles of living" or "copy foreign distinctions" when they keep their household (224-5). According to St. John, the "sundry particulars" of women's domestic labor are immensely important because they help to establish a national identity. As he advises the two women not to serve a light English breakfast to a hardworking American merchant (who, presumably, needs to eat earlier and more frequently than his aristocratic counterpart overseas) and to be mindful of practicality when they copy European dress patterns, St. John is careful to point out that the food women serve and the clothing they make and wear are not merely an expression of their personal tastes, but also of their cultural identity as Americans. In Warner's argument, domesticity becomes nationalism, and because women are caretakers of the domestic sphere, they play an important role in establishment of an authentically American culture. In Warner's essay, both the domestic sphere and women who inhabit it are elevated to a level of national importance. For Warner, the home and how it is kept becomes an expression of a nation's character and values.

In her essay "Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan reimagines nineteenth-century separate spheres ideology by redefining the domestic in terms of the foreign. "In this context," she argues, "domestic has a double meaning that not only links the familial household to the nation, but also imagines both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual

border of the home.” Reimagining domesticity in this way, Kaplan contends, complicates our understanding of separate spheres ideology because “another part of the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home.” As Kaplan observes, to envision the nation as a domestic space empowers not only the home, but the women who work within it. “If domesticity plays a key role in imagining the nation as home,” she writes, “then women, positioned at the center of the home, play a major role in defining the contours of the nation and its shifting borders with the foreign” (582). If, as Kaplan suggests, the nation itself is defined as a domestic space, women like St. John’s wife Laura are empowered by the ideology of domesticity to tend to the needs of their nation in the same way that they care for their home. This is, as St. John points out, the logical extension of the ideology of republican motherhood. In Warner’s argument, American women can best show their patriotism by protecting their nation from foreign cultural invasion: not serving foreign food, not speaking foreign languages, and not copying foreign fashions.

Like the writers Kaplan mentions in her study, Warner does “express anxieties about the opposing trajectory that brings foreignness into the home” (589). But the threat posed to the domestic by the foreign in “How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?” does not come from the African slave or the immigrant domestic servant (the threats she Kaplan identifies in the writings of Catherine Beecher and Sarah Hale), but from Britain, France, Germany, and other European nations. In this early essay, it is America that must be protected from cultural domination by foreign powers. In 1850, Susan Warner believed that American women could best serve their nation by confining their efforts to the newly-expanded arena of nation as home. They could, according to Warner, begin to more actively engage social issues

like poverty by expanding their moral influence beyond the boundaries of their home and family. And they could do this, she argues, by “daring” to be “Christians.”

Susan Warner was not the only woman in nineteenth-century America who advocated for an expansion of Christian female influence, nor was she the first. As Nancy Cott observes in her study *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England 1780-1835*, Christian women had been participating in the public sphere for several decades at the time Warner wrote her essay. “Religious identity,” Cox notes, “allowed women to assert themselves, both in private and public ways. It enabled them to rely on an authority beyond the world of men and provided a crucial support system to those who stepped beyond accepted bounds--reformers, for example. Women dissenters from Ann Hutchinson to Sarah Grimke displayed the subversive potential of religious belief” (140). Following the advice of their ministers, women formed reform societies. While these organizations focused primarily on culturally-sanctioned roles for women and appealed to commonly-praised female virtues, the maternal associations and moral reform societies Cott describes also encouraged their members to actively engage in the reshaping of American society so that it conformed to the Evangelical worldview. “Both kinds of societies,” Cott asserts, “institutionalized the idea that women's pious influence, especially as exerted over their children, could reform the world” (149). And that impulse to reform the nation only grew as the century progressed.

Lori Ginzberg observes in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* that, as women’s participation in church-sponsored reform societies increased, so too did the scope of the female influence on society as a whole. According to Ginzberg, by the end of the nineteenth century, “the growth of both economic hardship and benevolence associations expanded the list of Protestant women's duties

beyond recognition. In rhetoric and then in fact, women's influence leapt across barriers, permitting them to enter all but the most protected male bastions." As Ginzberg describes, women began to pressure their politicians and ministers to support their causes: "Sunday schools, immigrant neighborhoods, prisons, hospitals, and wars were but a few of the situations that succumbed to the 'maternal' force" (16-7). Because the ideology of true womanhood deemed them both naturally maternal and morally superior to men, women within these benevolent organizations claimed the right to intervene on behalf of those who were suffering, whatever the cause. "The rhetoric of Christian benevolence" Ginzberg states, "suggested not only that even the most oppressed women could aspire to a higher standard of virtue than that presumably exhibited by men but that women, acting together, would identify and care for the poor and downtrodden" (17). In light of Ginzberg's study, Warner's essay and the rhetoric she employs can perhaps most productively be read as belonging to larger cultural discourse surrounding the expansion of Christian women's influence in the mid-nineteenth century.

St. John does not advise his wife and sister to join a women's reform society, though we might assume that both Warner and her narrator would have supported the idea wholeheartedly. Instead, Warner uses a more personal, subtler argument in her essay, making use of the rhetoric of both the true woman and the evangelical reform movement. First, she distinguishes the type of Christianity she advocates from the "fashionable religion" that she characterizes as hollow. Then she argues that it is only through self-sacrifice and the conquest of personal desires that a true woman can be transformed to a true Christian. Though she does not clearly articulate it in this essay, Warner seems to have a particular role in mind for women like Laura. In order to fulfill this role, they must venture outside their own domestic sphere and enter into the homes of poor. While this was a popular idea among women in the evangelical community, readers of *The*

Ladies Wreath may have found Warner's impulse for social reform rather distasteful, particularly if it involved sacrificing the very luxuries that upper-class like the "French-style hat" upper-class women like Laura so desperately craved.

Perhaps because she knows that her husband's advice is unconventional, Laura questions him as to the popular appeal of his beliefs. "These religious views," she says, "aren't they too strict?" St. John's sister attempts to reassure Laura by noting that "religion is fashionable now," but he is quick to distinguish between the type of religion he advocates and the "fashionable" religion to which his sister refers. "The outside of religion is fashionable," he explains; "religious observances and ceremonials and decencies are in good favor; but when secret prayer and self-denying duties shall be fashionable—then will come to pass the saying that is written, 'These people have turned the world upside down'" (227). St. John's answer raises an issue that Warner will interrogate in her later fiction when he hints that many self-proclaimed Christians lack moral and spiritual depth of any kind, and practice their faith only when it is socially required. The solution he proposes—that women practice "secret prayer and self-denying duties"—appears to support Tompkins' claim that Warner advocated female submission and subservience (*Sensational Designs* 161). Similarly, his endorsement of "secret prayer" seems to reinforce Tompkins' assertion that Warner, like the members of the American Tract Society, believed that the real work of the evangelical reform movement was performed in the "closet" through private, personal prayer (*Sensational Designs* 150). St. John's response certainly contains these meanings, and the similarities between Warner's rhetoric and the views held by The American Tract Society are as readily identifiable in this essay as they are in *The Wide, Wide World*. But Warner's endorsement of self-denial here is more complex than Tompkins' study acknowledges. For Warner, self-denial did not always amount to total self-abnegation. Nor did Christianity

demand that they shun the material needs of the poor in favor of a purely spiritual solution to human suffering. *The Wide, Wide World* is a novel about a certain kind of self-denial that has a spiritual and moral benefit in that it is the primary means by which the protagonist achieves salvation. As a recently-recovered chapter from the novel reveals, Warner believed that self-denial can inspire charity and benevolence.

In a chapter from *The Wide, Wide World* that Putnam insisted be cut for the sake of brevity, Ellen Montgomery's encounter with a "little black girl" named Rebecca Richardson teaches her that denying herself luxury in order to aid those less fortunate is among her most important duties as a Christian woman. In this episode, Warner strategically employs sentiment and sympathy to convince her readers that they too had the moral obligation to help those in need. Like St. John's instructions to his fashionable wife in "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?" this episode of *The Wide, Wide World* reveals that Warner was, from the earliest point in her career, actively encouraging upper-class Christian women to work with and among the poor. For Warner, self-denial was not only a path to spiritual salvation; it was the means by which Christian women could affect positive social change.

St. John's wife Laura was correct when she observed that the religious views her husband advocated might be too "strict" to appeal to readers of nineteenth-century women's periodicals. Warner's belief that Christians had the moral obligation to offer aid to the suffering and her depiction of African American poverty may not have resonated with her publisher George Putnam, who demanded that the Rebecca Richardson scene be cut before *The Wide, Wide World* was published in 1850, ostensibly because the novel was too long (Roberson 2). But whatever the reason for its exclusion, the Rebecca Richardson scene reveals that Warner was more conscious of social and political issues than scholars previously thought. As Susan L. Roberson,

who recently recovered the lost portion of Warner's novel in her essay "Race Relations in Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*," observes, "knowledge of the manuscript contextualizes the published version of Ellen's story and its issues of morality, gender and economics against Warner's initial creation and against the larger national debates surrounding race, equality, and freedom" (3). I agree with Roberson that this scene offers valuable insight into Warner's views on slavery and race, and I discuss Warner's treatment of slavery in Chapter 4 ; but my purpose here is to highlight the fact that this scene also dramatizes Warner's beliefs about Christian duty and women's involvement with social issues. As her heroine Ellen Montgomery learns in this section of the novel, Warner believed that Christian women could only fulfill their moral duty by performing acts of charity and benevolence.

When Ellen Montgomery first meets Rebecca, she is immediately struck by her poverty. "Her dress was miserably thin and poor even for that weather," the narrator observes; "it made Ellen shiver to look at her." Ellen not only pities Rebecca, she identifies with her, internalizing her suffering and physically reacting to it as though she were experiencing it herself. These feelings of empathy are heightened when Ellen contrasts her own relative comfort with the suffering she witnesses, a comparison that rouses her emotions even further: "She could not help drawing comparison between her own condition and that of her fellow creature. Her heart smote as she did so." As Ellen contrasts Rebecca's "wretched, scanty frock" and "bare ankles" to her own "new silk blue hood and the dainties with which she was loaded," Ellen responds the only way she knows how—she cries (19). This spontaneous outburst of emotion may appear trivial, or even unrealistic, but as scholars like Nina Baym have observed, tears are incredibly significant in the sentimental novel. Baym claims in her discussion of *The Wide, Wide World* that tears are often shed by heroines like Ellen Montgomery to express sadness, but also anger, frustration and

helplessness. “One might theorize,” Baym writes, “that the frequency of tears in woman’s fiction is proportionally less to the amount of tenderness and sensibility that imbues it, than to the amount of rage and frustration may not be openly voiced by the powerless without unfortunate consequence to them” (144). In this view, Ellen’s tears convey the enormous sympathy she feels toward Rebecca’s suffering, but also serve to highlight the frustration she experiences with the realization that she is not capable of alleviating that suffering in any meaningful way. Ellen cries because she is angry at the social inequities that she is powerless to correct. Ellen offers her new friend one of the figs she has just purchased, which Rebecca gratefully accepts, and she is then shocked when Rebecca begins to pick up pieces of coal from the street, the errand that presumably caused their chance encounter. Ellen ends their conversation rather abruptly when she remembers that she must return home to her mother, but Warner makes it clear that this small sacrifice does not fulfill Ellen’s moral and spiritual obligation. When Rebecca Richardson returns, Ellen must again confront poverty and suffering in order to learn the true power of self denial.

Rebecca reappears a few pages later when she returns Ellen’s purse and is rewarded with a quarter and a lecture from Ellen’s mother about personal accountability for sin (22-23). But this is not the only lesson that Warner wants her readers to extract from her encounter. When Rebecca leaves, both Ellen and her mother resolve to offer more aid to the “little black girl” and immediately begin conjuring up ways that they might sacrifice what little luxuries they have so that they might provide Rebecca with proper clothing. Though the initial idea to give up the money for her new travelling bonnet is Ellen’s, Mrs. Montgomery carefully outlines exactly what garments this money will purchase, and how much of this money should be allocated to Rebecca. “Your new bonnet,” she informs Ellen, “cost five and a half dollars you told me. That

would buy Rebecca two good strong frocks and two pairs of stout shoes.” But Mrs. Montgomery is also careful to remind her daughter that charity is most effective when it performs the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people. “I think” she says, “I would spend only half of it upon her and keep the rest for some other creature.” Ellen internalizes the lesson immediately, and declares that she can “have a double pleasure” though she does not specify who, if anyone, will be the beneficiary of the second set of clothes (24). But Ellen’s desire to participate in charity is perhaps less significant than the manner in which she is instructed to perform these acts. In this scene, Warner again demonstrates that self-denial is spiritually rewarding when doing so allows you to provide for others and provides her readers with a practical model of charitable giving that they can emulate: she describes what should be sacrificed (luxury items, not necessities), who should benefit (the poor, as long as they are virtuous) and how much could be allotted to each (one dress and one pair of shoes). It is a model that she will repeat in both *The Little American* and, later, in the *Daisy* series, and it dramatizes, in miniature, Warner’s argument for both the social value of self-denial and the duty shared by all Christian women to participate in charitable giving. But as the conclusion of the Rebecca Richardson episode reveals, fulfilling this moral obligation sometimes requires women to venture outside the protected realm of their own homes to witness firsthand the living conditions of those less fortunate. When Ellen Montgomery and her mother do so, Warner exposes her readers to a domestic space dramatically different from their relatively well-appointed parlors and comfortable upper-class residences.

As Ellen and her mother make their descent into the cellar occupied by Rebecca and her washerwoman mother Mary Anne, Warner describes their journey in realistic detail:

Passing along a miserable, dark entry for a few steps, they turned to the right through an open door and entered a room corresponding well with the steps and

the entry way. It was dingy, dark, and dirty, and the air was clogged with a variety of unsweet and unsavory odours; the only one that could be distinguished carrying with it a very strong notion of soap suds. That was not surprising, for two tubs of it soot at the side of the room, and stooping over one of them was a stout black woman whom they immediately supposed to be Mrs. Richardson...flat on the floor, before a little bit of a cooking stove, sat Rebecca. (25)

Ellen remarks that the place is “very disagreeable” and complains about the putrid smell, to which her mother replies: “Then how would you like to live here always?” (25). Warner’s readers would likely have been asking themselves a similar question. Her description of the Richardson’s apartment invites her audience to draw comparisons between miserable cellar and the comfortable parlor from which Ellen and her mother had just departed, and, potentially, their own living spaces. Warner’s readers might also have recognized that the financial hardships suffered by Ellen and her mother paled in comparison to the poverty experienced by Rebecca Richardson. Though Warner’s language here lacks the sentimental flourish of previous scenes involving Rebecca, her description is designed to elicit the same response from her readers that Ellen initially experiences when she is confronted by such stark poverty. Warner expects, indeed almost demands, that readers compare themselves to the Richardson family, feel pity, and cry.

In the conversation that ensues between Mrs. Montgomery and Mary Ann Richardson, Warner describes the desperate state of the urban poor. When Mrs. Montgomery praises Rebecca’s honesty at having returned the money, Mary Anne Richardson accepts this compliment only reluctantly, claiming that had she found the money, she would have spent it on her daughter rather than returning it. Mrs. Montgomery then condemns her for her lack of Christian morality, and Mary Anne Richardson remarks that “you rich folks don’t know how

hard it is for poor folks to be honest when they want bread to put on their table.” When Mrs. Montgomery asks if it is truly “that hard to get along,” Mary Anne Richardson explains that both she and her daughter must struggle even to stay alive:

Last winter I was sick, nigh for two months, and could do nothing, and Rebecca was driven to begging for me; but we couldn’t live by that; and part of the time the weather was so bitter and the snow so thick the child couldn’t find coals, nor go after them. I didn’t know quite whether we were likest to starve or freeze; and indeed we did both in a measure; but some help we got kept us from dying either way for that time. And since that she have done little better in the warm weather, though it is a pinch to live in the best of times, and now the cold is coming on again, and I don’t know how it’ll be. (26)

Like Mrs. Montgomery, Warner’s primarily middle- and upper-class female readership knew little about the plight of the urban poor, and the image of young Rebecca desperately forging for coal in thick winter snow in order to save her sickly mother from freezing to death is designed to garner sympathy. But Ellen’s mother remains dry-eyed and begins to proselytize, arguing that if she simply “[t]rusts in the Lord” that she “will be fed,” and Mary Anne promises to do so (27). This encounter satisfies both Mrs. Montgomery and Ellen, and Warner has proven that “self denying duties” can have a positive impact on society at large. The episode ends with Ellen’s mother advising that she “remember Rebecca whenever” she feels “inclined to shrink from any disagreeable duty,” and Warner’s readers are now acutely aware of they too have a moral duty to offer material and spiritual aid to those less fortunate (27).

As Roberson observes in her analysis of the Rebecca Richardson episode, Mrs. Montgomery’s answer demonstrates that Susan Warner was committed to Christian charity.

“More than simply proselytizing,” Roberson argues, “Mrs. Montgomery is participating in the kind of political activity advocated by the Ladies’ New York Anti-Slavery Society and by Warner in her essay ‘How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?’” (12). Noting that the Ladies’ New York Anti-Slavery Society sought to “improve the situation of blacks through evangelism and charity,” Roberson states that the “Mrs. Montgomery’s gift then, is chartered by the narratives available her as a woman of New York City and is in keeping with her own (and Warner’s) deep Christian devotion” (13). Like Roberson, I believe the Rebecca Richardson episode reveals that Warner advocated charity and benevolence as the solution to urban poverty, and I agree that Mrs. Montgomery’s response to Mary Anne Richardson is similar to the rhetoric employed by Ladies’ New York Anti-Slavery Society. This episode also demonstrates that Warner’s involvement with the American Tract Society influenced her writing, as Jane Tompkins argues in both her afterward to *The Wide, Wide World* and in *Sensational Designs*. But neither Roberson nor Tompkins adequately describes Warner’s commitment to evangelical reform. Like Ellen Montgomery and her mother, Warner had ventured into the homes of the poor and witnessed human suffering firsthand. She knew how difficult it was to convince upper class women to sacrifice even a few dollars to help those in need. These experiences powerfully shaped both her fiction and her theological beliefs.

“THE UNEVENNESS STRUCK US”: TRACT DISTRIBUTION AND MISSION FUND COLLECTION

In September of 1843, Susan and Anna Warner began distributing tracts for the New York City Tract Society. In her biography, Anna prefaces her sister’s journals from this period with a telling observation. “One could smile, and sigh too,” she says, “over the details that are so much like what takes place today. People say we need ‘a new gospel,’ ‘new methods’ better

‘suited to the times’; and behold the times are identical, and human hearts the same” (214). According to Anna, the distribution of tracts was a frustrating experience even in the 1840’s, when the practice was relatively new. Anna summarizes the criticism of the Tract Society methods briefly and with good humor, admitting that she and her sister were largely ineffective in their mission to convert souls to Christ. In the journal excerpts that follow, she and Susan are either openly ridiculed or positively ignored when they attempt to distribute titles like “The Swearer’s Prayer” to citizens of the neighboring towns (214-16). But this lukewarm reception did not deter the sisters. When the opportunity arose to visit “a certain locality where no one wished to go,” Susan and Anna were the first to volunteer (220). Anna does not reveal what motivated Susan to volunteer the sisters to visit the homes of New York City’s most impoverished citizens when other members of her congregation refused to do so. But she did volunteer, and she and Anna began conducting home visits in New York City shortly thereafter.

Susan Warner was not alone in her desire to visit the homes of the urban poor, nor did she believe that doing so violated separate spheres ideology. As Christine Stansell notes in her study *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York: 1789-1860*, “the conception of the home visit grew out of the great moral importance attributed to the home” by evangelical Christians. “The ideology of domesticity” Stansell writes, “thus provided the initial impetus for what would become a class intervention, the movement of reformers into the working class neighborhoods and the households of the poor between 1830 and 1860.” For the women who volunteered, visiting the homes of the poor was a moral imperative. “Religious duty lay not just in responding to need—or vice—when it presented itself,” Stansell observes, “but in actively ferreting out opportunities to minister to or struggle with the benighted souls hiding away in those dark urban places” (65). Like other members of the New York City Tract Society, Susan Warner was eager

for an opportunity to visit the urban poor. She volunteered to do so when other members of her congregation refused. And, as Stansell's study reveals, she did so because she felt that it was her duty as a both a woman and a Christian.

Anna does not provide her reader with the exact locations she and Susan visited, perhaps because she was embarrassed at their youthful naiveté.¹⁵ The two sisters were, she recalls, "in happy ignorance of the big city's byways." Clearly, Anna was deeply affected by what she saw of urban poverty. She remembers these visits well, and describes one in vivid detail:

There was one particular dark long passage — a gap in the line of wall — through which we passed from the open street to a poor little dwelling in an inner court. There lived an old colored woman to whom my sister read and talked. Sometimes all was quiet enough; but I remember well one day when a posse of wild men came racketing up on the low porch; quarrelling, swearing, shouting; and the kind old woman — my sister reading on the while — rose up and silently placed herself between the door and us...I shiver sometimes, remembering the long dark passage and those voices. (220)

Anna's description of "the poor little dwelling" and the "old colored woman" who inhabits it is similar her sister's description of the Richardson's cellar apartment in the expunged chapter of *The Wide, Wide World*. The purpose of the visit is different; Susan and Anna are not there to perform charity, but to minister and distribute tracts. But Anna's account and the Rebecca Richardson scene are similar in subject as well as sentiment. In both episodes, a white Christian woman enters the home of an impoverished African American woman with the expressed aim to provide spiritual or material aid. In each instance, the white woman experiences fear and pity when she contrasts this environment with her own relatively comfortable existence (though Anna

only records her own fear and trepidation and portrays her sister as unaffected by the circumstances surrounding her). Their tract society visits shaped both her views of class inequality and Susan's depiction of urban poverty in *The Wide, Wide World*. Though she was unable to provide "the old colored woman" she visited with material comfort in part because she herself lacked the financial means to do so, Susan Warner knew firsthand how desperately such aid was needed by those even poorer than herself. She also knew that the upper-class women who read her novels were not likely to provide it.

At the same time that she was distributing tracts in the city's poorest neighborhoods, Susan Warner was visiting the homes of some of its wealthiest citizens as a collector for her church mission fund. As Anna recalls, these experiences were a painful reminder that she and Susan were no longer members of the privileged class.

What did try us...was the social standing of a collector for missions; in the houses of some of those who figured on the list, we were under ban. The servants bade us wait in the hall; the mistress scanned us and questioned us. There was the Collector's book indeed, with her own dues written down by her own hand; but still—young women so plainly and unfashionably dressed! For we were very poor just then, and shut off from most things; and I know it had been very pleasant to think of even five minutes in certain houses, and of even a greeting from some people. (220)¹⁶

Anna argues, ironically, that the reason she and Susan had difficulty collecting funds for the poor stemmed from the fact that they were poor themselves, and hence were held suspect by the very people who they hoped would pledge to help the needy. Acutely aware that their plain, unfashionable clothing and their diminished social status meant that they were now resigned to

wait in doorways and argue with servants, Susan and Anna knew the social stigma associated with poverty. Formerly members of the upper-class themselves, they were now “shut off from most things.” After years of being shunned by her former friends when she passed them on the street and experiencing the pain of social isolation firsthand, Susan knew that to be poor in nineteenth-century America was to be invisible.

She also knew that those who had the most to offer the poor were the least inclined to give. As Anna recalls, even the wealthiest families contributed very little to the mission fund. “In places where there seemed to be so much,” she laments, “the poor Collector's book received so little.” Though Anna proclaims that this was an “anomaly that belonged to all ages,” and quotes an appropriate Bible verse to remind her readers that material comforts are less important than spiritual fulfillment, she acknowledges that collecting for the mission fund and distributing tracts altered the sisters’ view of society. “But we had seen the world just a little,” she remarks, “and the unevenness struck us” (220).

Many Christian women were “struck” by the “unevenness” of American society in the mid-nineteenth century. As Lois Boyd and Douglas Breckinridge note in *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status*, Presbyterian women formed organizations like cent societies, sewing societies, mission societies, and prayer groups. Despite the fact that these organizations often included the term “mission” in their official title, such groups were often tasked with caring for the poor as well as providing missionaries with much-needed funds to support their efforts at home and overseas. As Boyd and Breckinridge discuss, women who were members of these organizations “gathered to sew and quilt and assemble boxes for the use of missionaries and for the needy; they walked two by two in immigrant neighborhoods to distribute Bibles and religious tracts, they held bake sales and craft sales to supplement their

personal donations, they taught in Sunday schools” (4-5). Though the primary purpose of these groups was to raise money for missions, the funds collected by these groups were also used for “aiding widows and orphans, and assisting in childhood education” (6).

Anna does not specify the name of the organization she and her sister belonged to, making it difficult for scholars to accurately reconstruct her involvement with women’s charitable associations, but she does note that both she and Susan participated in each of the activities that Boyd and Breckinridge outline.¹⁷ According to Anna, she and Susan not only distributed tracts and collected for their church mission fund; they also devoted an hour a week to sewing items for mission boxes and taught Sunday school courses (A. Warner 207-219). Although it is difficult to determine exactly how much of the funds Susan and Anna collected were allocated to helping the poor residents of New York City and how much was used to aid in the church’s missionary efforts, it is clear that both Susan and Anna Warner were committed to alleviating poverty and suffering wherever they found it, and dedicated much of their time and energy to aiding those in need.

Perhaps no other woman writer from her era understood the “unevenness” of nineteenth-century class structures as intimately as Susan Warner. By the time she was thirty, she had experienced both the indulgent life of a wealthy young woman and endured the seemingly endless humiliations of poverty. Her church activities took her to the very extremes of society, where she witnessed both the suffering of the urban poor and the cold indifference of the upper-class. Though she strongly believed that Christian women were morally obligated to provide both material aid and spiritual guidance to the poor, her experiences distributing tracts and collecting for the mission fund proved that neither of these methods were an effective solution to the problem of poverty. Warner knew that most upper-class women would—like Laura in “How

May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?”—rather buy a new “French hat” than sacrifice even the smallest luxury (as Ellen does with her “riding bonnet”) to help their fellow man. Though charity and self-denial continue to be important themes in Warner’s fiction throughout the 1850’s, Warner’s later heroines do not accept this lesson as quickly and easily Ellen Montgomery does in *The Wide, Wide World*. Instead, both Daisy Randolph and Wych Hazel must confront issues of social class more directly, experience the suffering of others more intensely, and accept a level moral accountability for the fate of those less fortunate that is not required of Ellen Montgomery. Similarly, the children who subscribed to *The Little American* were afforded a more in-depth, sentimentally-charged description of urban poverty in such articles as “The London Doll Maker” and “The Live of Others” than the readers of *The Wide, Wide World* would have been had the Rebecca Richardson scene been included in the novel. Because she had experienced the “unevenness” of society herself, and because her involvement with both her church mission fund and organizations like The New York City Tract Society broadened her perspective on social issues like poverty, Susan Warner was beginning to engage more actively with other social issues of her time. This was accompanied by a shift in her theological beliefs.

WARNER’S CONVERSION TO METHODISM

Because so few written records of Warner’s life during the 1850’s survived to the present day, it is difficult to determine exactly when Warner abandoned tract distribution, though we can speculate that it must have been soon after the publication of *The Wide, Wide World*. Nor does Anna’s biography reveal much about Susan’s life during the 1850’s.¹⁸ She summarizes the decade rather quickly, declaring only that they spent most of the decade writing feverishly: “Big books, little books; now and then an article for some paper or magazine” (376). Though she was

overly brief in her summation, Anna was correct to point out that these were among the most productive years of Susan's career. Susan produced a number of important works during this period. Susan Warner published six novels during the 1850's: *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), *Queechy* (1852), *The Law and the Testimony* (1853), *Mr. Rutherford's Children* (1853), *Carl Krinken: His Christmas Story* (1854), and *The Hills of the Shatemuc* (1856). Warner's work from this period spans several genres and engaged several audiences, and, importantly, was published by two different firms. *The Wide, Wide World*, *Queechy*, and *The Hills of the Shatemuc* were written for a mass audience, and were published by Putnam, along with *Mr. Rutherford's Children* and *Carl Krinken*, both of which were both part of Putnam's popular juvenile series "Ellen Montgomery's Bookshelf." These novels are all didactic, but in varying degrees; Warner uses Bible verses sparingly in *Queechy* and *The Hills of the Shatemuc*, and both lack the heavy-handed use of Christian rhetoric found on nearly every page of *The Wide, Wide World*. *The Law and the Testimony*, however, signals a clear departure from these other works in that it is not a work of fiction at all. As Jane Weiss observes, *The Law and the Testimony* was instead a "thematic anthology of Bible excerpts" that, taken together, "a form of theological argument." "The categories and selections were not neutral," she notes, "but expressive of the compiler's conclusions" about the nature of Christian faith (349). Published by Robert Carter Brothers, a notable evangelical press that focused almost exclusively on Christian fiction, *The Law and the Testimony* represents a significant shift in Warner's literary career. By 1860, Carter Brothers became the primary publisher of her work, and Warner ceased writing for more mainstream publishing houses and devoted herself almost entirely to religious fiction. Though she would return to Putnam decades later with *Wych Hazel* and its sequel *The Gold of Chickaree* (1876), Warner's decision to write for Carter signaled a change in both her fiction and her theological

beliefs. According to Weiss, “all of Susan's subsequent fiction reflected this shift of focus, discarding the evocation of pathos and sensitive, tearful heroines in favor of more austere examinations of the practical implications of Christian doctrine” (350). Like Weiss, I see Warner’s later heroines as distinctly different from Ellen Montgomery and Fleda Rinnegan, but I do not believe that Warner completely “discarded” sentimentalism in her later writings. As I discuss in the chapters that follow, Warner uses sentimental strategies to elicit an emotional response from her readers in order to convince them that they bore a level of responsibility for the human suffering she describes, and hence were obligated to relieve that suffering because of their moral duty as Christian women.

Weiss’s dissertation “Many Things Take My Time: The Journals of Susan Warner” is significant to any study of Warner’s later fiction because it details her conversion from Presbyterianism to Methodism, a process that began in the 1850’s but continued, in varying degrees, for several decades. In her study, Weiss recovers journals from the 1860’s that discuss Warner’s friendship with the Garretson family, especially Catherine Garretson, the daughter of Freeborn Garretson, an influential Methodist circuit rider and minister. Warner’s frequent visits to Wildercliffe, the Garretson estate in the mid-Hudson valley, exposed her to prominent Methodist intellectuals, who frequently gathered at the estate. As Weiss observes, it was because of her close relationship with the Garretson family that Warner converted to Methodism during this period, a conversion that inspired her to “later embrace the active, social emphasis” of the faith (350).

Warner’s conversion significantly altered her views on both female submission and the domestic sphere. According to Weiss, Warner was:

moving from the ideal of Christianity offered by her former mentor Thomas Harvey Skinner—a paradigm stressing absolute submission to God and to all legitimate earthly authorities—to the model she saw in the Methodist circuit-riders, indicating that true Christianity would require an active imitation of Jesus in every aspect of life, not merely within the domestic sphere but in the larger society. (355)

Such a paradigm shift helps to explain why the heroines of *Daisy* and *Wych Hazel* are decidedly less submissive than either Ellen Montgomery or Fleda Rinnegan. In fact, both Daisy Randolph and Wych Hazel actively challenge their male authority figures when they discover that themselves to be innately morally superior to those who wield power over them. It also explains why Warner would allow these later heroines women to venture beyond the domestic sphere that confined both Ellen and Fleda so completely. As Weiss argues, Warner believed that Christian women's influence should be expanded to include not only the domestic sphere but all of society, and the heroines of her later fiction actively engage issues like slavery and labor reform, topics Fleda Rinnegan is only permitted to speak about and Ellen Montgomery seems blissfully ignorant of. As I discuss in later chapters, both Daisy Randolph and Wych Hazel are socially conscious Christian reformers who confront the most pressing social and political issues of the era.

Weiss correctly characterizes Warner's later work when she observes that from 1850 forward, she

used her fiction to represent the practice of Christianity as healing the sick, sheltering the homeless, and clothing the naked--acts intended to bring about well-being for other people--rather than as a narcissistic pursuit. Warner's

deficiencies notwithstanding, her books argued increasingly forcibly that Christianity meant, not self- abnegation or unquestioning submission, but redistribution of wealth and the development of social services. (362-3)

Like Weiss, I believe that Warner underwent a radical transformation in thought during this era, and I wholeheartedly agree with the portrait of Warner's political and social beliefs that she advances in her study. But because Weiss's aim was to provide an accurate transcription of Warner's surviving journals, she appropriately limits her discussion of Warner's fiction to only a few pages, and focuses primarily on Warner's conversion to Methodism and her relationship with the Garretson family to establish the cultural context for Warner's later work. I argue that there were other cultural influences at work during the 1850's and 1860's that helped to shape Warner's social and political beliefs. As Ron C White and C. Howard Hopkins note in their study *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America*, the evangelical community was experiencing a similar shift in their thinking about social issues. According to White and Hopkins,

The rapid growth of concern with purely social issues such as poverty, workingmen's rights, the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial bitterness is the chief feature distinguishing American religion after 1865 from that of the first half of the nineteenth century. Such matters in some cases supplanted entirely the earlier pre-occupation with salvation from personal sin and the life hereafter. (7)

This new emphasis on social reform mirrors Warner's own growing concern with slavery and labor reform after 1865 and provides valuable cultural context to any reading of her work from the period.

As I discuss in the next three chapters, Warner's later novels are less concerned with the salvation of individual souls or conversion of individual sinners than with the correction of social ills, a feature that closely aligns Susan Warner's fiction with tenants of the Social Gospel Movement. In my discussion of these novels, I highlight the similarities between Warner and other, more vocal proponents of the Social Gospel and argue that she be added to the rapidly expanding canon of women writers like Elizabeth Stuart Phelps who are only now being recognized for their important intellectual contribution to reform movements. I hope that this portrait of Susan Warner will help to dispel the notion that Warner was unconcerned with social and political issues. Instead, I hope to stress that she actively participated in the discourse (if not the practice) of social reform.

Susan Warner's early writings are not overtly political. Neither *The Wide, Wide World* nor "How May an American Women Best Show Her Patriotism?" advocate reform of any kind. Warner's vivid descriptions of urban poverty were intended to inspire charity, not change. When she challenged women like Laura to "Dare to Be a Christian," she asked only that they deny themselves small luxuries so that others might have necessities like food, clothing and shelter. Ellen Montgomery never considers how Rebecca Richardson came to be so poor in the first place, and Laura is not asked to challenge the social conventions that limit her sphere of political engagement to the "Home Department." As a result, it is tempting to assume, as Roberson does, that nothing from her biography or her early work "supports a reading of Warner as an abolitionist or a feminist." As Roberson argues, Warner was, at this time in her life, merely "interrogating some of the same issues raised by more politically active women of her time" (15). But Roberson's analysis is only partially correct.

Like Jane Tompkins and Jane Weiss, I believe that knowledge of Warner's involvement with organizations like The American Tract Society and her association with influential families like the Garretsons can provide scholars with valuable insight into her social and political beliefs. I also believe that they help establish a cultural context for her fiction. I hope that the following chapters will add to the already rich critical conversation surrounding Susan Warner and her work.

CHAPTER 3

OF MINORS AND MISSIONARIES:

THE LITTLE AMERICAN AND CHRISTIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

“Am thinking” Susan Warner writes in her journal in August of 1860, “of the possibility or eligibility of our making a child's paper and printing it ourselves—to begin with at any rate. Some means of getting a better income with less hard work!” (A. Warner 408). The Warner sisters certainly needed an additional source of income in the summer of 1860. The family had weathered a second financial crisis just three years earlier when Henry Warner had been unable to make the final mortgage payment on Constitution Island and they were in danger of losing the property altogether. Susan and Anna were able to scrap together enough money from book sales to save their family home, but the ordeal left them just as penniless as they had been before the publication of *The Wide, Wide World*. “Every cent we had at interest was called in and handed over,” Anna recalls “and we faced the world once more, with hands almost as empty as on that memorable day when we colored our first pack of cards” (376). The sisters began writing at a feverish pace, supplementing their income by grading student compositions at a nearby school (Baker 69). Though royalty checks from various publishers allowed them to keep food on the table during these difficult years, the sisters were forced to maintain a rigorous and exhausting writing schedule in order to produce enough income to keep the family afloat. In February of 1861, Susan confided in her journal, “I have found out that we are very poor—must write” (A. Warner 416).

Susan and Anna knew that there was considerable demand for their juvenilia. Following the unprecedented success of *The Wide, Wide World*, Susan and Anna produced a series of

“juveniles” for Putnam titled “Ellen Montgomery’s Bookshelf” in an effort to market these works directly to the young fans of Susan’s novel.¹⁹ In 1853 they released *Mr. Rutherford’s Children*, followed shortly by *Carl Kringen: His Christmas Stocking* (1854) and *Casper* (1856). Still writing under her pen name Elizabeth Wetherell, Susan prefaced each of these volumes with a short explanatory episode, “The Story of Ellen Montgomery’s Bookshelf.” In it, she reminds her readers that while Ellen was studying Bible verses under the tutelage of her mentor Alice Humphreys, “there were a few of Miss Alice’s early childish books, for which...Ellen Montgomery had a great favor.” These texts, she explains, were kept on the lower shelves of Alice’s library, where Ellen could easily access them whenever she wished. “It is possible, I suppose,” Warner writes, “that other children might like what Ellen liked. But these books of hers cannot be found now at any of the bookstores. So we will give out the first volume of ‘Mr. Rutherford’s Children’ (there are several volumes) by way of trial; and if that is liked well enough, ‘The Christmas Stocking’; and in time, maybe, the whole bookshelf.” Susan addresses her young readers as consumers, reminding them that the fate of the series depends entirely upon their willingness to purchase each volume. “I hope they will be liked,” she tells them, “because else the ‘Bookshelf’ will never be finished; and unfinished things are disagreeable” (1).

The series did sell, and all three volumes were well received. Critics praised Warner’s choice to write to write for children and noted that her most successful novels were those that featured young female heroines. As a reviewer for *The Literary World* wrote of *Carl Kringen* in 1853, “Miss Wetherell succeeds as well with juvenile audiences as with children of a riper growth. Her delightful character of Fleda in the opening of *Queechy* showed how well she understood a child, so that it is not surprising she should essay in a delightful field of

authorship—that of writing for children” (358). By the end of the decade, Susan and Anna Warner had become well-known and well respected authors of children’s literature.

In 1861, Susan believed that *The Little American* would be a way to earn “a better income with less hard work” than writing novels, but she soon learned that neither was true. As Anna’s biography (and the excerpts from Susan’s journal she cites) reveal, the sisters shouldered a host of new responsibilities. Susan and Anna were responsible for collecting subscriptions, communicating with printers and illustrators, and all other business matters involved with the production of their “little paper” (A. Warner 440). As Anna recalls, she and Susan performed all these tasks themselves. “We did all the work, of every sort, except preparing the woodcuts,” Anna recalls, “and the head of the printing firm told some one that we were ‘the best business men he ever knew.’” Anna is predictably positive when she describes the experience of producing *The Little American* as “of the rarest” because the sisters were able to “perfectly set-free fancy and imagination” and remembers the entire process as “delightful” (441). Though the excerpts Anna includes from Susan’s journal reveal that she shared her sister’s enthusiasm for the project, it is clear that she harbored doubts about the paper’s success from the beginning. On October 14th of 1862, Susan writes “O this paper work! It seems like a direct working for Christ—yet maybe the Lord will not have just this work from us, and I must not set my heart on it too much. But it is immensely sweet” (442). Susan’s anxiety was well founded. Though the sisters were able to collect enough subscriptions to keep *The Little American* in print for nearly two years, they were forced to end the project in December of 1864 due to lack of interest and the rise in the cost of production materials.

However short-lived it may have been, *The Little American* is an important publication and deserves more critical attention than it has received. Though almost the entire run of the

paper can be accessed through the Constitution Island Association's online archives, *The Little American* remains a footnote in studies of nineteenth-century children's literature and women's periodical fiction. Like *The Juvenile Miscellany* and *The Youth's Companion*, the Warners' magazine is a valuable resource for scholars because it reflects what Carolyn Karcher refers to as the "social mission of nineteenth century children's literature: to promote domestic harmony, provide behavioral models for parents and children to emulate, foster a desire for education, and bridge the gap between the privileged classes and their subordinates" (57). On the pages of *The Little American*, the Warners' young readers found educational articles on topics ranging from botany to the Crusades, a fact that not only highlights Susan and Anna's diverse interests and intellectual achievements (Susan was a lifelong student of medieval history and a fan of Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of the Crusades*, while Anna was a master gardener who later published a guide on the subject titled *Gardening by Myself*) but also reveals their commitment to parent-directed education. Reoccurring columns like "The Breakfast Table" and "Mama's Dressing Table" encouraged parents to take time from everyday domestic activities to educate their children about the origins of common household items like furniture and to provide thoughtful answers to their child's questions about the purpose of hair and fingernails, while short parables like "The Seven Fairies" reminded children to cultivate virtues like "Grace," "Content," "Obedience," and the like. Because the Warners were devout evangelicals, *The Little American* also featured studies in Biblical history, religious parables, and various poems and hymns, making it a useful text for anyone interested in nineteenth-century evangelical children's literature. In short, *The Little American* is an invaluable resource for scholars of Susan Warner and an important cultural artifact that should be consulted in any study of nineteenth-century children's literature.

As its title indicates, *The Little American* was designed to promote patriotic values in children while educating them in Christian morality. Though it contained articles on a broad range of seemingly innocuous subjects like caterpillars and carpentry, *The Little American* was unabashedly nationalistic, and the Christian values it promoted were conservative and evangelical. Susan and Anna Warner were, after all, among the most famous authors of Christian fiction of their era. And as such, they knew that their publication could influence children. They had read dozens of letters from fans who idolized Ellen Montgomery, who looked up to her as a role model for their attempts to live more virtuously.²⁰ They knew that their paper potentially could shape the morals and values of an entire generation of American children. Like many other authors of children literature in nineteenth-century America, the Warners considered themselves “agents of acculturation and purveyors of patriotism” whose primary task was to “[draft] an idealized image of a society...which would command the unequivocal respect and loyalty of the younger generation” (Crandall 5). If *The Little American* had been financially successful, they may have achieved this lofty goal.

In addition to the broadly defined aim of transmitting evangelical morality and patriotic nationalism to an audience of young children, Susan and Anna had more specific, more political agendas in mind when they drafted several articles in *The Little American*. These articles reveal the extent of their commitment to two social missions of evangelical Christianity: 1) to apply Christian ethics to social problems at home and abroad, an ethos that would eventually become known as the Social Gospel, and 2) to promote the missionary efforts being performed by Methodists overseas. The Warner sisters were deeply committed to these twin agendas, and were personally, intellectually, and socially engaged with both social reform and missionary work. But they were also savvy enough to realize that they could not (or should not) advocate overtly for

any one political agenda on the pages of child's magazine. Other, more prominent publications had done so with mixed results. While temperance stories were common on the pages *The Youth's Companion*, it was widely believed among her contemporaries that Lydia Maria Child's abolitionist writings led to the collapse of the widely popular *Juvenile Miscellany* (Karcher 160). Susan and Anna Warner may have feared that raising issues like labor reform and abolitionism would alienate potential subscribers, or worried that too many references to specific Methodist missionary efforts would offend readers who belonged to other Protestant denominations. But they could instill an ideology of American exceptionalism that would prepare children to embrace these issues when they grew up and became "big Americans." They could teach children that families all over the world desperately needed help. They needed evangelical Christian values. Most of all, they needed American Christians to intervene.

The first installment of the "Children All over the World" series appeared in the third issue of *The Little American* in November of 1862. Called simply "The Little American," it served as a de facto introduction to the paper itself, as it clearly articulated the ideology of American exceptionalism that Warner sisters hoped to transmit to their readers. Though this series would educate children about the lives of foreigners, the Warners argue that their readers must first and foremost recognize the superiority of their own culture:

Do you know what a happy land you live in? For this is a land beloved of God, and where he pours out his blessings...And what most of all makes this land beautiful and happy is that here we know the one and only true God,—here we can do his will. Remember this when I tell you of children of other lands. Then we are free,—no one oppresses us: the laws are good, and the people are safe under them. You cannot understand this very well now, while you are only little

Americans; but just think how it would be, if you were where people might come and steal you for slaves,—or where some man to whom your father owed money might send to stay in prison til it was paid,—and many other such things. There are countries where little children are killed in sacrifice to some heathen God,—there are others where every weak and sickly child is destroyed because it is too much trouble. Be thankful that you live in a Christian land, where the weaker you are, the better your mother takes care of you. A true little American should love God first, then his country. (17)

America, as the Warners describe it, is not only the birthplace of liberty, freedom and justice; it is a “Christian land blessed by God.” It is a place where Christians are free to “do his will” without fear of oppression, a place where the “laws are good and people are safe under them.”²¹ In other words, it is a place where evangelical Christians are free to build a society that reflects their values.

It is this freedom to construct a Christian nation that the Warner sisters valued above all others, and it was their unabashed belief in the “exceptional, providential destiny of America as a Christian nation” that Derek Chang terms “evangelical nationalism” that provides the ideological basis for all of the articles in *The Little American* (7).

In his study of antebellum home mission associations *Citizens of a Christian Nation: Evangelical Missions and the Problem of Race in the Nineteenth Century*, Chang observes that for “home mission advocates, there was little difference between America's spiritual welfare and its civic well-being. The fate of the growing republic depended upon the equally rapid dissemination of the gospel” (21). Though Chang focuses his study on the work of Baptist organizations like the American Baptist Home Mission Society, he notes that “across

denominations, missionaries shared...a faith in America's particularly evangelical character" (21). Susan and Anna Warner were personally active in the home missionary movement: both sisters donated several volumes of their Sunday school fiction, along with clothing and other supplies to missionary schools in the west, and at least three of the cadets who attended their weekly Bible classes went on to perform missionary work himself.²² It is unsurprising, then, that their children's periodical contained the ideology of evangelical nationalism that Chang locates "at the heart of home mission project" (22). Although Susan and Anna Warner did not include stories of domestic missionary efforts in their children's periodical, the articles in *The Little American* begin with the same ideological premise that inspired the missionary work being conducted on the western frontier during this era: America is exceptional because it is founded on evangelical values and committed to not only the spiritual but the social goals of evangelical Christianity. As Susan and Anna Warner remind their young readers many times on the pages of *The Little American*, Christian America is a land where they should count themselves fortunate to be born. Most of the "Children All Over the World," were not so lucky.

America, as the Warner sisters construct it, is a safe place where children are nurtured and protected, where "the weaker you are, the better your mother takes care of you." Children of other nations, the Warners tell their readers, lived in a state of near-constant danger. They could be "sold as slaves," murdered by their own parents as a "sacrifice to some heathen god," or cast off because their illness "was too much trouble." As Susan and Anna make clear in articles from the "Children All Over the World" and "How People Live" series, the children of London and Fiji needed a mother, and American Christians were ready and willing to assume that role. Because they were both skilled authors of sentimental fiction, Susan and Anna knew how to tug at their readers' heartstrings. They knew that the children who subscribed to their paper were too

young to understand the social missions of evangelical Christianity intellectually, so instead they used emotion to convey the need for charity work and missionary intervention overseas. Susan and Anna were preparing children of nineteenth-century America to embrace efforts to alleviate urban poverty and support missionary work when they reached adulthood, thereby ensuring that evangelical social values were successfully transmitted to the next generation of American Christians.

It is important to note that Susan and Anna Warner borrowed much of their material for *The Little American* from other writers. Their descriptions of street life in London were excerpted from the writings of Henry Mayhew, an English journalist, political activist, and social reformer whose articles about the lives of the London poor were widely influential and frequently reprinted in both British and American periodicals. Similarly, the articles about life on the island of Fiji were copied from the writings of two Wesleyan missionaries, Thomas Williams and James Calvert, whose accounts of the island were compiled and published in 1858 under the title *Fiji and the Fijians* and widely reviewed and excerpted in popular magazines like *Little's Living Age*. As Meredith McGill observes in *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, the unauthorized reprinting of foreign-authored works, both fiction and non-fiction, was a common feature of the nineteenth-century literature marketplace. "Not only was the mass-market for literature in America built and sustained by the publication of cheap reprints of foreign books and periodicals," McGill notes, "the primary vehicles for the circulation of literature were uncopyrighted newspapers and magazines"(1). Susan and Anna's choice to fill the bulk of their small-circulation children's periodical with the works of more prominent social and religious reformers was not, according to McGill, "a violation of law or custom, but a cultural norm." In fact, the Warners likely believed that they were performing a valuable service to their young

readers by reprinting the works of other authors. As McGill explains, the “proliferation of general interest periodicals and affordable editions of foreign books” in nineteenth century America “was considered by many to be proof of democratic institutions remarkable powers of enlightenment” (3). The Warner sister’s unauthorized borrowing of other writers work, then, would have been considered not only culturally acceptable, but even patriotic.

Like the many publishers and editors McGill mentions in her study, the Warner sisters’ aim was to use these texts to sell copies of their “little paper” as well as to further their own ideological agenda. As McGill observes, “The emphasis of reprinters on getting books and periodicals to new groups of readers shifts the locus of value from textual origination to editing and arrangement, placing authorship under complex forms of occlusion. In reprint culture, authorship is not the dominant mode of organizing literary culture” (39). As I hope this chapter will prove, *The Little American* (with the unauthorized reprints it contains) is an invaluable text because it reveals the extent to which Susan and Anna Warner believed in the power of children’s literature to shape social and political discourse. By repurposing the texts of Mayhew, Williams, and Calvert for a younger audience, the Warner sisters believed that they could inspire the children of America to embrace the ideologies of evangelical nationalism and American exceptionalism at a young age, and therefore grow up to enact social and political reform themselves. In short, Susan and Anna Warner hoped that their small periodical would help secure America’s future as an evangelical Christian nation.

To accomplish this, the Warner sisters had to alter the texts they borrowed from their original sources. As I note throughout this chapter, Susan and Anna chose which portions of Mayhew, Williams, and Calvert’s texts they would excerpt carefully and purposefully. Because they knew that the children of nineteenth-century America had been reared in a society that

placed so high a value on the domestic sphere, the Warner sisters chose to include only the portions of Williams, Calvert, and Mayhew's texts that prominently featured mothers, children, and families suffering under conditions that American children would find shocking and emotionally disturbing. In each instance, they immediately follow the borrowed descriptions with heavy-handed, didactic reminders of the superiority of American culture and evangelical values. In articles like "The London Dollmaker" and "The Flower Girls," the Warner sisters introduce their subscribers to the many orphans and families who lived in abject poverty and squalor on the streets of Mayhew's nineteenth-century London. Borrowing only those portions of Mayhew's in which he employs the emotionally charged language common in both exposes and sentimental novels, they include descriptions of young children starving on the street, exposed to the elements, with no family to provide for them, in a nation where Christian charity is almost entirely absent. They then remind American children that the Bible commands them to care for the poor and suffering. In later issues of *The Little American*, the Warners shift their focus to the island of Fiji and borrow only the portions of Williams and Calvert's text that describe women and children being maimed, tortured, and even killed by members of their own family. They then suggest that because the Fijians did not know God, and because their culture did not subscribe to western ideals of maternity and domesticity, they were doomed to live in a vengeful, violent, society. As Susan Warner recorded in her journal in the fall of 1862, both she and Anna genuinely believed they were "working for Christ" when they attempted to publish their own children's magazine, but *The Little American* and the articles it contains also reveal the extent to which both Susan and her sister were involved in the effort to re-organize nineteenth-century society (both at home and abroad) around an evangelical worldview.

“TENDER AND GENTLE BENEATH THEIR SORROWS”: POVERTY IN INDUSTRIAL ERA LONDON

Issues like poverty and labor reform were far from most Americans' minds when the first issue of *The Little American* appeared in November of 1862. The nation was bitterly divided over the more pressing issues of slavery and the Civil War. Just two months earlier, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War had been waged at Antietam Creek, and President Lincoln was preparing to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. Despite the fact that Susan and Anna Warner's lives were greatly affected by the Civil War, it is mentioned only occasionally on the pages of *The Little American*, and any discussion of slavery or secession is notably absent, making this an unusual children's publication for this time period²³ Susan and Anna's decision to ignore slavery and the war is puzzling; but *The Little American* does address another prominent, though less immediate, social issue in nineteenth-century America—poverty. Perhaps because they could not direct their young readers to attend to domestic poverty and the need for social reform at a time when the nation was in the throes of war, Susan and Anna Warner relocated their discussion of urban poverty overseas to the streets of another industrialized, Christian nation—England. In articles from the “How People Live” series, such as “The Flower Girls” and “The London Dollmaker,” Susan and Anna use sentimentalized descriptions of urban poverty designed to provoke emotional reactions as they asked the children of nineteenth-century America to imagine solutions to the social problems caused by industrial-era capitalism.

The first description of urban poverty in England in *The Little American* is an article titled “The Flower Girls.” Susan and Anna Warner had never been to London, and had never seen the many orphan girls who made their living selling flowers on the street, nor had they any

firsthand knowledge of the dire conditions under which these children lived and worked. In fact, the Warner sisters were simply excerpting a chapter from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, a series of articles written for British periodical *The Morning Chronicle* and published in book form in 1863. Though she does not record reading *London Labour and the London Poor* in her journal, Susan was familiar with Mayhew's work. She and Anna had just finished reading one of his earlier books, *The Great World of London* (1856), in January of 1863 (Weiss 307). The Warners borrow heavily from Mayhew's chapter "Two Orphan Flower Girls" for their *Little American* article, but do not reprint the text exactly as it appears in Mayhew's bestseller. The Warners' orphan flower girls are dressed in the same clothing, down to their "black chip bonnets," they use the same dialogue, eat the same meals of stale bread and herring, and share their meager living space with the same Irish immigrant family. Like Mayhew's orphans, they forced to sell their winter coats and rugs to the illegal pawn brokers, or "dollys" [sic] for flower money, and they can make enough profit from the sale of flowers to keep themselves fed and clothed (*Little American* 186-8; Mayhew 135-6). But unlike Mayhew, Susan and Anna Warner were not writing for adults. Though their borrowed story is just as sensational and shocking as the original Mayhew account, the Warners had entirely different aims. Susan and Anna told the story of the orphan flower girls not only to inform children about the lives of those less fortunate, but also to instruct them in evangelical Christian morality, effectively merging the twinned goals of poverty awareness and missionary imperialism. In order to ensure that their readers extract the appropriate moral lesson from the images they borrow from Mayhew, the Warners carefully insert their own interpretation, and include the appropriate Bible verses, when necessary.

Like many articles in *The Little American*, “The Flower Girls” begins with a Bible verse that illustrates a particular Christian value or duty. In this case, it is Mark 14:7, “For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good,” and the lesson is clear. All Christians have the moral obligation to help the poor. But in order to do so, the Warners argue, “it is often necessary that we should understand something of their ways of life—know their particular wants and trials and their scanty comforts, if they have any” (186). This retelling of Mayhew’s “Two Orphan Flower Girls” is intended to inspire children to “understand” the lives of the urban poor and have sympathy for their daily struggles. By doing so, Susan and Anna hope that their young readers will begin to imagine possible solutions to the problem of poverty. To make sure that the children come to the appropriate conclusions, the Warners’ carefully mediate their readers’ emotional reactions, first evoking sympathy for the girls’ circumstances, then subtly suggesting that their burden could be at least partially alleviated through simple acts of charity, empathy, and kindness. Unfortunately for “The Flowers Girls,” these Christian virtues are entirely absent in this depiction of industrial-era London.

The Warners are quick to emphasize facets of the flower girls’ lives that would have the greatest emotional impact on young children—the fact that they are orphans. As they explain, the girls’ parents died when they were very young, and they were left with “no kith or kin, no good aunt or kind grandmother, nobody but themselves to look to; for they know little indeed of God.” By alluding to the many possible sources of physical and emotional support that their young readers relied on for food, shelter, and spiritual or emotional comfort, the Warners instruct children to imagine the frightening possibility of being alone and abandoned at such a young age. “Think of being alone in the world,” they write “and without bread to eat at eight years old” (187). The repeated images of the girls’ “bare feet” on the “hard and cold pavement,” the

constant reminders of the threats posed by cold and rainy weather or starvation, and the grim fact that sometimes the girls “would go all day without eating a bit” function not only to remind children to be grateful for their own comforts, but to emphasize that there is no support system in place to provide for these unfortunate souls. Perhaps worst of all, the girls lack knowledge of God, indicating that even spiritual salvation is, for these children, impossible.

In the description they borrow from Mayhew, Susan and Anna Warner emphasize the fact that the citizens of nineteenth-century London are spiritually and morally bankrupt. The flower girls do not spend their days selling flowers in the slums, but instead go “with their bare feet and thin stomachs, to another part of the city, where the houses were good and the people that passed and repassed had all they wanted and more” (187). Rather than offer them charity, or even pay them a fair price for their wares, the wealthy citizen of London haggle with the girls about the price of their bouquets, and they lower their prices so much that they never receive the six pence necessary to make a profit. The result of this lack of compassion is devastating. They barely have enough money to buy a stale crust of bread and flowers to sell the next day. They are forced to pawn their winter coats and rugs they use to keep warm for money to buy food (187). The flower girls are exploited at every turn by the very people who are in the best position to help them. And helping the poor is, as the Warners remind their young readers at the beginning of the article, a moral duty that all Christians share. As the Warner sisters describe the callousness and indifference displayed by the wealthy toward the poor, it becomes clear that the orphan flower girls are not the only citizens of London who do not read the Bible.

At the end of the article, the Warners once again prompt their readers to imagine themselves in similar circumstances. “Could one be happy in such a life?” they ask, and the answer that immediately follows is yes, if the circumstances were slightly different. “Lord God,”

they remind their readers, “is a sun and a shield; there is no dark place but he can make light.” Unfortunately, the flower girls do not have the benefit of this knowledge, as they “knew little of him.” Although Susan and Anna report that “the eldest girl said that religion taught them that God would take care of them,” God is conspicuously absent from the city as they describe it (188). As Susan and Anna reiterate by quoting the same verse from Gospel of Mark in the last line of the “The Flower Girls,” the poor are deserving of charity, and Christians are duty-bound to provide it. But in the city of London, as the Warners describe it, Christian charity is nonexistent, and it is children who suffer most from its absence.

If Susan and Anna’s young readers believed that it was only orphan children like “The Flower Girls” who suffered in the slums of London, another article, “The London Dollmaker,” corrected this assumption. Entire families, they note, also live and work in abject poverty. The Warners’ begin “The London Dollmaker” by directing children to picture where their toys come from, who makes them, and how they live. Using direct address to foster empathy, they write, “for you are not to imagine that all the doll-makers live in a nice house just behind the toy shop, or in a house anywhere else; many no doubt do, but many others live in the utmost poverty and distress, in places where it is a marvel how anybody can do anything but just die” (127). As Susan and Anna Warner describe the deplorable living conditions and the constant threat of starvation and illness that the family of doll makers must endure on a daily basis, it is indeed a “marvel” that they survive at all. Like “The Flower Girls,” they live in a society where charity is unavailable, though they are certainly deserving of it, a place where the sole practitioner of the Christian faith (a single clergyman that only visits the area during the day) lacks the resources to be effectual at all. And while the Warners are careful to emphasize that their readers should be grateful to God that they don’t live in such a place as this, and skillfully employ sentimental

language and domestic imagery to guide children toward this conclusion, they gesture toward a larger question in “The London Dollmaker,” one that has both spiritual and political ramifications. If the poor families of London are virtuous and deserving of aid, why is none being provided? And would charity alone even be adequate when the doll maker and his family can barely survive under the better circumstances? To what extent are Christians morally and ethically obligated to care for a population that industrial-era capitalism has simply left to die?

The neighborhood that the unnamed doll maker and his family inhabit is crowded, dirty, and overrun with illness and death. “There is a small district in London,” they explain, “about a quarter of a mile square, wherein lived some fourteen thousand people.” Here, whole families live in one room of a rented cottage, and “only wealthy families are able to afford two rooms.” Because “there are no sewers,” each cottage has only a “cess pool” beneath it, and the “stagnant water and mud” collect in the gutters, which occasionally contain “dead puppies, kittens, or other foul refuse” (128). The image of the dead puppies and kittens seems intentionally designed by the Warners to provoke emotional reaction, but it also subtly suggests that innocent, young creatures die here and are discarded without ceremony; it is a gentler way of reminding their readers that this is a place where no one is safe from sickness and death, not even children. The threat of illness is everywhere: “Fever and rags and starvation walk hand in hand through the district,” and one can spend the whole morning searching for a room “where there is not a sick person” (128). To a young child whose family could afford a magazine subscription, the knowledge that people lived and worked in such conditions would be emotionally disturbing, and the fact that the inhabitants of this slum were not criminals—there are no “pickpockets,” “gamblers,” or “thieves” in the Warners’ description of the slums—but rather virtuous and hardworking, would heighten their feelings of sympathy.

Perhaps most the most heartwarming feature of Susan and Anna's description of the slums is how desperately the poor families cling to one another for comfort. "All the dwellers of this 'black spot' try to keep out of the workhouse," they write, "and would rather die together than separate. The mother wants to nurse her sick child to the last, and the man to see his wife's face." Family values are strong here, and the struggles they endure do not weaken the family bond, but further solidify it. Rather than react with anger or frustration, Susan and Anna's poor grow meeker and more loving with every hardship they face. "The people grow gentle and tender beneath their sorrows," they declare, "as tender as they are sad and hopeless: and this spirit of love has wrought in them wonderfully, giving even their untaught manners a sort of quiet refinement" (128). Such heart-wrenching statements would evoke pity and sympathy from any child fortunate enough to have a caring and loving family and further emphasize that the poor are virtuous and deserving.

Susan and Anna are quick to remind children that they should be grateful that they "have the play and not the work of a doll," and direct them to "never forget to thank the Lord for his goodness." But the Warners raise another, more complicated question in the last lines of "The London Dollmaker." How, they ask, can people be expected to survive like this at all? The meager wages that the family earned were not enough to cover their cost of living. When "the profit of the toy merchant off was deducted" from the "the meager money they make on cheap dolls, what," they ask "was left for the poor dollmaker?" (128). After presenting their young readers with such emotionally-charged images of urban poverty, and describing the poor citizens of London as so thoroughly deserving of Christian charity and benevolence, the Warners suggest that no amount of philanthropy could solve the problem of poverty in industrial-era London. In order for the lives of the doll maker and his family to improve, they must earn enough from the

sale of their wares to provide food, shelter, and clothing to their children. Though the Warners could not construct a direct, didactic argument for reform on the pages of an American children's magazine and expect to retain subscribers, the fact that they pose this question to children at all renders their portrait of the London slums far more progressive than images of the poor contained in other children's magazines from the era.

In fact, children of nineteenth-century America would be unaccustomed to any description of the poor. As John C. Crandall observes in "Patriotism and Humanitarian Reform in Children's Literature, 1825-1860," writers of children's literature acted as "agents of acculturation and purveyors of patriotism" whose primary task was to "[draft] an idealized image of a society...which would command the unequivocal respect and loyalty of the younger generation." Even though philanthropy, and later, reform, were prominent cultural values during the Jacksonian era, Crandall notes that "the philanthropic motif" is largely absent from children's literature. "It would have been difficult for the young reader to have gotten a clear picture of his obligation to the 'have-nots' in his society," Crandall claims, because "America's poverty problem was patriotically minimized, if scarcely admitted" (5). Citing *The Juvenile Miscellany* and *The Youth's Companion* as examples, he argues that the

poor were portrayed as people who needed homilies more than handouts and large-scale philanthropy, however well-intentioned, was pictured as vicious and socially destructive in its effects. Christian charity, it would have appeared to the reader of the juvenile literature, was applicable only to wretched orphans and, in such instances it was a sentimental, personal act rather than an organized movement. (7)

Susan and Anna's descriptions of the virtuous and hardworking poor, in contrast, suggest that Christian charity is not only appropriate, but necessary. In these passages, it is not only orphans but entire families who suffer on the streets of London, and Christians are the only members of society who do not turn their back on the poor. In fact, the only person able to provide these people with any relief from their suffering is their clergyman, and his resources are severely limited. "Day after day," they note, "he toils among the wretched people; faithful, and sparing not himself or his small purse" to provide them with what little spiritual and material comforts he can afford (128). Though they do not directly advocate philanthropy, the praise Susan and Anna shower on the unnamed clergyman coupled with the descriptions of the hardworking, industrious people who are condemned to suffer in such squalor suggest that material aid would benefit London's poorest citizens nearly as much as spiritual salvation. Because the Warners choose to locate their argument for philanthropy overseas, they circumvent the problem of patriotism that Crandall describes. It is Britain, not America, that treats its poor so deplorably, proving that, as Crandall correctly observes, "The philanthropic impulse glowed brightly only when sparked by the nationalistic motif—helping those who purportedly shared traditional American principles or advancing the mission of America, the spread of American evangelical Christianity" (7). The children who read such vivid and disturbing images of poverty would certainly have been grateful that they were not born in the slums of London. America, they knew, cared for its weak and did not turn its back on suffering. Unbeknownst to many children of nineteenth-century America, similar conditions existed on the streets of New York and other cities, and though Susan and Anna Warner were well aware that urban poverty was a pressing social issue, they deliberately chose not to highlight their own nation's moral shortcomings on the pages of a child's magazine for exactly the reasons Crandall outlines.

Though they hesitated to argue overtly for social reform in 1863, when their magazine was suffering from a lack of subscribers and the Civil War had redirected most American's attention away from social issues like poverty, Susan and Anna Warner would actively promote progressive values in literature aimed at children a decade later. In her study of Susan's later religious writings, "The Edge of Possibility: Susan Warner and the World of Sunday School Fiction," Sondra Smith Gates locates Social Gospel ideology in both *The House in Town* (1872) and *The Little Camp on Eagle Hill* (1874). These novels, Gates observes, "rely on sentimental portraits of hardship to illustrate the need for social reform" (10). Like the articles in *The Little American*, these novels "contain images of children starving" and depict children suffering from all manner of abuse. And like Gates notes, these images were intentionally designed to provoke an emotional response in Warner's readers (11). But in Warner's later writings, Gates finds that children themselves often become the agents of social change. As Gates notes, children in the Warners' Sunday school fiction "become social actors whose emotional responses to scenes of suffering lead them to correct the injustices perpetuated by their elders" (12). Gates concludes that "the Social Gospel tenants expressed in the books posed a challenge to capitalism itself" because Warner repeatedly "turns to conditions of the capitalist economy to explain the dire condition of the poor people her heroines encounter" (12). Although Susan and Anna's writings for *The Little American* do not express the tenants of Social Gospel Christianity in the manner that Gates identifies, they do "emphasize that rents are high and wages low, and that many jobs available to the poor are injurious to their health" (Gates 12). Neither Susan nor Anna Warner had fully embraced the Social Gospel movement in 1862, and they would not begin to argue for labor reform for another decade, when they collaborated on *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*. But because *The Little American* contains such powerfully, sentimentally-charged

descriptions of urban poverty, it represents an important, gestational stage of Susan and Anna's social justice beliefs. Though they seem unable (or unwilling) to imagine solutions to the problem of urban poverty in "The Flower Girls" or "The London Dollmaker," as I discuss in subsequent chapters, Susan and Anna Warner would eventually become advocates of social reform.

"THE DEVIL REIGNED IN FIGI": METHODISM AND MISSIONARIES IN THE SOUTH SEA ISLANDS

Neither Susan Warner nor her younger sister Anna ever traveled to Fiji or any other of the exotic destinations they wrote about in *The Little American*. In fact, during the 1860's, they rarely ventured far from their home in Constitution Island, NY. But because they had both attained a great deal of notoriety as authors of religious fiction, and because they were active members in a number of religious and social organizations in their community, it was not long before the Warner sisters were invited to rub shoulders with one of the most prominent Methodist families in the nation. As Weiss notes, Susan was a frequent guest of Mary Rutherford Garretson, the daughter of Freeborn Garretson. Weiss calls Freeborn Garretson a "towering figure among American Methodists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century," a distinction he earned by "being one of the two first Methodist missionaries in the United States who "established Methodist congregations throughout the Mid-Atlantic region." According to Weiss, Wildercliffe, the Garretson family estate in Rhineback, NY, was a social hub for American Methodists, where Mary Rutherford Garretson and her family "entertained...the most prominent Methodist clergymen" (302). Though Weiss cannot accurately date the beginning of the Warner sisters' relationship with the Garretsons, she estimates that they first met the family sometime during the 1850's and notes that "the relationship between the Warners and the

Garretsons was established by 1861” when the Garretsons’ visited Constitution Island (303). As Weiss’s transcription of Susan’s journals reveals, Susan and Anna were visiting the Garretson home regularly by 1863 and often brought the proofs of *The Little American* with them to edit during the many afternoons they spent in Mary’s parlor reading, writing, and discussing Methodist doctrine and social principles. And during the 1860’s, the missionary effort overseas would have been a common topic of conversation.

Fiji and the South Sea Islands had been a popular destination for missionaries since the late eighteenth-century, and stories of the successful missionary efforts in Fiji filled the pages of popular magazines like *The Ladies Repository*, *Putnam’s Magazine*, and *The Youth’s Companion* throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth-century. Biographies of missionaries like John Hunt and John Williams (the latter of which was killed and allegedly eaten by natives) were frequently excerpted and reviewed in both mainstream periodicals and small, evangelical weeklies.²⁴ But Susan and Anna’s knowledge of Fiji was not limited to only what they read in the press. At the time they were composing the articles about Fiji for *The Little American*, Susan Warner was also researching the life one of the most influential Methodist missionaries of the nineteenth-century, a man who happened to be the father of her closest friend.

While staying at the Garretson estate in Rhineback, Susan was researching a novel that she loosely based on the lives of Mary Garretson’s parents. *The Old Helmet*, first published in 1863, features a heroine who begins life as a reformer in London, converts to Methodism and, against the will of her family, marries a missionary and follows him to Fiji. In her introductory note to the novel, Susan assures her reader that “the incidents and testimonies given in this work as matters of fact, are not drawn from imagination, but reported from excellent authority— though I have used my own words. And in the cases of reported words of third parties, the words

stand unchanged, without any meddling” (i). Her readers were forced to take Susan Warner at her word, because she never mentions any source for the “facts” she includes in her novel, nor does she share the source of the “incidents and testimonies” she provides. Both Susan and Anna were well read on the subject. The Constitution Island Association’s collection of books from the Warners’ library contains several volumes on Fiji, including the well-known title *A Missionary Among Cannibals, or the Life of John Hunt*, edited by George Strayer Rowe (1859).²⁵ But though she did not provide her readers with her original sources of information, Susan does identify one prominent missionary in *The Little American* by name, and the striking similarities between his firsthand accounts and the descriptions of Fiji in the “Children All Over the World” series indicate that Thomas Williams and James Calvert’s 1858 text *Fiji and the Fijians* greatly influenced the Warners’ writings about the South Seas.

In the June 15, 1863 issue of *The Little American*, in an article in the “Experiences of the Rush Family” series, a grandmother explains to a group of children why they should fear the island of Fiji and its inhabitants. After thoroughly frightening her grandchildren with stories of cannibalism and wife strangling, the grandmother informs the children that some brave Christian missionaries actually traveled to this dangerous place “to carry to those dreadful people knowledge of Christ.” The children are quite impressed, and ask their grandmother for the names of the brave missionaries, and she informs them that the people she speaks of are “Mr. and Mrs. Calvert—Wesleyan missionaries from England” (139). James Calvert and his colleague Thomas Williams were perhaps the most well-known Christian missionaries of the mid-nineteenth century. Their two-part volume *Fiji and the Fijians* (1858) quickly became one of the most widely read accounts of missionary activities in the South Seas. According to Christine Weir’s 1998 study “*Fiji and the Fijians: Two Modes of Missionary Discourse*,” their “the two-volume

work was circulated widely in Methodist and wider circles in Britain, and went into an American edition in the early 1860s” (153). Because they were socializing with influential Methodist preachers, former missionaries, and educators at the home of Mary Garretson, Susan and Anna Warner would have been made aware of the publication of this important text well before 1863. Beginning in the fall of 1859, American periodicals like *Littel’s Living Age*, *The North American Review*, *The American Periodical Review*, *Zion’s Herald*, and *The Methodist Quarterly* began running lengthy reviews of *Fiji and the Fijians*, and the Warners could have easily obtained a copy from one of their many Methodist friends if they could not afford to purchase one themselves.²⁶ However they obtained it, it is clear that Susan and Anna Warner used *Fiji and the Fijians* as their primary source of information about life on the islands of Fiji. Though they do not mention either author by name in the “Children All Over the World” article about Fijians, they borrow several episodes directly from Williams and Calvert’s text.

Susan and Anna’s decision to include excerpts from *Fiji and the Fijians* in their children’s magazine may have been motivated in part by monetary concerns. *The Little American* was not selling well, and Williams and Calvert’s text, with its graphic and sensational descriptions of tribal warfare, wife strangling, and cannibalism, had captured the imagination of readers and had enjoyed both critical praise and commercial success. The Warner sisters might have hoped that children would find these stories of Fijian savagery just as titillating, and would renew their subscription to the periodical if only to hear more gruesome anecdotes about life in the South Sea islands. The passages from *Fiji and the Fijians* that appear (unattributed) on the pages of *The Little American* were carefully selected to elicit powerful reactions from the children who read them. The Warners chose stories that featured women and children as victims of savage and brutal violence and described the practices of infanticide, wife-strangling, and

revenge killing in vivid and lurid detail. When their young readers were sufficiently shocked and terrified, the Warners gently reminded them that they were lucky to be born in a nation that did not allow such travesties to occur, and lauded the efforts of the brave missionaries who sought to civilize these heathen tribes by introducing Christianity to the islands of Fiji. Like Thomas Williams and James Calvert, Susan and Anna Warner believed that “no power but that of the Gospel, no improvement short of actual conversion, could deliver the savage heathen from the many evils which were cursed or confer upon them the blessings of a genuine civilization” (Williams and Calvert 226). Though they knew that their subscribers were far too young to fully comprehend the missionary work being conducted overseas, Susan and Anna believed that by appealing to children’s emotions rather than their intellect, they could ensure that the next generation of American Christians would grow up to embrace the ideology of imperialism and support the missionary efforts of the Methodist church.

After beginning the article with a relatively benign geography lesson in which they describe the island’s landscape and vegetation, the Warners introduce the first of the three children, an unnamed female infant. And their graphic description of the unfortunate fate of the young child seems intentionally designed to shock and horrify their readers:

Of these three children, one died when it was two days old,—killed by its own mother. Someone asked her to spare its life, but she answered that it was a girl,—why should it live? “Will she wield a club? Will she poise a spear?” And she put her hand over the baby’s mouth, holding its nostrils close, and as soon as it ceased to breathe she dug a hole in the ground by her and buried it. Do you suppose this woman was at once sent to prison? Not at all: such things were done every day in Fiji. In some places, half the children were destroyed in just this way. (46)

Susan and Anna alter very little of this account, which originally appeared in the “Manners of Customs” chapter of the first volume of *Fiji and the Fijians*, authored not by Calvert but Thomas Williams. According to Williams, infanticide was common in Fiji, and female children were often the victims of such a fate for exactly the reasons Susan and Anna outline. As Williams claims:

The extent of infanticide in some part of the island reaches nearer to two-thirds than half. Abominable as it is, it is reduced to a system, the professors of which are to be found in every village. I know of no case after the child is one or two days old; and all destroyed after birth are females, because they are useless in war, or some say, because they give so much trouble. But that the former is the prevailing opinion appears from such questions as these, put to persons who may plead for the little one's life: ‘Why life? Will she wield a club? Will she poise a spear?’ When a professed murderess is not near, the mother does not hesitate to kill her own babe. With two fingers she compresses its nostrils, while, with the thumb, she keeps the jaw up close, a few convulsive struggles follow, and the cruel hand of the mother is unloosed, to dig a grave close by where she lies. (181)

Children would certainly be terrified by the Susan and Anna’s borrowed descriptions, and their young female readers would immediately feel grateful for the fact that although their own nation was currently at war, no one was smothering female babies in their cradles. The Warner sisters chose to excerpt this particular passage of Williams in order to encourage such comparisons. Susan and Anna emphasize the fact that there is no legal system to protect the children in Fiji: the mothers who kill their children receive no punishment, as there are “no prisons.” The Warner’s readers might recall the first installment of the “Children All over the World” series,

and indeed “be grateful” that they were “Little Americans” who lived in a country where “the laws are good” children were “safe under them.” They would also be thankful that they lived “in a Christian land, where the weaker you are, the better your mother takes care of you” (17). After reading the first few paragraphs of the Warners’ description of Fiji, American children would have immediately recognized that their own culture was innately superior because it cared for its youngest and most vulnerable citizens. Children in other parts of the world, they now knew, were not so fortunate.

Young readers of both genders would have been especially disturbed by the fact that it was the mother who took the child’s life. In nineteenth-century America, the ideology of domesticity and the “cult of true womanhood” had sanctified the role of mother in the American mindset. In *Negotiating Motherhood in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Mary McCartin Wearn observes that “the stakes and status of maternity increased immensely” during the mid-nineteenth century, and notes that “motherhood was no longer considered one among many female duties, but became, for better or worse, the defining role of most women’s lives” (2). Wearn observes that motherhood became idealized in nineteenth-century American women’s writing, especially in sentimental fiction, a practice that she calls “sentimental maternity” (3). Because they were both experienced writers of sentimental fiction, it is unsurprising that Susan and Anna Warner chose to exploit this idealized, sentimentalized portrait of motherhood in their writings aimed at children. Ellen Montgomery’s mother in *The Wide, Wide World* is perhaps the perfect incarnation of the pious, loving, Christian mother in nineteenth-century American literature. In the Warners’ description, the women of Fiji not only fail to conform to western ideals of motherhood and maternity, they fail in the most graphic and barbarous way possible—they kill their own children. The practice of infanticide deviates so far from the cultural

expectation that all women possessed a natural maternal instinct that children of nineteenth-century America (and, no doubt, their mothers) would have been so shocked and horrified that they would immediately call for the rehabilitation of this savage and barbarous culture, and support any effort to introduce western values and Christian morals into Fijian society, if only to protect the most sacred symbol of innocence and purity, the newborn child. The children of Fiji, the Warners emphasize, needed to be protected from their own culture. They needed Christian morals and Western values. They needed to be saved from themselves. And after reading articles like this one, the children who subscribed to *The Little American* would, the Warners hoped, grow up to support the efforts of missionaries like Williams and Calvert to Christianize the world.

As Susan and Anna's next account reveals, infants were not the only citizens of Fiji who needed protection. The young women who survived infancy and eventually became wives and mothers themselves were also destined to become the victims of savage violence. "The father of Randi died when she was a baby," the Warners' explain, "and as soon as he was dead, the people came together and strangled his wife, the mother of Randi, and then laid her in the grave, her husband's body on top,—so Randi was left an orphan" (46). Susan and Anna do not provide nearly as much detail in brief description of the practice of wife-strangling, and Randi's story does not directly correlate to any of Williams and Calvert's accounts, though they do discuss the practice of wife-strangling at length in *Fiji and the Fijians*.²⁷ The practice of wife-strangling would have disturbed the children who subscribed to *The Little American*, especially the young girls, most of whom aspired to become wives themselves, but Susan and Anna emphasize that the most unfortunate consequence of wife-strangling is not the effect it has on the adult women, but on the children who are left motherless as a result. In the Warners' brief

description, Randi has become an orphan in perhaps the most brutal way possible: her mother is strangled to death by the other adults in her community. Though the Warners do not reveal Randi's ultimate fate, the reader can presume that she lives with another family in the village, as they describe her playing with other children of the tribe. Although Randi is being cared for physically, like the other children of Fiji, she is being neglected emotionally and spiritually. As Susan and Anna reveal, children like Randi are not educated or instructed in any way.

"Sometimes these children were indulged," they explain, "and sometimes they were treated cruelly, but nobody taught them anything good, or tried to make them gentle and lovely; and so they were passionate and ignorant and wicked" (46). Without mothers to nurture them, and without Christian morals to guide them, the children of Fiji seem doomed to become as "passionate, ignorant, and wicked" as their parents, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. Because women in Fiji are not responsible for the moral and spiritual education of children, the task falls to the elder men in the community, who train the young men to become warriors. And as Susan and Anna explain, the education they do receive causes the male children severe physical and psychological harm.

The final child that Susan and Anna introduce to their young readers is an adolescent boy named Seru. After his father is killed by men from the neighboring village, Seru is maimed by the men of his own community and taught to seek vengeance. "One of Seru's fingers was at once cut off," Susan and Anna explain, "as a mark of affection for his father, and soon after he was given a large butcher knife, and a dress that had been taken from one of the enemies of the family. This was to teach him to be revengeful; and little Seru, with the blood running over his hand, sat and chopped away at the dress of his enemy" (46). Though they do not assign him a name, Calvert and Williams describe this exact incident in *Fiji and the Fijians*. As they recall,

Visiting on the same island, a family who were mourning the recent slaughter of six of their friends, one the first objects I saw was a good malo—a man's dress—much torn, by which sat a child, cutting and chopping it with a large butcher's knife, while his own hand was covered with blood, which flowed from the stump where, shortly before, his little finger has been cut off, as a token of affection for his deceased father. The malo had been stripped from one of the party who had attacked the friends of that child, and was placed before him to excite and gratify a revengeful disposition. (177)

The Warner sisters did not take this gruesome story out of context, nor did they in any way misrepresent Williams and Calvert's conclusions about the effect of such practices. But because Susan and Anna are writing for an audience comprised primarily of children, they approached the story of Seru with different aims. Like Calvert and Williams, the Warner sisters' primary purpose is to garner support for the missionary efforts in Fiji, and in order to do so, they must appeal directly to their readers' emotions. In this case, that emotion is fear, as children who read this description of the brutal maiming of a young Fijian boy would have been terrified at the prospect of being maimed themselves, and felt extreme empathy for little Seru, who the Warner sisters chose to name so that children could more readily identify with him. Like the two incidents that precede it, the story of Seru is designed to demonstrate to children that Fiji is a dangerous place for children. In Fiji, as the Warner's describe it, abandonment, torture, and death are common, children and their mothers are brutally victimized, and western culture and Christian morality are sorely needed to improve the lives of its weakest and most vulnerable citizens. In short, it was the ideal place for future Christian missionaries to focus their efforts.

Susan and Anna do not shy away from telling their young readers exactly how to remedy the problems they identify in Fijian society. Because the people are inherently savage and brutal, they can only be reformed if Christianity is introduced into their society. Since there are no laws to govern them, “the people did just according to the wickedness of their hearts,” and the Warners list a host of other offenses committed by the people of Fiji, including cannibalism, mass execution, and honor killings. Though they end their description of Fiji by calling upon their readers to pity the inhabitants of this brutal society, the last lines of “Children All over the World: Fiji” reveal that Susan and Anna have great compassion for the Fijian natives. Instead, they are doomed to remain servants of devil. “Poor people!—they did not know about God,” Susan and Anna declare, “they had never heard of Jesus: and so the devil reigned in Fiji, and all the inhabitants who followed him” (46). By the time their young readers finished reading Susan and Anna’s carefully chosen excerpts from Williams and Calvert’s text, they would have been thankful that they had, in fact, “heard of Jesus” and that their own nation was decidedly more compassionate and civilized than the brutal, violent island in the South Seas.

Susan and Anna Warner were not the only authors of children’s literature that vocalized their support for missionary efforts overseas. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler observes in “Raising Empires Like Children: Race, Nation, and Religious Education,” the genre of Sunday School Fiction explicitly links the raising of Christian children to the larger cultural project of empire building. “In the didactic baldness of their rhetoric,” Sanchez-Eppler notes of Sunday School stories, “they explicitly articulate the felt similitudes between the national projects of raising good, white, middle-class, Christian, American children and that of raising an economic and cultural American empire” (399). Sunday school texts that feature missionaries, she asserts, attribute the savage practices of the native populations to the fact that they are ignorant of

Christianity, which, in turn, has direct consequences on the familial unit. “Sunday school stories about foreign missions,” she notes, “depicted the heathen as depraved more on familial than on religious grounds. Without the Bible, little heathens could never learn to be proper children” (412). The example Sanchez-Eppler provides, a tract called *Stories About the Heathen and Their Children*, published by the American Tract Society, contains a tale about an old woman whose family leaves her by the side of road to die, an event that would never happen in America because the Bible commands us to “honor our father and mother,” could easily have appeared as a column in *The Little American* had the Warner sisters not left the organization a decade earlier. Susan and Anna would definitely supported the Tract Society’s effort to teach American children this important lesson. In their own writings for children, the Warners adopt similar rhetorical strategies, and Sanchez-Eppler’s interpretation of this tract can easily be applied to the Warners’ writings about Fiji in *The Little American*. “Here” she notes, “the ‘darkness’ of Africa is given specific content: the rupture of what missionary, Sunday School teacher, and good American child must all recognize as the appropriate, and indeed biblically commanded, way of being a family. Heathenism may be a religious problem, requiring the religious solution of conversion, but its sign is not spiritual so much as domestic” (412). As the Warners’ writings about Fiji reveal, in *The Little American*, and in the Sunday School texts that Sanchez-Eppler discusses in her study, “accounts of heathen savagery work to justify imperial expansion, and such barbarism is best indexed by the condition of those whom the West recognizes as most vulnerable—women and children” (413). Like the writers of Sunday school fiction that Sanchez-Eppler examines, Susan and Anna Warner emphasize “the cruelty of heathen parents, especially of delinquent, non-Christian mothers,” and I agree that “such a focus emphasizes the vulnerability of children and so the threat to their own happiness and indeed survival should the project of

Christianization fail”(414). But although Sanchez-Eppler’s study greatly informs any reading of the “Children All Over The World” series, it is important to note that Susan and Anna Warner were not writing *The Little American* for an audience comprised only of Protestant Sunday school students and their educators. Instead, they sought a broader audience, and unlike the authors Sanchez-Eppler identifies in her study, Susan and Anna Warner attempted to publish their writing themselves rather than relying upon a well-established religious press or sponsoring organization. By the end of 1864, the Warners’ were forced to end the publication of *The Little American* altogether, perhaps in part because they did not mute their didactic tone nearly enough to suit their audience.

Although their paper was unsuccessful, Susan and Anna Warner did not stop writing children’s literature, nor did they cease to support Protestant missionary efforts. Instead, they embraced both projects wholeheartedly. Anna, who had been writing for the American Sunday School Union since 1857, when she published *Pond Lily Stories*, followed by *Sunday All Week* in 1859, and *The Children of Blackberry Hollow* in 1863, continued to write for children, including *The Three Little Spades* (1868), *Stories of Vinegar Hill* (1871), and *A Bag of Stories* (1883). Susan began writing Sunday school fiction in the early 1870’s, and wrote *The House in Town* in 1872 followed by *The Little Camp on Eagle Hill* in 1874.²⁸ Both sisters taught Sunday school, and both were instrumental in shaping the spiritual lives of others, including the cadets at neighboring West Point, who attended weekly Bible classes hosted by the Warner sisters beginning in 1875 and continuing until Anna’s death in 1915. Because both sisters strongly supported missionary efforts both at home and abroad, it is no coincidence that several of these cadets became missionaries themselves. Susan and Anna’s former student E.H. Catlin, for example, faithfully attended the sisters’ Bible classes while matriculating at West Point during

the 1870's. When Catlin graduated from the academy in 1880, he began corresponding with the sisters regularly, telling them that he had begun teaching Sunday school to the black children who resided near his barracks in Little Rock, Arkansas. He wrote to the sisters in May of 1881, "I am going to work in a school starting among children who do not go any other place and hope to do a little good. I miss something in the people here which exists in some people I know a power that makes me believe that they are earnest Christians" ("Warner Correspondence"). Though neither Susan nor Anna Warner included any description of missionaries in their later writings, letters like Catlin's reveal that they continued to support missionary work throughout their lives, and inspired others do so as well.

Despite the fact that their "little paper" was ultimately unsuccessful, the Warner sisters continued to explore the social and political issues they broached in *The Little American* in their later writings and supported the dual social missions of evangelical Christianity until the end of their careers. The fact that the sisters were only beginning to explore issues of social justice in the 1860's, and would later fully embrace the tenets of social Christianity, makes this short-lived publication an important phase in the Warners' literary career. As I discuss in subsequent chapters, Susan and Anna Warner would go on to collaborate on another series of novels, written this time for adults that explore labor reform and poverty more fully.

CHAPTER 4

“FEELING RIGHT” ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION:

SUSAN WARNER, EVANGELICAL REFORM, AND THE SENTIMENTAL NOVEL

In the spring of 1861, as the nation braced for the inevitable outbreak of the Civil War, Susan and Anna Warner were busy making preparations of their own. The war meant that there were few men or boys available for hire that year and that “household work at the Island came down upon” the sisters’ “already full hands.” More household chores meant less time to write, and the price of everything from lamp oil to paper was rising. Like many northern women, Susan and Anna struggled to maintain their humble household as the cost of food, fuel, and other basic necessities continued to climb. They could not even hire men to help with the most strenuous chores. “The young men of the neighborhood went off to the fight” Anna recalls in her biography, “while the women helped the old men wage the warfare with weeds and needs, at home” (420).

The sisters once again found themselves in dire need of money and began work on a series of projects that would occupy them for the next decade. Anna began writing stories for the *American Sunday School Union*, which she would later publish as *The Children of Blackberry Hollow* (Baker 79). As they struggled to produce enough short stories, newspapers, and novels to earn enough money to support their modest lifestyle, the Civil War raged on distant battlefields.

Anna Warner devotes surprisingly little space in her nearly 400-page biography to the Civil War, and includes only a few excerpts from her sister’s journals from the years 1861-1865. Although she is careful to include entries composed on significant historical events (such as

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation) and records her sister's reaction to important battles (including Fort Sumter and First Bull Run), Anna keeps her reader's attention squarely focused on Susan's personal and professional life throughout this short section of *Elizabeth Wetherell*. In some of Susan's entries, the war appears to be nothing more than an unwelcome distraction from the more important tasks of writing and publication. On September 18, 1861 Susan mentions the Battle of Antietam only briefly and then quickly resumes worrying about preparing the proofs of *The Little American* and corresponding with her publisher Robert Carter: "Went about my dispatches first thing and finished them up. Proofs, copy for No 2...and a word to the Carters...Terrible work in Maryland-such fighting-and not over yet. Afternoon we sat in the pine woods and wrote" (442).

Later that year, Susan Warner began writing *Melbourne House*, a series of loosely-related sketches about a young girl named Daisy Randolph. Because Daisy's parents do not approve of her Christian faith, she is forced to sneak away to attend Sunday School in the woods that surround her home and must constantly defy her family in order to live her life according to the principles she reads in the discarded family Bible. Originally published serially in *The Little American*, *Melbourne House* more closely resembles Sunday school fiction than it does a novel, as there is no discernible plot line or character development. From the first pages of *Melbourne House*, Daisy Randolph is a devout Christian child who already knows the appropriate Bible verse for any and all situations she encounters, and she does not hesitate to instruct her friends and family in Christian morality and virtue. Warner simply provides her with the opportunities to do so. Warner intended Daisy to be a role model for the young readers of *The Little American* to emulate, and likely would not have continued the series had her periodical not gone bankrupt in 1864. Clearly, Warner was already planning a sequel to *Melbourne House* when Robert Carter

Brothers published the sketches as a novel in 1865, as the last chapter abruptly concludes with the announcement that Daisy's parents will be traveling to Europe for an undetermined amount of time, and the heroine will be staying with relatives on a southern plantation until they return. With one well-placed plot device, Susan Warner relocates her young female Christian exemplar from the safety and seclusion of rural, upstate New York to the cotton plantations of the South on the eve of the Civil War. Like her heroine, Susan Warner was venturing into unfamiliar territory.

Because few of Warner's journals from the Civil War era have survived (other than the brief excerpts Anna includes in her biography), we do not know exactly when she began composing *Daisy* or its sequel, sometimes called *Daisy in the Fields*, but we can surmise that she was working on both between 1865 and 1868, when they were published by Lippincott. The novels themselves are incredibly disjointed, reflecting the confusion of the era in which they were written and the unfamiliarity of their author with her subject matter. Susan Warner did not experience the Civil War in any direct way. No battles were fought near her home, none of her loved ones lost their lives, and none of her surviving correspondence indicates that she suffered any significant personal loss during these troubled times. In light of these facts, it is unsurprising that scholars have neglected to include Susan Warner and *Daisy* in studies of American women writers and Civil War literature.

In *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War*, Lyde Cullen Sizer examines the lives and work of nine northern women writers, from the antebellum era through Reconstruction, who "who broached the war topic" in their novels (14). The writers she names, including Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, EDEN Southworth, Frances Watkins Harper, Gail Hamilton, Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Elizabeth

Stuart Phelps frequently appear alongside Susan Warner in other studies of nineteenth-century American women's writing, and Sizer calls these women "exceptional" because they made their living by writing and "representative" because "these were women whose work was sought out and eagerly awaited, reprinted in numerous magazines and newspapers, and referred to in lesser-known novels in an offhand way, as if readers would immediately see and understand the references" (15). And yet, despite the fact that she wrote two full-length novels in which the Civil War is not only "broached," but is central to the plot, Susan Warner is mentioned only once in Sizer's study when she compares the "conservative, religious" *Wide, Wide World* to more "radical" novels like *Ruth Hall* (58). Sizer is certainly not the only scholar of nineteenth-century American women's fiction to overlook the *Daisy* series, and the omission does not detract from her argument in any significant way. I believe that Susan Warner deserves to be included in the canon Sizer so artfully constructs. Warner definitely meets Sizer's criteria: as a woman who earned her living exclusively from her writing, she was an "exceptional" nineteenth-century American woman, and her work was easily as "sought out and eagerly awaited" as the work of her peers, perhaps even more so. Furthermore, Susan Warner wanted her voice to be added to the conversation surrounding social and political issues like slavery, race, and poverty in the 1870's. In *Daisy* and its sequel, Warner attempts to rewrite the most famous sentimental novel of the century, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, during Reconstruction. Warner greatly admired Harriet Beecher Stowe, but her homage to the century's most infamous abolitionist text rejects moral suasion and instead offers evangelical Christian women new strategies for inspiring social change. In the *Daisy* series, Warner advocates social activism rather than submission, and encourages selflessness rather than self-sacrifice. Even though Susan Warner knew very little about the realities of life on a southern plantation, and even less about the battlefields and hospitals she

describes, her contribution to this genre of literature deserves to be recognized, however flawed the novels themselves may be.

Daisy is especially important to any student or scholar interested in Warner's catalog because Daisy Randolph represents a dramatic departure from the submissive heroines of her earlier novels. Like Ellen Montgomery, Daisy Randolph is orphaned (though not permanently), forced to experience the world alone, armed only with her innate sense of Christian morality and ethics and plenty of well-chosen Bible verses. She is so virtuous, in fact, a critic writing for Lippincott's critics noted that her "life presents an unbroken series of such pious acts that the idea of vanity is rather too strongly suggested" (456). Unlike Ellen, Daisy does not have to learn her Christian duty, nor is she willing to submit to the will of others. In fact, she constantly defends her religious and political views even when they set her at odds with her own family. Like *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy*, *Daisy* is a female Christian bildungsroman in which the young protagonist must suffer many trials and tribulations as she grows into a mature, adult, Christian woman. But unlike Ellen Montgomery or Fleda Rinnegan, Daisy Randolph does not emerge unscathed, nor is she granted a happy ending in which she is protected from the world by an equally virtuous husband. In the *Daisy* series, the heroine's entire life falls apart around her, through no fault of her own, and there is absolutely nothing she can do to stop it.

Perhaps more than any of Warner's other heroines, Daisy Randolph is utterly powerless, and this powerlessness is made all the more tragic by the fact that she is constantly reminded of the authority she will one day wield. As her cousin Preston declares on almost every page of the novel's first chapter, Daisy will become the sole mistress of the plantation, and, by extension, the approximately 400 slaves whose labor makes their family's vast wealth possible. These promises of future empowerment do little to comfort the eleven-year-old Daisy, who must obey the will of

her relatives and her vengeful governess. But when Daisy first encounters the other residents of her new plantation home, she realizes that her own suffering pales in comparison to that of the slaves who are brutalized by the merciless overseer her father employs. Daisy uses every weapon at her disposal to right the wrongs of her family and improve the lives of the slaves on her family's plantation, but she quickly finds that her tears, her weekly Bible lessons, and the frequent gifts of food and clothing she provides from her generous allowance cannot correct the moral injustices of the plantation system.

Harriet Beecher Stowe proposed in the final chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that "every individual" could "see to it that they feel right" about slavery and abolitionism, and recommended that women rely on moral suasion, not political activism, to inspire social change (317). As Jane Tompkins observes in *Sensational Designs*, Stowe "recommends not specific alterations in the current political and economic relations, but rather a change of heart" as the solution to slavery (132). To this end, Tompkins argues, Stowe "retells the culture's central religious myth—the story of the crucifixion—in terms of the nation's greatest political conflict—slavery—and of its most cherished social beliefs—the sanctity of motherhood and family" (134). Both Uncle Tom and Eva, Tompkins notes, suffer and die to "save the powerful and corrupt," and their Christ-like self sacrifice inspires others to embrace both Christianity and abolitionism (127-128). As Tompkins points out, Stowe's novel was remarkably effective. It did, as she notes, help "to convince a nation to go to war and free its slaves" (141). But moral suasion was not the only strategy endorsed by Christian women writers during the Civil War and its aftermath, nor was Harriet Beecher Stowe the only prominent evangelical author of sentimental fiction to offer a formula for Christian women's role in politics. In fact, by 1865, when Susan Warner published *Daisy*, thousands of evangelical Northern women were flocking to the South with their Bibles in

tow to teach newly emancipated slaves to read and write. The author of *The Wide, Wide World* recognized that these female evangelical activists needed a new framework for their political involvement and a new role model to inspire them as they attempted to rebuild the post-war South. Although she had never set foot on a southern plantation herself, Susan Warner attempted to accommodate them.

Daisy is Warner's attempt to rewrite Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the Reconstruction era. Written in the first-person (a dramatic departure from Warner's previous novels), it provided Warner's white, female, Christian audience with a formula for enacting social and political change through acts of self-sacrifice and benevolence, and offered them a new heroine on to emulate. Daisy Randolph is a devout and pious Christian child, intrinsically knows that slavery is immoral, and embraces abolitionism rather quickly, with the help of a kind stable keeper named Uncle Darry. But no matter how "right" Daisy "feels" about slavery, she cannot cry or pray the injustice away. Warner uses a southern cotton plantation setting to dramatize issues of ownership, power, authority, and obedience that she explored in earlier novels, but with one important difference: this heroine is not submissive, but rebellious, and refuses to bow to authority or alter her abolitionist views to please her family. Unlike Little Eva and the many angelic child-heroines of anti-slavery literature, Daisy does not become a Christ-like martyr for the abolitionist cause. Instead, Warner has a different purpose for her female Christian exemplar, one that reflects the mission and values Christian women in the post-War era. By the end her stay on the family plantation, Daisy Randolph recognizes that activism and reform, not submission and self-sacrifice, inspire social change.

Perhaps more than any woman writer of the nineteenth century other than Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner believed in the power of sentiment. She knew that "feeling right"

about social and political issues could, potentially, reshape American society according to the principles of Christianity, a belief that she shared with the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But according to Warner, Christian women could not rely on sentiment alone to persuade. For Warner, Northern Christian women must not only “feel right” about social and political issues, they must act right and then loudly declare their righteousness, even if doing so violated conventional notions of female propriety like submission and obedience. Daisy Randolph is the first of Warner's heroines whose struggles with ownership, duty, freedom, and independence do not result in total submission to authority and negation of self. When she learns that her father, brother, mother, aunts, and cousin all support slavery and owe their vast wealth to the plantation system—an institution that she believes contradicts the moral and ethical teachings of Christianity—she immediately attempts to reform that system, despite the fact that doing so results in her family's disapproval. When she realizes reform is impossible and is confronted with her own relative powerlessness, Daisy does not grow ill and die like so many sentimental heroines before her. Instead, she takes a strong moral stance against slavery and argues her position to anyone who will listen.

But no matter how committed she is to her political agenda, Daisy Randolph is a young, unmarried woman, and as such, her power to effect change is severely limited. She cannot free the slaves on the plantation, though she desperately wants to, because they are not yet “hers” to free. This realization, although painful, does not result in Daisy abandoning her struggle. In fact, it only strengthens her resolve, and she continues to fight her battle against slavery in third and final installment of the series. Although Daisy Randolph never enters the public sphere of politics and remains squarely in the domestic realm, the fact that she continues to challenge authority and voice her beliefs indicates that Warner was, by 1865, beginning to advocate for the

expansion of women's influence, making Daisy Randolph the first example of Christian female activism in her catalog.

Warner definitely drew heavily from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, plantation novels, and slave narratives when she composed *Daisy*, but it is important to note here that she also had second-hand knowledge of the plantation life. In January of 1859, Susan and Anna were invited to stay at the Gramercy Park home of their friend Henrietta Haines, a prominent member of New York City's cultural elite and the founder of one of the most prestigious private schools for young women in the eastern United States. Miss Haines had invited her longtime friends to the city to attend a series of readings by the famed Shakespearean actress Fanny Kemble, and had secured the sisters tickets to several of her performances. Because they had just received a small royalty check from Lippincott's, and could afford the price of new dresses for the occasion, Susan and Anna Warner accepted the invitation and arrived in New York on January 20th, 1859 (Baker 69).

Susan and Anna stayed with Haines for over a month that winter, and throughout their visit, they attended nearly all of Kemble's readings and secured an invitation to meet with the actress herself, whom they quickly befriended. Soon, they found themselves seated in the coveted "sofa seats" at her performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, and were entertaining her at Haines' home (A Warner 386-7). Susan and Anna remained acquaintances of Kemble for the next two decades. According to an 1881 letter from Anna Warner to Kemble, Kemble and her daughter had once visited the Warner's at their home on Constitution Island for dinner, and wished to return (Anna Warner to Fanny Kemble, November 1881). Just three years after their encounter in New York, Fanny Kemble would become one of the most famous female abolitionist writers of the era. In May of 1863, Kemble published her memoir *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation*, in which she vividly described the brutal conditions she

witnessed while living on her husband Pierce Butler's island plantation. As Catherine Clinton observes in her study *Fanny Kemble's Civil War*, Kemble's text, and the many abolitionist pamphlets and letters Kemble composed throughout the 1860's, were so influential that they effectively swayed British popular opinion in favor of the Union cause (179). We do not know what Kemble and Warner discussed on those afternoons visits in 1859, but because Kemble was an ardent abolitionist, it is very likely that the subject of slavery was broached. Nearly a decade later, Susan Warner chose a southern cotton plantation as the setting for the second of the *Daisy* novels. Though we can never know what Susan Warner and Fanny Kemble spoke about in their real-life encounters, or wrote to each other in their private letters, it is possible that Warner purposefully placed her fiction in dialogue with the work of her famous friend.

As an experienced writer of popular fiction, Susan Warner knew that many of her white, northern, Christian women readers had already embraced abolitionism by 1865, and had very likely read not only *Uncle Tom's Cabin* but a host of other slave narratives, essays, memoirs, and fictional accounts of plantation life. Because of this, it is unsurprising that Warner chose to have her heroine come to the conclusion that slavery was both inhumane and immoral almost impossibly quickly. Even though she is only ten years old and has never even heard of slavery, Daisy Randolph knows that there is something deeply wrong with the way of life at Magnolia from the first day she arrives. As her cousin Preston leads her on a tour of the expansive property, she immediately notices not only the beautiful gardens, the expansive oak groves, and the well-kept stables, but the "bare" and "dirty" cottages of the hundreds of slaves who work the cotton fields and rice paddies that surrounded her lavish mansion (24). After learning that the unfortunate inhabitants of these cottages are forced to work long hours without pay or even adequate food (24), are unable to care for their own families because they have to work the fields

while their children stay home unattended or, worse, labor beside them, Daisy is shocked and nearly faints (25). When she discovers that the slaves are prevented from learning to read the Bible and have therefore never even heard of Jesus, let alone attended church, Daisy is so overcome with emotion that she retreats to her room to cry (32). Still reeling from disbelief, Daisy is comforted by her house servants before dropping to knees to pray over “the revelation that there were hundreds of people under the care of” her “mother and father who were living without church and without the Bible, in desperate ignorance of everything worth knowing” (34). In less than thirty pages, Warner singles out what is to her the worst of all the moral offenses perpetuated by the slave system: the near-total absence of Christian influence. Like all of Warner’s heroines before her, Daisy Randolph values her Bible greatly. It is, after all, the single most important possession to all of Warner’s heroines. It is the only object that Ellen Montgomery’s mother sends with her when she travels alone into *The Wide, Wide World*, it is the only source of comfort for Fleda Rinnegan as she toils away to keep her adopted family’s home afloat in *Queechy*, and it is the only form of moral guidance that Daisy Randolph has ever received. The fact that slaves cannot access this all-important text likely horrified Warner, as the Bible is more prominently featured as a physical object in Warner’s fiction. But luckily for Daisy, there is one resident of the plantation who is not only able to read the Bible, but who lives a life in keeping with Christian principles, a character that embodies the morals and ethics of Christianity more fully than even Daisy herself. It is a character whom Warner explicitly borrows from the novel of her most famous contemporary.

Just as Daisy Randolph is about to succumb to the overwhelming feeling of despair and desperation she experiences upon learning that the slaves on her plantation are ignorant of the teachings of Jesus Christ, she stumbles upon his most faithful servant, “Uncle Darry.” Like

Stowe's Uncle Tom, Darry is a stable hand and sings hymns as he brushes the horses (41). In the unlikely case that her readers failed to recognize the obvious allusion, Warner invites them draw direct comparisons between her Uncle Darry and his famous namesake by having her heroine muse:

Since I have grown older I have read that wonderful story of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom; he reminded me of Darry then, and now I never think of the one without thinking of the other. But Darry, having served a different class of people from Uncle Tom's first owners, had a more polished style of manners, which I should almost call courtly; and he was besides a man of higher natural parts, and somewhat more education. But much commerce in the Court which is above all earthly dignities, no doubt had more to do with his peculiarities than any other cause. (42)

Warner is careful to alert her readers that any similarities between her Uncle Darry and Stowe's Uncle Tom are not accidental. Warner admits that she is borrowing the character of Uncle Tom from Stowe's text, but she also reveals that she will alter Stowe's creation significantly to suit her own purposes. Warner's Uncle Darry possesses "a more polished set of manners." He is a man of "higher natural parts" than Uncle Tom because he is destined to become a reformer, not a martyr. Darry is mercilessly subjected to whipping, and like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Darry's brutal beating does little to turn the hearts and minds of those in positions of power.

After repeating Preston's tour of the slave cottages with Darry on horseback, Daisy rides triumphantly back to her mansion to speak to her family about reading the Bible to her slaves. But as soon as she and Darry arrive, she realizes for the first time that her new friend is not a person, but a piece of property. Unbeknownst to Daisy, she had borrowed her cousin's saddle for

their afternoon ride, and Preston retaliates by whipping Darry across the mouth with a switch (57). When Daisy confronts Preston and proudly informs him that, as a Christian, Darry “will wear a crown of gold in heaven” and that Preston should be ashamed to have raised a hand against him, she learns the cruel logic of the southern slaveholders and immediately recognizes it to be incompatible with both the teachings of the Bible and the ideology of domesticity. Families, her cousin tells her, are split apart as fathers, mothers, and even children are bought and sold at the slave market; even the pure and pious Christian is subject to the brutality of the overseer’s whip (60-1) . Worst of all, she is now one of the people upon whom they are forced to wait. “Daisy,” he says, repeating himself so that she fully understands her new position as master, “*they belong to you*, these people...they are your servants, *they belong to you*. They have no right to wages” (62). The realization that she, too, is culpable for these sins and that she is directly benefitting from the exploitation of slaves is too much for Daisy to bear. Like so many sentimental heroines before her, when Daisy is confronted with an injustice that was beyond their power to rectify, she attempts to sacrifice herself to redeem the sins of others.

Like Eva, Daisy Randolph grows ill and very nearly dies, and the source of her suffering is an overwhelming sense of sympathy for those who are powerless and oppressed. “For an hour after they put me to bed my heart seemed to grow chill from minute to minute,” she says, “and my body, in curious sympathy, shook as if I had an ague” (64). Her servants Margret and Theresa faithfully attend to her illness, even sleeping beside the bed to ensure that she does not perish during the night, and she grows sicker when she learns that Darry had once been whipped nearly to death for praying alone in his cottage (68). She cries so violently for Darry that she scares even her servants, who “shut the doors” to keep the “sound of [her] sobs from reaching other ears” (70). But unlike Eva’s illness in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which, as Tompkins points out

in *Sensational Designs*, epitomizes both Christian self-sacrifice and the redemptive power of a child's death, hardly anyone in Daisy's household recognizes that she is attempting to surrender her own life to in order to "lead adults to God" (128). Only the slaves (and, of course, Warner's readers) are capable of recognizing the source of her illness, and her "ghostly looks" are met with nothing but "tender affection" by Margret and Theresa (67). Her family is confounded as to what could possibly be wrong with the angel in their house, and even Preston, the person her death seems designed to redeem, is unmoved by her request that he ask forgiveness of Darry for striking him (72). Because Daisy's attempt at Christian self-sacrifice has gone unrecognized by those it was meant to persuade, she is forced to adopt a different strategy, one that does not require the participation of her slave-owning relatives. Since she is unable to sway the hearts of those who oppress by embodying the sacrifice of Christ herself, Daisy chooses to a different audience for her Christian evangelizing. With Darry's help, she will convert the slaves themselves.

Daisy's illness may not have convinced her family to embrace Christianity and free their slaves, but it does persuade them to allow her to "do as she likes" and preach the Bible to them herself. And so, with "weak and trembling fingers," the sick heroine writes to her father to request that she be permitted to hold weekly prayer meetings in the kitchen of her mansion, a request that she is immediately granted for fear that she will once again grow sick (75). After a brief conversation with Darry in which she learns that the household slaves typically gathered in the kitchen on Christmas Eve for a modest feast of eggs and salt pork, Daisy selects this time and location for her to "let her light shine" and introduce the teachings of the Bible to her slaves. On Christmas Eve, after Daisy secures for them extra food and drink from her Aunt's table, a jovial atmosphere develops. Daisy proudly declares that "there was a great enjoyment in the kitchen. It

was a time of high festival, what with me and the egg supper.” After dinner, Daisy gathers the household slaves together to and reads them the story of the birth of Jesus:

Margaret was sent upstairs to fetch my Bible; the circle closed in around the fire and me; a circle of listening, waiting, eager, interested faces, some few of them shone with pleasure, or grew grave with reverent love, while I read slowly the chapters that tell of the first Christmas night. I read them from all the gospels, picking the story out first in one, then in another; answered sometimes by low words of praise that echoed but did not interrupt me... And how glad I was in the words of the story myself, as I went along. How heart-glad; that here, in this region of riches and hopes not earthly, those around me had as good a welcome and as open entrance and as free right as I. (82)

During her reading, both Daisy and her slaves experience “pleasure” and “reverent love” for Christ that Daisy hopes will result in spiritual, if not literal, liberation and freedom. As Warner reminds her readers, the oppressed on earth are “welcomed” into heaven as equals, and given the same “free right” to worship God as those who oppress them. This realization makes Daisy “heart-glad,” a feeling which only increases when Uncle Darry leads the group in prayer. As Daisy declares, “I forgot that those around me were in bonds, for I felt them as free as I, and inheritors of the same kingdom” (83). For Warner, a recently converted Methodist, Daisy and the slaves’ emotional reactions to scripture and prayer serve as evidence that “true religion of the heart” that John Wellesley preached had the real potential to inspire social change. Together, Daisy and Darry inspire the enslaved to connect emotionally with the teaching of the scripture and immediately convert them to Christianity, an act that Warner genuinely believed would lead to their eventual liberation when their masters and overseers underwent such a conversion

themselves and recognized that slavery (and all other forms of oppression) were incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. Like Wellesley, Susan Warner now believed that conversion was a matter of the heart, not the mind, and a change of heart could, indeed, change the world.

Warner's choice of the kitchen as her setting for religious conversion is practical in terms of plot (it is the only location to which both Daisy and the slaves have access), but it has symbolic significance as well. For domestic novelists like Stowe and Warner, the kitchen was the most sacred room the home, the heart of the women's sphere, an area where wives, mothers, and daughters performed the most vital domestic duties. According to Gillian Brown, the entrance of slavery, and by extension, the marketplace, into the sanctity of the women's kitchen amounted to a violation of the domestic order. In "Getting in the Kitchen With Dinah: Domestic Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," she observes that "nowhere in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is this domestic violation so marked as in the careless condition of the Southern kitchen" (13). As Brown notes, "slavery...undermines women's housework by bringing the confusion of the marketplace into the kitchen, the family shelter. The real horror that slavery holds for the mothers of America to whom Stowe addressed in her anti-slavery appeal is the suggestion that family life nurtured by women is not immune to the economic life outside it" (16). The intrusion of the slave-holding economy into the most sacred area of the domestic sphere would have disturbed Susan Warner as much as it did Stowe, despite the fact that she hated housework herself. It is little wonder, then, that she chose the kitchen as a site for her young heroine to take her stand against the cruelty and oppression taking place in the home that she is constantly reminded will one day become hers. When Daisy takes control of the kitchen, she is, in essence, reclaiming the right to govern the domestic sphere of the mansion as she sees fit. The fact that she transforms this important locus of feminine power and influence into a figurative temple for the salvation of souls reveals

Warner's true purpose for Uncle Darry and Daisy. If the kitchen has become their church, and the slaves are souls to be converted, the plantation will be the arena in which they will conduct their missionary work.

Before Daisy and Uncle Darry can begin holding their Bible readings on a regular basis, Daisy must secure permission from Aunt Gary and Mr. Edwards, the overseer. Aunt Gary does not initially approve of the idea, and declines Daisy's request, but is quick to inform Daisy that as the reigning matriarch of Magnolia, her will, at least in matters of household management, supersedes that of the overseer, Mr. Edwards. "Mr. Edwards," she remarks, "would be well employed not to interfere with anything the family chooses to do" (88). As Catherine Clinton notes in her study *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, the sphere of white women's influence on a southern cotton plantation often extended far beyond the physical home. "The planter's wife was in charge not merely of the mansion," she explains, "but the entire spectrum of domestic operations throughout the estate, from food and clothing to the physical and spiritual care of both her white family and her husband's slaves. The borders of her domain might extend from the mansion's locked pantry to the slave-quarter hospital and the slaughtering pen for her hogs" (23). According to Clinton, it was not unusual for the plantation mistress to bypass the authority of the overseer altogether. "Very little escaped the attention of the white mistress," Clinton states, "and most plantation problems were brought to her unless, being crop-related, they fell within the sphere of the overseer. Indeed, the mistress often served as an intermediary between the slave and master, bypassing the overseer's authority" (24). As a northerner who has never before stepped foot on a plantation, Daisy has not been versed in the finer points of southern household management, and hence does not know the exact boundaries of her Aunt's authority. Warner, however, was obviously knowledgeable on the subject, and was

careful to make sure that her descriptions of the separate spheres of male and female influence were accurately drawn. Aunt Gary is not only asserting power over the overseer, she is establishing power over Daisy. By correctly identifying Aunt Gary as the authority to whom Daisy must address her appeals, Warner reminds her readers that they too have power over the lives of the sick and the suffering and that they can use the rhetoric of true womanhood to claim a similar authority for themselves.

As soon as her request is denied, Daisy begins to grow physically ill, which frightens her family into submitting to her will. “I declare,” remarks Aunt Gary, “if she isn’t growing pale about it!” It is immediately clear to her aunt that if the request is not granted, Daisy will purposefully make herself ill. “And now if you cannot have this trick of your fancy,” she declares, exasperated, “you will just fidget yourself sick!”(89). Should Daisy become sick, she will become physically weaker, but symbolically stronger. The weaker Daisy becomes, the more thoroughly she conforms the ideals of true womanhood, and it becomes more likely that those around her will celebrate her purity and piousness. As Alison Piepmeier notes in *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-century America*, “the sick woman in literature was often delicate, pale, and passive—characteristics valued for women in general—which suggests that poor health was not only widespread but could be, in some ways, a state to be desired.” Noting figures like Beth March, Alice Humphreys, and Eva as examples, Piepmeier observes that “fictional representations of women's illness made these illnesses virtuous, almost laudable states of being which amplified true womanly qualities, bringing women close to the ideal. Sickness in literature is both the cause of and the evidence for women character’s spiritual purity” (73). Daisy’s threat to become ill is rendered all the more powerful because her earlier illness was so severe that her family feared that she would die. Tompkins reminds us that the

sentimental heroine only grows more powerful in illness and death, as “death is not the equivalent of defeat but of victory, it brings an access to power, not a loss of it” (127). A skilled practitioner of sentimentalism, Susan Warner is able to artfully craft a rhetorical situation in which her heroine is guaranteed a victory no matter how her Aunt decides to proceed.

Unsurprisingly, Aunt Gary chooses to grant Daisy’s request. She seems to know that she is being manipulated, and it is obvious that Daisy is using her frail health to bend others to her will, but that does not rob Warner’s sentimental heroine of her victory over authority. Daisy and Darry’s Bible readings will continue because if they do not, Daisy could literally cry herself to death. In this scene, Warner is admitting that sickness and death can be effective strategies for claiming power, but is careful to point out that such tactics are only temporarily successful.

Daisy’s prayer meetings continue throughout the winter, but a letter from her father arrives in the spring forbidding them. Daisy summarizes the letter:

...it told me that I had better leave Mr. Edwards alone. He knew what he ought to do, about the prayer meetings and about the other things, and they were what I could not judge about...It said too that things seemed strange to me because I was unused to them; and that when I had lived longer in the south they would cease to be strange, and I would understand them and look upon them as everyone else did. (95)

Warner does not outline the rhetoric of southern apologists here, but the reader can easily assume that Daisy’s father feels the same as her cousin Preston, who adamantly defends slavery by citing a host of common pro-slavery arguments: slaves are property to be bought and sold by capitalists, and freeing them would amount to the loss of private property (59); white people were biologically unsuited for labor in the harsh southern climate (60); and providing slaves

with clothing, housing, and food was equivalent to providing wages (62). Daisy's father hopes to cool his daughter's feelings about the treatment those he claims as slaves by explaining that she will one day become accustomed to slavery and, until she does, she need not concern herself with the day-to-day operations of the plantation. But Daisy immediately rejects her father's suggestion and drops to her knees to pray for the strength to stand by her convictions. "I knelt down and prayed," she says, "that however long I might live at the South, I might never get to look upon evil as anything but evil, nor become accustomed to things I thought ought not to be so, so as not to feel them" (96). Daisy quickly concludes that she will renounce her father's political beliefs entirely, but she does not fault him personally. It is important to note here that Warner does not fault the slave owner. Instead, she blames southern culture and attributes the father's views to "habit and custom" (97). Daisy Randolph knows that she will never allow herself to be "blinded" to the evils of slavery because, as a devout follower of Jesus, she is morally superior to her non-Christian parents, and hence licensed to disregard their authority when their beliefs conflict with those found in her well-worn copy of the Bible. Like Eva St. Claire, she is able to clearly see what the adults in her life cannot: slavery is a sinful and immoral institution that defies Christian teachings.

Writing in 1865, Susan Warner knew that she was not the first writer to introduce the figure of a young, female, Christian child to the plantation setting, but she does skillfully manipulate an established literary trope to suit her own purposes. Rebecca De Schweinitz argues in her essay "Wake Up to Feel: Defining Childhood, Debating Slavery in Antebellum America," that abolitionist writers often "portrayed children as the vanguard of antislavery sentiment" (17). Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany* and other abolitionist literature created for children, De Schwienitz notes, "encouraged what abolitionists portrayed as children's innate sympathy for

slaves and aversion to the sin of slaveholding.” Like Daisy Randolph and Eva, the children featured in these early abolitionist texts were typically “white children [who] taught slaves to read and listened attentively and sympathetically” to their “tragic tales” of bondage and enslavement (18). As an experienced writer of children’s periodicals, Susan Warner was undoubtedly familiar with Child’s publication, and tailored her representation of the white, Christian child on a southern cotton plantation to meet the expectations her readers, primarily composed of white, Northern Christian women and children. The novel she produced reflects the cultural biases and racial insensitivities one might expect from such a non-diverse group. Like the early abolitionist writings Schweinitz identifies, *Daisy* can perhaps be best described as one of many “paternalistic stories that perpetuated racial stereotypes, portraying prescient, privileged, and active white children who saved helpless blacks.” As Schweinitz observes, such texts are still valuable because “that literature also advanced sentimental notions of childhood and used to them shame whites of all ages into supporting the antislavery cause” (18). Warner’s text, unfortunately, cannot be so easily defended. By 1868, abolitionism was a moot point, and Warner’s readers would have found Daisy’s rejection of her parents’ philosophy neither radical nor revolutionary. But unlike the children of the anti-slavery literature that Schweinitz notes in her study, Daisy Randolph does not even consider attempting to change her father’s mind about the issue of slavery, nor does she try to sway the hearts of the other pro-slavery family members at Magnolia. Instead, Warner gives her young, female, Christian child a new purpose. For the rest of the time she lives on the plantation, Daisy will act as a reformer.

Even though Daisy’s father refuses to intervene on her behalf and convince the overseer to allow her to hold her weekly prayer meetings, he does grant his daughter one of her requests, and gifts her healthy sum of money to spend as she pleases. With the ten dollars a month her

father has provided, Daisy chooses to purchase items for the slaves. Some items on the list are designed to encourage the slaves to attend her weekly Bible readings, which are now held in secret. She purchases a pair of shoes for one field slave who is embarrassed to come to the mansion with bare feet and a large print copy of the New Testament for a slave with failing eyesight (97). Others items are luxuries like tea, sugar, cups and saucers. Gifting a slave a teacup may appear naïve and short-sighted of Daisy Randolph. After all, an abolitionist might wonder, how much comfort could a cup of tea with sugar really offer an elderly woman who sleeps on a pile of straw (though Daisy later buys her a bed)? But Warner's female Christian readers would have immediately recognized that these gifts served a more important cultural function. By providing her slaves with clean clothing, comfortable beds, tea sets, and, later, even flowers for their gardens, Daisy is preparing them for their eventual emancipation by showing them how to live a manner that her white northern readers would find acceptable. Her gifts are not only meant to comfort, but to civilize, her slaves.

By 1865, when Warner was composing her novel, images of young, white, Christian women "civilizing" slaves had become a common motif on the pages of northern periodicals. In *Raising Freedom's Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery*, Mary Niall Mitchell discusses the prevalence of such images and the cultural function they served. "After emancipation," Mitchell notes, "reformers and missionaries sought to quiet the anxieties about the responses of millions of black freed people...with images of black freed girls in a rural landscape under the civilizing influence of a white female teacher" (91-92). Using a widely-circulated photograph of Harriet Murray, a white school teacher in South Carolina 1866, with her two black pupils, as an example, Mitchell observes:

Murray's presence—her motherly embrace, her finger directing Elsie to the book—said something about the civilizing northern presence in the post slavery South. Murray played the part of the white, middle-class female who often mediated, indeed domesticated, the boundaries between “civilization” and the “uncivilized” in the nineteenth-century, whether through missionary work or colonization or in allegorical illustrations and advertisements. Her presence suggests to northern viewers that while freed children learned to read and write, they would also learn the value to discipline and industry—the very fundamentals of Anglo-Saxon civilization. (92)

Warner's subjects are adults, not children, but she was participating in the cultural discourse Mitchell identifies. As Mitchell notes, both writers of fiction and missionary societies created a “parable” about the new role freed slaves would play in southern society that centered on the transformation of “ragged slaves” into “neat, disciplined, freed children” (93). According to Mitchell:

...as an early illustration of civilization as a spectacle to be consumed, this narrative allowed viewers to and readers to witness the event of the ragged child's reform. To a large extent, then, the selling of emancipation as a civilizing force, to a wary northern public...took the form of an educable, employable, free black child. With freed children, missionary and benevolent associations excited a process, on paper, using lens and light and shadow, through which the slave population became scrubbed of history, relatives, and the indelible marks of slavery. Here, they said, was a generation capable of rescue, receptive to reform. Here was the tidy, disciplined future of freed black labor in the South. (95)

Warner cleverly inverts the image of the northern white Christian adult reforming the poor, black freed child to fit her own novel's plot, and the image of Daisy planting flowers and drinking tea with her slaves served the same function as the images Mitchell describes in her study. Warner's version of the child reforming the adult is perhaps an even more effective way to "quiet the anxieties" of her northern readers. Civilizing former slaves, Warner's novel illustrates, was so easy that a child could do it.

Mitchell also links these images of reformed freed children to a larger cultural narrative of the reform of the ragged child in the writings of missionaries and works of sentimental fiction. Citing novelists like Lydia Maria Child and journalists like Henry Mayhew as examples, Mitchell argues that certain features of this narrative, such as the "discovery" of the ragged child by the reformers who dared to venture onto the plantations and into the tenements, indicate that writings about street children and freed children both belong to the larger genre of "discovery writing and benevolence." In all of these writings, Mitchell argues, "reformers could direct benevolence toward ragged children while at the same time asserting control over them and directing their future" (109). Though she is only a child herself, Daisy, like the reformers Mitchell describes, performs benevolent acts with a clear purpose in mind—she wants to ensure that the slaves on her plantation will, when emancipated, continue to dutifully read their Bibles and drink their tea from cups and saucers. The fact the Susan Warner had read the writings of Henry Mayhew and visited the tenements of New York City like Lydia Maria Child, as well as the writings of other missionaries, indicates that she was familiar with the works of "discovery writing and benevolence" Mitchell outlines in her study. As I have discussed in previous chapters, Warner adamantly believed in the power of Christian fiction to inspire social change,

and she very likely wrote *Daisy* in hopes that other northern Christian women would emulate her heroine and take up the mantle of social reform themselves.

By 1865, when Susan Warner published the second installment of the *Daisy* series, reconstruction had replaced abolitionism as the most pressing social issue in the minds of evangelical Christian reformers. The evangelical community was so active in the South during the period immediately following the Civil War that scholars like Daniel W. Stowell sometimes refer to this era as the period of “religious reconstruction.” According to Stowell, northern white evangelicals flooded the American South during the early years of Reconstruction in an attempt to “purify” the region and “break the corrupting grip of slavery and treason on region’s religious life” (7). Stowell’s study, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877*, chronicles the lives and works of the “hundreds of missionaries and teachers [who] travelled South under the banners of their denominations” to teach and preach to the recently liberated slaves and their former masters (131). Because Susan Warner had such strong personal and professional ties to many prominent northern evangelical educators, missionaries, publishers, and spiritual leaders, both she and her sister were undoubtedly aware of their faith’s southern reform agenda and very likely supported these efforts. Although the Constitution Island Association archives collection of Susan and Anna Warner’s correspondence contains no letters that specifically mention evangelical missionaries in the South during the 1860’s, the letters housed there indicate that in the decades that followed, the Warner sisters sent several packages of books, money, clothing, and other supplies to evangelical missionary schools in the West.²⁹ Because the correspondence collected by Warner archives is, unfortunately, incomplete, and because Anna Warner had a propensity for destroying old letters, it is impossible to determine exactly when Susan and Anna began sending supplies to mission schools, but we can infer from

the articles they excerpted in *The Little American* that both sisters approved of the evangelical missionary efforts both at home and abroad during the years in which the evangelical missionary efforts in the south were most active. And because Susan Warner was accustomed to explaining evangelical missionary work to children, it is unsurprising that her young heroine takes to it so easily.

Daisy Randolph is not only teaching her slaves the Bible, she is attempting to establish a sort of mission school on her plantation. Warner does not reveal the extent of Daisy's plans until later in the novel, when she has her heroine recall that a previous letter to father contained a request that "she might establish schools, where the people on the plantation might learn to read and write" (120). But her readers, many of whom were as well-versed in evangelical reform rhetoric as Warner herself, would have immediately recognized that this would be the inevitable outcome of Daisy's project. Her plans to purchase "more large-print Testaments, some copies of the Gospel of John," and "a few hymn books" suggest that she has a larger project in mind than simply teaching one or two select slaves to read (101). Like the organizations that Mitchell and Stowell discuss in their respective studies, and like the missionaries Susan and Anna donated to in the decades that followed, Daisy Randolph has a more ambitious aim. Daisy sees her new plantation home as a new frontier for the expansion of evangelical values. Daisy plans to expand her efforts to educate her slaves as soon as she returns from New York, where she and Aunt Gary will conduct their annual shopping trip. But before Daisy can enact such a plan, she must learn that charity, no matter how well-intentioned, is meaningless unless it is accompanied by deep personal introspection about the nature of exploitation and oppression.

While in New York, Daisy comes to realize that she, too, has materially benefitted from slavery and the plantation system. At the milliner's shop, she learns that the feathers that adorn her many hats cost more money than she realized:

My feather cost fifteen dollars! Fifteen dollars! Supposing I had that to buy tulips with? Or in case I had already tulips enough, suppose I had it to buy print gowns for Christmas presents to the women, which I had desired and could not afford? Or that I had it to lay out in tea and sugar, that my poor old friends might oftener have the one solace that was left to them or that more might share it? Fifteen dollars! It was equal to one quarter and a half's allowance. My fund for more than a third of the year would be doubled, if I could turn that black feather into silver or gold again...And now it seemed to me as if my riding cap was heavy with undeveloped bulbs, uncrystalized sugar, unweighed green tea. No transformation of the feather was possible; it must wave over my brow in its old fashion, whether it were a misguided feather or not; but my thoughts, once set a going in this train, found a great deal to do. (105)

In this brief section, Warner employs a rhetorical strategy common in all of her social reform fiction. In this passage, she insists that her audience should, like Daisy Randolph, take personal accountability for the suffering of others. Daisy realizes that she, too, is materially benefitting from the exploitation of her family's slaves, and that the feather in her hat was purchased at the expense of proper food, clothing, or shelter for the seven hundred people forced to work her father's land without pay. The feather is no longer simply an ornament—it represents the “undeveloped bulbs” she could have planted around her slaves' quarters and “uncrystalized sugar” and “unweighed green tea” that might have filled their teacups. Warner's female,

Northern, white readers would have easily recognized that they, too, enjoyed luxuries as frivolous as Daisy's fifteen-dollar feather, and this passage was intended to evoke a similar response from them. The realization that they, too, materially benefitted from the exploitation of others, and that their own feathers and lace could have purchased necessities for those in need undoubtedly weighed heavily on the minds of Warner's Christian readers. Warner's young heroine is deeply affected by her trip to the millenary shop, but her sorrow is only heightened by the terrible news she receives when she returns to the plantation.

When Daisy arrives back at Magnolia, the effects of her reform agenda have been noted by the overseer, who forbids the slaves to attend her Sunday meetings. Daisy must again confront the extent to which her family is depriving the slaves of any material or spiritual comfort, but this time she realizes that these acts are specifically designed to oppress them so that her family can financially benefit from their suffering:

And if anything could have made this bitterer to me, it was the consciousness that the reason of it all was that we might profit by it. Those unpaid hands wrought that our hands might be free to do nothing; those empty cabins were bare, in order that our houses might be full of every soft luxury; those unlettered minds were kept unlettered that the rarest of intellectual wealth might be poured into our treasury. (121)

Daisy's revelation is rendered all the more tragic by the fact that she is completely powerless to do anything to prevent the exploitation and oppression she so thoroughly despises. Although she continues to thwart the overseer by holding prayer meetings and Bible lessons at the slave cemetery and spends every penny of her monthly allowance on her slaves, she becomes depressed when she realizes that her attempts at reform are destined to fail (122-3). When her

former guardian Dr. Sanford unexpectedly arrives at Magnolia, Daisy informs him that she has become an abolitionist, a revelation that is met with praise from her like-minded friend, who calls her “rare as Egyptian glass” (125). But for all her tears and hard work, Daisy has had little positive effect on the plantation. Warner ends this section of the novel rather abruptly, informing her readers that Dr. Sanford will take Daisy north, back to New England, and hence to territory far more familiar to the author herself.

But even though Daisy’s attempts at religious conversion and reform have failed, Warner has proven a valuable point, and her readers have extracted an important moral lesson. When Daisy was confronted with a moral injustice, she did not submit to the authority of those who wielded power over her, but instead challenged the system of oppression at every turn. Daisy will never again return to the South, and the reader is left to assume that it was the Civil War, not Daisy herself, that eventually freed the slaves at Magnolia. But by detailing how a young, female, Christian child used her Bible and her innate sense of Christian morality to tackle an injustice as great as human bondage, Warner empowered her Christian female readers to take up similar projects that are equally radical.

As soon as she leaves the plantation, Daisy returns to the same stores a few chapters later with her abolitionist friend and guardian Dr. Sanford, and this time refuses to purchase expensive feathers and lace, instead choosing more modest clothing so that her servant Margret could have a warm dress and winter coat (159). Daisy’s insistence that Margret be well provided for while she is visiting the North with her mistress, and the fact that Daisy refuses to keep her wages when she is “hired out” to work while Daisy is at school, before ultimately freeing her altogether, indicates that Susan Warner was equally concerned with the fate of the many freedman who were relocating to the north after the war (185, 201). Daisy’s small acts of generosity toward

Margret, Warner may have hoped, would inspire her northern readers to emulate her heroine and sacrifice their own small luxuries and use those funds to improve the lives of former slaves by donating to relief funds and freedman's aid organizations.

The fact the Susan Warner herself took in a former slave as a servant during the late 1860's makes it all the more puzzling that she did not place more narrative emphasis on Margret's emancipation. Other than a brief scene in which Margret visits Daisy at school and thanks her for setting her free, Margret entirely disappears from the novel and its sequel, and Warner's readers are left to wonder about her eventual fate as a free black in north. Warner certainly had far greater firsthand knowledge of the lives of emancipated people working in the post-war North than she had about plantation life in the antebellum South. It is unclear when Bertha Buckner arrived on Constitution Island, but the materials held in the Warner archives indicate that she must have come to work for the Warner family some time during the mid 1860's, and remained there until her death in 1921. In several of the Constitution Island Association's extensive collection of letters, photographs, and other historical material that feature Bertha Buckner and her husband Willis (another freedman), friends and relatives of the Warner sisters describe a relationship that more closely resembles teachers and a pupil than servants and a master. Anne Tracy, a friend of the Warner family, recorded her memories of Bertha her personal journal in 1916. As Tracy recalls, "Miss Warner had taught her almost all she knows...In the evenings, they would sit around the fire and Miss Warner would "hear the lessons" and give some more, and read aloud as Bertha sewed. Miss Warner taught her geography and history and reading and writing "so that I can read the scripture, but though Miss Warner always said she would make me a real good writer I never got on very well with it. My old fingers were so used to other kinds of uses" (2). Warner biographer Mabel Baker paints a

similar portrait in *Light in the Morning*, though she emphasizes that Anna was closer to Bertha than was Susan. “Bertha was Anna’s almost daily companion,” she writes, “throughout their friendship Anna cared for Bertha in ways her friends thought unusual...if Bertha became ill while Anna was away on a visit, she would put aside her own plans and return if she felt Bertha needed her help and presence” (116). Clearly, both Susan Warner and her sister were close personal friends with their servants Bertha and Willis, both of whom lived on Constitution Island for most of their lives, and would almost certainly have conversed about Bertha and Willis’s experiences as free blacks in the post-war north on the many nights they spent together on Constitution Island in the forty years they lived together. Though neither Anna’s biography or any surviving material from the Constitution Island Association’s archives record such a conversation, we know from Olive Adams, another Warner family friend, that Willis Buckner shared his memories of bondage with the neighborhood children on at least one occasion, even going so far as to show them the scars on his back left by the overseer’s whip.³⁰ Susan Warner likely drew much of her inspiration for *Daisy* from her relationship with Bertha and Willis Buckner, and the relationship she describes between Margaret and her young protagonist is very nearly as intimate, if more short-lived, as the one that flourished between her sister and Bertha Buckner in the decades that followed the publication of Warner’s novel. Perhaps Warner knew as early as 1865 that Anna planned to devote so much time and energy to Bertha’s education, and modeled her young heroine after a trait she admired in her younger sister. And perhaps she hoped that by writing a protagonist who selflessly sacrificed her own comfort to help those in need, she would encourage other evangelical women of the north to do the same. What is certain, though, is that Susan Warner, like her sister Anna, was both personally and professionally dedicated to improving the lives of former slaves in the 1860’s. Though she would never again

write any fiction that addressed slavery or reconstruction, her later writings reflect the same dedication to the evangelical reform movement that she begun to explore in *Daisy*.

In their next series of novels, *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree*, Susan and Anna Warner revisit the character of the young, wealthy, heiress, but this time, they present a model of social reform that their female readers can successfully enact and they outline a theology that reform that nineteenth-century Christians can readily embrace. Though it would take them nearly a decade to do so, both Susan Warner and her sister would perfect their formula for female, Christian activism, and the *Daisy* series, flawed as they may be, represent an important, formative stage in Warner's career as a writer and an intellectual.

CHAPTER 5

OF FACTORIES AND FAIRY TALES:

WEALTH AND POVERTY IN *WYCH HAZEL* AND *THE GOLD OF CHICKAREE*

No other prominent women writers of the era were as directly affected by the many crashes and panics that characterized the nineteenth-century economic marketplace as Susan and Anna Warner. Their father Henry Whiting Warner, a lawyer by trade, had amassed a considerable fortune speculating on real estate during the sisters' youth, only to lose everything in the Panic of 1837, forcing Susan, Anna, and their Aunt Fanny to relocate to a small farmhouse on Constitution Island, a property that Henry had originally purchased as an investment. By 1848, Henry was deep in debt to speculators and creditors. As Anna Warner recalls in her biography of Susan:

...certain men got hold of a mortgage on some city lots which my father still held. They were foreclosed at a season when most buyers were out of town, and my father away; bought in the property themselves for less than the face of the mortgage (it being worth much more), turned about, and sued my father on the bond. Crippled by his old losses, he could not meet the new demand: it was a time of great business depression, and we were "the wheel going down the hill." (278)

In 1857, following another panic, the mortgage on Constitution Island, the last remaining piece of Henry Warner's once vast real estate fortune, was again called into foreclosure by the son of a close family friend who had held the mortgage since the crash of 1837. As Anna recalls:

It was a very 'tight' year said the monied men, hard, at times, even for the wealthy people to get a hold of ready cash. My father's friend had died, leaving to his son the care of our small matter; but we felt no uneasiness on that score. Then

one day this gentleman sent my father word that the last payment would fall due on such a time, and he could not meet it. A part he could furnish, if we could find the rest. (376)

In order to keep their island home, Susan and Anna Warner had to part with all of the money they managed to accumulate from the sales of their books. In the nearly four decades following the crash of 1837, the sisters wrote prolifically, but although their novels sold reasonably well, they were never able to earn more than a modest income, and lived a comfortably, if humbly, on Constitution Island for the rest of their lives. But neither sister ever forgot the life of luxury in which they were raised, the pain which resulted from the sudden loss of their family fortune, or the social standing which accompanied it. Susan, in particular, developed a strong dislike for the elite upper-class society that had rejected her. In her journal, she describes an interaction with a former friend that left her feeling insulted. “Mrs. Codwise,” she writes in December of 1850, “had been dwelling for two days on the proposal that we should occupy their cottage on Staten Island for the winter! There is good society there, she says! Does she think we have grown Polar bears, in our poverty? . . . Those people! Anna says one can understand how Sodom might have been spared if there had been ten righteous men in it” (332). However biased Anna’s text might be, *Susan Warner: or Elizabeth Wetherell* is the only surviving document to chronicle this turbulent and emotional time in the sisters’ lives. And from this text we can extract two important facts: 1) that Susan and Anna Warner had developed an intense distrust for the both the upper class and the source of its wealth, free-market capitalism and 2) both sisters believed that evangelical Christianity provided the solution to the economic injustices they had suffered.

Christianity, if we are to believe Anna Warner, rescued the young Susan in her darkest moment. It gave her life a sense of purpose in the absence of wealth and material comfort. It

offered alternative meaning to her life when a materialistic, capitalistic, often shallow world of high society that had turned its back on her. It gave her the strength to keep walking on when her former friends shunned her on the street. Susan and her sister devoted their entire careers and their considerable talent to writing fiction that celebrated their faith. They were also lifelong advocates of Christian social reform. As I have discussed in previous chapters, their writings strongly support missionary work, alleviation of urban poverty, the abolition of slavery, and the rebuilding of the post-Civil War South according to Christian principles. They both shared a vision of America as a nation whose values were dictated by Christian morality. These beliefs, and the passionate way they expressed them in their writing, put them at odds with the materialistic, ethos of the Gilded Age. In 1876, the Warner sisters coauthored a pair of novels that explore alternatives to Industrial-era capitalism. In *Wych Hazel*, and its sequel, *The Gold of Chickaree*, Susan and Anna Warner tell the story of how a young, wealthy heiress and her equally wealthy fiancée reject the leisurely lifestyle of the upper class and dedicate their lives (and considerable fortunes) to the construction of a Christian, capitalist utopia in a nearby mill town.

Over the course of these two lengthy texts, Susan and Anna introduce their readers to a young heroine named Wych Hazel, and through her eyes, they describe the economic and social inequality of Gilded Age America. The first of these two novels, named for the heroine herself, tells the story of a restless, intelligent young lady struggling to find meaning and purpose in a life lived solely in pursuit of her own happiness. Set against the backdrop of mansions, lawn games, horseback rides, and balls, *Wych Hazel* describes in luscious detail the daily lives of the wealthiest members of American society. Their protagonist is the unfortunate product of such a society: she is headstrong, shallow, and almost impossibly naïve. Because she has spent her

youth entirely in the company of novels, she has developed unrealistic expectations for her life. She conceives of herself as a fairy-tale princess and desires only to “seek her fortune” by relentlessly chasing adventure. As the sole heir to a vast fortune, she is well aware of the life she is expected to lead and constantly challenges her guardian Mr. Falkirk every time he dares to mention marriage. In spite of the fact that she enjoys a life of almost limitless luxury and freedom, Wych Hazel is bored and dissatisfied and is actively seeking an alternative to the life she has been so carefully groomed to lead. Evangelical Christianity is, expectedly, the solution to all of Wych’s problems. But before their young heroine can fully embrace the Christian faith, she must sacrifice both the life of luxury and the limited independence her inherited wealth affords her. She must abandon her novel-fueled fantasies of limitless freedom and adventure and accept a humbler, though more meaningful life devoted to the service of others. Such a heroine, Susan and Anna believed, could potentially inspire the wealthy women of nineteenth-century America to follow her example and devote their lives to helping the poor and their own resources to improving the lives of less fortunate. If the Christian women of America worked together according to these guiding principles, they could, the Warners hoped, remake American society according to their own values.

Susan and Anna Warner drew heavily from their own experiences as former members of the upper class in the construction of this heroine. Perhaps more than any of the sisters’ other novels apart from Anna’s *Dollars and Cents*, *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree* were inspired by the Warner sisters’ own lives. Susan, and to a lesser extent her sister Anna, both knew quite a bit about sacrificing wealth and luxury. But unlike their heroine, neither sister did so by choice. The humility and selflessness that their heroine must work so hard to cultivate in herself was essentially forced upon them by circumstance, and they used these novels as an

opportunity to reimagine their own path to virtuousness. *Wych Hazel* is so similar to the young Susan Warner that it seems as if she was purposefully modeled on Susan's recollections of her early life as a young lady. Like the young Susan Warner, *Wych Hazel* is living a life that, while comfortable and pleasurable, lacks meaning and purpose. Evangelical Christianity provides both for *Wych Hazel*, just as it undoubtedly did for her creators. *Wych Hazel* allowed Susan and Anna Warner to rewrite the story of their own religious conversion as they wished it would have happened and as they hoped it would happen to other women who were born wealthy. Susan and Anna genuinely believed in the redemptive power of self-sacrifice. As Susan wrote in her journal in January of 1871, as she and Anna were immersed in writing these novels "To live quite according to the Bible, what a deep, high, difficult, rare, hidden thing it is. To die to self-then live to the Lord" (463).

In *The Gold of Chickaree*, Susan and Anna describe the reforms that could be achieved if the wealthy imitated their heroine and not only embraced evangelical morals and values, but applied these values to industrial-era capitalism. In the sequel to *Wych Hazel*, the Warner sisters outline a strategy for Christian social reform that addresses the roots of social injustice—income inequality. Rather than offer the poor resident of a nearby mill town crusts of bread and Bible verses, *Wych Hazel* helps her husband Rollo construct a Christian utopia in which benevolence and sympathy drive the economy. In *The Gold of Chickaree*, Susan and Anna imagine a kinder capitalist system in which the wealthy conduct their business in accordance with Christian principles. In the community they imagine, *Wych Hazel* and her new husband are not only employers, but also caretakers who provide for their workers spiritual as well as physical needs. It is a vision of labor relations that is both paternalistic and progressive: along with higher wages, a shortened work day, clean and affordable housing, and other reforms, the residents of the

Warners' ideal mill community could also expect weekly temperance lectures, frequent social calls from the Visiting Committee, and even more frequent Bible readings. Inspired by the leaders of evangelical reform movement, Susan and Anna Warner genuinely believed that in such a community strikes and other labor disputes would not be necessary, as the workers would be so thankful for the benevolence of the factory owners that they would come to idolize them and perform their daily labors graciously and humbly. At the end of *The Gold of Chickaree*, Wych Hazel and Rollo are celebrated and revered by the members of the community they have built, a community in which every aspect of work and home life is performed in the direct service of God. Susan and Anna Warner would have desperately longed to live there.

As this pair of lengthy novels reveals, for Susan and Anna Warner, labor reform could only be accomplished by first reforming the capitalists themselves. If more members of the upper class abandoned their lives of frivolous luxury and embraced evangelical values, and vowed to conduct business in accordance with Christian morals and ethics, they would reform not only their factories but the communities that surrounded them and, potentially, the workers themselves. It was a vision of industrial-era capitalism free of vice and flush with Christian virtue. It was, in short, a vision of reform that could only have been dreamed up by a pair of devout Christian women who once counted themselves among the wealthy.

“SEEKING HER FORTUNE”: *WYCH HAZEL* AND THE YOUNG SUSAN WARNER

Unlike many of the Warner sisters' other heroines, Wych Hazel is not born a perfect Christian woman, but must become one. Unlike Ellen Montgomery, Fleda Rinnegan, and Daisy Randolph, Wych Hazel has never even held a Bible and knows next to nothing about evangelical Christianity. She has never suffered from either emotional or financial hardship. Like Daisy

Randolph, she spent her youth in luxury and has a nearly limitless income at her disposal. Like Ellen Montgomery and Fleda Rinnegan, she is an orphan whose parents entrusted her to the care of a guardian but unlike her predecessors, she has enjoyed a life of comfort and stability and has been nurtured into adulthood without ever having to care for herself. No other character in the Warners' extensive catalog of fiction so closely resembles the young Susan Warner. In this first novel, Susan and Anna invest their heroine with all the virtues, and all the vices, of Susan herself, in order to demonstrate how a life devoted only to the selfish pursuit of one's one pleasures is selfish and hollow compared to a life lived in service of God.

When Susan and Anna Warner introduce their newest heroine, they immediately make it clear to their readers that both her demeanor and her aspirations are heavily influenced by fiction and fantasy. From the moment we first encounter the young Wych Hazel, she is portrayed as naïve, headstrong, idealistic, and shallow. "Mr. Falkirk," she boldly declares, "I must go out and seek my fortune." She explains to her guardian that she has recently read these lines, and agreed with the sentiment so whole-heartedly that she now believes that she must "belong in a fairy-tale somewhere" (4). Wych Hazel and her guardian Mr. Falkirk have been living away from her large estate while she completed school, and now, on a whim, Wych has decided that they will depart for Chickaree on the next stage, and begin the adventurous process of "unfolding" her "possibilities" (9). Wych Hazel has, the Warners reveal, read entirely too many novels, and as a result, views her own life in entirely novelistic terms. Every time the young heroine reflects on her identity, her behavior, or her future, she compares herself to fiction, myth, or legend, a habit that is clearly derived from too much time spent buried in the pages of her books.

The Warners' readers would have noted that Wych Hazel was extraordinarily well read, a trait she shared with her creators, but particularly with Susan, who was fortunate enough to

receive the benefits of an extensive education before her family's financial ruin. As her journals from childhood and early adolescence reveal, Susan was a prolific reader and an accomplished student: she was well versed in history, read Latin, French and Italian, practiced piano diligently, and was familiar with the works of Bunyan, Shakespeare, and Sir Walter Scott, among others. As many young women of her era were encouraged to do, Susan Warner kept a detailed record of her daily lessons in her journal. In an entry from January 10th, 1833, Susan describes a typical day of study. "This morning," she writes, "I got my grammar lesson, and played an hour, and read one or two pages of Goldsmith's England" (49). Later that month, on January 30th, Susan describes another day spent studying. "Not so long as usual about my Latin this morning," she recalls, "and I took my music lesson, and read the greatest part of my history before dinner, after which we went to dancing school" (57). As Mary Kelley notes in *Private Women, Public Stage*, Susan Warner was educated in a manner befitting white, upper class young woman. "Both daughters," she observes, "were provided opportunities available only to the children of privileged families," such as access to the extensive personal library maintained by their father and the funds to hire a series of experienced tutors (87). Like many other wealthy young women of her era, Susan Warner's education had, according to Kelley, one primary purpose: to secure her a position as a "gentlemen's wife" (90). Wych Hazel has, presumably, been educated in a similar fashion, though Susan and Anna Warner chose not to emphasize this fact to their readers. Wych's early education is never discussed in the Warners' novel, apart from a few brief mentions of her time spent at an unknown school (2, 3). But her ability to quote easily (and accurately) from Longfellow, Shakespeare, and occasionally speak a few lines of Italian indicates that, like Susan and to a lesser extent, Anna, Wych has been educated in a manner befitting a young lady of her stature.

Wych Hazel spends the early portions of the novel cleverly side-stepping any questions Rollo (or anyone else) poses about her plans for marriage and her future. Every time Mr. Falkirk broaches these topics, Wych responds with a carefully-selected literary allusion. When her guardian makes the mistake of mentioning marriage one foggy morning on the steps of the boarding house where they are temporarily residing, she dreamily stares off into the fog and compares herself to Longfellow's *Evangeline*, who "saw her way all clear when she reached the mountain-top" (31). A few pages later, Wych decides to embark on an adventure herself, and hikes up the nearest mountain, upsetting Mr. Falkirk and her other traveling companions, who send out a search party to locate her. When she is discovered by Dane Rollo, the man who will eventually become her husband, and he chastises her for putting herself in a potentially dangerous situation before offering to lead her back to safety, she quickly asserts her independence, declaring, "I know the way by which I came perfectly... I never submit voluntarily to anybody's guidance" (53). They return to the boarding house, where Mr. Falkirk demands to know her whereabouts, and Wych Hazel compares herself to one of Britain's most lauded heroes, noting that she was merely "following the steps" of her "great predecessor, King Alfred" by "retiring from the enemy, sir, and being obliged to meet the Dane" (55). Alfred the Great was, in fact, a real ruler of medieval England, but Wych Hazel's allusion to the famous king was likely based more upon legend than fact, as Alfred the Great was mythologized in the Victorian Era by writers like Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle almost as often as King Arthur.³¹ Susan and Anna's readers would have interpreted Wych's reference in the same way they might had she mentioned Robin Hood or the Knights of Round Table. They would have immediately recognized that Wych was easily taken in by fantasy and myth, and noted the reference as further evidence that the young lady had spent far too much time in the company of

books, and as a result, had developed an overactive imagination. And Susan and Anna Warner knew firsthand just how dangerous too much novel reading could be for young women like Wych Hazel.

Like her heroine, the young Susan Warner was an avid reader of novels and romances. Sir Walter Scott was a particular favorite of both Susan and her father, and she records in her journals that she had read many of his works, including *Guy Manning* (1815), *The Black Dwarf* (1816), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), and *The Legend of Montrose* (1819) (Weiss 68, 70, 72). Warner was also a devoted fan of Maria Edgeworth, and recalls borrowing a copy of *Helen* (1834) from her aunt, which kept her up most of the night, alone with her thoughts. “I read a long while in it, and what was the consequence?” she recalled, “I sat long, long, after we came up to bed, thinking; and though I got up some time before them this morning, the same thing went on, and I just got down to breakfast, from my thoughts. Oh how wretched it is to do so; I hate it, and yet scarcely struggle against it” (A. Warner 164). Susan Warner was clearly aware that reading novels late into the night was having a negative effect, and chided herself for doing such a “wretched” thing, but admitted that she enjoyed her bad habit, and could “scarcely struggle against it,” though she knew she should resist the temptation. According to Anna (who hated novels herself), reading novels was the primary cause of Susan’s nervous disposition. Because she read novels, Anna argues, Susan was “afraid of storms, burglars, steamboats, and horses, and cattle; of worms, snakes, mice, bats, and caterpillars” (98). According to her sister, Susan’s nerves became so bad that she could scarcely leave the house because she was irrationally afraid of what may be lurking outside. “Her nervous imagination” Anna recalls, “fostered this indoor life; with slippery hills, and creeping things, and strange

wayfarers along the road, —all sorts of unknown possibilities everywhere—the sheltering walls of the house seemed delightful, and she left them as little as she could” (125).

While novel reading seems to have caused the young Susan Warner to become something of a recluse because she couldn't prevent herself from conjuring up imaginary threats, she also put her imaginative abilities to positive use by frequently entertaining her Aunt and younger sister with “talking stories” that she had dreamed up (A. Warner 156-158). Reading novels has the same effect on Wych Hazel; it empowers her rather than terrifies her. But as I have discussed in previous chapters, Anna Warner's interpretation of her sister's reading habits was heavily influenced by the conventional belief that novels were a corrupting force on young women, a belief that Susan at least partially shared. Although both sisters found novel reading distasteful, they both were aware that reading could, potentially, be a catalyst for social change. But in order for novels to change the world, women like Wych Hazel had to learn to read them correctly. And because so many of the Warners' novels culminate in the heroine's eventual marriage, it is unsurprising that Dane Rollo, Wych's future husband, is the one to teach her this important interpretative ability.

In one of her earliest encounters with Rollo, Wych is reading *I Promessi Sposi, or The Betrothed* (1827), an Italian historical novel by Alessandro Manzoni. After she describes the plot to him while he briefly peruses her copy, he adamantly expresses his disapproval. Wych Hazel is drawn to the novel, she explains, because the characters cannot escape the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves: the betrothed lovers are both peasants, and are kept from marrying because a wealthy landowner wants the bride for himself, forcing the two to wander through the 16th century Italian countryside and confront poverty, plague, and war. Upon hearing the details of the lovers' suffering, Rollo immediately asks why Wych finds this novel so

appealing. “Do you think,” he asks, “the people in the book are real people while you are reading it?” When she argues that realistically-rendered characters would make the story less interesting, Rollo informs her that he is only concerned with the problems of actual poor people. “For instance,” he says, “in real life the people who cannot help being in difficulties never interest me as much as the people who get out of them; and so I think most novels are stupid, because the men and women are all real to me. There!” (93). On the surface, Rollo’s condemnation of novel-reading appears quite conventional. Like many of the Warners’ readers, and even Susan and Anna Warner themselves, Rollo believes that reading too many novels is a dangerous habit for young women like Wych Hazel. But by revealing that fact that he dislikes novels because he cannot help comparing the suffering of fictional people to real life, Rollo is, in essence, making an argument in support of novels rather than denouncing them. If novels like *I Promessi Sposi* successfully convince their readers to emotionally relate to the suffering of fictional people as though they were real, the empathy readers feel for the poor and downtrodden peasants of Manzoni’s novel might inspire them to offer aid to their real-life counterparts. Susan and Anna Warner hoped that their own novels would evoke similar feelings of empathy in their readers, and that their descriptions of the suffering endured by laborers in the textile mills would encourage social and political change. Although Rollo’s brief lesson in how to read a novel is all but lost on the young protagonist, the Warners’ readers would have immediately grasped his point and prepared themselves for the descriptions of poverty and suffering that were sure to follow. Unfortunately, they would have to wait several hundred pages for Rollo to introduce Wych Hazel to the “real people” that populate the nearby mill town.

Dane Rollo is certainly not the first of the Warners’ male protagonist to take such an active interest in the heroine’s reading. As Suzanne Ashworth notes in “Susan Warner’s *The*

Wide, Wide World, Conduct Literature, and Protocols of Female Reading in Mid Nineteenth-Century America,” Ellen Montgomery’s reading was the primary means by which John Humphreys regulated the heroine’s spiritual and emotional development. This “fathered-reading,” in which John “selects the books” and “prohibits her from reading fiction or novels” while “schooling her in reading aloud” in order to “shape her responses to texts” he assigns are all, according to Ashworth, means by which Ellen’s future husband ensured that she would mature into suitable Christian wife whose beliefs exactly mirrored his own (153-55). The Warner sisters were intimately familiar with this model of male-dominated reading. As Mary Kelley notes, Henry Warner oversaw Susan’s reading and not only ensured that she was reading the proper texts, but frequently quizzed her on daily studies (86).

Dane Rollo’s objection to Wych’s interpretation of Manzoni’s text, while not as detailed a form of instruction as John Humphreys provides for Ellen, helps him achieve a similar goal. In order for Wych Hazel to transform from the shallow and materialistic belle to a Christian female exemplar capable of assisting Rollo with his reform efforts, she must learn feel the same sympathy for the actual poor that she has for the characters in Manzoni’s novel. But Wych Hazel, at this early point in the novel, is not yet capable of drawing such connections because she cannot yet distinguish the catharsis she experiences when she reads about the suffering of fictional people from the actual empathy she should feel when she witnesses actual suffering firsthand. It is not until she meets her elderly Christian neighbor Dr. Maryland that she begins to recognize the extent to which the novels she reads have distorted the expectations she has for her own life.

Wych Hazel first meets Dr. Maryland when, while out once again “seeking her fortune” by riding her horse alone through the countryside surrounding her estate, she is caught in an

unexpected rain storm. Luckily, she happens to meet Dane Rollo, who leads her to Dr. Maryland's cottage, where they wait out the storm while talking over toast and tea. As the conversation turns to Wych and her plans for her new life at Chickaree, she once again repeats her conviction that she craves adventure and loathes the ordinary and mundane and confidently announces that she has no plans because "people in fairy tales never do." Unlike Mr. Falkirk, Dr. Maryland does not accept this response. "Life is not a fairy tale, Hazel," he tells her; "you are a real woman. Did you ever think what you would try to do in the world? What you would do with your life?" (123). For the first time in the novel, Wych's fantasies are called into question. As Dr. Maryland gently chides her, it becomes clear that he views Wych Hazel's ambition to lead a life solely devoted to the pursuit of her own pleasure (as the heroines of her favorite novels do) as both unrealistic and misguided. Instead of being amused by her shallow and somewhat silly responses to his very serious inquiries (as Mr. Falkirk so often is), Dr. Maryland seems almost offended by Wych's superficial comments. Wych's life, Dr. Maryland observes, has been dedicated solely to the pursuit of her own happiness, and it lacks both purpose and meaning. But Dr. Maryland quickly proposes a solution. If Wych Hazel embraces evangelical Christianity and devotes her life to serving God, she will no longer need to worry about her life being mundane, ordinary, or boring. "If you set about doing what God would have you to do with yourself," Dr. Maryland tells her, "there will be no dullness in your life, and no lack of enjoyment, either." Wych Hazel will no longer need to seek out fairy-tale inspired adventures to make her life more interesting, Dr. Maryland tells her, because her devotion to the Christ will instantly give every daily interaction purpose. "It glorifies what is insignificant," he says, "dignifies what is mean, and lifts what is low, and turns the poor little business steps of every day into rounds of Heaven's golden ladder" (124). In this short exchange, Dr. Maryland is able to do what no other character

in the novel has—he correctly identifies the real reason the young debutante has been reading so many novels and why she so desperately seeks out adventure at every opportunity. Wych Hazel, despite all her wealth and privilege, is painfully bored, and has been turning to novels and fairy tales for clues as to how she might lead a more interesting existence.

And as Susan Warner herself knew firsthand, the life of a young, intelligent, upper-class white woman could be incredibly boring. “I do not think,” Susan wrote in her journal in 1836, “I have been much more usefully employed today than I was yesterday” (Weiss 22). At the age of twelve, Susan’s life consisted of a seemingly endless stream of piano lessons, study sessions, and reading. Her schedule varied little from day to day, and her journal entries from her early adolescence reflect her growing frustrations with the monotony of her daily routines. “Must I say again” she writes a few days later, “that I did nothing worth mentioning yesterday? I afraid the fact is so; at least I cannot call to mind anything useful. I did just what I have done for several days past” (23). Her life was so incredibly dull that she barely saw any point in keeping a journal at all, and often put the practice off for several days or weeks. “Some time has passed,” she confesses, “since I last wrote, but indeed there is so little variety that I don’t much love to write” (A Warner 156). At times, she believed that her life was so insignificant that her journal was merely “a collection of nothings” (95). Entries like these, which are numerous and can be found on nearly every page of her early journals, describe a young woman who was not only bored, but sincerely desired to be more “useful.” These journals were, as far as we can tell, the only records Susan Warner had of her own adolescence, the only means by which she could access a life that had long since disappeared. By the 1870’s, the Warner family’s former wealth was only a distant memory, and her own descriptions of the elaborate silk dresses, the evenings spent at balls, and even the complaints of a bored young aristocrat must have seemed quite foreign to a woman who

had been struggling with poverty for nearly three decades. Susan and Anna knew very little about the lives of young, wealthy women of their own time, and hence relied heavily on Susan's early life in the creation of their newest heroine. Like the young Susan Warner, Wych Hazel feels unproductive and idle, and because of this, she turns to fiction and fantasy in search of the stimulation she craves. But as Dr. Maryland points out, there is an alternative means by which the young, wealthy heroine might find meaning and purpose in her life—evangelical Christian activism.

Wych Hazel is not yet convinced that living a life solely dedicated to serving God would be any more rewarding than the life she is currently living. "All the nice, proper people I have ever seen" she tells Dr. Maryland, "are just like peach trees trimmed up and nailed to a wall. I'd rather be a wild wych hazel in the woods, though it's of no sort of use, and nobody cares for it!" (125). Susan and Anna's readers would have immediately recognized Wych's metaphor. Susan K. Harris notes in *Interpretative Strategies*, in nineteenth-century women's fiction, "the association of specific flowers with specific meanings had become a symbolic code, in large part reflecting liberal Protestantism's assumption that nature reflects God's intentions." As Harris observes, Susan Warner and other exploratory novelists relied on a series of symbolic references, such as the language of flowers, to convey meaning in the absence of a strong narrator. In Susan Warner's *Queechy*, Harris explains, "flower symbolism is also linked to the valuation of Christian piety. The linkage creates a decoding device, a series of associations, that helps readers locate and interpret the central problem of the text" (80). Wych Hazel is, like her namesake, wild and untamable. She loathes the idea of confinement, and would rather be idle and free and than serve only as ornamentation, like the carefully manicured "peach trees" that line the garden walls of her estate. According to Wych, these are the only two options available for upper-class

women like herself. But as Dr. Maryland quickly reveals, she has another option, one that would allow her to retain her strong sense of individuality but still serve an important social function. “Suppose, my dear,” he says, “the bush were a conscious thing; and suppose that while it remained in the woods and remained entirely itself, it could yet by being submitted to some sweet influence be made so fragrant that its influence should be known all through the forest; and its nuts, instead of being wild, useless things, should every one of them bring a gift of healing or of life to the hands that should gather them?” (126). Using the culturally-coded language of flowers, Susan and Anna Warner articulate here their vision for the proper role of upper-class women in nineteenth-century society. Like the medicinal wild-flower they named their heroine for, they have the potential to heal. They can contribute. They can be useful. And they do not have to sacrifice either their femininity (a wild flower is, after all, still a flower, and retains its feminine characteristics) or their individual will (they can remain “in the woods”). But like Wych Hazel, they need to “submit to the sweet influence” of evangelical Christianity. And Susan and Anna Warner will show them what they can accomplish should they do so.

Wych Hazel spends the next several chapters of the novel entertaining company, attending parties, riding her horse, arguing with Mr. Falkirk, and socializing with the other aristocratic families in her community. While Dane Rollo is often present at these gatherings, the reader hears very little about him other than the fact that he has used his own considerable fortune to purchase a mill in the nearby town of Mill Hollow and has begun making drastic changes to both the mill and the community in which it operates. As rumors begin to circulate among her friends that Rollo will be driven out of business due to lack of profitability, Wych grows more and more curious about Rollo and his new project. When he invites her to join him on a tour of his property while out horseback riding one afternoon, Wych eagerly accepts. As

they ride through the poverty-stricken community, the Warners' heroine learns for the first time that her life could have a purpose beyond the pursuit of pleasure. Wych is deeply inspired by Rollo's plans to build a better community at Mill Hollow (plans which I will discuss at length later in this chapter) as she begins to realize the wisdom of Dr. Maryland's advice. As Rollo outlines his plan for their proposed partnership, and articulates the role she could play in the creation of his idyllic community should she accept his marriage proposal, Wych Hazel is enticed by the notion that she and Rollo would be equal partners in the project, and that Rollo appears to genuinely value her input.³² As he tours her through the mills and patiently explains the function of each machine, while "taking pains to make her familiar with the philosophy of the subject, as well its history" before soliciting her advice on the construction of new homes for the workers, the proper arrangement of the community gardens, and the importance of keeping children under the age of twelve from working instead of attending school, it becomes clear to Wych Hazel that not only is there important work for her to perform at Mill Hollow, but that she will be given free reign to carry out this work as she sees fit (488). Unlike the many suitors with whom she has danced at balls and challenged at croquet, Dane Rollo values her intellect, and the life he offers her allows for her to retain the independence she values while providing her with the sense of purpose she craves. But while she agrees to marry Rollo shortly after their tour of the mills, Wych Hazel is not yet ready to fulfill the role he imagines for her. In order for her to help Rollo realize his dream, Wych Hazel must learn the importance of self-sacrifice and convert to Christianity—and that conversion will require her to give up the many of the luxuries to which she has become accustomed.

Almost immediately after she accepts Rollo's marriage proposal, her husband-to-be begins to inquire about Wych Hazel's choice of dresses. When she learns from her friend

Primrose that Rollo has been questioning whether she could accept a humbler style of clothing, Wych confronts him and demands that he explain his critique of her toilet. His explanation of the importance of sacrificing small personal luxuries in order to provide the less fortunate with the necessities of life would be instantly recognizable to fans of Susan Warner's fiction. Rollo remarks that he has often seen his bride-to-be wear an expensive hat adorned with a feather from an exotic bird, and explains that a seemingly insignificant luxury can have immense social impact:

Suppose I could show you that the pretty brown plume represented what would keep a certain poor family from suffering through the winter months... Then I could tell you of a poor invalid, to whom a few weeks in the country would be life and health; but she cannot stop work. Or I could tell you of a family just turned out of house and home because illness has made them behindhand with the rent. I could show you friendless children, to one of whom your feather would give safety and food for a year. Or feeble and ailing people, to whom it would supply the delicacies they cannot get nor do without. Or poor ministers, to whom it could go in an invaluable parcel of books. Or ignorant poor, seeking instruction, to whom it would be months of schooling. And then, I should but have given you samples, Hazel, which you might multiply by the hundred and the thousand, and still keep far within the literal fact. (173)

Susan Warner has used this example before, and to the same end. In *Daisy* (1863), it is the exact same article of clothing that prompts Daisy Randolph to recognize that the luxuries she enjoyed were purchased with the profits from her father's cotton plantation, and that the vast fortune she would one day inherit was obtained at the expense thousands of slaves who suffered there (105).

Unlike Daisy Randolph, Wych Hazel has not directly from the suffering of her fellow man. The feathers that adorn her many expensive hats were not purchased with money gleaned from slavery. The reader does not know, and never discovers, the source of Wych Hazel's seemingly infinite wealth. And perhaps because only indirectly benefitting from the exploitation of others, Wych Hazel has difficulty grasping how her coats, dresses, and other luxuries affect the lives of the factory workers her future husband employs. It takes Rollo several pages to explain that he is not merely calling her "extravagant" but is instead suggesting that the vast fortune the couple will soon share could be better spent on their reform efforts, rather than on expensive clothing and lavish parties for themselves (173-175). But readers would have immediately recognized the authors' point, though it is initially lost on the heroine herself. Humility and self-sacrifice are Christian virtues, and Wych Hazel is not, at this point in the novels, a Christian herself. But in order to join Rollo in his reform efforts, she must become one.

Although she is lectured to nearly constantly by Rollo, Dr. Maryland, and her friend Primrose about Christian virtues and the importance of the Bible, Wych Hazel does not convert to Christianity until very late in the novel's progression. When she finally feels compelled to open her Bible and pray, she does so seemingly out of desperation. When Rollo is called to Mill Hollow to help tend to the victims of a "contagious sickness," Wych Hazel is so distraught that she turns to her Bible for comfort. In the brief scene that follows, she struggles to comprehend the meaning of verses as she reads them over and over again to herself as she cries. "It was very bitter," the Warners write, "the struggle was sharp and long; and duty and possibility, and wrong and right, fought each other and fired upon their own men" (196). Wych pours over verse after verse in search of comfort as she fears for Rollo's life. She questions whether she can, or should, agree to become Rollo's wife if doing so meant that she must turn her entire life over to the

service of God. She wonders if she is capable of making such a promise. She struggles to hear the voice of God on the pages. “Back and forth, back and forth, went thoughts and will and purpose: sometimes almost persuaded, sometimes all up in arms. Something gentler than need was lacking, something stronger than fear must work. Slowly and sadly she turned over the leaves, far on and on, to the other marked point: seeing them then, those common words of print that she had read so often, seeing them then in letters of flashing light” (198). After three pages of tormented, almost forced, reading, Wych Hazel vocalizes her faith, and promises to live her life to the service of Christ (198). It is a conversion scene that has no parallel in the rest of the Warners’ extensive catalog. In the dozens of novels composed by Susan and Anna Warner over the course of their long career, none contains a heroine struggling so violently with the Christian faith as does Wych Hazel. In fact, most of their heroines never experience conversion at all. With the notable exception of Ellen Montgomery, who is taught the finer points of Christian virtue by the kind and patient Humphreys family, most of the Warners’ heroines are devout Christians from childhood, and never struggle with, or even question, their own faith. If Anna Warner’s biography is to be believed, Susan Warner’s herself never experienced a conversion as painful as Wych Hazel’s. Though she wrestled with the finer points of evangelical doctrine during her own conversion from Presbyterianism to Methodism, nothing in her journals or in Anna’s biography suggests that she struggled to accept the basic premises of Christianity in the same way as her protagonist. (Of Anna Warner’s conversion, we know nothing at all.)

Regardless of how she came to believe it, Susan Warner’s faith in evangelical Christianity was undeniably powerful and the description of Wych Hazel’s conversion is poignantly rendered. Perhaps Susan and Anna were compelled to write such a dramatic conversion because they had constructed Wych Hazel to so closely resemble Susan herself

before she embraced God. Like her protagonist, Susan Warner found Christianity partially out of necessity. Evangelicalism provided both Susan and Anna Warner with a profound sense of purpose and meaning when their wealth and privilege were being stripped away. It prompted them to turn their attention away from their own suffering and to focus instead of alleviating the suffering of others. Both women genuinely believed in the power of evangelical Christianity to change the world for the better. They believed that if their wealthy readers emulated their heroine and embraced a life of service to both God and their community, the problems inherent in the industrial capitalist system, such as income inequality, unequal access to healthcare, education, lack of material and spiritual comforts, and a host of others, would vanish almost instantly, leaving behind a Christian utopia to be enjoyed by both the owners and producers of wealth. And in the last few chapters of their lengthy pair of novels, they outline exactly how such a community might be constructed, and, more importantly, by whom.

“AS FULL OF BUSINESS AS OF ROSES”: SUSAN AND ANNA’S CHRISTIAN, CAPITALIST UTOPIA

During the late 1860’s and early 1870’s, as the Warners were composing the sequel to *Wych Hazel*, which they titled *The Gold of Chickaree*, both secular and religious reformers had been grappling with “The Labor Question” on the pages of periodicals and pamphlets. Susan and Anna Warner’s readers would have been quite accustomed to reading lengthy descriptions of the deplorable living and working conditions in New England textile mills. They would have remembered the Lowell Factory Girls, and may even have read excerpts from their self-published newspaper *The Lowell Offering* (1840-1845) or perused one of the widely-distributed tracts published by The Female Labor Reform Association of Lowell, Massachusetts. They very likely would have read at least one of the dozens of poems, stories, ballads, and novels that

Judith Ranta lists in *Women and Children of the Mills: An Annotated Guide to Nineteenth-Century American Textile Factory Literature*. They may have agreed with Catherine Beecher, who began her anti-suffrage essay “Something for Women Better than the Ballot” (1869) with the observation that “the next political struggle that will agitate this country... will be that of labor and capital” and shuddered as they imagined that “factory girls” who “must must stand eight and ten hours a day, often in a poisonous atmosphere, causing the decay constitution, and forbidding healthful offspring” (81). They would have remembered the day in January of 1860 when the Pemberton Mill in Lawrence Massachusetts collapsed, trapping hundreds of men, women, and children inside, an event which prompted Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who lived in nearby Andover, and many women writers like her, to take up their pens to aid the cause of labor reform.³³

“The Tenth of January” marked the beginning of what would become a long career of reform writing for Phelps. In *The Silent Partner* (1871), she describes the brutal and inhumane working and living conditions of the Industrial Era through the eyes of young, wealthy woman whose father’s recent death resulted in her becoming a partial owner of a booming textile mill. After informing her readers that some “intelligent manufacturers” had “expended much Christian ingenuity, with much remarkable success, in ameliorating the conditions of factory operatives,” she is quick to point out that such cases were the exception rather than rule. “Had Christian ingenuity been generally synonymous with the conduct of manufacturing corporations,” she assures them, “I should have found no occasion for the writing of this book” (ii). Like many Christian reform activists in the late nineteenth-century, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps believed that if industrial era capitalists conducted business in keeping with Christian ethics, the problems inherent in the factory system would disappear.

Susan and Anna Warner completely agreed. They had, in fact, recently been told as much by the leaders of the evangelical community. In the fall of 1873, they attended the annual meeting of the Evangelical Alliance in New York City, where they stayed at the home of their longtime friend Henrietta Haines. According to Anna Warner, the event profoundly affected both sisters intellectually and emotionally. “Merely to look at those five hundred delegates — almost of every kindred and tongue and people and nation,” she recalls, “stirred one’s heart to its depths” (479). Anna, who uses Susan’s journal entries quite sparingly in this last section of *Elizabeth Wetherell*, includes several entries from their time at this meeting, and Susan dutifully records each day’s events. According to the journal entries Anna includes, she and Susan attended all the lectures scheduled on Saturday October 11th (480). The topic of the day, as recorded in the *Annual Report of Evangelical Alliance Meeting 1873*, was “Christianity and Social Reforms.” Among the many speakers was William Allen, the President of Girard College in Philadelphia. “Working men are dissatisfied in America,” Allen began, “and more dissatisfied in Europe. They allege that, while they are the producers of all—wealth, they do not receive a fair share of the products of their labor; and they are groping in the dark to discover the cause and the remedy” (671). The “remedy” Allen proposed was not labor unions, strikes, or any other form of organized protest on the part of the workers (all of which he opposes), but instead the infusion of Christian morality and ethics into the factory system. Allen carefully outlined his recommendations to the assembled group:

If employers would feel and manifest sympathy for their workmen's troubles and sicknesses, take an interest in their welfare, rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep, and treat them as Christian men should treat human beings having the same sensibilities as themselves, and moving on to the same

eternal destinies, it is quite possible that the envy and hatred which the poor often bear toward the rich might give place to loyal and kindly sentiments. But, unfortunately, these classes do not understand each other. They stand aloof, and misunderstanding degenerates into enmity. (672)

Allen's plea for "employers" to "manifest sympathy with their employees," to share in their happiness and to "weep with them that weep" could not have fallen on more receptive ears than those of Susan and Anna Warner. One can hardly imagine that the author of *The Wide, Wide World* would not have been moved by Allen's unabashed support of sentimentality. When Allen went on to describe the factories in the north that whose owners and proprietors were caring for the old, the sick, and the disabled, and abiding by the Christian principles of charity and benevolence, he very likely had the Warner sisters' full attention:

There are great manufacturing establishments in this country in which the aged and disabled, the widows and orphans, are not driven away to starve or to seek refuge in an almshouse. They are humanely cared for, and the men in such places work cheerfully, and strikes are not thought of. There is no secret about this. It is simply grace instead of greed—the grace of Christianity instead of the greed of Mammon. (673)

When Susan and Anna Warner returned to Constitution Island the following week, and resumed work on *The Gold of Chickaree*, the community they imagine strongly resembles the factory towns described to them by Allen.

Like Phelps and Allen, the Warners believed that the wealthy bore a moral and ethical responsibility to care for the less fortunate. As devout evangelical Christians and life-long supporters of evangelical social reform movements, they also believed that American society

should reflect Christian values, and encouraged Christian social activism. As this dissertation has shown, their extensive catalog of novels features heroines who clothe the needy, care for the sick and disabled, and feed the hungry. But as *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree* reveal, Susan and Anna Warner also believed that the wealthy, not the poor, should provide the catalyst for social reform. In the final chapters of these novels, as Wych Hazel and her husband Rollo discuss the plans for the community they will construct at Mill Hollow, it becomes evident that the Warner sisters' vision for social reform is entirely dependent upon the benevolence of wealthy Christian tycoons. In the community they envision, the workers will enjoy a higher rate of pay, access to libraries, health care, affordable housing, and even day care for their children, who will no longer toil beside them in the factories. In addition to these implementing these progressive reforms, Wych and Rollo plan to care for their workers spiritual and social needs, and expect them to attend weekly Bible readings and temperance lectures. In this decidedly paternalistic vision of social reform, the wealthy couple construct a Christian utopia in which the virtuous rich preside over a grateful flock of laborers, disputes and strikes seem wholly unnecessary, and where everyone is Christian. It was, for Susan and Anna Warner, the perfect solution to the social problems caused by the unbridled greed of Industrial-era capitalism.

Wych Hazel gets her first glimpse of factory life when she accompanies Rollo out horseback riding one afternoon. As the two approach Mill Hollow, she gazes down from the top of a small hill:

There were dark, high, close factories, whence the hum of machinery issued; poor, mean dwellings, small and large, clustered here and there in the intermediate spaces, from which if any sounds came, they were less pleasant than the buzz of machines. Scarce any

humanity was abroad; what there was deepened the impression of the dreariness of the place (350).

The town is almost entirely deserted in the middle of the workday, and is eerily silent apart from the “buzz of the machines,” a fact which suggests that every single resident of this community is employed in the mills, leaving the streets empty and the “poor, mean dwellings” temporarily abandoned, as even women and children spend their days laboring in the “dark, high, close factories.” Wych Hazel, who has just enjoyed a long ride through comparatively bucolic countryside, is shocked by the “dreariness” of these surroundings, and becomes more and more uncomfortable as they proceed into the town. After a short visit with an elderly woman named Gyda, whom Rollo has known since childhood, the two ride back just as the residents of mill hollow are leaving the factories. As they ride past the many men, women, and children who are making their way home from the mills, they are greeted by empty stares and vacant faces. Wych observes that “they appeared to be doing nothing, all standing, gazing at the riders” (364).

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Wych Hazel* and *The Gold of Chickaree* is the lack of detail the authors use to describe both mill hollow and its residents. Unlike Phelps, Susan and Anna Warner do not invite their readers to witness their struggles, hear their heart-wrenching stories, or feel their pain. In fact, the mill workers are not characters at all, but nameless, faceless people who the reader is told are in desperate need of Rollo’s help. In this short scene, and for the rest of the novel (and its sequel), it is not the mill workers but the wealthy factory owners who are the focus of (and the audience for) the Warners’ reform novel.

When Rollo invites her to tour the inside of one of his newly-acquired mills several chapters later, Wych Hazel comes into close contact with the mill workers for the first time, and is immediately taken aback by their sickly appearance:

The men, and the women, employed as hands in the works, were lank and pale and haggard, or dark and coarse. Their faces were reserved and gloomy; their eyes would not light up, even when spoken to... Yet the children were the worst. Little things, and others older, but all worn-looking, sadly pale, very hopeless, going back and forth at their work like so many parts of the inexorable machinery. Here Rollo now and then got a smile that gleamed out as a rare thing in that atmosphere. On the whole, the outer air seemed strange and sweet to the two when they came out into it, and not more sweet than strange. Where they had been, surely the beauty, and the freedom, and the promise, of the pure oxygen and the blue heaven, were all shut out and denied and forgotten (489).

Susan and Anna's readers, who, by 1876, were likely quite well accustomed to the image of the forlorn factory worker, would find this brief description vague. The Warners use almost no details as they lump the "men and woman" who are either "lank and pale and haggard or dark and coarse" and the children, some of whom are "little things" and some who are "older," into one amorphous mass of humanity. Although Rollo and Wych presumably approach them on several occasions to speak with them, the reader is not privy to these conversations, and is quickly escorted out of the mill only sentences later. Wych is clearly upset when she exits the mill. She asks Rollo if all the people in the mill look and act as these did and proclaims that she would buy the mills herself since this was the case. But the Warners have given their readers little reason to share her outrage or disgust (490). Instead, readers left with only the impression of the workers suffering as we quickly leave them behind, just as Wych and Rollo do, to continue the tour.

Rollo and Wych proceed to the homes of the factory workers, and the Warners' descriptions grow even vaguer:

The cottages were forlorn looking places; set anywhere, without reference to the consideration whether space for a garden ground was to be had. No such thing as a real garden could be seen. No flowers bloomed anywhere; no token of life's comfort or pleasure hung about the poor dwellings. Poverty and dirt and barrenness; those three facts struck the visitor's eye and heart... The only person they saw to speak to was a woman sitting at an open door crying. (491)

While the reader is told that “poverty and dirt and barrenness” are the chief characteristics of these “forlorn-looking places,” the only evidence the Warners provide as proof is the lack of gardens and the absence of flowers.³⁴ Despite the fact that they allow their readers only a brief glimpse inside these dwellings, and do not permit their heroine to even speak to the only person she sees, it is clear that the Warners expect their readers to have an emotional reaction to the scenes they have just (barely) witnessed. Like the unnamed woman crouched outside her meager dwelling, they are expected to cry. In these brief descriptions, Susan and Anna clearly intend to “strike” their readers’ “eye and heart,” but they fall far short of that goal. It is somewhat perplexing, in fact, that the author of *The Wide, Wide World* could fail to make her readers cry. Perhaps Susan and Anna Warner were relying on their readers’ previously-held notions about the lives of factory workers, and assumed that they would be so accustomed to lengthy descriptions of the pain and suffering endured by the men, women, and children who labored in the New England textile mills that they could easily conjure up these images without the benefit of detailed descriptions.

Some readers may have compared Wych Hazel’s brief encounters with the mill workers with the experiences of another, more prominent heroine of nineteenth-century reform literature, Parley Kelso, the protagonist of Phelps’ *The Silent Partner*. Unlike Parley Kelso, Wych Hazel

does not speak to any of the factory workers in Rollo's mills, let alone befriend them and join them for a meager dinner of bread and molasses and weak tea, as Perley does in Phelps' novel (89). Nor would Susan and Anna's protagonist ever dream of following one of the children of Rollo's mills back to their dark and dank tenements to meet their family, and witness how poor construction and constant flooding has sickened them with consumption (112). Neither *Wych Hazel* nor *The Gold of Chickaree* contain such powerful or poignant examples of human suffering as Sip Garth or Bob Mell, and the Warners' protagonist never laments how little she knows "about people who work and have a hard time" (94). Although she does, like Perley, eventually recognize that the money spent on her own luxurious silks, satins, and laces could significantly improve the lives of the mill workers, she does not come to this recognition on her own, but must be carefully and thoroughly instructed by her husband-to-be (Phelps 127-8, Warner 173-5). Most importantly, *Wych Hazel*'s brief encounters with poverty and suffering do not cause her even a moment of self-reflection, shame, or guilt. She does not break down in tears and admit that she has come to "hate" her own wealth because she has "no moral right" to it, as Perley does, and does not wish away her own privilege. Nor would the Warner sisters have wanted her to. Even though Susan and Anna Warner had spent the majority of their lives in varying levels of poverty, it is clear here and throughout these novels that they could more easily relate to the owners of the factories than to the workers, and hence chose to focus their reform novel on the benevolence of the wealthy rather than on the suffering of the working poor. While their descriptions of the laborers current lives are frustratingly vague, when the time comes to discuss the reforms that Rollo and Wych plan to implement, Susan and Anna are quite generous with details.

When Rollo first solicits Wych's opinion of some "improvements" he could make in his factory town, her suggestions reveal the type of relationship she intends to establish between herself, the factory workers, and her husband. "Ah, you will only laugh and call me unpractical," Wych Hazel ventures somewhat apologetically, "but the first thing I should do, Mr. Rollo, would be to beautify the places where they live. I believe it does people good to be just a little smothered in roses" (85). At first, Rollo dismisses as naïve Wych's insistence that the workers' homes be beautiful as well as functional, and reminds her that "[r]oses are not a substitute for bread" before congratulating himself for giving his workers pay that was "sufficient for decent living." But Wych Hazel quickly reminds him that roses and pay are interrelated. "I should think," she tells him, "you had done the very best possible preparatory work by getting it into the peoples' heads that somebody cared whether they had roses, or clean faces, or anything else" (87). Wych's plan to plant "roses" for the workers and "beautify" their domestic spaces would certainly appeal to the Warners' female readership, which was versed in domestic ideology and particularly attuned to the importance of a well-maintained domestic sphere. Rollo does not immediately grasp the importance of this project, but as Wych explains, providing the laborers with flower gardens and paying them a decent wage both accomplish the same goal—to demonstrate to the laborers that Wych and Rollo are not merely employing them, but "caring" for their every need. In the Warners' vision of labor reform, Wych and Rollo are not merely employers or factory owners, but caregivers and nurturers who assume the role of parental figures, and even ensure that the "faces" of their workers are kept "clean."

Such an unapologetically paternalistic view of labor relations was common in the early-industrial era. Often referred to as "industrial paternalism," this ethos was not confined to the northern textile mills, but was also prevalent in the southern factories and farms, and has been

identified by literary critics and social historians as the defining characteristic of such industrial-era communities of Pullman, Illinois and Lowell, Massachusetts³⁵ As historian Larry Lankton notes in *Cradle to Grave: Life, Work, and Death at the Lake Superior Copper Mines*,

In an industrializing America, many companies used paternalism as a bridge between management and labor. One hallmark of paternalism was the belief that life and work were not separate domains, but were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Paternalistic companies provided workers with more than a job and a wage. They involved themselves in the workers' private lives by engaging in health, education and social welfare activities...owners made themselves available to workers for workplace complaints as well as for advice and help for family problems or financial difficulties and performed acts of kindness such as visiting the sick, distributing Christmas presents, or helping a particularly bright child.

(145-6)

These acts of charity and generosity from mill owners were often accompanied by lessons in morality and virtue. According to John Garner's study *The Company Town: Architecture and Society in the Early Industrial Age*, "owners assumed that their paternal authority necessarily included moral guidance, so they enforced values of thrift and temperance and strict standards of sexual behavior through regulation and punishment" (146). Rollo, it seems, has similar plans for Mill Hollow. In order to keep his workers "out of the gin shops," he has already begun to conduct weekly Bible readings in an abandoned warehouse. "Saturday night is pay time," he explains to Wych, "with his pockets full of money, what can a poor rascal do but ruin himself with beer, if he knows nothing better? I am following an English example in the endeavor to save them. I provide coffee and buns, at cost prices; and then I manage to give them entertainment,

with a spice of instruction, till too late in the night to allow of any foolery at the other places” (91). Because his workers “know nothing better,” Rollo needs to “save them” by providing them with “a spice of instruction” in Christian virtue, while actively discouraging them from consuming alcohol.³⁶ In Susan and Anna’s depiction of the ideal industrial community, the wealthy Christian capitalist has the potential to become not merely an employer, but a teacher, a mentor, and a spiritual leader. As Rollo describes his plan to relocate his weekly meetings to the nearby school he is constructing, it becomes evident that such “instruction” will not be limited Saturday evenings, as he expects both “children” and “adult scholars” to attend school on a regular basis (94). The reader is left to assume that the curriculum will likely include a healthy dose of Bible verses in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Wych Hazel has her own ideas about how to best mold this community to conform to evangelical Christian ideals. She plans to teach at Rollo’s school, she tells him, but she also imagines that she can have another impact on the lives of the mill workers. “I might be a Visiting Committee,” she tells him, “to go about in the houses and find out the women’s wants and troubles, and clear some of them away. I know at least how people ought not to live” (94). The Warners’ nineteenth-century audience would have immediately recognized that the heroine would be distributing more than food and clothing to the needy residents of Mill Hollow. As Tompkins explains in *Sensational Designs*, the primary purpose of such visits, when conducted by members of the American Tract Society, an organization to which both Susan and Anna briefly belonged, was to “distribute religious tracts,” organize “prayer meetings,” encourage “church attendance” and talk to “people about the state of their souls” (150). To their readers, the practice of home-visiting was synonymous with religious and moral instruction. Paying visits to the homes of the poor and destitute to offer both material comfort and spiritual guidance had

been common among evangelical Christians since the 1830's, and the Warners' readers would have found Wych's plan to form such a committee entirely appropriate, and commended her for her benevolence. The committee Wych plans to form would not only help the needy citizens of her and Rollo's community, but could potentially benefit Rollo financially. It was not uncommon, Christine Stansell observes in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, for even male "members of the rising commercial and industrial bourgeoisie" to visit the homes of the poor." As Stansell explains, "they sought to teach the poor virtues of thrift, sobriety, hard work, and deference to employers which they also fought hard to inculcate in their workers, traits that would ultimately contribute to their own profits" (67). By encouraging Wych's Visiting Committee, therefore, Rollo is not only ensuring that his employees are thoroughly inundated with evangelical beliefs both at home and at work; he also likely feels that this will contribute to his own financial success.

By the end of the novel, Wych Hazel and Dane Rollo have successfully used their combined wealth to implement reforms that transform Mill Hollow into a Christian capitalist utopia. The citizens enjoy not only a school, a hospital, a public bath, and a library, but a day-care, a nursing home, a public bath, several parks and even a botanical garden, all funded by the profits from the mill. They live in comfortable, well-appointed cottages with carefully maintained rose gardens, and purchase the necessities of life at a store whose goods are priced barely above their wholesale value. Each and every resident enjoys a relatively high standard of living, and poverty is unheard of. "Meet whom you will," the Warners assure their reader, "man, woman or child, no rags or penury or squalor will offend you." Instead, the reader can observe that the "respectable comfort and real and hopeful life" that the re-distributed wealth has afforded every citizen (120). Although the community is small, the faith of its citizenry is

expansive enough to require two churches (“one would not accommodate them all”) and, thankfully, “there is no place for the sale of liquor in the entire village” (421). In the rare instance that one of their residents should require the assistance of charity, their every need is immediately provided for by Wych Hazel herself, who frequently provided the “poor students” with college tuition and the “poor invalids” with “medical care.” Even the “overworked ministers” were afforded a “pleasure trip, wife and all,” whenever they grew weary from their workload (416). In the ten years since Wych Hazel and Rollo took possession of the community of Mill Hollow, it has completely transformed, and would be “unrecognizable” to those who knew it before (417).

One might expect that this luxurious community could never turn a profit, but as the Warners reveal, the exact opposite has proven true. “The place is as full of business as of roses,” Susan and Anna assure the reader, “and as full of prosperity as of either” (420). Rollo is richer than he was before, and “his business has grown and spread and increased” (421). Christianity, it seems, is not only morally and ethically correct, but immensely profitable. The workers, they explain, are more productive now that they are being properly cared for by the benevolent Christian tycoons, who reinvest their wealth back into the community they built, ensuring the continued prosperity of capitalist and laborer alike. Susan and Anna Warner do not specify how much of the profit from the mills Rollo and Wych Hazel set aside for the continuation of these reforms, but the reader can assume that they have more than enough to spare, as they continue to reside in Wych’s mansion at Chickaree, and frequently host modest, Bible-themed gatherings at the estate which are attended by both mill workers and elites (424). Susan and Anna do not describe these gatherings in any detail, so their readers are not given the opportunity to observe the wealthy interact with the poor. As their earlier descriptions of the mill workers indicates, the

Warners were not at all interested in providing their readers with lengthy descriptions of the poor. Instead, they simply assure their readers that these gatherings take place in one short sentence. Although it is lacking in detail, the fact that the Warners even suggest that the wealthy and the poor might intermingle in a social setting only highlights their shared belief in egalitarianism and equality.

And yet even though the couple is enjoying unparalleled financial success, which affords them a standard of living that is far superior to that of the of the average worker in their mills, the Warner sisters are quick to point out that Wych and Rollo are not scorned by their employees, but revered. In fact, they are worshipped like near-deities. When Wych Hazel's chauffeur-driven coach makes an appearance in the hollow, the citizens line the streets in order to catch a glimpse of her. "People did not bend to kiss her shadow—as of Florence Nightingale: they turned and shaded their eyes to catch the light" of her superior virtue (120). Rollo enjoys a king-like status in the eyes of his employees, each of whom feels lucky to be given the opportunity to serve him. "Nobody enters work at his mills," the Warners assure their readers, "but wants to stay with him; and nobody wishes, in all the hollow, to so anything but what his master wishes, for they all know that he does not live to himself" (422). In the community that the Warners imagine, labor disputes are unheard of. The workers perform their duties gratefully, and are thankful for the privilege of serving their benevolent "master." There are no strikes and no pickets. There is no poverty and there is no suffering. The wealthy Christian capitalist couple receives nothing but praise and admiration from their grateful flock of laborers.

It is somewhat surprising that, after nearly eight hundred pages of text, Susan and Anna Warner would devote so little narrative space to describing the utopian community they imagined. Their entire vision of the perfect community their heroine and her husband worked so

hard to create is described in less than fifteen pages, and occurs after a flashback of more than a decade. Perhaps Susan and Anna Warner knew that the creation of a place as perfect as Mill Hollow was pure fantasy, an ideal that could never be achieved. Perhaps they recognized that their solution to the problems of industrial-era capitalism could never be realized in a society fueled by greed and funded by the exploitation of the poor. But they did imagine that such a society could exist, if there was sufficient will to create it.

Susan and Anna Warner's vision of labor reform differs drastically from their contemporaries in the world of nineteenth-century women's fiction. Unlike Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, they did not chose to focus on the plight of the factory workers themselves, nor did they utilize their considerable talent for sentimentalism and sensationalism to call attention to the plight of the less fortunate, and did not attempt to sway their readers hearts on mind on the behalf of the victims of the factory system. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on the rich, on those who were arguably in the best position to affect social change. They called for a change of heart, for a change in policy, for a commitment to Christian ethics and Christian principles on the part of capitalists themselves. Neither *Wych Hazel* nor *The Gold of Chickaree* ever sold enough copies to actually inspire social change. These novels fell out of print in less than a decade, and are rarely remembered by anyone. Even scholars of nineteenth-century women's fiction and labor reform rarely acknowledge the existence of these texts. But for all their flaws, these works deserve to be noted in the annuals of women's history and the history of the labor movement, as they represent the valuable contribution of two of the most prolific writers of their time to the discourse surrounding labor, capital, reform, and religion in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

On a cold, rainy Sunday evening in early March of 1885, as she and Anna were preparing their nightly tea, Susan Warner experienced a sudden and “terrible pain at the back of her neck” and had to be rushed to bed. Over the next two weeks, Anna rarely left her ailing sister’s bedside. She fed her broth, administered the medicine that their local doctor recommended, and read to her from the Bible as she slipped in and out of consciousness (A. Warner 501-4). In one of her moments of lucidity, Susan requested that Anna read to her from the second chapter of Hebrews:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings (*Heb. 2:9-10*)

In her biography, Anna imagines that contemplating the mortality of Jesus was a source of great comfort to Susan, “who had all her life long been subject to the fear of death” (505). In any case, it would be the last time that Anna would read aloud from the Bible to her sister. Susan Warner died on March 17, 1885. After securing special permission from the Secretary of War, Susan Warner was buried in the West Point Cemetery, alongside Winfield Scott, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, and George Armstrong Custer. Susan and Anna Warner are still the only civilians interred there.³⁷

Even though her popularity had waned in the thirty-five years since the publication of *The Wide, Wide World*, Susan Warner’s obituary appeared on the pages of prominent publications like *The New York Times* and *The Critic*. Most remembered her with fond nostalgia as the author of a childhood classic who had all but vanished from the literary world after the

unparallel success of her first novel. *The Critic* used the occasion of her death to retell a once-popular anecdote in which George Putnam was persuaded to publish *The Wide, Wide World* only because it moved his mother to tears (150). Susan Bogart Warner's death was mentioned (if briefly) in dozens of newspapers all across the country. Many, like *The Boston Post*, remembered her only as the author of *The Wide, Wide World*, a novel which was so popular that it had been "read by every household in the land" (4). For most critics, the death of Susan Warner was an occasion to reflect upon the literature of their childhood, and to remember, if only for a moment, a novel that helped to shape the literary tastes of an entire generation of Americans. "I can truly say" wrote the editor of *The Christian Union* of *The Wide, Wide World*, "that no book after the Bible ever filled me with such a desire to be a Christian, or helped me so much in my Christian life" (27).

For the next twenty five years, Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World* were all but forgotten. It was not until 1909, when Anna Warner published her biography *Susan Warner: or Elizabeth Wetherell* that the American public once again paused to remember the once-famous writer. And, for the most part, they remembered her fondly, despite the fact that her religious zeal and sentimental style were incompatible with contemporary literary tastes. *Elizabeth Wetherell* was written by Anna Warner with the sole purpose of securing a lasting legacy for her famous sister, and had it not been for Anna's efforts, it is unlikely that Susan Warner would have been remembered at all. As the obituaries indicate, the literary world seemed ready to once again forget Susan Warner at the time of her death in 1885, and she would have remained forgotten had Anna Warner not put pen to paper in 1909. But the fact remains that if Anna Warner's biography represented the only contemporary effort to preserve Susan Warner and her work for future generations, it is doubtful that any of her journals, correspondence, or manuscripts would

have survived the last hundreds years relatively intact. It was only because a group of wealthy, local philanthropists took an interest in the preservation and promotion of Susan and Anna Warner's personal possessions that there is anything left of their legacy to recover.

Both Susan and Anna Warner maintained lifelong a friendship with many of their former students, and it is chiefly thanks to these relationships that any of she and Susan's personal possessions survive to the present day. In 1908, as Anna Warner was once again struggling with financial hardship and considering selling Constitution Island to a private investor, a former student turned West Point professor named Captain Peter Straub introduced her to Margaret Olivia Sage, the widow of the robber baron financier Russell Sage, who had recently begun donating large sums of her late husband's considerable fortune to colleges, reform efforts, and a host of other philanthropic endeavors.³⁸ Upon hearing of Anna Warner's financial difficulties, and Anna's desire to donate the property to the government to be used by the cadets at West Point, Margaret Olivia Slocum Sage agreed to purchase Constitution Island from Anna Warner for \$150,000, and then donated it to United States Government as a joint gift from Anna Warner and herself. Mrs. Sage named only two conditions: that the island be "for the use forever of The United States Military Academy at West Point" and not (as Anna feared) "a public picnic, or excursion, or amusement ground" and that Anna Warner be permitted to remain in her home for the rest of her life. News of the gift spread quickly, and both Mrs. Sage's letter and the President Roosevelt's acceptance of that gift were printed in *The New York Times* on September 8th, 1908 ("Constitution Isle Sage Gift to the Nation"). The sale of Constitution Island meant that for the first time in her adult life, Anna Warner was financially stable. She wrote to her friend Olivia Phelps Stokes on September 15, 1908 of her relief. "I had asked the Lord to do what he would, with the island and with me; and to take care of me through it all," she writes, "and you see how

he has done it.” After acknowledging that Sage had been “kindness itself, and thoughtfulness” throughout the process of executing the deed, she tells her friend that completing the transaction has left her feeling with a sense of “comfort and ease” (qtd in Stokes 125). Anna Warner died January 22nd, 1915. Her funeral was held in the chapel at West Point, and according to Stokes, it was well attended by both current cadets and many of her former students, who played Taps as they laid her to rest alongside her sister at West Point Cemetery (Stokes 58). The United States Military Academy at West Point still retains ownership of the Warner house and Constitution Island as part of the U.S. Military Academy Reservation.

Sage was not the only person interested in preserving the Susan and Anna Warner’s legacy. Shortly after Anna’s death, a group of local citizens from the surrounding communities of Highland Falls, Garrison, and Cold Spring, NY formed the Marteleair’s Rock Association for the Preservation of the Warner House. “I marvel at the results attained by our Association of neighbors and friends,” remarked Gelyna Fitzgerald, the President of the Marteleair’s Rock Association at their first meeting in September of 1917; “after all, there is more than gossip talked over the tea cups. Willful women must ever have their way. Two notable women made the presentation of the Warner House possible. Two Hudson River women made the gift of Constitution Island to the United States government a public benefaction and a memorial to the Warner sisters” (Marteleair’s Rock Association, 1917). There is no way of discerning exactly which two “notable women” Fitzgerald refers to in her address to those gathered to celebrate the inaugural meeting of the Marteleair’s Rock Association, but there certainly were some very notable names on the list of the six patrons, 22 life members, and 210 annual members that appeared at the end of *First Annual Report*. Above the expected list of former cadets, West Point faculty, and friends and neighbors of the Warner sisters (including Fanny Kemble and George

Putnam) appear the names of some of the nineteenth-century's most famous tycoons and financiers turned philanthropists: Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Morgan and Mr. and Mrs. William Church Osborne.

J.P. Morgan, the wealthy banker whose financial portfolio included large stake holdings in some of America's leading producers of steel, several public utilities, steamships, and railroads, died in March of 1913, and it is likely that the donation that resulted in him and his wife being listed as patrons of the Marteleer's Rock Association was made by Frances Tracy Morgan, his wife. Frances Tracy Morgan, who resided at Cragston, the Morgan family summer home in nearby Highland Falls, NY, was a generous benefactress to the neighboring communities, and gave generously to local organizations; including a circulating library she established which bore her husband's name. William Church Osborne, the son of William Henry Osborne, a railroad tycoon who controlled both the Illinois Central Railroad and the Chicago, St. Louis and New Orleans Railroad, was a philanthropist and patron of arts like his father, and served as the president of organizations like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Children's Aid Society, both of which his family donated to generously. Osborne and his wife resided in nearby Garrison, New York at Osborne family home. Given that these two families were well-known for their philanthropy and gave generously to their local communities, it is unsurprising that they continued to serve as patrons of the Marteleer's Rock Association for several decades. But in light of the fact that both Susan and Anna Warner were both avid supporters of Christian labor reform and believed that charity and prayer, not strikes and unions, could solve "the labor problem" that plagued late nineteenth-century capitalists like Morgan and Osborne, it is tempting to speculate that their interest in preserving the sisters' literary legacy was not simply based on proximity. Susan and Anna Warner were former members of the upper-class themselves, and

throughout their career, they had their finger on the pulse of America's ruling class. Had J.P. Morgan or William Church Osborne ever read *The Gold of Chickaree* (and it is doubtful that they did), they would have enjoyed Susan and Anna's vision of a Christian capitalist utopia.

In September of 1925, the Martlear's Rock Association changed its name to the Constitution Island Association, and has been operating under this designation ever since. In the ninety years since the organization's inception, it has, in conjunction with the leadership at West Point, overseen the restoration of the Warner family home, collected, cataloged, and preserved the Warner family possessions (including most of the original furnishings), and the numerous books, manuscripts, correspondence, and personal journals of Susan and Anna. In addition to preservation, the CIA offers educational programs to the general public in effort to promote the Warner sisters' legacy by hosting seasonal tours of the Warner house, live reenactments, and annual events including a Seafood Gala and a Garden Day. In recent years, their small staff of archivists has assisted numerous students and scholars conducting research on the Warner sisters by providing them access to the CIA's collection of archival materials, which were housed on site at the Warner house until 2009. Unfortunately, a series of events have unfolded in the last two years that culminated in the Warner house being shut to the public and the CIA being forced to relocate the Warner archives, which are currently not physically accessible to either the public or the academic community.

In April of 2009, West Point announced that the Warner home was to be temporarily closed to the public for "vital structural repairs." A few months later, in December of 2009, the local newspaper, *The Putnam County News and World Recorder* reported that the contents of the Warner house were relocated to an unspecified site during the construction period, which was scheduled to begin in the early spring of the following year ("West Point: Warner House

Structurally Unsound” 1). For reasons unknown, West Point delayed the projects, and as months turned into years, the community began to question whether or not the Warner home would ever reopen, and what would become of the CIA’s collection of historical materials. Then, in August of 2012, Senator Charles Schumer announced his support for a plan to transfer ownership of Constitution Island from the Department of Defense (which oversees West Point) to the Department of the Interior. In an official press release on August 6th, 2012, Schumer explained that “despite the great efforts on behalf of West Point, as an academic agency within the Department of Defense, the tools in their toolkit are very limited in terms of historic preservation and access.” Constitution Island, he explained, was currently inaccessible to the public for most of the year, and transferring ownership to the Department of the Interior would provide visitors with extended access and promote tourism in the region (Schumer 2). Residents of Putnam County interpreted Schumer’s proposal as the first step in a broader plan to turn Constitution Island into a National Park.

West Point immediately voiced its opposition to the plan. In an interview with *PCNR* in November of 2012, Commander of the U.S. Army Garrison, West Point, Col. Dane D. Rideout cited Anna Warner’s will in his explanation as to why the land should remain under the control of West Point. “In their will, they clearly stated that this was to be given to the corps of cadets and even laid out, that it would not be used to gain value or rented out for public space or to generate revenue, it was for the corps of cadets to enjoy” (“West Point Says No to Island Handover” 1). In January of the following year, *PCNR* reported that Schumer had withdrawn his support for the project, and noted that Rideout believed that the incident indicated that the CIA was in need of “a leadership change” and that he was directed by “high command” to cease communication with the CIA immediately (“West Point to Pugh: New Leadership Needed” 1).

Over the next few months, plans for a National Park were abandoned, and the CIA instead announced a plan to construct an educational center in the nearby town of Cold Springs, NY, to house the contents of the Warner house, using funds from a grant recently awarded to the organization by the Director of Tourism (and wife of former Governor) Libby Pataki (“Burned Bridges: The Battle for Constitution Island” 1). After a lively public hearing (perplexingly held not in Cold Springs, but in the nearby town of Caramel, NY) in August to discuss the construction of the center Pataki herself spoke against the construction of the museum located off Constitution Island, and plans for the center were abandoned (“Opponents Blast CIA Plan” 1). In November of 2013, at the 97th Annual Meeting of CIA, Betsy Pugh, Chairwoman, resigned her office along with several members of the Executive Committee and both full time archivists (“At Last, Pugh Steps Down” 1). As of November 2014, the Warner house remains closed pending renovations to the property, which is now being overseen by the West Point Association of Graduates. A link to the project currently appears on the CIA website, which was recently redesigned and all information about Schumer, the proposed education center, and the controversy over the fate of the Warner house have been removed. The CIA website states that organization “hopes to assist in the repair and restoration of the Warner House,” but there is no indication that a date has been proposed for renovation to begin. The new website does not include a link to the CIA online archives.³⁹

The Constitution Island Association has successfully preserved the Warner archives for nearly one hundred years, and despite this recent controversy, I firmly believe that this organization will succeed in reopening the Warner home to the public in the near future, and continue to assist students and scholars who wish to access Susan and Anna Warner’s diaries, letters, personal papers, and other archival materials. I hope that the new leadership will once

again make these archives accessible online. But the recent controversy over the fate of the Warner house highlights the fragile nature of Susan and Anna Warner's legacy. Although many of Susan and Anna Warner's novels (including *Daisy*, *Wych Hazel*, and *The Gold of Chickaree*) have been digitized and are available online through Google Books and The Internet Archive, those who wish to consult physical copies of these texts must consult WorldCat in order to track down the nearest library whose collection contains a particular volume. Some works, like *The Wide, Wide World*, *Queechy*, *Diana*, and *The Hills of the Shatemuc*, are widely available, and can be rather easily located at most university libraries. But others, like their religious writings and juvenilia, are far scarcer. Because most of these works were not reprinted in the twentieth century, they are typically not in general circulation, and are only available for use on site. In order to access these volumes, students and scholars must travel to a library, and read the text in Special Collections, or purchase a copy for personal use from a rare book dealer like Abebooks.com. Both options are time-consuming, costly, and do little to encourage future research on Warner and her work. Accessing Susan Warner's periodical fiction proves even more challenging. *The Little American*, for example, is only available at the Rare Book & Manuscript Collection at the University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library. Jane Weiss's transcription of Susan Warner's journals is available electronically through *MLA International Bibliography*, but the Constitution Island Association remains the only source for Susan and Anna Warner's letters and personal papers. Should the Constitution Island Association prove unable to successfully resolve their current conflict with West Point, it is unclear where their extensive collection of manuscripts, journals, letters, and first editions would be housed, and who, if anyone, would be granted access to these materials. And should accessing archival materials relating to Susan and Anna Warner become too difficult, too costly, or too time

consuming, it becomes more and more likely that future scholars will focus their recovery efforts elsewhere, and that Susan and Anna Warner will once again become a footnote in literary history.

As many scholars working the field of nineteenth century women's fiction have argued for decades, access to primary source materials is crucial to any recovery project. Without it, the important work of both reprinting forgotten primary texts and the production of scholarship about those texts become more difficult to perform. This study relied heavily on digital access to letters, journals, book reviews, and periodicals and because the Constitution Island Association remains the sole source of archival materials relating to Susan and Anna Warner, should they choose to not provide online access to their collections, future efforts to recover Warner's life and work could be significantly halted, if not stopped altogether. In "Looking Forward, Looking Back," a 2009 Roundtable discussion for *Legacy*, Patty Cowell admits that she often worries about the future of recovery movement. "What strikes me most" she says, "about the archive of American women writers is its fragility. It's so easy to imagine a world in which the gains of recent decades will be forgotten again" (224). Given the current state of the Warner archives and the controversy surrounding the restoration of the Warner house on Constitution Island, it is, unfortunately, easy to imagine that Susan Warner could indeed be forgotten once again.

Although it is certainly possible that Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World* could slip back into obscurity, it is far more likely that she will be remembered inaccurately, and that the record of her literary achievements, personal and political commitments, and religious beliefs, will remain incomplete. The efforts of scholars like Baym, Fetterley, Tompkins, and their colleagues who dedicated their careers to recovering the work of nineteenth-century American women writers have successfully secured both Susan Warner and *The Wide, Wide World* a

lasting place in the canon of American literature. It is difficult to imagine that their important work will go unrecognized by future students of nineteenth-century literature. *Sensational Designs* has been required reading for two generations of graduate students, and Tompkins' insights into the "cultural work" of American fiction rely heavily upon her interpretation of Warner's novel. But as I have remarked throughout this study, the image of Warner that Tompkins and others have perpetuated is incomplete (as they rarely, if ever, consult works other than *The Wide, Wide World* and *Queechy* in their analysis), sometimes factually inaccurate (as is the case with the often-repeated claim that Warner was not interested in political and social issues), and decidedly unflattering (most scholars are quick to type her as demure and submissive, a fitting foil for more progressive, proto-feminist writers like Fanny Fern). I hope that my reading of Warner's later novels has begun the important work of critically questioning such claims, and has advanced a more complex and nuanced portrait of Warner and her work. And I hope others will take up the mantle and reexamine Susan and Anna Warner's lesser-known works themselves, and that their discoveries further complicate our present understanding of the Warner sisters' literary legacy. The space and scope of this study required that I be incredibly selective about which works I discussed on these pages, and the fact remains that there are thousands of pages of essays, novels, religious fiction, juvenilia, and poetry that I have left unexamined. For this reason, I have included an appendix to this study that lists the works of Susan and Anna Warner so that others might explore those texts that I left unexamined.

I hope that others who are interested in Susan Warner's life and work will take to the archives themselves, and uncover other writings that reveal more about this prolific novelist, essayist, poetess, teacher, and religious scholar than is presently known. But should the historical record of Warner's life remain locked behind closed doors, inaccessible to both the general

public and the academic community, no such projects will be possible. Who knows what other Susan Warners lie in the archives, waiting to be recovered?

Clearly, the restoration of the Warner house and the fate of the Warner archives are incredibly important to those interested in recovering the life and work of Susan and Anna Warner. But the history of the Constitution Island Association and the recent controversy surrounding the restoration of the Warner house and the preservation (and public presentation) of its contents which resulted in the (hopefully) temporary inaccessibility of the CIA archives has implications beyond the admittedly small community of local historians, small town politicians, and the relatively few academics who are concerned with the fate of the Susan and Anna Warner's belongings. The fact that Warner's legacy is currently difficult to access in any form other than digital (and the discouraging fact that there is no active link to the digital archives presently available on the CIA website) should give any scholar who works with archival materials a moment of pause to consider the fate of the historical record on which we so closely rely to complete our respective recovery projects. If recovery is, as I argue in this study, an ongoing process of re-imagining the works of writers we think we know, and because each act of recovery is itself incomplete, the uncertain fate of the Warner archives highlights vulnerability of all recovery projects. If Susan Warner's journals, papers, and manuscripts can so easily disappear from public view, even temporarily, then it stands to reason that the archives of other writers are susceptible to similar forces and could potentially suffer the same fate. Who knows how many future recovery projects could be hindered, or even halted, if access to archival materials were restricted? What other legacies would be recovered only in part, or worse, not recovered at all? What other writers would we only think we know?

In retrospect, the single greatest impact that the temporary closure of the Warner house left on my own project was the fact that I was forced to rely on digital, rather than physical, archival materials as I completed my research. Because the Warner archives were relocated to several other historical properties in the area only months after I began this project, and because the archivist admitted that it would be difficult for me to trace down the materials I needed due to the collection being in such an unfortunate state of disarray, I completed my research using exclusively digital content, which, thanks to the once well-designed CIA website that meticulously cataloged a large portion of their collection, was both convenient and practical, as I had the time to inspect the materials at my convenience and revisit the collection at a moment's notice whenever I had the inclination that there might be something contained in the archive that would add (or in some cases, detract from or at least complicate) the arguments I was making about a particular text or moment in Warner's life. I also had the luxury of sitting down at my computer and spending the afternoon exploring the many sections of the archives that I would likely not have considered browsing had I been limited to a few days or weeks to spend at Constitution Island. I surely would not have read the sisters' Christmas cards, or learned that the early members of CIA had compiled a list of recipes from Anna Warner's novels into a cookbook titled *At Home with Susan and Anna Warner*. Though neither of these activities contributed in any meaning way to my arguments about Warner's novels or essays, I believe that knowledge of their existence affected my overall impression of the writers whose lives I was attempting to recover. I do not for a moment regret reading Anna Warner's cake recipes, as they reminded me that she and her sister were not merely the subjects of intellectual inquiry, but real women who lived real lives incredibly different from my own.

But as valuable as this unlimited access to the Warner archives was, relying solely on digital materials to conduct academic research is a methodology that remains controversial, especially to those in the field of archive theory. “As of last year,” Andrew Stauffer of the University of Virginia’s Department of English and Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES) writes in 2012, “Google had scanned more than 15 million of the estimated 130 million titles in the libraries of the world.” According to Stauffer, we are now “in an extraordinarily stronger position to study nineteenth-century culture via its published verbal record and to write new English literary histories based on digital searches, collations, and interventions of various kinds” (335). For Stauffer, this unprecedented access to archival materials is reason to celebrate, as it enables academic researchers to explore exciting new areas of inquiry with relative ease as the nearly every major research library in the world is currently in the process of digitizing their collections, which are widely available (for free) on the internet. But like many in archivists, librarians, and historians, Stauffer wonders what impact this increasing digitization will have on the physical archives that these university libraries currently house. Preserving nineteenth-century texts, he reminds us, is time-consuming and costly, and because many researchers are relying on digital archives, he worries that many libraries will one day abandon their physical collections altogether, and that “nineteenth-century books will be simultaneously instantly accessible and out of reach, displayed and untouched” for a future generations of scholars. “The books themselves,” he reminds us, “are not merely reports on the nineteenth century; they are individual nineteenth-century scenes of evidence, produced, conveyed, sold, handled, read, and marked by the culture of study. This archive of the history of the making and consumption of books cannot be replaced by single-copy scans, and new scholars of the historical record cannot be trained on simulations” (340). Stauffer’s argument for

the continued preservation of nineteenth-century books and manuscripts in their physical form leads me to wonder what insights into the lives of Susan and Anna Warner I might have gleaned should I have been able to physically access their extensive personal library and thumb through the pages of the books that inspired their writings about Fiji and the street children of London, searching for handwritten notes or turned down pages. Or, like Jane Weiss, hold Susan's childhood journals in my hands, and wonder what became of the torn-out pages. As crucial as I believe digital access to Warner's journals, correspondence, and ephemera may be because it allows other scholars (especially graduate students with limited financial means) to more easily and conveniently utilize archival materials, I admit that Stauffer's point is well taken, and hope that West Point and the Constitution Island Association recognize the importance of preserving their collections for posterity in both their physical and digital form.

The preservation of the Warner archive, and the restoration (and reopening) of the Warner house are both critical, but another, perhaps less obvious issue that recent events have served to highlight is that of presentation. It remains unclear who literally owns the Warner house and its contents, and although West Point has legal right to the property itself, convincing arguments could (and have) been made by both the Constitution Island Association's past leadership and the current members of the West Point community about the proper place to display the Warners' personal possessions, which include the letters, journals, nineteenth-century books, and other materials of interest to literary historians. And, as Helen Freshwater notes in her essay "The Allure of the Archives," the persons charged with the preservation and presentation of any collection of archival materials exert a great deal of interpretative influence over the materials they oversee. Noting the shift from the oral preservation of the historical record to textual model we rely on in the present day, Freshwater observes that "the collection and storage

of a text in an archive means that the curators of facts and information now authorize and oversee what was once a performance of individual recitation. It might be expected that there is a high price to pay for this guardianship. That price, I argue, is the very promise of the archive itself: the myth of a fixed historical record” (734). Considering Freshwater’s exploration of the complex relationship between the historical artifact, the written word, and modern notions of authenticity as they relate to archive theory, one cannot help but wonder how Susan Warner’s literary legacy could be shaped by the ideologies of those who seek to “authorize and oversee” her possessions, and how both these objects and the persons who once owned them will be presented to future generations. If, as Freshwater claims, the very notion of a “fixed historical record” that exists in all archives is merely a “myth,” how might the fact that the United States Military may one day soon be charged with overseeing Susan and Anna Warner’s physical legacy alter future perceptions of their work? The same could be said of the Constitution Island Association, which was founded by members of the nineteenth-century ruling class, which included both great philanthropists and robber barons? What version of Susan and Anna Warner might each of these organizations chose to display? Would their legacy look different if religious organizations were charged with the same task? What aspects of their life and work would each of these parties chose to emphasize, and ignore? As I hope my study has proven, each attempt at recovering the literary legacy of Susan Warner has resulted in a different image of her as a writer and an intellectual, and those images were shaped in part by the persons performing the act of recovery.

According to Freshwater, the very act of preserving archival materials can potentially alter how we perceive the subject of preservation, which leads me to question which version of Susan Warner will survive the current controversy, and who will be named the “guardian” of her

legacy? “As the archive cannot offer direct access to the past,” Freshwater reminds us, “any reading of its contents will necessarily be a reinterpretation” (739).

I would like to end my study by acknowledging that the image of Susan Warner that I have advanced in the proceeding chapters represents my own reinterpretation of the many letters, journals, historical manuscripts, that are housed in the Warner archives, each of which were chosen because they enabled me to argue a particular point, highlight a particular relationship, or explore a particular connection. As any person who attempts to retell the story of another person’s life soon discovers, it is impossible to objectively recreate the events of the past. Anna Warner wrote in 1909 that she “tried to put in nothing irrelevant, but with everything so interesting me, it was often hard to choose” (ix). Indeed, it was.

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APPENDIX A

SELECTED WORKS BY SUSAN AND ANNA WARNER

BY ANNA WARNER

- Dollars and Cents.* G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1852.
Mr. Rutherford's Children. G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1853.
My Brother's Keeper. D. Appleton and Co. 1855.
Casper. G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1856.
Hymns of the Church Militant. R. Carter and Brothers. 1858.
Little Jack's Four Lessons. R. Carter and Brothers. 1858.
Hard Maple. Shepard, Clark, and Brown. 1859.
Children of Blackberry Hollow. R. Carter and Brothers. 1863.
Walks From Eden. Robert Carter and Brothers. 1865
The Star out of Jacob. R. Carter and Brothers. 1866.
Stories of Vinegar Hill. R. Carter and Brothers 1866.
Three Little Spades. Harper and Brothers. 1868.
Gardening By Myself. A.D.F. Randolph and Co. 1872.
The Other Shore. A.D.F. Randolph, 1872.
Blue Flag of Cloth and Gold R. Carter and Brothers, 1879.
Tired Church Members. R. Carter and Brothers. 1881.
A Bag of Stories. R. Carter and Brothers, 1883.
Cross Corners. R. Carter and Brothers. 1887.
Patience. J.B. Lippincott, 1891.
Up and Down the House. A.D.F. Randolph. 1892
Susan Warner: Or Elizabeth Wetherell. G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1909.

BY SUSAN WARNER

- The Wide, Wide World.* G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1850
Queechy. G. P. Putnam and Sons. 1852.
Carl Kringen, His Christmas Stocking. G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1853.
The Law and the Testimony. R. Carter and Brothers. 1853.
The Hills of the Shatemuc. D. Appleton and Co. 1856
The Old Helmet. R. Carter and Brothers. 1863.
Melbourne House. R. Carter and Brothers. 1864.
The House of Israel. R. Carter and Brothers. 1866.
The Little Nurse of Cape Cod. American Sunday School Union. 1866.
Daisy. J.B. Lippincott and Co. 1869.
Daisy, Second Series. J.P. Lippincott and Co. 1869.
The Broken Walls of Jerusalem and How to Rebuild Them. R. Carter and Brothers, 1870.
The House in Town. R. Carter and Brothers. 1870.
Opportunities. R. Carter and Brothers. 1870.
The Little Camp on Eagle Hill. R Carter and Brothers. 1873.
Bread and Oranges. R. Carter and Brothers. 1875.

The Flag of Truce. R. Carter and Brothers. 1875.
Diana. G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1877.
Pine Needles. R. Carter and Brothers. 1877.
The Kingdom of Judah. R. Carter and Brothers. 1878.
My Desire. R. Carter and Brothers. 1879.
The End of the Coil. R. Carter and Brothers. 1880.
The Letter of Credit. R. Carter and Brothers. 1881.
Nobody. R. Carter and Brothers. 1882.
Stephen, MD. R. Carter and Brothers. 1883.
A Red Wallflower. R. Carter and Brothers. 1884.

BY SUSAN AND ANNA WARNER

Say and Seal. J.P. Lippincott Co. 1860.
The Little American. 1862-64.
Sybil and Chyrssa. Robert Carter and Brothers. 1874.
The Gold of Chickaree. G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1876.
Wych Hazel. G.P. Putnam and Sons. 1876

NOTES

¹ According to Mabel Baker, a Warner biographer who traced the Warner family ancestry in her book *Light In the Morning*, Henry Whiting Warner was related through paternal lines to William Bradford (albeit distantly) and his mother's family immigrated only three years later, in 1624. Anna Bartlett's family had similar roots. According to Baker, her ancestors once defended John Proctor during the Salem Witch Trials of 1631 (3-6).

² Daisy's age is not specified, but readers assume her to be quite young by the way her Aunt addresses her in the early portions of the novel, and Wych's early childhood is described in *Melbourne House* the prequel to *Wych Hazel*,

³ For a detailed discussion of the impact of The Cult of True Womanhood on nineteenth-century society and culture, see Barbara Welter's 1966 essay in *American Quarterly*, "The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860."

⁴ Just how faithful a chronicler Anna Warner was is debatable. As William McIntosh, author of "From West Point: The Warner Sisters of Constitution Island" notes, "After Susan's death in 1885, Anna who lived another thirty years, systematically destroyed all materials she believed might reflect unfavorably upon any member of the family...she has no interest in sharing her family's privacy with the world" (18).

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of domesticity and the public sphere of the publication industry, see Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America*, especially Chapter 9, "A The Crisis of Domesticity: A Crisis of Being"

⁶ Scholars have identified several strains of religious rhetoric at work in *The Wide, Wide World* and Warner's religious beliefs have been discussed at length from a variety of theological perspectives. For a discussion of Warner's work with The American Tract Society, see Jane Tompkins Afterword to the 1983 Feminist Press Edition of *The Wide, Wide World*. For a discussion of Calvinism in Warner, see Sharon Kim's 2003 essay for *American Literature* "Puritan Realism: *The Wide, Wide World* and *Robinson Crusoe*." For a more detailed analysis of Skinner and New School Presbyterianism as an influence on Warner, John Carlos Rowe's "Religious Transnationalism in the American Renaissance."

⁷ For a discussion of race in *The Wide, Wide World*, see, Susan L Roberson's "Ellen Montgomery's Other Friend: Race Relations in an Expunged Episode of Warner's *Wide Wide World*."

⁸ Williams argues that Warner's readers wielded such powerful influence that she or Anna "would never publish anything other than what their publishers and readers had come to expect" and that, as a result, their writings "appeared to suppress a literary will toward increasing worldliness" (575).

⁹ Anna Warner's aversion to novel reading continued throughout her life. As Olivia Wendell Stokes, a friend of the Warner family and author of *Letters and Memories of Susan and Anna Warner*, recalls, Anna once chided her for referring to Susan's works as novels, preferring the term "stories" (14).

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Ellen Montgomery's visit to Scotland, see John Carlos Rowe's "Religious Transnationalism in the American Renaissance: Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*."

¹¹ Nina Baym draws similar biographical connections in *Woman's Fiction* (150-156).

¹² For a more in-depth discussion of other writers whose work complicates separate spheres ideology, see Davidson and Hatcher's *No More Separate Spheres!: A Next Wave American Studies Reader* and Elbert's *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930*

¹³ The committee appointed to judge the essays commented that Warner's submission was such a clear winner that "They deem it cheap at the price." The full text of Warner's essay, along with the brief commentary by the committee, can be found in *The Ladies Wreath*, January 1, 1851, pages 1-3.

¹⁴ Warner's essay so perfectly adheres to the ideology of true womanhood that Barbra Welter uses "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism?" as one of her many examples from women's periodicals in her seminal essay "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." Like Estes, Welter reads Warner's essay as being conservative and conventional because it argues that "an American

woman best shows her patriotism by staying at home, where she brings her influence to bear ‘upon the right side of the country’” (172).

¹⁵ Anna’s biography is not a purely historical document, but it is still useful to students and scholars interested in Warner’s life and work. I rely upon Anna’s text when no other source of information is available about a certain period in Warner’s life, as is the case here. But Anna’s text is also valuable in that it includes her personal recollections of experiences that she and her sister both shared. Because they both participated in the distribution of tracts and mission fund collection, Anna’s memories are invaluable in that record she and her sisters emotional reaction to the stark poverty they both encountered.

¹⁶It is important to note that Anna Warner never overtly states that she and her sister belonged to The New York City Tract Society or the Ladies’ New York Anti-Slavery Society, though both Jane Tompkins and Susan Roberson have identified Warner’s writing as belonging to the discourse of these organizations

¹⁸ The last mention of the New York City Tract Society occurs in a letter written from Susan to Anna, which cannot be dated precisely, but is believed to have been composed either in 1847 or 1852 on one of Susan’s two trips to New York City during this period. In it, she states only that she has purchased two new tracts, and is excited to read them (A. Warner 233). After this, there are no other mentions of distributing tracts or making visits for the society in her journal, letters, or in Anna’s biography.

¹⁹ There was apparently some confusion about the level of Anna’s involvement in the project when the series was first published. Putnam’s 1853 edition of *Mr. Rutherford’s Children* attributes the text to “the authors of *The Wide, Wide World, Queechy, Dollars and Cents*, etc”, and all subsequent volumes in the Ellen Montgomery’s Bookshelf series name both sisters as authors. In the 1855 Routledge London edition, which included both *Mr. Rutherford’s Children* and *Carl Krinken*, Anna Warner added a “Suggestive” that appeared after her sister’s introduction. “I think it necessary,” she writes, “to come to the help of the Public. Lest Miss Wetherell should not have her dues, they are giving her the dues of everyone else; and whatever my hand may have to do with Ellen Montgomery’s Bookshelf, there it is—even though ‘a discerning public’ perceive it not. No matter for that—I had as soon be behind the books as before them...Whatever book or part of a book you particularly like, thank Miss Wetherell for it; and let all those pages which are least interesting be charged to the account of Amy Lothrop.” It appears that Anna actually wrote more of the Ellen Montgomery’s Bookshelf series than Susan did. In a letter from Susan Warner to John Seely Hart from 1854, Susan admits that Anna wrote all of *Mr. Rutherford’s Children*, and notes that she contributed only a few chapters to *Carl Krinken*. The original letters from the Warner sisters to Hart are housed at Kroch Library at Cornell University. Synopses of Warner’s correspondence can be found at The Constitution Island Association.

²⁰ As Jennifer Brady notes in her *Commonplace* “A young girl writing in 1881 compared Warner’s novel to the Bible and then talked about her everyday use of it: ‘When I feel angry or out of temper I read in the book and find out how Ellen fought against temptations, and I am instantly put right in tune again and feel good desires ...’” (n. page). The Constitution Island Association currently holds most of the Warners’ correspondence, and even a quick perusal of these materials reveals that the example Brady provides is typical of fans’ reactions to the novel and its heroine.

²¹ The fact that Warner sisters could describe America in November of 1862 in such idealistic terms seems almost impossibly naïve. To prompt children to be thankful that they were not born in a country that sells children into slavery and to claim that all Americans are free from oppression seems willfully disingenuous at the height of the Civil War.

²² The Constitution Island Association Archive has preserved much of Susan and Anna Warner’s correspondence with West Point graduates, including letters from E.H. Catlin, who went on to serve in the 2nd Artillery stationed in Texas and Arkansas during the Apache Wars of 1880’s. Catlin’s letters lament the lack of missionary work being performed on the Mexican-American border, a fact which inspires him to begin teaching Sunday school classes to the indigenous population. As Catlin writes to Susan in May of 1881, “I am going to work in a school starting among children who do not go any other

place and hope to do a little good. I miss something in the people here while exists in some people I know a power that makes me believe that they are earnest Christians.” The lengthy letters Catlin wrote to Susan are almost exclusively religious in nature, and though her replies have not survived, Catlin’s replies indicate that Susan was serving as a spiritual mentor to her former student, and was encouraging his missionary efforts. Both Susan and Anna Warner received multiple requests from Mrs. George Ainsley, the wife of a prominent missionary Reverend George Ainsley, for editions of their Sunday school writings to be used in various missionary schools throughout the west. Again, the sister’s replies have not survived, but the repeated requests for not only books, but food, clothing and other materials for the “Indians in the Dakotas” and the various letters of thanks indicate that the sister’s greatly assisted Mrs. Ainsley from 1875 to the end of their lives.

²³ As James Alan Marten notes in *Lessons of War: The Civil War in Children’s Magazines*, while authors of children’s literature “all but ignored” politics in the decades preceding the Civil War, when “an overwhelming majority of Northern publishers of juvenile books, magazines, and textbooks assiduously avoided racial issues,” once war broke out, “this trend changed”(xiii).

²⁴ See “Love in Fiji: My Early Life Among the Cannibals” *Putnam’s Magazine*. (1868-1870) Jul 1870; House, Erwin, “Missionary Life Among the Cannibals.” *The Ladies’ Repository*(1849-1876) Jul 1860; Stevens, Abel “Great Triumphs of the Gospel: Methodism in the South Sea Islands” *The Ladies’ Repository* (1849-1876); Dec 1861; and “Cannibals or Not?” *The Youth’s Companion* (1827-1929); Jul 9, 1874.

²⁵ Other titles currently housed at the Constitution Island Association on the topics of missionary work and Fiji include W.B. Boyce, J. Mullens, E.B. Underhill, *The Missionary World*. New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, n.d.; Walter, R. ed., *A Voyage Round the World ... by George Anson, Esq.* London: Strahan et al., 1780.; 15th edition. “His Brother”, ed., *John. G. Patton, Missionary to the New Hebrides, An Autobiography*. New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, n.d. Susan and Anna’s interest in Fiji and the South Sea Islands did not wane following the publication of *The Little American*, as their home also contained several volumes published after the paper was discontinued. These titles include *At Home in Fiji* (1878) and *A Life of John Coleridge Patteson, Missionary Bishop of the Melanesian Islands* (1882).

²⁶ For contemporary reviews of *Fiji and the Fijians*, see *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, Oct 1859; *Littel’s Living Age*, Feb 12, 1859; *National Era* Nov 3, 1859; *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, Mar 30, 1859; *The American Theological Review*, Nov 1859; and *The North American Review*, Jan 1860.

²⁷ In Williams and Calvert’s text, women often submit to this willingly, telling friends goodbye before they happily meet their fate. According to Williams, “It has been said that most of the women thus are destroyed and sacrificed at their own instance...Many are importunate to be killed, because they know that life would thenceforth be to them prolonged insult, neglect, and want. Very often to, their resolution is grounded upon knowing that their friends or children have determined that they shall die” (199).

²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Susan Warner’s Sunday school fiction, see Sondra Smith Gates’ “The Edge of Possibility: Susan Warner and Sunday School Fiction,” especially her bibliography and notes. Information about Anna Warner’s Sunday school fiction is more difficult to locate, but anyone interested in exploring Anna’s writings for should consult the Constitution Island Association’s online archives, especially the section marked “Warner Writings,” which contains a lengthy bibliography of the both sisters’ work.

²⁹ Susan and Anna Warner were particularly generous to Mrs. George Ainsley, whose husband ran several missionary schools for Native Americans in both the Dakotas and in Minnesota during the 1880s. The sisters habitually sent books, clothing, and the like to the Ainsleys’ schools for over a decade. The CIA’s Warner Correspondence file also contains correspondence from other missionary schools asking for donations, including several from the Sisson Agency in the Dakota territories. See letters from Mary Collins, Martha Morris, and S.R. Riggs in the Warner Correspondence File.

³⁰ In a personal interview conducted by the Constitution Island Association in 1966, Olive Adams, a friend of the Warner family, records a conversation she had with another friend of the family Dorothy Giles of Cold Springs, NY about a story Willis told him about his former life as a slave. “One night,” the unnamed interviewer states, “when she was a little girl, her father called her and her brother in his office and showed them the scars on the back of Willis that had been applied when he was a slave in the south.”

³¹ For a discussion of the importance of King Alfred in the Victorian Era, see Joanne Parker’s *England’s Darling: The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great*

³² Susan and Anna’s readers might have noted that the marriage Rollo proposes is similar to Margret Fuller’s ideal marriage—the religious union, the fourth type she outlined in her introduction to *Women in the Nineteenth Century* titled “The Great Lawsuit” (1845). Like the couple Fuller describes in her essay, Rollo proposes that he and Wych are to be equals on “a pilgrimage towards a common shrine.”

³³ Along with Ranta’s annotated bibliography, scholars and students interested in depictions of mill workers in nineteenth-century American periodicals should consult The Harvard University Library Open Collections Program online resource “Women Working: 1800-1930”

<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/>. The site is open-access, and features hundreds of photographs, poems, magazines, pamphlets, and other primary source material from the Harvard Library archives.

³⁴ Anna Warner would definitely have found the lack of gardens and flowers disturbing. She was an avid gardener who authored several books on the subject. A variety of rose is still named for her.

³⁵ See Benita Elser’s introduction to *The Lowell Offering: Writings of New England Mill Women, Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town* by Timothy W. Vanderburg, Shelley Sallee’s *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South*. For a discussion of industrial paternalism in the early twentieth century, see *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* by Andrea Tone.

³⁶ Although they were not temperance activists, Susan and Anna Warner definitely supported the movement, and several of Susan’s heroines preach the virtues of total abstinence. Matilda, the child-protagonist of *The House in Town* (1870) signs a temperance pledge early in the novel, then agonizes over whether or not to make a contribution to a fund to purchase a set of cordial glasses for an elderly friend because she had “pledged” to do all she could “to advance the cause of temperance.” She ultimately refuses to join in the gift, and proceeds to cry into her Bible “wishing it were not so hard to be a Christian” (270). In its sequel *What She Could* (1870), Matilda refuses to drink a glass of cordial herself when invited to a party at a neighbor’s home. When her sister indulges, the two do not speak for several days (149). Similarly, in *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen Montgomery earns the scorn of her Scottish relatives by refusing to drink alcohol with dinner (555).

³⁷ For a list of notable historical figures buried at West Point Cemetery, consult the website of the United States Military Academy at West Point, Memorial Affairs, at www.usma.edu/cemetery.

³⁸ See Ruth Crocke’s 2006 biography Mrs. *Russell Sage: Women’s Activism and Philanthropy in Gilded Age and Progressive Era*.

³⁹ As of November 2014, the old link to CIA online archives remains active through Olive Digital Software Inc., a for-profit, web-based, archival content developer. They can be accessed at <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODE/Constitution/>, but do not appear in the results of a Google search.