Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Knowledge Repository @ IUP

Theses and Dissertations (All)

1-30-2012

The Self-Fashioning of the Nineteenth-Century Woman in American Woman's Literature

Mary Dillow Stewart
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
Stewart, Mary Dillow, "The Self-Fashioning of the Nineteenth-Century Woman in American Woman's Literature" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 730.
http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/730

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact cclouser@iup.edu, sara.parme@iup.edu.

THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMAN IN WOMAN'S LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of English

Mary Dillow Stewart

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2011

University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Mary Dillow Stewart

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

___December 15, 2011__ ___Signature on File_____
Thomas J. Slater, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

___December 15, 2011__ ___Signature on File_____
David Downing, Ph.D.
Professor of English

___December 15, 2011__ ___Signature on File_____
Timothy Sweet, Ph.D.
Professor of English & Associate Chair
West Virginia University

ACCEPTED

____Signature on File_____ _____
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: The Self-Fashioning of the Nineteenth Century American Woman in Woman's Literature

Author: Mary Dillow Stewart

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Thomas J. Slater

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. David Downing
Dr. Timothy Sweet

The genesis of the self-fashioning of the nineteenth century American woman lies in the convergence of contemporary theoretical concerns and thoughts about women derived from the classical philosophical works of Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, early American philosophers, and religious leaders. Closer examination of these philosophies in characterizations of women in American woman's literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals the ways in which women view the possibility, or impossibility, of free choice and collective agency. Woman's literature contributes to the shaping of women's culture by providing opportunities for women to interact. They interact with the text, privately, when reading it for the first time. They interact with other women to exchange copies of various texts, and they interact with other women when they discuss what they are reading in parlor and salon gatherings. Through this process of exchange, a woman reader may discover selfhood and be comforted in the recognition of a self-made community of women—a safe community in which she can discuss varying themes and explore the depths of their meaning with other women. Women authors of the period not only try to define what it means to be an American but also what it means to be an American woman. Their works carry into the nineteenth century questions of nationalism and reform; in addition, questions on spirituality, civic engagement, marriage, and motherhood become frequent themes. These themes vary

according to the regional identity, class, and the socio-economic status of the author. Like most established literature, woman's literature employs many literary conventions to express a wide spectrum of cultural and humanistic themes not necessarily unique to women, but part of their experience, nevertheless. Central to this discussion is an examination of the ways in which women readers internalized the actions and characterizations of women in fashioning their identities through resistance or acceptance of new ideals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to the many people who have contributed their time and energy to the successful completion of this project. I would like to thank Dr. Thomas J. Slater, Director, and Dr. Timothy Sweet, a reader, for their tireless and timely commentary on the many drafts of this document. Their support and kindness in the wake of Karen Dandurand's death was truly remarkable. I would not have been able to complete this process without them. I would also like to thank the staff in IUP's Graduate Office for their patience and guidance during what seemed total chaos, Hilliary E. Creely for her advocacy on my behalf, and John Carl Hepler for his patience in preparing this document for publication. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Thelma Hutchins, Fairmont State University's Librarian for her expertise and knowledge of archival information, and Dr. Gail Berlin for sharing her knowledge of medieval women's literature. Lastly, I would also like to thank Tom Tonkovich, my partner in life, for his patient support, and my son Andrew Carter for being a sounding board.

DEDICATION

39

I never lost as much but twice,
And that was in the sod.
Twice have I stood a beggar
Before the door of God!

Angels—twice descending
Remembering my store—
Burglar! Banker—Father!
I am poor once more!

—Emily Dickinson (1858)

I dedicate this document to Dr. Karen Dandurand, my director, advisor, mentor, and friend, to Holly May Ryan, my grandmother, and to Florence Holly Rowan Dillow, my mother, all of whom lost their lives to breast cancer. I would also like to include my four sisters, Nancy Lane, Judith Ann, Sandra Kay, and Donna Marie in this dedication as well as Liz Mutzabaugh and Vicki Corkran Willey, fellow doctoral students and friends. Their friendship, understanding, and guidance created a community of supportive women in my life much like the one I discussed in this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

THE MIRROR HAS TWO FACES: ONE FOR *THEM* AND ONE FOR OURSELVES

"Now, like the Lady of Shallot,
I dwell within an empty room," (1-2)

— "Before the Mirror"
Elizabeth Drew Stoddard (1860)

Elizabeth Drew Stoddard's poem "Before the Mirror" references Alfred Lord Tennyson's eponymous heroine whose cursed life is spent in a closed tower (434). She must weave day and night and her only contact with the world is through the images that appear in the mirror. Like the "Lady of Shallot," Stoddard's speaker weaves "with a steady hand" and watches the shadows come and go in her mirror. Her speaker reflects on her fate: "The shadows, whether false or true, / I put aside a doubt which asks, / Among these phantoms what are you?" (18-20). The phantoms in Stoddard's poem represent the faint image flitting across the mirror—an image of the woman the speaker could be if unlocked from her room and released from her curse. What could a woman become if released from the curse of being born a woman in a time when women were thought to be without substance, so to speak? Stoddard's weaving of mythology and ancient philosophy suggests that women in the nineteenth century suffer from residual beliefs rooted in ancient philosophies that cast women in proscriptive roles with no escape. They become "Ladies of Shallot."

The genesis of the self-fashioning of the nineteenth-century woman in America lies in the convergence of contemporary theoretical concerns and thoughts about women derived from the classical philosophical works of Plato, Aristotle, and Hippocrates, and early American philosophers and clergymen. Closer examination of these philosophies in characterizations in American woman's literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals the ways in

which women view the "fleeting image" of possibility in their reflection should they be allowed to "weave the tapestry" of free choice and collective agency.

This analysis will offer ways to examine fashion's invasive impact on the public debate of the woman question through self-fashioning and/or self-branding. Rooted within its own historical moment, the debate is enmeshed in the allegory of shaping the identity of a new nation. Novels, letters, journals, newspapers, essays, speeches, and sermons of the period offer a body of evidence that, when examined within the rubric of literary criticism, illuminates the process through which nineteenth-century American women's private and public identities are governed by the systems of society that contain them—systems that shape ideologies for women without, for the most part, their direct participation. For lower-middle and middle-class women in nineteenth-century America, self-fashioning leads to an understanding of the ways in which a woman can re-fashion herself to make a better marriage match as the character Jean Muir does in Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask* (1866). Or, self-fashioning for nineteenth-century women can lead to proscriptive gender roles in the quest for independence and outright rebellion like E.D.E.N. Southworth's character Capitola does in *The Hidden Hand: Or Capitola the Madcap* (1859). Yet, the concept of self-fashioning for lower-middle and middle-class women in the nineteenth century is not a new one, nor will the idea fade with time. From ancient Greece to the Middle Ages and present day, society imposes value on personal appearance, and the pressure to maintain or fashion a level of respectability and self-presentation is the foundation of a multi-billion dollar industry in contemporary America, alone.[1]

Thoughts about women in the beginning of the nineteenth century in America are not so far removed from the antiquated and medieval representations of women like the eponymous heroines confined to towers or Elizabeth Stoddard's later representation of the "Ladies of Shallot" in her poem "Before the Mirror." Confinement becomes a prevalent theme in American

woman's literature in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the belief in the necessity for confinement of women is imbedded in the ignorance of a woman's intellectual capacity.

To further understand the influence of woman's literature on the self-image of lower-middle- and middle-class women in nineteenth-century America, we must first define the canon of woman's literature.

What Is the Definition of Woman's Literature and How Do Women Readers Respond?

> "If women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, then, they would have a literature of their own."
> – John Stuart Mill *Subjection of Women*

Elaine Showalter begins her chapter on "American Questions" in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* with the quote above from John Stuart Mill. Her point is that, like men, women are influenced by the language, history, cultural mythologies, ideologies, and ideals of the country in which they live (1). She regards the literature of the nineteenth century written by women, novels in particular, to be outspoken with regard to the woman question (3). Nina Baym suggests that woman's fiction, "whether fable, romance, or novel, believes in effective virtue" (34),[2] and she further argues that nineteenth-century women writers of fiction are writing a psychology of women (19). Woman's literature, in my opinion, reveals a self-conscious struggle to explore self-definition and provides scholars and historians with glimpses of the states of mind of women authors and women readers.

Some women write for economic reasons, some write to inform and educate, and others write anonymously to frame resistance to oppression and to re-claim or explore their identities.[3] When a woman picks up her pen and writes for the public, regardless of whether she signs her name, uses a pseudonym, or writes anonymously, we can say that her writing is an act of agency and activism. She is raising her voice in an attempt to end her silence. Woman's literature contributes to the shaping of women's culture by providing opportunities for women to interact.

They interact with the text, privately, when reading it for the first time. They interact with other women to exchange copies of various texts, and they interact with other women when they discuss what they are reading in parlor and salon gatherings. Through this process of exchange, a woman reader may discover selfhood and be comforted in the recognition of a self-made community of women—a safe community in which she can discuss varying themes and explore the depths of their meaning with other women.

Woman's literature in America in the late eighteenth century focuses on issues of nationalism and attempts to respond to questions of citizenship and education for women in a new nation, specifically, the work of Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Judith Sargent Murray, and Hannah Mather Crocker. Like other women authors of the period, they are not only trying to define what it means to be an American but also what it means to be an American woman. These early works carry into the nineteenth century questions of nationalism and educational reform; in addition, questions of spirituality and the woman question become frequent themes. These themes may vary according to the regional identity, class, and the socio-economic status of the author. Judith Sargent Murray's novella *The Story of Margaretta* offers an excellent example of how a well-educated female author can address social issues within the context of a fictional work. Issues of nationalism, education, and spirituality are addressed by Mr. and Mrs. Vigillius in the care of their young charge, the orphan Margaretta. Although the novella is sentimental in nature, Murray uses the names of her characters to symbolize various moral traits and behaviors. The Vigillius's, for example, watch over young Margaretta and ensure her complete education—not only in domestic arts but also the classics and French. As a result, little Margaretta blossoms into an accomplished, even-tempered, well-mannered, young woman capable of sound judgement and rational choice.[4]

Like most established literature, woman's literature employs many literary conventions to express a wide spectrum of cultural, national, regional, and humanistic themes not necessarily unique to women, but part of their experience, nevertheless. This definition echoes twentieth-

century womanist philosophy and gynocriticism.[5] Elaine Showalter's conception of gynocriticism provides a paradigm for analysis of women's writing from production and motivation to analysis and interpretation across literary genres. Alice Walker's description of womanist hinges on a commitment "to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (qtd. in Collins 38). Patricia Hill Collins builds on Walker's definition of womanist by suggesting that her philosophy universalizes "individual struggles while simultaneously allowing space for autonomous movement of self-determination" (38). These definitions provide a cornerstone for my definition of woman's literature. Yet, I am aware that in their attempt to define womanhood, not all nineteenth-century women writers are able to transcend class consciousness or racial bias and achieve a truly humanist perspective.

A broad definition such as this gives scholars the opportunity to study issues of race, class, and gender identity from different points of view in all woman's literature within the genres of poetry, prose, and fiction and sub-genres of sentimental, domestic, and reform literature. Ultimately, the plots and themes of woman's literature involve relationships within the family and community—woman to woman, woman to parent, woman to child, woman to man, and woman to society. The significance of these distinctions lies in the knowledge that women writers rely on women readers to connect to their writing and create meaning in their own lives, and thus women authors give voice to a mass audience of otherwise silent women.

Margaret Fuller attempted to fill this silence and give voice to women in the mid-nineteenth century by hosting "Transcendentalist Conversations" with twenty-five to thirty women in Boston, Massachusetts. They would meet regularly at Peabody's West Street bookstore for a few hours of discussion, lectures, and occasional papers (Capper 35). The purpose for these conversations was to address the problems that arose as a consequence of performing "social duties," which in Fuller's opinion prohibited women from opportunities to nurture "woman thinking" (35). The "conversations" also included a discussion on the nature of "beauty." Beauty, in Fuller's opinion, is beyond ornamental. In her lecture of November 4, 1840,

"She sympathized . . . with the sensible people who were tired of hearing all the young ladies of Boston sighing like furnaces after being beautiful" (34). From these conversations, women reached consensus on several points—education for women should be systematic and education would not unsex women nor would women shrink from it in favor of fashion and gossip. Fuller's "Transcendental Conversations" created a platform for woman's literature beginning with her assignment to her assistants to write essays on the topic of 'woman'" (35). These essays were the subject of further debate among the women in the group, and their discourse positive or negative, proved their ability to analyze, argue, and synthesize information in such a way that they created a "living" woman's literature apart from the established canon.

Following Margaret Fuller's lead, I wish to treat woman's literature as a category of its own regardless of whether the texts are included in the established canon of nineteenth-century literature or not. Women authors, then, define their own boundaries, as Jane Tomkins suggests, based on the cultural work of individual texts within the larger context of literature in nineteenth-century America. Therefore, no single aesthetic can contain the volume of woman's literature as its muted boundaries are ever evolving. As women writers experience changes, their ideas on self-definition change, and as a result, their feelings change and through extension, their writing changes. Woman's literature changes as women's perspectives change; sentimental and domestic literature is engulfed by reform literature, for example. A woman author's experiences, past and present, shape her identity and the message she wishes to convey to her readers, whom she perceives, for the most part, to be other women.

If women, young and old, are the primary readers of fiction, as Nina Baym and Cathy N. Davidson suggest,[6] then the message in woman's fiction, for example, is primarily intended for other females. Women authors develop a language expressed in a narrative employing "woman speak," as I call it, which extends from fiction to all genres of women's writing. Woman speak, as I use the term, refers to a metalanguage of experience connecting nineteenth-century women within the *culture* of womanhood and should not be confused with the "cult of womanhood," or

the "cult of domesticity," although they can be and are narrative themes in some woman's literature. Woman speak refers to a woman author's transformation of silence into language and action. Woman speak varies within the sub-cultures of women's culture. Woman speak in a slave narrative like Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), for example, is experientially different from woman speak in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822), which tells the story of a destitute young woman forced to live off of the charity of her aunt and perform household chores. Both offer detailed narratives of women who suffer at the hands of others, and when situated within their regional, socio-economic, historic, and cultural genesis they belong in the canon of woman's literature because they examine issues of self-definition. These two texts, like all woman's literature, educate and inform readers as to the condition of women and their ideologies within their time. They become historical and cultural artifacts of nineteenth-century women for all time.

Defining nineteenth-century woman's literature in this way enables scholars to subdivide writing by women into thematic categories of experiences expressed in the literature, regardless of the literary genre, much like the way Karen Kilcup does in her anthology of *Nineteenth Century American Women Writers* by grouping all genres within broader thematic categories like "Community and Society," "The Erotic: Sexuality and Sexualities," and "Cultural Crossings; Cross-Cultural Relations," for example. Doing so allows us to examine the ways in which the historical moment shapes woman's literature without forcing an ideological reading of their experience. We may be inclusive or exclusive based on thematic connections. For instance, the texts in this study reflect the changes in lower-middle- to middle-class women's identities in America as a result of self-fashioning. Although, by definition, lower-middle and middle class excludes most African American and Native American women writers, the choice to exclude these writers in this study is not a prejudicial one. It is made with the understanding that the cultural work of self-definition in African American, Native American, and other minority woman's literature does not use the currency of fashion to redefine these women; nevertheless,

their use of writing as a form of activism giving voice to women who otherwise have none is equally effective.

So, this study on the ways in which fashion plays a role in the self-fashioning of lower-middle- and middle-class nineteenth-century American women can be inclusive of all genres of woman's literature but with a sustained focus on the characterizations of women in novels written by women from the late eighteenth century beginning with *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* in 1791 and concluding with *The House of Mirth* in 1905. Through the span of time and changes in characterizations, we will be able to track historical changes in perceptions, ideologies, and behaviors of women as expressed in woman's literature.

To do so, the characterization of fashion in the description of women characters should be examined closely to begin to understand the attributes authors assign to clothing and how they anticipate, or not, women readers' responses. Then, the same characterizations should be analyzed from a psychological and sociological point of view. For example, when an author takes care to describe a female character's fashions, what is the description meant to reveal about the character's psychological state? How do women react to a character of this type and why? The semiotics of the descriptions of fashion for these characters should also be examined to understand the ways in which the reading of fictional characters employs the same practices as the reading of women's bodies in public. The connections between the act of reading and internalizing the characterizations that affect change in the way a woman appears in public should be examined to determine the relationship of the subject to the text. The additional study of the impact these literary characterizations have on women's issues such as dress reform, health reform, and educational reform will facilitate a discussion of the systems of society that contain women rather than emancipate them and the role of woman's literature in that process, as well as the creation of woman's culture with all of its sub-cultures.

Theorizing Self-Fashioning for Nineteenth Century American Women

For lower-middle- and middle-class American women in the nineteenth century, the recognition of selfhood beyond the domestic space is the end product of self-fashioning in which they must become the agents of their own transformation. But, before the process of their self-fashioning begins, they must come to the realization that their submission to the absolute authority of the dominant culture of containment limits their development as human beings by denying them their agency and their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as individuals. Furthermore, when women become the agents of their own self-fashioning, they must then confront the very real threat of alienation through the loss which may accompany a public display of their newly fashioned selves. Self-fashioning for these women may be, as Stephen Greenblatt writes, the "increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (2), or it may be a very private epiphany occurring as a result of having read woman's literature in "the protected space of her domestic sphere."[7] A woman reader may resist, re-frame or reinvent herself through the act of reading woman's literature. Furthermore, the life experience a woman brings to the act of reading becomes the foreground which justifies her resistance to new ideas of self. She may simply re-frame her present ideology, or she may re-invent herself through self-fashioning in the face of new ideas. Each of these activities is an act of agency because they require the reader to consider the concept of self-hood and to act upon it.[8] They are acts that acknowledge a sense of self and an awareness of the agency of fashioning ideology.

Greenblatt acknowledges that the verb fashion has special connotations, and that it "seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self—this forming may be understood quite literally as the imposition upon a person of physical form" (2). Just as he uses fashioning to "suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving" to discuss the Renaissance (2), we can use fashioning, or rather, self-fashioning, to discuss the discursive

practices in nineteenth-century woman's literature in America as a means of establishing a woman's culture that helps other women embrace ideas of self, new and old.

Self-fashioning for nineteenth-century American lower-middle- and middle-class women is a complicated process that when viewed through an historic lens reveals changes in women and their attitudes over the course of the century. The term can be used metaphorically to describe how the fashions of the day become outward signifiers of the condition of women on many levels, or it can be used as a verb to signify the process of doing in which the "doer," as Judith Butler suggests, "is constructed through the deed" as a way of exercising her own agency or coming unto a realization of her self-hood (195). In other words, these women must first reach the awareness that they are defined by the prevailing hegemonic culture dominated by men and not of their own "doing." Because self-definition prior to the act of self-fashioning is defined externally, women are treated as voice-less subjects lacking agency—as the Other, the outsider, the alien. Both their appearance and behavior become texts for public debate, and because these women are voiceless for the most part within the dominant culture, a woman's culture emerges. This emergent woman's culture centers around the self-improvement of women—a culture which gives voice to women and their concerns. Within this newly defined culture, women's literary salons and clubs emerge, and the agendas for many of these groups include expanded opportunities for the education of women and social reform.

Fashionable social interaction in literary and benevolent societies provided continuing education beyond female academy and seminary training for middle-class women. Mary Kelley notes that these settings provided nineteenth-century middle- and upper-middle class women an opportunity to address "the larger meanings of the knowledge they were pursuing," and to practice "the art of persuasive self-presentation," while instructing themselves in the "values and vocabularies of civil society" (14). She further contends that "Whether they defended or called into question dominant values, the thousands of women who participated in voluntary associations forged lives at the intersection of newly available educational opportunities and

engagement with civil society in local, regional, and national communities" (14-5). The label Kelley gives this process is individual subjectivity. She bases her definition of subjectivity on that of Jürgen Habermas's assumption that "Subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented toward an audience," and that "Identity, as the concept is used here, refers to performance of that subjectivity" (1-2). The process of individual subjectivity that Kelley defines echoes the process of self-fashioning as defined by Stephen Greenblatt because it involves self-perception and an understanding of the self in relation to society. Kelley discusses the effects that education, literary circles, and benevolent societies have on a woman's sense of herself and the development of her individual subjectivity, whereas Greenblatt discusses the process of self-fashioning through cultural poetics which lead to the recognition of the self as a cultural artifact.

Greenblatt's theory of self-fashioning relies heavily on the cultural theory and definitions of the systems of society outlined by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Geertz writes, "There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture" (49). Greenblatt's interpretation of Geertz's statement suggests that culture is not primarily "'complexes of concrete behavior patterns–customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters'— but rather 'a set of control mechanisms, plans, recipes, rules, instructions . . .'—for the governing of behavior" (3). Self-fashioning, then, is based on the cultural theory that humans are themselves "cultural artifacts."[9] In Greenblatt's opinion, "Self-fashioning is in effect a version of control mechanisms, the cultural system of meaning that creates specific individuals by governing their passage from abstract to potential concrete historical embodiment," or from invisible to visible, or from a lack of agency to a recognition of one's own power as an agent of change (3-4).

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare,* Greenblatt offers a very specific discussion of the process of self-fashioning as it relates to rising middle-class men in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, a paradigm for criticism emerges from this seminal study which engages scholars in a much broader application of cultural theory, or cultural poetics, in which the entire culture can be regarded as a text. The cultural text, then, allows for the interplay of

representations in the discourse of imitation and action, of background and foreground, of the body as a human, and of the body as text. This theory is applicable to any period in literature, in my opinion, in which the discursive practices of the text function within this system of cultural meaning, or the difference between thin description and thick description. Thin description merely describes the "mute act," and thick description foregrounds the act within "a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings" (Gallagher & Greenblatt 21). Catharine Williams's *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* provides an excellent example of thick description in a cultural sense in which the author relates the event, but does so in such a way that offers background, foreground, representations of the body, and a direct appeal to readers for their own interpretation of the facts.

Is *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* really a*uthentic*? The events of the trial are factual, but the way in which Catharine Williams writes a thick description of the events for readers certainly reveals more than the facts. She uses rhetorical strategies to expose the assignations against a young woman's character. Her perspective may stem from her single mother status as a writer or a genuine desire to affect change in society's attitudes about women, and in the process, perhaps redeem the character of one maligned by organized religion, the justice system, and her community. Williams wrote *Fall River* "with feelings of embarrassment" (3). In her "Preface," she states that "The tale which forms the principal part of its contents has been hitherto treated in such an indecent manner, that this, of itself, was nearly sufficient to terrify any one at the undertaking; and it was not until after long and reiterated persuasion, that the author was induced to attempt it" (3). She wrote the narrative in response to requests from subscribers and patrons of her previous work.[10] In November of 1832, *The Free Enquirer* reported that publication of "The Avery Narrative," had been delayed as a "consequence of having the edition enlarged above what was at first contemplated; the demands for the work being greater than what was expected." The demand suggests public confidence in Williams' ability to relate the accuracy of the events and the public's desire for more information about the murder and the subsequent scandal—

interesting too, that Sarah Maria Cornell, the murdered factory girl, was not mentioned in the article. Perhaps the details and circumstances of her death were too sensational for their regular subscribers, and those readers who wanted to learn more could purchase the book. If we consider the reflective and reflexive properties of the narrative, it is clear that Williams knew her audience and the potential impact her work would have on the general public.

As non-fiction, Williams's *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* exemplifies much of the sensational journalism of her day. In fact, Williams uses many of the same authorial devices to manipulate readers that Clifford Geertz would consider anecdotal elements of thick description.[11] Williams does relate the true sequence of events surrounding the murder of Sarah Maria Cornell and offers documentation and evidence for both sides, hence her claim that *Fall River* is an "authentic narrative" is justified. However, she does so in such a way that readers get a biased editorial—not unjustified given the outrageous acquittal of the murderer both in ecclesiastical courts and a court of law. She appeals to readers affectively through emotionally charged descriptions of the murder victim and the alleged murderer. To make sure readers get the point, she uses an abundance of italics and rhetorical questions, and even keeps her own voice as the "writer of these pages," as well as an elegy of sorts inspired by her visitation to both the site of the murder and Sarah Maria Cornell's grave.

Williams' use of italics sensationalizes the details and the outcomes that she feels are perhaps the most unfair or the most salient. As she writes of the events and conversations between Rev. Ephraim Avery and Cornell leading up to the fatal night, she describes Avery's affect in italics saying that "he passed the *most wretched night that he had ever done, having scarcely closed his eyes*" (22) suggesting that he was distraught over the news of Cornell, and, that, in the author's opinion is damning evidence. Further into the narrative when continuing to relate the facts surrounding the case and the trial, Williams again uses italics to suggest the mishandling of justice in favor of Avery: "*What he would have said, if interrogated*, belongs to another part of the story–and we hasten along with the trial" (50). Another example indicates the

ridiculous assumption or suggestion that the victim could have hung herself—the actual testimony of the medical experts. Williams manipulates this fact to emphasize the illogic of such a conclusion: "Next, that *hanging* was a very common death by suicide, and an uncommon way of murder" (51). In the same paragraph, she states that "However learned and elaborate it was, it is certain that *one single question* put to those physicians, if properly answered . . . would have put the whole to rest at once, by overthrowing the whole theory" (51). The question was one concerning the laws of nature versus the laws of the land. One further example of Williams' use of italics to editorialize the case occurs after the verdict when she tells readers that Avery had been prosecuted within the Methodist camp for defamation, and that "it resulted in *nothing to impeach his character*, and that *the Ecclesiastical Council acquitted him of all blame*" (59). Williams' use of italics appeals to readers' sense of fairness, or in this case the recognition of the lack of fairness, and in so doing engages them emotionally.

Williams further editorializes with rhetorical questions that also engage and direct readers' attention to the miscarriage of justice and the defamation of the victim's character through the hearsay and gossip of witness after witness. She writes, "But surely, says the reader, they must have made a lame piece of work of it, if that were the case. For what purpose this array of witnesses to prove the deceased bad?" (59). Her supposition is that the government wanted to prove the victim bad for she couldn't be good and the mistress of a married, Methodist minister. She asks readers, "How did all these inconsistencies of character in the deceased help him?" (59). Cornell is dead, so why defile her memory instead of trying the virtue of the man accused of her murder? These questions allow Williams to give a voice to the permanently silenced Cornell and to impose on readers her own editorial debate regarding the misdirection of the courts without inciting public outrage. Reading of the text takes place within the home, and engages the reader privately thus allowing for inspection of the authenticity of the retelling of the facts. Readers are more susceptible to Williams's interpretation of the facts because they are not being subjected to

public scrutiny while they read the text, unlike the outcry over a dramatized production of the events offered to the general public as entertainment.

In September of 1833, after *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* was published, *The Drama Called Sarah Maria Cornell* was produced by the Richmond Hill Theater in New York. *The New York Mirror: a Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts* wrote a scathing critique of the play. The writer considered the performance a "gross violation of propriety and public decency" and considered it:

> an offence for which the author, his aiders and abettors, may be presented and indicted. Here is a character [Sarah Maria Cornell] represented on a public stage, for the edification of our youth of both sexes, placed in interesting situations, calculated to excite their sympathies, and intended to serve as a model for imitation, when, if the circumstances of the sad tale, on which the play is founded, is adhered to, it is admitted that she swerved from the path of duty.

He refers to the parade of witnesses from Reverend Avery's followers whose malicious character assignations condemned the victim without, of course, any chance for a rebuttal as she was an itinerant factory girl lacking virtue, and deceased. The writer continues to defend the justice system:

> it would be the most dangerous absurdity which ever had a place in the long catalogue of human errors, to maintain, that the opinions of individuals or parties should be paramount to the solemn decision of twelve sworn men, founded on evidence carefully submitted to them, compared and collated during a patient investigation, and elucidated by the assistance of counsel and the charge of a responsible judge. If then, it is received as a general rule, that the decision of a jury, in regard to guilt or innocence, shall be conclusive, those who violate this rule are guilty of an offence which no community should, for a moment sanction. If it is sanctioned, no reputation is safe. The most spotless

> can be destroyed by a little artful management. It is only necessary to arrange circumstances in such order as to excite suspicion.

The irony, of course, is that the "artful management" of information submitted before the court did just that, destroy the character of the victim. This critique in *The New York Mirror* provides the historic foregrounding of the cultural moment and sentiment and in contrast, elevates the importance of Williams's *Narrative* as the voice of the real victim—Sarah Maria Cornell.

After the details of the murder case are revealed and the results conveyed to readers, Williams is determined to have the last word— the word that Cornell's sister thought best not to engrave on her tombstone, thinking that doing so would continue to draw undue attention. Here, Williams switches from an objective point of view (which occasionally, if not conspiratorially becomes "we") to first person. Williams tells readers that "The author of these pages visited that spot, as well as the one where she met her fate, at a most interesting moment" (62), during an eclipse. She then relates her thoughts, "For a time I stood wondering," she says, "I watched it [eclipse] as the shadow slid from the moon's disk, and I felt that confidence which I have ever felt since, that the mystery of darkness which envelopes the story and hides the sad fate of that unfortunate victim will one day be dispersed" (63). Williams inserts her elegy and justifies the second half of her book—to reclaim Cornell's character through her own voice in letters she had written to her sister and mother.

Part of the cultural work of woman's literature is to become the cultural artifact of women's struggle for identity beyond the domestic sphere. Over the course of the nineteenth century in America, women's writing provides a written record of woman's culture—a culture fashioned and defined by women in response to the demands of society.[12] *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* exemplifies that important work by revealing webs of significance in society, religion, government, and the justice system with regard to the treatment and/or mistreatment of women in the early nineteenth century.

Clifford Geertz states, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, [and] I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (5). When we build on Geertz’s theory of culture by changing “man” to woman, we find that woman’s culture cannot be defined as a single hegemonic body; it is indeed a suspension of webs of signification open to interpretation by the participants and the spectators.

The webs of signification interpreted and re-interpreted by the alleged murderer and the spectators of Sarah Maria Cornell’s dead body were debated privately and publicly to deduce the cause and effect of what for some was a tragedy and for others a service to polite society. The physician to whom she appealed for counsel is also the one who first attended her in death. He was “horror struck” by the change in her “countenance . . . livid pale, —her tongue protruded through her teeth—pushed out her under lip, that was very much swollen as though it had received some hard blow, or been severely bit in anguish, gave a dreadful expression of agony, while a deep indentation on the cheek looked as though that too must have been pressed by some hard substance” (Williams 23-4). He discovered a cord buried “nearly half an inch” in the neck of her frozen, stiff body. Her body was trusted to the “care” of several matrons “who had volunteered to perform this office of benevolence” (25).

When the women were undressing the corpse to prepare her for burial, they discovered evidence of something beyond their understanding of suicide—something unnatural to the circumstance of “self-murder.” They discovered “marks of violence” and “rash violence.” Cornell’s body revealed a series of bruises in the shape of a large hand just above her waist; there were other bruises on her back, and her knees were scratched and grass stained as though she had fallen or struggled for a time on the ground (25-6). The matrons continued their work and said nothing at the time to the authorities, only whispered among themselves. Why? They understood the significance of the marks on Cornell’s lifeless body, but they also understood they were not charged with the duties of a coroner and would have no voice in the matter unless called to testify.

When these details threatened to come out in the trial, they were set aside as hearsay and as such inadmissible because her body was buried before a "proper" examination could be made by an educated physician.

The women of Fall River were part of the hegemonic culture linking all women simply by gender, but they are also part of a woman's culture in search of a voice. Woman's culture has many sub-cultures. The women attending the body of Cornell were matrons. As a sub-culture, matrons would be older, perhaps married, wiser in the ways of the world with a better understanding of the mysteries of life, and "old hands" at domesticity. Cornell represents yet another sub-culture, one of an abandoned young female forced by economic circumstances to work in the mills. One sub-culture may enjoy domestic bliss, while the other may yearn for fulfillment in other ways. To further complicate matters, the definition of domesticity changes from the beginning to the end of the nineteenth century in America,[13] bringing changes in cultural socialization as well, thus creating new webs of signification.

In the mid-nineteenth century, daughters begin to question the socialization of the hegemonic culture and their mothers' roles within that cultural paradigm. These young women become prototypical New Women whose life experience provided a benchmark for the sub-culture of New Woman that emerges around 1870. One could argue that the New Woman sub-culture is a counter-culture to the culture of True Woman. Nevertheless, to survive, women belonging to any sub-culture, including counter-cultures, must participate in the way of life of both the larger culture and their own sub-group. They must confront their "otherness" in the larger culture that may result as a consequence of their participation in another sub-culture or counter-culture. To negotiate these cultural spheres, women's behavior, demeanor, and appearance must reflect the values and traits of her new agency as well as her former agency. So although a middle-class nineteenth-century American woman may have an epiphany of selfhood, in many cases, the act of wearing the uniform of complicity, such as a tightly laced corset, is a conscious choice made to disguise her true affect. These women become actors who manage their own agency. For other women, the

tightly laced corset may mean nothing more than their ascription to yet another fashion fetish like Mrs. Tiffany in Anna Cora Mowatt's play *Fashion*. In these examples, fashion functions as a noun and a verb to indicate self-fashioning on some level. Fashion, as a uniform, functions as an iconographic noun, and the conscious act of wearing a uniform to disguise or reveal one's true nature functions as a verb. Women, then, become clothed in webs of signification which situate them within different cultural classifications assigned to their gender like the angel of the home.

The interpretive practices of self-fashioning in literature must function within three interlocking ways, "as a manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (Greenblatt 4). There are several steps involved in the application of these principles to the self-fashioning of American women. To examine the codes of concrete behavior, the first step is to establish the historical roots of cultural expectations of nineteenth-century lower-middle- and middle-class women and the long lasting effects of Colonial sumptuary laws.

The Laws of Fashion

> We charge you answer–Is this picture true?
> Some little mercy to our efforts show,
> Then let the world your honest verdict know.
> Here let it see portrayed its ruling passion,
> And learn to prize at its just value–*Fashion*. (25-26)
>
> –"Epilogue." *Fashion*
> Anna Cora Mowatt (1845)

Anna Cora Mowatt's play *Fashion* is considered a parody of fashionable society.[14] The rhetorical question, from the last lines of the "Epilogue" in Mowatt's satire, engages audiences in the evaluation of the accuracy of the message conveyed in the play. She brings to the stage stereotypical characters whose actions cannot be misinterpreted. Among those characters are a

True Man, a True Woman, an honorable military man, a busy-body spinster, a spendthrift, several dandies, a poet, a charlatan, a foreigner, a black servant, a nearly bankrupt husband, his fashionable wife, and their daughter. *Fashion* acts out the necessity for nineteenth-century American women's complicity with the expectations of post-revolutionary society and the spiritual concerns of the Second Great Awakening by upholding the ideals of the True Woman.[15] Because Mowatt asks readers and audiences to decide for themselves, we could surmise that she actively uses her pen and her performance as an agent to engage them in the debate over fashion and to redefine or to re-frame their own definitions of a True Woman and domesticity in the process.

As *Fashion* demonstrates, women's bodies and their actions became the iconography for the debate on the prevailing ideologies of Republican Motherhood and the cult of domesticity, both realms of True Womanhood. A True Woman's appearance needed to reflect the angelic qualities of virtue, good health, and cleanliness appropriate to the socio-economic stature of her husband and/or male guardian. From the pulpit and public appearances to the ideals expressed in woman's fiction, magazines, journals, and newspapers, women in nineteenth-century America were bombarded with directives in many areas of their lives to maintain this appearance, particularly in New England where the Puritan ethic was strongest.

Sarah Maria Cornell's moral character, for example, was debated after her death through a critique of her dress and manner. When she first met with a physician to discuss her predicament, he noted that "he perceived a young woman very plainly habited" (Williams 17). Later, he witnessed her lifeless body still wearing her cloak, gloves, and calash. An onlooker commented that "She is well dressed . . . I think she must be somebody respectable" (23). After the true nature of her circumstances become known, her manner of dress was used against her as evidence of a preoccupation with showy trinkets and trifles which ultimately proved the undoing of her virtue. Her character fell from respectable to a masked "drab" not "worth having a trial about" (53). Another witness claimed that her dress didn't meet in the back properly which suggested that Cornell didn't "fit" the cloth of respectability after all. Abandoned by her father as a child and sent

to live with relatives, she was judged as lacking in guidance and deserving of her fate. Without a guardian, she turned to "a religion of feelings and frames" (75) in the Methodist camp meetings for comfort and guidance to fill the void in her life.

Pressure at home from the male members of their families, who wished to be perceived as pillars of the community, added to the necessity for complicity. Wives' and daughters' appearances had to uphold these ideals or risk the social and economic stature of the family. Their emulation and complicity was a critical link to the family's social acceptance or censure. Appearances mean a great deal, and fashion provided a way to shape their respectability. Consequently, women studied fashion carefully and began to judge as they were judged.

The fashion of tight lacing, in particular, came to signify a woman whose reason and emotion are well regulated, and a well regulated woman embodies the domestic ideal of nineteenth-century America.[16] In Susanna Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter*, her protagonist, Gertie, matures into a young woman, after being "domesticated" in the Graham family. She is described by the narrator as having a slight and delicate figure, and "her neat dress of spotted muslin fits close to her throat, and her simple black mantle does not conceal the roundness of her tapered waist" (129). Gertie is wearing the uniform of domesticity.[17] She is entrusted to the Graham family by her adopted Uncle Trueman, who is dying. Gertie's Uncle Trueman knows that they will mold her into a True Woman. Gertie's face is described as one of those "tell-tale faces, that speak the truth and proclaim the sentiment within; faces that now light up with intelligence, now beam with mirth, now sadden at the tale of sorrow, nor burn with a holy indignation for that which the soul abhors, and now, again, are sanctified by the divine presence, when the heart turns away from the world and itself, and looks upward in the spirit of devotion" (129). As the Grahams' ward, Gertie is socialized into the cult of domesticity and becomes a True Woman under the agency of a True Man.

The idea that clothing should represent one's affect and reason began, in this country, a century and a half earlier when the first immigrants colonized America and brought English

common law with them, specifically, sumptuary laws.[18] Sumptuary laws imposed rules and social codes on consumption, excess, and vice under the penalty of law. Because the Colonies were isolated and had limited commerce, sumptuary laws provided colonists with rules of consumption that enabled them to conserve their resources and enforce equality, at least initially. Later, those Colonies whose sumptuary laws were still in effect by the end of the seventeenth century amended them to impose class-based restrictions. Most of the Colonies had statutes of this kind, but not all were so clearly associated with religion as those in New England— the geographic area whose history would later be heralded as the history of the new Republic.

In the seventeenth century, strict sumptuary laws in Massachusetts regulated the amount of clothing individuals could own and dictated the austere style of their clothing. Any clothing that provided a sensual display was forbidden. However, "leaders and elders in the Bay Colony dressed differently from ordinary people. For godly men and women of 'good age' or high rank, black was thought to be suitable," according to David Hackett Fischer in *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (141). But, even "godly men" of "good age" had to adhere to preferred principles of dress to discourage excessive displays among their brethren. Men and women of every rank in 1634 were forbidden to wear "new fashions, or long hair, or anything of the like nature" (141). Later, because of complaints in the General Court, "the selectmen of every town were ordered to judge whether the dress of men and women exceeded their 'ranks and abilities'" (143). Expensive apparel was restricted to families "whose estates were worth more than 200 pounds, and to families of magistrates" (143). Men and women tested the limits of these laws. However, women violates were most often noted in court records. Some were guilty only of wearing brightly colored petticoats under their drab clothing or of tacking on a little lace for self-expression.

As populations increased, the elders of these Puritan communities struggled to preserve the values of their culture through sumptuary regulation. Fischer notes that occasionally, magistrates rounded up offenders for prosecution. For example, "At Northhampton in 1676, thirty-six young

ladies received criminal indictments for 'overdress chiefly in hoods.' One of them, a spirited young woman named Hannah Lyman, defiantly appeared before the court wearing the silken hood for which she had been indicted" (145). Her taunt enraged the magistrate and he added to her offense "flaunting." Punishment for these offenses usually included dunking or placement in stocks in full public view. As this archival evidence suggests, colonial women were judged harshly and often ridiculed in public. Holy watchers, ministers and their lay people policed their congregations and communities and reported any offenders to the magistrates.[19] Kathleen M. Brown reports that in Colonial Virginia clergymen were mandated by law to inform their congregation of proclamations, new laws, military alerts, and so on. They were also expected to report drunkenness to the authorities as well as Sabbath breaking, fornication, and other violations of those laws and proclamations (92). Her research clearly documents Colonial culture's understanding of the far-reaching power behind the pulpit, power that extended beyond religious indoctrination.[20] Although sumptuary laws became archaic and unenforceable due to growing populations and the expansion of cities and governments, the power to shape, intimidate and coerce a community into moral compliance remained strongly entrenched in the religious ethics of ministers and their laymen. Self-fashioning and material culture moved to the center stage of the debate between conspicuous consumption and religion.

In the notes of the debates during the Federal Convention of 1787 reported by James Madison dated August 20th, a Virginia delegate, George Mason, moved to "enable Congress 'to enact sumptuary laws.'" He argued that "no government can be maintained unless manners be consonant to it." Mason called the objections to sumptuary laws as contrary to nature a "'vulgar error.'" He said, "The love of distinction, it is true is natural; but the object of sumptuary laws is not to extinguish this principle but to give it proper direction." Although the motion didn't pass, three states, Delaware, Maryland, and Georgia, voted for the motion. Later, Mason refused to sign the Constitution because it didn't abolish slavery or include a bill of rights similar to the one he wrote for Virginia which included as discussion of excess in Section 15: "That no free governance

of the blessed liberty can be preserved to any people, but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue, and by frequent recurrence to fundamental principles" *(*"Madison Debates").

Regulating one's dress to be presentable in society was inexorably linked to public representation of wealth and power, social accomplishment, cleanliness, and virtue, as the sumptuary laws of Colonial Massachusetts and Virginia suggest. Families developed a sumptuary ethic based on their religious beliefs, and their economic and social status. Thus, the patriarch of the family regulated the levels of consumption and dress through practice and social conditioning to affect public recognition of his family's social acceptability. The preoccupation with appearance indicated a connection between fashion as a sign of social stability and the signification that the members of any given family were good examples of moral governance and civil conduct. By regulating his family's private consumption, the patriarch signified, publicly, the ideals of a civilized, well-regulated society so important to forming the nation's identity. If the patriarch did not employ reason and modesty when regulating his family's consumption, he would likely lose control of the situation and fail in his duties as a True Man of the Republic. Catherine Maria Sedgwick provides two such examples of patriarchs in her novel *A New England Tale*, published in 1822. Robert Lloyd is a reasonable, good-tempered, Quaker, in contrast to the excessive Mr. Elton, whose death renders his family penniless with no provisions or security for his only daughter, Jane. Lloyd regulates his family's level of consumption and thrives both economically and socially, whereas Elton does not and his excess sends him to an early grave.

Sumptuary excess, conspicuous consumption, and self-fashioning are certainly underlying themes in Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion*. When Trueman, an old family friend from the country, meets Mrs. Tiffany for the first time, he says, "Antony's wife, eh? I might have guessed that—ha! ha! ha! for I see you make it a point to carry half your husband's shop upon your back! No matter; that's being a good helpmate—for he carried the whole of it once in a pack on his own shoulders—now you bear a share!" (19). Mr. Tiffany, in true Republican fashion, works his way up from

humble circumstances to middle-class comfort. Through Prudence, a spinster and close friend of Betsy (Mrs. Tiffany), we learn that Mrs. Tiffany was once a milliner. When Mr. and Mrs. Tiffany argue over money, he says, "time was, Mrs. Tiffany, when you manufactured your own French headdress—took off their first gloss at the public balls, and then sold them to your shortest sighted customers" (34). It takes a True Man of the Republic, Mr. Trueman, to restore order. Trueman has the last word before the "Epilogue":

> When justice is found only among lawyers—health among physicians—and patriotism among politicians, *then* may you say that there is no *nobility* where there are no titles! But we *have* kings, princes, and nobles in abundance—of *Nature's stamp*, if not of *Fashion's*—we have honest men, warm hearted and brave, and we have women—gentle, fair, and true, to whom no *title* could add *nobility*. (71)

In the "Prologue" to *Fashion,* written by Mowatt's friend Epes Sargent, the speaker asks, "The *Stage*—what is it, though beneath *thy* ban, / But a *Daguerreotype* of life and man?" (25-26). Mowatt uses the rhetorical question in Sargent's speech to engage readers and audiences in the dialogue of the agency that we call fashion. Rather than close the dialogue with the "Epilogue," she asks her readers and audience, "We charge you answer—Is this picture true?" (22); thus the audience departed pondering the question, and the debate on fashion continued long after the performance.

The public debate on regulating one's dress continued to play out on women's bodies in fashion plates and editorials in women's magazines like *Godey's Magazine and Ladies Book*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Ladies Home Journal* and engaged women of many classes in the "work" of fashion. Because the debate was public, it created the awareness that women's fashion was an industry—yet another industry and system of society in which lower-middle and middle-class

women were conscripted through economic necessity to work in the factories and mills like Sarah Maria Cornell. Still others became dressmakers and needle workers to make ends meet. In addition, women were recognized and targeted as consumers in many of the ladies' magazines of the period. However, beyond owning a dressmaker's shop and performing needle work in her home, few women owned mills or manufactured clothing on a large scale or participated in mass marketing targeting women consumers.

The patterns of women's consumption are easily detected in various novels written by women in this period. Those instances of conspicuous consumption speak to the characters' moral governance or lack thereof as in the examples of Mrs. Cathcart, a model of domesticity, and her antithesis, the widowed Mrs. Hammond, in Rebecca Rush's novel *Kelroy*, published in 1812. Mrs. Cathcart's and Mrs. Hammond's fates and the fates of their daughters are intertwined with their sense of fashion and society's expectations. The narrator describes Mrs. Cathcart as "one of those easy, credulous, accommodating kind of beings, who observe little and think less, and approve, in a general way, of all they see and hear" (8). She adheres to a common routine for a woman of her social standing married to a man of "plain manners and large property" (8). She is without guile or artifice, a woman whom Mrs. Hammond normally regards with disdain unless their companionship suits her designs. The narrator describes Helen Cathcart, her daughter, as not handsome, but agreeable, understanding and intelligent with a gentle disposition. Although socially active at her mother's insistence, when given the choice, Helen prefers to remain at home, and she displays her true affect in "her taste in clothes" (10). This description suggests that even a True Woman like Helen understands the importance of fashion and what it represents to society, but her taste in clothing is modest and, therefore, not conspicuous.

On the other hand, Mrs. Hammond is described as "a woman of fascinating manners, strong prejudices, and boundless ambition which extended itself to every circumstance of her life" (3-4). Mrs. Hammond is left nearly indigent after her husband's death, yet, as the narrator explains, the widow still "retained an unabated relish for show and dissipation" (4). Her

"knowledge of the world" convinces her that the only way to retain the illusion of wealth in the future is to conceal "the alteration of her circumstances" as much as possible. To Mrs. Hammond, "appearances are everything whilst they can be continued" (4), and that is the philosophy governing the formulation of her plan for survival. She plays on society's virtues by renting her home in town under the pretense of intense grief, and then she retires to the country to shield herself from close scrutiny. Her society friends commend her on her virtuous devotion to her husband's memory, and the truth of her circumstances remains hidden. She successfully manipulates the circumstances to gain the advantage of time to fashion her daughters for the marriage market. Her intention is to re-fashion herself through their successful financial unions in marriage because she is too old to re-enter the marriage market. To do so, she must recreate the illusion of wealth through conspicuous consumption without drawing attention to her dwindling financial reserves, thus enhancing society's impression of the marriageability of her daughters.

To successfully implement her plan, Mrs. Hammond places her trust entirely in her daughters' beauty and her own experience. However, she loses sight of the reality of her limited resources in her attempt to secure wealthy husbands for her daughters, Lucy and Emily. She uses Mrs. Cathcart's penchant for sharing news to cultivate the myth of her immense fortune so as to attract suitors for her daughters. She also throws extravagant parties, and merchants extend her credit based on the community's belief that she is a wealthy woman, a woman who in fact discharged her late husband's debts promptly after his death. Mrs. Hammond's actions are all calculated and manipulative. Her parties are crowded and fashionable, and nobody, according to the narrator, "was half so elegant, or so fashionable as her daughters" (11). Lucy approves of her mother's manipulative techniques and the importance of fashioning oneself for public view to obtain a lucrative marriage match. Because Emily is heavily influenced by her close friendship with Helen, she can "not endure the idea of seeking to adorn herself confessedly for such mercenary purposes" (13). The characterizations of Helen Cathcart, Mrs. Hammond, and Lucy and Emily Hammond imply that women readers are aware of the uses of fashion and adornment as

a means of self-fashioning—some for artifice and others to express virtuous ideals. They also suggest that there is an industry catering to women's fashion needs in either case.

When Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes that "Cloth is social tissue" (3), she is referring to the sociology of clothing and fashion, particularly for women. Her study, *The Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing*, published in 1915, results in the careful consideration of the role women's fashion plays in the quest for rights and recognition as *femme sole*. Evidence of the importance of the psychology and sociology of clothing is certainly present in Anna Katharine Greene's *That Affair Next Door* (1897). Her protagonist, Amelia Butterworth, solves a murder by reading the clothing of the victim and the clothing changes of the suspects. Gilman, herself, explores a world in which women are no longer slaves to fashion and social trends in her novel *Herland* (1915). The women in *Herland* are not bound by the need to maintain appearances and therefore wear comfortable clothing and shorter hair and enjoy independence.

Some of the questions Gilman hypothesizes are voiced in the earlier works of Caroline Kirkland in *The Evening Book* (1852), Helen Gilbert Ecob in *The Well Dressed Woman: A Study in the Practical Application to Dress of the Laws of Health* (1873), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps in *What to Wear?* (1873), as well as numerous articles and editorials in newspapers and magazines often next to advertisements for corsets and stays or some other fashion fetish like the bustle. Kirkland goes so far as to suggest the reinstatement of sumptuary laws for aging women, the necessity for which is parodied by Anna Cora Mowatt in the play *Fashion* when the middle-aged Mrs. Tiffany says, "A woman of fashion never grows old! Age is always out of fashion" (13). Ecob rails against the apathy of women on the subject of dress, claiming that "ignorance is the mother of indifference" (3), and Phelps considers women's dress to be a case of "Bad-Taste, Bad Hygiene, and Bad Morals" (6). Kirkland, Ecob, Phelps, Mowatt, and Gilman all raise questions on how to reform women's dress to improve their mobility and health and to facilitate their entrance into the real world of intellectual enterprise. They advocate transcending conspicuous

consumption in favor of achieving a higher state of being. To do this, women had to, yet again, carefully and regularly evaluate fashion to give the appearance of less in order to re-present herself to society, which further emphasizes the importance of self-fashioning. Furthermore, nineteenth-century lower-middle- and middle-class women were overwhelmed with meta-messages governing the laws of fashion and proper behavior in popular magazines, journals, sermons and woman's literature of the period.

In Chapter Two, I analyze the role of self-fashioning in defining domesticity in the late eighteenth-century and throughout the nineteenth-century in America. Part of this analysis includes a discussion of the degrees of similarity and difference in definitions of republican motherhood, the cult of domesticity, the angel of the house, the cult of true womanhood as argued by Nancy Armstrong, Nancy Cott, Mary Poovey, and others. In support of these assertions, I compare and contrast characterizations of women in domestic roles in selected novels and prose written by women in America from 1790 - 1899. I argue that the characterizations of women and their actions in novels written by women of this period emulate, define, and challenge domestic ideals and the role of women in society. I examine the ways in which these characters help to define women and engage women readers in the act of self-fashioning, or at the very least, a discovery of their individual subjectivity. To do so, I discuss the primary female characters in Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), Catharine Marie Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822), Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps *The Story of Avis* (1877) and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899).

In Chapter Three, I analyze the public discourse of reading women's bodies as politic and how the language of fashion stays their efforts, metaphorically, and frames their public personas as much as the actual practice of tight lacing molds their physique. This analysis will include a discussion of the semiotics and psychology of fashion and their impact on the women's rights movements in the nineteenth century. In addition to essays, editorials, and pictorial iconographies of women, I offer as evidence the refashioned women characters appearing in novels from 1802 to

1897 with remarks on readers' responses and the social recognitions of fashion statements. I include a discussion of women characters' clothing descriptions in Louisa May Alcotts' *Behind a Mask* (1866) and Anna Katharine Greene's *That Affair Next Door* (1897), to the same characterizations in Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) and E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859). The discussion on fashion descriptions and the corresponding behavior of the characters reveals the extent to which women absorb the textual references into visual representations of style and/or social uniforms.

In Chapter Four, I foreground the debate on women's health and health reform in a discussion of the historical thoughts about women's bodies and the treatment of women's diseases. I offer a survey of articles in nineteenth-century American periodicals such as *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book, The Ladies Home Journal, Knowledge, Health, Scientific American, Woman's Journal*, and other medical journals of the period regarding the "evils" of tight lacing and the impact fashion fetishes have on women's health. The preponderance of these articles occurs between 1824 and 1920, with the greatest concentration occurring between 1840 and 1900. I also discuss the medical evidence documenting the "ill" effects of women's fashion, specifically tight lacing, in contrast with women's continued complicity in the face of public appeals for dress and health reform, as well as medical treatment for women. I revisit the characterizations of women in Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), Tabitha Gilman Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1802), Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *A New England Tale* (1822), Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis* (1877), but this time to look at the way in which the authors describe illness. I also examine characterizations of illness in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859), and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). Characterizations of female complaints often reinforce for nineteenth-century women the idea that invalidism is a fashionable condition for women.

In Chapter Five, I conclude the discussion on self-fashioning by examining cross-dressing women and the motivations which led them to pass as men in society. I argue that enacting a

social role for nineteenth-century women involved an awareness of self in the enactment of the role and an awareness of society's reception based on preconceived expectations and perceptions that led to a mutual construction of identity. Cross-dressing women, like their domestic sisters, became cultural artifacts, and as cultural artifacts, their bodies were read as transgendered texts. As evidence, I analyze Capitola Black's cross-dressing experiences in E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Hidden Hand* (1859) and Frank Heywood's in Lillie Devereux Blake's *Fettered for Life: Or Lord and Master a Story of To-Day* (1874). I assert that women who cross dressed and passed accepted the prevailing ideologies about gender with the understanding that as "men" they could overcome the boundaries that contained their circumscribed roles thereby subverting the restrictions of their sex to acquire power through their actions and accomplishments rather than their beauty.

All of the novels and short stories in this study in some way discuss women's roles and their struggles in American society during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By covering a longer period of time, 1790 – 1905, I hope, through extended case studies, to analyze the ways in which literature written about and by women reveals the development of a woman's individual subjectivity through self-fashioning. For example, novels early in the period elevated the true woman (helpmeet, republican mother, etc.) as the only good woman (total identification). Women who freely accepted this image did so in total identification with the role. Women who did not freely accept identification as true women were perceived as less than true (counter-identification), like a fashionable lady or a spinster. Furthermore, women who publicly contested identification as true women transformed their subjectivities in such a way that they distanced themselves completely (dis-identification), like suffragettes and cross-dressing women. True-women were the "gold-standards" of womanhood throughout most of this period, and women were judged by how closely they identified with those traits or the extent to which they distanced themselves from those traits.

Unlike other studies which simply identify women within static categories, I am interested in the role that woman's literature played in the process of self-fashioning that produced new

ideologies of womanhood—ideologies that expanded the definition of woman beyond a simple, static character. By examining how women authors characterized other women in their novels, we can begin to understand the forces, both internal and external, which governed them and shaped their identity. Within the novels I have selected, I have identified three primary areas of study, education, fashion, and health, through which I trace the ways in which thoughts about women as well as women's internal logic and individual subjectivity transformed through self-fashioning. Within each of these areas, I utilize an historical analysis of the external cultural influences which shaped the author's narratives while analyzing characters' internal struggles.

Notes

[1] See *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, by Naomi Watts.

[2] See *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-1870*. In her study, Baym creates for scholars a "woman centered" study of woman's fiction.

[3] Mary Kelley writes that "Intertwined, a desire to create and an identity other than creator fostered a conflict that would plague these women throughout their lives. Indeed, it created a divided self that would never be totally recognized" (127) in *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*. She refers to *secret* writers whose act of writing is a testament of their existence but their anonymity reinforces their private subjugation and their invisibility outside the domestic sphere.

[4] I will discuss *The Story of Margaretta* at length in Chapter Two.

[5] See Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* and Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.*

[6] See Nina Baym's *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* and Cathy N. Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*.

[7] In *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Antebellum Fiction in America*, Nina Baym's analysis of antebellum fiction reveals that the reading of novels is a "solitary activity carried on in the home" and that as a result, "it encourages a dangerous privatism by providing a solitary, self-centered activity" (50).

[8] In *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, Cathy N. Davidson contends that the novel in early America extends from "the places in society where issues are unresolved at the interstices between public rhetoric and private expression." These interstices, she argues, allow readers "forays into alternative possibilities of meaning where readers might not willingly venture on their own" (260). While navigating these spaces, women readers may redefine their ideas of self by resisting the text or they may refashion themselves as a result of reading the text.

[9] Greenblatt credits Clifford Geertz with the term "cultural artifact."

[10] Catharine Williams's career as a writer began in 1828 with the publication of *Religion at Home*, which went through several editions, followed by *Tales, National and Revolutionary* in 1830, and *Aristocracy: or the Hobley Family* in 1832. After *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* in 1833, she published several other historical accounts until 1845.

[11] See *The Interpretation of Cultures* by Clifford Geertz, and "The Touch of the Real," in *Practicing New Historicism* by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt.

[12] For an extensive discussion which further defines the term "cultural work," see Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790 -1860.*

[13] The changing definition of domesticity is a major focus of Chapter Two.

[14] Mowatt's play achieved critical and box office success and launched her career as an actress–all uncommon events for a woman in America in 1845. For more information on Mowatt, see Judith Barlow's "Introduction" to *Plays by American Women: The Early Years.*

[15] Since women of the period were considered the spiritual caretakers of their families, they were key players in promoting the spiritual unity of the nation, a major goal of the movement. Camp meetings and revivals turned into large social gatherings for communities and required community participation to handle the social arrangements. These duties were well within the realm of acceptable duties outside the home for women because they engaged in building civic virtue through religion.

[16] In the early part of the nineteenth-century, tight lacing does signify domestic ideals; however, by the mid-nineteenth-century, extreme tight lacing borders on fetishism rendering the wearers incapable of useful occupation requiring a full range of motion. In Chapter Four, I discuss the harmful effects of tight lacing on both social development and physical ability. As a fetish, tight lacing is discussed at length in David Kunzle's *Fashion and Fetishism* (2004), and in Valerie Steele's *Fetish: Fashion, Sex, & Power* (1996) and *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2001).

[17] Amy Schrager Lang suggests in *The Syntax of Class: Writing Inequality in Nineteenth-Century America*, that "the transformation of a barefoot orphan into a girl both sets the problem of the material inequities of class and sets it aside, producing, through the turn to gender, a woman who by meeting the gendered specifications of the middle class its material comforts as well" (7).

[18] See *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law*, by Alan Hunt, for a comprehensive study of English sumptuary laws.

[19] Holy watchers in Colonial America acted in the place of the sumptuary police in England and Europe during the Middle Ages.

[20] See "Gender and Social Order in a Colonial Settlement" in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*.

CHAPTER 2

SELF-FASHIONING, DOMESTICITY, AND THE EDUCATION OF YOUNG WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMAN'S LITERATURE

"Woman's Hard Fate"[1]
By a Lady

How wretched is a woman's fate!
No happy change her fortune knows:

Subject to man in every state,
How can she then be free from woes? (1-4)

This poem, published in 1744 in *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* accompanied with "The Answer" by a Gentleman, exemplifies that public discourse regarding the condition of women in the eighteenth-century was very much a part of social and cultural consciousness. In the poem, the "Lady" discusses how her fate is governed first by the "jealous eyes" of her "father's stern command," then:

A lordly brother watchful stands,
To keep her closer captive still.

The tyrant husband next appears,
With awful and contracted brow: (7-10)

She laments the fact that she is duped by her "lover's form" into believing that she will enjoy the same degree of independence and control over his affections in marriage as she has during their courtship. But, she states, "Her slave's become her sov'reign now," (12) and she suffers the confines of the "chains of marriage." The final lines of her poem:

Oh cruel pow'rs, since you've design's,
That man, vain man! Should bear the sway,
To a slave's fetters add a slavish mind,
That I may cheerfully your will obey. (21-4)

reveal her discontent in the state of marriage which restricts not only her legal and social status, but her mind as well. In the poet's opinion, she cannot exert her free will and must yield to the wishes of her husband.

"The Answer" by a Gentleman justifies her position as one that emerges from her natural condition, to be subservient to her "Guardian God" below and "Sure of man in ev'ry state."[2] He describes the division of labor and expectation as:

> . . .man's, to labour, toil, and sweat,
> And all his care employ,
> Honour, or wealth, or pow'r to get;
> Tis woman's to enjoy. (13-6)

He defends the "well-experienced eye" of father, brother, and husband as a necessity to protect her "strained mind" which is ". . . too apt to rove, / Enamoured with a toy" (7-8). Does he suggest that courtship is but another of her fancies and that she toys with his affections? When the "natural" consequences and courtship end in marriage, her affection dies. Is it that she falls out of love or that she is subsumed in the union and is no longer recognized as an individual?[3] He too laments "those *halcyon* days" of courtship "When women reign supreme." The Gentleman's reference to Strephon in "The Answer" implies that women are Goat-herd Goddesses who get what they ask for, marriage, and then rail against the very thing they sought in the beginning, thus rendering him a "screech-owl" to himself. Yet, he compares man's relationship to women as that of a goatherder. "The Gentleman" cries:

> How duteous is poor *Strephon's* love!
> How anxious is his care!
> Lest gentle *Zephyrs* play too rough,
> And discompose the fair. (21-4)

"The Answer" by a Gentleman appears to offer a balanced rebuttal until we consider his reference to Sir Philip Sidney's eclogue, "Ye Goat-herd Gods" (1590)[4] alluding to women as goats who must be herded.[5] Now, the Gentleman has "grown a screech-owl to [him]self each morning (13-18) because she abandons her affection for him and no longer listens to his wants, needs, and desires as she once did. Her mind, which in the Gentleman's opinion, is "strained" and "apt to rove," is no longer "enamour'd with a toy." Is woman without reason in her abandonment?

Finally, the ambiguities of the last two lines of the Gentleman's "Answer" argue that it is not divine power but reason which suggests the superiority of men, "When *reason* bids, let women reign, / When *reason* bids, obey" (27-8). The emphasis in this line on *reason* appears to be imbued with masculine properties, because if the "Lady" were to act on her own reason as her reason bids, she would abandon marriage.

What are the risks of acting on her own reason? "The Old Maid's Apology" (1801) speaks to the cost of being *feme sole*:

"The Old Maid's Apology"[6]
—Anonymous

I determine'd the moment I left off my bib,
I would never become any man's crooked rib,
An[d] think you to fright me, when gravely you tell
That Old Maids will surely lead apes when in hell?

I'll take the reversion, and grant 'twill be so
But yet I shall keep my vow,
For I'd rather lead apes in the regions below,
Than be led by a foolish ape now.

In other words, should a woman prefer to remain single rather than fulfill her obligation to God to procreate in *his* image, she is literally doomed to hell. Hence the pressure to marry is not only a matter of economic survival, but it has spiritual consequences as well, thus negating the appeal for reason mentioned in the previous poems. The prevailing ideology of the period suggests that marriage and childbearing are God's ordained intentions for women and the only measures of her true worth. Her reason comprises mindful acts in the service of God, her husband, and children, so in matters of the world, her "untrained mind" is "strained" and "apt to rove." However, should she choose to do so, a single woman could redeem her "roving, untrained mind" in the public's eyes by providing "motherly" guidance to her nieces and nephews like Aunt Merce in *The Morgesons* (1862) whose meaningful duties, even in surrogacy, occupied her otherwise "strained and roving mind." Elizabeth Stoddard's protagonist, Cassy, comments that "[Aunt Merce's] religion had

leveled all needs and aspirations. She inspired me with a secret pity; for I knew she carried in her bosom the knowledge that she was an old maid" (26). Aunt Merce's assistance in raising her sister's children is a conscious choice that provides her some independence from her overbearing and over religious father. She has a "useful" occupation as a companion to her sister, and for the time she resides with her sister's family, she enjoys the protection of her brother-in-law's guardianship when absent from her father's home. As a single woman, she is never without a male guardian, and in many instances oversees the care of the children. She is a working member of her extended family.

In rural areas in the early eighteenth-century, pre-Revolutionary women are regarded as valuable contributors to the economy of the family. Their roles as helpmeets have more of a semblance of equality than they do in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Women actively engage in public discussions regarding the rights of humanity, and participate in benevolent societies outside the home. Some women openly advocate for equal rights under the Constitution. What happens? How do the roles of women diminish in scope? The fact that women are not recognized in the Constitution was not by itself enough to change the public perception of women because the Constitution was modeled after British common law. As colonial subjects, women were used to these laws and customs. Yet rather than flourish and expand as equal subjects, women's legal roles diminish under law after the signing of the Constitution. Some women accept this shift, and others look for opportunities for self-expression within tight legal constraints and social acceptance.

As I discussed in Chapter One, woman's literature, in my opinion, reveals a self-conscious struggle—an exploration of self-definition. Whether we call that struggle self-fashioning, self-branding, self-actualization, or individual subjectivity,[7] the process women undergo is one that addresses identity—an identity shaped through the nuance of social interaction, education, religion, and civic duty. Woman speak, the metalanguage of experience connecting women authors with female audiences, reflects these cultural nuances—codes that contain multiple layers of meaning

depending on the life experience of both the author and the reader.[8] As women "read" these nuances, their own self-perception comes under scrutiny, and they become both the "authority and the alien." As the authority, nineteenth-century American women from the middling-classes address issues of caste as well as domesticity. As the alien, they address issues of discontent, reform, and a reevaluation of the ways in which they present themselves to society. The polarity of these two positions creates a natural tension for women between the roles they must perform and the roles they wish to perform. Failure to recognize the difficulties wrought from the struggle between obligations and desires could potentially cause social ruin.

Levels of increased self-consciousness about their identities contributed to the process of self-fashioning in contrast to social expectations of servility. Reading, for example, liberated their mind from servility, if only for a moment. But in the interstices of time, those combined moments of liberation through reading led to an internal dialogue of self-definition and the need for a degree of independence and personal expression. They learned from the characters' actions and enlarge their understanding of the human condition without direct participation in the action of the narrative. They could resist, reframe, or remake their subjectivity (identity, self-presentation, i.e., self-fashioning). Women could live in the fantasy of novels or internalize the female protagonist's characteristics to fashion a plan of action leading to a change in their own affect. Reading and education were integral parts of the process of self-fashioning for these characters and the authors' implied readers,[9] who were able to create meaning in their own lives from reading the text.

To understand how religion, domesticity, education, and cultural expectation impacted the self-fashioning of American women in the nineteenth-century, we must examine the development of thought on womanhood within a literary context as well as readers' identities. The author's readers were, for the most part, considered to be other women—impressionable women in great numbers within the upper, middle, and literate working classes. Their goal was to connect with an ideal reader who understood and could empathize with the protagonist. Authors like Judith Sargent Murray, Susanna Rowson, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Rebecca Harding Davis, Elizabeth Stoddard,

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Kate Chopin, for example, offered their implied readers female characters who emulated the ideals of helpmeets, republican women, imperial women, true women, and/or new women while defining, and in some cases redefining, domesticity through their characters' actions. The authors challenged cultural expectations with characters whose actions pushed the tenets of domesticity and redefine women's roles in society within the rubric of their own convictions. Each author, in her own way, advocated for educational reform and change to improve conditions for women of all classes. In nearly all of the prose in this study, there are examples of benevolence to women of lesser fortune and meager circumstance. Although women of the period were not recognized as politically independent, the female protagonists in the novels discussed in this study shared a degree of social independence—the result of their education and self-reliance. How they navigated that independence demonstrated their level of self-efficacy and how they perceived themselves and/or how they wished society to perceive them. Any adjustment or moderation of their affect suggested self-fashioning—a negotiation between authority and alienation.

Historians and literary scholars have given middle-class women a number of labels in their attempt to define femininity and the cult of domesticity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although many of those labels, share similar premises, there are shades of difference. I have divided the discussion into two categories: Characterizations of Women in The Early Republic, and Characterizations of New Women in Post-Antebellum Novels. Within these periods, I discuss the ideologies of true women (help meets and republican mothers) and new women essentially because those were the labels used in secular and non-secular literature of the period in the public debate of the woman question.

Characterizations of Women in the Early Republic

> Rise, sculptured pile!
> And show a race unborn who rests below;
> And say to mothers what a holy charge
> Is theirs—with what a kingly power their love
> Might rule the fountains of the new-born mind.
> Warn them to wake at early dawn—and sow
> Good seed before the world hath sown her tares;
> Nor in their toil decline—that angel bands
> May put the sickle in, and reap for God,
> And gather to his garner.
>
> — Stanza 5 from "The Mother of Washington"
> by Lydia Sigourney

Lydia Sigourney's poem, "The Mother of Washington," is an ode to Mary Washington, mother of George Washington on the occasion of the "laying of the Corner-stone of her monument at Fredricksburg, Virginia" (1). In her poem, particularly this fifth stanza, Sigourney describes Mary Washington as *the* original republican woman—the model of motherhood that women of her generation and those to come should emulate. Although the speaker is omniscient, Sigourney's Christian views of motherhood are clearly articulated. Motherhood, specifically republican motherhood, is rooted within the religious opinion that a woman's sole preoccupation should be that of her children to ". . . sow / Good seed before the world hath sown her tares;" (5:6-7). This ideal echoes the political sentiment and cultural expectation of society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century in America. Sigourney, like many other women writers of her time, advocates education for women albeit within the confines of society's expectations.

The discussion of the self-fashioning of the nineteenth-century American woman begins in earnest with an examination of historical thought on women's intellectual capacities and their abilities to reason and conduct themselves as rational, productive members of society, despite their coverture status or *feme sole* status. The root of the argument of self-fashioning for American women lies in the common law belief in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries regarding

women's coverture under law and the need for self-definition outside of those laws. Women were regarded as citizens, but as a non-political group rather than free-thinking individuals—a collective womb of republican womanhood whose duties were confined and defined by domesticity. Nancy Cott argues that "The central convention of domesticity was the contrast between the home and the world. Home was an 'oasis in the desert, a sanctuary where sympathy, honor, virtue are assembled, where disinterested love is ready to sacrifice everything at the altar of affection" (64). Women were expected to help populate and nurture a nation of civilized and virtuous citizens—citizens whose morality and civility will thereby promote and sustain national identity.

Cott also addresses the ideology of republican womanhood with her discussion of the "cult of true womanhood" and the "cult of domesticity" in the early nineteenth century, which in her opinion, relates to women's actual circumstances, experiences, and consciousness. "Within this 'cult' (it might almost be called a social ethic)," Cott says, "mother, father, and children grouped together in the private household ruled the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of happiness; the family's influence reached outward, underlying the success or failure in church and state, and inward, creating individual character" (1). Hannah Mather Crocker, for example, writes *Observation on the Real Rights of Women* in 1818 in response to the public debate on the woman question. Crocker includes a discussion of notable women whose lives exemplify virtue, learning, and religion, which in her opinion, constitute the "real felicity of the connubial relation" (242). In doing so, she responds to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Crocker acknowledges Wollstonecraft's intelligence, but is quick to add that "we do not coincide with her opinion respecting the total independence of the female sex. We must be allowed to say, her theory is unfit for practice, though some of her sentiments and distinctions would do honour to the pen, even of a man" (244). Crocker uses this example to reinforce the concept of a helpmate that is consistent with the dominant cultural ideology of republican motherhood. Her act of resistance to all that Wollstonecraft says is also an act of self-fashioning because she reaffirms her ideas of selfhood even though they support the role

of woman as *femme covert*.

Like Lydia Sigourney, Crocker offers readers a paragon of republican motherhood after whom all women should fashion themselves—Martha Washington, wife and helpmeet of the father of this country. Crocker memorializes her, "May her memory, with her virtues, be engraven on the tablet of every female's heart. She has erected a temple of virtue and fame, for the female standard," (244). She speaks from her experience of a woman as helpmeet when she states, "By mutual virtue, energy, and fortitude of the sexes, the freedom and independence of the United States were attained and secured. The same virtue, energy, and fortitude must be called into continual exercise, as long as we continue a free, federal independent nation" (248). Crocker's sentiments provide her readers with a primer on how a republican woman can best serve the nation.

When did women begin to fashion themselves as republican women? Linda Kerber contends that republican motherhood results from the fact that "women were left to invent their own political character" (88). Colonial and post-Revolutionary women "began to invent an ideology of citizenship that merged the domestic domain of the pre-industrial woman with the new public ideology of individual responsibility and civic virtue" (88). She argues that the Revolutionary War imbues "words like *independence* and *self-reliance* personal as well as political overtones" (89), and although women supported the Revolution and were engaged in activities as diverse as espionage and commerce, when the war was over, so was their service to society in those roles. Appeals such as those made by Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams to the writers of the Constitution on behalf of their countrywomen to include women in their definitions of independence and self-reliance are disregarded. So, women, as Kerber notes, have to fashion their own identity and the rules that govern that identity within the discharge of their domestic duties in consideration of the members of her own household.

However, as Mary Kelly suggests, "some women took its [republican womanhood] limitations, not as an end in themselves, but as a point of departure. As members of America's post-Revolutionary elite, they built on its tenets and in a deliberate refashioning of gender roles

claimed a signal role in civil society" (25). In a sense, some republican women successfully subvert the gendered republican model of womanhood and elevate their status to one of imperial womanhood—a role that affords them a much greater influence on civil society and the rules of republican virtue. The key to republican womanhood is education. Judith Sargent Murray, for example, debates the role of women in the new nation and strongly advocates for educational equality.

In "Equality of the Sexes," Murray argues that the education of middle-class girls for an upwardly mobile marriage by encouraging fashion, flirtatiousness, and charm is limiting and confines the natural intellect of young women. She states that "we have from early youth been adorned with ribbons, and other gewgaws, dressed out like the ancient victims previous to sacrifice, being taught by the care of our parents in collecting the most showy materials that the ornamenting our exteriour ought to be the principal object of our attention"(9). Murray adds that at the approximate age of fifteen, young women are introduced to the world to seek adulation from potential husbands. Improperly educated, these young women are "intoxicated by large draughts of flattery," and they are expected to wage war with eligible bachelors using the most "artful of machinations." In addition to these qualities, Murray notes that to be successful, young women must also be "on guard, prudent, and discrete." She criticizes the trend in her day to deny women what she considers a proper education, an education equal to men. Murray argues that to bemoan the fact that women are not *fit* to engage "in those entertainments which are productive of such rational felicity" (6) when they have been denied access to education is ludicrous. She states that in those circumstances a woman "experiences a mortifying consciousness of inferiority which embitters enjoyment" (6). Clara Porter, Rebecca Harding Davis's character from her short story, "In the Market," (1868) speaks of her inferiority when she knows her beau, John Bohme, will leave her without proposing marriage.

Throughout their courtship and conversation, Bohme alludes to art, literature, politics—topics about which she knows little because of her provincial education. The narrator

explains that "Her blood had burned, her brain throbbed as he talked to her daily" (199). The things he takes for granted, she will never experience. Clara thinks to herself that "If she had but two years chance of the culture which had been given to him, and then was suffered to put her hands to his work, she could keep pace with him!" (199). Bohme's thoughts reveal her inferiority. As he twirls a chess piece in his hand, he wonders how "this dainty Ariel of a woman [could] be born of such surroundings? It was like finding a picturesque bit of color in the gutter" (200). Clara's inabilities to engage in a discussion of those topics which interest him lead him to believe that she cares little for him and was never *really* interested. Thus, she fails to "marry up," so to speak, and settles for an unhappy marriage to "a short, obese man of about fifty." Clara is "fettered" for life in an unhappy marriage and a disagreeable constitution—she seeks no other avenue of expression because she has no formal training and fails to recognize the opportunity for such. Her husband, children, and life, as she knows it, tax her strength and constitution. Clara learns these lessons from her mother, and models the same behavior for her children. She is not a good fictional example of a republican mother or helpmeet. Through Clara, Davis provides readers with a realistic portrayal of the way in which the lack of education and meaningful occupation outside the home limits women's choices.

On the other hand, nearly every writer extolling paragons of republican motherhood lists the same qualities— the ideal republican mother is rational, benevolent, independent, self-reliant and can resist the vagaries of fashion (Kerber 89). Linda Kerber's observations are certainly accurate when analyzing *The Story of Margaretta*; however, Judith Sargent Murray's narrative offers readers something novel for the time, a narrative in which there is no "fallen woman."[10] The actions of all of the characters in the novella are treated by the author as opportunities for education and redemption.

Murray's heavy use of structural irony conveyed through her characters' names and actions in her novella, *The Story of Margaretta* (1790), clearly articulates her ideal vision of family and women's roles within the family. She creates for readers a microcosm of a young nation within the family unit of the Vigilius's. The family is governed by an egalitarian, benevolent, and merciful

patriarch who is wise in the ways of humanity. The patriarch, Mr. Vigilius (a.k.a. "The Gleaner") exemplifies the architect of the American family. His *vigilance* in presiding over the members of his family and all of their interactions preserves the sanctity of the family unit. By weighing infractions of social etiquette, settling disputes, righting wrongs, and dispensing justice, Vigilius governs the transmission of culture within the family unit and extends that transmission to those who keep society with the family.

Of course, he has help, Mary Vigilius. There is no subtlety in Murray's selection of Mrs. Vigilius's first name—Mary. The name Mary connotes purity, sacrifice, and reverence, thus imbuing the character with similar attributes to the mother of God, and the mother of the Father of the Nation, George Washington. Vigilius describes Mary as "a young woman of a mild and conceding disposition, who sincerely loved me, and who, accommodating herself even to my caprices, hath made it the study of her life, when she could not convince my judgement, however rational her arguments in her own estimation, to bend to my purposes her most approved wishes" (156). When Vigilius announces that they will travel to South Carolina, Mary "submitted with the kind of acquiescence, which our sex is so fond of considering the proper characteristic of womanhood" (156). That Mary only concedes after she has attempted to sway his mind by "suggesting some economical ideas" (156) implies a relationship in which there was at least some discussion about the course of events in their married life, albeit on unequal footing. Vigilius, a.k.a. the Gleaner and seeker of truth, and Mary, the reverent, self-sacrificing helpmeet, will soon provide security and comfort to the orphaned Margaretta Melworth.

Murray plays with the symbolism of names throughout the novella, and the character of Margaretta Melworth does not disappoint readers. Margarite, the referent for the name Margaret and Margaretta, denotes a pearly sheen. The sound of her last name, Melworth, if pronounced like mal worth, connotes a person wronged in terms of property and foreshadows events to come. When the Vigilius's first encounter Margaretta Melworth, she is in the care of Mrs. Arbuthnot, her aunt. Mrs. Arbuthnot's husband dies as a result of wounds he sustains fighting for the British in the

Revolution, and she is unable to return to England with the troops. As she relates her story to the Vigilius's, she reveals that she is not Margaretta's real mother. Mrs. Arbuthnot (are but not) is not a true republican mother. In her youth, she was an eligible young woman of some means with a loving sister, but they are robbed of their inheritance and left to make their own ends. Because she didn't approve of her sister's choice of a husband, Mrs. Arbuthnot shuns her. Mrs. Arbuthnot is a sister, but not a forgiving one. She is living in America, but is not an American. She is a mother through circumstance, but she is not Margaretta's real mother. She is a widow, but that she is not able to survive speaks to her constitution as a person in contrast to Mrs. Thrifty, an American widow whose impeccable reputation, thrift, and wise ways garner her a modicum of independent means and respect.

Just before she dies, Mrs. Arbuthnot tells the Vigilius's the story of little Margaretta and seeks their wise counsel. Vigilius reveals that "Mary cast upon me her intelligent eyes; I understood the reference, and I hastily replied, 'If, Madam, your confidence in us is sufficient to calm your mind, you may make yourself entirely easy about your girl; for, from this moment, we jointly invest ourselves with the guardianship of the little orphan, and we promise to consider her as the child of our affection'" (161). Once Mrs. Arbuthnot knows that Mr. and Mrs. Vigilius will care for Margaretta, she "yield[s] up her spirit without a remaining regret" (161). For narrative purposes, Mrs. Arbuthnot is clearly expendable. She must die so that Margaretta, the little pearl, can be honed and polished by Mary and her husband in the new American way. Although this is not an immaculate conception, through divine intervention, Mary Vigilius has a child which she has not conceived. Murray creates in Margaretta a savior of sorts whose exemplary behavior, a natural consequence of an extensive education at the hands of her "sainted" mother, will serve as model for her readers. Margaretta debuts at sixteen as "a beautiful and accomplished girl" (164). Devoting space in the narrative to address the extent of Margaretta's education enables Murray to create in fiction the educational doctrine which she espouses in "Equality of the Sexes" and "Desultory Thoughts upon the Utility of Encouraging a Degree of Self-Complacency, Especially in Female

Bosoms" (1784). She offers mothers and daughters a plan for self-fashioning through education.

In "Desultory Thoughts," Murray says, "I think, to teach young minds to aspire, ought to be the ground work of education " and that she would have her "pupils believe, that every thing in the compass of mortality, was placed within their grasp, and that, the avidity of application, the intenseness of study, were only requisite to endow them with every external grace, and mental accomplishment" (45). The character of Margaretta is a manifestation of Murray's ideology. Margaretta is as equally adept at traditional domestic pursuits (needlework, dancing, music, and art) as she is in her proficiency in English, Spanish, geography, history, astronomy, natural philosophy, and reading. As for novel reading, "Vigilius thought of debarring her the indulgence," but reconsidered because:

> those books, being in the hands of everyone, we conceived the accomplishment of our wishes in this respect, except we had bred her an absolute recluse, almost impracticable; and Mrs. Vigillius, therefore, thought it best to permit the use of every decent work, causing them to be read in her presence, hoping that she might, by her suggestions and observations, present an antidote to the poison, with which the pen of the novelist is too often fraught. (165)

Mary adds an extensive epistolary phase to the curriculum in which she and Margaretta correspond, the missives being delivered by Vigilius's boy Plato. As a result, her penmanship improves, and she acquires "the beautiful and elegant art of letter writing" (165) essential to communicating her true virtue to her constituents. Mary as mother-teacher encourages Margaretta's confidence by corresponding with her as though they are friends, not mother and daughter. Mary gains intelligence on the ways in which Margaretta assimilates knowledge and how she applies that knowledge to practical thought to regulate her emotions—particularly those emotions subject to public scrutiny. Close friendships between mothers and daughters serve as the core experience of "female acculturation."[11]

What is the total effect of Margaretta's education on her affect? Her training is tested through her quasi-courtship with Sinisterus Courtland. The name Sinisterus Courtland conspicuously suggests that in the land of courting, there are many sinister characters. But, with the proper education, a young woman is able to "glean" the truth and consequence of actions meant to conceal a suitor's sinister motives. Initially, because of her youth and inexperience, she is bedazzled by his charms. But later, as she witnesses his lack of pity and sympathy for the less fortunate she questions his sincerity. Rather than tell Margaretta of Courtland's faults, Vigilius and Mary stage a charade to test him and her ability to glean the true character of the man. Margaretta and her mother listen from an adjacent room as her adopted father discusses her lack of dowry and entitlement to his estate because she is not his biological daughter. Courtland excuses himself from his pursuit of her hand in marriage as she is not a young woman of property and therefore below his station. Margaretta later reveals her thoughts in a letter to her friend, Miss Worthington. She explains, "For some time, being left by my matchless parents wholly to the exercise of my own reason, I had begun to discover that Courtland was not the faultless being which my imagination had almost defied" (201). She judges him by "the dictates of equity" and finds him lacking. Courtland later discovers he was duped and renews his pursuit of Margaretta, but the damage has been done. Her reason prevails and she has proven her self-reliance. Murray's implied readers may themselves become gleaners—perhaps, that is her authorial intent.

The Story of Margaretta is the antithesis of Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* (1791). Although Margaretta "begins her career as a sentimental heroine somewhat unthinking in her actions and apparently destined for disaster [sic], because she gains some education, [she] escapes the standard sentimental role of the helpless victim of fate, fate typically taking the form of a designing man whose machinations the innocent heroine simply cannot decipher" (Davidson 129). One could argue that because Charlotte's education was interrupted, she lacks reason and cannot see through the artiface of Mademoiselle LaRue, Montraville, and Belcour. Once she agrees to run away with Montraville, she is literally and figuratively disrobed which leads

to her eventual ruin. In America, Charlotte, after much trial, finds a sympathetic friend in Mrs. Beauchamp, her neighbor and fellow Englishwoman—a woman to whom she can relay her sorrows. Aware of the negative social consequences of guilt through association, Mrs. Beauchamp is hesitant to act in Charlotte's defense:

> "Would to heaven I could snatch her from so hard a fate," said she; "but the merciless world has barred the doors of compassion against a poor weak girl, who, perhaps, had she one kind friend to raise and reassure her, would gladly return peace and virtue; nay, even the woman who dares to pity, and endeavour to recall a wandering sister, incurs the sneer of contempt and ridicule, for an action in which even angels are said to rejoice." (74)

To her credit, Mrs. Beauchamp is so moved by Charlotte's dilemma that she seeks her husband's counsel. He responds, "Exalted woman! . . . how dost thou rise every moment in my esteem. Follow the impulse of thy generous heart, Emily. Let prudes and fools censure if they dare, and blame a sensibility they never felt; I will exultingly tell them that the heart that is truly virtuous is ever inclined to pity and forgive the errors of its fellow-creatures" (75). She begins an "acquaintance with Charlotte," and promises to mail a letter for Charlotte to her parents "on the first packet that sails for England." Shortly after their friendship begins, Emily must accompany her husband to Rhode Island and is absent for some time. During that time, Charlotte falls even further into the abyss of ruin. She is betrayed, falsely accused of infidelity, and left penniless, homeless, and friendless. Mrs. Beauchamp returns, but she is too late to help her. Charlotte is briefly reunited with her beloved father, entrusts him with the care of her baby girl, and dies. Unlike another unwed mother, Frances Wellwood in *The Story of Margaretta*, Charlotte's shame robs her of reason and strength.

Frances Wellwood is a beautiful and accomplished woman in her youth, who relies on her parents to "approbate her movements." However, she is orphaned in young adulthood. She is left with an "impressive library" and a small patrimony, and is generally considered an independent

woman who was, "before she had completed her nineteenth year, absolute mistress of herself and fortune" (203)[12] because she has no male guardian. Although she has many close and sympathetic friends to whom she can appeal for counsel, she keeps her courtship and common law marriage to Courtland a secret. Courtland "hoodwinking her reason, and misleading her judgement by arguments the most sophistical, *he induced her to view, as the result of human regulations, the marriage vow*; it was not to be found in the law of God, and it (or rather, the calling a priest to witness it) was calculated only for the meridian of common souls " (205). As he explains to Frances, should he marry before an aging uncle dies, he will forfeit his inheritance. She leaves town to set up house with Courtland in a nearby village and lives as his common law wife bearing him three sons. Of course, she turns her entire fortune over to him, her husband. Although her friends are curious as to why she "quit" them, they have no familial connection and feel it impolite to pursue the matter.

To her credit, Frances lives as a "true-woman," devoted to her children and her then absent common law husband. When she hears of Courtland's possible marriage to Margaretta, she comes forward and tells all, knowing that in doing so she will expose her ruin to "an *event-judging* and *unfeeling world*" (207). The consequences turn in her favor and Frances finds in the Gleaner/Mr. Vigilius a fairy-godfather of sorts. He rights all wrongs, a formal marriage ceremony is performed, and he negotiates a settlement of Courtland's debts, and then establishes them in a business which will sustain them for the rest of their lives. Both Rowson and Murray reveal the fears of "guilt by association," toward young women of ruin, and both create merciful characters willing to rise above society's possible censure. Mrs. Beauchamp and Margaretta (through the Gleaner) act as both the authority and the alien because they respond in the interest of goodwill despite society's possible objections. They act according to their individual core beliefs and values, and because they act in a public way, they fashion new personas for the public. Thus, implied readers receive another valuable lesson in exercising their own reason.

Two women authors, both of whom are very interested in educational reforms for women, tell similar tales with very different outcomes. *The Gleaner,* which includes *The Story of*

Margaretta drew 675 subscribers.[13] The first American printing of a pirated copy of *Charlotte Temple* by Mathew Carey cost a mere 50 to 62 ½ cents and sold in excess of 53,000 copies in three years.[14] Why did *Charlotte Temple* continue to be a best seller throughout the nineteenth-century and *The Story of Margaretta* fade into obscurity until the mid-twentieth century? *Eve*-olution. Murray's narrative is more dogmatic, heavy with the rhetoric of reform, and there is a happy ending for all of the major characters. Even though the charge of the republican mother is to become the moral compass of the family and save her husband from spiritual ruin, which Frances Wellwood does, Rowson's narrative remains popular because it is closer to the reality of the life of a fallen woman at the time; its sensational aspect has a resounding impact on readers' affects. Readers may imagine a preacher at one of the many tent revivals in New England holding a copy of *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* and charging young women to protect their virtue in the name of God and all that is holy lest they fall prey to the same fate and drag their children and civil society down with them. At Mrs. Elton's funeral service, for example, in *A New England Tale*, rather than preach about "the operations of providence, and the claims of humanity" to his congregants, the clergyman "preached a long sermon in the vain endeavor of elucidating the doctrine of original sin" (13).

Reawakened religious fervor subverted the equalitarian view of helpmeets and insured that the *Eve*-olutionary beliefs that all women are of like mind and never far from original sin will prevail in society's understanding and treatment of women. In *The Bonds of Womanhood*, Nancy Cott argues that "The feminization of Protestantism in the early nineteenth century was conspicuous. Women flocked into churches and church-related organizations, repopulating religious institutions. Female converts outnumbered males by three to one" (132) in the New England Great Awakening between 1798 and 1826 (before the Methodist impact). As long as there was a minister around, women were constantly reminded that they were responsible for the fall of man. Although ideologies of republican womanhood remain entrenched in society, another model of womanhood emerges—true womanhood. True womanhood is much closer to definitions of the angel of the house, imperial motherhood, and the cult of domesticity. Republican motherhood,

particularly among the middling classes of women who are engaged outside the home in benevolent societies, implies involvement in the public sphere in addition to the home, whereas true womanhood allows for some of those activities but only those that are centered around their family and their home. Indoctrinating daughters into the cult of true womanhood through benevolence models moral behavior and plants seeds of virtue in the young. As a subcategory of republican womanhood, true womanhood in response to *Eve*-olution is a path to redemption.

True women are regarded "as the vine which has long twined its graceful foliage around the oak, and been lifted by it into sunshine " ("The Wife" 129). When life's adversities threaten to break her husband, the true woman's charge is to

> cling round it [the oak] with its caressing tendrils, and bind up its shattered boughs. It is beautifully ordered by Providence, that woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity, winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart. (129)

A similar article published in *The Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette* in 1827 praises the true woman

> Who can delineate the care with which she watches the dawning intellect, and directs the wandering steps of her child,—the undeviating affection with which she clings to her husband in the darkness and brightness of life, in the gloom and shadows which curtain the days of sorrow, or in the sunbeams of happiness that play around his path, when the world goes prosperously on, and riches and honours are laying their treasures at his feet. There is something in every true woman which prosperity may not elate, nor adversity depress; the flame of her affection burns yet brighter in the night of ill, and is not eclipsed in the bright glow of prosperous affluence. (55)

Murray's character, Margaretta Melworth Hamilton, exemplifies the clinging vine analogy. She stands by Edward despite his secrecy regarding his deteriorating financial situation and his illegitimate half-sister, Seraphina. Seraphina, who is unmarried, like Aunt Merce in *The Morgesons*, pledges her loyalty and everlasting service to her half-brother and sister-in-law. Both Margaretta and Serpahina are clinging vines, the former to her husband and the latter to her "guardian brother." Margaretta seeks counsel from her mother, Mary. Mary tells her to "persevere as you have begun—Mr. Hamilton is a man of sense and feeling; he will rouse you to a recollection of your virtues, and your *reward* will be great" (235). In other words, cling to your husband, and all will be made right in the end. The clinging vine analogy offers little room for negotiation of a separate identity for a married woman.

To rise above misfortune in marriage requires mental and physical fortitude— those qualities that arise from well regulated emotions and a developed sense of reason, which in Margaretta's case is the result of her level of self-efficacy and education. Ultimately, Murray's novel fails in its attempt to elevate women's stature and advance women's rights. She "hones" Margaretta's pearly sheen through education only to cover her up again in marriage. Nevertheless, Murray does suggest that well regulated emotion helps to develop a woman's sense of reason and a higher level of self-efficacy, all of which are sustainable when properly educated. Women are capable of independent thinking even though their actions may not follow the path of their own convictions. For example, Mrs. Elton's behavior in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *New England Tale* appears at times like a clinging vine, but because she lacks the strength of her own convictions the end is very different.

Mrs. Elton's physical, mental, and economic livelihood is so inexorably linked to her husband that his fate becomes her fate and has severe repercussions for her young daughter. Although the community judges Mr. Elton's showy ways as imprudent and improper

> Mrs. Elton neither deserved nor shared the dislike her husband received in full measure. On the contrary, she had the good-will of her neighbors.

> She never seemed elated by prosperity; and, though, she occasionally appeared in an expensive Leghorn hat, a merino shawl, or a fine lace, the gentleness and humility of her manners, and the uniform benevolence of her conduct, averted the censure that would otherwise have fallen on her. (9)

Mrs. Elton is aware that her fate is linked to that of her husband, but she is also aware that public scrutiny of her behavior is her own responsibility. Yet, despite her husband's reversal of fortune, Mrs. Elton becomes passively resigned to the impending ruin. The narrator cautions readers about virtue at this point, saying that "Few persons have virtue enough to retrench their expenses, as their income diminishes; and no virtue, of difficult growth could be expected from a character where no good seed had ever taken root" (10). Although good seed and virtue are among Mrs. Elton's characteristics, they are not shared by her husband, and she lacks the emotional strength to adhere to her own convictions. Sedgwick addresses the formula for sowing good seed in her novel through narration, description, and characterization. Her intent is to educate and promote virtue in the hearts and minds of her readers—a way to help them "fashion" respectability and acceptance as a true woman.

In response to Mrs. Elton's failing health and spirit after her husband dies and leaves her in debt, the narrator explains to readers that "The *morale*, like the *physique*, needs use and exercise to give it strength" (10). Readers discover through character development that Jane Elton is "a little more than twelve years old" and "already an interesting child" when her father dies. Her conduct, "the result of habitual passiveness" is incongruent with the virtues of a religious woman when faced with deception. Here, the narrator reveals the primary message of the novel, which suggests that "If we look around upon the circle of our acquaintance, and observe how few there are among those whom we believe to be Christians, who govern their daily conduct by Christian principles, and regulate their temporal duties by the strict Christian rule" (11), we will find that for many religion is just a show and not a way of life. Within this plot lies the author's formula for fashioning the moral education of young women.

"Little Jane," as the narrator calls her, "nursed her mother with fidelity and tenderness, and performed services for her, that her years seemed hardly adequate to, with an efficiency and exactness that surprised all who were prepared to find her a delicately bred and indulged child" (11-2), yet despite all of her tender care, her mother dies within a year of her father. Orphaned at thirteen, Jane's chief inheritance seems to be her father's "active mind" and her mother's "pure and gentle spirit." Jane, like Margaretta, is an orphan, and she, too, is a true woman in training. Unlike Margaretta though, she does not enjoy the amiable devotion of adopted parents. She must rely on her limited experience and education to fashion her own identity. Throughout the narrative, Jane's character is tested, and unlike her mother's habitual passivity, she habitually takes the moral high road. To do so, she must defy the authority (Mrs. Wilson) and assume responsibility for herself, thus suffering further alienation from the only family she has left. Sedgwick creates a spiritual light in Jane in contrast to the dark and unforgiving nature of her aunt and guardian, Mrs. Wilson. Her spirit is first contrasted with that of her aunts shortly after the internment of her mother. Her father's sisters, Mrs. Daggett, Mrs. Convers, and Mrs. Wilson, argue over what is to become of her and whether there are sufficient provisions to sustain her custodial care. Sedgwick uses this argument to establish their character for her readers.

The elder aunt, Mrs. Daggett, is childless and stands behind her husband's pledge to the Foreign Missionary Society and their sponsorship of "one of the young Cherokees" to a mid-western school; they cannot afford to take care of Jane. These, in her opinion, are more worthy Christian causes than taking in an impoverished niece. Mrs. Convers, another of her father's sisters, confesses that she is not the most religious of women and doesn't pretend to be. Nevertheless, she cannot possibly take care of Jane because all of their income is spent "raising their girls genteely" (15). Since neither of these aunts has any close connection to her, they don't feel compelled to perform their Christian duty. They are of the opinion that she should be "hired out," and Mrs. Convers suggests that if so, she change her name so that her "hired" circumstances won't reflect on their social standing or cause her daughters embarrassment. Ironically, it is the crazy woman, Bet,

whose voice restores reason and purpose to their exchange. She warns the aunts, "Offend not this little one; for her angel does stand before my Father. It were better that a mill-stone were hanged about your neck" (18). Does this invoke Mrs. Wilson's Christian indignation? No. Humanity? No. Pride? Yes. Their insensitivity affects readers, and Sedgwick begins to develop the darker side of Mrs. Wilson's character in juxtaposition to the lighter side of Jane's. In her scriptural lecture to her sisters on the sins of the ballroom and finery, she forgets that Jane's plight is the purpose of their discussion. Having exerted her moral superiority to her sisters, she has no choice but to accept responsibility for Jane, albeit reluctantly

Bet's warning turns the conversation to the question of Jane's spirituality and religious training. "Has Jane experienced religion?" Mrs. Daggett asks. To which Mrs. Wilson replies, "Experienced religion!—no. How could she? She has not been to a meeting since her mother was first taken sick" (18). Again, Mrs. Wilson's pride, not her religious virtue, move her to accept a duty to Jane by instructing her in religion and giving her room and board in exchange for her service to the Wilson household. The narrator takes the time to explain why Mrs. Wilson's character, although "originally cast in the same mould with [her brother's] Mr. Elton's" (23) was different. While she was married, "without having the pride of her nature at all subdued, [she] became artful and trickish; she was sordid and ostentatious, a careful fellow-worker with her husband in the acquisition of their property, she secured to herself all the praise in the expending of it" (23). During her marriage, she contributes handsomely to charities and religious causes all the while extolling the "duty of wives to submit themselves to their husbands" (23). Yet, she married a man "who, not having energy enough for the exercise of authority, was weak and vain . . . and easily cozened by the shadow, when his wife retained the substance" (23).

Clearly, this is a character aware of her power and her ability to fashion a life both economically and socially despite her *feme covert* status. She appears to society as a willing helpmeet and a pious woman committed to a Christian way of life. As a widow and "sole mistress of her estate," she finds justification to refashion her identity—yet again. She claims that her duty

is now to her children, and that she cannot enlarge on her donations without depriving them. Sedgwick uses the narrator's voice to unmask the fashionable facades of Mrs. Wilson and her sisters. Mrs. Daggett and Mrs. Wilson cloak themselves in religion, while Mrs. Convers bewails the possible negative consequences to her social reputation and the reputation of her daughters if word ever escaped that their cousin was a "hired girl." Which one is the greater hypocrite? Some readers may not indict Mrs. Wilson as the narrator does, but the narrator claims that even though she "had fancied herself one of the subject of an awakening . . . she assumed the form of godliness, without feeling its power" (23-4). Nevertheless, she appears to be the more virtuous of the three when she agrees to take responsibility for Jane. Thus far in the narrative, readers, like Jane, have several examples of womanhood upon which to reflect.

Mrs. Wilson sends a note to Jane "to secure some small articles which would never be missed: some of the 'the spoons, table-linen, her mother's ivory workbox,'. . . As I have undertaken the charge of you for the present, it is but right you should take my advice" (21). Her justification for the request is that she has "no doubt my [her] brother's creditors have cheated him a hundred fold the amount of these things, for the poor man! With all his faults, he was so generous, any body could take him in; besides, though these things might help to pay the expense I must be at in keeping you, they will be a mere nothing divided among so many creditors—the dust on the balance" (21). Mary Hull, Jane's trusted friend and confidant replies that she is afraid that Mrs. Wilson "will load the balance with so much of this vile dust, that when she is weighed her scale will be 'found wanting'" and encourages Jane to take the moral high road. This is Jane's first spiritual trial. To take the moral high road, she must defy her aunt's authority. In doing so, she doesn't assume the form of godliness, but she does feel the power. As the narrator explains, "The law of imitation is deeply impressed on our nature, Jane had insensibly fallen into her mother's ways, and had, thus early, acquired a habit of self-command" (24). Self-command for Jane is more spiritual than fashionable which is consistent with true woman ideology. Motivated by morality, equality, and justice, Jane's defiance is not premeditated to irritate her aunt. Because her aunt expects that

behavior from her own children, she admonishes Jane in the same way.

Again, Sedgwick inserts her voice as the narrator to caution mothers that Mrs. Wilson's actions will produce "such fruits as might be expected from her culture. The timid among them had recourse to constant evasion, and to the meanest artifaces to hide the violation of laws which they hated; and the bolder were engaged in a continual conflict with the mother, in which rebellion often trampled on authority" (24). When Jane tells her aunt that she weighed the request and that in consultation with Mary that she "did not think it was quite right to take the things" (36) her aunt berates her. Mrs. Wilson exclaims, "Miss, I tell you once for all, I allow no child in my house to know right from wrong; children have no reason, and they ought to be very thankful when they fall into the hands of those that are capable of judging for them" (36). Here, Sedgwick begins to establish Jane's educated reason and spiritual virtue. Jane is aware that she has both the knowledge and the reasoning capabilities to know the difference between righteous and unrighteous behavior. She understands that the trials she will face in the Wilson household will test her faith. Each trial reveals her self-reliance, and every defiant act contributes to her awareness of self as subject and the need to construct herself in a manner consistent with the way she defines and perceives that self—or in other words self-fashioning. From a theoretical point of view, Jane becomes the authority of her own person, thus alienating herself from the affections of the only family she has left.

Sedgwick establishes Jane's individuality from the onset and gives her protagonist the power of independent thought. Jane becomes accustomed at thirteen to "scan the motives of her conduct, and to watch for the fruit" (38). Her response to the many subterfuges of her cousins in their attempts to engage her as an accomplice in their lying, cheating, and stealing is, "That's no battle, ev'ry body knows, Where one side only gives the blows" (39). She converts her work into blessed distractions and enjoys some comfort and peace of mind in the attention to those details. In school, she excels, in manner, she is humble, and in virtue, she blossoms. Although her mind is free, she is still enslaved to her Aunt Wilson until she is unjustly accused of thievery. In her final break with authority, Jane says, "but hear me, ma'am, . . . all connexion between us is dissolved for ever;

I shall not remain another night beneath a roof where I have received little kindness, and where I now suffer the imputation of a crime, of which I cannot think you believe me guilty" (102). In the face of these accusations, Jane refuses to defend herself, so confident is she in her own virtue and identity that she says, "I have no explanation to make; I have nothing but assertions of my innocence, and my general character to rely upon. Those who reject this evidence must believe me guilty" (102-3). This she vows to Edward Erskine, a suitor. In this one instance, Stoddard allows her character's vulnerability to surface. Using the narrator's voice, she states that "At another time, Jane would have paused to examine her heart, before she accepted the professions made by her lover, and she would have found no tenderness there that might not be controlled and subdued by reason" (103). Jane's reason at the height of emotion is compromised. Although she agrees to the engagement, she refuses to accept his financial support, choosing instead "to teach little girls not yet old enough for Mr. Evertson's school" (103) and support herself.

In her newly won independence, Jane is free to fashion a life of her choosing. She can follow in the footsteps of her Aunt Wilson, adopt the fashionable frivolities of her cousin Elvira, marry Erskine, the most eligible bachelor in the county and live a life of ease, or live independently and examine her own heart. She chooses the latter and focuses all of her energies in the new school, although she is aware on some level that Erskine does not share her inclination for religion and service to others. Jane, like Margaretta, begins to see through the fashionable facade of her lover and begins to question the company he keeps, his apparent lack of religion, and disregard for those who suffer misfortune, and her ability to "win him over to virtue." She explains to Erskine that "if in the youth and spring of your affection, I have not had more power over you, what can I hope from the future?" (129). She beseeches him to "examine your heart as I have examined mine, and you will find the tie is dissolved between us" (129). Her examination of her conscience suggests that she is actively engaged in assessing her own worth—an act of agency and reflection on her subjectivity. Although Jane has the counsel of her loyal friend Mary and the ever-present Mr. Lloyd, unlike Margaretta, Jane exerts her independence and ends her engagement to Edward without their help.

Throughout this period of education and independence, Jane has a "guardian God" in Robert Lloyd, the Quaker who purchased her family's estate. He watches over her from childhood to womanhood. His are the questions that give her pause to reflect on Erskine's behavior. "What hast thou done Jane? . . . hast thou engaged thyself to Erskine?" (106). When she answers, he leaves her to wonder what she has done to offend him as she has come to rely on his friendship and loyalty. There is a growing animosity between Lloyd and Erskine due in part to their natural dispositions, one gives and the other takes. But, it is not until Jane learns of Erskine's exploits with his comrades at his gambling club that she understands just how far apart they are spiritually—she lives in the light of benevolence, and he lacks a benevolent spirit. Again, Jane assesses her own worth, and despite the life of relative comfort and economic ease she could have with Erskine, she understands that marriage to him would compromise her values and beliefs. To readers, Sedgwick implies that spirituality and thrift should govern reason.

A New England Tale was considered to be the first novel of merit written by an American woman. "Her skill in describing children, her sympathy with the lowly, her own religious feelings, that incline to duties rather than doctrines—all of these are portrayed in her first effort at novel writing" ("Miss Catharine"); not only did critics discuss the merits of this novel in numerous reviews in magazines and periodicals, but they hailed Sedgwick as a model for women authors. She was credited for the "improvement of public taste, in substituting truth, good sense and pure morality, for the extravagant, and artificial sentiments, which formerly filled our fashionable novels" ("New-England" 170). Her acclaim was due, in part, to her careful attention to the realistic detail and description of the manners and customs of New England society recorded through observation. *A New England Tale* was well received among readers as a text intended to facilitate good parenting and acted as a guide to educate young women on heartfelt morality imbedded in the ways in which true women led their lives as opposed to a shallow, showy exhibition of religious fervor.[15] For some, like Jane Elton, their escape came in the form of Quakerism; her authorial creator's escape came in the form of Unitarianism.

Sedgwick's novel, like Murray's and Rowson's, contrasted women as characters within the contexts of helpmeets, the cult of true womanhood, and republican motherhood as well as their relationship between home and the world.[16] Any woman not willing to sacrifice everything on the "altar of affection" at home and live a child-centered life appears selfish and risks social censure. Yet, some women did transcend the threshold of home and move beyond the restrictions of women's sphere to women's rights. Why some middle-class women transcended and others did not is difficult to determine. Women in the cult of domesticity and suffragettes shared "desires to develop women's self-esteem and to free them from obeisance to mens' whims and the two groups concurred on the need to advance educational opportunities and encourage women to be useful members of society" (Cott, *Bonds*, 205). Literary scholars and historians agree that both true women and new women, to varying degrees, continue to esteem home and family, and that "the majority of women upheld woman's sphere in order to enhance their status; they staked their major claim to social power on their 'vocation'" (205). The more young women sought fulfillment and vocation outside the home, the greater the opportunity to fashion new identities.

Characterizations of Prototypical New Women in Antebellum Novels and Post-Antebellum Novels

I use the phrase "prototypical new women" because the definition of new women changes over the course of the nineteenth-century, and they cannot be categorized as an homogenous group with the same characteristics. The characterizations of each of the protagonists discussed in this section reveal some of the attributes of a new way of thinking for women and about women, which is consistent with the philosophy of new women. Stereotypically, a new woman was considered to be young, reasonably well educated, and competent. She appeared resilient and strong minded with a healthy self-respect born of an independent spirit (Matthews 13). Being young, well educated, and resilient, however, did not always ensure independence. A great deal had to do with mothers and their relationships with their daughters. Often, the daughters began to define themselves in

relation to their mothers. Their similarities and their differences have an impact on the development of the protagonists' self-esteem as young women, and eventually as adults. That is certainly the case in Rebecca Harding Davis's novel, *Margret Howth* (1862), and her short story "In the Market" (1868).

A review of *Margret Howth* in *Peterson's Magazine* in April of 1862 heralds Rebecca Harding Davis "to be the foremost female novelist America has yet had." The article quotes a famous critic, Dr. R. Shelton Mackenzie as saying that "No man could have drawn the character, showing us the heart of the heroine." The author of the critique commends Davis for writing a book "full of proofs of true womanliness," yet, in the novel's "vigorous style, its strong characterizations, and its powerful thought, it shows a masculine force, which might be considered impossible in a female, if we did not recollect that genius has no sex, but is, in reality, dual." What is perhaps most profound about this critique is the acknowledgment of Davis's genius and careful attention to realistic detail in her writing. The critic concludes that she "has lived where individuality is marked, and has probed some of the deepest recesses of some of the strongest natures."

Another review in *The Continental Monthly* the same year claims that

> the author wearied of the old cry that the literature of our country is only a continuation of that of Europe, had resolved to prove, by vigorous effort, that it *is* possible to set forth, not merely the incidents of our industrial life in many grades, in its purely idiomatic force, but to make the world realize that in it vibrate and struggle outward those aspirations, germs of culture and reforms which we seldom reflect on as forming a part of the inner-being of our very practical fellow citizens,—it breaks, with a strong intellect and fine descriptive power, into a new field, right into the rough of real life, bringing out fresher and more varied forms than had been done before, and in doing this makes us understand, with strange ability, how the thinkers among our people *think*.

Her novel reflects the gritty reality of poverty, class struggles, and over-zealous reformists. Davis's writing also documents the evolution of a woman author's philosophy regarding women and reform.

Readers impressions of Margret Howth as a young woman are often gleaned through the voyeuristic musings of Dr. Knowles and the unrequited longings of Stephen Holmes. Margret is the only daughter of a blind schoolmaster. Although her education isn't discussed in the narrative, she often reads to her father in the evenings and occasionally corrects his quotations in Latin. Therefore, readers understand that she is educated. Her education is also reflected in her job which requires her to maintain the books for the mill and account for all expenditures and payments—a job she obtains through the current owner, Dr. Knowles. Margret's stoicism, born of economic necessity and resignation to her fate, baffles and frustrates both men. She has a clear sense of her duties, "Whatever slow, unending toil lay in them, whatever hungry loneliness, or coarseness of deed, she saw it all, shrinking from nothing" (51). To survive, she approaches each day's tasks mechanically, without affect. The narrator asks readers, "After you have made a sacrifice of yourself for others, did you ever notice how apt you were to doubt, as soon as the deed was irrevocable, whether, after all, it were worthwhile to have done it? How mean seems the good gained! How new and unimagined the agony of empty hands and stifled wish!" (61). The narrator's questions begin to negate the "great idea of American sociology, —that the object of life is *to grow*" (121), and to question the principal philosophy of transcendentalism.[17] Since her mother attends to her blind father who continues to dominate the family scene, Margret has no model for "female authority, emotional transcendence, or the moral significance of domestic work" (Phaelzer 67). Instead, she turns to a life of social duty with the intention of ministering aid to impoverished and morally debased women—women whose misery and suffering is greater than her own.

Throughout the narrative, Davis unites readers through suffering—conditions born of the turbulent times in which she lived. Unfortunately, sentimental traditions prevail and marriage is

again offered as salvation and Margret's true vocation in life. Her soon to be husband, Holmes, explains to Margret that when she becomes his wife "she shall be no strong-willed reformer, standing alone: a sovereign lady with kind words for the world, who gives her hand only to that man whom she trusts" (242). Instead, she will "keep her heart and its secrets for [him] alone" (242). To her credit, Davis reveals that she considers Margret "the completest failure in the story" (Phaelzer 74)[18] in a letter to James Fields, editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Perhaps, that is why years later she chooses the name Margaret as the protagonist in her short story "In the Market."

Davis writes in the introduction to "In the Market," published in *Peterson's Magazine* in January 1868, her distaste for the commodification of marriage as a young woman's only means of economic survival. She considers the phrase "in the market" impure and an unnatural consequence of the prevailing social acceptance of women's roles as *feme covert*. "In the Market" briefly examines the need not only for reforms in vocational education for women, but the need to educate society to that end and facilitate acceptance of the working woman as equal to the domestic woman in virtue—an end to *Eve*-olution

As discussed earlier in this chapter, "In the Market" begins with the future of Clara, the eldest sister, to secure a match with John Bohme, a young man of some means. Clara has two older sisters and three younger ones: her father, brother, and mother hope that she will be able to ease the financial drain on the family's resources by marrying up. Ironically, it is her brother Mason's appearance that seals her fate, and Bohme realizes that there is no way "to divorce her from her surroundings" (200). Clara is left with the painful task of discussing her failure to secure a match in front of the entire family at dinner. Davis uses Mason's disrespectful attitude toward his mother when she presents him with bills for the girls' shoes and clothing after dinner to reveal how much the women of this family are dependent on both father and brother for their well being and livelihood. He scolds his own mother as a child, and says "Mother, this is growing too serious a matter; you should have some mercy on father, if my sisters have none" (202). He continues to rant on the difficulty of supporting his sisters: "if there were any chance of a change—any chance!"

Clara retorts, “You mean if some of us would marry?” To which he admonishes, “Now, Clara, there is no need of temper—it won’t pay the bills. God knows that I do all I can, and so does my father, to keep you girls in idleness and plenty. It’s only natural that you should do as other women—go to homes of your own” (202). The younger Porter sisters watch and listen. Is this their only recourse?

Davis describes the girls’ beauty as “compatible with ill-health—chalky whiteness of skin, a hectic flush, a nervous glitter of the eye. They inherited strong constitutions; but the digestion of one was wrong, the liver of another, and the nerves of all” (203). Could we argue that their lack of prospects, both vocational and marital is killing them by slow degrees? It appears that Davis thinks so. She writes that “Had they been machines, some expert would have pronounced that the rust and decay come for want of use” (203-4). She declares that the “unused brain or nerve-power”of the girls escapes “in perpetual headaches and hysterics,”with the exception of Margaret.

Like earlier women authors, Davis provides readers with a number of female characters, all from the same family. Two are spinsters, a third is in danger of failing in the marriage market, and the younger sisters learn at a young age that they too have limited prospects because they are women—again, Margaret is the exception. In Margaret, Davis presents women readers with a different prototype. Whereas Clara is desperate to find a husband, Margaret has a marriage prospect in George Goddard, yet she turns him down. Because she cares for him, she doesn’t want to become a burden to him since he is already supporting an elderly mother and ailing sister. She vows, “I will not make debt and poverty a certain to you in the beginning of your life” (205). When he reminds her that she has fewer resources than he, she laments that “Love and religion are the only resources for women” (205). Margaret, like Clara, strives to find a place in life that justifies her “right to live.”

Using her characters’ dialogue, Davis discusses women’s lack of training for specific vocations throughout the narrative. In the beginning of the story, she uses an exchange between Clara and her mother to establish the prevailing thought on women’s professions. Clara’s mother

tells her that young women "must marry as they can," and Clara retorts, "Or starve!" Her mother replies, "Your father taught me the philosophy of the question." "And we learn it for ourselves" (203) is Clara's response. Later when she announces her engagement, her mother tells her "You have your little crosses to bear, but God meant you to be patient," and Clara boldly replies, "I doubt that, God never meant any creature he made to cumber the earth uselessly. These rules of custom that face me, turn where I will, are not of his making. He never meant that marriage should be the only means by which a woman should gain her food and clothes, and provide for her old age" (207). Clara bitterly accepts her fate. For readers, the conversation between Clara and her mother helps Davis call to question the philosophy that meaningful work de-sexes a woman. Margaret, on the other hand, does just the opposite.

Having witnessed some of the conversation between her mother and Clara, Margaret has an epiphany and turns down a proposal of marriage to her long time beau. She defies "a woman's mission . . . to marry and bear children" (208). Instead, Margaret determines to ease her family's burden and make her own way by growing herbs and selling them to doctors. Margaret, like Jane Elton, exercises her own agency and thus for a time becomes both the authority and the alien. Because her business enterprise fails in the first few years, her "folly" becomes the talk of the town. She is scorned by her brother at first. Nevertheless, she remains determined. She finances her enterprise through a conventional occupation for women, sewing and mending. With each success, she enlarges her vision for her growing herb business. Not only does she succeed, but she is able to establish her spinster sisters in business in another town and care for her parents in their retirement. Davis uses George Goddard's return after eight years to engage readers in a discussion of the erroneous notions that work will age women prematurely and render them unfit for marriage. When Goddard inquires after Margaret and her family, he finds that she is one of the "wealthiest citizens of the village" (211), and the change in her—that she "has the quiet manner, now, of one born to an inheritance" (213). In the character of Margaret, Davis alludes to a woman's natural right to knowledge, power, and self-actualization—every woman's inheritance.

Readers cannot help but to recognize Davis's inference when she uses the drained swampland and the seed of Margaret's enterprise metaphorically. A woman's brain when neglected is like that swampland, and it only takes a few seeds of knowledge and useful occupation to flourish. Unlike other authors of the period who use the gardening metaphor to suggest pruning and trimming young ladies' independence to prepare them for their God-given role in society, Davis reverses that metaphor to subvert the notion that women's brains are fallow. She suggests that women should seek their own destiny in the world, with or without marriage. Davis's short story offers readers a concise portrayal of a prototypical new woman—a woman much like the author whose development and philosophy blossoms with worldly experience.

Elizabeth Stoddard received similar reviews as those of Rebecca Harding Davis for her style of writing, but negative reviews on the content of the plot which ultimately had an adverse effect on the sale and reception of her novel when first published. In September of 1862, a review of *The Morgesons* also appeared in *Peterson's Magazine*. The critic claims that "It is not an exaggeration to say of this novel . . . that it exhibits much of the keen, subtle analysis of Balzac" in his depiction of provincial life in France. *The Morgesons* presents "The granite coasts; the stubborn fields; the gossiping villagers; the hard materialism; the narrow social life; the false pride of blood; these, and other peculiarities of the land of the Puritans, are painted with the minute fidelity of a Pre-Raphaelite picture." The reviewer praises her style of writing as true to experiences she must have drawn from real life. Long after the Civil War and Reconstruction, when *The Morgesons* was reissued, Julian Hawthorne wrote a critique for *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1889 praising Stoddard's "novelistic habits," and claiming it as "one of the best novels ever written by a woman, and superior to all but a very few produced before or since by any American author." He, like McKenzie, acknowledged that "Some things in it—and some of the best things—only a woman could have written." Hawthorne applauded her as an artist in her own right—an artist who didn't try to emulate a masculine voice. She wrote from the strength of her own observations and reflections, and "[wa]s affected by no other writer, but only by life itself; and she convey[ed] the

impression that life has made on her mind by a method original with herself." He credited Stoddard with having "extraordinary spiritual insight, which she employ[ed], not like our contemporary analysts, in dissecting the commonplace motives of commonplace people, but in shedding quite a new light on actions and impulses, done and felt everyday."

Stoddard's novel addresses many of the same questions circulating in popular women's magazines regarding women's roles in society and their education. Like other women authors in this study, she presents readers with as many female characters whose behavior they may or may not emulate. Her protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson (Cassy), is the narrator. As the narrator, she engages readers personally, as though they are reading her private journals and letters. They know her innermost thoughts. Thus, throughout the narrative, Stoddard tests the limits of religious and social philosophies regarding women in such a way that they become immersed in the debate, psychologically. Readers learn much about Cassy's education, her mother's education, her mother's aspirations, and the toll boredom and deferred dreams have on women. The detail with which Stoddard presents these scenes creates an intimacy with readers and further humanizes the discussion as though the characters and their actions are real. Readers become fully immersed in Cassy's struggles to understand her role in the family and her place in society—her struggle to define and fashion her own identity. Because of her father's affluence, Cassy has access to more education than any other female character discussed thus far, and it appears that the more she is educated, the more she is discontented with the direction, or lack of meaningful direction in her life—yet, she retains "the instinctive faith in the durability of [her] own powers of life" (27).

At Aunt Merce's urging, her mother sends her to live for a time with Grandfather Warren to attend a young lady's school, hoping that she will be transformed from her hopeless state into a helpful one. Her mother convinces her father to let her go, and she explains to Cassy that she wants her "to comprehend the influences of her early life, and learn some of the lessons she had been taught" (27). To Cassy, this is a year of penance and unhappiness, and she becomes imprisoned in her mother's past. She has altercations at school with other students and is openly defiant with Miss

Black, her teacher. Cassy asks, "Was it a pity that my life was not conducted on Nature's plan, who shows us the beautiful, while she conceals the interior? We do not see the roots of her roses, and she hides from us her skeletons" (45).

Her mother acknowledges this difference in a response to her letter. She begs her to be patient:

> My child, have courage. One of these days you will feel tender pity, when you think of your mother's girlhood. You are learning how she lived at your age. I trembled at the prosperity of your opening life, and believed it best for you to have a period of contrast. I thought you would, by and by, understand me better than I do myself; for you are not like me Cassy, you are like your father. (46)

In this passage, Stoddard establishes Cassy's streak for independent thought and reason. Her likeness to her father and her polarity from her sickly sister Veronica begins to shape her mind set. She offers readers a self-assessment of her character much the same way a man would unabashedly catalogue his virtues:

> As for my position, I was loved and I was hated, and it pleased me as much to be hated as to be loved. My acquaintances were kind enough to let me know that I was generally thought proud, exacting, ill-natured, and apt to expect the best of everything. But one thing I know of myself—that I concealed nothing; the desires and emotions which are usually kept as a private fund I displayed and exhausted. My audacity shocked those who possessed this fund. My candor was called anything but truthfulness; they named it sarcasm, cunning, coarseness, or tact, as those were constituted who came into contact with me. Insight into character, frankness, generosity, disinterestedness, were sometimes given me. (59)

Cassy becomes a trend setter. Her influence is profound. The village girls mimic her style, except Veronica (Verry), who never fails to give her opinion of her sister's actions.

Cassy's character is also contrasted with that of Alice Morgeson, her cousin by marriage. At eighteen, her parents don't know quite what to do with her, so they consent to her attending yet another school on par with a college to study with Dr. Price. The change of scene and the influence of both Charles and Alice Morgeson make a profound impression on Cassy. She learns from Alice's example of housekeeping how to maintain the appearance of a neat and orderly home. She curbs her excessive appetite by observing how little they eat. She tells readers that "I improved so much that I could find what I was seeking in a drawer, without harrowing it with my fingers, and began to see beauty in order" (76). As she observes her cousin Charles examine household matters as a woman would, her appreciation of the "art of living" grows. Yet, she continues to resist domestication. It is with Charles, a self-made man, that Cassy feels a kinship of spirit and eventually love beyond the familial relation. Interestingly, throughout this time, her father is her only correspondent. She exerts her authority with both men. With Charles, she withholds her declaration of love, and she converses with her father as though she is his equal—not his daughter. In both instances, her masculine independence threatens to alienate her from the women in her family. Nevertheless, she is not immune to life's suffering, and Charles's death is life altering for her—she is emotionally and physically scarred.

Later in the narrative, Cassy asks her friend Ben Somers, "What am I?" (227). He tells her that she has "been his delight and misery" and that she is

> so impetuous, yet self-contained! Incapable of insincerity, devoid of affection and courageously beautiful. Then, to my amazement, I saw that, unlike most women, you understood your instincts; that you dared to define them, and were impious enough to follow them. You debased my ideal, you confused me, for I could never affirm that you were wrong; forcing me to consult abstractions, they gave a verdict in your favor, which almost unsexed you in my estimation. I must own that the man who is willing to marry you has more courage than I have. (226).

These are the same qualities that helped her father identify with her, and the same qualities that attracted Charles. Charles sought to conquer her, and on some level, Cassy understands this, which is why she refuses his love even though she desires him.

Rather than keep her own counsel, when her father marries Alice, she confesses her sin—that she fell in love with a married man. She begs her father not to marry Alice telling him that it will kill her, to which he responds, "Must you alone have license?" (245). Eventually, they arrive at an understanding, and Cassy asks for her independence. She asks her father to buy their house from Ben and to provide her with a very small income. She says, "It is useless to disguise the fact—I have lost you. You are more dead to me than mother is." "You say so," he responds (247). When Cassy finally finds love and marriage, she is an independent woman commanding her own affairs. By the end of the novel, readers develop an understanding of Cassy as a new woman through Stoddard's use of a first person narrative. Whether readers agree with the protagonist's choices or not, they have been privy to her thoughts and emotions. After surviving many emotional trials and economic setbacks in her quest to define her identity, Cassy, a new woman, marries Desmond Somers, a man with whom she feels equal in both life experience and love.

Like Cassy, Avis Dobell, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps' protagonist in *The Story of Avis* (1877), rebels against the traditional education in the domestic arts for little girls. She argues with her father to the point that he admits that "It is an admitted principle in all systems of education that some concession shall be made to the moulds of individuality" (8), yet, he believes that in time "all theories cool off in such moulds at last" (8)— not so with Avis. She excels in her schoolwork and reads prolifically. Avis is "full of vague restlessness . . . and the more definite hungers natural to a girl of her temperament . . . she was ready to be fed with any full, rich nutriment which seemed to promise fibrine to a growing soul" (31). Her epiphany comes at an early age—she decides she wants "to be thoroughly educated in art." When she announces her desires to her father, Professor Dobell patronizes her and tells her that she will, "in due time, like other educated young ladies" (35) go to Florence to study art. Her "business" at present he tells her "is to 'be' a studious and womanly

girl" (34). His rebuff causes her to doubt her convictions, and Avis protects her desires by withdrawing so as not to risk further censure. At a young age, she is aware of her individuality and recognizes that she must protect her own interests or risk alienation.

After finishing her formal education at Harmouth, what she considers her "school" education, she accompanies friends to Europe for a year. Avis appeals to her father to allow her to remain and study art. He offers an analogy with "carrier-doves," explaining to her Aunt Chloe that "It is the custom. . .to let them all loose from their places of confinement into the upper air; but those which do not return readily without interference are cast aside as too dull to be worth the trouble of further education" (35). She works diligently for six years to master technique and to become a successful artist—for six years, she enjoys independence abroad with a singular focus.

Avis's singular focus guides her into young adulthood with convictions of remaining unmarried; instead, she chooses to redirect the energy normally subverted by domesticity and invest it in her artistic development. Her independence and passion for painting and art distinguishes her from other young women. She doesn't flock to the German lectures of Philip Ostrander as other young women do—she remains aloof and becomes an enigma to him. Ostrander commissions her to paint his portrait as a way to become intimate with her. To him, she "is like no other woman," she perplexes him "like the Sphinx," awes him "like the Venus," and allures him "like the Lörelei" (66). The more she resists his advances, the more he pressures her with confessions of his love. Although Ostrander professes to be a man with modern philosophies when it comes to women, readers are able to discern his motives. Avis is a challenge, and like Charles Morgeson with Cassy, he wants to possess her, to break her spirit and to own her emotions. Avis knows that to succumb to his advances will compromise her convictions and undermine her artistic passion. The narrator intrudes and explains her state of mind as akin to yielding "some impalpable portion of her personality," and that "her soul had gone out of her" (101). Her fear shows on her face, and the narrator intrudes explaining how her fear is interpreted by Philip, "Just then Ostrander thought her

beautiful terror of him more precious than her love" (101). Love for Avis "is like death . . . It is civil war" (106). Yet, she marries him.

After they marry, Avis continues to paint for a while, but the money she earns from her commissions barely pays for the sewing which she must hire out. Her worst fears are realized when her husband criticizes her. She reminds him, "But you remember you didn't marry me to be your housekeeper, Philip!," and he replies, "Yes, I remember. I don't know what we were either of us thinking of!" (153). Again, the narrator intrudes and interprets the emotional impact of this impasse for readers by reminding them that "The scar which an unkind word leaves upon a large love, may be invisible, like that of a great sin upon the tissues of the repentant soul; but for one as for the other, this life has no healing" (155). Avis must draw from the self-reliance she acquires abroad as a coping mechanism to survive motherhood and marriage. The narrator's point of view engages readers' empathy through a connection to their own experience. Stoddard makes no attempt at omniscience. She uses the narrator's point of view to convey her message. If readers identify with Avis's marital discord, perhaps they do so because they too have survived harsh criticism.

Avis's life's ambition and her passion for art are put aside to deal with the immediacy of child-rearing and wifely duties. Throughout the narrative, she must deal with her husband Philip's philandering, his lack of ambition, the loss of his job and income, and the death of her beloved son. During these years, her studio, like her artistic passion, becomes dusty from lack of use. After her husband's death, she gives herself a year to rediscover her talent and revive her passion, but it is too late. Along with her dreams, she locks and abandons her studio for good. Avis's plan from that moment forward is to devote her energy to securing for her daughter the freedom to pursue her own interests. This is the lesson that Avis learned, and perhaps that is Phelps's intent and her justification for the intrusiveness of the narrator—a warning to women that careers and marriage don't mix well, at least with society's current expectations of women. At least one critic agrees with that assertion, but disagrees with the author's premise.

A review of *The Story of Avis* appeared in the December 1877 issue of *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading.* The reviewer states that "Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's new novel, 'Avis,' is the story of a woman with a 'career.' As a study of womanhood it is unnatural and not attractive" (855). The critique offers readers a discussion of Avis's character in comparison to her Aunt Chloe "a homeless widow of excellent Vermont intentions, and high ideals . . . , who is ridiculed in a quiet way throughout the tale; but we really have a great respect and liking for the sensible, patient relative, and do not see how the household machinery could have moved at all without her efficient assistance. The heroine, on the contrary, must have been a trying person to educate or live with" (855), and even suggests that Philip's "flirtations seem very natural under the circumstances" (855). Ultimately, this critic warns readers against Phelps's dangerous influence "when she urges young girls, who are too often restless and eager for excitement, to leave off giving tasteful touches to the old homestead and go out into the world." She continues, "And it is cruel as well as injudicious to advise girls to write when the public is nauseated with feeble poems and weak novels already, and there is so much work to be done at home by these ambitious types" (855). So, twenty five years after the Women's Rights Convention and the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls in 1848, and fourteen years after the Emancipation Proclamation frees slaves, women are still being urged to adopt domesticity as their vocation in life.

Like Avis Dobell, Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) has artistic promise. Unlike Avis, Edna's recognition of her talent and ambition comes later in life *after* marriage and motherhood; up until that time, she "dabbled in an unprofessional way" (30). The narrator explains to readers that even as a child, Edna is aware of the necessity to live within herself. Like Avis, "At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (32). Edna is well schooled in social etiquette, but when she begins to yearn for self-expression outside the role of wife and mother, she neglects and eventually abandons her social duties. Like Margret, Cassy, and Avis, Edna holds herself apart and maintains aloofness. That same aloofness attracts men—although she is aware of

an “awakening” of her sexual power, she doesn’t quite understand how that power objectifies her until it is too late.

Chopin, like Stoddard, creates a narrative from Edna’s point of view, and like *The Morgesons*, *The Awakening* engages women readers’ emotions as though they are living vicariously through the protagonist. There are also interpretive passages from an omniscient narrator, yet not as intrusive as Phelps’s narrator in *The Story of Avis*. Chopin’s interpretive narrator is more subtle and seems to create the scenes which propel Edna’s actions and interactions with other people in Creole society. For example, in Chapter XVII, the narrator describes Edna’s social “programme” which she follows religiously for the six years of her marriage to Léonce (69). As she becomes increasingly agitated with the “routine” of her life, she too is criticized by her husband about her laxity in receiving callers and her growing disinterest in household affairs, both of which he feels are necessary “to keep up with the procession” (70). Later when she is alone in her room, in defiance, she flings her wedding ring on the carpet and tries to destroy it with her heel. Afterwards, she feels some remorse at the outburst—not the disillusionment with her marriage but the excessive display of emotion. Nevertheless, from that point on in the narrative, she begins to live her own life and central to that choice is a commitment to her painting, and she “resolved never to take another step backward” (76). Once resolved, Edna’s entire affect changes, and those changes are noticed by others who know her. Because she has become her own authority, her break with social tradition alienates her from her husband and significantly reduces her social circle. Her husband thinks she has become mentally unbalanced, and to others she has never looked more beautiful.

When she abandons her home and moves to the “pigeon-house,” the narrator explains that Edna realizes feelings “of having descended the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual” (115). Edna begins “to see and apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life” (115). She embraces her vision and recognizes the invitation of her own soul

to express herself—she awakens. In her awakened state she confesses her love to Robert Lebrun, and although he loves her, he refuses to flaunt their love in the face of Creole society by absconding with Léonce Pontellier's wife. In the face of this rejection, she becomes aware that he is like every other man in her life. Chopin juxtaposes his lack of courage and rejection of Edna against her brave commitment to individuality. She eventually realizes that although his actions appear chivalrous on the surface, as though he is making a supreme sacrifice by showing her any affection at all, that she would cease to care for him in time just as she has for Léonce and Arobin.

The Awakening ends where it begins with the sea's seductive undercurrents—a voice that never ceases "whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (136). The circular aspect of the narrative is symbolic of life and death, baptism, and last rites. As Edna swims to the point of no return, she does so knowing that death will release her soul from bondage. Edna's life begins metaphorically when she learns to swim in the sea and ends metaphorically when she undresses under the sun on a deserted beach. As she casts off her unpleasant, prickling garments—garments which symbolize the physical entrapments of society, her actions resonate with readers who identify with her struggle. "How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some newborn creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (136), the narrator explains.

Does Edna successfully negotiate the interstices between authority and alienation to fashion a new life? Yes, and no. During the time she enjoys her independence, her art and her beauty excel. When she is abandoned by Robert, she feels she has no one in whom to confide—no support group. So, in Edna's frame of mind, she has but two choices, one a symbolic death, and the other death. If she reverses her stance and caves to the conventionalities and demands of domesticity, she becomes one of the walking dead. What consequences would she face if she would continue to live apart from Léonce? Divorce would be difficult, but attainable, in time. However, Edna, it appears to readers, sees no other option until it is too late and her strength has already left her. Chopin isn't suggesting that women commit suicide rather than adopt the roles of mother/woman. Edna's death

is intended to shock readers into action. Written and published at the fin de siècle, Chopin leaves women readers with the lasting impression that they too can cast off conventionality and explore their own souls, to live as free thinking, whole individuals—as new women, provided they understand the obstacles they may face in the process.

When *The Awakening* was published in 1899, critics commented favorably on the style, but berated the subject. One such review published in *Outlook* called the novel "a decidedly unpleasant study of temperament," and stated that "the story was not really worth telling, and its disagreeable glimpses of sensuality are repellant." Another review published in the *Congregationalist* deemed it "a languorous, passionate story of New Orleans and vicinity, hinging on the gradual yielding of a wife to the attractions of other men than her husband. It is a brilliant piece of writing, but unwholesome in its influence." Unwholesome—how dare a woman reject the social norm to pursue her own wants and desire? How dare she unsex herself by esteeming new woman status?

How dare a woman . . . ? These are the questions that Davis, Stoddard, Phelps, and Chopin address to stimulate important dialogue over the latter half of the nineteenth-century regarding the intellectual, physical, and emotional capacities of women. The authors not only write about educated, self-reliant, independent, and emotionally troubled heroines, they depict male characters as flawed human beings—in temperament and moral fortitude despite their formal education. Each author, in her own way, advocates for educational reform and change to improve conditions for women of all classes. The female protagonists in their novels share a degree of independence—the result of their education and self-reliance. During these periods of independence, they are subject to outside influences without the direct interference of father, brother, or husband and are free for a brief time to revel in the luxury of self-reflection and action. Each internalizes and externalizes authority in different ways. Margret Howth chooses marriage. Margaret Porter chooses to become an independent entrepreneur before she marries. Cassy Morgeson also chooses to live as an independent woman before marriage. Avis Dobell is forced by marriage and motherhood to

abandon her dream of becoming an artist, and Edna Pontellier makes the ultimate sacrifice to end the ownership of her body and mind.

Notes

[1] Published in *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, June 1744; 1, 434. Online. American Periodical Series.

[2] In *The Boundaries of Her Body: The Troubling History of Women's Rights in America*, Debran Rowland argues that "Once married, a woman was deemed to be under the 'protection and cover' of her husband's wing, a feme covert, as the French would say. It is from this covered perch that 'she performs every thing. . .under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*" (17). She bases her argument on the earlier scholarship of Linda Kerber's "History Can Do It No Justice: Women and the Interpretation of the American Revolution," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (72).

[3] Mary Beth Norton notes that "American legislators and judges, like their English counter parts, assumed an "identitie of a person' between spouses after marriage" (72).

[4] "Ye Goat-herd Gods," Sir Philip Sidney (1850). Online. http://poetry.about.com/od/poems/l/blsidneysestina.htm

[5] Strephon, a goatherder laments the loss of his power to please the Goat-herd God:

> I that was once free burgess of the forests,
> Where shade from Sun, and sport I sought in evening,
> I, that was once esteemed for pleasant music,
> Am banished now among the monstrous mountains
> Of huge despair, and foul affliction's valleys,

[6] Published in *The Lady's Magazine and Musical Repository*, August 1802; 2, 107.

[7] In Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (2006), she quotes Jürgen Habermas's definition, "Subjectivity, as the innermost core of the private, was always already oriented to an audience" (1). Kelley states that "In connecting this 'core of the private' to a world beyond the interior self, Habermas aptly describes the subjectivity these women crafted—a self poised to take action in society" (1).

[8] Susan K. Harris contends that the "cover stories" in nineteenth-century American women's novels often reflect their own values and narrative designs, and the concept of authorial intention is important from a rhetorical point of view. Furthermore, she argues that what a text containing cultural codes "*thinks* it is saying (or pretends to be saying) and what it may be saying to some readers is not necessarily the same thing" (33). See *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (1990).

[9] The implied readers of these novels include women of the reading classes and are not solely defined by economics but by literacy. Research documents that the number of copies printed does not correspond to the number of readers. Books, magazines, newspapers, etc. were openly shared through salons, literary, reading, and gleaning circles. See Cathy N. Davidson's, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*; Nina Baym's, *Novels Readers and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*; and Mary Kelley's, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*.

[10] See page xxvi in Sharon M. Harris's, "Introduction" to *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*.

[11] See page 76 in Nancy M. Theriot's, "The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America."

[12] Kerber notes that "In practice, while the feme sole clearly had property rights that she might vigorously protect, she was not permitted to exercise the political rights that theoretically accompanied them" (120).

[13] See page 27 in Cathy N. Davidson's, *Revolution and the Word*: *The Rise of the Novel in America*.

[14] See page xxxi in the "Introduction," to *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson.

[15] Victoria Clements notes in her "Introduction" to *A New England Tale*: *Or Sketches of New- England Character and Manners* that "Sedgwick's purpose in writing the tale was to expose the 'thraldom of orthodox [Calvinist] despotism and to defend the more tolerant Christianity she had chosen" (xii). She quotes a letter from Sedgwick to Susan Higginson Channing dated 25 Sept. 1821.

[16] In the *Root of Bitterness*, Nancy Cott contends that "The central convention of domesticity was the contrast between the home and the world. Home was an oasis in the desert, a sanctuary where sympathy, honor, virtue are assembled, where disinterested love is ready to sacrifice everything at the altar of affection" (64).

[17] See Jean Pfaelzer's Parlor Radical: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Origins of American Social Realism, page 74.

[18] Phaelzer quotes a letter from Rebecca Harding Davis to James Fields dated August 9, 1861 held in the archives at the University of Virginia.

CHAPTER 3

THE MATERIAL GIRL: SELF-FASHIONING AND THE ICONOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN'S BODIES IN AMERICAN WOMAN'S LITERATURE

"Is not the last scene better than the first?" - Jean Muir

— "Behind a Mask" (1866)
Louisa May Alcott

Louisa May Alcott's story, "Behind a Mask, or A Woman's Power" provides several examples of the use of clothing as a means to employ the process of self-fashioning. Alcott's plot suggests that life is a stage, and each role enacted requires a different costume. These are lessons that she learned in her own lifetime. Rebecca Harding Davis remembers meeting her as a young woman in Boston in 1862, and shares her impressions of their meeting with readers in her memoir, *Bits of Gossip* (1904). "I saw at an evening reception a tall, thin young woman standing alone in a corner. She was plainly dressed and had that watchful defiant air with which the woman whose youth is slipping away is apt to face the world which has offered no place to her" (41). Davis explains to readers that she has "known many women and girls who were fighting with poverty and loneliness . . . , but never one so big and generous in soul as this one in her poor scant best gown, the 'claret-colored merino,'" and that "amid her grim surroundings, she had the gracious instincts of a queen" (41). Alcott doesn't try to hide her poverty from Davis; in fact, she tells her that the dress "is the only decent one I have. I'm very poor" (41). Years later, when they meet again, Davis reveals that "The lean, eager, defiant girl was done, and instead, there came to greet me a large, portly, middle-aged woman, richly dressed. Everything about her, from her shrewd, calm eyes to the rustle of her satin gown told me of assured success" (42). Her transformation has a Muir-*esque*

quality as though she is saying to her father, Bronson Alcott, and the other transcendentalists, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, who were present at the reception where she and Davis first met, "Is not the last scene better than the first?"

The process of transformation for middle-class women, as revealed in nineteenth century American woman's literature, involved a complicated web of signification. Not only did they understand their individual subjectivity apart from society, but they also understood how to successfully negotiate acceptance within a broader social context to secure their wants and needs. Social success and acceptance often relied on a woman's understanding of her body and her appearance as commodities.[1] As a commodity, to be successful, she had to package and exhibit those attributes closely associated with the ideologies of her intended audience and/or market. She stepped outside herself momentarily to view her image iconographically as an artifact[2] of sorts.

When viewing herself iconographically, a woman's self-reflection enabled her to evaluate her individual subjectivity in such a way that she assessed or reassessed her value in relation to society and the role in which she was currently cast in regard to the role she wished to play in life. If there was a difference between the two, then she had to make a conscious choice—to either accept her current role and play it out or to manipulate society's understanding of her affect in such a way that she employed the artful process of manipulation. To successfully do so, a woman had to understand the symbology and semiotic processes involved in "reading women's bodies." With that understanding, they achieved a higher level of self-awareness and a sense that their individuality was under constant scrutiny and therefore under constant construction.

Some of the characters in nineteenth-century American woman's literature, like Jean Muir, were able to successfully manipulate the semiotic process and elevated their perceived value to "marry up" for greater financial security. Others like Dorcasina Sheldon failed miserably and became carnivalesque caricatures of unfashionable women. Still others viewed the process as one of growth, a quest to define themselves and find their place in society, like Cassandra Morgeson. No matter the outcome, the processes they employed signaled a shift—a transition between the restrictions of domesticity and the need for individual rights and expression. In an effort to unravel the theoretical implications of these processes, we need to understand how the manipulation of affect worked as well as the connections between self-fashioning, fashion theory, the semiotic process and their impact on our understanding of women as cultural artifacts.

"Behind a Mask": Artful Manipulation

When the Coventry's first meet Jean Muir in Louisa May Alcott's "Behind a Mask, or a Woman's Power," they see a "pale-faced girl in her plain black dress, with no ornament but a little silver cross at her throat. Small, thin, and colorless she was, with yellow hair, gray eyes, and sharply cut, irregular, but very expressive features" (100). Readers soon discover that her ensemble is the first of many deceptions. Historically, black clothing is a basic staple of mourning and formality and usually worn on weighty occasions of a somber and serious nature. Black clothing projects an image of sincerity and the absence of color allows little room for nuance. To appear sincere and without nuance, Jean dresses herself in a plain black dress. That she adds to the garment the

simple ornamentation of a silver cross suggests to readers that she wishes to project an image of morality and modesty.

As Jean's interview continues, Mrs. Coventry inquires as to her sickly pallor. Having been recently hospitalized, Jean has left her sickbed to seek employment. When asked to play the piano to prove that she is an accomplished teacher, she walks across the room in search of the piano seemingly unaware that her movements are closely scrutinized by those in attendance, Belle her new charge, Edward (Ned) the second son, Gerald, the eldest son, and Lucia, a distant cousin of the Coventry's. Jean plays and sings a sad melody (101) and then faints. The heir apparent to the Coventry fortune, Gerald, whispers to his cousin, "Scene first, very well done" (101). In response, Jean breaks character, drops her mask for a moment, and with eyes that "seemed black with some strong emotion of anger, pride, or defiance," smiles and bows saying, "Thanks. The last scene shall be still better" (101). Her feigned fainting spell worked as she had hoped and evoked an emotional response in her favor from Gerald, which he suppresses. In her estimation, it is a scene well enacted—from costume to manner. Jean has an objective, and she carefully considers how best to enact the circumstances to realize her goal—to marry into titled affluence.

Behind the scenes, the narrator reveals a woman whose conduct is "decidedly peculiar." Jean, musing aloud, vows to herself that she will "not fail again if there is power in a woman's wit and will!" (105). Jean's reference to her failure alludes to her unsuccessful attempts to secure a proposal and marriage to a wealthy man. She toasts herself in celebration of a scene well played and speaks to her glass of "ardent cordial," saying, "Come, the curtain is down, and so I may be myself for a few hours, if actresses

are ever themselves" (106). As she sheds her somber uniform and unmasks her true identity, readers are given a very different description of a worn, weary, and bitter woman of about thirty. She wipes "the pink" from her face and removes "several pearly teeth." Jean is forced by circumstance to disguise her true identity to find placement in a genteel situation or face certain poverty. Her real ambition is to enact a performance so realistic and believable that she can trick one of the Coventry men into a proposal of marriage. Then, Jean will play the role of a lifetime, lady of the manor. Some women may bring to their reading of the story the experience and awareness of the coded messages within Jean's understanding and manipulation of women's "social" uniforms. Although they may not agree with her methods, they may recognize her manipulation of her audience through costume and custom to achieve an end.

The charade continues, and Jean acts for the other players. The other players are the members of the Coventry family who fall into three categories: her allies, eligible men (their age is of no real consequence), and possible enemies. She nurtures her relationship with Mrs. Coventry and Belle, and they become her allies. Her enemies include Lucia, who considers Gerald her betrothed, and her maid. Later, when Jean rejects Edward's proposal of marriage and talks Gerald into securing a commission for him in the army, he joins the group of enemies. Gerald and his uncle, Sir John, are the true marks of Jean's con. She would prefer marriage to Sir John because then she wouldn't have to wait to inherit a title.

As Jean becomes more accustomed to her surroundings and learns more about the other "players" on the stage through covert observation, she amends her appearance by donning different costumes with subtle ornamentation. These modest changes in her

appearance gradually build an impression of a young woman of culture, manners, beauty, sincerity, humility, and morality. Jean becomes the person she needs to be to entice first Edward, then Gerald, and eventually, Sir John. As she initiates her campaign to manipulate the emotions of Gerald, she appears "all in white, with no ornament but her fair hair, and a fragrant posy of violets in her belt" —gone are the austere garments, the cross, and severe braids wrapped around her head. She appears to her charges as young and pure in virginal white, and not who she truly is, "a divorced wife of a disreputable actor" (199). Again, Alcott assumes that readers grasp the meaning signified by the change in her wardrobe from black to white, with a hint of spring. Jean's ability to transform her countenance with each costume change acknowledges readers' cultural awareness of the ways in which clothing can mask and/or create identity. Likewise, it acknowledges their awareness of the appropriate behavioral codes one expects when they "read" this woman in each of the roles as a cultural artifact. The narrator explains that Jean, despite her misfortunes in life, was the stepdaughter of Lady Howard. Not lacking in "wit and a bold spirit," Jean takes "fate into her own hands . . ." (199) and assumes the identity of her dead half-sister to win the favor of Sir John. However, her bold spirit, hubris, in fact, nearly ruins her scheme.

An actress needs an audience—one that appreciates the quality of her performance. Jean corresponds regularly with her friend Hortense, to whom she confesses all—her scheme to marry into the Coventry fortune, her covert study of the behavior and nature of all of the members of the family, and the ways in which she used this knowledge to wield power over the men in the family. Her letters come into the possession of Edward, the first of the Coventry's to fall for Jean. The bitter tone of the

letters reveals Jean's manipulative schemes and "an actionable offense" (197); she intercepts a letter from her former employer's son, Sydney, which exposes her as a fraud. She "opened the letter by means of a heated knife blade under the seal" and forged a letter to protect herself. Readers are left to decide whether her actions are born out of misfortune and desperation, or whether she pursues her own gain at any cost. Nevertheless, by the time the letters are discovered, she is already married to Sir John and under his protection. While Edward is distracted, she slips behind him, snatches the letters, and throws them in the fire. Her laugh mocks them, and when they move toward her, she faces them with defiance and says, "Hands off, gentlemen! You may degrade yourselves to the work of detectives, but I am not a prisoner yet. Poor Jean Muir you might harm, but Lady Coventry is beyond your reach" (201). So, poor Jean Muir, a woman past her prime by nineteenth century standards employs the only means she has to secure that which she considers her proper place in society. On some level, readers may empathize with Jean, knowing that without a good marriage she has very few economic options.

Jean manipulates her audience through the use of fashion and her acting ability. As she leaves their company for her new home, she gives Gerald a piercing glance and remarks, "Is not the last scene better than the first?" (202). Indeed, the character Alcott created not only understands the impact specific clothing has in a social context, but she understands the coded messages conveyed through representation. In the narrative, Jean Muir knowingly commodifies herself as an object of desire as the means to justify a favorable end to her scheme to find life long security as the Lady of the manor.

Self-Fashioning and Fashion Theory

Because fashion plays a pivotal role in the creation of women as cultural artifacts, we should examine the underlying semiotic and psychological theories of fashion. In addition to individual reception theory, fashion theory relies on the cognizance of visual, verbal, and nonverbal cues as they relate to reading as a process—specifically, the process of reading women's fashion[3] as iconographies.

Furthermore, when we apply these abstracts to a discussion of nineteenth century American middle-class women, we must make the distinction between fashion as a noun embodying certain characteristics of behavior and personality traits and fashionable as an extension of the noun which suggests more of an understanding of the way in which one desires to appear in society. The former is more of a state of being and the latter, as a noun, expresses the result of action or doing.

As an adjective, fashionable alludes to a cognitive process of interpretation similar to semiotics in which the body is both adorned and read using a system of significations and codes. Both the subject and the reader have an understanding of their individual subjectivity. Their individual subjectivity is likely to mask a system of values based on their understanding of their own experience and their interpretation of their roles in society. The use of clothing in the process of self-fashioning can be broken down into two categories: sociological and psychological. Both classifications involve a complicated web of signification linked to individual characteristics and social expectations of character traits.

Although there are many articles in nineteenth century periodical literature with predominantly female subscribers like *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine, Peterson's*

Magazine, and *Harper's Bazaar* on fashion for women, those articles do not approach the subject of fashion theoretically. Thorstein Veblen is one of the first to address fashion as a sociological theory in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899),[4] and he is the only sociologist that Charlotte Perkins Gilman quotes in her treatise, *The Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing*.[5] Although Veblen's work is seminal, the focus here is on Gilman's study because she is a woman writing about sociology of women's dress and the behavioral traits that are associated with social uniforms.

Gilman claims that like animals, "our clothing has evolved to meet our needs as the scales on a fish or the feathers of a bird. It grows on us socially, as theirs grow on them individually" (4). For humans, clothing is a "social skin and a medium of expression" which addresses "a whole gamut of emotions from personal vanity to class consciousness" (4). Gilman further contends that because humans consciously manufacture clothing and adornment for public display, the process involves consideration of the product for manufacture based on the intent with which it will be displayed for public viewing (reading). The decision to manufacture specific items passes through a review process by "a number of hands and brains" (4). Because there is active discussion which prioritizes symbolic interpretation of the article's importance, in Gilman's opinion, the end product becomes a "natural product of society" (4) because its creation has been vetted.

Gilman identifies five areas of "causation" for the production of clothing: Protection, Warmth, Decoration, Modesty, and Symbolism. The first two categories have obvious value; however, when hypnotized by the vagaries of fashion, the fashionable

woman may sacrifice protection and warmth in favor of fashion trends. Because the fashionable woman has no clear perception of her individual subjectivity, she is prey for fashion's fads. So when a nineteenth century woman adopts fashion as a fad rather than a thoughtful reflection of her own identity, she subverts her individual subjectivity.

There are numerous articles in the periodical literature of the nineteenth century in fashion magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, Harper's Bazaar,* and others which debate and define women's clothing including the five areas of "causation" that Gilman mentions. These columns discuss everything from the construction of clothing and the type of fabrics best suited to different styles of clothing to which garments to wear according to the season. One such article, "Fashion's Mirror," published in *Godey's*, devotes an entire column to a discussion about coats and cloaks and the difficulty in finding the correct weight, style, and length that wouldn't crush the dress beneath. A fashionable woman might abandon the coat altogether to preserve the latest fashion she is wearing, whereas, a woman aware of her individual subjectivity may seek an affordable and effective compromise. At least that is the message that Gilman and other dress reformers try to convey to women readers.

In *What to Wear* (1873), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps writes, "The Girl of the Period, sauntering before one down Broadway, is one panorama of awful surprises from top to toe. Her clothes characterize her. She never characterizes her clothes," and that "She is a meaningless dazzle of broken effects" (11). Phelps discusses the need to abandon popular fashion in the interest of good taste. She states that "a modest woman [who] will attire herself in an immodest style does not purify or dignify the style. It only proves *how* ignorant a good woman can be" (28).

Helen Gilbert Ecob also addresses these same concerns in the "Preface" to the second edition of her book *The Well-Dressed Woman: Practical Applications to Dress or the Law of Health, Art, and Morals* (1873). She states that "It is obvious that woman's dress is not suited to the needs of a two-legged animal, as regards locomotion, cleanliness, or carrying power" (6). Gilman, Phelps, and Ecob advocate reform, and Ecob vows that "Only Reason and Conscience will rescue our womanhood from perverted taste and vicious servility to the Paris fashion-monger" (8).[6]

Gilman supports the argument that decoration develops along "sex lines," and she provides many examples from nature highlighting the more colorful plumage of the male species versus the female species of birds. In human clothing, she argues that decoration develops along two distinct lines: sex attraction and aesthetics (9). She differentiates between the adaptations of decoration during "mating season" with the cultivation of personal taste which lasts a lifetime. Rebecca Harding Davis alludes to the "dress" of mating season in the introduction to her short story "In the Market." She describes her pleasure at attending a weekly concert where she is "hemmed in on every side" by "numberless fresh, beautiful girl-faces" whose "fantastic vanities of dress" fail to break the charm of the evening (198). The young girls she refers to are on display for the young men in the audience, and each hopes to initiate a spark of interest from an eligible young man to make a match in the marriage market. Such an example underscores the fact that these young women understand their appearance and fashion are important factors which aid them in making a good match during the "mating season," and to some extent like other commodities, they realize that they have a limited "shelf life."

Gilman's second point, the cultivation of personal taste which lasts a lifetime, is attributed to personal aesthetics and how one perceives beauty in form and color in contrast with a more sensational style of dress intended to attract attention. She qualifies her argument by explaining that humans find comfort in the "primal laws of design," and that their pleasure in those things "reach[es] deeper and higher than sex" (10). Gilman's argument seems to suggest that individuals are capable of cultivating a personal aesthetic. Again, the act of cultivation of a personal aesthetic involves a woman's awareness of her own individual subjectivity and personal taste and her right to express that taste externally through fashion. Doing so enables her to fashion a public identity which expresses her personal ideology. To successfully achieve her goal, she must place herself in the public arena for affirmation.

In *The Story of* Avis (1877), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's protagonist, Avis Dobell, is a budding artist. As a young artist, she is keenly aware of the import that color, line, and form have on the perception of beauty and aesthetics. When readers first encounter Avis in a social setting, she is seated before "draperies made of a heavy carmine fabric which held a satin thread, and lent to the curtains the lustre of jewels in a dark setting or of water under a flaming sky" (6). Phelps plays with readers' understanding of visual cues and their signification by creating a frame for her character much the same way a painter uses color as background. In doing so, she is able to describe Avis's fashion sense as one of artistic taste unique to her personality and her understanding of her own subjectivity. The narrator explains to readers that "Color divorced from form, crude and clear, was to [Avis] what the musical notation is to the composer, who without striking a note, reads the score by the hour as other men read printed text. Besides, she knew perfectly well that

the curtain became her" (7). The narrator further elaborates on her fashionable appearance:

> Her dress, made in the fashion of the time, fitting closely, and without trimming, was of a negative tint, something toning upon black, else she should not, and so would not, have sat by the carmine curtain. She wore, as all well-dressed women wore at that time, a very full white under sleeve, which completely concealed the outline of the arm. Over her shoulders a shawl of Fayal[7] lace, white, and very delicate, hung like thistle down. She had a fresh but fine and restless color, and brown, abundant hair. She had a generous mouth and a delicate ear. Her profile, when the carmine curtain took it, had the harmony of a strong antique. (7)

Avis is aware that the image she projects when read by others is one that is consistent with her individual subjectivity.

The narrator defends Avis's choice of fashion by saying that "She had nothing of that wide-eyed, infantile look of distraction, which in a grown woman, indicates the very quintessence of egoism" (7). In her description of Avis, Phelps uses the narrators' voice to convey the antithesis of the fashionable woman which she describes in *What to Wear*. To Phelps, the fashionable woman does not have "the attributes of nature nor of proper art. She neither soothes the eye like a flower, nor pleases it like a picture" (11). Avis does not shy away from inspection, yet, she is not immodest. She is aware of the ways in which her choice of ornamentation enhances her affect which gives her confidence. Like Jean Muir, she has commodified herself as an object of desire, albeit unwittingly. Avis's confidence grows naturally from her education, her social class, and her ability to express

herself artistically, and it places her on equal footing with the men in her audience. Avis is not interested in marriage at the time, so she has no cognizance of or need to engage in the discourse of modesty.

Like decoration, Gilman considers modesty another human invention and a form of sex consciousness relegated by society to women. She argues that when women blush and look away in the presence of men, their actions call attention to gender differences in a negative way by assuming an inferior status. Susanna Rowson fictionalizes this scene in *Charlotte Temple* (1791). When Charlotte Temple first sees Montraville, she blushes and looks away (9). Rowson's description of Charlotte's behavior adds to readers' understanding that women are, in fact, inferior and vulnerable to the Montravilles of the world. If, as Gilman argues, "she met him clear-eyed and indifferent, as if she was a boy, or he was a woman" (10), her behavior would be considered immodest, and it would also imply that she had more worldly experience, like Mademoiselle La Rue, Charlotte's teacher. Rowson's juxtaposition of an immodest character against a modest one, engages readers' sympathies, and foreshadows Charlotte's fate. Even though *Charlotte Temple* was first published in the late eighteenth century, the novel was still in print due to popular demand at the time *The Story of Avis* was published. Both Avis and Charlotte in their own way manifestly displayed their ideologies in both costume and manner which signified their identities.

In her discussion of symbolism, Gilman notes the cultural connection to ideologies and archaic sumptuary laws which dictated the types of fashion and the amount of decoration allowable for each social class. She acknowledges that even though sumptuary laws are no longer enforced, "old custom, mere habit, the long

persistence of tradition, and our well-less, brainless tendency to imitate one another, keeps up the symbolic motive in our modern dress" (14). Nineteenth century fashion magazines provide ample evidence of imitation through consumption.

In addition to numerous descriptions of women's clothing in woman's literature, popular nineteenth century fashion magazines enjoyed long lasting success establishing and interpreting fashion trends. Not only did Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, select which fashion plates would be featured, she edited and juried the accompanying literature, thus giving her unparalleled power to shape middle- to upper-middle class women's sense of identity through fashion plates, descriptions of those fashions, and editorials critiquing domestic and foreign fashion trends. Identities were reinforced through characterizations of women in short stories, poems, and essays. At its peak, the magazine had 150,000 subscriptions (Okker 13) and by 1850, *Godey's* added a fashion editor who supervised a mail order service to aid subscribers in the acquisition of the fabric, clothing, and accessories they featured (See Appendix A). Although *Godey's* focused primarily on women's fashions, they often included fashion plates and descriptions for children—but not men.

In contrast to the sociological view of women and dress, Gilman contends that a man standing with a group of men stands out from the others through "personal distinction." "You see the man. You look at his face, at the shape of his head, the character of his hands. If he is handsome, it is he whom you admire; not masses of hair and cloth, feathers, ribbons, jewels and veils" (21), she argues. In Anna Katherine Green's *That Affair Next Door* (1897), Amelia Butterworth's description of the appearance of Franklin VanBurnam in a courtroom crowded with men supports Gilman's

assertion. Before Amelia describes VanBurnam, she tells readers that she does not see him with "the eyes of a young girl or even with those of a fashionable society woman" (Green 81). She says, "I know a man when I see him, and I had always regarded Mr. Franklin as an exceptionally fine-looking and prepossessing gentleman" (81). She describes him as any detective would, without emotion. "He is a medium-sized man, with a shape not unlike his brother's. His hair is dark and so are his eyes, but his moustache is brown and his complexion quite fair" (81).

As a reliable witness, Amelia's ability to recognize and describe different men aids Detective Gryce in determining which of the male suspects entered the VanBuren house in the middle of the night to commit murder. Gryce tests her recollection by sending a different suspect to the house over the course of a few days time. In Amelia, Anna Katharine Green provides a fictional representation of Gilman's assertion that men are perceived as individuals regardless of their attire, whereas women are part of a larger homogenous group. Women are continually judged not as individuals, but by how they associate with the larger group. There is a danger in standing too far apart from the group; too great a distance and a woman could be ostracized and lose social respectability and her financial support at the same time. Originality among women was not rewarded, for the most part, by society because she deviated from the social norm.

The Semiotics of Fashion

In *The Fashion System,* Barthes describes three kinds of shifters: technology—the structure of the garment, iconic—the visual garment, and verbal—words used to describe the garment. He argues that fashion and literature utilize a common technique,

which is description (6). He explores the relationship between connotation, denotation, metalanguage, and representations of the code and the message it sends. For example, each representation has a signifier which transmits a code or a set of codes/values that trigger a message or that which is signified and then converts that message into a new mythology. However to be successful, the new sign must in some way play on recognizable icons or signifiers of an existing mythology.[8] Regardless of whether society endorses the wearing of a specific garment, the wearer of the garment is subject to interpretation. Social validation results because wearing the garment signifies the adoption of core values/mythologies sanctioned by the governing forces of that same society. The wearer of that garment can establish a degree of individual interpretation through their selection of fabric, trimming, and/or adornment, provided the additions of those new signs/codes are still recognized as estimable within the current mythology.

If a woman wishes to change her image completely and establish a new mythology, she risks ridicule, censorship, and alienation. Turkish trousers, or pantaloons, for example, pushed women's dress reform into the political arena in nineteenth century: "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia Jenks Bloomer, and Elizabeth Smith Miller initially tried Turkish trousers because they were different, exotic, pretty, and offered freedom of movement. But at the same time the women made a political statement" (Fischer 91). Although Turkish trousers and bloomers are never universally adopted, these women successfully draw attention to the need for dress and health reform as well as the need to create lighter, comfortable, and versatile attire for women by introducing a practical alternative or a new signifier/code. However, these women's intention, to affect political

reform and advance the rights of women, is undermined by society's negative reception of bloomers.

Tolerance and acceptance of change in fashion depend on the context and frequency of the images which support that suggestion of change. Since consumers were not "sold" on the idea of Turkish pants and bloomers, they failed to become a fashion trend. Without demand, there is no commercial profit, and without the potential for commercial profit, there is limited, if any, supply of ready-made costumes in the nineteenth century. Yet, if a woman chooses to ascribe to a particular fashion, she can always make the garment or hire a seamstress. Nevertheless, change must come through careful cultivation of public perception, and by degrees. To succeed, they would have to have the endorsement of the general public, the clergy, and popular fashion magazines like *Godey's*.. For example, an article published in *Bentley's Miscellainy* in 1851 on "Bloomerism" argues that "The popular feeling is strongly enlisted against them; and however great the improvement may be in the opinion of the fair missionaries themselves, even their enthusiasm will soon renounce the vain hope of benefiting men, or rather women, against their will" (644). Because the bloomer uniform announces the ideology of the reformer before she has the chance to speak, it undermines her ability to affect change.

For other women readers, the lesson appears to endorse a more covert way of fashioning change. The psychological interpretation of the impact fashion has on identity can be broken down into three approaches: cognitive, cultural, and symbolic.[9] Each of these approaches explains how society interprets fashion and individuality. Iconography, mythology, signs, symbols, meta-language, and culture are, again, key components of

each of these approaches, and they result from the ways in which audiences perceive the fashions of others. Appearance is connected to social norms and a specific set of traits or qualities that imply a subconscious cognitive structure of interpretation (Kaiser 34).

Similar to reader response theory, audiences apply their own internal logic and value system to the interpretive process. If they don't perceive value in the fashion and adornment of the person they are "reading," they may dismiss that person as someone without redeemable qualities. When "read," the subject may become a social outcast, or at least fail in their objective of social acceptance. Likewise, the fashion described should fit the social occasion. This dilemma can be connected to woman's literature as early as 1801 when Tabitha Gilman Tenney wrote *Female Quixotism* and continues throughout the nineteenth century. Dorcas Sheldon, Tenney's protagonist, exemplifies all of these assertions.

Tenney's novel relates the romantic escapades of a widowed father's only child. He indulges her every whim and provides her ample opportunity to improve her mind through reading. He maintains an extensive library to which she has free access. Readers learn that Dorcas "either from nature or education, possessed nearly the same taste in books as her father, with this difference only, that novels were her study, and history only her amusement" (6). By the time she is eighteen, she has read so many romantic novels that she decides that henceforth she will be called Dorcasina—a much more romantic name than Dorcas. Thus begins her quixotic quest for idealized love. As a female quixote, she spends a great deal of time assessing her wardrobe and updating it according to the latest styles and trends, regardless of whether or not they are appropriate to her age and body type. To Dorcasina, fashion provides the opportunity to craft her

person to fit the social occasion, and she believes that through fashion she will attract and intoxicate her true love when she meets him.

Tenney establishes Dorcasina's carnivalesque qualities early in the narrative. By inserting her voice in the narrative to describe Dorcasina's physical attributes, or the lack thereof, she creates a separation between her character's fantasy world and the real world. She indicates as much to readers when she says, "Now I suppose it will be expected that, in imitation of sister novel writers (for the ladies of late seem to have almost appropriated this department of writing). By inserting her voice as the author, Tenney satirizes not only women novel writers, but also women who read novels. She plays with readers' expectations of a beautiful heroine and then presents them with a realistic description of a typical New England spinster. She writes, "I should describe her as distinguished by the elegant form, delicately turned limbs, auburn hair, alabaster skin, heavenly languishing eyes, silken eyelashes, rosy cheeks, aquiline nose, ruby lips, dimpled chin, and azure vein, with which almost all our heroines of romance are indiscriminately decorated" (5). Tenney's description creates a visual stereotype of a beautiful woman in a romance novel. But, *Female Quixotism* is not a romance novel, and Dorcasina is not a heroine, which Tenney clarifies in a realistic description of her character:

> In truth she possessed few of those beauties, in any great degree. She was of a middling stature, a little embonpoint, but neither elegant or clumsy. Her complexion was rather dark; her skin somewhat rough; and features remarkable neither for beauty nor deformity. Her eyes were grey and full of expression, and her whole countenance rather pleasing than otherwise. In short, she was a middling kind of person; like the greater

part of her countrywomen; such as no man would be smitten with at first sight, but such as any man might love upon intimate acquaintance. (5-6)

On some level, Dorcasina may be aware of her physical deficiencies which may be why she carefully considers what to wear for each occasion. Having little experience and only the heroines in her novels as examples, she always misreads the social cues.

When Dorcasina meets her "Captain" for the first time, she spends "all morning examining her clothes, and considering what color would best become her" (158). She tries several outfits, "But she finally rejected them all, concluding, as she was going to visit a sick chamber, that a plain white robe would be more proper than any of them" (158). She thinks that she is the "pink" of youthful fashion, but the Captain sees "A thin, plain woman, near fifty (as he thought her), and very different from what he expects." Captain Barry is unable to conceal his surprise, which Dorcasina "imput[es] wholly to the force and splendor of her charms" (158). She confides in Betty, her maid, that "he is violently in love" with her. If, as Kaiser suggests, humans create their own realities by managing their appearances, what then is Dorcasina's reality? For early nineteenth century readers, Dorcasina has no sense of reality which the narrator suggests is the result of excessive novel reading. Her sense of fashion is just as unrealistic as her behavior.

Jane Elton's reality in *A New England Tale* (1822), on the other hand, appears to readers as consistent with her circumstances, yet she is aware of the value of "her wardrobe, which had been well-stocked by her profuse and indulgent parents" (21). Through necessity, Jane abandons her lavish wardrobe in favor of a more serviceable uniform of a hired girl. She adjusts her sense of fashion to suit her circumstances, and her behavior reflects those changes. Ironically, the value of hers and her mother's

wardrobe enters the narrative when they are sold by Mary in a neighboring town to secure the one hundred dollars Jane needs to gain independence and become a teacher. In Jane's reflections regarding the change from a carefree young girl of fashion to a working girl, she realizes the wastefulness of frivolity and fashion. If her parents had been more conservative, there may have been money enough to secure her a better situation after their death.

When Jane packs her belongings, her trusted friend Mary hints that "she had better keep her things out of the sight of her craving cousins" (21). As she departs for her aunt's home, she surveys her appearance in the mirror and reflects on how just a short time before she had been "arrayed in finery," and now, "the rainbow tints had faded into the dark cloud" of her circumstances and her new uniform. Jane's epiphany sobers her attitude toward an external display of wealth in favor of internal grace and manner. Like Margaretta Melworth, she begins to understand that model behavior and good deeds reflect far greater wealth than the latest fashions.

From a contemporary theoretical and contextual perspective, meaning assigned to clothing and appearances in most situations is socially constructed and mutually defined (Kaiser 40)[10] through power relationships. According to Susan Kaiser, Western culture tends to dictate that women acquire their power through more covert and indirect sources than men, and women are likely to be socialized to expect more rewards for their appearance than for their overt actions or accomplishments (89). Although Kaiser's conclusions are based on research in the twentieth century, many of these assumptions describe the process of self-fashioning in the nineteenth century and the ways in which

clothing helps shape identity and fulfill role expectations. She identifies acting as a component of social interaction.

Within the binaries of doing and being, there is a dual system of power, agonic and hedonic. Agonic represents aggressive and active power whereas hedonic represents indirect and attracting power. Agonic involves the ideology of building character, and hedonic relies on the ideology of maintaining character, like being placed on a pedestal (89). Women in the late eighteenth century and throughout most of the nineteenth century were considered to be the moral guardians of the family. As such, they were often placed in hedonic roles like helpmeet, republican mothers, true women, angels of the house and so on. Each of those hedonic roles included a set of specific character traits often reflected in their fashion and behavior.

Acting a social role, in Kaiser's opinion, involves an awareness of self in the enactment of the role and an awareness of the audiences' reception based on their perceptions. On the other hand, symbolic interaction is often outside individual subjectivity and suggests an awareness of self within specific social contexts which involves mutual constructions of identity (207). The former could be considered an agent of self-fashioning while the latter is more conformist. One enacts the role and dons the social uniform with purpose, and the other simply accepts the role and its corresponding social uniform without an ulterior motive. Kaiser concludes that "clothes may be viewed not only as props in the performance of a role but also as a means for negotiating an identity in social contexts" (207), not unlike Charlotte Perkins Gilman's assertion that "cloth is social tissue" (3). The understanding of the psychology of fashion and the

sociological implications of social uniforms helps us decode nineteenth century characterizations of women as cultural artifacts in domestic fiction.

Nineteenth Century Women as Cultural Artifacts

As a cultural artifact,[11] a woman's body can be read as text—she becomes an archetype with a mythology—an iconograph. The distinction between ideology and mythology here is that ideology refers to the manner of thinking about women by women conscripted to a specific class, like the cult of true womanhood. In contrast, mythology refers to a body of myths perpetuated upon women regarding their roles in society—that they are unequal to men and only suited for domestic duties.

According to Lori Merish, these ideologies are produced with new ideals of domestic womanhood. Her analysis focuses on the affiliation between the emergence of an ethic of feminine consumption and the literary genre of domestic fiction in which domestic material culture is often depicted in great detail and in which personal possessions are endowed with characterological impact. In Merish's opinion, part of the cultural work of domestic fiction is to construct equivalences between material and subjective refinement and between commodity and psychological forms—while suppressing the market place orientation of private consumption (2). Explained in this way, it is easy to agree that domestic novels helped to write into existence a modern consumer psychology. Many of the novels discussed in this study include several female characters that express themselves through consumption and identify with personal possessions.

Furthermore, by examining the ways in which authors write about their characters' uses of clothing, readers are able to identity their social rank and place them within the context of specific social groups. In some cases, authors allow their female protagonists to refashion, reinvent, or mask identity with the use of clothing. All of these processes employ the ideology of self-fashioning because before they can take place, the characters must have developed an understanding of their own identity and how that identity merges, or not, with the larger group, in addition to the ways in which their identities are perceived by the larger group. Fashion consumption is an inherent part of this process.

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes discusses Greta Garbo's face in film as representing a "fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans toward the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman" (57). Susanna Rowson, Tabitha Gilman Tenney, Catharine Maria Sedgwick and other nineteenth century women authors create for readers the same essence and qualities of the lyric woman with their characterizations of nineteenth century middle-class American women as cultural artifacts who have fairly well defined mythologies. Their characters become enigmas offering their bodies iconographically to readers and viewers for affirmation and understanding. Perhaps that is why many women authors describe their characters' fashions in such a way that readers identify with their social uniform.

The mythology of true women often classed as helpmeets, republican mothers, and angels of the house includes a proscriptive set of behavioral and social codes, and of course, a social uniform. True women from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth

century are linked through these common attributes: modest attire made of natural fabrics like cotton and linen, very little adornment save plain ribbon, and hats, veils, or scarves to cover their heads.

The practice of covering one's head is deeply rooted in religious mythology. In 1 Cor. 11:2-16, St. Paul lists the reasons that women should cover their heads. First, he establishes that "women came from men" and that "every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered shames her head; for it is one and the same thing with a shaven woman" (5). In verse six, he continues stressing the importance by proclaiming "For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered." This, he attributes to an "account of the angels" (7). He adds to his call for the covering of women's heads as signification of their penance and devotion a call to grow their hair long as a crown of glory (15). Like covered heads and long hair, gloved hands signify similar attributes for women.[12] This mythology becomes tradition and remains in practice throughout the nineteenth century.

Early nineteenth century middle-class American women not only covered their heads in public, but they were likely to do so in the privacy of their own homes (See Appendix B).[13] An engraved plate accompanied by a story in the February 1850 issue of *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine* offers evidence of this fact. A story in the same issue, also entitled "The Nest at Home," relates the fate of a young woman who was "willful in her childhood, inflexible in maturer life" and "weds against her father's wishes and even his commands" (89). Her fate is a bitter one. She is betrayed, abandoned, and dependent upon strangers until her death as a young woman. She bequeaths the care of her child to her sister, the subject of the engraved plate. Her sister, Madeline, represents the ideal

image of womanhood which endures well into the nineteenth century. She appears in the social uniform of a true woman surrounded by infants. Her clothing is simply made of a dark, durable fabric. Her long hair is wound about her head like crown, and she covers her head with a cap presumably made of muslin and lace.

Susanna Rowson's character, Lucy Eldrige Temple is one whose "meek affect and submissive duty as a wife" (13) combines with a general description of her modest attire,[14] to perpetuate a mythology for true women. Rowson uses the narrator's voice to describe Lucy as being "fair as the lily" (13) with blue eyes and light brown hair. Her hair is "slightly confined under a muslin cap, tied round with a black ribbon," and she is wearing "a white linen gown and plain lawn handkerchief" (13). Rowson explains that "in this simple attire she was more irresistibly charming to such a heart as Temple's, than she would have been, if adorned with all the splendor of a courtly belle" (13). Lucy's modest attire and meek disposition earn her a marriage match that lifts her and her father from poverty. However, in keeping with the mythology of true women as unequal, she cannot participate in the rescue of her daughter. Mr. Temple tells her, "You cannot go, my Lucy, the delicacy of your frame would poorly sustain the fatigue of a long journey" (91). Because her only daughter absents herself from her mother's protective sphere, Charlotte is doomed to fall from grace, unlike Margaretta Melworth who embraces the true woman ideology and perpetuates the mythology by modeling her stepmother's fashion and behavior.

In Judith Sargent Murray's *The Story of Margaretta* (1794), Mary Vigilius as a true woman is of "mild and conceding disposition" (156) and "the pink of civility" (157). She is tender, wise, benevolent, eager to please, and devoted to family. She molds her

charge, little Margaretta, in her own image. As the narrator, The Gleaner, explains to readers, Mary "conforming as much as her ideas of propriety would admit, to the then fashion of the times, made her [Margaretta] a hat of white satin" with a "fancied ribbon" (167). When Margaretta wears the hat while making social calls, she considers it plain in view of a more fashionable one worn by an acquaintance. Like most "untrained" young girls, Margaretta must have feathers to further adorn her hat in the latest fashion. Instead of purchasing them for her, Mary gives her a choice. To purchase the feathers, she must use money she has placed aside to aid a poor neighbor. The choice for Margaretta is to buy feathers for her hat or to bestow an act of benevolence to a family in need. The Gleaner[15] explains to readers that the latter provides Margaretta with the highest plumed feathers than any she could purchase (168) even if she is the only one who can see them.

Mary teaches Margaretta to follow fashion "as far as they square with the dictates of rectitude" (169), thus using fashion to perpetuate the behavioral and social codes of helpmeets—to embrace the ideology and accept the mythology. Like her step-mother, she regards excessive ornamentation as "extremely venial," preferring "plain manners to all the glitter of a studied or laboured address" (169). Margaretta is conditioned to accept the role of a true woman and schooled in the wearing of the social uniform.

Another nineteenth century archetypal true woman is the angel of the house, a stock character in most sentimental domestic fiction in which women are cast as the keepers of home and hearth—no matter the hardship. They too have social uniforms. In *The Hidden Hand*: *or Capitola the Madcap* (1859), E.D.E.N. Southworth provides readers with the personification of an angel of the house through her character Marah

Rocke. Initially, Marah is presented to readers as a widow who scrapes to make ends meet and raise her son, Traverse, and her adopted son, Herbert.

When she first appears in the town where she currently resides, Marah is "clothed in rusty mourning" (61). She manages her meager resources by "sewing all day long and knitting through the twilight, and then again resuming her needle by candlelight, and sewing until midnight" (63). Her income was meager because the only occupations open to her were sewing and knitting. True to her caste, she sacrificed all to the betterment of her child. She kept a warm hearth, but "the widow's meals were often scant" (63). The narrator describes her at the age of 35 as "singularly refined and delicate . . . for one of her supposed rank; her little form, slight and flexible as that of a young girl, was clothed in a poor, but neat, black dress, relieved by a pure white collar around her throat" (63). Consistent with the mythology, her hair was parted plainly over her "'low, sweet brow,' brought down each side her thin cheeks and gathered into a bunch at the back of her shapely little head" (63). Her affect is described as "pensive" and "full of tender affections" (63).

The idea of the angel of the house is enlarged with the general mythology of the cult of domesticity. In *The Morgesons* (1862), by Elizabeth Drew Stoddard, the protagonist, Cassandra Morgeson (Cassy), describes her first conscious memory of her mother in a domestic scene. Cassy is allowed to attend her first party with a group of ladies who come to visit her mother. She becomes aware of the contrast between her mother's appearance and the ladies who attend the salon gathering in their home. She describes the women visitors as "larger, more rotund, and older" than her mother, and all wearing the same matronly uniform, "black levantine,[16] or cinnamon-colored silks" (17),

which are appropriate to their age and station in New England life. As Cassy notes in her narration, "Perhaps it was the first time [she] observed her dress; her face I must have studied before, for I knew all her moods by it" (17). Cassy's train of thought reinforces readers' awareness of the need for constancy in modeling behavior from mother to daughter.

Mary Morgeson wears "her long, lusterless, brown hair twisted around a high-topped tortoise-shell comb started backward, threatening to fall out. Her dress was a gray pongee, simply made and short . . . with round-toed morroco shoes tied with black ribbon. A ruffle of fine lace fell around her throat, and the sleeves of her short-waisted dress were puffed at the shoulders" (17). Mary is often found reading religious tracts and trying to impress the importance of morality upon her two young daughters. She is often in attendance to her husband, Locke Morgeson, and with the help of her spinster sister, Aunt Merce, she manages the household and the rearing of her daughters. Cassy describes her mother's visage as one would a finely sculpted bust, "Her face was colorless, the forehead extremely low, the nose and mouth finely cut, the eyes of heavenly blue" (17). As for her behavior, Cassy notes that "Although youth had gone, she was beautiful, with an indescribable air of individuality. She influenced all who were near her; her atmosphere enveloped them" (17), including Cassy.

In our discussion of the mythology and social uniforms of women as cultural artifacts, a study of Mary Morgeson reveals some transition between the traditional ideology of true women and the cult of domesticity and the need for individual expression. Cassy senses this in her mother, and explains that she "never understood her, and for that reason she attracted my attention. I felt puzzled now, she seemed so different

from anybody else" (17). This pivotal moment early in the narrative of *The Morgesons* foreshadows Stoddard's discussion of the changing attitudes which eventually debunk mythologies about women in the domestic sphere. Through Cassy's ever changing fashion sense and her study of fashion, she presents the psychological struggle between conflicting mythologies: domesticity and individualism.

As a child, Cassy is not indifferent to fashion; she begs to wear her new slippers. She skips down a gravel alley and walks back and forth admiring her shoes and wishes that "some acquaintance with poor shoes could see [her]" (7). Later when she dresses for her mother's reception, she dons a "red calico dress, spotted with yellow stars . . . and buckram undersleeves" which Cassy compares to balloons as she stands looking at her reflection in a mirror. Her life up to this point is carefree, full of frivolities, and grand notions of superiority.

Later, when Cassy is sent to her grandfather's to attend the Nipswich Seminary to further her education, she views herself subjectively for the first time. Cassy realizes immediately upon entering the seminary that she is an outsider, and for the first time in her life, she is shunned by the other girls. When she returns to her grandfather's house after her first day at school, she again returns to the mirror to assess her body. She comes to an unfavorable conclusion regarding her appearance. "My hair," she says, "was parted zigzag; one shoulder was higher than the other; my dress came up to my chin, and slipped down to my shoulder-blades. I was all waist; no hips were developed; my hands were red, and my nails chipped" (36). Immediately, she inventories her wardrobe and discovers a mismatched collection of her mother's old gowns remade to fit her, many of which Cassy concludes are "invidious mistakes in taste" purchased by her father from

shopkeepers and milliners. When scolded by her Aunt Mercy for wrinkling the contents of her trunk, Cassy cries "Aunt Mercy, these things are horrid, all of them" (37). She rails against a "sick orange silk shawl," and "red prunella boots that look like boiled crabs." Cassy begs to wear her "French kid slippers every day" (37) as her nemesis, Charlotte Alden, does, but her aunt tells her that they are only suitable for church.

When after a month her father visits her, she coerces him into taking her shopping for a "pink French calico, with a three-cornered white collar on it; it is the fashion" (39). Her father buys it for her as well as a new brooch and ring. But Cassy's plan to adopt the social uniform of her classmates through fashion to "fit in" backfires. Charlotte passes a note to the other girls in the classroom which says, "Girls, don't let's wear our pink calicoes again" (40). The girls concur, which infuriates Cassy. She forgets the refinement of her new dress and throws her book at Charlotte's head after she says something off color about Cassy's mother's past. The incident ends with another altercation between Cassy and her teacher, Miss Black. Miss Black tells her that "she is a bad girl," and Cassy retorts "And you are a bad woman . . . mean and cruel" (41). Miss Black barely restrains herself from striking Cassy and allows her words to deliver the blow. She tells Cassy that her temper is yet another indication of her vulgarity, thus confirming Cassy's suspicions that Miss Black and the other girls think she is beneath their social level. Several months later, Charlotte gets even with Cassy for throwing the book at her head by jumping off the seesaw when she is eight feet in the air. Cassy falls, hits her head on the ground, and faints. Her Aunt Mercy sees the incident and carries her home, thus ending her formal education at the Nipswich Seminary. Years later, Cassy unexpectedly meets Charlotte Alden in a shop in Surrey: "She could not control an

expression of surprise at the sight of the well-dressed woman before her. It was my dress that astonished her. Where could *I* have obtained style?" (137). Cassy assumes an air of superiority realizing that she has finally bested Alden in fashion, style, and demeanor. She has reached a level of comfort and superiority which she feels is appropriate for the beautiful daughter of a successful businessman like her father Locke Morgeson.

Cassy's experience at the Nipswich Seminary changes her, and she begins quietly to observe and study the behavior and fashion of other women. Not only has she become more aware of the world around her, but she has also changed physically and now has a "womanly" shape. As Cassy embarks on her next level of education, she is more conscientious of her appearance than ever. She begins by dressing her hair "after the fashion of the Barmouth girls, with the small pride of wishing to make [herself] look different from the Surrey girls" (54). She considers her entrance to the Bible Class a début of sorts as a grown girl, and she offers herself to their criticism. She arrives late so that she "might be observed by the entire class" (54), and she is pleased by her reception.

Cassy becomes cognizant of the power that her appearance has on others. Because she has unlimited financial resources and uses the power of her growing good looks, she is unpopular. The villagers think that "she dresses oddly for effect," and that "her manners are ridiculous" (60). Yet, women "[borrow] her dresses for patterns, imitate her bonnets, and [adopt] her colors" (60). So to preserve her originality, Cassy's taste in fashion follows "whim after whim . . . to preserve her originality" (61). She experiments with different looks and measures their impact on her audience.

Cassy is clearly aware of her body as an iconographic text. Although, her peers in the narrative resent her for her apparent conceit and vanity, readers, on the other hand,

may applaud her bravery and ingenuity. Yet, her fashion and social uniform change, her behavior is often incongruent with the many images she projects. She is often misread. Throughout her life, Cassy's sense of fashion changes as her subjectivity and ideology of womanhood change—her affect is constantly under construction and revision. In this sense, she is a prototypical new woman.

While most characters are introduced to readers through a description of their attire, Kate Chopin introduces Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899) with a graphic description of her body which implies a shift in public perception as to the way new women are read. The narrator explains that "The charm of Edna Pontellier's physique stole insensibly upon you. The lines of her body were long, clean, and symmetrical; it was a body which occasionally fell into splendid poses; there was no suggestion of the trim, stereotyped fashion-plate about it" (33). The body Chopin describes exudes an athletic appeal. In fact, Edna is learning how to swim, and she takes long walks. Her body type, like the description of her clothing, favors what fashion reformers call aesthetic fashion—loose fitting clothing allowing for a fuller range of movement.[17] After readers have an understanding of her stature, Chopin describes her clothing. Edna wore "a cool muslin that morning—white, with a waving vertical line of brown running through it; also a white linen collar," and "a straw hat" (33). Throughout the novel, her clothing is described as loose fitting and comfortable which is consistent with the social uniform of a new woman—one that is artistic and aesthetic.

Patricia A. Cunningham notes that "aesthetic dress was worn in public by only a few brave American women," (155), and that such an act was daring. Furthermore, she suggests that women who wore this style of fashion in public "may have been snubbing

their noses at current hegemony—fashion and the status quo" (155). Cunningham compares these women to Bohemians who care little for what others think of them. Edna's actions, her fashion sense, and her state of mind reflect a Bohemian lifestyle—particularly when she abandons tradition, her marriage, and its physical trappings to take up residence in a small cottage.

Near the end of her journey to independence, Edna gives a farewell dinner in the home she shares with her husband and children. For the occasion, she wears a "satin gown" which shimmers like gold and falls in "rich folds on either side of her," with "a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders" (109). The narrator describes her gown as containing "the myriad of tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh," and adds that there was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" (109). In this instance, Chopin's description of her fashion gives her an Elizabethan quality, a likely historical comparison to a strong, independent, courageous woman. Yet, unlike the Virgin Queen, Edna's flesh is vibrant and alive with sensation.

At the end of the novel when Edna dresses to swim in the ocean for the last time, she changes into her bathing suit and then casts the "unpleasant pricking garments from her" (136). If Edna swam to her death wearing the shackles of an old style, readers could misread the ending of the novel (See Appendix C). Instead of seeing her death as an awakening, they might perceive the wearing of the swimsuit as a return to conventionality, which would not convey the final message that Chopin wishes to bestow

upon her readers. Edna's nudity invites the adventurous reader to live vicariously through her and forsake conventional fashion.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, iconographies of fashion are so deeply imbedded in the collective consciousness of society that people are able to glean the significance of the social codes expressed in apparel. Anna Katharine Green relies on her readers' understanding of fashions' symbology in her novel *That Affair Next Door*. As discussed previously, her protagonist, Amelia Butterworth, uses her subjective interpretation of clothing as evidence to help solve a murder. Her first assessment occurs when she is giving aid to the housekeeper who discovers the body. She identifies the clothing that the deceased is wearing: "blue serge, . . . store-made, but very good; must have come from Altman's or Stern's" (21). Furthermore, Amelia is able to pinpoint the victim's age from her shoes; she concludes that "Her narrow pointed shoes show she has not yet reached the years of discretion" (22). Her subjective assessment reveals as much about Amelia as it does the victim. As a spinster, readers can visualize her austere but tasteful appearance.

Amelia deduces that the woman's death was not an accident because of "the decent, even precise, arrangement of the clothing about her feet" (28), and that the arrangement of the skirts "show the touch of a careful hand after death" (29). Although she doesn't share her suspicions with Detective Gryce, Amelia begins to suspect that a woman arranged the victim's clothing after the murder (29). She identifies the body as the one she had seen the night before entering the house based on the "summer cape tied to the neck with an elaborate bow or ribbon" (30) and then asks "But where is her hat?" (30). Amelia describes the hat as one of a "soft felt with one feather or one bow of

ribbon standing upright from the side of the crown" (30). A hat resembling the description she gives is found under the body. This hat is a key piece of evidence that eventually leads Amelia to a critical clue which helps her solve the mystery and properly identify the murdered woman.

She asks to see the hat which is badly crushed, "but for all that," she says, "it has been worn but once" (30). "Neither has she worn this dress long," she continues, "but that is not true of the shoes. They are not old, but they have been acquainted with the pavement, and that is more than can be said for the hem of this gown. There are no gloves on her hands; a few minutes elapsed then before the assault; long enough for her to take them off." To which Detective Gryce asks, "But are you sure she wore any? Did you notice that her hand was gloved when she came into the house?" "No, I answered frankly; but so well-dressed a woman would not enter a house like this, without gloves" (31). Again, the importance of hats and gloves are mentioned, but this time in a fictional representation of a woman's respectability.

In a later interview with Detective Gryce, he asks Amelia how she knew the hat had only been worn once, and she replied, "There was but one prick of a hat-pin in it . . . if you have been in the habit of looking into young women's hats, you will appreciate the force of my remark" (47). He remarks, "Women's eyes for women's matters! I am indebted to you ma'am. You have solved a very important problem for us. A hat-pin! humph! he muttered to himself. The devil in a man is not easily balked; even such an innocent article as that can be made to serve, when all other means are lacking" (47). Her fashion sense provides her with the insight to identify the murder weapon.

During the same interview, the detective brings forth a second woman's hat and asks Amelia what she thinks. She studies the hat and states that it was an "elegant specimen of millinery, and was in the latest style. It had ribbons and flowers and bird wings upon it and presented, as it was turned about by Mr. Gryce's deft hand, an appearance which some might have called charming, but to [Amelia] was simply grotesque and absurd" (50). He quizzes her as to whether it was "last spring's hat." Amelia declares it to have "come fresh from the milliner's." Again, she reasons that although recently purchased, the hat has been worn several times based on the numerous holes made by a hatpin. On the other hand, the gloves were fresh and did not show wear. Amelia identifies the hat as made by La Mole of Fifth Avenue, an uptown milliner with pricey merchandise.

Two hats, two pairs of gloves, two dresses, all of quality, but the degree of quality varied to the extent that Amelia began to confirm her suspicion that two different women entered the house the night of the murder. One set of clothing was of the latest fashion, but ready made and sold in a high-end department store. The other ensemble was made of much finer fabric and hand tailored to fit the woman who wore it. From their apparel, Amelia recognizes two different personalities, but both women of some means. Her realization reaffirms her supposition that only a woman would take care to properly arrange the skirt of a dead woman; only another woman would understand the decency of such an act; and, only a woman would care enough about the quality of the garment to arrange it in such a way that it lay in careful folds covering the victim's legs. Amelia follows the fashion trail which provides her with clues to affirm her theory that there

were two women, and through those clues, she identifies the second woman *and* solves the murder.

Amelia, like other nineteenth century heroines belongs to a social group, spinsterhood, and she wears the social uniform. She appears in public plainly dressed in age appropriate clothing, her hair is styled in puffs just above her ears, and she always wears a bonnet or a veil and gloves (141). She is frugal, yet she appreciates style and good taste. In fact, Amelia considers herself an arbiter of style, and she is very class conscious, to the point of condescension. Green plays with readers' assumptions about spinsters. Had it not been for Amelia's nosiness, that whole "affair next door" in the VanBuren home would never have been solved. She, too, is a cultural artifact with a keen sense of visual, verbal, and nonverbal clues as they relate to women's fashion and their behavior—she reads them as though she were reading a text. She, like other female characters in nineteenth century novels written by women, is in "a constant mode of perceiving and behaving." She understands herself and has a highly developed sense of her individual subjectivity, almost to the point of rigidity. Those traits are in keeping with the behavioral expectations suggested by her social uniform.

Notes

[1] In *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, Lori Merish discusses the impact that domesticity and gender have on the creation of the nineteenth century marketplace and commodity culture. Women dominate consumerism and drive the marketplace.

[2] Merish suggests "that the body's construction is a malleable artifact, produced within culture rather than defined within the realm of nature," and that "class-specific forms of bodily life were endowed with emotional and moral import, and reconfigured as a semiotics of 'civilized' subjectivity" (15).

[3] As discussed in Chapter One, the word fashion is used here as both a noun and a verb. When used in the context of self-fashioning, it expresses both a state of being and a state of doing "a constant mode of perceiving and behaving" (Greenblatt 2).

[4] In *The Theory of the Leisure Class*: *An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*, Thorstein Veblen argues that the wealthy use fashion to display their riches for purely symbolic purposes either in "conspicuous consumption" or "conspicuous waste."

[5] Charlotte Perkins Gilman published a serialized version of this text in the monthly journal *The Forerunner* in 1915. The original text was recovered and published by Greenwood Press in 2002 under the editorial guidance of Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan.

[6] See the chapter on "Written Clothing," (3-18) in Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, translated by Matthew Ward and Richard Howard.

[7] See "Chapter Two" in Susan B. Kaiser's, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context.* Kaiser offers a detailed perspective on the basic assumptions of each of these sub-categories. The methodology for each approach involves a subject and a perceiver the equivalent of a character and a reader in literature.

[8] Kaiser condenses her theory on fashion and symbology in a table on page 54 which is reprinted as Appendix E.

[9] I use the term cultural artifact in reference to nineteenth century women in two ways, as prototypes for aspiration and as representations to be imitated.

[10] See "Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues of Men," by Mary Rose D'Angelo in *Off with Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture* (1995), 131-64. For a history on glove wearing, see "Gossip about Gloves," in *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine*, Sept. 1, 1863, page 253.

[11] A brief story, "The Nest at Home," accompanies the engraved plate in Appendix A. The story begins with an epigram, "Crush in thy heart all pride— / By pride the angels fell."

[12] Another important distinction that Charlotte Perkins Gilman makes in is that "modesty in dress, as applied to that of women, consists in giving the most conspicuous prominence of femininity" (10).

[13] Judith Sargent Murray masks her own voice through the narration of Mr. Vigilius, a.k.a., The Gleaner, a newspaper columnist.

[14] According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Levantine is "a very rich stout twilled black silk material" imported from the Mediterranean country Levant in the early nineteenth century (1202).

[15] See "Fashion, Dress Reform, and the New Woman," in *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art*, by Patricia A. Cunningham, 203-22.

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER FOUR: "FRAILTY, THY NAME IS WOMAN": FASHIONABLE INVALIDISM AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMAN

Fannie Fern/Sarah Willis Parton wrote a column for the *Olive Branch* about her "Thoughts on Dress" in 1851. After the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, when women were threatened as a group for their fashion, Fern joined other literary women and challenged male critics by asking whether "a cravat or handkerchief, doubled and twisted around a gentleman's neck . . . tight enough to stop circulation, is a whit more reasonable than dresses lined with whalebone . . . or whether a dickey, starched stiff enough to cut the flesh under the ears, is altogether comfortable" (216-17). Fern was definitely opposed to corseting, especially tight lacing; however, she responded to a woman's right to self expression in light of men's frivolity of dress. Fern later wrote an article denouncing corseting and tight lacing in particular.

Fern's column, "Fashionable Invalidism," was published in the *New York Ledger* in 1867. In her satiric style, Fern bashed the trend of tight lacing; she said, "I hope to live to see the time when it will be considered a *disgrace* to be sick, [and] when people with flat chests and stooping shoulders, will creep round the back way, like other violators of known laws" (341). She further argued that "Those who *inherit* [sickness, flat chests, and round shoulders should] cease perpetuating themselves till they are physically on a sound basis" (341). In other words, if a woman thought that invalidism was fashionable, she shouldn't bear children until she was of sound body. Fern considered fashionable women and their fashionable invalidism a nuisance to society. She said:

> But a woman who laces so tightly that she breathes only by a rare accident; who vibrates constantly between the confectioner's shop and the dentist's office; who has ball-robes and jewels in the plenty, but who owns neither an umbrella, nor a water-proof cloak, nor a pair of thick boots; who lies in bed till noon, never exercises, and complains of "total want of appetite," save for pastry and pickles, is simply a disgusting nuisance. (341)

Fern's words may have seemed a harsh indictment of other women, but her message was intended to make an impact and challenge their way of thinking. She further asserted that she would not listen to a fashionable woman's theories "because their internal works are in a state of physical disorganization. Let them go into a Lunatic Asylum and be properly treated till they can learn how they are put together, and how to manage themselves sensibly" (341). Fern's public ridicule of the fashionable invalid signified a reversal of her previous stance on women's fashion and a break in the solidarity of women's culture. Basically, she was offering her own body, literally and figuratively, as an alternative model for self expression.

Self-perception was represented in a variety of signs/signals in the language used to describe women's physical ailments in woman's literature. Although many nineteenth century women authors advocated reform in their writing, characterizations and descriptions of women in secular and non-secular literature often undermined these authors' efforts to convey their message of reform to readers—health and dress reform, in particular. At the very least, they provided documentation of common illnesses and the sickly nature of women. Unfortunately, the cultural system meaning (codes) in the

language of description, however realistic, reinforced more of a code of ascription—an acceptance of a state of being. Rather than consider the ill-effects of such ascriptions as a consequence, nineteenth century women tended to accept their ill health as endemic of their natural frailty. As a result, issues of women's health reform became enmeshed with the sexual politics of women's many illnesses and dress reform.

In the chapter "The Sexual Politics of Sickness" in *For Her Own Good*, Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English discuss how doctors found many diagnostic labels for the "wave of invalidism gripping the female population: neurasthenia, nervous prostrations, hyperesthesia, cardiac inadequacy, dyspepsia, rheumatism, and hysteria" (93). These labels covered a multitude of symptoms that included "headaches, muscular aches, weakness, depression, menstrual difficulties, indigestion, etc." (93). Many medical journals argued that women who habitually laced tightly, for example, were more susceptible to respiratory diseases, fainting spells, high anxiety, involuntary abortions, and many other complications of the abdominal viscera. Doctors of the era adopted the "self-assigned duty . . . to define [a woman's] natural physical and mental constitution" (105). Often the descriptions of women's illnesses were pejorative.

The language doctors used to describe women's ailments played an important role in casting a pejorative veil over the ever mysterious uterus and its relationship to the diseases of women. Some physicians were outspoken with regard to women's fashions and the connection they had to ill health. For example, one doctor's opinion on the "evils of tight lacing" revealed the way in which language was manipulated to depict women as inferior. He stated:

> among the governing organs of the body, whose injury or unsound condition proves prejudicial to every other portion of it, I allude to the stomach, liver, and all the other chyle carrying viscera, and to the heart, lungs and large blood vessels. These are all compressed and deranged in their functions, and most of them reduced in their size, removed from their places and altered in their shape, by tight corseting. ("Evils" 731)

Words like "governing," "unsound condition," "prejudicial," "compressed," and "deranged" did not go unnoticed. They went beyond mere representations of the medical status of women to a way of life, or what social scientists call a zero order belief, an experience encountered early in life and continually validated through life experience; women's naturally weak constitution, for example, came to be understood as a zero order belief as did their ascription to fashion fetishes like corseting.

Zero order beliefs led to ritualistic repetitions of a way of life, and/or expression. Women's sexuality, for example, was controlled physically by men and defined psychologically though the physical entrapment of their bodies in corsets. Corseting, which suggested a natural state of piety or chastity, over the centuries became embodied in culture as a primitive belief, or a zero order belief—a belief learned in childhood and continuously validated through life experience—a belief very basic to the nineteenth century American way of life. Women may have been aware of the connection between the ritual of corseting and the public nuance supporting the practice, but until mid-century, they didn't question the authenticity or validity of the beliefs because nearly every other middle-class woman was wearing the same fashion. Women in the early part of the century didn't conceive of healthy alternatives because they were bombarded by visual images to the contrary—images that validated the ritual. Those visual images assailed them from the pages of fashion magazines, in public venues, and in the narratives of their favorite novels and stories. However, their repeated use of corsets was

the greatest source of "female complaints" and the ill health which led to invalidism.

To understand the contradictions surrounding fashion and invalidism and the documented evidence of women's health in the nineteenth century, we need to examine articles in nineteenth century medical journals which discuss not only the cause of women's ailments but treatment as well. Furthermore, to understand the underlying philosophy of the assumptions put forth in those medical texts, we must first examine classical philosophies regarding women's physiological structure and bodily functions. Doing so will help us comprehend how the antiquated ideas of ancient philosophies filtered into the institutionalized medical treatment of women centuries later and how those philosophies influenced the ascription to fashions which appeared to the public eye to regulate women's unstable constitution by "staying her uterus" and added to the general mythology that a woman's uterus controlled every aspect of her being. Women's nervous conditions and/or erratic behavior were often characterized in the novels in this study.

The Wandering Womb

In his examination of *The Diseases of Women*, Hippocrates (469-399 BCE) described the wandering womb in search of moisture within a woman's body. In his opinion, an empty womb would shrivel and die or cause a woman to choke and lose all reason in fits of anger. Hippocrates believed that choking was the direct consequence of a lack of intercourse. He believed that it occurred more often in "older women than younger ones" because their uterus was lighter (7), and this, he thought occurred because the womb was empty. Hippocrates stated that "when the woman has an emptiness of the vessels, and works harder than is customary, the womb, becoming withered, because it is empty and light, turns on itself" (7). The "turning on itself" resulted in the womb's wandering about in search of moisture.

Plato (428-347 BCE) also wrote about the "wandering womb." He referred to the

"seed" as "being quick with soul" (91c10) and women's matter as soul-less. According to Plato, the "womb in women, which is in them a living nature appetent of child-bearing, when it is a long time fruitless beyond the due season, is distressed and sorely disturbed, and straying about in the body" (91c10). Thus, Plato built on the teachings of Hippocrates[1] and the idea that the womb wandered about a woman's body in search of moisture threatening every bodily function in the process, including intelligence and good humor.

Plato's student, Aristotle (384-322 BCE) wrote in *Generation of Animals* that "the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the menstrual fluids are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul" (737a20), which echoed Plato's teachings. According to Aristotle, women were imperfect men and as such were vessels and nothing more.

Theories of the wandering womb also appeared in Aretaeus of Cappadocia's *The Causes and Symptoms of Acute Diseases*[2] of the second century CE. His theories differed a little in that the focus of the study included younger women. Aretaeus argued that younger women were "more mobile, wandering," and as a result, their uterus "was altogether erratic." He thought that:

> In the middle of the flanks of women lies the womb, a female viscus closely resembling an animal; for it is moved of itself hither and thither, also upwards in a direct line to below the cartilage of the thorax, and also obliquely to the right or left, either to the liver or spleen; and it likewise is subject to prolapsus downwards, and in a word, it is altogether erratic. It delights, also, in fragrant smells, and flees from them; and, on the whole, the womb is like an animal within an animal. (91)

These ancient medical texts established the perception that a woman's uterus, also called *hystera* in Latin, was the root of all of her physical, mental, emotional, and moral dilemmas. Furthermore, these ancient philosophers believed that when in flux, the cold

womb in search of heat could suffocate primary organs and cause any number of diseases of the uterus, or *hystera*.

Treatments for the wandering womb in ancient times included drawing the noxious vapors out with sweet smelling substances placed near the uterus while applying foul smelling substances to the nose in an attempt to force the womb back into position (See Appendix D). Noxious drinks were also prescribed, like a potion created from the dregs of beer and tar from the wood of a ship. The wicked taste of this potion was supposed to "induce the descent of the uterus" (Thompson, *Wandering* 32). Another treatment included "dried excrement of men placed on frankincense" (33). Some believed that the "definitive treatment" for a wandering womb "had to include a male component; if the uterus was unhappy because it had not received enough male substance, only something masculine would cure it" (33). This treatment suggested the "living animal" within a woman's body needed to have nourishment from a man in order to behave properly. Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other early medical practitioners developed their philosophies without the benefit of dissection of human cadavers, which was not practiced in their time.

The works of Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle were lost to Europeans until the Middle Ages, but their rediscovery influenced medical thoughts on women for the next several centuries. The wandering womb, or female flesh (matter) considered by the ancient Greek philosophers as a cold, soul-less, wanton, female, sexual organ,[3] was used by physicians, clerics, and society to justify the ill-treatment of women for centuries to come.

In the Middle-Ages, Galen of Pergamon was one of the first practitioners to acknowledge that the "errant womb" idea was not possible because the womb was connected through membranes and ligaments, which he learned from the dissection of female cadavers. He believed that since women were moist and cold and men were hot and dry, if a woman failed to have intercourse, then she would be left with too much seed

and it would corrupt and putrefy her blood (Thomasett 50). So, the ultimate cure for women's uterine ailments would be regular intercourse. Since widows and single women were exempt from legitimate opportunities for regular sexual activity, they were often considered to be afflicted with the "wandering womb," syndrome.

Dame Trotula, a twelfth-century woman physician in Palermo, further articulated the conditions under which an excess of seed could corrupt a woman's blood:

> Too much spoiled seed abounds in them and it changes to a poisonous character. Especially does this happen to those who have no husbands, widows in particular and those who previously have been accustomed to make use of carnal intercourse. It also *happens in virgins who have come to marriageable years and have not yet husbands*, for in them abounds the seed which nature wished to draw out by means of the male. (Benton 213)

Even a female physician believed that a woman's body could poison itself if she did not permit it to function normally by receiving necessary moisture though sexual union with a man. A woman's husband, through the act of sexual intercourse, acted as the steadying and controlling force, not only of the woman, but her uterus as well, which for nineteenth century practitioners reinforced St. Paul's sentiments in I Corinthians that "man is the head of woman."

Although Galen and his followers applied scientific investigation to support their theories, their translators and followers returned to the Hippocratic-Platonic wandering womb theory. This theory, and the diseases of women which accompany it, became commonplace in medical manuals well into the Common Era. Gradually, through scientific investigation, theories of the wandering womb were debunked for good, but beliefs regarding the inferiority and fragile nature of women's health and emotions were firmly imbedded in the consciousness of society, and they were still connected to the mysteries of her womb.

Claude Thomassett when writing on "The Nature of Woman" in the Middle-Ages

contends that "The medieval representation of woman's nature, diverse and contradictory as it was, was destined to enjoy a long life. The theories and vocabulary developed at this time would shape the imagination for centuries to come" (68). Even though the language of the wandering womb dropped from medical texts in the sixteenth century, the negative connotations and superstitions about women's anatomy continued to influence the ways in which women were treated medically, spiritually, socially, and legally. Although they were no longer considered as lacking in soul and matter, nineteenth century American middle-class women continued to be treated as the weaker sex. Theories of the wandering womb were replaced in the nineteenth century with elaborate theories of hysteria and misinformation regarding women's nervousness and their overall physical condition.[4]

Hysteria, Physicians, and the Diseases of Women in Nineteenth Century America

When a pair of stays comes in at the door,

health, paired with happiness, flies out of the window.

—*Punch* 1858[5]

Some of the most popular medical manuals of the early nineteenth century were the "Aristotle" series. These pamphlets drew from random sections of Aristotle and other Greek philosophers' writings, and according to John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, were combined by "literary pirates, [who] with a cursory knowledge of medicine incorporated legends, folklore, ancient medical practices, mysticism of the sexual act into a compendium of information which quickly disseminated throughout England and the American colonies" (93). They argue that without well researched and scientifically based medical texts, the Aristotle pamphlets became a major source of information on sex and gynecological practice. This pamphlet was reprinted more than one hundred different times well into the nineteenth century under such titles as *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, *The Last Legacy*, and *The Compleat and Experienced Midwife* (94). So, the

combination of men's study of classical philosophy (including the Greeks), religious doctrines depicting women as subservient to men, antiquated beliefs in the limitations imposed by natural law, and the lack of scientific knowledge and study, more ridiculous assumptions regarding women's normal bodily functions, childbirth, and her ability to use brain power emerge. The belief that every disease afflicting a woman was connected to her uterus became the prevailing assumption among medical practitioners, and it had a profound impact on the ways in which women perceived themselves. Invalidism and suffering seemed to be a woman's lot in nineteenth century America—consequences of medical disinformation, religious beliefs, fashion fetishes, and her own self-perception. Although there appears to be no evidence which definitively links theories of the wandering womb to the prophylactic effects of corset wearing to stay the womb, it is a curious coincidence and there is no denying the impact that corseting and tight lacing had on a woman's ill health.[6]

The *Southern Literary Messenger* ran an anonymous article in 1841 entitled the "Evils of Tight Lacing." This article pronounced corsets "most seriously, an alarming evil" (731). The author argued that "to secure adult females what are called 'fine figures'. . . the corset-screws are applied to them while they are young girls, their whole system being tender and their bones being comparatively soft and flexible" (731). Young girls were indoctrinated to the practice of tight lacing early in boarding schools where the headmistresses, maids, and students were expected to lace up and remain laced for twenty-four hours a day, with one hour of rest on Saturday as part of a rigorous figure-training program.

In an article published in *The English Woman's Domestic Magazine* in 1866, the author states that "At another boarding school, stays were compulsory and were sealed by the mistress on Monday morning to be removed for one hour on Saturday for 'purpose of ablution,'" or in other words, cleanse the bowel. Furthermore, Helene E. Roberts argues that the pressures to adopt tight lacing were a result of "conditioning in childhood,

physical dependence, the ideal of masochistic submission and discipline, and pride in moral rectitude" (558). This painful and early indoctrination[7] led to what physicians called "virgins disease," or "green sickness, associated with asexuality and delicate femininity" (Davies 632). Virgins or green sickness had a significant impact on fertility due to poorly developed reproductive organs and undernourishment which potentially disrupted normal menses. In addition, malnutrition "[had] been observed to reduce the size of the uterus and increase the incidence of uterine prolapse . . . causing hypergenesis of tissue, ovaritis, pelvic peritonitus, fluid accumulation in the utero, neuralgia, cystitis, and other complications" (633). Malnutrition was a side effect of a tight lacing. Because the abdominal cavity was so deformed by the constricting stays, the size of the stomach was reduced and limited the intake of food.

All of these afflictions could lead to sterility, involuntary abortion, and death. Abortion was indirectly referred to in the article on the "Evils of Tight Lacing" when the author remarked, "From the foregoing view of their [corsets'] destructive effects on the female system, added to another, which motives of delicacy forbid me to mention [abortion], it is neither unjust or extravagant to say that they threaten a degeneracy of the human race" (732). The author of this article referred to issues of health and called for abandonment of the stays in preservation of the human race. Fashion was interfering with a woman's ability to reproduce.

Dr. Charles Graham Cannaday delivered a paper entitled "The Relation of Tight Lacing to Uterine Development and Abdominal Pelvic Disease" before the International Medical Congress in Rome, Italy in 1894. He challenged other physicians to counsel their patients against the practice of corseting and to adopt "a united protest against corsetry." He reminded them that "uterine development in young girls [was] greatest from eleven to fifteen," about the time they were first introduced to stays. His conclusions reinforced what many physicians already knew, that the interference with a young girl's development created a frail, sickly, albeit fashionable invalid. That doctors

continued to debate the "ills of tight lacing," and their impact on the diseases of women at the end of the century proved that many doctors still considered a woman's natural physiology to be defective, and that her fashion may have exacerbated the symptoms, but did not cause the disease.

One of the most prevalent physical casualties from years of corseting and tight lacing which plagued women in the nineteenth century was the prolapsed uterus (fallen womb). The prolapsed uterus occurred when the muscles that support the uterus weaken as a result of multiple pregnancies, or in some cases under use (as in atrophy), and when the organ was displaced by corseting and tight lacing. The prolapsed uterus was common in the nineteenth century and as painful as childbirth in some cases. One American doctor reported a case in which an overweight woman wore a tightly laced new corset to church one Sunday, and "on her way, she was seized with violent pains" (Haller & Haller 172) which she perceived to be labor pains. After a long day of what she thought were labor pains, she called for the doctor to deliver the child. When he examined her, he told her that "if she wore that particular corset again, he just might deliver her womb" (173). Instead he prescribed castor oil, followed by opium and hot poultices (173). A tightly laced woman with a prolapsed uterus was a walking contradiction. If the corset was initially intended to "stay" a woman's uterus to protect her health and well being, tight lacing threatened to expel the problem once and for all. The medical community worked with the fashion industry to develop pessary devices for insertion in a woman's vagina to keep her uterus in place or from dropping further. Women continued to use corsets despite the pain and discomfort. To aid them, the corset manufacturers designed and produced corsets with ribbons attached to keep the pessaries from falling to the floor should they be squeezed out by the extreme pressure of the stays (Summers 115).

To further complicate matters, middle-class society of the era believed that a tight laced woman exhibited proper, decent, and morally upright behavior despite the limitations that corseting imposed. Corseted women, especially a tight laced woman,

found it difficult to perform the most menial physical chores and were generally regarded as unfit for work, ergo the corseted woman became part of a leisure class. Men were judged affluent by how well they could provide the necessary means to sustain the leisurely status of their wives and daughters. In addition, there developed what David Kunzle called extended tight-lacing families composed of "maids, governesses, cousins, friends, dressmakers, corsetiers, and even (very occasionally) physicians" (34), all of whom in some way enhanced the social position of the patriarch and transmited the fetish beyond the immediate family. As Kunzle indicates, "correspondence shows mistresses and maids vying with each other on equal terms," and that "the tight laced maid was also viewed by the employer as a social status symbol" (34). Readers are reminded of the extended corseting family in Harriet Beecher Stowe's description of Eliza in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "Her dress was of the neatest possible fit, and set off to advantage by her finely moulded shape" (6). Stowe's description of a number of mulatto women in her novel (Cassie, Rosa, Lucy, Madame de Thoux) illustrated general acceptance of the stereotypical tight lacer and the acceptance by free Blacks as well in an extended tight laced family.[8]

Unlike England, where the class system is rooted in noble birth, in America the poorest immigrant could obtain wealth and success, thereby gaining a position of power and subscribing to the status symbols accompanying their position. Unfortunately, nearly a century of corseting and tight lacing left a legacy of physical, psychological, and political dysfunction. Dr. Dio Lewis, for example, believed that a tight laced woman was not a suitable candidate for motherhood or marriage for many reasons. He published many articles in popular journals warning the general public about the dangers of corsets. He stated that "A girl who has indulged in tight lacing should not marry. She may be a very devoted wife, but her husband will secretly regret his marriage. Physicians of experience know what is meant while thousands of husbands will not only know, but deeply feel the meaning of this hint" (503). Another doctor alarmed at the incidents of

illness in his female patients remarked that "The history of the evolution of the corset is the record of the diseases of the womb" (Haller & Haller 172). Again, despite still more evidence of the ills of corseting, women continued to ascribe to the fashion public signification of "a well disciplined mind and well-regulated feelings" (Willet & Cunnington 114). This public signification was essential not only to their well being, but to their families as well.

Many middle-class American men in the nineteenth century preferred their wives and daughters to practice corseting for a number of reasons: public signification of religious piety mentioned earlier, and proof of the husband's/father's material success. Even Sarah Josepha Hale acknowledged that women's dress should please men, and that should be one of their primary concerns when selecting their apparel. She alluded to corseting when she asked readers "Are the mothers of men who rule the world found among the *loose*-robed women, or among the women who dress in closer fitting apparel?" (44). She later clarified her philosophies on dress for women by suggesting that they "adopt the prevailing fashion, but do not carry it to excess" (237). Tight lacing fits within Hale's definition of an excessive display of fashion, even to the point of fetishism. Yet, as the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine*, she personally approved the fashion plates, edited the descriptions of fashions, approved the articles, wrote about the fabrics, and encouraged women to buy their notions from local manufacturers rather than import their fashions from abroad.[9] No matter where a woman purchased her stays, the end results were the same, corsets and good health did not go together. Unfortunately, after wearing stays over the course of one's life, a woman's body would lose its ability to support the internal organs because of the atrophy of the abdominal muscles. Women would often lie down for comfort.

Before the "rest cure" was recommended, other doctors prescribed "lying in" as a treatment. Lying in meant that women could spend a portion of their day un-stayed, and doing so literally gave her body a chance to breathe. Lying in was also prescribed for

other illnesses which afflicted women and implied that due to a woman's overall weak constitution, regular periods of rest would fortify her for life's trials. Lying in was an essential treatment for hysteria as well.

The most prevalent diagnosis of women's diseases was hysteria. Numerous articles in nineteenth century medical journals discuss hysteria and its connection to diseases of the uterus. In 1872, Dr. Beard and Dr. Rockwell offered their theories on "Hysteria and Allied Affections" in an article published in the *Medical and Surgical Journal*. They discuss two cases involving middle-aged women, both of whom exhibited symptoms of hysteria. Although their age could have signified a peri-menopausal or menopausal state, the doctors don't disclose information to confirm or deny this. Drs. Beard and Rockwell discuss the fifty-five year old woman as presenting "symptoms of anemia, constipation, and delusions of various kinds" (314), which they concluded was a case of "hysterical mania." The forty-five year old woman patient had been "debilitated by a two years' siege of intermittent fever, and presented symptoms of globus hystericus, hysterical paralysis of the right arm, and melancholia" (314). To treat these patients, they used experimental "electro-therapeutics," otherwise known as electro-shock therapy. According to the doctors, the first patient was restored "to pretty nearly the standard of health," and the second patient who received twenty-five treatments was pronounced cured and returned to her duties as a servant-girl. They hypothesized that "neurasthenia, neuralgia, chlorosis,[10] and many other affections allied to hysteria were more frequent among the higher orders (middle-class and upper-middle class women), and that hysteria was "quite as common among the ignorant service-girl class, in whom the emotional nature reigns pretty nearly supreme, unchecked by reason, or education, or common sense" (314). Here again, doctors connect hysteria as a predominantly female complaint, and their diagnoses indicated a gendered and class based analysis of symptoms.

The Philadelphia Medical Times published the proceedings of the American Gynaecological Society's annual conference in 1878. Dr. William Goodell delivered the

"president's annual address," entitled "Relation of Neurasthenia to the Diseases of the Womb." The editor claimed that Dr. Goodell's presentation on "the special topic of the connection between nerve-tire and womb-ills" was delivered in a masterly manner, which suggested that his conclusions were accepted by the medical professionals in attendance. Dr. Goodell claimed that "mental overstrain, nerve-tire, or neurasthenia is so common a disorder in our over-taught, over-sensitive women, that in its successful treatment every physician has an abiding interest" (41). Although he admitted that the "general pathology of such neurosis is not clear," he stated that "disorders of the reproductive apparatus were declared to be merely the local expressions of the general neurosis" (41), meaning that women were neurotic by nature. Furthermore, he supported the Weir Mitchell cure, created by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, which called for "electricity, massage, and rest, with seclusion" (41). Many women feared the Weir Mitchell cure as much as they feared death because the cure represented a symbolic death of the mind. To a nineteenth century woman writer, this cure would have been torturous. Rebecca Harding Davis and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, for example, were both treated by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell for post-partum depression.[11]

There was a correlation between the growing instances of women's ailments and the growing medical profession, or more importantly the growing medical practice in nineteenth century America. Due to their sickly natures, women were becoming more dependent on the male medical profession. Furthermore, since the medical profession was dominated by men, women "who felt sick, depressed, or simply tired would no longer seek help from a friend or female healer, but from a male physician" (Ehrenreich & English 113). Male doctors monopolized the practice of treatment for women's illnesses and "The general theory which guided the doctor's practice as well as their public pronouncements was that women were, by nature, weak, dependent, and diseased," and doctors secured "their victory over the female healer: with 'scientific' evidence that woman's essential nature was not to be a strong, competent help-giver, but

to be a *patient*" (112). This development stalled the advancement of women's culture in some ways because, as patients, women consulted their physicians and their physicians were bound by confidentiality, therefore limiting open conversation regarding women's health. The more a woman accepted her role as a patient, the more likely she was to accept the fact that by nature she was prone to illness. So, all of the maladies typically affecting women which were believed to be connected to her uterus further marginalized her as the weaker sex. Invalidism became fashionable for women, and hysteria was a condition largely ascribed to womanhood. Because of their frequent visits to the doctor, or the doctor's frequent visits to their homes, women were further victimized through misdiagnosis and experimental treatment.

An article published in *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* in 1879, discusses an extreme case of molar pregnancy[12] in relation to hysteria. Dr. O. E. Herrick, the attending physician, treated Mrs. D for "a persistent pain in the head, occasionally attended, after three or four hours of severe pain, by paroxysms of frenzy, which would continue for from two hours to twelve or fourteen" (225) before they eventually subsided. Mrs. D thought that she was four months pregnant and that her headaches began when she conceived. She was in so much pain that she was afraid that she would die if the pregnancy was allowed to go to full term. Dr. Herrick thought that her condition was a "*ruse* to get [him] to produce an abortion" (225). Mrs. D was sent home without further consultation and treatment from April 15th to May 2nd, when the doctor was called to her bedside "in haste." In the space of four days, the woman passed eleven ill-formed embryos (also called mole pregnancies). Once normal flow was restored, the doctor stated that "She made a rapid and good recovery, and has had no return of head symptoms since" (225). Yet, the doctor noted in his article, "The fact that the woman can no longer control her mind is sufficient evidence that she is insane" (225). From his diagnosis and conclusions, Mrs. D was deemed temporarily insane, but through medical treatment her sanity was restored.

Mrs. D's treatment was problematic on many levels. First, she was treated like an hysterical woman tired of motherhood and in search of a doctor to perform an abortion. Next, the casual disregard for her condition nearly killed her. A molar pregnancy left untreated created an infection, and that infection when untreated was poisoning her body, thus causing a variety of symptoms which presented as mania. However, once the source of the infection was removed, the hysterical and manic symptoms disappeared. Nevertheless, the "infectious disease" of Mrs. D's womb was considered, yet again, the cause of her hysteria and mental anguish, when in reality it was the untreated infection which caused her mania.

Dr. Herrick further noted that "Authorities tell us the cause of puerperal mania is anemia, caused by hemorrhage, malignant disease of the uterus, abortion, etc. and is a disease which arises from great exhaustion" (225). He also argued that "Diseases of the uterus of all kinds, seem to exert a powerful influence upon the whole nervous system, and the brain being the great nerve centre, is especially apt to be more or less influenced by any severe or protracted disease of the uterus" (225). The diseases that Dr. Herrick refers to are those he observed among his middle-class and upper-middle class women patients, or fashionable invalids. He discussed his theories further by noting that:

> We frequently observe [protracted disease of the uterus] among frail married ladies living with strong and vigorous husbands, occurring from excessive coitus; the uterus is kept in a constant state of congestion, and the woman is converted into a maniac, and hates the man she should love better than all others, and for no other reason than that her brain is influenced by her much abused uterus. (225)

Too much moisture and the uterus will catch a cold! For this condition, Dr. Herrick suggested that "If the woman's husband [was] the cause of her trouble, either send him or

her on a visit, and her peculiar form of insanity [would] probably vanish. In short, treat each individual case, and ignore the classes" (225). To his credit, he encouraged individual diagnoses rather than the assumption that all women with the same symptoms suffered from the same ailments. However, separation of husband and wife as a cure for hysteria was not a popular prescription and didn't garner much support. Nevertheless, it was discussed in *The Story of Avis* and *The Awakening*.

Toward the end of the century, frustration among physicians regarding treatment of hysterical women grew to the extent that their prescribed treatments and their writing became increasingly angry and violent. Scientific objectivity was set aside and women were subjected to threats of head shaving, cold shower baths, suffocation, being struck in the face with wet towels, and ridicule in the presence of family and friends.[13] A woman's hair was considered her crown, her gift to God, so the threat of shaving off her hair would have, perhaps, shocked her into silence but would hardly have cured her. Suffocation to the point of cessation of an hysterical fit would have the same effect as threatening to shave her head. Should a doctor who would willingly strike a woman across the face with wet towels in the name of medical treatment really practice medicine? The basic theories behind these treatments mirrored ancient philosophies regarding women's inferiority and sub-human status—they were treated like animals, beaten into submission by an authority figure. Fear, intimidation, physical blows, and public ridicule were acceptable for the treatment of hysteria in women with sensitive minds. Doctors often referred to these treatments as powerful weapons against hysteria—weapons used against women to beat them into submission. These treatments were legal and recognized by the medical profession.[14]

While the relationship between doctor and patient was becoming increasingly difficult in America, in Vienna, Austria, Sigmund Freud was studying a course of treatment that "would remove the disease altogether from the arena of gynecology" (Ehrenreich & English 153). Scholars, long ago, gave Freud the label of the father of psychoanalysis, but according to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "psychoanalysis [was] the child of the hysterical woman" (197). Psychoanalytic treatment reestablished the narrative of experience in a woman's life because it enabled her to talk about her thoughts and feelings in such a way that she could work through them with a therapist—more importantly, someone was listening. In the context of her personal narrative, a woman could begin to direct her energies to more productive activities like gaining an awareness of the source of her nervousness. In either case, she was engaging her brain without the input of her uterus!

In 1883, a woman doctor, Dr. Hannah M. Thompson discussed "The Therapeutic Value of Mental Occupation," in *The Medical and Surgical Reporter*. The case she discussed was "a typical case of neurasthenia complicated, as it so often is in women, with uterine disease" (505). Her patient, a teacher, exhibited frequent headaches which impacted muscle control accompanied by memory loss, an inability to concentrate, mental fatigue, confusion, brain excitement, and an inability to rest, all of which were further compromised by the uterine affection (505). Dr. Thompson considered the Weir Mitchell cure for her patient, but much like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, she concluded that it was the monotony of mental inactivity that caused this woman's hysteria. Instead, her treatment was to direct the patient's "nervous energies into healthful channels" (505). The teacher began to take classes in medicine and thus in many ways cured herself.

Basically, Dr. Thompson established a cure, which she called "mental cultivation as a prophylactic," in direct opposition to the Weir Mitchell cure. Thompson's scientific inquiry corroborates the real life experience that Gilman wrote about in "The Yellow Wallpaper," that lack of useful intellectual stimulation would drive a woman to hysteria, not the other way around.

Extreme fashion fetishes like tight lacing contributed to the images of women as the weaker sex, and women who ascribed to the fashion were very likely to become invalids at some point in their lives. Diseases of the uterus, hysteria, and other female complaints led to the social recognition of middle-class and upper middle-class women as innately sick and therefore confined to a life of inactivity with little physical or mental exertion—as fashionable invalids. Whether fashionable or otherwise, there were many characterizations of illness in nineteenth century woman's literature.

Images of Illness in Nineteenth Century American Woman's Literature

> *Gracious God! wretch, wretch that I am!*—What he would have added, I know not; for, overpowered by my grief and my surprise, I sunk lifeless at his feet.
>
> —Margaretta Melworth,
> *The Story of Margaretta* (1790)

Fainting was one of the most prevalent characterizations of frailty and illness in nineteenth century woman's literature, and often after a fainting spell, the woman was indisposed for a period of time. In a letter to her mother, Margaretta Melworth elaborated on her fainting fit, and said that "*Real illness*, through that fatal day served me as an apology for not making an appearance at dinner time or at evening tea time; and, in the course of the night, reason taught me sufficient self-command to *appear* tolerably

composed at breakfast the next morning" (235). Margaretta suspected her husband of infidelity with her best friend, and when he called himself a *wretch*, she thought her suspicions were confirmed. Her fainting fit affirmed in fiction what society had already deduced about women as sensitive creatures not accustomed to too much stress. As it turned out, Serafina was really her husband's illegitimate half-sister. Margaretta's momentary attack of nervous shock and subsequent fainting episode was the result of the stress caused by her suspicions.

Like Margaretta, Dorcas (Dorcasina) Sheldon fainted often in the presence of shocking news or an emotional upheaval, in Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixote* (1801). When she witnessed her father's lifeless body after a fatal stroke, she stepped forward to embrace the corpse, "but she fainted in the effort, and was conveyed senseless to her chamber" (Tenney 226). Her "fit of fainting" led to "a universal weakness" which prohibited her from attending her father's funeral. She was so deeply affected by the loss that she succumbed to a "long and severe illness, which confined her to her chamber the whole winter" (226). Her request for some of her favorite novels signaled her recovery. Ill with grief, Dorcasina retreated from reality to her sick-bed—a luxury only the affluent middle- and upper-classes could afford.

In Rebecca Rush's *Kelroy* (1812), Emily Hammond, yet another sentimental protagonist in woman's literature, also suffered from a delicate constitution. Emily was the epitome of the "angel in the house," and as such, her sweet disposition compromised her ability to recognize deceit until it was too late. The narrator explains that "Emily, shocked and depressed, suffered intensely from her mother's want of confidence, and her own unfortunate predilection" (47), her love for Kelroy, a penniless, poet. Because Emily was "Unused to these conflicts, her appetite failed and her colour faded" (47), and her health was further compromised by a severe cold. Her anxiety, stress, poor appetite, and the cold combined with her melancholy "confined her wholly to her chamber" (48). Every emotional setback for Emily was a near fatal one, and when she learned the depth

of her mother's deceit after her death, Emily fell to the floor in a "death-like swoon" (189). Again, the fainting episode was succeeded by "a fever which reduced her to the borders of the grave" (189) and signaled the beginning of a "lingering decay." Emily, so disillusioned by the deceit of her beloved mother, longed for death, and at the age of twenty died.

When Jean Muir met Mrs. Coventry for the first time in Louisa May Alcott's "Behind a Mask" (1866), Mrs. Coventry was reclining. During their introductions, Mrs. Coventry described herself as a "sad invalid." Part of Jean's duties in the Coventry household required her to see to Mrs. Coventry's needs during her periods of confinement. She explained to Jean that she was "very delicate and [kept] to her room until evenings" (Alcott 105). Although Jean's sickly appearance was part of her act to con the Coventry family, when she fainted, there were no questions asked as to whether or not she faked the spell, largely because sickly and fainting women were commonplace. After being revived, Jean sang an emotional Scottish song about loneliness and death. At the end of Jean's enactment, Mrs. Coventry engaged her in a conversation about fainting fits. Mrs. Coventry's solution to prevent fainting was to remain in her room, unstayed until evening.

There are many examples of "lying in" in woman's literature. Readers have only to recall Emily's mysterious recurring illnesses in Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), and Marie St. Clare, Little Eva's mother in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), whose health declined from the time she gave birth to a life of:

> inaction, bodily and mental—the friction of ceaseless ennui and discontent, united to the ordinary weakness which attended the period of maternity. In course of a few years changed the blooming young belle into a yellow, faded, sickly woman, whose time was divided among a variety of fanciful diseases, and who considered herself, in every sense, the most ill-used suffering person in existence. (157)

Stowe's creation of Marie St. Clare appears to be the representation of the real experience in the lives of women, and her characterization worked very well in contrast to Little Eva's angelic qualities. As a result of his wife's health, Mr. St. Clare was afraid that Marie's weak constitution would in some way affect Eva who was "exceedingly delicate" and that with no one to look after her, "her health and life might yet fall a sacrifice to her mother's inefficiency" (157).

The weakness of the mother's constitution during pregnancy and labor often weakened the child's health as well. Elizabeth Stoddard's character, Veronica Morgeson (Verry), in *The Morgesons* (1862) suffered from a recurring unnamed illness throughout her young adult life and spent much of her life "lying in," so to speak. Her sister Cassy's description of her at the end of the novel hinted that she might have passed her illness on to her child. Her baby "never cries, never moves, except when it is moved" (252). Verry's illness was defined by doctors as "delicacy of constitution" (27), and it was not seasonally related. Likewise, there was no discussion in the narrative which indicated regular intervals of illness to suggest menstrual difficulties. Her illness was as fleeting as Verry was "queer" and "troublesome." Cassy characterized her sister as "the most reticent girl [she] ever knew, and but for her explosive temper, which betrayed her, she would have been a mystery" (59). When Verry was ill, she retreated to her room, confined in "darkness and solitude," plagued by "some inscrutable disease," which lasted for weeks (59). After one of these episodes, her father told her sister Cassy, "Don't get sick. If you are, hide it as much as possible. Men do not like sick women" (101).[15] In the novel's resolution, Cassy and her Aunt Merce watch Verry and her child closely, and they exchange knowing glances as though neither she nor the baby would live much longer. The source of Verry's illness was never disclosed. Perhaps, there was no need to do so because readers recognized and identified with her "delicate constitution" to the extent that they understood the natural consequence—death at a young age.

In addition to the real dangers that childbirth posed for women with "delicate constitutions," there were many instances of post-partum depression described in woman's literature. Marie St. Clair's long debilitating illness after childbirth could also be considered post-partum depression which seemed to be a natural consequence of childbirth. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps alluded to the realities of post-partum depression through her characterization of Avis Dobell Ostrander's illnesses in *The Story of Avis* (1877). After the birth of her first child, a son, an exhausted and sleep deprived Avis exclaimed, "That baby has cried ever since it was born! I wish somebody would take it out of my sight and hearing for a while" (150). Her husband asked whether she felt any "maternal affection for the little thing," and Avis, with every quivering nerve in her body cried, "No… not a bit!" (150). Avis's guilt weighed heavy on her heart and took its toll on her creativity.

Phelps restored order, to a degree, in the Ostrander household, but this time at the expense of Avis's real talent which she sacrificed on the altar of motherhood and marriage, like her mother before her. With the birth of her second child, a girl, Avis "dropped her household duties" and "proceeded . . . to be as ill as she knew how" (180). The author describes her illness as "characteristically intense and culminated rapidly" (180) from the "famine of exhaustion which renders that disease, when fatal, a peculiar prolongation of the agony of dissolution" (180). The fact that Avis suffered from post-partum depression two times further affirms that the condition was prevalent among nineteenth century women. In both cases, the Doctor was present, and it was to him that Avis confided her fears about dying and found her resolve to live.

Interestingly, through Avis's father who was a professor of philosophy, Phelps gave a nod to ancient philosophy. When Avis found out that she had given birth to a boy, she didn't hide her disappointment, and when she asked why the baby cried so incessantly, Professor Dobell responded, "What Aristotle and Leibnitz and Kant would have yielded their lives to know, you ask, Avis, over-lightly. Philosophy will be no

longer a fragment, but a system, when it has commanded the psychological process by which one infant is led to weep" (150). His use of the word "infant" was ambiguous enough to refer to Avis as the infant, for she was weeping alongside the baby who cried with colic.[16]

Although she suffered attacks of nervous exhaustion at varying times in her married life, Avis understood the underlying causes, the lack of a creative outlet, marriage, and motherhood, similar to Rebecca Harding Davis's and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's reality in life. Fortunately for Phelps's character, there was no Weir Mitchell cure slated in her future. However, like Gilman, Avis and her husband were separated for a time, and during that time she comes to the full realization of the price she paid when she abandoned her art for marriage and motherhood. Despite the fact that her even temper returned, she vowed to focus all of her creative energy on securing a better future for her daughter. Once she adopted this resolution, her good health was restored.

Rebecca Harding Davis sought S. Weir Mitchell's help in 1861 when she suffered an "acute attack of nervous exhaustion," resulting from a difficult pregnancy, from sharing a small house with her husband's family, and from tending to her husband and his sister throughout their respective illnesses (Pfaelzer 11). Like Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Davis wrote of her opinions on the "rest cure" which Mitchell prescribes in her short story, "The Wife's Story" (1864), Hester Manning, Davis's protagonist, was married to a doctor. Through Hester, Davis confronted her own issues which involved middle-class poverty, anxiety about writing, and fear that marriage and motherhood would terminate her writing career.[17] Husbands who thwarted their wives' ambitions were prevalent themes in Davis's work.

Marriage and motherhood for Hester Manning, Davis's protagonist, were like intellectual suicide (112). Davis offered readers a character who, suffering from postpartum depression with weakness, nausea, and anxiety, sends her "colicky" newborn daughter to live with a wet-nurse in the country (112). Hester reflected on her

circumstances, and the "paths" that "abut" into her life knowing that once she married, the door to creativity closed behind her. She laments, "Only He who led me here knows how humbly and through what pain I dared to believe this, and dare to believe that He did lead me,—that is by no giddy, blear-sighted free-will of my own that I arrived where I stand to-day" (112). The sheer reality of her circumstances terrorized her daily, leaving her in nervous exhaustion.

In this state of mind, she fell ill with "brain-fever," dreaming that she had returned to the opera, and upon seeing her perform and ultimately hissed off the stage, her husband died of a heart attack. However, her husband didn't die; his death was just an hallucination during her illness. Her brain fever was the consequence of her secret ambition and her desire to abandon her husband and child to pursue her career, or as Jean Phaelzer notes "guilt for even fantasizing about abandoning her family for an inadequate talent" (127). Davis, a reformer and conscious champion of women's intellectual development, returns her heroine to the bosom of her family, which was a much different view of the "cure" than that of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Gilman sought S. Weir Mitchell's help when she "collapsed with a nervous disorder" (Ehrenreich & English 111). To prepare for the interview, she wrote down her symptoms and the details which she felt were pertinent. Gilman noted that "her sickness vanished when she was away from home, her husband, and her child, and returned as soon as she came back to them" (112). Mitchell dismissed her testimony as "self-conceit," and he prescribed living as domestic a life as possible with her child in attendance at all times, to lie down an hour after each meal, and restrict herself to a mere two hours of intellectual life a day (112). Perhaps the most insulting advice that Mitchell could give a woman author was to advise her to "never touch pen, brush or pencil" as long as she lived. Under his attention and prescribed cure, Gilman wrote that she "came perilously close to losing [her] mind." She said, "The mental agony grew so unbearable that I would sit blankly moving my head from side to side" (qtd. in Ehrenreich & English

112). Unlike Davis, Gilman realized that her marriage was the source of her nervous exhaustion. As a result of her epiphany, Gilman divorced her husband and pursued her career as a writer. The theme of "The Yellow Wall-Paper" (1892) was generally considered to be a fictional version of her own illness and descent into madness under the Weir Mitchell cure.

In "The Yellow Wall-Paper," Gilman adopted a first person narrative to engage readers in such a way that they were inside the mind of her protagonist who was suffering from post-partum depression. She has been removed to the country by her husband, a physician, for a rest cure. The setting of the story in a decaying ancestral mansion spoke in some way about the archaic form of treatment the woman was to receive. As she slips deeper into her psychosis born of isolation and the lack of stimulating intellectual activity, the objects in the room, particularly the yellow-wall paper, become personified. She became fixated on freeing the woman trapped behind the wall-paper and began to peel back the layers to set her free. Gilman created in her fictional protagonist the fears she faced while undergoing the Weir Mitchell cure in the hope that it would draw attention to the inhumanity of his rest-cure. Despite her efforts, the Weir Mitchell cure remained a popular treatment for women.

Any behavioral breach of social etiquette on the part of a woman was suspect at the time and could be interpreted as a manifestation of her hysterical tendencies (Smith-Rosenberg 210). A woman suffering from hysteria in male medical literature was considered childlike or a "child-woman." An hysterical woman was described as "highly impressionable, labile, superficially sexual and exhibitionistic, [with] dramatic body language and grand gestures" (212). This description fits the one that Leonce Pontellier gave to Dr. Mandelet regarding his wife's strange behavior in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899).

In *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier's husband consults a doctor to find out what was ailing his wife. As he explained to Dr. Mandelet, his wife "doesn't act well. She's

odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out" (85). Pontellier continued to complain to the doctor that Edna's "whole attitude—toward [him] and everybody and everything—had changed . . . . She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women" (85). Edna had abandoned her social obligations, "let the housekeeping go to the dickens" (85) and stopped associating with the social circle which would have helped her husband advance his wealth. The narrator implied that she had also stopped "relations" with her husband. The doctor suggested that Pontellier leave her alone for a while; he said, "Woman . . . is a very peculiar and delicate organism—a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them" (86). The doctor concluded by saying that "Most women are moody and whimsical" (86). Dr. Mandelet suspected that another man was involved, but he didn't share his suspicions with Pontellier. Readers, on the other hand, know that Edna's awakening begins with her evaluation of "the empress of the 'mother-women' of Grand Isle . . . a 'self-contained' woman, Adele Raignolle" (Showalter 73). Through this comparison, Edna began to understand that she was different, and she began to "awaken" to her sexual power. Her moodiness was a manifestation of her self-reflection and general discontent with her life.

Pontellier invited the doctor to dinner so that he could surreptitiously observe Edna. When Mandelet dined with the Pontelliers, he could not find a "trace of the morbid condition which her husband had reported to him" (89). Instead, he found Edna animated and radiant, "transformed from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some "beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (90). Dr. Mandalet described Edna in the full bloom of her psychological awakening and her growing understanding of her sexuality. Her behavior, in his opinion, confirmed his suspicions that there was another man involved.

Later, when both Edna and Dr. Mandelet were called to Adele's bedside for the birth of yet another child, the scene so agonized Edna that she had an inward "flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature" (132). Dr. Mandelet witnessed her emotions and began to understand Edna's predicament. Her condition, as he reflected further on it, was psychological and not physical. Although he didn't label it as hysteria, Dr. Mandelet expressed his opinions carefully to Edna on the walk home. He said, "The trouble is that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of the moral consequences, or arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost" (133). When Dr. Mandelet encouraged her to confide in him, she responded that she didn't "feel moved to speak of things that troubled [her]," and that she had "periods of despondency and suffering," in which she wanted her own way, to be left alone. Her despondency and suffering, real or imagined, contributed to the underlying causes of her suicide. Edna's death through intentional drowning in comparison to Lily Bart's overdose, for example, seems to hold more symbolism for readers. Edna's body in death was not visible. Lily's body, on the other hand, was.

Over one hundred years after Tabitha Tenney created a carnivalesque female Quixote, with her weakness of mind and heart and her frivolous romantic notions, Edith Wharton wrote *The House of Mirth* (1905), an important narrative in the discourse of reform. Lily Bart, Wharton's, flawed protagonist, was also a spectacle. But unlike Dorcasina, Lily's flaws were characterized in such a way that she appeared a grotesque aberration of what fashionable women had become. Wharton's novel, published in 1905, offered proof that for all of the public debate on the woman question advocating reforms, the fashionable woman still existed and still manifested the same behavioral tendencies, frailties, fashion sense, misdirected education, and lack of intellectual occupation of her mid-nineteenth century predecessors. The decay of this mindset and lifestyle played out in the fictional characterization of Lily Bart. Lily offered her friend Lawrence Selden, her

philosophy regarding an upwardly mobile young woman's caste in life. She told him that:

> If [she] were shabby no one would have [her]: a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop—and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership. (14)

Lily's comments serve as evidence that one hundred years after Dorcasina's exploits, women were still being judged the same way. Partnership presumably referred to marriage, or perhaps the lesser condition of being a "kept woman." Lily's statement, "well-dressed till we drop," could have been interpreted in different ways. "Till we drop" could have referred to death, or it could have referred to the connection between fashion and illness. In either case, she was aware that her life and livelihood depended on the public's perception of her well being.

Lily's reversal of fortune played out in the public's purview through a decline in her physical health and the resulting nervous exhaustion, a natural consequence of her despondency. She gambled and lost in cards, in the stock market, and in the marriage market. With each loss, she slipped down the social ladder and moved closer to spinsterhood. Thoughts of spinsterhood and poverty drove Lily to excess and to gamble even more of her meager inheritance with the hope of making enough money to live independently. Lily was coached by her mother to live by her good looks, so when those looks began to fade, her nervousness and desperation caused her to take even greater risks which resulted in greater losses.

Gerty, Lily's one true and empathetic friend, lived as an independent woman, but her circumstances, like that of Selden's, were a little shabby and beneath Lily's standards. Gerty was in love with Selden. She knew that Selden cared more for Lily, and she knew

that to Lily, he was a rook in her game of life. Of the many potential suitors with whom Lily flirted away her youth, Selden remained the one with whom she was the most comfortable, and yet she was repelled by his meager circumstances. Knowing this, Gerty came to the realization that Lily was incapable of pity and deep feelings. All Lily wanted, in her opinion, "was the taste of new experiences: [Lily] seemed like some cruel creature experimenting in a laboratory" (187). Yet, when Lily suffered one of her fits of hysteria, she turned to Gerty for help, and her friend gave her shelter and comfort.

Lily, consumed by her anguish and inability to sleep, knocked on Gerty's door late one evening. Upon entering, she clung to her friend in fear, and said, "Oh, Gerty, the furies … you know the noise of their wings—alone, at night, in the dark? But you don't know—there is nothing to make the dark sound dreadful to you—" (191). She continued, "You'll let me stay? I shan't mind when the daylight comes—Is it late? Is the night nearly over? It must be awful to be sleepless—everything stands by the bed and stares" (191). Lily's explanation of the way she was feeling was erratic, emotional, and child-like. Had she seen a doctor, Lily would have been diagnosed as suffering from hysteria based on the symptoms she manifested. She said:

> I am not frightened: that's not the word. Can you imagine looking into your glass some morning and seeing a disfigurement—some hideous change that has come to you while you slept? Well, I see myself like that—I can't bear to see myself in my own thoughts—I hate ugliness, you know—I've always turned from it—but I can't explain to you—you wouldn't understand . . . . How long the night is! . . . I am a bad—a bad girl—all my thoughts are bad—I have always had bad people about me. Is that any excuse? I thought I could manage my own life—I was proud—proud! but now I'm on their level. (191)

Lily collapsed in convulsive sobs after this erratic rant, and Gerty tried to piece together the events of the evening to make sense of what her friend was saying. She came to the

conclusion that "other nerve-centers were smitten," and she "trembled back from conjecture" (192). Gerty began to see that her friend was in a state of physical and nervous exhaustion. When Lily awoke the following morning, she had a sense of "physical discomfort," "mental prostration," and "a languor of horror more insufferable than the first rush of her disgust" (195). She acknowledged to Gerty that she must have had "a nervous attack in the carriage" the previous night.

When she returned home, Lily explained her absence to her Aunt Peniston as the result of "an attack of faintness," and that "fearing she would not have strength to reach home, she had gone to [Gerty's] instead; but that a quiet night had restored her, and that she had no need of a doctor" (197). Again, fainting fits were so prevalent, that her aunt accepted this answer without hesitation and urged her niece to lie down. Later, her aunt noticed the change in her appearance. She told Lily, "You're a bad color, Lily; this incessant rushing about is beginning to tell on you" (197). Subsequently, Lily's appeal to her thrifty aunt for additional funds to pay her dress maker was denied, and as her worry increased, so did her nervousness.

To make ends meet, Lily was forced to find employment which wasn't easy for someone whose primary goal in life was to capitalize on her good looks, "to be ornamental" (343) and to land a "soft berth" as the trophy wife of a man of great wealth. Lily worked as a secretary/companion for Mrs. Hatch, a widow of some means. When Lily found out that Mrs. Hatch really wanted to "trade up," so to speak, using her social connections, she left her employ. However, she didn't leave empty handed. Lily kept the scripts for the apothecary that she used to fill Mrs. Hatch's prescription for sleeping drops and used them for herself. To cope with the downward spiral of her social and economic circumstances as well as her "incurable dread of discomfort and poverty," Lily self-medicated to the point of addiction. Her addiction to sleeping drops was characterized through her inability to sustain work, and a general malaise and deterioration of her good looks. She ate very little as the malaise affected her appetite, but she did drink her strong

tea. This cycle, drops in the evening to assure sleep and strong tea throughout the day to stimulate wakefulness and alertness, had a negative effect on Lily's ability to function normally.

After leaving Mrs. Hatch's employ, Gerty and Mrs. Fisher, a social acquaintance, recommended Lily as an apprentice milliner to Mme. Regina. Lily was unable to concentrate or sew a straight line, so she was released from employ at the end of the fashion season. The narrator explained, "Miss Bart's attendance had of late been so irregular—she had so often been unwell, and had done so little work when she came—that it was only as a favor that her dismissal had hitherto been deferred" (345). Lily expected as much, and even admitted to herself that "she was conscious of having been forgetful, awkward and slow to learn" (345). She began to avoid her friends, lest their presence remind her of her failures and deteriorating situation; her avoidance and isolation were also symptoms of her addiction.

As she walked home, Lily met Simon Rosedale, another former suitor. He was shocked to meet her on the "dirty and unpropitious corner" of the street, and offered to take her to tea. Strong tea, for Lily, was another "temptation she was always struggling to resist," and "it was forever conflicting with that other craving for sleep—the midnight craving which only the little phial in her hand could still" (336). As she sipped her strong tea, her eyelids drooped in "utter lassitude," and Rosedale examined her face in great earnest. He "was seized afresh by the poignant surprise of her beauty . . . the dark penciling of fatigue under her eyes, the morbid blue-veined pallor of the temples brought out the brightness of her hair and lips, as though all her ebbing vitality were centered there" (336). In uncharacteristic candor, Lily bared her soul to Rosedale, and buoyed by the stimulation of caffeine, for a short while she was uplifted by the realization that she still held the power to obtain an offer of marriage from him, an offer she had previously rejected. Realizing that she had no vision of the future beyond the very discomfort and

poverty she had run from all of her life, Lily hatched a scheme to blackmail her way back in to high society.

Lily came to this realization when she met Selden for the last time. Lily was on a mission to expose Mrs. Bertha Dorset's illicit love affair with him, the proof of which she had in letters that she purchased from Mrs. Haffen, a charwoman. Her decision to burn the evidence rather than implement her plan became the one defining moment of her life, an awakening of a different sort than Edna Pontellier's. Out of respect for Selden, she never acted on them, but in her desperate, drug induced state of mind, blackmail seemed justified.

On her way to the Dorsets', she stopped to visit Selden and had a change of heart; she burned the letters in his grate. Lily's physical decline was visible in her emaciated appearance. Selden saw how under the "loose lines of her dress," her figure had "shrunk to angularity," and "he remembered long afterward how the red play of the flame [of the fire] sharpened the depression of her nostrils, and intensified the blackness of the shadows which struck up from her cheekbones to her eyes" (361).

In saying goodbye to Selden, Lily talked of herself in third person, as though she was outside of herself seeing the person she used to be and the person she had really become for the first time. Her psyche was unraveling, and she told Selden:

> There is some one I must say goodbye to. Oh, not *you*—we are sure to see each other again—but the Lily Bart you knew. I have kept her with me all this time, but now we are going to part, and I have brought her back to you—I am going to leave her here. When I go presently, she will not go with me. I shall like to think that she stayed with you—and she'll be no trouble; she'll take up no room . . . . Will you let her stay with you? (359)

As Lily said goodbye, she laid her hand on Selden's and they observed a moment of solemnity—as though they were in "the presence of death" (360). She asked Selden to care for the old Lily, "whatever happens." Lily had come to the end of her troubled

journey. When she returned home, the long awaited inheritance check from her aunt's estate had arrived. She paid all of her debts, and unable to face a future of certain poverty, she filled a glass with water and chloral, drank it, and died in her sleep.

For Lily, being conditioned by her mother to rely on her looks to become a fashionable, desirable, socialite was a primitive belief, or a zero order belief—a belief that she learned in childhood. Up to her twentieth year, that belief was continuously validated through her life experience. She didn't question the authenticity or validity of those beliefs until she realized that she lacked the skills, knowledge, patience, and appreciation for work. Meaningful work, intellectual occupation, and life skills could have aided Lily in recovering not only a healthy outlook on life but good health as well. In the absence of those skills, she couldn't survive without perpetuating the shallow existence that she now abhorred.

In a figurative sense, Lily Bart, the fashionable lady with her nervous nature had to die to make way for a new generation of women, and a new way of thinking about women. Lily's awakening, unlike Edna Pontellier's, occurred as a result of an agonizingly slow descent into poverty—a realization of her worst fears. Her understanding of the underworld of working women who made life possible for fashionable women of leisure grew out of her own experience in the working class, and "Although her awakening proves unendurable, she really [tried] to overcome rejection, failure, and the knowledge of her own shortcomings" (Showalter 101). Lily was a characterization of Fannie Fern's fashionable invalid. She ate little, spent her time and money frivolously, and gradually wasted away, yet, she was what society and her mother made of her. Lily embodied the nineteenth century image of a woman delicate by nature and unfit for the stresses of the working world, so in fiction, "Lily dies—the lady dies—so that [working] women may live and grow" (101), or in the words of Elizabeth Ammons, "In the arms of the ornamental, leisure-class Lily lies the working-class infant female, whose vitality succors the dying woman. In that union of the leisure and working

classes lies a new hope—the New Woman" (qtd. in Showalter 101). Lily's slow agonizing awakening and subsequent downfall signified the painful discourse of experience that middle-class women endured in the nineteenth century. Their awakening to the need for change followed the same slow painful process as Lily's, and sadly, society's acceptance of health reform for women followed the same slow course.

Notes

[1] Of the many Greek and Medieval philosophers I could have selected, I chose Plato, Aristotle and Hippocrates because they are still studied today as major thinkers whose philosophies shaped western metaphysical thought. Furthermore, their treatment here is not intended to be an in depth critique of their works but basis for pejorative thoughts on women that lasted for centuries.

[2] This text disappeared for centuries but was rediscovered in 1554 and translated from Ionic Greek dialect. The original dates of Aretaeus's life and death as well as the original date of publication are unknown.

[3] See "The Nature of Woman," written by Claude Thomasset, translated by Arthur Goldhammer in *A History of Women: Silences of the Middle Ages,* Ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 1992. 43-69.

[4] See "Behind the Fig Leaf," in *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (1977) by John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, 89-138. In addition to primary articles in nineteenth century periodicals regarding women's health issues, I rely on Haller & Haller's comprehensive study, and "The Sexual Politics of Sickness" in *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Expert's Advice to Women* by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, first published in 1978 and reissued in 2005. Haller & Haller offer a much deeper examination using medical texts, journals, and conference proceedings to discuss sexuality in the nineteenth century. Although Ehrenreich and English also rely on some of these same sources, their study is more of a cultural one. Both texts remain definitive sources on women's sexuality in the nineteenth century.

[5] "Beginning of the Nineteenth Century to 1925," is a pictorial history of corsets and crinolines in the nineteenth century. This chapter also includes "Aphorisms upon Tight Lacing" as they appeared in *Punch*, thus establishing a growing concern for the adverse effects of tight lacing. These aphorisms appear as they were reprinted in Evelyn Waugh's *Corsets and Crinolines*, a Theater Arts Book.

[6] In Sauveur Bourvier's *Etudes historiques et medicales sur l'usage des corsets (1953),* the author contends that women began to shape their forms "as soon as men were sufficiently elevated above the beast to admire [them]" (qtd. in Haller & Haller 149). Haller & Haller's research reveals that corsets were used by the early Greeks and Romans, then disappeared during the Dark Ages and reappeared again in the sixteenth century. They don't offer an explanation as to why they disappeared. Their return in the age of Catherine de Medici and Queen Elizabeth I "inaugurated the era of the small waist and the earliest known medical warning published in 1602 by Felix Plater" (149).

[7] This letter from an English tradesman indicates that by 1828 tight lacing was spreading to the middle-class reprinted in *The History of Underclothes* by C. Willet and Phillis Cunnington:

> My daughters are living instances of the baleful consequences of the dreadful fashion of squeezing the waist until the body resembles that of an ant. Their stays are bound with iron in the holes through which the laces are drawn so as

> to bear the tremendous tugging which is intended to reduce so important a part of the human frame to a third of its natural proportion. They are unable to stand, sit or walk, as women used to do. To expect one of them to stoop would be absurd. My daughter, Margaret, made the experiment the other day; her stays gave way with a tremendous explosion and down she fell upon the ground, and I thought she had snapped in two. My daughters are always complaining of pains in the stomach. (132)

[8] Sander L. Gilman's article "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985, pp. 204-42) provides an in depth discussion on the depiction of Black women in art and literature.

[9] See *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth Century American Women Editors*, by Patricia Okker, 50-1.

[10] Chlorosis refers to anemia caused by an iron deficiency.

[11] I discuss the characterizations of post-partum depression and the S. Weir Mitchell cure's impact on both Rebecca Harding Davis and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the next section, "Images of Illness in Nineteenth Century American Woman's Literature."

[12] A molar pregnancy occurs when tissues that normally become a fetus instead become an abnormal growth in a woman's uterus. Even though it isn't an embryo, it triggers the same symptoms as pregnancy. Women over the age of thirty-five and those with a vitamin A (carotene) deficiency are more susceptible.

[13] See Ehrenreich's & English's, "Sexual Politics of Sickness," 153-4, and "The Hysterical Woman," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 207-8.

[14] Ehrenreich & English 153-4.

[15] Lock Moregson's comment here exemplifies what Ehrenreich & English suggest was a woman's way of escaping their domestic and wifely duties; "For the woman to whom sex really was repugnant, and yet a 'duty,' or for any other woman who wanted to avoid pregnancy, sickness was a way out" (150).

[16] Phelps's reference to Aristotle, in particular, provides evidence that study of his philosophies were common among educated men and women. Avis would have to have known of Aristotle's philosophies to understand her father's reference.

[17] See Jean Pfaelzer's *Parlor Radical: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Origins of American Social Realism*, 11.

CHAPTER 5

"BORN THIS WAY": CROSS-DRESSING WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

As I have argued in previous chapters, for lower-middle- and middle-class American women in the nineteenth century, recognition of selfhood beyond the domestic space was the end product of self-fashioning in which they became the agents of their own transformation. Before the process of their self-fashioning began, they had to come to the realization that submission to a patriarchal culture of containment limited their development as human beings by denying them their agency and their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as individuals. When women became the agents of their own self-fashioning through cross-dressing for example, they subverted the patriarchal containment that enchained them, but they risked the very real threat of alienation and ridicule if discovered.

Cross-dressing women's use of fashion in nineteenth-century America created new ideas of gender and threatened established social categories, or at the very least the secondary characteristics of gender—pants equal man and skirts equal woman. Their experiences provided insights into the complexities of cultural constructions of gender. For example, if society was to accept cross-dressing women openly it meant that their primary assumptions about the natural order of things would need to be re-conceptualized. Cross-dressing women changed the rules to suit their circumstances which inadvertently threatened an established social order that relied on the clarity of roles for men and women. The motivations behind each woman's choice to cross-dress for any length of time exceeded the mere change in clothing that enabled them to pass as

men. They provided important clues as to the extent of their discontent with the limitations and restrictions placed on their gender simply because they were born women.

In a discussion on the ways in which clothing and/or fashion helped shape identity and fulfill role expectations for women, we must not overlook the extent to which acting was a component of social interaction. Acting a social role for nineteenth century women involved an awareness of self in the enactment of the role and an awareness of society's reception based on preconceived expectations and perceptions that led to a mutual construction of identity. A cross-dressing woman relied on those assumptions to pass successfully.

Rigid ideas about gender roles and fashion were deeply entrenched in the social consciousness of nineteenth-century America, yet there *were* tropes of cross-dressing women in popular fiction like *Female Quixotism* (1802),[1] *Fanny Campbell, Or The Female Pirate Captain: A Tale of the Revolution!* (1852),[2] *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1864)[3], and on the theatrical stage. Still, most people did not anticipate or suspect men as being crossed-dressed women. A cross-dressing woman in the nineteenth century adopted male attire with purpose and society usually accepted her as a man without question because they recognized the gendered uniform. Even though fashion was used deceptively in this instance, it was still used to alter identity through perception and performance—an identity that signified acceptance and belonging to a larger group.

A cross-dressing woman's male attire could be viewed not only as a prop in her performance but also as a means for negotiating a masculine identity in a social context, or as Charlotte Perkins Gilman suggested, "social tissue" (3). Cross-dressing women, like their domestic sisters, became cultural artifacts, and as cultural artifacts, their bodies

were read as transgendered texts. Women who cross dressed and passed accepted the prevailing ideologies about gender with the understanding that as "men" they could overcome the boundaries that contained their circumscribed roles.[4]

Cross-dressing women transgressed gender for different reasons, and "[a]lthough the basic definition of cross-dressing is wearing the clothing of a group one doesn't belong to, the common understanding of cross-dressing conflates it with 'passing'" (Fischer 245). Passing, in this sense, means total immersion in a transgendered affect through the use of male attire and through the adoption of masculine behavior. To successfully pass, a woman had to symbolically "castrate"[5] her femininity by cutting her hair and binding her breasts. Then with a simple change of clothes and a quick study of mannerisms, she changed her identity. To maintain their identities as men, women had to keep their own counsel as much as possible to avoid detection. Furthermore, by transgressing their gender, cross-dressing women bypassed the restrictions of their sex to acquire power through their actions and accomplishments rather than their beauty. In nineteenth century American woman's literature, there are two types of cross-dressing women: women who passed temporarily for survival but eventually returned to their "natural" state, and women who passed through symbolic castration of their femininity for life.[6]

Capitola Black exemplifies the first category of a cross-dressed woman in fiction—one that passed for a time and later returned to her biological gender. When readers first encounter E.D.E.N. Southworth's protagonist in *The Hidden Hand: Or, Capitola The Madcap* (1859), the narrator described Capitola (Cap) as "a very ragged lad, some thirteen years of age" (33). Her benefactor, Major Warfield of Virginia (Old

Hurricane), described Cap as the "crown-prince and heir-apparent to the 'king of shreds and patches'" (33). Within a day of meeting Old Hurricane as a ragged boy, Capitola was arrested for appearing in public wearing boys' clothes. She was asked by the magistrate what "tempted" her to don boy's clothing knowing that if caught, she would be sent to the "work house." Capitola replied, "*want*, sir—and *danger*" (41). Left alone in the city by her guardian Granny Grewell, Capitola survived a few months on the money she was given and boarded with her neighbors, the Simmons. The security of her temporary home was contingent upon Mr. Simmons' ability to sustain employment to support his family. During this time, he lost his job in the city and later found work in the West. So he moved his family, and an orphaned Capitola had to fend for herself while waiting for her Granny to return. Granny died before she could send for Capitola. On her deathbed, Granny called upon Old Hurricane to travel to the city to find Capitola and bring her back to Virginia.

In the meantime, to survive, Capitola appealed to Granny's old friends in the city for work at other boarding houses, but she was turned down. She told the magistrate that she "went around to all of the houses Granny knew, but they didn't want a girl. Some of the good-natured landlords said, if I was a *boy* now, they could keep me in oysters, but as I was a *girl*, they had no work for me" (45). Dressed as a girl, she tried to make money honestly by offering to carry travelers' bags, shine shoes, shovel coal, and other jobs that the boys of Rag Alley regularly performed, but she was rebuffed because of her gender. Her hunger and homelessness were just as acute as any other street orphan, boy or girl. She slept where she could but was constantly exposed to danger from "bad boys and bad men" (45).

Capitola had run out of resources and just when it appeared that the only thing left for her was beggary, starvation, or death, in desperation, she decided to trade her last dress and her long black tresses for a suit of boys clothing. To make the switch and pass, Capitola had to disguise her femininity by cutting off her long locks of black hair and act the role. From that moment on, Capitola had no shortage of work. She ate well and slept in peace, but she forgot to keep her hair trimmed, and when a strong wind blew her cap off, she was arrested. When asked if she regretted her actions, she replied that her only regret was that she didn't think of making the switch sooner (47).

Consistent with the sentimental plots of many antebellum novels written by women, Capitola was rescued by Old Hurricane and taken to his country estate where he established his young ward in middle-class domesticity. Old Hurricane hoped to raise her as a young lady. He outfitted her wardrobe in the fashionable dress representative of a true woman. But, he was unable to tame Capitola's adventurous spirit, and she remained willful, outspoken, and fearless:

> I won't be treated with both kicks and half-pennies by the
> same person—and so I tell you. I'm not a cur to be fed with
> roast beef and beaten with a stick! Nor, nor, nor a Turk's
> slave to be caressed and oppressed as far as her master likes!—
> Such abuse as you heaped upon me, I never heard—no, not even
> Rag Alley . . . I'll go back to Rag Alley, for a very little more!
> Freedom and peace are even sweeter than wealth and honors! (123)

As a cross-dresser, Capitola maintained attributes of both genders. She understood herself as a woman of feeling, yet she was not overly sentimental or emotional—for her,

domesticity was a ruse of class representation and she preferred life as a working girl/boy. She found the boredom of country life and domesticity stifling, and she longed for a useful occupation and the independence she enjoyed in Rag Alley.

Capitola's cross-dressing and her retention of the masculine behavior she acquired when passing centered her within gendered conflicts in the narrative. Her exploits throughout the novel placed her in constant opposition with her male counterparts, whom she believed to be inept buffoons. She proved this later when she caught the elusive criminal Black Donald when the squire and the magistrate couldn't. She enjoyed the privileges of being a young woman but not at the expense of her "boyish" independence—she was clearly aware of the male and female attributes she possessed. As an orphan, her awareness of survival skills increased her ability to control her environment both in the city and in the country, and that same awareness gave her a sense of place, a home within herself, if you will, which was not necessarily gender based. So at home was Capitola with her transgendered philosophy that she continued to act as a boy/man despite her feminine apparel.

Craven Le Noir, her cousin and nemesis, knew that Capitola, as the only heir to his uncle's estate, could claim the fortune that he and his father had stolen from her. Rather than risk losing his status and wealth, he devised a plan to trick her into marrying him. Capitola challenged Le Noir to a duel for unjustly defaming her after she refused his proposal. When no one else would defend her honor, Capitola called Le Noir out. Then, she snuck into the armory in Major Warfield's bedroom and stole his pistols. She loaded them, prayed for guidance, and waited until dawn to meet Le Noir. When she met him on the road to the village, Capitola threw a pistol at him and told him to defend

himself. He refused to take her seriously, and she fired six times at his head. Wounded, Le Noir fell to the ground, but his boot was caught in the horse's stirrup. When Capitola realized this, "she tempered justice with mercy; threw down her spent pistol; dismounted from her horse; went up to the fallen man; disengaged his foot from the stirrup" (371), and with the help of her groom, moved the body from the middle of the road to safety. Her actions here provide further evidence of her bifurcated consciousness; she acted like a man but with the compassion of a woman.

Immediately after she shot Le Noir and saw to his safety, she jumped back on her horse and rode into Tip Top. She approached the "ladies entrance" of the hotel and sent for the proprietor. Capitola said, "I have just been shooting Craven Le Noir for slandering me; he lies by the roadside at the entrance of the village; you had better send someone to pick him up" (371). She then crossed the street and entered the magistrate's office and announced that she had come to give herself up "for the shooting of a dastard, who slandered, insulted, and refused to give [her] satisfaction" (372). The magistrate, dismayed, asked her how she could "answer for such a dreadful deed," and Capitola replied "Oh, as to the dreadfulness of the deed, that depends on circumstance, and I can answer for it very well. He made addresses to me; I refused him. He slandered me; I challenged him. He insulted me; I shot him" (372).

Le Noir, thinking that his death was imminent, called for the squire and a minister to take his dying confession. After he confessed to everything Capitola accused him of, they prepared to take her to jail. She shouted, "Stop . . . Be always sure you're *right*—*then* go ahead! Is not any one here cool enough to reflect that if I had fired six bullets at that man's forehead, and everyone had struck, I should have blown his head to the sky?—

will not somebody at once wash his face and see how deep the wounds are?" (374). When they did, they realized that Capitola had loaded the pistols with "poor powder and dried peas" (375). She had killed no one, and therefore couldn't be held on charges. Having confessed to all of his dastardly deeds against Capitola to those in attendance, she then forgave him saying that she was happy that he told the truth and that she hoped that he would live long enough to truly repent. She had publicly "whipped" Le Noir as soundly as any man would have thrashed him.

Throughout these events, the magistrate looked at Capitola as though she were "an individual of the animal kingdom whom neither Buffron[7] nor any other natural philosopher had ever classified, and who, as a creature of unknown habits, might sometimes be dangerous" (376). Capitola, the Madcap, was indeed dangerous because she upended all of the social expectations of her biological gender. Her transgressive behavior created uneasiness among the men in Tip Top because they didn't recognize her actions as those of a proper young lady, evidenced by Major Warfield's outburst when learning of her latest adventure: "Demme, you New York newsboy, will you ever be a woman?" (376). The answer to his question was yes—eventually.

Capitola did not develop self-restraint. Like other antebellum heroines, she married a rising middle-class man, her childhood friend Herbert Greyson, and with him inherited her deceased father's fortune. At the end of the novel, the narrator assured readers that Capitola's outspoken independence was not dampened and that "Cap sometimes [gave] her 'dear, darling, sweet Herbert,' the benefit of the sharp edge of her tongue" (485). Nevertheless, the village of Tip Top was somewhat relieved because her

actions as a married woman were now subject to the governance of her husband. Her actions and adventures became his problem.

As a cross-dresser, Capitola passed for a time out of necessity while living as an orphan on the streets of New York City, but once she was awarded by the courts to Major Warfield, she returned, albeit reluctantly, to a more traditional gendered role. Yet, through her outspokenness even as a married woman, Capitola retained a little of the independence she enjoyed while passing as a boy. Although E.D.E.N. Southworth's sensational representation of a cross-dressing woman engaged readers affectively, her portrayal of the circumstances that led Capitola to pass were actually consistent with women who wrote of their real life experiences while passing. Like other novels in this study, *Fettered for Life* included descriptions of fashions as social uniforms, but this time the social uniform was enlarged to include a cross-dressing woman who passed successfully.

Women crossed and crossed back for different reasons. Some crossed because they found it easier to assert their independence as men than join the endless battle for suffrage, and others simply enjoyed the physical freedom of male attire. Still others crossed out of economic necessity or to protect themselves against "bad boys and bad men," and to avoid persecution from abusive fathers and husbands (Fischer 253). Economic necessity and escape from a corrupt politician motivated Lillie Devereux Blake's character, Frank Heywood, to cross and pass as man. Blake's novel *Fettered for Life or Lord and Master, A Story of To-day* (1874) provides readers with another example of a woman who transgressed her gender to pass as a man, but this time, the character crossed and passed for life through symbolic castration. In this sense, for the time that

she passed, she became asexual—she couldn't share her life with a man or a woman in the biblical sense nor could she bear or raise children; therefore, her castration, although symbolic, was a significant sacrifice because she had to secret the emotions and desires she may have harbored as a woman.

Beginning with the title, *Fettered For Life*, Blake established the tone of her novel and created a frame through which she chronicled a long list of suffrage issues. She played on readers understanding of the emotions connected to the word "fettered"—a familiar word still associated with the bonds of slavery even in post Civil War society. Fettered followed by *Lord and Master* further engaged readers' emotions. Blake again alluded to slavery, but by adding *A Story of To-day* she enlarged their awareness to suffrage issues suggesting that women subjected to the tyranny of men was another form of slavery, one that fettered them for life. Fettered in the way in which Blake used the word emerges thematically in the novel with her characterization of a cross-dressing woman and the freedom she had to collect the stories of women's suffering. Blake juxtaposed Heywood's successful transgression in contrast with her protagonist, Laura Stanley, to draw attention to the frustrations and abuse that she endures because of her gender, which was why she didn't identify him as a cross-dressing women until the end of the novel. Like Capitola, both Heywood and Laura were embroiled in gender conflict throughout the novel.

As in *The Hidden Hand*, Blake introduced her protagonist, Laura Stanley, in police court. Laura Stanley, a recent college graduate, ran away from her abusive father to find work in New York City. On her way there, the train she was traveling in was delayed because of an accident on the tracks. Laura arrived too late in the evening to find

a decent boarding house. She was refused lodging at two different hotels because she was a woman and she was alone. Innocently, she appealed to a policeman for protection. Not knowing what to do with her, he took her to the police court to await a decision by Judge Swinton, a corrupt politician. In collusion with one of his ward bosses, Bludgett, he preys on unsuspecting, innocent, young women newly arrived in the city. Swinton releases "the outcasts and drunkards," but retains the "innocent girl" (12) for closer inspection. Ironically, Laura had not disguised her appearance, and she was in far greater danger than Capitola was.

Frank Heywood was a reporter from the *Trumpeter*, a newspaper that the judge, a politician, recognized as one of the largest and most influential in the city. Taking advantage of his role as a newsman, he watched the court proceedings closely. The narrator described Heywood here as a

> good-looking young man, apparently about twenty-five, with brown hair and chestnut mustache, shading a mouth that, but for this, would have been effeminate; dark earnest eyes, with a strange expression lurking in their depths, an indefinable something hard to interpret, yet felt by all who knew him; a look as of perpetual unrest, of yearning, almost of despair. (10)

Blake described Heywood's refined, manly, yet somewhat effeminate nature consistently throughout the novel. Readers were never given his true name as a woman. The intention here was to reinforce the fact that to cross and pass for life, a woman had to

forsake her past which represented a symbolic death of her former self through castration of her female identity. So as Frank Heywood, he was able to intercede on Laura's behalf.

As the exchange became heated between Laura and Swinton, when she demanded to be released, Heywood moved closer auspiciously to cover the story. The judge immediately changed his tone. Heywood offered his assistance and asked Laura if she had any friends in the city conveying as he did so his "friendly interest in asking." She responded that she "could find her friends, if [she] was allowed to seek them" (11). To resolve her immediate predicament, Laura reluctantly agreed to follow the older Bludgett to his home for temporary lodging rather than risk the impropriety of accepting the "young man's" assistance. Heywood's manner in the courtroom was so convincing that Laura was afraid to risk her reputation by leaving unchaperoned with a young, attractive man. Furthermore, his very presence influenced the proceedings of the court. Blake's assertion here in the narrative was that a man, even a cross-dressing woman in men's clothing, held power and sway over women.

Laura's second encounter with Heywood occurred when he came to remove her from the Bludgett home before Swinton could orchestrate his seduction. Conducting himself as a mannered gentleman, he said "Miss Stanley, this is no time to wait for useless ceremonies, I come to you as a sincere friend, to entreat you to leave this house at once. I know what sort of place it is and I assure you that you are not safe here" (22). His suspicions were confirmed by Bludgett's wife, and Laura gathered her things and prepared to leave without further explanation—she placed her trust and her life in his hands.

As they were leaving, Bludgett arrived home, and he grabbed Laura's shoulder to detain her. The narrator explained to readers that "her strength would probably have been of little avail against his superior power, but the young reporter who had stood by, with his face very pale and his lips pressed tightly together, now drew back and with wonderful vigor and scientific dexterity, planted a quick blow directly under the big man's right ear" (24). The blow was so strategic that it knocked Bludgett off balance long enough to give them time to flee. Laura would have demanded Bludgett release her, but she would not have struck him, whereas Heywood used a combination of dexterity and scientific knowledge to maximize his advantage given his slight physical stature. Again, Blake intimates that brute strength alone does not always give a man the advantage; Heywood looked for an opening and acted on instinct—a man's instinct.

Heywood again came to Laura's aid after she refused Judge Swinton's proposal of marriage and the judge retaliated by hiring thugs to drug and kidnap her. During the second rescue, Heywood enlisted the aid of a burly Irish cabbie to create a distraction so that he could enter Laura's coach unnoticed. When they arrived at a remote house, the scene where the seduction would have taken place, Swinton opened the door to find Heywood sitting next to Laura just as she was regaining consciousness. Heywood's successful, nonviolent intervention saved Laura from a disastrous fate. Again, Blake reinforced the notion that it doesn't take brute strength to outwit a man. Like Capitola, Heywood confronted his foe fearlessly and with great skill. In a traditional narrative, Heywood's chivalrous actions would have been discussed as the meritorious behavior of a good man, and he would have won the heart of the girl.

Near the end of the novel, Laura returned to the city after an extended visit with her family in the country and unexpectedly encountered Heywood on the train. Delayed by yet another accident, Laura joined Heywood in the car provided by the newspaper. Just as she was about the return to her seat when night fell, Heywood asked, "Have you never guessed my secret? [Y]ou have told me more than once that I was like a brother to you, if you had said sister, it would have been nearer the truth" (364). The impact of his question and statement settled in and Laura cried, "You are a woman! [T]hat is glorious!" (364). Heywood began to tell Laura *her* story.

Born in the south, Heywood was an only child whose mother died in childbirth. Her father devoted himself to her education. As a child, she "was less restrained by conventionalities than most girls," and accompanied her father on "his rides, his walks, and even in the athletic sports of which he was unusually fond," and she "grew up remarkably strong and vigorous" (365). Heywood's father went off to fight in the Civil War and was killed. By the end of the war, she "at twenty, [was] alone in the world, with no protector and no home!" (365). With the small sum of money that she raised from the sale of their home and furniture, she traveled to New York "full of a romantic belief in [her] possibilities of work" (366). Heywood's narrative was that of another friendless orphan's journey to the city.

Like Laura, Heywood had no friends and was entirely unprotected. Her beauty was not only a deterrent in finding work but placed her in Swinton's sights as well. She explained how when searching for work she was insulted and refused unless she "would comply with the disgraceful propositions of [her] employers" and she suffered the same way many young women did from "poverty, temptation, [and] cruelty" (366).

Furthermore, the judge pursued her too so relentlessly that she was afraid to leave her room.

Driven to desperation, like Capitola, she traded the last of her belongings for a suit of boys clothing. The result, she told Laura, was "delightful" her limbs and actions were freed, and she could walk about town "untrammeled," and "unquestioned." When she asked for work, she was not rebuffed. So, what began for Heywood as a short term plan to cross-dress evolved into a career commitment to pass. As she rose through the ranks at the *Trumpet*, Heywood developed a career plan—to become an editor of a large newspaper and to use that platform to espouse her own opinions on reform. To achieve this goal, she had to forsake her femininity and any expression of her gender for the duration of her life. The only way she could endure this sacrifice was to share *her*-story with a few intimate friends, Laura and Mrs. D'Arcy (Dr. D'Arcy).

To create a believable scenario for a cross-dressing woman to pass successfully, Blake had to create a "protector" of secrets like a female doctor bound by rules of confidentiality—someone whose own experiences as a woman in a male dominated profession would enable her to empathize with Heywood. With Laura and Mrs. D'Arcy, Heywood created a safe home, albeit symbolically, whose inhabitants bore witness to *her*-story, and only then was the sacrifice of her femininity made bearable. Unlike the outspoken Capitola who retained her transgendered affect when she crossed back to wearing feminine dress, Heywood had to suppress her feminine desires for love, marriage, and children to maintain a mannish affect. In Laura and Heywood, Blake created characters who understood the impact of commodification on individual subjectivity. Like Capitola, Heywood's value as a woman alone in the city made her

vulnerable, but dressed as a middle-class man and with hard work, she had access to liberty, fame, financial security, and she could vote!

Fettered for Life is unique in the canon of woman's literature because Blake covered most of the *her*-stories of lower-middle- and middle-class women, and in doing so she cast an unfavorable light on male dominated institutions like that of the workplace, marriage, and the judicial system. The darker theme of her novel did not go unnoticed by critics. On May 1, 1874, *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* published a critique of *Fettered for Life*. The critic accused Blake of endeavoring "to glorify woman at the expense of man, and to show that the weakness and meanness of the latter constitute the only barrier to the legitimate developments of the former" in a discussion of the "rights, or rather the wrongs of woman" in a series of "scenes and incidents of palpably indelicate character, nearly all of her female personages being victims of man's lust or violence." The critique deemed the novel an exaggeration of "men as unnaturally bad and women as unnaturally good," and therefore not a "faithful or instructive picture of life," and "utterly lacking in the warmth and light of human kindness." Interestingly, this article made no mention of a cross-dressed woman passing as a man, and apparently, human kindness, for this critic, didn't include women's benevolence and kindness to and for other women, like those represented in the actions of Heywood, Laura, and Mrs. D'Arcy.

Several days later, on May 6, 1874, another review on the novel appeared in the *Home Journal*, and unlike the review in *The Literary World*, this review spoke to the novels authenticity, "While the story makes several startling statements, and draws some very dark pictures of men, we believe none of them are stronger than the truth. The great

merit of this story is its startling reality, its truthfulness to every day life," and the novel was "a powerful book in its motive and [was] too true to be easily upset" (qtd. in "Afterword" 388). The polarity between these two reviews provides evidence that the struggle for individuality and freedom for women was ongoing and still publicly debated.

The message in woman's literature was primarily intended for other women, and women author's developed a language in their narratives expressed as "woman speak"—the collective of their shared experiences which engage women affectively through empathy, sympathy, and a general understanding of the conditions in which their fictional heroines found themselves. These experiences connected nineteenth-century women in such a way that it transformed their collective silence into language and action, and in *Fettered for Life* those stories were collected and disseminated through a network of sympathetic women and a cross-dressed reporter in such a way that it raised readers' consciousness concerning the rights and wrongs of women. Blake gave readers the background and foreground for individual characters whose experiences varied from working "girls" to working class women, from fashionable ladies to professional women, from happily married women to verbally abused and battered women. So, what began in novels in the late eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century as a private, internal language of understanding became part of the public rhetoric of women's experience expressed in the growing solidarity of women's culture in *Fettered for Life*.

The close examination and historical analysis of the characterizations of women in American woman's literature in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in this study revealed the ways in which women viewed the possibility, or impossibility, of free choice and collective agency. Woman's literature contributed to the shaping of women's

culture by providing opportunities for women to interact. They interacted with the text, privately, when reading it for the first time. They interacted with other women to exchange copies of various texts, and they interacted with other women when they discussed what they were reading in parlor and salon gatherings. Through this process of exchange, a woman reader discovered selfhood and perhaps comfort in the recognition of a self-made community of women—a safe community in which she could discuss varying themes and explore the depths of their meaning with other women.

Women authors of the period not only tried to define what it meant to be an American but also what it meant to be an American woman. Their works carried into the nineteenth century and early twentieth century questions of nationalism and reform; in addition, questions on spirituality, civic engagement, marriage, and motherhood were frequent themes, which varied according to the regional identity, class, and the socio-economic status of the author. Like most established literature, woman's literature employed many literary conventions to express a wide spectrum of cultural and humanistic themes not necessarily unique to women, but part of their experience, nevertheless. Central to this discussion was an examination of the ways in which women readers internalized the actions and characterizations of women in fashioning their identities through resistance or acceptance of new ideals thus embodying the text with cultural signification.

As cultural texts, the novels and short stories in this study allowed for the interplay of representations in the discourse of imitation and action, of background and foreground, of a woman's body as a human and of a woman's body as a text. In the

process of thick description which foregrounds the act within a web of authorial intentions, cultural meaning was conveyed through the characters' actions. Women's culture, for example, as it evolved over the nineteenth century could no longer be defined as a single hegemonic body but a suspension of webs of signification open to interpretation by the participants and spectators. Women, then, became clothed in webs of signification represented through their adoption of social uniforms which situated them culturally within different classifications in the broader context of womanhood. This broader context of womanhood was inclusive of subgroups from helpmeets to suffragettes, from angels in the house to the cross-dressing women, from republican mothers to new women. The common denominator within all of these binaries was an understanding of individual subjectivity expressed publicly through fashion.

Notes

[1] Harriot Stanley dressed in her father's old military uniform to solicit Dorcasina Sheldon's affections to save her from yet another of her romantic follies. Tabitha Tenney's depiction of Harriot as a cross-dresser was intended as a farce and fooled no one else in the novel except Dorcasina.

[2] Fanny Campbell, another example of a cross-dressed trope, masqueraded as a male pirate to save her kidnapped lover.

[3] Some of the most motivated cross-dressing women in nineteenth century America were those who fought in the Civil War, like Sarah Emma Edmonds (a.k.a. Pvt. Franklin Thompson). She passed for a time and eventually returned to her biological gender when compelled to seek medical treatment for malaria. While recovering from malaria, Edmonds wrote about her experiences as a Union soldier in her bestselling fictional memoir, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* (1864). Among the many examples of cross-dressing and passing that she included in the narrative, she was careful to again employ the use of disguise—this time in fiction. Throughout the narrative, she never revealed the fact that she was Private Franklin Thompson or that the adventures she recounted were really her life experiences. Her novel recounts her passing to pursue spying missions behind the Confederate lines as well as passing as an orderly in Union uniform during the battle of Fredericksburg (Blanton & Cook 157).

[4] See "Cross-Dressing?" in Gayle V. Fischer's *Pantaloons and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States*, 147-57.

[5] I use the term symbolic castration here because if a cross-dressing woman wanted to return to her female identity, all she had to do was change her clothes and let her hair grow.

[6] There is a third type of cross-dressing woman in the nineteenth century, a woman who refused to hide her biological sex to lie and dress as a man, like Dr. Mary E. Walker, dress reformer, suffragette, poet, and physician. Because society couldn't recognize women like Walker as belonging to either sex, they became social deviants—the feared others. Society couldn't read her, and they couldn't assess her motivation, her purpose, or her role. Why would a woman choose this path? Perhaps it was a symbolic demand for freedom from the fashions that marked women as inferior and limited their choices in life—an indication that women wanted lasting change and a means to transgress gender limitations. In this sense, clothing as James A. Brussel suggests, was powerful enough "to create a new gender because if a woman wore culturally defined male clothing but didn't try to pass as a man, she forfeited the right to be treated like a lady, yet, she was not a man" (Fischer 259).

[7] Joanne Dobson includes the following as a note in the text: "Georges Louis Leclerc, Compte de Buffon (1707-88), was a well-known French writer and naturalist" (495).

Works Cited

Abelson, Elaine S. *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*. New York: Oxford, 1989.

Alcott, Louisa May. "Behind a Mask." 1866. *Alternative Alcott*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986.

Baker, Charles D. "Who Charlotte Temple Was." *New York Times*. (June 22, 1905): 8.

Barthes, Roland. *The Fashion System*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1983.

—. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Noonday, 1992.

Baym, Nina. *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984.

—. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*. 1978. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1993.

Benton, John F. "Trota and Trotula." *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*. New York: Scribner, 1989. 213-14.

Blake, Lillie Devereux. *Fettered for Life: Or Lord and Master, A Story of Today*. 1874. Ed. Grace Farrell. New York: Feminist P, 1996.

Blanton, Deanne and Lauren M. Cook. *The Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*. New York: Vintage, 2002.

Brown, Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkley: U of Cal P, 1990.

Brown, Kathleen M. "'Good Wives' and 'Nasty Wenches': Gender and Social Order in a Colonial Settlement." *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs:*

Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996. 75-106.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. 1990. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Butler, J. M. "The Nest at Home." Engraved Plate. *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine.* Feb. 1850.

Capper, Charles. *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Live*. Vol. II. New York: Oxford UP, 2007.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening and Other Stories*. 1899. Ed. Nancy A. Walker. New York: Bedford, 1993.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* New York: Routledge, 1991.

Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1977.

Coultrap-McQuin, Susan. *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1990.

Cummins, Maria Susanna. *The Lamplighter.* 1854. Ed. Nina Baym. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988.

Cunningham, Patricia A. *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920*. Ohio: Kent State UP, 2003.

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues of Men and Angels: Women's Heads in Early Christianity." *Off with Her Head: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz & Wendy Doniger, Eds. Berkeley: U of Cal P, 1995. 131-64.

Davidson, Cathy N. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.

Davis, Rebecca. *Margret Howth: A Story of Today*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Gregg, 1970.

—. "Bits of Gossip." 1904. *Rebecca Harding Davis: Writing Cultural Autobiography*. Janice Milner Lasseter & Sharon M. Harris, eds. Nashville: Vanderbuilt UP, 2001.

—."In the Market." 1868. *Rebecca Harding Davis Reader*. Ed. Jean Pfaelzer. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1995.

—. "The Wife's Story." *Rebecca Harding Davis* Reader. Ed. Jean Phaelzer. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P. 112-38.

Ecob, Helen Gilbert. *The Well-Dressed Woman: A Study in Practical Application to Dress*. New York: Fowler & Wells, 1873.

Ehrenreich, Barbara & Dierdre English. "The Sexual Politics of Sickness." *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts' Advice to Women*. New York: Anchor, 2005. 111-54.

The Extant Work of Arataeus. Trans. Francis Adams. London: Sydenham Society, 1865. 289.

Farrell, Grace. "Afterword." Fettered for Life: Or Lord and Master, A Story of Today. 1874. Ed. Grace Farrell. New York: Feminist P, 1996. 381-429.

Fern, Fannie (Sarah Willis Parton). "Fashionable Invalidism." *Ruth Hall and Other* Writings. Ed. Joyce W. Warren. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990. 341-2.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Albion's Seed*: *Four British Folkways in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.

Fischer, Gayle V. "A Matter of Wardrobe?: Mary Edwards Walker, a Nineteenth

Century American Cross-Dresser." *Fashion Theory* 2: 3, 245-68.

—. *Pantaloons & Power: Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States.* Kent: Kent State UP, 2001.

Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. 1973. New York: Basic, 2000. 3-32.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing*. 1915. Ed. Michael A. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan. Westport: Greenwood, 2002.

"Gossip about Gloves." *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine (1854-1882)* 1 Sep. 1863: 253.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. 1980. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.

Greene, Anna Katharine. *That Affair Next Door*. 1897. Ed. Catherine Ross Nickerson. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

Hale, Sarah Josepha. *Manners, Happy Homes, and Good Society All the Year Round.* Boston: Lee & Shephard, 1889.

Harris, Susan K. *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Hawthorne, Julian. "Novelistic Habits and *The Morgesons*." *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. (Dec. 1889): 868.

Herrick, O. E., M.D. "Molar Pregnancy—An Anomalous Case." *Medical and Surgical Reporter (1858-1898)* 13 Sep. 1879:

Hippocrates. *The Diseases of Women: Book One*. Translation. Kathleen Whitely. Dissertation. January 2003.

Hunt, Alan. *Governance of the Consuming Passions: a History of Sumptuary Law*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996.

Kaiser, Susan B. *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*. 2nd Edition. New York: Fairchild, 1998.

Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006.

Kerber, Linda K. "History Can Do It No Justice: Women and the Interpretation of the American Revolution." Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1989.

—. *Women of the Republic*: *Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: U of N. Carolina P, 1980.

Kilcup, Karen L. "Introduction." *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997. xxxviii-xlx.

Kirkland, Caroline. *The Evening Book and Fireside Talk on Morals and Manners with Sketches of Western Life*. New York: Scribner, 1852.

Kunzle, David. *Fashion and Fetishism: Corsets, Tight-Lacing & Other Forms of Body Sculpture.* Gloucestershire, UK: Sutton, 2004.

"The Influence of Woman." *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette (July18,1827): 55.*

Lang, Amy Schrager. *The Syntax of Class: Writing Inequality in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003.

Lewis, Dio, M.D. "The Health of American Women." *The North American Review.* Dec. 1882: 503.

"Madison Debates, August 20, 1787." *Avalon Project.* Yale University. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/18th.asp.

Matthews, Jean V. *The Rise of the New Woman: The Woman's Movement in America, 1875-1930.* Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003.

Merish, Lori. *Sentimental Materialism*: *Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature.* Durham: Duke UP, 2000.

"Miss Catharine Maria Sedgwick." Obituary. *New York Times.* (Aug. 1, 1867): 4.

"The Morgesons." *Peterson's Magazine*. (Sept. 1862): 231.

Mowatt, Anna Cora. *Fashion.* 1845. *Plays by American Women: The Early Years*. Ed. Judith E. Barlow. New York: Avon, 1981. 1-72.

Murray, Judith Sargent. *The Story of Margaretta*. 1790. *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray.* Ed. Sharon M. Harris. New York: Oxford, 1995. 155-272.

—. "On the Equality of the Sexes." 1790. Ibid. 3-14.

—. "Desultory Thoughts upon the Utility of Encouraging a Degree of Self-Complacency, Especially in Female Bosoms." 1784. Ibid. 44-8.

Neal, Mrs. Joseph C. "The Nest at Home." *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine.* Feb. 1850: 89.

"A New-England Tale." *Christian Register*. (Jul. 7, 1822): 170.

Norton, Mary Beth. *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1996.

"Novels and Tales." *Outlook.* (Jun. 3, 1899): Vol. 62, No. 5, 313.

Okker, Patricia. *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.

Pfaelzer, Jean. *Parlor Radical: Rebecca Harding Davis and the Origins of American Social Realism.* Pittsburgh: U of Pitt P, 1996.

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *The Story of Avis*. 1877. Ed. Carolyn Farley Kessler. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001.

—. *What to Wear?* New York: Osgood. 1873.

Plato. *The Timaeus*. Ed. R. D. Archer-Hind. Salem, NH: Ayer, 1988.

Rev. of *The Awakening. Congregationalist*. (Aug. 24, 1899): Vol. 84, No. 34, 256.

Rev. of *Fettered for Life: Or Lord and Master, A Story of Today*. *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature.* (May 1, 1874): Vol. 4, No. 12, 178.

Rev. of *Margret Howth: A Story of To-Day*. *The Continental Monthly: Devoted to Literature and National Policy*. (Apr. 1862): Vol. 1, No. 4, 467.

Rev. of *Margret Howth: A Story of To-Day*. *Peterson's Magazine*. (Apr. 1862): Vol.XLI, No. 4, 343.

Rev. of *The Story of Avis. The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading*. (Dec. 1877): Vol XIV, No. 6, 855.

Rowland, Debran. *The Boundaries of Her Body: The Troubling History of Women's Rights in America*. Naperville: Sphinx, 2004.

Rowson, Susanna. *Charlotte Temple*. 1791. Ed. Cathy N. Davidson. New York: Oxford, 1986.

Rush, Rebecca. *Kelroy*. 1812. Ed. Dana D. Nelson. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Sedgwick, Catherine Maria. *A New-England Tale: or Sketches of New-England Character and Manners.* 1822. Ed. Victoria Clements. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

Shapiro, Ann R. *Unlikely Heroines: Nineteenth Century American Women Writers and the Woman Question*. New York: Greenwood, 1987.

Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. 3rd Edition. Ed. C. T. Onions. Oxford: Clarendon, UK, 1973.

Showalter, Elaine. "American Questions." *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1991. 1-21.

Sidney, Sir Philip. "Ye Goat-herd Gods." 1590.

http://poetry.about.com/od/poems/l/blsidneysestina.htm

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in Nineteenth Century America." *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America.* New York: Oxford UP, 1985. 197-216.

Southworth, E.D.E.N. *The Hidden Hand*. 1859. Ed. Joanne Dobson. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988.

Steele, Valerie. *The Corset: A Cultural History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001.

—. *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power.* New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

Stoddard, Elizabeth Drew. "Before the Mirror." *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets: an Anthology.* Ed. Paula Bernat Bennett. Malden: Blackwell, 1998. 434.

—. *The Morgesons*. 1862. Eds. Lawrence Buell and Sandra A. Zagarell. New York: Penguin, 1984.

Summers, Leigh. *Bound to Please: A History of the Victorian Corset*. New York: Oxford, 2001.

Tenney, Tabitha Gilman. *Female Quixotism*. 1801. Ed. Jean Nienkamp and Andrea Collins. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Theriot, Nancy M. *The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Greenwood , 1988.

Thompson, Hanna, M.D. "The Therapeutic Value of Mental Occupation: Mental Cultivation as a Prophylactic." Thesis. *Medical and Surgical Reporter (1858-1898).* 10 Nov. 1883.

Thompson, Lana. *The Wandering Womb: A Cultural History of Outrageous Beliefs bout Women.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1999.

Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Townsend, F.L. "Women in Male Attire." Holdens Dollar Magazine of Criticisms, Biographies, Sketches, Essays & Tales. Mar. 1850; 5, 3; 178.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. New York: Holt Rinehart, 1962.

"The Wife." The American Farmer. (July 23 1819): 129.

Williams, Catharine. *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative*. Ed. Patricia Caldwell. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.

"Woman's Hard Fate" by a Lady. *The American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, June 1744; 1, 434. Online. American Periodical Series.

Appendix A
"Notice to Lady Subscribers"
Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine, Jan. 1867

Miss J. S. P.—Sent hair switch and veil by Adams's express 23d.

Mrs. G. A.—Sent patterns 26th.

Mrs. S. R. S. E.—Sent articles by Adams's express 28th.

Miss L. G. W.—Sent articles 28th.

Mrs. O. H. H.—Sent crimpers 31st.

H. E. R.—Sent patterns 31st.

Mrs. M. S. W.—Sent patterns June 4th.

Mrs. E. H.—Sent articles by Adams's express 5th.

W. I. C.—Sent articles by Kinsley's express 5th.

Mrs. H. G. S.—Sent articles 6th.

Mrs. M. H. M.—Sent articles 6th.

N. S. W.—Sent album by Adams's express 8th.

Mrs. M. B. D.—Sent patterns by Adams's express 8th.

R. S. N.—Sent braid 9th.

Mrs. F. I. M.—Sent articles by Harnden's express 9th.

Miss A. McS.—Sent hair crimpers 11th.

Miss H. B. C.—Sent hair crimpers 11th.

M. W.—Sent India-rubber gloves 11th.

Mrs. D.—Sent silver wire, 13th.

Skeleton Leaves.—In answer to your inquiry, we give the following method, furnished by a friend, who has prepared them in this way:—

"Skeleton leaves are prepared by steeping the leaves in rain water, in an open vessel, exposed to the air and sun, adding water occasionally to replace that lost by evaporation. When the green part is putrefied, it may be separated by gently washing the leaves on a plate with pure water. This requires considerable time. It is said that the process may be accomplished in four hours by soaking the leaves in a quart of pure spring water in which a tablespoonful of liquid chloride of lime has been mixed. After they are perfectly separated, passing them through a weak solution of gum-Arabic will stiffen them."

J. E. Tilton & Co., Boston, publishes a work on the above art, containing fuller directions than can be given here.

A Subscriber.—We cannot recommend anything.

Julia.—A delicate question: no doubt put in good faith. Consult your parents, they are the best judges of the time. There should be no haste.

Elsie, H.—We object to whipping girls and also boys. There is a time in life that a few slaps may be all right, but not when they are grown up. Lessons set as a task is a good punishment.

Mrs. J. P.—It is an old idea. Boys do not in general wear suspenders. You could not get a patent for what has been in general use for years.

J. B.—We would advise you to devote yourself to the German and French, and let alone the Latin and Greek. You will find the two first the most useful. Ollendorf's books are the best.

A. L. O.—Lotteries are illegal in this State. The circular your received was decidedly an imposition. We have placed it in the hands of the police.

Miss L. A.—Write on one side of the paper.

Jenny.—If the stripes of the Afghan are knit in plain stitch, the flower can be knit in. If it is done Afghan stitch, they are worked on, as you would work on canvass.

Fashions.

NOTICE TO LADY SUBSCRIBERS.

Having had frequent applications for the purchase of jewelry, millinery, etc., by ladies living at a distance, *the Editress of the Fashion Department* will hereafter execute commissions for any who may desire it, with the charge of a small percentage for the time and research required. Spring and autumn bonnets, materials for dresses, jewelry, envelopes, hair-work, worsteds, children's wardrobes, mantillas, and mantelets, will be chosen with a view to economy as well as taste; and boxes or packages forwarded by express to any part of the country. For the last, distinct directions must be given

Orders, accompanied by checks for the proposed expenditure, to be addressed to the care of L. A. Godey, Esq.

No order will be attended to unless the money is first received. Neither the Editor nor Publisher will be accountable for losses that may occur in remitting.

The Publisher of the Lady's Book has no interest in this department, and knows nothing of the transactions; and whether the person sending the order is or is not a subscriber to the Lady's Book, the Fashion Editor does not know.

Instructions to be as minute as possible, accompanied by a note of the height, complexion, and general style of the person, on which *much depends* in choice. Dress goods from Evans & Co., or Curwen Stoddart & Brother; dry goods of any kind from Messrs. A. T. Stewart & Co., New York; lingerie and lace from G. W. Vogel's, 1016 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia; bonnets from the most celebrated establishments; jewelry from Wriggens & Warden, or Caldwell's, Philadelphia.

When goods are ordered, the fashions that prevail here govern the purchase; therefore, no articles will be taken back. When the goods are sent, the transaction must be considered final.

DESCRIPTION OF STEEL FASHION-PLATE FOR AUGUST.

Fig. 1.—Evening-dress of white silk, trimmed with puffings of *crêpe lisse* caught down by bands of bright green velvet. The skirt is also trimmed with bands of green velvet, and a deep Cluny lace arranged to simulate a tunic. The corsage is straight round, and finished with a berthe formed of *crêpe lisse* and bands of green velvet. The hair is dressed with pearl beads and a fancy coiffure of green velvet and a white plume.

Fig. 2.—Dress of violet *crêpe* Maretz, trimmed with black ribbon arranged in a pattern on the skirt and corsage. Hat of feather edge straw, trimmed with a long black plume and green ribbon streamers.

Fig. 3.—Infant's dress of French muslin, trimmed *en fanfalon*, with rows of Cluny insertion and a worked edge. The dress is made high in the neck, and with long sleeves. A sash of wide Magenta ribbon is tied at the back in bows and long ends.

Fig. 4.—Boy's suit of brown alpaca, trimmed with blue silk cord. A wide sash of blue silk, with fringed ends is tied at the side. Polish boots of brown kid, matching the suit, laced up with blue cord, and trimmed on top with scallops bound with blue velvet.

Fig. 5.—Dress of buff mohair, trimmed with folds of the same dotted with jet buttons and finished with a jet drop fringe. The corsage is plain, and trimmed to match the skirt. A wide sash is caught by a fancy ornament on the right shoulder, and fastens under the arm on the left side. Derby hat of fancy straw, trimmed with an upright feather and a long plume of very light cuir-color.

Fig. 6.—Skirt of white grenadine *barège*, dotted over with large Magenta balls, and finished with two bias folds of Magenta silk. Fancy corsage of black silk, made with deep basques trimmed with Cluny inserting. White chip hat, trimmed with a soft Magenta plume and a double veil of white *crêpe lisse*.

BONNETS AND CAPS.

(*See engravings, page* 208.)

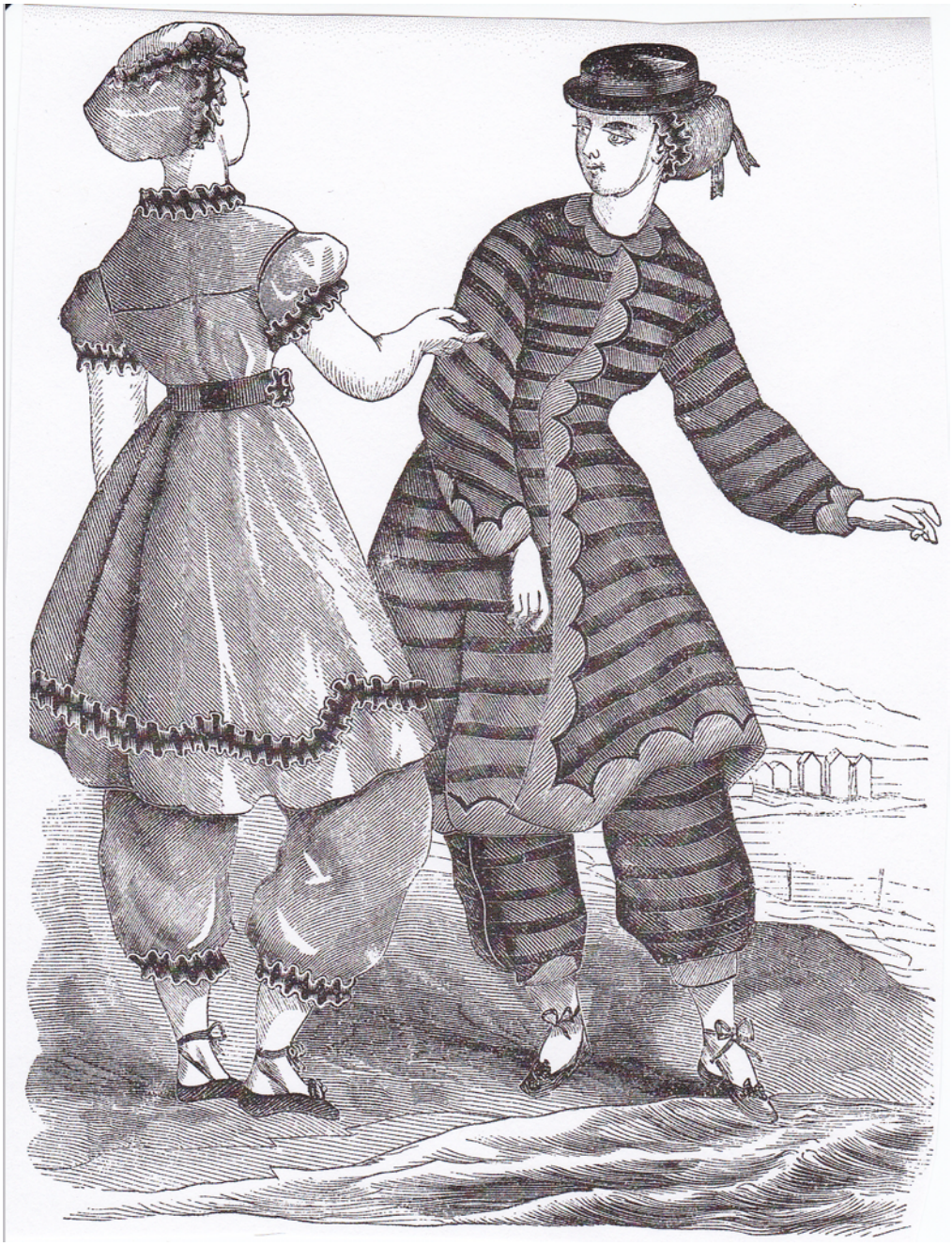
Fig. 1.—Dress bonnet, with white chip front. The crown is formed of leaves of white silk dotted with black beads. The trimming consists of scarlet flowers and frosted green leaves.

Appendix B

"The Nest at Home"
Engraved and Printed expressly for *Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine* by J. M. Butler

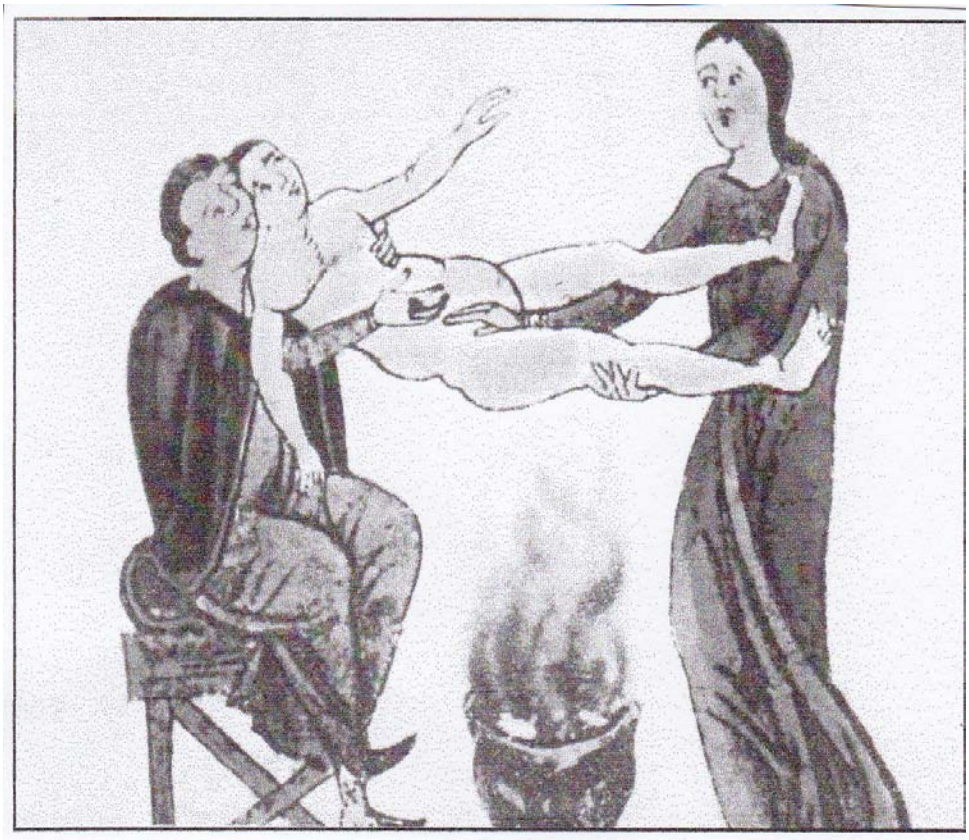
Appendix C

"Swim Suits"
Steel Fashion Plate
Godey's Lady's Book & Magazine, May 1850



Appendix D

"Illustration of the Egyptian Treatment for a Wandering Womb"
This image is part of a private collection and
re-printed in *The Wandering Womb* (32).



Appendix E

Susan B. Kaiser's

The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context Table (54)

	Symbolic Interactionist	**Cognitive**	**Cultural**
Meaning for whom?	Interacting Individuals	Perceivers	Individuals sharing a common culture
How is it produced?	Socially constructed through individuals joint actions	Perceivers use cognitive structures to interpret	Cultural representation of social relations and ideology
How is it produced?	Socially constructed through individuals joint actions	When perceivers' cognitive structures do not adequately explain social reality	Cultural and fashion change, influenced in part by unresolved ambivalence about the social order (for example, young/old, male/female)
Relative Strengths	Give and take of social interaction; human potential for creative appearance management and perception	Implicit perceptions and basic mechanisms for processing appearance and appearance cues	Cultural context for understanding linkage between social relations and appearance codes
Methods	Qualitative: focus on everyday life	Quantitative; experimental	Ethnographic: critique of cultural forms
Common Assumption (Humans use appearance to make sense of everyday life)	Explained in terms of humans fitting their lines of action together to communicate	Explained in terms of perceivers trying to simplify reality using somewhat structured thought processes	Explained in terms of cultural codes that we take for granted