MAKING THE "AMERICA OF ART"
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—Fanny Fern (1855)

I hope I shall yet do my great book, for that seems to be my work, and I am growing up to it. I even think of trying the “Atlantic.” There’s ambition for you! . . . If Mr. L takes the one Father carried to him, I shall think I can do something.

—Louisa May Alcott (1858)

Hurrah! My story was accepted, and Lowell asked if it was not a translation from the German, it was so unlike most tales. . . . People seem to think it is a great thing to get into the “Atlantic,” but I’ve not been pegging away all these years in vain, and may yet have books and publishers and a fortune of my own.

—Louisa May Alcott (1859)

Other magazines took their turn—the “Atlantic,” I remember—in due course; but I shared the general awe of this magazine at that time prevailing in New England, and, having possibly, more than my share of personal pride, did not very early venture to intrude my little risk upon that fearful lottery.

The first story of mine which appeared in the “Atlantic” was a fictitious narrative of certain psychical phenomena occurring in Connecticut, and known to me, at first hand, to be authentic. I have yet to learn that the story attracted any attention from anybody more disinterested than those few friends of the sort who, in such cases, are wont to inquire, in tones more freighted with wonder than admiration: “What! Has she got into the Atlantic?”

—Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1896)

The nation has found its true grandeur by war, but must retain it in peace. Peace too has its infinite resources, after a nation has once become conscious of itself. It is impossible that human life should ever be utterly impoverished, and all the currents of American civilization now tend to its enrichment. . . . Everything is here, between these Atlantic and Pacific shores, save only the perfected utterance that comes with years. Between Shakespeare in his cradle and Shakespeare in Hamlet there was needed but an interval of time, and the same sublime condition is all that lies between the America of toil and the America of art.

—Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1867)
INTRODUCTION

T O TALK about art, artists, or genius in the postbellum era was to talk about defining American identity in the wake of the event that called into question the nation’s very existence. Thomas Wentworth Higginson’s belief that it was only a matter of time before the “America of art” would emerge from the crucible of the Civil War was widely shared, even as the shape and meaning of “American” art and the identity of its producers were hotly contested. The Atlantic Monthly was only the most prominent site of this contest, which took place in book reviews, editorials, and essays published in the pages of the nation’s “quality journals” as well as in the pages of fiction produced by some of the nation’s best known writers: between 1859 and 1889 Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, Augusta Jane Evans, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Constance Fenimore Woolson all published novels that thematized art and artists and took up the central aesthetic questions of the day. At stake for all the participants in this conversation were questions of identity both personal and national; for the women writers who are the subjects of this book, participating in the conversation about producing an “America of art” signaled a fundamental shift in self-conception: from “bread and butter” writer to artist working on a “great book,” unwilling to disclaim either “ambition” or “fame” as a motivating force. But rejecting the persona of the writer driven by financial necessity or the identity of mere medium for a religious message, which had been the sole justifications for American women seeking literary careers during the first half of the nineteenth century, required a different rationale for one’s artistic work and new models to emulate. That process of literary self-definition, and the postbellum project of cultural nationalism that is its context, are the subjects of this book.
American women writers’ changing self-conception in the second half of the nineteenth century is reflected in Louisa May Alcott’s and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s responses to their initial publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Despite their obvious pleasure at having their work accepted by the preeminent literary magazine of the day, both express a certain ambivalence toward their achievement. Alcott’s observation that “[p]eople seem to think it is a great thing to get into the ‘Atlantic’” implies that she does not share this common view, despite her 1858 remark that suggests that she views publication in the *Atlantic* as a precursor to attempting a “great book.” Her subsequent remark—“but I’ve not been pegging away all these years in vain, and may yet have books and publishers and a fortune of my own”—strengthens the sense of Alcott’s mixed feelings about her accomplishment. Beginning as it does with the qualifier “but,” Alcott’s comment suggests that she finds people’s excitement at her work’s acceptance by the *Atlantic* misplaced, since this event is not a guarantee of literary success but rather an (admittedly high) point in a long literary apprenticeship.

Phelps’s account of her reaction to her first publication in the *Atlantic* registers a similar mixture of pride and diffidence. Her decision to delay submitting her work to the *Atlantic* until after she had published elsewhere points to Phelps’s sense of herself as a writer undergoing a systematic literary apprenticeship; her claim to be confused by the story’s acceptance and her somewhat sarcastic depiction of the kind of backhanded compliments such success elicits reveal her determination to view the event as a part of her artistic development rather than its culmination. Alcott’s and Phelps’s similar ambivalence about the meaning of their first publication in the *Atlantic* is emblematic of the paradoxical project they and their peers were engaged in: creating new professional identities that would allow them to eschew the persona of “bread and butter” writer and claim for themselves the status of literary Artist, and a place in the realm of high literary production embodied by the *Atlantic Monthly*, even as that realm was increasingly defined in opposition to the figure of the popular (female) writer, whose existence and example had enabled their own careers.

Like the nation, which, according to Higginson, had “become conscious of itself” in the wake of the Civil War and therefore capable of producing not only its own Shakespeare but an “America of art,” the members of what I call the transitional generation of American women writers—Rebecca Harding Davis (1830–1910), Louisa May Alcott (1832–88), Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840–96), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844–1911)—had begun to “assume” themselves publicly in the
years surrounding the Civil War. These writers’ literary careers began in the late 1850s, after female authorship had become an accepted fact in American cultural life but before women writers had regularly begun to produce work that was considered high literary Art, either by the literary establishment or by themselves. Theirs was a generation that was limited most severely not by the narrowly defined notions of acceptable female public speech, but by the absence of diverse and flexible models for female intellectual and artistic work. These writers shared with their predecessors popularity and professionalism, but they differed from their foremothers in their relationships to the literary establishment and male intellectual authority, and in their self-conception as artists and intellectuals. Whereas their predecessors—writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, Augusta Jane Evans, Susan Warner, Maria Cummins—typically highlighted the ethical concerns and financial pressures that propelled them into the public arena and minimized their artistic ambitions, the writers of the transitional generation inverted that relationship. Members of this group typically saw themselves as artists whose inspiration and motivation could be drawn equally from their native talent and ambition and from their religious or social commitments. This difference meant that the dominant model of authorship available to American women writers, the domestic-tutelary, was only minimally relevant to the writers of the transitional generation; consequently, each devoted considerable intellectual energy to revising old models of artistic production and constructing new ones.

I locate the beginning of the process of American women’s literary self-definition in 1859, with the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s The Minister’s Wooing and Augusta Jane Evans’s Beulah, each of which takes up a series of questions about the gendered nature of aesthetic production, the proper relationship between religious faith and art, and the role of art in producing national and regional identity, questions that would be central to their own work and that of their peers for the coming decades. Although the need for national culture had been a subject of concern for American intellectuals since the early days of the republic, the tenor of the conversation about American cultural production began to change in the 1850s, when a number of factors converged to produce a sea change in the frameworks that defined and shaped American literature and art. The 1850s saw the emergence of a group of
cultural institutions such as literary and art periodicals (*Harper’s Monthly* [1850], *Putnam’s Monthly* [1853], the *Atlantic Monthly* [1857], the *Crayon* [1855]) publishing houses (Ticknor and Fields), and libraries (the Boston Public Library [1852]), committed to supporting American art and literature, demarking a realm of “high” literary production, and making a specific notion of “culture” widely available. Meanwhile, a growing middle class was traveling in increasing numbers to Europe, with the express purpose of viewing, studying, and acquiring its artistic masterpieces; and although European art continued to be viewed as the standard of excellence, the increasingly well traveled American middle class represented a potentially large market for domestic visual art. The number of American artists studying in French and Italian schools also increased during the 1850s, and a growing number of American women, who were generally barred from studying the (nude) human form in the United States, began studying in French and Italian art schools.9

At the same time, American conceptions of art and the artist were being transformed. The publication of John Ruskin’s writings on art in the United States beginning in 1847, and the subsequent debate about the proper relationship between religious faith and the visual arts, contributed to the shift in American conceptions of the function of art, from the view, dominant in the early national era and shaped by Scottish Common Sense philosophy, that the only justification for producing art (both visual and literary) in the fledgling nation was moral utility, to the view, shaped by British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism and by the weakening of the strict Calvinist prohibition on religious art, that aesthetic ambition and the resulting art were expressions of divinity and that beauty and aesthetic pleasure were valuable in their own right.10 Although these institutional and conceptual changes affected both the literary and the visual arts, change in the literary arena was more rapid, chaotic, and contested because a large literary marketplace and a body of American literature had both emerged, virtually simultaneously, during the first half of the nineteenth century. Those concerned with producing American literature as a form of high culture, therefore, had to do so not only in relation to foreign traditions, but also in relation—usually oppositional—to the existing body of popular writings by Americans, many of them women, that had already begun to define what “American Literature” looked like.11

The *Atlantic Monthly* was central to the linked processes of defining “American Literature” and demarcating a realm of high literary culture that began during the late 1850s and accelerated in the postbellum
years. That aspect of the magazine’s mission is made explicit in its very first issue, which featured a poem titled “The Origin of Didactic Poetry,” penned by the magazine’s first editor, James Russell Lowell. In the poem Lowell tells the story of the goddess Minerva’s disastrous foray into poetry writing and her subsequent decision to take up Sunday School teaching. Minerva’s artistic and professional choices align her with the popular women writers of the day, putting future contributors to the Atlantic on notice about the magazine’s literary standards: the poem ends by warning that “The Muse is unforgiving” of didactic poetry and urging readers to “Put all your beauty in your rhymes, / Your morals in your living.” By privileging “beauty” over “morals,” Lowell announces the beginning of a new era in American literature, one that will exclude work produced under the premise that literary activity is an appropriate extension of women’s role as guardians of their families’, and the nation’s, moral character.

The struggle to transform the United States from a nation of “toil” to a nation of “art” and to redefine the most valuable art as that which produces “beauty” rather than “morals” took place over the next three decades in a conversation that focused on the urgent need to produce American culture. This conversation is characterized by a number of recurring themes, even while its contributors differ about specific details of their programs. For example, writers tend to agree that a uniquely American literature is a prerequisite to achieving cultural equality with England and Europe, but regularly disagree about what, exactly, makes a work or a body of literature “American.” Other shared themes are the importance of educating children, immigrants, working-class people, and newly freed slaves into an understanding of and appreciation for art (or “civilization,” or “culture,” or “taste”; the terms are often used interchangeably); and a belief that it is the patriotic duty of the nation’s prominent artists and intellectuals to contribute to the production of American culture, especially in the wake of the Civil War.

These two constellations of events—the newly urgent conversation about cultural nationalism in the wake of the Civil War, and the new willingness of a prominent group of women writers to lay claim to the identity of literary artist and to the task of producing “American” art—not only took place roughly simultaneously but were shaped and influenced by each other. Expressed in, on the one hand, an explosion
of fiction, most of it by women writers, that thematizes art and artistic creation and, on the other hand, a large body of nonfiction writing on questions of culture and nation, virtually all of it by male writers, these two bodies of writing can appear unrelated. Only a small fraction of the fiction overtly takes up the topic of cultural nationalism, and an only slightly larger fraction of the nonfiction explicitly takes up the subject of female artists. They are, however, part of a single conversation, and focusing on the intersections of these two bodies of writing complicates our understanding of the cultural terrain in the decades surrounding the Civil War. Putting the producers of two apparently disparate bodies of writing back into dialogue with each other reveals that these narratives—the struggle over the territory of American high culture and the emergence of female literary artists—are mutually constitutive.

Although this conversation takes place along rather starkly split gender and genre lines—virtually all the nonfiction is written by men; most of the fiction is written by women—the participants in this dialogue hailed from the same class backgrounds and most moved in the same fairly small social and literary circles. Indeed, many of the women writers I study belonged to the prominent families that formed the core of the white Protestant cultural elite for most of the nineteenth century: Harriet Beecher Stowe belonged to a family of prominent Calvinist clergymen—she was a daughter of Lyman Beecher, a sister of Henry Ward Beecher, and the wife of Calvin Stowe, well-known clergymen all. During her husband’s stint as professor of sacred literature at Andover Theological Seminary (1854–63), Harriet lived next door to the Phelps’s, and a young Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, herself a daughter and granddaughter of influential Protestant ministers and professors at Andover Theological Seminary, visited the Stowes often. Despite the difference in their ages, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the antebellum era’s most famous American writer, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, whose *Gates Ajar* (1868) would make her one of if not the most famous American authors of the early postbellum period, developed a friendship that lasted until Stowe’s death in 1896. Louisa May Alcott’s neighbors in Concord included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson and Thoreau were pallbearers at the 1858 funeral of Louisa’s sister, Elizabeth; the Alcotts lived in Hawthorne’s house in 1858 while he was in England and later bought Thoreau’s house; and Alcott knew Emerson well, borrowed books from his library regularly, and idolized him as a “god.” Alcott’s father, Bronson, was a well-known educator and public intellectual who hand-delivered her stories to *Atlantic* editor James Russell Lowell—the “Mr. L”
of the epigraph. A grandniece of James Fenimore Cooper, Constance Fenimore Woolson had deep New England roots and family connections to Lincoln biographer John Hay and to Samuel Mather, a descendant of Cotton and Increase Mather. And although she grew up in Cleveland, far from the nation’s cultural centers, and spent much of her adult life traveling in the United States and Europe, Woolson published extensively in American periodicals and maintained close connections to the postbellum literary scene through correspondence and friendships with such prominent literary figures as E. C. Stedman and Henry James. Not all the participants in this conversation were from prominent New England families, but all were familiar with and to the Boston and New York literary worlds. Born in West Virginia to a modest family, Rebecca Harding Davis became a protégé of James T. Fields after “Life in the Iron Mills” appeared in the Atlantic in 1861; she visited Boston as Fields’s guest in 1862 and was introduced to all the prominent New England intellectuals of the day. After her marriage Davis lived in Philadelphia, which, along with Boston and New York, was one of the three centers of the nineteenth-century publishing world. Even Augusta Jane Evans, who was born in Georgia and spent much of her adulthood in Mobile, Alabama, had strong ties to the New York literary scene. She kept up her friendship with William Seaver, an editor at Harper’s Monthly whom she met in 1859, for decades, frequently expressed her desire to enjoy the “genial literary glow” of New York, which she visited as often as she could, and read the prominent periodicals of the day.

In addition to moving in the same social circles, all but Evans published their work in the same group of “quality journals,” and all six read one another’s work. Stowe, Davis, Alcott, Phelps, and Woolson each published fiction in the Atlantic Monthly, though only Woolson and Phelps remained regular contributors after the mid-1860s, when the Atlantic “underwent a palpable stiffening of its selection criteria” and stopped accepting the work of Alcott and Davis, both of whom it had earlier featured. Their work was widely reviewed in the “quality journals,” almost always by their male peers, and a number of them published one or more books with Ticknor and Fields, which was instrumental in creating and marketing the category of “high” literary art. Although only Stowe and Phelps knew each other well, these writers’ interest in and support for their peers is evident from their diaries, letters, and memoirs.

These writers’ professional friendships included prominent literary men as well as women. Stowe, Davis, Alcott, Phelps, and Woolson all knew and worked with James T. Fields, whom Phelps described
glowingly in her autobiography: “He advocated the political advancement of our sex, coeducation, and kindred movements, without any of that apologetic murmur so common among the half-hearted or the timid. . . . He was incapable of that literary snobbishness which undervalues a woman’s work because it is a woman’s.”23 They also shared an antagonistic relationship with the young Henry James, who, as a reviewer for the Nation, wrote often-savage reviews of his female peers’ fiction. Although the subjects of his reviews did not necessarily know the identity of the author, they clearly recognized the bias against their work emanating from the Nation; writing Rebecca Harding Davis after James attacked her Waiting for the Verdict (1867), Harriet Beecher Stowe consoles the younger writer by reminding her the Nation is like “a sneering respectable middle aged sceptic who says I take my two glasses & my cigar daily . . . But dont [sic] mind them & dont [sic] hope for a sympathetic word from them ever in any attempt to help the weak & sinning & suffering.”24

Although their work was published alongside that of their male peers, the women in this group rarely contributed the kind of explicitly theoretical analyses of the central cultural questions of the day that dominate the pages of the quality magazines in the decades surrounding the Civil War.25 Women writers’ absence from the theoretical debates taking place in the “quality journals” during this period has contributed to the impression that they did not have well-thought-out aesthetic programs and did not care to participate in the collective work of defining U.S. cultural identity in the postbellum era. But even a cursory examination of the works published by Stowe, Evans, Davis, Alcott, Phelps, and Woolson between 1859 and 1889 reveals a deep concern both with the question of national cultural identity and with their own identity as American artists. Instead of producing nonfiction treatises and essays like those produced by Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville in the antebellum years, and by Lowell, Higginson, Samuel Osgood, F. H. Hedge, and others during the postbellum years, the women in this study took up these questions in their fiction.26

This gender/genre split can be attributed both to the conventions that determined the acceptable subjects and genres of literary production by women and to the structures of the institutions in which the cultural nationalism conversation was conducted. Although most of the women I discuss wrote nonfiction essays for a variety of periodicals, they tended to confine themselves to domestic and social topics and rarely offered their opinions on aesthetic or theoretical issues. It is not until the end of the century that we find women writers producing
memoirs in which they articulate their aesthetic vision. In this period, the women writers discussed here viewed their fiction as a primary vehicle for expressing their opinion and shaping public opinion. Alcott makes this point explicitly in a letter to her family from July 8, 1870, in which she describes Theodore Tilton’s attempts to persuade her to write for the Revolution, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s feminist newspaper: “I think I’d rather keep to my own work and lecture the public in a story, than hold forth . . . in the papers.” Although Alcott’s “public” is not gendered, her preference for lecturing “in a story” reflects what Nina Baym has suggested was a central function of fiction in this period: “from 1850 until well after the Civil War (some would say until the 1920s) the novel was chiefly a form of literary communication among women.” Indeed, that understanding of the difference between fiction and nonfiction as appropriate forms for women’s public expression was something of a double-edged sword for members of the transitional generation: it was one of the founding premises of the antebellum models of artistic production that they sought to revise; it was frequently used to denigrate their work and bar it from the realm of the purely literary; and it was a convention these writers regularly took advantage of as they used their fiction to participate in the ongoing conversation about the nature of American artistic production.

The institutions that shaped that conversation were almost exclusively male owned and run. And while a number of the men who occupied positions of cultural power were quite progressive on matters of gender equality—Thomas Wentworth Higginson and James T. Fields are particularly noteworthy in this respect—the writers, editors, and publishers engaged in demarcating a realm of elite literary culture increasingly sought to distance it from the female-dominated legacy of antebellum cultural production—a subject that will be discussed in detail in the second half of this book. Members of the transitional generation were visible contributors to many of the “quality journals” in which these views were promulgated, but no women edited or published any of these periodicals. There were, of course, female editors and publishers: Sarah Josepha Hale edited Godey’s Ladies Magazine for decades, Harriet Beecher Stowe was an editor of Hearth and Home from 1868 to 1875, and women edited periodicals such as the Lily, Woman’s Journal, the Revolution, and Forerunner. Most of these publications, however, catered exclusively to female readers or focused on “women’s issues” ranging from domesticity to suffrage. Although women were often consulted about editorial decisions by husbands and fathers, no woman edited or published any of the periodicals that shaped the high
literary culture of the postbellum years, making fiction the most readily available forum for American women writers to express their views of aesthetic and cultural questions.  

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My account of the changes to women’s “models” of authorship, or of artistic production more generally, is particularly indebted to and in dialogue with the work of Lawrence Buell and Richard Brodhead. In New England Literary Culture, From Revolution through Renaissance, Lawrence Buell traces the evolution of American conceptions of authorship from the late-eighteenth century, when literature was held to a highly utilitarian standard and required to serve a clearly visible moral purpose, through the emergence of American romanticism in the 1830s. American romanticism, which was, in Buell’s term, “domesticated” by Emerson and transformed into transcendentalism, did not reject the requirement that art have a moral or ethical component, but it redefined the author’s role, transforming him from moral instructor and entertainer to divinely inspired visionary. Although Buell’s study is one of the earliest to resist the “separate spheres” model of American literary history, his is primarily a study of male writers and of the models of authorship they constructed, models that were simply unavailable to the American women who began to enter the literary scene in large numbers between 1830 and 1850. Indeed, as I argue here, coming to terms with the romantic conception of the artist as divinely inspired genius is central to the project of creating alternative models of authorship.

Conceptions of authorship available to both men and women started to change around the middle of the century. Richard Brodhead’s The School of Hawthorne traces the institutionalization of the American Renaissance as a literary tradition around which American authors could construct their identities as writers, and Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America charts the changing literary field in the postbellum period and the concomitant changes to the idea of authorship. Although as Lawrence Levine has demonstrated, by the 1870s the American cultural world was increasingly differentiated into “high” and “low” artistic forms, Brodhead’s reconstruction of the “scenes of writing” in the three decades after the Civil War reveals that early in the postbellum era “low” and “high” had not yet become rigid, mutually exclusive categories. During this period of differentia-
tion numerous models of authorship coexisted, allowing writers to choose from among the available models, and enabling some writers to make use of several different models, either simultaneously or over the course of a career. Central to the transformation of authorship at mid-century and beyond was the shift away from the “domestically inflected” values that had shaped American literature in the first decades of the century. As I demonstrate in the second part of this book, this shift away from the domestic model of authorship meant that women writers in particular had to reconstruct their literary self-conception and reimagine themselves in the terms of the emerging models of authorship.

For the past two decades female authorship in this period has been seen through the lens offered by Nina Baym in Woman’s Fiction (1978), in which she noted a “decline” in “woman’s fiction” in the years immediately after the Civil War, and the emergence of serious female literary Artists at the very end of the century. This trajectory has been repeated by countless critics and literary historians and institutionalized by the growing body of excellent scholarship on the women writers who emerged at the end of the century. Making the “America of Art” tells the story of the emergence of the self-consciously literary American woman writer, a story that has been largely assumed rather than explicated. By focusing on the period between the heyday of popular women’s authorship and the emergence of such self-consciously artistic writers as Sarah Orne Jewett and Willa Cather I uncover the process whereby American women writers revised existing models of authorship and gradually came to proclaim themselves Artists. In identifying a group of women writers who were in dialogue both with each other and with their male peers I revise Elizabeth Ammons’s account of the period, though I agree with her sense that belonging to a group—however informally—was essential to these writers’ ability to redefine the models of authorship that had enabled their careers.

The most important precursor to Making the “America of Art” is Mary Kelley’s influential Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America (1984). I am particularly indebted to Kelley’s broad outlines of the ways in which antebellum women writers justified their entry into the literary public sphere as driven by financial necessity and religious motivation. In my view one of the most striking aspects of Kelley’s study is the tremendous consistency in the language her twelve subjects use to describe and justify their literary endeavors. Whereas to Kelley this consistency bespeaks a set of shared psychic experiences, to me they suggest a shared strategic approach. So,
although I rely heavily on Kelley’s description of the economic and religiously based explanations for antebellum women’s entry into the literary realm, I understand those explanations as themselves cultural conventions employed by women who understood that these justifications—whether based in their actual lived experiences or not—allowed them to engage in activities that were otherwise inconsistent with their prescribed gender roles. Indeed, my understanding of the identity of the antebellum women writer outlined by Kelley as a cultural construction is at the core of Making the “America of Art”: for it is my contention that women writers’ critical engagement with, and transformation of, the antebellum model of authorship was crucial to their participation in the production of American high culture in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

More recently, the study of nineteenth-century women writers has been enriched by scholarship that does much to expand and complicate our understanding of the literary culture of the period. Works such as Monika Elbert’s collection Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830–1930, and Aleta Cane and Susan Alves’s edited volume “The Only Efficient Instrument”: American Women Writers and the Periodical, 1837–1916, both contribute to the ongoing effort to dismantle the “separate spheres” view of literary culture in the period, and both collections are unusual in the breadth of their coverage. But although individual essays within these collections contribute to our understanding of female authorship during the period, these essays are limited, by their nature, serving as case studies rather than offering historical narratives. A number of important recent studies of individual writers such as Karen Kilcup and Thomas Edwards, eds., Jewett and Her Contemporaries: Reshaping the Canon; Victoria Brehm, ed., Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Nineteenth Century; and June Howard, Publishing the Family have contributed significantly to our understanding of literary culture at the end of the nineteenth century, but these studies all confirm the received historical trajectory, which emphasizes the emergence of self-consciously literary women artists at the end of the century.

My focus on the thirty-year period during which American writers and intellectuals of both genders actively debated what American high culture should look like, who should produce it, and what the rewards of success would be offers a new understanding of a complex, contested, and mostly overlooked period of American cultural history. That debate has been largely overlooked in part because there are relatively few accounts of the literary history of the second half of the nineteenth century, and even fewer of the relationship between the literary culture
of the antebellum era and the literary forms and values that came to dominate the postbellum era. Most accounts of the century use the Civil War as their dividing line, giving the impression that there is little, if any, continuity between the literary productions of the postbellum and antebellum periods. Recent examples of this tendency include a number of otherwise excellent studies such as Richard S. Lowry, “Littery Man”: Mark Twain and Modern Authorship (1996); Michael Newbury, Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America (1997); and Linda Grasso, The Artistry of Anger: Black and White Women’s Literature in America, 1820–1860 (2002). The literary historical view of the second half of the century is dominated by accounts of the rise of realism and its identification with high literary culture; it is only relatively recently that scholars such as Nancy Glazener (Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910 [1997]) and Barbara Hochman (Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism [2001]) have begun to focus on the years immediately before and after the Civil War, a period that has long been identified with what George Santayana famously derided as genteel literary culture.

Making the “America of Art” is explicitly concerned with the realm of high culture, and it seeks to illuminate the fault lines within what can appear to be a monolithic category. Cultural historians such as Lawrence Levine, Alan Trachtenberg, Richard Wightman Fox, and T. J. Jackson Lears have demonstrated that the institutionalization of high culture in the postbellum period was a response to the perceived threat to social order posed by the demographic and economic changes of the postbellum era, and a mechanism for consolidating the social authority of the Protestant elite whose standing as the dominant national elite was challenged after the war by the rise of a new business class and by the redistribution of political power to immigrants and working people. But these accounts tend to focus on opposition from without. I identify some of the internal struggles taking place between men and women of the same social class, who shared a similar worldview and, most importantly, shared a belief in the high value attributed to “culture” in general and to the literary in particular.

In the following five chapters I trace the process whereby American women writers negotiated their position within the emerging realm of high literary culture, and, in the process, modified existing models of female authorship and challenged the assumptions about women’s literary production that had governed their predecessors’ entry into the world of literary work. These chapters also outline a series of overlapping conversations in which both the theoretical and the practical
implications of attempting to produce “American” culture were endlessly debated, revised, and contested.

The first chapter, “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s ‘New School’ of Protestant Art,” focuses on Stowe’s attempts to redefine the religious and aesthetic frameworks for American cultural production. In The Minister’s Wooing (1859) and Agnes of Sorrento (1862) Stowe speaks to an audience increasingly confronted with scientific and intellectual challenges to religious faith, and in both novels Stowe aligns religious faith and aesthetic production, suggesting that the solution to the nation’s crisis of cultural identity lies, at least in part, in its religious roots. In her work from this period Stowe undertakes two, related projects: she critiques sentimental religion as the primary framework for women’s intellectual and spiritual expression, and she challenges the utilitarian view of art produced by yoking Puritan suspicion of aesthetic pleasure with Scottish Common Sense philosophy. As an alternative, for both women and the nation, Stowe imagines the possibility that America will produce “a new school of art, based upon Protestant principles.”

Chapter 2, “I Dedicate Myself . . . Unreservedly to Art: Augusta Jane Evans and Southern Art,” focuses on two of Augusta Jane Evans’s best-selling novels from the 1860s, Macaria (1864) and St. Elmo (1866), in which she critiques the antebellum model of female authorship, offers an alternative religious feminist aesthetic, and imagines American high culture with Southern artists at its center. Evans’s aesthetic is influenced by her reading of Ruskin, whose work is cited frequently both in her correspondence and in her published writing. Evans’s work, like Stowe’s, revises the basic premises underlying antebellum conceptions of authorship and offers an alternative that is based on equal parts artistic talent, ambition, and religious faith. But unlike Stowe’s Ruskin-influenced writing from this period, Evans’s work is explicitly concerned with the lives and careers of women artists, who are the protagonists of her fiction. Evans’s aesthetic vision is distinctly Southern, and her work from this period is shaped by the tension between her sectional loyalties and her artistic ambitions. As a Southern woman writer Evans had to overcome limitations of both gender and geography. On the one hand, Evans was fiercely loyal to the South, which she viewed
as the repository of national virtue and the antidote against Northern materialism and factionalism; on the other hand, she was painfully aware of the South’s cultural limitations, deeply drawn to the cultural riches of the North, and determined to contribute to the nation’s emerging high culture.

The next three chapters focus on the work of the members of the transitional generation—Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Constance Fenimore Woolson—who continued the conversation about reshaping the terms of women’s artistic production begun by Stowe and Evans and participated in the ongoing conversation about the making of an “America of art.” These chapters are structured thematically around the three central areas of concern that shaped much of the postbellum conversation about art, culture, and national identity: the place of the popular in the realm of high art; the role of the genius; and the legacy of the Civil War.

The development of an ideal of high literary Art in the postbellum era is the subject of the third chapter, “Exorcising the Popular Woman Writer from ‘the Domain of Pure Literature.’” I argue that the obsession with distinguishing literary Art from that produced for the marketplace is driven by the figure of the scribbling woman, whose popularity in the marketplace at once helped to create a broad audience for fiction and threatened to make it impossible for high literary art to survive. The conception of authorship underlying this ideal, which defined and privileged literary writing as an inherently masculine activity separate from the marketplace, posed special problems for a woman writer who wished to produce writing considered “literary,” as all the members of the transitional generation did. Working from within a self-conception shaped by the antebellum model of female authorship, which stressed women’s economic motivation for writing and required them to support themselves and their families, these writers were faced with an irreducible tension between the emerging conception of high literary art as incompatible with the marketplace and the practical and psychic pressures exerted by the literary self-conception that had made their careers possible. This tension is central to Rebecca Harding Davis’s Earthen Pitchers (1874) and “Marcia” (1876), to Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s The Story of Avis (1876), and to Louisa May Alcott’s Little Women (1868), each of which depicts the market-driven assumptions of the antebellum model as at once inescapable and enormously destructive to the careers of promising women artists. These works demonstrate that for a woman writer to claim for herself the status of literary Artist is, in more ways than one, to attempt to occupy a position that is defined in
opposition to her very existence.

Chapter 4, “Genius, Gender, and the Problem of Mentorship,” focuses on the figure of the artistic genius, which elicited considerable ambivalence from observers of the cultural scene in the middle quarter of the nineteenth century: treated with a mixture of reverence for his unique qualities and anxiety about the undemocratic implications of valuing those same qualities, the genius embodied the tensions inherent in the postbellum struggle to create a uniquely American high culture even as demographic changes and technological innovation ensured the democratization of culture. Steeped in the antebellum obsession with genius, postbellum observers attempted to preserve genius for their cultural project by playing down its antidemocratic implications and redefining it in terms of quintessentially American values such as self-control, discipline, and hard work. At the same time, women writers challenged the gender and class assumptions of genius, even as they, like their male counterparts, attempted to preserve the idea of genius as part of the project of reimagining the models of artistic production available to them and claiming their place in the emerging realm of high literary culture. For Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, the figure of the mentor is central to the discussion of genius. The relationships between the genius and her mentor range from neglect to domination, but in each case they underscore the failure of the mentor figure to transform the Romantic conception of genius in order to make it a viable model for American artists.

In the final chapter, “The Civil War and the Making of the ‘America of Art,’” I focus on the cultural nationalism that dominated Northern intellectual circles in the decade following the Civil War and produced a flood of essays on the topics of art, culture, and “Americanism.” To these observers, bringing the nation’s cultural productions up to the level of its industrial and manufacturing achievements was the most pressing concern of the day, and many viewed the cultural project as an extension of the Civil War’s political and moral aims. There was a remarkable degree of consensus among the Northern intellectuals engaged in this conversation, both male and female, about the need to produce a national culture and the methods for doing so; but while the women of the transitional generation generally believed in the importance of the postbellum cultural project and sought to participate in it, their analyses consistently challenge its underlying assumptions. For Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Louisa May Alcott, and Constance Fenimore Woolson, the cultural nationalism of the 1865–85 period presented both an opportunity and a challenge. As members of the educated cultural
elite, Phelps, Alcott, and Woolson were insiders. As women, who had not fought in the Civil War and whose cultural authority was historically limited to “feminine” concerns, they were outsiders. This doubled vision is evident in the ambivalence toward the Civil War as a source of national cultural production in Phelps’s *The Story of Avis* (1877); in the portrayal of expatriation as necessary for women artists’ success in Alcott’s “Diana and Persis” (ca. 1879); and in “The Street of the Hyacinth” (1882), Woolson’s analysis of the tension between an ideal of a democratically based American art and the reality of creating it. In each case, the cultural productions of women are both defined as essential to the project of creating the “America of art” and shown to be undermined by the institutions—both actual and rhetorical—designed to produce it.
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5. The term “quality journals” was widely used in the nineteenth century to denote a group of periodicals that published a mix of nonfiction and fiction, with a special emphasis on relatively rigorous pieces on literature and science. The group of “quality journals” includes the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Nation*, the *Century*, Harper’s *New Monthly*, and others that came and went over the second half of the decade. For detailed discussions of the role these magazines played in shaping American high culture during the postbellum years, see Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly 1857–1909, Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). In *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Institution 1850–1910* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), Nancy Glazener identifies what she calls the “Atlantic Group” magazines, a somewhat expanded group of the “quality journals” listed here, which shared a common set of aesthetic values and cultural purposes.
6. Examples include Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (1860); Rebecca Harding Davis, “Life in the Iron Mills” (1861), *Earthen Pitchers* (1874), and “Marcia” (1876); Louisa May Alcott, *A Marble Woman, or, The Mysterious Model* (published anonymously in 1865), *Little Women* (1868), and “Diana and Persis” (an unfinished fragment, ca. 1879); Henry James, *Roderick Hudson* (1875); Elizabeth Stuart Phelp, *The Story of Avis* (1876); Helen Hunt Jackson, *Mercy Philbrick's Choice* (1876); and Constance Fenimore Woolson, “Miss Grief” (1880), “The Street of the Hyacinth” (1882), and “At the Château of Corinne” (1886).
7. I view these four writers as the key figures in this generation, which also includes Elizabeth Drew Stoddard (1823–1902), Helen Hunt Jackson (1830–85), Emily Dickinson (1830–86), Gail Hamilton (Mary Abigail Dodge; 1833–96), Harriet Prescott Spofford (1835–1921), Celia Thaxter (1835–94), and numerous other,
lesser-known authors, for a number of reasons: Each had a successful career that
combined popular success and considerable respect from the high literary establish-
ment; each was as prominent a public figure as a respectable woman could be dur-
ing this period; and each produced numerous works that thematized the aesthetic
questions central to her own career and to the cultural nationalist project of the day.
I have chosen to exclude Emily Dickinson’s work for the obvious reason that it was
mostly unpublished during the period of this study and therefore did not participate
in the public conversation about women’s authorship that I trace here. I have cho-
sen not to include Sarah Orne Jewett’s (1849–1909) work because, as I will discuss
below, although her lifetime coincides with that of the writers I focus on, she is wide-
ly viewed as the first American woman writer to consider herself a serious literary
Artist—and to be considered so by the literary establishment. She is, in that sense, a
member of the next generation of women writers, which includes Edith Wharton,
Willa Cather, and others.

8. The phrase “domestic-tutelary” refers to Richard Brodhead’s classification of
the models of authorship available to American writers at midcentury into three cat-
egories: the high literary mode, “writing as a tutelary activity in support of the
domestic ethos”; and the “industrial” or hack writer, identified with popular dime
novels and story papers (Cultures of Letters 82). Women writing from within the
domestic-tutelary model of authorship typically depicted themselves as driven to
write for financial reasons; portrayed writing as an extension of domestic work;
denied artistic ambition—a quality that was considered unseemly in a woman and
that was inconsistent with these writers’ stated intention of remaining within their
own “sphere”; downplayed their achievements as accidental; and depicted them-
selves as mediums for a divine message rather than as originators of an aesthetic
message of their own. See Ann D. Wood, “The ‘Scribbling Women’ and Fanny Fern:
Baym, “Introduction,” Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in
America 1820–1870 (1978. 2nd ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); and
Mary Kelley, Private Woman Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century
America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), chapters 5–8. The business rela-
tionships of popular women writers are the subject of Susan Coultrap-McQuin,
Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century (Chapel
White Women’s Literature in America, 1820–1860 (Chapel Hill and London: University
of North Carolina Press, 2002), Linda Grasso complicates Kelley’s model in impor-
tant ways, by focusing on the ways in which antebellum women used their anger as
both a motivating factor and an aesthetic strategy. As I will discuss below, the model
of authorship described by Kelley, Baym, Wood, and Coultrap-McQuin and adopt-
ed, with some variations, by most white, middle-class American women writers in
the antebellum era was the dominant one available to the women who are my
subjects.

9. For a description of the institutional structures supporting American visual
artists at midcentury, see Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative
Years 1790–1860 (New York: George Braziller, 1966); and Roger B. Stein, John Ruskin
and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840–1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
1967). For an overview of the literary field during the 1850s, see Brodhead, The School
of Hawthorne.
10. Ruskin’s *Modern Painters I* appeared in England in 1843 and was published in the United States in 1847; *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* appeared in 1849, and the first volume of *The Stones of Venice* in 1851. Popular anthologies of Ruskin’s work began appearing within a decade. *Modern Painters* had an immediate effect on American intellectuals: both Emerson and Whitman read it shortly after it appeared, and it was widely and enthusiastically reviewed in American journals (Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought*, 40–44). For an analysis of the appeal of Ruskin’s writing for American intellectuals seeking an alternative to the Scottish Common Sense approach, see Stein, chapters 1–5.


12. *Putnam’s Magazine*, which was founded in 1853, prefigured the *Atlantic’s* commitment to promoting high-quality American literature and to promulgating standards of literary quality that were explicitly defined in opposition to the tradition of sentimental writing. This commitment was abandoned in 1856, however, when the editorial leadership at *Putnam’s* changed, leaving the *Atlantic*, which was founded a year later, as the foremost arbiter of national literary standards and shaper of an emerging literary high culture in the late 1850s and beyond. For discussions of *Putnam’s* editorial practices, see Sarah Robbins, “Gendering the History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Benito Cereno, Beloved* and *Middle Passage,*” *American Quarterly* 49.3 (1997), and Sheila Post-Lauria, “Magazine Practices and Melville’s *Israel Potter;*” in Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, eds., *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995).


14. Both of Phelps’s grandfathers were ministers. Her maternal grandfather, the Reverend Moses Stuart (1780–1852), brought German Biblical Criticism to Andover Theological Seminary in the early decades of the nineteenth century, an introduction that revolutionized the field of biblical study in the United States. Her father, Austin
Phelps, was appointed Professor of Rhetoric and Homiletics at Andover in 1848, where he remained for the rest of his life.


18. Woolson maintained most of her literary relationships by correspondence, both because she lived in Europe for much of her adult life and because of her increasing deafness, which made conversation difficult (Dean, *Constance Fenimore Woolson*, 6, 83, 178).


20. Evans published widely in Southern magazines and newspapers, but her work never appeared in Northern periodicals, despite evidence in her letters that she was invited to contribute to at least one Northern art magazine. Evans’s well-publicized sectional loyalty meant that her work was always viewed through the prism of her identity as a Southern writer, and that Evans never got to be an active part of the New York (or any other) literary scene. As I discuss in chapter 2, however, Evans very much wanted to play a central role in the intellectual and cultural life of the nation, and she gives her fictional surrogates precisely such a role.


22. See, for example, Rebecca Harding Davis, *Bits of Gossip* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1904) 36–41, and Alcott, *Journals*, 109, 119, for accounts of Davis and Alcott’s mutual admiration and respect for each other’s work. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s memoir, *Chapters from a Life*, is littered with references to the work of her female peers and predecessors, most of them admiring; the same is true of Annie Fields, ed., *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (1897; Detroit: Gale Research, 1970). Augusta Jane Evans makes frequent references to the popular literature of the day; see Sexton, *A Southern Woman of Letters*. Since Constance Fenimore Woolson’s surviving letters and journals are unpublished, it is difficult to know what her opinion of her female peers was.

23. Phelps, *Chapters from a Life*, 146–47. Both Alcott and Davis had somewhat more difficult relationships with Fields than Phelps did. Early in Alcott’s career, Fields had recommended that she give up writing and confine herself to teaching, a recommendation that Alcott ignored, noting in her journal “Being wilful [sic], I said, I won’t teach; and I can write, and I’ll prove it” (Alcott, *Journals*, 109). Fields’s comment clearly rankled Alcott, since she returns to it repeatedly. Recording her pleasure at the success of *Hospital Sketches*, Alcott writes: “A year ago I had no publisher & went begging with my wares; now three have asked me for something. . . . There is a sudden hoist for a meek & lowly scribbler who was told to ‘stick to her teaching,’ & never had a literary friend to lend a helping hand!” (Journals, 121). She mentions the comment again in a letter to Louise Chandler Moulton in 1883 (The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott [eds. Madeleine Stern, Joel Myerson, and Daniel Shealy. Boston: Little Brown, 1987], 160, n. 2). Although Alcott knew the Fields family well—
she stayed with them while teaching school in Boston in 1862—Brodhead suggests that she felt like a “poor relation” rather than a literary “find” and legitimate participant in the Fields’ sparkling literary salon (Brodhead, Cultures of Letters, 87–88).

Sharon M. Harris suggests that Fields had been looking for an excuse to drop Davis from the Atlantic when he ended their relationship on grounds of breach of contract after Davis published Waiting for the Verdict in The Galaxy in 1868—this despite the fact that Davis had long been in breach of her exclusive contract with the Atlantic by publishing in Peterson’s (Rebecca Harding Davis [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991], 138–39). It was during Fields’s tenure as editor (1861–71) that the Atlantic stopped accepting the work of both Davis and Alcott.

24. Quoted in Sharon M. Harris, Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 137. Many of James’s reviews of his American peers of both genders are reprinted in Henry James, Literary Criticism (New York: The Library of America, 1984). Joan Hedrick argues that the Nation’s hostility toward women writers was part of an effort to reclaim the cultural and political power that women writers of domestic fiction had amassed during the antebellum period by addressing matters of social and political reform in their fiction: “At a time when women lacked the vote, the Nation insisted that the important issues of Reconstruction should be decided in the political arena and literary women should give up their pulpits, pens, and podiums. The Nation’s method was to attack the literary excellence of women writers in the name of ‘art’” (Harriet Beecher Stowe, 349).

25. No one has conducted a systematic study of the gendering of high culture in the nation’s “quality journals” during the postbellum era, but many critics have noted the phenomenon in passing. Only publication patterns in the Atlantic have been studied in detail. Ellery Sedgwick observes that although approximately 50 percent of the contributions to the inaugural issue of the Atlantic were by women, they were represented exclusively in the fiction department (Sedgwick also asserts that this ratio held throughout the nineteenth century, a fact that Sharon Harris disputes). In Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism, Sharon Harris notes that although both Fields and Howells retained a ratio of 25 percent of contributions by women, under Fields’s editorship of the Atlantic, “23 percent of fiction and essays published were by women authors and 77 percent by men. When Howells began his editorship, the percentage for women dropped to 17 percent, leaving 83 percent of the fiction and essays to be produced by the journal’s male contributors” and relegating women’s contributions to poetry (167). Richard Brodhead notes that “the Atlantic underwent a palpable stiffening of its selection criteria in the mid-1860s” when it stopped accepting work by Alcott and Davis (Cultures of Letters, 87–88). A systematic gender analysis of the content of the Atlantic and of its reviewing patterns is in Anne E. Boyd, “What! Has she got into the ‘Atlantic’?: Women Writers, the Atlantic Monthly, and the Formation of the American Canon,” American Studies 39:3 (Fall 1998): 5–36. The most cursory survey of the tables of contents of other prominent magazines reveals similar trends: although a significant proportion of contributions are by women, they are almost exclusively fiction and poetry, along with the occasional nonfiction essay on a “feminine” subject.

26. Discussing the common critical misconception that Rebecca Harding Davis didn’t have a well-thought-out theoretical program, Sharon Harris observes that “because she, like the majority of early nineteenth-century women realists, explicated the premises of her theory in fiction rather than by writing a separate theoretical
tract, her contributions to the development of these concepts have been virtually ignored by scholars” (Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism, 10–11).

27. I believe that Phelps’s *Chapters from a Life* (1896) and Davis’s *Bits of Gossip* (1904) are the first published memoirs by American women writers. Although both discuss their vocations and careers, Phelps confines her aesthetic manifesto to a single chapter, at the very end of the book, and Davis provides no organized statement about her literary program. As discussed in chapter 3, Alcott fully expected that her journals and letters would be published after her death, but she wrote no formal memoir.


30. Susan Coultrap-McQuin points out that “the model of the Gentleman Publisher presupposed that the publisher was male. Although women had often been involved in printing and publishing during colonial days, by the nineteenth century few of them were publishers in their own right of books or magazines until the last two decades of the century” (Doing Literary Business, 33). Women did influence publishing decisions made by husbands and fathers—John P. Jewett’s wife recommended that he publish *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; Susan Warner’s *The Wide Wide World* was accepted by G. P. Putnam only after his mother read the manuscript and urged its publication; and James T. Fields’s wife, Annie, influenced her husband’s decision to publish Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s *The Gates Ajar* (Doing Literary Business, 35). A recent collection that demonstrates the myriad ways in which women writers did participate in the periodical press of the nineteenth century is Cane and Alves, eds., *The Only Efficient Instrument: American Women Writers & The Periodical, 1837–1916* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001).


34. “Evans and the Waning of Woman’s Fiction” is the title of the final chapter of *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women, 1820–1870*. Although Baym observes at the end of *Woman’s Fiction* that “the flowering of this fiction created the ground from which, after the Civil War, a group of women who were literary artists developed along with an audience to appreciate them” (298), the process by which this group developed is outside the purview of Baym’s study. Subsequent literary historians of the period have accepted and repeated both Baym’s timeline and her implication that this change took place either imperceptibly or organically or both. Elizabeth Ammons notes that for those who wanted to continue to produce popular fiction identified with domesticity and aimed primarily at female readers, “identification as a woman writer posed little problem.” But “for many women late in the nineteenth and then early in the twentieth century, the mid-nineteenth-century mainstream American image of the domestic novelist no longer applied. . . . Increasingly, women writers as a group were determined to assert their right to write not simply to make a living but for the same reasons that ambitious men (and a few women) had always turned to novel writing; to create original works of art” (“Gender and Fiction,” *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott [New York: Columbia University Press, 1991], 272). Richard Brodhead echoes Baym’s and Ammons’s sense that American women’s writing was qualitatively dif-
ferent by the end of the nineteenth century, observing that “[w]hen women writers
began to hang quotations from Flaubert over their writing desks—as Sarah Orne
Jewett did in fact and as Kate Chopin must have done in pectore—we know that
something has changed” (The School of Hawthorne, 13). Brodhead also argues that
Sarah Orne Jewett was the first American woman to write from within the vision of
the literary that had been articulated by the Atlantic: Jewett’s “career plan . . . set a
figure of authorship—aligning women’s writing with high-cultural aspirations,
with antifamilial careerism and profound artistic seriousness,” which numerous
women writers followed (Cultures of Letters, 175).

35. In her influential study Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn
into the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Elizabeth
Ammons argues: “What is significant about the group [of seventeen turn-of-the cen-
tury writers] I am discussing is not that they are unprecedented, but that before
them no historically coherent group of women of comparable artistic ambition and
accomplishment aspired to succeed as artists working primarily in fiction in the
United States. They were the pioneer generation. Before them were scattered indi-
viduals struggling with the problems of reconciling gender and art or gender, race,
and art. At the turn of the century, however—as books in the period about women
artists attest—there erupted a whole group of women struggling with the issues”
(12).

36. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands (Boston: Phillips,

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and Journals (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1889), 32. Hereinafter abbreviated
as Life of HBS.
Press, 1994), 87, 119. Hereinafter abbreviated as HBS.
4. Ibid., 239–40.
5. Despite their chronological proximity, these three texts are not typically read
as being in dialogue with each other. Although Nina Baym discusses them together,
she calls these works Stowe’s “religious novels” and views all three novels as virtu-
ally identical in their depiction of female characters who are not human but
“[p]erfected beings [who] have no functions to perform vis-à-vis themselves; their
purpose is to validate religious belief and the spiritual world for others, including
the audience” (Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America
6. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands (Boston: Phillips,
8. John Gatta has established definitively that Stowe joined the Trinity
Episcopal Church in Hartford sometime between 1864 and 1866 (“The Anglican
Charles Foster argues quite convincingly that Stowe never completely rejected Calvinism as the fundamental intellectual and theological framework that shaped her life and work. See The Rungless Ladder: Harriet Beecher Stowe and New England Puritanism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1954), especially chapter 7. Gatta does not disagree with this view entirely, although he ascribes more importance to the religious aspects of Stowe’s “involvement” with Anglicanism than does Foster, arguing that it helped shape “the aesthetic spirituality, the enlarged vision of human salvation, and the feminized theology of divine love that characterize most of her fiction” (432–33).


10. “Heart” religion refers to Horace Bushnell’s view that the heart rather than the head was the source of religious knowledge; God’s “‘purity, goodness, beauty, and gentleness . . . can never be sufficiently apprehended by mere intellect. It requires a heart, a good, right-feeling heart, to receive so much of heart as God opens to us in the Gospel of Christ’” (quoted in James Turner, Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985], 111). For an account of the transformation of Protestant theology from a focus on knowledge of God to an emphasis on feeling God, see Turner, chapter 3. For a discussion of the way in which “heart religion” coexisted with the ideology of domesticity see Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (1977; New York: Anchor, 1988), especially chapters 4–7. In her Common Sense Applied to Religion, or The Bible and the People (1857) Catharine Beecher articulated her belief, which drew on the work of Bushnell and other liberal theologians as well as on her own years of religious turmoil, that salvation was available to all who sought it, thus removing the central barrier Calvinism posed to those who sought eternal life. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), chapter 16.


13. On the gender dynamics of the institutionalization of high culture at midcentury and beyond, see Brodhead, The School of Hawthorne (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); and Hedrick, HBS, especially chapter 23.


15. The attitude toward “morals” expressed in this poem is a distinct departure from antebellum views of the proper relationship between morality and art. Although transcendentalism was based in part on rejecting Johnsonian views of art’s purpose, it did not give rise to an aesthetic that divorced morality from art. Lawrence Buell explains that in the early part of the nineteenth century the standard of judgment of art changed from “Does this book make vice attractive?” to “Does it make virtue beautiful?” Buell notes: “Transcendentalist aesthetics went one step further, referring the moral power of great literature to the act of creation (which Emerson, like Coleridge, saw as a quasi-religious experience), rather than to the
work’s reinforcement or promotion of accepted moral standards. At this point, in theory, an aesthetics completely divorced from morality became possible—Poe’s Coleridge-based aesthetic, for example; but in New England this did not happen. Emerson continued to make art subordinate to the moral and religious experience that underlay it and that it, in turn, was designed to provoke in the reader” (Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture, From Revolution through Renaissance* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 65). The effect, Buell points out, is a philosophy of art that wasn’t very far removed from the didactic moralistic aesthetics from which Transcendentalism initially distinguished itself.


17. Hedrick, *HBS*, 289. Women were invited to one of the *Atlantic*’s dinner meetings in 1859, but only two women (Stowe and Harriet Prescott [later Spofford]) attended, and the atmosphere was tense and uncomfortable. Women were not invited to the *Atlantic*’s meetings again until late in the century, and even then it was only on rare, celebratory occasions (the Holmes breakfast in 1880 and the celebration of Stowe’s eightieth birthday in 1882). For detailed discussions of the cultural and practical barriers to women’s participation in the editorial and business sides of literary culture in the nineteenth century, see Hedrick, *HBS*, chapter 23, and Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

18. Ibid., 291. For a detailed discussion of the institutional ambivalence toward women writers that permeated the *Atlantic Monthly* during the first four decades of its existence, see Ann E. Boyd, “‘What! Has she got into the *Atlantic*?’: Women Writers, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Formation of the American Canon,” *American Studies* 39:3 (Fall 1998): 5–36.

19. As numerous scholars of nineteenth-century women’s writing have demonstrated, antebellum women commonly used their fictional pulpits to critique the excessive materialism, individualism, and other social ills of the period and to endorse social reform based on extending the “feminine” values of the domestic sphere into the broader world. Stowe’s critique in *The Minister’s Wooing* text differs from this pattern in that the solution she imagines is based on aesthetic rather than primarily moral activity.


21. As Stein notes, “It was not so much the guidebook information with which Ruskin supplied [Americans] that contributed to his growing popularity . . . as it was the way he helped them to resolve the normative questions of the value of nature, religion, and art with what they felt to be a satisfying epistemology” (Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought, 86–87).

22. There is no record of the books in the Stowe family library, so we can’t know with certainty what Harriet Beecher Stowe read, but she was clearly very familiar with the ideas about the Italian middle ages and Renaissance advanced by Ruskin and others. In *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* she records her great pleasure at meeting Mrs. Anna Jameson, a British writer “whose works on art and artists were for years almost my only food for a certain class of longings” (Vol. I, 107). Stein notes that Mrs. Jameson’s works, along with those of Ruskin and Lord Lindsay, were among the primary vehicles for introducing Americans to ideas about Medieval art (Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought, 76).


25. Stowe’s critique of utilitarianism and her rejection of Calvinist strictures on beauty are not new ideas for her. They are central themes of *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, where statements on the topic are sprinkled throughout the two volumes of travel writing, sandwiched between accounts of social events and minor tourist mishaps and descriptions of people, meals, and hotels. One of her more pointed critiques of utilitarianism is inspired by a trip through beautiful Alpine meadows, where Stowe marvels at the beauty of wildflowers and argues that the “great Artist” who created them “is no utilitarian, no desirer of the fine arts, and no condemner of ornament; and those religionists, who seek to restrain every thing within the limits of cold, bare utility, do not imitate our Father in heaven” (Vol. II, 249). Noting that the natural world is filled with beauty that seems to lack a purpose, Stowe argues that beauty itself is divine: “The instinct to adorn and beautify is from him; it likens us to him, and if rightly understood, instead of being a siren to beguile our hearts away, it will be the closest affiliating band” (Vol. II, 250).

26. “The Position of the Artist,” *The Crayon* (March 28, 1855), 193. Although most of the articles in the *Crayon* were anonymous, more than half of the pieces in the magazine’s first three volumes were written by founder and coeditor, William James Stillman. His coeditor and financial backer was John Durand, son of American painter Asher B. Durand (Stein, *Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought*, 102, 106).


28. Ibid., 289–90.


30. Stowe’s comments on the destructive effect of Puritan culture on aesthetic sensibilities are strongly autobiographical; in *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* Stowe recounts with some bitterness her feeling of having had her soul “starved” by the lack of access to art and beauty, not only by virtue of living in a country relatively poor in works of art, but, more fundamentally, by the Calvinist tradition’s strictures against aesthetic pleasure. Describing her stay in a Paris house close to the Louvre, Stowe writes: “[The Louvre] is close by. Think of it. To one who has starved all a life, in vain imaginings of what art might be, to know that you are within a stone’s throw of a museum full of its miracles. . . . (Vol. II, 159). Commenting on the French love of beauty, Stowe mourns the paucity of beauty in her own life: “With all New England’s earnestness and practical efficiency, there is a long withering of the soul’s more ethereal part,—a crushing out of the beautiful,—which is horrible. Children are born there with a sense of beauty equally delicate with any in the world, in whom it dies a lingering death of smothered desire and pining, weary starvation. I know, because I have felt it.

One in whom this sense has long been repressed, in coming into Paris, feels a rustling and waking within him, as if the soul were trying to unfold her wings, long unused and mildewed” (Vol. II, 392).

31. Describing her first encounter with some of the great Italian Renaissance art about which she had read, Stowe records her ambivalence toward paintings of sacred subjects by Murillo and Raphael and concludes, “Protestant as I am, no
Catholic picture contents me” (Sunny Memories, Vol. I, 323). For an excellent discussion of antebellum Americans’ ambivalent relationship with Catholicism and Stowe’s engagement with Catholic Italy in Agnes of Sorrento, see Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

34. Stowe had evidently been thinking about the gendered nature of the “soul artist” long before she created the character of Mary Scudder; her description of Mrs. Anna Jameson, a well-regarded British art historian whom she met during her 1854 visit to England, depicts the writer as a kind of “soul artist”: “Mrs. Jameson is the most charming of critics, with the gift, often too little prized, of discovering and pointing out beauties rather than defects; beauties which we may often have passed unnoticed, but which, when so pointed out, never again conceal themselves. This shows itself particularly in her Characteristics of Shakespeare’s Women, a critique which only a true woman could have written” (Sunny Memories, Vol. II, 107). As in the description of the “soul artist” in The Minister’s Wooing, the ability to praise rather than criticize—a characteristic stereotypically associated with male critics—and to call the reader’s attention to little-noticed qualities in the object being examined, whether a person or a work of art, are understood by Stowe as specifically feminine qualities.

37. Stowe, Life of HBS, 25.
38. Ibid., 29.
39. Charles Stowe was apparently aware of the tension revealed by his mother’s letters to her brother Edward in which she challenged the solution he offered to her religious difficulties, but he persistently reads those tensions teleologically. He notes, “A letter written to her brother Edward in Boston, dated March 27, 1828, shows how slowly she adopted the view of God that finally became one of the most characteristic elements in her writings” (Life of HBS, 42). In the revised edition of the biography, published in 1911, Charles is only slightly more forthcoming about Stowe’s ambivalence towards her siblings’ theological views. He suggests that the crisis of faith his mother experienced in her late teens was prompted by her inability to reconcile “the powerful and somewhat contradictory influences brought to bear upon her mind by her father, her brother Edward, and her sister Catherine.” But, he insists, “She is naturally drawn to the winning and restful conception of God as like Jesus Christ which both her brother Edward and her sister Catherine unite in presenting to her, but at the same time she shows how the iron of her father’s Calvinism has passed into her soul. It may make her very unhappy and depressed, but still she cannot let it go immediately. For dull, lethargic souls Calvinism may be a most excellent tonic under given conditions, but on her artistic and sensitive nature it acted like a subtle poison. It appealed to her reason and left her heart unsatisfied,—nay, even wounded and bleeding (Charles Edward Stowe and Lyman Beecher Stowe, Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 57–58. In keeping with this narrative, Charles Stowe makes only passing reference to the repeated religious crises Stowe experienced throughout her adult life. For accounts of these,

40. Among modern critics, Dorothy Berkson originated the emphasis on Candace as the bearer of Stowe’s theological vision, arguing that the novel is one of a number of Stowe’s works dedicated to imagining a matriarchal millennial society “that will result from the wedding of Christian and feminine virtues” and will be opposed to “patriarchal Calvinism.” For her, “Candace’s maternal, New Testament philosophy is egalitarian, inclusive and participatory. The disciple, not the ruler, determines his own salvation. This, for one of Stowe’s background was radical theology with equally radical political implications” (“Millennial Fiction and the Feminine Fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe,” in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 245-46, 248. For Armand Barton St. Levi, Stowe is a “sentimentalist” redefiner of Calvinism (17). He argued that “[w]hile Stowe’s Sentimental Love Religion parodies the patriarchal nature of Calvinism by caricaturing its God as a desiccated New England deacon, it affirms the matriarchal amplitude of the New testament by extending the dogma of the immaculate conception to all women” (94). Summarizing the development of sentimental love religion as an alternative to Calvinist theology, Marianne Noble points out that comparisons of God to mothers “are particularly prominent in nineteenth-century sentimental fiction; indeed, sentimental fiction plays an important role in developing and disseminating them,” noting that “[i]n *The Minister’s Wooing*, Mrs. Marvyn nearly goes insane trying to love the wrathful, masculine God who appears to have damned her son for all time, but she is able to love God when her black servant, Candace, compares him to her own maternal self . . .” (Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, 67). John Gatta argues that in *The Minister’s Wooing* “Stowe renounces austere Calvinism. . . . She proposes instead a ‘feminized’ Christianity that stresses the motherly compassion of Jesus. . . .” The vehicle for Stowe’s “repudiation of Calvinist demands for a discrete moment of conversion” are the “unordained women like Candace and Mary” whose “charisma of spiritual maternity . . . emerges from a kind of priesthood whose power derives from a personal knowledge of affliction and identification with the bleeding heart of the Mother of God” (417, 418).

Although Joan Hedrick’s reading of the novel, and of Stowe’s relationship with Calvinism, is considerably more nuanced than that of many critics, she, too, focuses on Candace at the expense of Mary Scudder as the bearer of Stowe’s vision in the novel. Hedrick argues that “in the figures of Mrs. Marvyn and Candace, Stowe splits herself into two mothers, a white mother who sorrowed and a black mother who comforted. Making Candace the high priest of suffering was consistent with Stowe’s view of the outrages slave mothers had experienced and with her view, articulated in *The Minister’s Wooing*, that only those who had experienced ‘a great affliction’ were fit to guide those who are struggling in it” (*HBS*, 282). For other insightful discussions of Stowe’s relationship to Calvinism in *The Minister’s Wooing*, see Lawrence Buell, “Calvinism Romanticized: Harriet Beecher Stowe, Samuel Hopkins, and The Minister’s Wooing,” in Elizabeth Ammons, ed., *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*; and Buell, *New England Literary Culture*, chapter 2.


42. Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*, 43.

44. Although Henry Ward Beecher became the best-known public spokesman for liberal “heart” religion in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is unlikely that he was much of an influence on Harriet, since he was two years her junior. During her formative years, Edward, Catharine, and, of course, Lyman Beecher were by far the strongest influences on Stowe. See Stowe, *Life of HBS*, and Hedrick, *HBS*.


46. There is no written record of Stowe’s conversations about religion with Catharine from this time since the two lived and worked together. As correspondence from later in life reveals, however, Stowe was extremely close to her sister and strongly influenced by her theological views, which Catharine published in numerous treatises including *The Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Founded upon Experience, Reason, and the Bible* (1831); *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* (1836); and *Common Sense Applied to Religion, Or The Bible and the People* (1857). For a detailed discussion of Beecher’s struggles with Calvinism and the theological solutions she developed, see Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*.

47. See chapter 14 of Hedrick, *HBS*, for a detailed discussion of this difficult time in Stowe’s life.


50. Ibid., 153. Quotations from Stowe are from a letter to Thomas Beecher, March 16, 1844. The belief in the necessity of submitting completely to the divine will was a cornerstone of Lyman Beecher’s strain of Calvinism. Any failure to submit cast doubt on one’s regeneration and capacity to achieve grace and could bring about further trials. See Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*, 28–32. See also Hedrick, *HBS*, 150–53.


52. Foster, *Rungless Ladder*, 95.


55. Ibid., 322; Foster, *Rungless Ladder*, 98.


58. Ibid., 156.

59. Ibid., 186.

60. Ibid., 187.

61. Ibid., 146.

62. Ibid., 147.

similarly viewed the Victorian crisis of faith as a strictly masculine affair. See, for example, David S. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), and T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981). Recent work by religious historians has begun to focus on women’s participation in American religious life in the 19th century, but the mid-century crisis of faith has not yet been the subject of the newer scholarship.

64. Charles Foster discovered that the letter Mary sends to Dr. Hopkins in the “Evidences” chapter, in which she resists the doctor’s attempts to plant doubts and elaborates on the source of her faith, is drawn almost word for word from a letter Roxanna Foote wrote her then-fiancé Lyman Beecher in 1798; see *The Rungless Ladder*, 115–17. For a discussion of Roxanna Foote’s symbolic function in the Beecher family in general, and in Stowe’s life in particular, see Hedrick, *HBS*, chapters 1–2.


67. See Hedrick, *HBS*, especially chapters 14 and 15, for examples of Calvin Stowe’s religious doubts.

68. Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 344.

69. I am purposely focusing quite narrowly here on one aspect of the sentimental plot—conversion and Christ-like sacrifice—because it is fundamental to antebellum women writers’ authorial self-conception. As Mary Kelley and Ann Douglas have shown, antebellum women harnessed their need, or desire, to write for publication to the culturally sanctioned conception of women as modest, self-effacing repositories of the family’s and the nation’s religious values. Antebellum women writers’ emphasis on their religious motivation for writing fiction enabled them to justify, for themselves and their public, their violation of proper womanly behavior by defining their literary activities as entirely consistent with that behavior. For if they wrote to “do good,” “to share the gospel of St. John that ‘God is Love’; and to ‘bring forth much fruit to [God’s] glory,’” then their literary activities were, by definition, both consistent with acceptable feminine behavior and a form of doing God’s work (Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984]), 286, 288, 292, 293). For the women who adopted this rationale for writing fiction, the central mechanism for doing God’s work was effecting conversions in their readers by depicting conversions in their texts. And conversion, in domestic fiction, is almost always to a belief in the loving maternal God of Bushnell’s “heart religion.” Not all heroines of sentimental novels die, of course. But as readers have long noted, the death of a child or a young woman who has achieved conversion and becomes Christ-like is a staple of sentimental fiction. And for those heroines who don’t die, successful growth to adulthood is dependent on learning to practice Christ-like self-denial; as Jane Tompkins points out, the death or self-sacrifice at the center of the sentimental novel “enact[s] the drama of the idea, central to Christian soteriology, that the highest human calling is to give one’s life for another” (*Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1985], 128). To privilege Christ-like self-sacrifice and/or the untimely death of children and young women as a vehicle of conversion is, in the mid-nineteenth century, to identify oneself with a particular constellation of beliefs about religion, women, and women authors.
There is a large and rich body of scholarship on the cultural work of the sentimental which has extended the terms of the discussion beyond the narrow ones first outlined by Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins of being, as June Howard has noted recently, either “‘for’ or ‘against’” sentimentality (“What Is Sentimentality?” *ALH* [Spring 1999], 65). Some of the key contributions to the expanded critical dialogue include Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment: Race Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth Century America* (1992); Karen Sánchez-Epplar, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (1993); Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (1997); Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1999); Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (2000). These studies take account of the various ways in which the sentimental functions as a cultural discourse that both participates in and challenges the social, political, and economic structures of antebellum America. There is also a growing body of work that revisits the notions of sympathy and sentiment and interrogates the critical response to them in the last three decades of the twentieth century. See, for example, Joanne Dobson, “Reclaiming Sentimental Literature,” *American Literature* 69 (1997); June Howard “What Is Sentimentality?,” and an expanded version in chapter 5 of *Publishing the Family* (2001). For a useful overview of the trends in the critical discussion of sentimentality, see the Preface to the new edition of Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage* (2002) and Sharon Harris’s review essay, “‘A New Era in Female History’: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women Writers,” *American Literature* 74 (September 2002).

Although all of this work has greatly expanded the frameworks within which critics read and understand sentimental novels, it has not displaced the original insights of Ann Douglas, Jane Tompkins, and Mary Kelley about the central ways in which sentimental religion authorized literary production by white, middle-class women.

70. In “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Conversation with *The Atlantic Monthly*: The Construction of *The Minister’s Wooing*” (*Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 28, No. 1), Dorothy Z. Baker argues that the marriage between Mary Scudder and James Marvyn represents Stowe’s rejection of the marriage plots common to fiction published alongside *The Minister’s Wooing* in the pages of the *Atlantic Monthly*, in which the protagonist rejects the dashing but unsuitable young man of her choice and marries an older, stable man of her mother’s choosing. Baker asserts, however, that Mary’s “decision to accept James Marvyn as her husband is informed by her consultation with a French woman” who “teache[es] Mary about the emotional and sexual components of marriage” and urges her not to accept a loveless marriage out of duty (33). Baker’s reading overlooks the fact that Mary actually rejects Virginie de Frontigniac’s argument in favor of breaking off the engagement with Doctor Hopkins and that the final resolution of the plot has very little to do with Mary’s agency and is made possible by Miss Prissy’s intervention, which leads the minister to voluntarily release Mary from her betrothal.


72. For details of the lengthy composition of *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*, see Foster, *The Rungless Ladder*, 64–65, 69, 86–87. *The Pearl of Orr’s Island* was published in two parts; the first few chapters appeared in the *Independent* newspaper from January to
April 1861. Stowe halted the story after chapter 17, when Mara and Moses are still children, explaining to her readers that she had a previous commitment to fulfill and promising to continue the story in the fall. Agnes of Sorrento was serialized in the Atlantic between May 1861 and April 1862. Stowe resumed publication of The Pearl of Orr’s Island in December 1861, and the two stories were published concurrently for part of 1862 (Hedrick, HBS, 297–302).

73. The novel has received very little critical attention from contemporary critics, but the first part was widely praised by nineteenth-century readers. See Foster, The Rungless Ladder, chapter 6, for a summary of these responses and one of the few published extended analyses of the novel. See also Hedrick, HBS, 296–302.


75. Stowe, The Pearl of Orr’s Island, 163.

76. Hedrick, HBS, 301.

77. Hedrick observes that Stowe’s choice of a male pseudonym is rather puzzling, since she was by this time a world-famous author whose contributions were sought by magazine and newspaper editors because her name on the masthead helped boost sales. Hedrick attributes Stowe’s choice of a male pseudonym to the changes in the American literary scene in the 1860s, suggesting that “speaking in a male voice was the price of admission to the Atlantic club” (HBS, 314).

78. The Civil War began on April 12, 1861. Agnes of Sorrento was serialized in the Atlantic from May 1861 to April 1862. Stowe wrote most of Agnes before the war began, however. The novel was influenced by the three trips the Stowes took to Europe during the 1850s. Stowe began writing the story in Italy in 1859 and finished it after returning to the States, in 1860 and 1861 (Hedrick, HBS, 292–301).

79. HBS to James and Annie Fields; n.d. [ca. February, 1861], Fields Papers, HL; quoted in Hedrick, HBS, 295.

80. HBS to James T. Fields, January 16, 1861, quoted in Hedrick, HBS, 298.

81. In The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), J. B. Bullen explains that in the nineteenth century the word “Renaissance” had controversial, “morally unorthodox associations” that have disappeared in the twentieth century. For earlier writers the word “represented a change in values or an ontological shift; it suggested a substitution of pagan values, or the assertion of individualism for religious or moral attitudes established in the Middle Ages. This change could be interpreted in very different ways. For some—Ruskin and Montalembert, for example—the Renaissance brought about a change for the worse. For them it was the source of contemporary social ills, and in their view it continued to be a model for contemporary dissipation and decadence. For others—Pater and Michelet, for example—Renaissance art and Renaissance life offered models of freedom of expression, freedom of emotion, and intellectual liberty denied to them by Victorian culture” (10).

82. Although Pugin’s work was known to American architects, it never achieved the kind of widespread popular appeal that Ruskin’s did. Stein suggests that Ruskin’s “Protestant restatement and development of [Pugin’s] ideas . . . gained the popular hearing Pugin had forfeited” because of his conversion to Catholicism (Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought, 65).

83. Bullen, Myth of the Renaissance, 90. Bullen writes that Rio’s central evaluative standard was the degree of “Christian poetry” in a work of art and that in his
approach to art history Rio privileged intuition over reason and made “few demands on historical knowledge in his reader, and even less on technical expertise. ‘Your heart will tell you the difference between good art and bad art,’ he claims, trust that and you cannot go wrong.’ The mystical in art is, he says, inaccessible to reason, hence the limitation of the historian when dealing with outstanding ‘Christian’ artists. ‘It is here that the competence of those popularly called connoisseurs ends,’ he says, ‘the particular appreciative faculty which one applies to the creations of which we are about to speak is no longer that by which one judges ordinary works of art.’ ‘Mysticism is to painting,’ he adds, ‘what ecstasy is to psychology’” (quoted in Bullen, 83).

84. Contrasts [1841], 9 n. Pugin’s emphasis; quoted in Bullen, Myth of the Renaissance, 102.


88. Ibid., 4.

89. Ibid., 28.

90. The lack of time to write, and the necessity of squeezing her literary work in-between her myriad domestic responsibilities, is a constant theme of the letters reprinted in Annie Fields, ed., Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe (1897. Detroit: Gale Research, 1970). The subject is also discussed in detail in Hedrick, HBS.

91. According to Steinberg, the San Marco “School of Art” was largely a nineteenth-century invention: “As nineteenth-century writers became increasingly more interested in quattrocento art and more confirmed in their belief that the glory of the art resided in its dependence upon an intensely spiritual Catholicism, the more attention the ‘San Marco school’ began to receive. This attention was vastly augmented by the foundation in the nineteenth century of spiritual brotherhoods of painters and other artists who, in imitation of what they thought existed before the ‘pagan’ sixteenth century, actually formed cloistered religious groups with conventual labors” (Fra Girolamo Savonarola, 8). Steinberg explains that although Savonarola did indeed urge his fellow Dominicans to earn their livings by practicing the arts, he “did not advise the practice of the ‘fine arts’ of painting or sculpture as the nineteenth-century writers assumed; for Savonarola the fine arts were in no way distinguished from the other manufacturing arts” (9).

92. This quote is from a letter written by Stowe’s close friend, Annie Howard, in which she recounts a conversation with Stowe in the mid-1850s; the letter is reprinted in Annie Fields, ed., Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe, 163. A similar description of Stowe’s motivation for writing is also given in Stowe, Life of HBS, chapter 7. Although Stowe’s oft-quoted statement that “God wrote” Uncle Tom’s Cabin appears to have been made only toward the end of her life, she disclaimed authorial agency in writing the novel as soon as she began to be asked about her motives for writing. For the anecdote in which Stowe declared that “God wrote it [Uncle Tom’s Cabin]” see Fields, Life and Letters, 377. For other, undated examples of similar declarations see Stowe, Life of HBS, 156.

93. During the 1860s, the question of originality was a subject of much consider-
ation, often as part of discussions of genius and American cultural identity, and sometimes as a topic in its own right. The topic is discussed in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

94. When Stowe does speak publicly about women writers, in “How Shall We Learn to Write?” (Hearth and Home, January 16, 1869), it is to observe that “the best writing is done by men,” because of their superior educations, and to suggest not that women seek better education, but that they stick to writing about what they know best—the domestic; Stowe assures her readers, “There is a great deal of writing, very charming, very acceptable, and much in demand, which consists simply in painting by means of words the simple and homely scenes of every-day life”—in effect warning them away from attempting to challenge the boundaries of the literary sphere that had long been allotted to American women writers.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, August 28, 1860; reprinted in Rebecca Grant Sexton, A Southern Woman of Letters: The Correspondence of Augusta Jane Evans Wilson (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 19–20. Hereinafter abbreviated as SWL. Evans met Lyons in the fall of 1859, during her visit to New York City, where Evans was attending to the publication of Beulah.

2. Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, July 30, 1860 (Sexton, SWL, 18).

3. Evans’s first novel, Inez, A Tale of the Alamo (1855), is an anti-Catholic love story that also functions, as Elizabeth Moss has argued, as a piece of “proslavery propaganda” (Domestic Novelists in the Old South [Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992], 154). The protagonists of her three subsequent novels, Beulah (1859), Macaria (1864), and St. Elmo (1866), are all artists who serve as vehicles for Evans’s exploration of questions of aesthetics and cultural nationalism. Although each of these novels is written in Evans’s erudite, often-difficult style, all three were successful, establishing Evans as one of the most popular authors of her day: Beulah brought the Evans family financial security; royalties from Macaria, which was smuggled through the blockade and printed in the North in 1864, provided Evans with much-needed cash after the end of the Civil War; and St. Elmo was a tremendous commercial success, although it is difficult to establish precisely how many copies were sold. The publisher, G. W. Carleton, couldn’t keep up with demand when the book was first published and claimed to have sold one million copies in the first four months after the book’s publication (Mary Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], 25). See also William P. Fidler, Augusta Evans Wilson 1835–1909, A Biography (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1951), chapter 11. During the years of her marriage to Lorenzo Wilson, from 1868 until 1891, Evans wrote very little; and when she took up her pen again after Wilson’s death, she produced two works of fiction, The Speckled Bird (1902) and Devota (1907), in which a love story serves as a vehicle for Evans’s conservative views about women’s social roles.

4. Augusta Evans to J. L. M. Curry, July 15, 1863 (Sexton, SWL, 65).

5. Ibid. (Sexton, SWL, 66).

6. Ibid.

7. Evans was born into a prominent Southern family in Columbus, Georgia. Her father, Matthew Evans, lost most of his fortune to bad investments and an economic
downturn during the 1840s; the family moved to Mobile, Alabama, where they lived in straitened circumstances until Evans’s work as a writer brought the family financial security. The only book length biography of Evans is Fidler, *Augusta Jane Evans*. Summaries of Evans’s life and career and of the plots of Evans’s novels can be found in Anne Sophie Riepma, *Fire & Fiction: Augusta Jane Evans in Context* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2002).

8. Evans is classified by Mary Kelley as the youngest of the literary domestics, and by Baym as the last in the line of writers producing “woman’s fiction,” because of her immense popularity, which rivaled Susan Warner’s and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s, and because her plots rarely deviate from the standard formula that Baym outlines in *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820–1870* (1978. 2nd ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Subsequent scholars have elucidated the differences between the Northern and Southern domestic novel and focused on Evans as a specifically Southern practitioner of the form (Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859–1936* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981], and Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*). Drew Gilpin Faust has explored the role that Evans’s writing played in supporting the Confederacy during the Civil War (*Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996]), but Evans’s status as a “domestic novelist” is unquestioned by these scholars.


12. The members of the “Sacred Circle” Faust studies include William Gilmore Simms, a novelist; James Henry Hammond, a politician; Edmund Ruffin, an agricultural reformer; and two professors: Nathaniel Beverley Tucker and George Frederick Holmes. For a detailed discussion of the proslavery writings of these five men, see chapter 6 of *Sacred Circle*.

13. See the Introduction to Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South*, for an account of the significant ways in which the popular domestic novels produced by Southern writers differed from those produced by Northern writers.


16. Ibid., 209.

17. Ibid., 210.

18. The *Atlantic Monthly* was conceived, initially, by Francis Underwood, in order to “give the active support of letters to the anti-slavery cause,” a purpose that was obvious to readers in both the North and the South. George Wiliam Bagby, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, declared, after the magazine’s second issue appeared, “This magazine has appeared before the world challenging the patronage of all lovers of polite learning by articles of the highest excellence in point of style and sentiment . . . all enlisted in making attractive a work the object of which is to
wage war on Southern society’’ (quoted in Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly 1857–1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994], 62). In the first three years of the *Atlantic’s* existence, strongly abolitionist articles appeared in almost every issue of the magazine, all written by Robert Lowell, the magazine’s first editor, or his “radical abolitionist” friends (Sedgwick, 62). After James T. Fields assumed the editorship in 1862, Lowell continued to contribute much of the political writing that appeared in the magazine, and he and R. W. Emerson, became “the magazine’s principal spokesmen on emancipation” (101). Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was an outspoken abolitionist and the commander of the first regiment of freed slaves and who was also a regular contributor to the magazine, wrote “sympathetic accounts of the slave revolts of Toussaint L’Overture, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner” (101). *Putnam’s* was equally strongly aligned with abolitionism; according to Frank Luther Mott, it was widely viewed by the editors of Southern periodicals such as *De Bow’s* and *Southern Literary Messenger* as the unofficial organ of the Republican Party; that view is supported both by the tone and the content of the political writing that appeared in the magazine during the early 1850s and by the fact that Associate Editor Parke Godwin “wrote the first platform of the Republican party, basing it on an article he had contributed to the magazine in January 1856” (*A History of American Magazines, 1850–1865* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957], 423). For a discussion of the ways in which literary nationalism and abolition were inextricably linked in the pages of *Putnam’s* magazine, which was founded in 1853 with the explicit goal of “promoting high-quality, ‘resolutely American’ literature,” see Sarah Robbins, “Gendering the History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Benito Cereno*, *Beloved* and *Middle Passage*, *American Quarterly* 49.3 [1997], 547).

19. “Northern Literature,” *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 16, 1859, [p. 2]. Although the articles appeared anonymously, Evans biographer William Fidler definitively identified Evans as the author of the articles (Augusta Evans Wilson, 70), and it seems likely that her identity was not a secret, at least in Mobile in 1859, since she frequently published anonymous newspaper articles, which she equally frequently alludes to in her letters. She refers to the articles offhandedly in a letter to Rachel Lyons from Jan. 4, 1860, as part of her apology for not responding to her friend’s letter more promptly (Sexton, *SWL*, 7). The four articles are “Northern Literature,” which appeared in two parts on October 10 and 16, 1859, and “Southern Literature” which appeared on October 30 and November 6, 1859. The articles all appeared on p. 2 of the newspaper. All further references to these articles will be made parenthetically, by date. I am extremely grateful to Melissa J. Homestead for locating the only extant copies of these articles (in the Library of Congress) and sharing her transcription of them with me.

20. As my analysis in the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, I disagree with Rebecca Grant Sexton’s assessment that Evans was unable or unwilling to admit that she wrote “as a means of self-fulfillment” (xxii).


23. Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, July 30, 1860 (Sexton, *SWL*, 18). I am using a nineteenth-century notion of “literary” here, rather than a postmodern one. In a subsequent letter Evans expresses her pleasure that her friend has “really contemplated writing” and gives the novice writer some professional advice: “Elaborate your plot,
trace clearly to the end, your grand leading aim, before you write a line and then you will find no trouble I think in weaving the details, arranging your—chiaroscuro—in fine—polishing the whole. Let me beg of you not to waver in this project; set to work, and your labor will gather wonderful charms for you. I know you can write, and I believe you will, if you only once set about it” (Augusta Jane Evans to Rachel Lyons, Nov. 15, 1860 [Sexton, SWL], 21–22).


27. Maria Cummins to Annie Fields, September 16, 1862, quoted in Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage, 293.

28. Mary Kelley has demonstrated that the “literary domestics” rarely admitted, even in their private correspondence and diaries, that their careers provided the kind of intellectual satisfaction and purpose that Evans describes here. Kelley attributes this reluctance to claim either ambition or satisfaction from one’s literary endeavors as indicative of a kind of internal psychic split produced by the disjunction between the “literary domestics’” career choices and their socialization as proper nineteenth-century women. I see it as a rhetorical strategy adopted, indeed even internalized, by Evans’s predecessors because it was a convention that permitted them to pursue a literary career and preserve their status as “true women.”

29. The recommendation to read Ruskin is in a letter from Evans to Lyons from December 8, 1859. A few weeks later Evans tells Lyons that she is reading Dante whose “great work I consider far superior to ‘Paradise Lost.’ I believe I wrote you of Ruskin.” Evans continues, “Fully to appreciate ‘Modern Painters,’ one must possess an intimate knowledge of Dante” (Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, Jan. 4, 1860; Sexton, SWL, 8).

30. Susan K. Harris has theorized that popular fiction by nineteenth-century women writers frequently contains an “overplot” that functions as a “cover—or—cover up for a far more radical vision of female possibilities embedded in the text” (19th-Century American Women’s Novels: Interpretive Strategies ([Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990], 12–13).

31. The centrality of domestic life to preserving Southern culture and values was
the subject of domestic fiction produced by antebellum Southerners. As Elizabeth Moss explains, “Planter women, southern domestic fiction contended, had the privilege and the obligation to serve as the center of their immediate and extended community; they could not shirk their responsibilities if that community were to endure” (Domestic Novelists in the Old South, 10). In addition to serving as apologists for slavery, the authors of Southern domestic novels had a message for their Southern readers: “southern women of privilege must take an active role in protecting their region from northern encroachment; only through the efforts of the planter class, specifically planter-class women, could the northern threat [to the Southern way of life] be averted” (23).

32. Faust, A Sacred Circle, 7.
33. Augusta Evans to J. L. M. Curry, July 15, 1863 (Sexton, SWL, 65).
34. Ibid., 66.
35. Ibid., 67.
36. Ibid., 65.
37. Ibid., 66.
38. Ibid., 66.
39. Ibid.
40. Perhaps because she is writing privately, Evans is remarkably frank about the limits of citing history in defense of slavery; she reminds Curry that except for “Penelope and Lucretia, I can recall no examples worth adducing in favor of slavery,” and she dismisses the common claim that Christianity distinguishes the slaveholding South from other slave societies, asking, “Sir, do you find the status of the mass of women in Christian Russia, any more encouraging” than that of the “semi-barbarism” and “degradation” of women in the “East where the institution has been maintained from time immemorial” (Sexton, SWL, 66–67).
42. Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, June 14, 1864 (Sexton, SWL, 104).
43. For a detailed discussion of these views of art’s social and religious function, see chapter 1.
44. References to Ruskin are sprinkled throughout Macaria (e.g., 190, 356, 409) and Evans’s personal correspondence. For a detailed discussion of Ruskin’s influence on American aesthetic thought in the 1850s, see chapter 1.
45. Augusta Evans to J. L. M. Curry, July 15, 1863 (Sexton, SWL, 66).
46. Evans seems to have been quite willing to use her sources selectively; she invokes John Stuart Mill’s authority here, but in St. Elmo she strongly attacks Mill’s liberal social views.
47. Augusta Evans, Beulah (1859; reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 331. As Drew Gilpin Faust points out, the Civil War drastically changed the expectation of most elite Southern women that all but a small minority of them would marry. Although, as Faust notes, the war made possible heroines like Electra and Irene, and Evans’s embrace of singleness at the end of Macaria offers Southern women an alternative world view for facing the postbellum world, many Southern readers of Macaria were uncomfortable with the novel’s willingness to envision a world without men. See Mothers of Invention, chapters 6 and 7.
48. Drew Gilpin Faust argues in the Introduction to Macaria that the religious emphasis at the end of the novel undermines the subversiveness of Evans’s portrait
of female independence and self-sufficiency: “Evans redefines the work that is at the center of both Irene’s and Electra’s self-fulfillment as but a special form of divine worship. . . . The self-assertion implicit in the pursuit of artistic or intellectual goals is thus subsumed within the larger context of religious submission” (xxiii). Faust quite rightly notes Evans’s redefinition of women’s intellectual work as a form of divine worship, but her suggestion that this act of redefinition is a last-minute effort to contain overly subversive material misses the point of Evans’s project both in Macaria and in her other work from this period. As all three of Evans’s novels from this period, and as her 1860 letters to Rachel Lyons, demonstrate, religious faith is the source of Evans’s feminist aesthetic, not antithetical to it. Such a redefinition neatly inverts the formula that had authorized female literary production during the first half of the century and allows Evans, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to preserve both their religious faith and their socially conservative views about women’s proper role, even as they argued for the centrality of women’s aesthetic work to the cultural projects of their regions.

49. Evans’s work was reviewed widely in the newspapers of the day, but it received virtually no attention from the more prestigious literary periodicals such as the Atlantic Monthly.

50. One of Evans’s earliest biographers, Louise Manly, praises the decision to avoid explicitly sectarian themes in St. Elmo as “an act of rare self-control . . . and . . . high wisdom” which, she suggests, Evans made in an attempt to “lift . . . herself and her readers out of the overwhelming seas around them and place . . . them in a region of peace and prosperity, to which only the most sanguine hope then beckoned the stricken inhabitants of the South” (“Augusta Evans Wilson, 1835–1909,” Library of Southern Literature, 1909. Eds. Edwin Anderson Alderman et al. [New Orleans: Martin & Hoyt, 1907–1913], Vol. 13, 5843). Fidler speculates that Evans chose to ignore the war both because “[u]nlike many of her sentimental compatriots, Augusta quickly realized that the Southern cause, as interpreted and defended by Confederates, was lost forever” and because she “believed that she could lay greater emphasis upon the lasting values of former times, upon the noble impulses associated with good living in the ante-bellum South, if she developed the love story of Edna Earl and St. Elmo among stable, seemingly permanent conditions” (Augusta Evans Wilson, 124–25).

51. As Melissa Homestead has shown in her analysis of Evans’s business relationships during and after the war, Evans was quite capable of presenting herself in different lights to different correspondents, in order to advance her interests. See Melissa J. Homestead, American Women Authors and Literary Property, 1822–1869 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), forthcoming, 2005. It is quite possible, indeed likely, that when writing to fellow Confederate loyalists, Evans played to her audience and accentuated her hostility toward the North. There is no evidence, however, that her decision to set the novel in the ante-bellum South, and avoid all but the most muted sectional references was motivated by a conciliatory impulse of any kind.


53. Augusta Evans to General Beauregard, March 30, 1867 (Sexton, SWL, 138).

54. “A Chat with Mrs. Wilson,” N.Y. World, undated; in the Augusta Evans Wilson Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History. The interview is probably from sometime in 1878 or slightly later, since in it Evans refers to her 1868 marriage as taking place “ten years ago.”

56. Augusta Evans to William Seaver, Dec. 31, 1859 (Sexton, SWL, 5). I have been unable to find a specific reference to the dinners Evans alludes to, but Delmonico’s was a fashionable New York restaurant patronized by members of New York’s cultural and business elite and was the site of many famous dinners for literary celebrities as well as regular gatherings by groups of men associated through business. See Lately Thomas, *Delmonico’s: A Century of Splendor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967).

57. Augusta Evans to J. L. M. Curry, Oct. 7, 1865 (Sexton, SWL, 109). Evans assures Curry that she met “only such people as Ben Woods of the ‘Times,’ who had proved their detestation of the war party and policy”; she omits mention of calling on J. C. Derby in order to collect the considerable royalties from sales of *Macaria* that Derby had accumulated on her behalf. In *American Women Authors and Literary Property, 1822–1869*, Melissa J. Homestead speculates that Evans’s visit to New York immediately after the end of the war was motivated as much by a desire to collect this money as by her wish to seek medical attention for her brother.

58. Augusta Evans to William Seaver, Sept. 26, 1866 (Sexton, SWL, 130).

59. Augusta Evans to William Seaver, March 20, 1875 (Sexton, SWL, 154).


61. In calling Manning’s magazine “Maga,” Evans was invoking the general tradition of elite literary magazines established in Edinburgh by *Blackwood’s Magazine* (1817–1980), which was dubbed “Maga” by its founder and was emulated by numerous Americans in the 1850s and 1860s. See http://www.pmwc.napier.ac.uk/scob/blackhist.html

She might also have intended to allude to *Putnam’s Monthly*, which was often referred to as ‘Maga’ by magazine insiders and whose virulently anti-Southern views Evans would have undoubtedly been familiar with (for an example of these views see the article titled “Southern Literature,” discussed earlier in this chapter). *Putnam’s* existed from 1853 through 1857 and was revived briefly in 1868, after *St. Elmo* was published; but it was a very influential magazine during the 1850s, and it seems likely that readers who were at least Evans’s contemporaries or older would have been aware of the allusion. I am indebted to Melissa J. Homestead for information about the history of the name “Maga” in the United States.

62. Even as she was giving the fictional Manning the belief that “women never write histories” Evans was intending to do just that; she shelved her plans to write a definitive history of the Confederacy when she learned that Confederate Vice President Stephens intended to do the same. Despite her self-censorship and her frequent assertions that she was no “Xenophon,” Evans clearly viewed this proposed project as materially different from her fiction writing. She told J. L. M. Curry, “My history, I intend to make the great end of all my labors . . .” (Augusta Evans to J. L. M. Curry, October 7, 1865 [Sexton, SWL, 107]).


65. For a detailed discussion of the role of literary periodicals like the *Atlantic Monthly* in the stratification of American culture during the second half of the nineteenth century, see Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne*, and Glazener, *Reading for Realism*. 
66. Sarah Hale declared, in 1831, “It is only on emergencies, in cases where duty demands the sacrifice of female sensitiveness, that a lady of sense and delicacy will come before the public, in a manner to make herself conspicuous,” explaining that she had taken up literary work only after being widowed, and out of a need to “obtain the means of supporting and educating her children in some measure as their father would have done.” Following Hale’s lead, American women regularly declared, usually quite truthfully, that they had been driven to the unladylike measure of publication only because of economic necessity brought on by the death or financial failure of the male relatives whose responsibility it was to support them and their children. Hale’s quotation is from Lady’s Magazine 4 (1831), 2–4; quoted in Ann D. Wood, “Scribbling Women,” 10. For a detailed discussion of the economic bases for women’s authorship in the antebellum period, see Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage, especially chapter 6.

67. This attack is somewhat ironic, in light of her own significant economic motivation for writing, but it seems obvious from Evans’s letters and her autobiographical portraits of women writers that she never considered herself motivated to write for purely economic reasons.


69. Evans seems to have had both the ancient and the contemporary meanings of “hierophant” in mind. According to the OED, the ancient meaning is “An official expounder of sacred mysteries or ceremonies, esp. in ancient Greece”; by the late seventeenth century the meaning of “an initiating or presiding priest” had come into use, and by the early-nineteenth century the word was commonly used to mean “an expounder of sacred mysteries; an interpreter of an esoteric principle.”

70. As Susan K. Harris points out, Edna’s thorough classical education and her knowledge of ancient languages put her in distinctly masculine territory: she had “fulfilled the requirements for the Christian ministry. It would be difficult to imagine a more radical appropriation of elite male intellectual culture than Edna achieves” (19th Century American Women’s Novels, 67). See chapter 2 of Harris’s study for a detailed discussion of the ways in which Edna’s erudition might have served as an example and motivational model for the novel’s readers.


72. I discuss the gender/genre split in detail in the Introduction.

73. William Fidler claims that Evans was ambivalent about the popular success of Beulah: “The erudition in her writing indicates that she hoped to attract intellectual readers, but when it became evident that the masses and not the intelligentsia were her constituents, she professed to be pleased that her audience was composed of unsophisticated commoners who follow the dictates of their heart and conscience, even in matters of art” (Augusta Evans Wilson, 48). Whatever Evans’s initial reaction to her popular success may have been—Fidler provides no evidence that her pleasure was “professed”—it seems to me that by the time she published St. Elmo, she had developed an aesthetic vision based on her own experience of gaining a broad audience and popular success for fiction that challenges its readers in ways that most popular nineteenth-century fiction does not.

74. One of the rare references to the dates of the action is given toward the end of the novel, in a description of Edna’s satisfaction with her professional and social successes: “Only one cause of disquiet now remained. The political storm of 1861
alarmed her, and she determined that if the threatened secession of the South took place, she would immediately remove to Charleston or New Orleans, link her destiny with the cause which she felt was so just, so holy, and render faithful allegiance to the section she loved so well” (Evans, St. Elmo, 360).

75. Faust, A Sacred Circle, 47.

76. I know of only a few other examples, including Fanny Fern, Ruth Hall (1855). Although Jo March returns to writing in sequels to Little Women, at the end of that novel she has, at least temporarily, given up her career in favor of marriage and motherhood. Alcott’s “Diana and Persis” (1879) was left unfinished, so it is impossible to know if Alcott intended to allow either of the protagonists to continue their artistic careers.

77. Augusta Evans to Rachel Lyons, July 30, 1860 (Sexton, SWL, 18).

78. See, for example, Elizabeth Fox Genovese’s Introduction to the reprint edition of Beulah; Anne Goodwyn Jones’s discussion of Beulah in Tomorrow Is Another Day, chapter 2; Drew Gilpin Faust’s Introduction to the reprint edition of Macaria and her discussion of Macaria in Mothers of Invention, 168–78; Mary Kelley’s discussion of St. Elmo in Private Woman, Public Stage, 190–92. For a reading that argues that the focus on the marriages at the end of Evans’s novels is misplaced, see Susan K. Harris, 19th-Century American Women’s Novels, chapter 2.

79. Similarly, I read the fact that Evans’s second novel is a conservative analysis of “the only true and allowable and womanly sphere of feminine work” (St. Elmo, 337), which appears at the height of Edna’s prominence in New York’s intellectual scene, not as a sign of Edna’s decline into domesticity, but as an indicator of Evans’s commitment to imagining a woman writer who can function successfully in both intellectual realms.

80. Baym, Woman’s Fiction, 296.


Notes to Chapter 3

1. “Woman in the Domain of Letters,” Knickerbocker Monthly: A National Magazine (July 1864), 83. I’m assuming that this writer is a man not only because most such essays were written by men, but also because it opens with a comic description of “our” distress at discovering women ice-skating publicly on the Boston Common “in broad daylight” (83).


3. David Reynolds has found that the image of a marketplace flooded with popular fiction by women in the late-antebellum period, culminating in the so-called “feminine fifties,” is a myth. According to Reynolds, “The only time that female-authored American volumes had anything close to a numerical parity with male-authored ones was during the earliest stage of American fiction, between 1784 and 1810, when 41 percent of all volumes were written by women and 44 by men (the remaining volumes were published anonymously). By the 1830–1860 period the proportion of female-authored volumes had fallen to 23 percent, while the proportion of male volumes had risen to 57 percent” (David S. Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988], 338).
But these numbers can be misleading, because although women published far fewer volumes than men, the percentage of best-selling titles by women was dis-proportionate to the numbers of woman-authored volumes. According to Susan Coultrap-McQuin, who compiled statistics from a variety of sources, “in the 1850s, nearly 50 percent of the best-selling titles were by women, any one work selling more than writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman combined. This success was apparently matched by equally high percentages of women submitting and having works accepted. By 1872, nearly three-quarters of American novels were written by women” (Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century [Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990], 47).

As both Mary Kelley and Susan Coultrap-McQuin have shown, a significant percentage of the women who entered the literary marketplace earned at least some income from their literary work, and many earned quite a bit. Each of the twelve “literary domestics” Mary Kelley profiles earned a living from her writing, and some, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Augusta Evans, became quite wealthy. Although the concept of “bestseller” did not come into being until midcentury, books by the “literary domestics” all sold extremely well in the context of their times. For example, Catherine Maria Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie (1827) had a first edition of 2,000 copies, at a time when selling more than that was rare (Kelley, Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984], 13). By the late 1840s and 1850s, the numbers involved were much higher: Mary Virginia Terhune’s Alone (1854), which Terhune was initially required to publish herself, eventually sold over 100,000 copies (Kelley, 17); Susan Warner’s The Wide Wide World (1850) sold over 40,000 copies in the first year, was reprinted 67 times, and, its publishers claimed, eventually sold over a million copies (Kelley, 18). For detailed discussions of American women writers’ popularity and relationship to the market, see Kelley, especially chapters 1 and 7; see also Susan Coultrap-McQuin, Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century.

4. My thinking on this topic is informed by the work of Sonia Hofkosh, who argues that existing categories through which we understand British romanticism ignore and devalue women’s literary work, not because it didn’t exist, but “precisely because it was so formative, so responsible to and resonant with the literate culture’s emerging concerns, desires, aspirations, with the empowerment of and also contestation within bourgeois, literate culture itself.” Hofkosh’s goal is not to add any particular text or group of texts to the canon, but rather to uncover how romanticism was constructed: “In remarking the exclusionary practices operative in romantic aesthetics,” she writes, “I am specifically interested in how that aesthetics is haunted at its very foundation by the vision of women it can never quite occlude” (Sonia Hofkosh, Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 11).

5. Although there had been a publishing industry in the United States since Colonial times, it was small, localized, and published mostly pirated British reprints until the early-nineteenth century. Charles Brockden Brown and Susannah Rowson both published fiction in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, but Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were the first American writers to enjoy significant popularity and sales, in the early 1820s. For accounts of the emergence of a literary marketplace and a market for literature in antebellum America


8. The prominent “Gentleman Publishers” were William Ticknor, James T. Fields, Daniel Appleton, Charles Scribner, George P. Putnam, Joshua B. Lippincott, and James Osgood (Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business*, 32–33).


11. Ibid., 63.


13. Ibid., 56. Brodhead points out that “Fields the canon-former and institution-builder is the agent, in the literary domain, of a general social process . . . through which American culture was reorganized on a more steeply hierarchical plan, featuring sharp gradations of levels of cultural values” (56). Fields’s work was a direct continuation of that of Evert Duycknick, the famous New York editor and champion of American literature who, Brodhead argues, should be understood more accurately not merely as a “cultural nationalist but specifically as the proponent of an indigenous American high culture” (53); but Fields’s canons were much more discriminating than Duycknick’s because Fields “represents this process [of differentiation] in its fullness,” whereas Duycknick embodied a “transition phase, which already values a culture it thinks of as high but does not yet insist on the hierarchical differentiations such a culture would require. Fields’s American library is emphatically discriminating, Duycknick’s still a very mixed affair; unlike Fields’s it includes both men and women [Margaret Fuller], both established writers and newcomers [the Melville of *Typee*], both literature and nonfiction. . . .” (56). For detailed discussions of these processes of differentiation in the literary world, see *The School of Hawthorne*, especially chapter 3, and Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), chapter 7. For descriptions of the processes of differentiation taking place simultaneously in other realms of American life, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), and Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976).

14. Yunok Park chronicles the correlation between the shift in the style and substance of Melville’s writing, his waning popularity, and his changing conception of authorship in chapter 1 of “Masculine Genius and the Literary Marketplace: A Study of Melville’s Fiction in the 1850s” (unpublished dissertation, Washington State University, 1996). Richard Brodhead situates this phase of Melville’s career in rela-
tion to the emerging realm of “high” literary production in chapter 2 of The School of Hawthorne.

15. From an 1849 letter to Melville’s English publisher (quoted in Brodhead, The School of Hawthorne, 22).


21. Ibid., 2202, 2203.

22. Ibid., 2205.

23. Ibid., 2207.

24. Ibid., 2208.

25. Ibid., 2207. As numerous Melville scholars have pointed out, Melville never earned enough from his writing to support his large family and was frequently in debt. See Park, “Masculine Genius and the Marketplace,” 11–16.

26. Such ambivalence toward popularity and the marketplace is not necessarily a defensive response to failure; William G. Rowland, Jr., suggests that Longfellow is paradigmatic of this tendency among American Renaissance authors: “Despite his great commercial success, Longfellow could still disparage any attempt to associate literature and trade” (Literature and the Marketplace: Romantic Writers and Their Audiences in Great Britain and the United States [Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996], 35). Rowland’s survey of Longfellow’s statements on the subject of the poet’s relationship to the reading public and the marketplace suggests that Longfellow shared Melville’s and Higginson’s belief that artistic greatness and popular acceptance and success are fundamentally incompatible (36–37).

Interestingly, contemporary critics of Longfellow's work either bracket the question of his popularity, or, if they discuss it at all, see it as an indication both of the quality of his poetry and of the improvement in the tenor of the American reading public’s taste. When Longfellow’s popularity was discussed, it was almost always aligned with that of Washington Irving, while other writers and poets who had achieved popular and critical success in the antebellum period were simply ignored. See, for example, George W. Curtis, “Longfellow,” Atlantic Monthly (Dec. 1863), 769. British critics were far more likely than American ones to comment on Longfellow’s popularity, typically pointing out that Longfellow’s American popularity was initiated by the warm critical reception he received in Britain. See, for example, “American Literature. Longfellow,” Dublin University Magazine, reprinted in Eclectic Magazine in 1850 and in Kenneth Walter Cameron, ed., Longfellow among His Contemporaries (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1978), 34–40; and “Longfellow,” The National Review, reprinted in Littell’s Living Age in 1859 and in Longfellow among His Contemporaries, 63–66. Among American observers, Longfellow’s ability to appeal to a popular audience despite his status as a learned Harvard professor was
widely seen as a great strength. But it is precisely this status as a member of the literary and cultural elite, and his independent income, which was often alluded to in periodical pieces, that combined to give Longfellow’s popularity a different cultural meaning from that associated with the popular female novelists of the period. The differences in gender and genre are significant too: as a male poet, Longfellow occupied an identity that commanded literary respect in a way the female novelist—a relatively recent arrival on the literary scene—did not.

27. For a detailed discussion of this shift see Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially chapter 3.

28. Of course, many others participated in the conversation that defined high culture and explained its importance to middle-class readers, but Higginson stands out in both the number and the length of his contributions to the Atlantic, which was one of the institutional centers of this process.

29. Higginson also commanded the first unit of black soldiers to be mustered into the Union army, and he wrote about his war-time experiences in the Atlantic and in Army Life in a Black Regiment (1869). His “Letter to a Young Contributor” (1862) prompted Emily Dickinson to send him some poems, and their epistolary friendship lasted, intermittently, until her death. For a detailed overview of Higginson’s career as an activist and writer, see the Introduction to The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1823–1911, edited by Howard N. Meyer (Da Capo Press, 2000).


31. Ibid., 746.

32. Ibid., 747.

33. Melville, too, relied on the labor of the women in his household to support his career; his wife, sisters, and, eventually, his daughters all proofread, copied, and produced fair-copies of his manuscripts—no small task, since Melville’s handwriting was illegible and his spelling atrocious. Of course, Melville’s female relatives performed these tasks in addition to their own domestic work, which would have been considerable, since the family included many children and relatively few servants (Park, “Masculine Genius and the Literary Marketplace,” 4).

34. Higginson was an ardent support of women’s rights and a firm believer in women’s intellectual equality to men. He would have undoubtedly argued that a woman was just as capable of producing literary art as a man, under the right circumstances, which were, of course, not usually available to women. While it unlikely that he understood his views as excluding women writers in any practical sense, the rhetorical weight of the attack on the popular has precisely that effect.


36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., 753.

38. Although the Atlantic Monthly and its sister high-culture magazines paid authors much more generously than antebellum periodicals had, a writer could not earn a living, much less support a family, by producing only the kind of writing that Higginson privileges as literary art.

39. Alcott’s letters and journals are full of remarks about her frustration at being forced to produce lucrative work she considered inferior; although neither was
published in her lifetime, she knew that both would be published after her death, and she frequently edited her journals accordingly (see the Introduction to Alcott's *Journals* for a complete discussion of her editorial practices). Davis and Phelps both published memoirs late in life which, while not particularly revealing by modern standards, nevertheless bespeak an awareness of themselves as literary artists whose lives and opinions are of interest to their readers. Woolson, who died young, probably by her own hand, left no memoir, but she did leave specific instructions about the disposition of her papers and letters, not all of which were followed. Readings of her surviving letters in Sharon Dean's *Constance Fenimore Woolson*, Lyndall Gordon's *A Private Life*, and Joan Weimer’s Introduction to *Women Artists, Women Exiles* all reveal that she considered herself an artist first and foremost, although the financial aspects of her career were always of great concern to her.


41. Entry for June, July, August 1862; Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, eds. Madeleine Stern, Joel Myerson, and Daniel Shealy (Boston: Little Brown, 1989), 109. The "L" of the entry is Frank Leslie, the editor of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

42. Entry for February and March, 1873; Alcott, *Journals*, 187.

43. Entry for February, 1865; Alcott, *Journals*, 139.


50. The lack of a community of like-minded women and men was a significant problem for Davis early in her career. Sharon Harris notes that Davis regularly asked James T. Fields to forward to her "intelligent criticism" of her work so that she could learn from it. Fields didn’t, or perhaps couldn’t, oblige, sending only what Davis called "‘sugary’ reviews" (*Rebecca Harding Davis*, 74).

51. Although she had been a successful journalist, Jane’s career path was forced upon her by circumstances. Early in the novella Jane rejects the notion that she is "a woman of genius," explaining that writing is not her real calling: "I have covered up my real character in a reputation for wit and fancy just as I hid the bare walls with those pictures, which don’t belong to me. It is shop-work with me. I read this book and that to find a style. I scour the country for ideas and facts as capital. . . . If I were older and had enough money saved I think I’d go into trade. I could make a fortune at that" (Davis, *Earthen Pitchers*, 226).

Jane’s hostility toward Audrey may stem, at least in part, from her resentment
at having been forced into one of the few professions open to women despite her inclination for “trade.”


54. Although most observers shied away from defining originality in any specific terms, there was widespread consensus that being original did not simply mean being new. The central argument of an essay titled “Originality” is that since nothing can truly be new in the world, originality lies rather in one’s way of interpreting universal, familiar truth. For D. A. Wasson there are two principles on which any “sufficient doctrine of literature and literary production” rest: “First, that the perfect truth of the universe issues, by vital representation, into the personality of man. Secondly, that this truth *tends* in every man, though often in the obscurest way, toward intellectual and artistic expression.” If you accept these two truths, Wasson argues, then the fact that no one can ever say anything truly original does not matter, because “it is the verity, the vital process, the depth of relationship, which concerns us. Nay, in one sense, the older his truth, the more the effects of originality lie central to him” (D. A. Wasson, “Originality,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, [July 1862], 66). Wasson’s definition essentially leaves the judgment about a work’s originality to the critic or audience who, presumably, will recognize it when he or she sees it.

The relationship between originality and nationality was a source of considerable anxiety among observers of Longfellow’s career, who viewed his work as a literary translator, his deep knowledge of world literatures, and his willingness to borrow from those literatures as a threat to Longfellow’s status as the preeminent American poet. But virtually all came to the conclusion that Longfellow could be defined as an American genius despite his failure to be “original”; for many, his interest in American historical subjects was the saving grace—transforming poetry that might have been derivative into something truly original by virtue of its subject matter. For others, it was the harder-to-pin-down category of style that exempted Longfellow from the category of the merely imitative. See, for example, “Longfellow’s Song of Hiawatha,” *Putham’s* (Dec. 1855): 578–87, in which the author devotes the first half of the review to defending Longfellow from charges of imitation, carefully distinguishing between “servile reproductions” (578) and “free and fruitful reproductions” (579) which, in the hands of a talented artist like Longfellow, can produce work that is highly original in style if not in substance (581). Similar arguments in defense of Longfellow’s status as an original American artist inform George W. Curtis, “Longfellow,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1863), and “Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,” *The North American Review* (April 1867).


63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., 355.
65. Ibid.
66. Although American Renaissance writers were certainly concerned with the effects of industrialization on the author, these anxieties tend to be expressed in terms of the artist’s labor rather than the object he produces. See Michael Newbury, *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) for a discussion of the ways in which antebellum writers of both genders used various rhetorics of labor to negotiate their positions within the changing field of literary production.
69. Hawthorne’s companion portrait of female originality, in the character of Miriam, suggests that, if not contained and channeled, female originality is tremendously destructive. Numerous critics have focused on the figure of the copyist in *The Marble Faun*, frequently reading Hilda as emblematic of Hawthorne’s own anxieties about his place in the American art canon. See, for example, Robert Brooke, “Artistic Communication and the Heroines’ Art in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun*,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 29 (1983); Robert H. Byer, “Words, Monuments, Beholders: The Visual Arts in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun*,” in David C. Miller, ed., *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Carol Hanbery MacKay, “Hawthorne, Sophia, and Hilda as Copyists: Duplication and Transformation in *The Marble Faun*,” *Browning Institute Studies: An Annual of Victorian Literary and Cultural History* 12 (1984). Deborah Barker has situated *The Marble Faun* in relation to contemporary views about women’s limited artistic abilities and “properly” limited role as transmitters rather than creators of culture. Barker reads *The Marble Faun*, as I do, in conjunction with Phelps’s *The Story of Avis*, but our readings differ significantly in their emphases. Barker situates Phelps’s rejection of the role of copyist in relation to the figure of the Sphinx, the subject of Avis’s painting, which Barker suggests is “a symbol of the alien Other in all its diverse manifestations”—blacks, women, immigrants, Jews, and the working class, which “relates to American fears of the devolutionary threat of the alien Other” (*Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature: Portraits of the Woman Artist* [Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000], 65).
70. “Culture”—by which most antebellum observers meant European painting, sculpture, music, and literature—was integral to the emergence of an elite class in postbellum America, a class that coalesced, in large part, around its appreciation and consumption of culture. At the same time, the project of “civilizing” immigrants,
former slaves, and working-class people by exposing them to “culture” and inculcating in them a respect both for the objects themselves and for the institutions that were their custodians, was central to attempts by Northeastern Protestant elites to control the large numbers of workers moving into cities, bringing with them their own cultural habits and leisure-time activities. There was a widespread belief that everyone who could not afford access to original art, whether it be housed in European galleries or in the American museums that began to be built soon after the Civil War, could benefit from owning inexpensive reproductions of great art. For a discussion of the development of an American elite class coalescing around high culture see Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 122–24. For a discussion of the uses and abuses of culture in controlling and educating poor and working-class populations in large American cities, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), especially chapter 5.

71. From the mid-1860s on, a number of manufacturers offered large catalogues of lithograph reproductions of famous paintings that sold for anywhere from $1.50 to $10. Portraits and busts of famous men (and a few women) were also inexpensive and widely used to decorate middle-class parlors (Louise L. Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860–1880* [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991], 5–6). The definitive history of lithography is Marzio, *The Democratic Art*.

72. Copyists were essential to the process of chromolithography. According to Catharina Slautterback, Associate Curator of Prints and Photographs, The Boston Athenaeum, chromolithographs, or chromos, as they were popularly called, were produced by copying a design onto a lithographic stone which was then used for printing color copies. Since lithographic stones were extremely heavy and not easily transported, lithographic reproductions of famous paintings housed in European museums were produced using a secondary source such as an engraving, a hand-painted copy, or, more rarely, a photograph. In some cases, paintings were transported to the lithographer’s studio, where the lithographic artist copied them directly onto the stones. (Information is from the author’s personal correspondence with Ms. Slautterback.)


74. Phelps’s views about producing American culture, and the role of the Civil War in destroying the career of an artist who seemed poised to produce just what the war-torn nation required, are discussed in detail in chapter 5.

75. The original of Avis’s *Sphinx* eventually returns to Harmouth, the property of local millionaire Stratford Allen, who is known for the “many fine pictures” that hang in his house (243). Ironically, it is Allen who inadvertently precipitated the marriage that ended Avis’s career, by retrieving Philip Ostrander from the Army hospital where he might have died of his battle wounds and bringing him to his own Harmouth home, where he was nursed back to health by Stratford’s sister Barbara. As if to add insult to injury, Avis learns at the same time that she hears of the *Sphinx’s* purchase that since his sister Barbara’s marriage, Stratford Allen has hired a new housekeeper, one Susan Jessup, née Wanamaker, whom Philip Ostrander had jilted years before he met Avis. The fact that the ownership and domestic care of Avis’s *Sphinx*—the symbol of the wasted promise of her career—are in the hands of the man who saved Philip from almost-certain death, and the woman whose marriage to
Philip might have saved Avis from the artistic death of marriage, underscores the complex interrelations between marriage and the marketplace that precipitated the sale of the Sphinx in the first place.


77. Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, 55.

78. That Alcott considered her fiction a forum for shaping public opinion is evident throughout her journals and letters. She makes this point explicit in a letter to her family from 8 July 1870 in which she describes Theodore Tilton’s attempts to persuade her to write for the Revolution, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s feminist newspaper: “I think I’d rather keep to my own work and lecture the public in a story, than hold forth . . . in the papers” (The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott [eds. Madeleine Stern, Joel Myerson, and Daniel Shealy. Boston: Little Brown, 1987], 144 n. 17).


80. Alcott, Little Women, 443.

Notes to Chapter 4


4. Although historians of realism typically discuss realism’s rejection of genius in some detail, their discussions imply that attitudes toward genius remained unchanged from the 1850s through the 1880s, when leading realists began critiquing genius. For example, Christopher Wilson has only this to say about authorship in the Gilded Age before the emergence of realism: “Eventually, the oppositional culture of Transcendentalism only collapsed back into the sentimental genteeel mainstream of the Gilded Age. Upper-class and amateur associations of authorship had persisted. Even the postbellum bohemian communities, for which Whitman himself became something of a patron saint, had only sustained the aristocratic ideology he detested. Bohemian enclaves had hardly been congenial to the values (work, timeliness, responsibility) basic to a professionalized orientation” (The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era [Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985], 9).

In contrast, Daniel Borus is clearly aware of the debates about cultural nationalism in the early postbellum years, but he simply writes, “The issue of American literary contribution seemed especially compelling in the postwar nationalism that followed Reconstruction. What began as a new series of calls for an American literature that matched the greatness of the nation’s institutions became part of the debate over realism” (Writing Realism: Howells, James, and Norris in the Mass Market [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989], 81).


7. Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 3. See pp. 52–90 for a discussion of the historical gendering of genius as masculine. Although, as I will show, the concept of genius was put to specifically American uses during the nineteenth century, the understanding of genius as a specifically masculine quality was adopted in the American context without revision.


9. Description of Sand is from Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 262. Of course, the characterization of the female genius as monstrous was common in England as well. See Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, chapters 11 and 12, for a discussion of the ways in which monstrosity, madness, and degeneracy were all allied at various times with femininity as part of changing conceptions of genius.


13. This portrayal of Jo echoes Melville’s conception of writing as “a certain something unmanageable in us, that bids us do this or that, and be done it must—hit or miss” (from an 1849 letter to his English publisher; quoted in Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 22). Emerson expresses a similar belief in “The Poet” where he observes, “The poet knows that he speaks adequately, then, only when he speaks somewhat wildly,” and “the imagination intoxicates the poet” (*Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Richard Poirier, ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990], 208, 209). Interestingly, Alcott, who described her own bursts of intense creative activity as “fits” and “a vortex,” seems to have understood the “vortex” as a state she could choose to bring upon herself. In a journal entry for January 1879 she writes that she has “[g]ot two books well started but had too many interruptions to do much, & dared not get into a vortex for fear of a break down” (*Journals*, 213).


15. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759); quoted in Williams, *Culture and Society*, 37.

16. For a discussion of the historical conditions that produced the Romantic conception of genius, see Williams, *Culture and Society*, chapter 2.


22. What, exactly, constitutes “American-ness” in literature was a question that was hotly debated during the second half of the nineteenth century in the pages of quality magazines and newspapers. Although commentators differed in the details of their positions, there was a consensus that literature that depicted American people, places, and things and somehow captured the essence of the American spirit was the ideal to which a national literature aspired. A few examples of contributions to this discussion include Higginson, “Americanism in Literature,” Atlantic Monthly (Jan. 1870); John DeForest, “The Great American Novel,” The Nation (Jan. 9, 1868); Emerson, “Quotation and Originality,” North American Review (April 1868); and “Literature Truly American” (The Nation, Jan. 2, 1868). There were scores of others.

23. For discussions of the ways in which realism was institutionalized as the preferred mode of American high literary culture and was self-consciously defined in opposition to antebellum genres such as the “romance” and popular sentimental fiction, see Nancy Glazener, Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Institution 1850–1910 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997). Barbara Hochman argues in Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) that the high-realist aesthetic requirement of authorial self-erasure was produced by a conscious attempt to distance realism from antebellum assumptions about the “friendly” relationship between the reader and the author.

24. Wilson, The Labor of Words, 204, n. 3.

25. The paraphrase of Howells is from Criticism and Fiction (1891); Norris’s comments are from “Novelists to Order—While You Wait,” in Responsibilities of the Novelist (1903). Both quoted in Borus, Writing Realism, 70.

26. Daniel Borus points out, “Unlike the emerging industrial proletariat, writers did not suffer erosion of work skills, sell their labor, punch a time clock, or toil under direct supervision. For all the editorial intervention of the Gilded age, they kept control of their work process and retained the ability to initiate production. Even the most harried paragrapher did not turn out a standardized product in the way that a machine toolmaker did. The notion that the writer was a laborer did, however, have an ideological function. Unlike antebellum writers, who had no use for anything so
common as work, postbellum writers delighted in the implication that they, like farmers or craftsmen, were an integral part of American life. In claiming that their value was in their productivity, they ceased to be ‘aristocratic’ dabblers and became useful citizens instead” (Writing Realism, 66).

27. Brown likely has in mind the transcendentalist version of genius, theorized by Emerson, which Margaret C. Ervin notes, “exaggerates the role of the individual to the almost complete exclusion of place and nation” (Ervin, “Re-Placing Genius,” 29).


29. Ibid., 148.

30. Ibid., 148–49.

31. Ibid., 154.

32. The son of a Harvard professor and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Frederic Henry Hedge (1805–1890) was instrumental in bringing Transcendentalism to the United States. A member of the intellectual circle that included Emerson and Margaret Fuller, Hedge published “Coleridge’s Literary Character” in the Christian Examiner in 1833. The article surveyed Coleridge’s transcendental ideas and their origins in German philosophy. After founding the transcendental club that published The Dial, Hedge gradually distanced himself from transcendentalism, which he criticized for its antichurch positions. Hedge served as a Unitarian minister for various New England congregations and became a leader of the Unitarian church and influential in shaping nineteenth-century liberal theology. Source: Garraty and Carnes, eds., American National Biography, 491–92.


34. Ibid., 153.

35. Self-control and discipline were the two cardinal virtues of the Victorian middle class. As Louise Stevenson explains, “Victorians believed that civilized people should be punctual, industrious, neat, modest, and temperate—in other words, self-controlled. Self-control regulated the interaction between people, ensuring that they would be free both to compete with one another and to develop their better natures. If all were self-controlled, the world would be orderly. Individuals who worked hard would succeed because of their admirable personal traits, not because of chance” (The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860–1880 [New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991]), xxii.


37. Ibid., 153–54.

38. For example, in “A Plea for Culture,” Atlantic Monthly (Jan. 1867), Thomas Wentworth Higginson argues that the establishment of universities, as opposed to colleges, is a prerequisite for the development of an American high culture. In “Books for Our Children” (Atlantic Monthly [Dec. 1865]) Samuel Osgood anticipates a time when widespread aesthetic education produces a new breed of cultured citizens: “Give us a thirty years’ fair training of our children in schools and reading, galleries and music-halls, gardens and fields, and our America, the youngest among the great nations, will yield to none the palm of strength or of beauty; and as she sits the queen, not the captive, in her noble domain, her children, who have learned grace under her teaching, shall rise up and call her blessed” (732). Similar views are expressed in “Sculpture in the United States,” The Atlantic Monthly (Nov. 1868), and
“American Art,” *Scribner’s Monthly* (Nov. 1876), among other places. This topic is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

40. Ibid., 155.
41. Ibid., 158.
42. Ibid.
45. For a detailed account of the Puritan roots of the American work ethic and of its subsequent development in the popular imagination, see Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America*, chapter 1.
46. Hedge, “Characteristics of Genius,” 158. Hedge’s assertion that artistic merit was measured numerically (“So many readers, so many copies sold, so much merit”) is not empty rhetoric but is rather a slight exaggeration of common antebellum reviewing practices, which evaluated a work’s popularity and sales as a sign of its aesthetic merits. For a more detailed discussion of these practices see Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*.
50. Ibid.
51. Single middle-class women often worked as teachers before marriage, but their pay rates were extremely low—barely enough to maintain a middle-class standard of living or reputation (Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront*, xxiv).
52. See Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America*, chapter 7, for a complete discussion of the changing attitudes toward women’s work both inside and outside the home. For an account of the many varieties of unpaid work that middle-class women did outside the home, in benevolent organizations and in the abolitionist and other social change movements, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
54. The practice of employing skilled assistants at every stage of producing the large neoclassical statues favored by Hosmer and her peers was routine. In addition to making it possible for artists of all sizes to produce statues that significantly outweighed their creators, employing skilled craftsmen also enabled sculptors to reproduce their works and sell multiple versions of a single “conception.” According to William H. Gerdts, “[I]t was a time honored tradition that such work [of shaping the clay and carving the stone] was handed over to [skilled craftsmen]. . . . For the neoclassic sculptor, the workmen were men of talent, the artist were men of genius, and the distinction was carefully maintained” (*American Neo-Classic Sculpture: The Marble Resurrection* [New York: Viking, 1973], 17–18).


58. Marcia tests the editors to whom she submits her work by placing a black thread between the third and fourth pages of her manuscript. The manuscript is always returned with the thread undisturbed (“Marcia,” 312).


56. For discussions of what Weimer calls Woolson’s “difficult relationship with Henry James” (xxxv) and its effect on her work, see Cheryl Torsney, Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Grief of Artistry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), and Sharon Dean, Constance Fenimore Woolson: Homeward Bound (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995). Both studies set out to challenge the long-standing claims, initially introduced as media rumors and later validated by Henry James’s biographers and editors, that Woolson killed herself because of her unrequited love for James. Most recently, Lyndall Gordon’s biography, A Private Life of Henry James: Two Women and His Art (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), has highlighted the importance of the James-Woolson relationship to both writers and has revealed the extent to which Woolson’s work influenced James’s. For a nuanced reading of “‘Miss Grief’” in the context of Woolson’s relationship with Henry James and James’s attitudes toward women writers, see Anne E. Boyd, “Anticipating James, Anticipating Grief: Constance Fenimore Woolson’s ‘‘Miss Grief,’” in Victoria Brehm, ed., Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Nineteenth Century: Essays (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

60. Miss Grief’s name is actually Aarona Moncrief, which she shortens to “Crief”; the narrator initially misunderstands his valet, but he continues to call her “Miss Grief” in his own mind even after he sees the name spelled out because it reflects his dread of her power of the aura of sadness that clings to her.

61. Miss Crief is not actually “so much older” than the narrator: although he thinks that she is over 50, she is, in fact, just 43; he is “over thirty,” though he looks younger (260). Wondering how to address her, the narrator suggests that he might call her “Aunt,” though Miss Crief tells him her first name, Aaronna, which he proceeds to use. The idea of calling Miss Crief “Aunt” and the emphasis on the disparity in the two characters’ ages echo Woolson’s own attitude vis-à-vis Henry James; Lyndall Gordon quotes from a letter from Woolson to James in which she says, “I do not come in as a literary woman at all, but as a sort of—of admiring aunt” (Letter from Woolson to James, 18 Feb. 1882; Gordon, A Private Life, 170). Gordon points out that although Woolson was only three years older than James, she “pretended to be aged, fat, and unapproachable” (170).

62. Henry James’s short story “The Figure in the Carpet” was published in 1896. Lyndall Gordon speculates that the James story “may be a private tribute to
Woolson,” whom, Gordon suggests, James “singled out as his true reader” during a visit to Woolson’s rooms in Rome in the spring of 1881, during which he discussed his work in progress—The Portrait of a Lady—with her (A Private Life, 177, 175–76).

63. Lisa Radinovsky argues that Elizabeth Stoddard came to a similar conclusion in her own struggle with the label of “genius.” See “Negotiating Models of Authorship: Elizabeth Stoddard’s Conflicts and Her Story of Complaint,” in Brehm, Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Nineteenth Century.

64. LaSalle Corbell Pickett, Across My Path: Memories of People I Have Known (New York: Brantano’s, 1916), 107–8. Pickett does not date her recollections, saying only that the conversation took place “in Boston” after publication of Little Women (1868) but before that of A Modern Mephistopheles (1877).

65. Alcott’s career as a writer of sensational tales and thrillers remained a secret until Madeleine B. Stern began recovering and identifying the anonymous and pseudonymous works in the 1970s. Stern’s work has been invaluable in establishing the full range of Alcott’s literary career. Over the past two decades, Alcott’s sensational writing has been reprinted in numerous collections with various titles and overlapping tables of contents, making it difficult to refer the interested reader to the most comprehensive editions. The best place to start is with the two original collections of Alcott’s sensational stories, Behind a Mask: The Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott (1975), and Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott (1976), both edited by Stern.

A wealth of biographical information is available about Alcott: the Introductions to the Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott and The Journals of Louisa May Alcott provide detailed overviews of her life and career. The most recent biography is Martha Saxton’s, Louisa May, A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott (1977). Although not generically a biography, Sarah Elbert, A Hunger For Home: Louisa May Alcott’s Place in American Culture (1987) reads much of Alcott’s work through the lens of her life. Earlier biographies such as Madeleine B. Stern’s Louisa May Alcott (1950) and Ednah D. Cheney’s Louisa May Alcott, Her Life, Letters, and Journals (1889) are useful gauges of attitudes toward Alcott’s work at different points in the past century.

66. Alcott, Journals, 204.

67. Ibid., 139. As Richard Brodhead has shown, as the cultural scene became increasingly differentiated and categories of “high” and “low” hardened in the 1860s and beyond, writers were required to choose one model with which to identify. Alcott chose, quite consciously, Brodhead argues, to reject the sensational story paper writing that was so lucrative early in her career and align herself with the “domestic tutelary” model, which met both her economic and her emotional needs. For Brodhead, Alcott’s lifelong struggle to control her temper and what was defined by her parents as selfish willfulness, a struggle attested to in her Journals and fictionalized in Little Women’s Jo March, made the juvenile form, which she never liked writing, attractive for precisely that reason. It allowed her to “demonstrate that she had overcome her selfish will” because it “signified self-sacrifice, signaled that she had set aside personal pleasure for socially useful work” (Cultures of Letters, 88). My own view is that cultural and economic forces shaped Alcott’s professional decisions far more profoundly than the psychological motivation of intentional self-sacrifice that Brodhead suggests but does not demonstrate convincingly. Indeed, Alcott’s lifelong resentment of the derailment of her serious literary career is reflected throughout her Journals and Letters, and her pride in her ability to support her entire family...
with her pen is marked by a deep ambivalence about the personal sacrifices that were the price of her popular success.

68. See Madeleine B. Stern’s Introduction to *Plots and Counterplots: More Unknown Thrillers of Louisa May Alcott* (New York: William Morrow, 1976) for an overview of the plots and thematic elements Alcott used regularly in her sensational fiction.

69. Alcott takes up the question of the genius-mentor relationship again in *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1877), which was published anonymously as part of Howells’s “No Name Series,” to considerable acclaim. In that novel the genius-mentor, a Faustian figure, destroys an aspiring male artist, who sells his soul for fame (there is also a female artist figure, but she is not the central focus of the novel). For an interesting discussion of Alcott’s depiction of gender and genius in two stories not discussed here, see Gustavus Stadler, “Louisa May Alcott’s Queer Geniuses,” *American Literature* Vol. 71, No. 4 (Dec. 1999): 657–77.


71. The Faustian echoes are no accident; Alcott loved Goethe and reread him often. A January 1869 diary entry is typical: “Refreshed my soul with Goethe, ever strong and fine and alive” (*Journals*, 171).


73. The law establishing the creation of the National Statuary Hall was signed on July 12, 1864; Alcott’s *novella* was published almost a year later, in May 1865, so it is likely that Alcott was aware of the law’s passage and purpose, although none of the statues had been commissioned or displayed at the time of the novella’s publication. The first statue was placed in the Hall in 1870, the most recent in 2003. Fewer than ten of the 98 sculptures eventually commissioned and displayed are of female subjects, and perhaps ten of the sculptors are women. See, Gerds, *American Neo-Classical Sculpture*, 104–5, and the Web site of the Architect of the Capitol, http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/nsh_states.htm

74. The novella doesn’t end here, but the rest of it is devoted to reuniting Cecil with her long-lost father and revealing Cecil and Yorke’s love for each other.

75. One of the few details Alcott does provide identifies the setting as American; when Cecil first meets Yorke, she explains that she and her mother had spent the final year of her mother’s life “here in America” after living in England, Germany, and elsewhere in Europe for much of her childhood (137).

Notes to Chapter 5


3. Politicians and businessmen, of course, had other priorities, but among the intellectuals writing in the nation’s “quality journals,” the need to produce a national culture was widely viewed as the pressing issue of the day.

4. Nancy Glazener observes that the intensity of cultural nationalism had ebbed and flowed throughout the nineteenth century, often in concert with wars: “if the
nationalist polemics in Putnam's were galvanized by the Mexican War, as seems likely, the early nationalist polemics in the Atlantic and its kindred magazines took their force from the North's victory in the Civil War and the urgent task of providing cultural instruction and reconstruction for the South and West" (Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Institution 1850–1910 [Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997], 44). Glazener is one of the few literary historians to comment on the cultural nationalism of the early postbellum period, but her focus is not on the terms of the discussion itself, but on the way in which realism emerged as the preferred genre of the "high" cultural realm solidified in and through the cultural nationalism of the period.

6. Quoted in Foner, Reconstruction, 24.
9. Glazener, Reading for Realism, 27.
10. For the North, the Civil War years were the most prosperous years in history, a prosperity fueled by wartime inflation and speculation in stocks and gold ventures. In addition, northern and mid-western industries such as railroads, meat packing (Chicago), textiles (New England and mid-Atlantic states), and related industries such as banking all profited from hugely increased demand during the war years (Foner, Reconstruction, 18–19).
15. Ibid., 732
17. As David Blight has shown, similar rhetoric was frequently used in ceremonies to memorialize the Civil War dead in the decades immediately following the war (Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory [Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001] chapter 3).
20. The familiar view of the Civil War as “unwritten” has recently begun to be challenged by scholars. For a discussion of the myriad ways in which women writers engaged with the Civil War in a variety of genres, see Elizabeth Young, Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War (Chicago and London: The

21. In her autobiography Phelps credits Aurora Leigh with inspiring her to pursue a literary career: “what Shakespeare or the Latin Fathers might have done for some other impressionable girl, Mrs. Browning—forever bless her strong and gentle name!—did for me. I owe to her, distinctly, the first visible aspiration (ambition is too low a word) to do some honest, hard work of my own in the World Beautiful, and for it” (Chapters from a Life [Cambridge: Riverside, 1896], 65–66).

Other details of The Story of Avis are also biographical: Like Avis, Phelps lost her mother, a successful writer, at the age of eight, when she died soon after giving birth to her third child. Phelps was raised by her father, Austin Phelps, a respected theologian and a professor at Andover Theological Seminary whose conservatism about women’s roles was a serious source of disagreement between the father and the daughter, causing Phelps considerable distress throughout her lifetime. Unlike her fictional creation, however, Phelps did not marry until 1888, when her career was well established, and she continued to write until her death in 1911.

22. The boys are singing Julia Ward Howe’s “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

23. Kathleen D. McCarthy, Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 37. Although it encouraged women to limit their artistic productions to conventionally feminine art forms, Candace Wheeler’s decorative arts movement also “constituted the first major artistic crusade created, managed, and promoted under female control” (37). The decorative arts movement did not provide a stepping stone for women into other institutional involvement in the arts, however. According to McCarthy, “Throughout the nineteenth century . . . women shaped their most successful institutional mandates around the arts of design. Moreover, they were best able to maintain the institutions they created if they were clearly oriented toward female constituencies, domestic ends, and (rhetorically) limited gains.” A related phenomenon was women’s “lingering reticence to speak on behalf of the community as a whole when the subject was the visual rather than the decorative arts” (77). Avis’s rejection of the decorative arts in this scene is thus not only a form of distancing herself from conventionally feminine art forms but also an indication of Phelps’s willingness to offer a public statement about visual arts.

24. Avis’s refusal to speak for mill workers and other poor and exploited people, and her insistence on her need for distance from the world, can be and has been seen as a failure of compassion for which she is later punished by her own suffering and the failure of her career. Although Avis does eventually develop compassion for others’ suffering and a deeper appreciation for the kind of ethically driven work that she rejects here, I would argue that such readings overlook Phelps’s emphasis on the personal and national loss represented by Avis’s stunted career. Although Phelps developed an aesthetic based on the centrality of the artist’s ethical vision over the course of her lifetime, Avis’s rejection of the role of “apostle of want and woe” and her subsequent rejection of the opportunity to become a Christ figure point to Phelps’s commitment to imagining an alternative model of female artistic produc-
tion, one that depends neither on the suffering of others nor on self-sacrifice. For examples of readings that view Avis’s failed career as stemming from her lack of compassion and her rejection of the traditional moral foundation for feminine artistic endeavor, see Jack H. Wilson, “Competing Narratives in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s The Story of Avis,” American Literary Realism 26 (Fall 1993); Susan S. Williams, “Writing with an Ethical Purpose: The Case of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps,” in Steven Fink and Susan S. Williams, eds., Reciprocal Influences: Literary Production, Distribution, and Consumption in America (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1999); and Deborah Barker, Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature: Portraits of the Woman Artist (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000), chapter 3.


26. Higginson, “Americanism in Literature,” 63. This view was not, of course, new in the postbellum period. Writing in 1854, Harriet Beecher Stowe expresses a similar sentiment when she asserts, “The literature of a people must spring from the sense of its nationality; and nationality is impossible without self-respect, and self-respect is impossible without liberty” (Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands [New York: J. C. Derby, 1854], Vol. I., 189). As I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the changing cultural and religious climate in the 1850s contributed to a profound shift in the way elite Americans thought of the role that art should play in the nation’s identity; that shift was compounded by the Civil War, and in the early postbellum years the conversation about the need for American cultural nationalism took on a new intensity. For discussions of cultural nationalism in the antebellum era and before, see Richard Ruland, ed., The Native Muse (New York: Dutton, 1972); Robert E. Spiller, ed., The American Literary Revolution: 1783–1837 (New York: New York University Press, 1967); Benjamin T. Spencer, The Quest for Nationality, An American Literary Campaign (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1957); and Neil Harris, The Artist in American Society: The Formative Years 1790–1860 (New York: George Braziller, 1966).

27. Deborah Barker sees The Story of Avis as Phelps’s critique of European Romantic aesthetics and German idealist philosophy. For a fascinating reading of Phelps’s sphinx in the context of the profusion of sphinxes in nineteenth-century art, see chapter 3 of Aesthetics and Gender in American Literature: Portraits of the Woman Artist (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2000).


29. Phelps repeatedly uses the image of a grown person “crawling” to denote extreme powerlessness; whereas in the early parts of the novel the verb is used exclusively to describe the stricken soldiers on the battlefield and the injured Philip Ostrander, after her marriage the verb is increasingly used to describe Avis.


32. Ibid., 538.

33. According to Richard Brodhead, “Europe”—traveling to it, understanding and appreciating its art, and so on—became in the 1860s and beyond “the chief requisite for American artists seeking high-artistic careers, and in the late 1860s the ability to display this knowledge became the chief literary ticket in” (Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 97).
34. Stowe, Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands, 159.


36. “Sculpture in the United States,” Atlantic Monthly (Nov. 1868), 558–59. The sculptures this writer refers to were the work of William Wetmore Story (The Libyan Sybil, 1860–61); Hiram Powers (The Greek Slave, 1843); and Harriet Hosmer (Zenobia, 1859).

37. Ibid., 559.

38. Ibid., 561.

39. Indeed, most of the rest of the essay is a call for the development of art-education programs in elementary schools so that “the masses” can acquire the basic knowledge required to transform them into an intelligent audience for fine art.


41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 57.

43. Ibid.

44. “Diana and Persis” is the name given by Sarah Elbert to the four-chapter manuscript she discovered in the Alcott family papers at Harvard’s Houghton Library and subsequently arranged to have reprinted in 1978. The fragment has been reprinted in its entirety in Alternative Alcott, where the editor, Elaine Showalter, has reversed the order of the third and fourth chapters of Elbert’s edition. I find Showalter’s arguments for re-ordering the chapters convincing and have referred to her version throughout this discussion. See the Introduction to Alternative Alcott for a complete discussion of Showalter’s reasoning.


47. Although Mary Cassatt befriended other women artists both in Paris and in the United States, her career as an art collector and broker is marked by her dedication to the male Impressionists whose circle she joined in 1877, at the invitation of Edward Degas, who became her mentor. Kathleen D. McCarthy observes that “[r]ather than promoting her own works, or those of other women painters such as her friend Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt used her influence to steer wealthy American patrons toward the works of her male colleagues within the Impressionist circle” (Women’s Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], 108). Somewhat ironically, Cassatt’s own art was actively promoted by a female contemporary, Louisine Havemeyer, who collected Cassatt’s paintings along with those of her male contemporaries.

48. Brodhead, Cultures of Letters, 124. The new elite Brodhead describes was composed of “inheritors of older wealth and of older local-gentry status, mercantile and managerial groups grown rich in the new corporations, the new-order professionals of this professionalizing period; and elements of the earlier self-articulated middle class eager to distinguish themselves from a now more clearly defined working class strongly identified with this new elite formation as well, especially after the 1860s” (124).
51. Ibid.
54. Higginson argues specifically for the establishment of universities, as opposed to colleges, which he lambastes for their limited and parochial curriculum and provincial attitudes. Universities, in Higginson’s conception, are explicitly imagined as training grounds for the acquisition of “high culture”: “The demand for high culture outruns the supply,” Higginson notes, as evidenced by the large number of young people being sent to Europe for instruction. “What we need,” he continues, “is the opportunity of high culture somewhere,—that there should be some place in American where a young man may go and study anything that kindles his enthusiasm, and find there instrumentalities to help the flame” (“A Plea for Culture,” 30, 31).
56. In “Literature as an Art” Higginson defines high culture and popularity as incompatible when he declares, “Indeed, a man may earn twenty thousand dollars a year by writing ‘sensation stories,’ and have nothing to do with literature as an art. But to devote one’s life to perfecting the manner, as well as the matter, of one’s work; to expatriate one’s self long years for it, like Motley; to overcome vast physical obstacles for it, like Prescott or Parkman; to live and die only to transfuse external nature into human words, like Thoreau; to chase dreams for a lifetime, like Hawthorne; to labor tranquilly and see a nation imbued with one’s thoughts, like Emerson,—this is to pursue literature as an art” (747). The qualities Higginson valorizes as hallmarks of the “literary” are all associated with the American social elite: leisure, education, and masculinity. For a detailed discussion of the gender implications of this stance, see chapter 3.
59. Ibid., 563–64.
60. Ibid., 564.
61. Ibid., 563, 564.
63. Sharon Dean also reads “The Street of the Hyacinth” in terms of its assessment of truth and authority, but she asserts that Noel “lies about his assessment of the quality of her [Ettie’s] paintings” when in fact he fails to do even that (Constance Fenimore Woolson: Homeward Bound [Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995], 182). For readings of the story in terms of Ettie’s victimization at the hands of the male cultural establishment, see Dean, Constance Fenimore Woolson, 180–85, and Cheryl Torsney, Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Grief of Artistry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), chapter 7.
64. A reviewer of Alcott’s Little Men (1871) took the opportunity to assess Alcott’s career as a serious writer of fiction for adults: “That Miss Alcott has sufficient artistic power to succeed in a longer story, with more variety, incident, and machinery, it would not be safe to infer; she certainly had not when she wrote Moods. But between
that and her later works is an almost immeasurable advance: we say immeasurable, because it seems a positive change in kind as well as quality of work. However, while she will give us simple stories which all boys and girls read with delight and profit, and all fathers and mothers laugh and cry over after their boys and girls have gone to bed, we may well be content, without desiring that she should attempt that impossible thing, the American Novel” (Scribner’s Monthly [Aug. 1871], 446–47).


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