Reflecting upon the Model:  
Gendered Interventions  
in History
The Victorian Place of Enunciation: 
Gender and the Chance to Speak

For the nineteenth-century woman who had something to say, finding a safe space in which to say it was not easy. If she restricted herself to addressing her own domestic circle, her "true womanhood" could remain intact, but she would have to be content with the rather abstract prospect of influencing the public world indirectly through her personal impact on her husband, brothers, and sons. If she tried instead to speak in public—as the American socialist reformer Fanny Wright began to do in the 1830s—she might extend her range of influence. She ran the risk, however, of endangering not only her feminine reputation, but also the public perception of her female sexuality.

Women were fully aware of the danger of speaking before a sexually mixed audience, or what journalists of the period liked to call a "promiscuous" gathering. Even in places where women were openly encouraged to speak, as in meetings of the American socialist movement, they suppressed themselves. One Owenite woman, trying to explain her silence, asked: "It being so novel a thing for females to speak in public assemblies, and the idea of all eyes being, at once, directed toward them, is it all that marvellous that . . . a sufficiency of courage is wanting to speak their sentiments?" The woman's anxiety peeps through the shifting syntax of her question. The phrase "and the idea of all eyes being, at once, directed toward them" is grammatically unconnected to the first part of the sentence; it is a subject without any predicate, a state of "being" for which the consequences remain unspoken. What she cannot say is that the nineteenth-century female body toward which "all eyes [are] at once directed" must surrender its femininity.
Reflecting upon the Model

Catharine Beecher, the elder sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, dedicated her life to didactic writings and lectures on domestic science. She knew all about the immasculating potential of a woman's speech before a promiscuous audience. Teaching by word, if not by example, that women must devote themselves exclusively to their domestic responsibilities, Beecher covered the paradox of her own public activity by addressing chiefly female audiences and by attacking women who compromised their femininity by daring to speak before men. Consider her 1836 portrait of Fanny Wright:

Who can look without disgust and abhorrence upon such an one as Fanny Wright, with her great masculine person, her loud voice, her untasteful attire, going about unprotected and feeling no need of protection, mingling with men in stormy debate, and standing up with bare-faced impudence, to lecture to a public assembly... There she stands, with brazen front and brawny arms, attacking the safeguards of all that is venerable and sacred in religion, all that is safe and wise in law, all that is pure and lovely in domestic virtue. Her talents only make her the more conspicuous and offensive, her amiable disposition and sincerity, only make her folly and want of common sense the more pitiable, her freedom from private vices, if she is free, only indicates, that without delicacy, and without principles, she has so thrown off all feminine attractions, that freedom from temptation is her only, and shameful palladium. I cannot conceive any thing in the shape of a woman, more intolerably offensive and disgusting.

Beecher's description transforms the woman orator into a thing, not just an object of derision, but also the object of the looks that Beecher beckons her readers to direct at Wright. The conservative political agenda of the attack is evident; Wright's socialist ideas threaten "all that is venerable and sacred... safe and wise... pure and lovely." But Beecher is careful neither to quote nor to allude to those ideas: they never take shape in her text. What emerges instead is Wright's "great masculine person"—Wright was uncommonly tall—"her untasteful attire," her "brazen front and brawny arms." If Wright's clothes are "untasteful," then she has abandoned the feminine duties and values of her middle-class status and has given the promiscuous audience licence to undress her; the body they find beneath
the attire is "masculine" and "brawny." The placement of Wright's figure—"standing up with bare-faced impudence, to lecture to a public assembly," "unprotected and feeling no need of protection, mingling with men"—further accentuates the vision of the nakedly masculine stance Wright automatically adopts by mounting the stage.

Perhaps the most revealing move in Beecher's characterization of Wright, though, is her handling of Wright's personal virtues. Conceding the lecturer's "amiable disposition and sincerity," she demurs over Wright's "freedom from private vices, if she is free." Beecher reasons that so immasculated a woman could not have avoided vicious sexual entanglements through anything so feminine as "delicacy and principles." Instead, she has "so thrown off all feminine attractions" that no man would want her. What is "shameful" about Wright's "freedom from temptation" is that a feminine Victorian woman, while she must repulse sexual overtures from men, is also required to inspire them.

This vision of the incompatibility of public speaking with not only feminine propriety, but also female sexuality, would surely have presented a daunting picture to any "respectable" woman with ambitions of exerting a public influence. To speak in public, Beecher implies, is to become a "thing in the shape of a woman": to lose one's intrinsic sexuality as well as one's outward gender, and worse, to become the object of the public regard. Beecher's position is a startling one, given its context: she was herself making a public utterance when she wrote the sketch of Wright for publication in her *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* (1836). And Beecher did give lectures on domestic economy—but not, if she could help it, to "promiscuous" audiences. The position from which Beecher writes is the ambitious bourgeois matron's (or spinster's) compromise with the prevailing ideology of domestic influence. She will speak to women of women's concerns, but she will insist on remaining "in her place," out of that frightfully objectifying public view.4

Catharine Beecher's verbal cartoon of Frances Wright recalls the gender arrangements in nineteenth-century caricatures of women orators. Women speaking to groups of mixed or uncertain gender get stripped of their femininity in Victorian-era cartoons, while women speaking to women are marked as feminine, even if they are made to look foolish. The French caricature on the frontispiece of this book shows a coarse-featured, open-mouthed woman addressing amused women and distressed men from...
Reflecting upon the Model

The woman orator who speaks to women, thus maintaining her femininity. (Courtesy of Harvard College Library.)

a pulpit (1871). The 1842 cartoon from Punch (facing page) makes an even more masculinized thing of its subject, the “female Chartist,” Mary Anne Walker. Flat-chested, sharp-featured, wild-eyed, and speaking, the caricature of Walker is accompanied by Punch’s comments on her gender-identity. “Miss Walker,” Punch reports, “gave indications at a very early age of a turn for public life, and from her decidedly masculine predilections, she acquired the appellation of Tom-boy in her own immediate neighborhood” (192). By contrast, the 1848 drawing of a woman addressing a working women’s club (above, attributed to “Beaumont” in Fuchs, 472) shows an exaggeratedly feminine form, a delicately featured face, and an arm attached to a hand by a decidedly limp wrist. Evidently, to speak to a group of women was one thing; to speak to a “promiscuous” gathering was quite another matter.
Buried in these visual strategies for depriving women orators of their gender is the attribute of the lecturer that poses the greatest threat to the idea of true womanhood that Catharine Beecher shared with fellow domestic ideologues: “her loud voice.” Against the background of the ban on public self-expression, a woman with something to say was better off restricting her voice to the comparative silence of print. Indeed, by the 1870s, when Harriet Beecher Stowe toured New England and the Midwest, reading her fiction aloud in an unsuccessful attempt to earn large sums of money, a woman could appear on a stage without repercussions. Though some reviews of Stowe’s readings disparaged her voice for being weaker than, for example, Dickens’s (one review pointedly put her in her place, remarking that “as a parlour reader Mrs. Stowe may be pleasant enough, but as a public reader she furnishes forth dull entertainment”), no one
Reflecting upon the Model

challenged the right of America's most famous woman author to read her work before a mixed audience.3

Nevertheless, Stowe herself cherished an idea, very similar to her sister Catharine's, about the gendered implications of addressing an audience from a stage. In Annie Fields's memoir of Stowe, she tells of the novelist's preparations before her first public reading in Boston. Fields reports that Stowe

called me into her bedroom, where she stood before the mirror, with her short gray hair, which usually lay in soft curls around her brow, brushed erect and standing stiffly, "Look here, my dear," she said: "now I am exactly like my father, Dr. Lyman Beecher, when he was going to preach," and she held up her forefinger warningly. It was easy to see that the spirit of the old preacher was revived in her veins, and the afternoon would show something of his power. (299)

Granted, the phallic imagery of this description—the usually soft hair "erect and standing stiffly," the admonitory forefinger "held up," the father's spirit engorging the woman's veins with power—belongs to Fields, not to Stowe. But the fantasy of resembling the powerful male preacher is Stowe's, and Fields's avid participation in the fantasy shows that this woman of the 1870s had not strayed far from the ideas that Catharine Beecher had expressed forty years earlier about the immasculating potential of public speaking. To "preach" on stage was automatically to cross-dress.

Surprisingly enough, for some women, even to write for publication was to cross-dress. In spite of the firmly established tradition of eighteenth-century literary women, appearing in print in early nineteenth-century America was tantamount to appearing in drag. Mary Kelley relates a telling anecdote about Caroline Howard Gilman, who remembered in her old age that as a teenager she had been overcome with shame in 1810 when one of her poems (which a relative had secretly submitted for publication) was accepted. Gilman said she had "wept bitterly" and been "alarmed" to see herself in print—it was "as if I had been detected in a man's apparel" (180). What is interesting about Gilman's reaction is not just her youthful suppression of the generations of women who had written and published before her, but her intense identification of her poem with her own body. She explained the shame of publication as though it meant exposure of a hidden
predilection: for the public to see her manuscript clothed, as it were, in print was the same for her as if they had seen her own female body clothed in a man's garb. The key word in her reflection on the experience is "detected": the shame was not in the writing or the cross-dressing, but in having been caught in the act.

Gilman's confession suggests that occupying herself with literary writing was still a transgression of gender roles, even for a woman of Gaskell's, Stowe's, and Eliot's generation. Public speaking and preaching, too, were off limits for the woman who was anxious not to transgress gender lines. What the women novelists did was to take two modes of potentially dangerous expression and combine them, forming a mode through which they could "speak" without exposing themselves. By taking up the strategies that men used in real-world discourse—the earnest exhortation, the personalized direct address to an audience, the insistence on speaking a truth—the women transformed those rhetorical moves into feminine codes in literary discourse. By moving preacherly rhetoric into print, they created a literary space where they could "speak" in relative safety. To write fiction with engaging narrative strategies was, for the mid-nineteenth century, to write as a woman: when Dickens or Trollope sometimes borrowed them, they, too, were cross-dressing. And yet for the men, novel-writing represented such a different choice in the realm of public utterances from what it meant for the women: it is not really surprising that feminine, engaging moves are more difficult to find in men's texts than are masculine, distancing moves in women's novels. Men had so many other public places in which they could, if they chose to, say something.

The difficulty, then, for the Victorian woman who wished to speak was to find the space where she could speak safely, the place of enunciation she could occupy without the humiliation of transforming herself into a "thing in the shape of a woman," or even a figure "exactly like [her] father." She could, if she would, speak up at an Owenite meeting, in a Quaker church, before a group of women students, at a religious revival, or as an evangelist buttonholing individual sinners: each of these alternatives, though, had the double disadvantage of giving the speaker access to only a small (and usually already converted) audience, and of requiring the woman's physical presence in a public arena. If she was torn between ambition and the fear of immasculating and humiliation, if she wanted to reach large numbers with her voice without exposing her body to the
Reflecting upon the Model

genral view, her only option was to write. The challenge was to find a mode of writing that could wield the kind of power that public speaking represented for men. Realistic fiction became that mode.

MAINTAINING A GOOD NAME: AUTHORIAL PRIORITIES IN THE FEMININE REALM

The fact that writing was the respectable middle-class woman’s single opportunity for public self-expression has been firmly established in studies of gender’s relation to authorship. Ellen Moers, for example, says that “the novel and the poem were women’s only instruments of social action in the early nineteenth century: literature was their pulpit, tribune, academy, commission, and parliament all in one. ‘I want to be doing something with the pen,’ said Harriet Martineau, ‘since no other means of action in politics are in a woman’s power’” (Literary Women 20). Of American society, Kelley writes that “women were isolated from and generally denied participation in their country’s public life. They were not statesmen or politicians, judges or legislators, entrepreneurs or merchants, or in any way simply prominent, public citizens” (111). And Vineta Colby writes of British women that “forbidden the pulpit, the university lecture platform, the seat in Parliament, they turned to an outlet in which they were welcome and through which they could express their ideas and wield an influence otherwise denied them” (6). On both sides of the Atlantic, the ground where the respectable woman could speak authoritatively in public was strictly limited to the space within the covers of a book.

Under the circumstances, women who wrote were likely to regard their activity as being different from that of literary men. Robert A. Colby has said that when George Eliot referred “to herself in late career as an ‘aesthetic teacher,’ she was simply articulating what writers and readers had long accepted as the function of the man (or woman) of letters in society” (18). But did this parenthetical woman of letters necessarily regard her own function as identical to that of the man? And was the teaching that George Eliot’s early novels tried to accomplish strictly of an “aesthetic” nature? (In the context of the letter where she uses the phrase, Eliot distinguishes between “aesthetic” and “doctrinal” teaching, in order to dissociate herself from novelists who concentrate on theological or political current events.) I think that Eliot’s claim to be participating in the masculine tradition of
aesthetic teaching, like her pseudonym and her use of distancing techniques in *Adam Bede*, is a sign of her self-conscious appropriation of a male role. Men, after all, could exert moral and political influence directly from pulpits, lecture halls, or parliamentary seats if they chose to. For them, literature was primarily an aesthetic realm, a space where texts and traditions could be played off against one another in an admittedly artificial form. Literature could serve the same purpose for women, but from the perspective of the female writer, literature also had to be the space of action and of public influence, difficult if not impossible for her to achieve in other spheres.

Women of the period certainly could recognize the potential for power that writing fiction represented. Dinah Mulock Craik is often quoted on this subject, for her striking boast that the novel is “one of the most important moral agents of the community. The essayist may write for his hundreds, the preacher preach for his thousands; but the novelist counts his audience by millions. His power is three-fold—over heart, reason, and fancy.”8 The novelist’s power, then, is to be reckoned by the numbers he reaches as well as by the strategies—emotional, intellectual, and imaginative—he uses to move his enormous audience. What is odd about Craik’s assertion, though, is the elision of gender that leads her to call the novelist, along with the essayist and preacher, “he.” Whereas the essayist and the preacher would almost invariably be male, the novelist in Craik’s day would have a fair chance of being female. Though a novelist herself, Craik seems to hesitate to claim publicly the novelist’s power for her own sex. The implicit claim is there (along with the ironic fact that she is also for the moment included among the masculine group of “essayists”), but Craik’s hesitation to overtly assign female gender to these groups of writers supports Kelley’s contention that any mid-nineteenth-century woman who wrote for publication would have had to see herself as filling a male role.9

By taking on a public identity, by earning money, and by participating in the creation of culture, the woman writer, Kelley explains, assumed a “semblance of male status” (111). What Mary Poovey says of an earlier generation of English women writers was still largely true at mid-century: “The cultural pressure to conform to the image of proper (or innate) femininity directly contradicted the demands of professional authorship” (241). To be sure, authorship itself was not seen as intrinsically masculine. Caroline Howard Gilman, for example, expressed no sense of shame for having
written a poem, but she agonized over being "detected" at it. It was the professional aspect of writing for publication—transporting a woman's words outside the domestic sphere—that endangered her feminine reputation in the public's view and in her own.

That Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot—like the less celebrated "literary domestics" of their era—wished, at least at some level, to maintain their respectability has been well established by their various biographers. One sign of that desire was their reluctance to attach their names to their earliest work. Gaskell published *Mary Barton* anonymously; Eliot invented for herself a male pen name. And although Stowe did not suppress the fact that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was her work, she did try to disavow responsibility for it (with her infamous claim that "God wrote it"). Almost perversely, Stowe adopted a masculine pseudonym, "Christopher Crowfield," for her most domestically oriented books, *House and Home Papers* (1865) and *Little Foxes, or the Little Failings which Mar Domestic Happiness* (1866). Perhaps Stowe felt that her fame as the author of *Uncle Tom* disqualified her from making feminine pronouncements in her own female name.

Both Gaskell's and Stowe's feminine "good names" were damaged by the reforming thrust of their literary efforts. For Gaskell, the temporary loss of her reputation as a proper woman came, as I have mentioned, with the publication of *Ruth*. For Stowe, the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* precipitated attacks on her womanhood as virulent as the attacks on her artistry, especially from Southern reviewers. In a particularly memorable example, George F. Holmes in the *Southern Literary Messenger* made "a distinction between lady writers and female writers" to justify the vehemence of his condemnation of Stowe's novel:

> We could not find it in our hearts to visit the dulness or ignorance of a well-meaning lady with the vigorous discipline which it is necessary to inflict upon male dunces and blockheads. But where a writer of the softer sex manifests, in her productions, a shameless disregard of truth and of those amenities which so peculiarly belong to her sphere of life, we hold that she has forfeited her claim to be considered a lady, and with that claim all exemption from the utmost stringency of critical punishment. (Ammons 7)

Ironically, although Holmes's reasons for denuding Stowe of the privileges of her sex are not intentionally complimentary, his action has the effect of
distinguishing her work as deserving serious (albeit negative) attention. Stowe's use of the novel to extend her influence beyond "her sphere of life" meant that she gave up some of the feminine respectability due to a "lady writer," but it also meant she could be taken seriously. Stowe's family name was already a liability among Southern anti-abolitionists; in a flippant attack on *Dred* for its "profanity," the *Messenger* (speaking through an ostensibly female persona, a "young lady of New England") says of Stowe: "Were she a woman, we should blush for the sex—luckily she is only a Beecher" (Ammons 48). (I imagine this imputation would have nettled Catharine at least as much as it could bother her sister.)

For Eliot, too, a "good name" was a constantly nagging problem. Before she published her first novel, Eliot had already sacrificed her own feminine reputation to her relationship with George Lewes, not to mention having supported herself with professional, intellectual, literary work. On both counts, she "was no lady," and even after her fiction had been exposed as the work of a female writer, she was inevitably taken more seriously than any "lady writer" could be. Her insistence upon calling herself "Mrs. Lewes" throughout the twenty-two years that she lived out of wedlock with the man whose first name she borrowed for her pen name is a poignant sign of her desire to frame her personal life in terms of conventionally approved female roles. Biographers have speculated that Eliot's becoming "Mrs. Cross" so soon after Lewes's death signaled her eagerness to embrace that feminine role officially.

The personal positions Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot took on female roles, then, were not particularly revolutionary. Indeed, critics who look through the plots of their novels in the hope of finding proto-feminist assertions of female power and subversiveness are, as often as not, disappointed." Nevertheless, when these women wrote their first fictions, they embarked on the literary project in a distinctly feminine way, a way that was shaped by and appropriate to the positions they occupied as middle-class women torn between the irreconcilable desires to be publicly influential and to be irreproachably respectable. The narrative stance in their realist fictions is one sign of their feminine strategy for coping with the restrictions on their real-world discourse. By rejecting the model of self-referential narrative reflexiveness presented by the work of their male predecessors and contemporaries, and by using direct address to bridge the gap between strictly literary utterances and serious statements, they adapted the
Reflecting upon the Model

novelist's art to women's purposes. Engaging address to the reader is a sign of these women's conceptions of the purpose of art; as such, it signifies a gendered gesture.

The mid-nineteenth-century “feminine” idea of art is that fiction should be didactic in a particular way, with moral conversion as the novel's central goal. Men's novels of the period are also didactic, and their stories can trace the moral evolution of a central character (as in *Yeast*, *Great Expectations*, and *Phineas Finn*, for instance). The gendered difference, as I have argued for individual novels, is not one of story, but of discourse: feminine strategies for shaping the conversation between the narrator and narratee rely on the earnest mode of evangelical exhortation, while masculine strategies maintain a more conventionally literary structure of ironic, self-reflexive fictionality. Later in this chapter, I compare the feminine use of direct address in fiction to the rhetoric that nineteenth-century male writers use when they are speaking “in earnest,” especially in sermons. First, though, I want to examine the idea of fiction's purpose that these female writers held when they began their novel-writing careers.

A perceived difference between the aims of Victorian men and women in writing novels already lurks behind critical summaries of the period, though the difference is not always explicitly announced as one of gender. To cite one prominent example: in his classic study of the genre of didactic novels, Robert A. Colby correctly assumes that “fiction with a purpose” had roughly the same purpose for male and female authors: to teach. If we look at Colby's characterizations of male and female novelists' purposes, though, we can detect signs of the gendered difference in his own descriptions. Colby quotes at length from Dinah Mulock Craik's essay on the novelist's power, remarking that Craik's declarations (for example, “Fiction forsooth! It is the core of all the truths of this world; for it is the truth of life itself. He who dares to reproduce it is a Prometheus who has stolen celestial fire; let him take care that he uses it for the benefit of his fellow mortals”) “might have been written by George Eliot” (19). Thus yoking the purposes of two women writers, Colby adds Charlotte Brontë to their company, commenting that as novelists, Brontë and Eliot “enter not only their readers' homes but their minds and consciences. Miss Brontë, through Lucy Snowe, ministers to the soul in anguish. George Eliot, from a more detached viewpoint, becomes a guide to the perplexed in matters of faith and morality” (19).
THE VICTORIAN PLACE OF ENUNCIATION

Colby uses the same metaphor to describe the activity of male and female Victorian novelists: they penetrate the domestic circles of strangers to speak to their readers. Within his argument, though, Colby shows no sign of recognizing the distinction he is making between the women's purposes and the men's in entering readers' homes. Immediately preceding his characterization of Brontë and Eliot is a comment on one of their male contemporaries: "Dickens, as reporter turned novelist, exposes hidden shame and tries to shock his more affluent readers out of their smugness. Thackeray enters his readers' homes, bringing them cultural 'news,' advising the young on love and their parents on education and marriage prospects" (19). Colby's own phrasing points to a difference: the woman novelist "ministers to the soul," guides readers "in matters of faith and morality"; the man "exposes hidden shame and tries to shock," or dispenses advice on social relations and practical matters. The women's purpose is more personal, more individualized, more spiritual than the men's. When, in the same context, he quotes Trollope's remarks about "the low-heeled buskin of modern fiction" (18), which Trollope saw as filling a cultural need for "rational amusement" (17), Colby unintentionally emphasizes the gendered difference. The "low-heeled buskin" image draws attention to the artificial, staged nature of fiction, or its value as "amusement." Perfectly appropriate for the masculine literary pursuits of Trollope, Thackeray, Kingsley, and even (when he is "at play") Dickens, the formula seems oddly inapplicable to the feminine projects of Gaskell, Stowe, or Eliot.

Of the three women writers, Eliot was the one most concerned at the beginning of her career about the status of her work as art; she was, in this sense, the most "masculine." As we have seen, her preoccupation with aesthetic standards dominates her pseudonymous correspondence with her publisher on Scenes of Clerical Life, surfaces in her reviews of other writers' fiction (especially "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"), and pervades the narrative interventions in Adam Bede. We should not forget that the letters, reviews, and even the novels were ostensibly signed by a man and contain textual codes to support the signature—her "readers," from John Blackwood to the Westminster Review's audience to the narratees of Scenes of Clerical Life, were supposed to assume that they were being addressed by a man. (Blackwood apparently did assume it; his letters to Lewes about Scenes solemnly refer to the novelist as "he.") 11 Eliot was not scrupulously careful
Reflecting upon the Model
to gender all her published narrative "I's" as masculine: though many critics still assume that the Adam Bede narrator is a man, some contemporary readers found evidence that a woman must have written Eliot's first two novels, including, by their own report, Dickens and Stowe.12

In an even more revealing instance, Eliot shifts the gendered references of the pronouns in her essayist persona's impassioned call to "Lady Novelists" to stop writing silly novels. The essay's concluding paragraph begins with the "we" that stands for the essayist's masculine mask: "Hap­ply, we are not dependent on argument to prove that fiction is a depart­ment of literature in which women can, after their kind, fully equal men." This "editorial we," the name of the presumably male reviewer, recedes later in the paragraph, as the writer includes herself among the ranks of potentially serious women novelists: "No educational requirements can shut women out from the materials of fiction, and there is no species of art which is so free from rigid requirements. Like crystalline masses, it may take any form, and yet be beautiful; we have only to pour in the right elements—genuine observation, humor, and passion" (Essays 324, empha­sis added). Eliot's female identity, then, can slip through the male persona of her "editorial we" or her pen name. She flashed her adopted male name (or, alternatively, the anonymity of the reviewer) as though it were a license to write about aesthetic matters.

Nevertheless, in each of these fictional and nonfictional forums, the terms in which she writes about aesthetics place her in a feminine-gendered position in relation to art. Her interest in aesthetic form always comes back to questioning the artifact's relation to reality; for her, as for Gaskell and Stowe, that relation is only partly one of representation, of depicting a recognizable mirror of "truth" in the fictional world. Their novels' most intimate relation to the extratextual world inheres in their rhetoric—in the always complex, often contradictory messages about the world that the texts transmit, but even more in the appeal to actual readers to recognize themselves as the figures to whom those messages are addressed. The specific messages about social, political, or moral "realities" are less impor­tant than the medium, the interventions in these realist texts.

Eliot expressed this point directly in a late letter when she explained what it meant to her to be a novelist, in the famous passage that I men­tioned above: "My function is that of the aesthetic not doctrinal teacher—the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social
right, not the prescribing of social measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge.” (Letters VII 44). For Eliot, the job of the aesthetic teacher is not so much to instruct an audience in the appreciation of art, as it is to “rouse the nobler emotions” of actual readers. As Stowe put it, the feminine novelist’s function is to inspire readers “to see to it that they feel right” (Uncle Tom 624). And if a novel happened, as Gaskell expressed it, to “put the small edge of the wedge in” to a reader’s consciousness of the problems it depicts, if it should manage to “make people talk and discuss the subject a little more than they did” (Letters 226), then that would be a sign that the text was serving its desired function. As we have seen, neither Stowe nor Gaskell is much more concerned than Eliot with “the prescribing of social measures,” and their first novels propose no practical answers to the social dilemmas they raise. Like Eliot, Gaskell and Stowe use their first novels as a means to “make mankind desire the social right”—in other words, to do what preachers and politicians ostensibly tried to do. Except in evangelical circumstances, earnest public exhortation was a masculine prerogative. To use fiction for the same ends was a feminine alternative.

Clearly, these women exploited the novel’s moral potential self-consciously. Stowe wrote in a newspaper column that the novel’s “concentration on ‘the great question of moral life’ was becoming ‘one of the features of the age,’” and emphasized a change from a literary past she imagined, when “the only object of fictitious writing was to amuse” (quoted in Kelley 250). In picturing such a past, Stowe was suppressing the entire tradition that had come into the history of the novel through Cervantes and Fielding from Horace, the tradition which claimed that the function of imaginative writing was always “to instruct and delight.” The fact that Stowe was wrong about the past “object of fictitious writing” is less important, however, than her statement’s implication that she saw herself and her contemporaries as using the novel toward new and unusual ends.

SEEING THE VOICE IN THE FACE:
THE PRESENCE OF THE WOMAN WRITER

Although Gaskell and Eliot might not have endorsed Stowe’s vision of literature’s past, the three women apparently saw themselves as constituting a literary community. Their earliest correspondence with one another
Reflecting upon the Model

(and their public and private remarks upon one another's novels and personalities) reveal each woman's desire to emulate the other two. Their comments also show that each of them was "taken in" by the others' engaging narrators. They all tended to conflate the narrative persona of a novel with its author's identity, a tendency which hints at their own desire to project their personalities—in some important sense, their selves, their presences—through the narrative voice of a novel into the reader's world. Each claimed an intimate acquaintance with the others through having read their novels, and each appears to have believed that the narrator was identical to the woman who created it, and that novels of the earnestly engaging type genuinely expressed their authors' individual subjectivity.

Since neither Stowe nor Gaskell ever met Eliot (whose living arrangements made her an unsuitable acquaintance for respectable married ladies), and since Stowe and Gaskell (who did meet) lived on different continents, their community existed only metaphorically. Established originally through their novels, the relationships developed in letters that expressed the women's sense of affinity with one another. Certainly, ambivalence entered into their expressed feelings: for example, Gaskell could not resist alluding to her disapproval of Eliot's unmarried liaison with Lewes, and Eliot's first outbursts of warmth in her correspondence with Stowe cooled somewhat in later years. But their respective epistolary friendships represent a literary subset of what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has called "the female world of love and ritual. . . . [A] world built around a generic and unself-conscious pattern of single-sex or homosocial networks" (60). Solidarity among women was not to be taken for granted—for evidence we need only look to Catharine Beecher's position on Fanny Wright, or to the outspoken criticism of women to be found in the writings of Eliza Lynn Linton and Dinah Mulock Craik. But the novelistic goals of Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot bound them into a verbal version of the "community of women" that Nina Auerbach has described, one that "freely offers the work that must be wrenched grudgingly out of the 'real' world of Victorian patriarchy" (21). In the present case the "real" world is not only the public world of men's work and men's discourse, but literally the real world, that is, the world outside the fictional texts: the three women shared a belief in the genuine work they could accomplish through their fictions.

Though each of the women held specific reservations about some
features of the others’ lives, all three publicly and privately admired one another’s work. As I have mentioned, their comments in letters and memoirs reveal evidence that each identified the other two authors with the narrators of their respective novels. I think, too, that their relations with one another suggest “influence” in the traditional literary-critical sense: admiring one another’s books, seeing their personal concerns reflected in their own and the others’ narrative voices, they made their mutual affinities explicit in both public and private statements.

Stowe’s memoirs show that she had probably read *Mary Barton* before she wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1851. During her 1853 visit to London, when *Uncle Tom’s* phenomenal success ensured Stowe’s reception into British literary circles, she met Gaskell at a party. Stowe’s later account of the meeting implies previous familiarity with Gaskell’s novels: “Mrs. Gaskell [was there], authoress of Mary Barton and Ruth. She has a very lovely, gentle face, and looks capable of all the pathos that her writings show” (*Sunny Memories* 224). The “pathos” in those two novels is largely a function of the earnest narrator’s voice; Stowe read the narrator’s voice into the author’s face.

In fact, when Stowe met her, Gaskell was no longer writing novels with engaging narrators. Perhaps reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, with its energetic crossings from feminine earnestness to masculine irony, as well as its dire consequences for its author’s feminine reputation, reinforced the effect of *Ruth’s* reception on Gaskell’s narrative technique. In any case, after 1852 she abandoned direct address in novels altogether. Gaskell liked Stowe personally, and entertained her for several days in Manchester in 1856 (Forrest Wilson 432). After their first meeting in London, Gaskell wrote of Stowe to a friend, “I was 4 or 5 hours with her, and liked her very much indeed. She is short and American in her manner, but very true and simple and thoroughly unspoiled and unspoilable” (*Letters* 237). From Gaskell, who was concerned on her own account about the dangers of being spoiled by those who “lionized” her after *Mary Barton’s* popular success, this is a compliment to Stowe’s feminine integrity. Whether Gaskell meant to imply that Stowe was short in her manner as well as short in person (the American author was diminutive) is not easy to determine; clearly, though, she honored the woman she could call “true and simple.”

Though Gaskell left no written record of her reaction to Stowe’s
novels, she did write letters praising *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* to George Eliot, whom she never met in person. The correspondence between Gaskell and Eliot emphasizes the interests and approaches that the two novelists had in common. Not surprisingly, during the period after *Adam Bede*’s publication, when one of literary London’s favorite pastimes was guessing the identity of “George Eliot,” Elizabeth Gaskell’s name came up. Gaskell herself had been among the early supporters of a Mr. Liggins’s claim to have based George Eliot’s first two novels on his experiences in the Coventry neighborhood where Mary Ann Evans grew up. At the time when her own name was proposed, however, Gaskell seems to have believed that the Dean of Bristol, Gilbert Elliot, was the actual author (Haight, *George Eliot* 287).

The addressee of Gaskell’s first letter to Eliot is, then, male: she sent it to “Gilbert Elliot” and signed it “Gilbert Elliot,” playfully offering to take the credit for having written the novels. Gaskell frames her compliment to the novels in almost flirtatious language. She begins the letter, “Since I came from Manchester to London I have had the greatest compliment paid me I ever had in my life. I have been suspected of having written ‘Adam Bede.’ . . . [I]t would be very pleasant for me to blush acquiescence.” Going on in the same vein, she exclaims, “Well! If I had written Amos Barton, Janet’s Repentance, and Adam Bede I should neither be to have nor to hold with pride and delight in myself—so I think it is very well I have not” (Eliot, *Letters* III 74). Gaskell’s adaptation of the phrasing of the marriage ceremony (each spouse takes the other “to have and to hold”) is interesting. If she had written those books, she seems to be saying, she would be too proud and delighted with herself to remain a married woman, or at least to go on behaving as a respectable married woman should behave. The feminine modesty implicit in this declaration (and in her expressed pleasure at the thought of “blushing acquiescence”) suggests Gaskell’s assumption that she is writing to a man.

Gaskell’s surprise at learning that the author was Marian Evans did not diminish her admiration for the novels, though it did color her next letter to George Eliot. In a more serious mode, she wrote in 1859 to the woman novelist, declaring of Eliot’s first two novels, “how earnestly fully, and how humbly I admire them. I never read anything so complete, and beautiful in fiction, in my whole life before.” She tempers her praise with a frank but forgiving allusion to Eliot’s personal life:
Perhaps you may have heard that I upheld Mr. Liggins as the author for long. . . . But I never was such a goose as to believe that such books as yours could be a mosaic of real and ideal. I should not be quite true in my ending, if I did not say before I concluded that I wish you were Mrs. Lewes. However, that can't be helped, as far as I can see, and one must not judge others. (Gaskell, *Letters*, 586–587)

To say that "one must not judge others" is certainly not the same as saying "I accept your having chosen the life you have"—the gesture at the end of Gaskell's letter falls somewhat short of an embrace. And yet, Gaskell's letter apparently pleased George Eliot, who was very sensitive to adverse criticism but usually indifferent to kind words from enthusiastic readers. Eliot's reaction suggests that she respected Gaskell's feminine preoccupation with propriety enough to overlook it in her answer.

In 1856 Eliot had written respectfully (though anonymously) in "Silly Novels" of Gaskell's status as a serious writer. Accordingly, Eliot was fervent in her personal thanks for Gaskell's letter and for the influence that Gaskells first two novels had held over her while she wrote her own first two books:

I shall always love to think that one woman wrote to another such sweet encouraging words—still more to think that you were the writer and I the receiver.

I had indulged the idea that if my books turned out to be worth much, you would be among my willing readers; for I was conscious, while the question of my power was still undecided for me, that my feeling towards Life and Art had some affinity with the feeling which had inspired "Cranford" and the earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." That idea was brought the nearer to me, because I had the pleasure of reading Cranford for the first time in 1857, when I was writing the "Scenes of Clerical Life," and going up the Rhine one dim wet day in the spring of the next year, when I was writing "Adam Bede," I satisfied myself for the lack of a prospect by reading over again those earlier chapters of "Mary Barton." I like to tell you these slight details because they will prove to you that your letter must have a peculiar value for me, and that I am not expressing vague gratitude towards a writer whom I only remember as one who charmed me in the past. (Eliot, *Letters* III 198–199)
Reflecting upon the Model

Evidently Eliot did not focus on the personal allusions in Gaskell's letter, but was drawn instead to the "sweet encouraging words" about her work. She makes it clear, furthermore, that the words' having come from Gaskell made them more valuable; the letter implies that she thought of Gaskell as a literary mentor.

Pauline Nestor puzzles over the appeal that Gaskell's *Cranford* would have held for Eliot, "since as [Eliot] made clear in 'Woman in France' and . . . in the priorities in her fiction, the prospect of a community of women without men held little charm for her" (147). Similarly, Barbara Hardy has remarked that what Eliot meant by the "feeling towards Life and Art" she shared with Gaskell "is a matter for guessing" ("Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot" 182). Comparing the narrative stances of Eliot's first two novels with Gaskell's (as I have done elsewhere) can help solve part of the puzzle: Eliot's eye may have been drawn to the discourse, more than the story, of Gaskell's fiction. Just as the nameless male narrator of *Scenes* and Mary Smith of *Cranford* occupy parallel textual positions as minimally characterized, homodiegetic narrators, some of the similarities between the engaging narrators in *Mary Barton* and *Adam Bede* can probably be attributed to Eliot's having reread Gaskell's novel while working on her own. 14

George Eliot and Harriet Beecher Stowe also enjoyed mutual professional admiration and carried on a long, warm correspondence on literary and personal matters, although they were never to meet. Eliot reviewed *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* for the *Westminster Review* in the fall of 1856, and though by that time she no longer shared the Christian faith that motivates so much of Stowe's fictional vision, she nevertheless approved of Stowe's exalted tone. Eliot's review praises Stowe for having "invented the Negro novel," and points to the source of its power: "She seems for the moment to glow with all the passion, to quiver with all the fun, and to be inspired with all the trust that belong to her different characters; she attains her finest dramatic effects by means of her energetic sympathy, and not by conscious artifice" (*Essays* 326, 329). The referent of "she" in this statement is Stowe the novelist, but the "glow," the "quiver," the inspiration describe the narrator's voice. By setting Stowe's "energetic sympathy" off against "conscious artifice," Eliot conflates the narrator and the novelist.

The review of *Dred* does criticize Stowe for oversimplifying the com-
plexities of slavery by idealizing her black characters. Eliot's first letter to Stowe, written in 1869 to answer an unexpected fan letter from the American novelist, does not mention artistic differences, however; it stresses instead the spiritual purpose that the two novelists held in common:

I believe that religion too has to be modified—“developed,” according to the dominant phrase—and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent, must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply-awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot.

The letter acknowledges the risk of being misunderstood when writing on such “wide subjects,” but Eliot confidently concludes, “I trust your quick and long-taught mind as an interpreter little liable to mistake me” (Eliot, Letters V 29—31). Of course, Eliot's familiarity with Stowe's mind was limited to what she had seen in one letter and in Stowe's novels. In the narrative voices of those texts she had recognized the concepts of sympathy, of a sense of responsibility to others, and of an awareness of “the difficulty of the human lot” that informed her own novels. This striving to achieve sympathy, to turn away from the pursuit of “personal consolation,” and to inspire readers to widen their circle of personal responsibility is, of course, the impetus behind the engaging authorial address that both authors practise in their first full-length fictions.

Of the three novelists Stowe is the one who came closest to expressing the bond of narrative technique that connects them. When Eliot wrote her congratulations to Stowe on the success of Oldtown Folks (1869), Stowe responded with thanks, and asked Eliot in passing, “Is it not true that what we authors want is not praise so much as sympathy?” Kelley (who quotes the letter from Stowe's unpublished correspondence) interprets the remark in the context of the literary domestic's conflict-ridden life. She says Stowe's impulse “was to focus on the quandary of the person rather than the quality of the book; regarding the latter as a genus [Stowe] said, ‘A book is a hand stretched forth in the dark passage of life to see if there is another hand to meet it’” (283—284).

Perhaps Kelley is right. In their correspondence, both Eliot and Stowe often turned to each other for personal comfort. But if, in writing a
Reflecting upon the Model

book, a novelist stretches forth a hand to meet the hand of a sympathizing reader, the engaging narrator—extending her appeals for sympathy through direct address to a narratee—reproduces that metaphorical gesture within the text. The “sympathy” that “we authors want” is only partly personal: the authors of *Mary Barton*, *Uncle Tom*, and *Adam Bede* may have craved sympathy for themselves, but the novels operate to inspire a more generalized sympathy that would originate in egocentric self-involvement (“how fast could you walk?”) and would spiral outward to engulf fictional protagonists, their antagonists, the narrators who tell their stories, the real world the stories are meant to resemble, and finally (but by no means exclusively) the authors who created them. They wanted readers’ sympathy, and they wanted that sympathy to spill over from the realm of the fiction and transform the world through the same kind of feminine “influence” that domestic ideology promoted.

In this respect, Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot were emulating evangelical techniques of “buttonholing” sinners, singling out individual members of an audience and attempting to work on their feelings. All three had experienced such techniques in revivalist circumstances, and all three had been exposed to and influenced by more formal Protestant sermonizers. Daughter of Lyman Beecher, sister of Henry Ward Beecher, and wife of Calvin Stowe, Harriet Beecher Stowe lived a life suffused with powerful preaching and lecturing. Gaskell’s husband was a Unitarian minister. And, as a young girl, Mary Ann Evans had been moved to imitate the evangelical examples of her schoolmistress-friend Maria Lewis and her Methodist aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans. Though Eliot renounced her Christian faith in her early twenties, and though Stowe converted her allegiance to Episcopalianism from the sterner Calvinism her father represented, both of them shared with Gaskell the memory of the powerful influence of preachers. They all were familiar with the strategies and cadences that mid-nineteenth-century men used in speaking publicly and urgently.

**BEING “UP TO PAR IN MANLINESS”: THE PRESENCE OF THE PREACHER**

“If you are not a man, what business have you in the ministry?” Speaking in 1871 to a group of male seminarians at Yale Divinity School, Henry Ward Beecher uttered this question in the context of the increasing
female influence upon churches that Ann Douglas has described as part of the “feminization of American culture.” The clergy’s growing dependence upon influential female parishioners and the pastor’s inevitable collaboration with the woman whose primary responsibility was her family’s moral education contributed to the emasculation of religious institutions. As if in defense against this feminine onslaught, Beecher seized upon the immasculating power of public speaking to bring “manliness” more squarely into the center of the minister’s identity. If you are not a man and you wish to be a preacher, he warned the seminarians, “You have mistaken your vocation. You may do to make some other things, but you will not be a maker of men. It takes a man to refashion men. You cannot do it unless you have some sort of vigor, vitality, versatility, moral impulse, and social power in you” (Lectures 192). A woman might have a hand in the physically procreative process of making men in the first place, but only a man can spiritually “refashion men.”

And what of the woman who felt herself sufficiently in possession of the qualities of “vigor, vitality, versatility, moral impulse, and social power” to be a preacher? She was doomed. George Eliot’s fictional Dinah Morris has a relatively easy time of it, gradually moving out of the fields where she preaches and into interior, personalized spaces such as the prison cell where she comforts Hetty, or the Bedes’ home where she ministers first to Lisbeth by sweeping the floors and later to Adam by becoming his wife. The treatment Dinah received from nineteenth-century illustrators of Adam Bede suggests that the image of an attractive, feminine, woman orator in the act of preaching was to some degree unimaginable. Queen Victoria commissioned Edward-Henry Corbould in 1861 to depict the scene of Dinah’s preaching from the second chapter of the novel. In the resulting painting (reproduced in Laski, 60), Dinah stands elevated among her audience, arms and hands open to the crowd of men and women, and mouth firmly shut. The line drawing that serves as frontispiece to the nineteenth-century illustrated edition of Adam Bede follows Corbould’s precedent (Figure 3). Whereas Dinah’s sermon takes up nine full pages of text and serves as the first dramatic action in the novel, F. T. Merrill’s frontispiece shows her as she is described before she begins to speak (“with an egg-like line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow” [67]). Dinah’s primary role in the first part of the novel is to preach, unabashedly, unselfconsciously, powerfully, and publicly. But Dinah is to
become the novel's heroine, and the femininity of her ultimate image required that she be drawn as silent. Real women who insisted on public ministries fared much less well than Dinah. According to historian Leonard Sweet, American "women preachers in the first half of the nineteenth century paid an incredible price in tattered nerves, shattered reputations, and psychosomatic ailments. Their autobiographies are tortured testaments to the psychological abuse heaped on women who dared to preach" (143). Preaching, more than any other kind of public speaking, was perceived as an inalienable right of men.

Henry Ward Beecher's advice to aspiring ministers, collected in his Lectures on Preaching, can help illuminate the assumptions that operated to bar women from Victorian pulpits. In accord with Victorian theological views of "Christian manliness," Beecher sees preaching as a function of a man's body, as much as a product of his mind and heart. For Beecher, a preacher's appearance and physical stance are as essential to his effectiveness as his enthusiasm and earnest faith. A truly manly minister enters into a frankly physical relation with his audience when he mounts the pulpit. His primary responsibility to his congregation is to serve as the physical presence, the literal embodiment, of Christian faith: his body must be an appropriate object for the audience's observation, and it must become their source of inspiration. When a sermon works, the preacher's own joy is orgasmic:

I have had youth and middle age, and now I am an old man. I have seen it all, and I bear witness that, while there are single moments of joy in other matters that, perhaps, carry a man up to the summit of feeling, yet for steadfast and repetitious experience there is no pleasure in this world comparable to that which a man has who habitually stands before an audience with an errand of truth, which he feels in every corner of his soul and in every fiber of his body, and to whom the Lord has given liberty of utterance, so that he is pouring out the whole manhood in him upon his congregation. (192–193)

How could any respectable Victorian woman hope to emulate the habitual, public, and promiscuous act of ejaculation that Beecher evokes with that suggestive phrase, "pouring out the whole manhood in him upon his congregation"? No wonder Beecher's sister Harriet transformed herself into their father before she tried to face that Boston audience.
Beecher’s Yale lectures cover the material one might expect in an experienced preacher’s advice to beginners. In addition to many practical, professionally specific disquisitions, one of his ten lectures is devoted to the preacher’s body, or “Health, as Related to Preaching.” He provides “practical hints” on “the art” of eating, sleeping, regulating one’s work, and
Reflecting upon the Model

getting enough exercise, though he cautions against the excessive emphasis on sports training characteristic of the "muscular Christians": "Now if you undertake, as scholars, very violent exercise, according to the exaggerated idea of muscular Christianity, you will very soon use up all the vitality of your system in the bone-and-muscle development, and it will leave you, not better, but less fitted for intellectual exertion" (194). The preacher must conserve the "vitality of his system" in order to maintain his ecstatic experiences in the pulpit, but "you cannot expect either these exceptional, higher consummations, or the strong, steady flow of a joyful relish for your work, unless you cultivate a robust and healthful manhood" (193). The man's drive to preach is like an extension of his virility: it results, as does his sexual drive, from the proper care of his masculine body.17

His healthy body is more to the preacher than the source of his sermons' power: it is also the locus of his relation to his audience. Beecher objects to "barrelled pulpits" that obscure the preacher's body from the public view, for "a man's whole form is part of his public speaking. His feet speak and so do his hands" (Lectures 71). So, too, do the parts of his body that Beecher leaves unnamed. The speaker who would move his auditors must be visibly and even physically accessible to them, close enough to allow his "magnetic influence" to reach them (71). "There is a force—call it magnetism or electricity, or what you will—in a man, which is a personal element, and which flows from a speaker who is en rapport with his audience. This principle should be utilized in the work of preaching" (73). The phrasing suggests that the preacher must exploit animal magnetism, a "personal element" inextricably bound up with sexuality. And Beecher's suggestion for exploiting the physical connections between speaker and audience hints at the forbidden implications of a "promiscuous" gathering. Literal, physical contact among the listeners will heighten the effect of the electrical magnetism emanating from the speaker: "I can speak just as well to twelve persons as to a thousand, provided those twelve are crowded around me and close together, so that they touch each other. . . . [C]rowd your audiences together, and you will set them off with not half the effort" (73). As performer, as orchestrator of his own and his audience's visceral experience of the sermon, and as the one who must "set them off," inflame and excite them, the preacher is in the position of sexual aggressor.

The line between religious and sexual ecstasy has always been a blurred one, and the resemblance of revivals to orgies is obvious enough to
THE VICTORIAN PLACE OF ENUNCIAITION

any post-Freudian observer. And, too, the preacher who carries the role of seducer out from the pulpit and into his personal life is treading on dangerous territory. American culture is full of fictive and historical emblems of such scandal, working back in time from Jim Bakker to Elmer Gantry to Henry Ward Beecher himself. What is remarkable about Beecher’s characterization of the preacher’s task is not his equation of preaching with masculine sexuality, but the unselfconscious way in which he makes that equation so explicit while firmly restricting the minister’s seductive powers to the pulpit.

Beecher’s vision of the virile minister’s relation to his congregation recalls the astonishing sketches Charles Kingsley made before his marriage, as a wedding present for his fiancée (Chitty 64ff). The drawings, made during the period when Kingsley was most absorbed in his own rigorous training for “muscular Christianity,” show the young minister and his bride nude, copulating in postures suggesting the consummation of Christian suffering and joy. In one of Kingsley’s sketches the two bodies are bound together on a cross tossed by a turbulent sea, in another they ascend to heaven on the strength of the man’s broad, muscular wings. In Kingsley’s fantasies, all the energy of the ecstatic experience inheres in the man; the woman is limp, passive, even unresponsive. The drawing of their joint ascension is a particularly apt example. His eagle-wings contrast with her transparent ones, which resemble those of an inert moth; he supports her body with his strong hands, arms, thighs, and phallus, while her smooth, flaccid form hangs from him in a posture that suggests death. In an era when (as Douglas has shown) Protestantism was unquestionably undergoing “feminization,” when the success of congregations and of individual pastors depended vitally on the support of female parishioners, and when women were increasingly taking on the responsibility for moral reform toward a more Christian culture, Beecher’s and Kingsley’s equation of religious leadership with virility is significant—and also a bit sad. It suggests a self-protective defensiveness in the minister’s conception of his own function. In the drawing, the man’s body is all that prevents the woman from falling; in the pulpit, the man’s body should support his congregation in their efforts to avoid a Fall from grace.

Beecher undoubtedly felt that his body provided his congregation’s access to grace, especially when he stood before them, speaking extemporaneously. Invariably he ranks spontaneous, enthusiastic speech over read-
Reflecting upon the Model

As Beecher puts it in his Lectures, "every preacher should be able to speak, whether with or without notes. Christ 'spake'" (214). Speech is preferable to reading aloud, because "a written sermon is apt to reach out to people like a gloved hand. An unwritten sermon reaches out like the warm and glowing palm, bared to the touch" (215)—again, the electricity of physical contact is invoked. Speech is present the way a living body is present: in Beecher's view, that presence is the essence of a minister's calling. The effective preacher must deliver original, orally composed interpretations of biblical verses: "The reason why reading the truths that are just as plainly stated there [in the text] has sometimes so much less effect than stating them in your own way, is that the truth will gain a force when it becomes part of you that it would not have when merely read as a text" (7). That force is entirely a product of presence:

A preacher is in some degree a reproduction of the truth in personal form. The truth must exist in him as a living experience, a glowing enthusiasm, an intense reality. The Word of God in the Book is a dead letter. It is paper, type, and ink. In the preacher that word becomes again as it was when first spoken by prophet, priest, or apostle. It springs up in him as if it were first kindled in his heart, and he were moved by the Holy Ghost to give it forth. He is so moved. (3)

Transcending textuality—the inertia of the "dead letter," the "paper, type, and ink"—is a resolvable problem for the preacher. In personally delivering the word, he reenacts the origination of the word, and the truth to which it refers is reincarnated in him. In voice and person, he becomes the embodiment of the truth he speaks, and re-creates divine presence in mortal form. As in the crucifixion and resurrection fantasies of Kingsley's drawings, the preacher steps in for Christ: he becomes the Word made Flesh. Beecher's preference for speech over text, his faith in spontaneous oral expression as the unmediated means of access to thought, and his conviction that divine truth could be made manifest in a preacher's words beautifully exemplify the logocentrism that Derrida has identified as the heart of any Western "metaphysics of presence." Beecher, along with the world to whom and for whom he spoke, participated fully in the fantasy of presence,
unsuspecting of the moves that philosophers were soon to take toward dismantling the tenets of his faith.

The minister’s corporeal, gendered presence, then, was the sine qua non of Victorian preaching. In this respect, the male body played a similar role for political public speakers. If the minister’s body gave corporeal form to God’s word, the body of the Chartist agitator, for instance, was the vehicle that carried the word of the people. Martha Vicinus reports that “Thomas Cooper described himself as ‘the people’s instrument, rather than their director,’ claiming a leader to be one whose ‘temperament, nature and powers fit him by quick sympathy, and strong, energetic will, to become the people’s mouthpiece, hand, or arm, either for good or evil’” (489—490). The speaker’s body becomes a location for the voice of something larger than himself, whether that voice is God’s or the people’s. To become the “mouthpiece, hand, or arm” the body has to be positioned publicly, in close proximity to the audience to whom and for whom the voice speaks. Only a male body could be so publicly displayed with impunity; saying something in public was therefore both an expression and a function of the speaker’s masculinity.

The speaker’s virility extended beyond his appearance and stance, to include his rhetorical strategies for wooing his audience, for trying to “set them off.” Vicinus has detailed the strategies that the speakers for the three Chartist factions exploited toward this end (490—500). As for the minister’s tactics, I will turn again to Beecher’s own report for suggestions that he saw his relation to his audience in terms of his gender. In describing his preaching strategies, Beecher frequently employs similies comparing preaching to hunting, fishing, or warfare. As in poetic conventions that pit man against woman in venal pursuit, Beecher’s tropes place the preacher in the role of aggressor and the congregation in the role of prey. As far as rhetorical ethics are concerned, Beecher’s attitude might be summarized as “all’s fair in love and war—and preaching.”

Eschewing “mere trickery,” Beecher nevertheless endorses “preaching which produces a sensation,” because “the legitimate use of real truth is all right, no matter how much people get stirred up; the more the better. In this matter you will not err if you are up to par in manliness, neither above it nor below” (Lectures 237). Being “up to par” may mean feigning the passions one is hoping to induce: “In addressing a congregation, a man may use
Reflecting upon the Model

the language of a feeling for the sake of getting and propagating the feeling. Indeed, when it comes to preaching, I think it would be a great deal better to act as though you had the feeling, even if you had not, for its effect in carrying your audience whither you wish to carry them" (126). Faking arousal, then, is an acceptable act if it leads to consummation. "Getting and propagating the feeling" is another of the preacher's masculine sexual duties; as long as he believes his rhetoric is motivated by enthusiasm for the truth, he is free to use any tactics that will work to move his listeners.

The preacher's primary vehicle for encouraging individual listeners to participate in this process is, not surprisingly, direct address. Beecher calls the tactic "taking aim," and recalls anecdotally how he developed the strategy by studying the apostles' sermons when he was trying to hit upon an effective preaching style. He subjected each of the biblical sermons to rhetorical analysis, asking himself What were the circumstances? who were the people? what did he [the preacher] do? (Lectures 11). Concluding that the apostles typically made an appeal to common knowledge before applying its implications to their message, Beecher worked out a model of sermonic direct address:

First, I sketched out the things we all know. "You all know you are living in a world perishing under your feet. You all know that time is extremely uncertain; that you cannot tell whether you will live another month or week . . . ." and in that way I went on with my "You all knows" until I had about forty of them. When I had got through that, I turned round and brought it to bear upon them with all my might; and there were seventeen men awakened under that sermon. I never felt so triumphant in my life. I cried all the way home. I said to myself: "Now I know how to preach." (Lectures 11 - 12)

Taking aim at attitudes and experiences he presumed his audience could recognize and acknowledge, Beecher thus drew them in. Later, he reports, he learned to aim at individuals, or at specific faculties within an individual, by addressing the audience in general and avoiding the eye of the intended receiver of the message. Direct address to the crowd works in these instances, he explains, because his unsuspecting prey do not realize that he is shooting at them, but lower their defenses. Reflecting on the sermon later, "They take it to heart, and it is blessed unto them" (Lectures 168).
In Beecher's lectures as in his sermons, direct address pervades the rhetoric. Lectures and sermons alike were originally delivered extemporaneously, as Beecher—true to his tenets—preferred to speak from notes, rather than to read. When he spoke, his frequent references to "you" drew continual attention to the situation in which he was speaking. In the Yale lectures, the youthful, eager, doubting, earnest male audience's presence in the "you" is as manifest as the preacher/lecturer's presence is in the "I." In the original delivery of the lectures, this was as literally true as it can ever be in matters of language: preacher and audience were really there. In the printed transcripts of the sermons and lectures, the recurring "you's" evoke a shadow of the historical audience's presence. As Beecher himself was so quick to point out, the text is only "paper, type, and ink," and can provide only a pale imitation of the truth it seeks to represent—in this case, the actuality of the speaker's interaction with his listeners.

Beecher's reliance on direct address was by no means idiosyncratic, nor was it restricted to preaching in the revivalist mode. Charles Kingsley's sermons, written in a staunchly Anglican vein, frequently and repeatedly speak to "you." Typically, Kingsley begins his discourses by establishing the situation in which he speaks. He may introduce part of his sermon by justifying its relevance to his audience:

Before I can explain what this text has to do with the Church Catechism, I must say to you a little about what it means.

Now if I asked you what "salvation" was, you would probably answer, "Eternal life."

And you would answer rightly. (15)

Or he might begin with exhortation, then support his demands upon the congregation by means of illustration and reasoning throughout the rest of the sermon: "Have any of you here ever stood godfather or godmother to any young person in this parish who is not yet confirmed? If you have, now is the time for you to fulfill your parts as sponsors. . . . It really is your duty. It will be better for you if you fulfill it. . . . Let me try to show you what I mean" (59). Such introductory addresses establish the presence of speaker and audience and cement the relation in which they are to stand to each other: the paternal, authoritative speaker has access to the truth, which he undertakes to transmit to his auditors.
Within the body of each sermon, Kingsley uses “you” to stand for the receiver of rhetorical questions, the actor in hypothetical situations, and the subject of such reassuring phrases as “you know,” “you see,” “you understand.” In the sermons, the “you” is continually present, always there to be buoyed up by the preacher’s spiritual, intellectual, and physical strength, and thus to take the minister’s message to heart.

When novelists import earnest, exhortative direct address from preaching techniques into fictional discourse, they are employing the idiom of the minister. Just as the minister seeks to convert sinners by evoking memories and emotions they can recognize as their own, the novelist tries to transform readers’ attitudes through the same technique. The “you” in the sermon is, strictly speaking, an “addressee,” a figure the speaker creates and projects through his sermon’s language; similarly, the “you” in the novel is a narratee, a textual construct. But when the minister “takes aim” at a living audience by addressing them directly, he hopes that individual listeners will take the address personally and seriously. He believes that his words can work real change, and that “his people” can experience spiritual transformation through his presence. The engaging narrator is the sign that some novelists believed that their words could have a similar effect.

Evidently Gaskell, Stowe, and Eliot felt that they were present in their fictional texts. When they looked at one another, they saw their novels’ narrators: to identify another woman with her narrative voice was to declare one’s identification with the narrators in one’s own novels. Their strategies show a desire to accomplish the kind of moral and spiritual influence that preachers claimed to wield from the pulpit, but they wished, too, for feminine respectability. They could not afford the price that Fanny Wright (or even Catharine Beecher) paid for becoming a public presence; their feminine bodies could not occupy the space a public speaker stands in without undergoing immasculation in the public view as well as in their own. They relied instead on the influence of their narrative “I” over the “you” invoked in their texts, and they counted on the conventions of verisimilitude to lend the aura of truth to the “dead letter” that they found themselves producing when they conceded to men the privilege of speaking aloud in public.

The postmodern philosopher might reflect that the project of these Victorian women novelists was impossible to achieve, that the “I” and the “you” of realist fiction can never really refer to individual subjects, that they
are only the products of "differance" among signifiers in these and other texts, that the authors and readers themselves are merely constructs born of reading. And yet, the postmodern perspective would also see the preacher's faith in presence and in the manifestation of truth as a nostalgic illusion, a project just as doomed as that of the earnest women writers. The preacher's presence is, after all, only a substitute for the divine reality he hopes to transmit to his listeners: his body, like the fictional narrator's voice, is only a signifier standing in for the presence of the Real Thing. What links the feminine realist novelist and the masculine preacher is their shared hope that the signifier might be enough, that it might enable them to convey truth by hitting one's audience "below the fifth rib." For both kinds of speakers, the audience's emotional reaction metaphorically represents a moment of physical contact. Both preacher and novelist want to "touch" the audience. The Victorian male preacher does so by using his voice as an extension of his body; the Victorian female novelist shields her body by placing her voice in a text. Whether or not it could ever be possible to make real contact with an audience through a fictional text, that was what novelists who used engaging strategies were earnestly trying to do.