

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Keeping Home: Another Look at Domesticity in Antebellum America

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/03p395v0>

### Author

Chandler, Linda Lee

### Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Keeping Home: Another Look at Domesticity in Antebellum America

By

Linda Lee Chandler

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Katherine Snyder, Chair

Professor Mitchell Breitwieser

Professor Ula Taylor

Fall 2011



## Abstract

Keeping Home: Another Look at Domesticity in Antebellum America

by

Linda Lee Chandler

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Katherine Snyder, Chair

In the eighteenth century and earlier, domesticity functions as the practice of housekeeping. During the American Revolution, republican motherhood set the stage for the concept of domesticity to expand. By the mid-nineteenth century, domesticity becomes connected to womanhood as it develops into a virtue that defines true womanhood. Domesticity also operates as an ideology in the nineteenth century. Are we to assume that all three are identical? Most critics would have us believe so, as they do not differentiate amongst these domesticities. In fact, most critics take the definition of domesticity for granted, leaving the term undefined and assuming their audience knows what it means.

The criticism on domesticity to date has involved debates over the bifurcation of separate spheres, and whether domesticity operates as resistance to patriarchal authority or as conformity to the status quo. My project does not take sides in these debates, but rather focuses on two under-explored aspects of domesticity: practice and virtue. What does it mean for a practice to become a virtue, how does it happen, what are the implications, and how are these two meanings related to the current critical notion of domesticity as an ideology? My project responds to these questions. With the reformulation of domesticity as a virtue, domesticity would seem to be no longer a task anyone can master, but an intrinsic quality that one may or may not possess. As a virtue rather than a practice, domesticity becomes an issue of character, raising the questions: can it be developed and by anyone regardless of race, class, or gender? In addition, as an issue of character, domesticity is no longer grounded in an external location, such as the home, but in the person. What are the implications of this shift? Using an array of texts, I examine the construction of domesticity as a virtue, the cultural significance of domesticity's transformation from practice to virtue, and the implications for identity. My dissertation analyzes how representations of home, domestic practice, and family in a selection of texts from the long nineteenth century reconfigure current critical notions of domesticity. By investigating the distinctions between practice and virtue, my project expands the critical dialogue on domesticity, and in the process, deepens contemporary

discussions of identity and the value of home and family in antebellum American literature and culture.

**Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Mu Su Ae Choi (Chong) who continually sacrificed so that I may have a better life. She always believed in me and loves me more than a mother should.

## Keeping Home: Another Look at Domesticity in Antebellum America

### Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Chapter 1: "Undone" from the Start: The Struggle to Remain a Republican Daughter in Hannah Foster's <i>The Coquette</i></u>	6
<u>Chapter 2: Is Practice Enough? Susan Warner's Constructions of Domesticity in <i>The Wide, Wide World</i></u>	22
<u>Chapter 3: Domesticity, Consumerism, and Restoring the Nation: A Look at Catherine Beecher's Domestic Manuals</u>	37
<u>Chapter 4: Writing/Righting Family in Frederick Douglass's <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i></u>	54
<u>Bibliography</u>	66

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my chair, Katherine Snyder whose tireless commitment and heroic effort enabled me to reach the finish line. I will always be grateful for her steadfast encouragement and kindhearted willingness to read draft after draft. Her patience and guidance are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my other readers, Mitch Breitwieser and Ula Taylor for their guidance and suggestions. Mitch knew me at the very beginning when I took his undergraduate seminar as a returning student who wanted to change careers. His support over the years has been invaluable. Ula joined the team at a crucial moment for which I am forever indebted.

My friends have continually encouraged me over the years to not give up. Thank you for your gentle pushes and tender nudges. A special thank you to Greg Bell and Chalon Emmons for letting me turn your house into a mini writer's retreat.

Finally I want to thank my family. My husband, Stafford Gregoire and my children, Chandler Josephine Gregoire, Mason Scott Gregoire, and Lennox Ruby Gregoire, have all been tremendously supportive. Thanks for making many sacrifices during this journey, especially those three weeks in August. I love you all with all my heart.

## Keeping Home: Another Look at Domesticity in Antebellum America

### Introduction

Criticism on domesticity over the past several decades has focused on questions about the bifurcation of separate spheres, and about whether domesticity operates as resistance to patriarchal authority or as conformity to the status quo. But before we can participate meaningfully in such debates, we need to understand what we mean when we use the term "domesticity." Some contemporary critics use the phrase "the discourse of domesticity," while others cite "the culture of domesticity." Do these two phrases mean the same thing? And what is their relationship to another contemporary critical formulation, the "cult of domesticity"? The definition of domesticity is often taken for granted by its critics. In lieu of an explicit definition, critics tend to gesture toward various aspects of domesticity or treat it as coeval with such cultural offspring as "sentimentalism" and "women's fiction." Domesticity is often equated with femininity or sentimentality, concepts that themselves have complex, conflicted meanings and histories. Similarly, the "cult of domesticity" is often conflated with the "cult of womanhood" and the "cult of motherhood." Currently, domesticity is most often used as shorthand for domestic ideology, but in actuality, there are multiple "domesticities," and we need to clearly indicate which domesticity we mean.

In an effort to disentangle domesticity from the various terms with which it is assumed to be synonymous, I offer here an approach that distinguishes among three distinct functions of domesticity: as a practice, a virtue, and an ideology. My dissertation investigates these aspects of domesticity so that we may better understand this slippery term. By examining how these various facets of domesticity operate in several key nineteenth-century texts, we can unpack the complexity of this term and its function during this time period.

The root of domesticity, "domos," means home. In the eighteenth century and earlier, domesticity was understood to mean the practice of housekeeping. The American Revolution, with the attendant rise of republican motherhood in this period, set the stage for domesticity to expand into other conceptual arenas. By the mid-nineteenth century, domesticity no longer signified solely the practice of housekeeping; it now also was understood to signify virtue, a quality connected to white, bourgeois womanhood, as well as an ideology. What were the conditions for the expansion of the meaning of this term from its original focus? And what were the differences and overlaps between the earlier and later meanings of domesticity?

In order to highlight the differences and overlaps in the historical meanings of domesticity, I would like to consider the work of four late twentieth-century critics who have shaped our understanding of it. In her seminal essay "The Cult of True Womanhood" (1966), historian Barbara Welter identifies domesticity as one of four "cardinal virtues" which define "true womanhood" (152) in nineteenth-century America.<sup>1</sup> She uses periodicals, magazines, diaries, and other cultural artifacts to articulate the components of true womanhood as an ideal. What once signified solely the practice of housekeeping now signified a "virtue." Her characterization of domesticity as a virtue

---

<sup>1</sup> The other three virtues identified by Welter are piety, submissiveness, and purity (152).

implies that what was once just the practice of housekeeping now has an internal component. Welter's formulation thus suggests that domesticity can define interiority or shape identity.<sup>2</sup>

The reconfiguration of domesticity as an "identity," an interior quality rather than a practice, is crucial because this meaning of domesticity gave women the permission to extend their scope beyond the home. Domesticity as an identity furnished middle-class women with a surprising amount of mobility and enlarged the range of female concern and influence. In addition, as something internalized, domesticity is not grounded in a location, i.e. in the home, but in a person. In this formulation, domesticity is no longer a practice that anyone can perform, but an innate quality that a woman may or may not possess. Can the virtue of domesticity be acquired, or is it something one is simply born with (or not)? As a virtue rather than a practice, domesticity becomes embodied, suggesting that it may not be equally available to every woman.

In *Domestic Individualism* (1990), Gillian Brown highlights domesticity's affiliation with interiority (or "individualism") and with the marketplace. Brown uses domesticity as a trope for privacy, interiority, and the psyche. For Brown, as for Welter, the significance of domesticity lies in its interior aspect rather than its status as a discourse or a practice. Brown adapts Welter's formulation of domesticity as an interior quality, but does not limit domesticity to female subjectivity as Welter does. For example, Brown considers the meaning of domesticity for male authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, examining how domesticity constructs male subjectivity in texts such as *Pierre* and "Bartleby, the Scrivener." She argues that domestic values "of interiority, privacy, and psychology" (1) are in fact integral to capitalist development, as well as to the concept of individualism. In her analysis, the domestic has a reformist or revolutionary potential. Through a reformulation and manipulation of domestic boundaries, Brown reconceives the traditional distinction between the self and home (both often conceived as purely feminine) and the market (often conceived as strictly masculine), challenging the rigid binarization of separate spheres. Brown aims to "demonstrate the role of domestic ideology in updating and reshaping individualism within nineteenth-century American market society" (1).<sup>3</sup>

Lora Romero is another critic who considers identity and domesticity's role in identity formation. Using a Foucauldian framework in *Home Fronts* (1997), Romero examines power relations in the home and employs the term "home" both as the "ideological space in which domestic ideology was formed and as a site of power" (7). For Romero, the home is one of the "different horizons of representations on which struggles for authority played themselves out in the antebellum period" (7). But in that struggle for authority, there is also a struggle for identity. The home is traditionally regarded as a place that confers identity, but that conferral of identity often involves conflict or opposition. In *Home Fronts*, Romero shares Welter's emphasis on interiority, configuring domesticity as more than the practice of housekeeping, but as an internal quality as well. However, unlike Welter, Romero expands domesticity's reach to beyond the feminine realm.

---

<sup>2</sup> This concept of domesticity as an identity is further discussed in Lora Romero's *Home Fronts* as well as Barbara Epstein's *The Politics of Domesticity*.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* is another key text which considers domesticity and its relationship to the marketplace.

Like Gillian Brown, Romero investigate texts not traditionally associated with domesticity such as Herman Melville's "Bartleby" and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Male authors of the American Renaissance have long been understood as forming a counterculture to domesticity, but Romero refutes this characterization, arguing instead that these authors reinscribe domesticity.<sup>4</sup> With Brown and Romero, we see the expansion of the boundaries of domesticity as an interpretive lens through their exploration of texts not usually viewed through the prism of domesticity.

I would like to shift to a different theoretical trajectory which continues the expansion of the boundaries of this term. Nancy Cott, another influential scholar of women's history, defines domesticity as a discourse. In the preface to the second edition of her book, *The Bonds of Womanhood* (1997, 1977), Cott asserts that "a discourse of domesticity was established in [the] time period [1780-1835]" (xv), citing Gail Bederman's concept of discourse as "a set of ideas and practices which, taken together, organize both the way a society defines certain truths about itself and the way it deploys social power" (24). Bederman's concept of discourse, influenced by Michel Foucault, "does not differentiate between intellectual ideas and material practices" (24). As such, we see an overlap between ideology and discourse in Cott's use of the term "discourse."<sup>5</sup> Cott defines the discourse of domesticity as:

the ideological presumptions, institutional practices, and strongly held habits of mind insisting that the home must be guided by a calm, devoted, and self-abnegating wife and mother: that with her presence, the home would serve (and it had to serve, for social order and individual well-being) as a moral beacon, a restorative haven from the anxieties and adversities of public life and commerce, comforting the hardworking husband and provider for the family, and furnishing a nursery of spiritual and civic values for the children. (xvii)

Like Welter's formation, Cott's notion of domesticity focuses on the woman, but unlike Welter, Cott emphasizes the home. While Cott's definition reflects the dominant rhetoric surrounding nineteenth-century domesticity, in reality not every home was represented as a "restorative haven from the anxieties and adversities of public life and commerce." What made some homes havens and others horrors? Why did domesticity characterize some homes, but not others?

I hope to answer these questions and to build upon the work of these critics. My dissertation investigates marriage, family, and home in a late eighteenth-century seduction novel, a mid-nineteenth century sentimental novel, two nineteenth-century housekeeping manuals, and a mid-nineteenth century slave narrative. My work unpacks these different facets of domesticity—virtue, practice, and ideology (or discourse to use Cott's term)—to deepen our understanding of domesticity as a cultural and literary force.

My first chapter, "'Undone' from the Start: The Struggle to Remain a Republican Daughter in Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*," probes the formation of domesticity as a virtue and expose the chaos that erupts when a woman neither embodies nor practices

---

<sup>4</sup> Key critics of the American Renaissance, such as F.O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), and Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1980), identified the American Renaissance as an alternative to domestic culture, an understanding questioned in the past few decades. Certainly Brown and Romero are two critics who question this viewpoint.

<sup>5</sup> I would suggest that this overlap points to one example illustrating how domesticity is a slippery term.

domestic virtue. In this chapter, I argue that Foster's late eighteenth-century seduction novel does not chronicle the loss of female innocence, but actually *opens* with a heroine who has already been seduced and corrupted by the ideals of freedom. The main articulation of Eliza Wharton's corrupt female sensibility is her refusal to circulate the domestic ideology endorsed by her female associates. Eliza challenges the female collective who voices the joys of domesticity. She desires to be a subject rather than an object within the marriage market, and frankly does not want to participate in it at all. *The Coquette* raises the question: can a woman choose not to participate in the marriage market and still maintain her reputation? Eliza's resistance to becoming a republican wife disrupts the circulation of women from paternal to marital roof, which in turn threatens the patriarchal order. Her refusal to enter the marriage market is an effort at self-government. But her refusal is also a refusal to put domestic interest above private interest, a refusal to exercise domestic virtue which halts the circulation of republican virtue as well as domestic ideology. This chapter argues that Eliza's desire for independence instead of domesticity, her desire to remain a republican daughter, is the true cause of her ruin.

While the second chapter shifts to the practice of domesticity, it continues the investigation of domesticity as a virtue that the opening chapter initiates. Chapter Two, "Is Practice Enough?: Susan Warner's Constructions of Domesticity in *The Wide, Wide World*," reveals that domestic practice alone cannot transform the home into a safe haven from the outside world. In Warner's mid nineteenth-century novel, even though Aunt Fortune keeps her house in perfect condition, her home lacks spiritual values; it is not the model of a "restorative haven," but rather a site of confinement and a spiritual testing ground for her niece, the protagonist young Ellen Montgomery. It may be immaculate, but since there are no Christian principles guiding it, her home does not and cannot rejuvenate the soul. Barbara Welter differentiates domesticity from piety, classifying domesticity and piety as two distinct virtues. While Welter's distinction suggests that domesticity is separable from its Christian subtext, Warner's novel links Christianity and the virtue of domesticity. This chapter argues that Warner's version of domesticity maintains that the practice itself is an empty signifier if it is not grounded in a middle-class Protestant home. I use Warner's novel to distinguish between the practice and virtue of domesticity, and to contend that for Warner the ideology of domesticity can only exist within a Christian framework; otherwise we are left with the practice only, which renders the home barren. Aunt Fortune's old-fashioned style of domesticity is opposed to a more contemporary (i.e., nineteenth-century) middle class domesticity, in which not only class but also religion determines domesticity's true value.

My third chapter, "Domesticity, Consumerism, and Restoring the Nation: A Look at Catherine Beecher's Domestic Manuals," compares Catherine Beecher's *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) to *The American Woman's Home* (1869), an expanded version of the original manual that Beecher revised in collaboration with her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe. This chapter continues to examine the relationship among domestic practice, virtue, and ideology. In addition to looking at these three configurations of domesticity, I show how the manuals make connections between domesticity and nation-building as well as between domesticity and consumerism. The 1841 text calls for the standardization of the home, with a scientific emphasis rooted solely in practice. While *The American Woman's Home* keeps the scientific and economic registers of the earlier

text, it provides a Christian framework absent from the original edition. This new underpinning in *The American Woman's Home* also suggests that practice alone cannot accomplish the goal of the ideology of domesticity. A Christian foundation is necessary. These texts together suggest that the virtue of domesticity is the element that makes the shift from "domestic economy" (1841) to "Christian homes" (1869) possible. But does a Christian rubric result in the virtue of domesticity? Interestingly, the Beecher sisters envision the home not as a naturalized space for a woman, but one in and for which she must be trained. When domesticity is viewed as a practice, the implication is that anyone who can properly practice it, regardless of race or class, can potentially harness the power associated with this practice. This chapter uses Beecher's manuals to scrutinize the implications of a presumed need for a how-to-manual. The chapter also links local domestic practice to national harmony, showing how the manuals posit that keeping home will rebuild the Civil War-torn nation.

My fourth and final chapter, "Writing/Righting Family in Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*," further probes the construction of domesticity as a virtue by considering its relationship to family, home, and race. This chapter focuses on Douglass' revision of his original slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Frederick Douglass maintains a focus on family absent from his 1845 narrative. In the later recension, Douglass alters his "entrance" or "introduction" to slavery, effecting textual changes that reflect his new framework of family. In the first narrative, he marks his witnessing, as a child, of the brutal whipping of Aunt Esther (Hester) as the "blood-stained gate," "the entrance to the hell of slavery." Yet, in the 1855 edition, the emphasis of the text on this "entrance" into slavery shifts from brutal violence to the separation from his family. His grandmother's abandonment at his master's plantation now becomes the transformative moment—his "first introduction to the realities of slavery." This chapter spotlights this new information about his grandmother and mother, and posits this additional material as Douglass' attempt to write/right family for the slave. While most slave narratives tell of slavery's erasure of family, Douglass' revisions assert that while his family may have been eradicated, his family feeling endures. This chapter illustrates how the slave indeed embodies the virtue of domesticity and uncovers how Douglass uses this configuration of domesticity to critique slavery and to establish the humanity of the slave.

Domesticity is a slippery term and critics use different aspects of this term when they employ it. Thus, I urge critics to revisit this term. When we do use the term "domesticity," it is necessary that we clarify how we are using since it can operate as (1) a practice (an action performed), or as (2) an embodied quality (e.g. a virtue, an identity, a metaphor for privacy/interiority), or as (3) a discourse or ideology. By acknowledging our critical suppositions surrounding this term and recognizing its multiple facets, we can extend the scope and value of domesticity as a narrative and literary term. I offer my dissertation as an example of a critical text that unpacks the various aspects of domesticity to reveal its power as a literary device.

## Chapter One

### "Undone" from the Start: The Struggle to Remain a Republican Daughter in Hannah Foster's *The Coquette*

Published in 1797, Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* offers a fictional account of a factual event, as Foster transforms a newspaper clipping into a sensational novel. In her fictional rendering, Foster does not alter the key facts of the central character's fall. Like the historical Elizabeth Whitman, Foster's character, Eliza Wharton, has an illicit affair, is abandoned, gives birth to a stillborn child, and follows that child to her own death. Although most readers viewed Hannah Foster's epistolary narrative as a drama of seduction, the sexual fall in Foster's tale is oddly anti-climatic. Written in a time when a heroine's sexual fall invariably served as a cautionary and instructive tool for young women, Eliza Wharton's loss of innocence feels more like a narrative afterthought. In most seduction novels, the seduction culminates in the sexual fall of the protagonist and the sexual fall marks the loss of female innocence. In *The Coquette*, however, Eliza Wharton has already fallen from innocence by the time her sexual fall occurs.

Eliza's sexual affair is a symptom of the problem, not the problem itself. Her crime is her refusal to accept immediately a proposal of marriage from a respectable suitor.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the other female characters in the novel, Eliza refuses to operate as a pro-domesticity spokesperson for the patriarchal order. Unlike the real life Elizabeth Whitman, Foster paints her protagonist as a strong woman torn between her own desires for independence and the societal pressure to accept a marriage proposal. Eliza is "a woman armed with a radical theory of her own rights" (Fizer 257). In the crucial transitional stage between daughterhood and wifedom, between her father's home and her husband's home, Eliza struggles to negotiate her precarious place within society as a republican woman. Eliza's initial ambivalence and eventual hostility towards marriage drives this seduction novel, revealing that republican virtue in late eighteenth-century America can sustain only one ideal of womanhood—republican wifedom.<sup>7</sup> Set during a

---

<sup>6</sup> In "Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*: Critiquing Franklin's America," Sharon Harris remarks that "Cathy Davidson asserts that Foster fails to extend the connection between the social and the political" (2). In contrast, Harris proposes that Foster reveals "the social as a political construct" (3). Like Harris, I too read *The Coquette* as a political novel. But Harris argues that "Foster is far less concerned with the issue of marriage than with the political system of the new republic that can envision that institution as the only opportunity for its female citizens" (3). I see Foster as concerned with both the issue of marriage (and the marriage market) and the opportunities available for female citizens. Foster uses the institution of marriage to critique a political and social system that values self-expression, independence, and action by showing how codes of conduct restrict women from expressing these values. Harris states, "Foster exposes the sexist bases of the new nation's political ideologies" (3).

<sup>7</sup> Claire Pettengill states that during the late eighteenth century, "American women [were], more and more, expected to embody domestic ideals and virtues. Overlapping ideologies such as 'separate spheres,' 'republican motherhood,' 'the cult of single blessedness,' and 'the cult of domesticity,' all of which began to be formulated during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attest to the culture's anxious concern with inscribing 'woman's place' during a period of great uncertainty," "Sisterhood in A Separate Sphere: Female Friendship in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* and *The Boarding School*," *Early American Literature* 27 (1992): 185. For a fascinating reading of the gendered and changing meanings of "virtue" during the time period, see Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (1987): 37-58. The influence of republican ideology (when applied to women) transformed "virtue" to mean more than chastity. For more on the republican wife, see Jan Lewis, "The

crucial time period for the young republic, Foster's fictional account of Elizabeth Whitman "raises... at the very beginning of our national experience, the question of freedom, its meaning and its limits" (Wenska 244). Eliza desires self-determination, and she "prefigures a host of self-reliant American heroes, from Natty Bumppo to Isabel Archer, whose lives also serve as comment on the meaning and nature of freedom" (Wenska 246).<sup>8</sup> Rather than a tale of sexual innocence corrupted, *The Coquette* begins with a female protagonist who has already been corrupted by ideas. This chapter examines the ramifications of this ideological seduction and its narrative timing.

Most readers see *The Coquette* as a drama of seduction, and they locate the seduction in sexual terms only. While many critics note two different falls in this novel, a social fall and a sexual one, I believe there is also an ideological fall that occurs before the novel begins.<sup>9</sup> Eliza has been seduced by the Revolutionary ideas of freedom and independence. This ideological "corruption" leads to Eliza's social fall and eventual sexual fall.<sup>10</sup> Her desire for independence is an act of sedition in the early republic, and this is the true crime for which she must be punished. Eliza's ideological corruption, her lack of domestic virtue, is marked by her rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> Her use of political, commercial and anti-domestic rhetoric reveal her corrupted state prior to any social or sexual fall. Eliza's language betrays her true condition.

---

Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44.4 (1987): 689-721. Lewis notes "Women who wanted more status, influence, or power [than that of the republican wife] would have to look for another model. Thus the ideal of wife would give way, by perhaps 1830, to that of the mother. Men might not be malleable, but children were, and they seemed to offer a more promising opportunity for the exercise of influence" (721). We certainly see the influence and importance of the mother in the early republic in the form of republican motherhood. For more on republican motherhood see Mary Beth Norton and Linda Kerber.

<sup>8</sup> While Wenska discusses *The Coquette* as a prototypically "American quest for freedom" and Eliza as a prefigure of the self-reliant hero and "an antimonian" (249), he does not fully consider the issue of gender and the condition of freedom for women in late eighteenth century America. Wenska points out that these were still turbulent times for the new nation, "Instability was the essence of the American nation,' a nation which by 1797 had already had to suppress two insurrections and confront threats of secession in 1784 and 1789, in addition to being 'threatened by a monarchical counter-revolution and a military putsch in 1782'" (244).

<sup>9</sup> In "An Assault on the Will: Republican Virtue and the City in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*," *Early American Literature* 24 (1989), Kristie Hamilton reads the crisis in the novel as a "crisis of will that proves fatal for Eliza" (149). Hamilton writes "Throughout most of the novel, it is irresolution from which Eliza Wharton suffers. She is perceived by many as a coquette because she attempts to balance all of her opportunities, sanctioned and unsanctioned, until one should present itself as that which will best satisfy her in her pursuit of happiness" (148). I see Eliza as someone who suffers not from irresolution but from her resolution to reject marriage. Other critics (Sharon Harris, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Claire Pettengill, C. Leiren Mower, to name a few) have situated Eliza's true loss of innocence earlier in the novel (before the sexual fall). But I am suggesting that it occurs before the novel even begins.

<sup>10</sup> Eliza's ideological corruption encompasses her desire not to participate in the marriage market; her lack of domestic virtue; her desire to place female friendship above all else; and her desire for independence over marriage. In other words, Eliza desires to be a *femme sole*, an independent unmarried woman; she desires to remain a republican daughter rather than become a republican wife (and eventually a republican mother), and therein lies the problem. The social and sexual falls could not occur without this ideological fall preceding them.

<sup>11</sup> I am taking Barbara Welter's repositioning of domesticity as one of four cardinal virtues that defines "true womanhood" and using it to show that (1) Eliza lacks domestic virtue and (2) there are dire consequences both for women and for the nation when women lack this "virtue."

The novel opens with the language of seduction, as Eliza declares: "An unusual sensation possesses my breast; a sensation, which I once thought could never pervade it on any occasion whatever. It is *pleasure*; pleasure, my dear Lucy, on leaving my paternal roof!" (L1, 5).<sup>12</sup> The sensation of "pleasure" that Eliza experiences is directly linked to freedom—"leaving [the] paternal roof."<sup>13</sup> Gillian Brown notes that "[Eliza's] characterization of the change in her situation as a movement from subordination to freedom conspicuously echoes the rhetoric of filialism—the rights of each new generation over the claims of hereditary authority embodied in monarchy—that figured so urgently in American revolutionary polemics" (636). However the rhetoric of filialism was typically associated with men; only men had the right to choose whether to be married or not. As a woman asserting filial rights, Eliza finds herself cut loose from any authority and its protections.

Having escaped the noose of matrimony, Eliza finds herself free not only from her father's authority, but also free from any male authority. Mr. Haly, who "was chosen to be a future guardian, and companion for [her]" (L1, 5), has died. Eliza had no choice in his initial selection as her guardian, though she had become reconciled: "As their choice; as a good man, and a faithful friend, I esteemed him" (L1, 5). The novel reflects the tension between the conventional system of an arranged marriage and the new idea of marriage based on mutual affection. The novel also provides its audience with a heroine in an unusual state. Eliza leaves the paternal roof not in the traditional way—as a wife—but in an anomalous condition: as an unmarried young woman who owns herself.<sup>14</sup> She desires to remain a republican daughter, and resists becoming a republican wife.<sup>15</sup> Underlying her desire to remain a republican daughter is her desire for self-ownership. Eliza wishes to prolong her premarital state "where socializing and 'circulating' are productive labor, not only providing opportunities to choose a suitable mate, but also reinforcing ties between women" (Pettengill 188). Eliza, however, is not concerned with "choos[ing] a suitable mate," and that is her tragic flaw.

In the same opening letter that emphasizes the pleasurable sensation of freedom, Eliza announces her desire for independence: "Calm, placid, and serene; thoughtful of my duty, and benevolent to all around me, I wish for no other connection than that of friendship" (L1, 6). Her aspiration "for no other connection than that of friendship" reveals her longing to be a *femme sole* as well as to remain a republican daughter.<sup>16</sup> Her desire for male friendship reveals a post-Revolutionary female sensibility in which republican women began to question the "most basic assumption that marriage was every woman's destiny" (Fizer 258). Eliza has performed according to her family's and friends'

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton* ed. Cathy Davidson. (1797. New York: Oxford UP, 1986). All further citations are from this text, noting first the letter number and then the page number.

<sup>13</sup> While I read this "unusual sensation" of "pleasure" as linked to freedom, David Waldstreicher reads it as "unusual" because of "the removal of 'melancholy, the gloom, the condolence which surrounded' [Eliza] after the death of her fiancé, Rev. Haly," "'Fallen Under My Observation': Vision and Virtue in *The Coquette*," *Early American Literature* 27 (1992): 208.

<sup>14</sup> Irene Fizer states "the republican daughter whose identity is unbound—neither a property of father nor husband—and who, at least momentarily, belongs to herself alone, will end as an outcast" (244).

<sup>15</sup> According to Fizer, the discourse of the republican daughters was short lived (unique to the 1790s and early 1800s), replaced with the ideology of republican motherhood (243).

<sup>16</sup> Though it was frowned upon, there were a significant number of *femmes sole* in late-eighteenth-century America, mostly due to widowhood. See Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters* for more on this subject.

wishes in becoming engaged to Haly, and she has been "thoughtful of [her] duty, and benevolent to all around [her]." Her invocation of personal duty and benevolence toward those around her reflects her republican sensibility. She attaches her hope for "no other connection than that of friendship" to duty and community interests. Eliza's rhetoric associates male and female friendship with republican virtue.<sup>17</sup> She rewrites the basis of republican virtue so that friendship, rather than domesticity, becomes the foundation of republican virtue. Republican wifedom held that female sensibility acted as a spur to male virtue (Waldstreicher 211). Jan Lewis notes: "Marriage formed the basis of all other relationships, both in the family, because it led to parenthood, and in the society, because it schooled men in the disinterested benevolence that was supposed by republican ideologues to constitute virtue" (709). Eliza counters this formulation by positioning friendship as the foundational brick for republican virtue rather than wifedom. Eliza's republican rhetoric of duty, and of community benevolence within the confines of friendship, stands in direct opposition to marriage, that "other connection."

In addition to Eliza, every other female character in Foster's text is defined in relation to the marriage market: Julia Granby is poised to enter in the marriage market; Lucy Freeman is engaged and marries (becoming Mrs. Sumner) during the novel; Mrs. Richman currently partakes in it as a married woman; and Mrs. Wharton, as the matriarchal widow, has played a part in it. Each of these women represents a stage in the progression of republican domesticity: Julia Granby is the republican daughter, eager to take her place as republican wife; Lucy Sumner (née Freeman) is the republican daughter who transitions to republican wife; Mrs. Richman is the traditional republican wife, who becomes a republican mother during the course of the novel; and Mrs. Wharton is the matriarchal republican wife, who is now the republican widow. Marriage was essential to the new republic and "the very pattern from which the cloth of republican society was to be cut" (Lewis 689). Indeed, marriage was the foundation of republican virtue: "In the republic envisioned by American writers, citizens were to be bound together not by patriarchy's duty or liberalism's self-interest, but by affection, and it was, they believed, marriage, more, than any other institution, that trained citizens in this virtue" (Lewis 689). These female characters enact the female circulation that is necessary for the new republic to succeed. But Eliza Wharton counters this ideology and disrupts this circulation by desiring "no other connection than that of friendship."

The novel's cast of female characters promotes a pattern of movement from paternal to marital roof, with no detours. Yet Eliza feels that taking this well-defined route would mean an erasure of her identity and independence. Mrs. Richman, Eliza's happily married friend, tells her: "Your friends, my dear, solicitous for your welfare, wish to see you suitably and agreeably connected" (L12, 24) to her new suitor, Reverend Boyer. Her best friend, Lucy, informs Eliza that "[Reverend Boyer's] situation in life is, perhaps, as elevated as you have a right to claim" (L13, 27), using a rhetoric of rights to describe Eliza's domestic prospects. However, Eliza hesitates and deliberates. Unsure about becoming a republican wife, she attempts to prolong her status as daughter: "I do

---

<sup>17</sup> For an interesting study of female friendship in *The Coquette*, see Pettengill. Pettengill notes two compelling dramas in the novel: the seduction plot as well as "a parallel plot revolving around the fate of the powerful female circle—bound by the ideology of 'sisterhood'... The bonds of female friendship—theoretically sacred, practically fraught with tension—shape Eliza's thoughts and actions as much as any other system of values, and work in the novel both to advance and retard the more conventional plot" (186).

not intend to give my hand to any man at present. I have but lately entered society; and wish, for a while, to enjoy my freedom, in the participation of pleasures, suited to my age and sex;" (L26, 50) and later in the same letter: "I am at present, and know not but I ever shall be, too volatile for a confinement to domestic avocations, and sedentary pleasures" (L26, 53). Eliza believes that she is fit to be wife and mother neither "at present" nor in the future. Eliza desires sole proprietorship of herself, assuming a primarily masculine trait, sole proprietorship, and relocating it in the realm of female desire.<sup>18</sup> She knows that she will relinquish her freedom and her power once she becomes a *femme covert*, a republican wife, so she attempts to avoid the marriage market.<sup>19</sup>

Eliza's wish for "no other connection" reflects her desire to move without restriction, a desire which she often expresses using the political rhetoric of liberty and freedom. At one point, Mrs. Richman asks Eliza, "Your heart, I presume, is now free?" Eliza replies, "Yes and I hope it will long remain so" (L5, 13). While Mrs. Richman means available for an attachment when she says "free," for Eliza "free" means free from attachment. Unrestricted social mobility, constitutes her status as an agent rather than her status as a commodity with exchange value. Fizer notes that "the republican daughter increasingly was allowed to circulate within the marriage market, and to exercise her own choice about suitors" (257-58). But Eliza cannot "exercise her own choice" when that choice is to not participate in the marriage market. *The Coquette* reveals a conflict between the ideology and the practice of republican daughterhood, a conflict that produced anxiety for society. Fizer comments, "Circulating within the social sphere, the republican daughter became a subject of intense scrutiny and attack in the 1790s" (251). Certainly Eliza is scrutinized by her friends, and this scrutiny contributes to her social fall.

The American Revolution fundamentally underscored issues of political representation, and particularly anxieties about being seen and heard by the governing powers, as well as questions of liberty. Were these principles to apply only to the white men of America? In the 1790s, a consensus regarding the position of women within the Republic had not been reached (Fizer 244). The novel voices this lack of consensus in the disagreement between Mrs. Richman and Miss Laurence's mother:

[Miss Laurence's] mother replied, that she never meddled with politics; she thought they did not belong to ladies. Miss Wharton and I, said Mrs. Richman, must beg leave to differ from you, madam. We think ourselves interested in the welfare and prosperity of our country; and consequently, claim the right of inquiring into those affairs, which may conduce to, or interfere with the common weal. . . . If the community flourish and enjoy health and freedom, shall we not share in the happy effects? If it be oppressed and disturbed, shall we not endure our proportion of the evil? Why then should the love of our country be a masculine passion only? Why should government, which involves the peace and order of the society, of which we are a part, be wholly excluded from our

---

<sup>18</sup> For a fascinating discussion on Eliza's attempts at sole proprietorship, see C. Leiren Mower, "Bodies in Labor: Sole Proprietorship and the Labor of Conduct in *The Coquette*," *American Literature* 74.2 (2002): 315-344.

<sup>19</sup> As Lewis notes, "[the republican wife] led to a dead end, for her capability always depended upon masculine susceptibility. She had no more power than man allowed" (720).

observation?...The gentlemen applauded Mrs. Richman's sentiments as truly Roman; and what was more, they said, truly republican. (L23, 44)

Mrs. Richman here speaks both for herself and Eliza. As such, Mrs. Richman and Eliza seem to be narratively interchangeable. Mrs. Richman's words suggest Eliza will become the republican wife and mother that Mrs. Richman herself exemplifies. But the rest of the novel reveals that this fantasy will remain imaginary.

Mrs. Richman's discourse stays within the realm of politics and matters of the country, but Eliza's political rhetoric extends to the marriage market. Mrs. Richman "claim[s] the right of inquiring into those affairs" of the country because women are members of the community. But Mrs. Richman's vision of a woman's "right" pinpoints the more passive activities of "inquiring" and "observation." By contrast, Eliza claims the right to enter (or, more pointedly, not to enter) the marriage market on her own terms, and the right to choose a marriage based on mutual affection rather than convention—rights which entail changing the structure of the marriage market, so that women function as agents rather than as objects of exchange.<sup>20</sup> Eliza claims the right in her words and actions to manage the circulation of her own body (Mower 317). (However, that does mean that she actually gets to enjoy it.) Eliza continually emphasizes her desire to make her own choices, and as a republican daughter she is in a position in which she theoretically has the ability to do so. Through Eliza, Foster applies the political discourse of liberty to female private life, suggesting that the public rhetoric of Revolution has meaning in the private domain.<sup>21</sup>

While Mrs. Richman invokes the male rhetoric of politics, Eliza additionally co-opts the male language of commerce and banking: "Fortune, indeed, has not been very liberal of her gifts to me; but I presume on a large stock in the bank of friendship, which united with health and innocence, give me some pleasing anticipations of future felicity" (L3, 9).<sup>22</sup> Eliza here uses financial metaphors, traditionally male language, to describe her friendship with Lucy. Her description of "friendship" as a "bank" figures sentiment and feeling as part of an economy. Fortune has "not been very liberal of her gifts," but friendship "united with health and innocence" will provide Eliza with happiness. Friendship is set in opposition to fortune, where friendship is stable and fortune is

---

<sup>20</sup> Women's role in the new republic was a common topic, but this novel expands the "woman question" to include women's active role in politics and the marriage market as subjects, rather than objects. See Irigaray for a discussion of women as objects of exchange value and use value.

<sup>21</sup> Jurgen Habermas locates the emergence of the public sphere in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and he, as well as many other social theorists, marks the public sphere as the realm of politics. While Habermas characterizes the public sphere as space of rational public debate, *The Coquette* raises the question of what topics should be included in this rational debate and who can participate. Foster's use of political rhetoric for the private realm blurs the public/private line. Jan Lewis confirms this blurring when she notes that "eighteenth-century thought placed the family and the state on one continuum, that of 'society,' and did not yet—as the nineteenth century would—erect a barrier between the private sphere of the family and the public one of the world" (693). I believe this "barrier" begins after the Revolution with the emergence of the discourses of republican wifehood and motherhood and the rise of the middle class. See Fraser and Pateman for an analysis of the gender subtext and context of the public/private division.

<sup>22</sup> I characterize the language of commerce and banking as "male" because men were certainly the only individuals employed in these industries during this period. And while women may have had some contact with home finances, the financial realm of commerce and banking was traditionally viewed as "male." The emergent consumer is initially characterized as "male," but by the mid-nineteenth century the consumer is demarcated as "female." For more on the gender subtext underscoring the role of the consumer, see Nancy Fraser.

precarious. Notice that marriage does not provide Eliza with "future felicity," but female friendship does. Eliza's discourse illustrates her attempt to incorporate politics and finance into the new post-Revolutionary American female sensibility. Eliza's language of commerce also reflects a new middle-class identity based on capitalism. In the view of Smith-Rosenberg, "Eliza plays the role of a venture capitalist" (167), her financial rhetoric signifying her desire to rise socially.<sup>23</sup> By having Eliza employ this traditionally male rhetoric, *The Coquette* tests the scope of female rhetoric.

Eliza's rhetoric underscores her longing for self-ownership: "[Mrs. Richman] insisted that I should own myself somewhat engaged to [Mr. Boyer]. This, I told her I should never do to any man, before the indissoluble knot was tied. That, said I, will be time enough to resign my freedom" (L14, 30). With marriage as an "indissoluble knot," participation in the eighteenth-century marriage market was a serious and critical undertaking for women. Claire Pettengill aptly characterizes it as "marriage trauma."<sup>24</sup> Lucy voices the underlying anxiety of marriage trauma when she tells Eliza: "Remember that you are acting for life; and that your happiness in this world, perhaps in the next, depends on your present choice!" (L29, 59). Marriage is a decision "for life," even one with eternal implications. Tying the "indissoluble knot" might well be considered a life sentence which involves the resignation of freedom. Eliza is in no hurry to tie that "knot": "[there] will be time enough to resign my freedom." She uses a language of constriction to express her feelings about the trauma of marriage: "indissoluble," "knot," "tied." According to the laws of coverture, a woman forfeited her identity once she married, as it was reassigned (or "re-signed") to be a reflection of her husband's identity. Thus Eliza's portrayal of marriage as a loss of female freedom and of female self-possession is no exaggeration. For women in this historical moment, marriage was a process of confinement, one to which women must surrender or "resign" themselves. Marriage was essentially an act of submission.

As a "connection," marriage is a tie that binds, a bond that signifies restriction and captivity in Eliza's eyes. For Eliza, marriage is not a desired state, but one to be avoided. She narrowly escapes domestic internment as wife to her fiancé, Mr. Haly, who dies before they are wedded and before the novel begins. As early as letter five, Eliza reiterates her desire to remain unconnected: "I studiously avoided every kind of discourse which might lead to this topic [of marriage with Reverend Boyer]. I wish not for a declaration from any one, especially from one whom I could not repulse and do not intend to encourage at present" (L5, 12). All it takes is "a declaration from any one" to propel Eliza into the marriage market. She can become a participant in this market without choosing to do so—a male declaration is all that is required. Once a man makes a declaration of marital interest, her social position necessarily begins to change. Eliza's characterization of Boyer as one "whom [she] could not repulse" indicates the immediate loss of female freedom that is caused by a male declaration. Eliza's words "could not" suggests that she is not able to refuse Boyer. Thus, she understandably does not want to

---

<sup>23</sup> Kristie Hamilton sees the novel as "dramatiz[ing] in all its complexity the conflict in the mind of [the] protagonist between republican virtue and the appeal of materialism in an urban context" (140). There is competition between republican ideology and the appeal of material wealth (144-5).

<sup>24</sup> Pettengill states that "the thought of marriage provoked genuine anxiety in many young women" and Eliza's decision is particularly fraught "because her indecisiveness embodied a number of postrevolutionary anxieties, including issues of political alliance, economic change, social status, and urbanization" (186).

encourage him. This moment reveals the precarious position of the republican daughter, exposing female freedom as conditional, resting within male hands.

Eliza's avoidance of the topic of marriage with Boyer represents her desperate attempt to become an agent in the marriage economy, rather than an object of exchange within this economy of male desire. Waldstreicher states, "As Eliza Wharton goes public...she becomes less free, for in virtue's marketplace she is a defined commodity: not allowed to change, to be various, or even to have an interior will that differs from the true feelings she must show" (207). Marriage is not based on mutual affection or "true feelings" but is a business transaction that occurs in a "marketplace" where women are "defined commodities." Eliza, however, endeavors to set her own terms and conditions for entrance into and participation within the marriage economy: "I hope my friends will never again interpose in my concerns of that nature" (L5, 13). Eliza's evasion is an effort to establish female will as a component of the marriage market. Eliza aspires not only to choose whom to marry, but also when to marry, and ultimately whether to marry or not.

Initially it appears that Eliza cannot decide whether to choose Boyer and Sanford: "I am not sufficiently acquainted with either yet, to determine which to take" (L26, 51). Whereas Wenska asserts that Eliza refuses to choose between them because she simply does not know "which to take" (247), Hamilton depicts Eliza's dilemma as an issue of class mobility: "[Eliza] is presented with the competing appeals of the republican expectation of marrying within one's own socioeconomic class ... and the opportunities for upward mobility in late eighteenth-century, urban America" (135-6). Yet, like Wenska, Hamilton characterizes Eliza as suffering from "irresolution" (148), unable to choose between Boyer and Sanford: "Consistently acknowledging that Boyer is the rational choice clearly sanctioned by her community, Eliza nonetheless refuses to engage herself to him exclusively for she cannot reject the possibility, despite its impudence, of ascending into the 'first class of polished society' by way of a match with the fashionable and charming Major Sanford" (142). Claire Pettengill also sees Eliza's "marriage trauma" as the result of her agonizing inability to choose (186). But, in my view, her "marriage trauma" is caused by the requirement that she *must* choose—that she cannot extend her state of freedom as a republican daughter. Once a proposal has been made by a respectable suitor, Eliza is expected to accept it and she is pressured by her friends to do so. The real trauma is that Eliza enters the marriage market when she does not intend to, her entrance precipitated by a "male declaration," and that she cannot wait for a suitor whom she prefers. I do not read Eliza as suffering from "irresolution" as Wenska, Hamilton, and Pettengill do. Her chief dilemma does not stem from the choice between Boyer and Sanford, but from the fact that she prefers neither. While Hamilton sees Eliza as "attempt[ing] to balance her opportunities, sanctioned and unsanctioned, until one should present itself as that which will best satisfy her in her pursuit of happiness" (148), I contend that that "one" has not yet "present[ed] itself." Boyer and Sanford are both inadequate prospects; Eliza would prefer to choose neither unless she could combine them into a single man: "What a pity, my dear Lucy, that the graces and virtues are not oftener united! They must, however, meet in the man of my choice; and till I find such a one, I shall continue to subscribe my name Eliza Wharton" (L10, 22). She desires more than a loveless marriage, or marriage for its own sake.

Faced with this unhappy choice of suitors, Eliza voices an anti-domestic rhetoric that discloses her hostility towards marriage itself. When referring to Mrs. and General

Richman as the "happy pair," Eliza says: "Should it ever be my fate to wear the hymenial chain, may I be thus united!" (L6, 14). Even with the best example of domesticity, domesticity is still represented as confining and restricting, a "hymenial chain." Eliza's anti-marital rhetoric surfaces in another letter: "But I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse" (L5, 13). For Eliza, marriage is a "cell," a "contracted idea" which encloses women and transforms them into "recluse[s]." There is no question about how Eliza feels — she "despise[s]" those contracted ideas." She does not endorse an ideology of marital bliss. Rather, her rhetoric functions as a disruption, a dissenting voice that advances the view that marriage and domesticity control women and suppress female desire. Instead of conjugal bliss or republican duty, marriage is a prison for women, one which robs them of their agency and independence.

Surprisingly, Major Sanford, the character who "seduces" Eliza and is responsible for her sexual fall, also refers to domesticity as a state of confinement: "but you know [marriage] is no part of my plan, so long as I can keep out of the noose. Whenever I do submit to be shackled, it must be from a necessity of mending my fortune" (L11, 23). Sanford and Eliza both utilize a rhetoric of punishment to describe marriage: "cell," "noose," "shackles." They both make use of images that portray marriage as restricting individual freedom. Wenska notes that both Eliza and Sanford "regard marriage as a necessary evil to be endured only under extreme, principally economic, duress," and that both Eliza and Sanford "applaud 'the freedom and independence of a single state'" (249). For both of these characters, despite their obvious differences in social and gender status, marriage destroys personal freedom and liberty.

Eliza's negative view of marriage is particularly evident when she writes to Lucy, her soon-to-be-wed best friend:

Marriage is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state. Why do people, in general, as soon as they are married, centre all their cares, their concerns, and pleasures in their own families? Former acquaintances are neglected or forgotten. The tenderest ties between friends are weakened, or dissolved; and benevolence itself moves in a very limited sphere. (L12, 24)

Eliza not only wishes to be a free agent in the marriage economy, but she also defiantly devalues this institution of holy matrimony. To Eliza, marriage is worse than confinement; it is a "tomb," which signifies the death of friendship and the death of the individual, not a happy state of conjugal union. Eliza's concerns are confirmed when Mrs. Richman observes "we cannot always pay that attention to former associates which we may wish" (L12, 25). Pettengill points out that once Mrs. Richman and Lucy marry, "their primary focus is now on their own fledging households. They still value their friends, but no longer need them so desperately" (194). Pettengill continues: "Words like Mrs. Richman's, then, are not calculated to ease Eliza Wharton's 'marriage trauma'; rather they reinforce her fears that marriage will burden her with new and not necessarily pleasant responsibilities, and simultaneously weaken the most important bonds of her life. Indeed, they tell her that the process has already begun; that those she loves most have already begun to drift away" (195). For Eliza, marriage marks an ending rather than a beginning.

Thus, her hesitation to accept Boyer's proposal reflects not her desire to be a coquette, but her ambivalence, and even hostility, towards the state of marriage. For instance, at Lucy's wedding, Eliza reacts as if she were at a funeral:

Every eye beamed with pleasure on the occasion, and every tongue echoed the wishes of benevolence. Mine only was silent. Though not less interested in the felicity of my friend than the rest, yet the idea of a separation; perhaps, of an alienation of affection, by means of her entire devotion to another, cast an involuntary gloom over my mind. (L36, 70)

Marriage marks the death of her friendship with Lucy, since Eliza can no longer be the primary object of Lucy's affection. Instead of joy, Eliza experiences "gloom." Eliza is not only unable to say congratulations, but seems incapable of speaking at all. Her response is bodily and "involuntary." Her depressed incapacitation indicates how deeply her feelings about marriage are rooted within her. Eliza's actions at Lucy's wedding challenge society's notion that marriage is desired by all women, the wish that supposedly echoes on "every tongue."

Reverend Boyer misreads this moment. He offers to escort Eliza to Lucy after the ceremony, saying "[Lucy's] happiness must be heightened by your participation of it." Eliza replies, "Oh no... I am too selfish for that. She has conferred upon another that affection which I wished to engross. My love was too fervent to admit a rival" (L36, 70). Eliza speaks here as if she were Lucy's scorned lover. Eliza cannot participate in Lucy's happiness. She is too concerned with her own personal loss as she admits that she is "too selfish" to "heighten" Lucy's happiness. Eliza's jealousy hinders her ability to celebrate her friend's happiness.

Boyer responds with a proposal: "Retaliate then... [against] this fancied wrong, by doing likewise" (L36, 70). Rather than seeing marriage as the problem, Boyer regards marriage as the solution. In this moment of true virtue or "ideal transparency," where Eliza's body matches her heart, Boyer misconstrues Eliza's depressive jealousy. He believes her sadness is due to her unmarried state. His inability to read Eliza only confirms her suspicions about their incompatible dispositions. He cannot conceive that Eliza does not wish to be married. His misunderstanding of Eliza here also foreshadows his later, more dire misconception regarding Sanford's intrusion upon Eliza in the garden, which leads Boyer to reject her.

Eliza secretly meets with Sanford with the intention of rejecting him and announcing her acceptance of Boyer's marriage proposal. Her clandestine interview with Sanford, which is witnessed by Boyer, marks Eliza's social fall. This social fall has irreparable repercussions—it destroys her exchange value. Boyer's rejection removes Eliza from the marriage market altogether, destroying any chance of her one day becoming a republican wife able to fulfill a civic duty.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, he effects what she has wanted all along, but it is devastating to her. With her exclusion from the marriage market, Eliza transforms from active agent into passive victim. The irreversible consequences do not directly result from the interview itself, but from Boyer's witnessing and misreading of it.<sup>26</sup> Rejected by Boyer and abandoned by Sanford, Eliza changes from

---

<sup>25</sup>Bloch notes, "Women came to be idealized as the source not only of domestic morality but also of civic virtue itself... women were to instill public virtue in men through courtship and marriage" (46).

<sup>26</sup> For more on the effects of watching/observing/witnessing—"the scrutinising eye" (175)—see Waldstreicher. In his article, he refers to a "rhetoric of vision"—an "economy of vision: a new system of

an object of exchange into an object of speculation, whose "affairs are made [the] town talk" (L44, 99).

Sanford's letter to Deighton explains the reason for Eliza's consent to the request for an interview: "She was entangled by a promise (not to marry this priest without my knowledge,) which her conscience would not let her break" (L42, 94-95). Eliza's previous letter reveals: "I have nearly determined, in compliance with the advice of my friends, and the dictates of my own judgment, to give Mr. Boyer the preference, and with him to tread the future round of life" (L41, 91). Eliza has chosen to marry Boyer. For Pettengill, Eliza's acceptance of Boyer's marriage proposal is motivated by her desire to participate in the circle of sisterhood she has been excluded from: "To repair the loss, she must accept the unappealing, unsympathetic Rev. Boyer, who, by presiding over her transformation into a republican wife and mother, will enable her to rejoin their circle" (196). But when she chooses Boyer, she becomes victim to the "authoritative male discourse of her age" (Smith-Rosenberg 177). According to Smith-Rosenberg, "[Eliza] has been seduced not by the rake but by the minister's text of individual (especially female) submission to social consensus" (176). Smith-Rosenberg locates the "real seduction and fall" in the novel a year after this event, at the point when Eliza acquiesces in Boyer's denunciation of her, confesses she has sinned, and begs him to marry her (175). Smith-Rosenberg states: "It is the relinquishing of her social and intellectual independence, not of her sexual virginity, that constitutes her true fall" (176). However, I would argue that this moment, when she abandons her dream of freedom and decides to become a *femme covert* out of convention rather than affection, not the following year, marks the fall that Smith-Rosenberg speaks of.

This scene underscores a cultural anxiety about accurately reading appearances as Boyer and Sanford offer conflicting explanations for Eliza's clandestine meeting with Sanford. Having returned to Mrs. Wharton's parlor, Eliza asks Boyer, "Will you... permit me to vindicate my conduct and explain my motives?" Boyer replies, "Your conduct... cannot be vindicated; your motives need no explanation; they are too apparent!" (L40, 81). Boyer's conviction that the truth of this interview is "apparent" is actually wrong. While Boyer claims Eliza's motives as "apparent," this scene exposes a crisis of virtue and authenticity because Eliza is no longer transparent.<sup>27</sup> Brown remarks, "Eliza's calculated act of consent differentiates her public word from her private words and desires, creating at least two versions of herself" (628). Despite Boyer's claims, her motives cannot be read, they are not "apparent," as he misreads them. It is not that he can no longer read her, he never could. With this crisis of virtue, there is also a crisis of representation. The real fear is that perhaps women are not as they seem, that they are not transparent and readable. Even though Eliza's motives are innocent, Boyer's misinterpretation prevails. And while Sanford offers a virtuous motive for Eliza's actions, that "she was entangled by a promise," Boyer's point of view takes precedence. Boyer's voice ultimately becomes the hegemonic voice in the novel.

---

exchanged signs of sentiment governed by particular rules for viewing and interpretation" (206).

Waldstreicher states that "Watched more than ever, Eliza cannot but fall into the trap of coquetry, even in trying to do the right (virtuous) thing" (213).

<sup>27</sup> For more on the problem of "ideal transparency" see Mower. Waldstreicher defines virtue as a sense of transparency: the "'coquette' was the name for women whose display did not match and reveal her heart" (207). Waldstreicher also notes that in late eighteenth-century America there was a desire for transparency, the attempt to "make virtue wholly visible" (206).

In the end, Boyer's judgment, based on a misconception, ruins Eliza's reputation. Upon Boyer's return to the house, after he has witnessed this meeting, Eliza states "I must leave you [Sanford]...I will go and try to retrieve my character. It has suffered greatly by this fatal interview" (L41, 92). Eliza realizes that her "character" rests in Boyer's hands and not her own, hence her attempt to "retrieve" it. Eliza does not have ultimate control over her character. Not only does this interview tarnish her character, but Eliza recognizes the consequences as "fatal," which connects her ultimate demise to this pivotal moment.

Surprisingly, Eliza does not immediately defend herself: "Eliza entered the room...She sat down at the window and wept" (L40, 81). In this moment of male rejection, Eliza begins to be effaced; her voice of dissent and independence is silenced, and she becomes a victim of appearances. Eliza asks Boyer for permission to explain her motives rather than offering an explanation outright: "Will you...*permit* me to vindicate my conduct and explain my motives?" (emphasis added). But he denies her request, a rejection that marks her fall from agency.

Eliza never regains herself after this episode. She withers away in isolation, her vivacity gone and her voice progressively silenced. Her desire for social connection is lost. Eliza's letters are less frequent and shorter in length: "...you must excuse me if my letters are shorter than formerly. Writing is not so agreeable to me as it used to be" (L59, 127). Eliza's subdued voice marks her final transformation into an object. She cannot participate in society because she does not have a civic function to fulfill without the possibility of becoming a republican wife.

When Eliza does speak, she uses the language of a fallen woman, despite the fact that no sexual fall has occurred (Davidson 146). She tells Lucy, "Oh my friend, I am undone! I am slighted, rejected by the man who once sought my hand, by the man who still retains my heart!" (L48, 105). Foster's rhetorical invocation of sexual corruption to describe Eliza's social fall reveals the importance of character and the magnitude of the loss of reputation for women. Eliza directly connects her fall, "I am undone," with Boyer's second rejection (after Eliza admits her wrongdoing, asks for Boyer's forgiveness and for him to reconsider his marriage proposal). Like Smith-Rosenberg, Mower feels that Eliza has been "'seduced' into the economic and social necessity of offering herself to Reverend Boyer more than a year after his initial proposal...Eliza's fall actually seems to coincide with her perception that the performance of her proprietorship will not bring about its material realization" (335). Boyer rejects Eliza by telling her that he has chosen someone else to marry. Mower registers this moment as a "crisis of self-management" (335) for Eliza, and Eliza herself states: "I have given him the power of triumphing in my distress" (L48, 105). The issue of "power" underscores Boyer's rejection at this juncture. By admitting guilt and asking for a second chance, Eliza loses all power in this relationship. The control and power is within Boyer's hands. After Boyer announces that he has chosen another, Eliza then utters the language of a fallen woman. This moment is crucial for Eliza. Her friends are republican wives and she must become one in order to maintain the bonds of sisterhood. But Boyer's final rejection causes Eliza to fall "irrevocably from the unity of the harmonious circle" (Pettengill, 198). With his rejection, she loses her value as an object of exchange and as such she cannot rejoin the female circle as a marketable object. Her fall is social in nature and removes her from the circle of domesticity that her friends enjoy. But it is her ideological fall, her initial desire

for freedom and self-ownership, that leads to this social fall and her subsequent sexual fall.

The marriage market is potentially traumatizing for women because men ultimately control it, and it controls women's fates. Boyer's first choice does not result in a successful match, so he makes another choice and his life does not fall apart. But Boyer's censure plunges Eliza into social withdrawal and erasure. Eliza is slowly removed from the narrative; her letters, her voice is heard and read with less frequency: "I hope you and Mrs. Sumner will excuse my writing but one letter, in answer to the number I have received from you both. Writing is an employment which suits me not at present" (L62, 134). And her letter to her mother just before her final flight: "In what words, in what language shall I address you? What shall I say on a subject that deprives me of the power of expression?" (L68, 153). Eliza has lost "the power of expression." Sharon Harris writes that Eliza abandons writing because she recognizes that it is "futile:"

Late in the novel, when Eliza comes to believe that society's dictates will prevail, she abandons writing as futile, recognizing that there is no place in late-eighteenth-century American society for her opinions. It is the recognition of this fact that constitutes Eliza's true loss of innocence... In many ways, the novel's structure is the unfolding of Eliza's growing awareness of this social truth. (5)

For Harris, this moment marks Eliza's true fall. When Eliza abandons writing, she abandons all that she previously believed in.

The marked epistolary absence of Eliza's interiority toward the end of the novel illustrates Eliza's withdrawal—a withdrawal from her community of female friends which is, in turn, a withdrawal from the reader. Eliza's withdrawal is both a personal choice and a response to societal pressure. Waldstreicher sees this withdrawal as Eliza's insistence on solitude, a "solitude [which] means the annihilation of self" (215). Harris also reads Eliza's withdrawal as an act of "self-destruction," connecting this act with Eliza's knowledge of Sanford's marriage: "When Eliza learns that Sanford, the novel's overt symbol of duplicity, is married, she begins the fatal process of devaluing her own opinions... It is, ironically, in adhering to the republic's political silencing of women that Eliza sets out on an entropic path of so-called 'self-destruction'" (15).<sup>28</sup> I believe Eliza withdraws because of a sense of embarrassment at first—Boyer has rejected her and married another. Eliza's friends attempt to bring her back into the female circle by telling her to socialize, but Eliza feels too humiliated. She wallows in her sorrow and shame. Once she feels she has no place in republican society, she succumbs to Sanford's advances. Her subsequent alienation results from her feelings of shame, feelings that have fatal consequences.<sup>29</sup>

Boyer's rejection signifies Eliza's theoretical loss of innocence, the tainting of her character. A flawed character is tantamount to sexual defilement. She has symbolically lost her virginity and, with it, her ability to become a republican wife and mother.

---

<sup>28</sup> Mower has quite a different reading: "Rather than arguing that Eliza's seclusion marks her recognition of defeat and her gradual retreat from the public sphere, a position often suggested by critics of the novel, I contend that this shift registers an authoritative *extension* and *expansion* of her proprietary claims" (335). Further on, Mower continues "Eliza's wasting body exhibits a self-mastery that visibly registers her increased (body) proprietorship..." (336).

<sup>29</sup> For Harris, "The multifaceted self is lost ... when Eliza succumbs to the patriarchal ideology of Woman, which seeks to deny diversity and uniqueness among women. This loss constitutes one of the tragic themes of Foster's novel" (20). Again, Harris situates this loss after Eliza learns Sanford is married.

According to Bloch, "Women—as social companions, wives, and mothers—assumed a major role in instructing men to be virtuous" (55). Thus, without a respectable suitor, Eliza is essentially socially dead since she no longer fulfills a function in this republican society. It is only a matter of time before Eliza physically loses her virginity. Smith Rosenberg notes that "[o]nly then, having lost independence, pleasure, and happiness, does Eliza relinquish her virtue as well" (177). Davidson remarks, "[s]uccumbing to Sanford merely confirms and symbolizes what rejection by Boyer has already proved" (146). Yet, the sexual fall "comes unaccompanied by either pleasure or passion" (Smith-Rosenberg 175) for both Eliza and Sanford, marking Eliza's sexual fall as an atypical seduction. Smith-Rosenberg asks: "Can the striking absence of sexual passion be explained, then, by the fact that Foster's Coquette...died not from lust but from the imprudent desire for an impossible social independence and the desire to assert her right to control her own body?" (175). With Eliza, we see that the attempt to enact female rights within the marriage economy is a challenge to the patriarchal order and that challenge has fatal consequences.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, the novel closes with Julia Granby's voice. The details of Eliza's sexual fall are not told in Eliza's own words, but in Julia's. Julia's letters fill the latter part of the narrative where she becomes the voice of truth and reason. Julia arrives after Eliza's letter to Lucy in which Eliza declares herself "undone." Julia becomes a replacement for Eliza, as Eliza herself writes of Julia: "She is all that I once was; easy, sprightly, debonair" (L50, 108). As a literary replacement for Eliza, Julia is not only "all that [Eliza] once was," but also becomes all that Eliza could have been. The novel ends with Julia's voice—her letter to Mrs. Wharton recounting Eliza's tombstone inscription. Julia Granby is the character who ultimately restores balance to the chaos that has erupted. As the virtuous female representative, poised to enter the marriage economy, Julia Granby reinscribes the hegemonic domestic ideology. She is both an exemplar and part of the female collective, a "spokeswomen for republican ideology" (Hamilton 141) who disseminates a message of domestic interest that benefits the patriarchal order by confining and restricting female desire.

Julia and Eliza represent the two different figures of daughters operating during this time period and in the novel: that of the daughter loyal to the republican collective and that of the revolutionary daughter pursuing her own happiness, her own intractable desire (Fizer 259). Julia represents the loyal daughter and Eliza represents the revolutionary daughter. Eliza endorses the latter message to pursue one's own happiness and desire, a message which is incompatible with domesticity and ultimately incompatible with republican ideology. Fizer notes that "with the new stress on the household as the source of virtue and stability in government, attention necessarily focused on women...Eliza Wharton's rejection of domesticity is tantamount to a negation of the entire republican ethos" (249-50). Eliza's desire not to participate in the marriage market reflects her lack of domestic virtue which has civic implications, as it translates

---

<sup>30</sup> Her death shortly after childbirth also reflects an anxiety about the corrupt maternal body that bears an illegitimate child. Not only is this maternal body destroyed, but the child also dies. The absence of a name or gender for this child, robs it of any sentimental attachment, and suggests that Eliza gives birth to her dissension itself, and her sedition causes her death. Eliza is the sacrificial lamb whose death binds the community and reinforces the patriarchal domestic ideology which regulates women's participation within the marriage market. See Julia Stern for more about Eliza as a sacrifice for community cohesiveness.

into a lack of republican virtue.<sup>31</sup> Fizer remarks that: the "relation between civic and domestic spheres was central to republican political ideology. The unmarried daughter, circulating between these spheres, was expected to maintain this relation in a proper balance" (249). Eliza, however, does not live up to this expectation.

Eliza Wharton claims political rights—the right to choose whom to marry and when to marry. Brown observes: "Dedicated to choosing her way and her partners, Eliza appears something of a republican heroine" (636). Eliza wishes to "exercise free will" (L14, 29) in determining her future and she "attempts to mimic the freedom of choice successfully practiced by men" (Hamilton 146).<sup>32</sup> She tries to become an independent agent within the marriage economy by transacting her own exchange, but she fails because she is a woman. Eliza naively seeks to exercise her freedom only to learn that she has none. Her resistance to the current structures of the marriage market interrupts the circulation of women. Her actions and her words disrupt the patriarchal constructions of the traditional route of exchange for women from father to husband, thereby halting the conventional mode of transformation from daughter to wife to mother. For this, she is punished.

Eliza is a woman who lacks domestic virtue. According to Bloch, republican virtue "refers not to female private morality but to male public spirit, that is to the willingness of citizens to engage actively in civic life and to sacrifice individual interests for the common good" (38). Domestic virtue becomes the equivalent of female public spirit in that domestic virtue maintains and promotes domesticity, which in turn maintains and promotes republican virtue. Private (or self) interest is put aside for the sake and welfare of the family and ultimately the nation. In other words, what is performed in the private realm benefits or harms the public good. Yet Eliza has no desire to promote domestic virtue or domestic interest. And her lack of domestic virtue has civic implications.<sup>33</sup>

Davidson states that "Eliza Wharton sins and dies" (148) but where one locates that "sin" depends upon how the novel is read. Boyer's rejection may mark in the narrative the point of no return for Eliza, but it is her refusal to enter the marriage market, her refusal to put domestic interest and republican interest above private interest, which leads to her eventual demise. Eliza pursues her own happiness and refuses the "pursuit of public good, the most virtuous of passions" (Waldstreicher 211). She refuses to sacrifice her personal liberty for the social order or common good. Her "sin" is her desire to be independent. Her independence serves as a barrier to the transmission of domestic ideology, and that is the true cause of her ruin.

---

<sup>31</sup> According to Waldstreicher, "In republican theory, virtue was always a political question, and a deeply gendered one at that. Claims to virtue and virtuosity were claims to power and authority" (207). Bloch notes that "what did change as a specific consequence of the American Revolutionary experience was that the feminine notion of virtue took on a political significance it had previously lacked" (56).

<sup>32</sup> For more on the issue of "free will," see Kristie Hamilton's article.

<sup>33</sup> I see domestic virtue as embodied and domestic interest as theoretical. Bloch notes, "On the one hand, female virtues were themselves regarded as essentially natural. On the other hand, such virtues in women needed cultivation, and still more important, women were needed to cultivate virtue in men" (53). Bloch's comments raises the question: is domestic virtue natural or does it need to be cultivated? Is Eliza's lack of domestic virtue something inherent to her or can it be cultivated under the right circumstances? This question is left for the reader to consider.

Eliza stands as a figure of dissent. She challenges the conditions of marriage for republican women. As a figure representing revolutionary energies gone awry, Eliza needs to be restrained, since a controlled domestic sphere is essential to the patriarchal republican order. Lewis notes "it was not merely sexual lust that republicans found so threatening, but immoderate desires of all kinds, ambition and self-interest chief among them" (720). At one point in the novel, Mrs. Richman tells Eliza that she has the "wrong ideas about freedom, and matrimony" (L14, 30). These "wrong ideas" cause Eliza to delay becoming a republican wife. Her hesitation suggests that marriage may not be the ideal goal for all women. Her indecision within and avoidance of the marriage market question domesticity and all its promises. Cathy Davidson points out *The Coquette* is more than a story about the wages of sin—it is a tale about the wages of marriage (143). This early American novel is even more so a tale about the wages of not marrying, about the costs of staying a republican daughter, and the false promise of freedom for women in the early republic.

## Chapter Two

### Is Practice Enough? Susan Warner's Constructions of Domesticity in *The Wide, Wide World*

My overall goal in this chapter is to unpack aspects of domesticity that have been underexplored. The previous chapter discussed the implications of a woman who refuses to get married, a woman who does not embody domestic virtue. This chapter turns to another aspect of domesticity: practice. In this chapter, I explore three of the homes portrayed in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) in order to uncover the connections established in the novel between domesticity as a practice and domesticity as a virtue.

Jane Tompkins describes *The Wide, Wide World* as "an American Protestant bildungsroman, in which the character of the heroine is shaped by obedience, self-sacrifice, and faith" (184). In Warner's novel, the child protagonist, ten-year-old Ellen Montgomery, is essentially orphaned by her parents when they leave her in America to move to Europe. Her father turns to European business opportunities after losing a lawsuit in America, while her invalid mother believes that the European climate will speed her convalescence. Because of financial constraints, Ellen's parents leave her with her aunt, Fortune Emerson. This coming-of-age story ends with the promise of a Christian marriage for Ellen.<sup>34</sup> Tompkins identifies the novel as a "training narrative" for Ellen, one that teaches her how to survive through her suffering (176).<sup>35</sup> But the novel is also a "training narrative" that teaches her, and by extension the novel's reader, how to become an ideal woman and what the ideal home should be like. This chapter focuses on Warner's representation of domesticity, contrasting three homes portrayed in the novel—Mrs. Montgomery's, Aunt Fortune's, and Alice Humphrey's—to show that, for Warner's heroine, domestic practice alone is not enough to guarantee that the ideology of domesticity will be fulfilled.

The nineteenth-century ideology of domesticity positioned the home as a safe haven from outside forces. However, Sara Quay notes that in the mid-1800s "the integrity of 'one's home' or domestic space [was a challenge to maintain] in the face of vulnerable interpersonal relationships and frequent geographic moves" (39-40). The Montgomery home reveals that the domestic space was also vulnerable to market forces. Economic forces destabilize this middle-class home and drive the Montgomerys to leave the country and abandon their only child. As such, Ellen experiences "a series of moves" in which she "encounters various domestic spheres that successively inculcate her with the virtues

---

<sup>34</sup> For Sharon Kim, Warner's novel is "a spiritual bildungsroman; instead of ending in marriage or Ellen's triumph as a teacher or lady novelist, it ends with the maturation of her character." "Puritan Realism: *The Wide, Wide World* and *Robinson Crusoe*," *American Literature* 75.4 (2003): 801. It must be noted that there is an unpublished final chapter in which Ellen and John are married and Ellen returns to America and the "home" John provides for her. However that chapter was never published for the nineteenth-century American audience, though it has been recovered for today's readers by The Feminist Press.

<sup>35</sup> Catherine O'Connell claims that "suffering is a crucial narrative element of *The Wide, Wide World*." Her article posits suffering as means of self-expression and contends that the "emphasis on suffering provides the story with two competing sources of authority, the women who suffer and the authority figures who cause the suffering," "'We must sorrow': Silence, suffering, and sentimentality in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*," *Studies in American Fiction* 25.1 (Spring 1997) : 21.

of piety, self-discipline, and maternal affection" (Williams 570). I contend that these "domestic spheres" also teach Ellen about the virtue, practice, and ideology of domesticity.

Donna Campbell remarks that "housework as a practical embodiment of continual and selfless service to others, provides important moral and physical training for Ellen" (122). However, in Warner's novel, housework does not function the same way in each of the three key homes represented. Within each home, different types of housework get practiced and the tasks the women perform vary. These differences have significant implications. For instance, Aunt Fortune keeps a spotless home, tempting the reader to assume that she practices domesticity perfectly. Her tidy home may suggest that her home is a safe haven, but it is not. Rather than a restorative haven, Fortune's home is a site of confinement and a spiritual testing ground for young Ellen Montgomery. With Fortune's home we see that practice alone is not enough to transform the domestic sphere into a safe haven. But what does effect such a transformation? What is needed to transform the mere practice of housework so that the spiritual ideal of domesticity gets fulfilled? We turn to a closer examination of Warner's homes in order to answer this question.

The novel opens with the Montgomery home. While this house may have all the appearances of a model home, its mistress, Mrs. Montgomery, is disabled by an unspecified illness, unable to perform any household tasks. According to Claire Chantell, the fact that Mrs. Montgomery spends most of the day in bed may not really matter, since "a mother was supposed not 'to teach virtue but to inspire it'" and "the ideal mother accomplished her work simply by loving her children" (132). Chantell refers to this notion as "sentimental maternalism." Under a regime of "sentimental maternalism," it does not matter that Mrs. Montgomery performs no household tasks. Rather, it is her character, emotions, and feelings for Ellen that are privileged. For Chantell, the value of the Montgomery home resides not in any housekeeping practices that Mrs. Montgomery may or may not perform, but in the Christian and middle-class sensibility that she wishes to inculcate within Ellen. In this initial representation of home, domesticity is not practiced through housekeeping tasks but through sentiment, and Warner's narrative implies that this version of domesticity is inadequate.

Despite the domestic premium on the mother's feelings for her child, Mrs. Montgomery's doctor tells young Ellen: "[your mother] *must not* be excited,—you must take care that she is not,—it isn't good for her. You mustn't let her talk much, or laugh much, or cry at all, on any account; she mustn't be worried in the least..." (19). Her status as an invalid dictates that Mrs. Montgomery refrain from emotions deemed excessive, from expressing or even experiencing them. This medical restriction limits her maternal guidance. While Chantell claims that Mrs. Montgomery embodies sentimental maternalism, the textual evidence complicates this claim, since it is Ellen (the daughter) who is required to care for Mrs. Montgomery (the mother), rather than vice versa, not to mention that the daughter's charge is to suppress her mother's emotions rather than help her to express them. The doctor's orders reveal that not only is something defective with Ellen's mother but also with her home since she cannot practice, or is restricted from fully practicing, sentimental maternalism.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> In the novel it is never quite clear whether Mrs. Montgomery is truly defective as a mother or whether it is the patriarchal medical establishment to which she is subject that impedes her proper practice of

As a result of the limits imposed upon Mrs. Montgomery, Ellen is established at the outset of the novel as a lost soul who needs to be found. According to Tompkins, "The highest function of any art, for Warner as for most of her contemporaries, was the bringing of souls to Christ. Like their counterparts among the evangelical clergy, the sentimental novelists wrote to educate their readers in Christian perfection and to move the nation as a whole closer to the city of God" (149). But Warner has a specific idea and a specific practice of Christianity in mind. According to Kim, "*The Wide, Wide World* differs profoundly from other works of this genre. First, Warner incorporates a Calvinist faith in her work, while the sentimental novel was predominantly non-Calvinist or anti-Calvinist... Second, Warner's faith affects not only the type of religion portrayed in her novel but also its narrative and rhetorical craft" (785-6).<sup>37</sup> When Ellen is informed of her impending remove to Aunt Fortune's house and responds by sobbing uncontrollably, Mrs. Montgomery asks Ellen to read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd."<sup>38</sup> Mother and daughter have markedly different responses to the psalm. Mrs. Montgomery is soothed and falls asleep: "Those first sweet words had fallen like balm upon the sore heart; and the mind and body had instantly found rest together" (15). By contrast, Ellen says to herself "If I only could feel these words as mamma does!" (15).<sup>39</sup> While this biblical passage brings relief to her mother, it only exacerbates Ellen's doubts, a sign that her mother's guidance is ineffective.<sup>40</sup>

In these opening chapters, Mrs. Montgomery continually redirects Ellen towards God. When Ellen speaks of her fear that she will be lonely and have nobody to talk with at her aunt's house, her mother advises her to "seek that friend who is never far away, nor out of hearing. Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you" (22). Ellen tearfully responds: "'But mamma... you know he is not my friend in the same way that he is yours.' And hiding her face again, she added, 'Oh I wish he was!'" (23). Mrs. Montgomery reassures Ellen that "*He* is willing, it only rests with you" (23). Ellen's uncertainty once again suggests that Mrs. Montgomery's instruction is wanting. The stakes are so high that Mrs. Montgomery is willing to sacrifice her own life in return for Ellen's salvation: "if losing your mother might be the means of finding you that better friend, I should be quite willing—and glad to go—forever" (23). The novel opens with Ellen's salvation in question.

In order to ensure Ellen's spiritual condition, Mrs. Montgomery defies her doctor's orders and leaves the safety of her bed in order to purchase a Bible for Ellen. Mrs. Montgomery personally purchases this parting gift for Ellen with the expressed hope that

---

sentimental maternalism. Paradoxically, nineteenth-century women, especially mothers, were considered to have value and power because of their sentimental inclinations and also considered to be overly susceptible to emotions, even dangerous to themselves and others because of their emotions. Mrs. Montgomery represents this paradox as she is both too emotional and not emotional enough to be or function as a "good mother."

<sup>37</sup> I would argue that Warner's faith also affects her notions of domesticity.

<sup>38</sup> For a captivating discussion about female reading in the nineteenth century as a marker of class identity and the protocols of female reading, see Suzanne M. Ashworth's article "Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Conduct Literature and Protocols of Female Reading in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Legacy* 17.2 (2000): 141-164.

<sup>39</sup> O'Connell notes that "Feeling becomes the means of establishing narrative authority and authenticity not only more than speech or action, but frequently in opposition to them" (25).

<sup>40</sup> In the end, long after her mother's death, Ellen does "feel these words as mamma does," leading Chantell to observe that the sentimental mother is "more powerful absent than present" (139).

Ellen may find her way to the Heavenly Father. Tompkins notes that "the mother's Bible-gift, in sentimental literature, is invested with supernatural power because it testifies to the reality of the spiritual order where women hold dominion over everything by virtue of their submission on earth" (163). Similarly, Chantell notes that "the logic of sentimental maternalism as articulated in this novel defines the mother's greatest triumph as the implantation of her image in her child's mind, so that he or she may carry it throughout life as an emotional and spiritual touchstone" (136). The Bible serves as a substitute for the mother and only Ellen's mother can help Ellen with the task of choosing a Bible: "I want to get you a Bible, and some other things that I will not leave you without, and nobody can do it but myself" (26). Only the mother herself can select the "right" mother-substitute, but one might equally infer that any Bible picked by the mother would be endowed with maternal power.

The purchase of Ellen's Bible also marks a conflation of the religious and consumerist themes in the novel.<sup>41</sup> At the bookstore, Ellen and her mother face an overwhelming abundance of choices in Bibles:

Mrs. Montgomery was desiring the shopman to show her various kinds and sizes that she might choose from among them. Down went Ellen's book, and she flew to the place, where a dozen different Bibles were presently displayed. Ellen's wits were ready to forsake her. Such beautiful Bibles she had never seen; she pored in ecstasy over their varieties of type and binding, and was very evidently in love with them all. (29)

These Bibles have an almost erotic charge as Ellen pores in "ecstasy over [the] varieties" and she is "very evidently in love with them all." The plethora of Bibles causes Ellen to almost lose herself as her "wits were ready to forsake her." The sheer number of choices is exciting for Ellen, but it is not so much the quantity of Bibles as it is the "varieties" that excite her: "she was weighing the comparative advantages of large, small, and middle-sized; black, blue, purple, and red; gilt and not gilt, clasp and no clasp" (30). Indeed, the cover seems to be as important, if not more so, than the content. In this scene of consumerism, the Bible becomes a fetishized object of desire, rather than a mere purchase. When Ellen has a difficult time making a choice, "Mrs. Montgomery came to her help, for it was plain Ellen had lost the power of judging amidst so many tempting objects" (31). There is a clear warning here about the negative influence of consumerism, and especially its potential to convert what should remain sacred into a temptation. In this transaction, the holy is at risk of being stripped of its meaning by the trappings of outer packaging.

Mrs. Montgomery purchases other items for Ellen as well: a writing desk and supplies, a "dressing-box" (or sewing kit), and wool for clothing. Like the Bible, these purchases are invested with social and emotional meaning for both Ellen and her mother. They also serve as a substitute for the mother and the home. Ellen's mother tells her: "My gifts will serve as reminders for you if you are ever tempted to forget my lessons. If you fail to send me letters...I think your desk will cry shame upon you. And if you ever go an

---

<sup>41</sup> See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* for more on religion and consumerism. Sara Quay contends that "Upon closer investigation, however, *The Wide, Wide World* does not condone consumerism as eagerly as Douglas asserts. In fact, the novel actively resists the emerging ideology of commodity culture, representing it as a system that contributes to, rather than mediates, the problem of homesickness" (40).

hour with a hole in your stocking... I hope the sight of your work-box will make you blush" (37). Elizabeth Barnes claims that Mrs. Montgomery's words "move from the idea of the mother's gifts as reminders of her presence to their substitution for it. Ellen's writing desk, the instrument of her self-expression, assumes the mother's role as moral detective, indicting her should she waver in her spiritual struggle" (108).<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Quay notes that "Mrs. Montgomery's words describe the type of home that Ellen must remember in and through her objects" and that "her possessions remind Ellen of the values that define the home she is about to lose and the standards according to which recuperation of that home must stand" (45). The writing desk and sewing box are meant to serve as substitutes for and reminders of Ellen's mother in her absence. Their presence potentially allow Ellen to recreate her mother's influence in her absence, to make a home away from home. The values that they represent and the activities they enable—including industry, tidiness, godliness, and filial devotions—are the values and activities of middle-class Christian domesticity.

The wool is the only object purchased by Ellen alone because her mother is too ill to accompany her on that shopping trip. But the transaction of this purchase proves too much for Ellen, as the clerk who waits upon her is rude, and eventually abandons her at the counter: "Ellen stood a moment stock still, just where he had left her, struggling with her feelings of mortification; she could not endure to let them be seen. Her face was on fire; her head was dizzy. She could not stir at first, and in spite of her utmost efforts she *could* not command back one or two rebel tears that forced their way" (48). The store clerk's treatment of her signifies both the callousness of the commercial realm but also Ellen's inexperience, confirming that she needs protection from "the wide, wide world." Quay notes "In contrast to the earlier shopping trip, in which objects are sought in order to maintain interpersonal connections, this scene represents the way that commodity culture can leave individuals feeling isolated and alone. Here, objects are more important than people and the pursuit of them seems to drain even the most basic forms of civility from human interactions" (44-45). A kind old gentleman eventually comes to Ellen's aid and she succeeds in purchasing the merino she came for. But this gentleman tells Ellen (and the reader): "There are all sorts of people in this world, and a little one alone in a crowd is in danger of being trampled upon" (51). The gentleman's words emphasize the dangers of the public realm.

The potential perils of the public realm, in turn, reinforce the necessity of a safe and protective private domain, that is, a home where one is not "in danger of being trampled upon." His words of caution draw attention to Mrs. Montgomery's actions, indirectly suggesting that she has allowed Ellen to be "trampled upon." Her willingness to send Ellen on this task unaccompanied signifies something less than ideal about Mrs. Montgomery's mothering and, in turn, about her enactment of domesticity. Indeed, the Montgomery home serves as a cautionary example indicating that the protective realm of the home is critically vulnerable to outside forces. This potential shortcoming of the domestic realm is evident when Mrs. Montgomery tells Ellen: "But there is a home, Ellen, where changes do not come; and they that are once gathered there are parted no more for ever; and all tears are wiped from their eyes" (41). Heaven is a model home in part because it is economically stable. Mrs. Montgomery recognizes that her own home,

---

<sup>42</sup> See Barnes for more on letter writing and its etiquette. Barnes notes that there is a "relationship of writing to independence, improvement, and maternal influence" (108).

unlike heaven, is vulnerable to market forces that have precipitated the breakup of her family.

The demise of the Montgomery home due to economic vulnerability reveals that the Montgomery home is not a model home, but so too does the limited domestic practice that the female inhabitants perform within this home. The two main female characters in the Montgomery household, Mrs. Montgomery and Ellen, do not "work"—they do not perform any tasks to aid in the essential maintenance of the home. Instead, they have servants to perform the traditional tasks of housekeeping. Ironically, they are too rich to perform domestic tasks themselves, but too poor to keep their home sheltered from the buffeting of economic change.

Ellen's only "domestic" task is to make tea for her mother, a ritual which reflects the novel's middle-class sensibility: "To make her mother's tea was Ellen's regular business. She treated it as a very grave affair, and loved it as one of the pleasantest in the course of the day" (13). The act of making tea is described as a "business" here, which signals the novel's conflation of domesticity and consumerism. Warner describes in detail Ellen's ritual of making the tea and toasting and buttering the bread for her mother. She then writes: "All this Ellen did with the zeal that love gives, and though the same thing was to be gone over every night of the year, she was never wearied. It was a real pleasure; she had the greatest satisfaction in seeing that the little her mother could eat was prepared for her in the nicest possible manner; she knew her hands made it taste better; her mother often said so" (13). Ellen derives pleasure from this task because it gives her mother comfort. However, this domestic practice does not substantially contribute to the upkeep of the home. It is primarily a sign of leisure and luxury. Indeed, Tompkins characterizes the making of tea as "not a household task, but a religious ceremony" (169). The tea ritual signifies the middle-class sensibility that defines this home.

While Ellen loves making tea for her mother, this ritual nonetheless reinforces Mrs. Montgomery's infantilization. True, Ellen is being groomed to perform a task that reflects a middle-class sensibility and to imbibe a middle-class virtue, but she is also placed in the position of caregiver. Ellen prepares food for her mother and derives the "greatest satisfaction in seeing... the little her mother could eat." Ellen here resembles a mother caring for her child, a reversal of roles which, as I noted earlier in my discussion, signals that something is amiss in the Montgomery home.

The tea ritual, like the purchases made to prepare for Ellen's departure, suggest that, for Mrs. Montgomery, domesticity is not grounded in a utilitarian practice that maintains the home, but is more of a sensibility. Neither Ellen nor her mother is ever portrayed cleaning, making beds, or washing dishes. While Ellen prepares tea and toast, this hardly counts as cooking. Instead of teaching Ellen lessons about how to maintain the home, Mrs. Montgomery guides her daughter through words and purchases. The purchase of the Bible and the discussion about God and heaven reveal that Christian principles are privileged in this home. In the Montgomery home, our first example of domesticity in the novel, Ellen learns symbolic rituals but these rituals inadequately prepare her for the day when she will have her own home to care for.

When Ellen moves to Aunt Fortune's, she encounters a very different kind of home and practice of domesticity. Upon her arrival, she finds:

a good-sized, cheerful-looking kitchen. A fine fire was burning in the enormous fireplace; the white walls and ceiling were yellow in the light of the flame. No

candles were needed, and none were there. The supper table was set, and with its snow-white table-cloth and shining furniture, looked very comfortable indeed. (99)

However, appearances prove deceiving. While Aunt Fortune's home may "look very comfortable," it is not so for young Ellen. From their first encounter, Ellen receives no comfort from her Aunt. On her first night there, she falls asleep in tears as she reflects upon her Aunt's cold welcome: "She did not kiss me! she didn't say she was glad to see me!" (101).<sup>43</sup> Christian kindness is nowhere to be found in this new home; instead Ellen finds cold-heartedness, mean-spiritedness, and even violence when Aunt Fortune strikes her later on. Dobson notes the double meaning of Fortune's name—Miss Fortune as "misfortune" (229). Chantell observes that Fortune "stands as the novel's Anti-Mother" (146). Aunt Fortune's home may be immaculate, but it does not and cannot rejuvenate the soul. Her domesticity is grounded in pure functionality—there are no spiritual principles guiding her actions.

There are, accordingly, no concessions to material comfort in Fortune's home. When she inspects her room at Aunt Fortune's, Ellen finds just the bare necessities: "The room was good-sized, and perfectly neat and clean... But the floor was without the sign of a carpet, and the bare boards looked to Ellen very comfortless... The room was very bare of furniture too" (101-02). Quay notes that "As the critique inherent in the word 'comfortless' expresses, Ellen correlates the physical comfort, or refinement, of objects with the emotional comfort she defines as home" (46). Ellen is "not much pleased with the result of her survey [of the room]" (101), sensing that a house needs more than the "bare necessities," that it needs to be more than merely "perfectly neat and clean." Ellen's "coarse" blanket, for instance, is warm enough, but this comforter is not truly comforting. Quay remarks that "Absent from her aunt's possessions is the refinement that Ellen has learned marks meaningful objects" (46). The bareness of this room indicates the emotional barrenness of Fortune's household, where Ellen experiences neither a sense of comfort nor belonging.

The lack of comfort in Aunt Fortune's home is further illustrated when Ellen washes up before breakfast:

"Will you please, ma'am, to show me where can I wash myself."

"Yes," said Miss Fortune, suddenly standing erect, "you'll have to go down to the spout."

"The spout, ma'am," said Ellen,— "what's that?"

"You'll know it when you see it, I guess," answered her aunt, again stooping over her preparations. (104-105)

The "spout" is outside. Even though there is no comfort or convenience of indoor plumbing here, Fortune's home nonetheless has something valuable to offer. While it takes her a few moments to successfully wash "without a basin," we are told that "on the whole Ellen enjoyed her washing very much" (105). Ellen enjoys her washing partly because she is outdoors: "The morning air came playing about her; its cool breath was on her cheek with health in its touch. The early sun was shining on tree and meadow and hill; the long shadows stretched over the grass, and the very brown outhouses, looked

---

<sup>43</sup> For a fascinating discussion of the gesture of the kiss in the novel as an eroticized relation of power and submission see Jana L. Argersinger's article "Family Embraces: The Unholy Kiss and Authorial Relations in *The Wide, Wide World*," *American Literature* 74.2 (2002): 251-285.

bright. She thought it was the loveliest place she ever had seen" (105). Clearly Warner values nature, and at Fortune's house, Ellen is connected to nature in a way she never was when living in the city with her mother and father. The narrative suggests that country life is more authentic: "that sparkling trickling water was certainly the purest and sweetest she had ever tasted" (105). This moment reveals that the Montgomery home in the city has two weaknesses that Aunt Fortune's home does not: it is vulnerable to economic reversals, and it is disconnected from nature.<sup>44</sup>

Back inside this countryside residence, we learn that Ellen has no knowledge of the domestic practice of cooking. She watches with great interest as her Aunt makes the gravy for the fried pork chops, but misjudges the use of the pork fat, revealing inexperience in the kitchen:

Ellen...settled in her own mind that certainly this [the pork fat] would be thrown away, being fit for nothing but the pigs. But Miss Fortune did not think so, for she darted into some pantry close by, and returning with a cup of cream in her hand emptied it all into the pork fat. Then she ran into the pantry again for a little round tin box, with a cover full of holes, and shaking this gently over the pan, a fine white shower of flour fell upon the cream... The pan was then replaced on the fire and stirred; and to Ellen's astonishment the whole changed as if by magic, to a thick, stiff, white broth" (103).

It seems that Ellen has never been in a kitchen before. This scene reveals that Ellen has been removed from the basic tasks of household management, from domesticity as a utilitarian practice.

In addition to being unfamiliar with cooking, Ellen lacks knowledge of other aspects of domestic management. In another episode, when she accidentally falls into the mud and her white stockings are stained, her aunt dyes them a slate color to minimize the need for future washings. After dyeing the stockings and hanging them to dry, Fortune asks Ellen: "Well, how do you like that?" Ellen replies: "I don't like it at all." The conversation between the two continues:

"Well, *I* do. How many pair of white stockings would you like to drive into the mud and let me wash out every week?"

"*You* wash!" said Ellen in surprise; "I didn't think of *your* doing it."

"Who did you think *was* going to do it? There's nothing in this house but goes through my hand, I can tell you, and so must you. I suppose you've lived all your life among people that thought a great deal of wetting their little finger; but I'm not one of 'em, I guess you'll find." (113)

Ellen is so far removed from the actual practice of housekeeping that the question of *who* may perform these basic tasks has never before entered her mind. She is surprised to find that Aunt Fortune does the wash: "I didn't think of *your* doing it." Ellen has no experience of the mechanics of housework or household management, which again points to a deficiency in Mrs. Montgomery's domestic training of her daughter.

While Aunt Fortune is referred to as a "capital housekeeper" (22), her home nonetheless sustains an unrefined domesticity: "The noise of hissing and sputtering now became quite violent, and the smell of cooking, to Ellen's fancy, rather too strong to be pleasant" (103). And yet Warner's negative characterization of Fortune's domestic

---

<sup>44</sup> While Aunt Fortune's home is not 100% invulnerable to economic reversals, it is considerably sheltered from them because it is modeled on a producer-based economy.

practice is nuanced by her representation of the breakfast Fortune prepares, which tastes wonderful to Ellen: "She thought never was coffee so good as this country coffee; nor any thing so excellent as the brown bread and butter, both as sweet as bread and butter could be; neither was any cookery so entirely satisfactory as Miss Fortune's fried pork and potatoes" (106). While Aunt Fortune's domestic skills do have value, something is nevertheless amiss in Fortune's home: "Yet her tea-spoon was not silver; her knife could not boast of being either sharp or bright; and her fork was certainly made for any thing else in the world but comfort and convenience, being of only two prongs, and those so far apart that Ellen had no small difficulty to carry the potato safely from her plate to her mouth" (106). The ugly and awkward utensils ultimately mark a class distinction. Richard Brodhead points out that "Aunt Fortune's household exemplifies the logic of the old-style household economy: Fortune is always busy, because this home is a place of work; her house is smelly and noisy, because this house is still a scene of production" (80). Brodhead argues that Fortune is too busy to care for or about Ellen since Fortune herself has to make many of the household necessities. While Fortune may be busy with her domestic tasks, I would argue that she also has no desire to care for Ellen. Fortune's lack of maternal feeling for Ellen signifies Warner's critique of Fortune's style of domesticity.

In contrast to Ellen's mother, Aunt Fortune performs all the domestic tasks in her home herself. She draws the line, however, at making Ellen's bed. Certainly Fortune expects Ellen to be self-sufficient but doing such work is also the sign of a servant, and her household does not support such class distinctions or aristocratic pretensions. At the end of her first full day at Fortune's house, Ellen is taken aback to find her bed unmade. The narrative's representation of Ellen's reaction to her unmade bed indicates not only that she has never had to do any housework in the past, but also that she does not have any interest in it in the present: "It was rather a disagreeable surprise to find her bed still unmade; and she did not at all like the notion that the making of it in future must depend entirely upon herself" (113). Ellen has no desire to perform the simple task of making her bed, or of any other domestic chore for that matter. Her aversion suggests an upbringing that relied heavily upon servants rather than independence and hard work. O'Connell attempts to salvage her character by claiming that "Ellen is not usually shown doing hard manual labor, but rather the affective, nurturing work most commonly associated with domesticity" (28). However, I contend that the novel implies that it is necessary for women to perform at least some of the more strenuous kinds of domestic work. Ellen's aversion to making her bed is cause for alarm regarding the "invalid" domesticity modeled for her in the Montgomery home. Ellen's portrayal at this moment in the novel suggests that the absence of physical domestic labor produces girls who expect other people to take care of them; it does not produce self-sufficiency but self-centeredness, laziness, and helplessness. These characteristics signal the absence of "true" domestic character or domestic virtue. The physical practice of domesticity is important, the novel thus suggests, because it generates the virtue of domesticity; it develops women who enact domesticity both as a practice and as an ideology.

Ellen experiences a conflict between education and domestic chores in Aunt Fortune's home, a conflict which indicates the inadequate domestic education she received in her mother's home. Fortune allows Ellen to do as she pleases the first week she is there. Ellen assumes she will go to school after this week, but Fortune puts her to

work instead: "Ellen's life soon became a pretty busy one. She did not like this at all; it was a kind of work she had no love for..." (141). Not only does Ellen not enjoy doing these domestic chores, she fails to see any value in doing them. When she is performing the tasks of domesticity, she feels that she is "learning nothing": "One concern, however, lay upon poor Ellen's mind with pressing weight,—her neglected studies and wasted time; for no better than wasted she counted it. 'What shall I do?' she said to herself, after several of these busy days had passed; 'I am doing nothing—I am learning nothing—I shall forget all I have learnt, directly'" (141). Ellen does not value what she learns about the practice of domesticity at Fortune's farm because the chores she performs represent an agrarian, do-it-yourself model of domesticity rather than a later nineteenth-century, middle-class, consumer-based domesticity, a domestic regime in which butter is purchased instead of made. Aunt Fortune herself notes a conflict between education and domestic activity, though she values the latter over the former.<sup>45</sup> Ashworth comments that "Fortune deems reading and studying a frivolous activity in her farming household, and she will not indulge Ellen's predilection for it" (151). For Fortune, education impedes a woman's training and serves no real purpose: "[I]t doesn't do for women to be bookworms... That's the way your mother was brought up I suppose... If she had been trained to use her hands and do something useful instead of thinking herself above it, maybe she wouldn't have had to go to sea for her health" (140). Ellen and Fortune have different views of what counts as "true education": book-learning or domestic training. Aunt Fortune and Ellen's differing views reflect arguments about female education in general as well as the tension between a production-based domesticity and a consumer-based domesticity.

Housework is not the only thing to which Ellen has an aversion at her aunt's house; she also has difficulty being obedient to her aunt. Dobson contends that the lesson Ellen learns "that will allow her to survive in her given cultural milieu [is] the lesson of unquestioning obedience" (229-30). While Ellen is obedient to her mother, she has a hard time practicing "unquestioning obedience" to Aunt Fortune. Ellen's disobedience is not entirely unfounded. Fortune's home becomes a spiritual testing ground for Ellen. Dobson points out that "Fortune scolds Ellen incessantly, denies her any respect or affection, laughs at her aspirations, refuses to send her to school, and steal her mother's letters. Ellen comes to the point where she understandably hates 'the very look of [Fortune's] bonnet hanging on the wall'" (231). Ellen's acts of rebellion both humanize her and also register for the reader that something is faulty with her aunt's home, since Ellen is submissive to all her other guardians. Fortune's home may be spotless but it lacks spiritual principles.

Aunt Fortune's home lacks affection and allows some violence, but these shortcomings can ultimately be traced to the absence of Christianity from her home, not simply to Fortune's republican style of domesticity. The Christian context represented by Mrs. Montgomery's home in the opening of the novel is not visible in Fortune's home. There is never any mention of God or Jesus here. Aunt Fortune does not read from the Bible; it is not even clear whether she owns one. Finally, she does not attend church on Sundays, but instead does household chores. This absence of Christian domesticity from

---

<sup>45</sup> In the next chapter, I discuss Catherine Beecher's nineteenth-century domestic manuals. Beecher connects education and domestic activity. In fact, she sees one of the main purposes of female education is to teach women proper domestic practice.

Fortune's home is symbolized by her dyeing of Ellen's white stockings, a practical solution to a housekeeping problem that nonetheless leaves Ellen feeling emotionally bereft. The darkening of her stockings, one might venture, reflects her experience of the absence of love, an aspect of Christian domesticity, at Aunt Fortune's. What was once "white" at her mother's home has now become gray at her aunt's house. But Ellen does not allow all of her white clothes to be dyed; she hides a few articles of clothing in her trunk. These hidden white clothes symbolize Ellen's hope for redemption from this loveless home.

That hope is fulfilled in the character of Alice Humphreys. When Ellen meets Alice Humphreys, both she and the reader are reminded of the Christian values emphasized at the opening of the novel. After Fortune opens a letter to Ellen from her mother, Ellen leaves the house, goes for a walk, and ends up weeping. Alice finds her outside in this condition.<sup>46</sup> She extends kindness to Ellen, offering help. Our heroine responds, "Nobody in this world can help me." Alice replies "Then there's one in heaven that can...Nothing is too bad for him to mend. Have you asked *his* help, Ellen?" (150). Ellen has completely forgotten about the Christian principles her mother taught her. After our protagonist goes on to tell her new friend of her troubles, Alice asks "Then you have neglected your Bible and prayer for some time past?" (151). Ellen responds "Yes." At Alice's suggestion, together they pray. Alice does not merely speak of Christian precepts, but moves Ellen to put these principles into action. Alice has Ellen enact her Christianity in the form of prayer; she has Ellen *live* the Christian life, rather than merely read about it (as Ellen did with her mother). With Alice's support, Christianity is no longer an abstraction for Ellen but becomes concrete. Just as Aunt Fortune physically performs household labor, Alice physically performs Christian worship. Both also practice in nature, bringing domesticity beyond the confines of the house.<sup>47</sup> Ellen's mother's domesticity, by contrast, is flawed because it is passive and bound by the home. Her practice of domesticity privileges mind over body; reading over doing; inside over outside.

Alice prays with Ellen, suggesting that Christianity is a communal endeavor as well as an individual one. After she leaves Alice, Ellen unearths her Bible and reads it for the first time since her arrival to Aunt Fortune's. Nancy Schnog asserts that there is a "blurring of the edges between religious rhetoric and 'female' rhetoric...building an association between divinity and womanhood," and argues that "to invoke womanhood in this novel is essentially identical to invoking religion and vice-versa" (19). As a surrogate mother, Alice reveals how a link to God is a link to the mother, which confirms Schnog's claim that "[i]n Ellen's mind, religion recalls motherhood, while motherhood recalls faith" (22).

This first encounter between Alice and Ellen also confirms the absence of Christianity from Aunt Fortune's home. When Alice asks Ellen which church she attends, Ellen replies:

---

<sup>46</sup> Chantell asserts that "though Alice is without a doubt a paragon of domesticity, she is associated with the outdoors as well as with the intimate quarters of the parlor. Together, Alice and Ellen range about the country side, climbing a mountain together to visit old Mrs. Vawse and descending in a snowstorm" (145).

<sup>47</sup> Chantell states, "Tough critics may continue to speak, like Catherine O'Connell, for instance, of the novel's 'absolute immersion in the female sphere of domesticity,' [but] any drawing of that sphere's boundaries must recognize that domesticity travels" (145).

"To church, ma'am? — I don't go anywhere."

"Doesn't your aunt go to church?"

"She hasn't since I have been here."

"What do you do with yourself on Sunday?"

"Nothing, ma'am; I don't know what to do with myself all day long." (154)

Until now, the reader has only speculated that something is awry in Fortune's home. This conversation confirms the absence of Christian principles and practice in Fortune Emerson's home. We are left asking what is the value in being a "capital housekeeper" if there is no spiritual doctrine governing the home.

Ellen spends the next Sunday at Alice's home. Alice's household is in perfect order, like Fortune's is, but it reflects a middle-class sensibility missing from Fortune's house. In Alice's home, there is considerably more than the "bare necessities" found in Fortune's home. Here, we find comforts: "chintz covers" for a winter sofa, "a cabinet of curiosities" filled with Alice's "dried flowers, [her] minerals, and a very odd collection of curious things of all sorts that [she] is constantly picking up," carpet in the bedroom with "ample curtains of white dimity," a "toilet-table...covered with snow-white muslin," an "easy chair," a "flower-stand," and her "greatest treasure—[her] precious books" (163-164). Quay comments that the "Humphreys' home is modest yet comfortable; the objects in it do not overwhelm the family but create an environment in which people and relationships can flourish...It is characterized by a balance of physical and emotional comfort, by the presence of refined things that are not only physically pleasing, but emotionally comforting as well" (48-49). It is worth noting in this context that Alice Humphreys, too, does not know what the "spout" is when Ellen tells her about it (174). Her ignorance of such primitive arrangements signifies her middle-class sensibility, a sensibility that is distinguished by the objects of comfort and convenience in her home.

Immediately upon Ellen's arrival, Alice invites Ellen to tour her home: "Come this way and let me show you some of my housekeeping." Finding "a large, well-appointed, and spotlessly neat kitchen [,] Ellen could not help exclaiming at its pleasantness" (167). Alice's notion of "housekeeping" is very different from Aunt Fortune's and from Mrs. Montgomery's. We learn that Alice does have a servant: "Beyond this [kitchen] is a lower kitchen where Margery does all her rough work" (167). But unlike Mrs. Montgomery, Alice does undertake some domestic tasks herself. She tells Margery: "if you will put the kettle on and see to the fire, I'll make some of my cakes for tea" (167). Although Margery offers to make the cakes, Alice prefers to do it. Campbell comments that "Alice takes this work seriously despite the presence of [a] servant in [her] home." Campbell continues, "Appropriating for her 'work' the space between the unseen depths of Margery's 'lower kitchen' and the class-bound sanctuary of the parlor, Alice establishes both domestic space and the persona of her domestic self as an orderly, inclusive, and community-enhancing common ground, a fitting place for Ellen to serve her apprenticeship" (122). While Alice prepares the cakes, she does allow Margery to put them in the oven. The working together of mistress and servant suggest a harmonious domestic partnership in the performance of household tasks.

Alice's use of the possessive, "my cakes," indicates that she has baked these many times before, even that she may have her own special recipe for the cakes. The possessive differentiates these teacakes from those made in other homes or made by others in her

home, highlighting her sense of expertise and ownership. Alice clearly is comfortable in the kitchen:

Alice now rolled up her sleeves above the elbows, and tying a large white apron before her, set about gathering the different things she wanted for her work... And then, first sifting some flour into the tray, Alice began to throw in the other things one after another and toss the whole about with a carelessness that looked as if all would go wrong, but with a confidence that seemed to say all was going right.

Ellen gazed in comical wonderment. (168)

Alice is able to combine "carelessness" and "confidence," reflecting a combination of ease and effort. She turns a domestic task into an occasion for frivolity and gaiety. There is a sense of ease in Alice's kitchen that is not found in Fortune's, a difference that resonates in the notably uneasy sound of Fortune cooking: "the noise of hissing and sputtering...became quite violent" (107). True, Alice is not performing back-breaking physical labor like Fortune does, but according to Campbell, "The point is less that actual work be performed than that the figuration of domesticity be understood, ritually enacted, and preserved. Domestic ritual functions on several levels, production among them; and what Alice really produces in the obviously emblematic display of her 'large, well-appointed, and spotlessly neat kitchen' is herself as a domestic woman" (122). I would add to Campbell's point that, for Warner, in order to be a proper "domestic woman," that woman must perform domestic tasks as well as practice Christianity as we saw Alice do when she first meets Ellen.

The tea Alice and Ellen share is reminiscent of the tea that Ellen and her mother share at the opening of the novel, but Alice is a more active participant in this domestic rite. Unlike Ellen's mother, Alice makes the cakes for tea. As Ellen watches Alice with "wonderment," Alice asks "Did you never see your mother do this?" "No, never," [Ellen] said. "Mamma never kept house, and I never saw any body do it" (168). While Mrs. Montgomery dearly loves Ellen, she has failed to teach Ellen the basics of cooking and other household tasks. Not only did Mrs. Montgomery "never" keep house, but she allowed Ellen to be ignorant of all such practice: she "never saw *anybody* do it" (emphasis added). The absence of domestic practice in the parental home leaves Ellen ill-prepared for her own future as a homemaker. Alice's home confirms for the reader that something is deficient in the Montgomery home as well as in Aunt Fortune's home.

Ellen truly finds a *home* with Alice, something she never found at Fortune's. Alice welcomes her in a way that Fortune never does, telling Ellen, "Take a good look at my room. I want you to know it and feel at home in it; for whenever you can run away from your aunt's this is your home" (163). Alice later tells Ellen that they are sisters:

"Ellen dear," said Alice at length, "we are both motherless, for the present at least,—both of us almost alone; I think God has brought us together to be a comfort to each other. We will be sisters while he permits us to be so. Don't call me Miss Alice any more. You shall be my little sister and I will be your elder sister, and my home shall be your home as well." (224)

Alice becomes a surrogate mother figure to Ellen, and her home becomes a second home for Ellen, confirming that she never truly had a home at Aunt Fortune's.

Ellen proves willing to learn some housekeeping tasks once she has the right teacher. She resumes her education, both academic and domestic, under Alice's tutelage. Alice's (and Warner's) primary lessons revolve around Christianity. Through a series of

questions posed by Ellen and answers provided by Alice, the reader learns about Christianity and Christian values: how to live a Christian life, how to move from gray back to white. Through these questions, Warner removes the uncertainty of salvation and replaces it with an assurance of salvation. Ellen asks:

"But how shall I be sure, dear Alice, that *my* name is written there [in the Book of Life]? and I can't be happy if I am not sure."

"My dear child," said Alice tenderly... "if you love Jesus Christ you may *know* you are his child, and none shall pluck you out of his hand." (242)

In this home, Ellen feels secure enough to express her doubts and fears, which enables Alice to bring Ellen back to the fold. Warner uses a child's voice to articulate questions about God that the reader may have, and through Alice Humphreys, she provides the answers, with the hope that the reader will also return to the fold. Kim notes that Warner "distinguished between a Christian culture and actual Christianity. Instead of simply satisfying her audience, even an audience with moral tastes and habits, she wanted to challenge, convert, and instruct them in true religion" (804). For Warner, there is one true way of being a Christian, just as there was one true way of practicing domesticity.

For Warner, there is also a direct connection between the ideology of domesticity and the promise of Christian salvation. Kim states "Warner focuses on quotidian life in order to bring home the possibilities of religious faith: to show her audience how average people could be devout Christians and how their mundane actions, however petty or small, could have spiritual consequences" (791). Kim also maintains that Warner's "avoidance of church scenes followed her ethic of moving Christianity out of the church and into daily life" (805). Warner moves Christianity from the church to the home. Isabelle White states that Warner's book "promoted an ideology that combines domesticity and evangelical Christianity" (31). I would go even further to say that, for Warner, domesticity has no value unless it is combined with Christianity. She uses household scenes and home-making practices to take "God out of the cathedrals of patriarchy and into the intimacy of heart and home" (Hovet 6). Tompkins notes that "Not only happiness, but salvation itself is seen to depend upon the performance of homely tasks... By investing the slightest acts with moral significance, the religion of domesticity makes the destinies of the human race hang upon domestic routines" (171). Thus, Warner's faith influences how she portrays and values domesticity. Aunt Fortune's cold practice provides an ordered house, but not a home of warmth and love; and while Mrs. Montgomery's home contains affection, it leaves Ellen ignorant of domestic skills. Only Alice's home, which combines the practice of domesticity with Christian values, properly prepares Ellen for her future role as mother and homemaker.<sup>48</sup>

Warner leaves the reader with the vision of Ellen following Alice's example. Upon Alice's death, Ellen not only takes on the domestic duties she once refused to do, but she also takes over Alice's duties. Campbell states: "Assuming the household tasks

---

<sup>48</sup> For Tompkins, Mrs. Vawse's home presents "an ideal of fulfillment toward which the readers of sentimental fiction could strive. It is full of material pleasures—cleanliness, attractive surroundings, warmth and good food...and it offers spiritual and emotional nourishment as well" (168). But Mrs. Vawse is all alone—her husband, children, and former mistress are all dead. And although Mrs. Vawse says she is "never alone" because of her faith, I would argue against Mrs. Vawse as the ideal model for Ellen. Mrs. Vawse is at the winter of her life and Ellen is about to enter the springtime of hers. Mrs. Vawse has no need for human connection having lived a fulfilling life, but Ellen's future depends on the connections she makes and the domesticity she practices as a young wife and mother.

that [she] had so disliked demonstrates... Ellen's selflessness, [her] submission to a womanly role that [she] had earlier refused to assume" (123). However, I would argue that Ellen's earlier refusal was not a refusal of her womanly role but a form of rebellion against her aunt and particularly against her aunt's misunderstanding of the value of domestic activities. In the end, domesticity no longer is something that Ellen fights against but, as properly practiced, it gives meaning to her life. Campbell remarks that "Ellen find[s] refuge in domesticity" (123). Under Alice's tutelage, Ellen learns the proper practice of domesticity and her own proper domestic role. At the end of the novel, Ellen is due to become a Humphreys herself, with the promise of marriage to Alice's brother John. In the unpublished final chapter, Ellen heads her own household while employing a housekeeper, just as Alice did.<sup>49</sup>

The contrasting homes in the novel, and the female characters who maintain them differently, illustrate that domesticity took multiple forms in the nineteenth century. Susan Warner wanted her audience to know that domesticity as a practice alone was not enough to transform the home into a restorative haven. The practice of domesticity is an empty signifier if it is not grounded in a middle-class Christian home. Fortune's domesticity falls short without a foundation of Christian charity to support it. Her production-based domesticity is opposed to a consumer-based middle class version, in which not only class but religion also determines the true value of domesticity. Alice Humphreys becomes the appropriate model both for Ellen and the reader. She combines Aunt Fortune's adept housekeeping skills with Mrs. Montgomery's Christian principles and middle-class values. Through the example of Alice, Susan Warner shows her readers that domesticity must be skillfully practiced within a Christian middle-class context in order to transform a house into a home.

---

<sup>49</sup> The original publisher dropped this concluding chapter. In 1987, the Feminist Press restored it when they published a complete edition of Warner's novel.

### Chapter Three

#### Domesticity, Consumerism, and Restoring the Nation: A Look at Catherine Beecher's Domestic Manuals

#### INTRODUCTION

The widespread popularity of housekeeping manuals during the nineteenth century might suggest that the practice of housekeeping was the sole definition of domesticity circulating at this time. Catherine Beecher's manual, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), in particular, was the "first American volume to pull all the disparate domestic employments together and to describe their function in the American environment" (Sklar 151-2).<sup>50</sup> According to Lora Romero, Beecher's 1841 manual was "probably the single most influential statement of domesticity" (23). Despite her conservative views on women and the ballot, Beecher's 1841 text "made larger claims for American women than had ever been publicly made before with very few exceptions" (Matthews 46). Moreover, Beecher uses the practice of maintaining one's home to make larger assertions about domesticity itself.

*The American Woman's Home* (1869) was an enlarged and revised version of the 1841 *Treatise*, written by Beecher along with her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe.<sup>51</sup> Sklar views *The American Woman's Home* as "contain[ing] little new besides Harriet's elaborate designs ranging from shoe bags to entryways and Catherine's increasing support of a female-headed household" (263). Sklar does note that the revisions included some new illustrations of modern improvements, plus "Harriet's four new utilitarian chapters on decorating and gardening" (263-4). While most of the 1869 text was drawn from Catherine Beecher's earlier *Treatise*, keeping the how-to sections from the earlier manual fully intact, the latter version adds several chapters which give the 1869 manual a Christian framework absent from the first version. I contend that this emphasis on Christianity assigns a larger mission to the practice of housekeeping.

By the time *The American Woman's Home* was published, domesticity had been "raised from a millennial experiment to an accepted model of social organization" (Sklar 265). In addition to maintaining that "American democracy rose or fell on the effects of its female members" (Matthews 46), Beecher gave new meaning to the terms "housekeeper" and "homemaker." While Beecher's work still reinforced traditional gender roles, it nonetheless altered, elevated, and romanticized women's domestic status. This chapter examines Beecher's manuals with the aim of investigating their treatment of the relationship between practice and virtue, scrutinizing the implications of a "how-to" manual on domesticity, and exploring the relationship between consumerism and domesticity. By looking in particular at the revisions that distinguish *A Treatise on*

---

<sup>50</sup> Lydia Maria Child's *The American Frugal Housewife* (1832) was its chief competitor for many years. Child's text, a much smaller and somewhat cheaper text, was a compendium of general hints for economical housekeeping and cooking. Three-fourths of it consisted of receipts (Sklar 310 n35). It was not nearly as extensive or comprehensive as Beecher's manual. Child's text was comprised mostly of general maxims whereas Beecher's purported to explain the science behind domestic practice.

<sup>51</sup> While Stowe was a contributing author, Catherine Beecher was the lead author. As such, I refer to Beecher as the primary author for both manuals.

*Domestic Economy* from the earlier *The American Woman's Home*, we see the significant changes domesticity goes through during the intervening years.

Beecher's manual both responded to and helped to create a burgeoning public appetite for information on domestic practice. Due to increased geographic mobility in the early nineteenth century, the traditional circuit for domestic knowledge and practice was disrupted, contributing to a perceived lack of adequate information about how a woman should fulfill her domestic responsibilities. According to Sklar:

Many cultural indicators point[ed] to the heightened concern over the quality of domestic life in the 1840s—a concern that grew more emphatic when increasing geographic mobility removed many families from traditional sources of domestic knowledge. Just when Americans began to expect more from their domestic lives than ever before, the ability of the average American woman to meet this expectation diminished as she moved away from communal and familial ties that might have fortified her skills. (152)

Used in homes and schools, Beecher's manual filled the void left by the disruption caused by geographic mobility. Charlotte Beister notes that "[w]hen it was evident that the home economics course which [Beecher] envisioned could not become a reality until textbooks were available, Catherine Beecher prepared *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*" (90). As such, Beecher became the founder of the home economics movement, advocating that home economics be taught in schools because women were not necessarily learning these skills at home.

For Beecher, "homemaking was woman's true profession" (Biester 88), and the making of home was a very precise endeavor and one with political implications. Not only did Beecher create a new branch of study with the home economics movement, but with her manuals she also renovated the domestic space and its meaning. In addition to elevating women's work, Beecher's *Treatise* mainstreamed, standardized, and regulated the domestic environment: "Here for the first time was a text that standardized American domestic practices—prescribing one system that integrated psychological, physiological, economic, religious, social, and political factors, and in addition demonstrating how the specifics of the system should work" (Sklar 152). Sklar notes that "Catherine Beecher was among the first to engage in the contradictory task of both nationalizing and personalizing the American domestic environment" and that the "most important characteristic of this new domestic space was its ability to integrate personal and national goals" (xii). Beecher's regulation of domestic practices was an attempt to create a uniquely American style of domesticity.

The *Treatise* was reprinted nearly every year from 1841 to 1856, was "sold nationwide, was promoted through the network of teachers Beecher had trained, went through fifteen editions between 1841 and 1856, and established [her] as the nation's foremost authority on household practice" (Tonkovich, Introduction xiii). As a result, she became the "national authority on the psychological state and the physical well-being of the American home" (Sklar 151). Beecher's manual was both detailed and wide-ranging in its coverage of topics. Sklar notes that Beecher's *Treatise* "explained every aspect of domestic life from the building of a house to the setting of a table" (151). Beecher made sure there was no doubt about what the American home contained, or about how to care for the home and for the individuals living in it. Catherine Beecher was considered the "heroine who had simplified and made understandable the mysterious arts of household

maintenance, child rearing, gardening, cooking, cleaning, doctoring, and the dozen other responsibilities middle class women assumed to keep their children and husbands alive and well" (Sklar 152). While most people, then and now, might assume household management to be a self-evident practice, for Beecher it was indeed a "mysterious art" that needed to be practiced in a particular way as there were political, national and spiritual implications of that practice.

#### REVISING TOWARDS A NATIONAL PROJECT

By examining some of the revisions of the 1841 text that appear in the 1869 manual, we can see the evolving meaning of domesticity in the intervening years and the development of domesticity's larger mission. The original title suggests an emphasis on practice to be used locally, in the home and school, whereas the revised title suggests domesticity has national significance. The full title of the 1841 text is *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*. This title is cold, distant, and almost sterile. The word "treatise" signifies a formal, specialized, scientific register to an intimate and private subject matter. The word "economy" adds a sense of management, organization, and efficiency. The formality and distance with which this title is inflected give the practice of domesticity an air of seriousness and matter of factness. The subject of this text is not just how to clean one's house but a call for the standardization and regulation of the home, with a scientific emphasis underscoring proper practice. The need for a text that informs women about how to maintain their homes suggests that the home is vulnerable, subject to contamination. This manual will fortify the home.

Importantly, the emphasis of this title is on the practice and science of "domestic economy" meant for "young ladies." Beecher's original manual was not simply about caring for the home but about showing that the work of homemaking was a science. For Beecher, the practice of domesticity was more than just housekeeping—it was a branch of study that needed to be taught in schools.<sup>52</sup> According to Biester, Beecher "considered the subject to be a science and argued that it be included in the curriculum as a science on an equal basis with mathematics, natural science, and philosophy, rather than a vocational course" (89). For Beecher this subject was just as important as all the other subjects taught in schools.

While the 1869 text, *The American Woman's Home* retains the bulk of the information found in the 1841 text, its scope becomes more explicitly ideological and political. The shift from "domestic economy" to "home" in the title suggests an intimacy absent from the earlier version and reveals an emphasis on relationships that are fostered in this domestic space. *The American Woman's Home* solidifies the influential role women play in American society—it is not the American "Man's" Home. The title's focus, moreover, now shifts from the practice to the person. This text also suggests that practice alone cannot accomplish the ideological (and, for Beecher, political goal) of domesticity—women must possess and exhibit domestic virtue. Female virtue becomes just as important, if not more so, than what women practice. Since these domestic manuals focus on the routines and practices of housekeeping, it may seem that Beecher is solely emphasizing practice. While proper practice is important, the woman behind that

---

<sup>52</sup> Later in the chapter I discuss the significance of the fact that domesticity needs to be "taught."

practice is essential, an idea encapsulated by the shift of the focus in the revised title from practice to the practitioner.

The revised title also signals a more explicit feminist and nationalistic stance: "American" stresses a national register; "Woman" spotlights women and underscores their importance; and "Home" distinguishes the significance of the domestic space. The title's emphasis on "American" highlights the national scope of this domestic project and the desire to create an American identity. This shift from a technical register as expressed by "domestic economy" to a more intimate register of "home" signals the increasing status of the home. Indeed, the "domestic" has both a private register (i.e. the home) and a public one (i.e. the country), which this text reveals to be intertwined. The change in the title thus also reflects the new more prominent role of women within the household and society.

*The American Woman's Home* reflects traditional nineteenth-century notions of domestic ideology in which the home is celebrated as a spiritual refuge, and the woman's mission of home care and childcare is marked as sacred. *The American Woman's Home* reveres women by equating the domestic with the sacred and spiritual: "It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman's true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men" (23). Beecher aspires to "transform domesticity into a profession, similar to other professions such as 'law, medicine, or divinity.'" To do so, [she] argued, household procedures must be made rational; household practice must be based on scientific principles" (Tonkovich, Introduction xi). As such, the 1869 text combines the rational and the spiritual. Women's "true profession" is to be desired and respected the same as "most honored professions of men." Her profession is not only equal to men's professions, but gets elevated as she is the "chief minister" (*The American Woman's Home* 19). The use of the word "minister" clearly positions women as the head of the domestic space and denotes the spiritual importance of their work. Applying the label of "minister," which is a clearly male-dominated profession, to women is a rhetorical move that holds political significance. It implies that women are just as important as men regarding the future of the country.

The emphasis on the political and national significance of women's domestic role is evident in the dedication to the 1869 version of the manual, which reads as follows:

To the women of America, in whose hands rest the real destinies of the republic, as moulded by the early training and preserved amid the maturer influences of home, this volume is affectionately inscribed.<sup>53</sup>

Compare the dedication to the original version of the manual in 1841:

To American Mothers, whose intelligence and virtues have inspired admiration and respect, whose experience has furnished many valuable suggestions, in this work, whose approbation will be highly valued, and whose influence, in promoting the object aimed at, is respectfully solicited, this work is dedicated, by their friend and countrywoman, The Author.

The 1841 dedication suggests collaboration between the author and the reader as indicated by the phrases "[women] whose experience has furnished many valuable

---

<sup>53</sup> Both dedications appear on the page immediately following the title pages. There are no page numbers on these pages.

suggestions, in this work" and "whose approbation will be highly valued." This dedication also suggests a level of familiarity as the author refers to herself as "their friend." But this dedication does not have the sense of purpose and urgency that is reflected in the 1869 dedication. The earlier dedication provides a vague sense of the purpose of the book: "whose influence, in promoting the object aimed at, is respectfully solicited." But the "object aimed at" is never explicitly revealed.

Whereas the 1841 edition is dedicated to "American mothers," *The American Woman's Home* is dedicated to "the women of America." *The American Woman's Home* expands the scope of the audience for whom this book is intended—this manual is now for all women, not just mothers. This expansion partly reflects recognition of the work that all women do, but it also suggests that not all women become mothers, either by choice or circumstance. Indeed, Catherine Beecher herself was never a mother. The change in addressed audience is closely related to the subsequent phrase, "in whose hands rest the *real* destinies of the republic" (emphasis added), which highlights a sense of urgency. Astonishingly, the real destiny of the republic rests in the hands of the American woman. How? Through her proper domestic practice and household management. This dedication also calls for "early training" and suggests that women are "moulded." These two points suggest that domesticity is not necessarily innate but requires an education, a key point this chapter later explores. Finally the "maturer influences of home" preserve the training and molding that women undergo. All women, young and old, have an important role and duty to fulfill. The fact that women must receive "training" and be properly "moulded" for this task points to the necessity of Beecher's domestic manuals.

#### ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY

In addition to its proto-feminist and nationalist imperatives, the later version of the manual sustains a Christian framework not present in the original. The explicit Christian underpinning of *The American Woman's Home* suggests that good housekeeping practice alone cannot create a home that is a safe and restorative haven. A Christian foundation is necessary for the ideology of domesticity to be fulfilled. Accordingly, the first two chapters of *The American Woman's Home*, following Catherine Beecher's introduction, are "The Christian Family" and "A Christian Home." These chapters are replacements for the original first two chapters of the 1841 text: "Peculiar Responsibilities of American Women" and "Difficulties Peculiar to American Women." The revision signals Beecher's move away from American women's plight to their duty. Tellingly, the word "Christian" does not appear in any of the chapter titles of the 1841 version. By contrast, not only does *The American Woman's Home* begin with a Christian emphasis, it also ends with one as the last chapter is titled "The Christian Neighborhood." While the subtitle of *The American Woman's Home* includes *Principles of Domestic Science*, Beecher clearly structures the domestic space as a location of spiritual rejuvenation. The rest of the subtitle, *Being A Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Healthful Beautiful and Christian Homes*, emphasizes the revised manual's mission to be the creation of "Christian homes."

The shift from "domestic economy" in the subtitle of the 1841 text to "Christian homes" in the subtitle of the 1869 manual occurs upon the heels of the recent national crisis of the Civil War. This change in emphasis reflects an effort to re-construct the home, the domestic space, as a site of healing for the individual, the family, and the nation. Tonkovich notes that "[f]or the Beechers, domestic spaces and domestic places

are sites in which national identity can be planted and nurtured, where domestic acts and selfless daily habits can heal the wounds afflicting families divided by more public conflicts" (Introduction xxiii). *The American Woman's Home's* inscription of Christian values attempts to reunite a divided nation via what it terms the "family state": "The family state then, is the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister" (19). Traditional nineteenth-century notions of domesticity are reflected in this intertwining of the domestic and the spiritual, but in this postbellum text the domestic is elevated to the point of being equated with the "heavenly kingdom." The home becomes the venue for forgiveness, healing, and transformation. The domestic space can heal the divided soul of America, but only if that space is properly maintained. Beecher thus structures the American home as the place where the breach of the Civil War can be mended, beginning with the "Christian Family" and concluding with the "Christian Neighborhood."

However, for Beecher, not just any house would heal the nation, but only "a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy" (*The American Woman's Home* 23-24). In order for the home to heal and stabilize the war-torn nation, the house must look and be maintained in a specific way. According to Sklar, Beecher's manual and Andrew Jackson Downing's *Cottage Residences* were the two main texts that established the design upon which thousands of nineteenth-century houses were based (xi). Beecher's and Downing's texts established the foundational structure of houses that "embodied the spirit of what had become an American domestic orthodoxy" (Sklar xi) and that "a well-ordered self-sufficiency was the central tenet of that orthodoxy" (Sklar xi). Beecher advocated and promoted the standardization of the home. Both of her manuals contain diagrams and illustrations for the readers to duplicate so that there would be no variations in the "building of [this] glorious temple" (*Treatise* 32). The creation and proper maintenance of these temples were essential. Sklar notes that the ideal home was "the perfect vehicle for national unity because it was a universally experienced institution recognizing no economic, political, or regional boundaries" (158). Beecher insists that her manual will teach women how to create that ideal home.

As an early proponent of standardization, Beecher aims to create many Christian homes which together would form Christian neighborhoods and culminate in a Christian nation. The Christian framing device reminds nineteenth-century readers of Christian values such as forgiveness, mercy, and grace. Kristin Jacobson notes that *The American Woman's Home's* "invocation of Christian charity [is a] key element in the achievement of the American Dream" (106). If having a perfect home was the nineteenth-century's American Dream, then the perfection of that home had an explicitly spiritual register. *The American Woman's Home* "imbue[d] domestic tasks with a sense of urgency that is linked to Christian obligation" (Jacobson 107). Homemaking and morality are linked. Beecher imagines the home as a "domestic refuge, whether from the cutthroat competition of the world of business and politics or from the ravages of war" (Tonkovich, Introduction xvii). The domestic experience becomes the "focus around which a new and unified national identity could be built" (Sklar 158). *The American Woman's Home* is a political call for national healing, forgiveness, and reunification through proper maintenance of the domestic space. Beecher hoped "to transcend social divisions by emphasizing the universality and standardizing the contours of domestic values" (Sklar 158).

In addition to fighting and recovering from the Civil War, in the mid to late nineteenth century the nation was also expanding its borders westward and toward the south. Critics such as Amy Kaplan credit domesticity as having a role in that expansion. Kaplan notes that domesticity becomes the "engine of national expansion, the site from which the nation reaches beyond itself through the emanation of woman's moral influence" (586). Beecher's manuals were read by women across the nation including those on the frontier, as the book was "distributed throughout the western settlements by a network of teachers Beecher had trained" (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 92). The book's aim to "professionalize domestic practice on the frontier" (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 92) was successful, as many women attempted to emulate and recreate Beecher's guided practice. According to Kaplan, middle-class domesticity enabled "Euro-Americans [to] feel at home in terrain in which *they* [were] initially the foreigners" (591). The book's nationwide readership over several decades after its initial publication ensured that "the domestic practice it encoded [was] foundational to an American identity...[that] continued to be viable as the nation expanded westward" (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 92). Beecher uses the principles of domesticity to create a sense of community in order to rebuild the nation and to expand westward. Kaplan notes that Beecher's particular practice of domesticity unified women "of different social classes in a shared project of [national] construction while sustaining class hierarchy among women" (587). Even though people may have felt "rootless," Tonkovich suggests that if a woman who moved west "[could] not own the material signifiers of class, she [could] nevertheless maintain her status from her practice of the household economies articulated in [Beecher's manuals]" (*Domesticity* 94).

The household practices put forth in Beecher's texts involved more than just keeping one's home clean. The women enacting them were not only creating homes but spreading a particular ideology about home, nation, class and American identity. They reproduced ideology itself through their practices. This reproduction of ideology resulted from the "conveyed... sense of shared experience" that Beecher's manuals enabled (Sklar 152). Beecher's manuals on domestic practice thus bonded American women together, creating a community of united and unified households. The regularized domestic practices created a community of readers and practitioners through a shared experience, an experience that marked them as "American women." The women who practiced Beecher's brand of domesticity and who possessed the virtue of domesticity thereby enabled not only the expansion of the US, but also the global spread of Christian values, Beecher's idea of "the real destiny of the republic," to which she alludes in the dedication of *The American Woman's Home*.

While a standardized home is a means of rebuilding the nation post Civil War, it also becomes a means by which to expand the nation beyond its borders: "Women's work at home here performs two interdependent forms of national labor; it forges the bonds of internal unity while impelling the nation outward to encompass the globe" (Kaplan 587). Nationalism and domesticity are linked and both, according to Kaplan, have an imperialistic subtext: "If domesticity plays a key role in imagining the nation as home, then women, positioned at the center of the home, play a major role in defining the contours of the nation and its shifting borders with the foreign" (582).<sup>54</sup> The domestic

---

<sup>54</sup> See Kaplan's article "Manifest Domesticity" for more on the role of domesticity to domesticate the savage within the borders of the "civilized" as well as outside its borders, what she calls "imperial

thus contributes to the notion of the nation as a domestic space where "another part of the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home" (Kaplan 582). The home and the domestic have become synonymous with the nation when put in opposition of the foreign, alien, and other. Kaplan also states that "On the one hand, domesticity's 'habits of system and order' appear to anchor the home as a stable center in a fluctuating social world with expanding national borders; on the other, domesticity must be spatially and conceptually mobile to travel to the nation's far-flung borders" (591). How does domesticity accomplish these seemingly antithetical ends? Through practice, certainly, but primarily via the woman who embodies domestic virtue. Transforming domesticity into a virtue allows its reach to spread beyond both the individual home and the home nation.

While the revised version of Beecher's manual ends by expanding the realm of domesticity from the Christian home to the Christian neighborhood, the tacit implication is that the Christian neighborhood extends to not only the nation but also reaches out to the rest of the world. In *The American Woman's Home*, women's domestic activity is part of a larger spiritual and national mission that involves establishing the right relations between individuals through the practice of Christian charity and domestic virtue. It is also a means of extending Christian values beyond the nation: the "establishment of Christian neighborhoods settled primarily by women [is] a way of putting into practice domesticity's expansive potential to Christianize and Americanize immigrants in both Northeastern cities and 'all over the West and South, while along the Pacific Coast, China and Japan are sending their pagan millions to share our favored soil, climate, and government'" (Kaplan 589). Beecher's revised manual configures the virtue of domesticity as the element that makes the shift from "domestic economy" (1841) to "Christian homes" (1869) possible in that "[w]omen are not just keeping house and building a strong nation; they are doing Christ's work" (Jacobson 110). This shift has national and global implications. Local domestic practice is linked to national harmony and extends beyond to the world and "the heavenly kingdom." Properly keeping home will not only rebuild the Civil War torn nation; it is also a means by which Christian charity can reach beyond the national borders. For instance, Tonkovich notes that Christian missionary teachers frequently used Beecher's *Treatise* "as a primary component of the civilizing process" (*Domesticity* 101). Domesticity has become a means to spread Christianity across the globe.

## TRAINING

Interestingly, both versions of the manual construct the domestic space not as a naturalized space for a woman, but one in and for which she must be "trained." Beecher writes: "women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful" (*The American Woman's Home* 13). Beecher envisions housekeeping as a trade and a profession that women do not naturally know

---

domesticity." Her article looks at the relationship of domesticity to nationalism and imperialism. For Kaplan, domesticity is not necessarily an anchor but "more mobile and less stabilizing; it travels in contradictory circuits both to expand and contradict the boundaries of home and nation and to produce shifting conceptions of the foreign" (583).

how to perform—they need to be taught or "trained." If they are not trained properly, then "family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful." Proper training not only elevates the status of women's work but it also ensures that domesticity's spiritual significance is realized and that the "real destiny of the republic" is fulfilled. Beecher radically equates the private domestic realm with the masculine realm of the public, often deploying economic and religious rhetoric when referring to the domestic space: "These duties of women are as sacred and important as any ordained to man; and yet no such advantages for preparation have been accorded to her, nor is there any qualified body to certify the public that a woman is duly prepared to give proper instruction in her profession" (*The American Woman's Home* 14). The need for public certification of the "proper instruction" of domestic practices configures housekeeping not just as a private matter but as one that involves the public realm. Also, to label women's domestic efforts as a "profession" establishes home keeping as work that has both religious and economic registers. Woman's work is not only a calling; it is a career, a business, an employment, and a vocation as well.

In *The American Woman's Home*, the woman's "profession" is the "training of God's children for their eternal home, by guiding them to intelligence, virtue, and true happiness" (27). The true profession of women is not exclusively the daily routines and practices of housekeeping. It is keeping house so that the home becomes a space of spiritual training. The task of domesticity is not just to create good citizens for the republic, but to create morally right and spiritually fit citizens of Christ. The spiritual "training" that women do in the domestic realm is precisely why women need to be "duly prepared" and honored. Caring for the home is a spiritual act with eternal consequences.

Let us take a look at Beecher's section under "On Washing Dishes" for an illustration of her "instruction." One might think that washing dishes is a self-evident task but, in Beecher's view, "no item of domestic labor is so frequently done in a negligent manner, by domestics, as this" (*Treatise* 317). She gives specific directions regarding supplies:

Two or three towels, and three dish-cloths, should be used. Two large tin tubs, painted on the outside, should be provided; one for washing, and one for rinsing; also, a large old waiter, on which to drain the dishes. A soap-dish, with hard soap, and a fork, with which to use it, a slop-pail, and two pails for water, should also be furnished. Then, if there be danger of neglect, the following rules for washing dishes, legibly written, may be hung up by the sink, and it will aid in promoting the desired care and neatness. (*Treatise* 317)

A set of meticulous instructions on how to wash dishes follows. Beecher excludes nothing from her list of supplies, nor from her descriptions of how to perform the daily routine domestic practices of household management. The detailed directions for a seemingly simple task suggest that this task is not, in fact, so simple. Just as other professions require an apprenticeship, so too does the profession of housekeeping as the duties are detailed, technical, and precise. Yet, due to the dispersal of families, usual routes of apprenticeship for domesticity via the extended family have been eroded, thus the necessity of Beecher's manuals.

Beecher recognizes that the need for training does not indicate any moral lack in women, but rather reflects the changing demographics and familial structures of the time period which were mostly due to geographic mobility. Beecher provides supportive

instruction rather than judgment about the fact that women must be trained. The popularity of her manuals suggests that many women appreciated and welcomed her instruction. Sklar states that Beecher's text appealed to her audience more "like a good companion—knowledgeable but unpretentious, supportive without being intrusive, and above all, able to resolve self-doubts. Designed to reduce the anxiety of the reader, Catherine's discussions commiserated with her about the difficulties of her duties and supplied convincing resolutions of the ambiguities and contradictions involved in her everyday tasks" (155). Beecher's manuals attempt to alleviate any anxiety women may have regarding household management. Her text was not merely a "how-to" manual, but also a confidence builder. It showed women what to do, how to do it and often explained to them why they should do it.

However, I am not so sure her manuals solely relieved women's fears. Indeed, the new expectations associated with the domestic realm are themselves likely to have produced anxiety. The home now had meaning and significance attached to it that it previously did not have. Maintaining a proper domestic space at this moment had national and spiritual implications. True, Beecher's text helped women to properly manage their homes. The systemization and regulation of practice that characterizes Beecher's manuals are efforts to assist women to make order out of their domestic chaos by helping them to prioritize and adopt efficient work methods. Her "rules for health care, her receipts, her formulas for household management, her description of proper manners, her prescriptions for infant care" are all a means to "standardize and systematize American domestic practices" (Sklar 164). However, her manuals also clearly let women know when and how they could miss the mark. Now, they and others would know if they were doing something wrong because of the specificity and explicitness of Beecher's manual. Beecher's manual established a right way of practicing domesticity, a measure against which any woman might well be found wanting.

So what are the implications of a manual that properly instructs women on the correct practices of domesticity? Do the "how-to" sections mean that all women can wield the power of domesticity regardless of race or class? Or must a given woman possess an innate domestic quality, in addition to engaging in proper domestic practice, in order for the ideology of domesticity to be fulfilled?<sup>55</sup> If women need to be trained and taught, then it would seem that any woman could acquire these skills. Amy Kaplan contends that because it was "[n]o longer a leveling factor among classes with America, domesticity could be extended to those conceived of as foreign both within and beyond American national borders" (589). However, Beecher implicitly envisions a reader and practitioner who is both Anglo-Saxon and middle-class. Tonkovich clarifies that "this woman is not everywoman, but a literate, middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and economically self-sufficient woman" (*Domesticity* 93). While Beecher may have envisioned a particular type of woman, her manuals nonetheless offer training in, and the cultural benefits of, domesticity to potentially everyone, regardless of race, class, and gender.<sup>56</sup> Tonkovich states that "If a woman of lower caste can increase her status

---

<sup>55</sup> Consider the previous chapter in which Susan Warner's novel *The Wide Wide World* would answer yes, an innate quality is needed.

<sup>56</sup> Certainly, not everyone could read, or buy or even borrow, a book; and that kind of access is significantly influenced by both race and class. As such the democratic potential may be present in the Beecher's teachings, but this potential may not have been fulfilled in practice.

through a fortunately contracted marriage or through her own diligence, the conduct books assure her that if she has read them, she will know how to behave in a manner appropriate to her new economic status" (*Domesticity* 99). The implication is that money itself does not constitute an elevation in status; proper practice is also needed, and Beecher's manuals suggest that this can be learned. The power of domesticity now becomes available, at least potentially, to everyone.

## SERVANTS

In addition to preparing women to manage the domestic space through specific practices, both versions of Beecher's manual reveal that the nineteenth-century domestic space is also about relationships. Beecher "places the American home firmly within the political context of the nation, its economy not only reflecting but also determining the social and civic relations of the nation" (Ousley 132). In addition to the chapters on the formation and maintenance of the home, *The American Woman's Home* contains chapters titled "The Care of Infants," "Care of the Aged," "The Care of Servants," "Care of the Sick," "Care of the Homeless, the Helpless, and the Vicious." The original manual has basically the same chapters, but they are labeled slightly differently. These manuals are not only about women or the keeping of their house, but about how women "care" for others. The "Care of Servants" chapter clearly indicates that this manual is for a particular class of women who do not perform manual labor themselves, but who supervise servants. Tonkovich notes that the "reader's heaviest household work—laundry, cleaning, and cooking—would be performed by servants" (Introduction xix). Many of the servants were "foreign," either Irish immigrants or blacks. At the time of *Treatise's* publication (1841) slavery was being practiced in the country. While Beecher envisions a Northern household, it must be acknowledged that in slave holding states, the domestic servants were enslaved blacks. Even black servants in the North had to live under the shadow of the Fugitive Slave Act. These conditions continued until slavery ends in 1865. The publication dates of Beecher's manuals mark significant changes for black domestic servants from enslavement (1841) to freedom (1869). These servants, in particular, move from a condition of powerlessness as whites held absolute power (1841) to a state of freedom where there is more of a need to demonstrate power (1869).

The use of servants points to one of the many paradoxes of mid-nineteenth century domesticity. Middle-class women did not themselves perform many of the domestic practices that maintained their homes—their servants did. Even so, for the woman to properly manage her household and her servants, she must be educated in the scientific principles of domestic economy. While many of these households depended heavily upon the use of domestic servants, these servants also generated anxiety about the undomesticated status of the foreign. Kaplan argues that the "mother's empire is at risk of...contagion from the very subjects she must domesticate and civilize, her wilderness children and foreign servants, who ultimately infect both the home and the body of the mother" (591). However, this source of anxiety could also be conceived as a potential source of strength for both servant and mistress: "Throughout her *Treatise* Beecher turns the absence of good servants—at first cause of infirmity—into a remedy; their lack gives middle-class women the opportunity to perform regular domestic labor that will revive their health" (Kaplan 591). Beecher advocates "creating a work environment that will welcome a domestic and promise to instruct her in the matters of domestic economy" (Ousley 133). The act of supervising and properly training servants had potential to

revive middle-class white women, putting them in a position of power and authority as teacher and mistress.

The use of domestic help also substantiates the notion of the home as a microcosm of class relations occurring throughout the nation. Ousley states that "When women debated class relations in America, they often did so by examining how class worked within the home, which meant a particular examination of the relationship between housekeeper and the domestic servant" (133). However, also embedded in this relationship between housekeeper and domestic servant is a microcosm of race relations.<sup>57</sup> While the use of domestics gets characterized as a "relationship," the use of domestic help also represents the commodification of labor. Beecher conceptualizes working as a domestic laborer as a possible opportunity to achieve the American dream and rise above one's station. Tonkovich notes that "an ideology of American exceptionalism implicitly argues that domestic servitude in America is not a negative condition but a way that immigrants can begin to ascend in class respectability" (*Domesticity* 99). The proper training of domestics configures domestic service as "an apprenticeship that may lead to upward mobility" (Ousley 142). Domestics are not only trained in household practices, they are also trained in democratic, middle-class, Christian values so that when they have their own families, they will produce proper American citizens for the republic. Under this paradigm, both mistress and servant benefit.<sup>58</sup> The domestic represents the possibility of class mobility for both the servant and the mistress. Ousley notes that "Servants not only made the maintenance of the ornate home possible, but their presence also illustrated the new positions of the upwardly mobile" (136). Ousley suggests that the "treatment of domestics is part of a larger national economy and political ideology that announces itself as explicitly American, democratic and Christian" (142). According to Tonkovich and Ousely's reading, the woman who embodies the virtue of domesticity elevates not only her home but also all who inhabit it, including her servants. Both Tonkovich and Ousely envision a domestic servant who is a white immigrant. One might ask whether or not this potential for elevation is true for black domestic servants. I would argue that for Beecher in her revised manual domesticity certainly has the potential power to transform ex-slaves into "proper" citizens.<sup>59</sup> When Beecher writes about the "care of servants," she certainly envisions servants who are black or Irish immigrants.

Work also elevates the status of women and establishes order in *The American Woman's Home*: "To the minds of most children and servants, 'to be a lady,' is almost synonymous with 'to be waited on, and do no work.' It is the earnest desire of the authors of this volume to make plain the falsity of this growing popular feeling, and to show how

---

<sup>57</sup>It would be interesting to examine any changes in this relationship between white housekeeper and black domestic servant between 1841 and 1869 when blacks move from enslavement to freedom, as well as an examination of Northern and Southern households during these intervening years.

<sup>58</sup>This points back to how the notion of "training" frames the practice of domesticity and thus the ideology of domesticity as a democratic ideal. The practice is available for all to learn and so is the elevation in class as well as the benefits of the ideology of domesticity.

<sup>59</sup>The black domestic servant invokes a moment where we see a potential conflict between the promise and practice of Beecher's manuals. In theory, Beecher's manuals suggest mobility to all who properly practice domesticity regardless of class and race. However, what is potentially available may not be realized in the conditions of the real world. For instance, mobility for black domestics can only be truly realized during the latter manual when slavery has been abolished.

much happier and more efficient family life will become when it is strengthened, sustained, and adorned by family work" (22). Happiness stems from "family work" and "efficient family life" and "to be a lady" involves "work"—but "family work." In *The American Woman's Home*, life's meaning is determined through the spiritual, eternal effects of domesticity: "When, therefore, the wise woman seeks a home in which to exercise this ministry, she will aim to secure a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy, those cardinal requisites of domestic enjoyment and success" (23-4). Notice that it is the "wise" *woman* who "will aim to secure" the home. In her manual, Beecher continually places women in a position of authority and power.

### CONSUMERISM

As the "chief minister[s]" of the home, women now are also the primary purchasing agents of and for the family. Consumerism plays a vital role in the construction of correct domesticity. Along with "proper training" in domestic practices, women need to make the appropriate purchases. Proper home keeping extends women's power not only into the spiritual and political realms, but also into the economic and financial spheres. The increasing role of consumerism impacts the construction of domesticity and femininity. In *The American Woman's Home*, there is more of an emphasis on consumerism and its connection to domesticity than in the earlier version of Beecher's manual. This increased emphasis reflects the rise of consumerism in this period. In the second half of the nineteenth century, we see the consolidation of a commercial economy in which dry goods stores sold many products that women had previously produced; by the 1870s, department stores had appeared in America.<sup>60</sup> In order to maintain "proper" homes, women had to become proper consumers especially since they no longer produced at home items such as soap, butter, bread, etc.

There was also a shift in how consumer goods and luxury items were viewed. By the 1830s, "many Protestant authors acknowledged the 'civilizing' influence of luxury and tasteful surroundings in domestic life" (Merish 4). With the rise of a commercial economy and consumerism, we begin to see purchased goods being ascribed a meaning beyond their immediate use. Merish notes that there was a "new emphasis on the emotional value of consumer goods in antebellum America" (5). People increasingly expressed their role and status through the products they consumed. Merish observes that this emotional value was played out in domestic realistic fiction, but it is also found in Beecher's manuals. Tonkovich notes that "comfortable possessions became even more ubiquitous after the war ended, as retooled munitions factories in the victorious North spewed forth a plethora of consumer goods: worsted carpets, kitchen ranges, Franklin stoves, sewing machines, and seven-piece matched 'suites' of upholstered parlor furniture" (Introduction xii). These were items that Beecher advocated as vital elements within the "American woman's home." In the chapter on "Home Decoration" that was added in the revised version of the manual, we see an emphasis on having the "right"

---

<sup>60</sup> By the turn of the century department stores, the epitome of consumer culture, were in their heyday. They were places where shopping becomes a leisure activity for the middle class and as a result the desire for consumer goods that people may not need gets created. Consumerism describes a society in which people define their identities by acquiring and displaying material goods beyond what they need for subsistence. Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) is the classic contemporary account of this shift.

consumer goods in the home. This chapter focuses on "the important subject of *beauty* in reference to the decoration of houses" (*The American Woman's Home* 71).<sup>61</sup> This section insists that home decoration is "among the influences which make home happy and attractive, which give it a constant and wholesome power over the young, and contributes much to the education of the entire household in refinement, intellectual development, and moral sensibility" (*The American Woman's Home* 71).

The inside of the house is the heart of home and decorating it in a particular way was crucial. For instance, this chapter provides an inventory of items for decorating a parlor:

Wall-paper and border,.....	\$5 50
Thirty yards matting,.....	15 00
Centre-table and cloth,.....	5 00
Muslin for three windows,.....	6 75
Thirty yards green English chintz, at 25 cents, .....	7 50
Six chairs, at \$2 each,.....	<u>12 00</u>
Total, .....	\$61 75

(*The American Woman's Home* 75)

This list was meant to show women how to be economical. The chapter starts with the cautionary example of an inept housekeeper spending her \$80 budget on an inferior carpet. By contrast, the items on Beecher's inventory reveal the true acumen of the skilled homemaker: for the "price of the cheap ugly Brussels carpet, we have our whole room papered, carpeted, curtained, and furnished, and we have nearly twenty dollars remaining for pictures" (*The American Woman's Home* 75). Owning these specific consumer goods and knowing how to care for them was essential for the American home in the nineteenth century. Interestingly, most of the recommended items, except for the chairs, involve a certain amount of "do it yourself" home-making, suggesting that even though one needs to buy the "raw materials," the housewife's skill at tasks like sewing and wallpaper hanging was still necessary for the accomplishment of true domesticity.<sup>62</sup>

Tonkovich notes that as "the nation entered a postwar economic boom, *The American Woman's Home* offered its readers a guide for choosing among and integrating into domestic use a cornucopia of newly available consumer goods and public services" (Introduction xxi). In tandem with the economic boom, there were advances in civil engineering which "extended electricity, pure water, sewer pipes, and natural gas lines beyond the city" (Tonkovich, Introduction xxi). As a result, families fled the cities to build new homes in suburban developments. Even women who lived far away from cities could participate in consumerism by using mail order catalogs. There was also a plethora of new postwar commodities (such as meat, preserves, butter, and bread) that eliminated many arduous and time-consuming tasks for women. The sewing machine, for instance, was dubbed "The Queen of Inventions" by *Godey's Lady Book*. Beecher and Stowe saw the purchase of these commodities and consumer goods in general "not only as ways to lessen the labor of housekeeping, but also as means by [which] fragmented, mobile, dispersed and reconfigured families might be reunited" (Tonkovich, Introduction xxi).

---

<sup>61</sup> While it is a bit beyond the scope of this project, *The Decoration of Houses* is also the title of Edith Wharton's 1898 manual on interior decoration, a book that might well represent the culmination of a luxury-based, upper-class model of domesticity.

<sup>62</sup> Thanks to Katherine Snyder for making this observation.

Possessions and domestic practice created bonds and restored the family and the nation. According to Tonkovich, "their common possessions and their common household practices would cement their bonds and restore a deeply needed sense of national unity" (Introduction xxi). Beecher's emphasis on the standardization and regulation of domestic practice, a practice that highlighted specific possessions and consumer goods, created a sense of shared experience and commonality that reassured families of their identity as "Americans." The revised manual often emphasizes its role as an "American" text that reflects "American" domestic practices. These common possessions and practices created what Tonkovich calls "a grammar of solidarity" (Introduction xxii). They produced a sense of community. Common possessions, habits, household practices, and values enabled Americans to "transcend sectional differences and geographic separation" (Tonkovich, Introduction xxii). Not only does domesticity and proper domestic practice heal and serve as a "palliative for the disruptions in family life caused by the Civil War" (Tonkovich, Introduction xii), so too does consumerism. Consumerism not only ensured the spiritual state of the family, as well as rebuild the nation, but it also elevated the status of women. With Beecher's insistence on particular commodities, we see the emergence of consumerism's link to national identity, republican duty, and domesticity. By performing proper domestic practice and by buying the right consumer goods, Beecher's homemaker reveals that she possesses the virtue of domesticity.

Departing from the earlier rendition of the manual, *The American Woman's Home* contains "An Appeal to American Women by the Senior Author of This Volume." In this "appeal," Catherine Beecher offers a "brief outline of the past" and discloses her "attempt to introduce Domestic Economy as a science to be studied in schools for girls" (340). Even though her efforts were "crowded out by Political Economy and many other economies" (340), Beecher maintains the importance of "Domestic Economy" as a science and a trade. She also posits the significance of purchasing this particular manual: "Every woman who wishes to aid in this effort for the safety and elevation of our sex can do so by promoting the sale of this work, and its introduction as a text-book into schools" (343). Being a proper consumer and domestic woman means not simply making purchases for the home, but specifically purchasing Beecher's manuals and "promoting the sale of [these] work[s]."

## CONCLUSION

These cultural documents reveal the values, beliefs, and anxieties of the nineteenth century. Together, the two versions of Beecher's domestic manual highlight how domesticity shifted its focus from domestic practice alone to the virtue of the domesticity-practicing woman. The revision of the 1841 manual, moreover, reveals how the practice of housekeeping was understood to have significance beyond the home. Rather than a sphere separate from the public realm, the domestic sphere in Beecher's manual seemed "not so much removed from as central to the national life" (Sklar 159). Through her writings, Beecher "design[ed] an ideology that gave women a central place in national life. The home and family unit, [Beecher] believed could be redefined as the social unit that harmonized various national interest and synchronized different individual psyches" (Sklar xiii). The American family and home functioned as "mediator[s] between the expanding thrust of Jacksonian Democracy and the continuing social need for coherence and stability" (Sklar xiv). For Beecher, social coherence and stability could be

accomplished through standardized homes, proper domestic practice, and consumption of the right commodities which would create a virtuous home, one that operated on Christian principles and was guided by a woman who possessed domestic virtue. While Catherine Beecher believed that the ideology of domesticity "would answer the needs of American democracy" (Sklar 158), that answer would only come in the form of women who were properly trained.

The issue of how to create a virtuous home and how to link such a home to the larger society was of particular significance in the mid-nineteenth century as the home "[was] an integral part of a national system, reflecting and promoting mainstream values" (Sklar 163). Catherine Beecher tells her readers how to accomplish the task of creating virtuous homes in both versions of her manuals. While today one may think that practice alone would be sufficient to create virtuous homes, the inclusion of the Christian framework in the 1869 manual suggests that more than proper practice was felt to be needed. The Christian scaffold of the latter manual reveals that the woman who performs these domestic practices must be fundamentally virtuous. In order to possess the virtue of domesticity, she must possess Christian charity. The latter manual's linkage of domestic and Christian virtue is an attempt to resolve the tension created by the earlier manual's sole emphasis on practice and science. The 1841 text's emphasis on practice suggests that practice alone is enough, which would mean that the ideology of domesticity is available to anyone who reads her manual and practices it. The 1869 manual's emphasis on the person rather than the practice, and on the Christian virtue of that person, are attempts to create limits on the communal and common identity that Beecher's manuals encourage through its standardized practice. The added Christian framework suggests that domesticity relies upon interior qualities that may not be possessed by everyone or by everyone equally.

Beecher's manuals link domesticity and nationalism. The standardization of homes and the regulation of domestic practice had potential to create community and to develop a cohesive and unique American identity. With the connection between domesticity and consumerism, we see the emergence of a commercial culture in which commodities become associated with identity. The inclusion of the care of others in both manuals signals the changing role of women. Women are the caretakers of the world, not just of their homes. This changing view of domesticity, as reflected in Beecher's manuals, extends the meaning of home beyond itself, enabling women to extend their influence to larger arenas. This conception of domesticity challenges the notion of separate spheres. While some critics still underwrite the idea of separate spheres, recent studies have emphasized "the permeability of the border that separates the spheres, demonstrating that the private feminized space of the home both infused and bolstered the public male arena of the market, and that the sentimental values attached to maternal influence were used to sanction women's entry into the wider civic realm from which those same values theoretically excluded them" (Kaplan 581). But it is the expanding notion of domesticity—the movement from practice to person, as well as the changing meaning of home—that enables the permeability of this border. The nation is now understood in terms of the home; any matter that affects the nation now comes under the influence and purview of women.

The power and authority accorded to women in the 1869 version of Beecher's text is so great that it suggests that men might be removed from the home altogether. Unlike

the earlier *Treatise, The American Woman's Home* contains a vision of a home managed by an independent woman:

The blessed privileges of the family state are not confined to those who rear children of their own. Any woman who can earn a livelihood, as every woman should be trained to do, can take a properly qualified female associate, and institute a family of her own, receiving to its heavenly influences the orphan, the sick, the homeless, and the sinful, and by motherly devotion train them to follow the self denying example of Christ, in educating his earthly children for true happiness in this life and for his eternal home. (25)

Beecher's stunning claim appears early in the 1869 manual's first chapter, "The Christian Family." Perhaps the ravages of war influenced her claim, since "the adult white male population of the United States had been reduced by the Civil War, [and] the economic fate of the unmarried adult woman was no small issue" (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 200). While that may be so, Beecher here "frees unmarried women from any duty of obedience to men in general" (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 183). While Beecher may not have been an advocate of suffrage, she did believe in female authority and independence. Her radical vision of a home without a male presence, where men are not even needed for procreation as she calls for women to adopt children, is the ultimate sign of her confidence in women's skill and ability. Beecher claims a sororal family that is equal to other families, one that women enter by choice and in which they are treated as equals (Tonkovich, *Domesticity* 183). Domesticity has become more than mere practice—it empowers women to be the captains of their own destiny. Kaplan offers this point: "Domesticity's imperial reach posits a way of extending woman's sphere to include not only the heathen but also the unmarried Euro-American woman who can be freed from biological reproduction to rule her own empire of the mother" (589).<sup>63</sup> Beecher's utopian vision points to the awesome potential of domesticity—it can recreate the world of men, or even create a world without men.

---

<sup>63</sup> For more on this notion of "empire of the mother," see Mary Ryan's *Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity, 1830-1860* (1981).

## Chapter Four

### Writing/Righting Family in Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*

To return to an investigation of how an author uses domesticity in his/her work, I turn to Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass published two different versions of his autobiography over the course of ten years and most critics agree that "each self-portrait presents a different image" (Dorsey 437).<sup>64</sup> Douglass wrote his first narrative under the supervision and guidance of William Lloyd Garrison, whose influence ensured that a particular image of Douglass would be portrayed. After Douglass broke from Garrison, he became freer to tell his story as he desired. This relative editorial freedom, along with the popularity of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Douglass's experiences in the North and abroad in England, influenced the style and content of his second narrative. This chapter focuses on key changes, or corrections, one might argue, that Douglass makes to his first narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) in his second narrative *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), focusing on Douglass's revisionary use of the emblems of domesticity, family and home.

In "Becoming the Other: The Mimesis of Metaphor in Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*," Peter Dorsey notes that many critics have "shown that the first [narrative] was limited by Douglass's imitation of (or 'enslavement' to) conventions of the slave narrative and patriarchal notions of manhood" (435). Dorsey goes on to say that "some of these critics...see his voice emerging more clearly and more forcefully in the second [narrative]" (435). Critics have noted that the second narrative reflects Douglass's enhanced literary skills and that his style "shares much with the styles of other canonical writers of the American Renaissance" (Dorsey 435). According to John Sekora, the second narrative is "a true, full autobiography while the first is not" (610). William Andrews states that the 1855 narrative "was not designed to serve as merely an updated, second installment of the narrative" (xvii) but that in "its tone, structure, and dominant metaphors, the new book represents a thoughtful revised reading of the meaning of Douglass's life" (xvii). I contend in what follows that Douglass's revisions redefined his life's meaning, and the meaning of slave experience more generally, as fundamentally bound to domestic relations and identity.

Information about his family is absent from the 1845 narrative but highlighted in the 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*. This chapter spotlights this new information about his grandmother and his mother and suggests that this additional material constitutes Douglass's attempt to write/right family for the slave and the slave experience. According to Michael Chaney, when critics consider *My Bondage and My Freedom* they "tend to overlook or undervalue crucial changes affecting Douglass and the nation between the years 1845 and 1855" (391). I believe that the additional information about family and home that Douglass provides in *My Bondage and My Freedom* points to the power of domesticity as a cultural and national rhetoric. While most slave narratives emphasize slavery's erasure of family, Douglass's revisions insist that the eradication of his familial feelings is incomplete, suggesting the strength of family bonds for the slave.

---

<sup>64</sup> Douglass actually publishes three different versions of his autobiography over the course of his lifetime.

Douglass's family may have been broken, but his family feelings, feelings of connection and love and identity, remained strong.

Critics note that in the first narrative Douglass uses a language of conversion but Dorsey claims that Douglass's revised narrative "qualified, muted, or suppressed the language of conversion" that is so prevalent in the first narrative (438). I would argue that not only does Douglass alter the language of conversion but he adopts the discourse of domesticity as a rhetorical tool. Other critics touch on this change. Andrews notes that in the 1855 text, Douglass "suggests that before the ideal of freedom had infused his consciousness, his heart had been profoundly touched by hunger for a home" (xviii). Deborah E. McDowell describes Douglass's refinement of his representation of his mother as a "rewriting of his origins" (199). I contend that Douglass uses the additional material about family and home in the 1855 text to illustrate how the slave can embody the virtue of domesticity.

In the second narrative "the cause is not simply to end bondage" (Sekora 614) which was the primary purpose of the 1845 narrative. By the time he wrote the 1855 narrative, Douglass had broken from William Lloyd Garrison and Garrison's organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society. As the sole editor, Douglass took full control of the second narrative. The changes in this text signal a new direction and highlight new information that was absent from the Garrison-influenced 1845 narrative. While ending slavery remained an important goal, Douglass wanted his story to have an even larger impact. Andrews states that *My Bondage and My Freedom* "became the first Afro-American autobiography publicly designed to argue that a black man's life story had a wider significance than was usually accorded to the narratives of former slaves" (xii). Douglass uses the discourse of domesticity to give his story that "wider significance." The discourse of domesticity enabled him to speak to his audience in a familiar and powerful way. Douglass uses the metaphor of family and home, icons of domesticity, to critique slavery but also to show the human equality of blacks. This text was to be a vindication of "a just and beneficent principle, in its application to the whole human family" (Andrews xii). For Douglass, ending slavery was not enough; blacks also needed to be viewed as equals. The trope of family became a key tool to show equality. Anna Mae Duane argues that *My Bondage and My Freedom* is a "document that presents African American women and children as vital players in the struggle for black expression and recognition" (464). Douglass uses the search for and the loss of family and home to resist his status as a slave and to establish the equality of the races.

Critics often focus on how Douglass uses the trope of manhood, especially in his fight with Covey, to critique slavery. Dorsey argues that in *My Bondage and My Freedom* "major elements of his manly performance are attributed to his imitation of women" (442), which complicates Douglass's deployment of the trope of manhood. Douglass imitates Sophia Auld in her role of teacher; his grandmother provides a model for his work ethic; and he ascribes his drive for literacy and learning to his mother (Dorsey 442). In addition to Douglass's imitation of women, he also imitates the sentimental rhetoric associated with women's writing. Douglass employs a "linguistic mastery [that] moved [him] closer to patriarchal sources of power in antebellum America" (Dorsey 442). I contend that Douglass's appropriation of the discourse of domesticity in particular moved him closer to those "sources of power" in antebellum America.

In both versions of the autobiography under discussion here Douglass attempts to create a public identity. But what kind of identity is he trying to establish? Sekora states that "Garrison was pleased to present a noble beast" (616) in his introduction to the 1845 narrative, a particular representation of Douglass in which he was deeply invested. Garrison controlled the identity put forth in the 1845 text as well as when Douglass spoke at rallies. In his second narrative Douglass gained more control over the identity that was created and presented. This shift in control is represented in the 1855 introduction when James McCune Smith, the first licensed African American doctor in the country, claims that he is "proud to be associated with a noble man" (Sekora 614). I would offer that Douglass's rhetorical style and his use of domesticity are key elements that transform the "noble beast" of the 1845 narrative into the "noble man" of the 1855 narrative. His use of the signs of domesticity in *My Bondage and My Freedom* suggest that Douglass is attempting to establish himself as a man who values family. This characterization of manhood extends to all black men as Douglass became the "Representative [black] Man." Douglass's story gives "communal significance to an individual effort" (Sekora 621). In his second narrative, Douglass restructures black masculinity to include elements of domesticity.

One key marker of domesticity that Douglass invokes is that of the mother. Chaney accurately notes that "the figure of the mother is uniformly romanticized in sentimental literature of the nineteenth century, and the heart-rendering absence of the mother in many antebellum slave narratives often serves the abolitionist's objective further to inculcate slavery's vicious defilement of the 'Empire of the Mother'" (393). The 1845 narrative maintains the trope of the absent or negligent black slave mother, but in the revision he counters this prominent storyline by reinstating his mother and grandmother in his life story. By reinscribing the black mother, Douglass in essence is critiquing this story line, the institution of slavery, and white notions of blackness. In Douglass's initial narrative, very little is mentioned about Douglass's family, with only two paragraphs dedicated to his mother's life and death, and his grandmother mentioned just twice. But in the 1855 revision, he opens his autobiography with three chapters absent from the original version: "The Author's Childhood," "The Author Removed from His First Home," and "The Author's Parentage." These three chapters focus on Douglass's "home life." Why does Douglass frame his revision with these domestic facts? Why does he expand one line about his grandmother in the 1845 narrative to three chapters in the 1855 version depicting his relationship with her? His earlier self-portrait is that of the self-made man, an Emersonian or Franklinian hero who is without family. This early portrayal is invested in a solitary and self-reliant version of manhood. Ten years later, family becomes essential to Douglass's self-characterization and his critique of slavery. He transforms himself from the self-made, self-reliant man into a man shaped by and concerned for his family.

It is true that in *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass says that he was not "very deeply attached to" his mother, but he does paint her in a more favorable light than in the 1845 narrative. As in the earlier text, he tells how her visits were "few in number, brief in duration, and mostly made in the night" (*Bondage* 39). However, in the latter narrative he focuses on the effort she makes to see him. He writes: "The pains she took, and the toil she endured, to see me, tells me that a *true mother's heart* was hers, and that slavery had difficulty in paralyzing it with unmotherly indifference" (39 emphasis

added). In the 1845 narrative, both Douglass and his mother seem relatively indifferent, but when Douglass retells his story in 1855 he emphasizes his mother's love for him and his filial respect for her. Neither race nor slavery, Douglass suggests in 1855, can erase the love a mother feels for her child. When Douglass labels his mother a "true mother," the label carries cultural significance. Douglass invokes this particular icon of domesticity to reveal that black mothers are just like white mothers—the slave mother is a "true mother" and not a mere animal. He shows that slave mothers work hard against the "unmotherly indifference" that the institution of slavery attempts to create.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass tells a moving story about his mother which is absent from the 1845 narrative. He recounts how he had offended "Aunt Katy" who was the cook at Col. Lloyd's plantation, and how she in turn punishes him by "making [him] go without food all day" (40) after eating breakfast. Douglass paints a detailed and heartbreaking picture of himself as a hungry lonely child. He tells how Aunt Katy fed the other children dinner and gave him nothing. He found some Indian corn and at the risk of a beating from Aunt Katy, he takes the corn and attempts to roast it. As he was about to eat his "very dry meal," his "dear mother" came. He describes his rescue as such: "The friendless and hungry boy, in his extremest need—and when he did not dare to look for succor—found himself in the strong, protecting arms of a mother" (41). When Douglass told his mother of Aunt Katy's refusal to give him food, he informs his readers that "there was pity in her glance at me, and a fiery indignation at Aunt Katy" (41). Not only does Douglass's mother give him a "large ginger cake" but she also rebukes Aunt Katy. Douglass tells this story to show that his mother was indeed a "true mother" who protected and provided for her child when she could. This story reverses his earlier characterization of himself and their relationship as indifferent. Douglass is no longer a motherless child: "That night I learned the fact, that I was not only a child, but *somebody's* child" (41). The sense of belonging that Douglass highlights here signals his need to be part of a family and a community. He goes on to report that the sweet cake his mother gave him was in "the shape of a heart." This detail symbolizes how the maternal not only provides the body with nourishment but also nourishes the heart and soul. Douglass recounts how he was "victorious" and felt "prouder, on [his] mother's knee, than a king upon a throne" (41).

In this retelling of his life story, his mother appears as a heroine, a source of pride and love. The inclusion of this episode in his life story also gives us a Douglass who is different from the one we meet in the 1845 text. The earlier narrative goes to great lengths to refrain from presenting a sentimental view of the mother and child bond. However, in his revision, Douglass stages a scene that clearly showcases this sentimental bond. Duane states that the "laconic description of his hardy, if lonely, childhood in the 1845 narrative is replaced with visions of hearth and home more familiar to a reading public enamored of the idea of an idyllic mother-child bond" (480). This scene also enables his readers to feel empathy for Douglass and rage at the institution of slavery since these maternal encounters were brief and ceased upon the selling of his mother away from the plantation and her child. He uses this domestic scene to show the slave's inherent humanity and the true inhumanity of slavery.

This added scene also provides another piece of information that alters our previous understanding of Douglass. In the 1845 narrative, we learn the importance that literacy plays in Douglass's identity and his drive for freedom. Douglass uses the trope of

literacy to add to his characterization as self-reliant. But in the 1855 text, he astonishingly credits his mother with his love of learning. Douglass writes: "I learned, after my mother's death, that she could read, and that she was the *only* one of all the slaves and colored people in Tuckahoe who enjoyed that advantage" (42). He continues: "I can, therefore, fondly and proudly ascribe to *her* an earnest love of knowledge" (42 emphasis added). In the first version, Douglass's desire for literacy and knowledge seems to be entirely self-motivated, and his mother has no connection to his desire to learn to read and write. The revision drastically alters his early characterization of himself. Andrews notes that the "mature Douglass recognized that his character, his needs, and the direction of his life had been profoundly shaped by the maternal, paternal, and fraternal relationships of his past" (xxiii). In the revised story, his mother plays a pivotal role in his understanding of self, family, slavery, and his desire for knowledge which is directly linked to his desire for freedom. When Douglass writes his mother into his story, he rights, or corrects, the importance of family to his own story as well as to the life of all slaves.

Douglass expresses very little emotion concerning the death of his mother in the 1845 edition. Indeed, Douglass is notably matter of fact about the incident: "Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger" (*Narrative* 16). This information is put forth in the first few pages, then he moves on to the whipping of Aunt Esther (Hester). However, ten years later, in the second edition, Douglass expands the description of his mother and her death from two flat paragraphs to five pages filled with emotion:

It has been a life-long, standing grief to me, that I knew so little of my mother; and that I was so early separated from her. The counsels of her love must have been beneficial to me. The side view of her face is imaged on my memory, and I take few steps in life without feeling her presence; but the image is mute, and I have no striking words of her's treasured up. (*Bondage* 154)

Douglass's emotions towards his mother change from those of a "stranger" to a "life-long standing grief" where he takes "few steps in life without feeling her presence." Whereas she is essentially absent from the 1845 narrative, Douglass's mother is ever-present in the 1855 version. While this sentimentalized retelling can be read as an attempt to gain the sympathy of the reader, I see it as an act of defiance for Douglass. Even though slavery separated his mother from him in life, he will not permit the maternal bond to be broken in his telling of his life story. In the first narrative, he writes of the separation of mother and child before the child's twelfth month: "For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection towards its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result" (*Narrative* 48). But Douglass rewrites "the inevitable result" of his own mother-child relationship in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. In this latter version, slavery undeniably leaves its mark, but slavery cannot "blunt and destroy" his relationship with his mother: he feels "her presence" even after death.

Douglass thus utilizes the nineteenth-century sentimental rhetoric that surrounded the cult of the mother. Dorsey points out that "Douglass recognizes the necessity of inscribing the self by imitating the rhetoric of others" (436). According to Dorsey, "Douglass mimetically uses dead and trivial metaphors and 'novelizes' them in ways that

'break through' his audience's 'previous categorization' of African American slavery and that simultaneously identify him as a 'master of metaphor'" (436). Though Dorsey focuses on other metaphors in his analysis—the figure of the mother and the home were far from “dead” or “trivial” in the nineteenth century!—his analysis of Douglass's rhetoric is nonetheless apt. Douglass does indeed use the metaphor of mother to "break through" his audience's preconceived notions of blackness and the slave. Dorsey argues that Douglass employs imitation and that imitation is a political act of resistance:

Douglass emphasizes that resistance to oppression requires a degree of imitation: to change their position, the oppressed must at some level copy the metaphors, the behaviors, and even the thought processes of the oppressor. By imagining oneself as the other and then materially producing rhetorically effective images of this imaginative process, one gains access to political exchanges that can alter social structures. (436)

When Douglass incorporates the metaphor of the mother as integral to his story, he "alters social structures." By rewriting his relationship with his mother he challenges the dominant view maintained by antebellum ethnography that "white faculties necessary for feeling filial love was biologically impossible for figures like Douglass" (Chaney 394). By adding sentimental affection to his story, he challenges the dominant notions of the slave and shows slavery to be an inhumane institution.

The trope of family is so essential to Douglass's story that in *My Bondage and My Freedom* his "entrance" or "introduction" to slavery is altered. In the first narrative, he marks witnessing, as a child, the brutal whipping of Aunt Esther (Hester) as the "blood-stained gate," "the entrance to the hell of slavery":

I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I shall never forget it whilst I remember any thing... It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. (*Narrative* 258)

In this scene, Douglass refers to himself as "a witness and a participant." Terrified, Douglass believes he is next, and hides in a closet. Immediately after this scene, Douglass discusses his master's family, his own alienation from the other slaves (indicated by his inability to understand the slave songs), and includes another violent scene, the episode in which Mr. Gore kills the slave Demby for disobedience. After Esther's beating, Douglass mentions for the first and only time that he lived with his grandmother: "I had never seen anything like it before. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was put to raise the children of the younger women" (*Narrative* 259). There are no opening chapters about family and home in the first text, and he mentions his grandmother just once. Her role in his first narrative is brief, fully overshadowed by Esther's whipping. In the 1845 narrative, the "entrance to the hell of slavery" is marked by violence, witnessing, and unwilling participation.<sup>65</sup>

In the second narrative, we see some dramatic changes in his account of Esther's beating. Douglass is in the closet asleep and "probably awakened" by Esther's shrieks. He witnesses Esther's beating from the closet without being seen. In this revised version, the master's words are not reported—they are "too blasphemous to be reproduced"—whereas Esther's vocalizations, her cries for mercy, are highlighted. Douglass pities her and is

---

<sup>65</sup> For a fascinating discussion of Aunt Esther's whipping, see Jenny Franchot's article "The Punishment of Esther: Frederick Douglass and The Construction of the Feminine."

outraged, whereas no reaction of this sort is recorded in the 1845 edition. The revised text notes that the scene of Esther being beaten was often repeated; in other words, this scene is not marked as his entrance into slavery as it is in the first autobiography.

The challenge to conventional notions of the slave's lack of feeling and sentiment offered by the retelling of this incident in the second version of the narrative is even more pointed in the ultimate revision of this episode in the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1893).<sup>66</sup> We discover that Esther and Edward (we learn his name in this final version) meet repeatedly and that their meeting is what enraged the master to begin with. Esther's drive to fulfill her domestic desires overrides her fear of the violent consequences as she continues to meet Edward despite her beatings. In this final version, the desire for a relationship, the first step to having a family and home, is portrayed as act of defiance. Through Esther, we see a new aspect of domesticity: domestic desire. In the last revision of this scene, we see the connections among sexual desire, desire for a relationship, and desire for a home. Most nineteenth-century authors deliberately obscure the connection between domesticity and female procreative sexuality. In *Life and Times*, Douglass follows Esther's beating with another example of domesticity as defiance, the story of a slave couple, Jennie and Noah, who escape. Their success prompts Douglass to seriously consider escaping for the first time. In this moment, he refers to himself as "in spirit and purpose, a fugitive from slavery." The desire for domesticity explicitly leads Douglass to defiance. In these two latter versions, Esther's beating functions not as an "entrance" to slavery but as the beginning of Douglass's desire to escape. In both *Bondage* and *Life and Times*, this scene "awakens" Douglass to question the "origin, nature, and history of slavery."

Douglass richly demonstrates that "as a former slave he has a privileged understanding of what the institution of slavery does to human beings" (Dorsey 440). Many critics have focused on how Douglass portrays acts of violence to show the brutality and inhumanity of slavery. However, I posit that the type of damage slavery does to human beings shifts between the first version of the narrative and the second. The first narrative focuses on physical violence and sufferings while the revised narrative highlights the mental effects of such acts of violence. In his 1855 revision Douglass shows the mental and emotional abuse that converts the human into a "brute." The attempt to deny the slave maternal and family bonds, to deny him of domestic feeling itself, is part of the dehumanization process. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the "entrance" into slavery for Douglass is amended. His grandmother's abandonment at his master's plantation now becomes the transformative moment, his "first introduction to the realities of slavery":

The reader may be surprised that I narrate so minutely an incident apparently so trivial, and which must have occurred when I was not more than seven years old; but as I wish to give a faithful history of my experience in slavery, I cannot withhold a circumstance which, at the time, affected me so deeply. Besides, this was, in fact, my first introduction to the realities of slavery. (*Bondage* 150)

The horrors of slavery are found not just in physical violence, but also in the emotional and psychological violence associated with persistent attempts to "blunt and destroy" familial bonds. What may seem like a "minute" and "trivial" incident becomes one which

---

<sup>66</sup> A full reading of the 1893 narrative is beyond the scope of this chapter, but other critics such as Waldo Martin, Philip Foner, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. discuss Douglass's last narrative in detail.

"affect[s] [him] so deeply." Douglass engages readers by offering them an experience with which they can sympathize. While the brutal whipping of Esther causes outrage, it does not necessarily create empathy. Whipping is presumably an alien experience for most white nineteenth-century readers, whereas familial loss might well pull at most readers' heartstrings. Even though the separation in question is from his grandmother, she functions as a surrogate mother; we learn in *My Bondage and My Freedom* that she raises him from infancy to age seven. Douglass thus alters his entrance to slavery from the experience of physical violence (1845) to one involving the loss of maternal love (1855). The "realities of slavery" shift from the body to the heart; the heart rather than the flesh becomes the primary locus of the horrors of slavery.

While the idea of family is rarely mentioned in the earlier narrative, the loss of family becomes the focal point for Douglass in his revision. Interestingly, Douglass experiences such a loss not only when his grandmother leaves him at his master's plantation, but also when he meets his brothers and sisters for the first time at the plantation:

I had never seen my brother nor sisters before; and, though I had sometimes heard of them, and felt a curious interest in them, I really did not understand what they were to me, or I to them. We were brothers and sisters, but what of that? Why should they be attached to me, or I to them? Brothers and sisters we were by blood; but *slavery* had made us strangers. I heard the words brother and sisters, and knew they must mean something; but slavery had robbed these terms of their true meaning. (*Bondage* 36)

When Douglass he meets his brother and sisters for the first time, he becomes aware of the emotional distance he feels: "slavery had made us strangers." Yet he knows that he should not feel estranged from his siblings: "I heard the words brother and sisters, and knew they *must* mean something" (emphasis added). Here we see the split between the mind and the heart. Douglass wants to desire family and knows that family is sacred but "slavery had robbed these terms of their true meaning." He is left with a sense of loss and emptiness as he knows that "brother" and "sister" mean something he does not feel. His recognition of this loss and the knowledge of the erasure of family's proper meaning show that the slave is indeed a human being, which is an overarching goal for Douglass in his narrative.

In the 1855 revision, Douglass continually reiterates the "dread" of separation from his family, an idea absent from the earlier version: "Unhappily for me, however, all the information I could get concerning him [the master] but increased my great dread of being carried thither—of being separated from and deprived of the protection of my grandmother and grandfather" (*Bondage* 33). He now mentions his grandfather, a figure who is completely absent from the 1845 text. Family significantly provides "protection." As Douglass writes family into the 1855 text, we see that it is continually threatened and marked by the "dread" of separation and loss. What Douglass fears most is separation from his family, "of being carried thither." The slave is situated in this in-between position of family and no family. Slaves know they are related to others by blood but have limited emotional connections to their families. His mother exemplifies the slave's liminal state of family/no family: "My poor mother, like many other slave-women, had *many children* but NO FAMILY!" (*Bondage* 36). Douglass's mother does attempt to maintain a bond with her children illustrated by her night-time visits to Douglass. The

slave struggles to move from the condition of no family to family but is constantly faced with obstacles: "I really wanted to play with my brother and sisters, but they were strangers to me, and I was full of fear that grandmother might leave without taking me with her" (*Bondage* 36). In the 1855 narrative, Douglass repeatedly mentions his fear of abandonment. He also wavers between his desire to play and bond with his siblings and his fear of his grandmother leaving him. When he discovers that his grandmother has left him at the plantation, Douglass recounts his sense of despair: "heart-broken at the discovery, I fell upon the ground, and wept a boy's bitter tears, refusing to be comforted" (*Bondage* 36). Significantly, this "first introduction to the realities of slavery" occasioned by his grandmother's abandonment is not the knowledge that he is a slave. Douglass already knows that he is a slave. The "realities of slavery" to which he has been introduced is the loss of family. This climatic and emotionally charged scene in *My Bondage and My Freedom* starkly contrasts that of Aunt Esther's brutal whipping. The "realities of slavery" shift from screams, blood, and a child's silence to tears, abandonment, and a child's heartbreak.

The domestic frame present in the 1855 narrative is absent from the 1845 text, and with this absence the horror of slavery shifts from brutality and violence to the loss of family and home. So why include this narrative of "home life"? Certainly, Douglass invokes domestic scenes and domestic rhetoric in order to critique the slave system. But in the 1855 narrative, that critique has shifted from targeting the physical violence of slavery to targeting the emotional violence slavery imposes. Douglass personalizes that critique with his own life story. He co-opts the rhetoric and narrative conventions of domesticity hitherto reserved for white middle class life and transposes them onto the slave system. He uses these sacred icons to show the true horror of slavery. Douglass writes about the separation of slave children from their mothers, contending that this practice of separation:

is a marked feature of the cruelty and barbarity of the slave system. But it is in harmony with the grand aim of slavery, which, always and everywhere, is to reduce man to a level with the brute. It is a successful method of obliterating from the mind and the heart of the slave, all just ideas of the sacredness of *the family*, as an institution. (*Bondage* 29)

The absence of family, and in particular the lack of a maternal bond, is what transforms a man into a brute. Douglass most famously attributes his transformation from brute to man to his famous fight with Covey the overseer, but such a transformation also occurs when he writes family, in particular his mother and grandmother, back into his story. For Douglass, domesticity has an egalitarian effect; in his narrative, it demonstrates sameness rather than differences. While the aim of slavery is to obliterate the idea of family from the slave, Douglass's revised narrative shows that slavery does not successfully do this to him. The brutality of slavery cannot remove from the slave's "mind and heart" the "sacredness of the family."

Douglass's revisions to his narrative reveal the power of the discourse of domesticity in nineteenth-century America. His textual changes signify the cultural significance the ideology of domesticity had on American consciousness. Douglass expands one line about his grandmother to three chapters depicting his relationship with her, and two meager paragraphs about his mother to five pages detailing his feelings towards her. While these sentimental moments may not seem significant, Chaney states

that Douglass "dramatizes the salient lack of sentimentality in the life of a slave, but justly assigns this to slavery instead of to predetermined attributes in the slave" (394). Douglass shows that the "predetermined attributes in the slave" include a desire for family. Duane points out that traditional "descriptions of the mother-child separation almost always stress the grief of the adult" but "Douglass revisits the scene through the eyes of the child" (480). By focusing on the child's perspective, Douglass shows that the desire for home and family, both attributes of domesticity, is innate. Duane continues to argue that "Douglass's emphasis on the child's grief—rather than the adult's—constitutes a shift from the established sentimental formula, one he extends by further mediating on how a child recovers from such grief" (481). However, I would suggest that Douglass the adult has not completely recovered from these moments and that is why he includes them in his revision of his life story. He certainly uses these domestic scenes to critique the slave system, but they also suggest a remnant of grief as he recounts them. There is an ongoing mourning for domesticity in these scenes added to the 1855 narrative. Duane believes that the wild success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "with its emphasis on the emotional power of children...was likely one of the many reasons that Douglass chose to place more emphasis on his own childhood in his second autobiography" (479). But I believe Douglass was also correcting the story he told in his earlier narrative. Douglass's editorial control over the 1855 narrative enabled him to include these personal scenes that show slavery's violation of hearth, home, and family. While editorial control does not mean emotional control, his deployment of sentimental tropes is a type of control over the emotions, of the reader and even himself, complicating the idea of the 1855 narrative as simply an unbridled, emotional outpouring.

The sentimental register of Douglass's revised narrative reflects the popularity of this genre at the time as well as Douglass's "belletristic desire to become a man of letters" (Dorsey 445). However, Douglass may also have been "attracted to the sentimentalism because of its universalizing of human experience and moral development along an axis of gender" (Chaney 394). Sundquist claims that the 1855 text "reminds us that the revolutionary language of liberation and the abolitionist language of sentiment are virtually synonymous, not just in the best antislavery writing but in many of the era's literary and political treatments of the problem of bondage" (124-5). Douglass not only uses sentimental rhetoric but also harnesses the power of domesticity to charge his story with the revolutionary call for liberation and to paint it with the same literary brush that many famous writers of the time period were wielding. Although sentimentalism focused mainly on white mothers and infants—sentimental discourse identified feminine agency as the origin of morality in human beings—sentimentalism nonetheless "implied a universal application" (Chaney 394). Douglass aims to appropriate this "universal application" for his political and revolutionary agenda. Douglass was well aware of the key role played by the mother in antebellum America. Mary Ryan points out that antebellum constructions of motherhood "conferred upon women the function of transforming infant human animals into adult personalities" (quoted in Chaney 394). Since slavery typically removed slave infants from their slave mothers, then it follows that "the institution of slavery is responsible for the moral condition of so many motherless adults" (Chaney 394). We see this in Douglass's first narrative where his mother is clearly absent and he uses her absence to critique slavery. But in his revised slave narrative he is obviously determined to give her a presence. Douglass uses these

brief moments with his mother to reinforce his humanity and to show himself as civilized.

I view Douglass's use of family in his revised narrative as a form of discursive imitation. According to Dorsey, "the rhetorical sophistication of *My Bondage and My Freedom* is illustrated by Douglass's parodic imitation and exaggeration of antebellum metaphors for the experience of slavery" (435). For Dorsey, imitation is a powerful tool since it "entails overt, subtle, or unconscious forms of reproduction [that] can undermine or affirm existing systems of power" (437). Douglass certainly uses the imitation of metaphors, particularly metaphors of domesticity, to both undermine and affirm existing systems of power. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass writes family back into his narrative although some critics take issue with the contradicting "facts" regarding his family. Chaney asks whether "Frederick Douglass the man" in the intervening years (1845-1855) has "internalized the cultural capital of white literary America [so] that Douglass the author in 1855 can write about his mother as if she had been a sentimental construction all along" (396)? Perhaps. But I see Douglass as correcting the "facts" of the earlier narrative now that he has fuller authorial control over his story.

The case for correction is strengthened when we note that the first narrative was "shaped as much by the American Anti-Slave Society as by its author" (Sekora 620). Sekora states that the 1845 text was "not so much a life story as an indictment, an anti-slavery document, the testimony of an eyewitness, precisely what Garrison sought" (620). Sekora claims that the 1855 narrative, by contrast, is a "true autobiography" and that this "true autobiography marks a new stage in Douglass's life and prose style" (620). The extended description of his mother and grandmother and his inclusion of family and home in the 1855 revision are signs of his editorial control and reflections of what Douglass values. He gets to tell the story he wants to tell, and that story includes family and home. Sundquist states that "the autobiography or the short story, offered Douglass, as it had Benjamin Franklin, the opportunity to 'edit' his own American identity and thus reach a wider audience, white and black" (123). He uses these emblems of domesticity and includes these "facts" to make political claims about race and gender.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass corrects the erasure of the feminine that characterizes his 1845 narrative. In the 1855 revision of his story, Douglass "expands the emotional importance of maternity" (Chaney 396). Chaney notes that in the 1855 text, Douglass's mother "is no longer a sentimental other, a maternal void carved out by the horrors of slavery to be filled in by allusions to sentimental mothers; she no longer references the author's alienation from dominant cultural and linguistic tropes" (396). In his revision, his mother is ever present. She also becomes a vehicle that enables him to participate within the "dominant cultural and linguistic tropes" as a son rather than only as a slave. He also portrays his mother "as a source of strength and intelligence" (Duane 482). Rather than dwelling on the absent or negligent slave mother, Douglass insists that "his intelligence and literary talent were descended from his maternal heritage [which] complicate[s] two reigning assumptions: that white blood carried with it intellect and civilization and that women were incapable of providing the masculine attributes of perseverance, savvy, or strength necessary for citizenship" (Duane 483). Instead of portraying himself as a self-made man, Douglass claims his mother as the source of his future success.

In amending his self-portrait, he not only rectifies the importance of family for the slave and challenges slavery's ability to eliminate family from the slave and the slave experience, but he also opposes the dominant view of slave mothers as absent, negligent, and ignorant. He reinstates black mothers as providers of education and empowerment, writing morality into the consciousness of the slave. Chaney notes that ethnographers of the time "often implied that permanent physiological differences precluded slaves from ever fully appropriating European morality" (393). Douglass wants to counter this prevailing idea. By appropriating the maternal icon and making it central to his slave narrative, Douglass declares that the voices of black women must be heard. In so doing, he demonstrates that the slave does indeed possess a moral compass, as mothers were considered the source of morality. He also repositions "the black mother as the foundation of a legitimate cultural and emotional lineage" (Duane 482). Reclaiming the black mother is an act of self-reclamation that pervades his revised text. Describing the 1855 text as "at once fiery and sentimental," Sundquist argues that "*My Bondage and My Freedom* portrays the rebel-patriot Frederick Douglass as a figure who merges the urgency of eloquent personal facts and the heroic of a national ideal" (130). That national ideal includes family and home.

Douglass moves from a state of no family in the 1845 narrative to a state of family ten years later. This shift re-envisioned the role of the mother, family, and home in the slave narrative. These domestic icons have an irrevocable place for the slave. Douglass uses these symbols of domesticity to transform blacks from objects of slavery into subjects, despite slavery's cruelty. Douglass also emphasizes the importance of community and the collective. For Douglass, the home and family signify stability, normalcy, and acceptance. In the 1855 narrative, Douglass modifies the "Representative Man" so that he is no longer a self-made man but a man who recognizes that family, home and community are integral to the black subject whether enslaved or free. Douglass uses "an emotional and moral verity—the sanctity of the family—[to] align antislavery rebellion with the powerful conventions of domesticity" (Jay 234). His revisions thus reflect the "complex affiliations of femininity and feminism and abolitionism" (McDowell 199). By writing and righting family in his 1855 revision, Douglass uses family, the icon of domestic ideology, to critique the institution of slavery not only for the physical violence it commits. He also utilizes the structure and ideology of family to condemn slavery for the cruelty it perpetrates upon the heart and home. With *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass makes a direct connection between abolitionism and domesticity with the goal of looking beyond the end of slavery. Douglass looks towards freedom, using domesticity to establish and reclaim a sense of dignity, authenticity, and equality for all people.

## **Bibliography**

- Ammons, Elizabeth. "Legacy Profile." *Legacy* 2 (1985): 61-66.
- Andrews, William L. Introduction. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. By Frederick Douglass. 1855. 3rd ed. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1987. xi-xxviii.
- Argersinger, Jana L. "Family Embraces: The Unholy Kiss and Authorial Relations in *The Wide, Wide World*." *American Literature* 74.2 (2002): 251-285.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Ashworth, Suzanne M. "Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Conduct Literature and Protocols of Female Reading in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America." *Legacy* 17.2 (2000): 141-164.
- Barnes, Elizabeth. *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Bauermeister, Erica R. "*The Lamplighter*, *The Wide, Wide World*, and *Hope Leslie*: The Recipes for Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels." *Legacy* 8.1 (1991): 17-28.
- Baym, Nina. *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-70*. 1978. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Beecher, Catherine. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. 1841. Rev. ed. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008.
- and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home*. 1869. Intro. Nicole Tonkovich. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004.
- Benhabib, Seyla. "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jurgen Habermas." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, (1992): 73-95.
- Biester, Charlotte. "Catherine Beecher's Views of Home Economics." *History of Education Society* 3 (Spring 1952): 88-91.
- Bloch, Ruth. "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America." *Signs* 13 (1987): 37-59.
- Brodhead, Richard. "Sparing the Rod: Discipline and Fiction in Antebellum America." *Representations* 21 (Winter 1988): 67-96.
- Brown, Gillian. "Consent, Coquetry, and Consequences." *American Literary History* 9 (Winter 1997), 625-652.
- . *Domestic Individualism: Imaging Self in Nineteenth-Century America*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990.
- Campbell, Donna M. "Sentimental Conventions and Self-Protection: *Little Women* and *The Wide, Wide World*." *Legacy* 11.2 (1994): 118-129.
- Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Chaney, Michael. "Picturing the Mother, Claiming Egypt: *My Bondage and My Freedom* as Auto(bio)ethnography." *African American Review* 35 (Autumn 2001): 391-408.
- Chantell, Claire. "The Limits of the Mother at Home in *The Wide, Wide World* and *The Lamplighter*." *Studies in American Fiction* 30.2 (Fall 2002): 131-153.

- Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1977.
- Davidson, Cathy. *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- ed., "No More Separate Spheres." *American Literature* 70.3 (Sept. 1998).
- Dobson, Joanne. "The Hidden Hand: Subversion of Cultural Ideology in Three Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels." *American Quarterly* 38.2 (Summer 1986): 223-242.
- Dorsey, Peter A. "Becoming the Other: Mimesis of Metaphor in Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*." *Modern Language Association* 111 (May 1996): 435-450.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Ed. William L. Andrews. Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1987.
- . *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. New York: Penguin, 1982.
- Duane, Anna Mae. "'Like a Motherless Child': Racial Education at the New York African Free School and in *My Bondage and My Freedom*." *American Literature* 82 (September 2010): 461-488.
- Epstein, Barbara. *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan UP, 1981.
- Fizer, Irene. "Signing as Republican Daughters: The Letters of Eliza Southgate and *The Coquette*." *The Eighteenth Century* 34.3 (1993): 243-263.
- Foster, Hannah Webster. *The Coquette*. 1797. Rpt. Ed. Cathy Davidson. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Franchot, Jenny. "The Punishment of Esther: Frederick Douglass and The Construction of the Feminine." *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*. Ed. Eric Sundquist. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1990): 141-165.
- Fraser, Nancy. "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender." *Feminism As Critique*. Ed. Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press (1988): 31-56.
- Fuller, Margaret. *Women in the Nineteenth Century*. 1845. Rpt. New York: Norton, 1998.
- Gordon, Linda. "Voluntary Motherhood: The Beginnings of Feminist Birth Control Ideas in the United States," *Feminist Studies* 1. 3-4 (1973): 5-22.
- Habermas, Jurgen. "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)." *New German Critique* 3 (Fall 1974): 49-55.
- Hamilton, Kristie. "An Assault on the Will: Republican Virtue and the City in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*." *Early American Literature* 24 (1989): 135-151.
- Harris, Sharon. "Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*: Critiquing Franklin's America." *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*. Ed. Sharon Harris. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1995. 1-22.
- Hovet, Grace Ann and. Hovet, Theodore R. "Identity Development in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*: Relationship, Performance and Construction." *Legacy* 8.1 (Spring 1991): 3-16.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985.

- Jacobson, Kristin. "Renovating *The American Woman's Home*: American Domesticity in *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*." *Legacy* 25 (2008): 105-127.
- Jay, Gregory S. "American Literature and the New Historicism: The Example of Frederick Douglass." *boundary 2* (Spring 1990): 211-242.
- Kaplan, Amy. "Manifest Domesticity." *American Literature* 70 (Sept. 1998): 581-606.
- Kelley, Mary. *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1984.
- Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Kim, Sharon. "Puritan Realism: *The Wide, Wide World* and *Robinson Crusoe*." *American Literature* 75.4 (2003): 783-811.
- Lewis, Jan. "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 689-721.
- Mason, Jennifer. "Animal Bodies: Corporeality, Class, and Subject Formation in *The Wide, Wide World*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54.4 (2000): 503-533.
- Matthews, Glenna. *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- McDowell, Deborah E. "In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass and the Afro-American Narrative Tradition." *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*. Ed. William Andrews. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991. 192-214.
- Merish, Lori. "Sentimental Consumption: Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Aesthetics of Middle-Class Ownership." *American Literary History* 8 (Spring 1996): 1-33.
- Mower, C. Leiren. "Bodies in Labor: Sole Proprietorship and the Labor of Conduct in *The Coquette*." *American Literature* 74.2 (2002): 315-344.
- Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. Boston: Little Brown, 1980.
- O'Connell, Catherine. "'We must sorrow': Silence, suffering, and sentimentality in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*." *Studies in American Fiction* 25.1 (Spring 1997): 21-39.
- Ousley, Laurie. "The Business of Housekeeping: The Mistress, the Domestic Worker, and the Construction of Class." *Legacy* 23 (2006): 132-147.
- Pateman, Carole. "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy." *Public and Private in Social Life*. Ed. S.I. Benn and G.F. Gaus. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. 281-303.
- Pettengill, Claire. "Sisterhood In a Separate Sphere: Female Friendship in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* and *The Boarding School*." *Early American Literature* 27 (1992): 185-203.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Quay, Sara E. "Homesickness in Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18.1 (Spring 1999): 39-58.
- Romero, Lora. *Home Front: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.
- Ryan, Mary. *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860*. New York: Haworth Press, 1982.
- Schnog, Nancy. "Inside the Sentimental: The Psychological Work of *The Wide, Wide*

- World.* "Genders 4 (Spring 1989): 11-25.
- Sekora, John. "'Mr. Editor, If You Please': Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, and the End of the Abolitionist Imprint." *Callaloo* 17 (Spring 1994): 608-626.
- Shuffleton, Frank. "Mrs. Foster's *Coquette* and the Decline of the Brotherly Watch." *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 16 (1986): 211-224.
- Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973.
- Smith, Daniel Scott. "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America." *Feminist Studies* 1. 3-4 (1973): 40-57.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985.
- . "Domesicating 'Virtue': Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America." In *Literature and the Body*. Ed. Elaine Scarry. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988: 160-84.
- Stern, Julia. *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Stewart, Veronica. "The Wild Side of *The Wide, Wide World*." *Legacy* 11.1 (1994):1-16.
- Sundquist, Eric J. "Frederick Douglass: Literacy and Paternalism." *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*. Ed. William Andrews. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991. 120-132.
- Tate, Claudia. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Tonkovich, Nicole. *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catherine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern and Margaret Fuller*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.
- . Introduction. *The American Woman's Home*. By Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1869. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004: ix-xxxii.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750*. New York: Knopf, 1982.
- Waldstreicher, David. "'Fallen Under My Observation': Vision and Virtue in *The Coquette*." *Early American Literature* 27 (1992): 204-218.
- Warner, Susan. *The Wide Wide World*. 1850. Rpt. New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 1987.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74.
- . *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Athens, Ohio UP, 1976.
- Wenska, Walter Jr. "*The Coquette* and the American Dream of Freedom." *Early American Literature* 12.3 (1977/8): 243-255.
- White, Isabelle. "Anti-Individualism, Authority, and Identity: Susan Warner's Contradictions in *The Wide, Wide World*." *American Studies* 31.2 (1990): 31-41.
- Williams, Susan S. "Widening the World: Susan Warner, Her readers, and the Assumption of Authorship." *American Quarterly* 42.4 (Dec. 1990): 565-586.