

THE RADICAL FRANCES WRIGHT AND ANTEBELLUM EVANGELICAL REVIEWERS:
SELF-SILENCING IN THE WORKS OF SARAH JOSEPHA HALE,
LYDIA MARIA CHILD, AND ELIZA CABOT FOLLEN

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by
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ABSTRACT

The early antebellum, a nation-building period of industrial progress, financial crisis, and social upheaval, associated the values of evangelical Protestantism with American middle-class respectability. Individuals who contested those values, like Scottish heiress Frances Wright, came under intense public scrutiny. Once the intimate of revolutionary heroes, liberal theorists, and elite society, a radicalized Wright established in rural Tennessee a utopian and proto-feminist community that promoted interracial sexual unions and women's reproductive rights and forbade religion (as irrational and hypocritical) and marriage (as entrapping and enfeebling to women). She charged the Protestant clergy with conspiring with bankers and lawyers to deny Americans true liberty and argued that "universal education" would develop a generation of libertarian leaders by boarding poor and wealthy children equally together from infancy; she hoped to stimulate through an *amalgamation* of the races the organic attenuation of American slavery over three generations.

Wright circulated her theories through radical newspapers, but received little public notice until she discovered the lecture platform, speaking to mixed audiences of middle- and

working-class men and women. Male evangelical magazine reviewers had staunchly maintained that middle-class women never read Wright's radical words, but once women stood alongside men at her lectures, reviewers could no longer deny that they were being exposed to heretical ideas. Her message's new medium resulted in a widespread print backlash: evangelical reviewers denounced her as the "Red Harlot of Infidelity" and previously sympathetic writers shunned her.

I argue broadly that antebellum cultural acceptance of evangelical Protestant values co-opted women's attempts to enlarge their autonomy and agency, and specifically that throughout a decade of Wright's character assassination, female editors and novelists Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza Cabot Follen, performed a strategic self-silencing. They rejected Wright by name and distanced themselves from feminist arguments they would later embrace. In this project I examine the resonance that the evangelical press's rejection of Wright had with these three antebellum women novelists. There has been little recent scholarly notice taken of Wright, and no discussion of the impact that the ruin of her reputation had on antebellum women's fiction – lacunae I intend to address.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “The Radical Frances Wright and Antebellum Evangelical Reviewers: Self-Silencing in the Works of Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza Cabot Follen,” presented by Jane E. DeLaurier, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, husband, children, grandchildren, and friends, for their love

INTRODUCTION:
SOCIAL UPHEAVAL, FRANCES WRIGHT,
AND THE EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT RESPONSE

The first four decades of the American nineteenth century, following a war to win independence and then the establishment of a new nation, produced some terrific changes in the way society functions. Initially, although the *Declaration of Independence* asserted that all men were created equal, and although George Washington claimed that the “name of American ... belong[ed]” to all the “People of the United States,” residents of the new country were not equally accorded the rights of this American-ness.¹ The Constitution left citizenship to the states to delimit, and most of them restricted the franchise to property-owning white males over the age of twenty-one and required that elected officials be Christian. Many Roman Catholic, Jewish, and non-propertied white men who lived in the New Republic had a citizen’s responsibilities – paying taxes and serving in the military – but they, women, African Americans, and Native Americans could neither vote nor stand for office.² By the early 1840s, the United States, in a clear departure from the laws of its mother country, finally returned to what could be considered

¹ George Washington, Farewell Address, September 17/19, 1796. Kettner, 103, 107, 128, 14-15, 173. British and foreign immigrants to the young country were now to become “citizens” rather than “subjects” of the Crown. The fundamental difference that writers of the Declaration and of the Constitution understood was that where British subjects had that appellation by statutes evolving since the thirteenth century – by birth (*de natis*) on British soil (*jus soli*) or by descent (*jus sanguinis*). Americans would become citizens by deliberate choice, or what Kettner calls “volitional allegiance.” Writers of the Constitution mentioned the concept only with regard to eligibility for elected office; U.S. Constitution, Article Two, Section 1: “No person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President.”

² State legislatures at various points between 1812 and the 1840s began repealing religious and property restrictions; in 1868 the Fourteenth Amendment defined citizenship itself: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” Of course, this clause did not address the franchise, as subsequent amendments, African American organizations, and the Ku Klux Klan were to negotiate, and definitions of legal citizenship and what rights that conveyed continued to vary from state to state.

its original mandate and opened suffrage to working-class white men. By then the struggles for enslaved African Americans' emancipation and Native Americans' rights were also well underway.

Similarly, women had appeared ascendant during the early republican period when Christian leaders urged them to be moral guides to their children and husbands to encourage the development of virtuous new American politicians. Yet no clear path for women to gain legal or political rights and opportunities, such as the basic marital rights of property, inheritance, personal safety, and child custody, followed that moral authority. Instead, the prospect of empowered women evaporated from the popular imaginary until Seneca Falls in 1848, and in fact women were not enfranchised until 1920. Neither did print publications of the experiences of marginalized Americans in the antebellum period support women's self-determination. Available for contemporary readers were sensational tales of adventuring working-class white men, as well as accounts of enslaved African Americans and persecuted Native Americans. By contrast, there are no published stories of bold women struggling against poverty or profligate husbands until Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and newspaper columns in the late 1850s. Instead, a pious sentimentality invoking women's willing submission to patriarchal figures dictated the woman's narrative until almost the end of the century.

Why did the tumultuous antebellum period end without women gaining suffrage and expanded legal rights? Why is the nineteenth century nearly void of stories by or about women decrying the absence of these rights? I will argue that a key factor was the negative public response to the radical writings, speeches, and activities of Frances Wright, a Scottish-American woman who came to prominence during the late 1820s. The virulent reaction effectively shut down American proto-feminism for a generation and tainted subsequent efforts for decades

more. Even as working-class and African-American men moved into the public sphere to demand agency, women withdrew from similar engagement and silenced their own voices, thwarted from converting their moral imperative into the rights that came with full American citizenship. As a consequence, Wright by and large disappeared from the historical narrative, and few scholars today are familiar with her life or work. I turn to philosopher Jacques Derrida for a partial explanation of this lacuna, since an interpretation of his notions of a “trace” and an “absent presence” underlies my argument regarding antebellum women’s self-silencing.

As Gayatri Spivak explains, Derrida’s “trace” explores the notion that the absence as well as the presence of a signifier of a thing or person – that is, an “absent presence” – affects even the “possibility of thought.”³ Gabrielle Spiegel argues that sometimes the memories and warnings by those who have experienced physical or psychic violence are passed down from generation to generation and so, even in their absence, existential threats can dominate and shape a new present.⁴ Certainly recent research indicates that many trauma survivors draw a veil of silence around events that constitute an incomprehensible violation of their humanity – for example, sexual abuse, torture, the Nazi Holocaust, and the Vietnam War. Frances Wright

³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator. “Translator’s Preface.” *Jacques Derrida / Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997 (1967). xvii. Derrida claims that our attempts to use words as signs or signifiers to constrict a thing, experience, or idea into one or another specific, concrete meaning immediately distort and therefore deny that experience or thing; Derrida borrows from Heidegger’s *sous rature*, or what Spivak translates as “under erasure” – crossing out a word because it is inadequate to express all its possible meanings, yet using the word, since there is no other way to express thought or to communicate. As Gayatri Spivak explains, Jacques Derrida’s “trace” explores the notion that the absence as well as the presence of a signifier – that is, an “absent presence,” or “the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience” – affects the “possibility of thought.” That is, “Derrida’s ~~trace~~ is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.”

⁴ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “The Task of the Historian.” *American Historical Review* 114.1 (Feb. 2009): 1-15. Spiegel’s interpretation of the motivation behind some of philosopher Jacques Derrida’s work is his tangential experience in Algeria of the Nazi Holocaust. “It is my belief that Derrida alchemized into philosophy a psychology deeply marked by the Holocaust ... in which the Holocaust figures as the absent origin that Derrida himself did so much to theorize... Derrida belonged both by birth and by self-conscious identification to that ‘second generation’ of the post-Holocaust world on whose psyche had been indelibly inscribed an event in which it did not participate, but which nonetheless constitutes the underlying narrative of the lives of its members. Theirs was ... a world of silence ... that ‘swallowed up the past.’” See her fn.16 on p. 6.

wrote, thought, and did radical things during the early antebellum period that made her monstrous and terrifying to middle-class and elite white American men. She cropped her hair, wore pants, and engaged in premarital sex. She established an anti-religious commune that purposed to end slavery through miscegenation. She lectured on radical subjects to large, mixed audiences (of men and women). Twenty years before the Seneca Falls convention and the Bloomers costume made women's issues part of public discourse, Wright encouraged women to leave toxic marriages and, in fact, not to marry in the first place. She raged against an evangelical Protestantism that admonished women to submit themselves to male authority. She invigorated a Working-Man's Party to protest the greed of a burgeoning market capitalism and to support free public education for working-class boys and girls. Wright's idea of women's empowerment constituted a fundamental threat to white American men. That women might strive for a rigorous academic education and demand to become more involved in civil society and the public sphere challenged the ideal – and in most cases the reality – of their containment within the domestic space of the home.⁵

White men feared Wright's influence on their women and worked to obliterate her radical agenda from the "possibility of thought," halting American women's progress toward equality for at least a generation. The ideologies that Frances Wright presented to Americans festered in the hegemonic male consciousness even after her name had vanished from memory. Only with the modern emergence of feminist studies has Wright's name begun to appear in scholarly projects and in history, speech, and rhetoric textbooks. Wright's negative influence – or

⁵ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press / Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006. 87, 143. Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 74. The evangelicalism of the 1820s and 1830s prompted women, mostly white and middle-class, to form together into benevolent, mutual improvement, or reform associations; most began as sewing circles, and supported moral reform, temperance, abolition, and anti-Sabbatarianism; they earned large amounts of cash for their wares at bazaars. In the 1830s-1840s, American women's engagement with power-politics came through activities outside of their homes in petition campaigns against Cherokee removal and slavery.

conversely the absent presence of a radically powerful woman – encompasses the story of this project.



Fig. I.1 Frances Wright, 1835

Given the dearth of social opportunities and absence of legal rights of nineteenth-century women, it is astounding that any woman could attempt to influence society significantly. Importantly, Frances Wright had financial means; moreover, she apparently was little perturbed by the rancor of her detractors and at times actually seemed to be energized by it. Wright was an orphan of a wealthy Scottish family; unmarried until the age of thirty-two, she and her sister (who died young) were the sole inheritors of her family's fortune. Because Wright was orphaned at age two, because her only brother died young at sea, because she rejected the oversight of her Tory grandfather, and because she long remained unmarried, her male relatives had no legal control over her. From age sixteen she made her own decisions about her residence, her travels, her education, and her finances. Well-educated, she became the devoted student and associate of more than a few late Enlightenment thinkers: utopian socialist Robert Owen welcomed her admiration and aging atheist philosopher Jeremy Bentham joked that he had fallen in love with his brilliant young protégé. Thomas Jefferson praised Wright's "powers of mind" and considered her his friend; he wrote eleven pages of notes rhapsodizing on a philosophical novel

she had written at age eighteen.⁶ Wright's relationship with the Marquis de Lafayette – begun because of their shared admiration of the republican success that was the United States – became so close that he considered adopting her as his daughter.

When Frances Wright turned her efforts toward radical speech in 1828, thrusting herself into the political sphere with men, she was castigated almost from the first moment she mounted the lecture platform. Yet she stopped her violations of male space only long enough to hide an illegitimate pregnancy. Wright was a proto-feminist, since by her lived life and ideologies she anticipated the modern feminist movement by nearly two centuries. Wright was outrageous because she wrote, demonstrated, and spoke ideas so deeply subversive that she became a lightning rod for the wrath of evangelical Protestants. She positioned herself in the new United States as a self-sacrificing radical during the transitional, nation-building period of the early antebellum. In 1831 Calvinist preacher Lyman Beecher, the father of novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, warned his congregants against Wright and other atheists when he said, “The anti-christian conspiracy, the long-delayed but terrific result of perverted christianity, has given a new impulse to the cause of scepticism.”⁷ Wright questioned everything that the American antebellum power structure upheld: not only women's subjugation, but also slavery and the patriarchal political web of the banking, legal, religious, and publishing systems. She initiated a sweeping experiment to end slavery and first appropriated public space by purchasing a radical newspaper and printing articles on all these subjects with Robert Dale Owen, son of Robert Owen, as co-editor. Then she moved on to the lecture platform and began to speak her lessons

⁶ Frances Wright D'Arusmont. *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright D'Arusmont*. New York: John Windt, 1844. 5. “That little work, hastily entered on at the age of eighteen, to enliven a few winter evenings of some friends in the country, and then as hastily thrown aside, was first published in London ... at the request of a Greek scholar.”

⁷ Lyman Beecher, *Lectures on Scepticism, delivered in Park Street Church, Boston ...* Cincinnati: Corey and Fairbank, 1835. 15.

(she called herself a “teacher”) to mixed audiences of men and women with her own voice. In 1828 when she began lecturing, this was unheard of. The lyceum movement had barely begun and women would not participate in it for over twenty years.⁸ Where women had spoken publicly on occasions in the several decades prior to that, the addresses they delivered were conventional, did not challenge society, and were most often presented to women-only audiences in their parlors.⁹

Antebellum male conservatives were infuriated by both the content and the fact of her public speech, for it forced them to confront openly the specter of empowered women. That Wright refused to reside within the separate sphere that was women’s space was simply not to be borne by powerful American men. Their almost universal pattern of response was at first disbelief and then odium. In what became a decades-long barrage of calumny, outraged newspaper and magazine reviewers of the period – mostly Protestant ministers and theologians – had to coin new words and phrases in order to adequately vilify her, such as “the lectress,” “an itinerant lecturer in petticoats,” the “priestess of pleasure,” the “female apostle of infidelity,” and “the Red Harlot of Infidelity.”¹⁰ Her reputation was ruined; only because Wright was an heiress did she have the financial freedom to continue to follow the dictates of her intellect and conscience into elite male space. Frances Wright’s unconventional persona, her dicta, and her mode of delivery combined to constitute her as, in the words of one scholar, the “antithesis of respectability” and the “congruence of religious and sexual deviance” in the minds of evangelical

⁸ Angela G. Ray. *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005. Public lectures in the early lyceum movement, which originated in small towns and villages in Massachusetts, focused on educational topics and self-improvement and were directed toward the young and old, working-class and elite, and women and men. “[I]f the lyceum was to be a place appropriate for respectable women, then conventions of the day required the rhetorical containment of conflict and controversy.” Mary Alice Wyman, *Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927. 196. “While [Elizabeth Oates Smith] was not the first woman to lecture on a public platform in America, she was the first, according to her own statement, to secure admission to the lyceum for her sex...in October, 1851.”

⁹ Kathleen S. Sullivan, “Women, Speech and Experience.” *The Good Society* 14.1/2 (2005): 37.

¹⁰ “Fanny Wright.” *The New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2.

Protestant ministers, theologians, and writers across the young nation.¹¹ Placing Wright's writings in dialogue with those of other major antebellum figures reveals insights not only about that period, but about our own. Many of the topics that Wright addressed nearly two hundred years ago, such as religious autonomy, mandatory public education, birth control, unmarried cohabitation, interracial sex, and miscegenation, still discomfort many Americans today.

During the mid-antebellum period Wright's battles – with powerful men for women's and working-men's rights, and with working-class men and middle-class women to demand their full equality – were entirely unwinnable. Frances Wright's story has been one that no historian dared tell until the early 1920s, and it will be her story and those people whom she directly affected that I shall recount in this project. Wright's radical political positions, her atheism, and her proto-feminism expressed in person through public oratory ignited a firestorm of opposition among magazine reviewers, and especially at evangelical presses. The furor over Wright energized what had been a lackluster anti-fiction campaign by evangelical reviewers, which successfully silenced proto-feminist writers for two decades. I will explore Wright's contestation with the hegemonic evangelicals of her day, as well as her influence upon three women writers who followed her: Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza Cabot Follen. As I shall demonstrate, those women, in complicated and often self-abnegating ways, unequivocally rejected Wright's radical messages in their own efforts to escape the sorts of punishments being meted out to Wright. As a note, because of length restrictions this project examines only women writers who were white and from the middle-class. Certainly, similar consideration of women writers who were further marginalized by their being African American (enslaved or free), Irish American, Roman Catholic, Jewish, or lesbian would be valuable and

¹¹ Sarah Barringer Gordon, "Blasphemy and the Law of Religious Liberty in Nineteenth-Century America." *American Quarterly* 52.4 (Dec. 2000): 682-719. 691.

worth future consideration. Regarding my research methodologies, I support my arguments through archival evidence – primarily, contemporary periodical articles, but also correspondence, publishing catalogues, and library borrowing records, as well as the fiction written by Hale, Child, and Follen. I restrict the period of inquiry to 1828 to 1839; 1828 is the year in which Frances Wright first spoke from the public lecture stage, and 1839 is the year of the publication of the last novel that openly criticized Wright.

EVANGELICAL MORALITY IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

Frances Wright sought reform in many areas, but when her voice was shouted down in the 1830s, it would be years before advocates took up her causes again.¹² Her most radical positions – atheism and proto-feminism – vanished from public discourse for decades. They are the two Wrightist positions that Protestant evangelicals dominated the longest, and some religious historians argue that that conservative influence has had long-reaching effects.¹³ Tracing their “rhetoric ... back to second-generation New England Puritanism,” Peter W. Williams argues that “a powerful drive by the ... religious right, based in the agencies of Protestant evangelicalism, to maintain America as a de facto Christian nation remains unabated.”¹⁴ The persistence of this correlation between religious ideas, social identity, and political power is intriguing and invites one to trace its history.

¹² Not until the mid-1840s would Bronson Alcott, George Ripley, John Noyes, and Horace Mann begin to seek reforms similar to those Wright had encouraged in 1828, such as communitarianism, dress reform, birth control, workers’ rights, and public education.

¹³ James Turner. *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. 155, 262-263. Not until the late 1860s would Wright’s argument for atheism be resurrected by Charles Eliot Norton, under the influence of Darwinian science, and, not until the 1880s would it “assum[e] its present status as a fully available option in American culture.”

¹⁴ Peter W. Williams, *America’s Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990, 2002. 511. Paul K. Conkin. *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, p. xvi. Conkin argues that “to a much greater extent than most people realize, members of the Reformed mainstream ... still own and govern America” through their “continued influence on elite culture.”

In the first decades of the 1800s evangelical Protestantism was advancing in scope and influence in the new United States through what has been termed the Second Great Awakening. Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist ministers from Boston to Georgia preached at week-long revival services in churches and in wooded camp settings, drawing massive crowds. The movement militated against the perceived atheism of Enlightenment Deism, as well as against the spiritual coldness of both Deism and mainline Protestantism.¹⁵ Significant numbers of working-class and middle-class Americans began turning toward this vibrant and aggressive “heart-centered” Protestant evangelicalism. During the antebellum decades, a period of industrial progress, financial crisis, and social upheaval, evangelicals began to redefine decorum and propriety. The growth of evangelicalism in the new century began establishing an ideology of conservative Christian piety that increasingly replaced the liberal philosophical frame of the passing republican era. By the 1820s a movement toward evangelical Protestant unity across denominations began gaining momentum, with groups forming such as the American Evangelical Alliance, the American Sunday School Union, the American Home Mission Society, and the American Tract Society.¹⁶ A well-known Currier and Ives lithograph created for readers on the cusp of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age depicted Protestant cautionary and

¹⁵ Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.* Ed. by Charles Beecher. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1864. 100-101. “I did not attack infidelity directly.... That would have been cracking a whip behind a runaway team – made them run the faster. I always preached right to the conscience... At first there was winking and blinking from below to gallery, forty or fifty exchanging glances, smiling, and watching. But when that was over, infidelity was ended, for it was infidelity ... that had its roots in misunderstanding.”

¹⁶ Williams, *America's Religions*, 192-193. Carefully worded manuals and mission statements reminded participants of the need to stay clear of sectarian-specific doctrine as they shepherded converts from revivals into one evangelical project or another. One goal was to reach the working class, who either couldn't afford to rent pew space or were not proximate to a “free church.” Alliance-oriented evangelicals realized they could easily alienate individuals who had already have been converted at a revival and were already affiliated with a particular sectarian perspective. By the end of the 1820s a large-scale movement was at work among both clergy and laity to abandon Protestant denominationalism altogether as inherently divisive and intrinsically harmful to the advance of Protestant Christianity in America.

prescriptive messages that emerged from the antebellum and war years.¹⁷ *The Ladder of Fortune* leans against a sturdy oak tree, eleven people gathered at its foot.¹⁸ Scenes of disorder and dissipation in the distance narrate a tale of national irrationality, as groups of people in the background are engrossed variously in swindling, gambling, drinking, playing the lottery, speculating on the stock exchange, and going on strike. Contrasted with those scenes of chaos, sin, and greed is the other half of the evangelical lesson, told in the foreground. There, apples labeled *Influence, Reputation, Favor of God, Contentment, Riches, and Success* dangle enticingly above the heads of those assembled below. The two sides of the ladder read *Morality and Honesty*, and the rungs *Industry, Temperance, Prudence, Integrity, Economy, Punctuality, Courage and Perseverance*. Engaged with these word-tutorials are a family group and a young



Fig. I.2 *The Ladder of Fortune*,
Currier and Ives, 1875

male scholar, his hands raised approvingly or in grateful prayer. Workingmen and a merchant approach the tree as if prepared to climb it.¹⁹ A caption inscribed below the visual images moralizes, “Industry and Morality bring solid rewards. Idle schemes and speculations yield

¹⁷ Currier and Ives. *The Ladder of Fortune*. Lithograph. 1875. An earlier print, *The Way of Good & Evil*, presents identical and even more clarified earthly and eternal consequences for human behaviors. John Hailer. Color lithograph. 1862. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ This work is a melding of two earlier prints, *The Tree of Life, the Christian* (one is at the Library of Congress) and *The Tree of Life, the Sinner*.

¹⁹ Jama Lazerow’s *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America*. 1995.

poverty and ruin.” This lithograph aptly sums up the nineteenth-century evangelical message to Americans: sinners would suffer for their wrong choices, while moral and pious people would be spiritually and materially rewarded.²⁰ These evangelical Protestant values of a heartfelt and sincere piety, a rigorous work ethic, and God’s omniscience became hegemonic and integrated into antebellum evangelical Protestant identity and into the extra-religious temperance movement.²¹ Advances in print technology created increasing opportunities for evangelical writers and editors to reify that ideology in magazine and newspaper articles for the new faithful to use as a guiding light. Those who dared to contest evangelical values, including Frances Wright, would come increasingly under the public scrutiny of editors and reviewers.²² Middle- and upper-class evangelical Protestant ministers were the power brokers who set the agenda, of course, for they had ready access to print media in addition to their pulpits. Many of these men also taught theology courses at colleges, edited and contributed articles to denominational organs, held positions on benevolent society boards, delivered lectures on the new lyceum circuit, and wrote letters to magazines and newspapers. The positions that these men took demanded attention from everyone who intended to be respectable in antebellum America.

Unsettling social, economic, and political changes, and especially the gradual transformation of the economy through steam power and mechanization from a patriarchal agrarianism to market capitalism, gave many Americans reasons to welcome religious and

²⁰ This image also presents a visual lesson in nineteenth-century American gender roles and expectations: males needed to pursue and receive moral guidance so that they could advance in the material world of the public sphere (the father directs a toddler boy toward the tree and its lessons), while females were to content themselves with religious teachings within the domestic circle (a daughter, holding a miniature weaving loom, and mother set their gazes away from the tree).

²¹ Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, New York: Harper & Row, 1950. Bernard Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact on Religion in America*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1958.

²² From Turner, 101. By 1836 one college president openly scorned any Deistic theorist and statesman “who now obtrudes on the social circle his infidel notions” as an “arrogan[t] ... literary coxcomb, [in] want of that refinement which distinguishes the polished gentleman.”

spiritual inspiration. In 1829 when the market crashed, many wealthy and middle-class families lost their financial security and working-class families again were left struggling to survive. During this period workingmen began locating one another, in what historian Sean Wilentz denotes as the first time that they self-consciously identified as a class.²³ In holiday parades celebrating America's greatness workingmen refused any longer to walk alongside their masters, but instead walked with workingmen's symbols and slogans on their own banners.²⁴ Frances Wright played a pivotal role in their demands for advancement, and for a period some critics considered all workingmen as members of "Fanny Wright's Working-Man's Party." Many employers, though not inclined to relinquish to workers the rights that by dint of their legal citizenship they were due, still hoped evangelicalism would bring new opportunity for societal cohesion with a religious center.²⁵ In the early 1830s, evangelical employers saw Frances Wright's atheism-tainted political message as threatening to destroy that cohesion. Many workingmen initially did support Wright, though others rejected her atheism and her stand on

²³ Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*. Frances Wright's role was significant here as a co-champion, along with her colleague Robert Dale Owen, of the Working-man's Party, co-editor of their organization organ, the *Free Enquirer*, and as their principal public speaker. For a time theirs became known as the "Fanny Wright Party" and themselves as "Fanny Wright Men."

²⁴ The efforts by working people to unionize and work for improvement of their status were co-opted by a hegemonous capitalistic elite. Both Sean Wilentz and David Waldstreicher trace these efforts through their attempts at unionizing, the evidences of a wage labor ideology emblazoned on banners, in toasts at banquets, in speeches recorded in labor organs and later in the penny press. While different specific events can be blamed – BUS crisis in 1819, economic depressions in 1837, 1850, and 1877 – each time, in the end, Radical union leaders could not sustain their groups as coherent. Powerful political parties, like Van Buren's Whig Republicans and Tammany Hall, invariably swooped in with money, offers of smaller chunks of political power and influence, to draw off down every workingmen attempt at fundamental and permanent political power. While unions, over time, did win concessions – a ten-hour workday and better conditions – they constantly fought the hegemonous influence of powerful elites working carefully with but always also against them.

²⁵ Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, 1978; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, N.Y., 1790-1865*, 1983. Johnson, Wilentz and Mary P. Ryan engage Protestantism as a critical factor in the defusing of laborers' efforts to effect radical social change in antebellum America. Both Johnson and Ryan address the formation of the antebellum middle class in upstate New York through evangelical Protestant Christianity. Paul Johnson and Mary P. Ryan, through different approaches, both understand the working class to have been functioning in response to the moves of the growing middle and elite classes.

universal education, which separated children from their parents.²⁶ So while historians differ on the manner in which and purpose for which mercantilists, wives, ministers, and laborers became involved in evangelical Protestantism, its advent clearly changed the dynamics of social intercourse.

While evangelical religiosity played a key role in Americans' negotiation of their new market economy during the mid-antebellum, Christian rhetorics supporting or attacking African-American chattel slavery – another issue with which Frances Wright engaged – also originated in this period. The ground rules established by the 1819-20 Missouri Compromise had positioned Congress as arbiter of the degree to which chattel slavery would permeate the new country. It had also established the idea that the United States would be fractured by slavery; in 1820 Thomas Jefferson presciently argued that the Compromise would eventually be fatal to the country's peaceful union.²⁷ In the 1820s slavery discourse increased both in the North and the South, focusing on the economics of wage labor versus labor using enslaved people, as those regional sections vied for economic dominance. Frances Wright's strategy to solve the endemic problems of slavery, which I explore in Chapter 1, was *sui generis*. At her utopian community in western Tennessee, Nashoba, white supervisors lived and worked with enslaved black people to help them earn their manumission, thus Nashoba worked to free enslaved people without denying owners the value of their purchases. Antebellum owners of enslaved people, pressed by

²⁶ "Ward Meetings." *Genius of Temperance* 5.6, Union Series 2.23 (Aug. 11, 1830): 2. "Our readers will recognize on this list, several of the names affixed to the address of the Majority of the General Executive Committee last May, in which the schemes of the Wright and Owen, alias Agrarian, alias Daily Sentinel party were so successfully exposed.... They disapprove that paper believing it a vehicle for supporting the doctrines of Fanny Wright, rather than the interests of the Working Men. They ask for their proper influence in the government, a revision of the militia system, the abolition of auction monopolies, and of imprisonment for debt." "Ward Meetings." *Genius of Temperance* 5.6, Union Series 2.23 (Aug. 11, 1830): 2.

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes. April 22, 1820. Thomas Jefferson Papers. Manuscript Division. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C. "[T]his momentous question [the Missouri question], like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. but this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. a geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived [sic] and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated."

abolitionists' claims that slavery was unprofitable and inhumane, reached the point where they felt they had to justify slavery. Understanding enslaved African American to be constitutionally infantile and therefore dependent, owners argued that it was their moral duty and burden to care for them. Pro-slavery advocates believed that Northern capitalism had brought the peculiar institution to the South in the first place and that it was unfair for abolitionists to turn about and abuse them for its existence. They claimed that their enslaved people appreciated the provision of housing, food, clothing, and opportunities for leisure, and felt an abiding reciprocal love and affection for their owners. With the love and appreciation of the enslaved, owners could see themselves as moral human beings.²⁸ Nat Turner's 1831 revolt became a watershed moment in the national slavery debate, for his actions fundamentally challenged the foundations of slave-owning ideology by providing a new model of agency for enslaved African Americans.²⁹ Northern abolitionists saw such a rebellion as the terrible but inevitable consequence of an enslaved human being's desire for liberty, while owners of enslaved people interpreted Turner's actions as those of an individual fanatic.³⁰ The arguments on slavery soon began to turn

²⁸ Eugene Genovese. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Random House, 1976. Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Genovese argues that many African Americans did see their owners as their protectors, and believed they could negotiate with their owners for "privileges" – a cool swim in the middle of a hot day's work in the fields, a feast on Christmas day, the opportunity to attend religious services. Rather than struggle against their servitude, which rumor and witness of whippings attested to as hopeless, slaves simply accepted it in order to feel human. Mathews sees the slave owners' ideology as a religious extension of Genovese's argument – that God wanted them to care for their slaves, and that the Bible clearly supported that position. God also allowed punishment, so long as slaves were constructively disciplined by it and that it was not simply the outlet for a cruel man's passions.

²⁹ Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, The Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Va. As Fully and Voluntarily Made to Thomas R. Gray*. Richmond: Thomas R. Gray, 1832. 10, 14. Turner's orchestrated rebellion, which effected the murders of his apparently kind owner and fifty-four other whites, was intended to instill terror in slave owners, who subsequent to it could no longer be certain of their slaves' loyalty. "Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and ... I should take it on and fight against the Serpent.... And on the appearance of the sign, (the eclipse of the sun last February) I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons.... [I]t was my object to carry terror and devastation where we went.... Mrs. Williams fled..., but she was ... brought back, and after showing her the mangled body of her lifeless husband, she was told to get down and lay by his side, where she was shot dead."

³⁰ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. The 1833 South Carolina nullification crisis can be seen as part of the Southern response and evidence of the development of Southern nationalism.

theological. Southern ministers had long held that the existence of the institution was purely a political and not a religious issue, but when Northern ministers began attacking slavery as a sin and against God's loving nature, Southern clergy entered the arena.³¹ Discarding the Jeffersonian attitude that slavery was a "necessary evil," Southern clergy argued that the institution of slavery was in fact a "positive good" that God had created.³² They contended that slavery was beneficial to African Americans because it brought them out of a savage and heathen place to a civilized and Christian land. Southerners began the process of transferring the loyalties they had once felt toward the United States as a "Redeemer Nation" – now fetid with atheistic abolitionism – to their pure and Christian South; that is, Southerners were beginning to think sectionally rather than nationally.³³ By the late 1830s division along sectional lines began appearing in Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist denominations, essentially preparing Southerners for their separation from the North as an independent nation.³⁴ But the debate was rarely over race prejudice. White supremacy was assumed by both Northern and Southern whites, as indicated by the routine exclusion of African Americans from membership in national, state, and local anti-slavery societies.

³¹ Ibid, 158. Southern ministers responded that since the Northern ministers had dragged the subject into the moral and spiritual realm, they could no longer be silent. They argued that if "a political issue was perceived as possessing any kind of moral significance,...it fell within their jurisdiction and justified their attention." Northern anti-slavery became far more institutionalized and accessible to ordinary Americans in the 1830s. Lydia Maria Child's publication of *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* in 1833 rallied anti-slavery forces behind immediate emancipation, with William Garrison at the helm of that radical movement. The impetus to create a colony of freed slaves in Liberia, campaigns for legislation that declared all children born to slaves in the District of Columbia to be "free at a certain age," and Texas's appeal for admission as a slave state were more motivations for both men and women, black and white, to form anti-slavery societies in this decade. Susan Zaeske. *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, & Women's Political Identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 33, 44. Petitioning was an effective mechanism used by anti-slavery societies and is generally credited with forcing legislators to engage with the issue of slavery, and later Northern abolitionists flooded the South with anti-slavery print propaganda through the U.S. mails.

³² Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 20.

³³ Ibid, 178, 187. Snay argues for a "religious logic of secession" that correlated the process of Christian conversion and the steps of Southern sectionalism.

³⁴ Most academics would agree that there has been no moment in history when skin pigmentation has not affected the efforts of African Americans to engage in public policy. Certainly antebellum African Americans, enslaved and freed, were co-opted by powerful hegemonic ideologies, both Southern and Northern, secular and religious.

WOMEN'S SPHERE / WOMEN'S VOICES

The question of the inclusion of African Americans in anti-slavery societies created less controversy than did the inclusion of women, for issues of women's empowerment still had been little addressed publically in America.³⁵ Indeed, a moratorium on the issues of women's rights blanketed Americans for decades after Wright's intrusion into the public sphere in the late 1820s and 1830s. While the Seneca Falls convention and changes in the New York laws governing married women's property occurred in 1848, relatively few American women saw a real increase in their rights until passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Without question, Frances Wright's argument in her radical public lectures for women's autonomy enraged evangelical male editors more than atheism, miscegenation, or any other topic. Many educated, intelligent women had grown up in the culture of revering Washington and other Revolutionary patriots, and naturally many of them yearned for access to the American promises of power and liberty. Of course, mid-antebellum women understood that, ultimately, their biological realities and marital status demarcated the boundaries of their access to respectability. That is, a woman living without the nominal legitimate protection of a man (at the least), whether it was husband, father, or brother, had little chance of supporting herself financially and less of defending herself against any allegation of impropriety made against her. To be reputable a woman either had to marry a moral and upright man or remain unmarried in the household of her respectable father, and so almost all women sought marriage and tried to make the most profitable matches they could. Critical to this notion are both Linda Kerber's interpretation of the notion of separate spheres, popular during the early republican and the antebellum eras, and Mary P. Ryan's discussion of women's gaining moral authority in the home, which began to transform traditional

³⁵ Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak*, 143. Though abolition was the focus for some of the groups, none admitted African American women, who formed their own groups instead.

patriarchal relationships between the sexes.³⁶ Both Kerber and Ryan hold that early republican mothers had the primary task in their separate domestic space of shaping moral citizens and that these roles followed women into the antebellum period. These roles, as well as men's, naturally, were socially ascribed. Men were to dwell and succeed in the rough-and-tumble corporeal world outside the home – in politics, the marketplace, and the military. Women were to remain in the private sphere of the home and parlors of other women, where it was proper for them to commune with things ephemeral and eternal.³⁷ Both in the New Republic and in the early antebellum period, middle-class and working-class women were encouraged to support the American republic by being good wives, mothers, workers, and servants. Even though they could not hold property or vote, mothers were to educate their children and be moral guidance and “helpmeets” to their husbands.³⁸ Women demonstrated their right to that moral authority by their evincing particular personal qualities. As scholar David Reynolds notes, the antebellum “cult of sincerity manifested itself in a movement toward demure self-effacement in dress” and “quiet gentility in manners.”³⁹ So an important means by which a “true woman” was to

³⁶ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1980, and “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” *Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9-39.

³⁷ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Karin E. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-century American Culture*, 2003. Forty years before so-called “muscular Christianity” made an appearance, antebellum ministers found themselves in a dilemma: if trustworthy men were tough, how could Americans trust “men of the cloth,” who in their definition as religious were to be inherently and inevitably “soft”? While antebellum Americans might have wished for strong and masculine preachers, they were not believed to be much in evidence in evangelical Protestant America. Reynolds directs our attention to these in the character of the “reverend rake.” Gedge notes that relationships between women and clergymen seemed likely because of their apparently shared emotional states, unlike “real men,” who did not have claim to be comfortable with such spiritual intimacies. She argues that society was fearful of illicit relationships forming between women and clergymen, and that therefore clergymen often worked doubly hard to prove their hardness and inaccessibility toward women in their congregations.

³⁸ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

³⁹ David S. Reynolds. Book review. *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. *American Historical Review* 94.5 (Dec. 1989): 1478.

demonstrate her propriety was by self-abnegation and a willing self-silencing in both public and private settings.⁴⁰

For decades a small number of American women had been taking advantage of the opportunity to receive a semi-formal education at the elbow of their college-educated brothers or fathers. Some women thus educated felt a greater sense of entitlement than did their less enlightened sisters to engage, albeit limitedly, with the public sphere. The new evangelicalism of the 1820s prompted women who met at their churches or through missionary work to form together into benevolent, mutual improvement, reform, or maternal associations. These (mainly) white, middle-class women worked together for causes such as abolition, moral reform, and temperance through sewing circles, a natural and comfortable venue in which women could gather. Historian Mary Kelley argues that by performing these acts, women were able to position those they were helping – enslaved people, fallen women, and drunkards – as Others, or individuals who were on a lower social level than they.⁴¹ Their husbands and fathers approved of such endeavors, so long as women did not seem to try to help themselves or to step outside of the domestic sphere. Yet through these experiences women did begin to create and practice new empowering and proactive behaviors. For example, women’s sewing circles evolved into bazaars where women sold the items they produced and generated significant returns.⁴² Also, at

⁴⁰ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. Halttunen describes a complicated system of parlor etiquette that became widely accepted as defining reliable measures of trustworthy behaviors. Methods such as polite conversation, posture, dress, and calling cards were used to communicate a sentimental transparency that was supposed to distinguish moral, safe people from those (marginalized or poor) who were deviously upwardly mobile. Gestures, body language, and facial expressions could confirm one’s sincerity or expose one’s imposture. See also Andrew Peabody, “Peabody’s Address” in *Conversation: Its Faults and Its Graces*: “Part I. An Address Delivered before the Newburyport Female High School, December 19, 1846.” Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1855. 16-17. Peabody, Peabody, a Unitarian minister, argued for the “necessity of religion as the guiding, controlling element in conversation.”

⁴¹ Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 30. “Instead of acting on the basis of a shared gender identity, white, Protestant, and middle-class women reproduced economic and political inequalities.”

⁴² These first occurred on a voluntary basis, sewing garments and other necessities for the religiously affiliated – poorly recompensed missionaries and their families on the frontier, in settlements or “tramping” itinerants. Next

their meetings women discussed reading materials and read their own compositions aloud to one another – one way in which women began to learn to “stand and speak,” an element of civil society with which only Quaker women had ever before participated.⁴³ Far more importantly, from the mid-1830s on thousands of women participated in anti-slavery petition campaigns, especially with all-female groups, demonstrating a new boldness and commitment to their constitutional rights.⁴⁴ This engagement with power politics took early-nineteenth-century women out of their homes and gave them a taste of political agency; liberal men sanctioned petition drives, since these also kept women mostly in their place.⁴⁵ But though few men could condone it, by 1836 many male abolitionists were well aware, through casual conversations and by reading their written work, that female abolitionists like Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Abby Kelley, Lucretia Mott, and Lydia Maria Child had the intellect and the eloquence to speak for their cause, if allowed and if they dared. Yet in the early 1830s, with the sole and infamous exception of Frances Wright, adult women still did not “stand and speak” their words boldly for

women began to enter the world of mercantile capitalism with products that had currency, such as sewn or crocheted goods. Female social reformers wrote and distributed religious tracts and sewed clothing for needy Native and African Americans, and non-Christians in foreign lands.

⁴³ Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 98-100. Citing various ladies’ seminary students and parents of those students, Kelley notes that “[a]ll of them understood that standing and speaking before the public [at their final cumulative examinations] represented a challenge to conventional models of womanhood.” Apparently this effort was allowed to young women – presumably around sixteen years of age – since their innocence and youth protected them from sexual or self-aggrandizing implications.

⁴⁴ Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 74, 115, 119, 121. Zaeske delineates women’s use of anti-slavery petitions during the antebellum period as the only Constitutionally available means for the disenfranchised – women, African Americans, and others – to enter the political arena; the Grimké sisters were instrumental. Women participated despite the publication of an essay by the well-known Catharine Beecher, sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, warning women not to enter the public sphere of politics. Women used a deferential tone of address in the early 1830s; women’s and men’s names appeared on separate sides of those petitions. Women became bolder toward the end of the decade, using far more confrontational language and courageously signing their names beneath and above men’s signatures. They began shortening the opening lines so that supportive male congressmen could read them before the “gag” rule silenced them. On Feb. 21, 1838 at a hearing of the Massachusetts State Legislature in the District of Columbia on abolishing slavery in the D.C., Angelina Grimké read her petition (at J.Q. Adams’ invitation) through hisses of disapproval, and became the first woman to speak to a U.S. legislative body on a political subject.

⁴⁵ However, the opportunities that they gained came with great struggle with white elite males. During the antebellum abolitionist campaigns, women believed that they were fighting for rights for all people – the rights promised in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They were frustrated at being asked to wait for freedmen to be granted the franchise, but still, most complied. They believed that if they waited their turn, powerful white males would turn attention to their cause and bring them the vote and rights (dress reform, marriage law reform).



Fig. I.3 Abolitionist Theodosia Gilbert Chaplin seated next to Frederick Douglass, while Gerrit Smith addresses an anti-slavery convention, 1850

the cause of anti-slavery, in front of men or mixed-gender (promiscuous) groups.⁴⁶ Instead, the practice was for a man to rise and speak on behalf of a well-known woman; she remained seated wherever she was and handed her script to a man, who rose and read it aloud for her.⁴⁷ Women's desire to become more involved in civil society and the public sphere challenged the scope of their containment within the domestic sphere of the home.⁴⁸ Since 1828 Frances Wright had been ignoring the furor and revulsion over her public lectures; it was not until not until 1837 that Angelina Grimké opened the door to a pious, respectable female public speech on behalf of anti-slavery.

While during the antebellum period their political voices from the lecture platform were highly contested, women did have greater access to print. It is important, then, to determine what sorts of texts women of that period read and wrote, a task made easier in recent decades. Since the 1990s the study of publication has broadened, with scholars from the new disciplines of print culture and book history joining literary and reader-reception scholars to pursue

⁴⁶ Kelley, *Learning to Stand*. This is Mary Kelley's phrase, though abolitionism is not her particular subject matter.

⁴⁷ Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict*. Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869. 101. Abolitionist May recalled his doing so often. He said that Lydia Maria Child, Maria Chapman, Eliza Follen, and others "were presiding geniuses in all our councils and more public meetings, often proposing the wisest measures, and suggesting to those who were 'allowed to speak in the assembly' the most weighty thoughts, pertinent facts, apt illustrations, which they could not be persuaded to utter aloud. Repeatedly in those days, before Angelina and Sarah Grimké had taught others besides Quaker women 'to speak in meeting,' if they had anything to say that was worth hearing, - repeatedly did I spring to the platform, crying, 'Hear me as the mouthpiece of Mrs. Child, or Mrs. Chapman, or Mrs. Follen,' and convulsed the audience with a stroke of wit, or electrified them with a flash of eloquence, caught from the lips of one or the other of our antislavery prophetesses."

⁴⁸ Kelley, *Learning to Stand*, 87.

questions related to antebellum publishing. Some of these questions have been concerned with what antebellum readers read, what they thought they should read, what they thought about what they read, and what they wrote for publication.⁴⁹

A broad consensus is that the genre that appealed to most antebellum women was fiction, but it also was the most contested, since novel reading had long been viewed as time-wasting and as inspiring unrealistic expectations. In separate projects, Baym and reception scholar James Machor methodically analyzed periodical articles in order to obtain information on magazine reviewers' opinions about novel reading.⁵⁰ But neither scholar looked specifically at articles dedicated to the subject, relying instead on comments about novel reading that appear *in passim* in book reviews. But rabidly religious book reviewers who reviled fiction as inherently sinful were unlikely to review it, for if they reviewed a novel, they would have to admit to having read it.⁵¹ Articles deriding novel reading were far less likely to appear among Baym's and Machor's searches, since by default these scholars had restricted their sources to periodicals that approved of novels.⁵² Dawn Coleman also studies contemporary magazine articles to study antebellum

⁴⁹ Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1989. David Paul Nord, "A Republican Literature: A Study of Magazine Reading and Readers in Late Eighteenth-Century New York." *American Quarterly* 40.1 (March 1988): 42-64. Christine Pawley. "Seeking 'Significance': Actual Readers, Specific Reading Communities." *Book History* 5 (2002): 143-160. Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray. "'Have You Read...?': Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.2 (Sept. 1997): 139-170.

⁵⁰ Nina Baym. *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984. James Machor. *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

⁵¹ Dawn Coleman, *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013. 48-49. In her assessment of Baym's and Machor's work, Coleman notes that Baym's sources were "hundreds of book reviews published between 1840 and 1860 in major periodicals," and that Machor was "[w]orking from a similar archive."

⁵² Steven Mailloux, "The Use and Abuse of Fiction: 'Readers Eating Books.'" Chapter 2, *Reception Histories: Rhetoric, Pragmatism, and American Cultural Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998. Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*. New York: D. Appleton, 1930. Mailloux does use articles centered on novel reading itself, but none that appeared before 1868 – and most are from the 1880s. Novel-revilers commonly reviewed non-fiction – biographies, histories, theological exegeses, travel sketches, and volumes of poetry. So, when reception scholars search for actual magazine reviews of individual novels, they are often directed to relatively liberal and secular magazines – the ones that continued to publish fiction – as contrasted with religious and conservative magazines. Secular magazines, and especially secular literary magazines, like *The Southern*

novel reading and argues that the practice of puffery was a key factor, where reviewers with ties to novel-publishing houses routinely praised novel reading.⁵³ While Coleman is correct, she is only referring only to reviewers for secular magazines or magazines from liberal Protestant denominations – she discounts the impact of “anti-fiction discourse” – for only non-evangelical reviewers could have had ties to publishing houses that profited from sales of novels and benefitted from creating puffery.⁵⁴ By focusing on puffery, Coleman’s argument ignores the real impact of religious reviewers on novel reading. In my own research on reviewers’ attitudes toward the practice of novel reading I have relied on search terms such as “novel reading” rather than by looking inside reviews of novels. I have also restricted the time frame to the 1820s through the 1840s. That search produced over one hundred articles whose primary focus is novel reading from a wide range of secular and religious magazines, and which variously support, condemn, or equivocate on that practice.

There is no doubt that fiction was by far the most popular genre with antebellum women readers and, indeed, fiction was the only literary genre in which any female writer could expect

Literary Messenger, *The Knickerbocker*, and *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, were far more likely to approve of fiction- and novel reading. Baym and Machor also tend to conflate reviewer opinion across decades simply because the subject matter is similar. By not considering the trajectory of antebellum attitudes toward novel reading, they fail to discern real differences that existed in the types of attacks made about it. They often use a broad brush and refer to their work as reflecting the entire antebellum period, but their actual data reflects only the period after 1840. This approach ignores important, public-opinion-altering events that occurred before then. The arguments in my project emerge from events and a *zeitgeist* that emerged at the end of the 1820s and hits its fullest stride in the mid-1840s. Many scholars of antebellum periodical literature rely on Mott’s seminal investigation of American periodicals. He single-handedly located, organized, and assembled a vast database of information covering every periodical published from the 1740s to the early twentieth century. Given the fundamental theoretical shifts in academics’ approach to culture and history, the time is long overdue to reappraise his assessments.

⁵³ Coleman, *Preaching*, 49. According to Coleman, such reviewers projected the “viewpoint of an industry with an economic stake in respecting fiction.” Coleman focuses on articles from non-religious periodicals, but with a focus on reviewers’ puffery of books. Magazines published by evangelical Protestants who disdained novel reading would have had no ties to novel publishers. When she offers as evidence Lara Cohen’s research into antebellum puffery, which argues that magazine reviewers often functioned as an extension of company marketing schemes to promote a particular novel, Coleman and Cohen cannot be referring to evangelical religious publishers or religious magazines that were not associated with any houses that published fiction. It can only refer to secular magazines, which had ties to publishing houses that profited from sales of novels and benefitted from creating puffery.

⁵⁴ Coleman, 48. Coleman argues that scholars Nord, Paul Gutjahr, and Cathy Gunther Brown have characterized “antebellum anti-fiction discourse ... as peculiarly Protestant, without acknowledging that it was culturally representative or noting its circulation among non-religious writers as well.”

to earn money to support a family during this period.⁵⁵ As scholars have demonstrated, the subjects or foci of those novels tended to be the suffering and struggles of inherently good men and women who relied on their piety and Christian faith to overcome those obstacles. The question as to whether women might have entertained proto-feminist novels that attacked the material causes of women's suffering and struggles is one that this project asks. Locating early-nineteenth-century proto-feminist non-fiction writing is possible, and Frances Wright's work is the most abundant. Finding such sentiments in antebellum novels is a far more difficult task.⁵⁶ Certainly such work could be found in France and in England during this period, notably by Madame de Staël and Mary Wollstonecraft, whose unfinished novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* Frances Wright could well have read; she is known to have revered its writer.⁵⁷ Early in

⁵⁵ Before Fanny Fern's popular essays of the 1850s, only elite or radical magazines such as *Ladies' Garland*, *Ladies' Magazine*, or *The Dial* published cerebral essays by women. Full-length non-fiction works by women are difficult to locate in the 1820s, where in the mid-1830s many more appeared: Lydia Maria Child's *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* in 1833 and *History of the Condition of Women* in 1835, Catharine Beecher's *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* in 1836, Angelina Grimke's *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* in 1836, and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845 stand out, though only Child's, Grimke's, and Fuller's address women's rights. Lucretia Mott's *Discourse on Woman* appeared in the late antebellum in 1850. Other works appeared much later, including *History of Woman Suffrage* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Gage in 1881, and Stanton's *Woman's Bible* in 1895, both rich sources of early woman's rights and suffrage theory and advocacy. The first issue of *The Dial* did not appear until 1840, after the period under examination here. Antebellum lyric poetry was the medium strictly of elite women who had the money to access magazines such as *Minerva* or *Opal*, and the academic training to interpret it. Echoes of other female voices attempting to be heard can be found in periodical publications, often signed with feminine Greek or Latin pseudonyms. "Zenobia," whose article was accepted in the radical *Correspondent*, decried the "highly vituperative" language used against Wright in one of the early denunciations of her theories and alleged behaviors. "To the Editors of the 'Philadelphia Album, and Ladies' Literary Magazine.'" *Correspondent* 4.3 (Aug. 9, 1828): 36.

⁵⁶ One can see nascent feminist fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century in Fanny Fern's 1854 *Ruth Hall*, but her work did not immediately embolden "women scribblers" to follow in her path. Instead of proto-feminists, the female protagonists of best-selling authors Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner, and Maria Cummins were still pious, self-sacrificing, and ever subordinating themselves to patriarchal authority. These novelists were educated, informed women who understood well that in antebellum America, social hegemony was held by the white male citizens who had access to the ballot. They might have but did not join Stanton, Mott, Anthony, and others in their pioneer efforts to gain women's rights. It was only in the later novels of Rebecca Harding Davis and Louisa May Alcott and much later in Kate Chopin's when women's issues were addressed in a straightforward manner.

⁵⁷ Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, Paris, Aug. 22, 1827. Mrs. Julian Marshall, ed. *The Life & Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. II. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889. 169-171. Her letters to Mary Shelley, daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, include several references to Shelley's parents: "I have heard, or read, or both, that which has fostered the belief that you share at once the sentiments and talents of those from whom you drew your being. If you possess the opinions of your father and the generous feelings of your mother, I feel that I could travel far to see you. It is rare in this world, especially in our sex, to meet with those opinions united with those feelings, and with the manners and disposition calculated to command respect and

Maria, the eponymous protagonist says, “Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?” Maria protests marriage as an institution that “renders [women] dependent on the caprice of the tyrant whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them.”⁵⁸

In fact, *Maria* exemplifies the sort of radical and proto-feminist novel that no nineteenth-century American woman ever wrote, despite Frances Wright’s teaching and encouragement. Not until Kate Chopin’s Edna Pontellier swam out into the breakers in *The Awakening* (1899) over a century later did an American heroine begin to address the issues that Wollstonecraft’s *Maria* faced squarely. On the contrary, scholars have so far been unable to find proto-feminism in any works of American women’s fiction from the antebellum period. Essayist Margaret Fuller is the likeliest candidate, but she wrote no fiction.⁵⁹ Frances Wright’s own *A Few Days in Athens*, a novel with strong-willed and intellectually superior female characters, could be considered the sole exception. However, calling it an American novel is more than inaccurate; while she herself reprinted it in America in 1827, Wright was Scottish and wrote the work in Scotland as a teenager and first published it in England in 1822.⁶⁰ Instead of novels that encourage women’s defiance of society’s oppression of them, literary scholars discover works by antebellum women writers that encourage women’s submission.⁶¹

conciliate affection.... Whatever be the fate of this letter, I wish to convey to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley my respect and admiration of those from whom she holds those names, and my fond desire to connect her with them in my esteem.” Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, Paris, Aug. 22, 1827. Mrs. Julian Marshall, ed. *The Life & Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. II. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889. 169-171.

⁵⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, *Maria: Or, The Wrongs of Woman. A Posthumous Fragment*. William Godwin, ed. Philadelphia: James Carey, 1798, 1799. 11. Mary Hays’s *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* is another English novel that argues for women’s rights during this period. London: C., G., and J. Robinson, 1796.

⁵⁹ Instead, three decades after *Maria* and two decades after *A Few Days in Athens*, Fuller wrote and published her remarkable proto-feminist essay, “The Great Lawsuit.” Margaret Fuller, “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men: Woman versus Women,” *The Dial* 4.1 (July 1843): 1-47.

⁶⁰ Morris, 16.

⁶¹ Lydia Maria Child defended and financially supported an idealistic husband who was hopelessly out of touch with reality and unable to earn a living. Sarah Josepha Hale wore black for nearly six decades in memory of her dead husband. Even the bold Fanny Fern refused to speak from the platform.

Why is this so? Women were accused of enjoying fiction over any other form, so it would seem to have been a reasonable and profitable path for proto-feminist writers, had they existed, to have taken. Why did Frances Wright's bold rhetoric, readily available in both oral and written form, fail to inspire antebellum American women to write novels that demanded women's rights? I demonstrate in this project that women writers did not dare write such novels. Anthropologist Edwin Ardener posits that the "dominant structure" of human interaction has nearly always been "articulated in terms of a male world-position." Because of this, says Ardener, women historically have been "rendered 'inarticulate' by the male structure."⁶² Rhetorician Cheryl Glenn insists that in studying "women's contributions in the broad history of culture making" we pay attention to "who speaks, who is silent, who is allowed (or not allowed) to speak, who is listening (or not), and what those listeners might do."⁶³ I draw, again, on Derrida and what Glenn calls "self-silencing" to argue that during the antebellum period white male magazine reviewers' virulent reaction to the possibility of a women's discourse of independence— and especially their reaction to the rhetoric of Frances Wright – intimidated women novelists. In the critics' condemnations of female autonomy women novelists would have read the requirement that they convey their submissiveness and self-abasement in their fiction. This project examines magazine reviewers' discourse over Wright's philosophies and public persona, their subsequent attitudes about women's novel reading and novel writing, and the novels that antebellum women subsequently wrote.

Importantly, after Wright had been in the public spotlight for two years, she suddenly left for Europe, disappearing from public view for nearly six years. Evangelical magazine reviewers crowed that they had successfully routed and silenced her. That was only partially true. She was

⁶² Edwin Ardener, qtd. in Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004. 25.

⁶³ Cheryl Glenn, "Silence: A Rhetorical Art for Resisting Discipline(s)." *JAC* 22.2 (Spring 2002): 261-291. 261-262.

silent, but only temporarily, and not for her own sake. Wright went into hiding because she was unmarried and three months pregnant. As evidenced by the tough talk of the lecture she delivered to workingmen the day before she sailed for Europe, she had never appeared perturbed by public scrutiny and the infamy that followed – but she was unwilling to subject her daughter to it, for it would have fallen with a vengeance upon the illegitimate child. But neither conservative women writers nor those who might have wanted to argue for gender equality could have known Wright’s motive for leaving America. They knew only that after a thorough public shaming, Wright had vanished. In fact, her shaming affected the women who came after her as much (or more) than it did Wright herself.

Literary scholar Jane Tompkins has read with sensitivity the bind in which many antebellum women writers of fiction found themselves. She argues convincingly that antebellum women writers used the sentimental novel form to help them create a sense of power for themselves and for other women.⁶⁴ They told readers that their female characters’ submission to patriarchal authority, even in times of desperate distress, was submission to God and that the more complete the submission, the closer they drew to God – a proximity worth any suffering and humiliation by the evangelical rubric. Common sentimental novel plotlines included the poverty-stricken widows of sickly and ruined men or of abusive drunkards; these long-suffering women prayed for their husbands, sewed for the wealthy, and sent their children to beg on the street. Sometimes the pious mother “put out” one or more of her children to live and work in a respectable family’s home, found a way to send one son to school (he might grow to become a

⁶⁴ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. xi. Tompkins’s argument about the revaluing of sentimental and sensational literature undergirds my work. Rather than focusing on the aesthetic literary value of various elements in a work, such as finely delineated characters or intricate plotlines, Tompkins has taught scholars and readers to value literary works “because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself.” She argues that value must be seen in how a culture “articulate[s] and propose[s] solutions for problems that shape a particular historical moment.” Tompkins’s work establishes the parameters for this project as the context in which Frances Wright’s influence was received and expressed by her contemporaries.

mayor or banker), and lived to see her grandchildren adore her. Sometimes she died a noble and self-sacrificing death. In fact, the most powerful evidence of women's willingness to acquiesce to God's will was in death itself. Only then could women prove their purity and piety by expressing joy at their imminent meeting with Jesus. In this way women built a sense of themselves as supremely powerful through self-sacrifice and Christian faith.

But there were intelligent, capable women writers who, for one reason or another, needed to earn an income by their writing. They could not afford to be the next targets of evangelical reviewers, suddenly vigilant in the early 1830s to protect unsuspecting American readers from radical texts. Women writers learned quickly that any identification with Wright's positions meant economic ruin, for any woman mimicking her precepts would be hounded from publication. Instead, they understood that they had to demonstrate conclusively to magazine reviewers and their reading public that they were not radical "Fanny Wrightists." This is the self-silencing I see in antebellum women who needed to write novels in order to earn a living.

The furor surrounding Fanny Wrightism altered the direction of antebellum women's literature. In fact, that furor energized what was then a stagnant campaign against novels, silencing pro-novel magazine reviewers and the proto-feminist writers' voices in Wright's audiences for a generation. I argue that women writers in the 1830s were intimidated by antebellum reviewers' criticism of popular novels and damnation of Frances Wright, and moreover, that in order to support themselves they altered the content and tone of their works for publication. To lay the foundation for this overarching argument, in Chapter One I outline Frances Wright's radical activities, writings, and public lectures from 1828 through 1839. In Chapter Two I deconstruct antebellum critics' virulent attacks against Wright, which predicted the downfall of civilized society from Americans' consumption of her radical philosophies

embedded in popular novels. Chapters Three, Four, and Five examine the works of three women writers-editors from liberal backgrounds – Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza Cabot Follen. Each woman had been welcome among the New England social and intellectual liberal elites in 1825-1829. As magazine editors, they were part of the intra-periodical discourse that occurred in the public sphere – Sarah Josepha Hale single-handedly controlled the editorial operations of the most popular periodical in the country, *Godey's Lady's Book*, for forty years, and Child and Follen played significant roles in anti-slavery publishing. In the 1830s all three felt vulnerable to attack for thus stepping out of women's private domestic space. Follen and Hale were widows with children, and Child was the wife of an inept wage-earner; all three women depended on their publishing efforts to support their families.

Wright's extended castigation in the press and from the pulpit continued throughout the 1830s whether she was present in the United States and speaking or absent and silent. Each woman could have supported some of Wright's principles in her writing, but each instead contributed to the public censure of her. However, fearing association with the radical Wright, Hale, Child, and Follen shifted their rhetoric from liberal to conservative on different topics and for different reasons. All three performed some form of self-silencing in order to be aligned with the dictates of the conservative press.

Each woman wrote a novel that directly or by clear inference attacks Frances Wright. I examine these three novels and discuss the ways in which they work to project the vulnerability their writers felt onto the physical body, literary works, and infidel reputation of Frances Wright. In their novels Child and Follen directly attack atheism, and Hale, Child, and Follen denigrate and shame female public speakers and female self-aggrandizement. These three women effectually put into writing their solemn assurance to themselves, readers, and magazine

reviewers that they would never assume Wright's mantle.⁶⁵ Chapter Three examines Sarah Josepha Hale's 1839 *The Lecturess* as a frontal assault on female public lecturers and what Hale argues is their ambition and self-glorification. In writing the text Hale encourages women to be domestic and subservient, which works to protect her professional identity as the managing editor of America's top women's magazine. Chapter Four considers Lydia Maria Child's 1836 *Philothea* as an attack on a powerful and self-absorbed female public figure (Wright) who is publicly accused of atheism, while defending a humble, pious female protagonist for her support of a weak and dying husband. Chapter Five looks at Eliza Cabot Follen's 1835 *The Skeptic* as her frantic defense of her radical German husband (and herself, by association) against the charge of atheism; Follen blames Wright by name for spreading atheistic doctrines and counters point by point with Unitarian precepts. Hale, Child, and Follen used their novels to protect themselves from the condemnation that could occur if or when they were accused of any of various radicalisms or ultraisms. Through their fiction, Wright served as a convenient scapegoat that diverted society from discovering cultural transgressions that Hale, Child, and Follen needed to be kept hidden. My last three chapters, then, examine the ways in which these women registered Frances Wright's social execution and their awareness that that same penalty would swiftly be dealt them if they were not careful.⁶⁶ By publicly condemning Frances Wright they exonerated themselves and safeguarded their steady incomes as writers.

But, I also examine these three novels to see if, while they toed the gender line, Hale, Child, and Follen yet adumbrated hints of an independent spirit – admittedly an extremely risky

⁶⁵ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. 82. Protestant congregational praxis established the norm that women not be allowed to speak in church. Men could and did write the authoritative final word in every possible way – by law, as advocated by the press, and in common practice.

⁶⁶ Child had already experienced public humiliation herself after the 1833 publication of her treatise on immediate emancipation, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*.

move on their parts. Indeed, on rare occasions, these writers did seem to whisper contradictions of some of the ideas they appear to propound so vigorously. I examine each of those novels within the social context of its writer's everyday life, seeking to reveal what can be understood about the pressures the three women experienced that might have directed them to criticize rather than defend Frances Wright. I listen for what Elaine Showalter (from Mikhail Bakhtin) calls a "double-voiced discourse" that would demonstrate that while these women adopted the Protestant evangelical language of patriarchal piety in order to generate income and maintain middle-class respectability, they had not forgotten their own desire for independence.⁶⁷

My research process has been inductive; I consider the novels, but also newspaper reports, correspondence, and notes by and about these women to see if the writers privately confirm or disconfirm ideas they appear to hold publicly. Still, this project does not attempt overmuch to make causal inferences between particular persons, actions, or points in time. Here I follow Foucault's attribution of power to discourse, which discourages "the finger-pointing analyses of who silenced whom and allows an interpretation of the process through which certain discourses allowed and disallowed certain responses."⁶⁸ In Hale, Child, and Follen, I see women who were well aware of the negative consequences of failing to project a pious religious image in antebellum American society. Certainly, these novelists had a lifelong struggle in trying to maintain their integrity through difficult times, sometimes diverting unwanted attention away from themselves and always watching out for signs of danger.

⁶⁷ Elaine Showalter, qtd. in Glenn, *Unspoken*, 28. Applying Showalter to marginalized women in antebellum period, in this project I will consider the words they spoke through the medium of fiction – the novel. By fitting their words to the ones white men wanted to hear, women could maintain their respectability, sell novels, and provide much-needed income for their dependents. Carolyn G. Burke, qtd. in Glenn, *Unspoken*, 28. Burke argues that in order for women's voices to be heard by a dominant culture they are "forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue."

⁶⁸ Rosa A. Eberly, *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 7.

CHAPTER 1:

“THE RED HARLOT OF INFIDELITY”¹:

FRANCES WRIGHT’S RADICAL CHALLENGE TO ANTEBELLUM AMERICA

In 1827, before Frances Wright (1795-1852) gave her longtime friend Frances Trollope reason to fear being associated with her, Trollope glowingly wrote that there was “[n]ever I am persuaded such a being as Fanny Wright, no, never.... [S]he is at once all that woman should be, and something more than woman ever was, and I know not what beside.”² Five years later Trollope reported that Wright had become “celebrated as the advocate of opinions that make millions shudder, and some half-score admire.”³ Before any other woman in the United States did, proto-feminist Wright spoke on stages in lecture halls and theatres to audiences of men and women, holding forth with radical views on political topics that were off-limits to women. Since her wealth commanded the attention of hall renters, powerful white conservative leaders and pundits could not contain her during her first foray into public speaking (1828-1830), in spite of their concerted efforts.

A wealthy,⁴ brilliant, and well-connected woman, the reformer Frances Wright was one of the United States’ first and strongest defenders to its European critics.⁵ Yet over a period of

¹ “Fanny Wright.” *New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2.

² Frances Trollope to Julia Pertz, a note on a letter from Frances Wright to Julia Pertz, October 7, 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 103.

³ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832. 17.

⁴ Wright explains her wealth and independency in her 1844 third-person memoir, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright D’Arusmont*; she describes her father as “the only son of a wealthy Dundee merchant” Frances Wright D’Arusmont, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright D’Arusmont*. Dundee: J. Myles, 1844. 4. According to Celia Morris, Wright’s most recent biographer, Wright had a younger sister, Camilla, and one brother, Richard, who “was unfortunately sent, at the age of fifteen, to India, as a Cadet in the East India

six years her reputation in America changed because of her radical political and religious beliefs. Within a decade of her arrival in the new republic, the combination of her incendiary ideas and iconoclastic appearance marked her as a social pariah, America's first female scapegoat. This is a woman whose astonishing life story told in *cinema verité* would make any modern reviewer doubt the movie's accuracy: she was an intimate of Jefferson and Lafayette in the highest circles of European and American society, yet one who routinely did a solitary day's ride through rough western forests or worked alongside enslaved people to plant crops. Above everything else that powerful Americans would come to reject in Wright was her refusal to remain within a separate and private women's sphere, for she almost never disguised the radical ideas that would make her name a common epithet.⁶ The fact that Frances Wright insisted on speaking radical ideas and on doing so without apologizing for her gender rendered her degraded and ruined in the eyes of nearly all Americans for over a century.



Fig. 1.1 *Frances Wright*,
by Henry Inman, 1824

Company's service, and [was] killed on the passage out in an encounter with a French vessel." Wright, *Biography*, 6. Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 7. She and her sister were the only heirs to their father's inheritance; they also inherited half the fortune of their maternal uncle, William Campbell. In 1850 as she was filing for divorce from her husband, William Phiquepal D'Arusmont, she "had an estate worth \$150,000" – and that was after spending half of her fortune on her utopian community in Tennessee in the late 1820s. Celia Morris, *Frances Wright: Rebel in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. Reprinted, Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992. 6, 286.

⁵ Frances Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America; in a Series of Letters from that Country to a Friend in England during the years 1818, 1819, and 1820*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821.

Wright's panegyric *Views of Society and Manners in America* "was widely read in America, and for the most part gratefully." Wright, *Biography*, 48. Wright scholar Celia Morris quotes a contemporary review in the Edinburgh paper, *The Scotsman*: "The moral sublime of the American democracy was never so deeply felt, and so eloquently described, as in these 'Letters of an Englishwoman.'" Morris, *Frances Wright*, 48.

⁶ Only in 1848 did Wright finally concede to censor her anti-religious sentiments from her *England, the Civilizer*, per the requirement of her publisher.

Wright's significance to American history has been cried by a few writers every few decades for 150 years, yet her name rarely appears as more than a sentence or a short paragraph in American history textbooks or literature anthologies.⁷ In fact, Frances Wright played a major role in how Americans responded to gender at a critical moment in the nation's development, and so I find her continued relegation to the margins disturbing. This chapter engages questions of gender, race, sexuality, class, and religion as it traces the trajectory of Frances Wright's life and career in America. Just as Thomas Paine's atheism triggered an evangelical backlash in the first decades of the new republic, Wright's public persona as an infamous feminist-atheist-democrat provoked male white Americans to demand a return to traditional, patriarchal values in the 1830s and 1840s. Liberal antebellum women fled the image of Wright as the "Red Harlot of Infidelity" for the safety of the domestic sphere, where they negotiated a new moral superiority

⁷ The only full-length recent scholarly text focused solely on Wright is over thirty years old: Celia Morris, *Frances Wright: Rebel in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984. Dissertations: William Randall Waterman, "Frances Wright." Diss. Columbia University, 1924. Virginia Rutherford, "A Study of the Speaking Career of Frances Wright in America." Diss. Northwestern University, 1960. Marie Patricia Parnell, "The Educational Theory of Frances Wright D'Arusmont." Diss. Rutgers The State University of New Jersey - New Brunswick, 1964. Phyllis Marynick Palmer, "Frances Wright D'Arusmont: Case Study of a Reformer." Diss. Ohio State University, 1973. Mabry Miller O'Donnell, "Reflections on a Free Enquirer: An Analysis of the Ideas of Frances Wright." Diss. Bowling Green State University, 1977. Robert James Throckmorton, "Contributions of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Robert Owen (1771-1858), and Frances Wright D'Arusmont (1795-1852) to the Jacksonian Theory of American Public Education." Diss. University of Southern California, 1979. Jane Thompson Follis, "Frances Wright: Feminism and Literature in Ante-bellum America." Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1982. Susan Snowden McLeod, "The 'Red Harlot of Infidelity': The Life and Works of Frances Wright." Diss. Texas Women's University, 2000. An earlier full-length scholarly work is Margaret Lane, *Frances Wright and the 'Great Experiment.'* Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1972. Wright has been considered alongside others by several scholars: John Egerton, *Visions of Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, and the 'New Communities' in Tennessee's Past*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977. 1983. Susan S. Kissel, *In Common Cause: The "Conservative" Frances Trollope and the "Radical" Frances Wright*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993. Elizabeth Ann Bartlett, *Liberty, Equality, Sorority: The Origins and Interpretation of American Feminist Thought: Frances Wright, Sarah Grimke, and Margaret Fuller*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1994. Non-scholarly full-length works include: Amos Gilbert, *Memoir of Frances Wright, The Pioneer Woman in the Cause of Human Rights*. Cincinnati: Longley Brothers, 1855. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*, New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881. A. J. G. Perkins & Theresa Wolfson, *Frances Wright, Free Enquirer: Study of a Temperament*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939. Richard Stiller, *Commune on the Frontier: The Story of Frances Wright*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972. Historian Karl J. R. Arndt's account of Wright's meeting with Lafayette and George Rapp concludes that "[w]hat Wright needed was some cracked ice for a cracked brain." Karl J. R. Arndt, "The Pittsburgh Meeting of General Lafayette, George Rapp, and Frances Wright: Prelude to Frances Wright's Nashoba." *Historical Society Notes and Documents* (July 1979): 281-295. 295.

over men. Here I lay the groundwork for work in the second chapter that considers Wright's influence in the popular press and the consequent effect on women writers. Wright's is a story that has been little told and should be better known. Her influence on American society, and especially on women's recognition of their capacities and rights, would be profound.

BECOMING RADICAL

Born in Scotland in 1795, Wright was a wealthy orphan, raised in London by her Tory and Anglican maternal grandfather and maiden aunt. An autodidact, she wrote in her third-person memoir that as a child she had been “[s]urrounded at all times by rare and extensive libraries, and commanding whatever masters she desired, she applied herself by turns to various branches of science, and to the study of ancient and modern letters and the arts.”⁸ At a young age Wright became alerted to and concerned about the inequities in English society. She recalled asking her Tory grandfather about the women and children they saw begging on the city streets as they went for walks together; his reply was that she was a “foolish simple girl” and that the poor were poor because they were lazy.⁹ By fifteen Wright was distressed at seeing, in her words, the “painful labour of the aged among the English peasantry,” and she felt “powerfully drawn towards the sufferings of humanity.” Wright especially felt a burden of responsibility when she realized that the perpetrators of these harms were her own kind – the “wealthy proprietors of the soil among whom she moved,” she acknowledged.¹⁰ Inspired when she learned of her deceased parents' radicalism and influenced by her Whiggish relatives in

⁸ Wright, *Biography*, 7. She and her sister Camilla “probably lived with their aunt in [a] twenty-room mansion” where they had access to books and teachers. Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 7. “She was, at an early age, surprised at the inability of masters to answer her questions.... She learned ... two things: the one, that Truth had still to be found; the other, than men were afraid of it.” She established early on a habit of questioning truth: “[S]he remarked the discrepancy of views and opinions existing in books; and again, in society, when she listened to those accounted authority in learning, letters, or morals. If no *two* are agreed, no *one* has discovered Truth; and, if so, Truth has still be found. But where?” Wright, *Biography*, 7.

⁹ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 7.

¹⁰ Wright, *Biography*, 8.

Scotland, Wright rejected her grandfather's conservative bias and unsympathetic elitism.¹¹ In 1828 she wrote that “[i]n very infancy I drew conclusions in opposition to all I saw around me. The haughtiness of aristocrats, disgusted me with aristocracy.” Similarly she would come to question the Anglican religion into which she was born – “the bad feelings and clumsy reasonings of religionists, led me to examine religion”¹² – and move away from theism entirely.

At sixteen Wright became mesmerized with the idea of America. Reading Carlo Botta's *Storia della Guerra dell'Indipendenza degli Stati Uniti D'America*¹³ convinced her that the new United States was a “country consecrated to freedom,” in marked contrast with Europe's oppressive aristocracy. She said that from “that moment” of opening Botta's text “she awoke ... to a new existence”; suddenly her world was “full of promise” and awaiting her “useful exertion[s].” Wright began to understand herself as a serious intellectual with the capability of “redressing the grievous wrongs which seemed to prevail in society.”¹⁴

At age eighteen in 1813 Wright insisted on moving to Scotland to live with her maternal uncle James Mylne, the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow directly after Adam Smith, and a man who “exalted reason, self-control, and duty.”¹⁵ Mylne was the friend of industrialist and reformer Robert Owen, who wrote an essay that same year about the humanitarian principles he had put into effect at his cotton mills at nearby New Lanark – a living

¹¹ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 11. According to Morris, Wright became aware during her childhood that her deceased parents had been liberal and even radical intellectuals. Wright wrote that her father “took a lively and deeply sympathising interest in the great events and the greater principles which agitated Europe during the French Revolution.” Wright, *Biography*, 4.

¹² Letter from Frances Wright to A[mos] G[ilbert]. July 9, 1828, from New Harmony, Indiana. Reprinted in the *Free Enquirer* 4.21 (March 17, 1832): 1-2.

¹³ Note: Wright misspelled the author's name Bocca in her memoirs, and many subsequent references to it have repeated her misspelling. Carlo [Giuseppe Guglielmo] Botta, *Storia della Guerra Dell'Indipendenza degli Stati Uniti D'America. Terza Edizione con alcune correzioni dell'autore* Milano: Dalla Tipografia di Vincenzo Ferrario, 1819.

¹⁴ Wright, *Biography*, 7-8.

¹⁵ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 13. Wright, *Biography*, 14. Mylne was also the son-in-law of John Millar, “a friend and disciple of both [Adam] Smith and David Hume, and [a] professor of civil law and jurisprudence” at the University of Glasgow. Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 13. Wright, *Biography*, 14.

wage, ten-hour workday, refusal to hire children until age ten, and free education to the age of ten for children of factory workers.¹⁶ The environment of the Mylne household reflected a world of intellectual dissent and the extended family in Glasgow included two sets of well-educated sisters, whom Wright found inspiring.¹⁷ Through Mylne Wright engaged with higher education for the only time in her life: He obtained access for her to the library at the University of Glasgow and even to informal academic discussions with the (male) professors and students there. During these years Wright would write three major works: a volume of poetry in the classic style of the antiquities, a novel centered on an ancient Greek philosopher, and a play based on Swiss republicanism that was a rousing exhortation of radical fervor.

But what Wright observed nearby was instructive and formative in an equally significant way – what one scholar calls “industrialism’s legacy of social devastation.”¹⁸ In her memoir she wrote that in the Scottish clearances she saw the “peasantry ejected, under various pretexts, from the estates of ... wealthy proprietors,” as cottages of peasant renters were burned to the ground in 1813 so that clan chiefs could “enjoy the financial benefits of commercialisation.”¹⁹ She also became aware of the enforcement of the 1815 Corn Laws, passed to protect the financial interests of landowners at the expense of the desperately poor. In 1817 there were riots, attacks on the Prince Regent, and thirty-five men were convicted of high treason. One of them “was hanged,

¹⁶ In 1813 Robert Owen wrote an essay, *A New View of Society, or Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character, and the Application of the Principle to Practice*. London: Cadell and Davies, 1813. The publication actually contains four essays, each an extension of the previous one. He noted that he refused to employ children in his mills until they reached age ten, and advised “their parents ... to allow them to acquire health and education,” and actually believed that children should not be put to work until the age of twelve. “The children were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic ... from [age] five to ten, in the village school, without expense to their parents.” 49-50.

¹⁷ She later wrote that the time she spent with them constituted the “acme of her intellectual existence.” Qtd. in Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 14.

¹⁸ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 18

¹⁹ Wright, *Biography*, 7-8. Historian Finlay McKichan extends Allan Macinnes’s work to argue that clan chiefs “subordinated ... their personal obligations as patrons and protectors of their clansmen” when they ousted “multiple-tenant communal” workers and replaced them with “single tenant farms.” Finlay McKichan, “Lord Seaforth and Highland Estate Management in the First Phase of Clearance (1783-1815).” *The Scottish Historical Review* 86.221 (April 2007): 50-68. 50.

cut down before he was dead, and his entrails ... cut out and burned in front of him. He was then beheaded and his head was brandished on a spike.”²⁰ Overwhelmed at those horrors in Britain, Wright essentially gave up on reform in England as a hopeless cause. Against the wishes of most of her relatives, Wright began secretly planning a trip to the United States, for to “see that country was ... her fixed ... determination.”²¹

In September of 1818 at age 23 Wright and her younger sister Camilla, traveling with only a maid, arrived in New York and began what would become nearly a two-year tour of the United States. The sisters spent months in both New York City and Philadelphia, explored New Jersey, went west into upstate New York, up into Canada and across Montreal, and south to Virginia, Maryland, and Washington.²² They brought with them letters of introduction from her aunt, Robina Millar, who had spent some years in America. Wright was welcomed into the salons of both the intellectual and socially elite, where she was viewed as a brilliant woman who had rejected her aristocratic English heritage in favor of republican values.²³ She met with the well-known and powerful everywhere she went, including Charles Wilkes, the future president of the Bank of New York, Napoleon Bonaparte’s brother Joseph, and Henry Clay, then the Speaker of the House of Representatives. She was even introduced by a Senator to President James Monroe.²⁴ Initially she paid sincere homage to radicals of an older generation, often

²⁰ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 23.

²¹ Wright, *Biography*, 8.

²² Morris, *Fanny Wright*, Chap. 2, pp. 25, 33, 37-40. An *Atlantic* writer commented, “[T]he writer ... travelled, unmarried and unattended, through several portions of our country ... neither massacred nor gouged, but not even insulted or offended. It is truly a subject of wonder.” “A Few Days in Athens.” *Atlantic Magazine* (May 1, 1824): 364-369. 364.

²³ While in the United States she negotiated with publishers (including the well-known Mathew Carey) and Broadway producers to disseminate her writings, especially her poetry; reviews of these belletristic works were positive. *Altorf* was produced on stage both in New York City and Philadelphia, and audiences loved it, although the runs were brief.

²⁴ Wright, *Views of Society*, 514-515. “I perfectly acknowledged the influence of that moral sublime, so candidly admitted by my friend, when first addressed by the President of the United States. I meant to rise, or, rather, I afterwards felt that I ought to have risen; but when suddenly introduced to me by a senator, and that with the simple air of a private gentleman, and the calmness of a sage, he opened conversation, my recollection for a moment left

winning them over and even becoming their protégé. Sometimes she would become close friends with the esteemed elder and sometimes with his grown children.²⁵

The August 1819 Peterloo Massacre of striking workers by mounted British soldiers occurred while she was in America, cementing her belief that reforming England was futile. Wright and her sister returned to England in May of 1820, with the full intention of returning and becoming permanent residents of the United States. Throughout her two-year American tour she composed letters to her Aunt Robina, for the purpose of assembling them and publishing them later as a travel book. Her 1821 panegyric *Views of Society and Manners in America* glowed with enthusiasm for America's free institutions and people.²⁶ The British press quickly denounced the work for its anti-English sentiments, but Americans instantly hailed Wright as a passionate promoter of their country to Europeans. The Marquis de Lafayette, France's original defender of America against the British, reached out to her, inviting her to his LaGrange estate near Paris and initiating what would become a long-term and complex intimate relationship.²⁷ Within a year she would be serving secretly as a spy for Lafayette to "carry messages and money to French conspirators in hiding there"; she and Lafayette were part of a grand plot to move

me, and I fixed my eyes upon the venerable character before me with a silent emotion which he, quietly continuing his discourse, seemed unconscious of having excited, and thus relieved me from the awkwardness of framing an apology for my absence." Wright, *Views of Society*, 514-515.

²⁵ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 36. Examples of the revered elders are Lafayette, Jefferson, and Bentham, and of the grown children of radicals are the Garnett sisters and Robert Dale Owen. Wright became close friends with Julia and Harriet Garnett, daughters (and close to her in age) of John Garnett, a wealthy man who had left England out of "disgust with the political situation" there. Robert Dale Owen was the son (some six years younger than she) of Scottish utopian reformer Robert Owen. Friendship did not occur so easily with the children and grandchildren of either Jefferson or Lafayette, for they were part of polite society and rejected Wright as a "bluestocking."

²⁶ Frances Wright, *Views of Society and Manners in America; in a Series of Letters from that Country to a Friend in England during the years 1818, 1819, and 1820*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821.

²⁷ In her own words: "Miss Wright made her first visit to Paris in the spring of 1821. At this period commenced her intimacy with General Lafayette, from whom a pressing invitation had previously sought her in England.... Miss Wright's residence in France was prolonged until 1824." Wright, *Biography*, 13-14. In her letters to Frances Trollope and to Julia and Harriet Garnett, Wright almost uniformly refers to Lafayette as "the dear General." Wright to Garnett, June 5, 1825. In *The Garnett Letters*. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, ed. Published by the editor, 1979. 41. He encouraged her to have her novel *A Few Days in Athens* published, a text much appreciated by Thomas Jefferson. Morris, 66. Eventually they would discuss the possibility of his either adopting or marrying her.

European governments toward republicanism.²⁸ British utilitarian philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham was also fascinated by Wright; he invited her to become a regular houseguest at his home, the Hermitage, and “[f]or at least three years, ... they were master and disciple.”²⁹ Wright’s 1822 novel, *A Few Days in Athens* (1822), was dedicated to Bentham. A fictive defense of fourth-century BC atheist philosopher Epicurus, the work received positive reviews in the United States in 1824-1825, but later figured critically in her reputation.³⁰

After extended stays with Bentham and with General Lafayette, in 1824 Wright and Camilla returned to the United States and took American citizenship. Again she was welcomed by intellectual and social elites, this time as a wealthy British “authoress”; she was Thomas Jefferson’s houseguest at Monticello and a visitor of Martha Washington’s at Mount Vernon.³¹

²⁸ Neely, 251. Wright carried letters and documents back and forth for Lafayette from Paris and London to Columbian statesmen in their attempt to win independence from Spain – in exchange for a considerable financial payment: “Lafayette’s participation was considered essential. The [Belfort] conspirators ... needed a general who could lead the subverted troops. Lafayette’s reputation also guaranteed him a place in the provisional government to be established after the revolt. One historian writes that Lafayette was ‘the center to which all projects and all communications led.’ Yet he was not the only leader, and he did not exercise strict control over the Carbonist organization.... At the end of January 1822, Frances Wright left France for England, ostensibly to oversee the second edition of her book about America. But she had another purpose: to carry messages and money to French conspirators in hiding there. She was undoubtedly well informed about the Carbonist plans... On 7 February she wrote to Lafayette: ‘I have been all day talking about house rents, powers of attorney, and heaven knows what, with heaven knows who, and heaven knows where. I trust, however, I shall soon see my friend’s affairs arranged.’... Even as Lafayette and Fanny aided exiled conspirators in England, further plots in France were creating new victims to worry about.” Sylvia Neely. *Lafayette and the Liberal Ideal 1814-1824: Politics and Conspiracy in an Age of Reaction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991. 197-198.

²⁹ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 49-52. In July 1821 after the publication of Wright’s *Views on Society and Manners in America*, Bentham wrote to a colleague, “I want to talk with you about Miss Wright. I am in love with her, and I suspect that you are.” Morris: “Fanny had now earned the right to be taken seriously by men like Bentham.... [but the] fact that Fanny was a woman, however, and a proper one, presented an awkward problem, for she could neither apprentice herself to their professions nor share in the usual forms of male camaraderie. She could neither practice at their bar nor join their clubs.” Bentham, however, apparently ignored these problems and welcomed her: “Bentham not only invited Fanny to be his guest at the Hermitage, but took her seriously enough to argue with her.”

³⁰ *Atlantic* 1 (May 1, 1824): 364-369; *Minerva* (Feb. 5, 1825): 284; *United States Literary Gazette* (April 1, 1825): 34; *Rural Repository Devoted to Polite Literature* 2.3 (July 9, 1825): 20-21; *Philadelphia Chronicle*, rep. in *New-Harmony Gazette* 1.6 (Nov. 5, 1825): 44. Some referred to the 1822 London publication of *A Few Days in Athens* and some to an 1825 New York reprint.

³¹ Jane Blair Cary Smith. *The Carys of Virginia*, Accession #1378, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u3926803. 69-78. According to Jane Blair Cary, a young cousin of Jefferson, Wright was an oddity and lacked the expected social graces. “[I]n person she was masculine, measuring at least 5 feet 11 inches ... and she always seemed to wear the wrong attire.” Even more off-putting were Wright’s social interactions with guests of both genders. According to Cary, Wright routinely ignored women in attendance at parties – “[T]o ladies she never spoke, except to Mrs. Randolph

Yet Wright had come back to the United States for more than just the enjoyment of America's free institutions and citizens. When she visited Virginia in 1820, she had briefly viewed its plantations and their "African vassals," where the "sight of slavery [was] revolting every where." To her, "to inhale the impure breath of its pestilence in the free winds of America [was] odious beyond all that the imagination [could] conceive."³² Wright was drawn back to America with the purpose of using her wealth, position, and intelligence to address the horrors of slavery. She knew she had a great deal to learn before she could attempt to help. She sought to understand the problems created by the institution in all its forms – in small households and on moderate and massive plantations, as well as the poverty and disadvantage she saw in free black households. Over a two-year period in America (1824-1826) Wright studied the complexities of slavery by traveling to plantations in various parts of the South, conversing at length with planters and observing their enslaved peoples' behaviors. From New Orleans she wrote, "Alas, alas! The more I consider ...the subject of American negro slavery ... the more I shudder, the more I tremble! ... American industry, morals, enterprise, all is benumbed." Wright concluded

[Jefferson's daughter] as her hostess" – while with men she evinced "masculine proclivities – on occasions she wd. harrangue [sic] the men in the public room of a hotel and the like."

³² Wright, *Views of Society*, 517-519. Wright, *Biography*, 22-23. "She procured in Washington extracts from the registers of all the laws of the slave states, bearing directly upon the labour and the government of the negro. She travelled through the greater part of the Union, visited familiarly the planters, and consulted them on her object and her views; seeking the aid of their experience." As Wright closes her *Views on Society*, she writes that her "personal observation has been confined to a portion of this vast country, the whole of whose surface merits the study of a more discerning traveler than myself. I own that, as regards the southern states, I have ever felt a secret reluctance to visit their territory." But Wright did visit Maryland and Virginia briefly before leaving for Europe, and evidently saw both free and enslaved African Americans: "From the conversation of some distinguished Virginians," Wright was told to "[l]ook into the cabins of our free negroes." She was impressed with the degradation in which they lived: "I have not seen a miserable half-clad negro in either state whom I have not found, upon enquiry, to be in possession of liberty... [V]ice and wretchedness ... dwell in the cabins of the emancipated negroes." She wanted to believe the "Virginians [who] are said to pride themselves upon the peculiar tenderness with which they visit the scepter of authority upon their African vassals." Yet she seems to have seen the effects of slavery as well as emancipation on this visit: "The sight of slavery is revolting every where, but to inhale the impure breath of its pestilence in the free winds of America is odious beyond all that the imagination can conceive." In a letter she argued that it was "not in [the] authority" of the "southern States ... to hold the African much longer in darkness. Already he feels the chain, and he who feels will soon snare it.... These are my hopes and my belief. In these only am I patient under an evil at which the earth groans, and in the consideration of a crime which cries up to Heaven." Frances Wright to Julia and Harriet Garnett, October 1820, in Payne-Gaposchkin, 11-12.

that slavery was “disadvantage[ous] to the master race,” a “pernicious example to youth,” and a “monstrous anomaly.”³³ But she also determined that immediate emancipation would only exacerbate America’s problems, for it would bring about a “common ruin” for both enslaved people and owners. Wright later wrote (in third person):

[S]he had but little sympathy with professed abolitionists; among whom she usually found much zeal with little knowledge; and, not unfrequently, more party violence than enlarged philanthropy. Hatred of the planter seemed oftentimes to be a stronger feeling than interest in the slave.... She was satisfied that, to embrace all the difficulties – industrial, political, individual, local, states, and federal – with which the question was surrounded, she must consider it more especially on the very soil of slavery, and in the interests of the two populations there brought into juxta position.³⁴

In a letter to a friend she wrote, “The schemes hitherto adopted (in the way of emancipation and colonization societies, etc.) I have always considered as doing individual benefits at the expense of helping forward the general evil.”³⁵ She later argued that the “human enfranchisement” that African Americans lacked was “but another name for civilization,” and that suddenly-freed people would behave as wild persons let loose on society. Instead, she came to believe that the process of bringing people out of slavery and integrating them into white America, North and South, was of necessity “a slow, gradual, and complex operation” that “must be made to move forward simultaneously in the soul of the internal man, and in the external influences which

³³ Frances Wright to Julia and Harriet Garnett, January ?, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 30.

³⁴ Wright, *Biography*, 22.

³⁵ Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 37. In an 1825 letter to a friend she wrote: “They deliver the southern states of the free people of color of whom they are jealous, or of the old or lazy slaves (who are a charge to the owners when humanity induces them to keep them, or a trouble to the community when the owners turn them out in the highways to live by picking, as it is called), and thus tend to lessen the inconveniences (in which lie the only hope of a remedy) both to individual planters and to the states. Also where these societies raise money for purchase of liberty they help to swell the market for slavery, and so long as the market exists the commodity will be encouraged.”

surround him.” Only when the enslaved understood themselves to be civilized human beings could they be allowed their freedom, argued Wright. As importantly to Wright, only then could white Americans begin to see former enslaved people as human.

Wright also reflected about the likelihood that Southern planters would ever acquiesce to a reformation of the slave system. While Wright had had no significant contact with abolitionists on either side of the Atlantic, Wright came to believe, as did some abolitionists, that the greatest number of plantation owners were ethical human beings, trapped in an entrenched economic system:

The knowledge she possessed of the [southern United States] in its past history led her to distinguish at least as much to admire as to anathematize in the conduct of the master race towards the subject African; and, reasoning from these premises, she inclined to expect that, if the complex difficulties which surrounded the subject could be satisfactorily met, the will to act justly would not be wanting.³⁶

Prior to this, planters, felt Wright, had had neither incentive nor power to effect any beneficial alterations to the slavery system. She determined that they would act in a reasonable and moral manner concerning their human property, if only there were a logical and profitable path to follow.

³⁶ Frances Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright d'Arusmont*. Dundee: J. Myles, 1844. 20, 23. In 1844 Wright recalled that she had discussed with the planters “the dangers for the country, the disadvantage to the master race, the pernicious example to youth, the monstrous anomaly in the institutions presented by a state of things which associated labour – the source of all that is good and great in man – with social degradation, political nullity, and brutal ignorance. On the other hand, she readily admitted the impossibility, even the absurdity, the danger to American institutions – alone fitted to guide and to regulate bodies politic endowed with intelligence, and habituated to the exercise of sovereign power – the common ruin, in short, for the two races of an act of simple enfranchisement similar to that which had been passed in the northern States. She knew from observation the evil effects produced by the mere governmental abolition of an evil which has its seat in the mind, the habits, and, through hereditary influences, in the very physical organization of a race. She had distinguished, at an early age, that human enfranchisement – which is but another name for civilization – is, in its beginnings, a slow, gradual, and complex operation; and that, to ensure its certain advancement, it must be made to move forward simultaneously in the soul of the internal man, and in the external influences which surround him. It has been this conviction which has ever more and more guided her efforts and moulded her views.” Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters*, 20, 23.

Wright began seriously considering a possible solution to the problem of slavery. She began to envision that the institution might be destroyed through associationism, or utopian communities. These experimental settlements, inspired to a great degree by Charles Fourier's utopian-socialist "phalansteries," were self-sufficient and dedicated to social reforms, including vegetarianism, exercise and water regimens, comfort of dress, temperance, and so on. The movement would expand exponentially in the next three decades in the United States – George Ripley's Brook Farm, Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands, and John Humphrey Noyes's Oneida Community were the best-known – but in 1825 there were only a few settlements.³⁷ One of the first was the celibate Christian sectarian "Harmony" in Indiana, established by German Georg Rapp, which was remarkably successful.³⁸ He and Robert Owen provided Wright's initial inspiration in 1825; Owen had visited Harmony, for Rapp intended to relocate his people to Economy, Pennsylvania, and Owen was considering purchasing the Indiana buildings and grounds. He wanted to merge his own humane industrialism with Fourierian communitarianism and create a community with non-religious, American members.³⁹ Owen was offering room and board to anyone who was willing to labor, plus education for their children, and he had many

³⁷ John Humphrey Noyes, *Essay on Scientific Propagation, by John Humphrey Noyes. With an appendix containing a health report of the Oneida Community, by Theodore R. Noyes, MD.* Oneida, NY: Oneida Community, [1872]. 25, 31. At his notorious Oneida Community John Humphrey Noyes encouraged his followers to strive for Christian perfection through "Male Continence," or withdrawal before ejaculation during sexual intercourse; he paired older widows with teenaged boys and older men with teenaged girls.

³⁸ Wright, *Biography*, 23. Wright compared the religion practiced at Rapp's Harmony as similar to the sort she had "witnessed" at "the Shaker establishments," which she described as "Christian fanaticism and subjection ... employed to stultify the intelligence." Rapp preached that his followers needed to consider themselves married to Jesus Christ, and so Rapp's married followers agreed to live celibately, while he had a special relationship with Jesus Christ that allowed him to engage in sexual relations.

³⁹ William Owen, *Diary of William Owen. From November 10, 1824, to April 20, 1825.* Joel W. Hiatt, ed. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1906. 128-134. Owen renamed the colony after purchasing the buildings and grounds, then called Harmony, from prophet Georg Rapp of the Rappites. According to one of Robert Owen's sons (and Robert Dale Owen's brother), William Owen, Wright visited New-Harmony in March of 1825 while Owen was still negotiating the purchase of the town from Rapp.

takers.⁴⁰ He would also put radical egalitarian policies into place there, such as self-fulfillment on the job, women's rights, and a focus on political issues instead of religious beliefs.⁴¹

For nine months Wright traveled back and forth across America – to New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, Washington, D.C., Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana – including seven months in slave states.⁴² At the time she wrote, “[M]y thoughts and enquiries have been engrossed by, and directed almost exclusively to, the subject of slavery,” for she was focused on identifying ways to end the institution in America.⁴³ The process had a profound effect on her, such that she felt she had “lived half a life and seen half a world” during those months.⁴⁴ Wright visited Rapp's Harmony in March of 1825 just as Owen was in final negotiations for the property. Even then she had the “vague idea ... that there was something in the system of united labor, as there in operation, which might be

⁴⁰ Robert Owen, “Constitution of the Preliminary Society of New-Harmony, May 1, 1825.” *The New-Harmony Gazette* 1.1 (October 1, 1825): 2-3. “The members shall occupy the dwellings which the Committee may provide for them.... All Members shall ... render their best services for the welfare of the Society, according to their age, experience and capacity.... Members shall be temperate, regular and orderly in their conduct, and ... show a good example.... The Members shall receive such living, advantages, comfort, and education for their children, as this Society ...afford. The living shall be upon equal terms for all.... In old age, in sickness, or when an accident occurs, care shall be taken of the parties, Medical aid afforded.... Each Member shall, within a fixed amount in value, have the free choice of food and clothing...in proportion to the number of its useful Members.... Members may visit their friends or travel whenever they please, provided the Committee can conveniently supply their places in the departments in which they may be respectively employed.... The children will be educated in the best possible manner in the day schools, and will board and sleep in their parents' houses.”

⁴¹ Owen's community failed within only a few years; too many of the New-Harmonites did not work as diligently as had Rapp's devotees or Owen's factory workers in Scotland. According to Pitzer, “[M]any of those who quickly overflowed the town's dwellings proved to be unskilled or simply freeloaders.... The New-Harmony community was so egalitarian the residents took part in long, often ugly, public debates that produced seven constitutions.... When Owen and [educator and business partner William] Maclure sued each other in May 1827 over debts incurred in their financial partnership, Robert Owen's effort to create a working model of the New Moral World came to an end.... Sectarian leaders, like Georg Rapp, could ... insist that believers' eternal salvation depended on obedience to their divinely ordained, authoritarian leadership. Owen ... missed the point that his advocacy of Enlightenment, rationalism, and freedom of thought could militate against a unified community.” Donald E. Pitzer, *New Harmony Then & Now*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012. 74-75.

⁴² Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 36-46. “Since we left Washington in March we have travelled five thousand miles and upwards. We have still half that distance to make by the close of the autumn.” 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 36.

rendered subservient to the emancipation of the South.”⁴⁵ After traveling to Illinois and New Orleans,⁴⁶ Wright returned to Owen’s newly-named New-Harmony in April. This time she “considered attentively the practice of its original German proprietors, together with the system now commenced by Mr. Owen,” and was “forcibly struck ... with the advantages of united and organized labour” that she observed there. She wrote that it was at this time that she “distinctly conceived the only scheme which [she] believe[d] capable of being rendered general, and consequently efficient in its effects” in eradicating slavery in the United States. In the third person Wright later wrote that it was at this time that she “date[d] a first conception of the mode in which might be effected the gradual abolition of negro slavery in the southern States; and, equally, the gradual reformation of civilized society.”⁴⁷ That is, Wright drew on Rapp’s and Owen’s utopian communitarianism and determined that she could begin a similar communal living institution to solve the problem of slavery. She believed that the communitarian system would be “peculiar[ly] appropriate... to the ... southern negro” – that enslaved people would work cooperatively and diligently to earn their freedom.⁴⁸ As Rapp’s German devotees strove for Christian perfection and as Owen’s radical reformers worked for lives of self- and mutual fulfillment, Wright believed that if she started her own utopian community, the residents would unite behind the goal of gradual emancipation of America’s enslaved people through their own labor.

As Wright continued to travel about the United States she sought to gain the acquaintance of those who might later be willing to offer financial support toward her experiment to

⁴⁵ Owen, *Diary of William Owen*. 128. Per William Owen’s diary, Frances and Camilla Wright arrived for the first time in Harmonie on the evening of March 19, 1825.

⁴⁶ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 89-102.

⁴⁷ Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 37. “[I]t was not until I had visited for the second time the settlement of Harmonie in Indiana, considered attentively the practice of its original German proprietors, together with the system now commenced by Mr. Owen, that I distinctly conceived the only scheme which I believe capable of being rendered general, and consequently efficient in its effects.”

⁴⁸ Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters*. 23-24.

emancipate enslaved people. Moreover, she wanted to garner the associated credibility of prominent and respectable people. One was the governor of New York, De Witt Clinton, who, after an extended breakfast with Wright, wrote that he found her “the most superior female of his acquaintance.”⁴⁹ She was learning how to win enthusiasts to her new cause, also including well-known abolitionist Benjamin Lundy.

Wright was also beginning to understand the political realities confronting her, and determining where to establish her community was a critical consideration. Having spoken personally with plantation and slave owners in various parts of the South, Wright saw that her experiment had to be conducted in a way that would convince Southerners of its efficacy and productivity. Wright came to believe that if she planted and grew her community in a Southern state, and if it succeeded as she predicted it would, other Southern states would realize the real benefits to be gained by such enterprises and would consider trying to replicate them along the lines of her model.⁵⁰ Wright embarked on her adventure with energy and confidence and, together with the input of wealthy Quaker, abolitionist activist, and Jefferson protégé George Flower, wrote a prospectus for the project. “A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States, Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South” outlined the venture as one that allowed slaveholders to recoup the purchase value they had paid for their human property and encouraged the freed people to leave the local environs. The proposal also warned Americans that “disunion, bloodshed, [and] servile wars of extermination” would be the awful

⁴⁹ In Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 103.

⁵⁰ Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters*. 28-29. In her memoirs she later wrote: “It will be understood that, to prepare for the realization of a perspective so vast, an individual could only propose to furnish a limited experiment, capable of supplying to the bodies politic of the Southern States, some first data upon which to ground a general plan of procedure. That plan, when once undertaken by the States themselves, would necessarily ensure to the southern section of the Republic, a futurity of ever increasing power and grandeur.”

consequences of continued avoidance of the slavery issue.⁵¹ Wright's proposal essentially stated that indentured servitude was the solution to the problem – a “co-operative system of labor” that held out “as the great stimulus to exertion, the prospect of liberty [to enslaved people] ... with the liberty and education of the children,” during a period she calculated to be five years.⁵² Her plan included colonization of the freed people, “in accordance with the laws of the state,” to places yet undetermined, but probably “Hayti, [or] the Mexican territory of Texas, touching the line of the United States, free to all colors, with a climate suited to the complexion of the negro race.” Sending the freed people away at an age of “vigorous youth,” she said, eliminated the financial burden currently on slaveholders of supporting elderly enslaved people during their “period of infirmity” to their deathbeds. Her proposal, she offered, took into account that the four primary Southern crops – rice, sugar, cotton, and tobacco – depended on labor of enslaved blacks to be profitable, but she argued that “the class of poor whites, ... depressed by the slave system, and excluded from industry, to their loss and ruin,” would step in and perform that labor once the enslaved people had earned the price of their purchase. She provided a table of calculations intended to assure Southern planters that far from creating financial distress for them, the plan would prove itself to be immediately profitable. In fact, argued Wright, her plan would inevitably produce the “assimilat[ion of] the industry of the south to that of the north, and enable it to multiply its productions.” Wright encouraged others to reproduce her experiment in all of the slave states and presented a second table of figures that purposed “to evince the general

⁵¹ Frances Wright. “Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States, Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South.” *Genius of Universal Emancipation and Baltimore Courier* 1.8 (October 15, 1825): 58-59.

⁵² *Ibid.* Wright promised that even with what she called a “low estimate,” she assured planters that enslaved people aged nine to fifty “will replay the purchase money, with interest, in less than four years”; but, she said, she had even included “deductions for sickness and deaths” into her calculations, and so predicted that “the average term” for slave manumission would be five years.

man of colour?”⁵⁴ Lafayette, on the other hand, was concerned that “the ignorant white population of the South” would do her harm.⁵⁵

To seek support among Southerners, Wright sent Kentucky’s Henry Clay a copy of the proposal. She added a note that she knew it would be disrespectful to begin her project without “the countenance & assistance of many distinguished citizens in the South & North,” and hoped he would help her reach other influential Southerners. Lafayette began that process himself by sending the proposal to Andrew Jackson, the hero of Tennessee. At this point Wright seemed focused on Tennessee; she notes in a letter that she delegated George Rapp’s son Frederick to take care of her “business in Baltimore, namely to see an efficient philanthropist there, to explain the intended experiment [Nashoba] to him and to direct him to supply [Wright] with the names of some good planters in Tennessee, the state it seems in which they are the most numerous and the most liberal ... the state of General Jackson.”⁵⁶ Jackson had led a group of mulatto soldiers in the Indian Wars a decade before, and Wright reasoned that he might be inclined to support her experiment, as she was then presenting it. When Wright visited Jackson at the Hermitage in Nashville in the fall of 1825 she found the general more than amenable to her plan. In fact, he offered help in directing her to a tract of land some 300 miles to the west.⁵⁷ The tract was thirteen miles east of Chickasaw Bluffs, an Indian trading village that would later be renamed Memphis and that was directly down-river from the New-Harmony settlement on the Ohio River.

⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson to Frances Wright, August 7, 1825, Monticello. Frances Wright Papers, 1843-1896, MMS 46615, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵ Qtd. in Morris, 103.

⁵⁶ Wright to Garnett, June 5, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 43.

⁵⁷ Morris, 97, 109. Letter from George Flower to Frederick Rapp, Oct. 24, 1825, from Nashville: “Avarice and a fear of loosing their popularity have prevented any persons [slave owners] from giving up any of their people yet. But many say that they will if such an establishment goes into effect. Gen. Jackson is very favourable to it.” Karl J. R. Arndt, “The Pittsburgh Meeting of General Lafayette, George Rapp, and Frances Wright: Prelude to Frances Wright’s Nashoba.” *Historical Society Notes and Documents* (July 1979): 281-295. 288.

In October both the *Genius of Universal Emancipation and Baltimore Courier*, America's most radical abolitionist paper, and the *New-Harmony Gazette* anonymously published Wright's proposal. In introducing it a *Gazette* writer held that the plan would "counteract ... a national misfortune so pregnant with mischief as that of slavery."⁵⁸ Then in December *Genius* editor Benjamin Lundy announced with "pleasure" that the "project of this work" and "at the head of this great and philanthropic undertaking" was none other than "the lady so well known in the literary world by the name of *Miss Wright*." He reminded his readers of her influence and reputation, in that she had "for several years, travelled much in Europe and America, a part of which time she has been intimately associated with the family of General Lafayette." Lundy also broke the news that "the location [for the experiment] will be in West Tennessee," information Wright had shared with him in a personal letter.⁵⁹

BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

After a hard ride to visit and explore the land in Tennessee described to her by Jackson, Wright began the process of creating her own utopian community there – an "agricultural establishment in the bosom of the forests." Beginning in the late fall of 1825 Wright began purchasing land that would eventually amass to over 2000 acres on the banks of the Wolf River, a direct tributary of the Mississippi. She gathered up a few devotees, purchased some fifteen enslaved people, and started the colony she named Nashoba, the Chickasaw word for *wolf*.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States, Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South." *New-Harmony Gazette* 1.1 (October 1, 1825): 4-5. "Proposal for Gradual Abolition," *Genius*, 58-59. The writer also announced that "the projectors of the PLAN passed through this place a few days ago, with a view of making a location for carrying their benevolent intentions into effect early in the ensuing spring."

⁵⁹ "Frances Wright's New Institution for the Abolition of Slavery." *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 1.15 (Dec. 10, 1825): 117.

⁶⁰ Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters*. 30. Although the area seemed to be in a remote, wild, and southern part of the new United States, it had been accessible since 1811 by steamboat both up and down the Mississippi River from Pittsburgh to New Orleans. Robert H. Gudmestad, *Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011. 1-4. It was a straight shot from Chickasaw Bluffs to New Orleans, from which Wright may well have intended to bring new enslaved people to supplement her

Within two years of Wright's return to the United States she finally launched her own "great experiment" in Tennessee – a utopian-communitarian reform effort to weaken slavery from the inside out. Along the way she picked up a devoted ally in Robert Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, then the editor of his father's community newspaper, the *New-Harmony Gazette*. Some ten years younger than Wright and a kindred spirit, Robert Dale and Wright were to work closely together for the next three years on her social and political objectives.⁶¹ Their work relationship was collegial but also disproportionate: Wright set the agenda and Robert Dale diligently worked towards its reification. Robert Dale's early centeredness on Wright can be seen in an 1827 letter by Wright recounting that he felt "vexe[d]" that he was trapped "waiting his father at Lanark," for he believed he could be "of much use in London in helping me [Wright] preach the faith" of the Nashoba enterprise.⁶² Robert Dale was eventually elected to Congress for a few terms and became well-known in his own right, but in his early twenties he relied on his father and on Wright for political direction.

Wright's was a radical experiment, and by 1826 she herself was living in a swamp-land log cabin in Tennessee, the owner of enslaved people she had bought as part of the experiment and toiling in the muck alongside them, she and "her swarthy companions, piling brush, rolling logs, &c., &c., from early dawn to dusky eve."⁶³ Her daily reality had become, by choice, as fetid as the odious and pestilential world of slavery she viewed earlier as an English outsider.

experiment, for she predicted that by its great success the colony would grow in geometric proportions and would spawn other similar institutions nearby.

⁶¹ He was known as Robert Dale to his friends and acquaintances to differentiate him from his father.

⁶² Letter from Frances Wright to Harriet Garnett, October 8, 1827, Harrow, England. In Payne-Gaposhkin, 104.

⁶³ Amos Gilbert, *Memoir of Frances Wright, The Pioneer Woman in the Cause of Human Rights*. Cincinnati: Longley Brothers, 1855. 27-28. "It was not to be anticipated that one born and bred in the lap of wealthy aristocracy, who probably had never kneaded bread, churned butter, or perchance put a stitch in a garment, should, without the pressure of necessity, voluntarily turn woodman; But she did it.... [S]he left in the morning twilight in search of their cows, and returned in the evening twilight, having traversed the forest a whole day without a mouthful of food. Several times she went alone on horseback from Nashoba, Tenn., to New-Harmony, Ind., through a wilderness country, with several rivers of swimming depth."

Yet Wright, her sister Camilla, and the three other white supervisors, or “trustees,” that she had selected were devoted to the project: George Flower (the co-author of her *Proposal*), Quaker working-man Richesson Whitby, and Scotsman James Richardson, whom Robert Dale later described as an “impractical ... metaphysician.”⁶⁴

Certainly Wright’s goals in 1826 for the Nashoba colony were unlike anything anyone had proposed in America for a community and intrigued elites on both sides of the Atlantic. Radical and liberal newspapers began to pick up on the outlines of her “emancipating establishment,” which they greeted initially with respect and praise, representing Wright to readers as a starry-eyed but well-meaning philanthropist.⁶⁵ In April 1827 a writer for *Ariel*, a Philadelphia literary magazine, applauded Wright as an “English authoress of considerable talents.” He judged her to be a “valuable citizen of America” and her work in the country so far to be a “career of usefulness” that “seems also to be progressive.”⁶⁶ Another writer commented that the “good work in which she is now engaged will draw down blessings upon her head. Whether successful or unsuccessful, the intentions she has exhibited will place her name in a most enviable height among the active philanthropists who have done honour to our kind and times.”⁶⁷

Perhaps Wright did not know herself in 1825 and 1826 that her ideologies and protocols would soon extend far beyond her application of Owenian educational theories and

⁶⁴ Morris, 114. Perkins & Wolfson, 129-130. The number of trustees would eventually grow to a total of ten, excluding Wright herself as the primary trustee: Robert Owen, Lafayette, Camilla Wright, Robert Dale Owen, educator William Maclure, George Flower, Richesson Whitby, James Richardson, former New York mayor Cadwallader Colden, and Robert Jennings (future editor on the *Free Enquirer*). According to Morris, Wright deeded the Nashoba property over to all ten of them in the event of her death. Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 136.

⁶⁵ “Miss Wright’s Emancipating Establishment.” *Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph* 11.30 (July 28, 1826): 119. “Miss Wright’s Emancipating Establishment.” *Zion’s Herald* 4.31 (Aug. 2, 1826): 2. “Emancipation of Slaves.” *Religious Intelligencer* 11.10 (Aug. 5, 1826): 154. “Miss Wright’s Emancipating Establishment.” *Christian Register* 5.31 (Aug. 5, 1826): 124. “Slavery.” *Saturday Evening Post* 42 (Oct. 21, 1826): 3. “Colonization.” *Saturday Evening Post* 5.46 (Nov. 18, 1826): 3.

⁶⁶ “Philanthropy of Miss Wright.” *The Ariel: A Semimonthly Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette* 1.1 (April 4, 1827): 5.

⁶⁷ “Slavery.” *Saturday Evening Post* 42 (Oct. 21, 1826): 3.

communitarianism to the problem of American slavery. In the early years of Wright's promotion of her project she supported Southern planters' rights to their property and evinced no outward criticism of their Christian religion. But at some point between 1826 and 1827 Wright began linking her evolving plan for Nashoba to some of the most liberal lessons that she had taken from Robert Owen, Jeremy Bentham, and Thomas Jefferson. Her developmental years under the tutelage of Enlightenment rationalists Bentham in London and Jefferson at Monticello, and her absorption of the fundamental atheism of Robert Owen (the father) at New-Harmony had settled irreligious beliefs for Wright that she had been contemplating for years: a commitment to freedom from religious sentiments and rituals in her life and in the lives of those in her circles of influence. She had not yet revealed to friends outside of her inner circle, much less to periodical editors, that her theories for Nashoba were becoming even more radical than they already were, extending beyond education and emancipation of enslaved people to include blunt directives on religion and sexuality. Only in a private letter to her friend J. C. L. de Sismondi in 1827 did she openly mock the ideology promoted by most Southern Christians "that slavery is sanctioned by God himself in the Bible." She labeled that defense of slavery, among other defenses, as "very old nonsense."⁶⁸ Sismondi noted her "pronounced hostility to religion, which she accuses of having supported slavery." He connected her "rebell[ion] against the High Church" branch of the Anglican Church to her innovations regarding slave manumission, and averred that that hostility "carried her feelings much farther than she should have done."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Wright to Sismondi, September 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 94-95.

⁶⁹ Sismondi to Julia Garnett, September 9, 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 96. It is probable that many of the Virginia planters with whom she consulted were Episcopalian; perhaps she associated the planters' "nonsens[ical]" views with her own childhood Anglicanism, which by then she regarded with antipathy. Evidently Wright entirely rejected the traditions of High Church Anglicans, which were those most closely associated with Roman Catholic praxis. Wright's alleged "rebell[ion] against the High Church" implies rejection of so-called Ritualism. Ritualism including practices such as vested choirs, auricular confession, signing of the cross, and the Reserved Sacrament; and artifacts such as incense, bells, candles, crucifixes, priests' vestments (birettas, chasubles, and maniples). Wright's reaction against the High Church was a decade or so prior to the development by John Newman, Edward

Not until 1828 would Wright openly reveal that she had codified atheistic principles at Nashoba and that she had banned religious practices and theistic beliefs from the premises. At the school she planned to build, students were to learn to love Reason instead of “*a Being or Beings not cognizable by the senses of man.*”⁷⁰ Such ideas obviously had not been included in the proposal she had disseminated to potential supporters in 1825. Wright used the hedonistic utilitarianism of Greek philosopher Epicurus as a template for “the rule of moral practice” at Nashoba instead of Christian theology; for her, “simply and singly ... human happiness” rather than “God” set the ethical standard.⁷¹ Irreligion of any sort was sure to create opposition among most antebellum Americans, and Wright had avoided any mention of this development until she felt pressed for a full disclosure of her tenets.

An even more iconoclastic principle at Nashoba – and, again, one not included in her 1825 proposal and one she did not reveal publicly until pressed later – was her desire to end racial prejudice through an “amalgamation” of the black and white races. As she put it, she hoped “to kill prejudice in the white man by raising the black man to his level.”⁷² Her theory was that all American children – both white children and children of color – should be removed from their homes and educated together in boarding schools in relative isolation from their parents.⁷³ Parents and children naturally might see each other in the course of a work-day, but parents were to have no control over their children’s education, behavior, or morals. She spoke

Pusey, and others of the Oxford or Tractarian Movement that extolled High Church Anglicanism as the radical and near-evangelical attempt to return a lost purity and holiness to the Church of England.

⁷⁰ “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.133].” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.18 (Feb. 13, 1828): 140.

⁷¹ Wright, “Nashoba.” Feb. 13, 1828, 140.

⁷² Frances Wright to Sismondi, September 1827, from La Grange (copy in Julia Garnett’s handwriting). In Payne-Gaposchkin, 95.

⁷³ Frances Trollope. *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. 2 volumes. London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832. Frances Trollope, the British author of a book critical of Americas, travelled to the U.S. as Wright’s guest in fall 1827. She recorded her impressions of Wright’s oral performance in that book. Her plans for Nashoba included the development of such a school, but the institution failed before it materialized. They had many of the items required, but the building was never erected and, aside from Frances Trollope’s three children, there were no white children to educate along with the slave children. Trollope had brought her children to Nashoba to join in the experiment, but was so horrified at conditions that they left for Cincinnati after only ten days.

fondly to a friend about her “forest home” at Nashoba “with its smiling faces of every hue,” where the “children both of slaves and free are now gathered together . . . , separated from the contamination of their parents, whom they see only in the presence of their directors [white supervisors].”⁷⁴ As this generation of children grew up together to enlightened adulthood they might just as well be attracted to one another across racial boundaries as within them. Naturally some of these interracial couples would engage in sexual relations, produce children, and “gradually blend into one their blood and their hue.”⁷⁵ She believed that “by offering not the mere theory, but the practice of equality beneath the roof of Nashoba, and presenting a first example of union and brotherhood,” Americans would gradually begin to emulate that model. She hoped that the effects of her “good cause” would “be felt by the whole population” of Americans.⁷⁶

This radical model of using mixed-race children to address embedded racial prejudice is Wright’s sole creation, probably the serendipitous collision of a Lockean *tabula rasa* (through Bentham’s influence), Owenian communitarianism, and her own observations of the blending of the races in New Orleans.⁷⁷ She felt a responsibility to redress the horrors of slavery that she witnessed in Louisiana in 1825, which she called “slavery in its worst form.”⁷⁸ The idea that

⁷⁴ Letter from Frances Wright to the Garnetts, August 18, 1827, from LaGrange. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 90.

⁷⁵ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125].” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 133.

⁷⁶ Wright to Sismondi, September 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 95.

⁷⁷ Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 39. In her letter to Julia Garnett she mentions “the plan which has occurred to me, together with the means for putting it into effect.” On first visiting Rapp’s Harmony, she says that “a vague idea crossed me that there was something in the system of united labor, as there in operation, which might be rendered subservient to the emancipation of the South.”

⁷⁸ Frances Wright to Julia Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 37. Some Northerners continued to believe that Southerners would be more likely than they to accept interracial relationships and children; a writer in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* commented in 1828 about that aspect of Wright’s plan: “As to the proposal for amalgamating the colors, we are of the opinion that the idea will not be cherished in the northern or middle section of our country; tho it will be less objectionable in the extreme *South*. Indeed, the work is now progressing there as rapidly as possible. The nearer the blacks are placed to the equinoctial line, the better will it accord with their nature and constitutions; and the very law of nature will counteract the prejudices of man, if justice be permitted to speak in vindication of human rights.” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2.12 (April 26, 1828): 94.

moral error could be corrected or obliterated only by affecting and shaping the blank infant mind had presented Wright a tantalizing possibility. By deflecting or neutralizing the scarring social, racial, and gender influences of both the black and the white parents on their youthful progeny, Wright and her followers hoped to influence a new generation of mixed-race people to be more open-minded. Then when sexual nature took its rightful and moral course with continued coupling of mixed-race adults, predicted Wright, a third generation of prejudice-free children would begin to people the United States. In her letter to Garnett she scoffed at white racism: “An impartial spectator opens his eyes in amazement at this wonderful attachment to a pure white skin (the purity of which the climate destroys before the age of five and twenty), to which predilection the morals, happiness, wealthy and peace, and finally the very lives of a whole population are to be sacrificed.” She told Garnett that a critical element of the solution to the problem of slavery was “an amalgamation of the two colors.” She noted the impossibility of “remov[ing] the whole colored population of the country.” In an obvious reference to established relationships between white men and mulatto and quadroon women in Louisiana, she argued that such an “amalgamation is [already] taking place slowly but surely under the present system.”⁷⁹

Wright understood that white Americans’ antipathy for people of color would not change rapidly, and “look[ed] not for the conversion of the existing generation” or “even for its sympathy.”⁸⁰ She hoped instead that as white Americans were increasingly exposed to intelligent, mixed-race individuals emerging from her system, their better understanding of the

⁷⁹ Wright to Garnett, June 8, 1825. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 39.

⁸⁰ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125].” *New-Harmony Gazette* Jan. 30, 1828, 125.

capability of non-white people would necessarily reduce their racial biases.⁸¹ Wright's move to break fundamental racial taboos of American society was one of the first of her radical principles to catch the attention of middle- and upper-class Americans in both the North and the South.⁸²

Wright thought that her endorsement of miscegenation would upset Americans more than any of her other theories, including her promotion of atheism. She was wrong. A third radical principle, not included in the original 1825 plan for an "emancipating establishment," would earn Wright the greatest obloquy: her open confrontation of wrongs done to women and her demand for basic human rights for women.⁸³ A theme that would attract thousands of women to her cause, Wright had developed a profound sympathy for the many ways in which women were vulnerable because of the institution of marriage.⁸⁴ She argued that because of the "tyranny usurped by the matrimonial law over the most sacred of the human affections," women could be trapped with drunken or profligate husbands in poverty or physical abuse, or abandoned

⁸¹ Letter from Frances Wright to Harriet Garnett, 1824. Qtd. in Cecilia Helena Payne-Gaposchkin, "The Nashoba Plan for Removing the Evil of Slavery: Letters of Frances and Camilla Wright, 1820-1829." *Harvard Library Bulletin* 23.3 (July 1975): 221-251. 231. Wright illustrates her theory on reducing racial bias by describing the effect that a young Haitian had on his fellow steamboat passengers. Jonathas Granville, Wright relates, had met with nothing but respect and acceptance as he moved about Philadelphia, only encountering difficulty in an incident with a young white man on a steamboat crossing to Trenton, New Jersey. His fellow passengers, who had become familiar with the Haitian over the course of their passage together, complained to the boat captain of the young man's incivility to Granville. The captain induced an apology from the offender, to which Granville eloquently replied, "Benefits I engrave on marble, insults always upon sand."

⁸² When Wright's Tennessee experiment finally became known to liberal Americans in 1829, it undoubtedly sparked soul-searching about slavery among them. Lydia Maria Child's 1833 *Appeal* was the first text fully to promote immediate abolitionism, viewed as detestable because of the uncouth behavior and language of its proponents (Garrison et al) and because its result would inundate Northern culture with Southern blacks – unthinkable even to almost every liberal Northerner, and no different than Wright's experiment forced on them on a national scale.

⁸³ Frances Wright. "Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125]." *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 133. "The writer of this address is fully aware that the topic most offensive to the American public is that now under consideration.... The strength of the prejudice of color as existing in the United States and in the European colonies can in general be little conceived and less understood in the old continent." Frances Wright. "Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125]." *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 133.

⁸⁴ Morris, 147. Morris believes that Wright might have been reacting with grief and anger at being abandoned by a man she loved (George Flower) who returned to his wife rather than remaining with her: "As for the marriage tie, she had railed against it often...: it had blocked her chance to be happy. She was a proud woman who would have found it hard to believe that something more than the law tied George Flower to his wife." While Frances Trollope does make an allusion to a possible romance, I've found no further evidence for this relationship.

altogether.⁸⁵ Women's ignorance of any means of birth control left poor women with too many offspring to care for adequately. Little of this theory was original to Wright; rather, she was reframing what she had learned from Robert Owen in 1826 at New-Harmony about the inadequacies of the marriage institution and the penalties women paid for their fertility.⁸⁶ Wright put rules into place at Nashoba that experimented with ending women's subordination to men. Unmarried cohabitation, divorce if necessary, the use of birth control, and non-restrictive clothing were some of the means. Following Robert Owen's model and in a revolutionary move, with the stroke of her pen Wright mandated that the institution of legal marriage was not recognized at Nashoba – a move that would alienate Americans across the country:

The marriage law existing without the pale of the Institution [of Nashoba], is of no force within that pale. No woman can forfeit her individual rights or independent existence, and no man assert over her any rights or power whatsoever, beyond what he may exercise over her free and voluntary affections.

Whether the State of Tennessee would have supported Wright's code if it ever came up in court was never tested. But as primary trustee at Nashoba, Wright said it was so. Her argument held that since the human sex drive was powerful, "monastic chastity" was impossible to enforce. Therefore, when couples were genuinely attracted to one another, and only if women voluntarily agreed to the relationship, they simply should give themselves permission to have sexual

⁸⁵ Frances Wright. "Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125]." *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 132. A year later she challenged readers to "see a young creature ... pledging her troth to one who, some moons, or, it may be, years after, turns gambler, or drunkard, or speculator, staking at one throw, or wasting over nightly potations, not *his* property only, but hers also – see this, and then see her obliged, constrained, to stand silent by and watch the ruin – that ruin, which is to overwhelm alike herself and her children!" "Rights and Wrongs of Women." *Free Enquirer* 1.27 (April 29, 1829): 213.

⁸⁶ Robert Owen. "Oration, Containing a Declaration of Mental Independence, Delivered in the Public Hall, at New-Harmony, Ind-, by Robert Owen, at the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1826." *New-Harmony Gazette* 1.42 (July 12, 1826): 329-332. It is also likely that she had been influenced by one of her liberal relatives, Janet Millar, who was "strongly opposed to matrimony." Letter from Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, October 7, 1828. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 126.

intercourse without being married.⁸⁷ Robert Owen believed that most women's ignorance of any means of birth control left them with too many offspring to care for adequately and Owen's son, Robert Dale Owen, promoted modern techniques of "moral physiology" that could be employed to "check pregnancy."⁸⁸ Unmarried cohabitation was perfectly acceptable if both parties freely agreed to it, which was Wright's reification of the concept of "free love" twenty years before notorious communitarian John Humphrey Noyes imagined it.⁸⁹

Then in the summer of 1827 Wright left Nashoba and America for nearly six months. Although Wright was constitutionally strong, what she would call the "free exposure to the sun, and bodily and mental activity through all seasons and at all hours" in the muggy and mosquito-infested swampland at Nashoba resulted in her "severe and reiterated sickness."⁹⁰ Friends later attributed what they believed was Wright's near-insanity to the extreme fevers they believed she suffered at this time. Under doctor's orders and aided by Robert Dale's companionship and attention, she returned to Europe to recover, leaving Nashoba under the sole authority of her sister Camilla, James Richardson, and Richesson Whitby. The mild-mannered Whitby left (temporarily) almost immediately after Wright – driven away, probably, by Richardson's quick temper and domineering ways – and Richardson began ignoring Wright's benevolent principles and adopting harsher ones. When the enslaved people started to rebel against their new ill treatment, Richardson instituted flogging.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Again, Wright established this principle at Nashoba over twenty years before John Humphrey Noyes employed even more elaborately designed principles regarding sexual relationships at his Oneida Community.

⁸⁸ [Robert Dale Owen.] *The Moral Physiology; a Treatise on Popular Questions, or Means Devised to Check Pregnancy*. New York, 1836. He first published the book in 1830.

⁸⁹ Louis J. Kern, "Breaching the 'Wall of Partition Between the Male and the Female': John Humphrey Noyes and Free Love." *The Courier* 28.2 (Fall 1993). Digital edition. Oneida Community Collection, Dept. of Special Collections, Syracuse University Library.

⁹⁰ Wright, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters*, 30.

⁹¹ Qtd. in A. J. G. Perkins and Theresa Wolfson. *Frances Wright, Free Enquirer: Study of a Temperament*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939. Reprinted. Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1972. 166-168. Richardson's journal entry for May 20, 1827 has this: "May 24th: Two women slaves tied up and flogged by James Richardson in the

WRIGHT REVEALED AS RADICAL

In July 1827 the American public – albeit only a small, radical portion of readers – had the opportunity to learn that the principles in place at Nashoba had extended well beyond those originally propounded in Wright’s 1825 proposal. While Wright was out of the country – first convalescing from her swamp fever and then soliciting more elite white families to accompany her back to live at Nashoba – James Richardson leaked news of the colony’s extramarital and interracial sexual relationships to the substitute editor of the Baltimore *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.⁹² Proud of the radical ideologies in place at Nashoba, and especially pleased with his own intimate relationship with a free African American woman, Richardson kept a daily journal. He sent a lengthy entry to the *Genius*, which the substitute editor obligingly printed without editing or commentary in the July 28, 1827 issue, and without consulting Benjamin Lundy, the managing editor.⁹³ Included in the logs were two items that would later catch the attention of Americans across the country, and caught Lundy’s on his return. In addition to Richardson’s account of his cohabitation with a quadroon, he recounted the story of an enslaved woman who asked for a lock to be put on her door so that an enslaved man would not make any more undesired nighttime visits. Richardson indicated that Camilla Wright denied that request,

presence of Camilla and all the slaves. Two dozen [lashes] and one dozen on bare back with a cowskin.” Apparently Camilla had acquiesced, somewhat ill herself and probably overwhelmed by a situation that had intensified beyond her abilities. “Camilla Wright again stated it, and informed the slaves that, ... the conduct of Redrick ... ought in her opinion to be punished by flogging.” Morris carefully dissects Frances Wright’s possible complicity by considering records where she seemed to agree to punishment “according to the slave system.” Morris, 145. Also quoted at greater length in Perkins and Wolfson.

⁹² *The Life & Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. Vol. II* Mrs. Julian Marshall, ed. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889. 168-181. Especially in her return trip to Europe in 1827 Wright sought donors among the wealthy who could be convinced that her cause was just, as well as people who might be willing to join the community at Nashoba. Wright made a special trip to meet Mary Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin’s daughter and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s widow. Wright and Shelley had never met, but Wright wrote her, promoting Nashoba, which she said was “an association based on those principles of moral liberty and equality heretofore advocated by your father... Whatever be the fate of this letter, I wish to convey to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley my respect and admiration of those from whom she holds those names, and my fond desire to connect her with them in my esteem, and in the knowledge of mutual sympathy to sign myself her friend.” Evidently Wright and Shelley enjoyed each other’s company, but ultimately Shelley declined the opportunity.

⁹³ “Frances Wright’s Establishment.” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 1.4 (July 28, 1827): 29.

instead ordering the man simply to be more respectful of the woman's wishes. Three weeks after the *Genius's* publication of Richardson's journal, Benjamin Lundy printed a letter from a man from Philadelphia, "one of the most respectable and zealous advocates of universal emancipation [in the] country," who was shocked at the revelations. He said that "[n]o one, possessed of moral or religious feelings, [could] read without horror" Richardson's report, labeling the proceedings at Nashoba "indecent," "libidinous," and "repugnant." The writer asked incredulously whether it was "possible that Miss [Camilla] W[right]... an accomplished young English woman ... could publicly declare to the slaves, that the proper basis of the sexual intercourse was the unconstrained, and unrestrained choice of both parties?" He blamed "the wild and wicked system of Owen (the elder)" for the activities at Nashoba, which he called "one great brothel, disgraceful to its institutors."⁹⁴ The *Genius* writer stopped short of blaming either of the Wright sisters directly, since Frances Wright was in Europe and Richardson had been the writer of the log.

Still, private responses from Wright's friends to the shocking revelations from Nashoba came quickly. Wright's close friend, influential New York banker Charles Wilkes, had thought the Nashoba plan to have been "to the highest degree honorable," for Wright's goal was "to make the immediate objects of [the Wright sisters'] care happy and worthy to be so." Wright had promoted her project as an institution to educate enslaved people and to help them earn and deserve their own freedom. Now in October Wilkes wrote their mutual friend Julia Pertz that he was scandalized at the revelations from Nashoba:

Judge then my horror, for it is hardly too strong a term, at being shown a publication in a paper at Baltimore, professing to be an account of the proceedings of the Trustees at Nashoba, which ... stated that Camilla Wright had ... delivered to a meeting of the slaves the opinions of the Trustees, as to what in their cant they call the sexual intercourse,

⁹⁴ "Frances Wright's Establishment." *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 1.7 (August 18, 1827): 54.

which was declared to be, that the only proper basis was the unrestrained and unconstrained choice of both parties.... In short it was clear ... that there were to be no marriages, and to put the matter beyond the least doubt, one of the Trustees declared in person in the presence of Camilla that he had the night before begun to live with Mademoiselle Josephine, who it appears was a woman of color.⁹⁵

Lundy and other abolitionists would have interpreted Wright's policy against marriage as mocking and discrediting their efforts to legalize the institution for enslaved people.⁹⁶ Wilkes joined Lundy in blaming Robert Owen directly for the appalling developments, charging that Frances and Camilla Wright were the "dupes and the victims of the wretched sophisms ... of a madman." Sismondi agreed: "I cannot forgive Mr. Owen the evil he has done to the world by turning [Wright's] head."⁹⁷ Sismondi wrote to a friend that Wright was "really drowning, that in spite of feminine modesty, ... she has declared war on public opinion." He believed that Wright was "provok[ing public opinion] in such a way that she will be crushed by it."⁹⁸ Wilkes said the disclosures could not help but permanently terminate the Wright sisters' relationships with "any of the ladies of their acquaintance, and declared that "self-respect [forbade] further intercourse with [members of his own] family."⁹⁹ Most of all, her beloved uncle, James Mylne, wrote Wright and pleaded with her to change course. He recounted that letter to a mutual friend:

⁹⁵ Letter from Charles Wilkes to Julia Pertz, Oct. 15, 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 105-106. Underscore is Wilkes'.

⁹⁶ Cadwallader D. Colden, "Minutes, &c." *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2.10 (Nov. 25, 1826): 73-76. 74-75. "6. *Resolved*, That it be recommended by the Convention, to the Legislatures of the several slave-holding states, or any of them, where the marriage of slaves is not authorized or regulated by law, to provide for such marriages, guard their conjugal rights, and enforce their conjugal duties, by laws, corresponding with those which govern the whites in all civilized and Christian countries.... 1. Regulate the marriage contracts of slaves, and guard and enforce their conjugal rights and duties." Abolitionists also argued for the legal validity of the marriages of free blacks: "[T]his writer would fain have us to believe, that 'a marriage between free blacks is no marriage at all.' ... I cannot but think, with most men of common sense, that a marriage between free blacks is just as much a marriage, and as valid a one too, as a marriage between free whites." "For the Genius of Universal Emancipation. No. II." *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2.18 (June 21, 1828): 138.

⁹⁷ Letter from Sismondi to Julia Pertz, July 14, 1828. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 123.

⁹⁸ Letter from Sismondi to Julia Pertz, January 13, 1828, from Geneva. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 113.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 106.

It is true that she speaks in [her letter to him] of her denouncing of all religious creeds.... I have seen the numbers of the N[ew] Harmony Gazette which contain her addition “Days in Athens”, the last of which is an open pleading in defence of atheism, conducted with all that ardor that indicates a sincere conviction of the doctrine.... [T]he warmth of my attachment to [Wright] made the mortification given me by her absurdity but the more painful, and the difficulty of suppressing the language of disappointment, of grief, of shame, shall I say of anger – Good God! That I should live to see one in whom I had flattered myself I should have ground to boast as a benefit to mankind, an ornament to her sex and the pride of her connections, reducing herself to such a state that I should be compelled to conceal my relationship to her, nev[er] to utter her nam[e].¹⁰⁰

Mylne wondered if in fact an “excessive passion for notoriety ha[d] led to an incipient disorder of [Wright’s] mind.”¹⁰¹ Another family friend predicted that Wright would one day “die of a broken heart.”¹⁰² Not one family member or friend supported Wright’s project. Family members wrote to Wright directly with stern admonitions; her friends simply “cut” her from their correspondence and company.

Interestingly, there was initially no response whatsoever from the conventional press to Richardson’s revelations of the “free love” occurring at Nashoba. To the contrary, conservative and mainstream newspapers and magazines seemed unaware of the news. In August the *Ariel*, a magazine for middle-class Philadelphia readers that recently had praised Wright’s benevolent

¹⁰⁰ Letter from James Mylne to Julia Garnett, August 12, 1827, Glasgow College. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 87-88.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Letter from Fanny Garnett to Julia Pertz, written on the same sheet as a letter from Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, November 13, 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 109. In a subsequent letter Harriet Garnett agreed that while they continued to love Frances Wright, they could no longer support her radical project at Nashoba: “The horror that community will excite in every country, and most in America. What things will be said and written on such a field for slander and ill nature. And we must bear all in silence, for we cannot defend such a system, principle and propriety both equally oppose our defending it.” Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, December 12, 1827. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 110.

philanthropy now simply noted Wright's and Owen's curious traveling companions – that they and “6 Osage chiefs have embarked in a vessel from New Orleans for France.”¹⁰³ Reprinting a story from the *National Intelligencer* and still referring to Wright respectfully as an “authoress,” *Mrs. Colvin's Messenger* noted only that she had left the country to “re-establish her health.” It is clear that an editor there had recently skimmed, at least, the *New-Harmony Gazette*, for he refers to the paper for its news that Wright was “expected to return to her residence at Washoba” [sic] the following summer.¹⁰⁴ These three magazines chose to ignore any reference to any possibility of Wright's iconoclastic ideologies. After all, ordinary people living in polite society were probably not immediately interested in the untoward activities of a tiny colony in the backwoods of Tennessee.

But of course, news of James Richardson's and Camilla Wright's actions and of the *Genius's* printing of the material reached Robert Dale and Frances Wright in Europe, and eventually Wright responded to Richardson's revelations. First she wrote directly to Richardson from Lafayette's estate at LaGrange. She believed the leaked news actually would be beneficial for Nashoba, pricking “curiosity” among outsiders that would be “highly valuable” and might “widen the circle of our utility beyond the country of our residence.”¹⁰⁵ Certainly she was interested in spreading her theories to a larger audience. However, she was not pleased with Richardson's framing of the revelations; his release of raw journal entries seemed to her a crude means of suasion for their great mission. Wright told him that she felt that the unedited and unannotated journal entries were “very unfit for publication,” and feared that instead of persuading readers, their crudity was more likely to “increase the irritation which the opinions

¹⁰³ “Things in General.” *The Ariel: A Semimonthly Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette* 1.3 (Aug. 11, 1827).

¹⁰⁴ “Miss Frances Wright.” *Mrs. A. S. Colvin's Weekly Messenger* (Nov. 10, 1827): 186.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Wright to Richardson, written in LaGrange, Aug. 18, 1827; quoted in Perkins and Wolfson, 173.

themselves are sufficiently likely to excite.”¹⁰⁶ She would have preferred a careful defense of Nashoba’s tenets, “temperate in its language and complete in its reasoning,” rather than “launch[ing] our principles naked and defenceless [sic] in the midst of the enemy, leaving to that enemy itself the task of developing them.”¹⁰⁷ Wright decided to seize the opportunity that Richardson had created to clarify the principles she had established at Nashoba, in order to staunch the potential adverse reaction.

In November of 1827 onboard the ship *Edward* and returning to the United States from her convalescence in Europe, Wright wrote a thorough, three-part explanation of her colony’s principles and praxis and sent it to the *New-Harmony Gazette* for publication.¹⁰⁸ Frances Trollope, a British author travelling to the United States with Wright as her guest, noted that Wright read portions of it aloud to sailors to gain feedback from workingmen.¹⁰⁹ Published in the January 30, February 6, and February 13, 1828, editions of the *Gazette*, her “Nashoba (Explanatory Notes, &c.)” is a remarkable document. In “Explanatory Notes” Wright calmly and unapologetically explained the value of the revolutionary precepts in place at Nashoba to *Gazette* readers, who were mostly New-Harmonists and far more likely than most Americans to agree with her ideas.

She began with a reiteration of the principles from the 1825 proposal: that the “*especial object*” of Nashoba was the “*protection and regeneration of the race of color, universally*”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from Wright to Richardson, 173.

¹⁰⁸ Morris, 157. Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125].” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.16 (Jan. 30, 1828): 124-125; 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 132-133; 3.18 (Feb. 13, 1828): 140-141.

¹⁰⁹ “I saw her sitting upon a coil of rope in the steerage, reading to a sailor engaged in patching his breeches on another, some of the wildest doctrines of equality and concubinage that were ever traced on paper. Writing such, and reading them aloud, was her chief occupation during the voyage, and I often recurred to the idea that had tormented us in Paris, that she was not in her right senses.” Letter from Frances Trollope to Harriet Garnett, December 7, 1828, Cincinnati. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 163-164. 163.

oppressed and despised in a country self-denominated free.”¹¹⁰ She confirmed that she was “determined to ... devote her ... fortune, to the building up of an institution” that would

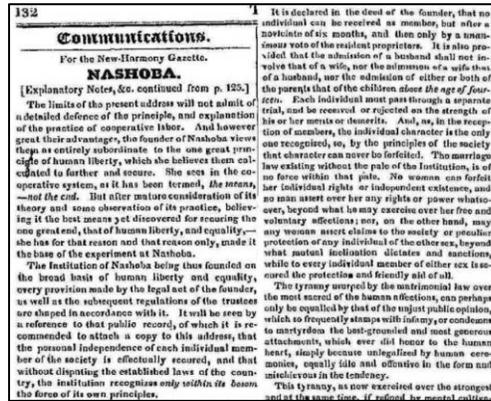


Fig. 1.4 Wright’s explanation of her principles at Nashoba, in “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes”

“develop all the intellectual and physical powers of all human beings, without regard to sex or condition, class, race, nation or color.”¹¹¹ She again argued that neither immediate emancipation nor immediate colonization was an effective solution to America’s slavery nightmare. Instead, enslaved adults were to be given the opportunity to earn the price of their manumission directly with the value of their labor; that is, they should be “led to work from the incentive of working out their liberty, with a view to being afterwards employed as waged laborers. With such a motive they would be found to work better.”¹¹² Once they understood and believed this offer, she reasoned they would work far harder than they would for their master’s sole gain. Further, enslaved people were “not urged to work by fear of the lash, or the presence of an overseer.”¹¹³ Rather, the poor behavior of enslaved people would be met with light consequences. Those should be followed by logical explanations of the unproductive nature of poor behaviors, provided at weekly meetings between the white “trustees” or supervisors – an essentially paternalistic system.

¹¹⁰ Frances Wright, “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes, respecting the Nature and Objects of the Institution of Nashoba, and of the Principles upon which it is founded. Addressed to the Friends of Human Improvement, in all Countries and of all Nations.” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.16 (Jan. 30, 1828): 125. The italics are Wright’s.

¹¹¹ Wright, “Nashoba.” 124.

¹¹² Wright to Garnett, June 5, 1825; in Payne-Gaposchkin, 38.

¹¹³ *Religious Intelligencer* 11.10 (Aug. 5, 1826): 154.

Then Wright began explaining the new rules in place at Nashoba that extended beyond restatements of her original plan, including the teaching of reason over Christian faith, female autonomy, the propriety of interracial and unmarried cohabitation, the amalgamation of the races, and separating children from their parents for the purpose of a bias-free education, all framed within the context of the “*free exercise of the liberty of speech and of action.*”¹¹⁴ She believed that issues surrounding “prejudice of color” were the ones “most offensive to the American public,” but assured her readers that her “Explanatory Notes” were not written or published “with a *view to offend,*” but to encourage them instead to undertake “cool investigation” of the subject.¹¹⁵

Wright’s application of Robert Owen’s principles to a mixed population at Nashoba was unprecedented. A writer for the radical *New-Harmony Gazette* noted approvingly in his commentary following their first installment that “[f]ew would *dare* to express their opinions openly and fearlessly as she has done, when these opinions are completely at variance with many of the most deep-rooted prejudices which exist among us.” He confessed the “lack of moral courage” that existed “even amongst the boldest and freest of men,” and so even among some of the New-Harmonists themselves.¹¹⁶ Her principles regarding unmarried consensual and interracial sex would mortify ordinary Americans and they raised alarms even among some radicals. Her friend Sismondi wrote a mutual friend that he reproached Wright “with being mistaken ... and very presumptuous.” He could not “admit that a young woman has the power to refashion human society” and “dread[ed] her prospects.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes], Jan. 30, 1828, 124.

¹¹⁵ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes], Feb. 6, 1828, 133.

¹¹⁶ “New-Harmony. Second Year of Mental Independence.” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.16 (Jan. 30, 1828): 126.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Sismondi to Julia Pertz, April 13, 1828. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 118.

Ultimately, Wright's principles threatened a white husband's fundamental privilege to rule the relationship he had with his white wife. While some wealthy women had opportunities to secure prenuptial agreements that protected women's property from creditors, this was still a time when most women could not divorce an alcoholic and physically abusive husband, were not supported by the law if they fled with their children, and could not protect their own inheritance from a spendthrift.¹¹⁸ Yet Wright was giving women permission to eliminate these problems by refusing to marry and by using birth control – techniques taught at New Harmony. Her admonitions that Americans had to act to eliminate racial prejudice through miscegenation further threatened white men. She had made easy reference to Southern relationships between elite white men and quadroon and slave women, with which she knew readers were familiar. She did not need to put into words the staggering thought that with the sexual freedoms she was extending to women, white women might choose to have sexual relations with black men. When Wright's explanation of her protocols and principles for Nashoba were reprinted a month later by

¹¹⁸ According to the Rev. Antoinette Brown, women's rights were still minimal in September 1853. At a convention of the newly formed Temperance Society, attended by both men and women, Brown gave an address in which she questioned the opening statement by the president, Rev. Thomas Higginson, that "This is not a woman's rights convention; it is merely a convention in which woman is not wronged, and that is enough." Brown complained that she effectively had been told not to say "a word about ... a woman's owing service to her intemperate husband, and his right to spend her earnings for his grog. Do not let it be known that the father has the legal right to the custody of his children, though he be a drunkard, or that he may take them away from their mother and apprentice them to ignorance, vice and the run-seller, as a security for his grog bill.... There have been bad laws, bad statutes, before this, which we are trying to get repealed." *The Weekly Herald* (NY) 36 (Sept. 3, 1853). According to Harris, "The common law right of the father had been considered nearly absolute in colonial America.... [T]he 1809 *Prather v. Prather* case ... the first published decision in the United States to deny the father's common law rights (Mason 60) ... was a rare deviation from the rule, and through the mid-nineteenth century the courts generally gave the father presumptive custody rights." Leslie J. Harris, "The Court, Child Custody, and Social Change: The Rhetorical Role of Precedent in a 19th Century Child Custody Decision." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34.1 (Winter 2004): 29-45. 31-32. See also Josephine Hoegaerts, "Legal or Just? Law, Ethics, and the Double Standard in the Nineteenth-Century Divorce Court." *Law and History Review* 26.2 (Summer 2008): 259-284. Sara L. Zeigler, "Wifely Duties: Marriage, Labor, and the Common Law in Nineteenth-Century America." *Social Science History* 20.1 (Spring 1996): 63-96. Elizabeth B. Clark, "Matrimonial Bonds: Slavery and Divorce in Nineteenth-Century America." *Law and History Review* 8.1 (Spring 1990): 25-54. Sara L. Zeigler, "Uniformity and Conformity: Regionalism and the Adjudication of the Married Women's Property Acts." *Polity* 28.4 (Summer 1996): 467-495.

the radical newspaper, *The Correspondent*, and the more widely read abolitionist *Genius*, white male editors of conventional-secular and religious periodicals were stunned.

Ironically, by the time Wright wrote and published her notes explaining the principles of Nashoba, the great experiment itself was in the process of failing. When she arrived from Europe in December of 1827 she realized that the circumstances had desperately deteriorated while she was in Europe and were now beyond repair. The fields were untended and “[d]esolation was the only feeling” that Frances Trollope, her traveling companion, could express about the place. Wright’s sister Camilla was “in very bad health, which [Trollope] ... attributed to the climate.”¹¹⁹ Wright later wrote that she had not realized the impact of a single personality over success and failure in an enterprise such as Nashoba. Where she had inspired the enslaved people to believe they could buy their freedom, in her absence James Richardson had stirred only their hatred, and in her weakened state Camilla had agreed to his cruel and unfair



Fig. 1.5 *Settlement of Nashoba*, by visiting artist Auguste Hervieu, Dec. 1827

treatment of them.¹²⁰ Moreover, the white families that Wright needed to complete her experiment had not materialized. Trollope noted that when they arrived, “[t]he only white

¹¹⁹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 38, 40.

¹²⁰ Wright, *Biography*, 30. Wright described the situation in the third person: “During her absence, ... an intriguing individual had disorganized everything on the estate, and effected the removal of persons of confidence.... It should be added here that all her serious difficulties proceeded from her white assistants, and not from the blacks.” Wright, *Biography*, 30.

persons we found at Nashoba were ... Mrs. W****, the sister of Miss Wright, and her husband” – that is, Camilla and her new husband, Richesson Whitby. Trollope’s first impressions of the settlement were enough to drive her and her white children up river to Cincinnati within ten days, never to return.¹²¹ Over the next six months Wright, perhaps not having the heart to begin her utopian project all over again – to win back the lost trust of the enslaved, to replant the crops, to recruit more white families – finally began to close down the project to which she had devoted her time, money, and efforts for over three years. All that was left was to remove the enslaved people, now numbering “thirty or forty, ... including children,” safely to freedom in Haiti, which took her over a year to accomplish.¹²² Family friends were already communicating to one another the news that “the trust was dissolved and the project altered.”¹²³ By April of 1828 the Whitbys had moved to New-Harmony, leaving Wright the only trustee left on the premises.¹²⁴ Yet, according to Camilla, New-Harmony was also facing financial difficulties. The *New-Harmony Gazette* was nearly bankrupt, and Camilla urged her sister to “affix her name to it as Editor, conjointly with R[obert] D[ale]...so that it would not “fall to the ground,” and Wright agreed.¹²⁵

So in the spring of 1828 while Wright was quietly shutting Nashoba down and at the same time establishing herself in New-Harmony, magazine publishers and editors, unaware of the Tennessee colony’s imminent demise, were still trying to digest the declaration of cultural

¹²¹ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 40.

¹²² Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 40.

¹²³ Letter from Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, on the same sheet as a letter from Camilla Wright Whitby to Harriet Garnett, April 26, 1828, from New-Harmony. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 121.

¹²⁴ Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, July 1, 1828. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 123. “I have received a letter from Cam, dated Harmony, where she and her husband were in April for change of air. Robert D[ale] also, and his affairs obliged him to remain there. Richardson, Josephine, Lolotte have all left Nashoba. Fanny was therefore alone, but Cam said in good health and spirits. Poor Fanny!”

¹²⁵ Letter from Camilla Wright Whitby to Harriet Garnett, November 20, 1828, from Nashoba. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 127-128. Robert Dale was first negotiating to safeguard his family’s affairs: he personally “renounced all his claim and share in the Lanark property in favor of his mother and sisters” so that they could “secure” a “competency for life.” Robert Owen (the father) had “embarked for Europe, leaving Robert [Dale] to fight his [financial] battles” at New-Harmony.

war that they had been handed in the “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes.” As far as critics knew, young black and white scholars were at that moment learning their ABCs at their teachers’ knees from the *Age of Reason*, but in fact “no school had been established.”¹²⁶ Most likely critics believed they could not launch an open attack on a person of Wright’s stature – and especially not on a woman. Frances Wright had a remarkable reputation and was in a unique position socially – she was the intellectual confidante of some of America’s most beloved Revolutionary heroes, a published author of fine books, including a bestseller that praised America to its enemies. When in 1825 Wright had challenged liberals across the country to reconsider their racial prejudices and assumptions about slavery, initially they had responded with respect, before she revealed the full scope of her experiment. By her own printed discussions of unmarried cohabitation and interracial sexual relationships, Wright had rebuffed the social codes of antebellum America that required men to respect every middle-class white woman. Critics could claim that no one had harmed Wright, but that she had “unsexed” herself. Wright had several times placed herself in questionable situations that begged social condemnation. The rumor had spread among her friends that in 1827-1828 Wright had been involved romantically with George Flower, a Nashoba trustee and an acknowledged bigamist.¹²⁷ Later in 1829 a friend wrote that she believed that Wright was “now living with Mr. [R. L] Jennings, one of the editors of her paper.”¹²⁸ As friends were aware of and passing reports about Wright, it is possible that newspaper editors were also aware of Wright’s alleged sexual indiscretions.

¹²⁶ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 40. Also: “Books and other materials for the great experiment had been collected, and one or two professors engaged, but nothing was yet organized.” 40.

¹²⁷ Letter from George Flower to Frances Wright, October 3, 1827, quoted in Perkins & Wolfson, *Frances Wright*, 156. “[W]e feel an assurance that we have a glimmering of the truth which words plainly printed and messages conveyed second hand, can never give.... [I]n silence, in secret and in twilight, in soft suppressed accents [the truth] is sometimes uttered.” Trollope to Harriet Garnett, December 7, 1828, 163-164. “[I]t is said ... that Camilla lived with her husband five months before she married him [and] that [Wright] has had a connection with George Flower, ... and they continued to do so till the jealousy of the wife made it impossible to continue together.”

¹²⁸ Letter from Ann Maria Stone to Julia Pertz, July 25, 1829, Stonington, Maryland. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 133.

But confronting Wright with any moral transgression, word or deed, was not a simple matter. In order to charge Wright, editors, writers, newspapers, or magazines had to be certain beyond any doubt that they had interpreted her printed text correctly. To attack her in error would have been unthinkable. Seen through the centuries-old frames of medieval chivalry and courtly love, a man's duty traditionally was to defend and care for weak and defenseless females. Given this time-honored context, publishers' ruining an innocent woman's reputation would have been a crime (or sin) nearly as vile as the ones they were decrying, since the stigma of the accusation inevitably remained her burden to bear forever. The press had to be certain they were correct before they accused Wright of violating societal norms. The obloquy began slowly and tentatively among the conventional press.

At the end of April, one editor, Thomas Cottrell Clarke at *The Philadelphia Album & Ladies' Literary Gazette*, cautiously picked up the story.¹²⁹ He referenced Wright as an "English lady and an authoress," thus conferring the honors conventionally accorded. He questioned the "singular" nature of her venture at Nashoba, but agreed that the scheme by which her enslaved people would earn their freedom was a "wise stratagem." Having established his sense of fairness by appreciating her sincere efforts, Clarke then began to question her actions more seriously. The idea of religion was clearly insignificant to Clarke – there is no mention of it. Instead, his questions concerned race and sex: "[T]his delicate female proposes intermarriages between the whites and blacks, and argues that such an amalgamation will in a little while be all efficient in removing the distinction between the colours." This accusation and Clarke's careful juxtaposition of the conventional term "delicate" with such an entirely scandalous idea as racial amalgamation would have sent shivers down any middle-class reader's back. Having already

¹²⁹ Information on Clarke from the Library of Congress Chronicling America – Historic American Newspapers website. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sf89091735/> Accessed July 31, 2013.

changed the tone from appreciative to critical, next Clarke shifted to a personal attack – the first article to do so since Wright had arrived in the United States in 1818. He noted that Wright, who was then not quite thirty-three, was noticeably aging and not as attractive as she once was. He mocked her decision to remain so-long unmarried and said a husband would have kept her forthrightness in check.¹³⁰ But still the *Philadelphia Album* maintained a light tone. The brunt of the sarcasm was presented in a short, silly verse. The article tested the ground for criticism of “Miss Wright,” the celebrity, but stopped well short of an *ad hominem* assault.

The printing of the *Album* article was all the editor of the abolitionist *Genius of Universal Emancipation* needed to finally end his working relationship with Wright. Ten days later Benjamin Lundy announced that while the paper had supported Nashoba for some time, Wright’s statement of principles demonstrated that the “change in the whole plan is too radical ... too wide a departure from the rules sanctioned by wisdom and experience, and calculated to break up the foundations of social order.”¹³¹ That is, the principles in place at Nashoba regarding consensual sex occurring outside marriage and even across races transgressed radical abolitionists’ boundaries.

Between April and June, not a single other paper picked up the story. This is a strangely silent period. Wright’s “Explanatory Notes” should have been all the proof publishers could want to finish the attack that the *Philadelphia Album* had begun, but not a paragraph was printed

¹³⁰ [Thomas Cottrell Clarke.] “Philanthropy.” *Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette* 2.46 (April 16, 1828): 364.

¹³¹ [Benjamin Lundy]. “The Institution of Nashoba.” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2.12 (April 26, 1828): 94. For unexplainable reasons, Lundy did not address the irreligion at Nashoba, even though Wright had labeled him as having to “depend ... on the favor of ... very high-toned religious, friends of the negro,” or the Protestant Evangelicals. Letter from Frances Wright to Harriet Garnett, March 20, 1828, from Nashoba. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 117. Oddly, on May 17 the *American Masonick Record, and Albany Saturday Magazine* reprinted a short fictional piece of Wright’s from the *New-Harmony Gazette* without comment, almost as if the news hadn’t reached Albany, which is quite possible. On the other hand, perhaps it was a covert reflection of their support of her. A year before they had labeled her a “blue stocking” and governance at Nashoba a “petticoat government” that they hoped would succeed. April 28, 1827, 95.

anywhere about what her radical friends at the *Genius* had just condemned as an ideology that threatened America. Publishers and editors may have remained mute during this period because what Wright was alleged to believe was still contained in print. They had not yet had the opportunity to see or hear Wright voice these opinions herself, in person. This was especially true since Wright apparently had never revealed the more controversial Nashoba principles in her various solicitations for recruits among friends and at dinner parties on both sides of the Atlantic. Consequently, publishers simply may have asked themselves if there were any possibility that an editor with a grudge had conspired to ruin her. Again, publishers and editors had to be certain that what was printed in the *New-Harmony Gazette*, the *Genius*, and *The Correspondent* reflected Wright's heartfelt beliefs. In fact, they could not be certain until she began to speak her theories audibly in public venues – and that opportunity would come soon.

Rev. Timothy Flint's *Western Monthly Review* picked up the story in June, but in a brief paragraph buried in a lengthy article. Based in Cincinnati, Flint had regular contact with Frances Trollope and others of Wright's friends, and probably felt that by June it was time that someone addressed the subject that no one would discuss. In a passing reference to the Nashoba scandal in an eleven-page essay on Western authors, Flint quickly denounced Wright's theories, saying he had "never read any thing from the press, to compare with her recent publication, touching female independence." This brickbat was no slight condemnation; Flint was an important figure and probably the most trusted by middle-class readers and East Coast literati to report accurately the events of the West. Flint did not mention Wright's views on race or religion, but focused on the Woman issue. He was sure that it was a "suicide project for ladies to attempt to weaken the validity of the marriage tie, for whose benefit it was chiefly sanctioned." The only reasonable

explanation Flint could make of Wright's views was that she "was not strictly sane."¹³² Flint's position made it clear: white men in positions of power would be unable to conceive anything logical or sensible in Wright's principles. In these few lines he sanctioned the torrent of acrimony that would follow. Yet, still, even after this from Timothy Flint, there is not another mention of the brewing scandal in Tennessee in any other newspaper or magazine – that is, not until Wright opened her mouth and began speaking aloud to the public.

WOMEN AND PUBLIC SPEECH

On July 4, 1828, Wright approached the lectern at the front of the New-Harmony Hall to give what is acknowledged to have been the first non-religious public address by a woman in the United States in front of a promiscuous or mixed-gender audience.¹³³ She looked out to face a friendly audience of fellow reformers at Robert Owen's utopian community in New-Harmony, Indiana, to give the Fourth of July address. This was a community founded on challenging societal norms, and dress reform had already occurred; the New-Harmony women wore a costume that preceded "Bloomers" by twenty years – knee-length dresses over men's pants, without hoops, corset, or stays. The New-Harmonists had invited her to speak, fully aware of her controversial stances, and understood, as she did, the historical significance of the moment. Perhaps her invitation came from pressure from married women, motivated toward change after Owen's remarkable speech endorsing marriage equality and divorce two years before.¹³⁴ Like Owen's, Wright's was not to be a conventional Independence Day speech. Following a holiday celebration replete with the drums and musketry of military fanfare, Wright remonstrated against

¹³² [Timothy Flint.] "Writers of the Western Country." *The Western Monthly Review* 2.1 (June 1828): 18.

¹³³ "Address, Delivered in the New-Harmony Hall, by Frances Wright, At the Celebration of the Furth of July, 1828, the Fifty-second Anniversary of American Independence." *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.37 (July 9, 1828): 289-291,295.

¹³⁴ Donald E. Pitzer, *New Harmony Then and Now*. Bloomington, IN: Quarry Press, imprint of Indiana University Press, 2011, 74. According to Donald Pitzer, many married women at New-Harmony were more discontent after Robert Owen had raised their awareness of society's epidemic unfairness to women than before he attempted the experiment there. Owen was accused of "the creation of a 'women problem.'"

military power, praising instead an America that “almost excluded war as a profession, and reduced it from a system of robbery to one of simple defence”¹³⁵ – this in a period that worshipped General Andrew Jackson for his martial triumphs. Wright delivered her address in a compelling manner. Her friend Frances Trollope later described Wright’s oratorical style:

Miss Wright [had an]... extraordinary gift of eloquence, ... [an] almost unequalled command of words, and ... [a] rich and thrilling voice; ... she had the power of commanding the attention, and enchanting the ear of any audience [A]ll my expectations fell far short of the splendour, the brilliance, the overwhelming eloquence of this extraordinary orator.¹³⁶

Wright also maximized her opportunity to startle and impress her audience with her remarkable physical appearance. Not only did she routinely wear the neo-Bloomer uniform, but she also was extraordinarily tall for a woman in that period – five-foot-eleven-inches¹³⁷ – and her hair was cropped so that it resembled a typical nineteenth-century man’s haircut. Trollope recorded her impressions of Wright’s clearly intentional and spectacular stagecraft:

[I]t is impossible to imagine any thing more striking than her appearance. Her tall and majestic figure, the deep and almost solemn expression of her eyes, the simple contour of her finely formed head, unadorned, excepting by its own natural ringlets; her garment of plain white muslin, which hung around her in folds that recalled the drapery of a Grecian statue, all contributed to produce an effect, unlike any thing I had ever seen before, or ever expect to see again.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Wright, “Address, Delivered in the New-Harmony Hall.”

¹³⁶ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 96-97, 99-100.

¹³⁷ Cary Smith. *Carys of Virginia*, 69-78. “In person [Wright] was masculine, measuring at least 5 feet 11 inches, and wearing her hair á la Ninon in close curls, her large blue eyes and blonde aspect were thoroughly English, and she always seemed to wear the wrong attire.”

¹³⁸ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 96-97, 99-100. Over the years some critics would charge Wright as simply an attention-seeker. Again, Mylne had wondered if in fact an “excessive passion for notoriety ha[d] led to an incipient

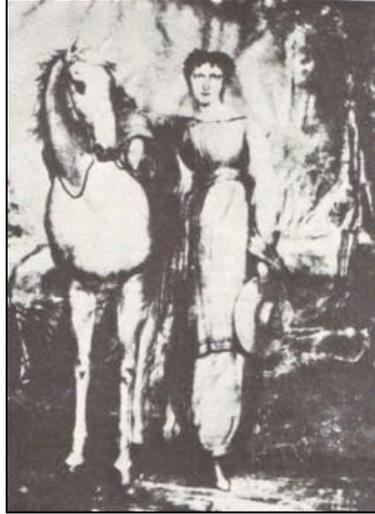


Fig.1.6 Frances Wright, by
Auguste Hervieu, c. 1828

Wright had read well her rhetorical situation on that Fourth of July occasion in Indiana. The New-Harmonists had set a precedent by inviting a woman to speak and she had met the call. Her performance was powerful and compelling; she had not simpered or apologized for her gender, and she had delivered an address that proved that a woman could function in the traditional male public sphere as effectively and appropriately as any man could. While in the past she had been praised by many personally and in the press for her benevolent, philanthropic work, it was all unseen by the outside – it was done privately, as was the custom of women. Now, for the first time, a woman who was engaged in activities traditionally reserved for men was also standing up to give public voice to her thoughts.

Wright's address appeared in its entirety in the *New-Harmony Gazette* five days later. It was followed by a side-note by a *Gazette* writer, who commented appreciatively that those in attendance at the occasion had been fortunate to have lovely weather, a fine barbeque, and the Thespian Society's rendition of "School of Reform." That is, in New-Harmony, life was going on as if "Woman" in fact had not just broken the compact with the society upon which she was supposed to be dependent. Evangelical women such as Harriet Livermore – women who

disorder of the mind." Letter from James Mylne to Julia Garnett, August 12, 1827, Glasgow College. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 87-88.

believed themselves anointed by God to preach the gospel – had stood before mixed audiences before.¹³⁹ Such a display was relatively acceptable by many because of the women’s selfless sacrifice of what would have been considered their feminine reserve on behalf of their Christian faith. But Wright’s exposition of philosophical and political principles was not a socially acceptable reason to rise and address respectable mixed audiences. Certainly it had been common practice since pre-revolutionary times for women to address groups of women in private parlors on a variety of subjects, including political ones and later, by the mid-antebellum years, as Kathleen S. Sullivan notes, it “was not uncommon for woman abolitionists to speak to women audiences, often in the home of a hostess.”¹⁴⁰ But not even the Grimké sisters would approach the lecture platform for another nine years. In the late 1820s at nonreligious public events where both men and women were in the audience, women simply did not “stand and speak.”¹⁴¹

Wright’s triumphant July Fourth address in New-Harmony signaled a new beginning for Wright. Robert Dale encouraged her to embark on a career of public speaking, “suggest[ing] to Fanny ... that she accompany him to the town of Cincinnati and there give a course of public lectures.” Camilla and Robert Dale “strongly urged [Wright] not [to] allow ... the spark she had so auspiciously awakened to be extinguished,” and to “devote the six ensuing months to visiting

¹³⁹ Catherine A. Brekus, “Harriet Livermore, the Pilgrim Stranger: Female Preaching and Biblical Feminism in Early-Nineteenth-Century America.” *Church History* 65.3 (Sept. 1996): 389-404. 394. “Livermore reached the height of her fame during the 1820s and 1830s.... In the early nineteenth century it was so rare to see women addressing mixed audiences – or ‘promiscuous’ audiences, as they were called at the time – that female preachers often attracted huge crowds of curious spectators. In a culture where only prostitutes and actresses willingly allowed men to stare at them in public, Livermore’s ‘delicate form,’ ‘expressive face,’ and ‘inconceivably sweet’ voice cause a sensation. She became a nineteenth-century ‘star,’ a religious celebrity whom others tried to imitate.”

¹⁴⁰Kathleen S. Sullivan, “Women, Speech and Experience.” *The Good Society* 14.1/2 (2005): 35-39. 37.

¹⁴¹ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

the larger cities of the Union.”¹⁴² Wright had spent several months alone with her enslaved people in Nashoba; her “solitary reflection” there convinced her that “by an obstinate prosecution of her enterprise, she endangered ... all chance of rendering any real service to ... the African[s].... She was now aware that, in her practical efforts at reform, she had begun at the wrong end.” Rather than working to overturn America’s peculiar institution, Wright hoped to find new ways to use her wealth and skills, armed with the “knowledge” she had gained through the “extended and varied observation” of her “practical experiment.” Now she would begin the new project of “attempting reform by means of instructional improvement” of the “American people – the only people free to choose between truth and error, good and evil.”¹⁴³ With what seemed to be a talent for public speaking, suddenly a new path of public service seemed laid out before Wright.¹⁴⁴ The title she took for herself was a “Public Teacher.”¹⁴⁵ At the time her sister Camilla commented, “I have never at any period of my life seen [Fanny] so apparently happy and contented with her situation and prospects than at present.”¹⁴⁶ Soon she would come to see herself as “employed in the public service” to effect “great reform” through a “revolution w^{ch} has been working in the public mind.”¹⁴⁷

In a preface to a publication of her lecture series that Wright wrote later, she identified the “two main strong holds” that had challenged ordinary Americans: One was “the ineptness

¹⁴² Letter from Camilla Wright Whitbey to Harriet Garnett, November 20, 1828, from Nashoba. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 130.

¹⁴³ Frances Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures, as delivered by Frances Wright, in New-York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Louisville, and other cities, towns, and districts of the United States with Three Addresses, on Various Public Occasions. And a reply to the charges against the French reformers of 1789.* New York: The Office of the *Free Enquirer*, 1829. 10.

¹⁴⁴ “Fanny[’s] talents for public speaking, Cam says, surpass everybody.” Letter from Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, February 1829. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Frances Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures*, 234; *What Is the Matter? A Political Address as delivered in Masonic Hall, October 28th, 1838.* New York: The Author, 1838. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, February 16, 1830. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 140.

¹⁴⁷ Letter from Frances Wright to William Maclure, misdated by Wright January 3, 1829; actually 1830; New Orleans. Maclure answered April 10, 1830. New Harmony Manuscripts Series I, January – February 1830, Folder 22. of the New Harmony Correspondence in the Workingmen’s Institute, New Harmony, Indiana.

and corruption of the public press.”¹⁴⁸ The other became a focal point for Wright the remainder of her life: “the neglected state of the female mind, and the consequent dependence of the female condition” on “that worst species of quackery, practised under the name of religion,” that is, dependence on evangelical Christianity. She explained that her initial motivation for public speech was the pity she felt for women who were experiencing the emotions wrought by Christian conversion at evangelical revivals in Cincinnati in the summer of 1828:

[L]ast summer, by the sudden combination of the clergy of three orthodox sects, a *revival*, as such scenes of distraction are wont to be styled, was opened in houses, churches, and even on the Ohio river. The victims of this odious experiment on human credulity and nervous weakness, were invariably women. Helpless age was made a public spectacle, innocent youth driven to raving insanity, mothers and daughters carried lifeless from the presence of the ghostly expounders of damnation; all ranks shared the contagion, until the despair of Calvin’s hell itself seemed to have fallen upon every heart, and discord to have taken possession of every mansion.

She reiterated that it was this “evil” of public revivals, “somewhat unusually exhibited last summer in the towns and cities of the western country” that “first led [her] to challenge the attention of the American people.”¹⁴⁹ She later wrote in a third-person narrative that 1828 was the year “that the standard of ‘the Christian Party in Politics’ was openly unfurled”: “This was an evident attempt, through the influence of the clergy over the female mind ... to effect a union of Church and State.... Miss Wright determined to arouse the whole American people to meet it, at whatever the cost to herself.”¹⁵⁰ That July of 1828 Wright made the decision to refocus her attention from Nashoba to public speaking. Beginning in Cincinnati, her plan was to finance the

¹⁴⁸ Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures*, 8.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures*, 8-9.

¹⁵⁰ Wright, *Biography*, 33.

rental of the halls herself and charge little or nothing for admission; she planned to donate any admissions fees to worthy causes. Within six days she arranged to speak three times over the next three weeks at the Courthouse in Cincinnati, a town that was potentially not as sympathetic as the radical New-Harmony. She later wrote that instead of needing Robert Dale as a chaperone, she “appointed Mr Robert Dale Owen ... as her assistant editor, and leaving editorial matter in his hands and forwarding other regularly by Post, she proceeded to Cincinnati, and woke up the city.”¹⁵¹ But Cincinnati was a town that already considered itself reformist and the most civilized in the west, and it favored evangelical Christian reform. Religious revivals were commonplace; Lyman Beecher, first president of the Presbyterian Lane Seminary, would soon join Cincinnati’s Rev. Flint¹⁵² (of the *Western Monthly Review*) there.¹⁵³ As Wright embarked on her public lectures, she accepted that conservatives in contemporary American society almost certainly would respond negatively to her message. She anticipated that because of her gender, her presence on the lecture platform would offend many people, and she was right. She drew negative notice in Cincinnati, but she also fascinated her listeners and won her their attention.¹⁵⁴ Wright believed she had the ability and the duty to “wake up” Americans to the problems she felt were besetting their country. After an average showing at her first appearance, word traveled and Wright’s audiences for the rest of her series there were large.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Wright, *Biography*, 40.

¹⁵² Charles H. Simms. Book review. *Debate on the Evidences of Christianity, ... & ... skepticism ...; held in the city of Cincinnati, April 1829, between Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell*. *Western Monthly Review* 3.8 (February 1830): 427-439. 438. Flint’s magazine reported on a debate on “the evidences of Christianity” between atheist Robert Owen and Alexander Campbell, a popular Presbyterian minister. When Campbell urged Christians to rise, the article reported that there was an “almost universal rising up” by the audience out of their seats, while when Campbell asked “persons doubtful of the truth of the Christian religion” to rise, only “three ar[o]se.”

¹⁵³ Lane Seminary later split when abolitionist Theodore Weld led twenty students to leave in protest over the abolition issue to form Oberlin Seminary.

¹⁵⁴ Carol Mattingly. “Friendly Dress: A Disciplined Use.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29.2 (Spring 1999): 28.

¹⁵⁵ Morris, *Fanny Wright*, 172. According to Wright scholar Celia Morris, Wright’s “lectures were so crowded” at the Cincinnati Courthouse that “she repeated them in one of the theatres.” Wright’s first speech in Cincinnati was Aug. 10, 1828, at the Cincinnati Courthouse, and then “she spoke there again the two following Sundays.”

THE MESSAGE AND RESPONSE

Wright began creating a series of six lectures, the first three of which she delivered in Cincinnati that summer of 1828. In “On the nature of knowledge,” Wright taught her listeners that they should ground knowledge in observation of material things over belief in things unseen. She encouraged discussion of governmental and religious control over the lives of average Americans, pointing out the “slavery of the press and all the learned professions” to the influence of ministers and priests. She previewed her second lecture, “Of free enquiry, considered as a means of obtaining just knowledge,” saying that “those who are too often overlooked in our social arrangements and in our civil rights [were] women” and that there was a “peculiar influence exerted to prolong the ignorance of the female sex.”¹⁵⁶ Wright insisted that women should not be understood as dependent, but that men and women should be seen as mutually interdependent. Wright had explored radical, proto-feminist ideas in print in her “Explanatory Notes,” but could not speak them aloud from the lecture platform, for she would have incited violence had she done so.¹⁵⁷ In her second lecture she discussed only the need for America to change its conception of women and its laws binding women, and “[e]quality of instruction” was “necessary” to facilitate this.¹⁵⁸ It is important here, then, to expand upon the proto-feminist material in “Explanatory Notes,” for talk of its scandalous nature preceded Wright in every new town and provided the backdrop for what she did *not* say from the lecture platform.

First, in the “Explanatory Notes” Wright had argued that American society’s system for coping with unwed motherhood was cruel and unfair to both mothers and children. She had condemned a system that allowed the “unprincipled fathers” of illegitimate children, “easily

¹⁵⁶ Frances Wright, *Lecture I. On the Nature of Knowledge*. In *Course of Popular Lectures*, 1829. 38.

¹⁵⁷ Both she and Angelina Grimké were attacked by violent mobs while lecturing in 1838.

¹⁵⁸ The third lecture, “Of the more important divisions and essential parts of knowledge,” criticized the influence of the clergy on Americans and argued for universal education.

exonerated by law and custom from the duties of paternity,” to bear no legal responsibility to provide for them. She had decried that the entire burden “and their accompanying shame” of caring for children born out of wedlock fell to mothers now unable to find respectable work and “rendered desperate by misfortune.” Wright had attacked American laws that refused to allow unhappily married couples to divorce. Because they were allowed to do so, fathers “bowed to servitude the spirit of fond” mothers, who stayed in unhappy marriages in order to remain with their children. If a mother left a relationship in which she was beaten and abused, the courts determined she had abandoned the family and denied her all rights to interact with her children. The “union” of such “unsuitable and unsuited parents can little promote the happiness of the offspring” – and so Wright had predicted the cycle would continue, with unhappy children begetting more unhappy children. Within a year she would state that case even more clearly in print, challenging her readers to

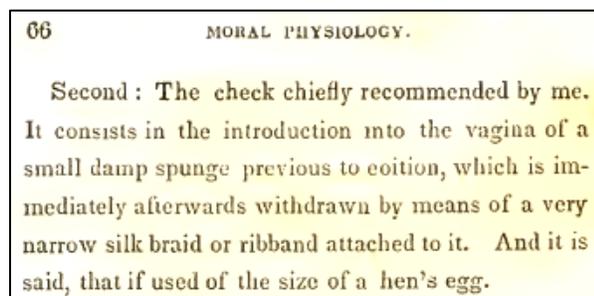
*see a young creature ... pledging her troth to one who, some moons, or, it may be, years after, turns gambler, or drunkard, or speculator, staking at one throw, or wasting over nightly potations, not his property only, but hers also – see this, and then see her obliged, constrained, to stand silent by and watch the ruin – that ruin, which is to overwhelm alike herself and her children!*¹⁵⁹

Even more radically, and in print only in the Nashoba “Explanatory Notes,” Wright had encouraged women to admit to themselves that they deserved to enjoy sexual pleasure, calling sexual and emotional fulfillment in a romantic relationship “the noblest of human passions.” Without doubt, a respectable woman’s sexual desire was the topic for which Wright was most profoundly condemned; that she directly addressed it marked her for over a century as licentious. Wright had exhorted women to reject society’s double standard that allowed men to enjoy their

¹⁵⁹ Frances Wright, “Rights and Wrongs of Women.” *Free Enquirer* 1.27 (April 29, 1829): 213.

physical nature and deny human passion to women.¹⁶⁰ Women were trapped between two extremes by “those ignorant laws, ignorant prejudices, ignorant code of morals, which condemn one portion of the female sex” – those who allowed themselves to experience sexual pleasure – “to vicious excess, another to as vicious restraint” – those who denied themselves sexual relationships – “and all to defenceless helplessness and slavery.” She had lamented that the greatest “repressive force of public opinion” on women’s enjoyment of sex had been “upon that class whose feelings and intellects have been most cultivated” – educated, middle-class women.

Probably most scandalously of all, Wright had promoted birth control. She had bemoaned the fact that “daughters [were] condemned to the unnatural repression of feelings and desires inherent in their very organization and necessary alike to their moral and physical well-being.” Wright had argued that “[i]nstead of shrouding our bodies, wants, desires, senses, affections and faculties in mystery,” parents should be teaching “the young mind to reason.” That is, adults should provide the young with scientific knowledge of the methods in Robert Dale Owen’s manual, *Moral Physiology*, to allow them the enjoyment of sexual passion when they grew older, without the consequence of unwanted children.¹⁶¹



66 MORAL PHYSIOLOGY.

Second: The check chiefly recommended by me. It consists in the introduction into the vagina of a small damp sponge previous to coition, which is immediately afterwards withdrawn by means of a very narrow silk braid or ribband attached to it. And it is said, that if used of the size of a hen's egg.

Fig. 1.7 Robert Dale Owen’s advice on contraception, in *Moral Physiology*

¹⁶⁰ Nancy Cott, “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850.” *Signs* 4.2 (Winter 1978): 219-236. Nancy Cott discusses the shift in society’s understanding of women and sexual desire from a mindless sensuality in the eighteenth century to a sentimental and middle-class “passionlessness” in the nineteenth century.

¹⁶¹ [Owen], *The Moral Physiology*, 66. In 1836 Robert Dale Owen published a manual that provided explicit instructions for a woman (or a couple) to prevent conception from occurring. One method that he likely taught the New Harmonists, including the Wright sisters, was the proper method of inserting a beribboned sponge into a woman’s vagina before sexual intercourse to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, one of several modern technologies with which Wright likely had endorsed for use at her Nashoba community.

Clearly Wright could not have discussed topics centered on sexual passion from the lyceum platform in front of a mixed audience.¹⁶² Wright instead explored women's desire for relational romance and the deleterious effects of women's subordination on the emotional health of a romantic relationship – a lecture women never thought they would hear, but one that stopped short of being criminally blasphemous. So in her second lecture, “Of free enquiry,” Wright argued that real emotional contentment could only be found in a romantic relationship between a man and a woman who considered themselves intellectual equals. Such a relationship could produce a contentment that was demonstrated by a “sympathy of mind with mind.” In order for this to happen, though, men had to stop dominating women, and women had to stop submitting to men. Instead, Wright argued, a man and a woman in a romantic relationship should perceive one another as “mutually dependent, ... ever ... giving and receiving.” Only when couples could do that would they experience “the delights which intercourse with the other sex can give.”¹⁶³ Wright's answer to these and other associated problems was, when possible, to avoid marriage altogether. Of course, she did not speak this concept from the lecture platform either. But editors for conventional newspapers began reprinting excerpts denoting her notorious doctrines when Wright came to town to lecture: for instance, that she had not recognized formal marriage at Nashoba, that educated women often found themselves entrapped in a loveless marriage, and that the “largest proportion of childless females [are] among the cultivated, talented and

¹⁶² *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838*. Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838. 138, 137, 140. Even ten years later when Angelina Grimke spoke about women's rights in Philadelphia in 1838 – about entirely non-sexual topics and using Biblical language – her audience turned into a heckling mob, which that night set fire to the building in which she had spoken.

¹⁶³ Frances Wright, *Lecture II. Of free enquiry, considered as means of obtaining just knowledge*. In *Course of Popular Lectures*, 1829. 55. “[P]ower [must be] annihilated on one side, fear and obedience on the other, and both restored to their birthright – equality.” She warned them that “affection [could not] reign without it; or friendship, or esteem.” Mill in 1869: “[M]ost men have not had the opportunity of studying ... more than a single case: ... [his] wife.... To make even this one case yield any result, the ... man [must have] nothing in himself which makes her shy of disclos[ure].... Even with true affection, authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence.” John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1869. 44-45.

independent women who ... shrink equally from the servitude of matrimony, and from the opprobrium stamped upon unlegalized connexions.” In “Explanatory Notes” she had lamented the sanctions society placed against unmarried cohabitation:

The tyranny usurped by the matrimonial law over the most sacred of the human affections, can perhaps only be equaled by that of the unjust public opinion, which so frequently stamps with infamy ... the best-grounded and most generous attachments, which ever did honor to the human heart, simply because unlegalised by human ceremonies, equally idle and offensive.¹⁶⁴

Apparently many of those who attended her lectures approved of her proto-feminist sentiments. A writer for the *Mechanic's Free Press* “[r]eporting on one of Frances Wright’s lectures to a Philadelphia audience ... noted that ‘one thing is certain, that in advocating the rights of women, she did not fail to insure the approbation of every body in the house.’”¹⁶⁵ While such ideas intrigued many women and continued to draw them to hear her speak, conservative Americans of both genders were stunned and appalled.

Where the American conventional press – almost entirely white men – had managed to ignore her near-incendiary rhetoric as contained in print, they could not avoid the phenomenon of the physical Frances Wright on a stage. Within thirteen days of Wright’s first lecture in Cincinnati, Thomas Clarke, the editor of the *Philadelphia Album*, printed the first serious attack on her. His *Album* had been the first paper to attack her, albeit discreetly, after publication of her “Explanatory Notes,” and now it was the first to publicly notice her intrusion into the male sphere of the lecture hall. Now, though, after a sarcastic description of Wright as a “distinguished preceptress of morality,” Clarke made no further pretense of discretion:

¹⁶⁴ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125].” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 132-133.

¹⁶⁵ Ginzberg, 212.

Miss Wright has again broached her very accommodating and delicate theory touching matrimony, quoting some such authority as Eloisa, to prove the invalidity of marriage. That a female should take charge of a public press for the avowed purpose of detracting from the character of religion and morality, is a circumstance so anomalous in the course of human events, that we cannot pass it by without a few observations. . . . What will the most of her sex think of such a woman? They must either attribute the avowal of such principles to a monstrous depravity of heart, or to some fatal fanaticism which has absorbed and swallowed up every feeling of delicacy, the inseparable characteristics of American females.¹⁶⁶

Calling Wright “monstrous” was a direct assault. In this personal attack Clarke agreed with Flint, who had said in the *Western Monthly Review* that he had “never read any thing from the press, to compare with” Wright’s principles. Clarke was affirming that indeed nothing like this “circumstance” in which Wright “broach[es] . . . matrimony” had ever happened before – it was truly “anomalous in the course of human events.” Yet the “circumstance” that so disturbed Clarke is not identified. While ostensibly it was her co-editorship with Robert Dale Owen of the *New-Harmony Gazette* – a female’s “taking charge of a public press” – in fact, that information had not yet been formally announced, and would not be for another month.¹⁶⁷ Wright’s publication of her feminist principles in her “Explanatory Notes” was already four-months’-old news and, while her treatise probably genuinely shocked Clarke, he had not attacked her fully at the time. What made Wright’s offense at this moment in time fundamentally different from the proto-feminist efforts of any other writer before her and absolutely intolerable to Clarke and

¹⁶⁶ “Miss Frances Wright.” *The Philadelphia Album and Ladies Literary Gazette* 3.8 (July 23, 1828): 60.

¹⁶⁷ “To the Public. *New-Harmony Gazette*.” *The Correspondent* 4.5 (August 23, 1828): 73. On August 23 *The Correspondent* the *New-Harmony Gazette* printed an announcement, which *The Correspondent* reprinted, that “Miss Frances Wright, and Mr. Dale Owen, will, in future, conduct [the *New-Harmony Gazette*] as joint editors and proprietors.”

other editors was the venue Wright had chosen to say what she had to say: The only new factor was that Wright had begun to speak her doctrines aloud, publicly. At a time when no women dared to speak in public on radical issues in front of mixed audiences, Wright had flaunted decorum by doing so in a bold, confident manner, and in short hair and pants.

Thomas Clarke was also clearly worried that women might take Wright's principles to heart, and warned them to stay in their place by asking the rhetorical question, "What will the most of her sex think of such a woman?" He was coaching his female readers to retrieve the correct answer, which was that Wright was "monstrous[ly] deprav[ed]" or a fanatic. He reminded readers that "feeling[s] of delicacy" were "the inseparable characteristics of American females." His admonitions tutored a potentially wayward female reader to reject Wright.¹⁶⁸ Then Clarke closed with a nod to propriety at the end of the article, since his was, after all, the first lengthy personal attack on Wright. In the last ten lines he adverted to the off-chance that he might be wrong: "[W]e acknowledge the possibility of our misconstruing Miss Wright's design....If so, we shall be glad to be enlightened ... fearful that some misapplication of her language might have been made by the paper from whence we extracted her doctrine." But this was just a salvo for good form's sake, for Clarke obviously had read Wright's explanations of her principles thoroughly.

At this point in Wright's public trajectory the nature and scale of response to her began to shift, both in the southern and northern evangelical press. By walking onto a public stage Wright had chosen to enter the battlefield that was man's domain and now white male publishers and editors were ready to respond. They had been sitting on their stories, not wanting to be the paper that lashed out at her first. Once Clarke's paper made this unambiguous move toward public

¹⁶⁸ "Phi Beta Kappa," *New-York Spectator* (Sept. 1, 1829). "Only think, Ladies – particularly those who attended Fanny Wright's lectures, of this line. 'A female atheist – and a learned dog!' Was not this a happy coupling together of subjects?" "Phi Beta Kappa," *New-York Spectator* (Sept. 1, 1829).

condemnation of her they no longer had to worry about backlash. In their next issues they began printing a universal message of astonished wrath and revulsion at Wright personally and at her principles. Where in earlier reviews she had been known as an intelligent “British authoress” of culture and refinement, within three weeks of her address in New-Harmony and one week after Clarke’s article she was labeled as “A Disgrace to her Sex.” That epithet was the most straightforward message yet that now Wright’s honor was fair game. *The Christian Watchman* essentially accused Wright of engaging in unmarried sexual intercourse in an attack at her argument for “divorces by consent”: “She is said not to confine herself to theoretical speculations on the subject ...; but that her practice has conformed to her principles” (illogical, since she had never been married).¹⁶⁹ As these calumnies were reprinted in other newspapers, there could be no doubt what powerful men thought about Frances Wright and were willing to say.

A Disgrace to her Sex. —We regret to learn, that a Miss Frances Wright, who had the address to ingratiate herself into the favour of Gen. La Fayette, and to obtain from him \$10,000, for the professedly benevolent object of enabling slaves to work out the amount of their purchase money, has become Editor of the New Harmony Gazette. Her principles appear to be as infidel, and of course as lewd, as those of the famous but visionary Robert Owen. She is said not to confine herself to theoretical speculations on the subject of divorces by consent; but that her practice has conformed to her principles. We are pleased to learn, for the honour of our American ladies, that she is not a native of our United States.

Fig. 1.8 Wright is labeled “A Disgrace to her Sex” by the evangelical press

Another week later a writer for *New-England Galaxy* sent a three-fold message to women when he declared he was “proud” that Wright, “so lamentably fallen” was “not an American,” and he hoped that the “God that has specially protected this happy land” would “preserve [his]

¹⁶⁹ *Christian Watchman* 9.31 (Aug. 1, 1828): 122. “New-Harmony.” *Christian Secretary* 5.28 (Aug. 2, 1828): 111. The epithet actually was printed in two separate articles in sequential days, one as the title of the article. “A Disgrace to her Sex.” *Christian Watchman* 9.31 (Aug. 1, 1828): 122. “New-Harmony.” *Christian Secretary* 5.28 (Aug. 2, 1828): 111.

countrywomen from falling into a similar degradation.”¹⁷⁰ He conveyed that a woman’s identification as *American* meant disbelieving Wright’s obscene philosophies; the British and the French might believe such atheistic trash, but not Americans. He reminded women that America was God’s country and that God would “protect” and “preserve” only those women who were faithful to his principles, which were not Wright’s. Finally, the *Galaxy* said clearly to women, If you don’t want to suffer the sort of “degradation” or psychic violence that the press was meting out to Frances Wright, don’t attempt to transgress American society’s gender boundaries. In a September 3, 1828, article in the *Western Luminary*, J.L.W. warned the “thoughtless multitudes” who “have been running, ever on the Lord’s day, to listen to the impious effusions of this Priestess of Infidelity,” implicitly tying Wright to the controversial issue of “Sabbath mail” postal delivery.¹⁷¹ J.L.W. aimed his recrimination directly at women: “What females have made themselves her companions! Let them receive special attention!”¹⁷² The serial exclamation marks signal his message clearly: Women who attended Wright’s lectures would be scrutinized and punished.

Wright’s society friends disapproved. Charles Wilkes, the powerful New York banker, wrote to a friend that he “most ardently and anxiously hope[d] she [would] not come” to New York to lecture: “Nothing can reconcile me to any female under any circumstances giving lectures, were her doctrines as pure and as full of talents as lectures ever were.” Since her speeches were “of a far different character,” he predicted that “in the minds of almost all respectable persons” her reputation would only be “plunge[d] deeper in disgrace.”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ “Miss Frances Wright.” *The New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 9.565 (Aug. 8, 1828): 4.

¹⁷¹ Wright often scheduled her lectures for Sunday evenings, which faithful Christians were to reserve for evening church attendance, or at least Bible-reading and devotions at home with the family.

¹⁷² “Miss Frances Wright.” *Western Luminary* 5.10 (Sept. 3, 1828): 77.

¹⁷³ Letter from Charles Wilkes to Julia Pertz, September 30, 1828. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 125-126.

But by the time critics began printing their admonitions, Wright was already speaking to audiences numbering in the thousands in major halls in their own cities – Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, New York City, St. Louis, Louisville, and in a multitude of smaller towns. Frances Trollope wrote later that during this period Wright “bec[a]me a public orator in every town throughout America..., celebrated as the advocate of opinions that ma[d]e millions shudder, and some half-score admire.”¹⁷⁴ Wright had also added three more lectures to her series that expanded, primarily, her thoughts on religion. She wanted to help Americans understand the complexities of irreligious concepts as a means of freeing them from what she saw as the religio-state complex that ruled their lives. But she knew Americans were already overwhelmed from turmoil within antebellum Protestantism over the Calvinist-Arminian definition of salvation; more, transcendentalism, historical Biblicism, and the issue of abolition were all working to splinter the major sects before 1845.¹⁷⁵ In these three lectures (“Religion,” “Morals,” and “Opinions”), Wright considered the ways in which religion dictated people’s emotions and she decried the damage that sectarianism did in splitting people from one another. But she offered that there was some good to be found in “Jesus’s mode of prayer”; rather than spending time in the “many spacious edifices” around the city, she said people should “muse, or pray, ... after the manner designated by the good Jesus, namely, by entering their closet and shutting the door.” Again she urged her audience to “leave things unseen” and “unearthly phenomena” for “knowledge obtained by the senses.”¹⁷⁶ Wright’s lecture series, which had begun with a focus

¹⁷⁴ Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 17.

¹⁷⁵ Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2007. Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993.

¹⁷⁶ Wright, *Course of Popular Lectures*, 104. Wright ended with an apology to anyone “whose opinions [she had] too rudely jarred, or, worse, whose feelings [she had] offended.”

on the nature of knowledge, came full circle in concluding that human reason provided the only means to resolve humanity's problems.

In January 1829 after six months on the lecture circuit she moved the *New-Harmony Gazette* to New York City, renamed it the *Free Enquirer*, and contributed editorials and articles to nearly every issue for two years. The very name of their organ was intended to identify Wright and Owen with the ideologies and movements that had been developing in the United States and identified variously as “freethought,” “infidelity,” “scepticism,” and “atheism,” depending on who was making the characterization.¹⁷⁷ She bought an old church on Broome Street, moved all of the printing presses and materials from Indiana, and settled the newspaper personnel there, including Robert Dale Owen.¹⁷⁸ They renamed the building the Hall of Science and made it clear that their purpose was to invite people to give atheism as much thoughtful consideration as they gave Christianity. They brought in teachers to give regular lectures and hold classes for both adults and children.¹⁷⁹ Starting in the spring of 1829 Wright wrote new lectures that focused on improving the lives of Americans, especially addressing the needs of the

¹⁷⁷ Abner Kneeland, *An Introduction to the Defence of Abner Kneeland, Charged with Blasphemy; Before the Municipal Court, in Boston, Mass. at the January term, in 1834*. Boston, 1834. 20. In 1833 Abner Kneeland, who, at the behest of Robert Dale Owen had established a *Free Enquirer* office in Boston, defined some of these terms in an article in his newspaper, the *Boston Investigator*: “By a Sceptic I mean one who doubts. Christians call those who do *not* doubt (the absurdity of) their religion, sceptics. Accordingly all ‘Infidels,’ whether Pantheists, Deists, or Atheists, are called sceptics. Truly language is malleable.”

¹⁷⁸ Henry F. Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson's Early Life: From 1803 to 1844*. Detroit: H. F. Brownson, 1898. 40-41.

¹⁷⁹ Frances Wright, *Introductory Address, delivered by Frances Wright, at the Opening of the Hall of Science, New York, on Sunday, April 26, 1829*. New York: George H. Evans, 1829. 7-8. “[L]et us preserve our popular meetings in this place uncontaminated and undistracted by religious discussions or opiniative dissensions. I would apply this exhortation equally to the sceptic as to the believer, and to the believer as to the sceptic.... Do we see with the eye of faith? Let us see what we may, and dream what we will, but let us dream at home. In our own closets be our worship, whether of god or gods, saints, angels, prophets, or blessed virgins; but here – here, in the hall of union, ... let us study that book which all can read, and, reading, none dispute – the field of nature and the tablet of the human mind.... We must bear in mind that we come together in this place, as members of a family long divided and estranged by feuds and strifes ... it may be Jews, Christians, deists, materialists, with *every variety of sect and class existing within the pale of each*.... [P]rudence, if no higher virtue, demands that we set a watch upon our lips, lest, haply, we offend where it is our object to conciliate, and divide where we are assembled to unite.” She cautioned sceptics to be wary “in what spirit we set forth our scepticism, lest, haply, while discarding the dogmas, we retain the dogmatism, and lend even to truth the tone of presumption and the spirit of error.”

working class.¹⁸⁰ Her “A Lecture on Existing Evils and their Remedy” lamented the “unrequited industry and hopeless penury, involving shame, and perhaps infamy,” that oppressed workingmen and later afflicted their “oppressed widows and unprotected children.”¹⁸¹ She demanded that attention be directed to resolving:

the hatreds of sect, the estrangements of class, the pride of wealth, the debasement of poverty, the helplessness of youth unprotected, of age uncomforted, of industry unrewarded, of ignorance unenlightened, of vice unreclaimed, of misery unpitied, of sickness, hunger, and nakedness unsatisfied, unalleviated, and unheeded.

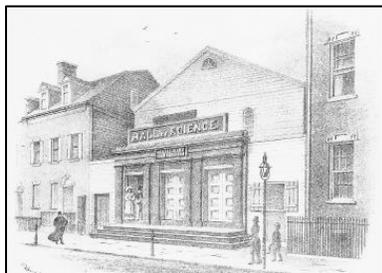


Fig. 1.9 Wright’s and Owen’s Hall of Science; on *Free Enquirer* masthead, Oct. 31, 1829

Morning lectures at 10 o’clock on the art of reasoning, at 11 on mathematics, and on natural history at 12 o’clock: afternoon lecture at 4 o’clock on Natural Philosophy. Admittance to all the lectures free.

BROADWAY HALL.

I will redeliver, tomorrow (Sunday) evening in Broadway Hall the lecture on Consistency which I gave last Sunday in the Hall of Science. R. D. O.

She argued that, though some saw America as an economically healthy country that shared its bounty equally across the classes, in fact America had distinct classes and its aristocracy enjoyed the fruits of the labor of the working class. When a workingman was “mowed down by ... labor, ... he leaves a family, ... to lean upon the weakness of a soul-stricken mother and hurry her to the grave of their father.”¹⁸² Wright disagreed with Thomas Skidmore’s proposal to solve the problems of endemic social-class inequity, which was to confiscate and redistribute private

¹⁸⁰ Her new lectures included *A Lecture on Existing Evils and their Remedy* in June 1829, *An Address on the State of the Public Mind and the Measures Which It Calls For* in fall 1829, *An Address to the Industrious Classes; a Sketch of a System of National Education* in winter 1829, *An Address, Containing a Review of the Times* in May 1830, and “*An Address to Young Mechanics*” in June 1830. In her *Introductory Address ... at the Opening of the Hall of Science* in New York in April of 1829, she told her audience, “Here may commence the work of reform by fitting ourselves to be reformers.” Wright, “Introductory Address,” 15.

¹⁸¹ Frances Wright, *A Lecture on Existing Evils and their Remedy: As Delivered in the Arch Street Theatre, to the Citizens of Philadelphia, June 2, 1829*. New York: George H. Evans, 1829. 5.

¹⁸² “Existing Evils,” 8.

property.¹⁸³ As historian Sean Wilentz recounts, Wright and Owen brought together the financial resources of a meeting place, a printing press, and paid employees in order to organize workingmen into a coherent and effective agent of social change.¹⁸⁴ As the new Workingmen's Party, workingmen were able to forge a unit that would serve as both a labor union and political party, grouping and regrouping in different configurations throughout the nineteenth century.

Wright's "The State of the Public Mind" focused criticism on ministers, priests, and a system that she believed implicated religious leaders with politicians and bankers.¹⁸⁵ Her idea for promoting social change was to create an American citizenry worthy of running the country as elected legislators. She explored this issue in her lecture on the "Existing Evils" in America, arguing, "Let the industrious classes, and all honest men of all classes, unite for the sending to the legislatures those who will represent the real interests of the many, not the imagined interests of the few – of the people at large, not of any profession or class."¹⁸⁶ To Wright, the only way such a group of men should become elected representatives was to create them – that is, to educate young Americans in rationalist and republican principles through her new system of

¹⁸³ Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* New York: Printed for the Author, 1829. Skidmore argued that all property was innately communal and sought to have all private property confiscated – especially land – and redistributed equally among all Americans. Skidmore was a theist, where Wright was an atheist; "[T]he Creator of the Universe is the being, who has furnished the property ... and ordered it to be distributed to all equally." For another, as one basis for his system, Skidmore looked to Native Americans' sharing of the game they killed and lands they inhabited; "Will it be said... that if an Indian kill a deer, it is not, therefore, his? Most certainly it is not.... The *animal is the property of the whole*, and if consent have not been given, it still remains their property, whatever *one* of their number may have thought or done to the contrary." Skidmore, *Rights of Man to Property*, 43; 34-35.

¹⁸⁴ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

¹⁸⁵ Frances Wright, *Address on the State of the Public Mind, and the Measures which it calls for*. New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, 1829. 9, 20-21. Wright argued that "religion, as publicly taught in this land, at a cost exceeding twenty millions per annum, is a *chimera*; ... the clerical hierarchy, and clerical craft ... are the two deadliest evils which ever cursed society." Yet again she also encouraged tolerance: "[L]et us question no man's faith; let us wound, if possible, no man's prejudicesBut [also] [l]et us not court the rich man, humor the fanatic, nor favor or disfavor the sceptic."

¹⁸⁶ Wright, "Existing Evils," 13-15.

“universal education.”¹⁸⁷ She believed that children, rich and poor, “*must be raised in national institutions as the children of a common family, and citizens of a common country.*” In a system like the one she had tried to effectuate at Nashoba, children would be removed from their homes sometime between the ages of two to four and placed in a nearby residential public school; the parents “could visit the children at suitable hours, but, in no case, interfere with or interrupt the rules of the institution.” Parents would be assessed a tax either in “money, or in labor, produce, or domestic manufactures” plus a “second tax ... on property,” which was to be “equivalent to the educational expenses.” Beyond that parents were freed from the financial burden of feeding, clothing, and housing children until age sixteen or older.¹⁸⁸ With Wright’s plan, the children of the working class would gain the opportunities to enter professions, if they were apt.¹⁸⁹ She argued that social class distinctions would disappear as children of all classes were raised and educated together. More radically, Wright’s plan was to include girls, so that the daughters of all would receive the identical educational opportunities as sons.¹⁹⁰ Many working-class parents

¹⁸⁷ Frances Wright, *Lecture III. Of the more important divisions and essential parts of knowledge.* In *Course of Popular Lectures*, 1829. Wright argued that reform could be “rapidly ... effected on the plastic disposition of childhood.” In her Lecture II she had already argued that it made no sense for public teachers to teach religious principles, since doing so automatically repressed free inquiry. Instead, she urged her audience to “exchange spiritual dreamers for experimental philosophers,” “churches for halls of science,” “declaimers for instructors,” and “wise guide for ignorant threateners.” In her third lecture she introduced the idea that would drive her for many years: “a pattern school of industry to children, attached to a hall of science for adults.” Both would be available equally to “the poor and the rich.”

¹⁸⁸ Wright, “Existing Evils,” 10, 13.

¹⁸⁹ Wright, *Lecture II*, 53. But Wright did not want parents to believe that every child should grow to join the professional class. Parents were to understand that it was “not for them to ordain their sons magistrates nor statesmen; nor yet even lawyers, physicians, or merchants.” Rather, Wright’s goal for education was to allow children to become “human beings, under the expanded wings of liberty. Let them seek ... just knowledge; encouraging ... free enquiry; and place them ... in the security of well regulated, self-possessed minds, well grounded, well reasoned, conscientious opinions, and self-approved, consistent practice.”

¹⁹⁰ Wright, *Lecture II*, 55-62. Wright discouraged her listeners from relapsing into what she saw as a “vulgar persuasion, that the ignorance of women, by favoring their subordination, ensures their utility. ‘Tis the same argument employed by the ruling few against the subject many in aristocracies; by the rich against the poor in democracies; by the learned professions against the people in all countries.” She argues instead that the wisdom women gain through education will make them stronger and more able to “struggle with difficulties ..., meet with serenity adverse fortune ..., accommodate themselves to irremediable circumstances...or, when remediable, ...control and mould them at will.” Opportunity had to be “throw[n] open to both sexes.” Still, Wright did not address the fact that girls’ access to an advanced education did not translate into access to employment.

would have welcomed opportunities for their children to gain an education, and unsurprisingly, Wright's ideas initially became popular with the working class and ignored by the wealthy. Given that antebellum middle-class families appreciated the discrete age of childhood, it is surprising that Wright simply did not anticipate the degree to which the proposed separation of children from their parents eventually would become a contested issue.

Some educated liberals in the early antebellum period appreciated Wright's arguments as systematically based on moral philosophy and on what human beings could perceive with their senses – a vast improvement, they would say, over the “superstition” of their Calvinist forebears. In addition to her intellectual skills, Wright had the advantage of the financial resources to withstand extraordinary stressors. Unlike ordinary middle-class women, Wright could afford to pay whatever price an owner asked to rent a public lecture hall. She could afford to refuse to be silenced by the conventional press.

WRIGHT'S AUDIENCE

At the offices of the Hall of Science and the *Free Enquirer*, Wright, Owen, and new colleague Robert Jennings began rallying workingmen to their meetings and lectures. A network of supporters grew from city to city, posting broadsides and passing out pamphlets that described Wright's up-coming lecture tours. Because Wright addressed such a broad range of radical and reformist issues, she attracted a wide audience, including young and older workingmen, young liberal-minded college men, working-class women, and middle-class women. In an autumn 1829 address titled *State of Public Mind*, Wright urged all Americans to unite:

Thus let us associate; not as Jews, not as Christians, not as Deists, not as believers, not as sceptics, not as poor, not as rich, not as artizans, not as merchants, not as lawyers, but as

human beings, as fellow creatures, as American citizens, pledged to protect each other's rights – to advance each other's happiness.¹⁹¹

Workingmen were the first to join with Wright, and were not much intimidated by newspaper condemnations of her. In a time when church attendance still meant well-appointed pew chambers for the wealthy and backless benches for the working-class, many workingmen listened attentively to Wright's message that exposed elite ministers as conspiring with bankers and Whig politicians to deny rights and privileges to workers. By 1830 most American workingmen were proud to have the vote and nearly the same legal rights as did "gentlemen."¹⁹² These republicans had little to lose by associating with Wright and quite a bit to gain. It is fairly easy to separately identify younger and older workingmen in the historical record of this period. As sons of Revolutionary soldiers, the older generation of workers were proud of their new liberty and undaunted in pursuing other rights they still were denied. Before Owen and Wright arrived in New York City in January of 1829, they had already formed into various groups to write pamphlets and agitate for change. They were happy to greet these two members of the elite class who were committed to empowering the powerless. Wright's and Owen's youthful energy and deep financial resources must have been viewed as a welcome addition to their aging working-class leadership. These men were more than ready to hear Wright rail against the demagoguery of wealthy capitalists and argue for workers' rights to better working conditions and better pay. An 1829 election poster demonstrates the union of these older workingmen with the two young newcomers from the West as it recalls soldierly rhetoric, commanding "Adopted

¹⁹¹ Frances Wright, *Address on the State of the Public Mind, and the Measures which it calls for. As delivered in New-York and Philadelphia, in the autumn of 1829.* New York: Free Enquirer, Hall of Science, 1829. 21.

¹⁹² Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. 213-216. Congress had turned the property-test provisions for voting rights over to the states in 1810; then, out of gratitude to the Revolutionary War soldiers and their cry for universal manhood suffrage, most states either loosened or dropped those restrictions almost entirely.

Citizens, *To Your POSTS!*” It calls for the “friends of *Robert Dale Owen* and *Miss Frances Wright*” to go “*To the Polls!* and vote.” The broadside plainly endorses public boarding schools and the right of married couples to divorce, two of the principles similar to those from Nashoba for which Wright had been vilified.¹⁹³ The broadside boldly lists the names of seventeen men, complete with middle initials and occupations, as candidates for state office. The workingmen on the poster – carpenters, cabinet makers, grocers, and a coppersmith – were proud to be associated in print with Wright’s name. For a short period the older, already formed Working-man’s Party

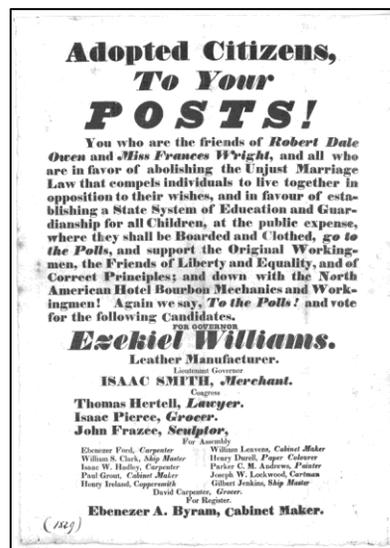


Fig. 1.10
election poster
supporting
Wright’s &
Owen’s
agenda, 1829

became known as the “Fanny Wright Party” and themselves as “Fanny Wright Men” or “Wrightists.” They were probably some of the first New Yorkers to welcome and support Wright and Owen as they began their assault on the East Coast.

Young workingmen in large urban areas constituted another substantial group of followers. Many of them were living in boarding-houses in the city, separated from their families in the country, and eager for the social, intellectual, and religious experimentation that such distance made possible. Poet Walt Whitman, a printer’s apprentice, was one of these young

¹⁹³ “Adopted Citizens, To Your POSTS!” Broadside. Portfolio 117. Folder 16. Printed Ephemera Collection. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C. Accessed through www.loc.gov on July 31, 2013.

Wright devotees. Late in his life he spoke openly and warmly of her to a biographer.¹⁹⁴ These young workingmen were dazzled by the power of Wright's spoken rhetoric and of her striking visual appearance. At her June 13, 1830, Hall of Science "Address to Young Mechanics," she spoke to young workingmen as her "select[ed]" audience and as her equals. She explained that they had a special political duty because of their "industrious class" and the "sound reason" of



Fig. 1.11 Frances Wright, date unknown

their youth, while young men with college educations were often afflicted with the "conceit of pedantry, and the jargon of sophistry."¹⁹⁵ Of everyone she had met so far in her life's study of humanity, Wright said she could "truly say that ... not only the best feelings, but the soundest

¹⁹⁴ Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden, July 16, 1888 – October 31, 1888 (Vol. II)*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908. Whitman recalled seeing Wright lecture: "In those days I frequented the anti-slavery halls, in New York.... It was there I heard Fanny Wright.... She spoke in the old Tammany Hall there, every Sunday, about all sorts of reforms. Her views were very broad – she touched the widest range of themes – spoke informally, colloquially." 204-205. To Whitman Wright was "the noblest Roman of them all, though not of them, except for a time: a woman of the noblest make-up whose orbit was a great deal larger than theirs – too large to be tolerated for long by them: a most maligned, lied-about character – one of the best in history though also one of the least understood." 204. "'Fanny Wright (we always called her Fanny for affection's sake) – Fanny Wright had a nimbus' – encircling her pictorially with a sweep of the hand, 'a 'halo.'" "Yes, they may object to her – object as the priestly class would object to Jesus, Socrates. She was one of the few characters to excite in me a wholesale respect and love: she was beautiful in bodily shape and gifts of soul." 445. Whitman said, "I never felt so glowingly towards any other woman [than Wright].... [S]he possessed herself of my body and soul: I have said much to you about her – much, much: but I have not said a word that I would not stick to – not a word that is not rather under than over the truth." 500. "There were people who objected to Fanny Wright as radical and all that. She was sweeter, nobler, grander – multiplied by twenty – than all who traduced her." 499. Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden March 28 – July 14, 1888 (Vol. I)*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906. 79-80. "Fanny Wright...had...magnetism She was a brilliant woman, of beauty and estate, who was never satisfied unless she was busy doing good – public good, private good."

¹⁹⁵ Frances Wright. *An Address to Young Mechanics as Delivered in the Hall of Science. June 13, 1830*. New York: Free Inquirer, Hall of Science, 1830. 5.

sense [were] among the operative classes of society.”¹⁹⁶ She admonished them not to harbor antagonism against educated people and stressed that she did not dislike particular clerics, bankers, or lawyers, but hated the jobs they performed. “All men and all women ought to be [labeled] *workers*,” said Wright, and her object was “union” of the social classes through universal education. Since society had provided advanced education only to wealthy young men, everyone had inherited a classist system in which “operative” and “intellectual labor[er]” were “unhappily separated.” She charged the workingmen to bear as their “watchword of the hour . . . union, and breathe of national fellowship, liberality, and harmony.”¹⁹⁷ The *Commercial Advertiser* characterized this portion of Wright’s audience as “poor deluded followers of a crazy atheistical woman,”¹⁹⁸ but to young workingmen Wright was a “grand,” charismatic figure and one that Whitman could not help but worship:

She has always been to me one of the sweetest of sweet memories: we [those who saw her lecture] all loved her: fell down before her: her very appearance seemed to enthrall us.¹⁹⁹ . . . [S]he was more than beautiful: she was grand! It was not feature simply but soul – soul. There was a majesty about her.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. She charged them to take care to study the elegant and effective use of language, for the “careful exercise of the faculty of speech” would “promote” their “public usefulness” as well as their own clearer thinking. She was concerned that the “art of good public speaking” had not been spread to the working classes, but had instead been held tightly by the “peculiar professions. . . [t]he bar and the pulpit, and, alas! the senate” – law, religion, and government. As she bid them good-bye “for the season,” she encouraged them to bear the “honor of free enquiry and practical reform” beyond the Hall of Science and into “the walks of life.” She cautioned that “[i]ndulgence . . . on the part of one class towards another, is imperiously called for; every expression calculated to excite jealousy should be carefully shunned.” Ibid., 5. She believed that the young mechanics were “destined to supply the best props to the reformed political edifice” of America. She solemnly charged them that as “THE STATE’S SERVICE” and as “members of the human family, it [was their] bounden interest and duty . . . to consider attentively society as it now exists, and society as it ought to exist.” Ibid., 9-13.

¹⁹⁸ Qtd. in Ginzberg, 203-204. For another example: “Cyrus Pitt Grosvenor, pastor of Boston’s First Baptist Church,” who “believed in 1829 that young men had simply been bewitched by the charms of Frances Wright.” Christopher Grasso, “Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22.3 (Autumn 2002): 465-508. 486.

¹⁹⁹ *WW in Camden, Vol. II*, 205.

²⁰⁰ *WW in Camden, Vol. II*, 499.

A third group of men drawn to Wright and her causes during the late 1820s and 1830s were educated, middle-class freethinkers, an amorphous group that included in its ranks young college men, professionals (lawyers, doctors, and liberal editors), and independently wealthy men (like Robert Dale Owen).²⁰¹ A loosely organized group of unbelievers and opponents of Christianity, freethinkers created the Jefferson Society, the Free Press Association, and held annual celebrations of Thomas Paine's birthday, where they toasted Wright and other liberal luminaries.²⁰² Of any men in antebellum America, freethinking men had the greatest capacity for perceiving women as potentially their intellectual equals.²⁰³ According to historian Lori Ginzberg, "advanced views on women's rights seem to have been shared or, at least, condoned by the greater body of freethinkers."²⁰⁴ At a gathering in Albany, Wright was spoken of as "at once the ornament and the champion of her sex and of humanity"; they hoped "her noble efforts in defence of the long neglected common rights of *women*" would "be as triumphant as were

²⁰¹ Lori D. Ginzberg, "'The Hearts of Your Readers will Shudder': Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought." *American Quarterly* 46.2 (June 1994): 195-226. Ginzberg argues that while these men purportedly welcomed women into their society as equals, they doubted women's ability to allow themselves to be equals. In 1832 women officially requested admittance to full participation in the freethinkers' Jefferson Society: "At the last meeting of the 'Jefferson Society' in this city, a written proposal from a female, well known for her energy, was read, in which the propriety of admitting women to participate in their readings, recitations, discussions, &c. was recommended. The proposition was favorably [sic] received, and will be acceded to if circumstances favor it." Editor Amos Gilbert asked "whether . . . it would not be well for them to form an association where, separately, they could qualify themselves to take part, to meet with men under circumstances more favorable to the removal of existing prejudices?" *The Free Enquirer* 4.35 (June 23, 1832): 273.

²⁰² "Paine's Birth Day." *The Correspondent* 5.4 (Feb. 14, 1829): 56, 58. They gathered every January or February to drink toasts in honor of Thomas Paine's birthday in New York City, Albany, Utica, Vermont, and even as far west as Ohio. They toasted Thomas Jefferson, Jeremy Bentham, Voltaire, Robert Owen, the infamous European atheist also Count Holback, Frances Wright, and Robert Dale Owen. At the celebration in Utica, New York, a Dr. Haslem of Baltimore proclaimed, "Frances Wright – a true philanthropist; the persevering and fearless promulgator of virtue and liberal principles." At the same celebration the chairman toasted "the female republicans of every clime." *An Oration Delivered in Tammany Hall, in Commemoration of the Birthday of Thomas Paine: and An Account of the Celebration Of the 95th Anniversary of that Day, (29th January 1832,) by the friends and admirers of his writings*. New York: Evans & Brooks, 1832. 27. At the "Birthday of Mr. Paine" "evening was, perhaps, as stormy as any other during this remarkably severe winter, [yet] Tammany Hall was crowded by as respectable an audience of ladies and gentlemen as New York could produce."

²⁰³ *An Oration ... Thomas Paine, 1832*. 27. At the 1832 celebration at Tammany Hall in New York, one toast by a Mr. Burton seemed genuine in his admonition to husbands to allow their wives to be "*equal mates*." *An Oration ... Thomas Paine, 1832*. 27.

²⁰⁴ Ginzberg, 212.

those of the fearless Paine in establishing the rights of men.”²⁰⁵ Yet these liberal men also saw women as easily duped by religious people and beliefs, by their own sensuality, and by their lack of confidence in their intellects, and so often freethought was still a “largely male preserve.”²⁰⁶

Wright also had many female followers, middle class and working class. When Wright revised her first three lectures for publication in October 1829 she noted that it was “with delight that I have distinguished, at each successive meeting, the increasing ranks of my own sex.”²⁰⁷ By June 1830 a writer noted that at one of her lectures “probably three thousand persons [were] present,” but “what was most surprising [was] the fact, that *one half of the audience were females – respectable females.*”²⁰⁸ But the women who attended Wright’s lectures left almost no written records of their experiences and so there is relatively little known about their perception of Wright’s principles.²⁰⁹ The most revealing piece of evidence is an 1828 letter from a “Zenobia” to the editor of the *Philadelphia Album*. Zenobia’s letter reviewed the subjects Wright addressed that may have resonated with women and prompted them to brave the scorn of their families and friends and attend Wright’s lectures. She shamed the magazine, supposedly “devoted to the [female] sex” for being the “first to hurl the shaft of reprobation” at Wright, and

²⁰⁵ “Albany celebration of the anniversary of the birth of Thomas Paine.” *The Correspondent* 5.8 (March 14, 1829): 122-123. Amos Gilbert, a *Free Enquirer* editor, encouraged readers to consider women as intellectually able as men; when a woman correspondent demurred that she did “not say that a Locke or a Newton in intellect, will ever astonish the world, by appear in [women’s] ranks,” Gilbert asked her, “Why not?” Frances. “Education of Daughters.” *The Free Enquirer* 4.49 (Sept. 29, 1832): 392. Gilbert printed and approved of the news that the New York Society for Moral Philanthropists had voted to admit women. *The Free Enquirer* (Dec. 31, 1831): 80.

²⁰⁶ Ginzberg, 213-215. Ginzberg notes that “Freethinkers’ condescension toward women was exemplified in their celebratory toasts: ‘Woman – may the lights of Science so illumine her mind, as to forbid her long remaining the dupe or victim of a crafty and designing priesthood.... When they are emancipated from Clerical influence the true millenium [*sic*] is at hand.’”

²⁰⁷ Frances Wright, *Lecture I. On the Nature of Knowledge*. In *Course of Popular Lectures*, 1829. 38. Italics original.

²⁰⁸ “Fanny Wright.” *New England Galaxy* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2. Quaker women notably were supportive of Wright; newspapers commented that they, in full grey dress, often accompanied Wright onstage and created a phalanx about her to protect her as she moved in and out of the lecture halls.

²⁰⁹ The written records by women include the journal entry by Elizabeth Oakes Smith; Lucretia Mott’s anger that fellow Quakers (including women) were excommunicated for attending (see fn 206); and Ernestine Rose’s comments to Walt Whitman that she had attended Wright’s lectures in 1836. It is unclear if the letter writer Zenobia ever attended Wright’s lectures, though we must presume she would have wanted to.

of printing “silly adulations of men, while the genius and talents of our sex are left to slumber in the night of silence and neglect.” Wright’s arguments regarding “the laws of divorce” were so patently true, she said, that “any attempt to defend her ... is unnecessary.” Zenobia upheld Wright’s efforts as “laudable, as it is likely they will stimulate the female world to rise from that degraded state in which arrogance and presumption have placed them.” She recognized in the “whole train of [the editor’s] argument, a fear” that was clearly intended to frighten women, but she says she felt “no apprehension,” but warned him that the “the era is coming, when you will acknowledge us equals.”²¹⁰ Zenobia was the sole woman to support Wright in a conventional magazine, and she did so veiled behind a pseudonym, from a safe distance.²¹¹ Another personal record of a Wright lecture by a woman is by Elizabeth Oakes Smith, later a well-known poet. Oakes Smith had gone to hear Wright speak over the adamant objections of her cousins, a doctor and his wife, and the mild protests of her husband, a liberal-minded poet. She recounted her impressions of braving New York’s decrepit Clinton Hall in late 1838 to attend one of Wright’s speeches, which was to a working-class audience, and after Wright had fallen into disfavor:

[W]e went up stairs and turned into a very dirty, dimly-lighted hall, filled with straight wooden benches, and only three persons in it. The appointed hour had already arrived, and slowly, men, one after another, sauntered in – several women, also, some with babes in their arms, and all bring an atrocious odor of tobacco, whiskey, and damp clothing. At

²¹⁰ [Zenobia.] *The Correspondent* 4.3 (Aug. 9, 1828): 36-38.

²¹¹ In *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts. Vol I. Family Notes and Autobiography, Brooklyn and New York*. Ed. Edward F. Grier. New York: New York University Press, 1984. 344. Another woman, suffragist Ernestine L. Rose, left a record of her having attended a Wright lecture. Walt Whitman sought her out and took notes on their Feb. 9, 1857, conversation; she recalled attending Wright’s 1836-38 lectures.

length, there might have been fifty persons, no more, present, and these began to shuffle and call for the speaker. It was all so ... gross and noisy.²¹²

Oakes Smith was “so distressed” by the “bad atmosphere” that she “nearly... faint[ed].” She was a middle-class woman experiencing a working-class setting and responded in the class ways in which she had been trained. Yet, even when the environment made her ill, she still was “too eager to hear” Wright speak even to consider “the idea of going out” [leaving].²¹³ Her comment clarifies that some women wanted badly to experience Frances Wright pronouncing her radical opinions in person. Historian Lori Ginzberg argues that Wright, “a religious skeptic, an advocate of free, universal education, a defender of absolute open inquiry, and an opponent of the legal and sexual customs surrounding marriage,” had a “message [that] electrified her audiences.”²¹⁴

Of course, in 1829 Wright was the celebrity radical of the age, so both the liberal and the conservative press reported women’s presence at Wright’s lectures for their own purposes – either to support or to condemn Wright. An eager supporter bragged that Wright’s “audiences [in Cincinnati] were crowded ... with the most influential [sic] and respectable citizens in the town.... [A]t Louisville, ... though she advanced ... all her heresies, religious and moral, her audiences to the last, were the fashionable resort of the ladies; who usually composed nearly half her hearers.”²¹⁵ Conversely, one horrified evangelical wrote that “the hearts of your readers will shudder, when they learn that fifty or sixty ladies [had] so far divested themselves of the fear of God ... as to attend these lectures” in his effort to shame those erring women.²¹⁶

²¹² Elizabeth Oakes Smith. Qtd. in Mary Alice Wyman, *Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1927.

²¹³ Smith. Qtd. in *Two American Pioneers*, 102

²¹⁴ Lori D. Ginzberg, “‘The Hearts of Your Readers will Shudder’: Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought.” *American Quarterly* 46.2 (June 1994): 195-226. 201.

²¹⁵ “Prospects in the West.” *The Correspondent* 4.16 (November 8, 1828): 271-272.

²¹⁶ From *Christian Advocate and Journal*. Qtd. in Ginzberg, 213.

It is more difficult to interpret women's presence at Wright's lectures than men's; by their association with Wright, workingmen seemed to feel liberated from their repressive employers and freethinking men from conventional American society. In contrast, middle-class women had reason to feel threatened by any association, for the consequences were far greater for women than for men. If word got out that a respectable woman had attended Wright's lectures it is not unlikely that on a ritual parlor visit she would have been turned away by a servant at the front door.²¹⁷ A writer for *New England Galaxy* commented in 1830 that "[w]hen Fanny first made her appearance in [New York City] ... she was very little visited by respectable females," noting that at "her first lecture in the Park Theatre, about half a dozen appeared, but they soon left the house."²¹⁸ Indeed, conservative reviewers' condemnation of women for being present at Wright's lectures was severe: The reporter for the *Christian Advocate and Journal* charged that the women in attendance had "divested themselves of the ... respect of their characters, and that jewel which alone adorns their sex."²¹⁹ Historian Celia Morris notes that most of Wright's proto-feminist contemporaries worked within benevolent organizations and "were reformers rather than radicals, ... were at least nominally Christian, and Fanny's skepticism, as well as her notoriety, frightened them away."²²⁰ Association with Wright was dangerous for women.

²¹⁷ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

²¹⁸ "Fanny Wright." *New England Galaxy* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2. Another reviewer recording his impressions of a lecture remarked that "there were ladies there without disguises" – clearly identifying them as respectable, middle-class women who, as far as polite society was concerned, *should* have worn disguises to conceal their identities. William Leete Stone. *New York Advertiser* (Jan. 5, 1829). Quoted in Morris, 186-187. Though it is not clear if the Quaker suffragist Lucretia Mott ever heard Wright speak, she and her husband "came near 'losing our place,'" in their religious society simply "by uttering our indignant protest" that several "liberal writers and their children" were "disowned" for attending Wright's lectures in Wilmington, Delaware. *James and Lucretia Mott. Life and Letters*. Anna Davis Hallowell, ed. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884. 230-231.

²¹⁹ Qtd. in Ginzberg, 213.

²²⁰ Morris, 283.

THE DIATRIBE AGAINST WRIGHT

In a period of two months in the summer of 1828, editors and reviewers across America began shifting their positions on Frances Wright, retracting positive opinions about her philanthropic work with enslaved people, repeatedly reprinting the Nashoba “Explanatory Notes,” and reexamining her earlier writings to uncover immorality there.²²¹ Within a year the heated rhetoric from magazine editorials and from preached sermons especially warned American women and workingmen that their holding Wright’s positions simply would not be tolerated. Evangelical ministers and magazine reviewers pilloried her as the “Red Harlot of Infidelity.”²²² A colored lithograph circulating in 1829 created for viewers a visual image of Wright as ultimately disgraced: She appears mid-lecture, speaking through a goose-bill, her short



Fig. 1.12
Caricature of
Frances Wright
giving a lecture;
by James Akin,
1829

curls pulled back with a ribbon to reveal avian features. The caption reads, “A Downright Gabbler, or a goose who deserves to be hissed.” A man waiting for her in the wings bears a close resemblance to Robert Dale Owen. Since Wright had dared to present her female form in public

²²¹ The “Explanatory Notes” were republished in 1830 at the height of the controversy over Wright’s persona, with the title, *Frances Wright Unmasked*, which marked it as pernicious. It was probably targeted at buyers of licentious reading materials, such as Owen’s *Moral Physiology* or Mason Locke Weems’s tracts on adultery and masturbation, rather than Wright’s enemies. It printed letters from Wright to a “Robert L. Jennings, advising him to leave his wife and family, and follow her destinies,” which would have titillated readers. So while an “Advertisement” from the publisher in the front matter claims he is a “friend of the much calumniated, and much abused Frances Wright,” calls her enemies “base traducers” of an “amiable lady,” and is sure readers are “well aware of [Wright’s] retiring modesty,” it is likely this publisher was simply profit-seeking.

²²² “Fanny Wright.” *New-England Galaxy and United States Literary Advertiser* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2.

view to be stared at, powerful white men saw her as having relinquished any right to personal dignity. To them, such a caricature was only fitting and far less insult than she deserved.

It may be thought that these remarks are harsh, and that there is a degree of generous courtesy which should never be withheld from woman. But when one thus shamefully obtrudes herself upon the public, waiving alike modesty, gentleness, and every amiable attribute of her sex, she also waives all claims to its privileges; and ceases to be respected as a woman.

Fig. 1.13 Wright no longer deserved respect; “Miss Frances Wright,” *Bower of Taste*

Old friends and acquaintances privately rejected her, either failing to invite her to events or writing snide comments in their correspondence to one another.²²³ Even considering the reviewers’ directives, it is still remarkable that one woman could so quickly become the focal point for so much odium. In print and in oratory, evangelical men labeled Frances Wright scandalous and spiritually bankrupt. While freethinking men had heard these ideas spoken from a public stage often, no woman before her had discussed atheism or the oppression of women with her own voice from a lecture platform, to an audience of men and women. When middle-class white men realized that their wives and daughters could be in her audiences, they were horrified.²²⁴ While during this period Wright did not comment on national political figures, perhaps the landslide victory of populist Andrew Jackson and news of his March 4, 1829,

²²³ Ellen Wayles Coolidge to Martha Jefferson Randolph, July 21, 1829, The Thomas Jefferson Papers, Manuscript and Archival Collections, University of Virginia. Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, a granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson, commented in a letter to her mother that “Frances Wright has arrived in Boston to deliver a course of lectures which I hope nobody will go to hear. The report is that she has made a sentimental arrangement with Mr. Owen Miss Wright will probably not be noticed by any modest woman.”

²²⁴ Lyman Beecher, *Lectures on Scepticism, delivered in Park Street Church, Boston, and in the Second Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: Corey and Fairbank, 1835. A year after Wright had fled to Europe and fallen silent, Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher narrated the threat that evangelicals still felt keenly: “[When] the female apostle of atheistic liberty visited [Boston], ... her lectures were thronged not only by men, but even by females of respectable standing.... She made her converts, and that too not among the low and the vicious alone. Females of education and refinement – females of respectable standing in society – those who had been the friends and associates of my own children – were numbered and are now among her votaries, and advocate her sentiments.” This was a series of sermons he delivered on atheism in Boston and Cincinnati in 1831 and 1833.

inauguration and White House ball, to which common people were invited, exacerbated people's fears of her.²²⁵

Then suddenly, on July 1, 1830, with one day's warning to her followers, Frances Wright vanished from the American scene. At a farewell speech in New York City she told them, "After two years of public exertion in a work ... called for by the accumulated corruptions and errors which had gathered in and around our social edifice, I feel warned, for a season, to retire." She lamented that her infamy was being held up to voters to dissuade them from voting a straight Workingmen Party ticket in the approaching political elections:

So long as I alone was concerned, the noise of priest and politician was alike indifferent to me, but I wish not my name to be made ... a stumbling-block to the innocently prejudiced, at a season when all should unite round the altar of their country.

She was leaving, she told them, for their sake, so that they could go to the polls and vote what their consciences dictated, without having her controversial presence on the scene to escalate tensions against their cause. Wright assured her audience that now they were "awake to their own interests" and needed to act boldly on their own behalf to take "the cause of reform into their own hands." She mentioned that she had "private interests of [her] own" to attend to and would return in the fall.²²⁶ In fact, Wright's "private interest" was that she was three months pregnant, and in late June it is likely she would have been barely able to conceal the bulge. She was unmarried to the father, New-Harmony teacher and printer William P. D'Arusmont

²²⁵ Lynn Hudson Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. xi-xiv.

²²⁶ Frances Wright, *Parting Address, as Delivered in the Bowery Theatre, to the People of New-York, in June, 1830*. New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, Hall of Science, 1830. 21, 22. "For these motives ... I shall take the present season for attention to some more private interests of my own, and shortly leave this city and the country for a few months, not to return until after the decision of the autumnal elections."

Phiquephal, as well she might be, after railing against the marital institution for two years.²²⁷ She fled to Europe and seemed to disappear into thin air for five years, eventually marrying in secret, then remaining in hiding with her husband, their child Sylva, and a part-time cook.²²⁸ In 1831 in a letter to Robert Dale Owen she wrote that she wanted to conceal the news of her marriage “because I was little desirous to have the public mind in America, w^{ch} I had succeeded in awakening to matters of real import, diverted from these even temporarily to gossip of my private affairs.”²²⁹ In fact, after so many reviewers had worked unsuccessfully to silence her, Wright finally silenced herself in order to maintain the fiction that her child was not born out of wedlock. After the tragic death of a second, legitimate daughter, Wright substituted that child’s birth certificate for the first, and after a few years, returned to the public eye.

When Wright left at the height of her celebrity, her followers continued without her, as she had admonished. She had promised she would rejoin them within a short time, a promise she had made often before and always kept, and so both her followers and American reviewers anticipated her imminent return. In the meantime, Owen ran the *Free Enquirer* with her name

²²⁷ Wright’s sister had since died. D’Arusmont Phiquephal was a printer for the *New Enquirer*, much older than she. He had accompanied Wright in early spring on a long journey to retrieve her enslaved people from Nashoba and liberate them in Haiti – dismantling Nashoba had not been a quick process. There is no evidence of their romantic relationship before their trip south; Morris guesses that Wright got caught up in the romance of the island and became pregnant.

²²⁸ Wright and D’Arusmont rented a bleak walk-up apartment in Paris and sometime in late December she gave birth to a daughter, Sylva. After the child was born the two were married; by French law, D’Arusmont first had to get his mother’s permission to marry. Wright kept her address secret from everyone except LaFayette and visited no one, except a Paris reception for Lafayette some weeks after the birth. When in 1831 Wright’s old friend Harriet Garnett wrangled Wright’s address from LaFayette’s secretary and dropped by the apartment unexpectedly, she saw a dismal scene: a disheveled and remote Wright tending to a year-old child and a silent D’Arusmont. Wright was angry that her location had been discovered by anyone and was uncommunicative during the friend’s brief visit. “I have seen F[anny] W[right] ... I found her with a child a twelvemonth old, a little girl like her, and naked, for she wears no garment except when she goes out.... Fanny received me kindly but coldly.... The sweet playfulness of her manner is gone; it was her, and yet not her.... The muddle is very great. A bedroom, a dirty girl [servant], a naked child, Fanny en robe de chambre, a stove and child’s victuals cooking. How different from the elegant boudoir in which we used to find our Fanny writing!” Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, November 26, 1831, Paris. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 145. Two years later Wright gave birth to a second daughter, but the child died three months after her birth and they substituted the birth certificate of their deceased baby for Sylva, then two years old. “F[anny] W[right] has another little girl, a fine child ... She has no female in the house. Her husband feeds the baby.” Harriet Garnett to Julia Pertz, April 25, 1832. In Payne-Gaposchkin, 146. Morris, 225-235.

²²⁹ Frances Wright, letter to Robert Dale Owen, 10. Nov. 1831, Owen Papers. In Morris, 232-233.

listed as one of the “editors & proprietors,” and printed the stacks of articles that he said Wright had written in advance. But she did not return in the fall of 1830, nor in 1831, nor in 1832.

Americans would not hear Wright speak for nearly six years. She finally returned in 1835 and again became caught up in the democratic and Jacksonian politics of the day, and in 1836 began two more years of public speaking.²³⁰ In response to Wright’s atheism and proto-feminism and under the threat of her physical presence, real or imagined, magazine reviewers throughout the 1830s delivered an unflinching message that educated, middle-class women writers heard. They essentially placed the issue of women’s rights and empowerment on what today is known as the third rail – a dangerous, even untouchable issue. Anyone in a position of any power who addressed the issue of women’s rights was certain to suffer for it both socially and politically. Reviewers dictated that women stay away from engagement with radical feminism, a dictum that women writers, above all others, dared not ignore.

²³⁰ According to newspaper reports, she drew large and boisterous audiences. “A Fanny Wright Riot.” *Atkinson’s Saturday Evening Post* 17.900 (Oct. 27, 1838): 3.

CHAPTER 2

“LIGHT, FICTITIOUS, DEMORALIZING AND IRRELIGIOUS BOOKS”¹:

PROTESTANT SILENCING AND THE FEMALE NOVELIST

In the spring of 1830, thirty-three Boston gentlemen signed and sent a letter to sixteen Boston magazines and periodicals regarding Frances Wright’s upcoming scheduled lectures in a local theatre. These men comprised the Boston hegemony – its bankers, lawyers, politicians, and wholesale merchants. They “respectfully request[ed]” that the newspapers and magazines would “not notice her, or publish any communications respecting her in [their] papers, during her residence” in Boston.² The *Boston Gazette* responded that they did “not feel predisposed to relish the masculine eloquence of this bold and forcible female” and were “not ... gratified by her visit.” The editors notified her to “come and we will listen or not as we desire.”³ These power brokers and editors, aware of the impact of Wright’s lectures in other cities, agreed that they would work to limit her influence in Boston. Conservative men did not want to hear the voices of liberal women.

Some scholars of the theories of rhetoric have analyzed the threat to male hegemony engendered by women’s use of language – the words they read, wrote, and spoke. In his

¹ [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian.” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 8.19 (Jan. 3, 1834): 73. “The public press is a great engine for good or for evil. One of its greatest evils is, the flooding the country with light, fictitious, demoralizing and irreligious books, written in a style, and on such subjects as most forcibly arrest the attention and impress the minds of youth of both sexes; and sold at such prices as to make them accessible to all.... The religious press ought to throw its whole weight here, and object constantly with candor, firmness and respect.” [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian.” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 8.19 (Jan. 3, 1834): 73.

² F[rances] W[right]. *Free Enquirer* 2.28 (May 8, 1830): 222. Wright wrote that “the original of the above circular, with all the signatures appended, has been forwarded to me in a blank cover from Boston.... The original of the above document can be seen at our office.” F[rances] W[right]. *Free Enquirer* 2.28 (May 8, 1830): 222.

³ Qtd. in William Randall Waterman. *Frances Wright*. New York: AMS Press, 1967 [1924]. Reprint. 178.

Discourse on Language Michel Foucault addresses power, knowledge, and silence: “We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything.”⁴ Edwin Ardener’s consideration of power relations sees women as having been historically “muted.”⁵ Boston’s hegemonous males simply indicated they would respond to Frances Wright’s person as they would to anyone who breached decorum – with the techniques of shunning taught in antebellum conduct manuals.⁶ Just as if they had noticed her on a public street but pretended not to, their response to Wright was designed to register with readers as a social cut. The Boston reviewers’ refusal to listen and their display of apathy was a form of silencing. Like a tree falling in a forest, antebellum Americans stopped up their ears to Wright, dismissing her as if she were not speaking at all.⁷

The radical presence of Frances Wright inside the public sphere from 1828 to 1830 was detestable to powerful white men and their obloquy against her terrific. This chapter considers that during the early 1830s, reviewers began to link her indirectly or directly – peripherally or causally – to the writing and reading of popular and licentious novels. During the antebellum period conservative reviewers tracked the radical ideologies of Frances Wright and other writers (especially Hume, Owen, and Paine) in these novels. While a long-standing transatlantic debate over novel reading had waxed and waned with the religious tides for nearly a century, I see

⁴ Michel Foucault, “Appendix: The Discourse on Language.” *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse On Language*. A. J. Sheridan Smith, trans. New York: Pantheon Book, 1972. 216.

⁵ Edwin Ardener, qtd. in Glenn, 2004. 25.

⁶ Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies*.

⁷ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences*. Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922. Vol. 1, 148; Vol. 2, 16. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, educated, middle-class women were well aware that during the antebellum period “the popular voice” reflected what was spoken “in the parlor, press, and pulpit” by “white men,” who were the “lords of all.” By 1857 Stanton realized that “the laws and religion of our country even now are behind the public sentiment which makes woman the mere tool of man. He has made the laws and proclaimed the religion; so we have his exact idea of the niche he thinks God intended woman to fill.” Vol. 2, 70.

Wrightism as related to its resurgence during the 1830s and 1840s. Writers who were dependent on book sales to support themselves and their families could not take the chance of offending reviewers. In 1848 a reviewer wrote:

We have heard a good deal said of late years both from the pulpit and the press in opposition to novel reading So much has been said upon *one* side of the question – upon the anti-novel side that the champions of the other party have been talked down and silenced, with few exceptions.⁸

As this writer finally bravely commented, evangelical reviewers in the 1830s and early 1840s were successful in silencing advocacy of novel reading. The virulence of that condemnation especially created fear in American women, over whom powerful men went to extreme lengths to maintain their dominance, as they had attempted with Wright. A topic that scholars have not yet addressed is that reviewers' threats to the novel-writing industry affected those antebellum women writers who depended on sales of their work to support their families. In this chapter I trace how magazine reviewers in the 1830s identified novels as one means by which young people and women might encounter and absorb radical, iconoclastic, and especially proto-feminist ideas, including what had come to be known as "Fanny Wrightism." I argue that reviewers predicted that the influence through popular novels of Frances Wright and others on young people and women would lead to the degradation of their morals and, ultimately, to the downfall of American civilization. The revival of anti-novel rhetoric produced significant consequences for women writers' freedom to express themselves.

THE NOVEL-READING DEBATE IN AMERICA

With the advent of steam-powered printing presses, new typesetting technology, and improved roads and canals that could transport products more efficiently, the publishing industry

⁸ "Novel Reading." *Saturday Evening Post* 28.1425 (Nov. 18, 1848): 4.

saw a vast increase in the numbers of periodicals that were printed in America during the mid-antebellum period. The scholarship on book and magazine publishing in the United States is well established.⁹ Publishers also boasted record sales of books of all kinds, now less expensive and more accessible, an opportunity that earlier educators would have envied.¹⁰ The first Surgeon-General of the United States Benjamin Rush had supported women's education and recommended reading as an essential learning tool – especially histories, biographies, and travelogues – but not novels, for he argued that “the subjects of novels” were “by no means accommodated to our present manners” in America. In fact, the “sympathy” engendered in female readers “blunt[ed] the heart to that which is real.”¹¹

⁹ William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America, 1790-1850*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996. Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid Nineteenth-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.

¹⁰ Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education*, 6. Since their “professional life exposes gentlemen ... from their families, a principal share of the instruction of children naturally devolves upon the women.” Rush argued that “[i]t becomes us therefore to prepare [women] by a suitable education, for the discharge of this most important duty of mothers.” Mothers, then, had the responsibility of raising sons to assume the “equal share that every citizen has in the liberty, and [possibly] in the government of our country.” Women also needed to be able to engage in a “general intercourse with the world” and to perform as an “agreeable companion for a sensible man.” A woman was to understand that because of her husband's daily experiencing of the pernicious life of the marketplace and political arena, his steps were likely to meander off the moral course. Her goals, then, were to gently remind him of his Christian duties to his family and to encourage him to return to that righteous path within and without the home, for his family's and his country's sake.

¹¹ Women needed to study “the English language,” “letter-writing,” “book-keeping,” “dancing,” and “vocal music.” Studies in “history, biography, and travels” would “subdue” young women's “passion for reading novels.” Rush believed women should be trained in a “knowledge of the English language,” “letter-writing,” “some knowledge of figures and bookkeeping,” “geography and ... chronology” so that she can “read history, biography, and travels, with advantage; and thereby qualify her not only for a general intercourse with the world, but, to be an agreeable companion for a sensible man.” Also, learning “vocal music” would enable her to sing and “soothe the cares of domestic life” when the “distress and vexation of a husband – the noise of a nursery, and, even, the sorrows that will sometimes intrude into her own bosom, may all be relieved by a song.” “Dancing,” the “reading of history – travels – poetry – and moral essays” were all important for young women's education. Kristin Boudreau, *Spectacle of Death: Populist Literary Responses to American Capital Cases*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006. 22. Kristin Boudreau discuss Benjamin Rush in this context: “Rush ... considered that the emotions generated by fiction were without exception destructive to the inculcation of public sensibilities. Though compassion, according to Rush, was natural, it could be depleted by a reader's encounters with melodramatic fictional scenes and thus unavailable when the society most required it.”

It was not an original argument; English reviewers had been discussing the merits and demerits of novel reading for decades already. But early American republicans, male and female alike, had long enjoyed novel reading, and so even an admonition from the preeminent Rush had little effect on the reading habits of young Americans, female or male. Late eighteenth-century publishers certainly had had no compunction about reprinting British novels and printing original novels that threatened conventional standards of morality; especially popular were the English novels of Richardson, Fielding, Goldsmith, and Smollett, as well as novels by Americans Charles Brockden Brown, Susanna Rowson, Hannah Webster Foster, Tabitha Tenney, and William Hill Brown. Neither did they pay much heed to the occasional articles against novel reading that appeared in religious magazines and written by minister-editors, who argued that novel reading had deleterious moral effects on young readers, and especially on young females. Such magazine articles tended to emerge from the waves of religious revivals that swept through New England, upstate New York, and the American West in the 1810s and 1820s.¹²

There were also increasing opportunities for such articles to be printed and read. For a variety of reasons, the antebellum was what one writer in 1831 called the “golden age of

¹² In his July 1787 address to the students and visitors at the Young Ladies’ Academy in Philadelphia, physician and Rush discussed the need for improved educational opportunities for America’s young women.¹² Since fathers were preoccupied with duties in the public sphere, women were almost wholly responsible for raising young sons to become good American citizens, suggested Rush; women also needed to perform as proper wives for their husbands in public forums. First-wave feminist historian Barbara Welter saw this as reflecting a “cult of true womanhood” that developed during the years of the Early Republic. That is, since American husbands were so constantly exposed to the depravity of public life, it was only through wives’ and mothers’ innate and elevating moral influence within the context of the home that men and boys could hope to fulfill their personal and civic obligations. Linda Kerber later extended Welter by arguing that a “separate spheres” ideology trapped early republican women in domestic spaces, since their crucial wartime productivity in and outside of the home was no longer significant.¹² These women, argued Kerber, realized that only through advanced education could they assert the moral authority men were granting them over child-rearing and domestic concerns. See Bernard Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact on Religion in America*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1958. Peter W. Williams, *America’s Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

periodicals.”¹³ Many small magazines were started and abandoned; another writer calculated the “average age of periodicals in this country ... six months.”¹⁴ According to scholar Frank Luther Mott’s estimates that figure was probably closer to two years, with fewer than one hundred magazines operating before 1825 and about six hundred by 1850.¹⁵ By the late 1820s and early 1830s, magazine reviewers and editors were almost all white American men living in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Charleston, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis.¹⁶ Some reviewers and editors were elite mainline Protestants from non-evangelical denominations, such as Episcopal, Unitarian, Deist, or Quaker;¹⁷ many of these men went on to hold positions in government.¹⁸ A second group was made up of elite and middle-class evangelical Protestants. Some edited or wrote for magazines that served as denominational organs for evangelical denominations.¹⁹ Radical periodicals had freethinkers, abolitionists,

¹³ *Illinois Monthly Magazine* 1.302 (April 1831). Qtd. in Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1930. 341.

¹⁴ *New-York Mirror* 6.151 (Nov. 15, 1828). Qtd. in Mott. *American Magazines, Vol. I*, 341.

¹⁵ Mott, *American Magazines, Vol. I*, 341-342.

¹⁶ Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995. There has been recent scholarship on women editors, but most of these were assistants and not the primary, managing editors of periodicals. Frances Wright and Sarah Josepha Hale are two primary exceptions.

¹⁷ Mott, *American Magazines, 1741-1850*. 136. According to Frank Luther Mott, “In 1828,...the *Hopkinsian* printed a list of twenty-eight religious monthlies and seventy-three weekly religious newspapers,” and apparently that list was not nearly complete. In 1823 a writer for the *Methodist Magazine* said that “a religious newspaper would have been a phenomenon not many years since; but now the groaning press throws them out in almost every direction.”

¹⁸ For example, editors of the *North American Review* Unitarian Edward Everett, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the Massachusetts governorship. *NAR* contributor Unitarian George Bancroft was appointed the Secretary of the Navy. They edited or wrote for magazines such as *North American Review*, the Unitarian *Christian Register*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, *Episcopal Watchman*, *Episcopal Recorder*, *Illinois Monthly Magazine*, *Philadelphia Album*, and *Saturday Evening Post*.

¹⁹ This included the Methodist *Ladies’ Repository*, the *Methodist Magazine*, the Presbyterian *Christian Advocate*, the Congregationalist *Christian Spectator* (which became the *American Biblical Repository*), the *Baptist Chronicle & Literary Register*, and *Christian Observer*, which advertised itself as “A Presbyterian Family Newspaper.” Mott, *American Magazines, 1741-1850*. 137. Other evangelical editors started or assumed editorships of magazines that were not affiliated with denominations directly, but evidence evangelical sentiments in their articles and editorials; these include former Congregational minister Timothy Flint’s *Western Monthly Review*. Its original name was the *Western Magazine and Review*. It ceased publication in 1830. In 1832 Hall’s *Illinois Monthly* became the *Western Monthly Magazine* after Flint’s died in 1830. Mott, *History of American Magazines*, 559-561, 596. According to Americanist Candy Gunther Brown, during the first half of the nineteenth century, “denominational and sectional identities [of print periodicals] solidified. By 1830, 131 out of 193 publications, or 68 percent, openly declared their denominational affiliations. This ratio remained relatively stable throughout the antebellum period.” Candy

“bluestocking” women and, later, educated African Americans as their subscribers and tended to have radical white men as their editors and reviewers; these men varied a great deal in their educational, religious, and social backgrounds.²⁰ All three types of editors wrote reviews of books as a regular feature in their periodicals.

Commentary published in early republican periodicals on novel reading focused on the pragmatic consequences of what reviewers’ argued was an unfortunate and habitual behavior. In the early republican period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the practice of novel reading was seen primarily as a waste of valuable time, which in Puritan New England was a sin in itself, for a person’s every moment was accountable to God. One reviewer condemned novels as that “immense flood of trash whose object is the murder of time.”²¹ Opponents to novels complained that novel reading drained its devotees of intellect, energy, and time that could be put to better use. Novel reading, they argued, established habits that inclined one toward laziness, lack of productivity, and physical and moral ruin.

The “dissipation of the intellectual energies” was a common complaint. Male students writing for the *Yale Literary Magazine* claimed novels turned the perspicacity of new freshmen to dull lethargy and stupidity.²² Both boys and girls attending academies, newly freed from parental oversight, were enjoying novels in their private time and in at least semi-private spaces

Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 144.

²⁰ These included *Ariel*, *The Garland*, *Minerva*, *Boston Investigator*, and *Genius of Emancipation*. For example, David Lee Child, editor of the abolitionist *Massachusetts Weekly*, was a Harvard graduate from a working-class family who had earned his way into Harvard on his obvious intellectual abilities; he had no particular religious affiliation and moved in elite circles after graduation. Yet Benjamin Lundy, editor of the abolitionist *Genius of Emancipation*, was a Quaker with no education beyond grammar school and training only in the trade of saddle-making. Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. 48. Thomas Earl, *The Life, Travels and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy*. Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847. 14-15.

²¹ E. C. Merrick, “The Evils of Romance.” *The Ladies’ Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16.

²² “Thoughts Upon Novel Reading.” *The Yale Literary Magazine*. Conducted by the Students of Yale University 5.8 (July 1840): 438-444. “Novel Reading.” *The Yale Literary Magazine*. Conducted by the Students of Yale University 11.1 (Nov. 1845): 5-10.

instead of attending to their studies; they should have been reading in disciplines such as history, philosophy, mathematics, religion, and the sciences. While some advocates of fiction suggested that novel reading provided models to teach young people elegant writing styles, others countered that immature readers cared only about plot, action, and romance – style be damned.²³ Advocates also argued that “historical romances” offered a pleasant alternative to dry, ponderous tomes as a means of learning the facts and events of history; soon Walter Scott’s Waverly novels would be the most often cited as examples. Opponents to fiction acknowledged that sometimes facts *were* dull, but that when novelists embellished the truth with dialogue and exciting imaginary events, readers were left unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

The fact that novels were fictive and imaginary was the focus of another controversy. Advocates of novels tried to uphold fiction’s imaginative quality as being capable, as was no other literature, of working on cold and unfeeling hearts.²⁴ Sarah J. Hale argued in *Ladies’ Magazine* that readers understood vital truths more fully through imaginative works than when delivered as hard “facts.”²⁵ Proponents of novels, disagreeing with Benjamin Rush on the matter, argued that female novel-readers would be so touched by the written images of desperate poverty and the anguish of orphans and widows that they would be moved to action – they would join benevolent societies or sewing circles or find some way to take that acquired sentiment and put it to good use.²⁶

²³ That argument lost any weight it had had in the 1840s when pulp thrillers replaced Scott’s Waverly novels as the most popular fare.

²⁴ A similar accusation was made by supporters of the new evangelical “heart” religions (Methodism, especially) against an older orthodox Congregationalism and churches of “form,” like the Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics.

²⁵ [F.] “Novels.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 1.8 (Aug. 1828): 357-359. [T]he heart, callous to every other good influence, bleeds and palpitates at the eloquence of the fable... *This*, we believe, truly explains the operation of the fable or novel... [I]t is ... our nature to be moved by example rather than precept... [W]e set the legitimate uses of fiction at a high estimate, and give a value to its influence... We raise the despised *Novel* to an eminence.”

²⁶ Indeed the common rules of behavior for middle-class females by the 1840s mandated women to feel this sympathy and be prompted by it routinely to perform, secretly and self-sacrificially, services on behalf of the poor

Critics of novels saw that the imaginative faculty let loose in fiction “habituate[d] the mind to a morbid excitement which totally unfits it for healthy and rational action.”²⁷ That is, habitual novel readers were oblivious to, bored by, or discontent with the realities of their daily lives and preferred the fantasies of fiction.²⁸ Boys so eager to return to the world of romantic adventures would not be able to concentrate on their studies or chores, nor girls their needlework, women their domestic duties, or men their occupations. Opponents argued that young men who read novels lost the ability to concentrate on more difficult texts, did poorly in academics, and later became ineffective and unproductive in their occupations and ultimately unable to support their families. What’s more, novels fed the worst parts of their imagination, making young men lust for alcohol, opium, and loose women.

When women read fiction, said critics, their minds became so keyed up that they could no longer function rationally; they were exhausted after reading, or they fainted, or wept. This “morbid excitement” had two dire sets of consequences. The first was that readers who were addicted to novels would “disrelish other employments”²⁹ – they would become so accustomed to the excitement and drama of fiction that their real worlds would pale in comparison.³⁰ They would be less and less eager to learn the practical skills needed to succeed in real life. Artist T.

and the destitute. A well-known image is Beth in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, who tended to the needs of a German family living in a hovel and desperately nursed their infant with scarlet fever.

²⁷ E. C. Merrick, “The Evils of Romance.” *The Ladies’ Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16.

²⁸ “Aunt Tabitha Timpson: The Novel-Reader.” *The Literary Gazette* 1.19 (Jan. 30, 1835): 148. One writer gently mocked his or her Aunt Tabitha Timpson’s romantic inclinations in a reprinted article from the *New York Transcript*: “Ah! It was one perpetual course of love, tenderness, joy, tears, and heart-aches, from seventeen to twenty-five. Nineteen times was she passionately in love, and twenty-six times in a more moderate degree. Four hundred and eighty-three moonlight walks did she take, and seventeen thousand sighs did she heave on the night breeze.”

²⁹ E. C. Merrick, “The Evils of Romance.” *The Ladies’ Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16.

³⁰ [Corneille.] “Novel Reading.” *Weekly Magazine & Ladies’ Miscellany* (April 3, 1824): 10. “It will, we trust, be admitted by our fair readers, that the reading of NOVELS, is, at least, reprehensible...” Reading novels leaves a female reader “totally incapable of mentally appreciating the rational enjoyments of ‘real life.’ The lady who is passionately prone to reading works of this description ... will find her mind emasculated, her wishes wavering and contradictory, her temper whimsical, and her views of life so extravagant, that in the sphere where it must still be her lot to remain, she sees nothing but what is offensive and uninteresting, because so ‘very unlike’ the visionary world she has created in her own imagination.”

H. Matteson compressed these fears into a single drawing that presents the antebellum husband's nightmare; in "The Novel Reader," a wife, entranced in her book, sits at a table at quarter past noon, her hand supporting her tilted head.³¹ She is blissfully unaware of the tasks she has left undone and of the chaos unfolding around her. Her daughter weeps and points at the laborer waiting at the door to be paid; her husband, in work clothes and home for a hearty midday meal, points accusingly at empty serving dishes, perhaps still unwashed from breakfast. A baby reaches from its cradle to be held, a dog steals the family's meat through an open window, a cat



Fig. 2.1 A novel-reading wife/mother neglects her duties in T. H. Matteson's *The Novel Reader*

laps the family's milk from open crockery, and unfolded laundry lies strewn about on the furniture. Novels had taken over this housewife's common sense, suggests Matteson. She is subsumed in the fantasies of her novel, unaware that she is failing the family that depends on her to fulfill their real needs. Opponents to novel reading argued that it caused women to misplace their sympathy, which antebellum middle-class women were supposed to feel innately, onto fictional characters. They argued that novel reading would invariably "vitalize the sensibilities, and render callous to the appeals of real distress, that heart which can pour forth copious floods of sympathy at the recital of those unreal miseries which hold their scanty existence only in the

³¹ Tompkins Harrison Matteson, "The Novel Reader." Engraving. *The Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 1.5 (November 1847): 231.

brain of the most refined and sickly sentimentalist.”³² Opponents recalled Benjamin Rush’s arguments in his *Thoughts upon Female Education* that “young ladies ... weep away a whole forenoon” and then “turn... with disdain ... from the sight of a beggar.” That is, they argued that excitable fiction – rather than inspiring women to put down their books and focus on their household responsibilities or rush to a benevolent society to volunteer – left them so emotionally drained and exhausted from the exercise of reading that they ignored or failed to recognize needy people in their lives.³³

But, according to critics, the most serious consequence of the “morbid excitement” produced by novel reading was the female-specific threat of seduction.³⁴ As reviewers pointed out, both young and aging coquettes preferred their fictive worlds to their real ones. Novels’ imaginative fantasies filled young women’s hearts with what a reviewer would label “false and unnatural sentiment[s].” Young women’s dreams of dashing lovers and romantic adventures

³² E. C. Merrick, “The Evils of Romance.” *The Ladies’ Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16.

³³ Rush, *Thoughts upon Female Education*, 12. Rush argued that fiction did not “soften the female heart into acts of humanity.” An 1841 reviewer agreed: Girls who sighed and wept over novels “never thought of visiting the poor and destitute, or of alleviating their afflictions; who would think herself degraded were she to enter the hovel of distress and soothe the sorrows of the dying inmate. Yes, although their *very* sensitive feelings ... cause them to set their pillow with tears ... they can hear with indifference the petition of the poor mendicant at their door begging for bread, or clothing, for her children. They have no tears, no sighs for real misery; yet, poor things, they imagine they have *very* tender hearts. I have ever noticed that young ladies who read nothing but novels have more affectation and are far more easily flattered; besides, they are more cunning and artful than young ladies who refrain from this indulgence. Show me a female who is fond of her bible, who delights in her Sabbath school class, and instead of spending her time in reading novels is engaged in her household duties, or in cultivating her mind, - and I will show you a female who heart sympathises with the sick and afflicted... if she sheds any tears, it will be over her bible, when reading the account of the sufferings and death of the Saviour of sinners; if her bosom heaves with sighs, it will be for suffering humanity.” K. “Novel Reading.” *Literary Messenger* 2. 1 (June 1841): 3.

³⁴ Scholars who have addressed seduction and the response to its threat include: Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. 46-47. David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988. Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

“sour[ed] the disposition” for their every-day realities.³⁵ When parents located an eligible but dull suitor and presented him to their daughter as a prospective husband, she would refuse the man as too tiresome, contended critics; his stability and stolidity would seem boring to her rather than dependable, the prospect of an ordinary married life dull and dreary.³⁶ Opponents of novel reading told parents that there were only two possible outcomes of this scenario, and neither was good: A young, headstrong girl could reject perfectly suitable marriage offers and spend the rest of her days reading romantic novels; a perennial spinsterhood and solitary old age could be her future.³⁷ The other result was far worse – parents should worry, warned critics, that their young novel-reading daughters would believe their suitors to be as noble as the heroes in their novels instead of the rascallions they truly were. A novel-reading young woman, argued reviewers, wanted a dashing young man to ride up and carry her off in a passionate flurry. Such a daughter could surrender her body to her predatory lover outside of the marriage compact and be ruined forever. Young girls were at risk to lose their virginity and with it their entire family’s



Fig. 2.2 Novel-reading daughters were easily seduced; Richard Redgrave’s *The Outcast*

³⁵ E. C. Merrick, “The Evils of Romance.” *The Ladies’ Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16.

³⁶ “Novel Reading.” *Zion’s Herald* (September 6, 1837): 144. “[Novels] are, without doubt, *dangerous* to any one. And if for no other reason, because they present life as it is not, and never should be. Novel readers will rarely be satisfied with their fortune in life. The daughter will be dissatisfied with her parents, and ultimately with her husband and children. The mind is so accustomed, by reading novels, to *fiction*, that nothing else can satisfy it. And we venture to predict, that novel reading husbands are never too well satisfied with their wives.”

³⁷ This plotline was played out in Tabitha Tenney’s *Female Quixotism*.

respectable reputation.³⁸ The possibility of the seduction and impregnation of young women by unscrupulous men was a consummate source of concern to many fathers and mothers.

Cautionary tales that warned young people, and especially women, about the dangers associated with seduction were enormously popular during this period, including Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, Foster's *The Coquette*, and Tenney's *Female Quixotism*, Simms's *Martin Faber* and *Beauchampe*, Lippard's *Quaker City*, and Child's "Rosenglory" and "Elizabeth Wilson."³⁹ In all of these works the female protagonist becomes infatuated with a handsome man, is seduced by him, suffers materially and emotionally, and dies an ignominious death. But reviewers would soon begin to question the effect of these cautionary tales; did they redirect young women's energies away from sensual subjects (real and fictional), or was the tale simply another romantic story that would further detach young women from the salutary realities of daily living?

Part of the problem was that young women who had books could read them in the privacy of their own homes. One writer described "novel readers" this way: "[T]hat is, any who make a business as well as pleasure of reading them; who read them in the morning, and at noon, and in the evening, and by stealth after they have *retired* for the night."⁴⁰ In her excellent monograph on reading and writing in early America, Cathy N. Davidson quotes a seventeen-year-old girl

³⁸ [Adelia.] Letter to the editor. *Young Ladies' Advocate* 3 (April 1, 1834): 38. In an 1834 letter to the editor of the *Young Ladies' Advocate*, Adelia still warned young women that such men could be duplicitous. She asked for help in exposing the "iniquity of some who call themselves *gentlemen*" and "instructing the innocent and inexperienced" by "cautioning them against the artifices of the flatterer, the slanderer, and the base hypocrite."

³⁹ William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy: Or, the Triumph of Nature. Founded in Truth*. Boston: Cupples & Patterson, 1894. [Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Company, 1789.] Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple. A Tale of Truth*. Hartford: Silas Andrus [1791], 1825. Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton. A Novel: Founded on Fact*. Boston: William P. Fetridge and Co. [1797], 1855. Tabitha Tenney, *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon*. Boston: J. P. Peaslee [1801], 1825. Simms, *Martin Faber; the Story of a Criminal*. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833; and *Beauchampe or the Kentucky Tragedy*. New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1856. George Lippard, *The Quaker Cit; or, the Monks of Monk Hall*. Philadelphia: Lieary, Stuart & Co., 1845. Lydia Maria Child, "Rosenglory" and "Elizabeth Wilson." In *Fact and Fiction: A Collection of Stories*. New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1846.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus. "Religious: Novel-Reading." *New York Observer and Chronicle* 18. 35 (Aug. 29, 1840): 1.

who was determined to read a “quasi-novelistic devotional work,” *Temper*, even if it meant evading her mother’s oversight:

I sat down and read a little in *Temper*, as I begin to be apprehensive that I shall never finish it unless I make myself more time to read ... [Later] I stole upstairs under the pretense of going to bed – when I sat down and read an hour in *Temper* – at last I heard Mama coming and jumped under the coverlid with my clothes on and she thinking I was asleep took away my light.⁴¹

When the content of a young girl’s novel was intrigue and sensuality rather than religious devotions, parents and ministers were frightened.

The problem of secret novel reading could be solved, cried Protestant ministers and writers, if their parishioners would only take control of those young people under their charge – of the sons they had sent off to college, of the daughters in ladies’ seminaries or still at home, and even of the young men and women who labored for them in their kitchens or stables. Parents and employers needed to stop allowing novels in their homes and they needed to institute periods of regular Bible-reading and family devotions in their place, ministers recommended. Still, as late as in the mid-1820s seduction was mentioned only briefly and at the very end of an article on novel reading, often with the implication that a more explicit discussion transgressed the bounds of decency.⁴²

⁴¹ Diary of Susan Heath, Sept. 11 and Oct. 6, 1812. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Qtd. in Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. 69.

⁴² “Novel Reading.” *The Pittsburgh Recorder, Containing Religious, Literary and Political Information* 2.29 (Aug. 7, 1823): 456. Only occasionally was a writer more direct, such as a writer for the *Pittsburgh Recorder*: “A portion of ... novels may be charged with being seductive and immoral on a more refined plan. They are systematic, and in some instances ingenious and plausible apologists for the most atrocious crimes.... [T]he fashionable novelist endeavors to throw the blame [for these crimes] on the religious and moral institutions of the world as narrow, illiberal, and unjust. When a woman has surrendered her chastity and prostituted herself to a vile seducer, and when she suffers in her reputation and her comfort by such base conduct, all this is ascribed to ... to the ‘deplorable condition of society.... [I]n a word [these novels] frame an apology for suicide, adultery, [and] prostitution.” While reviewers discussed the physical ills that could plague novel readers, the language they used rarely castigated novel

Importantly, reviewers had different messages about the consequences of novel reading on young men and young women. Some articles equivocated that perhaps fiction might actually have a beneficial effect on young men, but they universally condemned it for young women. A *The New-York Mirror* writer addressed the rationale for the difference:

As the characters of a man and woman ought to be widely different, in like manner their education, which has so strong an influence on their characters, should be ... totally dissimilar; hence it follows, that what is beneficial to the one sex may be detrimental to the other; and this obvious conclusion will assist in solving the question concerning the advantage or disadvantage of novels, toward forming the youthful and inexperienced mind. We are of opinion, that it is very desirable for a young man to form an attachment to a virtuous woman.... Every sort of reading, therefore, which awakens the feelings of virtuous love in his breast, may be safely and prudently encouraged.⁴³

The writer was considering the plight of some young men who might be able to relax with disreputable women, but who felt overwhelmed and uncomfortable around respectable women. He promoted fiction for these young men as a window through which they might learn the “feelings of virtuous love.” For them, novels were educational tools that could enable such a man to form a lasting romantic relationship with a “virtuous woman.”

In contrast, girls and young women were understood to be already too impressionable and passionate to gain any benefit from reading fiction, and so silly and immature that they had everything lose by it. This *New-York Mirror* writer saw no benefit in novel reading for young

readers as “immoral.” In fact, the terms are rarely seen until about 1834. The first article I spotted using such terms was printed in 1836; it flatly declared novel-reading to be a “practice [that is] anti-moral.” [S.] “Novel Reading. – No. 6.” *Christian Watchman* 17.24 (June 10, 1836): 1.

⁴³ “Novel Reading.” *New-York Mirror* (September 21, 1833): 91. Novelist Catherine Sedgwick in *Live and Let Live* wrote in her Preface: “Our young ladies are taught French, Italian, drawing, music, &c.; and let them be; these are the ornaments and luxuries of education.” Catherine Sedgwick, *Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837. v.

women: “But when we consider a *girl*, who is just entering into life, with a susceptible heart, instead of recommending novels in general to her perusal, we would strongly persuade her from reading them.”⁴⁴ The writer argued that women’s “inclinations ... lead them to wish to please.” An immature young woman too easily fell in love with a man who, though he “appears to like her now” may in “a little time dissipate his partiality.” In fact, a man “may only sport with her feelings.” Such situations were bound to end badly, said the writer. In 1829 another writer had commented in *The Christian Secretary*, “We do not ... censure all novels as invariably hurtful to the mind. But an exclusive devotion to these productions – the putting them into the hands of a female, before the taste is formed, is what we decidedly disapprove.”⁴⁵ A statement apparently made by English novelist Jeremy Lewis was reprinted widely by magazines; ostensibly Lewis had declared, “No young unmarried woman ... ought to be permitted to read a novel of any description. Had I a daughter with a heart of ice ... she should never pore on a tale of love.” As magazines reprinted his comment they highlighted the fact that Lewis, who wrote novels as a way to earn a living, would deny them to young women: “Such sentiments from a novel writer must be allowed to come with considerable weight, inasmuch as they are in direct opposition to his interest.”⁴⁶ So, while many articles warned both men and women away from novel reading, many others saw it as offering benefits to men and only devastation to women.

As I have said, articles for and against novel reading had appeared in periodicals on both sides of the Atlantic for a half century, with occasional surges following evangelical revivals. In 1829 articles on novel reading began appearing in America with greater frequency again, almost

⁴⁴ “Novel Reading.” *New-York Mirror* (September 21, 1833): 91. The writer quotes a “very sensible woman” who “once honestly confessed” to her that after reading the “novel of ‘*Sir Charles Grandison*’” she had “expected to have found in some lover a character similar to that of Richardson’s hero.” While waiting for this ideal lover she was “prevented ... from accepting several offers that would otherwise have appeared highly advantageous and proper.” Now all she had was the “felicity of being an old maid.”

⁴⁵ “Variety: Influence of Novel Reading in Forming the Intellectual Character.” *Christian Secretary* 8.16 (May 9, 1829): 64.

⁴⁶ “Novel Reading.” *Baptist Chronicle & Literary Register* (May 1, 1832): 80.

all of them condemning the practice. I have located fifty-five articles on the subject that were printed in the decade between 1829 and 1839, which was a five-fold increase over the previous decade. Why the sudden interest in the subject in 1829, and why was it so one-sided? Religious revivals had been on-going; 1825 was the most recent year of tremendous evangelicalism, not 1829. In the remainder of this chapter I suggest that Frances Wright's public lecture appearances created social upheaval and increased the level of antipathy to novel reading. The intrusion of her radical philosophies into the public conversation – especially those promoting atheism and women's sexual freedoms – was a reality that many Americans found profoundly disturbing.

WRIGHTING THE WRONGS OF NOVEL READING

In early 1829 conventional magazines began connecting what they were characterizing as the nation-destroying habit of the reading of popular novels to the ideologies of Frances Wright and other radicals. The first evidence appears in a *Christian Register* letter from an aunt to her niece, which focused readers' attention on the "opening [of] a ladies' reading room" in the young woman's city. The elder relative vehemently advocated against the proposal, arguing that there were "but few ladies who cannot readily command all the books, which their leisure, or abilities may give them an opportunity to read."⁴⁷ She averred that the "interests" of any women who were yet unsatisfied but wanted more reading matter must be "excessive." But moreover, in her letter the aunt linked what she saw as the outrageous public performances of three specific women to the idea of a woman openly reading books, especially novels, in public reading rooms:

What can be more disgusting than Miss Wright as a lecturer, Mrs. Royal as a book maker, and Miss Livermore as a preacher! – And why is it that we shrink from such a display; – because these women are out of their place – their minds want balance, and they are invading the province of man.

⁴⁷ "Ladies' Reading Room," *Christian Register* 8.6 (Feb. 7, 1829): 22.

paths of false philosophy. What can be more disgusting than Miss Wright as a lecturer, Mrs. Royall as a book maker, and Miss Livermore as a preacher!—And why is it that we shrink from such a display;—because these women are out of their place—their minds want balance, and they are invading the province of man. Let us beware, dear A. lest we make our literary acquirements, rocks, on which we wreck alike the delicate barks of our happiness and respectability. If a woman's literary tastes and acquirements lead her to neglect her family, while she is writing an essay or reviewing a novel

Fig. 2.3 “What can be more disgusting than Miss Wright as a lecturer ...?” “Ladies’ Reading Room”

Both writer Anne Royall and evangelical Harriet Livermore were well known in 1829, the former as a “common scold” and the latter as a preacher – she addressed the United States Congress four times with the “traditional Protestant message of conversion, repentance, and salvation.”⁴⁸ Wright, Royall, and Livermore, wrote the aunt, were “disgusting” because they were “out of their place,” just as any woman who sat in a public space and read books (especially novels) was disgusting and out of her place. Her niece should “shrink from such a display,” she said, “lest we make our literary acquirements, rocks on which we wreck ... the delicate barks of our happiness and respectability.” Women would ruin their lives if they could not overcome their desire to acquire and to read more and more books. In fact, the aunt warned, any woman who wanted an excessive number of books or who put herself on display in a public space certainly would be apt to “neglect her family ... while she [wa]s writing an essay or reviewing a novel.” This is the first print evidence where Wright is connected, albeit indirectly, with the ills that novel reading brought.

⁴⁸ Catherine A. Brekus, “Harriet Livermore, the Pilgrim Stranger: Female Preaching and Biblical Feminism in Early-Nineteenth-Century America.” *Church History* 65.3 (Sept. 1996): 389-404. Livermore first addressed Congress in January 1827; her sermon “was such a success that she was permitted to preach to Congress again in 1832, 1838, and 1843, each time to large crowds.” 389. “[S]ome [people] ... found [Royall’s] behavior undignified. ‘She was a loud talker – not delicate – and appeared to me and others somewhat deranged,’ noted one man; others found her overbearing and even rude.” 395, 389. Elizabeth J. Clapp, “‘A Virago-Errant in Enchanted Armor?’: Anne Royall’s 1829 Trial as a Common Scold.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Summer 2003): 207-232. John Quincy Adams commented that she “continues to make herself noxious to many persons; tolerated by some and feared by others, by her deportment and her books; treating all with a familiarity which often passes for impudence, insulting all those who treat her with incivility, and then lampooning them in her books.” 211.

While this linkage is secondhand, it yet is the first in what would become for many evangelicals an increasingly direct connection between “Fanny Wrightism” or other “ultraist” radical ideologies and novel reading. In fact, in 1830 conventional magazines railed that civilized society was threatened because Americans were reading about Wrightism in popular novels. Evangelical editors turned the argument inside out and averred that Wright’s followers were reading pernicious popular novels. Regardless of which argument was used, in almost every example I have found in which editors blame radicals for the breakdown of society, Wright’s name appears. Sometimes editors included the names of one or two others, such as Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, Robert Dale Owen, Thomas Skidmore, or Abner Kneeland, or even philosophers such as Voltaire or Hume, but they rarely omitted Frances Wright.

I have traced the inception of the accusation that Wright was connected to society’s possible ruin through novel reading to one particular 1830 conversation among writers and editors at four magazines: *The Free Enquirer*, *Genius of Temperance*, *New-York Evangelist*, and *Western Recorder*. Their focus was the bestselling and suspect novels of Edward Bulwer, a follower of Jeremy Bentham and future politician, and specifically Bulwer’s novel, *Paul Clifford*. Although Robert Dale Owen, not Wright, was the editor writing for *The Free Enquirer* in the discussion, conventional readers and editors still believed the more infamous Wright to be a principal antagonist. After all, her presence lingered. When the exchange began in early July 1830, she had only left the United States for Europe a few days before. Her articles continued to appear on every page next to Owen’s articles, and her name remained emblazoned on the masthead preceding Robert Dale Owen’s.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Robert Dale Owen, “Frances Wright.” *Free Enquirer* 2.37 (July 10, 1830): 289. Owen’s continued editing and distribution of the *Free Enquirer* allowed fear-mongers still to dread of Wright’s imminent return. Wright seemed to hover as an evil spirit, looking for the opportunity to snatch innocent women and children from the arms of their loving, Christian families.



Fig. 2.4 Wright’s name still on the masthead as editor/proprietor, 1830

In early July 1830 Owen printed a letter from a correspondent who unreservedly praised *Paul Clifford*. In what I will demonstrate was a significant moment in the public’s subsequent perception of Frances Wright’s connectedness to fiction – simply because the comment appeared in “her” newspaper – the letter lampooned conservative Protestant ministers:

[T]he moral, philosophical and political speculations continually introduced [in *Paul Clifford*] are so decidedly liberal, that could any of the Reverend clergy bring themselves to the heinous crime of reading a novel, Bulwer must, long ere this, have had the anathemas of the church fulminated against him.

The writer’s disdain for evangelical Protestants was obvious, but such sentiments were common in *The Free Enquirer*. His ridicule of the conservative clergy’s position on novel reading as a “heinous crime,” however, was not common, even in radical newspapers. Such a charge was intended to make the clergy look foolish and old-fashioned, and had the potential to draw the attention and concern of prominent evangelicals. The letter writer’s scorn of the evangelical position on novel reading reflected radical influences and reinvigorated a tired debate.

Even more threatening to conservatives was this *Free Enquirer* writer’s pleasure “[t]hat these novels are so popular,” which the writer interpreted as a “happy and pleasing earnest of the liberal turn of public sentiment” at that particular time.⁵⁰ Such a smug and celebratory declaration likely provoked evangelical clergy, who had been warning their congregations for a

⁵⁰ “Communications.” *The Free Enquirer* 2.37 (July 10, 1830): 293.

decade that the radicalism of Thomas Paine and Frances Wright could destroy America.⁵¹ Now Wright's newspaper was crowing over what it viewed as signs of liberals' success.

Probably prompted by this letter from a reader, in the same issue of *The Free Enquirer* Owen briefly addressed the value of Bulwer's Pelham novels. Admitting he had not yet thoroughly read *Paul Clifford*, initially he equivocated. While he approved of Bulwer's "stamp of liberality" and "not unfrequent ... originality and genius," he also questioned Bulwer's enormous popularity. He wondered if that popularity was evidence that Bulwer was "conce[ding] to the prejudices of the times" in order to maintain his readers' approval.⁵²

At almost the same time that this exchange was printed by Owen in *The Free Enquirer*, editor William Goodell printed an article in the *National Philanthropist and Investigator and Genius of Temperance* authored by "S." that decried novel reading – an event which I will connect to Wright and Owen shortly. "S." seemed unaware of *Paul Clifford* at the time, and made no mention of the *Free Enquirer* or of any radical movements or individuals. He simply laid out the basic arguments for and against novel reading and concluded that "habitual novel readers spend time in this way which ought to be given to other pursuits." "S." also mused that "truth," or the facts contained in non-fiction, "is beautiful – more beautiful than fiction." In his closing paragraph he brought religion into the discussion, which he warned was a "more serious ... objection to novels" than any other. "S." suggested that "those who would become Christians should carefully avoid ... this kind of reading."⁵³ But the writer stops there. "S." makes no claims on the effects of novel reading on society as a whole, and does not suggest even the slightest linkage between novel reading and intention on any person's or group's part.

⁵¹ See Lyman Beecher's warnings about young people following Thomas Paine's ideologies, cited in Chapter 1.

⁵² "Sketch of Character." *The Free Enquirer* 2.37 (July 10, 1830): 289.

⁵³ [S.] "Is Novel Reading, Upon the Whole, Advantageous?" *National Philanthropist and Investigator and Genius of Temperance* 5.1, New Series 2.18 (July 8, 1830): 1.

There is another objection to novels, more serious than any I have advanced. And that is, the injury they do to religion. They shut up every avenue to serious reflection, and indispose the mind for religious duties, and produce an insensibility of soul, exceedingly unfavorable to the attainment or the increase of piety. Christians in the exercise of religious feeling, will not relish this kind of reading—and those who would become Christians should carefully avoid it. S.

Fig. 2.5 “Is Novel Reading, Upon the Whole, Advantageous?” “S” said, *No*.

Two weeks later *The Free Enquirer* printed an article that essentially handed *Genius of Temperance* editor Goodell evidence that demanded any self-respecting conservative to link novel reading with radicals – a linkage that had not been made before. Either Owen’s original correspondent or someone new wrote Owen about Edward Bulwer’s novels, a letter that Owen printed in *The Free Enquirer* on July 24.⁵⁴ This writer stoutly defended Bulwer against Owen’s earlier insinuations of Bulwer’s possibly less-than-noble motives in writing *Paul Clifford*. Interestingly, this time the writer signed himself “Theon,” which happened to be the rather unique name of the young protagonist in Frances Wright’s early novel, *A Few Days in Athens*. Whether or not this writer (“Theon”) intended to prod Owen’s recall of Wright’s atheistic text, within a few months Owen would write an extended review of the novel, praising it and discussing his plan to reprint it.

As had the first letter on Bulwer, this second letter to *The Free Enquirer* about Bulwer’s *Paul Clifford* attacked the Protestant clergy, reviling them as “enemies to human improvement” and condemning them for their “arrogance and contempt.” Theon praised Bulwer for risking “alarming the fears and wounding the tender consciences, of a great part of his readers” by allowing a character who was “skeptical” (agnostic or even atheistic) to “go to heaven.” If the “great part” of Bulwer’s readers were conservative Christians – an unlikely possibility, though

⁵⁴ Theon. “Communications.” *The Free Enquirer* 2.39 (July 24, 1830): 309.

certainly some young people were reading these subversive novels without their parents' permission – then indeed the novelist's placing an atheist alongside God likely would have been shocking to them. In that same July 24 issue of *The Free Enquirer* Owen printed his own complete review of *Paul Clifford*, having finished his reading of both volumes of the book. Now Owen was in full agreement with his correspondent, confirming that Bulwer had written a “painfully powerful ... satire of *mankind*,” or of a “civilized society” that Bulwer saw as “deprav[ed].”⁵⁵

Importantly, in this issue and in the earlier issue of *The Free Enquirer* as both Owen and his correspondent(s) were deriding evangelical Protestants, they also were using language that drew attention to the fact that *Paul Clifford* was a work of fiction – a genre that had already been suspect to an older generation of conservatives. In his original commentary on Bulwer, Owen highlighted Bulwer's embeddedness in the world of fiction, speaking of his “true novelist-*imagination*” and use of “romantic coloring.”⁵⁶ Now Owen gave a hearty endorsement of this particular novel. He noted that while as a reader he rarely made it past the second chapter of any novel, he encouraged readers of *The Free Enquirer* to take up and read *Paul Clifford*, and not to “cast it aside with a pshaw! as only ‘another of these never-ending novels.’”⁵⁷ This may be a novel, implied Owen, but it had tremendous intellectual value in its potential to edify uninformed people about critical issues.

Indeed, both Owen and Theon pointed to the beneficial power of liberal novels like Bulwer's to enlighten a populace nearly blinded by the “superstition” of evangelical Protestant beliefs. In his letter to *The Free Enquirer* “Theon” was grateful that through the medium of popular fiction Bulwer was confronting and “exposing the baseless foundation ... of superstition

⁵⁵ Robert Dale Owen. “Review. Paul Clifford.” *The Free Enquirer* 2.39 (July 24, 1830): 310-311.

⁵⁶ “Sketch of Character.” *The Free Enquirer* 2.37 (July 10, 1830): 289.

⁵⁷ Owen. “Review. Paul Clifford.”

and prejudice.” He believed that through novels Bulwer could reach “a large class of the community” with “many important truths regarding laws, morals and religion” that the “heavier artillery of Polemics, or dry discussion, would never reach.”⁵⁸ That is, ordinary, non-academic Americans would not read abstruse arguments that questioned evangelical Protestantism in theological or philosophical magazines; however, said Theon, they would be willing to engage with such ideas infused into popular fiction. Fiction itself became a form that radicals were celebrating, which could only give opponents of novel reading more cause for concern.

Theon’s letter and argument persuaded Owen, who now praised Bulwer with the label of “politic novel-writer” and “novelist-reformer.”⁵⁹ Now Owen “retract[ed]” his “doubts as to the degree of good [Bulwer’s] writings may do” and agreed with his correspondent that Bulwer was doing as much as he could to further the cause of “honest reformers.” Any readers of *Paul Clifford*, no matter how “orthodox in religion, in morals and in politics” they might be, would come to “doubt ... whether the ‘present order of things’” was “just as it ought to be” – which, according to Owen, was a good thing. That is, after reading *Paul Clifford* even the most close-minded, dogmatic evangelical Protestants would begin to question their outdated, conservative positions. Owen agreed that the sort of “plain language” and “naked truth” that Bulwer presented was necessary to reach America’s “intolerant and proscriptive ... public.” He no longer questioned whether Bulwer’s popularity implied his abnegating his principles, but now believed “that [Bulwer] *does* go as far as a popular writer can, who will preserve his popularity.” And, like Theon, Owen was pleased at how well the novel was selling – it “was bought up

⁵⁸ Theon. “Communications.”

⁵⁹ Owen. “Review. Paul Clifford.”

almost entirely *on the first day*” – which he saw as “no insignificant or unpromising sign of the times.”⁶⁰

That very “sign of the times” was exactly the sort of danger signal that evangelical Protestants, like the editors at *Genius of Temperance*,⁶¹ had dreaded. Sure enough, the news had been delivered by the radical *Free Enquirer*, with Frances Wright’s name on masthead. Conservatives had tied the reading of impious novels to society’s downfall before, and now the menace had returned. Because innocent readers could learn radical ideas through Bulwer’s fiction, conservatives feared that radicals were actively threatening American society. According to the gloating writers of Wright’s *Free Enquirer*, real readers were buying this terrible book in droves. But no one yet had drawn a direct connection between Wright and novel reading.

That would finally happen in early August of 1830.⁶² *Genius of Temperance* editor William Goodell, who had printed the article against novel reading in July and was now joined with new co-editor Phineas Crandall, came across Owen’s promotion of Bulwer.⁶³ In their own

⁶⁰ Robert Dale Owen. Editorial response to Theon, “Communications.” *The Free Enquirer* 2.39 (July 24, 1830): 310.

⁶¹ “Art. IV –The Relations of the Churches and Mr. Garrison to the American Antislavery Movement.” *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 63, Fourth Series. 33.19 (April 1881): 270-286. 284. According to a Methodist journal, the *National Philanthropist* was started by a Baptist minister, Rev. William Collier. Frank Luther Mott merely cites the names and dates of the magazine. Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1742-1850*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1930. 473.

⁶² *Genius of Temperance*, August 11, 1830. David S. Reynolds also cites a Sept. 15, 1830 article in *Genius of Temperance* about “Paul Clifford”: “In the many issues of the newspaper I surveyed, I found only one piece of fiction.... This deemphasis of fiction was reflected in several articles attacking novels and the reportage of crimes in the popular press.” David S. Reynolds, “Blacks Cats and Delirium Tremens: Temperance and the American Renaissance.” In *The Serpent in the Cup: Temperance in American Literature*. David S. Reynolds and Debra J. Rosenthal, eds. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997. 24.

⁶³ Reynolds, “Blacks Cats,” 24. According to David S. Reynolds the “evangelical organ” was “[f]ounded in Boston in 1826 as the *National Philanthropist* ..., moved to Providence in 1829 and the next year to Manhattan, where it ran until 1833.” In early July 1830 the editor, William Goodell, moved the paper, which he had already moved from Boston to Providence, to 137 Nassau Street in New York City, exactly one mile away from the *Free Enquirer* offices at 359 Broome Street. Apparently he merged the paper with others, because it became *Genius of Temperance, Philanthropist and People’s Advocate*, and gained new co-editors, first Phineas Crandall, and later a third, S.P. Hines. According to the MARC Bibliographic Record, the New York series began as Vol. 1, No. 1, on July 14, 1830, and went through Vol. 4, No. 25 (Dec. 25, 1833), or Vol. 5, No. 2. According to MARC, for various periods from 1830-1833 the newspaper was published simultaneously in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. In 1834 it became the *Moral Lyceum, and Genius of Temperance*. At least, according to the 1834 *Longworth’s*

review Goodell and Crandall pointed out that *Paul Clifford* was regarded as a “great favorite in ‘the very first circles’ of aristocratic licentiousness” as evidenced by its “high commendation by *Robert Dale Owen* and *Fanny Wright* in their ‘Free Inquirer [sic].’”⁶⁴ Goodell and Crandall argued that “[w]hen *their* praise [Wright’s and Owen’s] is bestowed on *Bulwer*, the author of *Paul Clifford*, there can be little danger of mistaking the character of this work.” That is, the sentiments in *Bulwer*’s novels were undoubtedly consonant with the radical “scheme of [Robert] Owenism” and [William] “Godwin’s scheme” and “*Fanny Wright’s Explanatory Notes*,” or Wright and Owen would not have endorsed them.

This popular novel, which is understood to be a great favorite in “the very first circles” of aristocratic licentiousness, and of course, equally so, with the less polished, but equally intellectual herd who successfully ape them, is “re- veyed” in terms of high commendation by *Robert Dale Owen* and *Fanny Wright* in their “Free Inquirer.” This is as might be expected. With the estimate we have long held of the literary taste and moral appetite of the fashionables, we should look for their affinity with Owenism. We speak of the pleasure-loving, novel-reading community :

Fig. 2.6 Wright was part of a “pleasure-loving, novel-reading community” “*Paul Clifford*”

But the article went further in drawing a connection to Wright. Goodell and Crandall labeled Wright and Robert Dale Owen as “*fashionables*” and a “pleasure-loving, novel-reading community.” Criticizing Wright and others as “pleasure-loving” would have resonated with evangelicals who despised the radicals’ Epicureanism and preached a Christian anti-corporealism and self-sacrifice. They sneered at any literary review that appeared in the *Free Enquirer*, for they had a very low opinion of Wright’s and Owen’s “literary *taste* and moral *appetite*.” Goodell

American Almanac, the then *Moral Lyceum & Genius of Temperance* was located at 137 Nassau Street. Longworth’s *American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory, for the Fifty-Ninth Year of American Independence*. New York: Thomas Longworth, 1834. 774. That address, according to an 1839 Bradford map of New York City, was at the corner of Nassau and Beekman streets in downtown New York City. According to Orestes Brownson’s memoirs, compiled by his son, the Hall of Science was at 359 Broome Street. Henry F. Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson’s Early Life: From 1803 to 1844*. Detroit, Mich.: H. F. Brownson, 1898. 40-41. ⁶⁴ Goodell and Crandall condemned the “*fashionables*” for their “affinity with Owenism,” a damning reference to the socialist and atheistic philosophies of Robert Dale’s father, Robert Owen, considered a far greater threat by evangelicals than the son.

and Crandall used the latter term, “*appetite*,” rather than “the term *principle*,” which, they say, “would imply more intellectual research than could be attributed to the class in question.” In this attack, rather than arguing that radicals were bad because they read novels, the writers argued that this novel must be bad because bad and intellectually deficient people had endorsed it. Where the aunt in the *Christian Register* article had merely included Wright in a list of bold women and linked them with the shame of novel reading in public, the *Genius of Temperance* now directly linked novel reading to a licentious and perniciously influential Frances Wright.⁶⁵

Such is the language of the Free Enquirer. Had we commenced this article by stating that a majority of the rising and just risen generation were training and trained up in the principles of Owen and Fanny Wright, the reader would have thrown down the paper, indignant at the imputation. But here are the facts: he can make his own deductions. He sees the character of Bulwer's novels.— He knows, or may know, their almost unbounded popularity.

Is there any possibility of our country's escaping, for any length of time, the awful explosion that in every other age and nation, has allowed the introduction of such licentious literature? If so, the first symptom of hope, will be a deep sense of danger.

Fig. 2.7 Americans were reading Wright's and Owen's radical principles in Bulwer's licentious novels; “Paul Clifford”

“[H]ere are the facts,” they argued, and ask their reader to “make his own deductions.” Their argument was that, since Bulwer's novels were experiencing “almost unbounded popularity,” and since the youthful “pleasure-loving, novel-reading community” was the primary audience for the novels, therefore, by reading Bulwer, the “majority of the rising and just risen generation were training and trained up in the principles of Owen and Fanny Wright.”⁶⁶ Goodell and Crandall conclude that Bulwer's enormous success was evidence of the growing popularity of

⁶⁵ “Paul Clifford.” *Genius of Temperance* (1830). Qtd. in “Literary Notices: The Pelham Novels,” *New York Evangelist* 1.27 (October 2, 1830): 108.

⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the writers alternate in their use of the last name “Owen” without indicating whether they are referring to the father, Robert Owen, or to the son, Robert Dale Owen.

Wright's and Owen's principles – that, they said, fundamentally threatened American civilization.

Goodell and Crandall assured the reader that “in every other age and nation ... the introduction of such licentious literature” had been preceded by an “awful explosion” – which they all needed to anticipate with a “deep sense of danger.” They warned that the “topic of complaint” in Bulwer's novel was the “abuses in England and elsewhere which ought to be reformed.” But in fact, said Goodell and Crandall, the supposed reform efforts of Godwin, Bulwer, and Owen were “a pretext for dissolving the ‘social state.’” Worse, readers were being tutored in mocking America's social and moral system by reading Bulwer, for it was “government itself and law itself that is held up to ridicule and odium” in *Paul Clifford*. Goodell and Crandall argued that “the avowed object of the novelist is to bring the ‘social state,’ into contempt, to unhinge civil society; to annul law.” For these reviewers, the widespread acceptance of the radical principles that readers were ingesting by reading popular novels threatened America: “Those who understand the efforts of Owen and Fanny Wright well know that their success involves the downfall of all the present organizations of civil society.”⁶⁷ As far as these reviewers were concerned, Wright and Owen were agents actively conniving – through their own efforts and through willing mouthpieces like Bulwer – to destroy America's Christian foundations.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ “Paul Clifford.” *Genius of Temperance* 5.6, Union Series 2.23 (Aug. 11, 1830). Qtd. in “Literary Notices: The Pelham Novels,” *New York Evangelist* 1.27 (October 2, 1830): 108.

⁶⁸ *Genius of Temperance* 5.8, Union Series 2.25 (Aug. 25, 1830): 2. Goodell and Crandall followed with another article on August 25: “Mechanics and Working Men! – What think you of the scheme of ethics, and the tone of fashionable literature that calls it mere *cant*, to set ‘the merits of honest ability or laborious trade in opposition to’ the crime of highway robbery? What think you of the Free Enquirer of Owen and Fanny Wright, into which ‘the tone of sentiment’ here exhibited is copied with approbation?” He has just noted: “Paul Clifford. – We think it proper to sustain our late remarks on this popular novel of Bulwer, by some additional specifications. The Free Enquirer of Aug. 7th contains some further commendations, and continues its extracts from the favorite work. – We purposely speak of the *novel* in connection with the *oracle of anarchy*, because we wish to *put* things together that *belong* together, in order, if *possible*, to induce public enquiry, and avert public ruin.”

Within a few weeks an avowed “denominated Calvinist”⁶⁹ editor at a third magazine, *The New York Evangelist*, reprinted the recent *Genius of Temperance* article, praising Goodell and Crandall in a short introduction and wishing them “great encouragement.”⁷⁰ The editor himself argued that novel reading was an “unnatural stimulus” that resulted in “ungodly children.” In introducing Goodell and Crandall’s review of *Paul Clifford* the editor warned “godly parents” about “what sort of training their ungodly children will receive from the *permitted* reading of the popular novels.” The only solution the writer had to the potential threat to the nation’s security from Wrightism and other ultraisms was to encourage parents to monitor young people and preclude their ever reading “popular novels” such as Bulwer’s. He advised them to provide their “precious children with *safe* and profitable books, and thus preventing even a desire for the unnatural stimulus of novel reading.”⁷¹

Ten days later the *Utica Western Recorder* reprinted still another article from the *Genius of Temperance* entitled “Licentious Literature” that charged Wright and other radicals with threatening America’s foundations by “swelling the ranks of anarchy, and the future armies of despotism, from among our fashionable and headstrong youths.” Goodell and Crandall warned that “what Hume and Voltaire once attempted, and what Owen and Fanny Wright are now again *attempting*, by philosophical disquisitions, the popular *novelists* of the day are more effectually *accomplishing* by their creations.” So, the *Genius* editors argued, the radical philosophies, most

⁶⁹ Mott, *History of American Magazines*, 373. According to Mott, the magazine was not founded until 1832 by editor Joshua Leavitt. In fact it was founded in March 1830, but the editorship is unclear: “[This] is the first number of a Religious Paper to [be published] weekly in this city, by an Association of [clergy]. Its design, as intimated in the title, is [illegible] to promote Revivals of Religion, and to [disseminate] the essential doctrines of the Bible [embraced] generally by those who are denominated Calvinists.” “New York Evangelist.” *New York Evangelist* 1.1 (March 6, 1830): 1. Leavitt did take over in December of 1831. According to Leavitt’s Dec. 10, 1831 editorial, he and “Mr. O. E. Huntington, of this City,” were “now the *sole proprietors* of the Evangelist.” He said he had “been called to take the permanent charge of the Evangelist, as Editor” and also “part owner of the Establishment.” He said had “been a frequent contributor to it from the beginning, ... having edited one half of the first forty-four numbers, during the occasional absences and ill health of Mr. Saxton.” “Editorial Arrangement.” *New York Evangelist* 2.37 (Dec. 10, 1831): 355.

⁷⁰ “Literary Notices: The Pelham Novels, Paul Clifford.” *New York Evangelist* 1.27 (October 2, 1830): 108.

⁷¹ “The Pelham Novels, Paul Clifford.” *New York Evangelist*.

recently of Wright and Owen, had so infiltrated the popular literature of the day that carefree and impressionable young people were vulnerable to becoming persuaded by them.⁷² Young,

LICENTIOUS LITERATURE.
In vain shall we have established a press for purposes of moral and political reform, unless we can succeed in calling public attention to the demoralising and all unhinging effects of licentious literature. What Hume and Voltaire once attempted, and what Owen and Fanny Wright are now again attempting, by philosophical disquisition, the popular novelists of the day are more effectually accomplishing by their creations. The very characters which licen-

Fig. 2.8 Wright and Owen are implicated again in "Licentious Literature"

impressionable readers found role models in heroes like Bulwer's Paul Clifford, argued Goodell and Crandall: the "very characters which [the] licentious philosophy" of Wright and Owen "seeks to form, and would approve, are made the admired heroes" of popular novels.⁷³ Young readers could not have understood the "philosophical disquisitions" of Owen and Wright, the writers scoffed, for the "modern rakes and dandies" lacked "intellect enough to understand and relish the *theory* of Epeurean [sic] licentiousness, in an abstract form." But, they warned, "the veriest simpleton, sot, ... swindler, that ever haunted a theatre ... or a grog shop, can easily understand the *practice*" of hedonistic principles as explained by "popular novelists of the day." The reading of licentious novels threatened to "demoralis[e] and ... unhing[e]" America's youth, and Frances Wright bore significant responsibility for the breakdown.⁷⁴ Eleven days later, Robert Dale Owen reprinted a five-year-old *Philadelphia Chronicle* book review, effectively reintroducing Frances Wright's obscure and long-forgotten atheistic novel, *A Few Days in*

⁷² "Licentious Literature." *Western Recorder* 7.41 (Oct. 12, 1830): 164.

⁷³ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Paul Clifford*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1848. vii. In the preface to the 1840 edition of *Paul Clifford*, Bulwer comments that that novel was "the *only one* in which a robber has been made the hero." Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Paul Clifford*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1848. vii.

⁷⁴ "Licentious Literature." *Western Recorder*.

Athens, into the American popular imagination.⁷⁵ Many uninformed readers now were aware that Wright herself had written a novel that celebrated Epicureanism and atheism.⁷⁶

Another article directly linking Wright and novel reading would not appear until August 1833, or two and a half years later, when Sarah Josepha Hale renewed the subject in *Ladies' Magazine*. Perhaps Wright's absence from America during that period – she was in hiding in Paris with her husband and baby daughter – required reviewers to look elsewhere for scapegoats. Still, Wright's name continued to appear on the masthead of the *Free Enquirer* alongside co-editor Robert Dale Owen's. Almost certainly the impetus for the new article attacking Wright, entitled "English Novels," was Frances Trollope's 1832 burlesque of America, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. Though this text was not a novel, Trollope was well known as a novelist, and this latest freewheeling and merciless text had created uproar in America and a furious backlash against the English.⁷⁷ While Trollope had herself lampooned Wright in her book, Hale, the editor of *Ladies' Magazine*, went much further to exact retribution on the English by printing this new article.⁷⁸

The ostensible goal of the August 1833 *Ladies' Magazine* piece was to reject English immorality and to urge Americans to hold themselves to higher moral standards. The author, a Rev. M.A.H. Niles, opened with a few paragraphs that paid polite "filial respect" to England's

⁷⁵ Robert Dale Owen, "Review. "A Few Days in Athens." *The Free Enquirer* 2.52 (October 23, 1830): 409. Owen named the text among the "works of fiction" that even "philosophers and sages" such as Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Jefferson – both under attack by many as atheists – enjoyed reading. Owen claimed that "[b]efore bigotry had raised an outcry against the name of Frances Wright, ... the admiration which 'A few days in Athens' excited was freely expressed, even by those whose orthodoxy would now shrink from the confession that they ever applauded or approved a single word from her pen." Robert Dale Owen, "Review. "A Few Days in Athens." *The Free Enquirer* 2.52 (October 23, 1830): 409.

⁷⁶ "The Three New Works." *The Free Enquirer* 3.11 (Jan. 8, 1831): 88. Owen promised to reprint the book, again apparently without her permission; the edition was available by early 1831. While I have found no immediate periodical response to Owen's review, the responses to Wright after her disappearance to Europe routinely referred to her as a follower of Epicurus, a specific reference most commonly found in *A Few Days in Athens*. "Moral Physiology, A Few Days in Athens and Queen Mab, are now published and ready for delivery."

⁷⁷ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. 2 volumes. London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832.

⁷⁸ The public rejection in 1828-1830 of Wright's philosophies pronounced in her lectures encouraged Trollope's defection from Wright's group of supporters, as it did many others.

“inspired bards” and their “rich treasures.”⁷⁹ Soon, though, he began to address the real concern: the “polluted emanations of her press,” or English novels, which were the “darkest blots on England’s fair escutcheon.” The author was concerned that Americans, awed by traditional and classical English literature, would consume popular English novels, unaware of how vile they had become. Niles admonished his readers not to “follow in imagination the lordly knight and titled dame” through their fictional adventures, for too often those stories were filled with “vice and corruption.” The writer looked “with pity and contempt, on the degradation” of England for having produced those works, and promised to “censure and neglect . . . such works.”

The *Ladies’ Magazine* writer moved then to what had become a critical area of concern for American parents: their daughters. Girls, Niles wrote, were supposed to grow up to become proper ladies, the “guardians of our morals, and the safeguard of our happiness as a nation.” Yet young women had been receiving more education, were “among the fraternity of enlightened minds,” and so had greater access to books than ever before. The writer worried that these young women would “read and discuss” books filled with immorality “with companions of the other sex,” and that “[f]amiliarity with these pictures of depravity is peculiarly pernicious to America’s young, enlightened daughters.” He warned parents that “fascinating works,” or popular novels, “make [readers] familiar with vice.” Niles wanted American parents to realize that if they failed to monitor their daughters’ choice of reading materials, those daughters were vulnerable to being seduced and impregnated by immoral men. This, of course, was not a new admonition, but simply a revisiting of an old theme about the perils of novel reading for females.

Niles claimed that the source for this moral ruin of America’s daughters was Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen: “Mr. Owen and Miss Wright have endeavored in vain to disseminate, in this country, their vile and debasing doctrines; to destroy the sanctity of our

⁷⁹ M.A.H. Niles, “English Novels.” *Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6.8 (August 1833): 352-354.

homes, and break down the fortresses that guard honor and virtue: their sentiments are too gross to be received with complacency.”⁸⁰ Whether Niles had ever read them or not, he was reviving the *New York Evangelist* and *Genius of Temperance* attack that through their radical principles Wright and Owen were working to bring about the breakdown of American society. But Niles had identified a new scheme by which they would do it: Wright and Owen would destroy American society through America’s young women. That is, when daughters encountered Wright’s and Owen’s radical principles they would let down their guard – or their hymenal

Mr. Owen and Miss Wright have endeavored in vain to disseminate, in this country, their vile and debasing doctrines ; to destroy the sanctity of our homes, and break down the fortresses that guard honor and virtue : their sentiments are too gross to be received with complacency, even by those who, though destitute of religious principle, are still possessed of taste and refinement.
But there is, in those fascinating works which make us familiar with vice, without producing hatred and disgust for it, a poison more deadly, because it works silently and unheed-

Fig. 2.9 Rev. Niles rails against Wright’s principles promulgated in “English Novels”

“fortresses”– and succumb to the sexual advances of rakes and seducers. The respectability and “sanctity of [American] homes” and families would be destroyed when an unmarried daughter became pregnant and produced an illegitimate child.

Niles did not offer evidence as to how young women were supposed to encounter Wright’s and Owen’s doctrines. But, having just blamed Wright and Owen for the potential debauchery of America’s girls, the author apparently was claiming that young women could become “familiar with vice” by reading Wright’s and Owen’s “debasing doctrines” infused into popular fiction. English novels were “messengers of vice” to women, he contended, for “in those fascinating works” was a “poison more deadly, because it works silently and unheeded” –

⁸⁰ Niles, “English Novels.”

that is, the books were contaminated with Wright's and Owen's "efforts of infidelity" or principles of sexual freedom and atheism.⁸¹

Ultimately, argued Niles, the evil influence of Wright's and Owen's philosophies threatened to "exert a[n] unholy influence upon our national morals." Invoking America's "maternal ancestors," he turned to young women themselves in a direct appeal:

Daughters of America, to you belong ... sacred duties...; ...'tis yours, in a peculiar degree, to guard from corruption the sentiments of virtue, honor and religion ... Will you not ... banish from your hearts, and from your homes, descriptions of scenes like those from which [your maternal ancestors] fled?

By purging their own bookshelves of the pernicious "descriptions of scenes" in those Wrightism-laced volumes, pleaded Niles, America's daughters could safeguard their virginity and, by doing so, America's future.⁸² After conflating the ideologies that Frances Wright recently had enunciated from the lecture stage with the older ultraisms of Hume, Voltaire, Paine, and Owen, and then locating those radical tenets in popular novels, evangelical Protestant reviewers had

EVANGELICAL REVIEWERS AND READER RESPONSE

After reviewers began linking novel reading to Wrightism and other "ultraisms" in 1830, evangelical reviewers set themselves on a drive to eradicate the practice of novel reading in America. They were determined that assertive, elite women like Frances Wright would never again attempt to insert themselves into the public sphere.⁸³ Certainly there were other reasons for such a campaign, but, clearly, reaction against Wrightism and other radical ultraisms was a prominent factor in the enormous increase in the anti-novel-reading crusade of the 1830s – and

⁸¹ Niles, "English Novels."

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ When Livermore spoke to Congress she did so in support of patriarchal Christianity. When the Grimkes spoke to promiscuous abolitionist gatherings their arguments were grounded in Biblical rhetoric. Even those women were difficult for evangelical white men to countenance.

especially in its religious nature. Reviewers' disgust with Wright's proto-feminist scorn for gender inequality also prompted them to remind women that within the American religious establishment women had no option but to submit to the denominationally-specific guidelines communicated to them by their ministers.

By the mid-1830s, magazine editors almost universally disapproved of the reading of popular novels, although the level of their rancor varied substantially, roughly correlated to the level of religious conservatism of the periodical.⁸⁴ Generally, the more evangelical the journal, the greater the virulence, and the more liberal and secular the journal, the milder and more equivocal was the tone against novels. The *Christian Watchman*, a Baptist journal, labeled novel reading as "unbecoming the profession of religion" – that is, novel reading should be considered an embarrassing habit to someone who has made a public statement that he or she was a believer in Christianity.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ I have carefully read eighty-three magazine articles from 1821 to 1870 that unconditionally condemned novel-reading. Significantly, of those articles, sixty-seven (or four-fifths) were printed between 1830 and 1850, the period immediately following Frances Wright's intrusion into male-dominated space. I found articles in electronic databases in American Periodicals, the American Antiquarian Society, Sabin Collections, the Library of Congress, and more. As search terms I used: "novel reading," "novels," and "fiction." I collected over 300 articles published from 1810 to 1850 whose subject focus was novel reading. I did not collect data from articles that were in fact reviews of novels, since almost all of those by default approved of novel reading. That is, opponents of novel reading rarely admitted to actually reading a novel in order to review it. My purpose has been to analyze the intentionally propounded beliefs of writers who had an opinion about the act of novel reading. I analyzed the articles and identified them as either "Condemning," "Supporting," or "Equivocal" (of a split opinion on the subject of novel reading). I analyzed each article further by identifying factors or rationales that reviewers used to support their opinions: religious, intellectual, female, false view of life/over-stimulated imagination, waste of time, causes degeneration to immorality (drunkenness, atheism, promiscuity, prostitution, and suicide). See my table, "Tracking Reviewer Opinion of Novel Reading from 1821-1840" in the Appendix. Religious magazines would voice the strongest antipathy for novels and would be mostly likely to conflate novel reading with radical ideologies. Elite and radical magazines were less virulent and sometimes equivocal on the dangers of novel reading.

⁸⁵ [S.] "Novel Reading. – No. 6." *Christian Watchman* 17.24 (June 10, 1836): 1. Also, where the anti-novel articles printed prior to 1830 tended to shy away from explicitly describing the consequences for novel readers for their behaviors, articles after that date reflected a gritty sense of their realities. Such descriptions inevitably ended in implications of a novel reader's inevitable suicide, languishing death, or descent into hell. Merrick voiced that sentiment as late as 1843: "[T]hese, alas! are the least pernicious tendencies of indulging in novel-reading." E. C. Merrick, "The Evils of Romance." *The Ladies' Repository* 5 (January 1845): 16. Beginning in the early 1830s, articles began to enunciate in far more vivid terms than ever before the horrific consequences that inevitably accompanied novel reading, including lying, swearing, gambling, dueling, promiscuity, prostitution, atheism, and finally, suicide. The temperance movement was finding its feet during this period, and periodical writers often made direct connections between addiction to alcohol and addiction to novel reading. An early article that distinctly

A significant transformation occurred in 1830 in the focus of anti-novel-reading articles – that is, in reviewers’ arguments for the condemnation of novel reading. Before 1830, articles on the practice focused on its immorality, but after 1830 they began to argue that novel reading was irreligious. For decades most anti-novel reviewers had argued that novel readers were vulnerable to laziness, seduction, drunkenness, and other moral infractions, but after 1830 their focus shifted to novel readers’ sinfulness and likelihood to be eternal damned. In November 1830 one Protestant Episcopalian reviewer noted, “The word ‘Novel’ is so associated with irreligion, or at least mere worldly concerns, that to call a book a ‘religious novel,’ is at least not to recommend it.”⁸⁶ Popular novels were becoming “sinful” and “evil” in addition to simply being “immoral” and “demoralizing.”⁸⁷ Frances Wright, Thomas Paine, Robert Owen, David Hume, William Godwin, and other radicals were all understood to be soulless atheists, and popular novels were only vehicles for disseminating their “infidel” or atheistic ideologies.

In the early 1830s Methodists, as well as other evangelical Christians, set out to wipe out the evil of popular novel reading in America through magazine articles and preached and printed sermons.⁸⁸ Methodists, at this time an entirely evangelical denomination – before, during, and after the 1837 schism over slavery and abolition – especially felt impelled to condemn novels. In

addressed novel reading as leading to immoral behaviors linked it to alcohol by claiming that “*fiction is alcohol* – it is ardent spirits, it is destructive of the health of body and soul. [S.] “Novel Reading. – No. 6.” *Christian Watchman* 17.24 (June 10, 1836): 1. Public drunkenness and reading novels were both seen as “extravagant passions” and equally pernicious in leading the addict down the path to ruin. By 1843 a writer for the Methodist *Ladies’ Repository* would moan that a popular novel by Eugene Sue was truly filled with “abominations – where fraud, and crime, and stratagem, and guile, with ribaldry, profanity, and blasphemy, and murder are all bound together in one *unholy volume*.” C. M. B., “Novel Reading: An Essay.” *Ladies Repository, and Gatherings of the West* 4 (Nov. 1844): 340-341.

⁸⁶ “Remarks.” *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register* 7.83 (Nov. 1830): 331.

⁸⁷ [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian.” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 8.19 (Jan. 3, 1834): 73. Of sixty-seven articles printed from 1830 to 1850 that condemned novel reading, twenty-one or almost one-third had the sinfulness of novel reading as the central focus, where almost none did before 1830.

⁸⁸ My research indicates that for a decade or so they were fairly successful. I was able to turn up only six articles written solely for the purpose of supporting novel reading between 1832 and 1851, as contrasted with the seventy-six articles that condemned it to a significant degree during the same period. Of the 25 reviews that I found that were written for the purpose of supporting novel-reading, 10 appeared between 1828 and 1832, then only 4 until 1851, with the remaining 11 positive reviews appearing between 1851 and 1870.

1834 “Frances”⁸⁹ stated the case bluntly in the title of an article for *The Christian Advocate*, a Methodist weekly⁹⁰: “Novel Reading Unchristian.” She and other Methodists had realized that their own denominational principles contained a statement that they interpreted as condemning novels, which she quoted: “Reading ‘books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God,’ is contrary to the expressed statutes of the M[ethodist] E[piscopal] Church.”⁹¹ While Frances does not go so far as to say that God was going to damn novel-reading Methodists to Hell, she does stress that novel reading was “contrary to the expressed statutes” of their denomination.⁹² She also argued that Jesus Christ was offended by their attention to “light, fictitious, demoralizing and irreligious books” instead of the Bible. With unsuppressed sarcasm she extolled the “splendid talents of some authors” and the “recommendations of some admirers of elevated rank,” by implication castigating them for the insult that both the authors and the admirers were making to their “holy and adorable Redeemer.” Since her article was printed in a Methodist organ it was unlikely to reach non-Methodists, yet Frances also argued that it was the “imperious duty of Christians of every denomination [to] resist and discountenance novel reading.”⁹³

⁸⁹ She likely called herself Frances as emulation of one of the founding fathers of American Methodism, Francis Asbury.

⁹⁰ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865. Vol. II.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938, 1957. 66. According to Mott, by the 1850s the “Methodist weeklies ... usually employed the name *Christian Advocate*, with a praenomen indicating the place of publication or the region in which it was circulated. The original *Christian Advocate* had no such place-name attached, though it was often referred to as the New York *Christian Advocate*: it was *the* weekly of the church and accepted no regional limitation.”

⁹¹ Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America.* 10th ed. Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss [1792], 1798. 133-134. The excerpt appears nearly word-for-word in the 1830 edition. *Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church.* Baltimore: Book Committee of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1830. 58-59. Indeed, in their 1792 *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist*, bishops Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury had written that precise phrase: “There is one only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these [Methodist Episcopal] societies, *a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.* But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shewn by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation. First, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind: especially that which is most generally practised: Such as ... The *singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.*”

⁹² [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 8.19 (Jan. 3, 1834): 73.

⁹³ [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian.”

The campaign against novel reading by Methodists and other evangelicals, accelerated in intensity in late 1829 through the early 1830s, was effective, in my estimation. By late 1832 one reviewer for the *Cincinnati Mirror*, who signed himself “Ivanhoe,” mournfully acknowledged the verdict on novel reading:

As a sincere friend and warm admirer of Novels, I have witnessed with regret the almost universal acquiescence in the sentence pronounced upon them by the grave and stern among critics, which is sanctioned by the world. Not so much by direct assent, as by silence; which is always construed into tacit admission.⁹⁴

That is, by 1832, just two years after Wright’s disappearance from the United States, a Western reviewer named what he believed had resulted from the public debate over fiction, and that was its silencing. When he identified the “grave and stern,” his readers would have understood the phrase as antebellum code for the ministers, theologians, and editors who constituted New England orthodoxy. This Walter Scott fan identified the New England Protestant elite as able to reach and silence the voices of dissenters as far west as Cincinnati.⁹⁵ In admitting that this “sentence pronounced upon” novels was “sanctioned by the world,” he helps us interpret the feedback he was hearing from other antebellum Americans – that novels were condemned. When the writer mourned that novels were disappearing “[n]ot so much by direct assent, as by silence,” his regret was not only that the enemies of novel reading were turning their backs in a silent shunning of novel-readers, as powerful Boston men had done to Wright.⁹⁶ Rather, Ivanhoe

⁹⁴ [Ivanhoe.] “Novel Reading.” *The Cincinnati Mirror, and Western Gazette of Literature, Science, and the Arts* 2.2 (Oct. 13, 1832): 9.

⁹⁵ [Lucius.] “Fiction.” *Boston Cultivator* 11.15 (April 14, 1849): 117. In all likelihood, this probably referred to Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Episcopalian ministers, editors, and theologians. In April 1849 “Lucius” in the *Boston Cultivator* commented that “[m]any persons of education at the present time, are strong in their denunciations of fiction.” Since almost every American institution of higher education was either supported by a Christian denomination or well-grounded in Christian theology, by reduction the “persons of education” who opposed fiction *were* religious people.

⁹⁶ [Ivanhoe.] “Novel Reading.”

also acknowledged that his defense of novels would constitute an isolated appeal, since all of the friends of novel reading had been silenced. They could no longer support it for fear of reprisals. They had been shouted down, and the silence was long. While a few liberal magazine writers made tentative attempts at defending literature that explored radical topics in a moral and appropriate way, almost every one of them quickly retreated, for they had their reputations as respectable, middle-class, American citizens to lose.

By the 1830s conservative magazine reviewers had almost universally damned the writing and reading of popular novels. That judgment had several effects, including the self-silencing of liberal magazine reviewers and of liberal women novelists, the focus of the final three chapters of this project. Among the effects, however, was not the cessation of novel reading by Americans. To the contrary, Americans were buying and reading novels in record numbers, clearly disregarding the advice of magazine reviewers. Both contemporary and statistical evidence indicates many novels were printed and read during the 1830s.⁹⁷ The Methodist who called herself “Frances” regretted that “novels were almost exclusively the books called for at present” at “a noted book store and circulating library.”⁹⁸ An 1832 article, written as a sprightly dialogue between a bookshop owner and his customers, provides contemporary evidence that the novel was the primary genre of book sold during this period:

“Have you any new novels in your shop,” Said a lady, who had stepped into a circulating library. “I have not, but expect a fresh supply next week.... [T]hey make up, the greater part of reading we now have – and I sell few books of any other kind – and you know I must fill my library with such books as are most in popular use.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Lyle H. Wright, “A Statistical Survey of American Fiction, 1774-1850.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2.3 (April 1939): 309-318.

⁹⁸ [Frances.] “Novel Reading Unchristian.”

⁹⁹ “Novel Reading.” *Youth's Companion, & Weekly Family Visitor* (May 26, 1832): 34.

The article writer intended to shame booksellers who were selling products he considered “on the same level with ardent spirits” and who exploited customers to the “point of degradation.” He worked to persuade his readers to boycott these shops: “These are the principles, abounding in our city among book dealers – that what is most popular, however poisonous, is my profit to keep.”¹⁰⁰ But that shame and those boycotts apparently were not enough to stop readers from buying or sharing novels.

Instead, authors were writing fiction and publishers were printing it in order to supply readerly demand. However, they did have to find ways to satisfy the public’s interest without unnecessarily provoking conventional reviewers; two methods were particularly effective. The first was simply to admit it was fiction, but to sell it as “religious fiction.” The second was to pretend it was not fiction – to frame it as a retelling of real events that had occurred.¹⁰¹ Both methods effectively distanced such fictional works from attacks by reviewers as “licentious popular novels.” Lyle H. Wright, the first scholar to consider the value of popular antebellum fiction, commented in the 1930s that the “puritanical attitude of early readers” against novels “was overcome ... by offering the lighter reading under the guise of letters, histories, moral tales, and true stories.”¹⁰² That is, by adopting a pious tone, addressing religious topics, and promising

¹⁰⁰ “Novel Reading,” *Youth's Companion*.

¹⁰¹ Jacob Abbott, *The Young Christian; or A Familiar Illustration of the Principles of Christian Duty*. Boston: William Peirce, 1835, 1832. 4. It was easier to justify fiction for the young, as evidenced by novelist Jacob Abbott’s explanation: “I have attempted ... to present each subject in such an aspect, and to illustrate it in such a way, as is adapted to the young mind, using ... such language as has suggested itself spontaneously.... The difficulty is in *interesting [children] in [religious truth]*. They will understand readily enough, if they are interested in the form and manner in which the subject comes before them. These principles will explain the great number of narratives, and dialogues, and statements of facts, which are introduced to give vividness to the conceptions of my readers. Many of these are imaginary, being cases supposed for the purpose of illustration. Where this is the case however, it is distinctly stated; and all those accounts which are introduced as statements of facts, are strictly true. I am not certain but that some individuals may object to the number of imaginary incidents which I have thus introduced. If the principles stated above are not considered satisfactory, I must appeal to authority. This book is not more full of parables than were the discourses of Jesus Christ. I shelter myself under his example.”

¹⁰² Wright, “Statistical Survey,” 316. Wright, of the Huntington Library in San Merino, California, noted that “scathing attacks on novel reading and its evil influence on readers, especially feminine readers” was “[p]roof of the ... puritanical attitude of early readers.” Wright, “Statistical Survey,” 309, 311. The question of exactly what sort

that the stories they were telling were “true,” writers and publishers worked to placate rabid evangelical reviewers while trying not to lose their eager novel-reading audience. I am not as confident as Lyle Wright that publishers always succeeded in calming the critics, but they certainly were able to provide fiction to many willing readers.

These moral tales were rarely labeled as “novels,” “fiction,” or even “religious fiction,” however. Instead, they reframed and repackaged novels as “tales” – accounts of true events. Not unlike what novelists had done before in writing fiction, the authors could tell both heartwarming and cautionary stories about people they supposedly knew or knew of, all while repeatedly assuring readers of the veracity of their tales. Many of the works opened with an author’s preface that mildly condemned fiction and promised readers that the events contained in the book had really occurred *or* that the author’s intent was to demonstrate the *sorts* of behaviors that actually occurred with the purpose of teaching readers morally uplifting lessons.¹⁰³

Publishers and writers hoped that reframed in this manner their novels would be less likely to draw the attention and consequent wrath of conservative critics. A long list of terms began appearing regularly on the title pages of antebellum novels, including “romance,” “story,” “tale,” “history,” “legend,” or as a collection of “letters,” “scenes,” and “sketches.”

Some reviewers were not deceived. H.S., a correspondent in 1831 for the *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register*, mocked publishers’ new habit of labeling novels as

of material these readers were reading can also be answered by looking to Wright’s work. According to Table V in Wright’s article, nearly a third of the titles published from 1774 to 1850 were focused on “Life and Manners,” “Domestic Life,” “Religious” subjects, or “Temperance.”

¹⁰³Hannah Farnham Lee’s *Elinor Fulton* has such an introduction written by an editor; he assures readers that the goal of the book’s “truly practical writer” was to “inculcate the ... great fundamental principle ... -- a just observance of ... true economy in living.” Hannah Farnham Lee, *Elinor Fulton*. Boston: Whipple & Damrell, 1837. viii. Another example is Caroline M. Sawyer’s preface to her 1841 *The Merchant’s Widow*, a volume with three “tales” and a poem. While her first tale was “entirely a work of fancy,” she vowed that “the most fastidious [reader] will be able to detect nothing in its pages that militates against the interest of morality and religion.” Her second story was “no fiction” and the third was “but a literal and unembellished transcript of a scene” in which she herself was the “actual and deeply-moved spectator.” Her purpose in both fiction and ostensibly non-fiction forms was “to hold up virtue in its most attractive colors.” Caroline M. Sawyer, *The Merchant’s Widow, and Other Tales*. New York: P. Price, 1841. 5-6.

some sort of non-fictional work: “They are *novels* in fact, and I know not why we should be at the pains to find for them a *name* that is *in better repute*. ‘Things by their right names,’ ... is an excellent motto.”¹⁰⁴ While others might “style them *histories* or *narratives*,” said H.S., he saw such labels as “*softened, modified and euphonious appellations*.” H.S. noted that he, along “with the sound and judicious Editor of the ‘Family Visitor,’ will still call them ... ‘novels for children’ [and] ‘*Religious Novels*.’”¹⁰⁵

But apparently the publishers’ marketing strategy worked in the way that mattered most to them: the American public was persuaded to buy fiction when it was disguised as non-fiction. John E. Edwards, a reviewer for the Methodist *Ladies’ Repository*, commented that when novels were given an “absurd and deceptive title” such as “‘Moral Tales;’ ‘No Fiction;’ ‘A Tale of Truth;’ ... these works are devoured by thousands, nay, millions of men, women, and children.”¹⁰⁶ Novels were outselling any other genre, whether as domestic productions or cheap British imports.¹⁰⁷ In the 1930s Lyle Wright studied thousands of works published from 1774 to 1900 and traced the patterns of how fiction was presented to readers during the antebellum period. He laboriously identified and tallied the various terms that writers and publishers used to describe fiction, including the variations on those labels, such as “American novel,” “historical

¹⁰⁴ Anna Laetitia Barbault, *Things by their Right Names, and Other Stories, Fables, and Moral Pieces, in Prose and Verse, Selected and Arranged from the Writings of Mrs. Barbault. With a Sketch of her Life, by Mrs. S. J. Hale*. Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1840. This was a pun; Anna Laetitia Barbault had written a work entitled *Things by their Right Names*, which Sarah Josepha Hale had reprinted with other short works in 1840.

¹⁰⁵ H.S. “On Religious Novels.” *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register* 8.85 (Jan. 1831): 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ John E. Edwards, “Novel Reading.” *Ladies’ Repository, and Gatherings of the West* 3 (April 1843): 115.

According to Edwards, in their attempts to increase sales of novels publishers labeled them “by an inoffensive and *ad captandum* name – such for example as ‘Moral Tales;’ ‘No Fiction;’ ‘A Tale of Truth;’ ‘Religious Novels;’ or some other equally absurd and deceptive title.... Strange as it may appear, these works are devoured by thousands, nay, millions of men, women, and children.” John E. Edwards, “Novel Reading.” *Ladies’ Repository, and Gatherings of the West* 3 (April 1843): 115.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Winship, *American Literary Publishing in the Mid Nineteenth-Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. Winship has studied the account books of the Boston publishing house of Ticknor and Fields from its establishment on July 14, 1832, throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.

Description on title-page	1790-99	1800-09	1810-19	1820-29	1830-39	1840-49	1850
Novel.....	7	9	6	7	7	11	2
American Novel.....	1	...	...	1	1	...	...
Historical Novel.....	...	...	...	...	3	1	...
Romance.....	...	...	1	6	9	92	15
Historical Romance.....	...	...	...	1	4	8	1
Story.....	...	4	1	9	12	43	8
American Story.....	...	...	...	...	...	2	...
Tale.....	2	1	3	47	88	253	18
American Tale.....	2	...	1	7	2	3	...
Historical Tale.....	...	...	1	3	2	...	...
Temperance Tale.....	...	...	...	...	2	8	1
History.....	5	2	2	1	3	4	...
Legend.....	...	...	...	...	8	12	2
Letters.....	1	5	...	2	6	5	1
Scenes.....	...	...	...	1	5	11	...
Sketches.....	...	...	...	4	14	19	4

Fig. 2.10 Lyle Wright's data on the labels that publishers created to disguise fiction

romance,” and “temperance tale.”¹⁰⁸ According to Lyle Wright, for the sixty-year period from 1790 to 1850 the number of books with the label “novel” published per decade remained static – from 7 to 11 depending on the decade – even at the height of the 1840s publishing boom. At the same time the number of books that were clearly fictional but called “tales” rose from 4 in the 1790s to 59 in the 1820s, 94 in the 1830s, and 264 in the 1840s.¹⁰⁹ So while the publishing industry was in the heyday of printing and selling popular novels, they were successful in doing so only through a carefully controlled marketing strategy.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Wright, “Statistical Survey,” 309. For his short article in the *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Wright’s data is based on nearly 1400 nineteenth-century books, which he “restricted to works by Americans and by the few foreign-born writers who claimed America as their home.” The collection actually expanded to include nearly 3000 texts, which he analyzed in his three-volume work on the subject, *American Fiction: A Contribution toward a Bibliography*, for the years 1774-1850, 1851-1875, and 1876-1900. A table in the appendix reflects data on the bestsellers from 1792 to 1849. Wright also says this: [The] Curator of the Rare Book Room in the Library of Congress... has under his charge a collection of some 40,000 title-pages and cover titles which were originally deposited for copyright purposes. This collection is a storehouse of information, as in many instances the copyright clerk penned in the authors’ names on the title-pages, even though the books were published anonymously.” 315.

¹⁰⁹ Wright, “Statistical Survey,” 213, table drawn from data on 316-318. “The writings of many of the forgotten authors, true enough, may not be literary masterpieces, but the point so often overlooked is the contemporary taste for such literature. Publishers did not bring out second, third, fourth, and fifth editions of any authors’ titles unless the demand justified it. The appended list of best sellers itemizes only the titles that reached at least four editions. A brief examination of the list shows that the majority of the writers are those who receive little or no mention in literary histories.” Wright, “Statistical Survey,” 213, table drawn from data on 316-318.

¹¹⁰ Christine Pawley, “Seeking ‘Significance’: Actual Readers, Specific Reading Communities.” *Book History* 5 (2002): 143-160. Another possible way to research reading habits of the period is through library patron borrowing records. Reception scholar Christine Pawley has analyzed conducted this sort of study of a late-nineteenth-century

My research into publishers' catalogs from this period suggests that, according to their own self-selected reportage, publishers were in fact publishing books of all genres, but they were under-listing the quantity of novels they actually published and disguising fictive works as non-fiction.¹¹¹ For example, as late as 1847, over 240 publishers listed in *The American Bookseller's Complete Reference Trade List* were still attempting to camouflage novels in this manner. A densely printed volume of over 350 pages, *The American Bookseller* lists very few books that are overtly identified through headings or individual book descriptions as being any form of fiction – roughly one out of every hundred.¹¹² In a section that identified the categories of books that various companies published, not surprisingly *American Bookseller* did not include any category

community in Osage, Iowa. Patrons' records are available for the American Antiquarian Society in Boston; I accessed them to study Lydia Maria Child's borrowing records.

¹¹¹ I use four references books and catalogues published during this period by publishing companies and libraries listing their holdings. Since they are catalogues, not accounting records, they do not contain numbers of books published or sales figures: *Catalogue of Books in the Boston Library, June, 1830, kept in the Room over the Arch, in Franklin-Place*. Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1830. *Systematic Catalogue of Books in the Collection of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York: With a General Index, and One of the Dramatic Pieces; Together with an Appendix: Containing the Constitution, and the Rules and Regulations of the Association*. New-York: Harper & Brothers, 1837. *Catalogue of Books in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, Massachusetts*. Worcester: Printed for the Society, 1837. *Bibliotheca Americana Catalogue of American Publications, Bibliotheca Americana Catalogue of American Publications, including Reprints and Original Works, from 1820 to 1848, inclusive*, O. A. Roorbach, ed., New York: Orville A. Roorbach, 1849.

¹¹² The catalogue begins with 160 pages in which publishing companies have submitted their lists of books, which *American Bookseller* apparently printed exactly as they received it. In a "Publisher's Advertisement," Simeon Ide, wrote that "a principal object of this work, is to give such a description of each book, published in the United States, as will enable the inquirer, whether a wholesale or retail dealer, or a purchaser of a single copy, to ascertain by it, with considerable precision, the actual contents or character of the work he is in search of." He praised the lists of "Messrs. Harper, Wiley & Putnam and D. Appleton & Co." for their "concise, but FULL descriptions." 4. Then on page 159 *American Bookseller* began an "Alphabetical Catalogue of American Publications," which identified every book and indexed the page on which it appeared; many books appear multiple times, since in 1847 the copyright law was still unenforced and many companies printed the same book; that was repeated in a "Supplement to the Alphabetical Catalogue of American Publications" on page 321. In a "Supplement" to the volume that began at page 235, one particular company, Zieber & Co., uniquely listed some twenty or books targeted at women, and then five titles as "Eugene Sue's Works" (including *The Temptation*) and five as "Lippard's Works" (including *The Quaker City*) all of which would have been considered racy and radical in the extreme. 278. Another entire section of new "Additions, Alterations and Corrections to Trade Lists" began on page 285, and included another four pages of books for Harper & Company, including many books identified as "novels" among the listings and several individual entries that comprised different series of novels: the "Pocket Series of Novels," of which there were twenty-one, and the "Library of Select Novels," of which there were 110, including ten by Edward Bulwer, and others by Eugene Sue and Catherine Gore. *The American Bookseller's Complete Reference Trade List, and Alphabetical Catalogue of Books Published in this Country, with the Publishers' and Authors' Names and Prices Arranged in Classes for Quick and Convenient Reference*. Alexander V. Blake, compiler. Claremont, N.H.: Simeon Ide, 1847. 293.

aside from “Juveniles” that is clearly identifiable as fictive; instead, of the forty-one categories, twelve are religious in nature.¹¹³ Only one company in the entire volume of *The American Bookseller*, Harper & Brothers, openly identified a relatively short list of novels.¹¹⁴ Yet buried in the middle of the volume appears another extensive list from Harper of “additions” that were conveniently “received after the original Lists had gone to press.” If Harper & Brothers had listed their 200-plus novels in the original, official listing for the company in the front of the book, it would have been far more obvious that their novels list dwarfed every other category.¹¹⁵

Some publishers and writers worked to improve the acceptability of novels (and dispel evangelical reviewers’ antagonism toward novels) by centering plots on Christian salvation and then marketing the novels as “religious.” They hoped to win the favor of evangelical reviewers by separating their efforts from “irreligious,” “pernicious” and “licentious” novels. By the late 1830s, the subject of religious fiction finally entered the periodical conversation about novel reading. In 1838 a writer who signed himself “Citizen,” and thus argued by his signature that he represented average Americans, began by showing support for the established clerical or religious reviewers:

¹¹³ Blake, *The American Bookseller*, 221-224. Some of the twelve religious categories include “Bibles,” “Catholic Books,” “Prayer and Psalter,” “Sabbath School Books,” “Testaments,” and “Toy Bibles.” Some of the non-religious categories included “Almanacs,” “Law,” “Medical,” and “French and Spanish.”

¹¹⁴ Blake, *American Bookseller*, 41. “Works of Fiction” appears at the end of an eleven-page list that is in roughly alphabetical order, and includes the headings “Agricultural and Domestic Economy,” “Voyages and Travels,” and “Splendidly Embellished Works.” “Fiction” may well have been conveniently prefixed with “Works of” to justify its being at the bottom of the list instead of near the top of it. *The American Bookseller’s* identified fifteen authors’ names as writers of fiction, including the notorious Edward Bulwer and Eugene Sue.

¹¹⁵ Blake, *American Bookseller*, 58. This Harper list included Edward Bulwer’s *Falkland*; Catherine Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* and *The Linwoods*; James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Spy*; Walter Scott’s *Waverly*; three novels by Joseph Ingraham: *The Quadrone*; *Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf*; and *Burton, or the Seiges*; two novels by T. S. Arthur: *Sweethearts and Wives* and *Married and Single*; Catherine Gore’s *Romances of Real Life*; three novels by Frances Trollope: *Michael Armstrong*; *The Refugee in America*; and *The Abbess*; books without an author but with catchy titles, like *Confessions of a Pretty Woman*; *The White-Slave*; and *Zohrab, the Hostage*. Publishers D. Appleton & Company and Wiley & Putnam handled their novels list in a similar manner. D. Appleton & Company’s five-page list includes eleven headings and offers books like Maria Edgeworth’s *Popular Tales*, Daniel DeFoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, and Alexandre Dumas’s *Marguerite De Valois*, but there is no mention of fiction or novels – just “Juvenile” and “Miscellaneous.” Blake, *American Bookseller*, 7-8. Wiley & Putnam listed *Hawthorne’s New Tales*, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, in alphabetical order, directly after a *Hand-Book of Oil Painting* and a *Hand-Book of the Water Cure*.

[T]he weight of public opinion has been for some years against the prevailing habit of promiscuous novel reading. By this I mean, that those who have been best qualified to examine this question, and who *ought* to govern the public sentiment, have generally been of this opinion.¹¹⁶

Citizen was acknowledging the right of “those who have been best qualified to examine” – undoubtedly the same New England Protestant clergy that Ivanhoe had identified as the “grave and stern” – to adjudge the American people’s morality and reading matter. Citizen gave credit to those qualified critics for the fact that “few works comparatively are now issued from the press containing any open and avowed immoral sentiment, and, generally speaking, the novels of the present day inculcate those principles of morality, which are in accordance with the christian religion.” Citizen was pleased that because of the legitimate interference of the moral arbiters the book industry was restricting the publication of pernicious materials. He appreciated their silencing the writers of non-Christian fiction.¹¹⁷

But significantly, Citizen also acknowledged that not only were Americans reading novels, they were reading novels that were “in accordance with the christian religion.” By the

¹¹⁶ [Citizen.] “Morality of Fiction. Are Novels, and Other Works of Fiction, Upon the Whole, an Evil, or a Good, in the Present State of Society?” *The Hesperian; a Monthly Miscellany of General Literature, Original and Select* 1.4 (Aug. 1, 1838): 296.

¹¹⁷ [Citizen.] “Morality of Fiction.” Interestingly, not until the late 1830s was the discourse over novel reading framed by its antagonists as a true debate. For a decade, conservative Protestants, and especially Methodists, had dominated the novel-reading debate with their anti-novel stance. Articles made arguments on one side or the other; each article was monologue (or a harangue) rather than an attempt to participate (or allow readers to participate) in a logical, reasonable, and appropriate dialogue. Listeners and readers were told what to do. The language used to prove points did not lend itself to the notion that anyone might entertain any point of view other than the one at hand. In order to realize there were multiple points of view, readers had to have access to and read multiple journals, which ordinary, non-elite and non-academic readers normally did not. Toward the late 1830s, both equivocal and somewhat supportive reviewers argued that for some years there had been a moratorium on open discussion of novel reading. In this article, Citizen intimated to readers that they would be allowed to consider both sides of the novel-reading issue. Unlike Methodist articles on the subject that ranted at their readers in support or refutation of a point, “Morality of Fiction” hedged and compromised: “These are some of the most prominent arguments that can be offered” and “All sophistry ... ought to be avoided in argument.” The writer reached the conclusion that he would leave the “candid and conscientious reader to decide the question in controversy for himself.” Who was to control what Americans could read was now being presented squarely as a topic of discussion. [Citizen.] “Morality of Fiction.”

late 1830s, novels that were framed as essentially religious or Christian by their authors and publishers were beginning to be reflected by some reviewers as respectable. Either these novels were openly acknowledged to be “religious novels,” or were fictional or semi-fictional work disguised as “true tales.” Either way, American readers were buying and reading them.

The evidence is clear that although reviewers and writers for most antebellum periodicals directed readers, and especially female readers, not to read novels (or any fiction), those readers defied that direction. By the late 1830s and 1840s all sorts of Americans read novels, for they could do so with relative impunity. Antebellum novel reading became immensely popular among American readers, and especially among women, in spite of rather than because of reviewers’ input.¹¹⁸ In fact, Americans were reading in a variety of venues, as they had for generations. Elite men had long had access to libraries, either in their own homes or on the campuses of their colleges, and some fathers and brothers shared those volumes with daughters and sisters. In the 1830s efforts were made to provide public reading rooms to young men in the mercantile class: In 1837 the compiler of the *Systematic Catalogue of Books in the Collection of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York* proudly enunciated his goal that young male clerks gain access to edifying reading matter to help them rise out of the lower middle class and into the “commercial class.”¹¹⁹ In 1838 William Ellery Channing reached out in the same way to Boston workingmen: “Books are the true levelers... [and] are now accessible to the multitude....Let every man ... gather some good books under his roof, and obtain access for himself and family

¹¹⁸ Here I disagree with literary critics Nina Baym, James Machor, and Dawn Coleman, all of whom tend to see a parallel development of easily available mass-produced books, reviewers promoting those novels, and American readers eagerly buying and reading them. They see Christian magazine editors managing only weak efforts to discourage the consumption of fiction. Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-70*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. James Machor, *Reading Fiction in Antebellum America: Informed Response and Reception Histories, 1820-1865*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. Dawn Coleman, *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013.

¹¹⁹ *Systematic Catalogue of Books in the Collection of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York...Library in Clinton Hall*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837.

to some social library.”¹²⁰ Still, women and girls were encouraged to read only within the privacy of the family dwelling. As the aunt had been mortified at the idea of a ladies’ reading room, women were considered “out of their place” in such a public space.¹²¹ Female readers commonly read novels aloud to one another, either in pairs or small groups, and Channing exhorted his workingman audience to do the same.¹²² In all sorts of ways, during the mid-antebellum Americans read all sorts of books, including novels.

Literary scholar Elisabeth B. Nichols says that women readers “dismissed claims about the treacherous influence of novels by applying familiar rhetoric about the necessity of reading being useful to novels.”¹²³ Novels, many women readers held, taught them wisdom, whether through the example of glory gained by virtuous actions or desperate consequences for sinful behavior. As a character in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Boarding School* argues, “[S]ome novels ... convey lessons for moral improvement; and exhibit striking pictures of virtue rewarded; and of vice, folly, and indiscretion punished.”¹²⁴ Evidently many parents were giving up their attempts to curtail or even monitor their older children’s reading during this period. One reviewer quoted a mother who was allowing her thirteen-year-old son to read one of the “pernicious” novels of Edward Bulwer: “I do not consider novels so very bad. I often allow my children to read one. And if I did not allow it, they would be sure to find a way to read them in

¹²⁰ William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture. An Address Introductory to the Franklin Lectures, Delivered at Boston, Sept., 1838.* 430-432. “Books ... are now accessible to the multitude; and in this way a change of habits is going on in society.”

¹²¹ “Ladies’ Reading Room,” *Christian Register*.

¹²² Elisabeth B. Nichols, “‘Blunted Hearts’: Female Readers and Printed Authority in the Early Republic.” In *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800-1950.* Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002. 13. Mary Greene “abbreviated a letter in favor of listening to a book being read aloud, explaining hastily that ‘we have a noval [sic] call’d Sophia Sternheim. Carroline is going to read so adieu.’” Nichols also cites Nancy Shippen Livingston, who “read with her parents, her beau, and female companions, and in one entry happily described an evening she spent with friends ‘in a very agreeable manner, us three alone – chatting, reading & singing till ten oclock.’” Channing, *Self-Culture*, 431. “I know how hard it is to some men, especially to those who spend much time in manual labor, to fix attention on books. Let them strive to overcome the difficulty, ... by reading in company with those whom they love.”

¹²³ Nichols, “Blunted Hearts,” 3.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Nichols, “Blunted Hearts,” 4.

private.”¹²⁵ Church-going readers even defied ministers’ admonitions not to read novels by sneaking them into worship services and reading them there. One reviewer noted that congregants were reading “on Sundays, and in church, (for I have seen many a novel carried to church to be read in sermon time).”¹²⁶ Another reviewer angrily blamed parents, Sunday School teachers, and even the parish sextons for not better monitoring children who read novels during church sermons: “The lamentable fact ... illustrate[s] the keen appetite for story-reading,... the irreligious bias of the child’s mind, and the neglect of his guardians.”¹²⁷ In all these cases, reviewers had to face the reality that Americans *were* reading novels in either open or covert defiance of the reviewers’ own printed admonitions and those spoken from the pulpit and by evangelical parents.

Clearly wanting their firms to be profitable, antebellum printers published novels, whether written by men or women, that readers would buy or borrow. Successful antebellum magazine publisher George Graham explained how he predicted such an event: “I know the test of *general* popularity [of a writer] as well as any man.... This, of course, I *know* – it is no guess work, for with a thousand exchange papers scattered all over the whole Union I should be a dolt in business not to *see* who is most *copied* and *praised* by them.” So Graham constantly

¹²⁵ [Y.] “Indiscriminate Novel-reading.” *Christian Watchman* 26. 31 (Aug. 1, 1845): 122. “Such was the reply of Mrs. M. to a lady who had expressed surprise at finding the son of the former, a lad of about thirteen, intently engaged in reading a volume of Bulwer.... The assertion of this lady, that if she did not openly permit such pernicious reading, it would be resorted to in private, affords no reason either in her case, as in any other for such criminal license. It is probably that if such a state of things existed in her family, it was the result of her own careless or injudicious management.... Were the youthful taste for reading patiently and properly cultivated in the atmosphere of home, the unnatural craving for works which inflame the imagination, and corrupt the heart would almost entirely cease. And parents who have publicly pledged themselves to train up their children for God, are in neglecting such cultivation, guilty of a breach of their covenant vows.... The reasons why Christian heads of families should discountenance in their children the perusal of Bulwer’s novels, and others of similar character are so palpable, that it seems needless to specify them.” Y. “Indiscriminate Novel-reading.” *Christian Watchman* 26. 31 (Aug. 1, 1845): 122.

¹²⁶ Irenaeus. “Religious: Novel-Reading.” *New York Observer and Chronicle* 18. 35 (Aug. 29, 1840): 1.

¹²⁷ “Remarks.” *Gospel Messenger and Southern Episcopal Register* 7.83 (Nov. 1830): 331. “Can it be possible that any child, during divine service, is engaged in reading – we care not whether it be a work of fiction, or even the Bible itself. Where is his parent, or his Sunday School teacher, or we might say the Sexton? He deserves reproof from any one who witnesses the profanation.”

researched American newspapers to see what writers were being excerpted and reprinted.¹²⁸ Yet, just as antebellum men and women did not read the same sorts of novels, neither did they write the same sort of novels. Of course, both men and women were welcome to read and write moral, *sentimental* novels. But publishers and reviewers expected *sensational*, immoral novels to be read (discreetly) and penned by men only.¹²⁹ Male authors could flout conventions with relative impunity while women had to stay within them. So long as the novel made a profit, some publisher was willing to publish it.¹³⁰ A male writer's reputation could be ruined by evangelical reviewers in one quarter, yet publishers from another would still print his work. A good example is George Lippard, who wrote texts that brazenly confronted the pious hypocrisy of wealthy and politically powerful men who oppressed the American working class, yet his *Quaker City* was a bestseller that went into five editions.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Letter from George Graham to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1844. Qtd.in William Charvat's *Literary Publishing in America, 1790-1850*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959. 25. Charvat comments about Graham's statement that "Graham was right, and the records of Ticknor and Fields ... confirm his judgment." William Charvat, "Literary Economics and Literary History." Chapter 14 of *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat*. Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed. Ohio State UP, 1968. 290.

¹²⁹ Some male writers rebelled against white male Christian hegemony by writing sensational novels. They ignored reviewers' admonitions to desist from providing fiction to publishers that religious reviewers characterized as greedy and immoral. The purpose of their work varied widely. Some sensational works were clearly profit-motivated, such as a scandalous novel with the incendiary title, *The Matricide*, which defiantly identified its author as "John K. Duer, USN," a sailor. Others, perhaps written by Freethinkers, were more sincere efforts to rail at religious hypocrisy, such as *The Hypocrite*, *Retrogression*, and *History of a Pocket Prayer Book*. Gregory Godolphin's *The Unique, A Book of Its Own Kind: Containing a Variety of Hints, Thrown Out in a Variety of Ways, for Evangelical Ministers* exposed "Cheating by Churches" in one chapter, and challenged Christian leaders to "Look in this mirror and behold thy face." Overall, most of these novels were escapist in nature and directed primarily at entertaining young men. They routinely traced the transformations of innocent girls tricked, seduced and manipulated into becoming mistresses and prostitutes. Today we accept that most of the sensational literature was written by men and most of the sentimental literature was written by women. Arguments have not occurred over reassignment of these terms across gender boundaries, but simply over the proper definition of the terms themselves. Hence, Jane Tompkins argues with Ann Douglas over the correct way to understand "sentimentalism," and Nina Baym argues with Tompkins's interpretation.

¹³⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson bucked the Boston Unitarian establishment in publishing his radical "New Philosophy" tracts during this decade, yet developed a new coterie of supporters. Editor and writer Orestes Brownson transformed his religious orientation repeatedly – from Calvinist to Universalist to Wrightist atheist to Catholic – yet simply replaced lost readers for his *Brownson's Quarterly* with new ones. Robert Dale Owen, reviled in the 1830s as the atheistic co-editor with Frances Wright of *The Free Enquirer*, served two terms in the 1840s in the United States House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., while in Cincinnati Wright languished alone in obscurity.

¹³¹ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. 372. According to Reynolds, "In popular sensational

To the contrary, antebellum women were allowed, by reviewers and publishers, to write pious works only. As if not one woman had ever read Frances Wright's radical words or heard her speak, by the early 1830s American women novelists wrote nothing but sentimental fiction.

SILENCING THE RADICAL FEMALE VOICE

Certainly, antebellum women raised with the traditional patriarchal values of evangelical Protestantism sought out such conservative, sentimental fiction. But from 1828 to 1830 in hundreds of lectures Wright had encouraged women to consider the idea of living without domination by men. Her audiences often included large numbers of women; one writer noted that at an address in June 1830 and at one lecture in June 1830 there evidently were over a thousand women present.¹³² It is reasonable to consider, then, that those liberal women might have sought fiction in bookstores or circulating libraries that explored the ideas they had heard

literature, the most important phenomenon was the devaluation of male authority figures and the intensification of iconoclastic female character types such as the sympathetic fallen woman, the feminist criminal, and the sensual woman.... For example, Lippard's *The Quaker City* traces the self-destruction of a moral exemplar, Mary Arlington, as a result of her deluded faith in the Conventional; it also includes the complicated Dora Livingstone, the intellectual, voluptuous, scheming confidence woman who sleeps around and even plots her husband's murder in order to get ahead. On the level of political activism, the late 1840s was the watershed moment when the Seneca Falls feminists initiated heated public agitation for women's rights." The data on printings of *Quaker City* is from Wright, "A Statistical Survey."

¹³² "Fanny Wright." *New England Galaxy* 13.662 (June 18, 1830): 2. Quaker women notably were supportive of Wright; newspapers commented that they, in full grey dress, often accompanied Wright onstage and created a phalanx about her to protect her as she moved in and out of the lecture halls; some sat or stood behind her on the podium as she spoke. Both the liberal and the conservative press reported women's presence at Wright's lectures for their own purposes – either to support or to condemn Wright. An eager supporter bragged that Wright's "audiences [in Cincinnati] were crowded ... with the most influential [sic] and respectable citizens in the town.... [A]t Louisville, ... though she advanced ... all her heresies, religious and moral, her audiences to the last, were the fashionable resort of the ladies; who usually composed nearly half her hearers." "Prospects in the West." *The Correspondent* 4.16 (November 8, 1828): 271-272. Conversely, one horrified evangelical counted some "fifty or sixty ladies" at one of Wright's lectures in his effort to shame those erring women. From *Christian Advocate and Journal*. Qtd. in Ginzberg, 213. A reporter for the *New York Courier and Enquirer* commented, "The effect of her lectures is already boasted of by her followers. 'Two years ago,' say they – 'twenty persons could scarcely be found in New-York who would openly avow infidelity – now we have twenty thousand.'" Reprinted in *The Religious Intelligencer* 15.9 (July 31, 1830): 133. When she returned from her six years in France, she drew large and boisterous audiences, according to newspaper reports: "Last evening the disgraceful farce of Fanny Wright and Co. was again repeated at the Masonic Hall....At the usual hour for the commencement, the Hall was filled to overflowing, and not less than 5,000 tickets probably were disposed of at the usual price of one shilling each.... At the close of the performance, ... not less than 10,000 persons were assembled in front of the building. A large number of females who, (to their shame be it said) had attended the lecture, now attempted to effect their egress." "A Fanny Wright Riot." *Atkinson's Saturday Evening Post* 17.900 (Oct. 27, 1838): 3. Elizabeth Oakes Smith's report of a speech at the very end of her speaking career indicates a much smaller crowd.

from Wright's mouth. Yet while a very few women wrote short non-fiction essays for small, iconoclastic journals with minimal dissemination (like *Dial*), not a single overtly proto-feminist fictive text from that period is extant. Novels that criticized the American political system or religious leaders, allowed a moral female protagonist to struggle to overcome societal gender injustice, directly addressed the protection of women's reproductive and physical safety rights, or engaged with immoral ideas or language could not be written by a respectable, educated, middle-class woman in the 1830s. Such a thing was unthinkable, and no women writers dared.¹³³ With the exception of the disreputable Maria Monk, there were not even sensational or scandalous novels where authorship was claimed, implied, or later identified as female. The ongoing public degradation of Frances Wright made it clear to antebellum women writers that if they committed a proto-feminist act like writing a radical novel, their reputations would be ruined.¹³⁴ Women writers understood that what suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton would later label "white manhood" had the means and the will to harm or destroy what it saw as threatening, and noisy, obstreperous women were threatening.¹³⁵

Instead of exploring Wright's radical and proto-feminist ideas through fiction, most antebellum women who needed to earn a living wrote and sold thoroughly sentimental novels. Speaking through pious fictional protagonists, intelligent women writers like Catherine

¹³³ Kate Chopin was condemned and shunned by polite society nearly a century later for broaching such subjects.

¹³⁴ The exception of Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures* only proved the rule, for after publishing her account of priests' sexual assaults of nuns it was understood that she was the pawn of an anti-Catholic Protestant who ghost-wrote the text. After the work was published, Maria Monk's knowledge of the *Awful Disclosures* of the seductions that she alleged occurred inside a convent only served to confirm her own guilt; her descriptions of the inside of the nunnery were discovered by an investigatory team to be entirely erroneous, and the time she claimed she had lived inside the nunnery turned out to be time she had spent in a Magdalen home.

¹³⁵ In Françoise Basch, "Women's Rights and the Wrongs of Marriage in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America." *History Workshop* 22 (Autumn 1986): 22. "In 1859 ... Stanton humorously remarked that this was not a good time to be a Negro or a woman. And, when she imagined Peter asking her where she wanted to sit in paradise, she would answer, 'Anywhere so I am neither a Negro or a woman. Confer on me, good angel, the glory of white manhood, so that ... I may enjoy the most unlimited freedom.'"

Sedgwick, Maria J. McIntosh, Emma Embury, Caroline Kirkland, Hannah Sawyer Lee, Eliza Leslie, and many others advised women to remain within the existing patriarchal constraints of



Fig. 2.11 T.H. Matteson's
The Drunkard's Home

American socio-cultural expectations. Their protagonists, often married to alcoholics, atheists, philanderers, and wastrels, suffered, wept, and prayed for their husbands to become Christians rather than seeking an independent and safe existence for themselves and their children. The solution in their sentimental novels to the problems of male inebriation, insolvency, violent behavior, adultery, and atheism was for women to accept the grim situation, pray for its improvement, read their Bibles, and submit to what they believed to be God's will for them. Of course, temperance and moral reform fiction did enable women to see themselves as moral creatures, which was an improvement over the eighteenth-century model of women as depraved daughters of Eve. Still, it fell far short of Frances Wright's challenge to women to overcome the obstacles that patriarchal dominance created in their lives – to stop entering into marriages that became financially oppressive and physically abusive for women.

In his project on American literary culture, William Charvat "limited [his] study to those writers for whom both art and income were matters of concern, and whose work, accordingly, revealed the often conflicting pressures of the will to create and the need to create for a buying

public.”¹³⁶ Such a description is apt for many antebellum women novelists, who indeed were not ladies of leisure, writing to relieve their *ennui* or as an intellectual exercise. Rather, many were their families’ primary financial support; they needed to produce stories and novels that editors and publishers would finance and that the reading public would purchase. These women novelists had no choice but to conform to the fictive product required of them. In true sentimental style, the more a novelist’s female characters prayed, suffered, and wept, the more likely it was that she could sell her novel to a publisher. They avoided female protagonists who defied men’s rightful control or argued for women’s rights. In 1829 in a short novel entitled *The Proselyte*, a Mrs. L. Learned wrote the first novel that attacked Frances Wright’s atheism. The work blamed Wright for the spiritual and physical deaths of several of the novel’s characters.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Qtd in Michael Winship’s *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995. 3.

¹³⁷ At least six novels written during the antebellum period focused almost entirely on combatting atheism : Mrs. L. Learned’s 1829 *The Proselyte*, Hannah Farnham Lee’s 1835 *The Backslider*, Eliza Cabot Follen’s 1835 *The Skeptic*, Orestes A. Brownson’s 1840 *Charles Elwood, or the Infidel Converted*, Maria J. McIntosh’s 1846 *Two Lives: or, To Seem and To Be*, and Anna Hanson Dorsey’s 1846 *The Sister of Charity*. Three of them detail the downfall and finally the death throes of an atheist, usually in a drunken stupor or wasted away from years of dissolute behavior. Lee, McIntosh, and Dorsey all focus on the desperate circumstances affecting atheists, but none of them allude to Wright in their works. While Brownson had been closely associated with Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen during their time in New York City, he did not implicate his former colleagues in this tale of his journey from atheism to Roman Catholicism. In an 1850 lecture he did blame Wright for leading people into atheism: “Francis [sic] Wright ... and her friends were the great movers in the scheme of godless education.... I was for a brief time in her confidence, and one of those selected to carry into execution her plans. The great object was to get rid of Christianity, and to convert our Churches into Halls of science. The plan was not to make open attacks on religion, although we might belabor the clergy and bring them into contempt where we could; but to establish a system of state, we said, *national* schools, from which all religion was to be excluded, in which nothing was to be taught but such knowledge as is verifiable by the senses, and to which all parents were to be compelled by law to send their children.” O[restes] A. Brownson, *An Oration on Liberal Studies, Delivered before the Philomathian Society, of Mount Saint Mary’s College, Md., June 29th, 1853*. Baltimore: Hedian & O’Brien, 1853. 19. Mrs. L. L[earned]. *The Proselyte*. New York: G. Long, 1829. 16, 17, 34. The novel was published by a G. Long, located at 169 Broadway (from the title page of *The Proselyte*) in lower Manhattan in 1829, the same year that Wright was becoming most notorious, and just a mile away from Wright’s and Owen’s Hall of Science; the Hall of Science was in the old Ebenezer Church at 359 Broome Street. See *Frances Wright: Free Enquirer*, by Perkins and Wolfson, 236. The author of *The Proselyte* is identified on the title page only as a “Mrs. L. L.”; through research in multiple publications I have identified her as a “Mrs. L. Learned” from New York City. First, an 1830 review of the novel in the *Magazine of the Reformed Dutch Church* indicates that the author is “an accomplished lady of this City,” and I have evidence from a title page of that magazine that it was published in New York City. “Literary.” *Magazine of the Reformed Dutch Church* (January 1, 1830): 320. Next, in the *New-York Mirror*, *The Proselyte* is identified as “from the pen of the accomplished writer of the ‘Uneducated Wife.’” “The Proselyte.” *New-York Mirror, and Ladies’ Literary Gazette* 7.26 (January 2, 1830): 207. Next, “The Uneducated Wife” was reprinted in *The Atlantic Club-Book, Vol. 1*, 1834; the author is identified there as a “Mrs. Learned.” Table of Contents, *The Atlantic Club-*

While *The Proselyte* never used Frances Wright's name, magazine reviewers recognized her instantly: The *New-York Spectator* commented that the "object of '*The Proselyte*,' is to show the results to which the principles of the Fanny-Wright-ers will inevitably lead, when carried out to their full extent."¹³⁸ Learned used language then coded by the evangelical press to point to

The Proselyte.—Two or three weeks since, we received, and read, a handsome octavo pamphlet of some 70 or 80 pages, under the above title. The author, we understand, to be an amiable and really deserving lady, who has written another and more extensive work, the publication of which depends upon the success of the present. The object of "*The Proselyte*," is to show the results to which the principles of the Fanny-Wright-ers will inevitably lead, when carried out to their full extent. And although

Fig. 2.12 Book review of Mrs. L. Learned's *The Proselyte*, 1829

Wright – such as “an itinerant lecturer in petticoats” and the “female apostle of infidelity” – for in mid-1829 Wright was the only woman who could have been thus identified on either side of the Atlantic.¹³⁹ Learned has her protagonist in *The Proselyte* fear the “free enquiry, philosophy, priestcraft, &c. &c.,” reciting terms Wright used in her lectures and publications.¹⁴⁰

Book, Being Sketches in Prose and Verse, by Various Authors. Vol. 1. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834. See fn 67 for her residency in New York City.

¹³⁸ “The Proselyte.” *New-York Spectator* (January 15, 1830).

¹³⁹ Wright's name was well-known even outside of major metropolitan areas; one writer was sure that “all our readers ha[d] heard *something*” of Frances Wright. *American Masonick Record and Albany Saturday Magazine*, October 24, 1829, 310. In November 1829 a writer defended Wright when she was “represented ... as ‘a female monster.’” *Liberal Extracts*, November 1, 1829, 71. Eliza Sharples, the so-called Lady of the Rotunda, became famous in London well after the writing of this novel in 1829; in fact, her mentor Richard Carlile encouraged Sharples to look to Wright as a role model. Iain McCalman, “Ultra-Radicalism and Convivial Debating-Clubs in London, 1795-1838.” *The English Historical Review* 102.403 (April 1987): 309-333. The writer of an article in the September 19, 1829, issue of *Christian Secretary* alluded to “‘the female orator’ (meaning Miss Wright)”; obviously the writer believed that the definite article *the* was all that was required for a reader to make the connection between “female orator” and Wright. Clearly, Wright was *the* only female orator any reader could conceive of, and of course the writer “was so disgusted with [Wright's] doctrine, that [he] could not stay.” *Christian Secretary* 8.35 (Sept. 19, 1829): 137.

¹⁴⁰ Mrs. L. L[earned], 18, 25, 31, 34-35. Learned says the “powerful speaker,” implying Wright, “fascinated, and ... strangely infatuated her victims; not by the force of her reasoning, ... but by ministering” with arguments of sophistry to her listeners’ “sensual appetites.” *The Proselyte* refers to Wright as the “priestess of pleasure,” and “her system” as that “*new philosophy*, as it was called” which was “certainly as old as Epicurus.” This was a reference to Wright's praising “the mild, unassuming, reasonable Epicurus” in her fifth lecture (“Morals”). Frances Wright, “Lecture V: *Morals*.” *Course of Popular Lectures*. New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, Hall of Science, 1829. 110. It is possible but less likely that Learned had a copy of *A Few Days in Athens*, which centers on Epicurus as a main character. Frances Wright, *A Few Days in Athens, Being the Translation of a Greek Manuscript Discovered in Herculaneum*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822. Also printed in *New-Harmony Gazette*,

As I have demonstrated in the first chapter, Wright's name became synonymous with the breakdown in society that accusers predicted would come through women's accessing and exploiting a language of independence and freedom. For the two decades following Wright's declaration of war on the Protestant clergy,¹⁴¹ professional women editors and writers consciously distanced themselves from any association with Wright's name. Yet intelligent, well-educated women now had to be wary of being disastrously labeled "bluestockings." Women writers had to find ways to write and publish novels without linking themselves to Wright's reputation or fate. In the 1830s three such female novelists drew clear lines of distinction between themselves and the notorious Frances Wright: Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza Cabot Follen. In this project I consider these three writers, a novel that each wrote, and negotiations the women made with the patriarchal institutions that affected their lives.

For an extended period in each of their lives, Hale, Child, and Follen all had to depend on their own labors to earn a living. All three were managing editors of magazines and an integral part of local and national print culture. Two were early and active participants in the immediate abolition of slavery. Each of these three women expressed politically conservative ideas in her fiction that seem profoundly disconnected to the unconventional realities of her professional

2.1 – 2.28 (October 4, 1826 to April 11, 1827). *Longworth's American Almanac, New-York Register ...*, 263. Mrs. Learned did not leave any record of writing and publishing again. After checking multiple city directories I found a Samuel Learned at the posh address of Canal and Hudson streets, New York City – evidence that he had the means to support them both. *Longworth's American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory, for the Fiftieth year of American Independence*. New-York: Thomas Longworth, 1825. 263. Canal Street was the northern boundary of New-York City in 1825; the wealthy were building homes there to flee tradesmen who were settling into older homes being turned into boardinghouses. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 25, 109.

¹⁴¹ Morris, 205.

career.¹⁴² While performing successfully (most of the time) in the public sphere of publishing, Hale, Child, and Follen wrote novels in which the female protagonist was a conventional, submissive woman, the pious guide to the males in her nuclear family; her influence and proper place was the personal, domestic space of her home. By writing female protagonists who conformed to this model, Hale, Child, and Follen could be confident that their novels were socially acceptable and marketable and that they had placated rather than threatened men who could have otherwise hurt them. Still, in their personal lives these three editors and writers more often behaved as empowered authority figures.

Why in the 1830s did these three women try so hard to *seem* to be something through their fiction that their daily lives denied? In the next three chapters I will demonstrate that they felt vulnerable to attack from conservative evangelical reviewers because they feared they would be perceived as having become “Wrightists” – as having strayed from the “delicate female” image. Hale and Child had a great deal to lose personally by the outraged response of powerful males to Wright’s platform, as both were the sole or primary support of their families. Follen’s vulnerability was through her husband; the Rev. Karl (Charles) Follen was the one vulnerable to attack as a “Wrightest” and her novel represents a defense by a loyal wife of an “innocent” man. In each case, either the woman or her husband had, from a sense of profound passion and commitment, performed some liberal-radical act or written some liberal-radical text. All three women had powerful reasons to be concerned that, as strong women with important positions in the antebellum culture of print, they could be accused of being radical. Also, Hale, Child, and

¹⁴² Karcher, *First Woman of the Republic*, 293. Even Lydia Maria Child, after years of attempting to look to her husband as a model husband, in 1843 drew up legal papers transferring all her monies to her friend Ellis Loring to keep them safe from David Child’s spendthrift habits. According to Carolyn Karcher, “[u]nder New York equity law a wife could keep her property from her husband’s creditors by transferring it to another male custodian. Child named Ellis Loring as her legal surrogate. She was not acting in a ‘selfish or monopolizing spirit,’ she explained; rather, by protecting her earnings from David, she was ensuring that they would be of use ‘to *him* as well as myself.’ Nor did she seek an actual divorce – she had simply given up relying on David to make a home for her.”

Follen feared they easily could be perceived as under Wright's influence, not only because they were professional women, which transgressed the boundaries of woman's sphere, but because their religious leanings lacked the correct evangelical Protestant sentiments then sweeping the country. As one scholar comments in a discussion of antebellum oratory, "Many women were quick to broadcast their deference to men concerning commerce and politics in the wake of Frances Wright's vocal criticisms of the clergy's influence on government."¹⁴³ All three women made overt and concerted efforts through personal writings and a fictional work to identify themselves as entirely outside of Frances Wright's sphere.

That liberal antebellum women who might have been radicalized to a more strident proto-feminism could not, if they had wanted to, write the story of a strong, independent female protagonist speaks to the reality that conservative evangelical reviewers won the anti-novel-reading debate. After the 1829-1830 transformation of popular culture that followed Frances Wright's explosion onto the public scene, liberal women writers who needed to earn a living had good reason to feel anxious for their families' survival. The history of liberal-radical acts or texts threatened these three female writers with dire consequences of financial ruin. In the chapters that follow I will work to demonstrate the reality of their fears through examination of Sarah Josepha Hale's *The Lecturess*, Lydia Maria Child's *Philothea*, and Eliza Cabot Follen's *The Skeptic*.

¹⁴³ Granville Ganter, "The Unexceptional Eloquence of Sarah Josepha Hale's *Lecturess*." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 112 (2002): 272.

CHAPTER 3:
“PUBLIC DEFENDER OF THE RIGHTS OF HER SEX”¹:
SARAH JOSEPHA HALE’S *THE LECTURESS*

In 1845 Transcendentalist and bluestocking Margaret Fuller charged men “to remove arbitrary barriers” that blocked women’s professional options: “[L]et them be sea-captains, if you will.”² Conventional antebellum Americans could shake their heads and laugh at the nonsense of it, and today only scholars recall the phrase. Six years before Fuller’s petition to American readers, a female character in the novel *The Lecturess. Or Woman’s Sphere* by Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879) had made a far more outrageous proposition – a challenge that still today gives pause to some Americans: “What should *I* do as President of the United States?”³ But where Fuller was in earnest, Hale’s character spoke it rhetorically and as the nonsense that contemporary readers surely understood it to be.

Anyone who knows Hale’s name today recognizes her as the editor of the enormously popular *Godey’s Lady’s Book* or as the writer of “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Stories that she reenergized the Bunker Hill Monument project and convinced Abraham Lincoln to establish Thanksgiving as a national holiday appear in internet blogs and on government websites. In 1977 scholar Ann Douglas dubbed her the “most important feminine arbiter of her day.”⁴ Still, the scholarship on Hale is spotty and a cultural biography of her is overdue. She has long been

¹ Sarah Josepha Hale, *The Lecturess, or, Woman’s Sphere*. Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1839. 36. Available only on microfiche.

² S. Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1845. 158-159.

³ Hale, *The Lecturess*. 25.

⁴ Ann Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977. 45.

understood as a sentimentalist who as *Godey's* editor worked to convince nineteenth-century women that they were morally superior to men, but who also taught women to restrict their behavior to the domestic woman's sphere. Overall, the image we inherit of Hale is that of a strong but moral woman who urged women toward education, self-improvement, and into certain professions, but away from all political engagement – indeed, most scholars consider her to be decidedly conservative in her views on women. Hale worked to create an image of herself as a wise, pious, and carefully domineering matriarch, crafting a female persona that was at once socially retiring, discretely assertive, and morally right. In fact, in her early years as a writer and editor she considered herself a bluestocking, an epithet that early in her writing career Hale argued women needed to co-opt and claim as honorable.⁵



Fig. 3.1 Sarah Josepha Hale, by James Reid Lambdin, 1831

The image of Hale as the ideal or iconic republican mother, willingly confined to the female domestic sphere, was one that early Hale scholars tended to confirm. As literary scholar Patricia Okker and others have observed more recently, the development of this model woman during the early decades of the nineteenth century should be seen as a significant ideological shift from the recent past. Many intellectuals in Western societies in the eighteenth century had begun to accept that if women received an education equal to that given men, women had the

⁵ Sarah Josepha Hale. Book review. "Blue Stocking Hall. *In 2 vols. New York.*" *Ladies' Magazine* 1.3 (March 1828): 143-144.

capacity to be the intellectual equals of men. However, for reasons not sufficiently investigated by scholars, “ideologies of sexual difference underwent profound transformation in the early nineteenth century.”⁶ In England William Godwin’s proud exposé of his radical wife Mary Wollstonecraft after her death in 1797 prompted an outpouring of animosity toward “bluestockings,” both as licentious Jacobins and as shrill and self-aggrandizing intellectuals. In contrast, during the same period Americans encouraged women’s education so that they could become pious republican wives and mothers. Then a generation later, just at the moment that some women began contemplating using their intellects for purposes other than inspiring their sons and husbands, Frances Wright’s entrance upon the American scene and her defiance of social norms hardened the resolve of powerful men against strong and liberal women. Wright’s degradation in the public eye encouraged restrictions on women’s liberty, and henceforth there was no question what the results would be for an intelligent woman who openly took radical positions. The reputations of American radical women who persevered in their quests for gender equality, regardless of their pedigree, bank account, or connections, would be destroyed.⁷

Sarah Josepha Hale, a well-educated woman, saw the frightening consequences of being recognized as a bluestocking with liberal views on women’s rights and capacities. A recent widow with a desperate need to provide for her fatherless children, she took her cue from evangelical reviewers and began refashioning herself as a social conservative. Once she argued for women’s intellectual equality with men and for expanded women’s legal rights, yet in 1829 Hale performed a careful self-silencing. When Frances Wright’s public crucifixion became evident, Hale reframed her message to conform to Benjamin Rush’s notion of “female

⁶ Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995. 38.

⁷ An example is Lewis Tappan; in 1836 he urged Lydia Maria Child to speak publicly for abolitionism, yet within just a few years he was adamantly opposed to the women’s rights movement.

education,” which inspired American males to moral greatness. Because prior to 1829 Hale had found employment that led to a position of significant power, she also engaged throughout her lifetime in a balancing act. She performed her part as a powerful editor, jostling for power with men for readership and sales. But she also performed another part that she believed society required of her – a shy, deferential female accessory or sidekick to power. In real life Hale “lobb[ie]d Senators and badger[ed] Presidents of the United States to do her bidding” and in print she urged women to read, study, and expand their minds – yet she also admonished women to remain subservient to men on a daily basis.⁸ It is this Janus-like image of Hale that causes modern feminists to view her as a hypocrite – a woman who engaged head-to-head with powerful men in the public sphere, yet reprimanded other women who did the same thing and suggested that they treasure their God-ordained passivity.⁹ In this chapter I argue that Hale, in the wake of Frances Wright’s persecution and in order to avoid a similar persecution as a bluestocking, actively participated in the ideological transformation of gender difference in America. With the organizational support of *Godey’s Lady’s Book* she promulgated standards for women’s thoughts and behaviors that established her as the model for America’s wives and mothers, and through those mothers, the preceptor of America’s children.

Beginning with Nathaniel Hawthorne in the mid-nineteenth century, critics have routinely dismissed as second-rate the literary productions of Hale and many other nineteenth-century female writers.¹⁰ Some scholarship considers Hale’s negotiations of her self-

⁸ Geraldine K. Ellis, *Sarah Josepha Hale, Mr. Godey’s Lady*. c. 1970s. Unpublished manuscript. Richards Free Library, Newport, New Hampshire. Ellis’s work is a full-length unpublished manuscript held at the Richard Free Library in Newport; it was apparently written sometime in the late 1970s. Pages 10-19 appear to be missing, and the chapters appear to be misnumbered. Many thanks to the Ellis family for giving Richards Free Library permission to send me the digital files of this work by their relative, Geraldine K. Ellis, now deceased.

⁹ Some people might consider Phyllis Schlafley and Sarah Palin to be Hale’s recent reincarnations.

¹⁰ In the 1970s feminist scholarship continued to see Hale’s work from a negative perspective as part of a complicit domesticity and sentimentalism in which women willingly remained in their own separate sphere. Over the past thirty years scholars from a range of disciplines have thoughtfully begun to reconsider the influences on Hale and

identification as a strong and intelligent woman functioning in a world that insisted she be compliant and unobtrusive. According to historian Angela Marie Howard Zophy, Hale used *Godey's Lady's Book* to broaden women's sphere of influence by encouraging the expansion of women's opportunities through education and employment considered appropriate to women's nature, inside and outside of the home.¹¹ Early Republic scholar Laura McCall asks scholars to look for a nuanced feminism in Hale, pointing to her advocacy of female education, admission of women to medical school, and women's physical exercise.¹² Barbara A. Bardes and Suzanne Gossett argue that the long view of Hale's work reveals "an astonishing constancy of purpose": Hale's message, they say, was that while "[w]omen ... were charged with responsibility for the moral direction of the family and the society," she entirely "opposed any attempt by women to compete with men, to enter the public spheres of politics or economics, or ... to try to become

the ways in which she influenced others. Isabelle Webb Entrikin's dissertation entitled "Sarah Josepha Hale and *Godey's Lady's Book*" (1943) and Carol Dick Buell's master's thesis, "Sarah Josepha Hale, The Editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*" (1976) both work to restore Hale's place in book publishing history. Gail Senese's dissertation, "Sarah Josepha Hale and 'Ladies' Magazine': A Reconstructed Image" (2003), does not much expand our understanding of Hale or her work. She locates (in the first issue of *Ladies' Magazine*, Jan. 1828) Hale's "intent and purpose" to use her position as editor of a magazine as an opportunity to advance the cause of women's education; she does a statistical analysis of all of the nine volumes of *Ladies' Magazine* for its "educational (expansive), domestic (restrictive), or neutral nature," and she finds that "Hale met her goal to educate." Joseph Michael Sommers, "*Godey's Lady's Book*: Sarah Hale and the Construction of Sentimental Nationalism." *College Literature* 37.3 (Summer 2010): 43-61. 44. Sommers argues that Hale's association as a Daughter of the American Revolution prompted a powerfully motivating nationalistic pride. He contends that "Hale appropriated seemingly innocuous sentimental modes and devices already present in [*Godey's Lady's Book*] ... as a thin façade masking her antebellum call for union among women who she believed should fight against the impending secession of the southern states."

¹¹ Angela Marie Howard Zophy, "For the Improvement of My Sex: Sarah Josepha Hale's Editorship of *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1837-1877." Diss. The Ohio State University, 1978. 5-6. Zophy agrees Hale insisted that women should remain within their designated sphere. As part of the so-called cult of republican motherhood, Hale wanted women to feel empowered within that "fortress" as the "custodians of domestic virtues and the guardians of the morality and spiritual consciousness of American culture" and to exert their "maternal influence over children." Women should marry and become the "mother[s] of civilization and the educator[s] of the race."

¹² Laura McCall, "'The Reign of Brute Force Is Now over': A Content Analysis of *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1860." *Journal of the Early Republic* 9.2 (Summer 1989): 217-236. 235. McCall performed a systematic study of the fiction that Hale approved for publication in *Godey's*, analyzing the traits of 234 female protagonists, and determined that they were not the "pious, pure, submissive, or domestic" characters that Barbara Welter and other first-wave feminists had seen.

like men.”¹³ Nina Baym contests the idea that Hale avoided addressing political issues, saying instead that she was “a profoundly political writer throughout her career,” working to advance the conservative agenda of separate spheres.¹⁴ At the same time, says Baym, Hale brought a “female polyvocality into the public arena,” for as she shamed women for their radical positions, she also drew attention to the fact that radical women had spoken.¹⁵ Amy Beth Aronson suggests that Hale encouraged women to discuss ideas of female moral authority with female peers – with her and one another – through the written venue of *Godey’s* letters to the editor, rather than with their husbands.¹⁶ Patricia Okker’s excellent *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors*, the only recent and full-length scholarly treatment of Hale, argues that Hale “proposed that public positions typically

¹³ Barbara A. Bardes and Suzanne Gossett. “Sarah J. Hale, Selective Promoter of Her Sex.” In Susan Albertine, ed., *A Living of Words: American Women in Print Culture*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995. 32.

¹⁴ Nina Baym, “Onward Christian Women: Sarah J. Hale’s History of the World.” *The New England Quarterly* 63.2 (June 1990): 256. Baym argues that *Woman’s Record* is a document that perhaps recorded Hale’s clearest explanation of her theories on gender. Hale prefaces this nearly 1000-page text with a Biblical history that demonstrates women’s moral superiority over men’s physicality. She traces that superiority to Adam’s and Eve’s banishment from the Garden of Eden, saying that once that occurred, Adam’s superior physical strength left him selfish and sexually excited. She cites the apostle Paul’s judgment that “woman was made for man,” and reasons that the only way Eve could be this “helpmate” was where Adam was lacking – morality. “If woman was destined to help man, she self-evidently had to be superior to him in whatever area she was supposed to provide aid.... Therefore, she must have been ‘above him in her intuitive knowledge of heavenly things.’” Sarah Josepha Hale. *Woman’s Record; or, Sketches of all Distinguished Women, from “The Beginning” Till A. D. 1850. Arranged in Four Eras. With Selections from Female Writers of Every Age*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853. Hale, says Baym, believed “that WOMAN is God’s appointed agent of *morality*, the teacher and inspirer of those feelings and sentiments which are termed the virtues of humanity; and that the progress of these virtues and the permanent improvement of our race, depend on the manner in which her mission is treated by man.” Baym notes that in *Woman’s Record* “in quoting chapter and verse, meeting doctrinal objections with counter-argument, [Hale] behaves like a trained biblical scholar,” which “might look like behavior that is inconsistent with [her] feminine methods; but it looks equally like behavior enacting her conviction that educated Christian women have the right and obligation to speak out.” Baym, “Onward Christian Women,” 255. (*Record* xxxv). Nina Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays by Nina Baym*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992. 168.

¹⁵ In her *Woman’s Record*, Hale systematically disputes and denigrates the liberal and radical ideologies of Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, George Sand, and more. But in fact her “eagerness to debate her contemporaries in print inevitably circulated their points of view.” Hale “represented the contemporary moment as one in which women were no longer willing to be silent. Instead of just speaking softly among themselves, women were now invited to address each other in public, within earshot of men.” Baym, “Onward Christian Women,” 268.

¹⁶ Amy Beth Aronson, “Domesticity and Women’s Collective Agency: Contribution and Collaboration in America’s First Successful Women’s Magazine.” *American Periodicals* 11 (2001): 1-23. Aronson argues that through her magazines Hale, other middle-class female editors, and their writers and readers collaborated to construct the ideology of domesticity that confined women. She uses Jane Tompkins’s “ethic of submission” in which women rely on Biblical admonition (God) to agree to submit to male authority – but then essentially understand the action ultimately as submission to God, rather than to men.

associated with men be redefined as occupations within women's public sphere."¹⁷ Okker, Nicole Tonkovich, and Amy Easton-Flake have identified and explored the complexities of Hale's conservative feminism. As Okker notes, "during the late 1820s and the 1830s [Hale] gradually came to promote an essential sexual difference based on Victorian notions of woman's inherent morality and the idea of a separate women's sphere."¹⁸ In a complicated and compelling argument, Easton-Flake argues that women writers of mid-century anti-suffrage fiction struck a "precarious balance" as they worked to improve "women's status and society while maintaining what they regarded to be the beneficial aspects of nineteenth-century femininity."¹⁹ Yet these scholars have not pursued a context or rationale for the important ideological transformation in Hale from liberal to conservative ideologies.

There are points of disjuncture in the narrative that bring Sarah Josepha Hale from an Enlightenment upbringing in rural New Hampshire in the early years of the nineteenth century to the mantle of urbane conservative spokeswoman at the end of it. It can be hard to discern where Hale's story is sometimes just a cover – a dominant narrative that established and maintained to hide aspects of her life that she feared could bring her harm. The images of Hale before 1829 are very different from those that most scholars accept as the iconic Hale, a figure many Americans came to revere. The insightful work of Nicole Tonkovich is instructive; she sees Hale's consistent urging of women to retreat into the domestic circle as reflecting Hale's own seamless

¹⁷ Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 74.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁹ Amy A. Easton-Flake. "An Alternative Woman's Movement: Antisuffrage Fiction, 1839-1920." Diss. Brandeis University, 2011. iv. Easton-Flake supports the use of the private sphere/public sphere dichotomy that has been the subject of contestation over the past five decades, but makes a further subdivision within the public sphere. Where those who follow Habermas divide the public sphere into the marketplace, the government, and print culture, she instead sees a tripartite model: a private or domestic sphere and a public sphere divided into only two parts: political and civil. Men visited the private sphere but dominated all areas of the public sphere. Women dominated the private sphere, shunned the political, and increasingly moved into the civil, which "encompass[ed] institutions such as schools, churches, lyceums, reform movements, benevolent associations, and businesses." She argues that Hale, among other nineteenth-century women, understood the ideal woman to be "intelligent, cultured, charming, well educated, wed or unwed, independent, and economically self-sufficient," but at the "same time, she [was] modest, benevolent, highly moral, lady-like in manners and appearance, and appropriately disinterested." 10, 12.

strategy for successfully shielding from her readers the fact of her real power and influence in the masculine marketplace for nearly a half century – first for nine years at the *Ladies' Magazine* and then for forty years at *Godey's Lady's Book*. As importantly, Tonkovich suggests that a concomitant element of the “rhetorical power” of Hale’s platform to promote female education was her “perhaps unwilling but nevertheless effective contributions to the coming paradigm of individualism.”²⁰ That is, through Hale’s efforts ostensibly to enable women to educate themselves for the purpose of guiding their children, women were becoming less predictable and compliant, and more uniquely themselves – not the outcome that Hale had intended.²¹

The vicious 1828-29 reaction by the evangelical press to Frances Wright’s public lectures and published writings clarified for Hale the consequences of liberal female behavior. The reviewers’ response to Wright communicated clearly that Hale, if identified as a “blue-stocking,” could become the next target of their vitriol, framing her as a laughingstock and, much worse, as a radical and a jezebel. The explosion of Frances Wright onto the public stage altered Hale’s already iconoclastic plans for her future, moving her toward a far greater conservatism than she otherwise would have adopted. Between 1828 and 1840 in the midst of a challenge to create a solid financial base for herself and five children, Hale pivoted ideologically. Hale turned away from the suddenly dangerous stance that valued a woman’s intellectual independence and turned toward the socially apodictic position of female domesticity and purity. Hale consciously worked to project a particular image of herself as reserved and feminine in order to mask the

²⁰ Nicole Tonkovich. “Rhetorical Power in the Victorian Parlor: *Godey's Lady's Book* and the Gendering of Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric.” *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*. Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran, eds. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. 170.

²¹ Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997. I am less convinced by Tonkovich’s argument regarding Hale in *Domesticity with a Difference*; she argues that Hale’s ideologies evolved primarily out her sense of being abandoned by her father.

reality of her extraordinary professional power and occasionally even her quasi-political power.²²

With the astonishing success of *Godey's Lady's Book* and her own independent efforts, by the early 1840s Hale established herself as the ideal and indisputable matriarch and moral guide to American women. She built and maintained a power base for herself that equaled or exceeded that of most of her male editors and publishers and, after a career of nearly fifty years, died at age ninety an affluent woman.²³

NEWPORT, NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1788-1828

Hale was born Sarah Josepha Buell in 1788 and raised in Newport, a small town in the middle of New Hampshire. Baptized into the Congregational church, she probably attended services, although she apparently did not develop an affinity for strict religion.²⁴ Her two brothers were schooled in town at the Proprietors' House, while Hale learned at her mother's knee.²⁵ An autodidact, she gained more advanced learning through her brother Horatio's textbooks – first as he prepared for college with the Congregational Church minister, Rev.

²² Tonkovich, "Rhetorical Power." 167. Hale's revival of stalled efforts to establish a monument for Bunker Hill (where her older relatives had fought) exemplify the parallel nature of a feminism in which women become empowered, but under the guise of domesticity: "Under the rhetoric of women's exalted patriotic duty she subsumed the potentially threatening fact that women had banded together independently to raise money to complete a project men had abandoned." It could not be that women had succeeded where men had tried and failed. Beverly Peterson, "Mrs. Hale on Mrs. Stowe and Slavery." *American Periodicals* 8 (1998): 30-44. Peterson's analysis of the texts Hale writes to contest abolitionism also contains useful references to Hale's willingness to subvert the truth in efforts to control the response to her message.

²³ Finley, *The Lady of Godey's*, 91-92. According to Ruth Finley, "Mrs. Hale enjoyed a most comfortable income from 1840 on, for beside her salary as editor her many successful books brought her comparatively large royalties." Louis Godey gave her \$5000 "on the thirtieth anniversary of her editorship of his magazine." She "was an excellent business woman." When she died she was described as a "venerable authoress and editress" – an epithet that at once honors her as respected, respectable, skilled, and female. *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 1879, in Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 1.

²⁴ Ernest L. Scott, Jr., "Sarah Josepha Hale's New Hampshire Years, 1788-1828." *Historical New Hampshire* 49.2 (Summer 1994): 59-96. "In a rare personal comment, published in the *Ladies' Magazine* for July 1828, Sarah Josepha did recall the gloomy austerity of the Sabbath as observed at her grandfather Whittlesey's home in Saybrook, which she had visited once as a child."

²⁵ Hale, *Woman's Record*, 1853, 686. Years later Hale credited her mother with her early education: "I was mainly educated by my mother, and strictly taught to make the Bible the guide of my life." Tonkovich comments that the "details of Hale's educational background are sparse and ill-documented." Tonkovich, *Domesticity*, 27.

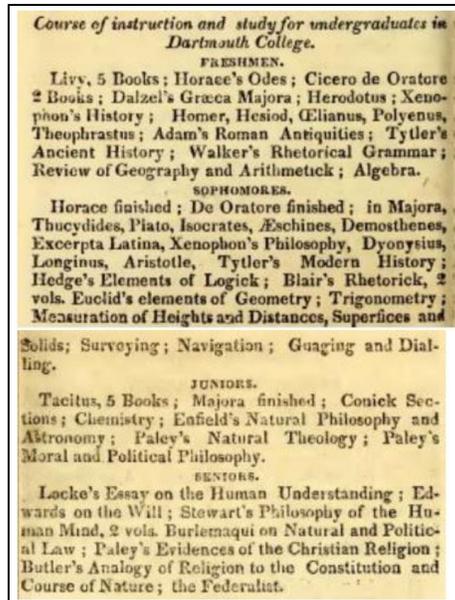


Fig. 3.2 Four-year curricular outline for Dartmouth students, 1823

Abijah Wines, and later by using his textbooks from Dartmouth College.²⁶ Hale taught herself Latin, the classical philosophers, the British empiricists, history, chemistry, mathematics, religion, and political law as listed in Dartmouth’s 1823 “Course of instruction and study for undergraduates.”²⁷ In 1813 at twenty-five she married attorney David Hale, whom she credited even more than her brother for her education through their rigorous two-hour evening study sessions together – with him she learned French, botany, geology, and the “English classics.”²⁸ Without question, Hale came to see herself as the intellectual equal of men.

²⁶ Scott, “New Hampshire Years,” 79-79.

²⁷ Four-year curricular outline for Dartmouth students, 1823. From the *New-Hampshire Register*,...1823. 56-57.

²⁸ Hale, *Woman’s Record*, 1853, 687. “To my brother [Horatio] I owe what knowledge I possess of the Latin, and the higher branches of mathematics, and of mental philosophy. He often lamented that I could not, like himself, have the privilege of a college education. To my husband I was yet more deeply indebted. He was a number of years my senior, and far more my superior in learning. We commenced, soon after our marriage, a system of study and reading which we pursued while he lived. The hours allowed were from eight o’clock in the evening till ten; two hours in the twenty-four: how I enjoyed those hours! In all our mental pursuits, it seemed the aim of my husband to enlighten my reason, – strengthen my judgment, and give me confidence in my own powers of mind, which he estimated much higher than I. But this approbation which he bestowed on my talents has been of great encouragement to me in attempting the duties that have since become my portion.” Shortly before her death Hale sent this same account almost word-for-word to Edmund Wheeler to include in his *History of Newport, New Hampshire, from 1766-1878, with a Genealogical Register*. Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1879. 126-128.

Hale was a vital part of the Coterie Society, a local literary group; according to Newport native Joseph Parmalee, Hale and the other “members of this aesthetic circle” acted out “characters and scenes” from their own plays and poems, as well as various classic and Shakespearean works.²⁹ According to Parmalee, they met on a grassy spot under a massive elm tree and the “gay appearance” of the members at these “rural gatherings” entranced onlookers. While local literary societies were common in the 1810s and 1820s on college campuses and among the elite in Boston, Charlestown, New York, and Philadelphia, they were not typically found in small rural New England towns this early in the century. Apparently Hale herself contributed to Newport’s having one, for Parmalee recalled that Hale was “at the head” of this group of “literary young people,” organizing and leading the group’s activities.³⁰

This certainly could have been harmless fun, but what is particularly striking in Parmalee’s account of the Coterie Society, given Hale’s later reputation as the icon of nineteenth-century American sentimentalism, was the almost decadent nature of the entertainment. Not only did the Society’s activities allow “free scope” to “conversation, songs, merriment, wit and repartee,” but their display on Newport’s grassy commons verged on the erotic. Hale and her friends – female and male, single and married – included in their repartee “love-making and philosophizing,” reported Parmalee. He nearly tripped over his erotic tropes as he described his childhood memories of the Coterie’s meeting grounds as a “trysting-place”

²⁹ Joseph W. Parmalee, *History of Newport*. In *History of Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, New Hampshire*. D. Hamilton Hurd, ed. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1886. 267. The record of the Coterie is found in a history of Newport written shortly after Hale’s death. Parmalee implies that he was one of the “gray-haired men and women walking about town” in 1885, “who, as small boys and girls with curious interest, hovered on the outer margin of the charmed circle ... as spectators; and the gay appearance of these rural gatherings ... is still fresh in the[ir] memory.” Their primary activities involved imaginative public speaking – poetry readings, monologues, “dramatic performances, recitations and readings from books and magazines, or the productions of some of their leading spirits.” They played the “Dukes and their retainers, Rosalind and Orlando, Celia and Oliver, Old Adams and the melancholy Jaques.”

³⁰ Parmalee, *History of Newport*, 267.

under two elms whose branches were woven together in a “widely spreading and reciprocal embrace” known as the “Matrimonial Tree.” The Coterie members’ performances, he said, allowed them to experience vicariously “all the incipient stages of the tender passion leading up to the connubial state,” leaving his readers guessing at the degree of passion openly demonstrated on the town lawn.³¹ In a scene hovering somewhere between the barely respectable and borderline bawdy, Parmalee recalled that he and other curious young boys and girls were permitted to “hover ... on the outer margin on the charmed circle” to watch the adults at play. The town seemed content with the young people’s institutionalized romp. Hale and her friends also sought to see their works in print, and some pieces did find their way into the “columns of the village paper,” the *New Hampshire Spectator*.³² Parmalee noted that Hale was known to have published her “literary ventures” under the pseudonym “Cornelia.”³³ One stanza in her poem “I’ve Loved,” published in the *American Monthly Magazine* two years later, recalls the Coterie Society’s activities in the mid-1820s:

I’ve loved Society – to join
At times the sportive throng;
To witness joy enhances mine,
Nor is the feeling wrong;
Pure was the social spirit given,
And tuned to harmonize with Heaven;
Tho’ jar’d and nearly lost, yet even

³¹ Parmalee, *History of Newport*, 267-268.

³² *Ibid.*, 267. Parmalee argued that the “piquant essays and disquisitions on various subjects ... illustrate[d] ... the advanced literary culture that existed among the people of Newport during that period.” He regretted, however, that the “names of the authors of these papers are concealed under signatures ... in such a manner as to destroy the ... identity” of “these literary young people” of the Coterie. The members used pseudonyms – “classical, Scriptural and sometimes common-place” names, such as “Philo, Apollonius ... Gamaliel, Mentor and Minerva ... Jotham, Uncle Toby and Rebecca.”

³³ *Ibid.*, 264.

It now can breathe a song,
Whose tones the roughest heart will melt,
And shame the check of hardened guilt;
And virtues, cloisters never felt,
Its music doth prolong.³⁴

Here Hale recalls their carefree frolics as innocent amusement. Yet Parmalee later characterized them as “various posturings and movements in the refreshing shade of the twin elms, ... pleasantly suggestive of ... love-making ... in the forest glades of Ardennes.”³⁵ In the twenty-first century, the unabashed pleasure Hale took in the Coterie’s literary activities would be lauded as self-actualization, but in the early nineteenth such behavior may well have been seen as indelicate. Such goings-on from a married mother were certainly *not* the sorts of activities Hale scholars would expect from a woman who later successfully sold herself as a revered conservative. Yet they do help create a context for Hale’s later transition from the “sporting throng” to a position in the periodical press as a conservative “editress.”

Then suddenly, in September 1822, after only a short spell of ill health, Hale’s husband David died of pneumonia at age 38.³⁶ His was a Freemason’s funeral: the minister who preached the funeral sermon was a “distinguished Mason” and “many members of distant Lodges” were present. David’s “remains [were] borne to the grave by his brethren [and] deposited with the solemn rites of the order.”³⁷ Poems Hale wrote in the period after his death reveal her profound grief at the loss; David had encouraged her intellectual curiosity and theirs apparently had been a

³⁴ Cornelia [Sarah Josepha Hale]. “I’ve Loved.” *The American Monthly Magazine* 1.3 (March 1824): 271.

³⁵ Parmalee, *History of Newport*, 267.

³⁶ Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*, 37.

³⁷ Edmund Wheeler, *History of Newport, New Hampshire, from 1766-1878, with a Genealogical Register*. Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1879. 152-153.

deeply satisfying marriage.³⁸ Although his law practice had done well, the family was not yet financially settled, and Hale was left destitute – a widow with four small children and one soon to be born.³⁹ In 1823, through the contacts and financial resources of her husband’s Masonic brothers, Hale published a volume of poetry, *The Genius of Oblivion*.⁴⁰ In its “Dedicatory Poem” Hale explained why she chose to write poetry; she said that “[n]o mercenary muse inspires my lay; / But Gratitude would her deep off’ring pay -- / Her patrons and her friends would number o’er, ... / [and] patronized a muse unknown to fame... / ... bending o’er a brother’s early bier, / ... your patronage shall be my boast.”⁴¹ But though she disavowed a “mercenary” motive, in fact Hale did begin to earn income from publishing her work under the pseudonym “Cornelia” in newspapers and magazines.

The Masons wrote to magazine editors describing Hale’s grim plight and by 1826 she became known as the widow whose work was worth reading. One reviewer wrote, “We understand the author of this work is a *lone woman, a widow with several children* [italics his]; but her state or condition has nothing to do with our opinion of her merits; every writer, whether widow, maid or man, should be judged by the standards of heart and mind, and by nothing

³⁸ “The Mourner.” In *The Genius of Oblivion; and Other Original Poems. By a Lady of New-Hampshire*. Concord: Jacob B. Moore, 1823. 117-120. Sarah Josepha Hale, “Stanzas, To a Deceased Husband.” *The American Monthly Magazine* 1.6 (June 1824): 552.

³⁹ *New-Hampshire Patriot* [Concord, NH] 5.3 (Jan. 20, 1823): 3. *New-Hampshire Sentinel* [Keene, NH] 25.1272 (Aug. 29, 1823): 3. David Hale died on Sept. 25, 1822, and William Hale was born four weeks later on Oct. 29, 1822. Albert Welles, ed. *History of the Buell Family in England, from the remotest times ascertainable from our ancient histories, and in American, from town, parish, church and family records*. New York: Society Library, 1881. 365, 367. Records show that Hale was represented in Cheshire County Court as “insolvent” and that in October 1823 the claims of David’s creditors would be resolved by the sale of her “dwelling-place.”

⁴⁰ Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*, 38. Hale, *Ladies’ Wreath*, 385. There is some reason to think that Hale may have written an earlier novel, *Stranger of the Valley; or Louisa and Adelaide. An American Tale*. New York: Collins and Hannay, Collins and [illegible], E. Bliss and E. White, and W. B. Gilley, 1825. According to the researchers at the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research at Cardiff University, “OCLC (Accession No 27635457) attributed New York edn. unquestionably to Sarah Josepha Hale (1788-1879). This work is not listed as Hale’s, however in Blanck.” *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 12 (Summer 2004). 91-92. Notes in WorldCat cite the attribution to one copy of the book (1825, New York: Collins and Hannay) microfilmed for Wright American Fiction. The work is not generally discussed as being Hale’s, and the style is quite different from *Northwood*, published two years later. Many copies available in World Cat only state the authorship as “By a lady.”

⁴¹ “[Sarah Josepha Hale.] Dedicatory Poem. Inscribed to the Friends and Patrons of the Author.” In *The Genius of Oblivion*, v-viii.

else.”⁴² Another editor wrote that he lamented Hale’s hard luck and was happy to “extend [her] fame.”⁴³ The state of widowed motherhood, then, initially her entrée into the publishing industry, became one Hale realized she could depend on as respectable and marketable; it became an advantage she would employ and extend. Literary scholar David Leverenz comments that Hale wore a “mask of *mater familias*”; Tonkovich notes that throughout her lifetime Hale “memorialized” her efforts to keep her family together in the face of overwhelming grief over the loss of her beloved husband, “repeat[ing] the story with little variation in several versions of her autobiography.”⁴⁴ As recently as 1931 a Hale scholar still repeated the account, commiserating that “[David’s] death remained the supreme tragedy of Mrs. Hale’s long life.”⁴⁵ Historian Jeffrey Steele argues that Hale used her widowhood to gain sympathy, recalling that Hale dressed in black mourning clothes her entire life instead of just during the year after David’s death, as was more common.⁴⁶

But proceeds from the sale of a volume of poetry could not feed five children, and Hale was forced to consider various means to support them and herself. She could have quickly remarried, as widows commonly did – but she did not. Instead she and her sister-in-law Hannah Hale, again with the financial backing of the Masons, opened a millinery shop together.⁴⁷

⁴² “Northwood; a Tale of New-England.” Book review. *Daily National Journal* [Washington, D.C.] 3.832 (May 2, 1827): 3. “We understand the author of this work is a *lone woman, a widow with several children*; but her state or condition has nothing to do with our opinion of her merits; every writer, whether widow, maid or man, should be judged by the standards of heart and mind, and by nothing else; and by this scale the author of Northwood has much to hope for” [italics his]. “Mrs. Hale.” *Hallowell Gazette* 14.3 (Jan. 17, 1827): 3.

⁴³ “Communication. Northwood: A Tale of New-England.” *New Hampshire Sentinel* 29.16 (April 20, 1827): 3. Another writer says that “the object of this notice is not to censure an unpretending and interesting volume” and noting that “the authoress is a widow and a mother,” recommends it to his readers.

⁴⁴ David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance*, Cornell University Press, 1990. fn.8, 337. Tonkovich, “Rhetorical Power.” 163.

⁴⁵ Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*. 31.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Steele, “The Gender and Racial Politics of Mourning in Antebellum America.” In *An Emotional History of the United States*. Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds. New York: New York University Press, 1998. 91. Steele says that Hale “was so affected by the death of her husband in 1822 that she wore black mourning dress for the rest of her life.”

⁴⁷ Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*, 37.

According to some Newport townspeople, Hale landed “patronage [from] those who ... generously employed her to trim their old bonnets.”⁴⁸ But Hale clearly was far more interested in literature than she was in sewing.⁴⁹ She was known to be “found standing,” reading, “hours after ... having been given” a new book. Some Newport folk reported that “good and true people told her she ‘must give up reading so much and attend strictly to business.’” Worse, she “wrote nights” and was likely exhausted at work. To reduce her expenses she sent her second-oldest son, then five, to live with Hale’s brother and his wife over 100 miles away in Glen Falls, New York.⁵⁰

In 1826 Hale’s focus shifted entirely toward literary efforts. She made several trips to Boston to try to find favor with magazine editors for “Cornelia’s” poetry and prose pieces.⁵¹ Hale managed to get twenty-one pieces published in one newspaper, the *Boston Spectator and Ladies’ Album*, in 1826 alone, nearly all autobiographical and centered on the joys of marriage and the sorrows of widows and fatherless children.⁵² By early 1827 Hale already seemed capable of handling herself in the print marketplace and even of manipulating the antebellum

⁴⁸ Lucy E. Sanford, “Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.” *The Granite Monthly. A Magazine of Literature, History, and State Progress* 3.6 (March 1880): 208-211. 209. This is from a woman who wrote for *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and who spoke with Hale’s friends from Newport after Hale’s death.

⁴⁹ Sanford, “Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.” 209.

⁵⁰ Ellis, 92, 94. Ellis quotes from a letter, dated March 24, 1824, from Horatio Buell in Glen Falls, who tells Hale that his wife had just died in childbirth and that he had sent the newborn, his son, and his nephew away to relatives: “Your little Horatio is now at Mrs. MacGregor’s [his wife’s mother].” Ellis quotes from another letter from Horatio Buell dated April 21, 1824: “Horatio [Hale] is spending his time very agreeably to himself. He is now at Wilton. He goes to school. He stays a part of his time at Mr. MacGregor’s a part at William MacGregor’s etc among our connexions in that vicinity.” Ellis, 95.

⁵¹ “‘Cornelia’s’ [sic] visit, this week, was as opportune, as it was acceptable. Her prose communication shall have an early insertion.” This was a reply published in a column entitled “The Critic.” Hale’s article is “‘The Duties of Husbands,’ Reviewed,” a reply to an earlier article with that title by “Marcia” regarding the husband-wife relationship. “To Correspondents.” *Boston Spectator* August 12, 1826. “‘CORNELIA’ is a favorite of the muses, and we hope to be gratified with her presence soon.” “To Correspondents.” *Boston Spectator* Sept. 23, 1826.

⁵² Okker, *Our Sister Editors*. 44. She says she relied on Blanck’s *Bibliography of American Literature* and Isabelle Webb Entrikin’s 1946 *Sarah Josepha Hale and “Godey’s Lady’s Book”* for this information. Also see Scott, “New Hampshire Years,” 93. According to Ellis, five periodicals published her poems: *Minerva*, *American Monthly Magazine*, *United States Literary Gazette*, *Boston Spectator and Ladies Album*, and *New-York Mirror*. Ellis, 92.

system of “puffery” to her benefit, with editors going out of their way to promote her work.⁵³ Then in 1827, again through her husband’s Masonic connections, Hale found a publisher, Thomas Bowles, for her first novel, *Northwood*. According to historian Geraldine Ellis, General Lafayette’s visit to Newport in June of 1825 inspired her writing the book; Ellis surmises that Hale “may have been one of those fortunate enough to meet Lafayette.”⁵⁴ In early February when the announcement came out in *Lyceum* and *Farmers’ Cabinet* that *Northwood* would be released soon, readers were already predisposed to take notice.⁵⁵ Quite a few newspaper articles published in 1827 went so far as to admonish readers to support Hale out of sympathy for her difficult situation. Hale had learned the system well and was well situated to succeed in the publishing world.

Northwood was an ambitious undertaking. One purpose for the work is clearly to tell a complex story for the purpose of entertaining its readers. But it also works at a different level in that it openly addresses and takes clear stances on controversial social and political issues. Within the plotline of *Northwood* Hale addressed slavery,⁵⁶ the convergence of philosophy and religion, the superiority of American governance, and universal education.⁵⁷ By direct

⁵³ For a fine exploration of antebellum puffery, see Lara Langer Cohen’s “Democratic Representations: Puffery and the Antebellum Print Explosion.” *American Literature* 79.4 (December 2007): 643-672.

⁵⁴ Ellis, 98-99. Ellis says that in Newport Lafayette laid the cornerstone for the Bunker Hill Monument in Boston; when the project lagged for lack of funds in the 1830s, Hale led the movement to continue its construction.

⁵⁵ “New Novel.” *Farmers’ Cabinet* 25.21 (Feb. 3, 1827): 3. Reprinted from *Lyceum*. This is an announcement that *Northwood* will be published shortly by Mrs. S. J. Hale, whose “signature” is Cornelia.

⁵⁶ *Northwood* is arguably the first American novel to directly engage with Southern chattel slavery within its plotline. Hale simply seems to be exploring the subject and using it to complicate the plot, especially in that it allowed her to look at cultural differences in the American geographical landscape. She could contrast the stoicism, perseverance, and perspicuity that seemed to stem from New Englanders’ hard labor with what she outlined as the indolence, ignorance, and self-doubts produced in white slave owners as a result of the institution of chattel slavery. In 1826 she could do so with equanimity because prior to Garrisonian abolitionism the topic of slavery had not yet become unacceptable in polite conversation.

⁵⁷ Sarah Josepha Hale, *Northwood: A Tale of New England*. Boston: Bowles & Dearborn, 1827. 143-145. In *Northwood* Hale anticipates Frances Wright’s views on “universal education,” the very phrase Wright used to discuss it, by three years. Squire Romelee proclaims “universal education” to be the “broad foundation on which [Americans] are rearing the imperishable structure of our liberties and national glory.” Hale, *Northwood: A Tale of New England*, 1827. 143-145.

confrontation of such political subjects in 1826 Hale positioned herself at the frontline of women engaging with the public sphere, alongside Lydia Maria Child (*Hobomok*) and Catharine Sedgwick (*Hope Leslie*). As Bardes and Gossett write in their discussion of *Northwood*, “[W]omen who attempted to express publicly their attitudes toward contemporary political questions challenged the prevailing norms of social conduct and the political role defined for women as republican mothers.”⁵⁸ Through *Northwood* Hale tackled American political topics in the same bold ways that male writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving did.

Hale also demonstrated boldness in *Northwood* through a direct address to magazine reviewers, expressing concern that the text’s dialogue was “rather dull ... is it not, Mr. Critic?”⁵⁹ Such a comment reflects an attitude of appropriate deference to a senior – a fairly common position for accomplished male writers to assume. It also reflects a touch of the audacity of a new writer vying for respect, demonstrating the sort of cautious spunk that could gain her reviewers’ attention. It did, and in fact in 1827 Hale received nothing but encouragement from reviewers for her eschewing the self-effacing mannerisms then common to women writers. At that particular historical moment – one year before Frances Wright burst into male-controlled space – it was not entirely inappropriate for a bluestocking to be a bit spunky. In fact, Hale’s careful networking and negotiating culminated in an offer in 1827 by Episcopal minister John Lauris Blake (and Masonic friend of her dead husband’s) to establish her in Boston as the editor of his new literary magazine for women, the *Ladies’ Magazine*.⁶⁰ Once Hale was established in

⁵⁸ Barbara Bardes and Suzanne Gossett. *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990. 38.

⁵⁹ Hale, *Northwood: A Tale of New England*, 1827. 166.

⁶⁰ “Grand Lodge.” *New-Hampshire Patriot* [Concord, NH] 4.27 (July 1, 1822): 1. From archives of Richards Free Library, Newport, NH. Blake had served as the chaplain of the Masonic Grand Lodge where David had been a Steward and a Pursuivant since 1819. The fact that Hale entitled her first novel *Northwood* is certainly intriguing, since it is the name of the Rev. Blake’s hometown, some sixty miles away from Newport. Originally from Northwood, New Hampshire, a town some sixty miles from Newport, in 1819 Blake was the rector of an Episcopal church in Rhode Island. *New-Hampshire Register*. Concord: George Hough, 1823. 71-72. “Grand Lodge.” *New-*

Boston and welcomed to the liberating venue of an urban literary salon, she, along with bluestockings Elizabeth Peabody and Lydia Maria Child, could expect to be taken seriously by literary men, though the male spaces of coffee houses and publishing firms were still off limits.⁶¹ But that period of relative gender equality was brief for Hale, for Frances Wright's 1828 intrusion had a chilling effect on men's attitudes toward educated women.

PROFESSIONAL WOMAN

The story of Hale's assumption of the editorship of *Ladies' Magazine* and of her move to Boston is intriguing. For the first four issues of the magazine (January through April) Hale remained in Newport, writing, gathering, and editing articles and mailing them back and forth to Boston for typesetting and proofing. From January to April, Hale also arranged for three more of her five children to live with relatives, who almost certainly covered the cost of the youngsters' room and board themselves.⁶² In April 1828, at the age of forty, when she finally packed up her house in Newport, New Hampshire, and moved to Boston, she took only her youngest child with her, five-year-old William – and immediately hired a governess to attend to his care during the work day.⁶³ Leaving everyone who knew her and beginning a life independent of everything

Hampshire Patriot [Concord, NH] 4.27 (July 1, 1822): 1. At the age of ninety in her farewell address to *Godey's* readers Hale claimed that Blake's invitation "was not only unsolicited, but entirely unexpected." "Grand Lodge." *New-Hampshire Patriot* [Concord, NH] 4.27 (July 1, 1822): 1. From archives of Richards Free Library, Newport, NH. Given the contact that Hale had had for years with magazine publishers all over New England in getting poems published, and then in getting *Northwood* published, such a statement is hard to take at face value. Sarah Josepha Hale. "Editor's Table." *Godey's Lady's Book* 91 (December 1877): 522-524.

⁶¹ See both Fanny Fern's and Louisa May Alcott's descriptions of their entering the male space of a publishing house some thirty years later; they are met with dismissiveness and rudeness. Fanny Fern, *Ruth Hall: A Domestic Tale of the Present Time*. New York: Mason Brothers, 1855. 230-231. Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women: A Story for Girls*. London: Ward, Lock, & Tyler. [1868, 1922]. 280.

⁶² Ernest L. Scott, Jr., "Sarah Josepha Hale's New Hampshire Years, 1788-1828." *Historical New Hampshire* 49.2 (Summer 1994): 59-96. 96. When Hale left Newport in 1828 her children were ages thirteen, eleven, nine, seven, and five. Although one or two of her children occasionally lived with her for brief periods, after she left Newport in April 1828, she and her five children would never live together as one family again. In fact, only the girls, Frances Ann and young Sarah Josepha, who were kept together for years, spent any amount of time with any other sibling. Ellis, *Sarah Josepha Hale*, 129. Hale to Catherine Fiske, Nov. 2, 1830. Sarah Josepha Hale Letters, University of New Hampshire Library. Durham, New Hampshire.

⁶³ Scott, "New Hampshire Years," 96. By 1830 Hale had sent "little Willey" to board at Catherine Fiske's Ladies' Seminary, and brought Horatio to work "in the printing office of French and Brown" and "enrolled him in the

familiar, Hale moved into a boarding house in Boston. U.S. Census records from 1830 confirm that Hale lived there with one boy and with two older women, presumably the governess and a housekeeper, and so was not burdened with domestic duties.⁶⁴ Within a few years of her husband's death, all of her children but one were living with relatives, and Hale never again had more than one child living with her. According to historian Ernest L. Scott, Hale's sending her children away so that she could turn her attention solely to the magazine drew, with "certainty, criticism from her peers in Newport."⁶⁵

Hale's move to Boston marks the beginning of her project to reinvent herself as a woman participating with men as an equal in the public sphere of antebellum publishing. Doing so required her to discount the rebuke of her Newport friends and neighbors, who were shocked that Hale was engaging in a working relationship with a man. Lucy E. Sanford, who wrote for *Godey's Lady's Book* and who spoke with Hale's friends from Newport, commented that "many of [Hale's] Newport friends thought [taking charge of the ladies' magazine] an absurd project."

Chauncey Hall School." Sarah Josepha Hale to Catherine Fiske. Nov. 22, 1830. Sarah Josepha Hale Papers. University of New Hampshire Library. Durham, New Hampshire. According to Ellis, Hale "invited some other mothers to bring their children to her rooms to be cared for and taught with William" to "help defray the expenses for the woman's services." Ellis, 142.

⁶⁴ Ellis, 138. When Hale first arrived in Boston she lived at 56 Eliot Street. By 1830 Hale's Boston address was another boarding house at 5 Tremont Place and written on a letter addressed to Hale from Oliver Wendell Holmes, accepting her invitation "with pleasure." Oliver Wendell Holmes to Sarah Josepha Hale. Autograph note in the third person, addressed to Mrs. Hale at 5 Tremont Place [Boston]. Record ID 289372, accession number MA 7437. Dept. of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, Pierpont Morgan Library. New York, NY. A history of Boston indicates that in 1830 that address would have been in the seventh ward of Boston, just a block or so away from the sixth ward, where Hale's name was duly entered in the 1830 U.S. Census. *A Catalogue of the City Councils of Boston, 1822-1908*, Boston: City of Boston Printing Department, 1909. I examined the census records for all twelve wards that comprised Boston in 1830. I checked every head of household whose last name begins with "H"; the single entry that could reasonably be Sarah Josepha Hale is a household that lists what looks like "Sarah Hase," but given the faded paper (117 years old at the time it was microfilmed), smudging, and the penmanship of the census-taker, the name reasonably could be "Sarah Hale." There is no "Sarah Hase" or any family with the surname "Hase" listed in the 1825, 1832, 1834, 1835, or 1836 *Stimpson's Boston Directory*. At that house are listed four individuals: three females between the ages of twenty and thirty and one boy between the ages of ten and fifteen. Fifth Census of the United States, 1830; Population Schedules, Massachusetts, Volume 7. Suffolk County, City of Boston. File Microcopies of Records in the National Archives: No. 19, Roll 65, Ward 6, 215. The National Archives, Washington, 1947. From www.census.gov, accessed Aug. 10, 2014.

⁶⁵ Scott, "New Hampshire Years," 96. Historian Ellis comments that "[e]veryone in Newport believed that Mrs. Hale's rightful place was at home raising those five fatherless Hale children." Ellis, *Sarah Josepha Hale*, 128.

The friends predicted the magazine would fail and that Hale “would have to come back” to a town where she had “lost the sympathy” of her friends.⁶⁶ Ellis suggests that when Hale left Newport in 1828 the townspeople “were scandalized” and “gossiped about her with a mixture of derision and dismay.”⁶⁷

For most of her life after that move, Hale obfuscated the fact that she had essentially abdicated her responsibilities as a mother with daily, supervisory contact with her five children, and she never recalled the semi-risqué Coterie activities in which she had engaged as a married mother. Certainly, both of those circumstances complicate the persona and now the legacy of a doting mother and a grieving widow that Hale presented to publishers, reviewers, and readers throughout her lifetime. Indeed, had contemporary rival editors or writers bandied about news of her children’s abandonment to relatives and of her Coterie exploits, Hale might have had reason to fear the negative reaction of readers and reviewers – especially during and after the period of Frances Wright’s infamous contestation with powerful men in the United States. So Hale iterated repeatedly in *Ladies’ Magazine* and later in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* her identity as a mother. She reminded readers that the only reason she worked as an editor was that she was a widow and needed to obtain funds to educate her children, as their father would have done had he lived. In an editorial at the end of *Ladies’ Magazine*’s first year she assured readers that if they accorded her magazine to have been successful, it was the “mother, and not the author” who “had been successful.”⁶⁸ Since she never revealed her children’s permanent absence, readers naturally could assume that all her progeny were at her dinner table each night, instead of just one child under

⁶⁶ Sanford, “Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.” 209.

⁶⁷ Ellis, *Sarah Josepha Hale*, 128.

⁶⁸ “To Patrons and Correspondents.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 1.12 (Dec. 1828): 575-576.

the care of a governess.⁶⁹ While questions about her Coterie activities or her children's presence with her may seem inconsequential, they provide a window into deconstructing Hale's ideology of women's place. Hale's writings reveal her significant concern with preserving her good reputation as a virtuous widow and mother, and being known as a bluestocking could only diminish her credibility with powerful antebellum men.⁷⁰ While she was vulnerable to exposure as a liberal-minded and autonomous female editor before 1829, she had much more reason to fear after Frances Wright's infamy.

When Hale began her professional work at *Ladies' Magazine* in 1828 she viewed herself as a respectable bluestocking, an identity that she suggested other intellectual women should claim also. In the January 1828 issue she stated that her intention for the new periodical was to promote the "progress of female improvement." She argued that with advanced education women could demonstrate their intellectual equality with men – familiar territory for her, since her brother and husband had entirely supported her in efforts toward self-education.

Hale took a bold step toward exposing herself as a true liberal in the March 1828 issue when she claimed for herself the label of "blue stocking" and argued clearly for the "rights of

⁶⁹ Finley, *Lady of Godey's*, 87. Ruth Finley writes that a "governess ... conducted classes" or held an "Infant School," for young William and his neighborhood friends while Hale was off at the office. My research in the 1830 U.S. Census reveals that at that time Hale lived with one young boy and two women, one of whom Ellis says Hale referred to as a "governess." Fifth Census of the United States, 1830; Population Schedules, Massachusetts, Volume 7. Suffolk County, City of Boston. File Microcopies of Records in the National Archives: No. 19, Roll 65. The National Archives, Washington, 1947. From www.census.gov, accessed Aug. 10, 2014.

⁷⁰ Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 114-115. "According to Patricia Okker, "blue assumed a pejorative meaning by the nineteenth century. Although the 'blue' derived her pleasure from intellectual rather than entertaining or religious pursuits, she, like the domestic idler, was frequently charged with failing to fulfill her responsibilities as a woman. She had a penchant either for philosophy – a field considered too masculine for a proper lady – or for a professional career in writing, an ambition leading to neglected domestic duties. Unlike the idler, however the 'blue' was seen as unfeminine as well as nondomestic....[T]he 'blue' suffered accusations of manliness." Other scholars have considered bluestockings: Evelyn Gordon Bodek, "Salonieres and Bluestockings: Educated Obsolence and Germinating Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 3.3/4 (Spring-Summer 1976): 185-199. Harriet Guest, "Bluestocking Feminism." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.1/2 (2002): 59-80. Alison E. Hurley, "A Conversation of Their Own: Watering-Place Correspondence among the Bluestockings." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40.1 (Fall 2006): 1-21. Jane Magrath, "'Rags of Mortality': Negotiating the Body in the Bluestocking Letters." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.1/2 (2002): 235-256. Emma Major, "The Politics of Sociability: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.1/2 (2002): 175-192. Anne Miegou, "Biographical Sketches of Principal Bluestocking Women." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65.1/2 (2002): 25-37.

woman.” In a review of a novel entitled *Blue Stocking Hall* Hale wrote that the work “contain[ed] an able vindication of the right of the female sex to share with the other in the highest branches of intellectual cultivation.” In the novel, reported Hale, a young man felt “fearful apprehensions” at visiting female relatives whose “mansion ... had received the ill-omened name of ‘Blue Stocking Hall.’” He feared “being addressed only in ‘words of learned length’ ... or the barbarous nomenclature of botany.” But, in a “gradual conquest over his prejudices,” the protagonist found the “united power of affection, taste, intelligence and piety, as displayed in a well governed and well educated family.” Hale’s sentiments are clear: “Few more unfounded prejudices have ever swayed the opinions of men, than the long prevalent and even now too common dislike of what are called ‘learned ladies.’” She closed her review with a note that she was aware that there were “those who are less disposed than ourselves to respect him [the author] as the champion of the rights of woman.” That is, Hale plainly stated that she *was* disposed to support women’s rights. Because of her proto-feminism, Hale implied, she could “recommend [the novel] highly” to her readers.⁷¹ In this review Hale worked to co-opt the socially pejorative “blue stocking” moniker and reframe it as a positive image for women. Significantly, she made no references to Christianity or to women’s superior or elevated morality in her discussion of women’s intellectual capabilities.

In May 1828 Hale again confidently argued for women’s legal rights in a startling frank article entitled “Legal Condition of Woman,” a response to a book review in the *North American Review*. Hale quoted the reviewer’s most inflammatory language in his calling the law of coverture a “monstrous doctrine” and praised his efforts to remedy the inequity of women’s legal position relative to men’s. She complained about the “disadvantages and disabilities to which [women are] particularly exposed” and that Roman civil law provided women “better and surer

⁷¹ Sarah Josepha Hale. “Blue Stocking Hall. *In 2 vols. New York.*” *Ladies’ Magazine* 1.3 (March 1828): 143-144.

provision allotted them out of their husband's estate, than females are now permitted, by the common law, even in our own free, favored country, to claim." She noted the "injustice as well as impolicy of depriving married ladies of all legal rights in the property for which her husband is, perhaps, indebted to her." At this point Hale demurred, acknowledging that powerful men "would more willingly yield it to the arguments and expostulations of their own sex than the clamor and complaints of ours" – but it is important to note that, for now, Hale was willing to write and print an article stating her liberal position on women's legal rights. She closed her article on a note of hope: "Of one thing we feel certain, that, however the laws may be penned or interpreted, public opinion is in our favor." She found her "proof" in the fact that "the ablest writers and most popular journals in our land," and here she is no doubt referring to the *North American Review* – "are, in our cause, voluntary advocates."⁷² Those apparent supporters would soon abandon any connection with women's empowerment, for in fact a specter loomed over Hale's newfound safe haven of intellectual endeavor.

Within seven months of Hale's assumption of the editorship of *Ladies' Magazine* and embarking on her new life as a working woman in a man's world, Frances Wright and the "infidel" ideologies of woman's rights suddenly intruded into the public consciousness. When Wright mounted the lecture platform in New Harmony, Indiana, on July 4, 1828, she critically

⁷² Hale, "Legal Condition of Woman." *Ladies' Magazine* 1.5 (May 1828): 233-238. Hale is reviewing Caleb Cushing's unsigned article in the April 1828 *North American Review*; she refers to it as "Legal Condition of Woman" because that is the running head on all the 41 pages of the article, but actually the article was ostensibly a review of two books on the subject, published some years before, in 1821 and 1824. Cushing says, "We do not propose to ourselves ... to set up for the female sex any extravagant standard of legal privilege, nor to lay lance in rest for the support of quixotic pretensions, in her behalf, to political or municipal rights adverse to those of the male sex. ... We do not esteem it any hardship, as some have done, that the property of an unmarried female is taxed without being represented." Cushing argues against the "pernicious facility of divorce." [Caleb Cushing.] "Art. II. – 1. *The Law of Infancy and Coverture* ... 2. *Traites du Contrat de Mariage*... *North American Review* 26.59 (April 1828): 316-356. 318-319, 327. In a May 1879 article entitled "Absent Friends" O.B. Frothingham discussed Cushing's 1828 article: Cushing does not "take the position of the modern reformer; he does not, that is to say, advocate the extension of the franchise to women; but he does make distinctions and lay down principles which strike at the heart of much popular prejudice.... In particular he takes exception to the iniquitous disposition of married women's property, and to the absurd mixture of masculine and feminine responsibility in case of complicity in crime." O. B. Frothingham, "Absent Friends." *North American Review* 128.270 (May 1879): 493-510. 505-506.

antagonized American magazine reviewers by speaking what antebellum society considered heresies. The coincidence in the occupations of Frances Wright and Sarah Josepha Hale – both were female managing editors of a periodical, which was still atypical – created dangerous opportunity for comparison of the two women. If the press were motivated to perceive Hale as sharing Wright’s beliefs about women’s rights, they might begin to paint her not as the gentle mother-figure that she claimed to be, but a powerful, “masculine” businesswoman. Because Wright sought attention in the public sphere, Hale was suddenly vulnerable to a similar surveillance, which she had scrupulously avoided. There was no doubt about it: Hale was an anomaly, and after July 1828, being marked by magazine editors and reviewers as a paradigm-shattering female became a terrifying prospect for her to confront.

Within a month of Wright’s first public oratory one can detect in Hale’s prose a slight retrenchment from the liberal positions she had taken regarding women’s sphere. Patricia Okker notes that Hale “underwent [a] profound transformation ... during the late 1820s and the 1830s” – a “conversion to separate spheres” ideologies, but Okker does not offer any explanation for this change.⁷³ It seems clear that in late 1828 and throughout 1829 when Frances Wright’s public humiliation was only intensifying, Hale came to realize the magnitude of the threat that the evangelical press posed to the reputations of individuals and of institutions, large and small. She recognized that, given her barely tawdry history with the Coterie, the absence of her children from her daily life, and the somewhat liberal tendencies of her rhetoric, she could easily become the target of their fury. Hale needed to revise her rhetoric from liberal to conservative, lower its decibel level, and soften its tone. She also needed to shield her private life from exposure.

By January 1829 Hale had begun working to retrace her steps to allow her to take back her words concerning her identity as a bluestocking. Now she understood that “learned women,

⁷³ Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 38-39.

bas blues, as they are contemptuously styled” were treated with “pity or contempt, ... ridicule or fear, ... hatred or envy”⁷⁴ and assured her readers that she “ha[d] no wish to tinge all her sex *blue*.”⁷⁵ Doing so would only turn America into a “great literary Factory, and set all our young ladies to spinning their brains” – a reference to working women’s drudgery in New England spinning mills. Hale discreetly avoided allusions to Mary Wollstonecraft and other wild and immoral “Jacobin” women, such as Thomas Rowlandson depicted in his 1815 lithograph, *Breaking Up of the Blue Stocking Club*. Hale’s goal instead, she said, was “a far nobler ...

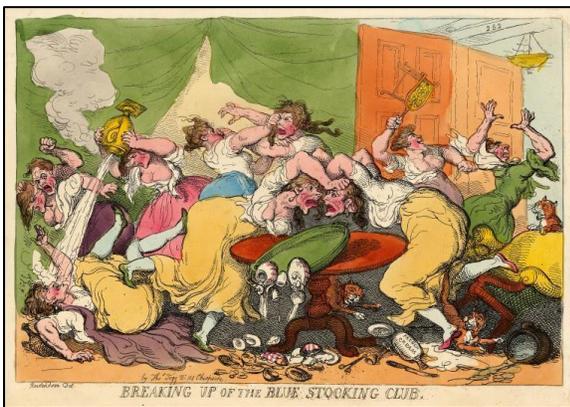


Fig. 3.3
Thomas
Rowlandson’s
*Breaking Up of the Blue
Stocking
Club*, 1815



Fig. 3.4
*Literary
Woman*.
c.1840s

method of gaining an influence, and maintaining an importance in society” for women. She wanted women to begin to understand themselves as having the “vast power nature has given them over the human mind” to become the “tutors of men.” They should do this as mothers to male and female children, a “pure and holy source of moral influence”; the schoolmaster ranked second in importance, she said.⁷⁶ Her readers did not need to fear that a bluestocking was guiding the content of the magazine in their hands; rather, she assured them that she was the truest of all republican conservatives. In the June issue she took another long step toward the conservative position that allowed women’s moral voice to be heard publicly:

⁷⁴ “Authoresses. – No. 1.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.1 (Jan. 1829): 31-34.

⁷⁵ “The Beginning.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.1 (Jan. 1829): 2-5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

It was never our design, when we undertook to conduct the Ladies' Magazine, to engage in those elaborate discussions, or profound researches which confer the title of scientific and learned on the work they employ. Nor did we propose to be critical We only intended to explain to our readers what we considered the *moral* [italics hers] tendency of the books we might notice.... We considered this course most appropriate for a woman..... [W]e were fully sensible that the highest literary celebrity would not be awarded us, but *that* we do not seek. We are contented with a more lowly niche in the temple of fame.... We would not, by precept or example, make women emulous of obtaining the same kind and measure of fame as men....The domestic station is woman's appropriate sphere.⁷⁷

Now Hale's tone was almost apologetic. By promising not to "engage in those elaborate discussions" and not to be "critical" anymore, Hale was silencing herself. By promising not to aspire to the "title" of the "learned," Hale was removing herself from entire areas of intellectual discourse that entertained educated men. By accepting a "more lowly niche" Hale was moving herself out of male conservative critics' line of fire. She clearly wanted to make her "example" as a magazine editor invisible, admonishing all women to remain with "woman's appropriate sphere." Hale's focus for the magazine was shifting from female education for women's sake back to the old idea that Americans would benefit from having enlightened, educated mothers and that women should aspire to raise moral and rational boys to lead the nation. She continued to argue for female education, but redirected it away from its usefulness in any venue except for a woman to educate her children and to maintain her husband's respectable status. Hale's tone quickly began to soften; it was no longer strident and insistent, but gentle and assuring. No longer, moreover, did she use words that connoted women's frustration or anger towards their

⁷⁷ Sarah Josepha Hale. Book review, *Letters on Female Character*. *Ladies' Magazine* 2.6 (June 1829): 282.

limited sphere. She began to embrace the separate female sphere as an inherent and natural and therefore a pleasing space for women.⁷⁸

Then in July 1829, the enemy actually arrived at the gates. Having already spoken in more liberal urban areas like Philadelphia and New York, Frances Wright finally brought her by-then infamous lecture series to Calvinist-bound Boston. Certainly Hale was stupefied by Wright's audacity, which in Hale's mind threatened to displace all of her efforts in *Ladies' Magazine* to move women toward a greater sense of their own intellectual abilities. She did not mention Wright in the August issue, but clearly had her in mind as she recommended the lectures on botany by a Mrs. Lincoln, vice-principal of the Troy Female Seminary. The "*Lectures* [would] do honor to her sex" because they were "*written, not spoken*" and so would not "intrude ... on the public in the bold defiance of feminine propriety."⁷⁹ In the same issue Hale printed an article by an "N. L." that infused religious sentiment into Hale's argument that women and men possessed equal intellect:

[M]an's superiority arises from his *physical* and not his *mental* strength.... Woman, 'the last and best of all create [sic],' was made also in the image of her Creator.... [T]he time will come ... when woman, exerting the powers with which God has endowed her, will assert her rights and stand forth side by side on perfect *mental* equality with the self-styled lord of creation. Then ... when her mental, as well as moral influences are ... *felt*

⁷⁸ Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 50. "As an independent, unmarried woman eager to earn a living for herself and her children, Hale would have likely found republican ideologies of gender limiting, for such rhetorics tended to define women primarily as wives and mothers and as occupying the domestic space. Unable to earn her living within that space but still insisting on her identity as a mother, Hale needed – both professionally and personally – a rhetoric that fused womanhood with remuneration for work." But Okker does not attempt to identify what had inspired those conservative rhetorics. According to Okker, "To a great extent, Victorian ideologies of gender provided just what Hale needed ... a rationale for [women's] emergence into the public sphere.... [T]he metaphor of separate spheres remained an empowering rhetoric on which to base an editorial career."

⁷⁹ Sarah Josepha Hale. "Works in Progress." *Ladies' Magazine* 2.8 (Aug.1829): 391-392.

in society, may we expect to see ... a godlike harmony of reason and feeling, capable of rising to the excellence of angelic spirits.⁸⁰

This step away from “reason” was also a step away from Frances Wright; a move toward elevated moral “feeling” was a step toward conservative and patriarchal Protestantism.

In the September issue Hale finally addressed Wright’s lectures. She announced to her readers that as their advisor she had been “repeatedly solicited to give [her] opinion through the medium of the Ladies’ Magazine” on the subject of Frances Wright’s lectures. She said that initially she had demurred, for she had not felt she could do so “satisfactorily, unless we had attended her lectures; which was not to be thought of.” That is, for a genteel antebellum woman to sit and hear Wright’s spoken words would only bring her society’s condemnation; Hale considered “every respectable female who appeared there, no matter what were her motives” as “having degraded herself.”⁸¹ Rather than write a review of a lecture she said she would not attend, Hale addressed Wright’s lectures within a review of a book, *Robert Owen’s Opening Speech, and his Reply to the Rev. Alex. Campbell*, published in May.⁸² Within just a few lines Hale scorned the “recent open and impudent attempt, made in this city by one of our own sex, to advocate the cause of infidelity and disorder.” According to Hale, no one hearing Wright speak

ROBERT OWEN’S BOOK.

We have been repeatedly solicited to give our opinion, through the medium of the Ladies’ Magazine, on the recent open and impudent attempt, made in this city by one of our own sex, to advocate the cause of infidelity and disorder. This we could not do satisfactorily, unless we had attended her lectures; which was not to be thought of. We consider every respectable female who appeared there, no matter what were her motives, as having degraded herself, by giving countenance, which her presence certainly did, to the applauses which were lavished on the sophistry of a shameless and impious woman.

Fig. 3.5 Hale calls Wright shameless and impious in “Robert Owen’s Book”

⁸⁰ N.L. “Man’s Mental Superiority Over Woman, Referrable to Physical Causes Only.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.8 (Aug.1829): 369-371.

⁸¹ Sarah Josepha Hale. “Robert Owen’s Book.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.9 (Sept.1829): 413-418.

⁸² Robert Owen, *Robert Owen’s Opening Speech, and his Reply to the Rev. Alex. Campbell, in the Recent Public Discussion in Cincinnati, to Prove That the Principles of all Religions are erroneous, and that their Practice is injurious to the Human Race.* Cincinnati: Published for Robert Owen, 1829.

could doubt that she was an atheist, and women especially should fear her atheism and immorality. She warned women that it was “of much consequence that our own sex should be aware” of the ways in which Wright, Owen, and others were working to “undermine” Christianity, a religion that was “the strength, the treasure, the peculiar blessing of woman.” She condemned the “applauses which were lavished on [Wright’s] sophistry” and warned that the “sentiments” of her speeches would work like an “insidious poison” on the “dear charities of domestic life, and the holy hopes of religion.”⁸³ Hale had added her voice to the male evangelical reviewers’ in their outcry against Wright and radical philosophies.

After Wright’s explosion into Boston Hale understood that she was going to need to drastically revise not only the messages she had been delivering, but also her tone, amending it from unbending and demanding to conciliatory and weak. She needed to perform in this new style both to her readers and in personal correspondence with powerful men from whom she needed favors. For example, in letters regarding raising funds to build the Boston Monument to memorialize Revolutionary War soldiers, Hale, who had recited love poetry for promiscuous audiences in a Newport grotto and approached magazine editors in their print shops with her writings, now wrote that she was morbidly fearful of personally “addressing” men. She described the emotions she felt on engaging with “strangers” as a “dread almost approaching to terror.” In one note concerning the Monument she stated that although she was “sometimes obliged to intrude on the notice of strangers,” she “never [did] it without fear” and much preferred meetings in which she could be “respect[ed as] the *mother* rather than the author” [emphasis mine].⁸⁴ Several months later this suddenly agoraphobic woman claimed to “dread” the possibility of a “public meeting” that “gentlemen attended,” where the “parade of *names* and

⁸³ [Hale], “Robert Owen’s Book.” 413-418.

⁸⁴ Sarah J. Hale to David Henshaw. Boston, Oct. 26, 1829. Sarah Josepha Hale Papers, Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library.

offices &c all exposed [women] to the scrutiny of the world.”⁸⁵ This change was a sudden and stark modulation of the tenor of Hale’s private prose used for public purpose; it can be contrasted with the egalitarian tone she used in correspondence with men she considered her colleagues, and an autocratic tone with men she considered her subordinates.⁸⁶

Hale can be seen silencing herself again by curbing her tone; in December 1829 she began using the self-deprecatory language typically associated with antebellum sentimentalism, which she had rarely done before. Her earlier discussions of women’s physical weakness had centered on their moral strength and dominance over men’s native immorality. Now, some months after Wright’s appearance in Boston, Hale’s drew upon her education in science to reinterpret female “helplessness” in the context of biology and to retreat entirely from discussions of women’s strength: “The science of anatomy ... we are not competent to unfold. It is our wish only to call attention to [the idea that] Nature has denied to woman the physical strength and muscular power.” She was certain that woman “was not formed for independence; but endowed with ... properties which enable her ... to adhere to her natural protector,” or men.⁸⁷ In 1829 the safest image for an intelligent and self-sufficient woman like Hale to project for herself had become everything she was not: a weak and dependent female.

⁸⁵ Sarah J. Hale to Henry A. S. Dearborn. March 13, 1830. Sarah Josepha Hale Papers, Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library.

⁸⁶ Sarah Josepha Hale to B. B. Thatcher. Personal correspondence. Boston, March 23, 1839. Sarah Josepha Buell Hale Papers, 1830-1855, MS 61, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH. In a letter to B.B. Thatcher, a colleague and contributor to *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, written at about the time Hale was finishing *The Lecturess*, Hale discusses the potential for a “border war” with England over a boundary dispute in Maine. She speaks in a confident and straightforward manner and never simpers: e.g. “The truth is, that Boston has too much pecuniary interest at stake in the commercial line, to feel ambitious of military renown... But such a crisis is hardly probabl[e]. England can hardly be so blinded to her real interests.” Sarah Josepha Hale to Edmund Wheeler, Dec. 21, 1870. Hale Letters, Richards Free Library. Newport, NH. In a letter to Edmund Wheeler, who was compiling a history of Newport, she occasionally used an autocratic tone: “I send MSS. for your book – Please do not alter or add to them: should you find the material too full, of course it must be abridged; but I should like in such case to have the articles sent back for me to cut down.” Sarah Josepha Hale to Edmund Wheeler, Dec. 21, 1870. Hale Letters, Richards Free Library. Newport, NH.

⁸⁷ [P.] “The Friendship of Women.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.12 (Dec. 1829): 558-561.

From Hale's regular association with other editors and publishers and her knowledge of what they were choosing to print, she would have seen that the nation's political temperament was shifting away from positions that allowed for female empowerment. She had to steer *Ladies' Magazine* so that it stayed current with that trend, or suffer the consequences.⁸⁸ For example, with Frances Wright still publically lecturing on radical ideas until July 1830, Hale had to take a strong stand against her in order to establish the *Ladies' Magazine* as safe for her readers to consume. In the January 1830 issue Hale again addressed the subject of "Fanny Wright"; she commented briefly that "we detest her principles – [she] would wholly dispense with the clergy."⁸⁹ Writing such a strong statement about religion broke new ground for Hale, for while Congregationalism had been part of Hale's upbringing, it had never been her focus or personal inclination.⁹⁰ For her to take a tough stand in 1830 demonstrates that she then needed to establish herself on the popular evangelical side of what was becoming a public conflict.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, by the early 1830s male evangelical reviewers, reacting against Frances Wright's terrifying radicalism, had undeniably effected a shift to a new message regarding the reading of fiction: Imaginative literature triggered unwholesome thoughts and led

⁸⁸ Sarah Josepha Hale, "Woman's Way to Eminence," *Ladies' Magazine* 7.9 (Sept. 1834): 385-388. 385. In 1834 Hale would continue to give especial attention to the ideal of republican motherhood, defining eminent women as the "good mothers" of "illustrious son[s]" and "of great men." Sarah Josepha Hale, "Religion Is the Strength of Woman." *American Ladies' Magazine* 7.5 (May 1834): 222-228. 226-227. Again, in another 1834 she would forswear the notion of women's public identity: "Very few females obtain celebrity for any public performance," for the "wide world is not their sphere." Rather, "we should deprecate the very idea ... that woman should be a politician.... She must ever lose her claim to respect when she steps beyond the peculiar sphere assigned by nature; but this surely would not prevent her from knowing something of the genius of her own government ... *without one sacrifice of feminine delicacy*. I know that in many minds there exists a prejudice to the very name of a talented or distinguished female; nor is this prejudice unfounded; for these terms have often been synonymous with all that is arrogant in pretention, and shallow in reality."

⁸⁹ Sarah Josepha Hale, "Literary Notices." *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3.1 (January 1830): 42-48. 46.

⁹⁰ Sarah J. Hale to Henry A. S. Dearborn. March 13, 1830. Sarah Josepha Hale Papers, Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library. In a letter to a supporter of her Bunker Hill Monument fundraising campaign she complained about the narrow-mindedness of some evangelicals: "Many of our religious people look on the contributions to the Movement not only as a worldly affair – but positively mischievous as calculated to awaken ambitions, pride &c. These silly prejudices it is vain to combat by reason – for they are founded in ignorance or selfishness. It requires art to manage those prejudices, and turn their strength to the support of the cause we advocate.

abusers down a slippery slope to damnation. Hale's magazine had long relied on fiction to fill the vast majority of its pages, and Hale had written most of it herself for the first six months of its existence. The work that marked Hale's popular entrance into the literary world had been her 1827 novel, *Northwood*, and in 1828 she had strongly supported novel reading, writing, "We raise the despised *Novel* to an eminence which overlooks the whole field of human conduct." If Hale continued to print fictive pieces whose purpose was merely to entertain and that featured frivolous and immoral characters, it was only a matter of time before she and her magazine would come under attack. Yet if she discontinued soliciting and printing fiction altogether, as was the standard protocol at the Methodist *Ladies' Repository*, her enterprise would not survive the transition, since her loyal readers were long accustomed to the pleasure of reading fiction. Hale needed to locate and secure some middle ground to assure her professional future. Her first step was to shift blame to the radical British.

In 1833, after Frances Wright had been physically absent from the country and the American lecture stage for three years, Hale seized on a particularly incendiary moment to carve out a safer space for herself and her magazine. At the height of the outcry over the publication of *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, a vicious satire by a disreputable former friend of Frances Wright's, Frances Trollope, Hale renewed a discussion of Wright.⁹¹ This time, the context of the conversation was novel reading. Hale printed an article in *Ladies' Magazine*, "English Novels," that dramatically implicated Wright, effectively shifting the focus away from Hale's own fiction-saturated magazine and onto the evils of imported British books. The article, written by Rev. M.A.H. Niles, condemned the "corrupt transatlantic works of fiction, with which our reading community is inundated," and directly associated Wright's name with the evils of reading

⁹¹ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. 2 volumes. London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832. Trollope's surname was mocked routinely in furious reviews of the book.

novels.⁹² Three years after the *Free Enquirer* and *Genius of Temperance* argument about Wright's and Owen's philosophies permeating Bulwer's popular novels, Hale and Niles resurrected the debate, again linking Wright with pernicious English novels. It was this article in Hale's magazine that revived the dire *Genius of Temperance* predictions that Wright's radical ideologies could lead to America's destruction:

Mr. Owen and Miss Wright have endeavored in vain to disseminate, in this country, their vile and debasing doctrines; to destroy the sanctity of our homes, and break down the fortresses that guard honor and virtue: their sentiments are too gross to be received with complacency, even by those who, though destitute of religious principle, are still possessed of taste and refinement.... [U]nless the overpowering voice of public sentiment shall banish these messengers of vice from our dwellings, they will exert a more unholy influence upon our national morals, than the combined efforts of infidelity.

The article drove home the point to readers that Hale's magazine judged as abominable Wright's radical methods and ideologies. It did not matter that Wright's own fiction (*A Few Days in Athens*) was unknown to Americans: she was British, her name still appeared on the *Free Enquirer* masthead, and Americans still remembered her notorious lecture crusade three years earlier. Niles labeled Wright a "female profligate" and her co-editor at the *Free Enquirer* a "wretch who well deserves a badge of infamy." Recalling images of Wright's appearances before audiences of thousands of eager listeners, Niles said he "should not wish to ... see vice and corruption ... receiving the homage of admiring crowds, and virtue and religion the mere watchwords of derision." By printing the article Hale's magazine automatically claimed as its own that very "virtue and religion," or the evangelical high moral ground.⁹³

⁹² M.A.H. Niles, "English Novels." *Ladies' Magazine and Literary Gazette* 6.8 (August 1833): 352-354.

⁹³ Niles, "English Novels," 353.

This article benefited Hale at a difficult juncture: Her magazine depended on women's reading fiction, yet the evangelical movement was continuing to advance in the battle against fiction reading. Hale needed to divert attention away from the reality that *Ladies' Magazine* was successful primarily because of its reliance on original fiction, and that over the years Hale herself had written many of the magazine's stories. At a time when conservative magazine reviewers were finally uniting to condemn the practice of reading works that were blatantly fictional, Hale had to keep printing fiction to keep her magazine solvent. She had no choice but to continue working to keep peace with male magazine reviewers.

Within the year Hale twice returned to the subject of novel reading, finessing the equivocal position she took in 1833. In "Religion Is the Strength of Woman," she assured readers that women should not "constant[ly] indulge" the habit of reading fiction. Habitual novel reading was like habitual drink, implied Hale; it only led to doom and destruction. Instead, women should take up the reading of non-fiction, and she suggested that they read about the American political system: "[T]he study of our political economy may well take the place of the tale of fiction, giving more enlarged and liberal views, and at least checking the imagination, which, by constant indulgence, might become too fatally active for the peace of its possessor." Of course, Hale rushed to add, "We do not mean by this, that woman should be a politician; we should deprecate the very idea." Rather, Hale argued that women's "knowing something of the genius of her own government" would enable them to understand "their superiority over the decaying governments of Europe ... *without one sacrifice of feminine delicacy*" [italics original]. By telling women to read about the supremacy of American governance over European, she was likely to appease conservative reviewers. By asking readers to use such non-fiction reading to "check... the imagination," she essentially gave readers permission to continue to read fiction

with moderation.⁹⁴ She delivered a message that conservative magazine reviewers were demanding, at the very least: Women should read less fiction overall, no pernicious fiction at all, and more non-fiction. Then in this issue of *Ladies' Magazine* Hale addressed the subject of reading fiction once again, and again took a strong conservative stance.

In “Literature for Ladies” Hale sneered at publishers who “poured forth ... publications for the Ladies ... ‘In one weak, washy, everlasting flood’ of frivolity and trifling.” Clearly the target of this attack was popular novels.⁹⁵ Yet in the same issue in which this attack against popular fiction appeared Hale printed several short fictive works – one by James Fenimore Cooper – now safely labeled “tales” and “sketches,” which she would have assured her readers were *not* pernicious, but morally uplifting. In fact, many such stories centered on frivolous subjects, such as parties and “*sociable visiting*.”⁹⁶ And at the same time that Hale was negotiating her printing fiction in both *Ladies' Magazine* and then in *Godey's Lady's Book*, she was also continuing to write fiction, supplying many of the stories printed in those magazines. In the mid-1830s she was also beginning to write longer works of fiction. *My Cousin Mary* was a thirty-three-page temperance tale; although “By a lady” appeared on the title page instead of her name as the author of the work, she clearly identified it as her production by signing her name fully – “Sarah J. Hale, Boston, March, 1839” – at the end of “Prefatory Remarks.” Its publication was followed shortly after by a much longer novel in which Hale took an opportunity to confront and consider the opportunities and penalties of women’s open engagement in the public sphere as the moral advisors of men.

⁹⁴ “Religion Is the Strength of Woman.” *American Ladies' Magazine* 7.3 (March 1834): 222-228. 226.

⁹⁵ “Literature for Ladies.” *American Ladies' Magazine* 7.3 (March 1834): 116.

⁹⁶ In this same March 1834 issue Hale printed “No Steamboats – A Vision,” by James Fenimore Cooper. *American Ladies' Magazine* 7.3 (March 1834): 71-79. She also printed excerpts from Eliza Leslie’s *Sketches by a Southern Pen*, labeled “Domestic Sketches”; they closed with a note that her “kind friends ... made us more than ever in love with *sociable visiting*” – hardly high moral sentiments. *American Ladies' Magazine*, 54-65.

THE LECTURESS, OR, WOMAN'S SPHERE

Sarah Josepha Hale's 1839 novel *The Lecturess, or, Woman's Sphere* is her most extensive effort to respond to Frances Wright's radical ideologies and public speaking. Over the past twenty-five years, scholars from a wide range of disciplines have examined *The Lecturess* in some depth. Most tend to agree with Barbara Bardes and Suzanne Gossett that the novel is a *roman à clef* and that the characters could be easily identified by antebellum Americans, for "anyone who read the eastern [news]papers was furnished with the key."⁹⁷ That is, readers of *The Lecturess* who kept themselves current with contemporary print culture knew exactly who the protagonist and a visiting female lecturer were supposed to represent: "Marian's career and experience with marriage parallel, in many details, those of two prominent women lecturers, Frances Wright and Angelina Grimké."⁹⁸ Yet *The Lecturess* was Hale's least direct attack on Wright. Though contextual clues guaranteed that the novel's characters would resonate with readers as Wright and Grimké, Hale never identified either woman by name. Instead she called an infamous visiting female lecturer "Mrs. ____" and a "twaddling," "artful, intriguing woman" (63, 102).⁹⁹ Nor did Hale identify herself as the author of the book, though she did acknowledge authorship of *My Cousin Mary* on the title page.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps she did not want to draw attention to herself as the author of such an extensive and intimate discussion of radical women. Perhaps she did not seek a direct confrontation with Wright, a fight from which Wright would have never

⁹⁷ Bardes and Gossett, *Declarations of Independence*. 47.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Many readers would have been familiar with A[ngelina] E. Grimké's "Appeal to the Christian Women of the South." *The Anti-Slavery Examiner* 1.2 (Sept. 1836): 1-36.

⁹⁹ All in-text references are indicated by page numbers in parentheses, and refer to Sarah Josepha Hale, *The Lecturess, or, Woman's Sphere*, Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1839.

¹⁰⁰ By retaining some degree of anonymity and by limiting her potential market, Hale had already limited her potential exposure to any possible negative criticism. She does, however, include a quote from her own *The Ladies' Wreath*, published one year earlier, and she does identify the quote as hers: "'The wish to promote the reputation of my own sex and my own country were among the earliest mental emotions I can recollect.' Mrs. S. J. Hale" (23).

backed away. Such a clash – similar to the one that had occurred only a year before between Catharine Beecher and Angelina Grimké over somewhat similar precepts – would only have

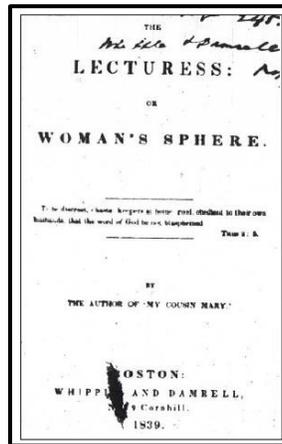


Fig. 3.6 Title page, Hale's *The Lectress*, 1839

brought Hale into the public discourse in the same breath and on the same printed page as the reviled Wright. Hale would not have wanted that to happen.

But it is not entirely clear what did prompt Hale to write this novel at this time. The summer of 1835 had seen intense contestation between pro-slavery and anti-slavery devotees in Boston, and with 1837 came bank failures and financial disaster. Karen Halttunen summarizes the mid- to late 1830s as a time of “personal failure, financial panics and depressions, political corruption, the urban masses, and the influx of immigrants, and growing labor discontent.”¹⁰¹ As often happens, times of crisis prompted politicians and others with a forum in the print media to seek scapegoats. Certainly in 1838 Hale was vulnerable to attack after her recent transition from *Ladies' Magazine* to *Godey's Lady's Book* as its managing literary editor. She might become a lightning rod for newspaper reviewers as a bluestocking working prominently in the public sphere, and may have felt a sense of urgency to redress or ward off criticism that would bring about her personal ruin. At the height of the economic crisis in America Hale would have been

¹⁰¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. 187.

under considerable financial strain.¹⁰² Aside from her own rooms in a comfortable boarding house – the one where Oliver Wendell Holmes also took rooms – she was paying tuition, room, and board for four children.¹⁰³ It is likely that she needed continuously to create remunerative opportunities for herself. As before, Hale turned to writing multiple long projects to generate cash.¹⁰⁴ From 1838 to 1839, in addition to editing the monthly *Godey's*, Hale wrote a temperance novel,¹⁰⁵ a domestic advice book, and a play, *The Lecturess*, and edited a collection of work by another writer – an unusually large amount of material for her.¹⁰⁶

Most of all, 1838, the year when Hale wrote *The Lecturess*, was the year that Frances Wright returned to lecturing publicly in the United States, railing against bankers and “priestcraft.” Sarah and Angelina Grimké began lecturing against slavery, even after abolitionist Gerrit Smith warned them “that if [they] spoke in public, ‘it would be called a Fanny Wright meeting & so on & advised [them] not to make addresses except in parlors.’”¹⁰⁷ After nearly eight years without female lecturers, suddenly three were circulating, and Wright and Angelina Grimké were both met with mob violence – the windows of Wright’s lecture halls were pelted with stones, and a hall where Grimké spoke was burned to the ground.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 93. The American economy was at a low point following the economic crash of 1837, which certainly affected Louis Godey’s cash flow at *Godey’s Lady’s Book* – Okker says that “the Panic of 1837 caused the collapse of many publishing houses” – and Hale was working at Godey’s pleasure.

¹⁰³ Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*, 97. Hale’s oldest son David had graduated from West Point in 1833 and was in the U.S. Army, but both younger boys (21 and 16) were at Harvard and both girls were at Emma Willard’s Female Seminary in Troy, New York. According to Finley, in 1841 William was a junior at Harvard. Finley, *Lady of Godey’s*, 88, 95.

¹⁰⁴ Throughout her years as an editor she wrote and sold dozens of poems, stories, novels, and non-fiction works to publishers on stiff terms that always worked to her advantage.

¹⁰⁵ For *My Cousin Mary* she was certainly assured of a quick lump-sum payment by the publisher of *The Lecturess*, a temperance society that sustained itself through charitable contributions.

¹⁰⁶ *Esther*, 1838. *The Pleasures of Taste*, 1839. *The Good Housekeeper, the Way to Live Well*, 1839. *My Cousin Mary*, 1839. *The Lecturess*, 1839.

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen S. Sullivan, “Women, Speech and Experience.” *The Good Society* 14.1-2 (2005): 35-39. 37-38.

¹⁰⁸ “A Fanny Wright Riot.” *Atkinson’s Saturday Evening Post* 17.900 (Oct. 27, 1838): 3. “As the fair Fanny reached the street door the whole crowd made a simultaneous rush toward her. Being surrounded by the body of the police she was in a measure protected from violence but yet so great was the pressure that she was lifted from her feet and forced along the walk to the corner of Anthony street. Down this street her supporters were forced, and the watchmen forming a double file cordon, for a moment stayed the violence of the mob, till the modern Hecate was hurried into a coach, ... and she was hurried off, homeward bound, amid the horrid din of oaths and shouts, and

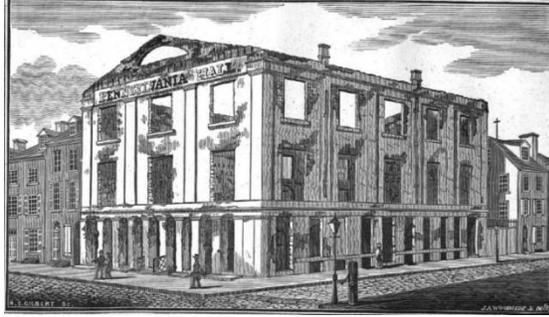


Fig. 3.7 The burned-out shell of Pennsylvania Hall

Hale was particularly vulnerable to personal attack as a powerful female editor; she had been working hard at *Godey's* to solidify her reputation as a good and pious *mother* and not a businesswoman. Perhaps she hoped that by writing a text that reviled radical women she could redirect potential negative attention away from herself.¹⁰⁹ One possible threat can be seen in the remarks of a reviewer who, after noting that “Fanny-Wrightism” was “all the rage,” conflates “political candidates for office and ... newspaper editors [as] the exclusive monopolists of th[e] entire department of popular instruction.” Here Hale, as an editor of a major periodical, was linked to Wright, partnered with scheming politicians, and charged together with them with manipulating public opinion. The writer says “[f]orty nine out of fifty” of editors are “too ignorant for the service ... and ... cannot be trusted.” He blasted that it was editors’ “interest and their vocation to mislead, deceive, *humbug* and mystify” their readers – just the sort of attack that Hale would have found profoundly unsettling.¹¹⁰

imprecations of the outraged multitude, thousands of whom followed her even to the door of her lodgings.” *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838*. Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838. “Whilst Angelina E. Grimké Weld was addressing them, our building was assailed by a mob, who broke our windows, alarmed the women, and disturbed the meeting my yelling, stamping, and throwing brick-bats and other missiles through the windows.” Building burned: “This was done by forcing open the doors, and carrying papers and the window-blinds upon the speaker’s platform, where they set fire to them, and turning the gas pipes towards the flames thus increased their activity, and in a few hours the building was consumed.”

¹⁰⁹ This assumes that she originally planned to put her name on the title page of *The Lecturess*, as had been her custom in recent years: in *Sketches of American Character* (1831) and *Traits of American Life* (1835) she was “Mrs. Sarah J. Hale”; in *Flora’s Interpreter* (1832) and *The Ladies Wreath* (1837) she was “Mrs. S. J. Hale”; in *The Book of Flowers* (1836) she was “Mrs. Hale.” Instead, she did not clearly identify herself on the title page – an anomaly for her, not the norm.

¹¹⁰ *North American Quarterly Magazine*, 9.37 (March 1838): 195-200. The writer quotes a “Utopian,” a Dr. Lindsley: “Indeed, abolitionism, and radicalism, and agrarianism, and ultraism, and amalgamationism, an Loco-

An article published in 1838 may have encouraged Hale to write *The Lecturess* as a condemnation of Wright as a powerful woman. Henry F. Harrington cited “Fanny Wright’s vagabondising habits of body and mind,” which he said were “well known.” He damned “[Mary] Wollstonecraft, [Frances] Wright and [Harriet] Martineau” for the “masculineness of mind and character” that he saw “evinced in their writings” and called the three women “semi-women” and “mental hermaphrodites.”¹¹¹ This *Ladies’ Companion* article entitled “Female Education” would have been imminently threatening to Hale, since it connected female education, the subject on which she wrote most often, to the radical political engagements of well-known educated women. Hale herself was well known, educated, and engaged with political issues as the leader of the movement to erect the Boston Monument. Hale needed to clarify in conservative reviewers’ minds that she was not radical. Redirecting reviewers’ attentions toward radical female public speakers, or *lecturesses*, might prevent their displacing their misogynist feelings onto pious and conventional intellectual women, which was how Hale was presenting herself.

But Hale may also have found encouragement in Harrington’s article to write such a work for positive reasons. For, in this article Harrington seems to spotlight Hale personally as the antithetical model of those three radical women. He offers to readers examples of three conservative women writers living nearby, presumably in Boston. He calls the first a woman who “has seen the Winters of half a century” and a “true woman – a right proper umpire,” one

Focoism, and Lynchism, and Fanny-Wrightism, are all the rage: and whether any existing law or usage or institution shall survive the ferment and the struggle, is beyond our prophetic ken to decide or to conjecture.” 198, 200.

¹¹¹ Henry F. Harrington, “Female Education. Number II.” *The Ladies’ Companion, a Monthly Magazine; Devoted to Literature and the Fine Arts* (Oct. 1838): 293-296. 295. In the four-page article Harrington expresses his horror at then-Congressman (ex-President) John Quincy Adams’s recent speech in favor of “woman’s full political existence” and right to petition against slavery; Adams supported Angelina Grimke’s speech on the House floor to present anti-slavery petitions. In this article Harrington argues for women’s remaining within their “proper sphere” and calls out the extreme behaviors of the “three greatest advocates of her own sex ... Wollstonecraft, Wright and Martineau.” He damns their demands for “woman’s full political existence; her unfettered equality with man.”

who had “reared a family of children to usefulness.” Indeed, this likely was intended to be Hale, for she was the best-known conservative female voice in Boston, would have been fifty years old in 1838, and had built her career out of her expressions of devotion to her five children.¹¹²

Harrington pretends to hold a conversation with these three women in which he consults with them about ex-President John Q. Adams’s request that men and women be allowed to present anti-slavery petitions to Congress (related to the annexation of Texas as a slave state).¹¹³ The “elderly mother,” says Harrington, answers as he would want every “true woman” to answer: “Let the men take care of politics....[W]e will stay at home!”¹¹⁴ So, Hale may well have found in this article motivation to give fictional voice to that “elderly mother” in *The Lecturess*. She could have its moral narrator and moral characters condemn radical women like Wollstonecraft, Wright, and Martineau.

In Hale’s 1839 *The Lecturess, or, Woman’s Sphere*, Marian Gayland is a beautiful young female lecturer in Boston. School chum Sophia and her fiancé Edward invite his cousin William to accompany them to Marian’s lecture. William is horrified, but agrees to go when he learns that Marian has to support her poor widowed mother, who had worked as a seamstress to send Marian to ladies’ seminary. After graduation Marian had begun writing essays on “Female Education” and eventually began lecturing on women’s rights. William courts Marian, believing that if she falls in love with him and they marry, she will give up public speaking for his love, housewifery, and motherhood. A conversation on the subject only reveals how different their opinions are, and they agree to part. She goes to Charleston to deliver a series of lectures, but the

¹¹² One of the others was undoubtedly Catharine Beecher; though she had moved to Cincinnati in 1832, she returned to Connecticut in 1837. She never married and had no children.

¹¹³ John Quincy Adams. *Speech of John Quincy Adams, of Massachusetts, upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition; on the Freedom of Speech and of Debate ...and the Petitions of More than One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, relating to the Annexation of Texas to this Union*. Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1838.

¹¹⁴ Harrington, “Female Education,” 296.

audience turns into a mob and sets fire to the building when she speaks against slavery. She faints in the chaos, is nearly trampled, and has to be transported home, where she remains ill for weeks. William hears the news of the conflagration and Marian's humiliation; they are reunited, marry, and she gives up public speaking for some time. A year later an infamous female lecturer comes to Boston and Marian begins attending her lectures regularly despite William's disapproval. He refuses to speak with her for weeks, finally passing a note that he will leave her if she continues to attend the lectures. The famous lecturer dines with Marian at their home and leaves town, her lecture series complete. Marian gives birth to a son, and hopes the child will unify the couple emotionally, but they remain estranged. Marian feels responsible for the impasse, buckles under the stress, becomes ill, and falls unconscious. William reappears, apologizing for his coldness. They reunite again, resolving to be better partners, and they enjoy another period of tranquility. Four years pass uneventfully and then Marian is invited to head an anti-slavery society where there are meetings of both men and women; she wants to do it, and William opposes her doing so. He distracts her by taking her on a grand excursion to Philadelphia, and the couple manages to avoid the conflict for several months. But in Philadelphia the infamous woman lecturer reappears and convinces Marian to return to lecturing. William sends Marian a farewell letter and moves out of the house, saying he will always provide for her and their child but that there is no hope for their reunion. Marian sinks into a depression and becomes dangerously ill. William loses all his money in the 1838 bank failures and cannot send the promised support. On her deathbed Marian asks Sophia to tell William that she apologizes to her young son for leaving him motherless, and that she accepts full responsibility for the calamitous outcome of their marriage. The novel closes twenty years later

at the wedding of their son and Sophia and Edward's pious daughter. William tells his son that he wishes he had been more compassionate to Marian during their marriage.

For the most part *The Lectress* received the sorts of notices one might expect, with most reviewers seeing it as a cautionary tale: "The object of this little work 'is to hold up as a warning to every woman the folly ... of a stubborn ... disposition'"¹¹⁵ One reviewer commented that the fact that Marian was "a staunch asserter and defender of female rights" was "exceedingly offensive to her husband's taste and feelings" and told his "fair readers" that "a Lectress is cautiously to be avoided."¹¹⁶ But another magazine apparently took the work to be supportive of women public speakers, for the reviewer offered that the "sentiments and views of the writer in relation to the appropriate sphere of women do not accord with our own. We think woman's appropriate sphere is not in the lecture room or hall of debate, but in the domestic circle."¹¹⁷

so insipid. The sentiments and views of the writer in relation to the appropriate sphere of women do not accord with our own. We think woman's appropriate sphere is not in the lecture room, or hall of debate; but in the domestic circle. 'Tis there she is seen in all her loveliness—and when she stoops from the dignity of a woman by raising her voice in a public assemblage; in our opinion she does violence to her nature.

Fig. 3.8 A *Haverhill Gazette* reviewer thinks that "woman's appropriate sphere is not in the lecture room"

Scholarly opinions also vary on Hale's purpose in *The Lectress*. Nina Baym, David Reynolds, Granville Ganter, Caroline Field Levander, Patricia Bizzell, and Barbara Bardes and Suzanne Gossett have all examined the text and proposed a variety of interpretations. Many of these scholars refer, though sometimes only briefly, to the person and ideologies of Frances Wright in their work. Wright had returned to the United States in 1835 and in 1838 when Hale

¹¹⁵ "The Lectress, or Woman's Sphere." *Christian Register and Boston Observer* 18.49 (Dec. 7, 1839): 195.

¹¹⁶ "The Lectress." *Christian Register and Boston Observer* 18.52 (Dec. 28, 1839): 206. Other reviews that see the novel as a cautionary tale include: *Vermont Chronical* 46 (Nov. 13, 1839): 182; *The Monthly Miscellany of Religion and Letters* 2 (1840): 110. *New-Hampshire Sentinel* 41.47 (Nov. 29, 1839).

¹¹⁷ "The Lectress, or Woman's Sphere." *Haverhill Gazette* 3.49 (Dec. 6, 1839): 3.

was writing *The Lecturess* Wright was actively lecturing. Construing *The Lecturess* as Hale's conventional, conservative attack on radical proto-feminist ideology, such as Frances Wright's, is an obvious interpretation of the novel – that because of their defiant rejection of woman's domestic sphere Hale believed that female lecturers earned a dismal fate.¹¹⁸ Nina Baym calls *The Lecturess* the “earliest anti-feminist fiction that [she has] found.”¹¹⁹

The nature of the public gaze (or the male or patriarchal gaze) is another critical lens through which female lecturers can be viewed.¹²⁰ Historian Karen Halttunen offers that respectable antebellum men and women averted their eyes on seeing something outside the bounds of decorum; moreover, any woman who willingly offered men the opportunity to stare at her in public defined herself as indecent.¹²¹ Baym agrees, suggesting that a “strong conviction” of Hale's was that “public display is inappropriate and counterproductive for women.”¹²² Respectable conservative writer and educator Catharine Beecher wanted a woman to “shrink ... from notoriety and public gaze.”¹²³ She indicted Wright for “step[ping] out of th[e] character [of] woman *as a woman*” by her lectures to promiscuous audiences, and that by doing so she had

¹¹⁸ When female lecturers married, their refusal to quit speaking publicly was seen as a direct rejection of the insulated and protected homes that husbands offered.

¹¹⁹ Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978. 75-76.

¹²⁰ Mary Devereaux, “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers and the Gendered Spectator: The New Aesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 48.4 (Autumn 1990): 337-347. 340, 347. Devereaux quotes Simone de Beauvoir: “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.” Also this: “Feminism ... offers a unique critical perspective. It provides resistance, and an alternative to, the male gaze.” Also see Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18. Edward Snow, “Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems.” *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989): 30-41.

¹²¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*. Naturally, in *The Lecturess*, since William understands Marian to be a respectable woman, he constructs in his mind the only situation that could possibly prompt her to stand and speak (that she must do so to support her destitute mother) and he pities her for it. In recounting his recent conversation with Marian he says, “I avoided the subject [of lectures], as I felt certain it must be a painful one to her...it must be a severe trial to appear that way in public. I pity her more than I can tell.” 30.

¹²² Baym, *Woman's Fiction*, 75-76.

¹²³ Catharine Beecher, Letter I, in *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion*. Hartford, Conn.: Belknap & Hamersley, 1836. 22-23.

“become disgusting and offensive.” According to the “standard of feeling and of taste,” Beecher protested:

[W]ho [could] look without disgust and abhorrence upon such an one as Fanny Wright, with her great masculine person, her loud voice, her untasteful attire, going about unprotected, and feeling no need of protection, mingling with men in stormy debate, and standing up with bare-faced impudence, to lecture to a public assembly.¹²⁴

While Angelina and Sarah Grimké had begun to lecture on abolitionism, they wore the “plain, simple dress of Quakers,” their message was framed in religious rhetoric, and their personal lives were conventional. Only Wright was accused of extreme improprieties with regard to appearance.¹²⁵ As rhetoric scholar Carol Mattingly argues, conservative critics “filtered Wright’s political stance through appearance, equating Wright’s radical ideas with her body and its attire.”¹²⁶ When Wright wore the New Harmony costume of “Turkish trousers” and the shape of her thigh could be detected by the cut of her garment, she “publicly demonstrated ... that women’s upper torsos rested on legs, not on pedestals.”¹²⁷ Equally appalling was that when Wright lectured in a traditional gown, she exposed more skin than antebellum society believed was acceptable for daytime dress. A writer for the *New York Daily Express* was offended by Wright’s display of “an open bosom, as if habited for a ball room.” He commented that Wright’s exhibition of “the usual share of legs ... would have answered well enough for an employ on

¹²⁴ Beecher, *Difficulties of Religion*. 22-23.

¹²⁵ Carol Mattingly, “Friendly Dress: A Disciplined Use.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29.2 (Spring 1999): 25-45. 34. Wright spoke weekly in New York City for two months. *The Jeffersonian*. 1.41 (Nov. 24, 1838): 323. Note: Hale had already begun working with Godey on the *Lady’s Book*, but she still was living in Boston in 1838 and 1839.

¹²⁶ Mattingly, “Friendly Dress,” 31. But I disagree with Mattingly’s argument that appearance dictated and directed the negative response to Wright: “Ministers had summarily dismissed Wright, focusing criticism on her corporeal form” (40). In fact, ministers and the conservative press criticized Wright for the radical content of her speech and her writing as well as for her radical appearance.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

some Theatrical Boards, at fifty cents a night.”¹²⁸ He perceived Wright’s public performance as similar to that of a saloon showgirl who pulled up her dress to expose her bare calf, as depicted



Fig. 3.9 *The plot exposed! or, Abolitionism, Fanny Wright, and the Whig party!* 1838

in a recent broadside.¹²⁹ Catharine Beecher sneered, “There she stands, with brazen front and brawny arms... I cannot conceive any thing in the shape of a woman, more intolerably offensive and disgusting.”¹³⁰ Clearly, in 1838 when Hale wrote *The Lectress*, only loose women – chorus girls and prostitutes – invited the public stares of males. Some of Hale’s anti-feminist readers would have interpreted the text, then, as condemning Marian for allowing men to gaze upon her publicly. The narrator tells the reader that Marian knew that she was “breaking one of the established rules of society [and] exposing herself to the animadversions” of both men and women, but (most of the time) was comfortable with that outsider position (11). So, says Baym, Hale believed that female lecturers angered men by lecturing to promiscuous audiences, gained none of the freedom and privileges they demanded, and deserved to be scorned.

A woman’s lecturing publicly for the purpose of self-aggrandizement – in order to win admiration and acclaim for her intellectual prowess – was an even more egregious proto-feminist error that Hale might have wanted to address. In *The Lectress* Hale mirrored from an 1836

¹²⁸ Qtd. in Mattingly, “Friendly Dress.” 28.

¹²⁹ *The plot exposed! or, Abolitionism, Fanny Wright, and the Whig party!* 1838. Broadside. Printed Ephemera Collection. Portfolio 56, Folder 35. Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.

¹³⁰ Beecher, *Difficulties of Religion*. 22-23.

novel by Lydia Maria Child a scene that was clearly intended to address this charge of arrogance against female lecturers.¹³¹ Hale's scene with Marian and her friend Sophia is remarkably similar to a scene in Child's *Philothea* in which the proud Aspasia exclaims the following in a "piercing tone" to the pious heroine:

Am I not the wife of Pericles, and the friend of Plato? ... Is there in all Greece a poet who has not sung my praises? Is there an artist who has not paid me tribute? ... To the remotest period of time, the world ... will hear of Aspasia the beautiful and the gifted! ... In history, the star of my existence will never set – but shine brilliantly and forever!¹³²

By 1838 *Philothea* had gained enough currency that Child's characterization of a self-glorifying Aspasia was understood to represent an ambitious and egotistical Frances Wright. And in 1838 in *The Lecturess*, Hale wrote the following passage that closely mirrors Aspasia's speech in *Philothea* in content, tone, and even grammar. When Marian is asked by Sophia if she was unhappy, the young lecturess trumpets,

Unhappy! what a question. Why should *I* be unhappy? Am I not beautiful, talented, accomplished – ay, and popular? did you not hear the shouts of applause that declared all this last night? and yet, you ask if I am unhappy? Know you not that it is only the poor and friendless who are unhappy? (23)

In both diatribes the speakers boast and use a series of rhetorical questions and even the identical syntax – "Am I not ...". Whether readers had read *Philothea*, Hale wanted Marian to resonate with Wright in the same way that Child had wanted Aspasia to resonate with Wright.¹³³ Female

¹³¹ Sarah Josepha Hale, "Literary Notices." *American Ladies' Magazine; Containing Original Tales, Essays, Literary & Historical Sketches, Poetry*. 9.8 (Aug. 1836): 479-484. 481. Hale had reviewed *Philothea* in 1836 and "earnestly recommend[ed] the book to the notice of [her] readers."

¹³² Lydia Maria Child, *Philothea. A Romance*, 28. Quoted in Hale, "Literary Notices," Aug. 1836, 482.

¹³³ Hale mimics *Philothea* in one more way: she aligns Aspasia and Marian in their desire to convince women to unveil themselves, metaphorically and literally. As *Philothea* enters Aspasia's home, her host grabs the guest's veil and tries to flip it back to reveal her face. When *Philothea* clutches the veil to her face, Aspasia says, "I must see

lecturers promoted a proto-feminist agenda and for that, according to the anti-feminist argument, they should be denounced.

Caroline Field Levander agrees, arguing that Hale believed Marian's "bawdy talk" deserved society's condemnation.¹³⁴ That is, Hale put bold words in Marian's mouth to identify her as a radical who abrogated nineteenth-century standards that restricted public speech to men. Interestingly, the reader of *The Lectress* never actually hears (reads) the words of Marian's lectures, but rather, the content of her speeches is filtered through her listeners' impressions.¹³⁵ So Marian's "bawdy talk" is contained in stunning and radical monologic conversations with herself or in dialogic conversations with her husband, mother, and close friend.¹³⁶ Levander argues that Hale wrote Marian's rude words in the interest of verisimilitude, to draw an accurate picture of radical feminist ideology, which Hale had read and could replicate, but with which she never agreed. From this anti-feminist view, the novel allows a woman to lecture to men about women's rights, then humbles her and brings her back, broken and remorseful, to a silenced, subservient position. If Hale's intended purpose in *The Lectress* was to convey a cautionary

this tyrannical custom done away in the free commonwealth of Athens. All the matrons who visit my house agree ... all are willing to renounce the absurd fashion.... In *you*, I was sure of a mind strong enough to break the fetters of habit." Child, *Philothea*, 24. Using a similar tone and imperative, Marian admonishes Sophia, "O! woman, woman, ... when will you tear away the veil of superstition that enshrouds you ... and, asserting your rights, dare to be free?" Hale, *Lectress*, 27.

¹³⁴ Caroline Field Levander, "Bawdy Talk: The Politics of Women's Public Speech in Henry James's *The Bostonians* and Sarah J. Hale's *The Lectress*." When women spoke in public it was by nature "bawdy" for the same reasons that Halttunen elucidates: by definition, bawdy talk was any talk that was outside the bounds of decorum. In *Voices of the Nation: Women and Public Speech in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. The chapter was printed earlier as: "Bawdy Talk: The Politics of Women's Public Speech in *The Lectress* and *The Bostonians*." *American Literature* 67.3 (Sept. 1995): 467-485.

¹³⁵ Hale, *Lectress*, 43. An example: "That night an assembled crowd gazed in admiration upon the faultless beauty of the lectress, and listened to her eloquent appeal in behalf of woman. Loud applause rang through the vaulted hall. The voice of the many expressed pleasure, if not approval."

¹³⁶ Hale, *The Lectress*. For example, as a thirteen-year-old girl, young Marian rudely says to her mother, "I will not wear out my life as you are doing, sewing, sewing, all the time" (17). Her mother appropriately responded by trying to "repress the enthusiasm of Marian." Though Mrs. Gayland "could not but admire the deep feeling" and "superior powers of mind," she "feared for the result" (18). No proper young lady would ever so address her mother, Levander would argue.

message that criticized radicalism and proto-feminism, it could be argued that she accomplished that in Marian's repeated humiliations and chastenings, and then in her lonely death.

It should be noted that some scholars do not see *The Lecturess* as anti-feminist, but rather as a subversive, liberal attack by Hale against traditional patriarchal ideology. Historian David Reynolds (1989) argues that the novel projects Hale's unequivocal support of female lecturers and "boldly feminist views," held openly during this early period in America only by Frances Wright.¹³⁷ For example, early in the novel Marian insists that the feminist sentiments she expresses in her public speeches are sincere:

I do not, when I appear before the public, merely echo the opinions of others, learned from books. Every word I speak is dictated by my heart, by the wish to raise my sex; to establish that equality between them and man which justice calls for (35).

When William replies by expressing love for her, she replies, "[R]emember that you are addressing a lecturess – a public defender of the rights of her sex" (36). When he ignores what she has just said, proposes marriage, and asks her to "lecture no more" (36-37), she replies:

I cannot conceive what possible difference my being married could make. I might ... be enabled to speak from bitter experience of the injustice of man towards woman.... If your love is only to be obtained by relinquishing my own opinions, and blindly submitting to your will, I will have none of it. I will not be the slave of man (37-38).

And when William labels woman's leaving her "own sphere" as "unfit" and "uncalled for," Marian scoffs,

Ay, ay, uncalled for. That is ever the burden of man's song. Uncalled for, that woman should aspire to be aught than the painted doll of the harem, or the mean drudge of

¹³⁷ David S. Reynolds. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. 390-391.

domestic life. The proper sphere of woman! where is it? in the kitchen, or the laundry-room? or, to rise one step in civilized life, to sit beside the cradle, and bow her head meekly in acquiescence to her husband's will, be it ever so arbitrary or unreasonable?(39)

These are powerful words and yet Hale, the conservative editor of *Godey's*, composed them. One is left to wonder what she had heard or read to make her reflect feminist sentiments with such perspicacity. She had read enough of Robert Owen's book to engage with it carefully; it is not out of line to consider that she had read the published works of Wollstonecraft and even Frances Wright.¹³⁸ Even more stunning and prescient are words Hale had Marian pronounce that predicted Hillary Clinton's political objectives by nearly two hundred years. In *The Lecturess* when Sophia asks, "[W]hat should *I* do as President of the United States?" Hale had Marian reply:

Nothing. Nor any other woman, educated as you have been, with the prejudices of society instilled into your mind with the first dawn of reason. But let woman be educated as man is educated, to fill the offices of honor from which she is now excluded, and she would not need to ask, "what should I do?" (25)

But Hale also predicted what she believed must be the inevitable consequences for every female orator, as they had occurred for Frances Wright and Angelina Grimké: object humiliation and degradation.

Given Hale's prominent role among powerful men, she had no choice but to publish her novel anonymously, says Reynolds, but she did so in order to express these, her most earnest sentiments. True, the narrator does openly condemn Marian's radical behaviors and makes death their consequence, but Reynolds argues that otherwise no publisher would have published the text. Reynolds explains the "incongruously conventional ending scene" as "designed to placate

¹³⁸ Hale, *Lecturess*, 50. When William proposed marriage, Marian "answered him *a la Mary Wollstonecraft*."

those readers who might have been shocked” by the novel’s radical protofeminism.¹³⁹ That is, Hale could allow a radical woman to speak freely only because she chastised and killed the character in the end. From this interpretation, Hale wanted Marian’s boldness to resonate with constrained and frustrated women and hoped to encourage them to begin to think independently.

Historian Granville Ganter (2002) agrees, adding that Hale subversively supported women’s public speaking, including Frances Wright’s, but *only* if it was “genuinely done on behalf of the social welfare” and was performed in such a way as to please and not offend powerful men.¹⁴⁰ He uses as evidence a five-act play, *Esther*, written by Hale and published in 1838 in *Godey’s*, only months after Angelina Grimké’s address on anti-slavery petitions to a Massachusetts legislature subcommittee in which she analogized herself to Esther.¹⁴¹ According to Ganter, Hale believed that the supplicating manner Esther used in her speech to King Ahasuerus to gain freedom for herself and her people was just the manner women should use in public address – not the aggressive, unapologetic manner that Frances Wright was still using. Ganter proposes that Hale’s publication of *Esther* “validat[ed] ... Wright and Grimké’s civic activism and public speech” and “provided careful rhetorical instruction about how to advance controversial ideas.”¹⁴² Ganter argues that Hale’s similar hope for *The Lecturess* was to get feminist ideology in front of readers’ eyes. He points out that when Marian makes feminist

¹³⁹ Granville Ganter, “The Unexceptional Eloquence of Sarah Josepha Hale’s *Lecturess*.” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 112 (2002): 269-289. 288. Ganter contests the emphasis Reynolds places on Marian’s misery and eventual death, which he says were *not* intended to “placate” offended readers, but reflected Hale’s genuine beliefs about the consequences of Marion’s sinful pride and arrogance. He argues that the degree to which Hale indicates that women should care about slavery should be a factor in this analysis; that is, that while lecturing on women’s right could be easily dismissed as egotistical behavior and thinking, lecturing against slavery could be seen as scriptural, altruistic, and self-sacrificial.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 278, 272, 286. Ganter argues that Hale had already been promoting feminist ideology in her position at *Godey’s Lady’s Book*: “*Godey’s* did not market female submission, piety, and domesticity as ideals of conduct. Rather, the women featured in the magazine were assertive, independent, and often heroic.” In that speech Grimké had analogized her experience before them to the biblical Esther’s speech to King Ahasuerus to gain freedom for herself and her people. Grimké had noted that where Esther had appealed to the king’s “sensual appetites,” Grimké could praise the subcommittee for its “loftier sentiments of the intellectual and moral feelings.”

¹⁴¹ M.W.C., “Angelina E. Grimke.” *Liberator* 8.9 (March 2, 1838): 35.

¹⁴² Ganter, “Unexceptional Eloquence,” 288.

statements (“I will never acknowledge the inferiority to which so many of my sex assent”), Hale’s moralistic narrator eventually counters them, yet Marian often remains stalwart: “I will publish my opinions; if they avail nothing more, they may lead some few to *think*” (24-25). Rhetorician Patricia Bizzell agrees, noting that Marian “is made to deliver some speeches that voice exemplary nineteenth-century women’s rights views (thus Hale gets those ideas covertly before her readers).”¹⁴³ An actual account of real readers responding to *The Lecturess* suggests that this did happen, whether or not Hale wanted it to happen. Reader-response scholars Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray discuss a young woman who became imbued with a fiery spirit in defense of female public speech after reading Hale’s novel. Her sister wrote to a friend that “Elizabeth has been quite stirred up by [*The Lecturess*] ... and has pounced upon my innocent head a torrent of advice and council [sic] so that I fear she too may turn lecturess.”¹⁴⁴ Ganter contends that Hale actually wanted her readers to believe the feminist ideology that Marian preached, but wrote those dangerous ideas “in codes that women could hear” – so that men could read it at a surface level and not be perturbed, yet women could read and interpret it at a deeper level and be inspired.¹⁴⁵ Ganter argues that *The Lecturess* could thus be received by conservative readers as an apparent cautionary tale to warn women against public speaking and against aligning themselves with women’s rights. Such a text would please evangelical reviewers, who were still raging in the newspapers about Frances Wright, the evils of fiction reading, and the threat that radicalized women posed to America’s welfare.

But Ganter’s work simply does not account for Hale’s lifetime dedicated to conservatism. His work in calibrating the meanings that could be associated with *Esther* is careful, but still

¹⁴³ Patricia Bizzell, “Chastity Warrants for Women Public Speakers in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40.4 (Fall 2010): 385-401. 387.

¹⁴⁴ Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “‘Have You Read...?’: Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52.2 (Sept. 1977): 139-170. 166.

¹⁴⁵ Ganter, “Unexceptional Eloquence,” 288.

requires imagination. There is not an existent diary or intimate correspondence with a trusted friend or an unpublished essay to support Hale's secret, closeted feminism. Except for Hale's writing of *Esther*, there is no hard evidence, public or private, to argue that the subtextual level of Marian's arguing for her political rights is Hale's real voice. The argument that both Reynolds and Ganter make – that Hale was really a subversive radical feminist and merely played the republic mother for the last fifty years of her life – goes too far. Still, the points they make about the remarkable power and apparent feeling Hale gives Marian's feminist voice is compelling and convinces me that the most unified explanation of Hale's ideology in *The Lecturess* is that she was profoundly conflicted about the issue of women's rights. I see her liberal and rationalist upbringing, early widowhood and the need to support her children, and the 1828-1830 Frances Wright debacle as working together to create this internal conflict. In *The Lecturess* Hale seems genuinely torn about issues of gender inequality, but as the respectable editor of *Godey's* she was unable to express her doubts publically for fear of press reprisals. The preponderance of evidence from *The Lecturess* suggests that in it Hale was, protected by anonymity, experimenting with feminist ideas rather than presenting a honed ideological position. Bizzell suggests that it is "Hale's ambivalence about the era's protofeminism" that is reflected in *The Lecturess*, and Okker and other scholars agree, as do I.¹⁴⁶ But no scholar devotes more than a paragraph or so to sorting out the confusion. In my view, Hale's ambivalence is the result of her determination to avoid embroilment with the now-toxic protofeminism associated with Frances Wright.

A root problem for scholars is that, as Baym and others have pointed out, as a rhetorical piece *The Lecturess* is "structurally discontinuous."¹⁴⁷ This is not surprising, given that Hale

¹⁴⁶ Bizzell, *Chastity Warrants*, 387.

¹⁴⁷ Baym, *Woman's Fiction*, 76.

probably wrote it hastily and for quick cash turnaround, along with five other major works. Indeed, the novel does not make any single argument effectively, but rather delivers counterarguments at various levels, and so is neither a didactic anti-feminist tract nor a didactic feminist tract. A good anti-feminist tract, says Baym, would have answered the feminist question of equitable pay in one of Marian's farewell speeches, for it had been Marian's original reason for lecturing, but the issue is left unaddressed. Conversely, the narrative voice of a good feminist tract would not consistently condemn the protagonist's feminism, but in *The Lectress* it does, a fact that Reynolds and Ganter disregard. Bardes and Gossett offer that Hale felt "ambivalen[t] toward Marian's public career and philanthropic urges," including female education and anti-slavery.¹⁴⁸ Hale's ambivalence is evident in Marian's ideologically schizophrenic monologues, which encompass diametrically opposed doctrines. That is, often Marian publicly speaks strident feminist words to her husband, mother, and friend, and seems to do so with integrity because she has stated forcefully that these are her own true beliefs. Yet moments later in private Marian chastises herself for those very sentiments. These quick changes of heart on Marian's part occur throughout the entire text and leave the reader befuddled and unable to determine which sentiments Hale intends as Marian's real sentiments.¹⁴⁹ This clearly

¹⁴⁸ Bardes and Gossett, *Declarations of Independence*, 47.

¹⁴⁹ Hale, *The Lectress* For example, in Chapter 4 she says she is speaking and acting with integrity as a "defender of the rights of her sex" (36), and rejects William's entrapping marriage proposal ("I cannot compromise any principle which I consider right"). She argues that a woman's self-silencing is counterproductive ("were you to bind me by a promise never to address a public audience again," she would "be enabled to speak from bitter experience of the injustice of man towards woman" (38, 37). Yet the instant William leaves the room Marian begins contemplating engaging in a pretense of self-effacement and self-denial for him, "the only man I could love" (41). In a private monologue Marian self-consciously determines to engage in hypocrisy and become a submissive and traditional female; she considers that she "cannot alter the opinions which my reason approves, and which study and experience show me to be correct" and realizes she "might disguise them and live a life of hypocrisy and deceit, as thousands do." "[B]y a little dissimulation" she could "purchase . . . wealth and station," including a quiet home for her mother. When she decides, "I will do it," the reader is left with the understanding that Marian is motivated by greed or need (41-42). Then within moments her motivation changes again, as she "ceased speaking" and the "long-repressed feelings of her heart burst forth; she leaned her head upon her hands and wept! ay, the proud despiser of her sex – its would-be reformer – the contemner of its weaknesses – wept like a *very woman*; wept for the love her pride forbade her to accept!" (42-43). Now the reader is to understand that Marian's innate nature is weak and

makes it difficult to pin down Hale's own "true" beliefs about feminist politics or women's rights. The narrator's voice and that of Marian's elderly servant are the ones we could understand to be Hale's. From the narrator we read Marian's desperate inner thoughts: "[T]he still, small voice of conscience ... now found its way to her heart.... Marian shuddered ... to find that her actions, instead of flowing from a pure desire to benefit her fellow-beings, were in fact the result of obstinate, unyielding pride, and a craving for popularity" (57). The servant "murmur[s] softly" that Marian was a "proud and stubborn" woman, but a "kind [and] good" one (115). The reader is to see William as having "failed" as a good husband by his "coldness," which made it impossible for Marian to "yield" to his "requests," for she could not retain an "iota of her dignity" (83-84).

Indeed, some scholars argue that the novel should be seen as Hale's attempt to address gender conflict at the personal and domestic level. Ganter believes that Hale only wanted to redress woman's pride and arrogance, not hinder their public speech.¹⁵⁰ Bardes and Gossett suggest that Hale's intent in the novel was to discuss egoism, altruism, and personal responsibility within the marital relationship; they call *The Lecturess* "a moral tale warning against the sin of pride in both husbands and wives."¹⁵¹ The narrator does expound occasionally

womanish. Marian's actions indicate that she is fulfilled by her traditional and supportive role. And yet after a year of marriage Marian changes again and argues that "the relation between [them] of husband and wife shall not imply a blind submission on [her] part to his opinions and will." (65).

¹⁵⁰ Ganter, "Unexceptional Eloquence," 272. "In my reading, the novel censures [Marian's] selfishness more than her speech itself."

¹⁵¹ When Marian performs as a feminist – when she becomes verbally assertive and refuses to do what Williams hopes she will do – William refuses to speak or engage emotionally with her in any way. That scenario occurs three times in the novel, and is twice followed by a reunion, both times at Marian's instigation because she cannot tolerate the pressure of the separation and isolation. Repeatedly throughout the novel Hale uses the voices of the narrator, William, Marian, Mrs. Gayland, and Sophia to argue that both men and women should deny their own happiness and forsake personal pride for the sake of the marriage. The narrator argues that both Marian and William were wrong in the manner in which they went about their relationship. After their disagreement over Marian's feminist activities, the narrator intones, "Had Mr. Forrester rightly understood his wife's character, ... he would have been more sensitive to her pride and been patient with her: "But, falling into the error so common to husbands, ... [he] continued cold and forbidding" (78). As she lies dying, Marian confesses to her culpability in not being a loyal and good wife to her husband – to have failed to put his interests and happiness before her own: "[T]rue pride, true

on human insensitivity and pride, blaming both Marian and William for their failure to communicate and reconcile.¹⁵² And while Hale was understandably reluctant to attach her name to *The Lectress*, she did take advantage of her position as a book reviewer at *Godey's Lady's Book* to puff her own work – never acknowledging the deception in which she was engaging: “We have looked over this little book, and commend it to the consideration of married people – husbands as well as wives will find lessons worth learning in this unpretending story.”¹⁵³ Where she could have used the opportunity to argue against Wright, or against women lecturers, or radical women, she did not; instead, she used those few lines to argue for a shared responsibility for a happy marriage relationship. Ultimately, *The Lectress* was an opportunity for Hale to explore feminist issues. With one voice she decried antebellum society's restrictions on women, criticizing male insensitivity and insistent dominance. But just as fiercely she stoutly maintained that she understood what woman's role was and criticized women who would defy men's authority. That torn allegiance was the best she could muster, given the urgent mandate that Hale harbored to remain cloistered and protected.

independence in a woman, is to fill the place which her God assigns her; to make her husband's happiness her own; and to yield her will to his in all things, conformable to her duty to a higher power” (120). After her death William feels remorse for his lack of patience with Marian's foolish and headstrong nature – he chastises himself for not having been more patient and gently encouraging her to find maturity and wisdom, instead of coldly rejecting her for her foolishness. Twenty years later William replays the scene: he confesses to his son his culpability in not listening to and hearing his wife's deepest needs: “Remember, my son, your father's fate, and do not let pride, or a wrong idea of dignity, make you assume a cold, forbidding manner towards the being you have taken to your bosom”(123). But Bardes and Gossett mistakenly argue that Marian is treated roughly by audiences only after she marries: “Her voice and her body now belong to her husband and should be on view only in her home.” Bardes and Gossett, *Declarations of Independence*. 47. This is not correct. The mob fires the hall in Charleston before she marries William. Marian gives only one single lecture after she marries, and there is no immediate negative response.

¹⁵² Hale, *The Lectress*. 83-84. “I do not make these remarks in order to screen Marian from the censure which her conduct unquestionably calls for, but to show wherein Mr. Forrester failed. Most probably, had he assumed a milder course, his chance of success had been greater. All must at once condemn the unyielding self-will of Marian, as not only unbecoming in a woman towards a truly kind and attached husband, but as the height of ingratitude. Still, I cannot but think Mr. Forrester's conduct exceedingly injudicious. Had he ... represented to her the unhappiness which her disregard of his requests had caused him she would have yielded, and all would have been well. Instead of which, his continual coldness and stateliness of manner, by arousing all the inherent pride of her nature, determined her to an obstinate warfare, rather than yield an iota of her dignity.”

¹⁵³[Sarah Josepha Hale.] “Editor's Book Table.” *The Lady's Book* 19 (Dec. 1839): 286.

In fact, the public humiliation of Wright thwarted liberal women's participation in the male public sphere, and Hale had fled into the conventional woman's sphere, space guaranteed by powerful men to be safe. From there she evinced a careful political conservatism, maintaining a reputation as a "delicate female" while she was actually functioning as an accomplished business executive. In Hale's view, arguing with men for women's rights led inevitably to personal ruin, as it had for Wright. The proto-feminist goals she had, which centered primarily on female education, could be gained over time with women's self-deprecatory and patient supplications. As literary scholar Nicole Tonkovich notes, early critics were unable to see beyond Hale's conservative messages:

Subsequent literary scholarship, ... whose agenda was to promote the masculine energy of American literature, believed Hale's protestations of domestic retirement and insignificance and failed to recognize that such concessions masked both Hale's power and the contradictions by which she maintained that power.¹⁵⁴

Tonkovich argues that because of this blind spot, both during Hale's lifetime and well beyond, Hale escaped being exposed as a subversive or closet liberal. So in *The Lecturess* it is not surprising that Hale worked to label women's public speech for women's rights as inappropriate, thus distancing herself as far from Wright as possible.

Perhaps Hale's lifelong conservatism simply represents a generational problem she could not overcome. At age forty in 1828 she had argued for women's rights in the *Ladies' Magazine*. But by the 1850s when a new generation of educated, liberal women finally began emerge and network, the difference in their ages was extreme: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were young women at their 1848 meeting in Seneca Falls, but by then Hale was sixty years old. Whether she could have safely acknowledged and expressed the liberal notions

¹⁵⁴Tonkovich, "Rhetorical Power." 180. Okker, *Our Sister Editors*, 50, 58.

she had earlier held is moot, since by then she was professionally entrenched and financially invested in the ideology of separate spheres.

Sarah Josepha Hale's self-silencing in the wake of the press's condemnation of Frances Wright is easy to trace. Her *Ladies' Magazine* editorials and articles from 1828 to 1829, while not radical, are clearly liberal regarding women's rights and opportunities. As soon as Frances Wright became toxic in the print conversation of evangelical reviewers, Hale's discussion of women's rights and opportunities becomes markedly conservative. Only months before Hale had argued without excuse or deference for women's freedom to self-expression, education, and opportunities outside the home. Then in early 1829 – the moment that Frances Wright became seen as toxic – Hale essentially apologized for her earlier liberal positions on women's rights and even began aggressively attacking those positions. Hale clearly believed she had no choice but to silence herself on her identity as a bluestocking and on the issue of women's legal rights. She salvaged her magazine by infusing more pious language into her prose and by claiming for women the position of moral authority in American society.

Twelve years after publication of *The Lectures* Hale addressed Frances Wright's legacy. Rather than omitting her from her massive compendium of famous women, *Woman's Record*, she included her.¹⁵⁵ The work's subtitle identified and described “all Distinguished Women, from ‘The Beginning’ Till A. D. 1850.” For Hale in 1851 to have labeled as “distinguished” a woman who had been lambasted as the “Red Harlot of Infidelity” only twenty years before is remarkable. True, Hale publicly shamed Wright in the volume, as she did Stowe, Child, Grimké, and every other semi-radical woman in the collection. But she also revived Wright's message and memory among readers. Not one other public figure had gone on the record at that point – and this was during Wright's lifetime – as recognizing Wright's value or contributions to

¹⁵⁵ Hale, *Woman's Record*, 843.

American society. In the three-page section on Wright (in which she got many matters of fact wrong), Hale wrote that “[t]here is no doubt that she has sought to do good” for enslaved Americans. Hale, at best a colonizationist and not an abolitionist, now gave Wright credit in print for her “philanthropic labours on behalf of the coloured race.”¹⁵⁶ By 1851 Hale’s earlier fear of Wright’s influence in the world became a patronizing compassion for her as a hell-bound rationalist. In *Woman’s Record* she reminded readers that Wright’s fundamental precepts had been founded on “the Epicurean doctrine – that pleasure is the highest aim of human life” – rather than on Christianity. She concluded her “sketch” by claiming to have heard “by a lady who lately conversed with Madame Darusmont” (Wright’s married name) that Wright had “freed herself from ... the heavy servitude of infidelity.” With this personal insight Hale generously condescended to hope that Wright had abandoned her heartless atheism and greeted an evangelical salvation, “that true liberty and happiness which the Gospel only can give.” No longer seeing Wright as posing any threat, Hale now framed her as a figure her readers should pity and for whom they should pray.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ In November 1829 Hale acknowledged that she was reprinting a letter to the abolitionist newspaper, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, in which the writer said, “[W]e presume that there are few, especially among our own sex, who will not readily acknowledge the injustice of the slave system.” Sarah Josepha Hale, “An Appeal to the Ladies of the United States.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.11 (Nov. 1829): 515-517. Hale did not print the last sentence of the letter: “or will you not stand boldly and ... declare that American women will never be tamely made the instruments of oppression?” [Elizabeth Margaret Chandler]. “An Appeal to the Ladies of the United States.” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 4.2 (Sept. 16, 1829): 12. Per Deborah De Rosa, Chandler was the author of the letter. De Rosa, *Domestic Abolitionism*, 20. Assessing Wright’s work in a far more generous way than anyone in the conventional public had ever done, Hale also said that it is “in justice to her” that “[i]t must be said that she is not like the fanatics who would destroy the Union to carry out an abstract principle of human rights.” Here Hale is leveraging one ideology against another. That is, Hale knew full well that her readers remembered Wright as an infamous fanatic and heretic. Now Hale was linking abolitionists with Wright’s vile name in an effort to contest immediate emancipation and promote colonization.

¹⁵⁷ Hale, *Woman’s Record*, 843.

CHAPTER 4:

“A MODEL FOR THE SERAPHS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH”¹:

LYDIA MARIA CHILD’S *THE FIRST SETTLERS OF NEW-ENGLAND* AND *PHILOTHEA*

When Lydia Francis appealed to influential literary critic George Ticknor for help in promoting her 1824 novel, *Hobomok*, he obliged, and doors immediately opened for Francis.² The young author, a new favorite at tea-rooms and literary soirées in Boston’s finest homes and venues, commented later that the “Boston fashionables took me up and made a ‘little wee bit’ of a [literary] lion out of me.”³ The highlight of Francis’s whirlwind encounter with Boston high society was the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the battle of Bunker Hill, where the honored guest was the Marquis de Lafayette. When the general kissed Francis on the hand, she swore she would never wash it off.⁴ It was also at this event that Francis, the future Lydia Maria Child, likely encountered Frances Wright in person.⁵ Both women were certainly in attendance, and

¹ Lydia Maria Child, *Philothea. A Romance*. Boston: Otis, Broaders & Co., 1836. 10.

² “Art. IV. – 1. *The Refugee* ... 2. *Hobomok, a Tale of Early Times*.” Book review. *North American Review* 21.48 (July 1825): 78-104. 94-95. It is likely that Ticknor, a central figure in the building of a national literary aesthetic, agreed with his reviewer-friend that the novel would “stand the test of repeated readings,” unlike others of the “ephemeral class.” Devoting nearly nine of twenty-five pages to the novel and quoting extensively, he regretted that *Hobomok* had “suffered much from the general prejudice against the catastrophe” of its indelicate events and was sure that readers would feel “respect and national pride” after reading its history of New England.”

³ “Art. IV. ... *Hobomok*,” *NAR*, 87. Letter from Child to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, n.d. [1845?]. Frank H. Stewart Collection Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ. Micro 23/646. Qtd. in Clifford, 45. “We believe there are few American novels, from which we could present our readers with an extract more beautiful in its kind, than the following.” L.M. Francis to her sister, qtd. in Anna Davis Hallowell, “Lydia Maria Child.” *The Medford Historical Register*, 3.3 (July 1900): 101. “Valuable gifts, jewels, beautiful dresses pour in upon me, invitations beyond acceptance, admiring letters ...” Child was escorted about by Nathaniel Parker Willis, one of early antebellum Boston’s most eligible bachelors. Child to Marianne Silsbee, Feb. 5, 1867. *The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880*, ed. Patricia G. Holland, Milton Meltzer, and Francine Krasno. Millwood, NY: Kraus Microform, 1980. 66/1761a. Qtd. in Karcher, 50.

⁴ On June 17, 1825. Hallowell, “Lydia Maria Child,” 100.

⁵ Letter from Frances Wright to Julia Garnett, June 8, 1825. *The Garnett Letters*. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, ed. Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin, 1969. 43, 24. Writing on June 8, Wright says, “Our route now lies therefore, my loved friends tomorrow to New York, from thence through Connecticut to Boston, where we have promised to meet the dear General on the 16th inst., round by Albany (where we shall make a short visit to the Henrys) to New York by

Wright famously stayed close to Lafayette's side at public events. Child may well have heard (or heard of) Wright's arguments for a utopian colony to end slavery that evening, since Wright was actively soliciting support for Nashoba among elites at this time.⁶ If she did, it would have not escaped her notice that a woman was openly speaking anti-slavery opinions to respectable people and was heard with respect. Certainly Child could not have predicted at this early moment that the calumny that followed Wright's ingress into the male public sphere would come to threaten Child's own ability to earn an income.



Fig. 4.1 Lydia Maria Francis, Francis Alexander, 1826

New Englander Lydia Maria Francis Child (1802-1880) built a reputation as a skillful, pioneering, and successful novelist, magazine editor, and scholar.⁷ For five decades her innovations in subject matter and style resulted in notable literary firsts. Her *Juvenile Miscellany* was the first English-language periodical directed solely at children, and her advice books were the first to address the practical needs of working- and middle-class women.”⁸ She was the first writer, male or female, to publish a full-length argument for the immediate emancipation of enslaved Americans. Her “Letters from New-York” column in the *National Anti-Slavery*

the 4th July again to see the dear General and pass three weeks with the Wilkes and Goldens. The General will pay his farewell visit to Mr. Jefferson and Madison; we shall want to embrace him on his return, and then instead of returning to you my loved friends [in Europe], must turn our faces westward in the first days of August.”

⁶ Wright would leave for Europe shortly after this tour with the goal of actively recruiting comrades to join her in her project.

⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, “Lydia M. Child.” In *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Vol. VIII. Criticisms and Reviews*. London: J. Shiells & Co., 1895. 175-177.

⁸ John G. Whittier, Introduction, vii. *Letters of Lydia Maria Child, with A Biographical Introduction by John G. Whittier and An Appendix by Wendell Phillips*. Cambridge, [Mass.]: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882. Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife*, 1833; *The Girls' Own Book*, 1833; *The Family Nurse*, 1837.

Standard introduced the genre of the *sketch* to mass journalism,⁹ and her *Progress of Religious Ideas* was one of the first discussions of comparative religions to attempt real objectivity.¹⁰ In the 1860s she supported women's suffrage.¹¹ Child's abolitionist stance, her proto-feminism, and her unconventional religiosity set her apart as one of the most liberal women of the antebellum period – one whom ultra-radical William Lloyd Garrison would name “the first woman in the republic.”¹² Yet she had to survive in a conservative publishing environment reacting against Frances Wright's iconoclasm. Fearful for her reputation and for her ability to earn money by writing, Child found it necessary to censure Wright repeatedly, both indirectly and directly, and, with one significant exception, to retreat dramatically from expressing liberalism in her writing for over a decade.

Scholars have scrutinized the writing and publishing decisions that Child and other antebellum women made, working to determine the extent to which they explored socially prohibited territory.¹³ Carolyn Karcher has been Child's primary biographer; her *The First Woman of the Republic* suggests that all her life Child yearned for the mother's love she never received. She also offers that Child's husband David, a financial disaster, was also likely a poor

⁹ This column appeared in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* from 1843 to 1845.

¹⁰ Carolyn L. Karcher, ed. Introduction to *Hobomok and Other Writings of Indians*. Lydia Maria Child. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986. Karcher says Child was the first to attempt “complete impartiality.” xiv. Child, *Progress of Religious Ideas*, 1855, x. Child herself says that no one had “ever before tried the experiment of placing [Christianity] precisely on a level with other religions.”

¹¹ Lydia Maria Child, “Woman and Suffrage.” *The Independent* 19.946 (Jan. 17, 1867) 1. “No human being can possibly think for me, or believe for me, any more than he can eat for me, or drink for me, or breathe for me.... Their [women's] appearance at the polls would soon cease to be a novelty, and the depositing of a vote might be done as easily and as quietly as leaving a card at a hotel.”

¹² Karcher, *First Woman*. xi.

¹³ Carolyn Karcher is the only recent scholar to focus her efforts almost solely on Child; her excellent cultural biography, *First Woman of the Republic*, focuses on a psychosocial analysis of Child's disappointment in her husband's many failures. Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. Aside from William S. Osborne's summative *Lydia Maria Child* (1980) for Twayne's United States Authors Series, the only other extended scholarly work is Deborah Pickman Clifford's *Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child* (1992). Child became the subject of articles as early as the 1940s, and since then over twenty scholarly articles have been published with Child as the primary focus. At least three books have been directed at the juvenile audience: Milton Meltzer's *Tongue of Flame: The Life of Lydia Maria Child* (1965), and Helene G. Baer's *The Heart is Like Heaven: The Life of Lydia Maria Child* (1964), and Lori Kenschaft's 2002 *Lydia Maria Child: The Quest for Racial Justice*.

lover and even impotent. Karcher argues that Child's childhood and marital disappointments often drove the content and theory of her literary works, and especially that she refused to pursue a proto-feminist agenda because she did not want to further humiliate David with her successes. In contrast, I see Child as chronically unsettled about the issues of women's right and atheism and unwilling to incur the wrath of magazine critics for either. Yet her convictions for the cause of the abolition of slavery were so powerful that she was willing to risk critical martyrdom for it. In this chapter I consider the publications of two novels by Lydia Maria Child, *The First Settlers of New-England* and *Philothea. A Romance*, as reflecting first her attraction to and then her concerted disassociation from Wright's atheism and proto-feminism.

* * * * *

Child was the youngest of five children of an uneducated bakery owner and his wife, who Child recalls as "hard-working people, who had had small opportunity for culture."¹⁴ There were "nothing like literary influences in the family, or its surroundings" in Child's early years at the "thriving household enterprise and family farm" in rural Medford, Massachusetts, some six or seven miles north of Cambridge.¹⁵ Her next oldest brother Convers was six years older, an introspective and studious boy who "early manifested an earnest desire to go to college."¹⁶ By then a relatively prosperous business owner, Mr. Francis agreed to send him to preparatory school in Medford and then to Harvard in 1811, but did not expect Lydia to be similarly inclined. She "alarmed" her father by "her increasing fondness for books" – especially at age twelve after her mother died.¹⁷ When a year later her beloved sister Mary married and moved to Maine,

¹⁴ Lydia Maria Child to John Weiss, April 15, 1863. Qtd. in Karcher, *First Woman*, 2.

¹⁵ Karcher, *First Woman*, 3.

¹⁶ Child to Weiss. Their father "considered a college-education something out of the line of himself or his family," but both the family's minister and physician advised that if he "tr[ie]d to make anything else of [Convers] he will prove a total failure."

¹⁷ Anna D. Hallowell, "Lydia Maria Child." *The Medford Historical Register* 3.3 (July 1900): 95-117. 97. Child later wrote to Convers's biographer John Weiss that after school "I always hurried to his bed-room, and threw

Child was lonely and miserable, home alone with her taciturn father; he soon sent his “wayward, bookish adolescent daughter” to live with Mary and her husband, a lawyer and a judge. Child seemed to blossom there. Norridgewock, the county seat, drew “professional men, . . . members of cultivated Massachusetts families, graduates of Harvard,” and had become a “centre of intelligence and refinement.”¹⁸ She helped care for her sister’s children, observed and interacted with the nearby Abenaki and Penobscot Indian tribes, and continued to read.¹⁹ Her brother Convers, a divinity student, handed his textbooks down to his precocious younger sister, and she through letters they discussed her impressions of “Samuel Johnson, Addison, Gibbon, Scott, Milton, and Shakespeare.”²⁰ Child and her brother both outgrew the restrictive and dogmatic Calvinistic Congregationalism of their sister and father. At eighteen, motherless and separated from her beloved brother, she yearned for a religion “in which [her] heart and understanding could unite.”²¹ As did many children from Calvinist households across New England in the early nineteenth century, the brother and sister gravitated toward Unitarianism (he toward the ministry).²² When Convers married and became the Unitarian minister of the Watertown

myself down among his piles of books. As I devoured everything that came in my way, I, of course, read much that was beyond my childish comprehension.” Qtd. in Karcher, *First Woman*, 2.

¹⁸ *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880*, ed. Milton Meltzer and Patricia Holland. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. 1.

¹⁹ L.M. Child, “The Indian Boy,” *Juvenile Miscellany* 2 (May 1827): 31. Child wrote that during her youth in Maine she had visited with Indians in the woods “very often.” L.M. Child, “Physical Strength of Women,” *The Woman’s Journal* (15 March 1873): 84. Maria Child, *Letters from New York*. London: Richard Bentley, 1843. 19. Child recalled a Penobscot woman who had just given birth, yet walked four miles to ask for food; she also recalled eating dinner with a Penobscot chief and his handsome nephew.

²⁰ Karcher, *First Woman*, 12.

²¹ Letter from Child to Convers Francis, May 31, 1820. In Meltzer and Holland, in *Selected Letters*, 2.

²² Holland, “Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880).” 47. She had herself re-baptized, giving herself the middle name of Maria, since she had always disliked Lydia. Letter from Lydia Maria Child to Convers Francis, Dec. 22, 1838, in Child, *Selected Letters*, 103. But Child soon realized that Unitarianism did not fill her with any more inspiration or truth than had Calvinism; she felt that their religious services “chill[ed her] with their cold intellectual respectability.” Letter from Lydia Maria Child to Lucy Osgood, June 28, 1846, in Child, *Selected Letters*, 226. She later wrote that Unitarianism was “a mere half-way house, where spiritual travelers find themselves well accommodated for the night, but where they grow weary of spending the day.”

congregation near Cambridge, Massachusetts, Child moved into their home and began attending his church.

But Child was pulled even more toward Swedenborgianism, which combined traditional Christianity with an ethereal other-worldliness and seemed to Child like “a golden key to unlock the massive gate between the external and the spiritual worlds”; devotees were known for their conversations with angels.²³ Even liberal Unitarians saw the sect as fanatical. When the newly ordained Rev. Convers Francis, Jr., communicated his apprehensions to his sister, Child breezily claimed to be more at risk of becoming an atheist than a Swedenborgian,²⁴ yet within two years she had joined the sect’s New Church in Boston.²⁵ In 1820 as an eighteen-year-old looking forward to her future Child wrote that while she had not “formed any high-flown expectations,” she “expect[ed] that, if I am industrious and prudent I shall be *independent*.”²⁶ As a young woman in Watertown, Child began associating with her brother’s Harvard literary friends and saw that men could achieve such independence through the occupation of writing. Realistically, however, only well-to-do, unmarried women could hope for even a limited financial independence, since coverture laws left wives without a legal identity or standing in a court of law.

²³ This is the religion of Swedish scientist and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem Church Concerning Angels and Spirits Attendant on Man*. Philadelphia: William Brown, 1829. Letter from Child to Parke Goodwin, January 20, 1856, in Child, *Selected Letters*, 275. See also *Letters from New-York, 2nd series* (New York: C.S. Francis, 1845), letters 12, 13, and 22.

²⁴ Letter from Child to Convers Francis, May 31, 1820. In *Letters of Lydia Maria Child, with A Biographical Introduction by John G. Whittier and An Appendix by Wendell Phillips*. Cambridge, [Mass.]: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882, 2. Child said Convers need not fear for her since she claimed to be “more in danger of wrecking on the rocks of skepticism than of stranding on the shoals of fanaticism.”

²⁵ Lydia Maria Child, *Letters from New-York, Second Series*, New York: C. S. Francis & Co., 1845. 114. Though she had rejected Swedenborg’s core beliefs by the 1840s, the transcendental, soul-focused elements of his ideas returned to her thoughts and writings for the rest of her life. She says that the subject of the theories of correspondence in the writings of Swedenborg “took strong hold of my mind, and has ever since deeply and vividly coloured the whole fabric of my thought.” Karcher, *First Woman*, 609. “Nor did Child profess the evangelical faith often regarded as the norm for women writers. Her iconoclastic bent, which ultimately took her well beyond the liberalism of her Unitarian/ Transcendentalist milieu and Swedenborgian denomination, aligned her more closely with skeptics like Melville than with her less heterodoxical peers of either sex.”

²⁶ Child to Convers Francis, Winslow [Maine], March 12, 1820. In *Selected Letters*, 2.

Child entered the sphere of public letters in 1823 by writing and self-publishing a novel, *Hobomok*,²⁷ which with her brother's connections drew some attention. Critics assumed the bold work had been written by a man, since in her Preface Child had named her narrator "Frederic."²⁸ The text flaunted fairly radical content – a strong female protagonist defies traditional gender role expectations by rejecting her father's Calvinism and then by marrying an Indian man.²⁹ An 1824 *North American Review* writer found "unnatural [and] revolting" the marriage of a "high born and delicate female" and her "copper" lover, as well as their "infant semisavage." Still, the reviewer offered that *Hobomok*'s "excellencies outweigh its faults" and praised the text as ushering in a new and authentic national fiction.³⁰ It is significant that a liberal reviewer could respond positively to a text that challenged both traditional gender roles and American Calvinism. But in 1824 it would be five years before Frances Wright's emergence into the public sphere prompted evangelical outrage that would mute liberal reviewers' approval of radical women writers. In fact, two years before in England Frances Wright had printed her

²⁷ Child wrote *Hobomok* in response to *North American Review* critic John Gorham Palfrey's challenge. Convers Francis's friend, Palfrey had referred to progressive writers James Wallis Eastburn and Robert Sands and their poem, *Yamoyden*: "We are glad that somebody has at last found out the unequalled fitness of our early history for the purposes of a work of fiction ... with all the bold rough lines of nature...Whoever in this country first attains the rank of a first rate writer of fiction ... will lay his scene here. The wide field is ripe for the harvest, and scarce a sickle yet has touched it." John Gorham Palfrey, "Art. XXV.—Yamoyden, a tale of the wars of king Philip, in six cantos." *North American Review* 12.31 (April 1821): 466-488. Palfrey argued that Americans needed to shake off the influence of their mother country and develop their own national literature by incorporating elements indigenous to America: in Child's words, to "adapt[] early N. England history to the purposes of fiction." Child to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Oct. 1846? Child, *Selected Letters*, 232. At the time (and still in 1846) Child believed her *Hobomok* was the first truly American novel: "There were at that time scarcely any American books. Cooper's and Mrs. Sedgwick's had not appeared."

²⁸ Child, *Hobomok*, iii.

²⁹ Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times*. Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, 1824. 61. In *Hobomok*, Mary says: "Thou [evening star] hast kissed the cross-crowned turrets of the Catholic, and the proud spires of the Episcopalian...on distant mosques and temples...on the sacrifice heap of the Indian, and the rude dwellings of the Calvinist. And can it be, as my father says, that of all the multitude of people who view thy cheering rays, so small a remnant only are pleasing in the sight of God? Oh, no. It cannot be thus." Nancy F. Sweet, "Dissent and the Daughter in *A New England Tale* and *Hobomok*." *Legacy* 22.2 (2005): 107-125, 116. Sweet says that *Hobomok* is part of the "founding of a genre in which parental figures are freighted with the symbolic baggage of American religious history."

³⁰ "*Hobomok, a Tale of Early Times*." Book review. *North American Review* 19.44 (July 1824): 262-263.

full name on the title page of her atheistic novel, *A Few Days in Athens*, and had been praised in the American public press for the work.

Although *Hobomok* was not a bestseller, its moderate critical success led Child to see *independence* as achievable in her life through writing and publishing.³¹ At the same time that she was going to fashionable evening parties and was escorted about town by the town's most eligible bachelor, writer-editor Nathaniel P. Willis, she also began a determined effort to earn a living as a professional writer. She sent stories to magazines and in 1825 wrote a second historical and patriotic novel, *The Rebels, or Boston before the Revolution*, with "By the author of *Hobomok*" on the title page. Caring for her sister's children as a teenager in Maine had helped her identify young readers (and their parents) as an untapped print market, and in 1826 Child established *Juvenile Miscellany*, a magazine for young readers. Significantly, she did not promote her work in the juvenile market as evidence of her participation in the domestic sphere, as Sarah Josepha Hale would do determinedly; rather, the magazine was for Child a source of reliable income – a means by which she could strive to obtain *independence*.³²

Child's literary work became "financially rewarding," yet she probably still assumed that if and when she married, her occasional writings would simply supplement her husband's earnings, while children and housework would consume her greatest attentions.³³ That assumption was proven wrong within a year of her marriage to Harvard-educated David Lee

³¹ *Hobomok* went into a second edition and then was reprinted again in 1830.

³² L.M. Child, editorial, *Juvenile Miscellany*, first issue, Sept. 1826, iv. After a single editorial in the first issue promised her young readers she would work to entertain and inspire them, Child withdrew her direct voice from the magazine, and never attached her name to its title page. "You, my dear young friends, shall be my critics. What you find, neither affords you amusement or does you good, I shall think is badly written... I [will work] to convince you, that you *can* do, whatever you *try* to do, in the acquisition of learning." L.M. Child, editorial, *Juvenile Miscellany*, first issue, Sept. 1826, iv.

³³ L.M. Francis to Rev. Doctor Allyn, Sept. 28 1826. *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, 10. "My *Miscellany* succeeds far beyond my most sanguine expectations. That is, people are generous beyond my hopes." L.M. Francis to Margaret Fuller, 1828? After Oct. 19? Microfiche 33. "I hope to be more settled than I now am some time or other." L.M. Francis to Lydia [Bigelow] Child, July 11, 1828. Microfiche 28. "[David] has communicated his plans and prospects very freely and candidly to me; and the result is, that I have made him think it most prudent to defer our marriage, at least until Spring.... I ... am rather low-spirited."

Child, a world traveler, brilliant lawyer, and new editor of an abolitionist newspaper. She met him in December of 1824 as a guest to dinner at her brother Convers's house in Watertown.³⁴ Historian Deborah Pickman Clifford says his "intelligence, idealism, and lack of conceit ... endeared him to [Child] from the start" and they married in October 1828.³⁵ But David took unwinnable legal cases that damaged his professional reputation and racked up unmanageable debts; he proved inept at handling money. His only major literary effort, *The Despotism of Freedom*, was not well received by critics and landed him in a financially devastating libel suit and jail term. Initially Child's letters to him, relatives, and friends reflected her hopes for children and for David's improved job outlook, but gradually they revealed her frustrations and disappointments.³⁶ No babies were born from the marriage, and her prodigious writing efforts proved to be their only reliable source of income – an unusual situation for respectable antebellum American families.³⁷ Indeed, in her aggressive pursuit of various writing tasks during the first five years of her marriage she produced three novels, two volumes in a series on women in history, multiple juvenile works, two advice books, and her infamous argument for immediate emancipation. She also served as editor and reviewer for her husband's *Massachusetts Weekly Journal*, an anti-slavery newspaper – a task that soon would bring her again into the presence of Frances Wright. Certainly, her next writing effort – a powerful defense of Indians' human rights – indicates that during this period she would have harbored some degree of admiration for Wright as a champion of those rights for women and for enslaved African Americans.

³⁴ Hallowell, 102.

³⁵ Meltzer and Holland, in *Selected Letters*, 5-11.

³⁶ L.M. Child to David Lee Child, Aug. 8, 1830. *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, 11. "Oh, how I do wish we had a snug little cottage here, and just income enough to meet very moderate wants."

³⁷ Child to Francis Shaw, August 2, 1846. Child, *Selected Letters*, 228. She writes, "I will ... briefly say that for the last six or seven years my conviction has been constantly growing stronger that my husband's deficiencies in business matters are *incurable*."

One of the newspapers that exchanged copies with the *Massachusetts Weekly Journal* was the *Cherokee Phoenix*, which its editor Elias Boudinot began publishing in February 1828.³⁸ The Cherokee were models of Indian compliance with local, state, and federal governments of the United States, and had encouraged the building of Protestant missionary schools and established a method for printing the Cherokee language.³⁹ But by January 1828 the Georgia legislature had demanded that the federal government fulfill their commitment to force the Cherokee out of Georgia as soon as possible on “peaceable” and “reasonable terms.”⁴⁰ The cause of the dire straits of the Cherokee Indian nation became a cause célèbre among many Americans in the late 1820s. Where previous presidents had managed to avoid the issue, the newly elected Andrew Jackson seemed eager to effect the Cherokee removal to Western lands. When Boudinot’s *Cherokee Phoenix* reported the ways in which United States governments were abrogating solemn treaties with the Cherokee, they found massive popular and print support from both the conservative and the liberal press.⁴¹ Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen at the *New-*

³⁸ Karcher, *First Woman*, 87. Maureen Konkle discusses Boudinot and others who defended Cherokee claims against the United States in her text. Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations: Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

³⁹ Konkle, 42. They had established themselves a nation, with a capital city at New Echota, and were the “most ‘acculturated’ of the Indian nations.... [T]hey had hundreds of mills, schools, manufactories – and thousands of African slaves.’... [I]n 1827 they held a constitutional convention, which established a government consisting of a principal chief, and bicameral national council, and courts.” The second part of this quote is by historian Jill Lepore.

⁴⁰ Konkle, 49. “In 1802, Georgia surrendered its claims to land extending to the Pacific Ocean under its royal charter to the federal government, which in turn agreed to help to extinguish Indian title to land within Georgia’s borders.” “Cherokee Lands in Georgia.” *Niles’ Weekly Register* 33.853 (Jan. 19, 1828): 347-348. 347. The *Niles’ Weekly Register* reported: “A long report on the subject of these lands has been made to the legislature of Georgia, and the committee recommended the adoption of the following resolutions.... ‘Resolved, That the United States, in failing to procure the lands in controversy, ‘as early’ as the same could be done upon ‘peaceable’ and ‘reasonable terms,’ have palpably violated their contract with Georgia, and are now bound, at all hazards, and without regard to terms [to] procure said lands for the use of Georgia.”

⁴¹ “Cherokee Lands in Georgia.” *Niles’ Weekly Register* 33.853 (Jan. 19, 1828): 347-348. “Cherokee Phoenix.” *New Harmony Gazette* 3.26 (April 23, 1828): 203. “Reply of the Cherokee Council to the United States’ Commissioners.” *The Religious Intelligencer* 13.8 (July 19, 1828): 122. “How terrible thy tenderest mercies are!” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 3.10 (Dec. 6, 1828): 74. “Georgia and the Cherokees.” *The Religious Intelligencer* 13 (Dec. 13, 1828): 458. “Rights of the Cherokee Indians.” *Christian Watchman* 9.51 (Dec. 19, 1828): 202. “The Cherokees.” *Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph* 14.6 (Feb. 5, 1829): 24. “View of Public Affairs.” *Christian Observer* 29.5 (May 1829): 326-328. “Cherokee Land.” *Religious Monitor and Evangelical Repository* 5.10 (March 1829): 480. “Extracts from the correspondence between Col. Thomas L. McKenny and the

Harmony Gazette extended early support for Cherokee rights, as did the abolitionist *Genius of Universal Emancipation*; apparently abolitionists were unaware that many Cherokees were slaveholders. Evangelical magazines were equally vocal in their indignation at Georgia's actions against the Cherokee. Lydia Maria Child doubtless engaged with the issue through her husband's research and writing at the *Massachusetts Journal*. In 1828 David Child wrote tirades against presidential candidate Andrew Jackson, recalling his cruelty in 1818 as he hunted down "defeated and fugitive Indians" in a campaign that violated Spain's sovereignty in Florida.⁴² Child, doubtless recalling her intriguing experiences with Indians in Maine, must have found the Cherokee issue compelling. Given the outpouring of support for the Cherokee, she likely felt assured that a novel written supporting American Indians would be greeted with approval. Given Child's position at her husband's magazine, it is highly likely that Child signed the anti-removal petition that educator Catharine Beecher circulated at the urging of Jeremiah Evarts, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.⁴³ Child would go farther than any other novelist in 1829 in expressing that support through fiction.

RADICAL NOVEL: *THE FIRST SETTLERS OF NEW-ENGLAND*

Sometime in the late fall of 1828 Child finished a genuinely radical novel, *The First Settlers of New-England: or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets, as Related by a Mother to her Children*, her eighth book in five years and her fourth novel, and either in late 1828 or early 1829 it was printed.⁴⁴ The text's subtitle, "*as Related by a Mother to her*

U.S. Agent, Col. Hugh Montgomery, on the subject of the present Cherokee emigration." *Religious Monitor and Evangelical Repository* 5.12 (May 1829): 566-567. "Georgia, the Cherokees, and Robert T. Campbell." *The New-England Galaxy* 12.607 (May 29, 1829): 2.

⁴² David Lee Child, *Massachusetts Weekly Journal*. Qtd. in Karcher, 88.

⁴³ Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, & Women's Political Identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 24. Beginning in 1838 Child and her husband became actively involved in circulating anti-slavery petitions in Northampton, Massachusetts. Zaeske, 111.

⁴⁴ [Lydia Maria Child.] *The First Settlers of New-England: Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets. As relayed by a mother to her children. By a lady of Massachusetts*. Boston: Printed for the Author,

Children,” suggests that Child was positioning *First Settlers* as instructive juvenile literature, but in its finished form the work hardly fits the label. Rather than being a benign lesson warning youngsters against immoral behavior, this dialogue between a “*Mother*” and her two daughters is a didactic condemnation of European American domination of Indian people. Its maternal narrator accuses “our pilgrim fathers” of the “entire discomfiture and subversion” of the Pequod, the Narraganset, and the Pokanoket Indian nations, and ends with an account of contemporary efforts to displace the Cherokee nation from Georgia.⁴⁵ *The First Settlers of New-England* was far more revolutionary in content and tone than any part of *Hobomok* had been.⁴⁶ Throughout the text Child repeatedly and stridently attacks Calvinism and advocated not only humane policies toward Indians, but also women’s rights and interracial marriage.

In fact, the ideas and language Child used in *First Settlers* were easily as radical, and in many instances more radical, than those Frances Wright had used in her published description of her experiment to end slavery, “Nashoba: Explanatory Notes,” which often were framed with a more cajoling and conciliatory purpose and tone.⁴⁷ Child would almost certainly have read Wright’s three-part explanation in March of 1828 when Benjamin Lundy published it in *Genius of Emancipation*, an abolitionist newspaper to which she would have had regular access. That is,

by Munroe and Francis, 1829. Carolyn Karcher suggests that Child “finish[ed] the manuscript in the weeks following her wedding” on Oct. 19, 1828. Karcher, *First Woman*, 90. Child cites journal articles in *First Settlers* that were printed in the fall; on page 253 she cited the “*American Quarterly Review* for September, 1828.”

⁴⁵ Zaeske, 27. Zaeske comments that *First Settlers* “provided an extended argument against Cherokee removal.”

⁴⁶ Karcher, *First Woman*, 86, 91, 95. Karcher calls *The First Settlers of New-England* “undoubtedly one of the most radical works [Child] would ever write.” The novel, Child’s “debut as a political writer,” is a “searing indictment of European bigotry and rapacity and a passionate defense of Indian rights.” The novel “redefin[es] the ideology of Republican Motherhood in profeminist terms,” empowering two female characters to speak on behalf of the persecuted Pequots during the war with the English. Even more radically, the novel speculates on “how large-scale intermarriage between English colonists and Indians might have altered the course of history” for the benefit of all involved. Karcher, *First Woman*, 86, 91, 95.

⁴⁷ Child’s views on several primary topics in that work – interracial intermarriage and Calvinist narrow-mindedness – could already be seen in *Hobomok* as similar to Wright’s. “[T]he peculiar object of the founder [Wright herself] [is] ‘The benefit of the negro race.’” Frances Wright, “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes,” *Genius of Emancipation*, 2.7 (March 1, 1828): 51-53. Also, “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes,” 2.8 (March 8, 1828) and 2.9 (March 15, 1828).

since her engagement the prior autumn with immediate emancipationist David Lee Child,⁴⁸ she had become closely involved in the day-to-day operations of her fiancé's abolitionist *Massachusetts Journal*, which certainly traded copies with Lundy's *Genius*, as was common practice.⁴⁹ It is highly probable that when Child wrote *First Settlers* she was challenged and even inspired by Wright's principles regarding religious freedom, women's legal autonomy, and racial intermarriage in "Explanatory Notes"; ample similarities exist between the two works to support this conclusion, which I will demonstrate shortly. After all, in the summer and early fall of 1828 when Child was writing *First Settlers* she could not have reasonably predicted that harm would befall her if she echoed Wright's radical principles, for the negative evangelical response to Wright was still somewhat balanced by the support, if equivocal, of some liberal journals.⁵⁰

Child's defense of Indians' basic human rights was the overriding theme and purpose in *First Settlers*, as had been Wright's defense of the African American "human beings raised under the benumbing influence of brutal slavery" in "Explanatory Notes."⁵¹ In language equally direct and condemning as Wright's, Child called antebellum European Americans "usurpers" of the Indians' lands. She held that their "crooked and narrow-minded" Indian policies "marked" white elites with the "blood and ruin of their fellow-men" and "subject[ed them] to the finger of scorn ... for ... so grossly violat[ing] the principles [and] the religious and civil institutions which we

⁴⁸ Letter from [Lydia] Maria [Francis] to [Mary (Francis) Preston], Oct. 28, 1827. Microfiche 25. "Dear Sister, I blush that I should have been absolutely engaged more than a week without having found a moment to tell you of the important news." Letter from [Lydia] Maria [Francis] to [Mary (Francis) Preston], Oct. 28, 1827. Microfiche 25.

⁴⁹ Karcher, *First Woman*, 173. According to Karcher, Lundy's one-time editorial partner at *Genius* was a young William Lloyd Garrison, who had just previously worked as an apprentice printer at the *Massachusetts Journal*.

⁵⁰ These journals included *The Correspondent* and the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*. "All who heard her applaud her talents and eloquence; the religious condemn her infidelity; the infidels approve most of her doctrines and remarks." *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* 1.14 (Oct. 4, 1828): 55. "[T]here are few persons who could listen to her five minutes, without feeling that physical deficiencies may be amply compensated by mental strength. Her language is in the highest degree, clear, forcible, and eloquent – her voice strong, and melodious – her emphasis and gestures correct and appropriate. Though we do not approve of all her doctrines, yet she enchain[ed] attention, and excited our admiration.... She is, altogether, an *interesting* woman – and her oratorical and reasoning powers are of the first order." [Edmund Morris.] *Ariel* (Jan. 1, 1829): 150.

⁵¹ Wright, "Explanatory Notes," *Genius* (March 1, 1828): 53.

have heretofore so nobly defended, and by which we profess to be governed.”⁵² *First Settlers* was not the first American novel to take this stance; both James Fenimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales and Catharine Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* had defended the Indian way of life, but a good deal more cautiously. Child’s discussion of white European Christianity in *First Settlers* was as confrontational as Frances Wright’s in her “Nashoba,” if not more so. In “Explanatory Notes” Wright had sought to “remove all mystery from ... the peculiar doctrines of Rome or Geneva” – Roman Catholicism or Genevan John Calvin’s Protestant tenets – and declared instead that “no religious doctrines shall be taught” at Nashoba.⁵³ She had allowed that some would-be Nashoba newcomers might not agree with her atheism and had assured them that “it will of course never be demanded on any individual to adopt the shades of opinion held by the existing proprietors.” Wright had required only that Christians (or other “Theis[ts]”) understand that since “perfect liberty of speech” would be granted to all residents, such a “liberal” society might well “wound [the] feelings” of conservative Christians. Child’s rebuke in *First Settlers* of Puritan Calvinism and of modern-day evangelical Protestantism was far more severe than this relatively gentle position of Wright’s in “Explanatory Notes.” Child criticized Puritans as a “sect” that “ascribe[d] to God passions highly vindictive and unjust,” and accused them of believing that their God had created humanity “for the express purpose of inflicting on them torments the most excruciating and endless.” According to Child, Calvinism was essentially the religion of frightened and sadistic Englishmen who “believed themselves authorized to inflict all the evil in their power on wretches who are born to suffer” – immediately, American Indians.⁵⁴

⁵² Child, *First Settlers*, iii-iv, vi. She accused Georgians of “insatiable cupidity” and “craving rapacity,” for, after the Cherokees had worked to become a “civilized community,” Georgians were still “urg[ing]” them “to quit their territory ... and retire to the western wilds, where they must erelong miserably perish.”

⁵³ Wright, “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes.” *Genius* (March 15, 1828): 62.

⁵⁴ Child, *First Settlers*, 31. Calvinist Puritans intensely felt themselves to be instruments of God’s anger and vengeance, she said, yet at once lamented their own secret iniquities: “[T]hey vainly attempted to escape from the

She claimed that too many modern-day Christian ministers were yet “apparent[ly] indifferent to the unhappy fate of our natives.” She decried the white Protestant hypocrisy of “exclaiming against Mahometan [Muslim] cruelty and oppression, whilst our own cruelty and oppression” to Indians “far exceeds theirs.” After all, said Child, the “Mahometans” had not been nearly “as merciless, as we who bear the name of Christians have shown ourselves to be” to American Indians.⁵⁵

Both Wright and Child supported racial intermarriage and miscegenation; in “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes” Wright reminded readers that an “amalgamation of the races” was already occurring in the Southern United States. She claimed that “no *natural antipathy* blind[ed] the white Louisianian [sic] to the charms of the graceful Quadroon,” and that in fact white Southern men there often married “whiter skinned” women of mixed race.⁵⁶ Wright had advocated that the “physical amalgamation of the two colors ... must surely be viewed as a good equally desirable for both.”⁵⁷ Child has the narrator refer obliquely to divine affirmation of miscegenation, for, “[w]hatever objections there may be for people of different colours to unite, ... our heavenly Father ... has made of one blood all the nations of men, that they may dwell together.”⁵⁸ But both Wright and Child also acknowledged that white antebellum Americans were repelled by the idea of interracial sexual relationships; Wright wrote that she was aware that it was “the topic most offensive to the American public.”⁵⁹ Similarly, in *First Settlers* one of

remorse [of their committed sins], which, with all its terrors, seizes on the hearts of the guilty, by redoubling their superstitious observances.” Child, *First Settlers*, 31.

⁵⁵ Child, *First Settlers*, 267-268, 277. Caroline comments, “I shall ever think of the Pequods with compassion and regret, nor can I ever allow that their oppressors were deserving the appellation of Christians.” 42.

⁵⁶ Wright, “Explanatory Notes.” (Mar. 8, 1828): 62.

⁵⁷ Wright, “Explanatory Notes.” (Mar. 8, 1828): 61.

⁵⁸ Child, *First Settlers*, 66-67. Caroline further asks, “It is not generally supposed that coloured people are inferior in point of capacity to those who have fair complexions?” which her mother disputes by discussing the scientific discoveries and accomplishments of the Greeks, Hindus in India, and Egyptians.

⁵⁹ Wright, “Explanatory Notes.” (Mar. 1, 1828): 53. “...the olive [branch] of peace and brotherhood [must] be embraced by the white man and the black; and their children, approached in feeling and education, gradually blend

the daughters offers that “it would not have been very agreeable, I think, for white people to marry Indians.” But both Wright and Child suggested that interracial blending was vital to America’s future. Wright believed that through racial intermarriage and miscegenation “*slavery* [would] safely be left to work its own ruin” by creating an organic interracial harmony.⁶⁰ Child’s *First Settlers* similarly argued that a policy of “intermixing with the natives” could be curative for both whites and Indians. In the text Child’s “Mother” narrator intoned that through such “intermixing, ...in my opinion we should have gained more than would have been lost.” Had the early Puritans and Indians intermarried, the mother argues, Indians’ profound spirituality might have ameliorated harsh Calvinist dogma and cured Europeans of their rigid doctrinal religiosity. At the same time, suggested the mother, the European representation of Jesus could have inspired in Indians greater moral self-discipline.⁶¹

Finally, Child’s and Wright’s positions on the subjects of women’s rights and roles are conspicuously similar in their two works. Wright had devoted most of the first third of “Explanatory Notes” to women’s place at Nashoba, and by association in society at large. She directed her reader, “Let us advert to the far more important half of the human species (whether we consider their share in the first formation and rearing of the infant, or their moral influence on society.) Let us consider the effects of existing institutions and opinions as exemplified among women.” Requiring her readers to understand women as fundamentally more significant than men was remarkable, considering that at the time women had no legal standing in the United

into one their blood and their hue.” Wright, “Explanatory Notes.” (Mar. 8, 1828): 61. “The writer of this address is fully aware that the topic most offensive to the American public is that now under consideration.”

⁶⁰ Wright, “Explanatory Notes.” (Mar. 1, 1828): 53.

⁶¹ Child, *First Settlers*, 65. “The primitive simplicity, hospitality, and generosity of the Indians would gradually have ... softened the stern and morose feelings resulting from the false views of religion.... The pure religion of Jesus would have ... confirmed their innate convictions of the ... Almighty, [which] would have taught them to subdue their ... evil propensities. We should thus have been saved from the hordes of vagrants [Irish and other working-class democrats], who have been allured to our shores ... that they might seize on the spoils of the natives whom we have destroyed.”

States. More astounding in her outline of Nashoba's policies, of course, was Wright's declaration that the power of American marital law had "no force" over women on her property.⁶² By her statement Wright had claimed essential human rights for those women dwelling on her Nashoba acreage, and clarified that "to every individual member of either sex, is secured the protection and friendly aid of all."⁶³ Child is likely to have read this statement – one that most white American men would have found staggeringly radical. By early fall of 1828 Child may also have read newspaper reports of Wright's second lecture, which centered on women and was widely discussed in the press.⁶⁴ That lecture contained empowering admonitions to women, including arguments for "Equal rights!" and rigorous female education.⁶⁵ In any event, in *First Settlers* Child addressed women's vulnerable position in a direct manner not undertaken by any other American women writers at the time. She admonished her readers to acknowledge women's capacity to perform in positions of power and leadership, a stance Wright exemplified in her own actions but had not addressed directly in her Nashoba essay. Child noted that the "common notion, that women are incapable of occupying high and responsible stations in society, is not sustained by history or experience." She cited the reigns of

⁶² Again, the full statement is: "The marriage law, existing without the pale of the institution [of Nashoba], is of no force within that pale." *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 132.

⁶³ Wright, "Explanatory Notes." (Mar. 1, 1828): 52.

⁶⁴ Wright's second lecture was not available in print until March 1829 in the *Free Enquirer*. Frances Wright, *Lectures on Knowledge. By Frances Wright. As delivered in the Park Theatre, City of New York. Lecture II. Of free enquiry considered as a mean [sic] for obtaining just knowledge.* *Free Enquirer* 1.22 Second Series (March 25, 1829): 169-171; 1.23 Second Series (April 1, 1829): 177-179. Child would almost certainly have read Benjamin Lundy's assessment in *Genius of Universal Emancipation* that Wright's proto-feminist theories – her "proposal for amalgamating the colors" – was "too wide a departure from the rules sanctioned by wisdom and experience, and calculated to break up the foundations of social order." [Benjamin Lundy.] *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 2.12 (April 26, 1828): 94. She is also likely to have read Rev. Timothy Flint's assessment in the *Western Monthly Review* that Wright was "not strictly sane" to promote "female independence" and that it was "surely a suicide project for ladies to attempt to weaken the validity of the marriage tie." [Timothy Flint], *Western Monthly Review* 2.1 (June 1828): 18-19. She would reference Flint within *First Settlers*: "[A]ll ... is corroborated by the testimony of Mr Flint, in his History and Geography of the Western States. Child, *First Settlers*, 261.

⁶⁵ Wright, *Lecture II.* 46, 55, 52. More: There was a "vulgar persuasion," lectured Wright, "that the ignorance of women, by favoring their subordination, ensures their utility." She noted that "We see men who will aid the instruction of their sons, and condemn only their daughters to ignorance...; Sunday's preaching ... a little music, a little dancing, and a few fine gowns [will] fit [young women] out for the market of marriage."

Queen Isabella of Spain and Queen Anacaona of Santo Domingo as evidence: “[T]he “few females, who have attained sovereign power, have ... discharged the[ir] important duties” with greater dignity” and “attention to humanity and the rights of their subjects” than did kings.”⁶⁶

Both Wright and Child also criticized the legal entrapment of women in the American institution of marriage. In “Exploratory Notes” Wright had censured the “tyranny usurped by the matrimonial law over the most sacred of the human affections,” but she would not directly outline her specific complaints until spring of 1829 in the *Free Enquirer*.⁶⁷ In language far more direct and specific than Wright’s, Child took up the cause in *First Settlers*, railing against American women’s lack of rights to their property and children in the event of a marital dispute: “The degree of independence, I so anxiously desire should be secured to females, is ... important here, as they receive so little protection from the laws of their country.” Child lamented:

The only relief a women [sic] can obtain, who wishes to free herself from an unfaithful and abandoned husband, is ... more cruel and humiliating, than the evils she ... desires to avoid. She must relinquish the society of her children.... She is deprived of her rank in society, and obliged to subsist upon the pittance ... which the Court, (who are careful to discourage every attempt made by women to emancipate themselves from their thralldom) deem it proper to allow.⁶⁸

In addition to her arguments for matrimonial rights, Child’s perspective on women within evangelical Protestantism in *First Settlers* also paralleled Wright’s ideologies. Both argued that some ministers used evangelical Protestantism and the Bible to support women’s subordination. When Wright began her first lecture tour in the summer of 1828 she was appalled at the obvious

⁶⁶ Child, *First Settlers*, 241.

⁶⁷ Frances Wright. “Nashoba. [Explanatory Notes, &c. continued from p.125].” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 132. Then, “Rights and Wrongs of Women.” *Free Enquirer* 1.27 (April 29, 1829): 213.

⁶⁸ Child, *First Settlers*, 244-245.

“influence of the clergy over the female mind” in their attempts to convert women to evangelical Protestantism.⁶⁹ Again, Wright’s writings on the subject were not yet published when Child wrote *First Settlers*, but as before, her sentiments were widely published in newspapers. Child considered evangelical assumptions about women in her novella; when the daughter asked, “Why is it so often asserted, that women owe to Christianity much of their present estimation and rank in society?” the mother answers, “Those, who profess this belief, can have given but little attention to the subject; women were created to be the companions and equals of man.”⁷⁰ Child reminded readers that in the “time of the Apostles, women held offices in the churches”; she even asked her readers to respect those who sought gender-neutral “favor in the sight of the great Parent of the Universe” through “worship ... to female deities.”⁷¹ This is a stunning text that supported racial intermarriage and miscegenation, criticized Protestantism, and demanded respect and legal rights for women at a time that had only one other female advocate for such radical causes: Frances Wright. The ideologies Wright extolled regarding unjust marriage laws, divorce, and universal (multi-class) boarding schools were not significantly different from Child’s in *First Settlers*. While in fact Native American-European miscegenation was not as horrific in the antebellum mind as that of African American and Europeans, Child’s vision of miscegenation and women’s rights in *First Settlers* would have mirrored Wright’s challenges to American society in that same historical moment.

Lydia Maria Child’s reasons for writing *The First Settlers of New-England* are simply not apparent. That is, there is no written record – no diary entry, no correspondence, no moving

⁶⁹Wright, “Preface,” *Course of Popular Lectures*, 8-9. Wright condemned their “odious experiment[s] on human credulity” – the “evil” of public revivals, where the “victims ... were invariably women.”

⁷⁰ Child, *First Settlers*, 246-248. More: “[A]lthough different stations have been allotted them, the duties which devolve on women are assuredly not the least important... [T]hose who entertain the opinion you mentioned, can have given little attention to the history of the bible, or indeed to any ancient history [I]ndeed the manners of the Romans all have a tendency to confirm the influence of women.”

⁷¹ Child, *First Settlers*, 251.

dedication – that reports its inspiration and motivation. We cannot know whether she was convinced that Wright’s lecture audiences would create a reading market for radical fiction – or perhaps that she was stirred by what she then saw as her husband’s self-sacrificial court battles for righteous but unwinnable causes. When Child began to write *First Settlers*, there were few American precedents for the scapegoating and scourging of respectable women for publicly untoward behavior from which Child could learn. The damning rhetoric in England that had followed Mary Wollstonecraft after her death was thirty years past. It is almost certain that up to this point Child had not seriously considered that the book could damage her reputation. In the months when *First Settlers* was being printed and made available in bookshops, Child could not have predicted that a firestorm of criticism would build gradually and finally rage at Frances Wright as she lectured to promiscuous audiences in public halls up and down the East Coast. But it did, and in the spring of 1829 Child had to face that fact. She had to realize that the increasingly menacing conservative response to Wright could just as easily be shifted to include her. While her tale was historical fiction, Child had to acknowledge the similitude of the content and tone of *First Settlers* to Wright’s real and now-demonized radicalism.

Sometime during the winter of 1828-1829 – it is unclear exactly when – *The First Settlers of New-England* was printed. Although negative reviews of Frances Wright had begun by early August 1828, those tended to appear in evangelical magazines, such as the *Christian Baptist*, the *Christian Watchman*, and the *Christian Secretary*. During the fall reviewers for more liberal and literary magazines, such as *The Correspondent* and *Ariel*, continued to offer mixed and even supportive comments about Wright. Given the similarity of Wright’s basic tenets to some of those in *The First Settlers*, and given the advent of negative publicity against Wright, it should not be surprising that Child might attempt to thwart the text’s distribution before readers

or reviewers had a chance to identify her as another devotee of the “Red Harlot of Infidelity.”⁷² Child had good reason to fear the sort of condemnation that Wright was experiencing. Child scholar Carolyn Karcher acknowledges that if Child had “attempted to promote *The First Settlers*... she would have risked literary boycott just when she could least afford it.” She suggests that “it is hard to avoid suspecting that she simply chose – whether deliberately or by default – to let the book die stillborn.”⁷³ But Karcher does not make the connection between the disappearance of Child’s *First Settlers* and the timing of Frances Wright’s lecture appearances in Boston – and that timing is significant.⁷⁴ After all, when Child wrote *Hobomok* and the first *North American Review* article called its contents “unnatural” and “revolting,” no one denounced her personally or called for a boycott of her works. After Wright, Child had reason to consider silencing her radical self – at least on some topics – in order to avoid retribution that she could not control.

In an effort to turn up some solid evidence regarding the actual – perhaps missing – copies of *The First Settlers of New-England*, I conducted an analysis of the extant copies of Child’s texts in academic and public rare book collections. That research indicates that there are far fewer copies available today of *First Settlers* and, interestingly, of its proto-feminist, pro-miscegnation, and anti-Calvinist predecessor, *Hobomok*, than of any other of Child’s books – even of her much-condemned *Appeal* (an anti-slavery text). There are only fifty-seven extant copies of the 1824 *Hobomok* and only fifty-eight of the 1828 *The First Settlers of New-England* *First Settlers*, compared with 331 of *An Appeal* and 530 of her collection of newspaper

⁷² “Female Infidelity,” *Advocate of Moral Reform*, August 1, 1836. Karcher, *First Woman*, 216. Karcher notes that Child “did not want to be associated with the pioneer female lecturer who had been denounced” so virulently by the press. Karcher, *First Woman*, 216.

⁷³ Karcher, *First Woman*, 98. Karcher believes that Child kept the copies in storage.

⁷⁴ Karcher, *First Woman*, 98. Instead, she suggests that Child was unwilling to eclipse her husband by out-earning him through her writing.

columns.⁷⁵ This fact could well point toward both books' original numbers having been intentionally reduced – a complicated possibility that I shall explore further. Of course, there could be any number of other reasons why there are so few copies of *First Settlers* – lack of popularity, degeneration due to poor quality of physical materials, or reduction in book-buying overall during the period. But it could also be that Child took deliberate steps to hinder the public notice, open distribution, and easy sales of the text.

The problem is that no correspondence or any other archival evidence has yet surfaced to clarify exactly what happened with regard to the publication and sales of the text. The proof I would offer is what is missing. That is, when *First Settlers* was printed in 1828-1829, a time when she and her new husband badly needed the income that might have come from its sales, the normal elements of Child's normal publication process are simply not there: She did not take any of the steps she normally took to promote a new text – steps she had originally taken for *Hobomok* and *Rebels* and would take in the immediate future for *Frugal Housewife*. Child had the title page inscribed with "By A Lady of Massachusetts" instead of her name, a common form of authorship for women writers, but recently uncommon for her. She did not have its authorship

⁷⁵ I have undertaken an analysis of the extant copies of the book in order to try to reconstruct Child's management of the distribution of her texts. I looked at the library ownership of ten texts, which constitute a wide range of genres. I considered the numbers of copies of Child's texts currently available across America – at rare book dealers and in rare book collections in academic and public libraries. That research revealed some interesting patterns. Genre does not seem to be the deciding factor in the persistence of her texts into the twenty-first century, for the three most available texts are the colloquial and blunt *Letters*, the radical and intellectual *Appeal*, and the popular novel *Philothea*. The text with most available copies is her collection of newspaper columns in the best-selling *Letters from New-York* (1843 and 1845), with 530 original copies available today after twelve printings. The next most available is the 1833 radical anti-slavery text *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* with 331, even though it was despised by the popular reading public at the time it was first published. This was the text that Child published with full knowledge that it would damage her reputation and salability – and a text that certainly found its way into the hands of ardent anti-slavery supporters for the next thirty years. Next is Child's popular 1836 novel *Philothea* with 178 copies with ten printings; then the immensely popular 1829 advice book *The Frugal Housewife* with 171 from ten editions. By 1838 *American Frugal Housewife* was in its twenty-second edition, and would go through ten more until 1845. We can assume that its owners used it as the recipe and advice book that it was and did not treasure it as a keepsake, as owners of *The Appeal* apparently did. Next is the 1855 non-fiction *Progress of Religious Ideas* with 135 from five printings; then the 1825 novel *The Rebels; or, Boston Before the Revolution* with 130 copies from two printings; then the 1835 non-fiction *The History of the Condition of Women* with 129 copies; and the combined 1832 biographies of *Madame De Staël and Madame Roland* with 121 from six printings. Neither of her two radical novels was reprinted after 1829.

– which she did with other works.⁷⁶ Child wrote no letters seeking reviews in the periodical press, and indeed, not a single review of the book appeared anywhere.⁷⁷ Elites like George Ticknor, Sarah Josepha Hale, Nathaniel P. Willis, and Jared Sparks at the *North American Review* had elevated her to literary heights for her earlier works and would certainly have recognized any new novel by Child, but instead the text “left no trace of its reception.”⁷⁸ Not even the magazine that Child then edited with her husband, the *Massachusetts Weekly Journal*, took the liberty of puffing the book – a benefit Sarah Josepha Hale would access regularly at *Ladies’ Magazine* and later at *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. *First Settlers* is not listed in George Putnam’s *The Booksellers’ Advertiser, and Monthly Register of New Publications*, published every month during 1834, as being available with any publisher that year, though it does list the *Frugal Housewife*, her *Juvenile Miscellany* magazine, and even the controversial *An Appeal in favor of that Class of Americans called Africans*, and *Oasis*, her anti-slavery annual.⁷⁹ None of the major libraries at the time listed *First Settlers* in their catalogs during this period – not the Mercantile Library in New York, the Boston Library, nor the American Antiquarian Library.⁸⁰ I

⁷⁶ The title pages of Child’s earlier books all stated their authorship as “by the Author of ‘Hobomok’” or ‘by Mrs. Child.’” Her 1825 *The Rebels* indicates that the novel was “by The Author of Hobomok.” Her 1827 *Tales for Youth* was “by the Author of ‘Days of Childhood’ and ‘Girl’s Own Book.’” Her 1829 *The Frugal Housewife* was “by the Author of Hobomok.” Boston: Marsh & Capen, and Carter & Hendee, 1829, and the 1831 *Mother’s Book* was by “Mrs. Child.” Boston: Carter, Hendee and Babcock, 1831. By the twelfth edition in 1832 her name finally appeared: “By Mrs. Child, author of ‘Hobomok,’ ‘The Mother’s Book,’ editor of the ‘Juvenile Miscellany’ &c.” Her 1832 *The Biographies of Madame de Stael, and Madame Roland* were “by Mrs Child.”

⁷⁷ Evidently Meltzer and Holland turned up no letters from the period from Child to reviewers seeking reviews of the book. Also, I have done a thorough search of all of the databases that contain early nineteenth-century magazine and newspaper reviews and found no trace of the novel.

⁷⁸ Karcher, *First Woman*. 96.

⁷⁹ *The Booksellers’ Advertiser, and Monthly Register of New Publications*. 1.1-12 (January – December, 1834). The *Bibliotheca Americana Catalogue of American Publications*, lists two of Frances Wright’s book, but does not list Child’s *First Settlers*. *Bibliotheca Americana Catalogue of American Publications, including Reprints and Original Works, from 1820 to 1848, inclusive*, O. A. Roorbach, ed., New York: Orville A. Roorbach, 1849.

⁸⁰ Even though p.39 lists Frances Wright’s *Views of Society and Manners in America*, no book with the title *The First Settlers of New England* appears in *Systematic Catalogue of Books in the Collection of the Mercantile Library Association of the City of New-York: With a General Index, and One of the Dramatic Pieces; Together with an Appendix: Containing the Constitution, and the Rules and Regulations of the Association*. New-York: Harper &

have tracked over forty individual copies of the book in rare book collections, and after researching the information on bookplates and handwritten inscriptions, it is clear that some readers did obtain copies during this period. For example, a well-known Swedenborgian minister, T. B. Hayward, gave a copy to his young pupil in Boston on August 18, 1830.⁸¹

So the question is, did Child intentionally work to silence her own rhetoric in *First Settlers* by removing copies of the book from bookstores? The fact that her cousins, Joseph H. Francis in Boston and C.S. Francis in New York, were the printers for many of her texts would have rendered that task considerably easier for her to accomplish than it might otherwise have been.⁸² She could have written her cousins (or just walked into the shop) and asked them to ship the copies to her, or to store them or destroy them. If other bookshops also had taken copies for sale or circulation, she could have requested repossession of her own property – on the title page she had imprinted, “Printed for the Author by Munroe and Francis” instead of a publisher. She (that is, David) owned her copies. With a lack of any evidence that Child followed her normal publication protocol following the publication of *First Settlers*, I have to conclude that the timing of the increased outcry against Wright and Wright’s Boston visit did prompt Child to intervene intentionally somehow to try to make this text to disappear.

Certainly Child had no desire to bring upon herself the sort of defamation that had exploded upon Wright, for Wright had been hit with far more than just a literary boycott. By

Brothers, 1837. The title does not appear in the *Catalogue of Books in the Boston Library, June, 1830, kept in the Room over the Arch, in Franklin-Place*. Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1830. It is also not listed in the *Catalogue of Books in the Library of the American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, Massachusetts*. Worcester: Printed for the Society, 1837, which also contains Wright’s *Views of Society and Manners in America*, 39 of the “W” section.

⁸¹ This copy is the one available online; the physical copy is at Harvard University in the Widener Library, us10879_2_a-widener.

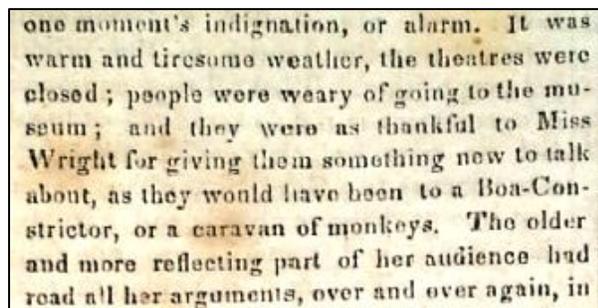
⁸² “Obituary Note [David G. Francis].” *The Publishers’ Weekly* 1599 (Sept. 20, 1902): 423. “Their store was a large and spacious one, with a marble front, and as much as ever a popular resort of noted people of literary tastes and men-about-town.” Child had two distant cousins in the publishing business, both of whom would print and/or publish her works throughout her lifetime; Joseph H. Francis had a printing shop and bookstore in Boston, and C.S. Francis had the same in New York, which Ralph Waldo Emerson nicknamed “Unitarian Headquarters.” Untitled article on C.S. Francis, *Norton’s Literary Gazette* (April 1, 1854): 166.

spring of 1829 Wright's name was denounced across the country, and the anger at her was only increasing. Child could only hope that she could bury *First Settlers* before she became associated with Wright and suffered collateral damage. One of the damning tropes she likely would have read in the press was that Wright was "the modern Aspasia," which associated Wright with an indiscreet and irreligious but wealthy and powerful woman from ancient Greece. In January 1829 both the *Aurora & Pennsylvania Gazette* and the more commonly circulated *Ladies' Literary Portfolio* used the phrase to mock the infamous lecturer.⁸³ Six years later Child herself would borrow the image to reify Wright as the Greek queen Aspasia in her novel *Philothea* – the final subject of this chapter. By spring 1829 even the radical papers were turning against Wright; in June the liberal *Ariel* finally wrote: "Miss Wright. We have refrained from noticing this lady ... because we thought silence was wisdom.... Her whole system of atheism and blasphemy is so ridiculous ... that any further discussion would only lead to a waste of time."⁸⁴ Then suddenly, as she had four years before, Child found herself listening to Frances Wright herself speak her radical doctrines – but this time the crowd was far larger than the one that had gathered around General LaFayette and Wright at an elite Boston soirée. In July 1829 when Wright finally made her first lecture appearance in Child's city of Boston, Child chose to attend. Although she did not discuss the event in any correspondence, given her circumstances, she must have believed that she did not dare miss the opportunity to address the force that threatened her. Child elected to review the lecture for the August 14, 1829, issue of the *Massachusetts Weekly Journal*. In that review, entitled "Letter from a Lady, concerning Miss

⁸³ "Miss Wright's Apotheosis." *Aurora & Pennsylvania Gazette* 21 (Jan. 24, 1829). "For three quarters of an hour ... the modern Aspasia entertained her congregation by a recapitulation of all she had said before." "Melancholy Departure." *Ladies' Literary Portfolio: a General Miscellany Devoted to the Fine Arts and Sciences* 1.7 (Jan. 27, 1829): 55. "It appears that Miss Frances Wright contemplates returning to England.... As Great Britain is in such a priest ridden condition, would it not be kind in the modern Aspasia to take along a company of proselytes from this country? It would save Justice Hopson some fatigue, and the state some money. A subscription might be made up to pay their passage in the steerage."

⁸⁴ "Miss Wright." *The Ariel, A Semimonthly Literary and Miscellaneous Gazette* 3.4 (June 13, 1829): 30.

Wright,” she took a significant and public step away from Wright, politically and ideologically.⁸⁵ Indeed, the piece stands in stark contrast with the radical content of *First Settlers*, which had nearly mirrored elements in Wright’s “Nashoba. Explanatory Notes” and in her lecture on women’s rights. Child first made a condescending *ad hominem* attack, noting that in the summer heat Bostonians, “weary of going to the museum,” were “thankful to Miss Wright for giving them something new to talk about, as they would have been to a Boa-Constrictor, or a caravan of monkeys.” Child reminded readers that Wright’s crossing of the gendered boundaries of



one moment's indignation, or alarm. It was warm and tiresome weather, the theatres were closed; people were weary of going to the museum; and they were as thankful to Miss Wright for giving them something new to talk about, as they would have been to a Boa-Constrictor, or a caravan of monkeys. The older and more reflecting part of her audience had read all her arguments, over and over again, in

Fig. 4.2 Child criticized Wright in “Letter from a Lady, concerning Miss Wright,” 1829

acceptable public speech and appearance – Wright’s reformer pantaloons, cropped hair, extreme height, and confident in-person performance – had led to “various and contradictory descriptions given of ... her person and voice ... by those who have heard and seen her.” That foregrounding of Wright’s physical “person and voice” confirmed that Child was well aware of the pejorative judgments critics were making about Wright. She judged that “self-conceit and a love of notoriety” prompted Wright’s public appearances – and especially Wright’s belief at “the especial call she thought she had ... to exhort people not to neglect the pleasures of this world.” Since Child had just published a broadly radical book (*First Settlers*) and was about to publish *The American Frugal Housewife*, which adamantly defended humility and parsimony, her attack

⁸⁵ “Letter from a Lady, concerning Miss Wright.” *Massachusetts Weekly Journal* 1.48 (Aug. 14, 1829): 3. It is clear that Child was present in the audience from her mention of her smiling at hearing Wright’s iconoclastic ideas and from her description of the warm weather and Wright’s unique pronunciation of the word “know-ledge.”

on the pursuit of pleasure was the point on which she would work to establish what was ultimately her own moral self-defense.

Child began that defense by saying she did “not hate [Wright] as a bad woman, or despise her as a weak one,” but “pit[ied] her as a misguided one.” She was crafting a position carefully, since her own criticism of Christians in *The First Settlers of New-England* was now regrettably available and left her vulnerable to reproach from evangelicals. After commenting that Wright “disbelieves the Christian religion,” Child took the middle-road stance of neither a narrow-minded, anti-evangelical antagonist nor Wright’s apologist. She offered that “abuse” of Wright “upon this subject” was “misplaced.” Rather than defending Christianity, suggests Child, the public needed to reject what she saw as the selfishness of Wright’s Epicureanism, the prominent feature of Wright’s novel *A Few Days in Athens* and evident in her fifth lecture (“Morals”)⁸⁶: “Epicurus maintained that ‘pleasure was the only good,’” quoted Child, and “believed that virtue gave a man the most pleasure, in the long run.” Child contested this claim, arguing that the “‘pleasure’ of Epicurus [was] liable to ... foul abuse,” for “his disciples cast their own pollutions on the maxim, and sought happiness ... in mere sensual indulgence.” She reproached Wright for “preaching doctrines, which, if they have any effect at all, must be ruinous to the peace and good order of society.” Those tenets, said Child, were “specious” and “utterly fallacious,” which the “older and more reflecting part of [Wright’s] audience” already knew, having “read all her arguments, over and over again, in the infidel writers of the French clergy.” “Young[er] minds”

⁸⁶ Frances Wright, “Lecture V: Morals.” *Course of Popular Lecture*. New York: Office of the Free Enquirer, Hall of Science, 1829. 109-110. “Among the Athenian schools, indeed, were some models of practical virtue, and teachers of moral science, whose lessons and whose lives seemed to have equalled all that we can show in modern generations of good and wise. Such appears to ... have been the mild, unassuming, reasonable Epicurus, in whose ethics, as imperfectly conveyed to us, we find the science first based upon its just foundation – *the ascertained consequences of human actions.*”

were too “unused to such discussions,” but would come to agree with their elders after “a few years [sic] experience,” she said.

Still, Child had more motivation to challenge Wright’s Epicureanism than for the sake of either morality or “good order.” Aware that one needed to be cautious in the conservative and evangelical “*self-denying, overrighteous* days” in which they lived, she warned that those who practiced Epicurean hedonism offended the public: “[H]e who proudly throws off the fetters of public opinion, exposes himself to a needless, and most fiery temptation.” She counseled readers repeatedly not to “give themselves up to unbridled impulse,” but rather “submit to restraint” in all things. This was a position on which she did not need to fear reproach, for her recently available volume of domestic advice in the *American Frugal Housewife* supported her position as a conservator of things rather than as a radical destroyer of them. With that volume and her sharp criticism of Wright in the August 1829 *Massachusetts Weekly Journal*, Child could hope that she had fended off any incipient or potential affronts from critics. She could only hope that no copies of *The First Settlers of New-England* made it into the hands of conservative magazine reviewers – and, judging from the absence of any response, liberal or conservative, to the novel, it is likely that none did. Immediately, Child needed to write something that could create both badly needed income and a wholesome and uncontroversial image for herself.

Nearly the entire focus of the *American Frugal Housewife* (1829) was on women’s domestic duties – spreading ear wax on a nail puncture or on chapped lips, applying a compress of “glutinous . . . quince-seed in a little cold tea” to “sore nipples,” and splitting a pig’s skull open between the eyes before roasting it. Child offered these and hundreds of other instructions to help a woman effectuate a “true economy of housekeeping”; she argued that for a couple to

“liv[e] beyond their income” was “morally wrong.”⁸⁷ She was chastised for its working-class content by *American Monthly Magazine* editor Nathaniel P. Willis, with whom she had been romantically connected in 1825. Willis now viewed Child as having betrayed and disgraced her adopted class by writing a book directed to common people. Willis dedicated three of fifteen pages of his “Editor’s Table” to ridiculing *Frugal Housewife*. He feigned pleasure that he could not “detect traces of breeding” in the book. He extolled the “innate sympathy” he detected that this “celebrated lady” felt “with her intended readers” and commended Child for “resist[ing] constantly the insidious advances of refinement.” By doing so, the *Frugal Housewife*’s humble readers – “rude creatures” of “the lower classes” – would feel comfortable using the text. He picked out fifteen of what he clearly considered the crudest passages in the book, including seven that used the vulgar expression, “nice.”⁸⁸

“ Indian pudding is *nice* baked.”
 “ Hard gingerbread is *nice* to have in the family.”
 “ A *nice* pudding may be made of bits of bread.”
 “ The heart, liver, &c., of a pig is *nice* fried.”
 “ A Bullock’s heart is very profitable for a steak.”

Fig. 4.3 Willis mocked Child’s use of the vulgar “nice”

In his next issue Willis leveled Child with the very charge she had been so assiduously avoiding: he linked *Frugal Housewife* with Frances Wright. Integrated into reviews on other books he commented derisively that in the “droll world” of America it was “odd that General Jackson

all its oddity. It is odd that General Jackson should be President—
 odd that Fanny Wright should be a man, and Mr. Owen a woman,
 (it explains, by the way, Lady Morgan’s story of the “ tunic ”)—
 odd that John Neal should be quiet a month, and very odd that any
 body can think “ hard gingerbread is nice ”—but the oddest thing

Fig. 4.4 Willis associated Child’s apparent vulgarity with Wright’s apparent desire to “be a man”

⁸⁷ Lydia Maria Child, *The American Frugal Housewife, dedicated to those who are not ashamed of economy*. New York: Samuel S. & William Wood, 1838 (1835). 3, 5, 50, 116.

⁸⁸ Nathaniel P. Willis, “The Editor’s Table.” *American Monthly Magazine* 1.10 (January 1830): 718-732. 721-723. Willis lashed out at Child one final time in this article, mocking poor “young masters” for whom buying a copy of a *Juvenile Monthly* would “draw ruinously on [their] gingerbread funds.”

should be President – odd that Fanny Wright should be a man, and Mr. Owen a woman ... and very odd that anybody can think ‘hard gingerbread is nice.’”⁸⁹ Since he had just quoted the last phrase from Child’s book, the personal jab at her was unmistakable. When Willis contemptuously associated Child with Wright as both being “droll” and “very odd,” he demonstrated the power that he and others in the popular press could wield, should they care to exercise it: Willis showed that he was unafraid of sneering at the President of the United States, and certainly, that he cared nothing about damaging the reputation and earning capacity of this now-degraded female writer.

But writing the *American Frugal Housewife* identified Child as morally unassailable. From that point on she could challenge social taboos and survive the subsequent ostracism, which would never have been possible were she not its writer. *Ladies’ Magazine* editor Sarah Josepha Hale shamed Child for her use of “vulgarisms” (such as “nice” for “good”) and encouraged Child to revise her book to be more suitable for all “christians and republicans.”⁹⁰ By impressing Hale with the revisions to her text, Child also was able to continue to market her stories and shorter pieces to Hale’s Boston magazine.⁹¹ *American Frugal Housewife* was a terrific popular success, coming out in at least thirty-two editions from 1829 and 1845; Child touted her authorship of it on the title page of nearly every book she wrote for decades.

AN APPEAL: “I EXPECT RIDICULE AND CENSURE”

Yet between 1829 and 1843 Child would abrogate her new and safe image of female conservatism – not for women’s rights or religious freedom, but for the single cause she felt deserved and demanded her self-sacrifice: Child determined to endure the wrath of evangelical

⁸⁹ Nathaniel P. Willis, “The Editor’s Table.” *American Monthly Magazine* 1.11 (February 1830): 798-804. 803.

⁹⁰ Sarah Josepha Hale. “Literary Notices.” *Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3.1 (January 1830): 42.

⁹¹ Hale had experienced a similar self-chastening during the period when Wright was tramping about the country on lecture tours; Hale approved of Child’s intelligent writing, curbed with a sense of determined acquiescence and self-denial.

and conservative reviewers for the abolition of slavery. Apparently her convictions for it were far more intense at that time (and aligned with the interests of her husband) than her feelings regarding women's rights or the errancy and opportunism of Calvinistic evangelicalism – of which no one spoke publicly except Frances Wright – or of Cherokee removal. To Child, immediate emancipation of the slaves was an issue that she must support publicly in order to remain true to her principles. She vehemently disagreed with the abolitionist sentiments popular during the early republican period, which held that gradual emancipation and colonization of slaves to Liberia and Haiti were the only possible solutions to the evil of chattel slavery.⁹² The righteous, emphatic, and even violent rhetoric of William Garrison and his American Anti-Slavery Society offended respectable traditional abolitionists.⁹³ In their Declaration of Sentiments the AASS attacked gradual abolition and colonization as anathema to Christianity; they claimed that “according to Scripture (Ex.xxi.16),” a slaveholder was a “MAN-STEALER.” Laws that allowed slavery were “before God, utterly null and void.”⁹⁴ The AASS accused clergy who supported or failed to oppose slavery as not offering “the whole counsel of God” to their congregations.⁹⁵ At this time it was likely far easier for Child to hold this radical position than

⁹² Paul J. Polgar, “‘To Raise Them to an Equal Participation’: Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31.2 (Summer 2011): 229-258. 257-258. Beginning in the 1770s and 1780s, New York and Pennsylvania Quakers led the drive for gradual emancipation; by the turn of the century most Northern states had passed legislation instituting gradual emancipation to end slavery; slaves remained enslaved but their progeny were free at birth or at some future date. “By the end of the War of 1812, prejudice was hardening into racism and the problem of slavery was becoming conflated with the problem of race..... The founding of the ACS [American Colonization Society] in 1816 signaled the dawn of a new era in organized abolition and antislavery agitation.... [B]lack Americans ... understood the ACS as a smokescreen for slaveholders to further strengthen the institution of slavery.”

⁹³ Ira V. Brown, “Pennsylvania, ‘Immediate Emancipation’ and the Birth of the American Anti-Slavery Society.” *Pennsylvania History* 54.3 (July 1987): 163-178. 165-166. In the late 1820s and early 1830s William Lloyd Garrison, drawing on the writings of Anthony Benezet and George Bourne, recruited James and Lucretia Mott, and together they began a drive toward immediate emancipation. With the support of wealthy New York abolitionist Arthur Tappan and *Genius of Universal Emancipation* editor Benjamin Lundy, Garrison worked to form the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia; eventually Tappan's brother and Theodore Weld would join them, among others.

⁹⁴ Qtd. in Brown, “Pennsylvania,” 172-173.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

other radical positions (e.g. proto-feminism or anti-evangelicalism), since Child's husband earned his living through his anti-slavery work and since she felt her anti-slavery position was on the firm moral ground that the Garrisonians outlined.⁹⁶

In August 1833 Child published a paradigm-shattering anti-slavery text, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*.⁹⁷ In this text Child called for the immediate emancipation of black people who were held in bondage, a stance that scarcely two or three men had yet dared to take publicly, and none so forcefully, cogently, or comprehensively as she in *An Appeal*. Historian Deborah Pickman Clifford notes that William Lloyd Garrison's more crude and less systematic appeal for immediate emancipation in the *Liberator* "was barely heeded by white Bostonians" and that for "the first few years subscribers [to the *Liberator*] were mostly free northern blacks."⁹⁸ Even more shocking, *An Appeal* addressed relationships or "marriages between persons of different color," and not just unions of Southern white men and their quadroon mistresses, which she portrayed as regrettable yet commonplace. This, of course, was the very subject she likely first saw in print in Wright's "Exploratory Notes" and which she had suppressed in her own writing by trying to withdraw *First Settlers* from circulation. Then the participants were whites European Americans and Native Americans. Now, for the critical subject of the emancipation of enslaved black people, Child openly discussed committed relationships between white working class women and what she calls "reputable, industrious colored men," presumably free black men.⁹⁹ Some of the brightest and most liberal thinkers in America were stunned by the logic and plan for immediate abolition of American slavery

⁹⁶ Eliza Follen's husband, for example, needed to earn an income through institutionalized religion, which still supported slavery. Though they were both Unitarian ministers, with his early vehement rejection of abolition William Ellery Channing lagged far behind Charles Follen.

⁹⁷ Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom*, 104.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁹ In Karcher, *First Woman*, 190-191.

Southerners and Southern sympathizers of the anti-abolitionist press responded far more aggressively, intent on frightening abolitionists into ceasing their activities. Child and her husband spent the next year in hiding from mobs that threatened the lives and burned the homes of known abolitionists.¹⁰²

Child was not taken by surprise by her public censure. Her introductory remarks in *An Appeal* make it clear she had fully expected it:

Reader, I beseech you not to throw down this volume as soon as you have glanced at the title.... Read it, if it be merely to find fresh occasion to sneer at the vulgarity of the cause: – Read it, from sheer curiosity to see what a woman (who had much better attend to her household concerns) will say upon such a subject: – Read it, on *any* terms, and my purpose will be gained.... I am fully aware of the unpopularity of the task I have undertaken; but though I *expect* ridicule and censure, I cannot *fear* them.¹⁰³

When Frances Wright began her section in “Nashoba” on interracial marriage and miscegenation, she said bluntly and directly to her readers, “The writer of this address is fully aware that the topic most offensive to the American public is that now under consideration.”¹⁰⁴

Child echoed this honest and confrontational language as she began to discuss the identical subject: “I am perfectly aware of the gross ridicule to which I may subject myself, ... but I have

who doubtless would not so much as touch it with a pair of tongs.” Child to Henrietta Sargent, Nov. 13, 1836. *Selected Letters*, 57.

¹⁰² Child, *Selected Letters*, 15. Child discusses the difficult circumstances of various abolitionists in correspondence of a collection of her letters; the editors note that the home of philanthropist and reformer Lewis Tappan was destroyed in 1834, 35n2. They also note that Adam Dresser, one of the seventy “Lane Rebels” from Lane Theological Seminary, was flogged by a pro-slavery mob in Nashville, Tennessee, for “having abolitionist material in his suitcase.” 62n3. On August 15, 1835, in a letter to Mrs. Ellis Gray Loring, Child wrote, “I am at Brooklyn, at the house of a very hospitable Englishman, a friend of Mr. [George] Thompson’s [an English abolitionist]. I have not ventured into the city, nor does one of us dare to go to church to-day, so great is the excitement here. You can form no conception of it. ’Tis like the times of the French Revolution, when no man dared trust his neighbors. Private assassins from New Orleans are lurking at the corners of the streets, to stab Arthur Tappan; and very large sums are offered for any one who will convey Mr. Thompson into the Slave States.”

¹⁰³ Child, Preface, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, n.p.

¹⁰⁴ Frances Wright, “Nashoba. Exploratory Notes.” *New-Harmony Gazette* 3.17 (Feb. 6, 1828): 133.

lived too long, and observed too much, to be disturbed by the world's mockery." She had predicted as she wrote the book that she would be subverting popular opinion and that the text's shocking contents and unapologetic style would make her a social pariah. She was correct – they did. But the adverse response was far greater than she had anticipated.

Child had projected that publishing *An Appeal* would affect her financial circumstances, but she had thought that any boycott of her works would only be minimal and short-term, and so she had gone ahead with the project. But the adverse response was far greater than she had anticipated. Child's loyal readers were paralyzed with horror and disgust at her arguments in *An Appeal*. Where her previous books had sold well, now the audience for her popular novels and advice books vanished.¹⁰⁵ Parents terminated their subscriptions to her *Juvenile Miscellany*, and by the end of 1834, with no available funding, she was forced to shut the magazine down and turn it over to Sarah J. Hale.¹⁰⁶ The personal financial consequences for Child and her husband were severe: creditors were already hounding David over lawsuits and the couple was "desperate [to] get out of debt" even before the negative response to *An Appeal*. All of Child's book profits legally belonged to David because of the coverture laws and so creditors automatically grabbed them, but this new loss of her income meant possible imprisonment for debt.¹⁰⁷ The literary boycott of her work plunged the couple into greater poverty than they had ever known.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Patricia G. Holland, "Lydia Maria Child as a Nineteenth-Century Professional Author." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1981): 157-167. 159-160. According to Holland, Child "could count on earning \$300 a year from" publishing *Juvenile Miscellany*; there were "thirty-three American editions and printings" of *The Frugal Housewife* and "a reasonable estimate would be that in the first two years of publication she earned about \$2,000" from it. "Child successfully published other advice books for women at this time and achieved the high point of her literary reputation with a series of five books called the *Ladies' Family Library*." She quotes the *North American Review*: "We are not sure that any woman of our country could outrank Mrs. Child." *NAR* 37 (July 1833): 139.

¹⁰⁶ Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom*, 106. Patricia G. Holland, "Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880). *Legacy* 5.2 (Fall 1988): 45-53. 46.

¹⁰⁷ Meltzer and Holland, *Selected Letters*, 42. David Child had been invited to work with English abolitionist George Thompson in London; the couple had made plans to go, but at the last moment he was seized and imprisoned for debt, quashing their plans. They also considered "joining the free-labor colony at Matamoros, Mexico (now Texas), planned by Benjamin Lundy ... as a refuge for free blacks from persecution in North America.... The Childs' decision to join was a coup for Lundy and, to some extent, an indication of how desperate

Having willingly subjected herself to ostracism for the cause of abolition, Child continued to work to protect herself from criticism as an atheist or proto-feminist by distancing herself from Frances Wright. In a discussion of freedom of the press within the text of *An Appeal* itself Child took an oblique shot at Wright's irreligiosity. She noted that New York City officials routinely allowed the "disciples of Fanny Wright" – presumably referring to Workingmen Party members and Freethinkers, atheists, and other radicals – to "promulgate the most zealous and virulent attacks upon Christianity" through the *Free Enquirer* – this, of course, occurring in Wright's absence, since she had fled to France.¹⁰⁹ Child argued that extending such

the Childs were to get out of debt." In January 1836 they were still planning to move there. Ibid. Then in May, citing "[d]ifficulties ... in Mexico, and the probability of a war between that country and our own," they changed their minds and "again resolved to go to England! ... to edit a periodical." Child to Louisa Loring, May 3, 1836. *Selected Letters*, 49.

¹⁰⁸ But interestingly, the actual copies of the *Appeal* must have been treasured and cared for well by their owners, for there are more copies of the book still available today in academic and public libraries than all but one of her other books, even though there were only three printings. There are 331 copies available of *Appeal* and only 171 copies are available of ten editions over twenty-five years of *Frugal Housewife*, well-used as a recipe and domestic advice book. While some individuals and friends whom she respected privately showered her with praise for *An Appeal*, it would be years before any well-known, popular, and reputable American man publicly took up her cause or defended her personally. William Garrison's approval only hurt her socially, since his extremism made him infamous in the public eye rather than simply renowned. Most abolitionists still supported gradual emancipation and colonization. It took time, but after a period of months and years, many were influenced by it to move toward a more liberal position of immediate abolition. Charles Follen and Child's brother, Convers Francis, Jr., were examples. Popular minister William Ellery Channing came around only partially to her perspective and only after repeated correspondence and private discussions. "At Newport, I called to say farewell to Dr. Channing; and I gladly said farewell; for during our brief interview, my remaining respect for him diminished rapidly. He said the abolitionists ought in their publications to advocate peace principles with peculiar care. I told him they did so, to a remarkable degree. He said he was glad to hear it – he did not know anything about their books – he never read them. What right then had he to judge and advise?" Child to Louisa Loring. August 15, 1835. 3/80. Microfiche. It is not until 1836 that Child seems to detect some difference in the public attitude toward the propriety of abolitionist behaviors: "Abolition is rapidly growing respectable here, because the abolitionists are becoming more and more numerous." Letter from Child to E. Carpenter, May 9, 1836, in *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*. 19. The explosion within the abolitionist community over women's equal participation with men, which became known as the "woman question," was initially prompted by Child's undeniably pivotal contribution to the cause. That is, many male abolitionists objected when strong women abolitionists like Abby Kelley, the Grimké sisters, and Lucretia Mott began to argue for greater opportunity for participation alongside men in anti-slavery activities – and when some men agreed and argued in their stead. The national organization split in two over the issue.

¹⁰⁹ Lydia Maria Child, 1833. *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*. 2nd ed. Newburyport: Charles Whipple, 1838. 224-225. "The disciples of Fanny Wright promulgate the most zealous and virulent attacks upon Christianity, without any hindrance from the civil authorities; and this is done upon the truly rational ground that individual freedom of opinion ought to be respected – that what is false cannot stand, and what is true cannot be overthrown. We leave Christianity to take care of itself; but slavery is a "delicate subject," – and whoever attacks that must be punished." Child refers specifically to the fact that the "Legislature of Georgia have offered five

liberties was a good thing – it was “truly rational” – because “freedom of opinion ought to be respected,” no matter how “zealous and virulent” the “attacks upon Christianity” by Wrightists were. But, argued Child, if under the United States Constitution radical Wrightists deserved freedom of speech and of the press, the same liberties should be extended to abolitionists.¹¹⁰ So as part of an argument for freedom of the abolitionist press, Child deliberately took the opportunity to distance herself from Wright’s anti-Christian stance, and at the same time implicitly demanded at least as much public forum as was initially allowed to Wright.¹¹¹

After publishing the *Appeal* Child tried to continue researching for her next book, a history of women around the world – and not, she made clear, an argument for women’s rights. Although the American Antiquarian Society had cut off her lending privileges at the library in response to the outcry against *Appeal*,¹¹² she still finished the work and published it in late summer/early autumn of 1835.¹¹³ In *History of the Condition of Women* Child leveled another charge at Wright’s radical feminism, describing Wright as wanting “men and women” to be able to “change places, that the latter might command armies and harangue senates, while men attended to domestic concerns.”¹¹⁴ Child’s criticism in her *History* of women “harangu[ing]

thousand dollars to any one who will ‘arrest and prosecute [William Lloyd Garrison] to conviction’” and that an “association of gentlemen in South Carolina have likewise offered a large reward for the same object.”

¹¹⁰ It was wrong and inequitable, she felt, that politicians in Georgia and South Carolina were persecuting abolitionists through print media; these Southern legislators and “association[s] of gentlemen” had put bounties on William Lloyd Garrison’s head for his promoting immediate abolition in his newspaper, *The Liberator*. Worse, Child claimed, both Northern and Southern politicians felt slavery was too “delicate [a] subject” to be tampered with and that “whoever attacks that must be punished” and denied their Constitutional freedom of speech.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 224-225. Interestingly, Child does not actually take any particular stance on Christianity in this comment in *An Appeal*. Missing is the sort of pious language that would direct the reader to see Child as sympathetic to evangelical Christianity. Rather, she creates an image of the institution of Christianity as inhabiting a subculture persecuted by Wright and her followers, but one that Child felt should be “le[ft] to take care of itself,” where slaves were a group that desperately needed and deserved respite and assistance.

¹¹² Karcher, “Censorship, American Style.” 284. “[T]he Boston Athenaeum hastily revoked the library privileges she had been only the second woman in its history to receive; outraged parents cancelled their subscriptions to her children’s magazine, bringing about its collapse; and the sales of her other books plummeted.”

¹¹³ Child to Louisa Loring. August 15, 1835. 3/80. Microfiche.

¹¹⁴ Lydia Maria Child, *A History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations. Vol. II*. Boston: John Allen & Co., 1835. 210-211. “These doctrines were maintained by infidels of the French revolution, and by their modern disciple, Fanny Wright.”

senates” foreshadowed the ancient Greek character of Aspasia in the novel *Philothea* that she was also working on, off and on. In fact, within a year Child had the real opportunity to rise and speak in front of a promiscuous audience. Abolitionist Lewis Tappan had organized a meeting between pro- and anti-slavery forces, which Child reported “was a failure” because “[n]o one came prepared to speak.” In a desperate moment (“There was a good deal of embarrassment, and long intervals of silence”) Tappan began to plead privately with Child: “Three successive times, [he] came to urge me to address the audience; of which, I think, a majority were men.” Child responded to him that she “had never spoken in public,” implying that she had never before addressed men publicly, and told Tappan that she “should feel very much embarrassed.”¹¹⁵ By refusing to stand and address a mixed-gender audience – by silencing herself – Child presented herself as a socially appropriate woman, where Wright consistently had shown herself a wanton in the public’s eye. Although by 1835 Wright had been absent from the public scene for five years and although, in fact, their ideas on slavery and race actually aligned well, Child still needed to confirm publicly her ideological distance from Wright, and especially from anything remotely involving the “woman question.”

The *History of the Condition of Women* did not sell many copies, nor did any other of Child’s publications in the years directly after her publication of *An Appeal*.¹¹⁶ By 1835, after a year’s loss of sales of all of her literary productions, and the failure of her idealist husband (then planning to relocate them both in Mexico) to support her, Child’s finances deteriorated desperately. She wrote to her brother Convers that she was working on a new novel and that her

¹¹⁵ Child, *Selected Letters*, 128. Child knew if women ascended a platform to speak, they were almost certain to be branded as scandalous and unafraid of men’s persistent and sanctioned stares at their exposed female forms (fully clothed or unclothed) – what scholars have named the “male gaze.” Laura Mulvey originated this phrase in her work on psychoanalysis and film in her “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema, *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

¹¹⁶ *History of the Condition of Women* was reprinted at least ten times, but none sold many copies. Most of the editions are either London editions or reprints by her cousins’ firms, and seven occurred after 1840. There are only 129 extant copies in U.S. libraries.

motivation was to improve her reputation, so that that improvement would boost the abolitionist cause. In fact, she was in the deepest poverty and living on the charity of generous Quakers.¹¹⁷ Child needed to sell books to create income. In order to do so, she had to rehabilitate her standing with the popular and conventional book market by producing a text that apprehensive magazine reviewers would appreciate and promote and that her disaffected readers would be persuaded to purchase. Child was aware that a new genre of moral and religious novels had the prospect of selling well to an evangelical Protestant audience suspicious of fiction. Her good friend Eliza Follen had just completed and sold such a novel (her 1835 *The Skeptic*), which openly rejected Frances Wright's irreligious ideologies, and which was selling well. But writing a didactic and religious text with pious, hyper-moral language would not have come easily to Child, who would later complain that women's magazines were "so skittishly *moral*, that they are always devilishly *dull*."¹¹⁸ More challenging, the transcendental and Swedenborgian spiritual concepts that made sense to her were decidedly unconventional.¹¹⁹ While a moral novel might reestablish her trust with a conservative readership, one suffused with her "unevangelical" religion could backfire and trigger its antagonism.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Letter to Convers Francis, October 25, 1836. In *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, 21. "For my own sake, I care far less about literary success than I could easily make people believe; but I am glad if [*Philothea*] adds to my reputation, because it will help to increase my influence in the anti-slavery cause."

¹¹⁸ Child to Francis Shaw, July 11, 1847. She also says, "I long to see the crow-bars got under, and the *whole* edifice fall." From Jeffrey, 119. Also, see Kirk Jeffrey's "Marriage, Career, and Feminine Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America: Reconstructing the Marital Experience of Lydia Maria Child, 1828-1874." *Feminist Studies* 2 (1975): 113-130. Jeffrey says that in the 1840s Child became "aware of the narrow, trivial character of much 'ladies' literature.'" 119.

¹¹⁹ Karcher, *First Woman*. 609. As Karcher argues, "her iconoclastic bent ... ultimately took her well beyond the liberalism of her Unitarian/ Transcendentalist milieu and Swedenborgian denomination [and] aligned her more closely with skeptics like Melville than with her less heterodoxical peers of either sex." Karcher comments, "Nor did Child profess the evangelical faith often regarded as the norm for women writers." Letter to Convers Francis, December 19, 1835, in *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*. 18. During the turbulence after the *Appeal* was published, Child wrote that she believed in a God, "One who is brooding over [the] moral chaos [of the world] with vivifying and regenerating power." Letter to Convers Francis, December 19, 1835, in *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*. 18.

¹²⁰ Rev. Robert Baird used the term "unevangelical" in 1842 to describe non-evangelical denominations in his *Religion in America; or, an Account of the Origin, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States, with Notices of the Unevangelical Denominations*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1842.

PHILOTHEA: CREATING FICTIVE DISTANCE FROM WRIGHT

Child took the chance with the novel she had already been dabbling with off and on for four years, *Philothea, A Romance*. She purposed *Philothea* to regain the readership she had lost from the *Appeal* boycott. She needed to convince her readers that they could trust her once again to speak with a conventional, moral voice – to be more like the editor of *Juvenile Miscellanies* and author of *The Frugal Housewife*. Most of all, she was certain that her readers wanted her to help them forget that she had ever written *An Appeal*. With complex polyvocality Child used *Philothea* to speak at once with the entertaining voice of an imaginative storyteller, with the conventional voice of a trustworthy sentimentalist, and yet with the reasonable voice of a liberal moral reformer.

Like the popular works by J. G. Lockhart and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the novel was set in ancient Greece, but unlike those works it was not another popular retelling of early Christian Bible stories.¹²¹ Child's calculus for matching *Philothea, A Romance* to the conventional reading

¹²¹ Much of Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is grounded in an ancient Greek context, but it is not, of course, a fictional text. Though Fuller was eight years younger and unmarried, she and Child were close friends. This was a genre Hannah More and others had already made fairly common: Hannah More's *An Essay on the Character and Practical Writings of Saint Paul* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1815); More's *Sacred Dramas; The Search after Happiness; and Other Poems* (London: J.F. Dove, 1827); Helen Plumtre's *Scripture Stories, Or, Sacred History Familiarly Explained and Applied to Children* (James Nisbet, 1826); William B. Sprague, ed., *Women of the Old and New Testament: A Series of Portraits* (New York: D. Appleton, 1850); Hannah Flagg Gould's *Esther: A Scripture Narrative* (New York: D. Appleton, 1835); Bourne Hall Draper's *Bible Stories; or, A Description of Manners and Customs Peculiar to the East* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1832); Samuel Burder's *Oriental Customs: or, an Illustration of the Sacred Scriptures* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822). Child may have first learned of Greek personages and stories through Plutarch, for the characters in *Philothea* reflect details from his *Life of Pericles*. Historian Mary Kelley notes that *Plutarch's Lives* was popular reading for women in New England in 1816 when Child was fourteen and reading everything in her brother's library: "Issued in 148 editions in the five decades after the Revolution, *Plutarch's Lives* became the most popular of these histories." Mary Kelley, "Designing a Past for the Present: Women Writing Women's History in Nineteenth-Century America." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (October 1996): 315-346. 315, 322. In the book Child portrays Pericles as a powerful Athenian king. Aspasia is his controversial and foreign second wife; Paralus is Pericles's beloved son from his first marriage; Anaxagoras is Pericles's wise older philosopher-teacher. Phidias is a well-known sculptor (the Elgin Marbles), and Alcibiades is Pericles's scheming cousin. Child uses Plato in her story, but to aid her tale she ages him forty years beyond Plutarch's report of him. Classics scholar Hubert Ashton Holden says that Pericles "owed much to the teaching of Anaxagoras in natural science; especially his freedom from vulgar superstition." Hubert Ashton Holden, *Plutarch's Life of Pericles, with Introduction, Critical and Explanatory Notes and Indices*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1894. xliii.

market took into account that authors and publishers were successful in selling fiction only when it was labeled as a “romance,” “tale,” “story,” or “history.”¹²² So, she framed and promoted *Philothea* that way, using the word *romance* four times within the first five pages. The novel is subtitled “A Romance,” and the first words addressed to the reader after the dedication are: “This volume is purely romance; and most readers will consider it romance of the wildest kind.”

Perhaps Child intended to dissuade rabid anti-novel evangelicals from picking up the volume with such a statement. Certainly, in the Preface Child addressed a reader interested in spirituality and morality, but not necessarily part of an evangelical Protestant public. In saying she had written the novel for “kindred spirits, prone to people space ‘with life and mystical predominance,’” Child’s tone reached out expectantly to sympathetic, educated, and liberal readers – but still conventional and theistic – who would not resist the Greek philosophical wisdom in the text but would “perceive a light *within* the Grecian Temple.”¹²³ In fact, the Preface gave fair warning to those who might take offense to the work as irreligious, subsumed as it was with Greek philosophy and devoid of historical Christian references: She said that if some readers [read, evangelical Protestants] wanted an apology for a work “they will deem so utterly useless,” she had none to offer than “the simple fact that [she] found delight in” writing it.¹²⁴ So while not attacking evangelical readers, she informed them that if they were willing, they could enjoy the work as a pleasant historical romance.

In what was probably both a heartfelt and a calculated move on her part, Child had already begun working to win back her lost conventional readers by “respectfully and

¹²² Carolyn L. Karcher. “Censorship, American Style: The Case of Lydia Maria Child.” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1986): 283-303. In 1843 Child demonstrated her ability to analyze and maximize her public acceptance: At that time she wrote, “I am exceedingly anxious to get well-established in business connexions here [New York], and make publishers and printers *desirous* to be in connection with me.”

¹²³ Child, Preface to *Philothea*, vi.

¹²⁴ Child, Preface to *Philothea*, vi.

affectionately” dedicating *Philothea* to “the Reverend Convers Francis of Watertown,” clearly labeling her brother as a Protestant minister. Such a tribute was certain to win conventional readers’ approval. Child credits Convers with giving her a “love of literature,” and by doing so she attached her new literary effort to her brother’s good reputation, daring readers to criticize *Philothea*’s morality.¹²⁵ Child also worked to build ethos among conservative readers in the Preface to *Philothea* by obliquely conflating two of her texts – the contentious and subversive *Appeal* with the popular and conventional *Frugal Housewife*.¹²⁶ Pairing her radical abolitionist tract with her popular advice book was an ingenious effort on Child’s part to reframe her public image from aggressive masculinity to conventional female passivity. In a folksy reference in the Preface to her husband she presents herself not as a wild-eyed radical from whom respectable readers should flee, but as just an ordinary “old woman with a checked apron” making purchases in a butcher shop. From this conventional persona Child argued that just as *Frugal Housewife* was useful, the *Appeal* had contributed “to the substantial fields of utility” and was her response to “the practical tendencies of the age.”¹²⁷ Further, educating her fellow Americans about immediate emancipation and the “spirit of the times” had not been a subversive activity, but her patriotic duty as a good citizen “of the country in which [she] lived.”¹²⁸ Child had a great deal a stake in succeeding in this complex strategy.

The story of *Philothea* includes both fictional characters and historical figures. The fictive orphan Philothea is being raised in fifth century BC Athens by her grandfather, Anaxagoras, a real, historical philosopher, who has taught her to value the spiritual over the material. Philothea cherishes the monotheism she has learned from him, a precept that was

¹²⁵ Ibid., iii.

¹²⁶ Ibid., viii. “When I related this dream to my husband, he smiled and said, ‘The first part of it was dreamed by Philothea; the last, by the Frugal Housewife.’”

¹²⁷ Child, Preface to *Philothea*, vi-vii.

¹²⁸ Ibid., vi-vii.

confirmed by Plato. Philothea avoids the hedonistic and rebellious Queen Aspasia (an apparently real figure) and tries to inspire her friend Eudora to do the same, with disappointing results. Aspasia and Anaxagoras have been reported to the Athenian Fourth Assembly of the People for violating new morality laws – for disbelieving in the pantheon of gods – she for atheism and he for monotheism. When Philothea’s betrothed becomes ill and wastes away, she follows suit shortly thereafter. After Philothea’s death, Eudora proves herself worthy of her friend’s spiritual investment and disavows Aspasia’s friendship.

From the beginning paragraph Child carefully constructs a new literary Greco-Roman context for her readers – one that was moral and monotheistic, but neither mythological nor Christian. As the story opens Child introduces Philothea and her friend Eudora as emblematic of two separate genres – New Testament stories and classic Greek mythology: “One [Philothea] might have been a model for the seraphs of Christian faith, the other [Eudora] an Olympian deity” (10). Child establishes that the novel would not be an imaginative retelling of stories from the early Christian era, as Philothea exclaims, “It is a night to feel the presence of the gods!” (10-11). Then after using the plural “gods,” in the very next line Child destroys the notion of a pantheistic plotline when Philothea contemplatively sighs, “In such an hour as this, Plato must have received the sublime thought, ‘God is truth – and light is his shadow’” (12). With this Child signals that in the novel she would be working within the framework of the Greek antiquities to construct the monotheistic notion of a *single* Supreme Being, a much more acceptable notion to most antebellum readers.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Note: Philosopher Anaxagoras and sculptor Phidias are accurately depicted as contemporaries of approximately the same age. However, when these two characters are portrayed as quite elderly, the character of Plato appears to be in his mid-30s to mid-40s at the very youngest – he already has students and is running the Academy in Athens. In reality, he would have been only four years old when Anaxagoras died. *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.umkc.edu>. Accessed online 02/04/2013. While the historical record is not entirely clear, tradition has it that the artist Phidias, the philosopher-teacher Anaxagoras, and Aspasia were all the subject of persecution and legal proceedings in attempts to attack Pericles’s power. “Hermippus

In her attempt to answer with finality any possible question her readers might have about the possibility of Child's loyalty or affection for Wright or Wrightism, Child also goes out of her way in *Philothea* to humiliate Wright by creating a damning and obvious resemblance between her and the primary female antagonist of *Philothea* – the king's consort, Aspasia. Indeed, there are striking similarities between the two figures that would be easy to exploit. In *Philothea* Child juxtaposes a self-effacing protagonist (*Philothea*) against a Wright-like Aspasia to negotiate a safer, more conventional female identity for herself within antebellum American society. Several scholars have seen the connection. Political scientist Kathleen Sullivan says she sees the novel *Philothea* as Child's "reaction to the ... social reformer Fanny Wright." Sullivan argues that by setting up Wright as a model for the character Aspasia, Child "was able to illustrate her fears about libertarian theories and offer an alternative." This is an argument with which I wholeheartedly agree, and regret that Sullivan does not offer specific support regarding Child's critique of Wright in her wide-ranging but brief article.¹³⁰ Child scholar Carolyn Karcher correctly sees Aspasia as a "caricature of Wright not only in her 'self-conceit,' ... but in the feminist and atheistical doctrines she preach[ed]."¹³¹ She argues that in *Philothea* "Child categorically rejects the model of liberated womanhood Aspasia/Wright incarnates."¹³² Child

institutes legal proceedings against Aspasia as an atheist, and procuress." Holden, 56. Holden comments that the possible charges "included all cases of breach of reverence due to the gods," though "[w]hat the particular offence committed by Aspasia was, is unknown." Holden, 186. In fact, according to Plutarch, Phidias died in jail, Anaxagoras was banished from Athens, and Aspasia was acquitted after Pericles made an emotional appeal for his wife's life to the Assembly of the People. Holden, 63-65.

¹³⁰ Kathleen S. Sullivan, "Women, Speech and Experience." *The Good Society* 14.1-2 (2005): 35-39. 37-38. She only offers that Child's advocating that "[f]or Child, freedom was to be found not by escaping status but by engaging in one's status. Her interest in Transcendentalism allowed her to appreciate that to engage was to become consumed in one's work as a farmer, or a priest, or a scholar, or a woman. It was an invitation to explore one's status and find liberation within it rather than to liberate oneself from it." The lack of any detailed explanation connecting Child to Wright denies strength to an argument with which I otherwise fundamentally agree and support with real evidence and connections.

¹³¹ Karcher, *First Woman*, 234-235. Karcher comments that the character of *Philothea* was "recognized by all [Child's] friends as an idealized self-portrait."

¹³² *Ibid.*, 235-236. "Philothea, Eudora, and Aspasia all represent projections of the selves Child wished or feared to be: ... the domestic expert and loving spouse, the literary lion and darling of Boston's salons, the political advocate

intentionally organized her novel such that her protagonist Philothea was able to demonstrate morality and purity in all the ways that the antagonist Aspasia demonstrated immorality and impurity. The historical Aspasia was commonly known in the 1820s and 1830s through popular consumption of Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*. Before their marriage David had even acknowledged Child as his Aspasia.¹³³ Indeed, abundant evidence exists that Frances Wright was mocked in the press regularly as a “modern Aspasia,” and it is clear that Child and others in the conventional reading public would have understood the damning connotation of that connection. Since late 1828 Wright had been accused of being a dangerous, scandalous woman, and in 1829 the press began linking Wright with the historical Aspasia. In January 1829 both the *New York Evening Post* and *The Ladies' Literary Portfolio* printed a poem labeling Wright as a “new

ODE TO MISS FRANCES WRIGHT.
Thou wonder of the age, from whom
Religion waits her final doom,
Her quiet death, her Euthanasia;
Thou, in whose eloquence and bloom
The age beholds a new Aspasia!

Fig. 4.6 An ode likening Wright to Aspasia, 1830

Aspasia.”¹³⁴ In that same month the *Aurora & Pennsylvania Gazette* labeled her “the modern Aspasia.”¹³⁵ In 1830 when the press heard that Wright was leaving the United States, the *New-York Spectator* rejoiced, also calling her a “modern Aspasia” and offering to take up a collection to pay for her passage in steerage.¹³⁶ Then when Child read the works of Baroness De Staël in

and heroine of the antislavery movement.... *Philothea* seems to repudiate the theories and arguments “incidentally implied” in Child’s *History of the Condition of Women*. Far from exposing the arbitrary tyranny of the practices that restrict women to a narrow sphere in male-dominated societies, the novel discredits feminist rebellion, idealizes traditional feminine roles, and apotheosizes a deadly self-sacrifice as the highest virtue.”

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹³⁴ “Ode to Frances Wright.” *The Ladies' Literary Portfolio: a General Miscellany Devoted to the Fine Arts and Sciences* 1.7 (January 27, 1829): 55. Reprinted in *New-York Spectator* (June 11, 1830).

¹³⁵ “Miss Wright’s Apotheosis.” *Aurora & Pennsylvania Gazette* 121 (Jan. 24, 1829). “For three quarters of an hour, ... the modern Aspasia entertained her congregation by a recapitulation of all she had said before... She recommended theatres, in animated strains, as the proposed substitutes for churches.”

¹³⁶ “Melancholy Departure.” *New-York Spectator* (June 11, 1830).

order to write her biography (1832), she must have read De Staël's essay on Aspasia.¹³⁷ Child realized that Wright's dangerous persona could be constituted and easily recognized by readers in the fifth-century BC Greek figure of Aspasia. After all, Follen had already heartily criticized Wright in a novel, as had Mrs. L. Learned before her in *The Proselyte*. Child had nothing to lose and everything to gain by crafting a Greek romance that parodied Wright personally and challenged her philosophies. Child's barely veiled criticism of Frances Wright in the antagonistic character of Aspasia positioned *Philothea* for reception by a popular and conventional audience that would be eager to make such a connection.¹³⁸ Aspasia, the controversial wife of King Pericles, is best known by the conclusions drawn about her by Plutarch in his *Life of Pericles*, written five centuries after Aspasia's death, which were (and are) both controversial and contested;¹³⁹ some scholars still question whether Aspasia existed at all.¹⁴⁰ For over two thousand years historians, poets, artists, and writers have created various images of Aspasia, ranging from a self-focused, atheistic brothel owner to an intelligent and influential woman functioning as an equal among powerful men.¹⁴¹ The only material written about Aspasia during or shortly after her lifetime is from references to her in comedies by Aristophanes and three

¹³⁷ See [Madame la Baronne] De Staël-Holstein, *Oeuvres Complètes de Madame la Baronne De Staël-Holstein. Tome Deuxième*. Paris: Firmin Didot Frères et Cie., Libraires, 1836. Child wrote a biography of De Staël as part of the first volume in her Ladies' Family Library series. Lydia Maria Child, *The Biographies of Madame De Staël, and Madame Roland*. Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1832. Child's Athenaeum Library borrowing records indicate she repeatedly checked out books by "Madame De Stael" in 1832 and 1833. Boston Athenaeum borrowing records, Vol. 1, 1827-1834. Unpaginated and handwritten record. Approximately p.72.

¹³⁸ "Robinson's Case." *The Herald* 87 (June 21, 1836): np. In June of 1836 the New York *Herald* printed another report on Frances Wright that confirmed her identification as the Greek Aspasia in the public mind; the articles decries "Miss Frances Wright, and ... her worthy disciples," to expose her as one of "these Aspasia's [who] possess unbounded wealth. They own bank stock, rail roads, houses, and lands."

¹³⁹ Hubert Ashton Holden, *Plutarch's Life of Pericles, with Introduction, Critical and Explanatory Notes and Indices*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1894.

¹⁴⁰ Madeleine M. Henry, *Prisoner of History: Aspasia of Miletus and Her Biographical Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. 9. Rhetoric scholar Madeleine Henry suggests that to "ask questions about Aspasia's life is to ask questions about half of humanity," since relatively few historical accounts record the lives and words of women.

¹⁴¹ Cheryl Glenn, "Sex, Lies, and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric." *College Composition & Communication* 45.2 (May 1994):180-199. Henry and rhetorician Cheryl Glenn have both considered the ways in which centuries of patriarchy have layered meaning around the person of Aspasia and essentially "constructed" her.

Socratics, which later writers, like Plutarch, have assumed to be historical fact.¹⁴² In the end scholars acknowledge that they “can do no better than distinguish what is provable from what is not [about Aspasia] and what is knowable from what is not,” which turns out to be quite difficult to do.¹⁴³ From Child’s readings of Plutarch and contemporary playwright Aristophanes she would likely have viewed Aspasia as a brilliant but immoral courtesan.¹⁴⁴ Yet evidence from her commentary about De Staël’s interpretation of Aspasia indicates her sympathy and respect for her.¹⁴⁵ Likely her feelings about Aspasia/Wright were conflicted.

¹⁴² Henry, *Prisoner of History*, 19.

¹⁴³ Henry, *Prisoner of History*, 127. Henry comments about response to her work at a conference: “‘You’ve taken away our image of Aspasia and have shown it to be a construct!’ exclaimed a classicist after hearing me speak on this topic. ‘What have you given us back?’ The fear of a vacuum is very real....Now that the prisoner has been freed from her historical tradition, can we ever know who was in the cell? Who was, who is that Other? I think we can do no better than distinguish what is provable from what is not and what is knowable from what is not. This having been done, we can say remarkably little about Aspasia of Miletus.”

¹⁴⁴ Henry, *Prisoner of History*, 16. According to Plutarch, Pericles met and wed Aspasia subsequent to Pericles’s own decree that *metics*, or non-Athenian-born people, could never be citizens. So, because of her resident alien status, their marriage, however formalized, could never be legal in Athens. Because Aspasia and Pericles had a child while legally unmarried, Plutarch and many after him branded her a *hetairai* or well-educated courtesan. There were “[s]piteful attacks on Aspasia, when she became the wife of Pericles, by the comic poets of the day,” and especially from Aristophanes.

¹⁴⁵ [Madame la Baronne] De Staël-Holstein, *Oeuvres Complètes de Madame la Baronne De Staël-Holstein. Tome Deuxième*. Paris: Firmin Didot Frères et Cie., Libraires, 1836. 297. Interestingly, at the time Child wrote her biography of De Staël she would have read De Staël’s vigorous defense of Aspasia in her essay in the *Biographie Universelle*. De Staël held that Aspasia had been relegated to “the class of courtesan” solely because of Aspasia’s giving birth to a child in an illegitimate marriage. De Staël celebrated Aspasia’s “political and literary talents” and eloquence as a speaker and rhetorician. She praised Aspasia’s “alignment ... with public affairs” and framed her as Pericles’s politically astute advisor. « Une ... beauté d’Ionie, Thargélie, avait, avant Aspasia, donné l’exemple de la singulière réunion des talents politiques et littéraires, avec toutes les grâces de son sexe.... Il paraît qu’Aspasia la prit pour modèle.... Les femmes étrangères étaient, pour ainsi dire, prosrites par les lois d’Athènes, puisque leurs enfants, nés dans le mariage, ne pouvaient être considérés comme légitimes : peut-être cette situation contribua-t-elle à placer Aspasia dans la classe des courtisanes.» *My translation*: “A ... beauty of Ionie, Thargélie, had, before Aspasia, provided an example of the singular combination of political and literary talents, with all the graces of her gender... It was she whom Aspasia took as a model.... Foreign women were, as they say, proscribed by the laws of Athens, so that their children, born from their marriages, could not be considered legitimate: perhaps this situation contributed to placing Aspasia in the class of courtesans.” De Staël respected Aspasia for her “d’éloignement ... des affaires publiques,” noting that “il semble qu’elles deviennent les rivales des hommes.” “Aspasia s’occupa ... d’une manière remarquable de l’art des gouvernements, et en particulier de l’éloquence, l’arme la plus puissante des pays libres.” *My translation*: “Aspasia functioned remarkably within the art of government, and especially within [the art of] eloquence, the most powerful weapon of the free world.” It is likely that in 1832 Child respected De Staël’s opinion. When she turned in her manuscript to her publisher she told him that “Madame de Stael ... could not have desired a more partial” biographer than she. Child. Letter to George Ticknor. [183?1-1832?]. *Selected Letters*, 22.

One aspect of Aspasia's history must have struck Child as similar to Wright's on-going warfare with the moral judges in American pulpits and editors' chairs. According to Plutarch, Aspasia was charged by comic poet Hermippus with *asebeia*, or impiety, and taken to the



Fig. 4.7 Bust of Aspasia.
Vatican Museums



Fig. 4.8 Michel Corneille's *Aspasie au Milieu des Philosophes de la Grece*, c. 1672



Fig. 4.9 Marie Bouliar's self-portrait as Aspasia, 1794

Thesmothetae Archons and then to the Fourth Assembly, which heard cases dealing with religion.¹⁴⁶ Both Aspasia and Wright crossed the bounds of propriety in society's eyes; while Aspasia faced a formal, legal trial, which Wright avoided, both were tried and found guilty in the court of public opinion.¹⁴⁷

Both Karcher and Sullivan have pointed out important connections between Wright and the text of *Philothea*, but I see two additional areas that bear investigation: the issues of women's self-veiling and Epicurean philosophy. I believe that Child addresses both issues in *Philothea*

¹⁴⁶ Henry, *Prisoner of History*, 15. Child, *Philothea*, 118. Scholars disagree as to whether or not this actually occurred, and Henry notes that "if Aspasia was literally tried in court, it was in order to discredit Pericles."

¹⁴⁷ "Robinson's Case." *The Herald* 87 (June 21, 1836). In June of 1836 the New York *Herald* printed another report on Wright that confirmed her identification as the Greek Aspasia in the public mind; the article decries "Miss Frances Wright, and ... her worthy disciples," to expose her as one of "these Aspasia's [who] possess unbounded wealth. They own bank stock, rail roads, houses, and lands... In politics, in religion, in speculation – in every public affair of the city, the superior and talented class of these beautiful female devils, (for it is useless to deny their beauty, though their stock of virtue is small,) exercise as great an influence as the celebrated Aspasia did over Pericles and his friends in the movements of ancient Athens. The connection between Aspasia and Frances Wright continued during Wright's extended absence from the United States. No title. ["Wednesday Evening, May 17."] *New-York Spectator* (May 18, 1837). As late as 1837 the *Spectator* was still linking Wright with Aspasia. Mocking the idea of politically active women, it wrote: "What! Shall it be said that the voice of woman is to be heard in this free land of slaves, in vain? Spirit of Aspasia forbid it! ... Shall it be said that ladies shall not mount the rostrum, and be eloquent? Spirit of Fanny Wright Darusmont, forbid it!"

with the purpose of distancing herself from Frances Wright. Through a hypothetical debate over the ancient Greek social custom of women's veiling themselves in public, Child interrogates female morality and immorality in *Philothea*. She uses Aspasia's objections to women's self-veiling as corollary to Frances Wright's objections to women's self-effacement.¹⁴⁸ Child notes that "the custom of Grecian women" was to veil (16), and in his study of veiling in ancient Greece, historian Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones notes that women who did not veil were commonly understood to be prostitutes.¹⁴⁹ That is, only notorious women who were willing to be exposed to the prolonged gaze of men would not veil themselves. Aspasia calls veiling an "absurd fashion" and demands that Philothea remove her veil and reveal her face in mixed company: "I must see this tyrannical custom done away in the free commonwealth of Athens" (24).¹⁵⁰ Philothea demurs, removing her veil only after she and Aspasia have relocated to Aspasia's private quarters and are "quite sure of being uninterrupted" by men (25).¹⁵¹ So Philothea claims an identity as a "true-hearted woman" – which antebellum readers understood as sentimental code for female respectability – by her refusal to show her face to any man outside her family. By this standard, Child uses Philothea's choice to self-veil as a demonstration of Child's own advocacy of women's willing acceptance of a cloistered social position, against Wright's demands for inclusion and equality inside male public space.

¹⁴⁸ There is no evidence that the historical Aspasia addressed the issue of veiling.

¹⁴⁹ Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, "House and Veil in Ancient Greece." *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 251-258. 255, 257. Llewellyn-Jones cites historian Plutarch's suggestion that "[i]deally a woman [w]ould stay at home in security and silence." Llewellyn-Jones argues that the *tegidion*, a particular type of veil, "overlooked in scholarship for so long, may have had a profound effect upon women's access to a more active lifestyle," allowing them to "attend[] festivals" and other public events. Veiling made an Athenian woman "socially invisible, allowing her to enjoy privacy and to be in public." "[T]he women who attract the most notoriety are those who are conspicuously uncovered to the public view."

¹⁵⁰ Child, *Selected Letters*, 128. It is interesting to note that Anaxagoras's refusal to urge Philothea to remove her veil, saying instead that "My child must be guided by her own heart" (24) echoes David Child's response to Gerrit Smith's request that Child mount the platform and speak to abolitionists (he had "wished [her] to act in perfect freedom"). I cannot determine if Child wrote these lines before or after the incident occurred with Smith and David.

¹⁵¹ Philothea offers, "Why should a true-hearted woman wish to display her beautiful face ... to any but those on whom her affections are bestowed?" (16). The sentimental code of being "true-hearted" identified Philothea to antebellum readers as a woman who knew that her place in society was subservient to men's.

Yet this issue is complicated by historian Karen Halttunen's argument that during the antebellum period a truly respectable, "sentimental woman was not to veil her face," for her face was the primary canvas on which tell-tale signs of her sincerity and innocence, like tears and blushing, were revealed.¹⁵² So the *New-York Commercial Advertiser* reviewer who reported that "there were ladies [at a Wright lecture] without disguises" was reflecting the judgment that a respectable woman in such untoward circumstances *should* have worn a veil – and ultimately, that they should not have attended at all.¹⁵³ Using this guide, then, the act of women's veiling in Boston in 1829 to 1836 sometimes served the same purpose that it did in fifth century BC Athens: to create a mechanism by which women could retain their anonymity at a disreputable scene and, therefore, their respectability in the long run.¹⁵⁴ But, ultimately, Child's argument in

¹⁵² Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 88. While literary scholars have traced the metaphorical use of the veil in nineteenth-century literature, they do not consider the cultural or historical context of the act of wearing of a physical veil, a commonality then in America. See Theodore Ziolkowski, "The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth." *Religion & Literature* 40.2 (Summer 2008): 61-81. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel." *PMLA* 96.2 (March 1981): 255-270. Carroll Viera, "'The Lifted Veil' and George Eliot's Early Aesthetic." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24.4 (Autumn 1884): 749-767. It was required for the formal mourning period following the death of a close family member; historian Karen Halttunen describes the "long, thick, black crape veil" worn by widows for specific periods of time. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. 136. The white veil also entered and faded periodically as a fashion accessory. "History and Antiquity of the Veil." *The National Register*, (Nov. 16, 1816): 180. "London Female Fashions," *The Album and Ladies' Weekly Gazette* (June 21, 1826): 1.3. "Recipes. To Clean Black Lace Veils." *Lady's Book* (Feb. 1832): 120. "Female Fashions for August and September." *The New-York Mirror* (Aug. 28, 1841): 279. "Recipes. To Clean White Lace Veils." *Lady's Book* (Jan. 1832): 64. In 1838 a writer for the Unitarian *Christian Register* commented that the veil "has its periods of abundance and scarcity even to this day [and] has been much in vogue for a quarter of a century." Joseph B. Felt, "Collections Relating to Fashions and Dress in New England. Veils." *Christian Register* 17.33 (Aug. 18, 1838): 132. In 1839 a writer for *Lady's Book* reported that bonnets with "small veils, which do not hide the face" were "again in fashion." "Editor's Table: Education of Females. Fashions." *Lady's Book* (Oct. 1839): 190. Many antebellum writers traveling abroad sent back vignettes of veiling by Muslim women, and readers appeared fascinated with the *hajib* and *chador* as cultural and religious norms. "State of Female Society in Persia." 1.44 (March 20, 1834): 4.

¹⁵³ William Leete Stone. *New York Commercial Advertiser* (Jan. 5, 1829). Quoted in Morris, 186.

¹⁵⁴ Lyman Beecher, *Lectures on Scepticism, delivered in Park Street Church, Boston, and in the Second Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: Corey and Fairbank, 1835. 75. As Lyman Beecher lamented, many apparently respectable women did attend Wright's lectures; veiled women could only be there because they had become trapped by Wright's powers of persuasion. Lyman Beecher left a succinct report of women attending an 1829 Frances Wright lecture: "Females of education and refinement – females of respectable standing in society – those who had been the friends and associates of my own children – were numbered and are now among her votaries, and advocate her sentiments." This was from a series of sermons he delivered on atheism in Boston and Cincinnati in 1831 and 1833.

Philothea was not whether or not antebellum women should veil. Rather, with a raucous and insolent Aspasia/Wright as a foil, she used the willing self-veiling by “true” ancient Greek women (like Philothea) as contrast for the superior virtue of women’s self-abnegation for the sake of others. Philothea fulfills this mission by willing herself to waste away to her own death.

A critical connection that only one other scholar has noted also centers on the issue of virtue, and concerns the fact that *Philothea* bears striking similarity to Frances Wright’s 1822 novel, *A Few Days in Athens*. The novel was Wright’s imaginative framing of Epicureanism, the materialism-based philosophy that held virtue as the greatest pleasure and avoidance of pain as a moral pursuit. Though set a century apart in ancient Greece (Child’s is a century earlier), the tone and style of the *Athens* and *Philothea* are remarkably similar, each weaving together fictitious and historical characters and philosophical ideas.¹⁵⁵ In fact, literary scholar Kenneth Cameron argues that Child used Wright’s *Athens* as a sort of a model for *Philothea*. Wright’s novel and her extolling of Epicurean philosophy had raised little to no concern among reviewers when the text was published in 1822. It is probable that Child, the toast of Boston literati in 1824 and 1825, was familiar with this novel of another intellectual woman – especially after crossing paths with the renowned Wright in 1825 at the Bunker Hill anniversary celebration.¹⁵⁶ This was a time when Child was unsettled in her spiritual beliefs, and so a book that explored

¹⁵⁵ *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*. <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.umkc.edu>. Accessed online 02/04/2013. Philosopher Anaxagoras and sculptor Phidias are accurately depicted as contemporaries of approximately the same age. However, when these two characters are portrayed as quite elderly, the character of Plato appears to be in his mid-30s to mid-40s at the very youngest – he already has students and is running the Academy in Athens. In reality, he would have been only four years old when Anaxagoras died.

¹⁵⁶ Book review. *A Few Days in Athens*. *Atlantic Magazine* 1 (September 1824): 364-369. 364. Wright’s novel was published in London in 1822 and news of it reached American readers two years later through an *Atlantic Magazine* reviewer, who was “delight[ed with] the spirit and beauty of the sketch.” As the *Atlantic* reviewer acknowledged in September 1824, “Few ... readers, probably, have ever seen or heard of the little work,” and those who noticed it simply received it as a highbrow but harmless project of the “amiable and accomplished authoress” from Scotland. He gave the book six pages of attention, praising “the beauty of [Wright’s] narrative” and the “fine colouring of the descriptive scenes.”

unusual beliefs likely would have been intriguing.¹⁵⁷ She would have respected the *Atlantic* reviewer who had called some of Epicurus’s ideas “rational and noble”; though he had taken mild exception to those sentiments that were unchristian, he had not chastised Wright for disseminating them, but only the ancient philosophers themselves for originating them.¹⁵⁸ No further mention of Wright’s Epicureanism occurred until July 1828, after Wright’s first speech in New Harmony, Indiana, when a reviewer for *North American Review* finally recalled Wright’s “very ingenious exposition and defence of the Epicurean philosophy” in *A Few Days in Athens*; he now “disapprove[d of] the doctrine.”¹⁵⁹ Again, in her August 1829 *Massachusetts Weekly Journal* review of Wright’s lecture Child herself had challenged Wright’s Epicureanism.¹⁶⁰ Now in *Philothea* Child confronted the radical ideology again, this time through historical fiction.

Cameron insightfully identifies a direct link between Wright’s *A Few Days in Athens* and Child’s *Philothea. A Romance*, suggesting that Child contested Wright’s Epicurean framing of Greek civilization by offering her Transcendentalist interpretation instead.¹⁶¹ Certainly Child had an urgent need to refute Wright’s philosophies in order to solidify her reputation in the

¹⁵⁷ Letter from Child to Convers Francis, May 31, 1820. In *Letters of Lydia Maria Child, with A Biographical Introduction by John G. Whittier and An Appendix by Wendell Phillips*. Cambridge, [Mass.]: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882. 2. Child had hinted to her brother some years earlier that she might be “in danger of wrecking on the rocks of skepticism.”

¹⁵⁸ Book review. *A Few Days in Athens*. *Atlantic* 1 (May 1, 1824): 364-369. 368. He did not indict Wright for showcasing them, but lamented the “wasted energies of powerful intellects” of the “ancient philosophers,” and the “dreary void in which all their investigations ended.”

¹⁵⁹ “Art. VI. – Essai sur l’Art d’Etre Heureux.” *North American Review* 27.60 (July 1828): 115-140. 117. Two weeks after Wright’s July 4 address in New Harmony, a writer for the *North American Review* recalled the work and reminded readers of it: “We regret, by the bye, to learn that our fair friend, Miss Frances Wright, lately consented to pass a few days in these same suspicious garden; but venture to hope, that she has only been upon a tour of observation, and will not think of making them her habitual residence.*” Footnote: “*See her work, entitled *A Few Days at Athens* [sic], which contains a very ingenious exposition and defence of the Epicurean philosophy.... Although we disapprove the doctrine, which is also decidedly at variance with the principles recommended in the *View of Society and Manners in America*, by the same lady, we cannot but regard the literary execution of it as highly creditable to the learning and talents of the fair writer.”

¹⁶⁰ Child, “Letter from a Lady.”

¹⁶¹ Kenneth Cameron, *Philothea, or Plato Against Epicurus: A Novel of the Transcendentalist Movement in New England*, by Lydia Maria Child. *With an Analysis of Background and Meaning for the Community of Emerson and Thoreau*. Hartford, Conn.: Transcendental Books, 1975. Karcher, *First Woman*, 672, fn 65 and 67. Frances Wright, *A Few Days in Athens, Being the Translation of a Greek Manuscript Discovered in Herculaneum*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822.

conventional book market, but she had little to no stake in promoting Transcendentalism's "New Thought" movement. Rather, Child's primary purpose in publishing the book was to win back her lost conservative Christian readers; in order to do so she needed to convince them that though she might not share their Trinitarian, Calvinistic, or evangelical precepts, she was theistic, as they were, and not atheistic, like Wright. Writing a book that defended theism was an effort she could realistically make, and while her religious beliefs in 1835 were still grounded in Swedenborgianism, those beliefs were still essentially Christian and theistic. If she could center her plot and her protagonist's beliefs (and by association her own) around a single, omnipotent Supreme Being, she could work to convince conservative readers that she was more like them than unlike them.¹⁶² Child's friend Eliza Follen in *The Skeptic* had defended her husband against charges of atheism and affiliation with Frances Wright by turning to the monotheistic god of Unitarianism and by recalling the language of William Ellery Channing. But in her *Philothea* Child responds to Follen's work by arguing that atheistic ideologies can be countered with a monotheism that does not necessarily have to be Christian. Close reading and analysis of Child's *Philothea. A Romance* against Wright's *A Few Days in Athens* enables one to see Child making this argument. Significantly, where Wright's work treats Epicureanism strictly as a rational and desirable philosophy and lifestyle choice, in *Philothea* Child often uses the word "religion" to

¹⁶² Child to Louisa Loring, March 2, 1836. 4/92. In late May in writing a potential publisher for her "Grecian novel," she gave him "fair warning that it is steeped in mysticism to the very lips. Whether this will obstruct its sale, or induce people to buy it, to see how crazy a person may be, and yet be able to cook their own dinner, is more than I can tell." Her novel was, she warned her friend, "sublime or ridiculous" – she could not decide which: "Other may well think it profoundly mystical, when even to me it seems like a ghost with a glory round its head." Consciously or not, she is quoting here from S.T. Coleridge's "Constancy to an Ideal Object" ("a glory round its head"). She uses the phrase again in a Dec. 22, 1838 letter to her brother describing Unitarian faults: "Something is coming toward us (I know not what), with a glory round its head." *Letters of Lydia Maria Child*, 1882. 33. Child to Park Benjamin, May 30, 1836. 4/97. Two years later in presenting *Philothea* to Thomas Carlyle she wrote: "Had I not previously written a book upon cooking, I should probably be adjudged insane by all the sound part of the community; as it is, many shake their heads dubiously." April 7, 1838. 5/134. Microfiche.

describe her protagonist's Platonic and Swedenborgian beliefs.¹⁶³ In *Philothea*, Child used her characters, plot, and "Transcendentalist" religious theories to demonstrate that she was *not* the hedonist, public speaker, or atheist that Wright allegedly was.

A Few Days in Athens is an uncomplicated story of a young man, Theon, and his spiritual quest. Wright demonstrates some elements of Aristotelian plot structure – the action occurs within a short timeframe, there is a midway climax (a horse and rider in a torrentially flooded river), and there are even hints of a boy-girl romance, though no actual subplots. *Athens* focuses solely on the debate between Epicureanism and what its characters call "Theism." In both *A Few Days in Athens* and *Philothea* there is a conflict over the notion of belief in the supernatural. *Philothea*, in contrast, has a far more complex structure and takes place over a period of years rather than days. Child's novel engages diverse elements, including questions about slavery and racial prejudice, women's bold speech and forthrightness, male authority, and unfaithfulness in romantic relationships.

In Wright's *A Few Days in Athens*, youthful protagonists study at the feet of philosopher Epicurus (fourth to third century BC), who teaches them to seek to understand materialism – the notion that people could gain knowledge only through the senses.¹⁶⁴ Since virtuous people, things, and pursuits created sensations of happiness and pleasure, people should allow themselves to be drawn toward virtue and away from immoral pursuits, which inevitably were followed by pain.¹⁶⁵ Conventional readers and reviewers, in contrast, understood the philosophy

¹⁶³ Karcher, *First Woman*, Ch. 10 footnotes.

¹⁶⁴ Wright, *A Few Days in Athens* 1850, 172-173. Epicurus's follower Leontium explains that "real philosophy ... advances no dogmas, – is slow to assert what *is*, – and calls nothing impossible. The science of philosophy is simply a science of observation, both as regards the world without us, and the world within; and, to advance in it, are requisite only sound senses, well developed and exercised faculties, and a mind free of prejudice." Theon is astonished: "This explanation is new to me, ...and, I will confess, startling to my imagination. It is pure materialism!"

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40. "Virtue, is it not happiness? And is not happiness, virtue?... What other means have we of judging of things than by the effect they produce upon our senses? Our senses then being the judges of all things, the aim of

as nothing more than an excuse for pleasure seeking, or hedonistic excess. Child used *Philothea* as a means of distancing herself from that Epicurean hedonism: the “new customs, introduced by Aspasia, had rendered industry and frugality mere vulgar virtues” (76). She cautions Eudora against Aspasia’s teaching that “happiness consists not in the duties [that people] perform, but in the distinction [they] acquire” (220). Child establishes Aspasia as the epitome of self-absorption, a “proud,” “queenly,” and powerful woman “long accustomed to homage” (23-24, 32). When Philothea challenges Aspasia by gently declining her offer of friendship, Aspasia explodes in self-righteous self-aggrandizement: “Is there in all Greece a poet who has not sung my praises? ... To the remotest period of time ... the *world* ... will hear of Aspasia the beautiful and the gifted!... In history, the star of my existence will never set” (28). Philothea instead embodied self-effacement and altruism; she sought only to serve others, and especially those who were not at peace, such as the wayward Eudora and the obstreperous Wright/Aspasia.

But more than as a means of denouncing Epicurean hedonism, Child intended to use *Philothea* to reject Wright’s atheism and to promote her own image as a godly, conventional woman. Both fictional protagonists were supposedly learning at the feet of real historical figures and hearing their actual words when they spoke. To Epicurus (and to Frances Wright), beliefs about supernatural gods (or a single God) were based solely on the immaterial and ephemeral workings of the mind and not of the palpable senses.¹⁶⁶ Young Theon listened amazedly but

all men is to gratify their senses; in other words, their aim is pleasure or happiness: and if virtue were not found to conduce to this, men would do well to shun her, as they now do well to shun vice.... I think virtue only the highest pleasure, and vice, or ungoverned passions and appetites, the worst misery. Other pleasures are requisite to form a state of perfect ease; which is happiness; and other miseries are capable of troubling, perhaps destroying, the peace of the most virtuous and the wisest man.”

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 179, 184. Leontium says, “The vague idea that some mysterious cause not merely *precedes* but *produces* the effect we behold, occasions us to wander from the real object in search of an imaginary one.” “[T]he power ... you attribute to some unseen existence, who, by a simple volition, should have called into being matter itself [is] a power I have never seen; and though this says nothing against the possibility of such an existence, it says every thing against *my belief* in it. And farther, the power which you attribute to this existence – that of willing every thing out

eagerly when Epicurus said, “[S]ays the Theist, his [god’s] existence is evident – and, not to acknowledge it, a crime. It is not so to me, my friends. I see no sufficient evidence of his existence; and to reason of its possibility, I hold to be an idle speculation.” (211). Wright created a Greek-like name for her protagonist that conveyed an essential aspect of his relationship to the divine or the supernatural; her hero is “Theon,” which translates as “divine,” implying that humankind is itself godlike, and indeed Epicurus tells Theon that knowledge makes “gods” of human beings.¹⁶⁷ In response in her novel, Child drew a sharp contrast between Wright’s Theon with his newfound logical foundation for disbelief in the supernatural and the theistic beliefs of her godly Philothea, who was content, even blissful, in her Platonic monotheism. Placed in a society that worshipped a pantheon of gods, Philothea subordinates herself to a single god. Child’s Philothea prayed privately to a single God: she “inwardly prayed to that Divine Principle, revealed to her only by the monitions of his spirit in the stillness of her will” (194).¹⁶⁸ Child also created a Greek-like name for her protagonist that placed her in relation to the divine, but her neologism for her eponymous heroine draws a stark contrast to Wright’s: Child’s “Philothea” translates into “lover or friend of God.”¹⁶⁹ So Child has challenged Wright by creating a protagonist whose name labeled her as having an opposite ontological purpose than that of Wright’s atheistic protagonist.

of nothing, – being, not only what I have never seen, but that of which I cannot with any distinctness conceive – it must appear to me the greatest of all improbabilities.”

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 114. “‘Knowledge,’ said the Master, ‘is the best riches that man can possess. Without it he is a brute; with it, he is a god.’”

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 117. The fictional Anaxagoras refers to a single God both in private conversations and in a public venue. As he bids farewell to his young student Philaemon, he embraces him and says, “May that God, whose numerous attributes the Grecians worship, forever bless thee, my dear son.”

¹⁶⁹ There are actually several seventeenth-century Latin texts that Child might possibly have seen or heard about. They discuss Philothea in the context of a theatrical presentation entitled *Philothea hoc est amor divinus erga hominem. Ex SS. Litteris. Per modulus musicos in universitate Dilingana*. Dilingae, Dum Facultate Superiorum, 1657. Joanne Paullino, *Philothea, id est, anima deo chara: sive admiranda dei erga hominis animam charitas e sacris litteris deprompta*. Soc. Jesu Sacerdote, Monachii, 1669.

In *A Few Days in Athens* Frances Wright's Epicurus brusquely condemned religion for the ills of mankind, saying it was the "bane of human happiness." Through Epicurus Wright attacked "Theists" as purveyors of religion who had vested interests in taking advantage of vulnerable people when they sought to encourage belief in supernatural gods:

We have named the leading error of the human mind, ... the perverter of human virtue! It is Religion – that dark coinage of trembling ignorance! It is Religion, – that poisoner of human felicity! It is Religion – that blind guide of human reason! ... Grant that ... we could ascertain the existence of one god, or of a million of gods: we see them not, we hear them not, we feel them not....But it is not that religion is merely useless, it is mischievous ... by its idle terrors; ... by its false morality; ... by its hypocrisy; by its fanaticism; by its dogmatism; by its threats; by its hopes; by its promises.¹⁷⁰

Against this condemnation of religion by Frances Wright, which conventional antebellum readers would have interpreted as sacrilege, in *Philothea* Child often used the word "religion" to connote sacred things.¹⁷¹ For example, she has Plato teach that "[w]ithin the holy mystery of our religion is preserved a pure and deep meaning.... Anaxagoras said wisely that material forms lead the contemplative mind to the worship of ideal good, which is in its nature immortal and divine" (47).

Ultimately, Child's purpose in *Philothea* was to demonstrate her ardent support for theism in contrast with Wright's rage against theism. As Wright used Epicurus (and his disciples) to speak her atheism for her, Child uses Anaxagorus (Philothea's grandfather) and

¹⁷⁰ Wright, *A Few Days in Athens*, 1850, 199-204.

¹⁷¹ Letter from Child to Convers Francis, May 31, 1820. In *Selected Letters*, 2. Yet in 1820 Child had written her brother: "I am apt to regard a system of religion as I do any other beautiful theory. It plays around the imagination, but fails to reach the heart."

other known philosophers (Phidias and Plato) to speak for her theism. Through Anaxagoras, Child addresses the way in which the concept of materialism figures logically into theism:

[T]he sight of that glorious orb [the sun] leads the contemplative soul to the belief in one Pure Intelligence, one Universal Mind, which in manifesting itself produces order in the material world, and preserves the unconfused distinction of infinite varieties (46).

Anaxagoras's friend, the sculptor Phidias, had agreed with Anaxagoras that "the tendency of all reflecting minds" was to believe in this "Universal Mind," the mind of the single God, greater than all of the other gods.¹⁷² Because their earlier public statements violated a new edict requiring belief in the pantheon of gods, Anaxagoras and Phidias are arrested and accused of having "taught the existence of but one God" (119). Witnesses are brought to testify that Anaxagoras had regularly taught to his students the principle of "One Universal Mind." When Anaxagoras is given one last opportunity to speak on his own behalf, he clarifies that he believes in the gods only as "representatives of various attributes in One Universal Mind."¹⁷³ Child's sympathetic account of Anaxagoras's commitment to the idea of a single God forced antebellum readers to conclude that Child shared his theistic beliefs.¹⁷⁴

A Few Days in Athens ends triumphantly, with Epicurus upholding his materialistic and atheistic beliefs to a crowd of eager listeners. *Philothea* ends in a confusing muddle: The purity and goodness of her grandfather and her suitor (and later, husband) inspire her to self-effacement and eventually to a self-sacrificing demise. Her self-abnegation is complete in her quiet and undramatic death, and the story continues for another few chapters without her. Aspasia, the Wright character, who she had briefly counseled to be more discreet, is not vanquished or even

¹⁷² Child, *Philothea*, 46.

¹⁷³ Child, *Philothea*, 120.

¹⁷⁴ Anaxagoras is sentenced to exile from Athens. Because of his theism, the setting of the action changes for several chapters from Athens and follows Anaxagoras and Philothea as they move to a village outside of the city's boundaries.

banished; rather, she eludes public condemnation by trickery. Child does bring the novel's complicated plot to a conclusion by having the sister figure Eudora humble herself, as Philothea had taught and inspired her to do.

Interestingly, both authors wrote themselves as characters into their novels. In *A Few Days* Wright is certainly Leontium, a young woman follower of Epicurus with a "stature much above the female standard" and "nose ... rather Roman than Grecian"—a fair physical description of Wright herself.¹⁷⁵ Several scholars have noted that Child saw herself as her eponymous heroine; the self-effacement that Philothea actively promotes in the novel resonates with Child's refusal of Lewis Tappan's plea that she stand and speak in front of a mixed audience. So, Child's characterization allowed her to contest both Theon in Wright's *Athens* and the Aspasia/Wright character in her own work; where Theon aggressively seeks to know and then to disseminate philosophical truth, and where Aspasia's vanity disempowers her to see any value in humility, the morally sound Philothea seeks only to live virtuously and to serve others.

Child wrote later that after the publication of *Philothea*, evangelical Protestant readers had counseled her that the "fair, floating Grecian shadow" was "cast[ing] itself too obviously over [her] Christianity" throughout the text. They censured her Greek references as "transcendental," which, she commented, was a "word of most elastic signification, used to denote every thing that has no name in particular, and that does not especially relate to pigs and poultry."¹⁷⁶ And in fact Poe predicted that as a "*species* of novel," a Greek romance would never truly appeal to ordinary readers — that "not any powers on the part of any author can render it, at the present day, popular" because the "manners, costume, habits, and modes of thought" were

¹⁷⁵ Wright, *A Few Days in Athens*, 19. Also, Wright dedicated *A Few Days in Athens* to Jeremy Bentham, the British philosopher who was one of Wright's earliest mentors. Both Karcher and Cameron note that the Epicurus-Leontium relationship is probably intended to reflect Wright's relationship with Bentham.

¹⁷⁶ Lydia Maria Child, *Letters from New-York*, London: Richard Bentley, 1843, 15-16.

“so widely at variance” with their own.¹⁷⁷ In the January 1837 *North American Review* writer Cornelius Conway Felton agreed that novels about the classic Greeks were hard to sell; he pointed out that J. G. Lockhart and Bulwer-Lytton had both attempted it, but neither had made the historical moment come to life in any genuine or convincing manner.¹⁷⁸ He did believe, however, that Child had more skill in that area and expected the novel would be popular.

And indeed *Philothea* did please many reviewers. According to Karcher, *Philothea* “restored [Child] to a measure of the literary fame she had forfeited” three years before. She says that reviewers “welcomed her back into the literary fold and intimated that they would gladly regard the *Appeal* as an aberration, provided she would put abolitionism behind her.”¹⁷⁹ Edgar Allen Poe wrote in the September 1836 *Southern Literary Messenger* that *Philothea* was “no ignoble specimen” of the Greek romance and highly recommended it to female academies for its “purity of thought and lofty morality” and “purity of language,” as well as a means of teaching the Greek antiquities.¹⁸⁰ Felton predicted the novel would “take a permanent place in our elegant literature ... for, ... [e]very page of it breathes the inspiration of genius.”¹⁸¹ Glowing reviews like this meant everything to a writer so severely chastised as Child had been for writing *An Appeal*. It gave her the opportunity to try to return to a place of respectability within society again, regardless of how well the novel actually sold with the buying public. Granted, *Philothea* did not sell as well as Cooper or Sedgwick novels. Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Ladies’ Magazine*, would comment later in a biographical sketch that Child’s controversial politics had

¹⁷⁷ Poe, “Critical Notices. *Philothea*,” 662.

¹⁷⁸ J.G. Lockhart’s *Valerius: A Roman Story* and Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Last Days of Pompeii*. In Cornelius Conway Felton, “Mrs. Child’s *Philothea*.” *North American Review* 44 (Jan. 1837): 77-90. 78.

¹⁷⁹ Karcher, *First Woman*, 236. “Sarah Hale assured readers of the *Ladies’ Magazine* that *Philothea* had ‘nothing in common with the “Frugal Housewife,” or the “Appeal, &c.” – except the directness of expression and energy of purpose, which always mark the writings of the authoress.’ *Philothea* did ‘credit to Mrs. Child, and to her sex,’ she judged.”

¹⁸⁰ Edgar Allen Poe, “Critical Notices. *Philothea*.” *Southern Literary Messenger* 2.10 (September 1836): 659-662.

¹⁸¹ Cornelius Conway Felton, “Mrs. Child’s *Philothea*.” *North American Review* 44 (Jan. 1837): 77-90. 85.

likely reduced the sales of *Philothea*, saying that “the bitter feelings engendered by the [antislavery] strife have prevented the merits of this remarkable book from being appreciated as they deserve.”¹⁸² In her letter to Thomas Carlyle in 1838 Child commented, “Philothea is what the booksellers consider an unfortunate book, for it does not sell.”¹⁸³ But clearly, the text did find a fair market and at least helped pay some of her husband’s debts. Even before its publication Child wrote a publisher friend that she reserved “title to the copy-rights, or profits,” confident that “the Oasis, Frugal Housewife, Girl’s Book, Family Library, and Philothea” could be relied on to generate some income. She was right about *Philothea*, for it went through six editions and was still being reprinted in 1861.¹⁸⁴ Child gambled that writing a novel that portrayed herself as a self-effacing, self-sacrificing female and depicted a Frances-Wright-like character as predatory and opportunistic ultimately would bring her into a safer relationship with reviewers and readers, and her wager paid off.

Lydia Maria Child’s selective self-silencing in response to the 1828-1830 press attacks against Frances Wright, while less obvious than Sarah J. Hale’s conservative shift in *Ladies’ Magazine*, is still clear and occurred at almost exactly the historical moment as Hale’s. In 1833 Child chose to reject systematically and publicly the pro-slavery position that predominated in antebellum American society and then coped bravely with the condemnation and poverty that followed with hardly a regret. But in early 1829 Child was unwilling to bring the calumny of the public press that met Wright’s revolutionary ideologies upon herself and her husband for her radical novel, *First Settlers of New-England*. The expected and unfortunate coincidence of her

¹⁸² Sarah Josepha Hale, *Woman’s Record; or, Sketches of all Distinguished Women, from “The Beginning” Till A. D. 1850. Arranged in Four Eras. With Selections from Female Writers of Every Age*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853. 620.

¹⁸³ Child to Thomas Carlyle. April 7, 1838. 5/134. Microfiche.

¹⁸⁴ Child to Ellis Gray Loring, January 30, 1836, in Child, *Selected Letters*, 44; Child to Francis Shaw, July 18, 1844, in Child, *Selected Letters*, 209. In terms of actual numbers still available today, there are 178 extant copies in academic libraries in the United States, compared to only 171 of the enormously popular *Frugal Housewife*.

novel's publication with Wright's ferocious intrusion into public space forced Child to retract *First Settlers* from the book-selling marketplace. Views that Child espoused in that work were suddenly too subversive to be allowed in the public eye – especially views advocating miscegenation and women's empowerment and criticizing outdated Calvinism. Perhaps she was concerned that the tide would turn against her even on Cherokee removal. By making her novel disappear from the public imagination she chose to silence her rhetoric entirely on all these issues. Her novel *Philothea*, with its self-effacing and reticent protagonist representing Child herself, reiterated and supported Child's distancing of herself from the aggressive and outspoken Frances Wright, as well as from Wright's ideological positions. Since there was no outpouring of support for women's rights, miscegenation, or religious freedom, as there was for Cherokee removal, Child had nothing to lose financially or socially by silencing herself regarding them, and everything to gain.

CHAPTER 5

“MAY ALMIGHTY GOD CONVERT YOU”:

CHARLES FOLLEN'S RELIGIOUS SKEPTICISM AND ELIZA FOLLEN'S *THE SKEPTIC*

Late 1834 was stressful for writer and abolitionist Eliza Lee Cabot Follen (1787-1860) – she was in the latter months of pregnancy and her husband Charles was about to be terminated from his full-time Harvard professorship. On December 23 Susan Cabot sent wishes to her sister that her “health and spirits” would “hold out ... when the trial does come” and that she would be “again the mother of a living child.” Sadly, she would not be. Exactly what happened to the child is not clear; whether at age forty-eight Follen miscarried or whether the child was stillborn or died soon after birth is not recorded.¹ The couple wrote a poem together that mourned their loss and envisioned their child in heaven and in the loving embrace of a “gentle” God; the poem’s title reflected a Horatio Greenough sculpture of a child “Ascen[ding,] Conducted by an Infant Angel.”² Follen also dealt with the death by enshrining the child within a novel she was writing, *The Skeptic*; in it innocent little Fanny dies blissfully with the sight of heaven before her.

¹ Susan B. Cabot to Eliza Lee Cabot Follen, Dec. 23, 31, 1834, and Jan. 2, 1835. Papers of Samuel Cabot (1713-1858). Microfilm. Roll 2, Box 2, 1815-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. In early 1835, while Eliza was in the process of writing *The Skeptic*, the couple suffered the death of another infant. In a December 23, 1834, letter to Follen from her sister, Susan B. Cabot, discussed the upcoming birth: “I hope my dear Eliza that your health and spirits will hold out to the last and that when the trial does come you know that strength is added proportioned to the demand.... I do not allow myself to indulge any hopes beyond your being again the mother of a living child[;] whether it will be a son or a daughter of your heart it matters little so long as it is an heir of heaven.” There is no obituary for a Follen infant in the Cambridge or Boston newspapers from the period, and the death is not listed in *Vital Records for Cambridge, Massachusetts, to the year 1850*. Thomas W. Baldwin, *Vital Records for Cambridge, Massachusetts, to the year 1850*. Boston, 1915.

² “Greenough’s Ascension of a Child guided by an Infant Angel.” 1834[?]. Papers of Samuel Cabot (1713-1858). Microfilm. Roll 2, Box 2, 1815-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society. Eliza Follen, *Poems*. Boston: William Crosby & Company, 1839. Beyond the reference in Susan Cabot’s correspondence, the only record of the child is a short elegiac poem that Eliza and Charles co-wrote during this period, entitled “Lines by Dr. & Mrs. Follen on



Fig. 5.1 Horatio Greenough,
*Ascension of a Child
Conducted by an Infant Angel*

Child... When some sorrow did befall me,
Or I felt some strange alarms,
Then my Mother's voice would call me
To the shelter of her arms.—
Now—what bids my heart rejoice?
Clasped in arms I cannot see,

Lines by Dr. Wm. Follen
— on Greenough's Groupe

Fig. 5.2 “Lines by Dr.
& Mrs. Follen on
Greenough’s Groupe”

Follen already had a serious focus for *The Skeptic*: it decried atheism and urged readers to seek the answers she knew Christianity had for them. She, her husband Charles, and five-year-old son needed the income the novel would bring, for in 1835 employers who had once favored him – university and church administrators and governing boards – no longer wanted to employ him because of his growing reputation for radicalism. Five years before he had defended himself against a gentleman’s public accusation that he held principles that “were a sort of ‘Fanny-Wrightism’ for the higher classes.” He had bridled at the contention and countered that “Frances Wright” was an “odious name”; he understood himself charged with “materialism and atheism” and demanded a retraction. After all, if circulated and believed, such an accusation would ruin a man’s prospects for any respectable employment, and thus a family’s hopes for survival. Now in 1835, his prospects were slim. In fact, since 1830 Charles had supported two more radical causes: the Harvard students’ rebellion against their administration and the immediate emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. Public awareness of those activities was

Greenough’s Groupe.” The poem appropriated the visual narrative of two infant boys sculpted in marble by Horatio Greenough a year earlier in which an infant angel guides a mortal child to heaven. In the poem the child appears confused – “Lost in wonder ... Joyful, fearful, longing, shrinking” and asks the angel to “lead me, ... Keep a trembling child from sinking!” The child recalled, “[M]y mother’s voice would call me / To the shelter of her arms,” but now the child felt “[c]lasped in arms I cannot see” and heard “a gentle voice / Softly whisper, Come to me!” The poem is written entirely in Charles Follen’s hand; a slightly different title also appears on the manuscript. Eliza Follen published a revised version of the poem in 1839. Eliza’s brother Samuel purchased the work and likely had it on display in his Cambridge home. Provenance from the museum where the sculpture is now displayed indicates that “[m]any of Greenough’s sculptures were intended for display in domestic settings.”

increasing. And to make the situation worse, to supplement their income Charles had begun delivering public lectures that encouraged listeners to consider thoughtfully all aspects of “the subject ... of the truth or untruth of religion,” regardless of whether that study “leads ... to unbelief, or, ... to religion” – in spite of the fact that as a devout Unitarian he often preached for absent ministers. Eliza had to worry that the charge against her husband of “Fanny-Wrightism” would resurface. A far more terrifying threat was that, while she believed him to be completely innocent, she also certainly knew that her German husband had fled to the United States to avoid prosecution as a political assassin.³ In 1835 her purpose in writing her novel, then, was more pressing than the small income it could bring: Eliza needed for *The Skeptic* to mount a moral defense on behalf of her family – to shield them from the devastating social and economic consequences that she feared her husband’s radical reputation might bring them. Her strategy for doing so was to attack Fanny Wrightism. Eliza Follen’s finished novel repeatedly condemned and blamed the lectures and atheistic principles of Frances Wright (by name) for encouraging men’s spiritual and moral ruin and the threat of the destruction of their families.

Little scholarly attention has been given to Eliza Follen, and not surprisingly. Her oeuvre – juvenile fiction and poetry, a biography, and two novels intended for adult readers, most of which sold relatively well during her lifetime – has not generated much interest since her death in 1860. Only Elizabeth Schlesinger’s essay on two Harvard wives (1965) specifically focuses on Eliza Follen, and it contains little substantive information regarding her literary works, socio-political activities, or financial straits – all issues important to this project.⁴ She contributed

³ Charles (or Karl) Follen charted new territory for German student organizations by reorienting the *Burschenschaft*, previously a social and fraternal group, toward violent political remonstrance against the post-Napoleonic Holy Alliance for its denial of nationalistic democracy to Germans. His history of having done so becomes a burden for Eliza to bear.

⁴ George Washington Spindler, *The Life of Karl Follen: A Study in German-American Cultural Relations*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1917. Edmund Spevack, *Charles Follen’s Search for Nationality and Freedom*:

meaningfully to the abolitionist movement, but her contributions pale in comparison with that of other better-known figures, such as Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, Abby Kelley, Maria Chapman, and Anne Weston. Still, several scholars have given Follen some credit for the role she played in anti-slavery reform. Debra Gold Hansen includes Follen occasionally in her account of women's abolitionist work in Boston, as does Deborah C. DeRosa in her study of children's abolitionist literature.⁵ Considerably more attention has been paid to the life and writings of her husband, though the majority of this scholarship is written in German and focuses on his radicalism in Europe. Two full-length treatments of Charles Follen's activities on both sides of the Atlantic are George Spindler's biography (1917) and Edmund Spevack's analysis (1997), and other monographs devote considerable space to his work and influence on German and American historical events and movements. None of the scholarship on Charles Follen gives much more than a nod to his wife.

In fact, scholars have probably been correct in assessing Charles Follen's work as far more significant historically than Eliza Follen's. His strong headship of German student organizations affected the direction of European politics; his written contributions to early nineteenth-century moral philosophy were extensive. As Hansen and DeRosa argue, Eliza Follen's primary place in American literature and history is her anti-slavery work, yet there too the role her husband played certainly outshone hers, because of the nature of the limited role women were allowed to play. But there is one way in which Eliza Follen is unique to American history: she is significant for the role she played in separating and elevating the dangerously liberal Unitarianism up and away from atheism, which she accomplished by aggressive

Germany and America, 1796-1840. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, "Two Early Harvard Wives: Eliza Farrar and Eliza Follen." *The New England Quarterly* 38.2 (June 1965): 147-167.
⁵ Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-slavery Society*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009. Deborah C. DeRosa, *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830-1865*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003.

engagement with radical “Fanny Wrightism” in *The Skeptic*. Three other antebellum women wrote novels that criticized Wright, yet only Follen cited Wright by name, and only Follen took Wright’s work and systematically critiqued it alongside the work of a contemporary Christian theologian. Scholars have not considered the significance of Follen’s *The Skeptic* for its direct confrontation of the person and ideologies of Frances Wright – and they could not have, because they have been unaware of the impact that Wright’s notoriety had on antebellum women writers. This chapter argues that through her novel, *The Skeptic*, Eliza Lee Follen intended to identify herself and her husband as pious, respectable, and antagonistic to Frances Wright.



Fig. 5.3 Eliza Lee Cabot Follen

HER “SAUCINESS,” *SCHWARZEN*, THE UNCONDITIONALS, AND A NEW START

Eliza Lee Cabot Follen and Karl (Charles) Follen were well known in the 1830s as anti-slavery activists and as a pious and devoted couple.⁶ Both came from respectable families with influence and both were independent-minded. But Charles’s radical roots in an angry post-Napoleonic Germany were unlike her content New England mercantilism. She was born Eliza

⁶ Since my argument in this chapter hinges on Eliza Follen’s attempt to protect herself, her husband, and her son from the possible harm Charles Follen brought to them by his writing and actions, I have no choice but to discuss Charles Follen nearly as often (and more, sometimes) than the subject of the chapter, Eliza Follen. Therefore, because my examination of the lives and works of Eliza Follen and Karl (or Charles) Follen necessarily are of substantially equal depth, through the course of my analysis I will refer to them as Eliza Cabot (until their marriage) or Eliza Follen and Karl Follen (in Germany) or Charles Follen (in the United States), and sometimes simply by their first names.

Lee Cabot in 1787 into a “cultivated and well-connected”⁷ family in Cambridge, Massachusetts, one with a long history in the New World: Cabot was distantly related to dissenting Puritan Anne Hutchinson.⁸ Her parents had married in the Congregationalist Church and later transitioned into

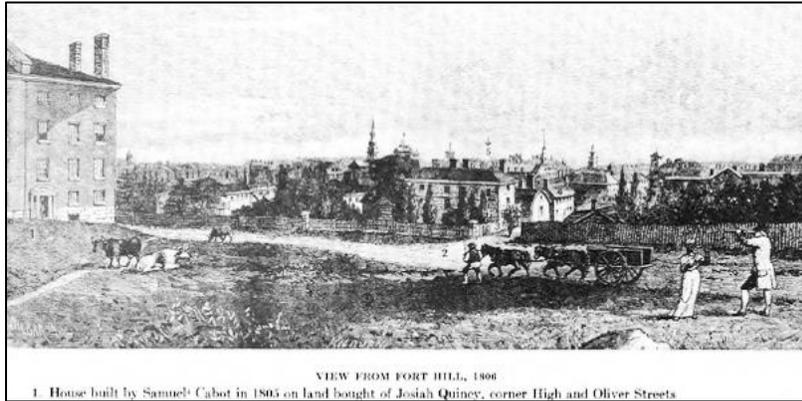


Fig. 5.4 View from Fort Hill, 1806; Cabot home is at left



Fig. 5.5 Samuel Cabot

Unitarianism, as did many New Englanders in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.⁹ Her merchant father held a prestigious position as a claims negotiator for President Washington following the Revolutionary War.¹⁰ The family lived comfortably and enjoyed the friendship of what historian Edmund Spevack indicates was an “intellectual class ... interwoven with the business community and the political elite.”¹¹ One scholar suggests she had “unusual

⁷ Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, “Two Early Harvard Wives: Eliza Farrar and Eliza Follen.” *The New England Quarterly* 38.2 (June 1965): 157.

⁸ L. Vernon Briggs, *History and Genealogy of the Cabot Family, 1475-1927, in Two Volumes*. Boston: Charles E. Goodspeed & Co., 1927. 219. Eliza’s mother, Sally Barrett Cabot, was the granddaughter of Elizabeth Winslow Clarke, whose father Edward Winslow married Mary Chilton. Mary Chilton’s brother Edward Chilton married Elizabeth Hutchinson, who was the granddaughter of Anne Hutchinson. That is, her great-great-grandmother was the sister-in-law of Anne Hutchinson’s granddaughter.

⁹ Briggs, 209. Married at the Congregationalist New North Church in 1781, by 1819 the father, Samuel Cabot, owned a pew at the New South Meeting House on Church Green in Boston. When he died in 1819, he left a pew in the New South Meeting House, valued at \$500. F.W. P. Greenwood, *Sermons*. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1844. xix, liii. Unitarian F. W. P. Greenwood was the minister at the New South Church from October 1818. Greenwood first wrote for and then co-edited the organ of the Unitarian Church, the *Christian Examiner*, from 1829 to 1839.

¹⁰ Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-slavery Society*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009. 70. Briggs, 197. “Like the rest of the Cabot family of his time, [Samuel Cabot] was educated for a career in foreign commerce.”

¹¹ Spevack, 137. According to historian Edmund Spevack, Boston’s “intellectual class was interwoven with the business community and the political elite. The leading thinkers came from Boston’s socially prominent families and had a sense of responsibility for the community at large.” Walter Donald Kring, *Liberals Among the Orthodox: Unitarian Beginnings in New York City, 1819-1839*. Boston Press: Beacon, 1974. 209. Kring says that Eliza Cabot was “a member of one of the best New England families.”

opportunities to associate with many distinguished figures of her time,”¹² but it is unlikely the Cabots would have described themselves as affluent. The father had to endure frequent ocean voyages and long periods abroad as part of his employment; as a consequence he suffered rather poor health and lapses in income.¹³ Early in 1805 he built a new home on Fort Hill in Boston and served first as president and then director of the Boston Marine Insurance Company.¹⁴

Eliza Cabot had “an education unusual for women of her time,” according to Cabot-family genealogist L. Vernon Briggs, who adds that her mother, Sally Barrett Cabot, was also “a woman of unusual education.”¹⁵ She would have had access to the family’s extensive and eclectic library, which her mother had inherited at her parents’ deaths, including classic books of law, Latin and Greek, Pope, and Increase Mather, but also more modern and liberal works,

¹² Schlesinger, 157.

¹³ Schlesinger, 157. “While her home afforded intellectual companionship, it was not a wealthy one, since her father’s uncertain health and financial worries kept the family in uneasy circumstances. They moved frequently – to Milton, Jamaica Plain, Brookline.” Sarah Cabot to Sarah Startin, August 3, 1807. In Briggs, 249. Cabot also apparently suffered ill health in her youth; at age twenty, long-term severe leg pain prompted her mother to divide the large family between “*lodgings in Milton*” and their home in Boston so that Eliza could benefit from cleaner country living. Eliza’s mother wrote that “Eliza has been afflicted with a complaint that has been of an ambiguous complexion and which has caused me infinite anxiety.... The right leg is affected and constantly subject to pain which seems to be occasioned by a contraction of the cords. We have been apprehensive of worse than this. – We lost a relation last winter in consequence of an inflammation in the joint of her hip – a most distressing and fatal disease and which in some of its symptoms resembles Eliza’s.... My plan for what remains of the season is to devote myself to Eliza in the hope that the vigilant [sic] pursuit of bathing and rubbing [sic] with suitable regimen may overcome this obstinate evil.” Briggs, 205. “Medicine for Eliza” is listed in a “glimpse of [Samuel Cabot’s] household expenses” from 1810. Sedgwick to Charles Sedgwick, Oct. 27, 1826. In *Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick*, Mary E. Dewey, ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871. 180. In 1825 Catharine Sedgwick commented that Eliza evinced a “magnanimous contempt of bodily pain.”

¹⁴ Sarah Cabot to Sarah Startin, April 22, 1805. In Briggs, 246. “We like our house and situation very much.... Mr. Cabot has fixed himself down in the marine insurance office ... I am trying divest myself of all local attachment and consider it only as so much money alias trash which might have been sunk in the Ocean, and then we should be ashamed to think twice about it.... Mr. Cabot is wholly engrossed at his office.” He had bought the land from Josiah Quincy, who served as Boston’s mayor and was the President of Harvard during Follen’s time there.

¹⁵ Briggs, 595, 226. Also, Follen’s French was good enough to translate the work of Fenelon, a seventeenth-century French bishop, to the satisfaction of Harvard-trained theologian William Ellery Channing. Briggs, 203, 204. By her early teens, Eliza’s father was having her serve as a witness to legal documents. Eliza did this once for a document in which her mother was “relinquishing her dower rights” (1801) and once for the sale of their country home (1805).

including Fielding's *Tom Jones* and a book entitled *Free-thinker*, and books by Voltaire and Joseph Addison.¹⁶

Interestingly, the Cabot library also contained a text entitled *Laws of Plantations*, which covered case law governing slave ownership.¹⁷ The Cabot family had been merchants and traders for generations, and had certainly engaged in the slave trade.¹⁸ While there is no evidence that Eliza Cabot's own father dealt in slaves, her grandfather, granduncles, and uncles had bought slaves from the coasts of Africa, delivered them to buyers in America, and even owned them themselves.¹⁹ According to Briggs in 1927, "Without doubt the Cabots owned slaves; and tradition has it that little negro boys kept fires blazing in the big fireplaces night and day so that in the most rigorous winter the spacious rooms of the Cabot mansions were always warm."²⁰ Childhood memories of having their personal needs attended to by slaves – perhaps

¹⁶ Briggs, 209-210, 212. Sally Cabot inherited all of her parents' property: "[T]he only surviving child of this marriage was *Sarah Barrett*, (born 1763, died 1809), who married 27 Nov. 1781/2, *Samuel Cabot* of Beverly."

¹⁷ This was probably: Nicolas Trott, *The Laws of the British Plantations in America, Relating to the Church and the Clergy, Religion and Learning*. B. Cowse, 1721.

¹⁸ Briggs, 157-161. Interestingly, in 1788 in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, the Samuel Cabot's uncle John "buil[t] and operate[d] the first cotton mill in America.... The Cabots were instrumental in bringing ... two European Artists ... [and their] machines for carding and spinning cotton." Briggs quoted from a petition to the Massachusetts General Court in 1790: "The general Use within the United States of imported Cotton Goods, is well known to this Court.... The Manufacture of Cotton ... finds *employment and support for a great number of persons and among others, for infirm women and children, who for want of employ are often burdensome to the Public.*" Briggs quotes a letter from George Cabot to Alexander Hamilton, Sept. 6, 1791: "We have yet had no experience of the cotton of the Southern States; but it appeared early to be essential to our interests to use cotton of the longest fibre and the best cleaned. That of Cayenne, Surinam, and Demerara, has been preferred ... In proportion as our workers are awkward and unskillful is the necessity of furnishing the best materials." Briggs comments, "However encouraging the prospects for cotton manufacturing may have appeared to George Cabot, in 1791, it was not long before he and his associates came to the conclusion that the experiment was too costly, and they transferred their interest to the overseas trade."

¹⁹ Briggs, 162, 170. Records show that her grandfather, Joseph Cabot, owned a thirteen-year-old slave named Tuesday, and that her uncle, Andrew Cabot, transported "a negro boy named *Pollock*" on his ship. "In the Essex Institute is the following volume of slavery papers: 'Received on board the *Schooner Volant* a negro boy named *Pollock* which I promise to deliver to Theodore Ketterling (?) Esq^r at S^t Eustatia or S^t. Martins – dangers of the Sea excepted [signed] Asa Woodberry.' The official register of the *Schooner Volant* gives Andrew Cabot [another uncle] owner." Briggs writes, "I find one more reference to Cabot slaves in Vol. 6, page 364 of Salem Vital Records: '*Tuesday*, belonging to Joseph Cabot, buried June 14, 1756, aged 13 years.'" Joseph Cabot was Eliza's grandfather.

²⁰ Briggs, 162.

only when visiting extended family – may have haunted Eliza Cabot and motivated her toward abolitionist work.

By the time her mother died in 1809, Eliza was evincing an independent spirit. At age twenty-one, Eliza collaborated with her friend Sally Lyman as “principal contributors [of] criticisms, essays, and poems” for their own “little paper,” a satirical magazine they called *The New Salmagundi*, intended to mimic Washington Irving’s short-lived *Salmagundi* from a year before.²¹ At age twenty-six Eliza apparently was not much concerned with attracting and winning a husband, which her friend Mrs. S. L. Howe, a mother figure, good-naturedly urged her to do: “I cannot help believing you have practised [sic] making *sweet faces* in the looking-glass...to get yourself in readiness in case you should find personal necessity for them.” Howe could only hope that “when I next see you, that you will have on an *English* gown, embroidered with darns,” suitable to dazzle prospective suitors.²² In 1813 Howe hoped her “dear Eliza,” having reached the advanced age of twenty-six, would marry and “bring ... up a family.” But the older woman did not hold out much hope, recognizing Eliza’s refusal to play the deferential part to eligible bachelors through the courting ritual: “[B]ut I will not waste my paper, for I despair of reforming your sauciness.” That “sauciness” or sense of independence likely contributed toward Eliza’s later adoption of liberal ideas on social and political issues such as abolition, women’s place, and religious freedom; her family’s history with slavery and wealth would have otherwise mitigated against such notions. For some years Eliza spent considerable

²¹ Susan I. Lesley, *Recollections of My Mother*. Boston: Geo. H. Ellis, 1886. 61. According to Lesley, Eliza’s friend Sally Lyman had met Washington Irving and friends (ex. James Kirke Paulding) in the winter of 1808-1809 while traveling in New York. “It was the period of the ‘Salmagundi,’ in which Sally took a lively interest; and when she returned to her isolated, hard-working life at Brush Hill, she set about privately editing a little paper for herself and her friends, which she called ‘The New Salmagundi,’ to which she and her friend, Eliza Cabot, were the principal contributors. It afforded them much pleasure, and, no doubt, gave them great facility in writing criticisms, essays, and poems.” Charlene Avallone, “Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York.” *Legacy* 23.2 (2006): 115-131. 120. Interestingly, Paulding later wrote in favor of slavery; it is safe to say that Eliza Follen would not have emulated his work then.

²² Mrs. S. L. Howe to Eliza Cabot, Dec. 31, 1813. Lesley, 107, 109, 110.

time visiting friends in Northampton, Milton, and other communities some distance from Boston, sometimes staying for extended periods. She stayed a month with Mrs. Howe, who introduced her to novelist Catherine Sedgwick and her extended family.²³ Sedgwick notoriously defended the notion of being a “bluestocking,” and perhaps that is what Eliza was deciding to become and remain.²⁴

Eliza and her two unmarried sisters, still living with their father in the family home on Fort Hill, cared for him as he continued to “suffer ... much from poor health in his later years.”²⁵ Her brother Samuel Cabot, Jr., married well and was becoming a quite wealthy shipping merchant. Most of her other four brothers also pursued similar livelihoods, some working in their father’s Boston store, though none became as wealthy as Samuel.²⁶ When their father died in 1819 he left an estate valued at some \$35,000, including stocks, the house, and a store, which was distributed equally among each of the ten surviving children (of thirteen).²⁷ When the family

²³ Sedgwick to Mrs. Channing, June 4, 1821. In *Life and Letters*, 122. Eagerly anticipating Eliza’s arrival, novelist Catherine Sedgwick complained at the wait, saying that Eliza “has captivated all my friends” in New York. Mrs. S. L. Howe to Emma Forbes, Aug. 6, 1822. Lesley, 156-157. “We are enjoying a great deal from the society of Eliza Cabot at this time; she is very well, in fine spirits, and of course very agreeable. I am going to carry her to Stockbridge to-morrow, to spend a few days with Miss [Catherine] Sedgwick. I expect so much from this little excursion, that it will be a strange thing if disappointment does not ensue.” Mrs. S. L. Howe to Mrs. Greene, Aug. 29, 1822. Lesley, 157-158. “Miss Eliza Cabot has been here a month on a visit to my sister Howe;... I went three weeks ago to Stockbridge with Miss Cabot; we passed a night at your father’s on our way there, had a pleasant ride, and were well pleased with a visit of two days after we got there. Charles Sedgwick’s is one of the most crowded houses you can conceive of. Every room in the house has several beds in it, except one parlor. Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Sedgwick, with Mrs. S’s aunt and two children, Mrs. Watson and two children, and two of Mrs. Dwight’s children, added to Charles’s own family, consisting of seven.”

²⁴ Avallone, 119. “Sedgwick ... satirizes the ‘horror of *blue stockingism*’ and exalts a character ridiculed as ‘*such a blue*’ as the ‘*prima donna*’ of ‘fine society’ (‘A Sketch of a Blue Stocking’ 334; *Clarence* 2: 163, 285).”

²⁵ Briggs, 205-206.

²⁶ Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-slavery Society*. 70. According to Debra Gold Hansen, “Follen’s brother, Samuel Cabot, Jr., became a successful businessman...; indeed, in 1850 his wealth was estimated at more than \$500,000.”

²⁷ Briggs, 209. The value of the estate was \$35,510.48, “after all bills [we]re paid.” It was divided among ten living children, so in 1819 Eliza Lee Cabot inherited \$3551.04, or the equivalent of about \$68,000.

home was sold several years after the father's death,²⁸ Eliza, then in her mid-thirties, and her two sisters moved into a house in Cambridge.

By the mid-1820s Eliza had become drawn to Unitarianism; during a visit with her in June 1825, Catherine Sedgwick noticed in Eliza a “heart [that] naturally unfolds to ... celestial influences” and “a mind so elevated, so full of holy feeling and benevolent purpose, so purified ... , so above the world ... the presence of a superior spirit.”²⁹ She became associated with the Federal Street Church in Boston and its preeminent minister, Dr. William Ellery Channing, her



Fig. 5.6 William Ellery Channing, by Henry Cheever Pratt, 1857

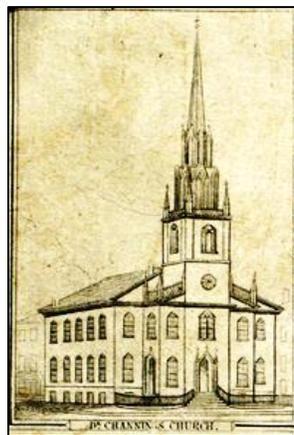


Fig. 5.7 George W. Boynton's Dr. Channing's Church, 1835

cousin by marriage.³⁰ With Channing, Eliza helped found a Sunday school for children, writing and publishing moral literature for use with them, including *The Well-Spent Hour*.³¹ According to De Rosa, her “frequent appearance in print suggests that publishers considered [her] an important and marketable children’s author.”³² During this period Channing also influenced her to undertake the translation of the essays and poetry of seventeenth-century French Roman Catholic archbishop, François Fénelon, an individual Channing had described as a “benefactor of

²⁸ Briggs, 204. “FN: After his death, his children sold this estate in 1821 to Robert Waterston who lived there many years.”

²⁹ Sedgwick to Mrs. Watson, June 5, 1825. In *Life and Letters* 173-174.

³⁰ Sedgwick to Mrs. Channing, June 4, 1821. In *Life and Letters*, 121. This is from a reference by Catharine Sedgwick in a letter to Channing’s wife; Sedgwick refers to “Miss Cabot” as “your cousin.”

³¹ [Eliza Lee Cabot]. *The Well-Spent Hour*. Boston: James Munroe & Company, 1827. Reprinted 1838.

³² De Rosa, 27. From 1828 to 1830 Follen also would edit a periodical for Sunday school instructors, the *Christian Teacher's Manual*. Spevack, 139.

mankind.”³³ Channing’s glowing thirty-three page review in the *Christian Examiner* encouraged Unitarian readers to see the common ground of Catholics and Protestants in what he implied was Fenelon’s ecumenical and visionary purpose – that Fenelon would have “aimed to free religion from exaggerations, which ... weaken its influence over reasonable men, and ... to illustrate [religion’s] dignity and happiness.”³⁴ In 1828 this once-free-spirited intellectual – turned pious Sunday school teacher – would marry an earnest and brilliant young German intellectual, Charles Follen. There is little doubt that theirs was a happy marriage, but, even more certainly, Charles’s radical words and actions also would introduce for the first time economic instability and the specter of financial disaster into Eliza Cabot’s comfortable life.

The son of a prominent lawyer and judge, in his youth Charles (then Karl) Follen had gone through an intense period during which he had had no religious faith (“my mind passed through the trial of a complete intellectual skepticism”).³⁵ As his first biographer George Spindler notes, Karl’s “early training ... was in accordance with the skeptical spirit of the age... Although he had the greatest admiration for the life and character of Christ, ... [as a boy] he did not accept the orthodox view concerning Christ’s nature.”³⁶ After passing through this period of unbelief, in 1814 Karl Follen “entered as a volunteer the military service of his country, in the

³³ [Eliza Lee Cabot]. *Selections from the Writings of Fenelon, with a Memoir of his Life. Second edition, revised and enlarged.* Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins, 1829. This quote is from Karl Follen’s notes of a “Meeting of the Sunday-School Teachers at Dr. Channing’s” on Nov. 27, 1827, including, among others, Follen, Elizabeth Peabody, Eliza Lee Cabot and at least one of her sisters. In Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 194-195.

³⁴ [No author.] “Art. I. – Selections from the Writings of Fenelon, with an Appendix, containing a Memoir of his Life. By a Lady.” Book review. *Christian Examiner* 6.31 (New Series 1.1) (March 1829): 1-35. Reprinted in book form: William Ellery Channing, *Remarks on the Character and Writings of Fenelon.* London: Edward Rainford, 1829. 14-15, 28-29. “The translator [Eliza Follen] has received and will receive the thanks of many readers for giving them an opportunity of holding communion with the mind of Fenelon. Her selections are judicious, and she has caught much of that simplicity which is the charm of Fenelon’s style... He extolled Fenelon’s “characteristic views” of God as a “Supreme Being, ...all-comprehending, all-absorbing,” and as “present to the soul, as a reprove, enlightener, purifier, [sic] and guide to perfection.... The word which Fenelon has most frequently used to express the happiness to which the mind ascends by a supreme love of God, is ‘peace.’ ”

³⁵ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. V, 258.

³⁶ Spindler, 155. That is, he did not believe the basic evangelical Protestant precepts that Jesus was the son of a supernatural God and that belief in Jesus’s divinity was the only means through which human beings could earn eternal salvation with God in heaven.

war of German independence against Napoleon,” which encouraged him to see a bolder faith put to the purpose of winning “the glorious fruit of Christian freedom” for the German people.³⁷ In the wake of Napoleonic imperialism as well as traditional monarchical despotism, Europeans were struggling to determine how to create for themselves more livable societies. Germany in 1814 was a post-Napoleonic alliance of individual states held together under a peace settlement approved by the Hapsburg monarchy and known as the German Confederation.³⁸ Flush with nationalistic fervor after returning from battle, Karl Follen determined to play a role in directing Germany toward becoming a republican state. In 1818 he earned a doctorate in civil and canon law from the University of Giessen.³⁹ He first came into prominence when he became involved with the *Burschenschaft*, a student movement that began in Follen’s hometown of Giessen. Before Follen arrived the young men had “busied themselves mainly with drinking, fencing, fistfighting, and annoying townspeople,” but the society became politicized under his leadership.⁴⁰ Biographer George Spindler called Follen the “heart and soul of this movement,” for Follen “inspired his followers to the highest pitch of enthusiasm for his revolutionary program” to urge the German people to demand a republican state.⁴¹ Historian Rolland Ray Lutz characterizes Karl Follen as “emotional, impetuous, erratic, eloquent, and idealistic.”⁴² Follen energized the existent student organization by dint of his charismatic personality; he tightened rules on the common practice of dueling to resolve personal conflicts, requiring members to

³⁷ William E. Channing, “A Discourse occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. Follen.” Cambridge: Metcalf, Torrey, and Ballou, 1841. 22. Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 113.

³⁸ Paul W. Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763-1848*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1994. viii-ix, 538. As Schroeder argues, “European international politics was transformed between 1763 and 1848, with the decisive turning-point coming in 1813-15.... [M]ore real change occurred in the arena of international politics than can be demonstrated in other areas of politics and society from other more celebrated revolutions – the French, the so-called Atlantic, the Industrial, the Napoleonic, or those of 1830 and 1848.... What happened ... was a general recognition by the states of Europe that they could not pursue the old politics any longer and had to try something new and different ... and [gave] sudden birth [to] a new international system.”

³⁹ Kring, 207.

⁴⁰ Spevack, 19.

⁴¹ Spindler, 17.

⁴² Lutz, 218.

work harder toward peaceful negotiation before resorting to weapons. He removed all class-based strictures to members' participation, giving equal privileges and voting rights to both wealthy and working class students.⁴³ Christian faith was a requirement for members: the students "were to apply Christianity as one of the main forces in order to hold them together."⁴⁴

At Giessen Follen began organizing a "dominant, inner circle" of the *Burschenschaft* known as *Die schwarzen Bruder*,⁴⁵ or the Brotherhood of the Blacks. Follen "met regularly in secret with [these,] the most radical students." The Blacks were so labeled because they



Fig.5.8 *Fraternization of Giessen Black with fellow unionists; the Giessen Black is at left with dark coat, long hair, and rounded cap*



Fig.5.9 *The Giessen "Black," 1816 – Karl Follen?*



Fig.5.10 Ernst Fries's *The Chivalrous Kahl*, 1819



Fig.5.11 *Christian Sartorius as Giessen Schwarzer*, 1815

"adopted the old German garb, – long hair, black velvet coat, and dagger,"⁴⁶ and "on the front of their black caps members had a silver cross."⁴⁷ Follen deepened and broadened the Christianity of the Blacks by spending "a large amount of time" on "[r]eligious topics ... at the [group's] regular meetings," and impressing on them the ideal "religious organization would ... be a united

⁴³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 459-461. Charles Follen repeated this dynamic in 1837 during his time as the minister at the First [Unitarian] Church of New York, "bring his congregants together socially and began inviting all of them to their house on Wednesday evenings between 7 and 11pm. ... We had the pleasure of introducing to each other many who had found the divisions of the pews impassable barriers.... The rich in worldly goods, ..., and its poor forgotten pilgrims, ... all met at our house.... It was also a high gratification to ... do away some of those arbitrary distinctions in society.... One of these Wednesday evenings a lady was present who belonged to a family, that, ... might be called patrician," while others there that night included "a hair-dresser ... a dress-maker ... a watch-maker's wife." Catharine Sedgwick regularly attended these Wednesday evening social events

⁴⁴ Spindler, 21.

⁴⁵ Rolland Ray Lutz, "The German Revolutionary Student Movement, 1819-1833." *Central European History* 4.3 (Sept. 1971): 215-241. 218.

⁴⁶ Spindler, 24, 18.

⁴⁷ Spevack, 27.

national church, to include all Christian denominations.”⁴⁸ The *Schwarzen* movement spread to other German universities. After he graduated, the University at Jena offered him a teaching position (as *Dozent*), which he accepted, and after a time the *Schwarzen* that already were intact there began recognizing him as their leader. This Jena group became known as the *Unbedingten* or Unconditionals,⁴⁹ which marked them as nationalist radicals willing to go to any lengths to gain a free state for the German people – including the murder of government figures, when necessary. When Follen wrote the original proposal for the group’s “guidelines and goals,” his primary objective was, according to Lutz, the “revolutionary overthrow of the German governments and the convening of a national assembly to create a new constitution for Germany.” His recommendation for “disposing of the German rulers” was, again, “assassination.”⁵⁰ Spindler comments, “That Follen advocated political assassination as a means of subverting monarchic government cannot be denied.”⁵¹

When [Karl Follen] was asked ... whether he thought he could put his system into practice without the shedding of blood and whether his feelings did not revolt against the destruction of men, who were probably good and just, merely because they ventured to think differently from him, he replied calmly: ‘No. If matters come to the worst all who

⁴⁸ Spindler, 26-27. “The students discussed Bible passages and [27] the role of religion in the new national state which was to come in the future. The ideal of religious organization would then be a united national church, to include all Christian denomination....The dominant creed within the Black group, however, always remained Lutheran Protestantism. Martin Luther was seen as a national hero as well as a religious reformer.”

⁴⁹ Lutz, 222. Spindler, 46. Follen started a student club in Jena “for discussing the practical working of his philosophical and political ideas.” Another philosophy professor, Jakob Fries, had gotten him the job there; he was milder and the students were loyal to his less radical ways – Follen and Fries and the students “gathered weekly ... and discussed the subject warmly. Fries and Follen each had his own system and neither could convert the other... Fries [believed] that conviction must not lead to action by unlawful, violent deeds. This was of course directly opposed to Follen’s democratic conception of popular conviction and to his doctrine of unconditionality.”

⁵⁰ Lutz, 226.

⁵¹ Spindler, 40.

are wavering in their opinions must be sacrificed; this is not a matter of feeling, but of necessity.’⁵²

Yet at the same time, Follen and his *Unbedingten* still professed to be, “first and above all zealous Christians.”⁵³ Spevack notes that the “German patriot was almost by definition a Lutheran Christian, and religion was mixed with politics.”⁵⁴ One member of Follen’s small group, Karl Ludwig Sand, acted on this sentiment. In November 1818 Sand wrote in his diary

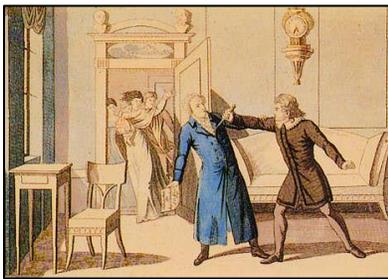


Fig. 5.12 J.M. Volz’s *August von Kotzebue’s murder*, c.1820



Fig. 5.13 *Karl Ludwig Sand on the Scaffold in Mannheim*

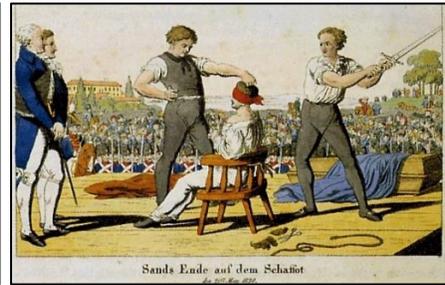


Fig. 5.14 *The execution of Karl Ludwig Sand on May 20, 1820*

that murdering German Confederation loyalist August von Kotzebue would allow him to take on “the condition of true likeness to God.” On March 23, 1819, Sand gained entry to Kotzebue’s Mannheim home and stabbed him to death.⁵⁵ Just before his beheading a year later Sand reportedly cried out, “Mein Vertrauen steht auf Gott!” or “My trust is in God!”⁵⁶ Scholars have continued to examine the facts in the Sand case and still ponder whether Karl Follen was

⁵² Spindler, 41.

⁵³ Spindler, 55. “They considered Christ, however, not so much a divine mediator, but rather the highest type of manhood, the ideal Republican, and it was his loving self-sacrifice for the cause of humanity, his loyalty to a conviction for which he boldly and joyously faced death, that appealed to them so powerfully.”

⁵⁴ Spevack, 27.

⁵⁵ George S. Williamson, “What Killed August von Kotzebue? The Temptations of Virtue and the Political Theology of German Nationalism, 1789-1819.” *The Journal of Modern History* 72.4 (December 2000): 890-943. 892.

⁵⁶ Spindler, 61-62. In a May 1818 diary entry Sand had written, “[S]omebody ought to have courage enough to thrust his sword through the body of Kotzebue,” and then on Nov. 2, 1818, “I will tremble no longer! This is the condition of true likeness to God.” Finally on Dec. 4, 1818, he wrote, “O the momentous hour when I decided to live unconditionally for my country.”

complicit in the deed.⁵⁷ Naturally Follen was arrested and went through two separate trials on suspicion of collusion in Sand's plan, but he disavowed any knowledge of it. Government investigators confiscated Sand's diary, which revealed Follen's insider language of the "Unconditionals."⁵⁸ Although Follen admitted to having loaned money to Sand to travel to Mannheim, he adamantly claimed that he had not known the purpose of Sand's trip. He was accused – at one point, by Sand – of having mailed a confession letter for Sand, but Follen denied doing so and again protested innocence of any intentional involvement with the crime. Spindler notes that Sand's diary confirmed that the "assassination of Kotzebue had become a fixed idea in the mind of Sand nearly a year before he ever met Follen."⁵⁹ By German law, "no legal evidence was found against him ... [and moreover] Sand stoutly maintained that he had no accomplice or confidant."⁶⁰ Follen was exonerated in both trials. But the government shuttered all work opportunities from him and after Sand's execution he heard rumors that he would be arrested again under tougher guidelines. To escape further police investigation Follen fled to Strasbourg and then Paris.

In Paris Follen sought out a "number of leading French liberals and radicals ... to learn about French radicalism" and made an ally of the Marquis de Lafayette, a man who one historian describes as promoting "violence as the means to political change."⁶¹ For the next three years Follen worked subversively to rally radical German students and academics to craft a Christian

⁵⁷ Williamson, "What Killed August von Kotzebue?" Also: Rolland Ray Lutz, "The German Revolutionary Student Movement, 1819-1833." *Central European History* 4.3 (Sept. 1971): 215-241. Karl H. Wegert, "The Genesis of Youthful Radicalism: Hesse-Nassau, 1806-19." *Central European History* 10.3 (Sept. 1977): 183-205.

⁵⁸ Spindler, 62. For example, Sand revealed in the "momentous hour when I decided to live unconditionally for my country."

⁵⁹ Spindler, 62.

⁶⁰ Spindler, 64.

⁶¹ Edmund Spevack, *Charles Follen's Search for Nationalism and Freedom: Germany and America, 1796-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. 14, 95. Sylvia Neely. *Lafayette and the Liberal Ideal 1814-1824: Politics and Conspiracy in an Age of Reaction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1991. 111. Historian Sylvia Neely describes Lafayette "in the summer of 1819" as being especially concerned with the "politics of youth" and "increasingly attracted to the optimism of youth as he became discouraged by the lack of progress [toward liberty] made in the Chamber [of Deputies]."

republic from within and from outside of Germany. Interestingly, during the time Follen was communicating with Lafayette, the French aristocrat was also becoming the mentor and near-adoptive father of Wright. While Follen was working to subvert was commonly called the monarchical “Holy Alliance” of France, Prussia, Austria, and Russia against Napoleonic France, Wright was serving as a spy for Lafayette to prevent efforts by Spain to regain its “control over its former colonies, and ... to destroy republicanism in North America.”⁶² While there is no evidence that Wright and Follen ever met, they both were working with Lafayette in the early 1820s to work toward political liberty across Europe. Yet within a decade these two radicals, linked through a fervor for nationalism and independence shared with their common mentor, were naturalized Americans and at opposite ends of the American public debate over the centrality and relevance of the Protestant religion.

In 1824 word reached Follen that he would be arrested again, and so he finally made the decision to flee the continent entirely. Unable to avoid state persecution anywhere in Europe, in November 1824 Follen sailed to America, settling for a year in Philadelphia. Coincidentally, he made the voyage just five months after Lafayette had made the same trip; the war hero was embarking on a triumphant cross-country tour and was greeted by formal celebrations everywhere he went. At Lafayette’s side during many of the events were Frances Wright and her sister Camilla, who had followed him in a separate boat from Paris. Follen met with Lafayette briefly and the elder statesman wrote letters of introduction for Follen⁶³ that connected him

⁶² Neely, 251.

⁶³ In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 155-156. According to Eliza Follen, when Karl Follen arrived in America, he “immediately wrote to Lafayette, the only person he knew in this country.” ... “July 25 [1825] ... When I arrived, on Sunday last, I found that Lafayette was going the following morning. I could not see him that day, as he had made an excursion into the country. I went, therefore, on Monday morning, at 5 o’clock, to the steamboat. He welcomed me in a very friendly manner, inquired after you, and of my prospects. I went with him as far as Chester. He invited me, urgently, to go in August to Washington, when he would make me acquainted with many distinguished men, and give me letters to Jefferson and Monroe, which might be of service to me. Although I feel the importance of improving the last moments of Lafayette’s presence, the money for the journey is a point about which I am not

especially with George Ticknor, professor of modern languages at Harvard. Ticknor eagerly worked to bring Follen on to the Harvard faculty as an instructor of German, and Follen, now the Anglicized “Charles,” received an invitation to begin teaching there in the autumn.⁶⁴ Charles began meeting remarkable men and women in the Cambridge community,⁶⁵ and was becoming aware that certain aspects of his European radicalism would play well in the United States and others would not. While his frustrated efforts to force oppressive monarchies toward independence and republicanism would make Americans feel self-satisfied with their own hard-won liberty, his ardent advocacy of political assassination would have quickly labeled him as cold and inhumane – that is, as radical and distinctly un-American. In a December 1826 letter to his father he reconsidered the meaning of his European “principles”: “[Y]ou know, that the principles, on account of which I ... have been persecuted ... have been with me matters of conscience, and the results of laborious thought and study.” By contrast, he implied, were irrational individuals like Karl Sand, for whom such principles instead “may have been opinions

certain.” “August 25. I do not go to Washington, chiefly because the journey would cost me more than forty dollars, which I cannot spare.” Follen sought out and met with Lafayette in July 1825 in Philadelphia and traveled with him to visit the battlegrounds in Chester. A. Levasseur, *Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825; or, Journal of a Voyage to the United States. Vol. II.* Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1829. 234-236. Lafayette’s secretary Levasseur confirmed that Lafayette was passing through from Philadelphia to Chester at this time, revisiting old battlefields.

⁶⁴ In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 153-156. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, on December 22, 1825, Follen comments in an Dec. 22, 1825, letter to Karl Beck: “Professor Ticknor has been constantly very friendly towards me.” Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 158. Spevack, 131-133. As Follen had hoped, “in the autumn of 1825 [he] was appointed teacher of the German language in Harvard University.” Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 149.

⁶⁵ It took little time for him to notice that at Harvard, the religious hegemony was shifting from Old School Congregationalism to Unitarianism, and he looked for opportunities to engage with prominent Unitarians. In December of 1825 he wrote that he was “taking] his] meals at Dr. [Henry] Ware’s” and had enjoyed a “splendid and elegant ... party at Professor [Andrews] Norton.” The following fall he wrote his father about hearing a “glorious sermon from Dr. Channing” and a “very witty poem from Mr. [Andrew] Peabody.” Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 158, 160. At the time, Henry Ware, Jr., was the minister at the Second [Unitarian] Church of Boston. He must have seen that this transformation was not agreeable to everyone on the faculty and that power struggles between denominational factions on the faculty and the “Corporation” (the Harvard governing board) were ongoing. He intimates his observation of this in a letter to his father about a toast he had made at the dedication of Harvard’s Divinity Hall in September: “‘That mysterious trinity of Greek letters [probably IHS, for Christ], which unites the members of our society, and makes us at the same time Trinitarians and Unitarians,’ was my toast. The general applause calmed or rather drowned my evil conscience concerning the wit of this witticism.” He realized he had taken a chance, as a relative newcomer to an institution in the throes of religious upheaval, in challenging Trinitarians and Unitarians to reconcile their divergent beliefs by simply acknowledging their shared “trinity of letters.” Charles Follen to Karl Beck. Sept. 26, 1826. In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 162.

taken upon trust, or mere freaks of an ill-regulated imagination.” Now in Boston, he told his father, “Religion and the church are far more important in New England than in Europe”; ... “scarcely one now among a thousand to be found, who does not go to church twice on the Sunday.” Follen was working, he said, to persuade his new acquaintances that his principles were sound and essentially American: “They are convinced, that my new country has always been the country of my principles.”⁶⁶ Follen was carefully negotiating that pathway to respectability in his new country.

When Charles’s friend Catherine Sedgwick wrote a letter of introduction for him addressed to her friend Eliza Cabot in the fall of 1826, her purpose was not to spark a courtship.⁶⁷ Eliza was then thirty-nine years old, considered well past marrying age, and Charles was nine years her junior. Sedgwick only sought a mentor for him as he struggled to learn English since she, living in New York, was too distant from Cambridge to be helpful. Her idea was that Charles would be Eliza’s protégé.⁶⁸ At the time Charles remained contentedly engaged to a woman in Germany, and so initially there was no hint of romance in their relationship.⁶⁹ But in 1827 Charles’s fiancé wrote that “her love for him did not warrant her in sacrificing her

⁶⁶ Charles Follen to Christof Follenius. December 19, 1826. In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 164-165. He also wanted his “new countrymen” to feel “assured, that I am not one of the many adventurers and impostors, through whom the name of a foreigner has become suspected to the natives.”

⁶⁷ In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 149-150, 152. According to Eliza, in Philadelphia, Charles Follen had read Catherine Sedgwick’s *Redwood* (“the first English book he read”). In the summer of 1825 on his way from Philadelphia to Cambridge, he stopped to visit her in New York, where she was visiting her brother, and they became lasting friends. “The first English book he read, was Miss Sedgwick’s ‘Redwood,’ which he enjoyed highly. He always thought it aided him greatly in turning his ear to a graceful English style, and to a just comprehension of the idioms of our language.... Before Dr. Follen established himself in Cambridge, he ... paid his respects to Miss Sedgwick, ... [who] was then at her brother’s ... in [Stockbridge] New York.”

⁶⁸ Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 163. “He was introduced to me by our mutual friend, Catherine Sedgwick, who was in Boston on a visit.” Catharine M. Sedgwick to Eliza Lee Cabot, December 12, 1825. Massachusetts Historical Society. Cited in Kring, 209. Catharine M. Sedgwick to Eliza Lee Cabot, December 12, 1825. Massachusetts Historical Society. Cited in Kring, 209. Sedgwick’s letter asked Eliza to “forgo all German prejudices and speak kindly to the man.”

⁶⁹ In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 247-248. Follen’s fiancé wrote, “The lady to whom he had pledged his affections had written to him, that her love for him did not warrant her in sacrificing her country and friends for his sake.” Eliza quoted from the journal he had kept in 1827: “[A]ll I demanded of her, was truth. She has been true to herself and to me, in saying that she did not love me. May the God of truth reward her.”

country and friends for his sake,” and broke off the engagement,⁷⁰ and soon the relationship between Eliza and Charles began to change. Eliza “invited Dr. Follen to join ... small number of ladies, of whom I was one, [who] had just formed a little party to meet once a week for the purpose of improvement in the art of reading well.” He “gladly accepted the invitation.”⁷¹ Eliza also invited him to attend the meetings of Channing’s Sunday school teachers,⁷² where he met William Ellery Channing for the first time.⁷³ Channing tapped him as a candidate for the Unitarian ministry almost immediately, and Charles began training under him. Charles Follen selected which parts of his problematic past in Europe he would share with his new friends. He explained his sacrificial defense of the common people of Hesse-Darmstadt, which prompted persecution by German Confederation of grand duchies.⁷⁴ That harassment, he said, led to his being falsely accused in the Sand matter, and his Boston friends saw no reason to doubt him. Through the rest of 1827 and 1828 he paid frequent formal parlor visits to Eliza’s home;⁷⁵ the romance intensified and was clearly headed toward marriage.⁷⁶ The pair wed in the fall of 1828;

⁷⁰ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 247-248. “Although her letters had been few and unsatisfactory, yet he would not allow himself to doubt her love, and the blow was unexpected. He says, in speaking of her decision, ‘I shrink from the task of describing my feelings, since that time....She has been true to herself and to me, in saying that she did not love me. May the God of truth reward her. May every cloud of grief, which rises from my heart, be turned into showers of blessings upon her innocent head.’”

⁷¹ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 164.

⁷² Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 172. The “teachers of the Sunday School in the Rev. Dr. Channing’s church were in the habit of meeting in his study, once a fortnight, to discuss with him and each other the subject of religious education.”

⁷³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 172. “I was one of the teachers, and invited Dr. Follen to make one of our happy and truly privileged company. This was his first introduction to Dr. Channing, and was the commencement of a friendship which has had no change, and can have no end.”

⁷⁴ Neely, 33. Spevack, 47-55. As a lawyer he had argued for the rights of the common people of the state of Hesse in Germany, won in court, and thereafter had been persecuted for that.

⁷⁵ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 232. An example is: “[January] 19th [1828]. Passed the evening at Miss C----’s.”

⁷⁶ Qtd. in Schlesinger, fn23, 157, 159. Interestingly, Catharine Sedgwick was intensely displeased. Sedgwick: “I am half tempted to wish I was a man and could go acourting to you.” When Sedgwick learned of Follen’s engagement, she wrote, “Your death would not appear to me so violent a change.” Catharine Sedgwick. Journal entry. Sept. 15, 1828. In *Life and Letters*, 199. Although initially Catharine Sedgwick was aghast at the idea of their marrying, eventually she resigned to it and spent the week prior to the wedding with Eliza. In her journal later after the nuptials she commented: “*Boston, September 15, 1828. Eliza Cabot’s wedding-day.... Never have I witnessed such a sweet serenity, ... such celestial feeling – devotion, benevolence, charity, sisterly love, friendship, all receiving their dues*” at the ceremony. Avallone, 121. According to historian Charlene Avallone, Sedgwick “actively

Eliza was forty-one and Charles thirty-two.⁷⁷ Eliza's wealthy brother Samuel was not reconciled to her marriage to Charles, who he "considered beneath" her.⁷⁸ After all, Charles was still just a part-time instructor at Harvard, not a fully employed professor. Also, in accordance with the marital property or coverture laws still in effect, once they were married she lost the legal right to earnings from the Cabot family properties and everything Eliza owned became legally Charles's.⁷⁹ Samuel could well have considered Charles simply an opportunistic immigrant with an unsettling personal background.



Fig.5.15 Charles and Eliza Follen, Massachusetts Historical Society

Certainly, during the antebellum period, a respectable married woman like Eliza Follen was expected to be able to depend on her new husband for financial support, but in fact that support was erratic. During their first year of their marriage he supervised the Sunday school at the Federal Street Church in Cambridge, filled the pulpit for absent ministers at various Unitarian churches, and taught occasional courses in German, Ethics, and Ecclesiastical History at

promoted Follen for the First [Unitarian] Church [in New York City] in 1836 ... in part to have in New York the 'sweet society' of his wife and her friend, writer Eliza Lee Cabot (Sedgwick, *Life and Letters* 173)." Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 247. Their engagement, said Charles, was "when ... we met as friends, for time and for eternity."

⁷⁷ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 256. "On the 15th of September, 1828, we were married, and immediately commenced housekeeping in Cambridge. My two unmarried sisters, with whom I was living, were to him as his own, and, at his request, we invited them to make part of our family."

⁷⁸ Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood*, 70.

⁷⁹ Charles Follen to Christoph Follenius ["My dear Parents, Brothers, and Sisters"], Aug. 24 and Sept. 26, 1829. In Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 265-266. She had to adapt to living without those financial resources, a theme that dominates her 1838 novel, *Sketches of Married Life*. Charles later described to his father: "The sisters of my wife live on the income of their property, which is independent, and not more than barely sufficient to maintain them respectably."

Harvard.⁸⁰ Yet theirs seems to have been a marriage of compatibility and by both their accounts, genuine contentment. On April 11, 1830, at the age of forty-three, Eliza gave birth to a healthy boy, Charles Christopher Follen.⁸¹ Now the couple had all the more reason to want a solvent marriage. The couple's financial circumstances finally stabilized in 1830 when Eliza's brother Samuel and two other relatives endowed a full, five-year German Language and Literature professorship at Harvard for Charles.

AMERICAN RADICAL: "FANNY WRIGHTIST," HARVARD REBEL, ABOLITIONIST

From the beginning of his time at Harvard Charles drew the attention of both apprehensive conservatives and eager liberals in the Boston area. According to Spevack, the home that Charles and Eliza built nearby "became a social center where prominent Unitarians and reformers as well as Harvard faculty and students met."⁸² By the time Charles began as a full faculty member at Harvard in the fall of 1830, he had built a loyal student contingent there, for many students had been seeking an ally among the faculty.⁸³ After several decades of

⁸⁰ Debra Gold Hansen, 70.

⁸¹ In Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 267-269. "My wife gave birth, yesterday, to a strong, healthy boy. She is well and strong... 'Charles Christopher Follen' together make a very good sound!" Follen's father's name was Christoph Follen. In an April 12 letter to his father in Germany Charles was overwhelmed with joy: "Yesterday, my soul was so full of unspeakable things ... Even my dear mother tongue seems to me now too strange to express to my friends the newly-born joys of a father."

⁸² Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 304. It was "located at 11 Waterhouse Street on the northern boundary of the Cambridge Common." Spevack, 142. Charles and Eliza had allowed four students to board with them; Eliza says that they "made part of our family." Andrew P. Peabody. *Harvard Reminiscences*. Boston: Ticknor and Co., 1888. 122-123. Unitarian minister Andrew Peabody wrote, "[Charles Follen] previously married Miss Eliza Lee Cabot, and about this time he built a house at the corner of the street that now bears his name. His wife was no less lovely in her domestic and social relations, than worthy of high distinction for her literary attainments and ability. Their house was second to no other in Cambridge in all that can make home-life beautiful and love. They were 'given to hospitality,' and no guest failed of the kindest welcome. ... The reception was simple and unostentatious, but always cordial; and we young men regarded our perhaps too frequent visits there as among the greatest of our social privileges."

⁸³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 141. As the first instructor of the German language and of "gymnastics" (or physical exercise) at an American university, he had developed intense student interest in both. Many of his students, including prominent ones like James Freeman Clarke, Andrew Peabody, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, soon made trips to Europe – to tour and to study. An example is James Freeman Clarke, who in 1836, after learning that Charles had been terminated from Harvard, wrote this editorial in the *Western Messenger*, 1836: "Our whole class loved him, - a feeling towards an instructor very unusual among captious and restless collegians. We all love him and revere him now."

increasingly dissolute student behavior on campus, such as drunkenness and destruction of college property,⁸⁴ the Governing Board had appointed hard-nosed politician Josiah Quincy to the university presidency to return order to the campus.⁸⁵ At the same time, just after the pregnant Frances Wright had slipped away from America on a ship, Charles delivered a series of lectures in Boston on “Moral Philosophy.”⁸⁶ He wanted to give the lectures “as popular a character as possible”⁸⁷ so as to win a positive reception, for not only did he want to convey precepts he believed to be important for his listeners, he also “felt the importance of increasing his means of living” – he needed to sell lecture subscriptions and fill halls. Over the course of the addresses, Eliza later argued that the series did make “his name and character more widely known” and “brought [Charles] into more immediate contact with the true heart of our society... [a] very agreeable audience.”⁸⁸ In this series he “reaffirmed one of his most basic principles: that the true meaning of life lay in the ‘conquest of the self,’ and ‘the striving for divine perfection.’”⁸⁹ Students attending the lectures of their favorite professor appreciated his extension of Kantian arguments on individuals’ (and students’) rights and moral imperatives.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Robert A. McCaughey, “The Usable Past: A Study of the Harvard College Rebellion of 1834.” *William & Mary Law Review* 11.3 (1970): 587-610. 593. “In view of the tender age at which students matriculated in the 1820’s (freshmen were accepted in their twelfth year), undergraduate carousing had reached epic proportions. Mid-week drinking bouts lasted through the night, halted only by the need to appear at morning chapel. Weekends meant jaunts into Boston which included visits to the West End brothels and often ended with town-gown brawls on the Common. One observer of Harvard undergraduates during the Kirkland era offered this description of the prevailing life style: ‘The time not spent in classes is divided between eating and drinking, smoking and sleeping. Approach the door of one of their apartments at any hour of the day, ... you will find half a dozen loungers in a state of oriental lethargy.’”

⁸⁵ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard, 1636-1936*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1936. 247. Before coming to Harvard, Quincy had served “in Congress, in the state government, and as a reforming Mayor of Boston,” and had a reputation for being inflexible.

⁸⁶ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290. These were in his 1830-1831 public “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” which he delivered in Boston to a paying audience. The fifteen lectures are printed in Vol. III of Follen’s *Works*.

⁸⁷ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. III, 14. “These lectures should be popular, that is, free from dry and abstruse disquisitions and scholastic terminology.”

⁸⁸ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290-291.

⁸⁹ Spevack, 152-153.

⁹⁰ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290, 90. Follen cites Kant: “He says, ‘Act always in such a manner, that your mode of conduct might be or become the general law of all intelligent beings.’”

But the content of this series also led to some unpleasant consequences. Charles had chosen in his first lecture to provide a “historical account of some of the most remarkable systems of morals and religion; particularly those of Plato and Aristotle, Zeno and Epicurus.” The last figure, Epicurus, had been linked recently in the American public mind with Frances Wright and her atheist philosophies. As he did for the other philosophers that he listed, Charles explained the basic precepts of Epicurus’s beliefs – that for him, “virtue is a good, and crime an evil, so far only as the former is conducive to pleasure, and the latter to pain. Thus, injustice is no evil, except so far as it exposes to detection, and is therefore a cause of constant fear.” [sic]⁹¹ Further, he advocated that religious seekers be inclusive in their study. He encouraged them to examine not only various Christian sectarian doctrines and praxis, but also pantheism, atheism, and even Islam and eastern religions in order to analyze the ideologies systematically and then make a rational religious choice.

At least one person in his audience the day of the first lecture believed that, by tacitly approving of wide-ranging religious inquiry and by discussing Epicureanism without criticizing it, Charles was giving audience members leave to believe in Frances Wright’s teachings. On two separate occasions the man publicly accused Charles of preaching a sort of “‘Fanny-Wrightism’ for the higher classes” – that is, “principles of materialism and atheism.” The accuser thought “that Fanny Wright and all her class ... bring out ... infidelity ... and give it distinctness and confirmation.” He said that he “considered” Charles “as unconsciously helping [his] hearers to choose which master they would serve, reason or revelation.” The two engaged in an extensive letter exchange;⁹² Charles wrote the man that he was appalled that his name was linked with “so

⁹¹ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. III, 62.

⁹² Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290-299. Eliza Follen was aware of the letter exchange at the time it occurred; she characterized his response as “not quietly submit[ting] to a false accusation” but “firmly, though mildly, demand[ing] justice for himself.”

‘odious a name’” as Frances Wright’s, since any “report” that associated his name with Wright’s, “if credited by others, is calculated to produce ... [an] injurious effect.” For, “[b]y ‘Fanny-Wrightism,’” wrote Charles, “I believe everybody understands the principles professed and taught by that lady, that is, materialism and atheism.” Charles complained, “I wish you would ask yourself, whether ... you think it considerate to couple so ‘odious a name’ with a man, ‘whose character,’ you say, ... ‘nobody for a moment ever doubted!’” Still, not until his eighth lecture did Charles finally clarify his position that, of course, there was a need for a “check against the Epicurean doctrine.”⁹³ The man explained his misunderstanding of Charles’s meaning, and Charles replied that he appreciated the man’s “readiness to repair” any damage that came from publicly disseminating such a “falsehood.” Given his own awareness of the gravity of accusations that had been made of him in the past in Germany, Charles was determined to clear his name of any serious attack before it could get established. This was only the first of the accusations made in the United States against Charles Follen that would prompt Eliza Follen to defend him through the means of a novel.⁹⁴

In that letter exchange Charles also asked the man if he had made the charge against him because of Charles’s Unitarianism and to “secure popularity” with Protestant evangelicals: “It is obvious, that the fact of my belonging to a class of Christians [Unitarians], who are charged with infidelity by those from whose opinions they feel bound in conscience to dissent, is likely to secure popularity to such a remark, particularly if applied to a foreigner, who has the misfortune to be a German theologian.” This contextually dense statement demonstrates that Charles believed his detractor to be an evangelical and a Trinitarian – one of “those from whose opinions” he as a Unitarian felt “bound in conscience to dissent” – and so he wondered if this

⁹³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. III, 14, 62, 159.

⁹⁴ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290-299.

antagonist was courting the support of popular opinion. Charles was frustrated that not only did evangelicals and Trinitarians accuse Unitarians of being irreligious and atheistic, but that they also (he guessed) held his Germanness against him. He was likely concerned that xenophobic, native-born, evangelical antebellum Americans viewed him with mistrust as just another German mediational theologian, intent on testing the Bible on scientific grounds.⁹⁵

In fact, Charles was at times on the cutting edge of liberal theology and vulnerable to conservative clerical disapproval. The Unitarian denomination in America had been undergoing schism and transformation for over two decades, with many Boston-area Congregationalists moving away from Calvinist Congregationalism and toward the more liberal Unitarianism. As Unitarians they had for years been accused of Socinianism – the idea that Unitarians were not real Christians but secret skeptics in disguise.⁹⁶ The longer Charles remained in the United States, the closer to the liberal margins he became.⁹⁷ In the 1820s the Unitarian denomination was suspected by orthodox and evangelical Christians of leaning toward both Pantheism (which

⁹⁵ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 290-299. The man replies, “That it would be popular with the orthodox, no ways reconciles me to it, for I am as little in unity with them as with their opponents.” Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993. Also see accusations against him of being associated with Wilhelm De Wette, to follow. He and Eliza may well have experienced this “Othering” by evangelical Americans more often. As a German theologian Charles would have been associated with the mediational theologies of August Neander, Friedrich Tholuck, and Philip Schaff, intellectual Christianity that pursued rational, scientific explanations for biblical phenomena and content, and a pragmatic faith that evangelicals found sacrilegious and offensive.

⁹⁶ Sidney E. Mead, “Lyman Beecher and Connecticut Orthodoxy’s Campaign Against the Unitarians, 1819-1826.” *Church History* 9.3 (Sept. 1940): 218-234. Lyman Beecher was the most vocal in making this attack.

⁹⁷ Morison, 187, 189. In 1803 Henry Ware was initially rejected as a candidate for Harvard’s Hollis Professorship of Divinity for being a “liberal Congregationalist.” But on Feb. 15, 1805, after a “long and patient discussion” between stalwart Calvinists and liberal Arminians and Unitarians, Ware won the vote of the Board of Overseers. Morison writes that when this happened, “the theological department of New England’s oldest university went Unitarian.” Baird, 272-280. “While the question of his election was pending, a suspicion of his Unitarianism was suggested, but it was repelled by his friends as a calumny. Even when President Kirkland was elected, in 1812, it has been said, on high Unitarian authority, that he could not have been elected if he had been known as a defender of Unitarianism.... On the publication of Mr. Belsham’s disclosures [in], it was found that all the Congregational churches in Boston had become Unitarian, except the Old South and Park-street.... They had then almost entire possession of Harvard College.... Unitarianism ... originally grew out of a dislike to the practice of requiring evidence of piety in candidates for admission to the churches.” Also, McCaughey, 591. [Lyman Beecher.] “Dr. Codman’s Speech in the Board of Overseers of Harvard College...” *The Spirit of the Pilgrims* 4.7 (July 1831): 373-396. 377, 394. As Lyman Beecher later bitterly complained, Hollis himself had established that any man earning the position “must not be an infidel.” Unitarians, Beecher argued, “have no right to monopolize the College of the State, ... to support out of it their Theological Institution.”

one Calvinist defined as the belief that “held nature, or the world itself, to be God”⁹⁸) and “Infidelity” or atheism. Already there had been a significant increase in the United States in the number of avowed “Freethinkers,” that loosely organized group of atheists and skeptics – that is, agnostics or those who were unconvinced of the reality of a supernatural god. Inebriated Freethinkers had been celebrating Thomas Paine’s birthday (January 26) in raucous, toasts-driven parties in the United States since 1825 (and earlier in England).⁹⁹ An increase in Freethought in New York City in the early 1830s was almost certainly a direct result of Frances Wright’s efforts in establishing her Hall of Science and the *Free Enquirer* magazine there. In 1831 any accusation of an individual of atheism by an evangelical minister necessarily associated the accused with Frances Wright; indeed, in his 1831 public lectures in Boston – fully a year after Frances Wright had sailed for France – Beecher himself was still attacking her as the “female apostle of atheistic liberty” and condemning her efforts to use an organization of “working men” to impose a “political atheism” on the city of New York.¹⁰⁰ Defections to Freethought also became a serious threat to Unitarianism; as Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher wrote, “American Unitarians ... stand blindfolded on [a] perilous precipice.” He believed that “in the whirling dizziness of their descent” they would likely be “drawn irrecoverably and forever within the vortex of a blank infidelity, or an unintelligible pantheism,

⁹⁸ [Lyman Beecher.] Book reviews. “*Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung ...*” *Spirit of the Pilgrims* 1.4 (April 1828): 191-212. 193.

⁹⁹ James Epstein, “Radical Dining, Toasting and Symbolic Expression in Early Nineteenth-Century Lancashire: Rituals of Solidarity.” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 20.2 (Summer 1988): 271-291. 274, 283-285. Christopher Grasso, “Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22.3 (Autumn 2002): 465-508. 485. These toasts to Paine, Wright, Owen (both father and son), Voltaire, Hume, and Jefferson went late into the night and were annually recorded and published throughout the 1820s and 1830s.

¹⁰⁰ Lyman Beecher, *Lectures on Scepticism, delivered in Park Street Church, Boston, and in the Second Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: Corey and Fairbank, 1835. 75, 77. This was a series of sermons he delivered on atheism in Boston and Cincinnati in 1831 and 1833.

or a dreary, cheerless, heartless, hopeless atheism.”¹⁰¹ Liberal Unitarians’ rejection of Christ’s divine attributes was a source of especially intense debate in religious journals.¹⁰²

In July 1831 Beecher attacked Charles Follen’s spiritual credibility directly in print, though anonymously, through his magazine, *Spirit of the Pilgrims*.¹⁰³ In a lengthy complaint about Unitarian domination of Harvard faculty and governance, he questioned whether the “individual of ‘the Evangelical Reformed Lutheran creed,’” Charles Follen, was really a “Trinitarian – a Lutheran, in the sense of Luther – a *bona fide* receiver of the Augsburg Confession of Faith? Or is he not known to be a Unitarian of the most liberal class – a German of the school of De Wette?”¹⁰⁴ This was a serious attack against Charles Follen, for, as scholar Siegfried Puknat notes, “[German philosopher William] De Wette saw embodied in the Trinity every truth contained in monotheism [or Unitarianism], anthropomorphism, and pantheism”¹⁰⁵ – heretical beliefs to evangelical Calvinists.¹⁰⁶ Beecher previously had labeled De Wette as the “advocate” of a “sentimental religion” – a “sickly, sterile, undefinable abortion of

¹⁰¹ [Lyman Beecher.] “Reviews. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews...By Moses Stuart.” *The Spirit of the Pilgrims* 2.2 (February 1829): 80-106. 105. T. Gregory Garvey, *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006. 62. “Beecher underscored the instability of Unitarian doctrine by characterizing liberal ministers as prodigal sons who had left the high peaks of orthodoxy and begun to slip from one error to another on the downward slope to infidelity and atheism.”

¹⁰² Baird, 279. Baird wrote that Unitarians demand for “evidence of miracles, ... reject[ed] Christ as a mediator” and “declare[d] that, in order to be true Christians, we must hold intercourse with God...without a mediator.” Presbyterian minister and religious historian Robert Baird warned that “German Transcendentalism” and “Pantheism” had infiltrated Unitarianism and, as a consequence, Unitarians believed that “all religions, from Fetishism to the most perfect form of Christianity, are essentially of the same nature, being only developments ... of the religious sentiment which is common to all men.”

¹⁰³ “Dr. Codman’s Speech in the Board of Overseers of Harvard College...” *The Spirit of the Pilgrims* 4.7 (July 1831): 373-396. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D. ... Vol. II*. Charles Beecher, ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865. 122. Evidence of Beecher’s authorship of this article: “Chapter XIV. The Spirit of the Pilgrims. Toward the close of the year 1827, arrangements were made for the establishment of the monthly periodical named at the head of the chapter.”

¹⁰⁴ “Dr. Codman’s Speech...” 388. “The individual of ‘the Evangelical Reformed Lutheran creed,’ is supposed to be the Professor of German, a popular and efficient officer, whose influence is extensive in the University.”

¹⁰⁵ Siegfried B. Puknat, “De Wette in New England.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102.4 (Aug. 27, 1958): 376-395. 378.

¹⁰⁶ That is, Calvinists saw monotheism as either conflating God the father, the son, and the Holy Ghost into one divine being or denying the divinity of the latter two entities.

metaphysics.”¹⁰⁷ By alleging that Charles was “of the school of De Wette” Beecher was labeling him a religious radical. And in fact, Charles had been influenced a great deal by De Wette’s extreme philosophies and had known him personally in Germany, for De Wette was the stepfather of Karl Beck, Follen’s fellow German émigré and traveling companion in 1824. The threat of exposure as a De Wette radical came even closer to Follen’s doorstep since De Wette had been persecuted in Germany for writing a letter of sympathy to the parents of executed *Unbedingten* assassin Karl Sand.

In September 1831 Charles struck back at his accusers in his *Inaugural Address*, the speech in which he accepted his five-year appointment at Harvard. In it he remonstrated that “German Philosophy ha[d] been accused of a tendency to materialism and skepticism, and of leading to a denial of those spiritual realities which form the foundation of the Christian faith,” for, he said, those philosophies were rightfully associated not with Germans but with England’s David Hume and France’s Victor Cousin. Instead, he avowed, “[T]here is no country in which ... there has been so much liberty in the profession of *philosophical* and *religious* opinions,” yet “among all the philosophers of Germany there has not been one materialist.” Rather, he claimed, the “philosophic literature ... of the Germans is signalized by its loyalty to spiritual truth.”¹⁰⁸ German immigrants were the most trustworthy and faith-filled Christians of all of America’s new residents, he argued, and he was one of them.

More significantly, Charles also reiterated in that address his liberal opinions on the idea of free inquiry. His definition of the concept was that people should examine both atheistic and

¹⁰⁷ [Lyman Beecher.] “The Decline, Revival, and Present State of Evangelical Religion in Germany.” *Spirit of the Pilgrims* 3.2 (February 1830): 57-71. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Charles Follen, *Inaugural Address, Delivered Before the University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, September 3, 1831*. Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1831. 12-14.

theistic teachings before deciding which was correct.¹⁰⁹ Charles encouraged the “spirit of free inquiry in... every department of science and learning,” yet simultaneously contested Wright’s use of the phrase. He held that free inquiry was “not a sneering skepticism” that used “knowing hints” and “sarcastic allusions” that assumed atheism as its end.¹¹⁰ Biographer George Spindler said that Charles

knew how to sympathize with men who were struggling with doubts and unbelief [and] eagerly grasped th[e] opportunity to present his views on religion and at the same time do justice to the so-called infidels. He knew that skepticism usually grows out of an earnest desire to be assured of the rational foundations of faith; therefore he maintained that it is... unjust to accuse a man of willful unbelief.¹¹¹

Where Wright expected someone who studied widely in religious and irreligious beliefs to choose irreligion, Charles Follen expected them to choose Christianity.

Within a few years Charles’s ultra-liberal Unitarianism would be only one of several reasons for conservatives to be apprehensive of him. By 1834 Harvard’s President Quincy suspected both him and Eliza of encouraging students to protest unreasonable treatment by campus authorities. In both juvenile and sophisticated acts of rebellion freshmen and sophomore students had begun stomping their feet in unison during chapel services, breaking windows, and setting bonfires, the juniors hanged Quincy in effigy on the college grounds, and the seniors

¹⁰⁹ Spindler, 182-183. “[O]n two different occasions [he] delivered a series of lectures on the history of Pantheism....Although he was hardly in sympathy with the pantheistic tendency of the new school of theology [Transcendentalism], with which he fully identified himself, he believed that a fair discussion of the subject would be a real aid to the cause of true religion. During these two years he took part also in the meetings of the Transcendental Club.... [He wrote,] ‘A clear determination to break loose from the Unitarian orthodoxy, and a vague conception of something greater and better with marked individuality of opinion and mutual respect, characterized the discussion.’”

¹¹⁰ Follen, *Inaugural Address*, 12.

¹¹¹ Spindler, 180.

wrote a careful proposal to the Corporation for Quincy's removal from his position.¹¹² Historian Samuel Eliot Morison suggests that when Quincy began cracking down on student infractions, both Charles and Eliza were accused of "maintain[ing] too close a contact with students" and instigating student unrest.¹¹³ Morison quotes Quincy's wife when he comments that "Mrs. Follen, a rival queen to Mrs. Quincy, fomented the student Rebellion 'by her wit and talent.'"¹¹⁴ So now Eliza found herself caught up with Charles in what to him had been normal behavior on German university campuses – alienating people in positions of power over him. In meetings of the full faculty with Quincy, Charles "called for 'less outward government in college' and thought that 'the young men should govern themselves.'"¹¹⁵ Young rebellious men, both working-class and college-educated, had been the population best known as "Fanny Wrightists," and Charles's popularity among any part of that group was likely to have created unease among conservatives.

Still at the same time that Charles and Eliza were earning the distrust of the "Harvard Corporation" through their support of student rebellion, they also were increasing public wariness of them both by beginning to engage with the radical idea of immediate emancipation of enslaved Americans.¹¹⁶ Charles already knew that "anti-slavery would never be tolerated at Harvard University," for New England was deeply invested in the success of Southern slavery.

¹¹² Morison, 252-253. McCaughey, 602.

¹¹³ Spevack, 160.

¹¹⁴ Morison 254. Morison does not source the quote from Mrs. Quincy. Samuel Cabot, Jr., to Josiah Quincy, July 8, 1819. Box 2, Folder 8. Microfilm Roll 2. Samuel Cabot Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. But, apparently the quarrel between Eliza and Mrs. Quincy had some history behind it; a letter exchange Samuel Cabot, Jr., and Josiah Quincy, indicates that Eliza and Mrs. Quincy had had a close friendship, a "lady from N. York" had somehow become divisive in the relationship, and Eliza had felt she "had received a wound" from "Mrs. Q." such that she no longer felt she could "receive marks of undiminished friendship" from "Mrs. Q." and "return [them] entire."

¹¹⁵ Spevack, 160. Spevack agrees that Charles worked to "diminish Josiah Quincy's support among the Harvard faculty" and to empower students, as he had in Germany.

¹¹⁶ Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 304. Charles Follen had become intrigued with addressing the evils of slavery in 1831 after speaking at length with "a negro man" he had seen walking along the road in the pouring rain. Soon after, Charles began visiting William Garrison in the tiny printing office of the anti-slavery *The Liberator*. "He took him all dripping wet into his chaise, and the poor man soon began to talk with him about slavery.... His accidental conversation with this poor man excited his mind powerfully."

Moreover, American society was invested broadly in the present racialized and gendered organization of society, where elite white men were at the top of the pecking order and black enslaved women were at the bottom.¹¹⁷ Southerners and Southern sympathizers further argued that slavery was Biblical, brought Christianity and civilization to African savages, and was a far superior economic system to the wage slavery of poor whites in the North. Charles Follen became impressed with the need to become involved in anti-slavery activity after reading Lydia Maria Child's revolutionary *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* in 1833. Charles began visiting Garrison at the *Liberator* offices; he excused Garrison's notoriously "offensive language" because of the "principle" that prompted it, and "loved ... the purity of his purposes, and the childlike sweetness of his disposition." Charles contemplated the consequences of joining Garrison's Anti-slavery Society.¹¹⁸ He predicted that joining the abolitionist movement meant "los[ing] all chance of a permanent place in [Harvard] College, or perhaps anywhere else," and was likely to plunge them and their young child into "the evils of real poverty."¹¹⁹ But Eliza encouraged Charles in his abolitionist fervor and later that year he helped form an anti-slavery society in Cambridge. By the next fall the Follens became caught up

¹¹⁷ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, vi. Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. 100-101. Junius P. Rodriguez, ed. *Slavery in the United States: A Social, Political, and Historical Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007. 108-109. Both Northern and Southern economies had flourished after the 1794 patenting of the cotton gin, enabling short-staple cotton to be grown in the Old Southwest states of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Louisiana, and to be shipped to steam-powered spinning mills in New England. Northern industrialists and shipping merchants were benefitting as much or more than Southern plantation owners from their shared exploitation of African American slaves. American working-men and -women – dressmakers, merchant marines, dockhands, mill workers – also had steady employment because the Deep South supplied the raw cotton for this industrial development. Northern shipping company owners, industry owners, and the workers employed by them knew that the loss of free slave labor would be economically disastrous for them.

¹¹⁸ *An Appeal* was the first systematic, comprehensive, and objective argument for the immediate emancipation of America's slaves. Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 340, 380. Eliza wrote that the *Appeal* also "produced a powerful effect upon his mind." Repugnant to many people, the text was bringing converts to the radical cause and into the orbit of William Garrison, despite his reputation for profanity and lack of decorum. Charles "admired [Garrison's] disinterestedness, his magnanimity; ... he loved the single-hearted purity of his purposes, and the childlike sweetness of his disposition.... in short, he loved and honored Mr. Garrison." At this time William Ellery Channing was adamantly opposed to immediate emancipation.

¹¹⁹ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 340.

in the heightened tensions between pro- and anti-slavery contingents. In 1834-35 Southern sympathizers – and especially the clerks and workingmen employed by Northern business owners – gathered into mobs and threatened the lives of known abolitionists.¹²⁰ On October 21, 1835, when William Garrison attempted to attend a meeting of the Female Anti-Slavery Society, a mob of pro-slavery rioters grabbed him, dealt him “violent blows aimed at his uncovered head,” and dragged him through the streets of New York with a noose or halter around his neck.¹²¹ Garrison and two observers claimed that “gentlemen of property and standing ... [m]erchants and bankers of Boston” were responsible, for the purpose of “demonstrat[ing] their goodwill to their ‘Southern brethren’ in deeds as well as by words.”¹²² This emotionally charged environment only urged Charles on to greater involvement with immediate emancipation. Eliza took up the abolitionist cause as readily as had her husband; her views seem to have been

¹²⁰ “Appendix: ‘[T]he Great Long National Shame’: Selected Incidents of Racial Violence in the United States.” *Counterpoints* 163 (2001): 1165-1177. This Appendix contains excerpts from: Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial & Religious Violence in America: A Chronology*. New York: Garland, 1991. 1167. In 1834, “[a]t least fifteen mob attacks on abolitionist groups and speakers occur[ed] during the year, all in northern states.” In New York City beginning on the fourth of July and lasting a week, “white racist rioters destroy[ed] sixty homes and six churches ... [that had] gone on record supporting the abolition of slavery”; stores owned by abolitionists were destroyed, including one owned by philanthropist and reformer Lewis Tappan. *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880*, Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland, eds. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982. p.35n2 & p.62n3. Lydia Maria Child and her husband David, who had become the Follens’ colleagues and good friends through their mutual abolitionist activities, spent 1835 mostly in hiding from the mobs. Child discusses the difficult circumstances of various abolitionists; the editors note that the home of philanthropist and reformer Lewis Tappan was destroyed in 1834. They also note that on August 8, 1834, Amos Dresser, one of the seventy “Lane Rebels” from Lane Theological Seminary, was flogged by a pro-slavery mob in Nashville, Tennessee, for “having abolitionist material in his suitcase.”

¹²¹ *Right and Wrong in Boston. Report of the Boston Female Anti Slavery Society; with a Concise Statement of Events, previous and subsequent to the annual Meeting of 1835*. Boston: Boston Female Anti Slavery Society, 1836. 38. Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Athens of America: Boston, 1825-1845*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006. 167. Garrison tried to return to Boston, hoping the worst had blown over, but it hadn’t. He tried to attend the October 21, 1835, meeting of the Female Anti-Slavery Society, which was supposed to convene at 3pm sharp. A mob broke the window; Garrison went out the back window but they grabbed him, put a noose around his neck and paraded him through the streets. The police finally rescued him and put him in jail for his safety.

¹²² Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992. 93. Lydia Maria Child to Louisa Loring. August 15, 1835. Microfiche. 80-Transcript/1-2. Lydia Maria Child claimed that thousands of Southerners were prowling about New York City during the summer of 1835 with the intent to do real harm: “Private assassins from N. Orleans are lurking at the corners of the streets, to state Arthur Tappan; and very large sums are offered for any one who will convey Mr. Thompson into the slave states.... There are 7000 Southerners now in the city [New York City].... The steam-boat to Newport was full of Southerners; and Mr. Thompson and the fire-brands with him, soon attracted their attention, and became the permanent objects of their malignant looks and scornful jests.”

cultivated through her husband's interest, but must also, like the Grimke sisters, have reminded her of the Cabot family's history with slavery.¹²³ Charles referred humorously to himself and to Follen as: "I, the incendiary, and my equally incendiary partner."¹²⁴ That both Eliza and Charles were attending abolitionist functions together identifies them as belonging to one group of an essentially divided movement. In the 1830s, women's participation in anti-slavery had become a marker separating (though not wholly defining) the groups. According to historian Michael D. Pierson, "abolitionists" were the radicals who welcomed women's equal participation with men in their associations and demanded immediate emancipation of the slaves, while "antislavery moderates" vehemently disagreed, for they generally did not support women's activity outside of the domestic circle, and they favored colonialization and compensation to slave owners.¹²⁵

¹²³ Eliza Cabot Follen to Samuel and Eliza Follen, Aug. 9, 12, 13, 1836. Box 2, Folder 8. Microfilm Roll 2. Samuel Cabot Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. In an 1836 letter to her brother Samuel Cabot and sister-in-law Eliza Cabot, Eliza Follen confirmed her entire agreement with Charles about abolitionism: "I know that our antislavery views ... are so in the way of our interest....We made our choice knowing the consequences & mean to hear them cheerfully."

¹²⁴ Charles Follen to William Ellery Channing. In Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 443. She was present at male-only events, such as the Massachusetts subcommittee meetings where Charles testified. Eliza says: "I went with him to the State-House where the gentlemen from the anti-slavery society met the committee of the House." (389). Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 389-392. Eliza says: "I went with him to the State-House where the gentlemen from the anti-slavery society met the committee of the House." Eliza and her sister Susan insisted on being there, which was unusual for respectable women and more so for women from families who historically owned slaves or had dealt in the slave trade, as theirs had. Briggs, 644, 162. For example, in 1838 Eliza's cousin Joseph Sebastian Cabot, would "respectfully decline answering" certain 'interrogatories' of the committee appointed by the Essex County Abolitionists," noting that as a Democrat "he felt bound to take this position." This was Eliza's first cousin, once removed – her cousin Joseph Cabot's son. In a "printed letter of Joseph S. Cabot of Salem, dated November 6, 1838," Joseph S. Cabot "respectfully decline[d] answering" certain 'interrogatories' of the committee appointed by the Essex County Abolitionists to send letters to the candidates for the State Senate and for representatives in Congress. Mr. Cabot stated that as a member of Democratic Party he felt bound to take this position." Follen, *The Works of ..., Vol. I*, 465. After a printer, Lovejoy, was murdered in Alton, Illinois, by a pro-slavery mob for printing anti-slavery materials, Eliza and Susan accompanied Charles in December 1837 to a memorial and silent, peaceful protest of 5000 people in New York City. Charles's name was printed on materials associated with it, although he really had not wanted it to be. In a letter to their friend Harriet Martineau Charles wrote, "I was warned by some of the trustees of my church against giving my name to the meeting, and going to it, but I went with Eliza and S--, who would not be left at home."

¹²⁵ Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 5-6. As Pierson explains, "[h]istorians have labeled the radicals who pressed for the most sweeping social changes the abolitionists while calling the moderates antislavery.... Abolitionists ... campaigned for an immediate end to slavery because it was sinful and a direct affront to God ... In contrast, antislavery people sought only to halt slavery's growth in the hopes that it would then die out gradually...; their members were ... less receptive to claims of universal racial equality, and they [considered] compensating slaveholders or settling freed blacks in colonies outside the United States." More: "abolitionist women began to

Indeed, Eliza helped organize the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, participated in fund-raising fairs, worked to create schools for African-American children in Boston, prepared remarks to be read by men at assemblies, and wrote and edited juvenile abolitionist materials.¹²⁶

Charles Follen did actively support the right of his wife and all women to work as equal partners in their efforts to free the enslaved.¹²⁷

Garrisonians were initially reviled for their advocacy of immediate emancipation, but nearly as repugnant to conservatives was their interest in wide-ranging societal reforms to gender relations and the family structure.¹²⁸ Any discussions of women's rights at this historical moment automatically recalled Frances Wright in the public imagination. So in the early 1830s when Charles spoke about women's rights from the pulpit of the First Congregational Church in

occupy prominent places in the movement ... circulat[ing] petitions, deliver[ing] speeches, organiz[ing] women's antislavery societies, and wr[it]ing books and pamphlets." Chris Dixon, *Perfecting the Family: Antislavery Marriages in Nineteenth-century America*. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1997. 8. Dixon uses different nomenclature, calling those who rejected Garrisonians "political abolitionists"; he argues that they "fear[ed] that attempts to expand the boundaries of women's sphere threatened the success" of the abolitionist movement. These political abolitionists believed that "women should be limited to a subsidiary role, working in the private sphere commonly allocated to women." I would suggest that Charles and Eliza Follen deserved mention by Dixon.

¹²⁶ Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood*, 78-82. Scholars from various disciplines have considered the issues pertaining to gender and abolitionism, including Susan Zaeske's *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity*, Debra Gold Hansen's *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society*, Julie Roy Jeffrey's *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement*, Carol Faulkner's *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, and Beth A. Salerno's *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America*. DeRosa, *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature*, 37. Many publishers considered a juvenile audience to be a "'safe' public forum," and so by writing for young people Eliza and other women abolitionist writers could remain within the good graces of publishers.

¹²⁷ Appendix. No. VI. "Speech Before the Anti-slavery Society." Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 631. In a January 20, 1836, speech to the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society he argued the Garrisonian position that women should be full and equal participants in abolitionist activities: "Men have at all times been inclined to allow to women peculiar privileges, while withholding from them essential rights.... [T]he rational and moral nature of man is the foundation of all rights and duties, and ... women as well as men are rational and moral beings.... Women [are] begin[ning] to feel, that the place which men have marked out for them is but a small part of what society owes to them, and what they themselves owe to society." Pierson, 5. William Garrison's promotion of Abby Kelley for a prominent position in the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS) in 1840 dealt his organization the final blow and ultimately split it in two.

¹²⁸ Dixon, 8. Dixon notes that "Conceiving family reform in terms of a reordering of gender roles, and believing that women should be liberated from the confines of the domestic sphere, [Garrisonians] attributed an important role to women in the reform process."

New York City, a Unitarian congregation, he again risked criticism as a “Fanny Wrightist.”¹²⁹ Fragments of his sermon notes indicate that in his sermons there he addressed “Equality of the sexes.... Shameful partiality of the laws and the customs of society, and of philosophizing men of the world upon this subject.”¹³⁰ So Eliza had reason to fear conservative backlash to Charles not only because of his liberal views on religion, student rebellion, and abolition, but also his proto-feminism.

Even more frightening than another accusation of “Fanny Wrightism” would have been a discovery of Charles’s authorship of the *Unbedingten* doctrine of political assassination. It is unlikely that Charles was ever completely forthcoming to his wife, William Ellery Channing, or others within his trusted circle in New England. Certainly they were aware of the accusations of his complicity with Karl Sand in the murder of Kotzebue, but by being exonerated in Germany in 1820 he had been able to translate his German radical engagement into martyrdom for nationalistic republicanism. An abolitionist colleague, Rev. Samuel May, called Sand a “deluded murderer” and only cared that Charles was, “as ... he must have been, fully exonerated” of the crime.¹³¹ Channing simply believed that Follen’s political successes in Hesse-Darmstadt on behalf of working-class Germans had “exposed him to the hatred of influential men in his native Province.”¹³² If Charles’s friends and associates had understood the full extent of his responsibility for the *Unbedingten* principles, he would not have been allowed to continue to

¹²⁹ Kring, 213.

¹³⁰ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 258, 634. Charles also made notes for a magazine he planned to begin writing and editing entitled *All Sides*, and included “Political rights of women,” “Universal suffrage,” “Relative rights of husband and wife” and “Wages of men and women” as articles he intended to include. Appendix. No. VII. “List of Subjects for the Journal to be Entitled ‘All Sides.’”

¹³¹ Samuel J. May. “A Discourse on the Life and Character of the Rev. Charles Follen.” Boston: Henry L. Devereux, 1840. 7-8. [Bound together with William Ellery Channing’s 1840 eulogy.]

¹³² Channing, “Death of the Rev. Dr. Follen,” 22-23. Channing believed that Charles had been “driven by the persecutions of the Holy Alliance” to flee Germany, and that Follen’s success in arguing for the “liberties and rights” of the common Germans in the Duchy of Hess Darmstadt had “exposed him to the hatred of influential men in his native Province.”

function in good society in the United States at all. There is no evidence to suggest that Eliza believed anything other than what Channing and May believed – that Charles was a righteous and self-sacrificing man. But it is also not unreasonable to consider that she, knowing him more intimately than any other American, may have had lingering fears and concerns that something from Charles’s *Unbedingten* past would ruin him and her family entirely.

Finally in May 1834 Eliza’s family’s web of financial security began to unravel. Charles’s endowed professorship would end in May 1835, and in order for him to continue as a full-time faculty member the university’s Corporation would have had to institutionalize the position. But when it met and voted on Charles’s position in May, it “decline[d] continuing his Professorship” – they were finished with him. They had repeatedly warned him that he risked being “materially injured” by his involvement with abolitionism.¹³³ Eliza wrote,

After ten years of faithful service in the College, he was left with five hundred dollars a year as teacher of the German language, if he chose to remain in Cambridge. This was of course an inadequate support for himself and family, and obliged him to seek employment elsewhere; he felt that this was intended.¹³⁴

According to Harvard historian Morison, “Follen’s friends let it be known that the reason for his being dropped was his ardent espousal of the anti-slavery cause,” and Eliza repeated it in a letter to her family: “I know that our antislavery views ... are so in the way of our interest.”¹³⁵ But Morison feels that “more likely... the real reason [for the dismissal] lay in the fact that Professor

¹³³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 343.

¹³⁴ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, vi, 345. Elizabeth Bancroft Schlesinger, “Two Early Harvard Wives: Eliza Farrar and Eliza Follen.” *The New England Quarterly* 38.2 (June 1965): 147-167. 160. In today’s dollars this \$500 would be the equivalent of \$13,900. “Dr. Follen took this disappointment deeply to heart.” Eliza “believed that their participation in the antislavery cause was a factor, since many proper Bostonians disapproved of the movement.”

¹³⁵ Morison 254. Eliza Cabot Follen to Samuel and Eliza Follen, Aug. 9, 12, 13, 1836. Box 2, Folder 8. Microfilm Roll 2. Samuel Cabot Papers. Massachusetts Historical Society. John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Writings of John Greenleaf Whittier in Seven Volumes. Volume IV*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1888, 30. Abolitionist poet Whittier believed that Charles “lost ... his professorship” because of his joining the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Follen opposed President Quincy's autocratic methods."¹³⁶ The truth more likely lies in Quincy's characterization of Charles generally as a "troublemaker."¹³⁷ It was not his abolitionism alone that motivated Harvard to terminate the professorship, but all of his radicalisms combined – his abolitionism, student radicalism, ultra-liberal Unitarianism, and proto-feminism. If that were not enough, he would shortly renew his solidarity with working people. Eliza's brother Samuel also refused to support his brother-in-law any further, and did not offer to extend any portion of the endowment himself.¹³⁸

By the end of 1834, Eliza knew that their little family, which had begun with so much hope, soon would be without any substantive income.¹³⁹ Charles began seeking a "settled" Unitarian pulpit,¹⁴⁰ but Eliza knew that any sort of controversy was likely to cause conservatives on a church hiring committee to reject him as a candidate for a permanent position.¹⁴¹ Follen was her husband's first reader for his sermon and lecture drafts, and knew which of Charles's works would be acceptable to conservative critics and which would trigger their suspicion.

¹³⁶ Morison 254. Robert A. McCaughey, *Josiah Quincy: 1772-1864: The Last Federalist*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974. 157. Thomas S. Hansen, "Charles Follen: Brief Life of a Vigorous Reformer: 1796-1840." *Harvard Magazine* (Sept.-Oct. 2002): 38. Hansen agrees with Morison, arguing that Charles's anti-slavery views were not the only cause of his dismissal: "Because Follen opposed the strict disciplinary measures that President Josiah Quincy imposed on undergraduates, he and his wife were suspected of fomenting student unrest. Although Follen claimed he was dismissed in 1835 for his growing abolitionist views, Quincy's antipathy was probably an equal factor."

¹³⁷ Spevack, 160.

¹³⁸ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 340. "One of the Corporation in a letter to his brother-in-law, had expressed his hope that it would be made permanent, and Dr. Follen's trustful nature led him to believe that it would be; still he had no absolute promise."

¹³⁹ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 404. Schlesinger, 161. "These were hard years" for the Follens. They found renters for the new house they had just built for themselves in Cambridge and, unable to rent an entire house, rented two rooms (parlor and bedroom) in a boardinghouse. "We have a firm faith that something will offer [Charles will find employment]; & if nothing does, with lecturing & occasional preaching, we can live." Eliza Cabot Follen to Samuel and Eliza Follen, Aug. 9, 12, 13, 1836. Charles held a series of temporary jobs – as a live-in tutor to three young boys in Watertown, Massachusetts, independent lecturer, and as a pastor at the First Unitarian Church of New York City.

¹⁴⁰ Spevack, 166. "In July of 1828 Charles Follen was accepted as a candidate for the Unitarian ministry. He was finally ordained as a minister eight years later, in 1836, the year after his dismissal from Harvard," so that he could administer Holy Communion to congregants during church services.

¹⁴¹ Eliza Cabot Follen to Samuel and Eliza Follen, Aug. 9, 12, 13, 1836. "I know that our antislavery views ... are so in the way of our interest We made our choice knowing the consequences & mean to hear them cheerfully."

Certainly, new charges of “Fanny Wrightism” would terminate any interested church hiring committee. Yet in November 1834 in his *Franklin Address* to an audience of the “workingmen of this city” of Boston, Charles again supported positions unpopular with conservatives who could have helped him. He lamented that working-class men were routinely condemned as being atheistic, since elites, he said, were frequently atheistic as well. But, he said, he did not blame workingmen for their lack of faith in a religion (Christianity) that had contrived to keep them subservient to wealthy elites. After all, he offered, the “unbelief arising from free inquiry” was a “far more hopeful state of mind than the irreligion of the sensualist who supports religion for its tendency to maintain what he calls the good of society.”¹⁴² In fact, Charles again returned to his support of the radical praxis of “free inquiry” of various religious (and irreligious) doctrines: Charles said he had come to his Unitarian faith as a skeptic, and so had gone through an extensive process of examining and weighing religious beliefs carefully before accepting any as valid. Now he hoped he could convince his audience of workingmen that “the free and faithful inquirer” would eventually arrive at “the conclusion that perfect freedom is to be found only in religion.” A period of unbelief, he argued, might simply be a stage through which someone might need to pass and in fact might be the only way in which an atheist or skeptic might eventually come to belief in the Judeo-Christian God. In fact, his argument went further to advocate that Christians study the precepts of atheism; he believed that their doing so would allow them to weigh the arguments, detect what Charles believed were the inherent flaws in atheism, and affirm their choice of Christianity. With Charles continuing to espouse tenets as

¹⁴² Charles Follen, *An Address, Introductory to the Fourth Course of the Franklin Lectures, Delivered at Masonic Temple, Nov. 3, 1834*. Boston: Tuttle and Weeks, 1835. 18. “It may seem unfair to single out the workmen as a class, as aiding the progress of infidelity ... It may seem unfair, on the other hand, to pass over the essential irreligion that is frequently found among what are called the higher classes of society, the idolatry of pleasure, of wealth, of circumstances....No wonder that the less favored children of society ... should question the reality of a doctrine that is made to teach humility to those who have no rank, and self-denial, and charity to those who have nothing to lose, or to give.”

radical as these, Eliza had good reason to be concerned for their family's financial well-being and even for their physical safety. Charles also was continuing to speak out publicly against slavery.¹⁴³ With vivid memories of the noose around William Garrison's neck, mob violence always seemed a real possibility to her. The final blow for Eliza Follen came at the end of 1834 when her pregnancy suddenly ended in tragedy – that is, when she did not become “again the mother of a living child.”¹⁴⁴ Immediately after the loss of her baby, Follen threw herself into the writing of a novel, *The Skeptic*.¹⁴⁵

THE SKEPTIC: “A FREE INQUIRER SHOULD READ BOTH SIDES”¹⁴⁶

Although writing the book was likely cathartic for Eliza Follen,¹⁴⁷ its real purpose was to create a shield of words, a rhetorical wall of defense, to protect her remaining family against accusations of atheism and radicalism from a conservative, evangelical press. More than anything else, Eliza Follen needed to prevent further damage to her husband's reputation in order to safeguard their family's financial stability – so that he could find permanent employment as a respectable Unitarian minister. Yet at the same time, Unitarianism was itself under attack as being semi-atheistic, so she also needed to defend Unitarianism as a valid Christian denomination. Of course, by securing Charles's good name, perhaps they eventually also could earn a greater opportunity to advance the cause of abolition, to which they were devoted.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ *An Account of the Interviews Which Took Place on the Fourth and Eighth of March, between a Committee of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and the Committee of the Legislature.* Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society [sic], 1836. Printed by Isaac Knapp. 8-9, more. Charles gave defiant testimony at special sessions of the Massachusetts State Legislature called to consider sanctions against abolitionist activities; he was silenced when the chairman considered his rhetoric as too inflammatory.

¹⁴⁴ Susan B. Cabot to Eliza Lee Cabot Follen, Dec. 23, 31, 1834, and Jan. 2, 1835. Papers of Samuel Cabot (1713-1858). Microfilm. Roll 2, Box 2, 1815-1858. Massachusetts Historical Society.

¹⁴⁵ Eliza L. Follen, *The Skeptic*. Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1835.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁴⁷ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 4. On the fourth page of the text Follen, in justifying “the Christian religion,” says that “free inquirers ... are not free to estimate the truth of a faith that enables the mother to consign her infant to the grave, with the consoling trust that the child liveth, though her arms cannot press it to her aching heart.”

¹⁴⁸ It is less likely that Eliza had realistic hopes of achieving any other goal through the book; for instance, while Charles had spoken about the issue publicly, it is unlikely that the prospect of advocating for women's rights was on

Eliza's strategy was to focus her novel on a young working-class skeptic who attends Frances Wright's lectures and reads her books.¹⁴⁹ When the young man's employer accuses him of being an atheist and fires him, his determined Christian wife begins to contest Wright's influence on her husband by urging him to study William Ellery Channing's liberal Unitarianism. In the text Follen criticized Frances Wright's atheist ideologies in order to distance herself and her husband from them and uphold Unitarianism. By doing so *The Skeptic* could work to create a reputation of respectable Christian Americanness for Eliza Follen and by association for her husband.¹⁵⁰

Of course, during the antebellum period most evangelical and liberal Christians alike continued to understand novel reading to be immoral and fraught with dangerous consequences and, as I discussed in Chapter Two, conservative magazine reviewers' frantic rejection of Frances Wright reinvigorated their condemnation of fiction. Reviewers participating in the novel-reading debate of the 1830s and 1840s generally did not approve of fiction or novels; at the least, they required that readers be reasonably able to believe a tale to be a recounting of factual circumstances. By the mid-1830s, these so-called instructive and inspirational "moral

Eliza's horizon. Other than narrating at length her husband's advocacy of women's right to autonomy – which is in itself was bold, since in 1840 there was still little support for it – there is no evidence that Eliza herself felt strongly about the issue, and certainly not in 1835 during her composition of *The Skeptic*.

¹⁴⁹ Wilhelm De Wette. *Theodore; or, The Skeptic's Conversion*. 1829. Trans. George Ripley. Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1841, xxv – xxviii. She may well have taken the idea from Charles's description to her of an 1822 novel, *Theodore; Or the Skeptic's Conversion*, written by his old friend, the radical Wilhelm De Wette. Eliza Follen, *Poems*, Boston: William Crosby & Co., 1839. 81. De Wette's work did not appear in English until 1841, but based on the fact that Eliza herself translated the poem "Home-Sickness" from the German, it is likely that she actually read De Wette's novel in German before writing *The Skeptic*. There is some similarity in purpose and plotlines between her novel and his; De Wette's protagonist was a young theology student who reasoned his way through various religious ideas and theological systems, including atheism, and before realizing the truth and value of liberal Unitarian Christianity and emerging a faithful Christian. In a preface De Wette labeled the novel a "*History of the Culture of a Protestant Clergyman*," and said he hoped it would "assist young theologians, by helping them to a clew by which to find their way through the labyrinth of contradictory systems, [such as] the Rationalists [and] the Supernaturalists...that the skepticism produced by narrow and shallow study is removed by profounder examinations," and that while he was "willing that others should commence *their* religious life by a conviction of their sinfulness, ...the religious experience of a theologian could be only found in the union of reflective thought with pious and sound feeling."

¹⁵⁰ Follen, *The Skeptic*, title. While Follen did not have her name printed on the title page, she identified herself there as the "Author of 'The Well-Spent Hour,' 'Words of Truth,' &c.," earlier and familiar novels that did identify her by name. For example, the copyright page of the 1832 *Words of Truth* reads as follows: "Entered according to the act of Congress, in the year 1831, by Charles Follen, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts."

tales” for adults constituted the most popular genre with both book reviewers and readers. In his *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America*, a sweeping survey of hundreds of American novels and novelists, David S. Reynolds explains that antebellum “writers of various denominations discovered in doctrinal and illustrative fiction a convenient vehicle for religious discussion during a time of intense controversy and religious change.”¹⁵¹ The purpose of these novels was didactic communication of particular theologies or ideologies, and much of the prose was verbose, stodgy, and more like thinly disguised sermons than entertaining narratives.¹⁵²

Editor Henry Ware, Jr., the son of Harvard theology professor Henry Ware and a Unitarian minister himself, actively solicited such manuscripts for a series of six novels that he called *Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truths*. Follen’s *The Skeptic* would be the second work in the series. In a preface to the first novel in the series Ware wrote that the authors’ task was to “present familiar illustration of some of the important practical principles of religion.”¹⁵³ He wrote Catherine Sedgwick that the novels were to fall somewhere “between a formal tale and a common tract” – that is, he wanted his writers to take religious precepts preached from the pulpit by liberal Unitarian ministers and translate them into fictional narratives to engage readers eager for novels.¹⁵⁴ According to his brother, Ware “furnish[ed]

¹⁵¹ David S. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981. 72.

¹⁵² “Polemical Fiction.” *Prospective Review; A Quarterly Journal of Theology and Literature* 7.28 (November 1851): 404-423. Reprinted in *Christian Inquirer* 6.11 (Dec. 20, 1851): 1. In 1851 a writer for the *Prospective Review* noted that an “augmented number” of “what may be denominated ‘Polemical Fictions’” was drawing “increasing interest” from British readers. England’s religious climate was considerably different, of course, and so “[e]very considerable party in Church and State ha[d] its representatives in this department of literature, written with various degrees of zeal and ability.”

¹⁵³ Henry Ware, Jr. “Advertisement.” [Sarah Savage.] *Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truth. No. 1. Trial and Self-Discipline*. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1835, iii.

¹⁵⁴ Qtd. in Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*, 118. Liberal Unitarian ministers Henry Ware, Jr., and his brother William were among the first to begin writing religious fiction. William Ware wrote novels based on Biblical stories and Henry Ware, Jr., sought to engage the reader in real, every-day, and contemporary living situations. He began in 1824 with an anti-Calvinist novel, *The Recollections of Jotham Anderson*. Henry Ware, Jr., was convinced that

subjects” for the novels in his series, but “trust[ed] to others for the treatment of them.”¹⁵⁵

Perhaps Eliza could have tried to persuade Ware to accept a novel that attacked the Protestant Christian theology that defended white enslavement of black people, but such a novel would have been considered an outrage in the volatile year of 1835.¹⁵⁶ During this period Eliza certainly was writing anti-slavery poetry that criticized the beliefs and praxis of pro-slavery Christians; for example, in “For the Fourth of July” Follen argues that pro-slavery Christians pray to God and “bend ... [t]he proud knee at his altar” but “forget he’s the Father of all,” including the enslaved. In “Where is Thy Brother” Follen contends that Southern slaveholders will have to “answer ... to the Judge of all” at the day of “judgment.”¹⁵⁷ But she did not attempt to publish these poems until 1839. The fact that she did not attempt to write a popular novel about the evils of slavery in 1835 suggests that she silenced herself on the issue that meant the most to her.

In his selection of *The Skeptic* Ware wanted his series to contest Unitarians’ vulnerability to the charges of atheism and approved of Follen’s repeated references to her good friend

people preferred to hear a “common-place explanation” of a theological topic than a “logical, philosophical, and elegant discussion of ... metaphysical divinity, the use of which they cannot fathom.” He believed religious ideas “ought to have more entertainment and less abstruseness” and should be made “attractive and forcible.” Qtd. in Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*. 115, 114.

¹⁵⁵ John Ware, *Memoir of the Life of Henry Ware, Jr., Vol. I*. Boston, American Unitarian Association, 1880. 130.

¹⁵⁶ Scholars who have examined Christian theology defending slavery include: Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1977. Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. The Southern clergy argued that 1) God had sanctioned slavery among ancient Hebrews in the Bible, had been permitted among primitive Christians, and that slavery was a positive good, not a necessary evil (Jefferson); 2) slavery brought Africans out of a savage and heathen place to a civilized and Christian land; 3) Africans were a degraded and inferior race and unable to care for themselves in America; 4) it was a burden to the white man to care for slaves, which protected society from moral decay, anarchy, and insurrection; 5) slaveholders must be converted to Christianity in order to carry out God’s will; 6) slaveholders must lead their slaves to Christian faith.

¹⁵⁷ Follen, *Poems*. Quotes from 173, 135, 138, 175, 183. In 1839 Eliza Follen published five impassioned poems against slavery, which appear in the same volume as a revised version of the poem she co-wrote with her husband on the death of their baby in 1834-1835. In “Remember the Slave” Follen writes: “Ye Christians! ministers of Him / ... [L]et your prayers ascend / For the poor slave, who hardly knows / That God is still his friend.” She calls upon Christians to “Unite in the most holy cause / of the forsaken slave.” The three other poems are “Remember the Slave,” “Children in Slavery,” “The Captive Eagle.”

William Ellery Channing's 1821 Duddleian Lecture, *Evidences of Christianity*.¹⁵⁸ In that text Channing argued that Unitarianism supported rather than denied the existence of miracles and therefore legitimately defended the truth of the Christian religion.¹⁵⁹ In her novel Follen sets Channing's text in direct dialogue with "Miss Wright's book," or the 1829 *Course of Popular Lectures*.¹⁶⁰ One character comments in the text that there was "more logical argument and more true eloquence in favor of religion" in Channing's "Duddleian Lecture, and the Sermons in the last volume upon the Evidences of Christianity... than Miss Wright can boast of against it."¹⁶¹ As a strategy to interpret Channing's theological tenets Follen used what Dawn Coleman calls a "sermonic voice," or "novelistic speech that mimics the sound of the sermon."¹⁶² Various characters speak in both brief and lengthy instructive passages to compare the correctness of Christianity against the error of atheism.¹⁶³ Reynolds, the only scholar to discuss *The Skeptic*, comments that Follen's text was the "most polemical piece" of the five *Scenes and Characters*

¹⁵⁸ William Ellery Channing, *A Discourse on the Evidences of Revealed Religion, Delivered Before the University in Cambridge, at the Duddleian Lecture, March 14, 1821*. Boston: Cummings and Hilliard, 1821.

¹⁵⁹ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 92. Ware and Follen were also prescient in disassociating the Unitarians from the Transcendentalists, who only two years later were scorned by Andrews Norton and other old-school Unitarians as atheists for their alleged pantheism. Follen saw the attachments nonbelievers feel for the powers of nature, arguing that "Miss Wright and other infidel writers recognise and deify nature, the law of nature, the order of things, as if it were a Supreme Power."

¹⁶⁰ In fact, Follen gives far more space to one of her arguments than she does those in Channing's book, as I shall demonstrate.

¹⁶¹ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 75.

¹⁶² Dawn Coleman. *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013.

18. Coleman says that whether this fictive language "sounds prophetic, inspirational, hortatory, consolatory, instructive, or monitory, it conveys emotional intensity" – and so, says Coleman, it is found in the "preachy" moments in a novel, and in varying tones and qualities. She argues that where contemporary readers are generally bored or resistant to such language, nineteenth-century readers likely "found didacticism desirable and valuable."

19. J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1990. 227. Hunter, looking at the origins of the novel form, suggests that "real eighteenth-century readers seem[ed] actually to ... take pleasure in being told what to do."

¹⁶³Follen, *The Skeptic*, 70. Alice Grey's was the humble, pious, and simple sermonic voice of a young, respectable, but working-class female; she uses appropriate but colloquial language, and quotes the Bible. Fanny Grey, the young daughter of Alice and James Grey (like Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) reflects the tradition of the childish, innocent, pure, fervent, and transcendental sermonic voice – especially in her death. Dr. Howell, a medical doctor and "a truly religious man" and "an enlightened Christian," projects the elevated sermonic voice of a Unitarian minister. An older, educated, professional, white male, his voice reflected the voices readers were accustomed to hearing from their own real ministers – biblical exegesis and homiletics, combined with compassionate clerical discipleship. Old Mr. Vincent's sermonic voice is a rough, scraggly, judgmental, and Calvinistic voice, which, during the antebellum period, would have been a Methodist or a Baptist one.

works.¹⁶⁴ For example, the chapter titles of most antebellum sentimental novels typically had a gentle tone and were plot-focused, such as “The Struggle with Shame” and “Trials of Heart.”¹⁶⁵ Yet the titles of the chapters in Follen’s novel were polemic – “Reason the Defence of Faith,” “Persecution strengthens Unbelief,” and “Religion is Infinite Progress”¹⁶⁶ and resembled the titles of Channing’s sermons from the same period (1828-1841) – “Likeness to God,” “Means of Promoting Christianity,” and “Importance of Religion to Society.”

Follen’s focus on skepticism and atheism for the text is not surprising. In 1834-1835, a period of intense conflict over the abolition of slavery, an adult “moral tale” on that highly controversial topic would have been met with universal rejection by reviewers.¹⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, Follen did not write one, but silenced herself on the issue that regularly engaged her and through which she normally earned an income. Instead, by targeting Frances Wright as atheism’s contemporary voice, Follen sought to “refute freethought through Unitarian argument coupled with pietistic sentiment.”¹⁶⁸ Since Wright had already been convicted in the press, Follen’s using her as a scapegoat likely would be popular with conservative reviewers and readers.¹⁶⁹ Follen refers pejoratively to Wright by name over thirty times in *The Skeptic* and

¹⁶⁴ Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*. 118.

¹⁶⁵ William Ellery Channing, *The Works of William Ellery Channing in Six Volumes. Vol. II*. Joseph Barker, ed. London: J. Watson, 1844, 1852.

¹⁶⁶ By contrast, chapter titles in Hannah Farnham Lee’s *The Backslider*, the other novel in Ware’s *Scenes and Characters* series that addressed atheism, are more typical of antebellum sentimental novels; Lee’s titles tend to be descriptive, plot-focused, and gentle in tone: “A Good Beginning,” “The Struggle with Shame,” and “Trials of Heart.” Lyman Beecher, *Lectures on Scepticism, delivered in Park Street Church, Boston, and in the Second Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati*. Cincinnati: Corey and Fairbank, 1835. vii, viii. By contrast, in fact, the titles of Congregationalist (Calvinist) preacher Beecher’s 1831 lectures on “Skepticism” – “Political Atheism” and “The Perils of Atheism to the Nation” – bear far more resemblance to Follen’s chapter titles than do Lee’s. Interestingly, Charles’s sermons are not titled at all. Rather, in Follen’s reprinting of them in *Volume II* of the *Memoirs* they are distinguished one from another only by the Biblical verse that was the central focus of each; e.g. Sermon II is headed, “Exodus XXXIV. 29, 30,” followed by the verses reprinted in their entirety.

¹⁶⁷ While Eliza Follen’s forte in the popular market had been juvenile abolitionist fiction, juvenile works were not as remunerative as the adult texts, and in 1834-35 generating income mattered a great deal to her.

¹⁶⁸ Reynolds on *The Skeptic*. Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*, 118.

¹⁶⁹ Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction*. 115, 116, 118. Reynolds says Ware had an “intrinsic fear of controversy,” which “led him to treat the topic [of the errors of Calvinism] with delicacy.” Reynolds notes that as a matter of policy Unitarian author and editor Henry Ware, Jr., tended to avoid controversy and soft-pedaled controversial issues when

many other times she makes indirect references to her, her publications, and her ideas. Follen also linked Wright's followers with drinking and alcoholism just as the temperance movement was gaining significant ground,¹⁷⁰ which would further motivate readers to buy and read the book – and it did. Citing four editions in twelve years, book historian Lyle Wright categorizes *The Skeptic* as an antebellum bestseller.¹⁷¹ In 1835 Eliza Follen needed for *The Skeptic* to be popular. She needed it to support, by association with her, a respectable public image for Charles Follen in America, so that should any rumor surface about something as heinous as his *Unbedingten* policy, it would seem outrageous and unbelievable. In fact, *The Skeptic's* popularity could construct a conservative appearance for the Follens that would safeguard both wife and husband from censure for their support of the 1834 Harvard student rebellion, their aggressive abolitionism, and for Charles's advocacy of spousal equality in marriage, and perhaps enable their future efforts for those causes.

The plot of *The Skeptic*, which contains little action but instead moves from one admittedly tedious dialogue (or monologue) to another, centers on a young couple, the devout

he could. For example, Ware had softened outright criticisms of Calvinism in *Jotham Anderson*, intentionally using strategies that enabled him to “neutralize orthodox dogma” rather than “lashing” at it. With Ware's predisposition for caution, his approval and publication of *The Skeptic* suggests that he believed Frances Wright to have been a relatively safe target for open criticism in 1834-1835. L. Learned, *The Proselyte*, 17. The 1829 publication of Mrs. L. Learned's novel, *The Proselyte*, preceded Follen's work, and so she would not even be the first to criticize Wright directly through fiction; by using coded language like the “female apostle of infidelity,” her antebellum audience understood that figure to have been Wright.

¹⁷⁰ “Art. VII. – Temperance.” *North American Review* 36.78 (January 1833): 188-205. 200, 189, 194, 198. Jed Dannenbaum, “The Origins of Temperance Activism and Militancy among American Women.” *Journal of Social History* 15.2 (Winter 1981): 235-252. The American Temperance Society, formed in the 1820s in Massachusetts, had grown and flourished and spun off local societies throughout the nation. An annual report of the New York Temperance Society saw the direct connection between drunkenness and atheism, for as they saw it, “hearts, before callous and closed” were “softened and unlocked” by the intervention of “temperance reformation.” These “needy and wretched” were “now admitting ... the pure, peaceful, holy and saving instructions of the word of God!” According to the *North American Review* in 1833, by 1830 the New York State Temperance Society claimed to have 1,158 auxiliary societies and 161,721 members, or “at least one in thirteen of the entire population of that State.... A very large portion of murders and all other crimes are committed by drunkards, or in moments of drunkenness... As habitual intemperance and a strong religious sense are wholly inconsistent with each other, the temperance reformation is most emphatically a *praeparatio evangelii*; while all the means, agents, offices, and ordinances of religion seem marked out, by a peculiar aptitude, as auxiliaries in the cause of temperance.”

¹⁷¹ Lyle H. Wright, “A Statistical Survey of American Fiction, 1774-1850.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 2.3 (April 1939): 309-318. 317.

Alice Grey and her husband, the nominally Christian James Grey, and James's atheistic workmate, Ralph Vincent, who is a "true disciple of Miss [Frances] Wright."¹⁷² From the beginning of the novel Follen identifies skepticism and atheism with Wright, her *Free Enquirer* newspaper, and with her followers, who Follen regularly calls "free inquirers."¹⁷³ Ralph tells James that as "free inquirers [they] must unite in [their] efforts to overthrow this barbarous system" of organized Christianity.¹⁷⁴ Through the narrator's voice Follen establishes early in the text her own opinion on Wright's devotees:

Ralph belonged to that set of men who call themselves free-thinkers, or free inquirers, which means, ... free to rail, against the Christian religion; free to abuse and contemn what they see is held sacred ... by thousands of their fellow-beings; free to scorn and ridicule ...; free to misrepresent and deride the conclusions of the ... sages, ... (the *true* "free-thinkers" of the world,) who have believed in the simple story of Jesus.¹⁷⁵

Family-man James is easy prey for Ralph, who "had attended Miss Wright's lectures" and "had read Tom Paine." Ralph begins taking James with him to the "meetings of the self-styled Free Enquirers" and "made him read Fanny Wright's Lectures," the *Course of Popular Lectures* printed in 1829.¹⁷⁶

Follen links the Free Enquirers and Freethinkers with alcohol, defining a shot of whisky as the first step in a family's ruin. In *The Skeptic* alcohol is a bonding agent for Ralph and his friends, that "glorious set of jolly fellows" who were "among the followers of Fanny Wright."¹⁷⁷ He urges James to abandon the Temperance Society, saying "taste my whiskey-punch, and let it

¹⁷² Follen, *The Skeptic*, 98.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 57, 38.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁷⁶ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 98, 19, 57, 38.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

now christen you a man.” Follen connects drunkenness to a man’s skepticism and descent into atheism: Ralph’s “habit of exciting himself by spirituous liquors deadened his reasoning powers,” and as a result “[a]ll his passions seemed to centre in that of hatred to Christianity.”¹⁷⁸ Conservative Lyman Beecher would have approved; he had been preaching on intemperance for years and linked it to “irreligion.”¹⁷⁹ Agreeing with such a sentiment, James’s pious wife Alice had convinced him to swear off drink: “[I]f you allow yourself to drink whiskey-punch, you will, I fear, first lose your reason, and then your faith.... O touch not, taste not; go not near it; for your soul’s sake, for your wife’s and your children’s sake, forswear it now and for ever.”¹⁸⁰ When Ralph offers him whiskey-punch, James is able to “push [the drink] impatiently from him.”¹⁸¹

But eventually, says Follen, people who explore ultrasisms like atheism eventually will suffer – sometimes for humanitarian causes and sometimes as part of the necessary spiritual journey to find God. When Ralph’s and James’s devout Christian employer learns of their attendance at Wright’s lectures, he fires them both from his printing shop for being “followers of Fanny Wright.” James is “shocked at being thus publicly placed among the ranks of unbelievers.” This mirrored the Follens’ real-life experiences of the audience member’s publicly accusing Charles of Fanny Wrightism, of Beecher’s accusing him of being a De Wette Unitarian (on a dizzying descent into atheism), and Harvard president Quincy’s labeling him a troublemaker.¹⁸² Of course, while Eliza interpreted the allegations against Charles as persecution for his ethical convictions, James’s comeuppance is the natural result of his dabbling with

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁷⁹ Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance*. New York: American Tract Society, 1827. 57, 98. “[W]ho are found so uniformly in the ranks of irreligion as the intemperate? Who like these violate the Sabbath, and set their mouth against the heavens ...?... [B]ehold them bitten, swollen, enfeebled, inflamed, debauched, idle, poor, irreligious, and vicious.”

¹⁸⁰ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 10. Follen also included temperance societies as an important defense against Wrightist excess: “Dear Alice,” said her husband, “I have no objection to joining the Temperance Society.... If you think best, I will go and sign my name to-morrow.”

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁸² Dr. Codman’s Speech...,” 388. “Reviews. A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews...,” 105.

immorality – but, she says, the financial consequences are the same. Through a fictional reconstruction of her precarious life with Charles, Eliza demonstrated the real outcome of charges of radicalism for their family: In 1831 Charles had predicted, “[I]f credited by others,” a “false accusation” of Fanny Wrightism was “calculated to produce ... [an] injurious effect.”¹⁸³ Now, just as Charles was finally terminated from his Harvard position, in *The Skeptic* James’s employer “turned [him] out of the office.” James is “stupefied with astonishment and anger” and is frightened, “suddenly stripped of the means of supporting his family, his character injured with his employer.”¹⁸⁴ Indeed, James believes that “[i]t will be known everywhere” that he was fired “because [he] was an infidel.” Now he fears that he can “not ... get in at any other office but ... the office ... where they print ... infidel, atheistical, or any other books.”¹⁸⁵

Frances Wright’s philosophies and beliefs are at the center of Follen’s novel as a contrast with liberal Unitarianism: Ralph gleefully looks forward to seeking employment as a printer at Wright’s magazine, the *Free Enquirer*, the “office ... where they print liberal books, as they call them, which means infidel, atheistical, or any other books.”¹⁸⁶ Ralph says he would take pride in “print[ing] liberal books, and help[ing] on the glorious cause of unchristianizing the world.”¹⁸⁷ She quotes nearly verbatim from Wright’s “Lecture III: Divisions of Knowledge,” which Ralph is forcing James to read, as evidence of Wright’s incivility: “[T]he clergy, are constrained to conciliate every prejudice and gainsay every truth.”¹⁸⁸ Ralph urges James to join him at the *Free*

¹⁸³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 296.

¹⁸⁴ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 56.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸⁶ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 58.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, “Lecture III. Divisions of Knowledge.” *Course of Popular Lectures*, 69. That is, Wright was arguing that ministers were forced to convince their listeners of every “error which the pulpit promulgates” and to oppose or deny everything that was true (that could be verified by the senses). The Wright quote is nearly an exact quote from Wright’s *Course of Popular Lectures*, published in 1829. Since this phrase does not appear to have been quoted by magazine or newspaper reviewers in their articles, and since she quotes the line nearly perfectly, Follen must have had read a copy of Wright’s infamous lectures herself.

Enquirer establishment – Frances Wright’s Hall of Science – telling him that there they will be able to “read what you please, think what you please, say what you please, and do what you please, – laugh at all ministers, and use the Bible for waste-paper if you like.”¹⁸⁹ Follen uses such statements to demonstrate the divergence between the immorality involved in following Frances Wright and the saving nature of Unitarianism.

Follen also includes just enough mild abuse of Wright to titillate her conservative readers and reviewers without breaking the bounds of decorum. Old Mr. Vincent, Ralph’s salt-of-the-earth Calvinist father, quips, “Miss what’s her name, Miss Wright (well named, I’m sure, for she’s missed the right, for an honest woman)”¹⁹⁰ and calls her “that Miss Wright, a fool of a woman.” The New England farmer likens Wright to livestock, calling her a “stray sheep” and “such cattle as that Miss Fanny Wright.”¹⁹¹ But Follen is also careful to put coarse and “warm” feelings only in the mouths of Calvinists and atheists – never liberal Unitarians. By doing so she was contrasting what she appreciated as the objective nature of Unitarians over the impassioned and fanatical nature of both atheists and evangelical Trinitarians. Newly converted James responds in righteous but controlled anger at Wright’s argument that ministers live in luxury at their parishioners’ expense; he says that her “abuse of the clergy is in a bad spirit; she utters what is perfectly false about them ... continually harping upon the immense sum that it costs to support the clergy.” He complains that “If Miss Wright knew any thing of the clergy of this

¹⁸⁹ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 58.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52, 54.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 52, 54, 76. By contrast, Follen wanted to establish Howell as decent, sincere, objective, and representative of liberal critics like Channing who maintained their reason regardless of the antagonism of their detractors. For example, Howell generously does “not impugn Miss Wright’s motives” but “believe[s] her honest and benevolent.” Perhaps Channing made such comments in person; there is no record of his viewing Wright as “honest and benevolent” in any of his published texts or published collections of correspondence, as he does not mention her even once in any of his published works.

country, she must have known [her statements] to be false; and if she was ignorant, she was inexcusable for carelessly uttering such a calumny.”¹⁹²

Halfway through the novel Follen introduces a character named Dr. Howell who drives the apologetics of the text, and one who Follen clearly intended to represent William Ellery Channing: When James’s and Alice’s young daughter Fanny falls ill, the home visits of a Unitarian physician become opportunities for James to listen to the wise Dr. Howell’s rational supports for Christian faith. Follen describes Howell as “a truly religious man ... an enlightened Christian.”¹⁹³ The conversations among James, Alice, Ralph, and Dr. Howell comparing atheism and Christianity drive the plot of *The Skeptic* and constitute the primary Christian apologetics of the novel. As support for their various arguments Follen has her characters frequently refer to Channing’s *Evidences of Christianity* and occasionally Wright’s *Popular Lectures*. Through her dialogic apologetics Follen challenged Wright’s materialism and atheism by contrasting her views on the importance of the five human senses and on the credibility of miracles with Channing’s.¹⁹⁴ For example, Ralph argues, “I cannot believe in any thing but what my senses teach me. What I can touch, or taste, or see, or hear, or smell, why that I know and believe in, and that’s all.”¹⁹⁵ Later the doctor responds, “Miss Wright ... says that all knowledge is derived from positive sensation. ... Can you tell me the form, color, or taste of your reason?”¹⁹⁶ Ralph concedes his inability to describe “how reason, hope, fear, and all moral and intellectual qualities look,” but insists that, “as Miss Wright says, ... our knowledge of these faculties is ... derived from accumulated sensation.” Howell quotes extensively from *Evidences of Christianity* as

¹⁹² Follen, *The Skeptic*, 119. He speaks on the authority of his wife Alice, the “daughter of a country minister,” when he insists that the “clergymen in this country are poor men” and after death become “objects of charity.”

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹⁴ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 19. Her narrator commented that “Ralph ... was perfectly ignorant that Miss Wright’s lectures contained nothing that had not been advanced and answered long before he or Miss Wright was born.”

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

Channing mocks “Hume’s celebrated argument” that “I ought to reject a miracle, even if I should see it with my own eyes, and if all my senses should attest it.”¹⁹⁷ The doctor claims the right to assert “the reasonableness of my faith” in an unseen “Great First Cause” arguing that “It appears to me, that the manifestations of design in a single organ might convert the most stubborn atheist.”¹⁹⁸ But aside from the two pages that Follen dedicates to Howell’s discussion of Channing’s arguments about miracles, very little else in *The Skeptic* actually pertains to Channing or his *Evidences of Christianity*.¹⁹⁹ Instead, her focus for most of the book is the edgy religious notion that her husband was still peddling in sermons and lectures: free inquiry.

Indeed, the primary problem that Follen addresses in this novel is that Frances Wright’s followers, like Ralph, are not exploring both (or many) sides of questions of religious faith. Instead they are reading “the books of the infidel writers, but not the answers of believers in Christianity.”²⁰⁰ In *The Skeptic* Follen repeatedly confirms that exploring both theistic and atheistic ideas is appropriate, if equal attention is given to both systems. It is likely that Follen knew that Channing had shifted several times from one faith tradition to another in his progress toward Unitarianism, including a fascination with Locke and rationalism.²⁰¹ Just so, she writes that Howell “had himself passed through that perilous season of doubt which many thinking

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 90. Channing, *A Discourse on the Evidences*, 205-206.

¹⁹⁸ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 80-83; 23-24. When James pleaded with Alice to “persuade Jane to marry” Ralph, she replied unequivocally with a flat, “Never . . . never would I advise a woman to pledge her faith to a man who believes in nothing but what his senses teach him.”

¹⁹⁹ Channing, *A Discourse on the Evidences*, 209. For example, Channing’s summary statement on miracles is that “the great difficulty is, not to account for miracles, but to account for their rare occurrence”—a powerful idea that Follen certainly could and should have explicated for her readers.

²⁰⁰ Follen, *The Skeptic*, 48. James says that when “Ralph began to talk against [our religion,] . . . laughed at me, and called me cowardly and superstitious,” James then “thought perhaps [Ralph] was right” about Wrightist irreligion. Initially James decides to “listen to him.”

²⁰¹ Herbert Wallace Schneider, “The Intellectual Background of William Ellery Channing.” *Church History* 7.1 (March 1938): 3-23. 21. “[F]rom faith in universal moral order, as exhibited in both the Calvinistic and the republican versions of Platonism, [Channing] shifted to faith in social benevolence or humanitarianism, and from this he shifted to the faith of romantic Transcendentalism in individual freedom. Channing began virtually a pietist, with a socialized version of the theology of regeneration; he ended virtually a humanitarian, with a firm faith in human nature.”

minds have experienced; he was possessed of the arguments against as well as for a faith which he now held with an unwavering assurance.” Now, after all of that exploration the doctor was “a humble, earnest Christian,” said the narrator.²⁰² James’s wife Alice begins the discussion in *The Skeptic*, urging her husband, “[I]f you allow yourself to hear arguments against your religion, you ought to read and try to inform yourself of the argument in favor of it.”²⁰³ Later she says, “You have ... for some time been studying all on one side of the question [of belief].... [L]et us now study the other together.”²⁰⁴ When Ralph comments to Dr. Howell that “gentlemen of your profession are more disposed to free inquiry than those of other professions. You notice facts, and judge by your senses, the only means by which we actually *know* any thing,” Howell takes issue with this definition of free enquiry from “Miss Wright, your great authority.”²⁰⁵ The doctor argues that a “*free inquirer* should read both sides, or he has hardly a right to his name.”²⁰⁶ Howell says that “[i]f free inquiry ... means fair and full and faithful inquiry,” then the honest seeker of wisdom would study widely in religious teachings and realize that “the religious sentiment is natural to man, and that the whole history of man attests it.”²⁰⁷ Free inquiry, argues the doctor, leads to Christian faith, not to atheism. For Howell (and for Charles), allowing questioners to consider the tenets of atheism would enable them to realize how foolish and wrong they are, and return finally to Christianity. Follen’s narrator in *The Skeptic* claims that Ralph or any of Wright’s Free Enquirers, “the self-styled ‘free-thinker,’” demonstrates that he

²⁰² Follen, *The Skeptic*, 70.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 85. Howell says that a seeker “would find that all superstition,” or old-fashioned Calvinistic doctrine, “is grounded upon an original principle in the nature of man, which leads him to reach after the infinite, to believe in the invisible.” That is, orthodox Calvinist doctrines, admittedly outdated and wrong in many ways, had originated in the truth of reliance on a supreme being; so, rather than relying on “what his weak and uncertain senses can teach him” and abandoning Protestantism altogether, the seeker should “hold this part of his nature, his own spiritual being, as ... real and incontestable.”

“fears religious inquiry” when he refuses to study both sides of the theism question.²⁰⁸ In the end, James reaffirms his faith in the salvific powers of Jesus Christ and anticipates a peaceful and successful life, while Ralph chooses the “principles acknowledged by infidels” and dies a ghastly death – a consequence, according to Eliza Follen, of his conviction that free inquiry meant only the freedom to reject Christianity.²⁰⁹

It is safe to say that Eliza Follen’s novel *The Skeptic* was born out of complicated circumstances. In 1834-1835, when Charles needed to convince an established Unitarian church to hire him as a permanent minister with a comfortable salary, he was vulnerable to criticism on several different fronts, as I have demonstrated in this chapter. Any novel that Eliza Follen wrote at this time needed to seek support for her and her husband from powerful conservative reviewers. She needed to take any opportunity she could to reduce their reputation as a radical couple and increase Charles’s likelihood of winning a reliable means of supporting their family – yet 1835 was the very moment in which they both were intensifying their involvement with anti-slavery work. Henry Ware, Jr., needed a book on a religious and not a political topic, which she could have produced by criticizing the ideology of pro-slavery Christianity. While such a novel would have been intellectually and emotionally fulfilling for her, it would have been considered an outrage by popular society. So in fact Eliza entirely silenced herself on the issue that she cared about most in order to protect her family.

Instead, when Ware tapped Eliza to write a pro-Unitarian, anti-atheism work and not a novel condemning pro-slavery Christianity, Eliza Follen’s self-silencing maximized the opportunity to improve her family’s reputation. The spiritual arena in which Charles was most immediately vulnerable was his advocacy of genuinely free inquiry. Not only should atheists

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 122.

study Christianity, Charles argued, it also was not detrimental for Christians to study arguments supporting atheism as well as Christianity, for they were likely to choose the latter and then feel affirmed in the wisdom of their free choice. But such a position would have been controversial and so Eliza, unsurprisingly, mirrored in *The Skeptic* only the part of Charles's argument that encouraged atheists to consider Christianity. While Eliza ostensibly chose in *The Skeptic* to redact the preeminent William Ellery Channing's support of the credibility of miracles in *Evidences of Christianity*, yet she expended far more effort justifying Charles's support of free inquiry as a pathway to Christian belief than she did Channing's on miracles. In fact, Dr. Howell's defense of free inquiry reflects Charles's preaching more so than it does Channing's, since the idea does not appear in *Evidences of Christianity* at all, while it is prominent in several of Charles's sermons and lectures. Through *The Skeptic* Follen defended a notion of her husband's that threatened his ministerial job prospects – that religious seekers should not be discouraged from investigating both theistic and atheistic perspectives before making a religious choice. As a result, *The Skeptic* became a simple plea to would-be atheists to consider the truth of Christianity – a popular conservative position – and certainly Eliza's scapegoating of Frances Wright would win her husband some small amount of leverage with evangelical reviewers. By silencing herself on the evils of slavery and turning instead to promoting only the acceptable aspects of her husband's questionable views on free inquiry, she won favor from the conventional press.

After Follen wrote *The Skeptic* and saw it published in 1835, Charles continued to uphold his argument that Christians should tolerate atheism in others. In 1837 he addressed the contentious subject in a series of lectures entitled "Religion and the Church,"²¹⁰ stating flatly that

²¹⁰Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 446. "Directly after his return he commenced a course of lectures in the church, on infidelity, which was well attended; the house was always full. Many of those men who are so unhappy as to

“sincere skepticism [and] unbelief, though often stigmatized as infidelity and irreligion, are necessary stages in the progress of religion.”²¹¹ According to Spindler, Charles planned to open a “free church on broad, unsectarian principles,” but realized that the “time was not yet ripe for the full realization of the projected religious reform which hovered before his eyes.”²¹² Charles also had plans to start a new magazine entitled *All Sides*. He wrote out a list of topics he intended to cover “from all sides,” including “creeds and no creeds,” the “political rights of women,” “universal suffrage,” and “relative rights of husband and wife.”²¹³ Remarkably, in the winter of 1837-1838, Frances Wright’s husband, William D’Arusmont, visited the Follens to discuss his proposed Owensian community. There, said D’Arusmont, justice, hard work, and education would be preeminent, while “[r]eligion was to have no part.” When Wright’s husband had left, Charles lamented that nominal Christians were “eager to condemn” D’Arusmont as “an infidel”; he called him instead a “noble old man” with “magnanimous love for his fellow-beings.”²¹⁴ Eliza’s apparent approval of Charles’s respect for D’Arusmont must have been a complicated negotiation for her, given that her publisher, William Ware, was yet continuing to reprint her best-selling and anti-Wrightist *The Skeptic*.

And so continued Eliza Follen’s predicament of being legally bound to and financially dependent on a radical; as a married women living in antebellum America, her financial stability

have doubts with regard to Christianity came to hear him. He declared at the outset his determination to do justice to the infidels, as they are called; he disliked the term as it was usually applied. He said, in one of his lectures, ‘I would rather call him an unbeliever than an infidel (I mean the conscientious skeptic), whose life is governed by the precepts of religion, though his mind is not satisfied of its evidence.’

²¹¹ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. V, 273-274.

²¹² Spindler, 182-183.

²¹³ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 634-635.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 471-472. Eliza notes in Charles’s memoir, “I was present at the conversation.” At D’Arusmont’s proposed community “each [person] should have an equal opportunity for efficient action, such as was best suited to his nature, and should receive an adequate compensation for his labor and where the surplus wealth should be employed for the mutual benefit of all; so that the best education, and the highest civilization should be secured for each and all.” P. [Theodore Parker], “The Life and Character of Dr. Follen.” *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion* 3.3 (Jan. 1843): 343-362. Parker refers to this meeting between D’Arusmont and Charles Follen several times.

and personal reputation were entirely enmeshed in the decisions he made. The degree to which Eliza herself agreed with Charles's ideas is difficult to determine; the tone of her commentary about his theories in both personal letters and commentary that she wrote during his lifetime and after his death are consistently glowing with veneration. She never offered any personal commentary about the rectitude of his ideas, but simply esteemed the intelligence, sincerity and holiness of any man who would hold them.

Ironically, Eliza would not have to defend Charles much longer. After several more difficult years, in January of 1840, on the way to the dedication and ground-breaking ceremony for a new Unitarian church building in Lexington, Massachusetts, where he was to be the first minister, Charles died suddenly and tragically in a steamboat accident. In eulogies at Charles's memorial service, in poems written in his honor, and in memoirs by his contemporaries it was clear that many others agreed with her portrait of Charles Follen as the self-sacrificing advocate of human liberty that Eliza portrayed in her first volume.²¹⁵ Eliza Follen had no choice but to find ways to support herself and her young son and did so by continuing to write and publish. Her immediate task was to collect and publish her husband's complete works, which she accomplished within a year of his death in a five-volume set. The first volume, *A Memoir of His Life*, was an edited compilation of his journal entries and correspondence, tied together with her memories of him and information he had related to her. Predictably, in it she continued to support all the doctrines Charles advocated after arriving in the United States, and included a lengthy panegyric of his youthful struggles in Germany. The volume reads like a beatification – also unremarkable, since she was a recent and clearly grieving widow. In recalling Charles's attitude toward skeptics, she praised his courage as having earned new converts to Christianity,

²¹⁵ Samuel J. May. "A Discourse on the Life and Character of the Rev. Charles Follen." Boston: Henry L. Devereux, 1840. 7-8. William E. Channing, "A Discourse occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Dr. Follen." Cambridge: Metcalf, Torrey, and Ballou, 1841. 22. Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 113.

saying that “[m]any of the ‘Society of Free Inquirers,’” the association still formally associated with the name of Frances Wright, “came to hear him; some never left him afterwards.”²¹⁶

Follen’s *The Skeptic* was the only novel to attack Frances Wright head-on, relentlessly, and by name. She never wrote its sequel or any other novel resembling it, for she no longer had any need to defend her family’s reputation. Follen never remarried; she continued to support herself and her son by writing and editing juvenile abolitionist works and educated her son (herself) for Harvard. Yet although Eliza Cabot Follen would write professionally for twenty-five years more, she would never write a novel that condemned the American Protestant evangelical support of the institution of slavery. Ironically it would be Harriet Beecher Stowe, the daughter of her husband’s most vocal critic, who would take the opportunity Follen had to forgo.

²¹⁶ Follen, *The Works of ...*, Vol. I, 449.

CONCLUSION

“REDRESSING THE GRIEVOUS WRONGS ... IN SOCIETY”¹

Frances Wright was born to wealth and privilege, but her values were shaped by the knowledge of the radical-ness of her parents and then by shock at her grandfather's disdain for working-class people. *Noblesse oblige* and then altruism drove her to be useful to the poor, the uneducated, and the powerless. She came to believe that her wealth, knowledge, intellect, writing skill, and public speech were all tools at her disposal to effectuate those efforts. When, pregnant, she left the United States in 1830 at the height of her popularity (and notoriety), she believed that she had helped many people who were grateful for her work. At that time an older liberal intelligentsia, youthful and working-class followers, and women across classes and educational backgrounds appreciated her as a woman unlike any woman they had seen, heard, or read before. Elite- and middle-class white men castigated her viciously, also as an anomaly, and the abuse from reviewers only increased in intensity with every month she stayed on her lecture circuit. The outcry against her rose to a peak in 1830 and continued unabated for over a year, reviewers apparently believing she would return from Europe any day and resume her rabble-rousing activities. Only when Wright had been gone for three to four years did reviewers begin to crow that they really had vanquished her. The comprehensive defamation of her by the conventional press and then her own extended absence from the country eventually led to the public retreat of almost all of her American devotees. The consequences of the reaction and

¹ Frances Wright D'Arusmont, *Biography, Notes, and Political Letters of Frances Wright D'Arusmont*. Dundee: J. Myles, 1844. 8.

response between and among newspaper and magazine reviewers and Wright were profound and far-reaching, so much so that for an entire generation in the 1830s-1850s, almost anything that recalled liberality or irreligion was linked to “Fanny Wrightism.”

This project has described conservative reviewers’ response to Frances Wright and the effect of negative press reaction to Wright on three antebellum women writers. Sarah Josepha Hale began silencing herself almost immediately upon Frances Wright’s first public shaming; beginning in late 1828 Hale began backing away from the proto-feminist message she had been delivering to readers in *Ladies’ Magazine*; where only months before she had claimed the label of “bluestocking,” by early 1829 she was assuring readers that she would not “tinge all her sex *blue*.”² Lydia Maria Child silenced herself in early 1829 by altering her normal marketing and distribution process for her enormously radical novel *First Settlers of New-England*, an attack on American politicians for their treatment of the Cherokee. Child did so in order to prevent the work from becoming known to conservative reviewers. When Eliza Cabot Follen had the opportunity to write a “religious novel,” she did not promote the liberal Protestant condemnation of slavery, a task that would have engaged her deepest fervor, but instead produced an anti-atheism and anti-Wright novel, *The Skeptic*. Follen silenced herself in order to increase her husband’s chances of gaining a settled Unitarian pulpit. Each of these three women wrote a novel that mocked and distanced herself from some element that the popular press saw represented by Frances Wright. Follen attacked Wright’s atheism, Child denigrated Wright’s perceived self-aggrandizement, and Hale condemned Wright’s (and Grimké’s) audacity in lecturing in front of promiscuous audiences.

Yet, while these three apparently strong and capable women writers worked diligently to conform their messages to what conservative reviewers wanted to hear, Wright remained

² “Authoresses. – No. 1.” *Ladies’ Magazine* 2.1 (Jan. 1829): 31-34.

genuinely detached from the calumny directed toward her. That she did so remains perplexing, for it is hard in the twenty-first century to comprehend exactly how anomalous her response was. During the antebellum era, women's mortification at being subject to the public gaze of men partially defined them as respectable. For example, Sarah J. Hale claimed to "dread" the possibility of a "public meeting" that "gentlemen attended," where the "parade of *names* and offices &c all exposed [women] to the scrutiny of the world."³ Sometimes respectable women could be bold in small mixed-group settings. For instance, on a stagecoach ride Lydia Maria Child humiliated a pro-slavery male passenger on the subject of slavery and then bragged privately about it later: "Who this Northern 'sky-ophant' was, I know not; but I burnt him up like a stroke of the sun, and swept his ashes up after him.... never in all my life was I half so brilliant and witty."⁴ Yet she and other women were horrified at the prospect of speaking in front of a large group of men, or men and women. When asked to speak at an important meeting, Child declined, replying that she "had never spoken in public" before men and that she "should feel very much embarrassed."⁵ Privately she confided, "Oh, if I was a man, how I *would* lecture! But I am a woman, and so I sit in the corner and knit socks."⁶

In this same period Frances Wright seemed to have relished and even been invigorated by the combative nature of her encounters, both in-person in the lecture halls and in print in the public press. Wright had headed into the political fray with intention; in her third-person memoirs she recalled December 31, 1828, a "clear and fiercely cold night," during which she had "passed an hour or two on the deck" of a steamboat, detained in a New York harbor. She was

³ Sarah J. Hale to Henry A. S. Dearborn. March 13, 1830. Sarah Josepha Hale Papers, Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library. They often confessed this in personal correspondence.

⁴ Child, *Selected Letters*, 64.

⁵ Child, *Selected Letters*, 128. In the early 1830s while Wright was in hiding in Paris, Eliza Sharples began speaking as the Lady of the Rotunda under the wing of her husband, Robert Carlile – but even with *Isis*, her newspaper, she did not threaten genteel womanhood across England, for she had no resources outside of Carlile's and spoke only in one theatre in London.

⁶ Child, *Selected Letters*, 64.

just then arriving in New York to establish the *Free Enquirer* and the Hall of Reason. She had “gaz[ed] on that [city] which was to be the chief seat of her exertions, and, as she foresaw, of painful and complicated sacrifice and persecution.” She remembered thinking of the network of people from whom she was about to “sever” her connections – “[f]riends in official situations or political standing, whom considerations of propriety would oblige her in appearance to forget.” Reformers became, she wrote, “excommunicated, ... removed ... from the sympathy of society, for whose sake they consent to be crucified.” With regret she cut ties from close contacts, for their sake, predicting that infamy would follow her and destroy their reputations for being associated with her: “Houses in which she had been as a daughter, ... she must now pass ... [as] a stranger. Some she knew would understand her course and in silence appreciate her motives. Others might feel embarrassed.” She believed that “a really consistent reformer stands exposed ... [to] injury and inconvenience of every kind and every hour.”⁷ So Wright willingly moved forward into years of confrontations with conservatives who mocked and insulted her.

This project has not pursued how or why Frances Wright withstood and interpreted the written and shouted verbal abuse that was dealt her, given the contemporary standards for polite behavior.⁸ What she did in engendering the open contempt of men was simply unimaginable for a woman in 1830 – yet for her it seemed to be nothing more than an adventure and an opportunity to sacrifice herself for those who could not defend themselves. It was only after mob violence began erupting regularly at her lectures that in 1839 Wright quit her attempts to speak publicly in the United States; she was by that time being openly derided as more shameful

⁷ Wright D’Arusmont, *Biography* . 42-44.

⁸ I confess to curiosity as to whether an old-fashioned psychological analysis of Wright might place her on the low end of the autism spectrum.

than a “street walker.”⁹ Wright retreated to a cabin at Nashoba and to a house she had built for herself Cincinnati, and a life of solitary reflection and writing. She interacted with few people; a carpenter recalled her eagerness to share her ideas, and a trusted lawyer, William Gholson, cared for her finances until her death.¹⁰

Her efforts certainly had no immediate positive effect for the people for whom she had fought – not for enslaved people, not for working-men, not for evangelical Christians trapped (as she saw it) in their theologies and praxis, and not for women. Her experiment at Nashoba to end slavery through miscegenation spawned no imitations, as she had hoped. Eventually many of the working-men who followed her were enticed toward the middle-class respectability that evangelicalism promised.¹¹ Her attacks against “priestcraft” only encouraged evangelicals to remand women to the safety of domestic and church spaces and to praise them for their piety and subservience. Sophia Ripley, wife of utopian George Ripley, noted in 1841 that women’s issues were being discussed “[i]n society, everywhere” and summarized the Protestant clergy’s message:

There have been no topics, for the last two years, more generally talked of than woman, and ‘the sphere of woman.’... [T]he clergy have frequently flattered ‘the feebler sex’ by proclaiming to them from the pulpit what lovely things they may become, if they will only be good, quiet, and gentle, attend exclusively to their domestic duties, and the

⁹ “Fanny Wright.” *Christian Reflector* 2.52 (Dec. 25, 1839): 207. “This infidel woman has for many years been striving to poison the minds of the people of this country with her Atheism.... Even ‘street walkers’ usually have modesty enough left to ‘keep dark,’ but this super-infamous advocate of promiscuous intercourse presumes, without once blushing, to stand out in bold relief before the eyes of the world. She merits a reward – let her have it.”

¹⁰ In 1844 she spent time in Scotland and England, but again returned to Nashoba and Cincinnati.

¹¹ Eliza Follen made the claim after her husband’s death that many workingmen were won over to the most liberal Unitarianism.

cultivation of religious feelings, which the other sex very kindly relinquish to them as their inheritance. Such preaching is very popular!¹²

The message from the pulpit was that women should be silent and stay in their place. For Ripley, the ministers' gift to women was a Trojan horse. The clergy's "very kindly relinquish[ing] to them as their inheritance" their "religious feelings" – that is, stating that women were spiritually superior to men – gave women just enough moral authority within the home to teach themselves and their children to submit to God and to patriarchal figures. A decade later poet and lecturer Elizabeth Oakes Smith noted that the literary giants – writers and reviewers – had engaged in a similar process: "The lions have written the books, and having persisted and making that part of our character which brings us in relation to themselves the prominent subject of comment, they have ignored our other attributes till there is a vague feeling engendered that a woman is the worse for large endowments of any kind whatsoever." That is, women who considered themselves only as extensions of men – "in relation to themselves" – were in a right relation with men, and women who instead had "large endowments" of intellect or ambition were the "worse" for it.¹³

After one last unsuccessful foray into public speaking in London,¹⁴ Wright made one more attempt to correct society's continuing misuse of women through written text. In 1848 she

¹² W.N. [Sophia Ripley.] "Woman." *Dial* (January 1841): 362-366. Ripley was a well-educated liberal and a utopian reformer with her husband, Unitarian George Ripley.

¹³ Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Woman and Her Needs*. New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1851. 82

¹⁴ *The Reasoner*, a London radical-atheist journal, announced Wright's upcoming lecture series with excitement, but the lectures were poorly attended: "The large audiences to which she, as Frances Wright, had been accustomed in America, contrasted disadvantageously with the present London ones." "Letter from Madame D'Arusmont." *The Reasoner* 52 (May 26, 1847): 287. After her fourth lecture Wright claimed ill health: "I am considerably relieved to-day from the afflicting attack of neuralgia, in the form of violent palpitation of the heart and throbbings of the arteries, which seized me soon after the opening of my discourse the other night. For some two years past I have been liable to the affliction upon any over exertion.... I had on Thursday night, as my audience would perceive, much difficulty in getting through my task.... Here is the whole explanation of my stopping short in the course, which, however, I am now satisfied my inefficient health must have constrained me, at any rate, a day or two later to have done.... I feel now authorized to meet all such applications with this matter-of-fact answer, *I have no longer the physical strength*." She claimed not to care about the size of her audience: "The numbers of my audience

published a comprehensive 500-page work entitled *England, the Civilizer*. Ostensibly a historical, cultural, and political analysis of England, it covered a wide range of topics and drew significant social-scientific conclusions on gender, nature, and civilization that predated Darwin's similar ideas by eleven years. Wright considered the natures of women and men and came to believe that "the male, throughout all nature's tribes," was "[a]nimated by the selfish impulse, ... fierce in his desires, and greedy to appropriate all that may slake his appetite, or pleasure his sense." On the other hand, women were "[a]nimated by the generous impulse," which motivated "the most timid female [to] become ... courageous for her young." As a consequence the "female instinct ... sustains, and promotes the whole scheme of progressive civilization. Through and by woman alone, the male barbarian is tamed... and ... society [is] held together."¹⁵ Wright argued that these distinct natures drove men's and women's disparate styles of engagement with social and political systems:

[S]ociety – as ever submitted to male government under one or another of its forms, variously styled the patriarchal; monarchical, oligarchal, aristocratic, democratic, despotic-military, or ... the money jobbing, scheming, ... bank-ruled and by corruption ruling, legislative – up to the present, society submitted, under government, to the master-action of the selfish principle, stifles, tramples under foot, or even perverts the very

occasioned me no mortification. I never in my life had thought of self." "Letter from Madame D'Arusmont." *The Reasoner* 52 (May 26, 1847): 288. Instead, she agreed that rather than delivering the remainder of her lectures from the stage, *The Reasoner* could simply publish them. First the editor described her first lecture and quoted informally from it. "Frances Wright D'Arusmont's Lectures." *The Reasoner* 53 (June 2, 1847): 295-297. Then "The Mission of England. Preliminary Address by Madame D'Arusmont." *The Reasoner*. 54 (June 9, 1847): 313-315 and "An Exposition of the Mission of England: Addressed to the Peoples of Europe. By Frances Wright D'Arusmont." *The Reasoner* 55 (June 16, 1847): 317-326. But, she had signed a clause with the publisher of her book (the focus of her lectures) *England the Civilizer*, in which she agreed not to become associated with any public venue that denigrated religion, which *The Reasoner* did. The journal announced her decision with regret, both at the loss of the opportunity to publish Wright and that she had acceded to such a demand for silence. "Influence of the Pulpit in the Nineteenth Century. Withdrawal of Madame D'Arusmont's Lectures." *The Reasoner* 57 (June 23, 1847): 345-352. They were true fans, though, and continued to recount news of Wright's activities to their readers.

¹⁵ [Frances Wright.] *England the Civilizer: Her History Developed in its Principles; with reference to the civilizational history of Modern Europe, (America inclusive,) and with a view to the denouement of the difficulties of the hour. By a woman.* London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1848. 12.

nature of the generous. And this by forcibly circumscribing all the holy influences and lofty aspirations of woman within the narrowest precincts of the individual family circle.¹⁶

Wright agreed with Sophia Ripley's complaint that the clergy had pushed women back into isolation in the private sphere, "the individual family circle," but expanded beyond the clerical circle of "selfish" male perpetrators to include bankers and politicians as well. She argued that in fact "woman" had "sublime duties which – as the collective mother of the collective species – she alone can fulfil, she alone can distinguish." Wright saw that men had denied woman the authority to engage in performing those duties, but instead dubbed her the "providence and guardian angel" of her individual family unit. Then in order to "sustain" that good and holy "character," a woman had to "forcibly clos[e] her eyes upon the claims of the great human family without that circle." Wright saw each woman as directed not to concern herself with the greater problems of society at large, but to concentrate solely on her own family. This belief required her to close off and "estrang[e] her soul from the conception of all the glorious powers as yet dormant within her." Wright predicted that, thus co-opted and in order to maintain the integrity of the family, women had come to accept the subservient position forced upon them, even becoming the "stringent conservative sustainer of the established order." Ultimately, Wright believed, women had done so in order to protect the "great human family" and to preserve the species.¹⁷

For the first time in twenty years Wright published a major text anonymously, certainly hoping to increase the chances that it would be read, since she understood that her popularity had evaporated. Still, *England the Civilizer* was scarcely noticed in America, even when it was

¹⁶ [Wright], *England the Civilizer*, 12-13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

connected to her, for by 1848 conservative American reviewers simply had dismissed Wright as no longer a serious threat. In fact, it is unlikely the text was read by few outside of a small group of working-class supporters in England. That would not have surprised Wright, who commented after the above musings on the nature of gender that “[t]his may require elucidation in an age when scarcely any think deeply, and but a minority ever think at all.”¹⁸



Fig. C.1 Frances Wright,
daguerreotype, c. 1850,
Cincinnati

In 1852 at age fifty-six, Wright fell in Cincinnati on the winter ice and broke her hip. Living alone and with only a hired servant at her side – her estranged daughter never came to her – she lay in bed “in torture” for months, but her hip did not heal and she came down with influenza. Knowing she was dying, she wrote to her lawyer William Gholson, “This is a sorry world for w^{ch} we take so much trouble – you to punish its errors & I to prevent them.”¹⁹ At her solitary death two weeks later all she had to hold onto was her belief that it had been her life’s duty to help those in need, regardless of the public’s acknowledgement of her efforts.²⁰ The

¹⁸ [Wright], *England the Civilizer*, 12.

¹⁹ Frances Wright to William Gholson. Nov. 29, 1852. Frances Wright Papers. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio.

²⁰ *Ibid.* In a letter from Wright to her lawyer, William Gholson, a month before she died, she wrote, “I passed the night in torture & my corporeal barometer stands at the same point of storm now, for heavy rains this morning.” Rental agreement between Frances Wright D’Arusmont and Mr. Ezekiel for Wright’s house at 19 William Street at the corner of Elm and William streets in Cincinnati, 16 February 1846. Folder 26, unnumbered item. Letter from P.G. Gaines to Frances Wright, 19 Dec. 1844. Item 26. Frances Wright Papers. Cincinnati Museum Center,

Unitarian *Christian Inquirer* reported that “the last morning of her life she replied, when it was told her that she could not live many hours, ‘Then I can do no more good to mankind.’”²¹ In 1857 suffragist and public lecturer Ernestine Rose said, in private, “Frances Wright ... was a noble, (but much scorned) woman.... Frances died ... a heart-broken, harassed woman – all her philanthropic schemes and ideas, coming to naught.”²²

In fact Wright did make a lasting difference in how American women perceived themselves and their capabilities. None of those who were aware of her lecture campaigns could forget that Wright had challenged evangelical and patriarchal domination in the United States adamantly and repeatedly, though even at the end of her own life none yet would admit to it. Three antebellum female novelists – Sarah J. Hale, Lydia Maria Child, and Eliza C. Follen – could have told very different stories of enslaved people escaping cruel masters or female protagonists demanding rights to their children, earnings, physical well-being, and even the vote. But in order to sell books to provide for their families, instead they mocked and shamed Frances Wright. The near-hagiographic memoir of Wright self-published in 1855 by Amos Gilbert, *Free Enquirer* editor and Wright’s devoted friend, contained the last printed words supportive of her until 1881.²³ Only after her death did early feminists privately begin to acknowledge the groundbreaking work she had performed. In 1855 in a personal letter Lucretia Mott felt that feminist writer and speaker Ernestine Rose had “vindicated ... Frances Wright’s womanhood”

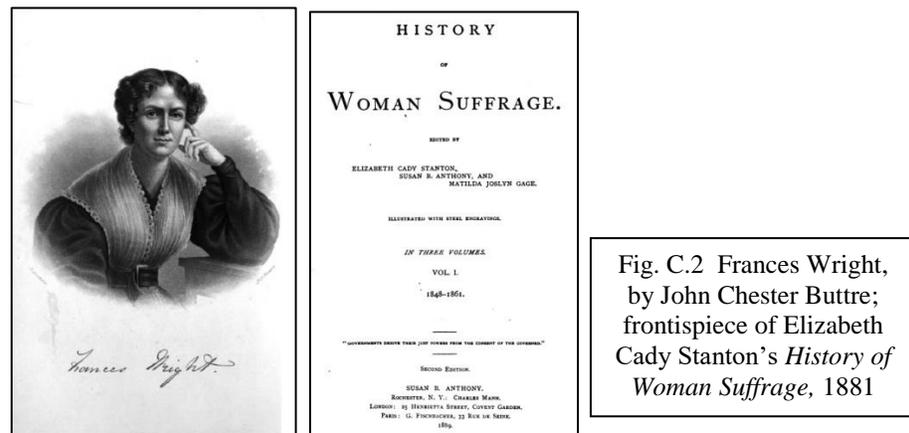
Cincinnati, Ohio. Morris, I have located the address of the house and visited the spot where Wright died; the house is no longer standing. *Frances Wright*, 286. In her 1850 divorce papers she “had an estate worth \$150,000.”

²¹ “Editorial Correspondence: Cincinnati, Dec. 17, 1852. Mrs. Frances Wright.” *Christian Inquirer* 7.13 (January 1, 1853): 2.

²² *The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman: Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts. Vol I. Family Notes and Autobiography, Brooklyn and New York.* Ed. Edward F. Grier. New York: New York University Press, 1984. 344. In 1857 suffragist Ernestine Rose spoke with poet Walt Whitman, who took these notes on that conversation.

²³ Amos Gilbert, *Memoir of Frances Wright, The Pioneer Woman in the Cause of Human Rights.* Cincinnati: Published for the Author by Longley Brothers, 1855, iii-iv. Gilbert began with an admission that he had “a selfish motive stimulated in part to the work – a craving to be somewhat identified with one who was once the hated of a class, who by the force of moral conviction, have since adopted all her reformatory views.... Those who once denounced now eulogize.” In fact no such eulogies except his actually appeared in print until 1881.

by her public speaking. Mott said she had “long wished and believed that the time would come, when Mary Wollstonecraft and Frances Wright, and Robert Owen, would have justice done them, and the denunciations of bigoted sectarianism fall into merited contempt.”²⁴ The first positive mention of Wright did not appear in print until fifty years after she began her first lecture tour; in *History of Woman Suffrage*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage finally publicly named Wright “a person of extraordinary powers of mind.”



To encourage popular acceptance of their new feminism Stanton, Anthony, and Gage had an engraving of Wright drawn – a far more feminine one than any done of her since she was in her teens – and placed as the text’s frontispiece – they did not want to resurrect the old haggard images of Wright that had circulated in the late 1830s and 1840s. The writers argued that Wright’s “radical ideas on theology, slavery, and the social degradation of woman,” once “denounced by both press and pulpit and maintained by her at the risk of her life,” were at last “generally accepted by the best minds of the age.”²⁵ Yet even in 1881 such a statement was far

²⁴ Letter from Lucretia Mott, May 9, 1855. In *James and Lucretia Mott. Life and Letters*. Anna Davis Hallowell, ed. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884. 357.

²⁵ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*, New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881. 85. It would be the only positive assessment of her until Elizabeth Lee published an article in 1894. Elizabeth Lee, “Frances Wright: The First Woman Lecturer.” *Gentleman’s Magazine* 276 (May 1894): 518-528. After that: William Randall Waterman, “Frances Wright.” Diss. Columbia University, 1924. Virginia Rutherford, “A Study of the Speaking Career of Frances Wright in America.” Diss. Northwestern University, 1960.

from accurate; many brilliant conservatives like the powerful Sarah Josepha Hale still profoundly disagreed with such a serene assessment.

Writer and public speaker Elizabeth Oakes Smith, who had heard Wright speak in the late 1830s, used the clearest language yet to explain the phenomenon that was Wright and that sustained the near-silence that had surrounded her legacy for over fifty years. In her 1885 unpublished autobiography she wrote that while “strictly conservative and conventional” people had accused Wright of being an “infidel,” the real “meaning of it all was, that plain, simple-minded men” had been “scared out of their wits, lest their wives should learn from her example something that would induce them to question masculine supremacy.”²⁶ These were certainly the social realities that had confronted Frances Wright in the 1820s and 1830s and that apparently had co-opted women for the past half century. The antebellum men who had condemned Wright in fact had been starkly terrified at the prospect of women’s empowerment and did everything they could to prevent her ideologies from becoming attractive to American women. Unsurprisingly, the candid memoirs of Oakes Smith, one of Wright’s few true legatees – one who saw her speak and, many years later, entered the lecture circuit as the first invited female speaker – were never published.

When lifelong-Wright-devotee Walt Whitman was asked in 1888 why he did “not himself write up [Wright’s] story,” Whitman replied, “I ought to do it: ... I may perhaps be the only one living today who can throw an authentic sidelight upon the radicalism of those post-Revolutionary decades. The average historian has either not seen the facts at all or been afraid to

²⁶ The autobiography remains unpublished; Mary Alice Wyman’s 1924 doctoral dissertation on Oakes Smith included excerpts from it. Elizabeth Oakes Smith, *Selections from The Autobiography of Elizabeth Oakes Smith*. Mary Alice Wyman, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1924. 83. Date of original writing was “ca. 1885” per David R. Whitesell, *Elizabeth Oakes Smith Papers, 1834-1893*. 1992-1993. 3. The New York Public Library Humanities and Social Sciences Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, 6.

do anything with them.”²⁷ He said Wright had been one of the “unpopulars” or the “radicals” and contrasted her with what he called the “conventionals.”²⁸ No one had yet dared explore the woman that Whitman saw as “too large to be tolerated for long by them: a most maligned, lied-about character – one of the best in history though also one of the least understood.”²⁹ “Fanny Wright,” said Whitman, “had ... magnetism She was a brilliant woman, of beauty and estate, who was never satisfied unless she was busy doing good – public good, private good.”³⁰ Nearly sixty years after Wright had disappeared from the American public sphere, he claimed, historians were still “afraid” to examine Frances Wright’s life and legacy.

A note penned in Wright’s hand, gathered with materials written toward the end of her life, contains the single comment that “The Universe is not a patchwork quilt, nor an orange cut into quarters by the hand of a god. It is unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in Unity. It is a vast entity^{wh} we decline for our convenience that we may study with better accuracy.”³¹ For nearly a century, because of the radicalism of her message, most scholars of American history and literature have declined to consider the impact of Frances Wright on Americans, and especially on American women. Now we can recall from her third-person memoir the “solemn oath” she

²⁷ In Horace Traubel’s *With Walt Whitman in Camden March 28 – July 14, 1888*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1906. 80. In 1888 Horace Traubel took notes on a conversation he had with Walt Whitman about Wright, whom the poet had heard speak in the late 1830s.

²⁸ Whitman’s comment on “unpopulars,” “radicals,” and “unconventionals” is from Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden, July 16, 1888 – October 31, 1888*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908. 135. Hereafter Traubel, *WW in Camden, Vol. II*.

²⁹ Traubel, *WW in Camden, Vol. II*. 204.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 205, 445, 517. Wright’s *A Few Days in Athens* was important to him: “[O]ne little book I remember well – a little pamphlet, a mere whiffet for size but sparkling with life: Ten Days in Athens it was called.... The book is not great but it is interesting, even fascinating – written, I think, in her eighteenth year – immature, perhaps, crude, but strong.” “They used to say – they would say still – that it is a green book. It is crude: it might be in a certain sense be said – crude as the Bible and Homer are crude... Her book about Epicurus was daily food to me: I kept it about me for years.” Whitman saw “something of damn certainness in it.” He said she “got along beyond that after a time: she was young when she wrote that book – eighteen, I think. She went beyond Epicurus himself and he would have commended her for it.... She had got pretty well soaked with the teachings of Epicurus before she wrote the book else she could not so well have caught the trick of his style.”

³¹ Undated and unnumbered item. Frances Wright Papers. Cincinnati Museum Center, Cincinnati, Ohio. While this comment bears striking resemblance to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature*, there is no evidence that Wright read Emerson’s work nor Emerson hers.

had made as a young woman “to wear ever in her heart the cause of the poor and the helpless; and to aid in all that she could in redressing the grievous wrongs which seemed to prevail in society.” As Wright looked back over her life’s work, “[s]he not unfrequently recall[ed] the engagement then taken, and fe[lt] that she ha[d] done her best to fulfil it.”³² Many of the changes for which Wright argued – legal and social equality for African Americans and for women, and acknowledgement and reduction of religious leaders’ influence on laws controlling citizens’ behaviors – have been recognized as valid only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Her efforts and her writings, and especially her lectures, should become standard subjects of study in university courses in American culture, anti-slavery history, religious studies, and feminist history and theory. Frances Wright deserves finally to gain her rightful place in the American historical narrative.

³² Wright D’Arusmont, *Biography*, 8.

APPENDIX: TRACKING REVIEWER OPINION OF NOVEL READING, 1821 TO 1840

Complaints about Novel Reading: A = extravagant passion or addition to novels; B = gives one bad skills (conversation topics, etc.); C = Christian; E = excitement; FA = false view of life/over-stimulated imagination; FE = female; H = novels' history is all wrong; I = intellectual; L = lazy, "disrelish for other employments"; M = causes degeneration to immorality (drunkenness, atheism, promiscuity, prostitution, suicide, lying, gambling, dueling, swearing); R = religious; S = seduction; SY = sympathy misplaced for characters instead of real people in need; T = waste of time

	CONDEMNING		EQUIVOCAL		SUPPORTIVE
1821	<i>Episcopal Magazine</i>	M, FA			
1822	<i>Minerviad</i>	FA			
1823	<i>Pittsburgh Recorder</i>	T, FA, S, M	<i>Pittsburgh Recorder</i>	FA, I	
1824	<i>Weekly Mag & Ladies Misc.</i>	I, FE			
1826			<i>The Album & Ladies Weekly</i>	H, T, FA, A	
1827			<i>Religi Monitor & Evang. Rep.</i>	E, I, A, T, FA, C	
1828	<i>Episcopal Watchman</i>	A	<i>Literary & Evangelical Mag.</i>	FA, A, SY	<i>Ladies' Magazine</i>
	<i>Christian Advocate & Jnl</i>	FE, FA, I, A			
1829			<i>Christian Secretary</i>	FE	
			<i>Family Visiter & Sun.SchMag</i>	A, FA, FE	
1830	<i>Natl Philan & Investigator</i>	FA, L, I, T	<i>Gosp Mess & South EpisRec</i>		<i>Saturday Evening Post</i>
	<i>Western Luminary</i>	FA, L, I, T			<i>Casket</i>
	<i>Western Recorder (FW)</i>	R			
1831					<i>Cincinnati Mirror</i>
1832	<i>Baptist Chron&Lit Register</i>	FE			<i>Illinois Monthly Mag</i>
	<i>Episcopal Recorder</i>	B, I, T, FA			<i>Adelphi</i>
	<i>Episcopal Watchman</i>	FE			<i>Illinois Monthly Mag</i>
	1 - <i>Youth's Companion</i>	FA, I			<i>Shrine</i>
	2 - <i>Youth's Companion</i>	SY			<i>Cincinnati Mirror</i>
	<i>Village Fire Fly</i>	FE			
1833	<i>Bouquet: Polite Lit.</i>	I, FA	<i>Literary Gems</i>	FA	<i>Amer Monthly Mag</i>
	<i>Mess of Truth & Impartial Religious Recorder</i>	FE, FA			
	<i>Ladies' Magazine</i>	FE, T			
	<i>New York Mirror</i>	FA			
	<i>Record of Genius</i>	RA			
1834	<i>Christian Advocate & Jnl</i>	R, C	<i>Young Ladies' Advocate</i>	FE, T	
1835	<i>The Literary Gazette</i>	T, FA			<i>BaltYoungMen'sPaper</i>
	<i>Episcopal Recorder</i>	C, M, I			
	<i>Juv Reform & Sab Sch Instr</i>	T			
1836	<i>American Tract Magazine</i>	C			
	<i>Mothers' Monthly Journal</i>	I, FE, FA, C			
	1 - <i>Christian Watchman</i>	C			
	2 - <i>Christian Watchman</i>	C, M			
	3 - <i>Christian Watchman</i>	C, T			
	<i>Moral Reformer</i>	FA			
	<i>New England Telegraph</i>	FA			
1837	<i>Journal of Reform</i>	FE, M	<i>The Garland</i>	FA	<i>Eglatine</i>
	<i>New York Evangelist</i>	S, FE			<i>Southern Lit Messeng</i>
	<i>Zion's Herald</i>	FA			
	<i>Christian Index</i>	FE, C, SY, L			
1838	<i>Southern Literary Mess</i>	S	<i>Catholic Telegraph</i>	M, S, A	
	<i>Southern Literary Mess</i>	M, FA, T, I			
	<i>Christian Register</i>	A, FA			
	<i>New York Observer(8-29)</i>	FA, M			
1840	<i>New York Evangelist</i>	C	<i>Maine Farmer</i>	I	
			<i>Yale Literary Magazine</i>	M, A, I	
			<i>Southern Ladies' Book</i>		
			<i>Knickerbocker</i>		

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