



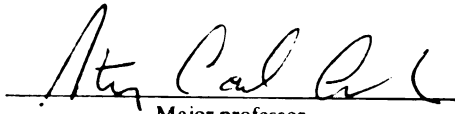
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WOMEN'S ADDRESSES: EPISTOLARY
STRATEGIES IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN LITERATURE

presented by

JENNIFER DAWSON

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WOMEN'S ADDRESSES: EPISTOLARY STRATEGIES IN
ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN LITERATURE

VOLUME I

By

Jennifer R. Dawson

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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2002

ABSTRACT

WOMEN'S ADDRESSES: EPISTOLARY STRATEGIES IN
ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

Jennifer R. Dawson

This dissertation explores how three antebellum epistolary texts - Lydia Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies, Caroline Kirkland's A New Home; Who'll Follow?, and Lydia Maria Child's Letters from New-York - complicate the boundaries between the critical oppositions currently defining nineteenth-century textuality: sentimentalism and realism; literary and non-literary; public and private spheres. Foregrounding how these epistolary texts blend rhetorical strategies, engage the overarching letter-writing and oratorical culture, and complicate conventional attitudes toward separate spheres ideology provides a critical framework for comparing these politically and generically diverse texts.

I contend that Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child can be described as "cultural conversationalists" because they present themselves as outspoken cultural commentators,

performative narrators, engaged in discursively imagining, creating, and educating their readers, while promulgating self-culture for women, and actively participating in public sphere debates. I analyze how Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child construct dialogic author/reader relationships by exploiting letter-writing practices. These essentially propaedeutic texts blend affectional addresses and representational discourse thereby creating complex strategies for teaching readers to expand their pre-conceived notions about narrative and cultural authority.

Just as epistolary practice allows women writers to transgress conventional discursive boundaries, it furnishes a crucial critical wedge for investigating literary texts across generic boundaries. My conclusion briefly addresses additional epistolary texts -- in relation to conduct literature, travel narratives, and reform literature -- with a special emphasis on Margaret Fuller's European dispatches to the New York Tribune. The interpretative approach I pursue can facilitate new interpretations of epistolary texts that have been generally categorized as non-literary. In addition, it can be used to recover authors and texts that defy twentieth-century genre categories.

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TO BILL, EMILY, AND LIAM

Acknowledgements

The staff, faculty, and graduate students at Michigan State University contributed substantially to this project. I would like to thank the MSU English Department for four years of valuable teaching experience, and Marilyn Wilson for her dedicated mentoring. I am also indebted to the College of Arts and Letters for granting me a Merit Fellowship that enabled me to spend a year conducting research.

I am fortunate to have worked with an exemplary guidance committee. Jenifer Banks helped me to rethink my ideas about women's professional status, and her thoughtful commentary enhanced my revisions. Edward Watts changed my thinking about the author/reader relationship. Judith Stoddard fostered my interest in reception theory and has consistently asked the most difficult questions of my career; she inspires my scholarship and teaching. My director, Stephen Arch, guided me expertly through every stage. He suggested necessary sources, provided invaluable feedback (and title writing), and challenged me to keep contextualizing my argument. His example continues to shape my ideas about authorship, teaching, and the profession.

This dissertation could not have been written without my colleagues, family, and friends. Jill Anderson and Cathy Swender, acted as my support team and their friendship, scholarly advice, and countless conversations sustained my writing. Terri Trupiano Barry and Rebecca Coogan, my women's writing group, guided me through conceptual problems, shortened paragraphs, and proved that "real" readers can be "ideal" readers. I also received support from the Aquinas College English Department and especially from Gary Eberle who encouraged me to "keep writing" while recognizing my need for a room of my own.

I received unfaltering encouragement from my parents, Frank and Ricci Dawson, and my mother, Sandie Knight who also combined child-care with proofreading. Long talks and walks with Zoe Carmichael reduced stress and added perspective. My mother-in-law and sister-in-law, Joyce and Jane French supplied priceless childcare. Megan Watts's friendship and dedication to Emily enabled me to start and keep writing. However, my deepest appreciation is reserved for my husband, Bill French, who listened endlessly, waited patiently, helped unceasingly, and inspired me daily. I am also thankful for my children -- Emily and Liam -- whose interruptions supplied much-needed comic relief. Emily even asked, "Momma, did you really write all that?"

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Introduction

A Letter is a joy of Earth --

It is denied the Gods --

Emily Dickinson (Poem #1639)

Letters are not to be read in a crowd, but by one's self,
and late into the evening or at dusk. Nor must they be
read aloud, but softly and quietly, with the mind free and
the heart open. The American Review (Jan. 1845)

Literary critics have interpreted antebellum American women writers primarily in relation to the sentimental tradition while only occasionally acknowledging how some authors incorporate early realist techniques and engage in myriad formal and stylistic experiments.¹ Within this critical context, Lydia Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies (1833), Caroline Kirkland's A New Home; Who'll Follow? (1839), and Lydia Maria Child's Letters to New-York (1843) have presented a challenge to traditional readings of the period's literature. Scholars tend to read these texts, and others like them, as experimental hybrids, or as extended explorations for a suitable form necessitated by subjects and rhetorical approaches which are, at times, conventionally "unwomanly," occasionally "nonliterary," and decidedly not domestic. However, a shared investment in epistolary rhetoric and a deep connection to nineteenth-

century letter-writing culture inform all three texts. Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child creatively present themselves as outspoken cultural commentators discursively imagining and engaging their idealized readers. Letters constitute an inclusive genre with fluid boundaries; and reading these texts in terms of their epistolary rhetoric expands our potential for historical and literary re-contextualization. By discussing their shared epistolarity and then historically positioning them in relation to cultural questions and rhetorical trends, this dissertation explores how these texts metaphorically converse with each other and engage in widespread cultural debates. This reorientation exposes three antebellum authors' common concern with creating and promulgating self-culture for women, and their firm commitments to active participation in public sphere debates, thereby expanding current critical discussions about nineteenth-century women's discourse beyond ensconced genre definitions.²

As incongruous as this authorial assemblage may first appear, these women moved in many of the same literary and professional circles. Their personal lives and professional careers intersected and overlapped throughout the antebellum period. Although this dissertation does not aspire to construct a linear study of authorial influence, the three composite careers do reflect a chronological progression toward fully professionalized authorship.³ All three women also labored as educators, editors, and social

reformers. Moreover, most importantly for this study, these women were invested in a cultural belief in letter writing's rhetorical power. They are surprisingly free of the conflicted attitudes over professional authorship and conventional definitions of womanhood which Mary Kelley documents in Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America. It is my contention that these authors, who cannot be termed "literary domestics," can be described as "cultural conversationalists" because they created dynamic dialogic texts in order to engage the nineteenth-century's most vexing social problems and cultural questions. Through these propaedeutic public performances, they emerge as articulate, informed social commentators and critics committed to training their audience to be better readers and cultural interpreters. As public letter writers, Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child create cultural conversations predicated on their faith in the possibility for cultural reform through sentimental appeals and representational discourse, both hallmarks of epistolarity. Moreover, they challenged conventional nineteenth-century gender constructions that limited female narrative authority.

This dissertation will explore how their individual epistolary voices address cultural politics in response to four overarching critical questions. How do these women create themselves as public rhetors? How do they imagine

ideal audiences which their direct epistolary addresses attempt to influence and educate? How do their letters combine sentimental and representational narrative strategies to create educational dialogues? How do their overtly literary texts manipulate the letter's ambiguous status as an ostensibly non-literary and private genre to enter public debates?

For the past thirty years, literary critics have been assiduously engaged in recovering, interpreting, teaching, and reprinting nineteenth-century American women's writing. Since the publication of Nina Baym's definitive Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870, feminist criticism has continued to focus primarily on the sentimental novel and its practitioners.⁴ While regionalist writers and poets have, to varying degrees, generated groundbreaking book-length studies and sustained critical attention, their works are generally seen as belonging to a secondary tradition. Similarly, the primary literary critical context for investigating sentimental novels and their middle-class cultural milieu has been dominated by the authoritative and contentious debate between proponents of Ann Douglas's The Feminization of American Culture and champions of Jane Tompkins's Sensational Designs.⁵ The Tompkins-Douglas debate's enduring legacy has been to force literary scholars into often critically untenable positions as either denigrators or defenders of sentimental novels and culture. Lora

Romero has responded to this polarization. She argues persuasively that the basis for the critical assumption that nineteenth-century mass culture was "dominated by women" with clearly defined political agendas needs to be re-examined:

At this moment criticism on antebellum culture seems to have distilled itself into a debate about whether or not the reign of white middle-class women through their domestic power base either fostered or prevented progressive cultural politics. (14)⁶

Romero argues against the tendency to characterize women writers as either resisting victims of a repressive domestic ideology or as perpetrators of white middle-class cultural imperialism because this stance can over-simplify investigations into individual authors and their often politically complex texts and careers. Romero's claims complement Sharon Harris's recommendation that critics should develop new interpretive strategies using an approach she calls "process analysis" to examine works historically, rhetorically, and ideologically.

The Tompkins-Douglas debate, moreover, has contributed to hardening the generic boundaries between sentimentalism and realism. By concentrating too intently on how female authors participate in sentimental culture, critics often overlook or undervalue how women writers were incorporating representational discourse into their cultural critiques

well before the Civil War.⁷ This dissertation will argue against entrenched notions that American realism is a cohesive, male-dominated literary movement arising primarily in response to the Civil War. Contemporary critics tend to categorize sentimentalism and realism as competing discourse strategies (generally in response to an implicit aesthetic hierarchy which elevates realism); however, the epistolary rhetoric of Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child consistently blends these discursive strategies.

This dissertation engages these critical debates and theoretical questions. In response to Romero and Harris, I use a "process analysis" methodological approach to discuss influential women writers who exerted a considerable cultural influence and represent a range of complex political ideologies. The three primary letter texts for this study -- Letters to Young Ladies, A New Home; Who'll Follow?, and Letters from New-York -- are intentionally generically diverse. They were chosen for their rhetorical complexity, their dynamic construction of narrative authority, and their active narrative appeals to an imagined reader. These epistolary texts complicate the traditional boundaries between the critical oppositions currently defining nineteenth-century textuality: sentimentalism and realism; literary and non-literary; public and private spheres.

Despite a critical consensus that A New Home and Letters from New-York represent their authors' finest work,

these texts remain comparatively under-read and under-interpreted, in part, because they defy easy generic categorization. Paul Lauter and Judith Fetterley have raised the question of whether or not Kirkland and Child adopted the popular letter writing format because it "offered the possibility of being at once public and private," but neither critic adequately explores the implications of this observation and its possible connections to epistolary conduct literature (Lauter 293).⁸ All three texts exploit a common paradox: they use a rhetorical form, conventionally valued as private, and non-literary, and often celebrated as a marker of genteel female accomplishment, to create a public forum, thereby providing an apt trope for exploring public/private sphere debates.

The ensuing chapters will interpret Letters to Young Ladies, A New Home; Who'll Follow?, and Letters from New York within the historical context of nineteenth-century epistolary culture, a brief overview of which follows. Nineteenth-century Americans were passionate letter writers and readers. Early in the century, reprinted eighteenth-century British letter writing manuals were exceedingly popular and the letter-books of celebrated seventeenth and eighteenth-century English writers -- such as Margaret Lucas Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, Katherine Fowler Philips, Samuel Richardson, Alexander Pope, Aphra Behn, Lady Wortley Montague, and Horace Walpole -- were popular

literary staples.⁹ However, in the late eighteenth century, as writing "familiar" letters -- with their emphasis on a conversational style and increased formal flexibility to suit myriad occasions -- became a desirable activity, letter-writing spread from an elite upper-class activity to a more egalitarian form of expression. For nineteenth-century Americans, letter-writing gradually became a marker of upward class mobility. As more Americans started writing letters, homespun letter-writers and penmanship manuals which stressed their uniquely American applications gradually eclipsed imports. Between 1837 and 1857, American publishers printed sixty new editions of letter-writers (Zboray 114).

Americans viewed letter writing as a desirable skill, and rhetoric manuals, conduct manuals, and more specialized letter-writers, which contained an array of model letters, stylistic advice, and tips for sealing, folding, and addressing letters, were exceedingly fashionable.¹⁰ In 1839, The New Universal Letter-Writer; or, Complete Art of Polite Correspondence pronounces the unparalleled success of earlier editions while proclaiming: "the letters are all carefully adapted to the circumstances of our own country, and a considerable number are taken from approved American writers, and were never before published in any work of this kind" (10). American letter-writers celebrated a society which was not restricted by the elaborate system of addresses and titles still common in Europe. American

letters were seen as more democratic. By 1843, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna felt the need to write a short polemical treatise deploring a widespread "letter-writing mania" which so occupied some Americans that they had no leisure time for socializing or neighborhood philanthropy (60). Tonna re-visions epistolary communication, once viewed as a conduit for fostering community and building public consensus, as a potentially all-consuming leisure activity. Tonna's claim attests to a growing middle-class identification with letter writing. Extant collections of nineteenth-century personal letters testify to the ubiquity of letter-writing practices as they reveal a continuum of letter-writing ability ranging from basic literacy to accomplished eloquence.

Nineteenth-century letter-writers, rhetoric manuals, conduct literature, and periodical essays all advocate a conversational style, a general prescript frequently attributed first to Cicero, as the epistolary ideal." "A correspondence between two persons, is simply a conversation reduced to writing . . ." the author of The New Universal Letter-Writer explains; "we should write to an absent person, as we would speak to the same party if present" (12). Prescriptive letter-writing literature also reiterates the constant refrain that a "letter should be a natural expression of one's thoughts and feelings" (Hill 184). This tenuous balance between achieving proper epistolary style and expressing natural sentiments may be

read as a metaphor for the demands of antebellum sentimental culture that prized social decorum as well as genuine emotions. According to The New Universal Letter-Writer, "there are some persons who, when they express a feeling or a thought, of which simplicity should be the charm, clothe it with all the verbal treasures they possess: this is like wearing one's whole wardrobe at once; the figure is lost in a mass of drapery" (12-3). The sartorial metaphor emphasizes both the high value sentimental culture assigns to genuineness and transparency and the cultural tendency to read literary style as a marker of character.

In fact, an underlying tension between a universal call for a "natural" style free of affectation and appeals to follow prescriptive forms and models permeates nineteenth-century letter-writing advice. For example, the anonymous author of The American Letter-writer: containing a variety of letters on the most common occasions of life . . . (1793) asserts that every American should own a copy of a letter-writer:

There is nothing more commendable, and at the same time more useful in life, than to be able to write letters on all occasions with elegance and propriety. When you write to a friend, your letter should be a true picture of your heart; the stile [sic] loose and irregular; the thoughts themselves should appear naked, and not dressed

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in the borrowed robes of rhetoric. (3)

This epistolary style, defined as a spontaneous flow of feelings and affections combined with an intense attention to the minute details of daily life, speaks the "language of the heart," a skill that was increasingly gendered as female. "Letters, when they are real, are usually pervaded by this play of feeling and affection, hence it has been said, that a man can rarely write a good letter; it is eminently woman's forte and function" (Knight 203). During the nineteenth century's closing decades, the periodical press printed essays proclaiming women to be the consummate letter-writers, as well as essays lamenting the rapid decline of letter writing as a literary art.¹²

Several historians and literary critics have used nineteenth-century personal letters as artifacts to explore the links between sentimental culture, increased literacy, and letter-writing practices.¹³ Literary critics have documented the decline of the epistolary novel while cultural historians have affirmed letters and letter-writing as important components of nineteenth-century American culture.¹⁴ In addition, the acts of reading, writing, receiving, and, of course, failing to receive letters function as important motifs and inform pivotal scenes in countless nineteenth-century American novels. According to Robert Zboray, antebellum American reading preferences reflected a reflexive relationship between private letter-writing and popular literary practices:

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The strong motivations toward letter writing in antebellum America had far-reaching implications for reading taste. Since the stream of personal correspondence carried a great deal of affection, it comes as no surprise that the most popular literature of the period was high in emotional content. (115)

Zboray's speculations also suggest how personal correspondences can provide professional authors with culturally familiar conventions and models that can be exploited in the "practical public discourse" of the periodical and popular press.¹⁵

The potential for letters to cross the boundary between public and private is a recurring theme in nineteenth-century correspondence. Rhetoric manuals distinguished between those letters written for private perusal and those intended for publication. At the same time, the increasingly popular practice of publishing "private" letters highlighted the tenuous divide between public and private correspondence. The important public role of letter-writing as a popular form of cultural rhetoric is nowhere more apparent than in antebellum periodical literature.¹⁶ During this period, the periodical industry grew into a powerful cultural force. "This is the golden age of periodicals!" the New-York Mirror proclaimed (qtd. in Mott's History I: 341).¹⁷ In Letters to Country Girls, Jane Swisshelm explains the important relationship

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between self-culture, self-reliance, and periodical reading:

It's all mere fudge to talk about not having time to read, or money to get books and periodicals. Every body in this country who wants to read can find time, and the means of improvement. . . . It is reading, more than anything else, that makes one woman or man superior to another -- that makes one nation superior to another. (119)

Popular antebellum periodicals are filled with correspondences between editors and readers; letters sent from the frontier, or other remote areas of the country; literary dispatches from Europe or more exotic foreign countries; and letters proffering advice to "young ladies and gentlemen." Simultaneously, American conduct books written in the conventional "letters to . . ." format were exceedingly popular. Both male and female authors wrote in these genres. However, as writing became a financially viable profession very slowly, many male authors supplemented their incomes and exerted cultural influence on the lecture and lyceum circuit. Women writers, restricted by social taboos against public speaking, especially to "promiscuous" audiences, relied almost exclusively on the printed page to create a public forum, and in order to augment their finances, they wrote for periodicals and gift books and published conduct literature. The letter texts of Sigourney, Kirkland, and

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Child attempt to entertain and to educate the reader and in doing so expose a trenchant component of the dynamic public discourse wherein authorship was being debated and middle-class cultural identity was being formed.

This relationship between cultural formation, letter-writing practices, and sentimental cultural conventions provides the overarching historical context for the ensuing chapters. Within the context of the historical tendency to reify the rhetoric of separate spheres ideology, the tension between the open letter's dual function as private communication and as public document creates a rich site for engaging ongoing critical debates about women's roles as cultural creators and purveyors. The terms "public" and "private" will be examined in an attempt to understand how nineteenth-century women writers used the rhetoric of separate spheres descriptively and metaphorically in order to explore the permeability of these boundaries.¹⁸ Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child readdress ostensibly private letter writing rhetoric in order to address public issues and audiences, thereby creating, in the words of Patricia Okker, a "public space for women" (6).¹⁹ By manipulating the convention that they are writing private letters, they are able to establish their narrative authority as cultural conversationalists.

The three main chapters follow a tri-part structure in order to explore each author's performance of self as public letter writer, her explicit addresses to an imagined

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reader, and her formal experiments in order to draw out the cultural and literary connections and implications of these epistolary conversations. Each chapter addresses specific rhetorical trends because, as Stephen Mailloux claims, "one can talk as a formalist about the rhetoric of the text, but that text is rhetorically constituted by its location and activity within an inter-textual space of cultural rhetoric which includes the subject positions of its author . . . and its reader" (101).

Chapter One recovers Lydia Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies and argues for reading her conduct literature as much more than a simple endorsement of separate sphere ideology. My argument foregrounds how Sigourney incorporates the rhetoric of republican motherhood and the affectional rhetoric of female friendship to create a conversation about women's roles that challenges nineteenth-century separate spheres ideology. Sigourney advocates an empowering attitude toward pursuing self-culture, a stance she increasingly emphasizes in each new textual edition. Epistolary conduct literature represents an important established American genre that was actively engaged in forming cultural norms dictating behavior, gender roles, and letter-writing practices; as a result, my investigation of Letters to Young Ladies provides essential background for subsequent chapters. Chapter Two, focusing on Caroline Kirkland's A New Home; Who'll Follow?, examines Kirkland's creation of Mary Clavers as a performative

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letter writer who derives her narrative authority from her status as social gossip, explores the text's use of realism as a function of its epistolarity, and investigates how the text's narrative addresses attempt to educate the reader while affirming Clavers's affectional ties to the East. This exploration downplays the contemporary critical emphasis on Kirkland's role as "pioneer" realist and the text as autobiographical document and instead foregrounds her investment in epistolary conduct literature and travel writing conventions in order to reveal how she blends satire and sentimentalism through her cultural critique of frontier life and Jacksonian democratic rhetoric. Chapter Three, concentrating on Lydia Maria Child's Letters from New-York, explores how Child's periodical letters construct a performative narrator who speaks as a public individual intent on reconciling the ideals of Romantic individualism with Christian rhetoric exalting philanthropic duty. Combining vivid representational portraits with the sentimental discourse's conventional tropes and rhetoric, Child creates innovative propaedeutic letters which teach her readers to reinterpret their culture and experiences as the first step toward public reform.

As a composite, the three chapters expand our understanding of how nineteenth-century women writers constructed themselves as authors and taught their readers to recognize their narrative authority as cultural conversationalists. In the "author" section of each

chapter, I will explore how Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child initially locate their narrative authority within private, and ostensibly female-gendered, epistolary practice and then translate this position into a public space where they perform as public critics, and contribute to cultural formation. They construct performative first person narrators who exploit the assumption that letters are autobiographical and somehow reveal a "true" self. Brief biographical background will be provided; however, it is my contention that the autobiographical components of these texts have already been over-emphasized and interpreted.²⁰ In contrast, my argument contends that these are constructed identities which create narrative authority within culturally constructed norms for female behavior while at the same time causing, in Judith Butler's words, "gender trouble" by challenging the idea that women should not participate in public sphere debates.²¹ As Stephen Railton explains, nineteenth-century notions of authorship were particularly dependent on audience: "Writers did not necessarily have to tremble, but it was directly before the public that they had to perform. For almost any validation of his or her identity as a American artist, the writer was directly dependent on their response" (19). This is particularly true for letter writers because "the letter is by definition . . . the result of a union of writer and reader" (Altman 88). Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child use their addresses to construct their public letters as

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conversations dependent on this "union of writer and reader."

In the "reader" section of each chapter, I will explore how Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child discursively create, engage and educate their readers through their epistolary addresses.²² As public letter writers, these authors reveal an acute awareness of audience. Their diverse narrative addresses forge textual unity between letters, add rhetorical emphasis, and, most importantly, create the illusion of an ongoing and intimate epistolary conversation. All three texts are essentially epideictic. I will be using the term "reader" to signify the letters' implied recipient, the constructed epistolary dyad's performative other half, and the object of their cultural work.²³ At the same time, special attention will be paid to discursively constructed "ideal" readers as well as "real" readers, those reviewers and correspondents whose reading responses represent important moments for interpreting these cultural conversations and their rhetorical effectiveness.

In the "text" section of each chapter, I foreground issues of "genre trouble" in order to explore how Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child exploit the letter format's conventions and fluid boundaries to incorporate a polyphony of voices and styles. Since epistolary rhetoric is founded on the separation, both literal and figurative, of the correspondents, it creates an opportunity for the author to

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imagine herself as well as her reader. This imaginative act taps into a cultural preoccupation with letter writing as a discursive strategy for bridging spatial, temporal, and emotional distances, a preoccupation which critics have associated with sentimental literature. In light of the recent debates about sentimentalism as a literary category, I will be relying primarily on Joanne Dobson's definition of sentimentalism as a body of literature

premised on an emotional and philosophical ethos that celebrates human connection, both personal and communal, and acknowledges the shared devastation of affectional loss. It is not a discrete literary category, as the term genre might imply, but rather an imaginative orientation characterized by certain themes, stylistic features, and figurative conventions.

(266)²⁴

In their narrative addresses, all three authors participate in this defining ethos as they attempt to connect with the reader. All three texts rely upon mixing sentimental literature's conventional tropes, characters, and rhetorical patterns with the type of representational discourse found, to varying degrees, in contemporaneous periodical and travel literature. I am re-examining realism as a distinct category therefore I am using the term "representational discourse" to refer specifically to those passages in which the authors attempt to use language

to portray the "truth" or, in nineteenth-century terminology, the "graphic" reality of their experience as a strategy for making their rhetoric more visually immediate, emotionally compelling, and representationally "true" for the reader. As Romero notes, the "valorization of the quotidian" is an integral component of sentimental culture; moreover, it is also a trademark of effective letter-writing practice (32). Sigourney, Child, and Kirkland blur the boundaries between sentimental and representational discourse.

New interpretative strategies are needed for these texts which obfuscate, what have become for us, conventional discursive boundaries. Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child experiment within a wide range of letter-writing practices while incorporating and blending multiple discourse strategies and narrative voices. Letters as texts call attention to their fictionality and construction while manufacturing an insistent intimacy with the reader, a familiarity which complements these authors' didactic intentions. What makes these texts didactic is the way in which they consistently "foreground theme" over plot and directly address the reader, characteristics Susan Harris has effectively applied to didactic novels (19th-Century 40). While characterizing texts as didactic tends to foreclose debates about their meanings and intentions, letter texts provide superlative examples of what David Reynolds defines as "open texts which provide an especially

democratic meeting place for numerous idioms and voices from other kinds of contemporary texts. These idioms and voices often conflict to create paradox and irony" (9). All three letter texts juxtapose a primary first person narrative with a polyphony of competing voices derived from diverse sources, including literary quotations, political letters, drawing room conversations, tea time gossip sessions, abolitionist meetings, and frontier political rallies. What emerges are not monolithic political or simplistic moral messages but complex strategies for teaching readers to engage in cultural conversations and to expand their pre-conceived notions about narrative and cultural authority.

The three main chapters explore women's public epistolary practice during the 1830s and 1840s, a period when middle-class cultural identity was being formed, in order to investigate nineteenth century constructions of the author/reader relationship. In the final chapter, I expand this historical discussion to suggest how my argument can be extended in order to juxtapose other ambiguous, and frequently critically neglected, epistolary texts, thereby bringing together texts and authors which are conventionally segregated in critical discourse by twentieth-century genre definitions. My argument suggests how entrenched twentieth-century genre definitions can be further challenged by juxtaposing epistolary texts with

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surprisingly different generic or political affinities. I
amass a roster of diverse cultural conversationalists who
address a wide-range of cultural issues, and use a variety
of epistolary strategies and styles. Margaret Fuller's
European dispatches to the New York Tribune serve as the
concluding example because Fuller represents the first
American woman to achieve fully professionalized authorial
status, a process which I begin discussing in relation to
Lydia Sigourney and her epistolary conduct literature.

Chapter One

Addressing Self-Culture: Lydia H. Sigourney's

Letters to Young Ladies

Hartford, May 2nd, 1850

My Dear Sir,

I shall be happy to write, according to your request, for the exquisit Annual you are to edit. -- This month I am rather unfortunately situated, for the leisure of poetic thought, having sickness in my family, and not the best of servants to aid me in the semiannual household purifications, canonical in N. England. -- Supposing you allow me to re-model the "Sleeping Child," sent for Sartain, but still unused?

Let me tell you, that I admire you above all my multitude of correspondents for the brevity & perfect taste of your little notes, in which there is never a supernumerary or ill-chosen word

I marvel at your industry, very respectfully, LHS '1

Lydia Huntley Sigourney was one of nineteenth-century America's most enthusiastic letter writers. In her posthumous memoir, Letters of Life (1866), Sigourney describes her daily letter writing regime. "My epistolary intercourse is extensive," she claims, "and exceeds a yearly exchange of two thousand letters" (377).² For Sigourney, letter writing was a business necessity, a civic

duty, an emotional lifeline, and a daily ritual. Her literary correspondence maintains friendships, enlarges her literary connections beyond Hartford, Connecticut, and promotes her career. For example, Sigourney consistently initiates correspondences with other authors and assiduously cultivates epistolary friendships, especially with notable English literati, some of whom she never met face-to-face. For Sigourney, letter writing supported her professionalization.

Contemporary critics cite Sigourney's popularity and prolific publications as incontrovertible signs that she should not be considered a serious literary artist. However, for nineteenth-century readers, Sigourney was an important literary personage, a cultural conversationalist with considerable cultural authority. "Popularity, or the denial of it, seemed an irrefutable aesthetic judgment" Stephen Railton explains; "reviewers were generally as reluctant to criticize a popular writer as they were to praise an unpopular one" (19). For Sigourney, her popularity and intimate relationship with her readers signify literary success. In Letters of Life, she proudly chronicles how an incredible deluge of fan mail flooded her writing desk, an epistolary testimony to her enduring popularity and her reciprocal devotion to her readers. Although Sigourney acknowledges that her correspondence "includes many from strangers, who are often disposed to be tenacious of replies, and to construe omission as rude

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neglect," she endeavors to answer their entreaties (377).
Sigourney explains how she often felt overwhelmed by
letters from adoring readers requesting personalized poems.³

Twentieth-century critics have cited some of the more
ludicrous requests as evidence to support their
constructions of Sigourney as an elegiac poet mired in a
bankrupt sentimentality. However, this dismissal fails to
recognize Sigourney's awareness of "some of the most
unique" requests' comedic value (376). "Perhaps,"
Sigourney wryly informs the reader, "they may amuse you, my
patiently sweet friend" (369). The more eccentric examples
include letters from

The owner of a canary-bird, which had
accidentally been starved to death, wishes some
elegiac verses A father requests elegiac
lines on a young child, supplying, as the only
suggestion for the tuneful Muse, the fact that he
was unfortunately "drowned in a barrel of swine's
food." (373)

However absurd these examples may be, the composite
requests show how Sigourney constructs a performative self
whose public celebrity is defined by a conversational
relationship with her reader, an audience representing a
cross-section of American social classes, educational
backgrounds, and literacy levels. Moreover, they
immortalize Sigourney's role as a patriotic public figure
repeatedly called upon to write hymns, verses, and speeches

for public festivities (368). Critics tend to interpret these occasional pieces as hackneyed and emotionally contrived.⁴ However, it is important to note that Sigourney refers to these productions in gender coded terms as "custom work" and "trifles":

This habit of writing *currente calamo* is fatal to literary ambition. It prevents the labor of thought by which intellectual eminence is acquired. If there is any kitchen in Parnassus, my Muse has surely officiated there as a woman of all work, and an aproned waiter. Lacking firmness to say no, I consented so frequently, that the right of refusal began to be counted invidious. (376)

Her consciously constructed authorial persona, a "woman of all work" whose domestic Muse labors in the kitchen in order to serve her reader's literary tastes, has yet to be fully recovered.

Sigourney's steadfast association with promoting middle-class gentility, morality, and piety has made her an easy target for critical attacks on the sentimental tradition as excessively emotional and aesthetically bankrupt. Gordon Haight, Sigourney's sole biographer, concurs. In Mrs. Sigourney: The Sweet Singer of Hartford, Haight explains how he initially intended to explain her phenomenal nineteenth-century success as "America's leading poetess" (ix). Instead, Haight concludes that none of her

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poems merit critical attention, and that her popularity was based on her "wide acquaintance with famous people both at home and abroad" (ix). Jane Tompkins explains Sigourney's status as the author "who epitomizes the sentimental tradition for modern critics" (Sensational 160).

Excoriated for being obsessed with writing bombastic elegies -- especially for cherubic children and chaste maidens -- and denigrated for being exorbitantly prolific, Sigourney has been relentlessly constructed by twentieth-century critics as an example of sentimental authorship as rhetorically conventional, stylistically derivative, and politically conservative.⁵ Most criticism, if it mentions Sigourney at all, characterizes her as a second-rate sentimental poetess, or as a conservative mouthpiece, a defender of separate sphere's ideology who proselytized the ideals of "true womanhood."

Recently, Sigourney's work and legacy as America's first professional woman writer have been historically reevaluated. Lawrence Buell documents "Sigourney's inspirational role as a model of literary success for younger women writers" (New England 34). Buell argues that Sigourney is "a more interesting writer than one would suppose from the standard critical practice of invoking her (with some justice) as an epitome of religious sentimentalism and stylistic meretriciousness" (130).⁶ Mary De Jong's "Legacy Profile" (1988) further resurrects Sigourney as an important public figure and popular author

meriting sustained critical reappraisal.⁷ In addition, Nina Baym's thoughtful "Reinventing Lydia Sigourney" (1990) directly counters critical dismissals of Sigourney as primarily a funereal versifier by historically re-contextualizing her poetry within the elegiac tradition. Baym accentuates Sigourney's role as a "republican public mother" whose dominant idiom was history, a genre which she argues is implicitly political and public (58).⁸ Sigourney's poetry and Sketch of Connecticut have also been receiving a well-deserved critical re-appraisal, primarily from feminist critics, while her popular advice literature and its far-reaching political implications remain largely unexamined.⁹

Literary historians have memorialized Sigourney as the "American Hemans" and the "Sweet Singer of Hartford," thereby misrepresenting her overall career. Her vast prose archives reveal a woman intimately concerned with practical concerns and social problems.¹⁰ While critics tend to cite her prolific career as incontrovertible proof that her works lack literary merit, her ubiquity raises questions about nineteenth-century periodical publishing practices. During a fifty-year career, Sigourney published fifty-six volumes and, by her own account, contributed over two thousand pieces -- poems, essays, and sketches -- to numerous periodicals:

They were divided among nearly three hundred different publications, from the aristocratic

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"Keepsake" of the Countess of Blessington, and the classic "Athenaeum" and "Forget-Me-Not" of London, to the "Coachmakers' Magazine," the "Herald of the Upper Mississippi," the "Buckeye Blossom" of the West, and the "Rosebud" of the factory girls at Lowell. (1866, 366)

Sigourney's selective list, including highbrow British annuals and working class western weeklies, reveals her keen awareness of the link between audience and literary status. Frank Luther Mott describes Sigourney as an "indefatigable" (History 745) and "omnipresent" (679) author who made significant contributions to the premier periodicals.¹¹ Bradford A. Booth calculates that Sigourney was by far the most prolific contributor to antebellum annuals and giftbooks, publishing 225 texts (301). Moreover, the highly influential reviewing organs of the Southern Literary Messenger and the North American Review consistently reviewed, albeit sometimes critically, Sigourney's publications.¹² For Sigourney, the cultural boundaries separating the "aristocratic" literary journals from popular magazines were infinitely permeable, and her ability to cross and re-cross these boundaries should be read as a marker inscribing her literary and historical status, a rank she judiciously guarded and actively promoted.

Sigourney's popularity stands as a testimony to the fluidity of nineteenth-century literary genre definitions,

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as well as to the crossover between the periodical and volume publishing markets, and attests to the need for developing new interpretative strategies for interpreting her prose texts. As her popularity grew, so did her penchant for compiling volumes best categorized as generic hybrids clustered around a central theme.¹³ For example, Letters to My Pupils (1851) is divided into three main sections: fourteen advice letters (originally written to former pupils), a fifty-six page prose description of "My Schools," and twenty-six character sketches immortalizing her deceased pupils entitled "My Dead." Addressed specifically to women, Water-Drops (1847) combines prose sketches and poetry to enlist the reader's support of the Temperance movement. Lucy Howard's Journal (1858), "a partly autobiographical novel-conduct book," celebrates woman's domestic role (De Jong 36). These hybrids have been variously attributed to a slap-dash composition process, as well as to personal greed; however, Sigourney may also have been exhibiting her intimate knowledge of her audience's reading taste. Moreover, the style, rhetoric, and themes of these texts closely resemble Sigourney's epistolary conduct literature.

Sigourney edited several popular annuals and must have been aware that her readers seemed to prefer these generic amalgams and were eager to purchase them.¹⁴ Nineteenth-century annuals closely resemble the standard periodical format which consistently juxtaposes fictional stories,

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historical sketches, sentimental poetry, letters, moral prose pieces, and reviews. In practice, Sigourney often gleaned pieces -- sketches, essays, letters, and poems -- from her periodical submissions and combined them with new pieces to create complete volumes. Similarly, she often submitted selections to periodicals that she culled from published volumes.

The widespread editorial practice of "clipping" -- the unauthorized periodical reprinting, especially of poetry -- further fostered Sigourney's ubiquity. If Sigourney sold volumes because of her periodical publishing reputation, she also commanded premium prices from periodical publishers based on her literary publications. According to Dana Estes, a nineteenth-century publisher, professional authors could only survive through cultivating relationships with periodical publishers. "It is impossible to make the books of most American authors pay," Estes argues, "unless they are first published and acquire recognition through the columns of the magazines."¹⁵ This essential publication fluidity further blurs the lines between "popular" periodical and "literary" publishing practices.¹⁶

During the 1830s and 40s, the appropriate content and goals for women's education gradually become predominant literary themes. Frank Luther Mott speculates that antebellum magazines concentrated so intently on female behavior and education "that at least some of them must

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have grown very weary of it" (History 65). Drawing from her personal experiences as a teacher and, to a lesser degree, a mother, Sigourney habitually and authoritatively addresses the topic. The first edition of the Southern Literary Messenger (1834) includes Sigourney's "On the Policy of Elevating the Standard of Female Education" in which she expounds upon the unique need for female education in a republic because "here the intelligence and virtue of every individual possesses a heightened relative value" (169).¹⁷ In February 1837, an anonymous Knickerbocker reviewer explains that

Few topics are so interesting as female education; and perhaps no subject has risen so much in public opinion, during the last twenty-five years. Nevertheless, but little, comparatively, has been written on the theme during that period. We are glad to find that the chasm which was beginning to be felt in that department of letters, has been so happily filled by our own fair countrywoman, Mrs. Sigourney . . .
.. (194)

These remarks proved prophetic. Sigourney successfully dominated the burgeoning American advice literature field, publishing Letters to Young Ladies (1833), Letters to Mothers (1839), Letters to My Pupils (1851), countless readers and textbooks for children of both sexes, and numerous pieces in Lydia Maria Child's popular Juvenile

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Miscellany. The three epistolary conduct manuals manifest the dominant characteristics of Sigourney's professional career: her sharp-edged business acumen, her commitment to writing as a means for "doing good," and her steadfast belief that American women's historic destiny entitled them to expanded educational opportunities.

Sigourney's popularity should be interpreted as a function of her ability to address her audience effectively by tapping into cultural problems, desires, and fears. This chapter will not attempt to parse Sigourney's complex gender politics. In some letters, she confirms conservative definitions of "true womanhood"; in other letters, she advocates progressive challenges to separate spheres ideology. In contrast, I will construct an interpretive framework based on Lora Romero's assumption that nineteenth century women used the rhetoric of separate spheres metaphorically in order to "imagine" a role for women within the republic.

Such women [those who seem to defend separate spheres] were neither victims of false consciousness nor clever manipulators of an ideology forced upon them for which they had secret contempt. Instead, they were women who found in the antipatriarchal analysis of the family at the heart of domesticity a compelling language for describing women's second-class status and for imagining ways (some more

efficacious than others) of improving it. (20)

Letters to Young Ladies may be read as a dynamic example of this blend of description and creative "imagining" encased in the epistolary conduct mode. Sigourney describes an idealized private sphere for women grounded in the intimacy of an ongoing epistolary conversation while at the same time she imagines a revolutionary phalanx of appropriately educated female educators -- teachers and mothers -- instructing children and adults of both sexes how to be model citizens. In fact, Letters to Young Ladies often sends contradictory ideological messages to the reader concerning women's roles, thereby revealing Sigourney's ability to negotiate the boundaries between public and private while exposing her conflicted relationship with the ideals of "true womanhood."

In this chapter, I will explore how Sigourney manipulates conduct literature's "open letter" format in Letters to Young Ladies. This text evolves significantly through a series of radically edited and enlarged editions, thereby showing Sigourney's writing process engaging in a complex attempt to reconcile "woman" and "citizen." Sigourney's epistolary model attempts to harmonize the spiritual and civic realms: Christianity and Republicanism; private and public. A popular text, Letters to Young Ladies merits critical investigation as an influential early example of American conduct-of-life literature, a genre which participates in the codification

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of women's self-culture. Conduct literature's traditional mode -- letters written by a more experienced author to a surrogate child -- enables Sigourney to exploit the convention that the text is an intimate didactic conversation between women. She repeatedly inscribes the female author as moral republican teacher, a representation which, in turn, Sigourney performs, and which she eventually came to symbolize for nineteenth-century periodical audiences. The successive textual editions reveal how Sigourney's performative self progressively blurs the boundaries between public and private, the very boundary the text, by generic definition, seems to reinscribe.

Within the context of nineteenth-century epistolary culture, the rhetoric of Republican motherhood, and conduct literature conventions, this chapter will investigate how Sigourney creates a didactic relationship between her performative letter writer and her ideal reader based upon three essential traits: "good talents, a good education, and a good heart" (98-9). Through a close examination of the text's four successive editions, I will show how Sigourney refines her genteel performance of female self as letter writer and cultural conversationalist who increasingly derives her narrative authority from her own experiences; creates a conversational pedagogical model based upon shared affectional intimacy to promote self-culture for women; and merges women's public and private

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roles within sentimental culture. This reading transcends conventional interpretations of conduct literature as perpetuating static representations that reify conventional gender roles. It suggests how Letters to Young Ladies may also be read as a dynamic epistolary performance in which Sigourney uses letter-writing conventions to claim a public role for women as cultural critics. The textual changes between the 1833 and 1841 editions reveal how Sigourney manipulates the complex relationship between the rhetoric of Republican Motherhood and the emerging rhetoric of female benevolence in order to challenge the boundaries between public and private.¹⁸ Ultimately, this chapter reveals Sigourney's role as an influential early champion of women's self-culture, and establishes her as an important professional mentor and role-model for the second generation of professional women writers, including Caroline Kirkland and Lydia Maria Child, who began writing in the 1830s and 1840s.

I

A cursory glance at Sigourney's lifework and biography may suggest that Mary Kelley overlooked a perfect candidate for her salon of "literary domestics" (ix). Sigourney was a white, Protestant, New Englander who "could claim social respectability" and although she was not a popular novelist, she published many prominent bestsellers (x). Nevertheless, what distinguishes Sigourney is that while

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she prudently publicized her devotion to domestic duty, she never apologized for her successes or backed away from public acclaim. De Jong is right to argue that Sigourney's career demonstrates how "authorship was compatible with femininity; she enabled American women to envision useful and remunerative careers as writers. It was left to her literary daughters to work through the conflicts inherent in the role of 'sweet singer'" (40). However, by defining Sigourney primarily as a poetess, De Jong's analysis fails to account for Sigourney's complex letter-writing and conduct literature persona and her influence on later prose writers.

Comparing the successive editions of Letters to Young Ladies reveals how Sigourney's didactic narrative persona uses the conventional letter-writing format to exploit its domestic connotations while exhibiting increasing narrative authority, as well as increased attention to modeling sentimental culture's twin ideals: genuine emotions and sincerity. Because Letters to Young Ladies contains both politically conservative statements about female duty and more socially progressive passages that question separate spheres ideology, Sigourney's cultural conversations are more politically complex than most critical readings would suggest.

It is Sigourney's experiences as a teacher rather than her later experiences as wife and mother that provide the subject matter and the ideological underpinnings for her

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prose texts.¹⁹ Her teaching experiences form the foundation for her prose. Sigourney's memoir emphasizes Madam Lathrop's importance as her personal mentor. A genteel and wealthy matron who employed Sigourney's father, Lathrop recognized Sigourney's intellectual precocity and encouraged her early education. Sigourney first began working in 1811 when she opened a small school for girls in her native Norwich, Connecticut. She also taught local poor children and held free classes for African-American children. Her career as a respected professional educator commenced when, under the tutelage of the Lathrop's wealthy relative Daniel Wadsworth, she began teaching academic subjects at an exclusive all girls' school in Hartford. From 1814 until 1819, Sigourney thrived in the school environment where she established herself as a respected scholar and moral instructor.

In Letters of Life, an autobiography following the *Kunstlerroman* narrative pattern, Sigourney devotes an entire letter to memorializing these years while her children's formative years are summarized in a few quick sentences. Teaching, not motherhood, contributes to her self-realization as successful moral author. "Letter IX: Educational Remembrances" describes her pupils and their daily routine in loving and exacting detail characteristic of her personal letters. She describes this time as "the most cloudless period of my life, the most methodical, tranquil, and congenial" (186). It was also during this

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period when Wadsworth edited Sigourney's vast journals. Under his patronage, Sigourney published her first book, Moral Pieces in Prose and Verse (1815) using her maiden name, Lydia Huntley. This didactic generic hybrid was designed specifically for school use and can be seen as a model for her later prose. The publication is a pivotal personal moment: "she realized that she could support herself, her parents, and charities by teaching and writing" (De Jong, 36). This epiphany represents the first step toward Sigourney's professionalization.

The 1820s were a troubled decade for Sigourney. With her marriage to Charles Sigourney, a prosperous merchant and widower thirteen years older than herself, she secured middle-class respectability, but at a price. Her marriage initially inhibited her fledgling career. Her busy new household included three apparently recalcitrant stepchildren, the first Mrs. Sigourney's maiden sister, a fully functioning household staff, and the sanctified memory of a blessed first wife and mother. In addition, she quickly bore five children. The first three died as infants and while her daughter Mary survived to act as the final editor for Letters of Life, her only son, Andrew, later died tragically of consumption at nineteen. Charles Sigourney was a taciturn and pious businessman who prohibited Sigourney from publishing under her own name. The 1822 publication of Traits of the Aborigines of America dramatizes their power struggle. Sigourney published the

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text anonymously; however, Charles appended one hundred pages of explanatory notes that he signed under his own name.

Throughout the 1820s, Sigourney's letters reveal how she continued to publish anonymously and often concealed her activities from Charles by using various friends as literary couriers.²⁰ These clandestine measures were necessitated, in part, by financial imperatives. Sigourney wished to continue supporting various charities as well as her elderly parents, expenses which Charles's grossly over-estimated wealth simply could not sustain. Biographers concur that Charles resented her popularity as essentially unwomanly, and their correspondence suggests that Charles and Lydia discussed legal separation.²¹ Denied the marital bliss her texts promulgate, Sigourney and Charles maintained at least the appearance of a conventional marriage until his death in 1852. Sigourney's steadfast devotion to publishing despite Charles's sustained objections suggests that she increasingly defined herself as a professional author, a status she refused to compromise.

The 1830s wrought an enormous transformation in the power dynamic governing Sigourney's marriage which rekindled her professional development. In 1833, as Charles's financial problems deepened, threatening the family with insolvency, Sigourney published Letters to Young Ladies, By a Lady under a copyright registered to

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Charles. The decision to publish anonymously does not necessarily signify Sigourney's desire to remain unknown. In a letter, she explains, "I wish to avoid notoriety, with regard to it . . . but if it should be fixed on me, I have no disposition to deny it" (Haight 35). The text's surprising popularity catapulted Sigourney into the limelight and abruptly truncated her anonymous publishing career. The 1830s were Sigourney's most prolific decade. By her own account, she published eighteen volumes and edited The Religious Souvenir for three years. In Letters of Life, Sigourney characterizes these texts as intended for young adult readers. Letters to Young Ladies and Letters to Mothers (1838) were widely and enthusiastically reviewed and went through multiple editions. Moreover, her ability to sustain the family financially became a point of pride and also public knowledge. According to Sigourney, her earnings which

at first supplied only my indulgences, my journeyings, or my charities, became eventually a form of subsistence; and now, through the income of its accumulated savings, gives ease to the expenditure of my widowhood, and the means of mingling with the benevolent enterprises of the day. (Life 378)

Sigourney repeatedly invokes her financial independence and a sense of ownership as well as pride imbues her language. For Sigourney, authorship provides a means for "doing good"

as well as a basis for self-definition as an independent professional, a role which she performs in Letters to Young Ladies.

During her long career, Sigourney carefully crafted and maintained her public image. For example, in an 1851 letter, Sigourney includes a short autobiographical sketch about her childhood for John Hart who had requested the information for his Female Prose Writers of America (1852).²² Sigourney expresses her desire to retain editorial control of the piece, a concession Hart grants: "If you will be so kind to allow me the right of your sketch of this personage, I may be able to aid you by some suggestions" (Schultz 106). Sigourney's stylized use of the third person indicates her awareness that they are constructing "Sigourney, the writer" as a public persona, an image she intends to control. Critics have been obsessed with reconciling Sigourney's domestic gentility with what has been stylized as her overweening, and implicitly unmerited, professional vanity. Two lengthy reviews of Letters of Life (1866) published shortly after Sigourney's death highlight how her self-construction was already being contested. A reviewer for the American Quarterly Church Review and Ecclesiastical Register unabashedly praises Sigourney and her life's work, in the process equating the two:

There exists between the life and writings of this noble woman a harmony so beautiful, that the

very contemplation of their unison seems to elevate and gladden the spirit. Her biography, like her books, will teach the young to improve with diligence their intellectual faculties; to venerate their parents, to study the great Author of Nature in His works. (546)

In stark contrast, Timothy Dwight writes a tongue-in-cheek review for The New Englander (1866) which pillories Sigourney's "stilted and absurd style" before evaluating her character, and finally her texts (356). While Dwight concludes that Sigourney is to be commended for her undeniable personal virtue, he questions her vanity:

If the book we are examining shows anything upon its very face it is artificiality of style, and we must believe that a person who could write, as the author of this book writes, must have had a certain artificial element pervading her life in no inconsiderable degree. (354)

Both reviewers equate female self and text, a tendency which Sigourney anticipated and attempted to control, and their differing evaluations identify a debate which remains at the heart of Sigourney criticism: her personal integrity.²³ Ironically, achieving sincerity and expressing genuine emotions are major motifs in Letters to Young Ladies, a text which enthusiastic reviewers overwhelmingly equated with Sigourney. As Karen Halttunen argues, achieving "perfect sincerity or 'transparency of

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character'" was the zenith of sentimental culture. "The broadest significance of sentimental culture between 1830 and 1870," Halttunen explains, "lay in the powerful middle-class impulse to shape all social forms into sincere expressions of inner feelings" (xvii).

Sigourney's often troubled personal correspondence exemplifies how negotiating the fluid boundaries between public and private epistolary discourse sometimes yield disastrous results for her very public reputation. Three biographical episodes reveal Sigourney manipulating this divide. Sigourney frequently presents herself as a conventionally self-effacing domestic letter writer who collects poems primarily for her private portfolio. During a polite correspondence with the literary Countess of Blessington (1842), Sigourney thanks her for a "sweet" poem and remarks that "I had desired to adorn a periodical, circulated very widely among American ladies, with some original effusions of yours, but the very flattering manner in which it alludes to me . . . will oblige me to confine the tuneful guest to my own portfolio" (85). Sigourney gestures toward the public value of the enclosed poem; however, she skillfully repositions herself as private woman, unwilling to be self-aggrandizing, thereby reclassifying the letter and poem as a private memento.

In contrast, two other episodes highlight how Sigourney recognizes that "letters" are commodities with potential public and promotional value, as well as

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sentimental keepsakes. In December, 1842, a public controversy erupted which placed her sincerity on trial. In Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands (1842), Sigourney reprinted passages from a private letter written by Mrs. Southey whom Sigourney knew only through letters.²⁴ Mrs. Southey's impassioned letter provides intimate details about her husband's advanced mental deterioration. The London Athenaeum editor vituperatively attacked Sigourney for "the moral wrong in publishing a private letter at all, especially a letter so obtained [through a polite letter of introduction]" and questioned Sigourney's integrity. "We assumed that it could only have become public by strange inadvertence or accident," he continues, "but which we now learn was published by this 'high-principled lady' herself, as soon . . . as she could hurry a volume through the press" (qtd. in Haight 72).²⁵ The charges quickly multiplied to include an imputation that Sigourney tampered with the letter to make it self-aggrandizing. While her prominent friends attested to the letter's authenticity, the charge that she violated private decorum for personal fame and financial gain endured (Haight 72-3).

In a similar vein, Maria Edgeworth complained privately to Sigourney for taking public liberties with her ostensibly private commentaries on Sigourney's work. In an 1842 correspondence, Edgeworth repeatedly reminds Sigourney that "I should rejoice if my name or my opinion could be of any use to you -- I only request that my *letters* should not

be published" (Haight 74). Earlier, Sigourney gleaned a passage from a private letter and included it in a "puff" advertising Moral Pieces, in Prose and Verse, and other epistolary snippets were incorporated into Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands.

Although conduct literature such as Mrs. Jane West's Letters to a Young Lady . . . (1806) cautions against publishing private letters as a breach of decorum, the practice was fairly wide-spread. Sigourney is not the only nineteenth-century author to transform a private letter into a public endorsement. For example, a more famous transgression occurred when Walt Whitman included a laudatory personal letter from Emerson as an introduction to the highly controversial second edition of Leaves of Grass without asking Emerson's permission. In her exhaustive study of Sigourney's correspondences, Betty Harris Day concludes that her "personal correspondence reveals Sigourney as a woman competently maneuvering the conflicts inherent in her movement out of a culturally prescribed domestic role, yet not as emotionally conflicted by the tensions and constraints" (42). According to Day, much of Sigourney's surviving correspondence, especially during her editorship of the Religious Souvenir, demonstrates her control of the polite-letter format. Moreover, Sigourney prided herself on her impeccable "chirography," a cultural marker designating true womanhood. In letters soliciting literary contributions

for the annual, Sigourney intermixes polite personal remembrances with professional business as she works to reconcile her professionalization, her domestic concerns, and her public image.

Until recently, contemporary biographers have been unable or unwilling to harmonize Sigourney's public performative self's competing aspects. In "Reinventing Lydia Sigourney," Nina Baym explains how first Sigourney, and then her contemporaries, wrote numerous biographies which constructed her life as a "modern success story of upward mobility through hard work and self-sacrifice [which] led to an affirmation of traditional class structure" (54). Baym deftly compares this narrative to how twentieth-century critics have defined Sigourney as the "epitome of the female author in her range of allowed achievements and required inadequacies" (54). Nineteenth-century authors wrote hagiographic biographies inevitably emphasizing her meteoric transformation from Lydia Huntley, the benevolent Madam Lathrop's poor yet precocious dependent, to Mrs. Charles Sigourney, the celebrated author and fashionable mistress of a well-appointed Hartford mansion.²⁶ On the other hand, twentieth-century biographers have juxtaposed her genteel performance and celebrations of domesticity with biographical facts detailing her contentious and apparently loveless marriage. Some critics, like Ann Wood Douglas, have labeled Sigourney a hypocrite.²⁷ In his biography, Gordon Haight depicts her as

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a vainglorious entrepreneur who pursued literary fame with mercenary zeal. Ironically, modern biographers seem as entrenched in evaluating Sigourney's professional ambition as a function of her gender as her nineteenth-century reviewers were dedicated to evaluating her texts as a function of her femininity and domestic prowess.²⁸

Antebellum women writers consistently foster the convention that they are writing from a domestic space even while commenting on public issues. As late as 1858, Catharine Beecher begins Letters to the People on Health and Happiness with an entreaty to allow the reader into explicitly gendered public and private spaces. For Beecher, the masculine realm is the defining norm while the adjective "female" marks the domestic realm as secondary and "other."

My Friends: Will you let me come to you in your work-shop, or office, or store, or study? and you, my female friends, may I enter your nursery, your parlor, or your kitchen? I have matters of interest to present in which every one of you had a deep personal interest. (7)

The immediate domestic setting and the intimate tone allow women writers to comment on public issues from behind the cover of a feminized genre, the intimate letter. Sigourney conventionally returns to this domestic imagery in her didactic letter texts.

In Letters of Life, she metaphorically describes her

budding periodical publishing career as a young ingenue's forced journey, a transcontinental elopement: "On this sea of miscellany I was *allured* to embark, and, having set sail, there was no return. I think now of it with amazement, and almost incredulity, of the number of articles I was *induced by the urgency of editors* to furnish" (366). These protestations re-invoke the image of a domestic Sigourney seated at her desk inundated with epistolary appeals from devoted -- and equally desirous -- readers, a stance she adopts in virtually every prose preface.²⁹ Sigourney's personal epistolary self-representations repeatedly emphasize genuine interest and personal sincerity, and alternate between expressing maternal and sisterly devotion. Nevertheless, her textual representations speak with an authority which contradicts these conventional niceties while incorporating the rhetoric characteristic of sentimental friendship letters. Letters to Young Ladies reflects how Sigourney begins exploiting these epistolary conventions and shows how she moves resolutely toward openly asserting her narrative authority and individuality as her popularity grew.

Critics such as Jane Rose, Sara Newton, Frances Cogan, and Barbara Welter have all variously explored how conduct literature created middle-class "beau ideals" for the nineteenth-century reader and female author. For many nineteenth-century reviewers, Sigourney best represents this ideal. An anonymous writer for the American Literary

Magazine (1849) selects Sigourney as the first subject and "beau ideal" for a series on American women writers because "she is one, above all whom we know, who neither loses the woman in the writer nor the writer in the woman. She illustrates what a female author ought to be. No trait, exhibited in her works, is more vividly clear than her perfect womanliness" (390). Private virtue determines public value. For Sigourney, Lydia Maria Child represents her example of the "ideal" intellectual woman:

the accomplished editor of the Juvenile Miscellany, whose prolific pen enters almost every department of current literature, to instruct and delight, is also the author of the "Frugal Housewife;" and able practically to illustrate its numerous and valuable precepts.
(182)

Sigourney's rhetoric combines the neoclassical standard that literature must "instruct and delight" and the Victorian emphasis on domestic practicality and utility as daily objectives for women. In Letters of Life, Sigourney repeatedly depicts herself according to these precepts while recalling Beecher's gendered spaces. "Hungering presses must be fed, and not wait," Sigourney explains, "how to obtain time to appease editorial appetites, and not neglect my housekeeping tactics, was a study" (366). Sigourney's figurative language conveys pride in her popularity while metaphorically aligning publishing with

the domestic act of feeding a hungry family. It is important to note that Sigourney's "beau ideal" emphasizes Child's prolific production and the ability to publish in multiple genres, including conduct literature, which are two hallmarks of Sigourney's professional career.

During the 1830s and 1840s, conduct literature authors increasingly enshrined motherhood as a moral imperative and women's sole province. Historians have chronicled how motherhood had been transformed into a holy mission so that "the entire burden of the child's well-being in this life and the next was in the mother's hands" (Margolis 33). Sigourney's Letters to Mothers is redolent with this rhetoric; however, in Letters to Young Ladies, she concentrates on another aspect of sentimental discourse and dilutes the maternal rhetoric: the letter writer's absolute dedication to modeling genuine emotions and utter sincerity to influence the reader. Sigourney exploits the conduct literature convention that she is speaking from the heart "in loco parentis . . . assuming the voices of mother or father or at least mentor, fully initiated adults who have completed a successful passage themselves and who have gained the authority to speak for the culture at large" (Newton 157). She consistently advocates deference to one's elders while highlighting the age disparity between herself and the reader: "In youth and health, you can scarcely appreciate the truth of this argument," she frequently intones before dispensing advice (130). This

consistent rhetorical move establishes Sigourney's authority as moral letter writer and friend, a role which surpasses parental authority. Her model resembles what Jay Fliegelman has defined as an eighteenth century conduct literature ideal: "the true parent of a child . . . is he or she who has exercised the most influence on that child's mind and character and who encourages and helps develop a self-trust" (49).

Male conduct authors like William Alcott tend to adopt an Old Testament version of hierarchical parental authority; however, Sigourney favors what Richard Brodhead has termed "disciplinary intimacy" wherein the didactic model is highly personalized and fosters "self-trust" (18).³⁰ Sigourney sets herself up as a mild-mannered model pedagogue whose intimate style and nurturing addresses gently draw the reader's heart and mind toward her lessons. Her addresses may be read as "a strategic relocation of authority relations in the realm of emotion, and a conscious intensification of the emotional bond between the authority-figure and its charge" (Brodhead 19). Sigourney's rhetoric creates the feeling that genuine respect and affection for her audience motivate her prescriptions. For example, her epistolary addresses incorporate phrases emphasizing this personal bond. "Suffer me then, with the urgency of true friendship to press upon you the importance of time," she urges (8). Her persistent use of the third-person plural combined with

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strings of leading questions undercuts the hierarchical relationship of conduct literature and attempts to instill an internal monitor within the reader which will guide her moral choices, a rhetorical move common in familial correspondences. Frequently deferring to the reader, Sigourney invites the reader to search within for answers. "This point I would prefer not to dilate upon, but rather recommend to your own reflection, and innate sense of propriety," Sigourney characteristically suggests (44).

By stressing the primary sovereignty of individual interiority, Sigourney's rhetoric presages Margaret Fuller's claim that women cannot be properly educated until they first learn self-reliance. Sigourney advocates self-reflection as the first step toward self-culture and ultimately self-reliance for women. In Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Fuller explains that "the difficulty is to get them [women] to the point from which they shall naturally develop self-respect, and learn self-help" (263). Fuller experimented, in the 1830s, with teaching women intellectual self-reliance through mentored conversations in which she guided her pupils through a series of questions on specified topics. This dialogic pedagogical approach, with its emphasis on rhetorical questioning, is a natural extension of the epistolary conduct mode. For Sigourney, the letter format with its emphasis on affectional reciprocity between author and reader acts as a pedagogical conduit teaching the reader the appropriate

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sentimental response as the first step toward genuine self-culture and ultimately religious redemption. "Those whom you will teach, will teach you; those who serve you will influence you in turn. The reaction is perpetual," Sigourney explains (1841, 55). As in Fuller's model, Sigourney's text carries on a cultural conversation based on intellectual reciprocity.

In each letter, Sigourney's narrative persona performs this rhetoric of "disciplinary intimacy" to teach a specific lesson and what emerges is an idealized mentor, a model of piety, sincerity, and emotional intimacy. For example, in "Letter VI: On Doing Good," Sigourney contrasts herself as didactic letter writer with her young reader: "suffer me, from the experience of an older and earth worn traveler, to urge you to *bind yourself an apprentice to the trade of doing good*" (102). The paragraph urges the reader to model her benevolence on Christ's life. However, the letter relies upon describing benevolent young women and their domestic examples which Sigourney reports from a satisfied mentor's point of view as she tenderly watches her charges. She punctuates each example with her persistent presence: "I reflected," "I knew," and "I recollect," she asserts (108-9). By establishing her bodily presence, Sigourney is able to perform the correct somatic and emotive response to the situation thereby doubly educating the reader: "So that *doing good* is one of the legitimate paths to *being good*."

Therefore, have I so much pressed it upon your susceptible hearts, dear young friends, now, in life's sunny morning, while God is waiting to be gracious" (123).

Almost every letter ends with a conventional closing which sounds as though it may have been copied from a nineteenth-century letter-writer's model letter for parent/child correspondences. These closings express an ardent concern for the reader's salvation, and they are often written in the first-person plural as though Sigourney speaks as both mother and father, thereby co-opting patriarchal as well as maternal authority. "Shall we say, we have had friends to boast of on earth, but have acquired none to ourselves in heaven. . . . And shall it be written upon our lives -- *time lost for eternity*," Sigourney asks (1833, 24). Sigourney derives her authority from this rhetoric of "disciplinary intimacy," with its concomitant Christian grounding, and from her extensive embedded history lessons. On the simplest level, Sigourney's narrative persona performs the role of an exemplary historian. "She saw history as the core of a republican woman's education," Baym explains, "so that in some sense the domestic 'preceptress' and the historian are facets of the same female construction" ("Reinventing" 58).

In the first edition's final letter, Sigourney's epistolary discourse emphasizes affiliation over corrective discipline. "In pursuing with you, objects of tender and high concern, my heart has been drawn toward you with

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something of a mother's love," Sigourney intones (152). In Letters to Young Ladies (1833), Sigourney does develop a nascent persona consonant with the one Nina Baym has labeled "a republican public mother." However, Baym cites the more histrionic later editions which promote patriotic duty relentlessly. "The motherly persona adopted by Sigourney in her advice book contains a significant Spartan element in her makeup," Baym explains, "and her advice authorizes women to move outside the home when the cause is right" ("Reinventing" 58).

Baym's construction identifies the public mission inherent in Sigourney's project; however, her interpretation elides how Sigourney artfully displaces motherhood as the central role defining women's culture and replaces it with a self-reliant female-centered community guided by a charismatic "republican public" teacher and author.³¹ As Susan Harris notes, "the desire for an education is one of the most common themes evinced in nineteenth-century women's literature; throughout, moreover, there is a sense that knowledge is power, definition; a chance to 'be Somebody'" (19th 27). For Sigourney, teaching represents cultural power.

Antebellum women gradually came to predominate as grade school teachers until "about a quarter of all native-born new England women between 1825 and 1860" taught at one time or another (Zboray 100-1). Louisa May Alcott, Lydia Maria Child, Caroline Kirkland, Margaret Fuller, Harriet

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Beecher Stowe, Gail Hamilton, Catherine Sedgwick, and Fanny Fern are only a few of the literary women who began their professional careers as teachers. In the 1833 "Preface," Sigourney describes writing the text as a "pleasant" occupation based on a reflexive relationship with her students. "For their interests are dear to me;" Sigourney explains, "and several years devoted to their instruction, have unfolded more fully their claims to regard, and the influence they might exercise in society" (3). Sigourney emphasizes that her experience as a teacher rather than a mother authorizes the text. This is an important distinction because Sigourney is not basing her authority on the emerging cultural discourse exalting women's innate moral superiority, but rather is choosing to ground her authority on her public duty and intellectual ability. This is not to suggest that Sigourney is radically altering existing constructions of woman's role, but that she is advocating an important shift in how self-culture was being justified and promulgated for women, a rhetorical move which aligns her text with Margaret Fuller.

At the time, many vocal educational reformers were stressing the continuity between motherhood and teaching. As Mary Kelley explains, "there was a strong sense that women employed as teachers were serving as surrogate mothers. Except for the very few who remained unmarried, their experience was frequently seen as training for actual motherhood" (61). In "Letter XIV: Superficial

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Attainments," Sigourney explains how the female life stages from childhood to motherhood can be interpreted as progressive teaching experiences ultimately dedicated to fostering Christian salvation:

But the daughter or sister, in the quietness of the parental home, the faithful teacher in the village school-house, the mother in her secluded nursery, are they not all forming others after their model -- writing deathless words upon that which is never to die? (206)

The domestic writing metaphor conjures up images of female letter writers and invokes the authorial influence Sigourney wields by adopting these complementary roles. Writing as a teacher therefore grants Sigourney narrative authority while allowing her to exploit its culturally derived maternal and spiritual connotations.

When the editions are read chronologically, a persistent pattern of subtle editorial omissions and the more obvious additions becomes obvious. Throughout the texts, Sigourney quotes historical personages, and American, British, and Classical authors. Her extensive roster of authorities includes Harriet Martineau, Cicero, Benjamin Franklin, Catharine Beecher, Cotton Mather, Hannah More, and the Rev. Gallaudet, to name only a few. However, in the 1841 text, Sigourney edits out many of the references to American luminaries such as "the principal of the Troy Female Seminary" and the editor of the "American

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Ladies' Magazine" (1835, 181). Moreover, she increasingly quotes notables without identifying them or the sources. This practice may suggest that Sigourney is attempting to make the text more accessible to an English audience; however, these deletions also indicate a growing confidence in her own narrative authority. At the same time, this shift aligns the letters more closely with conventional private correspondences in which anecdotes about mutual friends and acquaintances are standard. Sigourney's rhetorical strategy evolves away from reliance on outside sources toward increased use of her own experiences as argumentative evidence.

The sequential prefaces to Letters to Young Ladies can be read as an encapsulated metaphor for how women authors, in general, evolved from writing anonymously in the 1830s to active self-promotion by the 1840s and 1850s. When Letters to Young Ladies first appeared, the title page bore the conventional anonymous signature, "By a Lady." The short "Preface" includes the obligatory refrain that she has "been requested to address a few thoughts to the youth of my own sex, on subjects of simple nature, and serious concern" (3). Her sentimental effusions situate "this little volume" firmly within the domestic tradition (3). In the second edition (1835), "By Mrs. L. H. Sigourney" appears prominently on the title page and the "Preface" concludes with her widely recognized signature "L.H.S." Clearly, the publisher is eager to exploit her growing

popularity. In 1841, the London edition boasts a lengthy "Introduction" in which Sigourney greatly expands her audience to include "those who direct [women's] education, either as parents, instructors, or rulers of popular opinion" (1). Sigourney's rhetoric moves beyond the flowery and self-deprecating original "Preface" and establishes her as a missionary working for human progress. Sigourney equates her role as author with "not only the practical man, but the divine, the philosopher, and the poet, devising modes of nurture for the unfolding mind, and striving to make useful knowledge the guest of the common people," thereby claiming a powerful public role (1-2). Moving beyond the motherhood trope, Sigourney equates herself with masculine culture creators. The "Introduction" adopts a historical stance and Sigourney's highly charged republican rhetoric fuses her call to "True Womanhood" with an endorsement of women's vocation as teachers. Sigourney's admonition that "the domestic sphere is her province" seems conservative and yet her argument that women are "natural teachers" also accords them the "highest honours" as "allies of legislatures" (5). "Well, may statesman and philosophers debate how she is to be best educated who is to educate all mankind," she states (7). The "Introduction" crosses gender boundaries to validate Sigourney's vision of the epistolary author as moral instructor, historian, cultural conversationalist, and universal educator. In the successive editions, Sigourney

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voices a strong narrative authority which she increasingly manipulates in order to market herself as a self-made commodity, thereby actively participating in the masculine literary marketplace.

II

Although contemporary critics have construed Sigourney's popularity into an aesthetic liability, nineteenth-century reviewers cite it as proof of her incontrovertible merit. In fact, the laudatory "Lydia Huntley Sigourney," published in the Jan. 1849 American Literary Magazine, begins with a conventional lecture on the proper topics, genres, and style for a woman writer and ultimately celebrates Sigourney in terms of the "virtue of popularity" (391). "If any one doubts to what her fame is due, let him ask the hearts of her readers," the author exclaims (391). In Letters of Life, Sigourney echoes this sentiment using conventional sentimental language to validate her preoccupation with letter writing:

Yet if ever inclined to account so large a correspondence burdensome, I solace myself with the priceless value of the epistles of long-trying friendship with the warm vitality often breathing from young hearts, and the hope of disseminating through this quiet vehicle, some cheering thought or hallowed principle. (378)

Sigourney defines the essence of letter writing -- both

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public and private -- as an inherently didactic and Christian process of engaging the reader's sentiments, or "heart," thereby positioning her text within cultural letter-writing conventions. Her private correspondence suggests two prime motivations for writing: self-promotion and public conversion. Sigourney explains the publication of Letters to Young Ladies as an act of Christian duty:

I felt a peculiar degree of diffidence about this publication, and offer it in my journal as an oblation at His footstool who alone giveth guiding wisdom and sustaining strength, and who is able to grant that it may implant in the young mind some seeds of pure motive and prevailing piety. (336)

This rhetorical justification appears repeatedly in Sigourney's prose prefaces wherein she claims authority from an overarching Christian mission. She disseminates moral messages grounded in a rhetoric of tireless devotion to educate her "young friends' hearts" through moral correspondence, a rhetorical move which Lydia Maria Child and Caroline Kirkland similarly employ.

For Sigourney, the letter-format, with its domestic connotations and its open appeal to the reader's private sentiments, represents the perfect pedagogical medium. Her epistolary addresses rely upon an assumption central to eighteenth-century neoclassical rhetorical models: her audience belongs to an ideal community who shares her

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republican and Christian values. Sigourney's patriotic rhetoric further affirms this neoclassical rhetorical model when she uses "family" as a synecdoche for the country and stylizes her readers as "sisters," a move which occurs more frequently in the later letters.

Indebted as you are for innumerable privileges to the free government under which you live, you will not surely disregard such forms of patriotism as fall within your province. Acquaint yourselves, therefore, with all the details of a well-ordered family, and make this department of knowledge both a duty and a pleasure. (1841, 69-70)

Piety, virtue, benevolence, reason, philanthropy, utility, cheerfulness, and respect for one's elders and betters are attributes Sigourney aligns with patriotism and which she never imagines the reader would want to resist.³² Instead, Letters to Young Ladies, and conduct literature in general, "constructs an ideal of behaviour that the reader is urged to believe is possible" and is implicitly desirable (Newton 145). Within this rhetorical context, the letter-writer's style becomes a direct sign denoting character, utter candor is a pre-requisite, a bond of sympathy guarantees the reader's complete confidence, and writing becomes an exercise in affirming and conforming to middle-class social standards. Sigourney's rhetoric never creates the illusion that the reader is an isolated individual but rather

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cultivates consensus. Her title reinforces this plurality. For Sigourney, the reader is a receptive class member, a potential republican teacher, who can only realize self-culture through a process of patriotic education supported by affectional bonds.

What emerges from these addresses is a composite portrait of the reader as a moral, middle-class woman striving for sincere relationships, genuine self-culture, and an education transcending "artificial accomplishments" and genteel intellectualism. "Would that I might succeed in persuading you, my young friends," Sigourney asserts, "to strive that all your attainments should minister to the happiness of others, as well as your own" (1841, 255). One consistent rhetorical move occurs when she artfully demurs to the readers' judgment, thereby reinforcing their autonomy and the underlying assumption that her audience shares her values. Sigourney assumes that her reader is already approaching self-reliance. For example, while discussing female dress and "delicacy," Sigourney accedes to the reader: "This point I would prefer not to dilate upon, but rather recommend to your own reflection, and innate sense of propriety" (1833, 44). In fact, although the text is obviously didactic in intention and design, the addresses create an impression that the reader is already well educated and that this education acts as a prophylactic to inappropriate behavior. "My dear young friends, for you there is a remedy. Education has provided

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you with a shield against this danger [insipid conversation]," Sigourney explains (1833, 91). Nevertheless, Sigourney's addresses fuse a perpetual feeling of class-consciousness with nostalgia. "There was a fine character of dignity, in the manner of females of the higher classes in the olden time," Sigourney laments (49). This longing for simpler times is a conduct literature staple. Her rhetoric consistently draws attention to the reader's youth and inexperience, thereby re-affirming her own status as epistolary educator and historian.

Nineteenth-century educational reformers also promoted republican ideals as the basis for forming cohesive educational communities. According to Nancy Cott, "the philosophy of female education that triumphed by 1820 in New England inclined women to see their destiny as a shared one and to look to one another to form similar sensibilities and moral support. . . . Academies promoted sisterhood among women" (177). Sigourney's letter texts promulgate this ideal. In Letters of Life, Sigourney details how she fortified the sentimental bond between teacher and pupil as well as between her pupils:

As the epistolary style is always valuable to our sex, and, by its endless variety of subject, allures those who would shrink at the formidable idea of "composition," and its attendant criticism, I permitted them, at stated times, to

express their thoughts in a letter addressed to myself. They strenuously insisted on a response, and I found this furnished me with opportunities of suggesting or enforcing subjects of consequence to us both, more fully than I could do in conversation. (215-16).

Sigourney engages the reader in a didactic epistolary "conversation" which simultaneously nurtures the affections and educates pupil and teacher. In Letters of Life and Letters to My Pupils, Sigourney affirms her educational plan's validity. She describes how she and her eighty-four Hartford pupils continued to hold annual August school reunions for over thirty years. In turn, Sigourney constructs the reader as one of these immortalized pupils. Using rhetoric aligning the reader with her model students, she attempts to integrate the reader into her educational flock. Letters to My Pupils represents Sigourney's most developed use of this strategy. The text's dedication reads "to the children of my former pupils, this book is dedicated by their mother's friend and their own."

Letters to Young Ladies exalts the importance inherent in these tenacious bonds between women, thereby reflecting an important cultural preoccupation. Cultural historians have documented how the desire to bridge the spatial and emotional distance between correspondents is a recurrent motif in nineteenth-century private letters.³³ Samples from letter-writers also reflect this theme which Sigourney

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exploits for its emotive appeal. Her rhetoric strives to decrease the distance between the author and the reader. "To you, who, just emancipated from the restraints of 'tutors and governors,' stand joyously in your youth and beauty . . . suffer me to say, from the love I bear you, that your education is but just begun," Sigourney explains (1841, 55). As Joanne Dobson argues, "the principal theme of the sentimental text is the desire for bonding, and it is affiliation on the plane of emotion, sympathy, nurturance, or similar moral or spiritual inclination for which sentimental writers and readers yearn" (267). Within this context, Sigourney's insistence that a sympathetic heart is a prerequisite for achieving true wisdom takes on practical meaning because she inculcates this desire for bonding as the basis for the text's pedagogical designs.

In general, letter-writer texts define letter writing as a key moral component of friendship. The Modern, Polite, and Fashionable Letter Writer . . . explains that "letters afford an opportunity of saying what is kind, just, and amiable; they tend to consolidate friendships, to improve the affections, and to exhibit our best moral feeling" (18). Friendship rhetoric is a staple epistolary convention for letters written by men and women. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has explored how female correspondences contribute to "a female world of varied and yet highly structured relationships which appears to have been an essential aspect of American society" (53). Passionate

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exaltations celebrating friendship and extended professions of loving friendship were universal in nineteenth-century women's epistolary rhetoric.³⁴ A reviewer for the American Biblical Repository describes Sigourney's rhetoric in similar terms:

It is the going forth of the heart to meet hearts; it is the communion of an elder sister with beloved younger sisters, portraying the loveliness of knowledge and of virtue, and fondly alluring them to follow her own footsteps in the onward, upward course. (303)

The reviewer praises Sigourney for effectively modeling the affectional values she promotes.

Sigourney uses her direct addresses to weave friendship rhetoric through her arguments. These addresses include various repeated stock epistolary phrases, especially "my young friends" and "my dear young friends" for rhetorical emphasis. After approximately 1850, advice literature generally warns against relying on these conventional phrases and seems to suggest that frequent over-use has diluted their sincerity. In The Lady's Guide . . . Also a Useful Instructor in Letter Writing, Toilet Preparations, Fancy Needlework . . . (1857), Emily Thornwell prescribes distinct address modes:

we do not pretend to regulate, by any ceremonial, the sentiments of the heart, but it is in good taste to abstain from too frequent use of

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endearing epithets, especially when they are not truthful; such as, "Your tender, sincere, constant, and faithful friend." (161)

However, Thornwell's comments attest to the form's former ubiquity and allude to its potential cultural power while highlighting the double bind prescriptive writers faced when advocating "natural sentiments." According to William Merrill Decker, "for many letter writers, the clichés of the genre are part of its condition and are instrumental in articulating epistolary relationships" (95).

As Decker suggests, the power of epistolary rhetoric may not reside solely in the letter writer's expressive originality but may emanate from implied affectional associations. In "Friendship," Ralph Waldo Emerson makes this connection.

The scholar sits down to write, and all his years of meditation do not furnish him with one good thought or happy expression; but it is necessary to write a letter to a friend, -- and, forthwith, troops of gentle thoughts invest themselves, on every hand, with chosen words. (341)

Emerson suggests that positive affiliation between author and reader provokes epistolary felicity. In Letters to Young Ladies, the formulaic addresses enact a sentimental shorthand, thereby performing this intimacy.

In the second edition, Sigourney inserts a letter devoted to "Friendship," an attribute she values on par

with patriotism. "A rare combination of virtues is requisite to friendship," Sigourney explains, "elevation of character, fixedness of principle, a generous, disinterested and affectionate spirit, are among its essential elements" (98). These virtues are essential to Sigourney's creative imagining of the reader whom she urges toward this ideal. "I should delight to think that each of you were capable of firm and confiding friendship for one of your own sex," Sigourney explains (1833, 17). In her addresses, she first creates an ideal image of the reader, and then strengthens the bonds of affiliation. In Letters to My Pupils, Sigourney combines these techniques with her rhetoric of disciplinary intimacy: "Pure-minded and kind-hearted beings, my cherished pupils, whom every day I love more, because every day discloses some new excellence worthy of love, I do not summon you to such efforts of self-denying philanthropy. It may not fall within the sphere of your duty . . ." (63-4). For Sigourney teaching is the ultimate philanthropic duty: "Still if they would adopt *teaching as their charity*, and give it regularly and laboriously, some portion of every day, it need not interfere with other employments and pleasures" (268). This shift validates conduct literature authorship as a form of charitable and civic duty.

Sigourney creates an affectional rhetoric prizing female friendship above all else:

The friendship of which I speak . . . comprises

sympathy in sorrow, counsel in doubt,
encouragement in virtue, that blending of the
strength of two spirits which nothing can but
death can part, and which cemented in piety,
cherishes the hope of consummation where
affection's cup hath lost the taste of tears.
Services to the poor, the uneducated, the
afflicted, you will also, as you have
opportunity, comprehend within your daily
department of duty, to your fellow beings. (18-
19)

This rhetoric is decidedly divorced from the emerging rhetoric of female benevolence exalting women's innate moral superiority as a means for promoting social reform. Although Sigourney herself was active in local philanthropy and actively supported important reform causes, this rhetorical move marks an important departure from advice literature conventions. Sigourney's advice resonates with Margaret Fuller's definition of philanthropy. Fuller shifts the emphasis away from narrowly prescribed public duties toward its potential relationship to self-culture. "I like to see women perceive that there are other ways of doing good beside making clothes for the poor or teaching Sunday-school," Fuller explains; "these are well, if well directed, but there are other ways, some as sure and surer, and which benefit the giver no less than the receiver" (50). Like Sigourney, Fuller stresses reciprocity as a key

component for judging philanthropic endeavors. Sigourney encourages the reader to aspire to this exalted form of female friendship as a step toward spiritual redemption, thereby affirming female relationships' value and validating women's communal experiences. While other conduct authors caution young women against wasting time on overly sentimental friendship letters, Sigourney encourages this practice and defines it as a private duty.

The original conventional "Preface" dedicates the text to educating the reader's heart: "Should a single heart in 'life's sweet blossoming season,' derive from this little volume, aid, guidance, or consolation, tenfold satisfaction will be added to the pleasure with which it has been composed" (3). As Sigourney adds new letters and her republican rhetoric matures, so does her conception of audience. By 1841, a more authoritative Sigourney exploits the open letter text's potential "polysemic . . . imaginings of the reader" (Guillen, 7). She extends her imagined audience to include the "young ladies" and their moral, spiritual, and parental guardians and elaborates on her underlying neoclassical model. In the "Introduction," Sigourney's rhetoric shifts from addressing to describing the reader. She uses "family" as a synecdoche for the nation. "We solicit [increased educational opportunities] for the daughters of our country," Sigourney intones, "the rose-buds, the birds of song, who make our homes so beautiful" (2). This split empowers Sigourney to challenge

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the "Guardians of Education, whether parents, preceptors, or legislators," to fulfill America's historical promise and educate women appropriately. "Gird her with the whole amour of education and of piety," she exclaims, "and see if she be not faithful to her children, to her country, and to her God" (8). This subtle rhetorical shift suggests that while the individual female reader does have the power to create an ideal self, hegemonic cultural standards must also evolve to facilitate this transformation. In the 1841 letters, Sigourney occasionally returns to this pan-optic audience in order to describe her readers:

For, beset as our country may be with external dangers, or disordered by internal commotions -- if from every dwelling there flows forth a healthful and healing influence, what disease can be fatal? The young ladies of the present generation seem to pass in review before me, with all their privileges, and in all their grace and beauty. Methinks their hands are upon the ark of their country. (1841, 70).

Expanding her audience, she reinforces her republican rhetoric which equates female education and continued national prosperity, thereby dramatically enlarging the domestic sphere. Sigourney challenges the reader to interpret women's progressive historical role and recognize their potential cultural authority.

All four variant editions end with the same patriotic

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letter urging the reader to fulfill her republican duty and culminate in a sentimental entreaty which reaffirms her rhetoric of affiliation:

And now, my daughters, farewell! In pursuing with you, objects of tender and high concern, my heart has been drawn towards you, with something of a mother's love. . . . Though we never meet in the flesh, yet at that day when "dead, small and great, shall stand before God," may it be found that we have so communed in spirit, as to aid in the blessed pilgrimage to "glory, -- honor, immortality, -- eternal life." (1833, 152)

This conventional closing affirms a celestial reunion which will ultimately erase the distances, temporal and geographic, between the author and her reader, as well as terminate their shared spiritual separation from God. Republican duty is rewarded with Christian salvation. This closing resonates with conventional epistolary practices. As Decker notes, "the most prominent [themes] are those of separation, loneliness, and apprehension that death will intervene before the parties can reunite -- a fear that letter sheet, mail and language are inadequate to the task of maintaining relations" (22). Sigourney exploits these cultural fears; however, her rhetoric affirms epistolarity as a means for maintaining affectional bonds, promoting self-culture for women, and working toward salvation. She teaches the reader that correspondence promotes "spiritual

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communion," therefore transforming it into a salvific activity for author and reader. These addresses argue that women have control over their spiritual destinies as Sigourney grooms them to take their metaphoric first steps toward self-reliance. Moreover, by equating self-reliance with salvation, Sigourney conflates Romantic individualism and self-reliance with Christian salvation.

III

T.W. Higginson recalls the important contributions antebellum women made to the emerging national literary scene:

In those days it seemed to be held necessary for American women to work their passage into literature by first compiling some kind of cookery book. They must be perfect in that preliminary requisite before they could proceed to advanced standing. (Contemporaries 117)

While Higginson's glib remark may sound like a over-generalization, an impressive cast of influential early authors -- Lydia Huntley Sigourney, Catharine Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catherine Beecher, Lydia Maria Child, Caroline Kirkland, Ann Stephens, and Eliza Leslie -- did write nonfiction advice literature for women. Higginson implies that writing didactic texts publicly validated the authors' lives, and by extension their works, as morally legitimate for middle class audiences.

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Moreover, publishing conduct literature was often lucrative, thereby forming a basis for financial independence, an essential step toward becoming confirmed professional authors.

As Nina Baym has argued, "author as woman accepted use and morality as her fictional aims" (Novels 255). Ann Stephens's 1843 "Literary Ladies" succinctly summarizes this construction:

Miss Sedgwick and Mrs. Sigourney, Mrs. Child and one or two others, exerted mental wealth to render domestic life lovely, and to persuade their sisters into content with the blessings of their natural condition They have taught the ambitious of the sex, in many a beautiful page, and by their own blameless lives, that women may become great, yet remain humble and affectionate, and that the most lofty ideal is not necessarily divorced from the useful. (85)

For women writers determined to support themselves, and often families and husbands, through professional writing, the economic incentive to write advice literature was compelling. By the 1830s, American advice literature contained distinct sub-genres, each with its own conventions and traditions. Sigourney's letter texts should be defined as conduct literature: "texts which, aimed at an inexperienced young adult or other youthful reader, derive an ethical, Christian-based code of

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behaviour for life that normally includes gender role definitions" (Newton, 162). Conduct literature is concerned with promoting ethical behavior. Etiquette manuals describe social norms and are primarily concerned with manners, social functions, and interpersonal relationships. Domestic advice manuals focus on household hints, recipes, home remedies, recommendations for managing domestic employees and, in some specialized texts, hands-on counsel about child rearing.³⁵ Throughout the nineteenth-century, the letter-writing format remained popular in all three of these sub-genres. As a popular conduct literature writer, Sigourney merits renewed scrutiny because of her significant deviations from standard generic conventions dictating women's appropriate roles and activities.

Before discussing how Letters to Young Ladies participates in conduct literature culture, it is important to understand the genre's historical significance and defining characteristics. In the early national period, many popular British conduct manuals were formatted as ostensibly private letters and had become well-established staples in the American literary marketplace. Samuel Richardson's Familiar Letters (1741) which as "a letter-writer, in spirit and content is very closely allied to the domestic conduct books" was very popular and many variant pirated editions were printed (Hornbeak 1).³⁶ As early as 1775 Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son, a posthumously published collection of private letters, sold 20,000

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American copies and was subsequently republished in various bastardized forms.³⁷ In addition, John Bennett's Letters to a Young Lady (1789), Hester Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind (1783), and W. H. Dilworth's The Complete Letter-Writer were reprinted numerous times.³⁸

In the 1830s, American audiences were clamoring for domestic advice from American authors. Historian Arthur Schlesinger estimates that

aside from frequent revisions and new editions, twenty-eight different manuals appeared in the 1830s, thirty-six in the 1840s and thirty-eight more in the 1850s -- an average of over three new ones annually in the pre-Civil War decades. (18)

Although Schlesinger's list includes more highly specialized letter-writers, etiquette books, domestic advice manuals, and conduct texts, it suggests that Americans were anxious to read prescriptive literature in order to understand their ever-changing social milieu. Despite this widespread popularity, Letters to Young Ladies and American advice literature in general have received scant critical attention and have been cited primarily as evidence for supporting historical arguments about gender roles.

As a genre, advice literature can provide essential historical information about gender construction. Although there has been a tendency to oversimplify these depictions and prescriptions as perfect mirrors reflecting the

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absolute reality of men's and women's lives, conduct literature does echo cultural attitudes about idealized middle class gender roles.³⁹ In the 1830s, an important shift in audience occurred. While eighteenth-century advice literature generally addressed a unisex audience, Jacksonian authors increasingly adopted separate spheres rhetoric and petitioned single sex audiences.⁴⁰ By the Civil War, two compound ideals -- the self-reliant American man and his domestic counterpart, the self-reliant, yet economically dependent, American woman -- appear in advice literature:

In fine, these books invent an American woman who transcends the circumstances of her birth, location, economic circumstance, or marital status. This woman is not everywoman, but a literate, middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and economically self-sufficient woman. (Tonkovich "Rhetorical" 93)

This composite "woman" represents, in many ways, the emergent American professional woman writer for whom Sigourney is the proto-type.⁴¹

In 1829, Lydia Maria Child's groundbreaking The Frugal American Housewife firmly established the American advice literature tradition which Sigourney would come to master. By 1836, there were twenty-five editions; by 1855, there were thirty-three editions. In comparison, Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies never reached "best seller" status.

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Nevertheless, Frank Luther Mott estimates that the 1833 edition alone sold over 125,000 copies (Golden 357). After twelve years, Sigourney's Harpers contract was hastily re-drawn because the text was still earning a healthy profit.⁴² In her characteristically self-celebratory and self-abnegating style, Sigourney chronicles the text's enduring success:

After its unexpected publication in England and Scotland, where it was very kindly received, I was embarrassed by the solicitations of publishers wishing to secure the copyright. It has appeared, for the last sixteen or eighteen years . . . and still meets a steady sale, having passed through between twenty and thirty editions. (336)

Sigourney continually edited and enlarged the text. The first edition contains a comparatively sparse eight letters on conventional Christian topics ranging from "On the Improvement of Time" to "On Conversation." In 1835, the second edition includes these eight letters plus three more standard topics: "On Friendship," "On Cheerfulness," and "On Utility." The third edition introduced letters on "Religion," "Sisterly Virtue," "Knowledge," and "Motives to Usefulness." Finally, the 1841 British edition appears with an expanded preface as well as new letters exploring "Evening Thoughts" and "Superficial Attainments."

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Sigourney with conservative domestic ideology; however, this reading fails to recognize how the editions progress toward advocating a self-culture for women which blurs the boundary between public and private she seems to be inscribing. Sigourney's subject inventory adheres to conduct literature convention with one notable exception: information about courting rituals, advice about marriage, and, in fact, caveats about female/male relationships simply do not appear. In "Letter V: On Conversation," she briefly cautions her readers to avoid "frivolity" and to use their power to inspire young men to greater Christian good. "How important, my dear young friends," Sigourney explains, "that the influence thus entrusted to you, be rationally and kindly, and religiously used" (96). She enjoins the reader to examine her actions but presupposes that the reader will act correctly. This subtle rhetorical move aligns the text more closely with private familial letters which instruct while affirming affectional ties. Moreover, unlike her contemporary conduct writers, Sigourney does not assume that her text's main didactic purpose is to educate "young lady" readers exclusively for marriage. Instead, Sigourney, like Lydia Maria Child, emphasizes self-culture and religious salvation. "The greatest most universal error [in female education], is teaching girls to exaggerate the importance of getting married; and of course to place an undue importance upon the polite attentions of gentlemen," Child explains (Frugal

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91). Child and Sigourney are establishing the basic ideological tenets about women's moral role in the republic which Margaret Fuller and other later feminists like Elizabeth Oakes Smith and Jane Swisshelm adopt to begin more actively questioning the cultural assumptions supporting separate spheres ideology.

By adopting the established British epistolary model, Sigourney was able to tap into the burgeoning advice literature market effectively while bolstering her narrative authority.⁴³ The epistolary format remained popular, according to Ruth Bodenheimer, because "the letter form was intended to inscribe the discourse of female conduct firmly within a domestic or familial context" (10). Sigourney's republican rhetoric exploits that convention. She adopts a letter-writing style which beautifully complements conduct literature's ambiguous standing as what Nina Baym calls the "halfway literature of domestic instruction (halfway, that is, between the public and private realms)" (History 58). Throughout Letters to Young Ladies, Sigourney seems keenly aware of this "half-way" status. Despite her didactic intention and adherence to conduct literature's conventions, the text is rife with competing rhetorical strategies and contradictory messages about women's roles.

Early conduct literature generally relies on two discourse strategies: a highly charged Christian rhetoric modeled upon Puritan sermons, or an intensely emotive and

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condemnatory rhetoric which presumes that every female reader is potentially "fallen."⁴ Sigourney occasionally wields the inflammatory rhetoric characteristic of the Puritan jeremiad; however, her overall tone is intimate, conversational, and free from bombastic preaching or hyperbolic warnings. The relative simplicity, despite an occasionally ornate extended metaphor, of Sigourney's epistolary style is thrown into stark relief when compared to the highly metaphorical, ornamental, and prolix style of her more sentimentalized texts like Whispers to a Bride and Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands, as well as other conduct literature like Josiah Gilbert Holland's Titcomb's Letters to Young People Single and Married. In Letters to Young Ladies, Sigourney restricts her emotional and sentimentally charged effusions to her direct addresses. The epistolary narrative favors a more measured appeal to reason using structured arguments based on historical examples and biographical precedents. She uses model stories and presents systematic regimes in order to teach women both how and what to read while answering a troublesome cultural problem: what can, and should, American women do? By addressing this pressing cultural question, Sigourney again anticipates Margaret Fuller's feminist manifesto, Woman in the Nineteenth Century. Although she does not advocate abandoning traditional gender roles, Sigourney teaches her audience to be self-reliant readers.

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Throughout Letters to Young Ladies, Sigourney amplifies her rhetoric validating women's experiences as a literary subject, a natural extension of the epistolary mode. For Sigourney, reading teaches women about history and culture, while writing fosters self-knowledge. In her opening letter, she advocates keeping a journal and acknowledges a central problem: finding an appropriate topic.

Though in the seclusion of the domestic sphere, the course of passing events will usually be too monotonous to justify narration, yet the current of feeling and sentiment, the authors with whom we are conversant, and the reflections of a mind in the search of knowledge and truth, will always furnish something worthy of memorial. (20)

Sigourney argues that feelings and sentiments merit textual inscription. She characterizes the journal as the "sensible presence of a friend, whose frown makes folly ashamed and whose smile gives confidence to virtue" (20). This rhetorical move enables Sigourney to authorize private writing for women based upon the letter-writing ideal. By describing private writing metaphorically as a conversation between friends which keeps "vivid in the heart, the lessons taught by the discipline of heaven," she elevates the importance of individual women's experiences (21). For Sigourney, letter writing helps alleviate the painful distance between separated friends; journal writing

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mitigates the writer's separation from God. Addressing her readers directly, she requests that her "young friends" answer a series of probing questions on a daily basis, thereby creating a dialogic model to be used for justifying every moment of their time in relation to their salvation. By establishing this rhetoric of conversational questioning in the opening chapter, Sigourney demonstrates for the reader the model which the text continues to perform.

Letters to Young Ladies (1833) develops a dominant motif of antebellum conduct literature for women: "Home is our Province." Following conventional models, Sigourney depicts the domestic sphere as "subordinate" and women's status "of peculiar privilege" to be "sheltered from temptation" (36). However, unlike her contemporaries, she explicitly acknowledges and decries the intellectual and experiential narrowness of this sphere: "A taste for reading is important to all intellectual beings. To our sex, it may be pronounced peculiarly necessary . . . because dwelling in little things, they are in danger of losing the intellectual appetite" (59). Although carefully acknowledging the conventional attitude that auto-didacticism should never interfere with domestic duties, Sigourney ardently argues that wifely duties and motherhood should not interrupt personal development and education. Sigourney and Catharine Sedgwick were the first American advice writers to suggest that women should be educated so they might "secure a subsistence should they be reduced to

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poverty" (1833, 31).⁴⁵

Sigourney never overtly champions women's right to enter the professions or speak publicly; however, her plea that they should be educated to be economically self-sufficient becomes more persistent and fully articulated in each subsequent edition.⁴⁶ Within the domestic realm, reading and writing function as compensations for the cultural and educational restrictions placed on women. She advocates that American women must be formally educated and then continue rigorous self-study involving systematic reading and self-reflective writing.⁴⁷ Sigourney's heartfelt yearning for increased educational opportunities must have resonated deeply with the ever-growing community of nineteenth-century women clamoring for more education, and may, in fact, have contributed to the text's enduring popularity.

For Sigourney and other women writers like Lydia Maria Child, encouraging women to pursue a serious course of reading with a heavy concentration on History and Scripture not only provided an important intellectual and spiritual outlet but also informed American women of their unique historical purpose, a role Linda Kerber has labeled "Republican Motherhood."⁴⁸ "Since the march of history had created a nation in which home was coextensive with the body politic," Baym explains, "knowledge of history would show republican women in republican homes who they were and what their work was" (History 13). Letters to Young Ladies

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teaches the reader to expand the domestic sphere into the public. Baym persuasively argues that "home was where the most important national product -- the citizen -- was manufactured; the domestic sphere was therefore a work site fully participant in public life" (12). While conduct literature authors consistently equate women's role as teachers exclusively with Republican Motherhood, in each subsequent edition, Sigourney expands women's role as educator to include public school teaching, charitable tutoring in the community, and intense self-education. Ultimately, she elevates teaching over mothering as the defining expression of women's experience and republican duty.

Before women can teach, Sigourney explains, they must first educate themselves. Advice about appropriate curriculum for female students is a staple subject of women's personal letters and advice literature. She demonstrates how this process benefits both the teacher and pupil in almost every letter. For example, epistles devoted ostensibly to "Sisterly Virtues" and "Religion" discuss the educational benefits arising from these virtues. Sigourney's suggested reading list emphasizes developing both reason and sentiment. In "Letter IV: On Books," Sigourney devotes fully half the letter to explaining the intellectual benefits inherent in a systematic reading regime designed specifically "to strengthen the Memory" (72).

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Unlike many of her contemporaries, Sigourney does not moralize against reading novels nor does she depict the obligatory innocent virgin seduced first by fiction and then by vice.⁴⁹ For example, Mrs. Virginia Cary's Letters on Female Character addressed to a Young Lady on the death of her mother (1828) conflates novel reading and corporeal defilement: "a mind that can take pleasure in the trash of silly novels, which may be raked from the charnel houses of literature, deserves to be compared to the female monster in the Arabian tales who fed upon dead bodies" (125).⁵⁰ In stark contrast, Sigourney's epistolary rhetoric is measured and reasonable. She envisions the danger of overindulgence in reading "works of imagination" to be the tendency to categorize reading as "recreation": "It forms habits of desultory thought, and uproots mental discipline. It makes it an object not to *read and remember*, but to *read and be amused*" (63-4). Sigourney repeatedly argues that women's need for education is eminently practical, or in her words "useful," and not ornamental. In the 1841 edition, Sigourney adds a final letter on "Superficial Attainments" which explicitly derides fashionable accomplishments as impediments to more useful education.

Following conventional wisdom about women's appropriate education, Sigourney advocates an intense immersion in Classical and Modern History. Nina Baym argues that educators envisioned history as "the centerpiece of female education, in order to connect

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domestic women to the polity, bring civic self-understanding to the home, and bridge the widening gap between sites of public and private activity" (History 11). For Sigourney, history, with its heavy-handed emphasis on patriarchal conquest, is not to be read passively. She advocates reading combined with active questioning of the text's authorial bias and its moral implications:

History is replete with moral lessons. . . . Read History, with candor and independence of mind. The opinions of the historian should be examined, and the gilding stripped from false glory. The admiration so profusely bestowed on warriors and conquerors, should be analyzed. (66)

This admonition resonates with Emerson's "The American Scholar," in which he argues that "there is then creative reading as well as creative writing" (59). For Emerson, active reading is an essential component of true self-culture. Sigourney links this analytical reading to learning how to interpret women's special role in the republic. After characterizing Greek and Roman civilizations' downfall as the product of an inability to recognize women's indispensable role within a healthy republic, she outlines women's patriotic debt to American society. Speaking authoritatively, she incorporates rhetoric which abolitionists and reformers would codify into a discourse exalting women's superior morality as an imperative social mission:

Has she [America] not a right to expect that we give our hands to every cause of peace and truth, -- that we nurse the plants of temperance and purity, -- that we frown on every inroad of disorder and vice, -- that we labor in all places where our lot may be cast, as gentle teachers of wisdom and charity, and that we hold ourselves, in domestic privacy, the guardians of those principles which the sage defends in the halls of legislation, and the priest of Jehovah upon the walls of Zion? (145)

Knowing History and Scripture empowers the female reader to defend republican and Christian ideals in "domestic privacy," but it also ultimately challenges her to interrogate public policies and historical imperatives. As Baym notes, Sigourney is "identifying American exceptionalism with its historically unique appreciation of women's intellectual and moral capabilities" (History 12). For Sigourney, women's innate moral purity is powerless without education.

In the 1841 edition, appeals to American patriotism increasingly dominate Sigourney's rhetoric. Within the context of conduct literature conventions and an emerging cultural rhetoric exalting women's essential moral superiority, Sigourney is unique because her primary focus is not necessarily to inspire women to philanthropy. The updated preface resonates with patriotic rhetoric. She re-

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invokes the Greeks and Romans and then inexorably connects American exceptionalism with women's "natural" predisposition to nurture and teach. In a republic, Sigourney reasons, "teachers should be held in the highest honour. They are the allies of legislators" (1841, 5). She inserts a letter devoted to "Knowledge" in which she clarifies the reasons for female education, thereby refining her argument about women's participation in the public sphere. At first, she seems to adhere to conduct literature's traditional rationale: "Knowledge makes home pleasant and self-communion no solitude" (1841, 42). However, Sigourney recognizes women's historical role: "There was a period when humble industry, and virtuous example, were all that society demanded of woman. That period is past" (1841, 63). Her language celebrates woman's public role as republican rhetor. She attempts to educate the reader to recognize and accept this new historical role while evincing nostalgia for the "fine character of dignity, in the manner of females of the higher classes in the olden times," which resonates with conservative conduct literature (1833, 48).

In each letter, Sigourney follows standard epistolary and oratorical models that typically rely upon historical precedents. She frames each letter with a brief salutation generally written in the first person plural to establish her solidarity with the reader and a brief closing statement inevitably attracting the reader's attention

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heavenward. Sigourney's pedagogy incorporates biographical evidence drawn from three primary sources: history, Scripture, and her personal experiences. These biographical examples amplify the letters' main themes, enacting models for republican virtue, piousness, and genuine sentiment. Each letter tends to begin with examples drawn from Roman and Greek history and moves toward contemporary anecdotes. This process performs her advice about understanding history's importance; moreover, it serves to ground her personal narrative authority firmly in relation to the public record. Some of Sigourney's model characters are conduct literature staples, especially her decorous interest in George Washington's mother, "a model of the true dignity of woman" (49).

As if to counter history's masculine emphasis, Sigourney includes her own testimonials about women teaching and "doing good" through myriad charitable enterprises, as well as modeling traits -- piety, purity, and submissiveness -- associated with what Barbara Welter calls the "cult of True Womanhood." By using the personal letter format, Sigourney is able to validate the inclusion of personal narratives as examples, thereby juxtaposing personal and historical discourses for dramatic and didactic effect. Conduct literature frequently advocates reading biographies as a source of moral uplift and inspiration. Sigourney, Kirkland, Child, and Fuller avidly wrote biographies of other women as if to counter the

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cultural assumption that women's lives did not contain events worthy of historical discourse. She uses friendship as a trope to describe women's personal journals, the Bible, and then extends it to include biographies:

Next in intellectual interest to History, and superior to it in its influence upon the heart, is the study of Biography. . . . As by our chosen associates, the character is modified, so the heart exhibits some transcript of the models kept most constantly in its view. (67)

Sigourney's text actively reflects this belief in redemptive role models and suggests that women's lives can exert this important public influence.

This vested interest in educating the "heart" as well as the "head" resonates with conventional dictates about female education; however, this emphasis also characterizes Transcendental thinking about education and individualism. For Emerson, true education is the result of practiced perception and emotion. Emerson's construction of the "new" American scholar reflects these values: "He is one, who raises himself from private considerations, and breathes and lives on public and illustrious thoughts. He is the world's eye. He is the world's heart" (63). Emerson's concentration on validating individual perception and emotion complements Sigourney's increased dependence on sentimentally charged eyewitness accounts.

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consonant with history's idealized and mostly male heroics. In contrast, she records everyday deeds and aligns them with Christian salvation. This rhetorical shift valorizing individualism resonates with Emerson's thoughts on the relationship between reading history and achieving self-culture. Like Sigourney, Emerson advocates reading history critically, and stresses the potential for great actions and truths dormant within the reader. In "Self-Reliance," which appeared in 1841, the same year as Sigourney's fourth edition, Emerson promotes an auto-didacticism consonant with Sigourney's program. "As great stake depends on your private act to-day, as followed their public and renowned steps," Emerson argues, "When private men shall act with original views, the lustre will be transferred from the actions of kings to those of gentlemen" (268). Emerson collapses the distinction between public and private virtues and deeds as the first step toward re-vitalizing American self-culture. Sigourney extends a similar paradigm into the domestic sphere. The tremendous rhetorical disparity between their rhetorical styles acts as an appropriate trope representing the discursive gulf between their highly gendered conceptions of self-reliance. For example, in her letter "On Doing Good," Sigourney's rhetoric translates daily tasks -- such as knitting socks and repairing clothes for the poor during "the reading and recitation of a course of History" -- into an account of an "interesting period in the history" of girls. Alms-giving

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and charitable acts transform the girls: "some little contribution rendered subservient to the greatest good, their eyes sparkling with the heart's best gladness, and their sweet voices echoing its melody, I could not but trust that some pure spirit of Heaven's prompting hovered over them" (109-10). Sigourney's sentimental language and conventional imagery create a figurative connection between the girls' history lessons and self-culture, a link which confirms their salvation.

In the 1841 edition, these accounts punctuate the new letters. Sigourney often switches to the present tense, thereby exploiting a letter-writing convention that the action being recorded is actually happening before the letter writer's eyes. This technique temporarily transforms the ideal into the real by making it momentarily immediate and potentially viable for the reader. She lingers over descriptions of idealized young women and her rhetoric is full of images like the tottering infant, the dying mother, and the older sister who graciously becomes "the guide and comforter of orphans," images that would soon become sentimental discourse's conventional icons (127). One notable addition to the 1841 edition occurs in the letter on "Benevolence." Sigourney lapses into an unusual autobiographical reverie about her early benefactress, Madam Lathrop, as a model influence who exemplifies "the benevolence of an angel" (223). Sigourney relies on her own experience to make her point about

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benevolence as a form of immortality: "among the eyes that were then raised to [M. Lathrop] with affectionate reverence, some must still restore her image, as well as that which now fills with the tear of an undying gratitude" (223). Sigourney's narrator performs the appropriate sentimental response, redemptive tears.

It is important to note that for Sigourney this ideal is not only attainable but is palpable. At the same time, the opposing negative female stereotypes remain purely hypothetical and underdeveloped despite their widespread cultural currency.⁵¹ Seduction plots exemplifying woman's weakness, especially those starring predatory men and pejorative female stereotypes, simply are not Sigourney themes despite their ubiquity in conduct literature. For example, The American Letter-Writer contains several cautionary letters under the heading "For Ladies: Always the Specter of Danger," including a letter "To a Young Lady, cautioning her against keeping company with a Gentleman of Bad Character" (24). Unlike many other early advice writers who rely upon scare tactics, Sigourney interlaces representational discourse and sentimental imagery to incorporate examples drawn from her own experience. In other words, her rhetoric suggests that these ideals are attainable while their antithesis, the fallen woman, remains outside her experience and is rendered discursively invisible.

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dialogic or "conversational" activity which is expressly feminine. In the second edition (1835), she adds a prescriptive section on letter writing as an "accomplishment which every educated female should possess" (67). Commenting directly on letter writing as "naturally feminine," she advocates a conversational style:

Our sex have been complimented as the possessors of a natural taste for epistolary composition. It is an appropriate attainment, for it admits the language of the heart which we understand, and rejects the elaborate and profound sciences in which we are usually deficient. Ease and truth to nature, are its highest ornaments and Cicero . . . said "whatever may be the subject of my letters, they still speak the language of conversation." (1835, 68)

Sigourney adopts this conversational mode which the standard letter-writers also promulgate, thereby maintaining the illusion that she is not orating upon public matters but "naturally" chatting about domestic concerns.

In Letters to Mothers, Sigourney admonishes mothers to maintain their correspondences, an activity she justifies as their natural vocation: "'Rules for Letter-Writing!' What rules can it require? . . . letter-writing is but to talk upon paper. It seems one of the natural vocations of our sex, for it comes within the province of the heart"

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(163). Nevertheless, Sigourney rails against hasty and careless composition. She cites Mrs. Farrar's The Youth's Letter-Writer (1834) to help the uninitiated learn "the lesser niceties of folding, sealing, and superscription [which] are not beneath the notice of a lady" (68).⁵²

Sigourney demonstrates the double-bind prescriptive writers face when instructing their readers how to express themselves "naturally" and "genuinely," as well as "correctly." This instruction exposes how the sentimental ideal of "natural" expression is artificially constructed rather than spontaneously realized. She addresses this dilemma directly in "Letter V: On Conversation:"

You are aware that chirography is considered one of the talismans by which character is decyphered [sic]. Whether this test may be depended on or not, the fact that letters travel farther than the sound of the voice, or the sight of the countenance can follow, renders it desirable that they should convey no incorrect or unfavorable impression. (1835, 68)

Acknowledging the reigning convention that letters act as a transparent marker of character, Sigourney counsels the reader to present herself carefully. "For the sentimentalists who instructed the American middle classes on epistolary etiquette, writing a letter was an act of emotional self-expression," Karen Haltunnen explains, "at the same time, letters, like manners were a critical aspect

of the genteel performance" (121). For Sigourney, the rhetorical act of writing as historian, domestic advisor, cultural conversationalist, and professional public letter-writer represents a highly visible negotiation of this performance which extends well beyond the confines of the private drawing room.

IV

The text's enduring popularity and the increasing authority of Sigourney's voice only seem to authenticate sentimental cultural norms and separate spheres ideology. Nevertheless, uneasiness about essentializing the trope of women's separate sphere ripples beneath Sigourney's rhetoric. As Sigourney's commitment to separate spheres ideology seems to harden, her discourse becomes more political and more explicitly public in nature and intention. In short, the 1833 edition adheres to established Christian conduct literature topics and only briefly introduces patriotism and republican motherhood as important themes; however, by 1841, patriotism, American exceptionalism, women's role as teachers inside and outside the domestic circle, and exaltations of female friendship dominate Sigourney's rhetoric about women's self-culture. Although conduct literature has been harshly criticized as a conservative genre dedicated to inculcating middle-class values as universal social norms, Letters to Young Ladies suggests how the epistolary model could also be used to

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address questions surrounding women's self-culture and move women's discourse from the domestic toward the public realm. Sigourney's model letter-writer effectively validates women's emotional bonds while suggesting their centrality to the larger social good. By affirming affectional rhetoric and using letters to create a community of readers, Sigourney develops a performative model which later women writers would modify and eventually parody. For example, Jane Swisshelm's Letters to Country Girls emphasizes self-culture and female self-reliance while satirizing conduct literature like Letters to Young Ladies.

Sigourney translated her belief in sentimental affiliation into epistolary, if not political, practice. In 1844, Ann Stephens memorializes Sigourney as her mentor and guardian angel in a lavish biography which also describes Sigourney, her home, and gardens in rich detail. Stephens depicts herself as a despondent young writer until a letter from Sigourney revitalizes her resolve:

It was the first bright gleam of sunshine that flashed across my literary life. It was a woman in the bloom and plenitude of her power pausing to cheer and encourage a sister woman. It was only a letter . . . but simple as it was, little as it cost her, that letter has left its impress on my whole life. ("Visit" 260)

Stephens's language attests to how the rhetoric of female

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friendship defines Sigourney's private letters in which she also performs as sentimental mentor. A host of second-generation writers including Stephens, Frances Osgood, Rose Terry Cooke, Sara Clarke, Catharine Beecher, and Julia Ripley Dorr actively corresponded with Sigourney, soliciting her advice regarding their publishing careers. Sigourney supplied editorial advice, personal encouragement, and practical publishing pointers. She frequently forwarded pieces to appropriate journals and annuals along with endorsing letters. As the editor of the Religious Souvenir and through her connections with Godey's and the Ladies Companion, Sigourney exerted her influence to help other women publish. According to Betty Harris Day, "the number of women (including Sedgwick, Hale, Stowe, Beecher, Lynch, Embury, Stephens, and Gould) that she included in her religious annual in its several numbers indicates not only her desire to assure that women were published but re-confirms their roles as moral and religious influences" (127). In her private letters, Sigourney frequently conveys an implied moral message by appending an appropriate self-authored book. Throughout her memoir, Sigourney details how she ordered special editions, reprints, and extended printings so that she "might have the privilege of distributing a larger number gratuitously" (342).⁵³ This performative act of fusing personal letters and published texts exemplifies a larger pattern which characterizes Sigourney's prolific career and

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her legacy: she seamlessly integrates ostensibly public and private discourse and combines fostering her own professional career with attention toward serving the public good.

Within the public literary marketplace, Sigourney herself became a desirable commodity coveted by editors for her financial and moral currency. Editors quickly recognized how her popularity and culturally sanctioned status as exemplary moral female author could be translated into financial gain and cultural credibility. During the late 1830s and early 1840s, three influential magazines -- Godey's Magazine, The Lady's Companion, and Graham's Magazine -- vied for exclusive rights to Sigourney's name and periodical publications. In November 1839, the "Editor's Table" column in Godey's Magazine triumphantly announced that "Mrs. L. H. Sigourney will be associated with Mrs. Hale in the editorial management of the Lady's Book" (238). The article praises her as a national treasure:

Of Mrs. Sigourney qualifications it is, of course, unnecessary to speak. Her excellence as a writer in various departments of literature, is universally acknowledged by her own countrymen and countrywomen, and her transatlantic reputation is not inferior to that of any female American author. (238)

In reality, Sigourney's position was strictly titular.

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Nevertheless, from 1839 until 1842, Godey paid Sigourney five hundred dollars a year to append her name to the magazine's masthead as associate editor.⁵⁴ The editorial announcement itself demonstrates how magazine publishers coveted her as a desirable and lucrative commodity: "The acquisition of Mrs. Sigourney, is a subject upon which the publisher cordially congratulates his subscribers, as her fine taste and diversified abilities will add further value to the 'Book'" (238; my emphasis). In the April 1843 Ladies Companion, William Snowden announces that he has "secured the valuable aid of two of the most prominent ladies in the literary world," Sigourney and Emma Embury, to act as co-editors, thereby creating "the only magazine edited solely by ladies" (308).⁵⁵ Snowden, with a financial interest in the morally suspect Bowery Theater, needed Sigourney to signify his publication's unimpeachable moral stature and its conformity to a respectable women's discourse. When a highly publicized slander case between Snowden and a competitor ended Sigourney's relationship with the Ladies Companion, Ann Stephens tried to woo her friend away into another "editorial" position with Graham's Magazine. Then in 1855, Robert Bonner, who would later propel Fanny Fern to fame, "acquired" Sigourney as his first "exclusive" author for the New York Ledger, a relationship which endured until her death (Day 2). This remarkable cultural currency attests to Sigourney's status as a professional writer in the literary marketplace.

In addition to these editorial endorsements, by mid-century popular "Sigourney Societies" were being formed. At the Griffin Female College, the society's mission statement announced its "great aim to elevate woman, mentally and morally," and, in the words of Virginia Townsend, the Arthur's Home Companion editor, to "emulate the gentle, beautiful example of her whose name they have chosen" (98). As a cultural event, the emergence of "Sigourney Societies" suggests how nineteenth-century women readers embraced Sigourney as an important role model who exerted cultural authority as a professional public celebrity and a private paragon of conventional womanly virtues. As a model "republican public" letter writer, Sigourney opens up rhetorical space for women to begin voicing their opinions about public issues; however, it is this same cultural ideal which signifies how women authors' public narrative performances expose their private lives to public scrutiny and evaluation. As a popular writer and cultural icon, Sigourney bequeaths a divided legacy to later prose writers. On the one hand, her professional career reveals how women writers could achieve financial independence and use epistolary writing to enter public debates, thereby challenging the boundaries between public and private. On the other hand, her professional persona continues to endorse and perform gendered virtues associated with true womanhood, a potentially dangerous territory for epistolary writers since it tends to

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encourage autobiographical readings which conflate the author and her persona.

While Sigourney never translated her belief in self-culture and women's republican duty into overt political practice, works like Letters to Young Ladies participate in a larger cultural rhetoric which evolved into a rhetoric of female benevolence, a rhetoric which empowered female abolitionists and feminists. In the 1830s and 40s, increased periodical publishing opportunities and the growing popularity of travel narratives encouraged American women to begin experimenting with publishing letters which operated outside the conventional conduct literature mode. At the same time, as immigration increased and Americans increasingly migrated westward and congregated around eastern urban centers, new class relations, social conventions, and epistolary practices emerged, and revealed the tenuous constructed nature of Sigourney's ideal audience, and called into question the ability of her republican rhetoric to speak for all Americans. In response, writers like Caroline Kirkland, Lydia Maria Child, and Margaret Fuller continued using sentimental tropes and rhetorical strategies; however, they begin addressing more overtly political and social issues, experimenting with incorporating representational discourse, and expanding their subject matter to include topics formerly considered "unwomanly." Writing from the Michigan frontier, Caroline Kirkland represents the perfect

demographic model for Sigourney's model republican teacher faced with a particularly intractable set of pupils. Kirkland's A New Home; Who'll Follow? provokes an epistolary conversation with an eastern reader about the inadequacies of conduct literature and travel narratives to prepare settlers for frontier life. While Sigourney writes from a secure class position and never questions the basis for her patriotism, Kirkland writes from the margins of established society about unstable class relations and her performative letter-writing narrator evinces deeply conflicted attitudes towards republican rhetoric, class relations, and American individualism.

Chapter 2

Addressing Gossip: Caroline Kirkland's

A New Home; Who'll Follow?

New York Jan 14.1848

My dear Mrs. Sigourney -- I should be sorry to know that your natural kindness of heart, and your experience of a business life, together, had not pleaded for me, in this interval of apparent neglect -- It is strange, and I own it freely, that words of kind greeting, should, though highly prized, remain without response for weeks -- But my poor head tells me that if you could but see its most miscellaneous contents and exercises, you would yourself frame my apology and accept it. I hardly know when I shall over-take my short-comings, perhaps never, while I have charge of two totally distinct periodicals, with two sets of printer's imps forever in full chase, goading me on like the pendent spans of the Roman race-horse ---
. . . . Farewell, my dear Madam -- Do not forget the Union, or its Editor --- truly yours
C. M. Kirkland ("Letters" 446-7)¹

The Jacksonian period was a pivotal era when Americans, hungry for economic opportunities, increasingly abandoned traditional rural communities for urban industrial jobs and western land opportunities. As Americans migrated, generally farther and farther west,

they created a society which was forced to confront widespread individual and familial dislocations. "By 1860 more than a third of free Americans resided outside the state of their birth; probably an equal or greater proportion relocated within their home states" (Zboray 111). Cultural historians concur that the American love affair with letter writing was fueled by an intense desire to span these ever burgeoning distances separating family and friends.² William Merrill Decker has aptly characterized epistolary discourse's central paradox:

As much as correspondents affirm their transcendence of geographic distance or affect . . . the fact of separation remains and excites the suspicion that separation . . . is a condition that neither written nor spoken language can bridge. (47)

Rhetorical attempts to ameliorate this physical separation, while acknowledging the potential for a corresponding emotional distance, contribute to the intimate tensions forming the essence of epistolary discourse.

Caroline M. Kirkland's surviving letters sent from the Michigan frontier express this preoccupation with geographical and affectional dislocation on two levels. First, her personal letters written to family members attempt to console, instruct, and entertain while maintaining familial intimacy. Letters to her daughter, Elizabeth, sent to New York to augment her backwoods home-

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school education, are particularly poignant.³ Second, her business and social letters speak of her intense longing for renewed intellectual companionship and cultural stimulation.⁴ These twin impulses may also be found as underlying motifs in Kirkland's popular first book, A New Home, Who'll Follow?, a text which continually explores spatial, cultural, gender, and class-based distances through the voice and experiences of such a deracinated letter writer.

A New Home and Caroline Kirkland's composite career have enjoyed a uniformly laudatory critical reception and relative critical neglect. Published under the pseudonym Mary Clavers, the book burst on the 1839 literary scene and "thirteen editions were published in eleven years" (Merish 491). From enthusiastic nineteenth-century reviews in The North American Review, Godey's Lady's Book, The Knickerbocker, and N.P. Willis's The Corsair, to name only a few, to twentieth-century assessments heralding the text as incipient "pioneer realism," an oft-repeated appraisal, A New Home has been canonized as a "minor" classic. The text's status as Kirkland's best work is a scholarly truism, thereby keeping it almost continuously in print.⁵ During the nineteenth-century, even the fractious New York literary elite -- Edgar Allan Poe, the Duyckinck brothers, Rufus Griswold, and John Hart -- who rarely agreed upon an author's merit, praised Kirkland almost unequivocally.⁶ Similarly, twentieth-century critics as diverse as Henry

Nash Smith and Annette Kolodny have applauded Kirkland's nascent realism.⁷ However, despite this consensus, little sustained critical attention has been focused on Kirkland to date and no satisfactory full-length biography has been published. Since Kirkland herself was reticent to reveal personal information to would-be biographers, scant verifiable biographical information is available.⁸

In 1985, Judith Fetterley's inclusion of the text in her influential Provisions generated fresh scholarly interest. Critical articles and a 1990 reprint, featuring Sandra Zagarell's expanded and updated introduction, soon followed.⁹ Kirkland's other works, which include two western narratives (Forest Life [1842] and Western Clearings [1846]) and three eclectic periodical collections (The Evening Book [1852], A Book for the Home Circle [1853], and Autumn Hours [1854]) remain largely unread. Kirkland's editorship of The Union Magazine of Literature and Art and her life-long commitment to expanding women's education, abolishing slavery and capital punishment, and legislating comprehensive prison reform, especially for female inmates, have been discussed tangentially at best.¹⁰ The twentieth-century fixation on A New Home counters nineteenth-century evaluations of Kirkland's career. As John Hart, with whom Kirkland shared editorial responsibilities for Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art from 1849-50, notes, "her contributions have been in the shape of essays and they form, in my opinion, her

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strongest claim to distinction as a writer" (106)."

A New Home dominates Kirkland's career, at least in part, because of the compelling chattiness and relatively secular sensibility of the text's first-person narrator Mrs. Mary Clavers, Kirkland's nom de plume. Clavers's narrative voice constructs alternating rhythms of witty and often self-deprecating satire as she gossips about her neighbors. For nineteenth-century critics, this "fresh," "natural," and uniquely "American" style immediately distinguishes the text. In his 1846 essay "Tales of the South and West," W.A. Jones discusses the emerging "national character" of American literature and states that Kirkland

occupies a prominence in historic authorship, quite distinct. . . . Her sprightliness, good sense, high feeling, keen perception are inexhaustible, and her style is a clear and natural reflection of these fine qualities.

(472)

Similarly, an anonymous reviewer for the Knickerbocker praises Kirkland as an "accomplished lady, evidently of high literary and even scholastic, attainments" whose style is "natural, pleasant, and entertaining" (452). Edgar Allan Poe cites a "naturalness" which Sandra Zagarell attributes to Kirkland's candor and the continuity between her private correspondence and A New Home. "She did not distinguish between her personal and public voices,"

Zagarell notes (xv). When read against the background of antebellum "women's fiction," A New Home does exude a fresh enthusiasm and playful conversational tone more common to women's correspondences than to more overtly literary texts.

From the 1930s to the 1980s, historians and scholars investigating frontier narratives and early realism frequently cited A New Home without detailed textual analysis. Early feminist critical reassessments of Kirkland tended to focus primarily on her legacy as the foremother of later regionalist writers such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Harriet Beecher Stowe and the Cary sisters, without adequately accounting for her use of sentimental tropes and plots.¹² "Kirkland . . . carried the village sketch tradition far beyond its genteel origins and paved the way for growth of a genuine women's realism," writes Josephine Donovan (36). Other literary critics such as Langley Carlton Keyes, Henry Nash Smith and, more recently, David Leverenz define Kirkland primarily in relation to the antebellum male realists, including her son, novelist Joseph Kirkland. In their haste to reclaim Kirkland as American realism's female progenitor, some critics have read A New Home without adequately considering its relationship to contemporaneous literary influences, including Jacksonian rhetoric, sentimental conventions, and periodical and personal letter-writing practices. Stacy Spencer argues that recovering A New Home for its incipient

realism has exacted a hidden cost. The text is "alternately humorous, sentimental, sensational, elevated, and gravely serious," Spencer insightfully explains, "yet twentieth-century critics have downplayed its rhetorical shifts and stylistic range, instead preferring to interpret A New Home as an early example of American literary realism" (138). Since Spencer's article, critics have begun dissecting Kirkland's racial and gender politics primarily in relation to western narrative traditions and recovering her importance as a pioneering female satirist.¹³

Repeatedly critics have suggested that Kirkland herself was searching for an appropriate form to contain her sprawling and inherently unruly subject matter.¹⁴ This criticism is inevitable, if scholars persist in categorizing nineteenth-century texts based on twentieth-century genre definitions. Nineteenth-century reviewers never even mention this generic slipperiness.¹⁵ Recently, a few critics -- most notably Henry Nash Smith, Judith Fetterley, David Leverenz, Paul Lauter, and Lori Merish -- have fleetingly defined it as a series of fictionalized personal letters penned to a distant and urbane Eastern reader. Since epistolarity crosses traditional genre boundaries, this definition suggests that A New Home does not represent Kirkland's failure to find an adequate form but rather her investment in experimenting with an established cultural rhetoric, the familiar letter.¹⁶ The full implications of this rhetorical style have yet to be

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fully analyzed.

This chapter will interpret the text as a dialogic epistolary narrative and explore the implications of Kirkland's "natural" epistolary style within the context of women's private correspondences, public periodical "letters," and epistolary conduct literature in order to explore how the text engages in larger cultural conversations. Other scholars have noted how A New Home, with its constant "designs" on an imagined correspondent, critiques romantic masculine frontier narratives such as Judge Hall's Letters from the West and Charles Hoffman's Winter in the West.¹⁷ At the same time, Kirkland's erudite epigrams, featuring liberal quotes from Shakespeare, Enlightenment philosophers and Romantic poets, demonstrate her overt desire to engage Western literary traditions. By juxtaposing these epigrams with a conversational style and liberal samplings of Michigan vernacular, Kirkland effectively blurs the conventional demarcation between literary and nonliterary texts.¹⁸ She creates an innovative epistolary voice which directly engages popular epistolary conduct literature from Lord Chesterfield's patriarchal Letters to My Son to contemporary American texts like Lydia Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies and Lydia Maria Child's more practical The Frugal American Housewife.

I will argue that Kirkland fashions a series of familiar letters in which the dominant discursive mode is epistolary gossip. Within this culturally sanctioned

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feminine mode, she creates a surprisingly wide spread cultural critique in which she explores the social distances created by gender and class hierarchies. In Kirkland's words, the reader "must expect nothing beyond a meandering recital of common-place occurrences -- mere gossip about every-day people" (3) written in a "rambling gossiping style" (82). Gossip functions as a dominant trope thematically uniting the text and creating the illusion that it is a continuous conversation. Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that there is an "implicit conversational model" behind much familiar letter writing and that the pleasure derived from reading letters stems from the reader's sometimes prurient interest in the characters being described (76-77).¹⁹ Gossip, like published letters, Spacks argues, is "sometimes uncomfortably intimate, yet always concerned with other people" (91). The familiar letter form enables Kirkland to shift her subject matter from "nature" and the picaresque, the dominant topics and tropes of travel narratives and frontier manuals, to the often messy and complex interdependence of social relations, customs, and manners, the traditional turf of conduct writers and novelists. If we interpret the text as a superlative example of epistolary gossip, Kirkland's stylistic admixture blending realism, sentimentalism and satire may be read as generic mastery.

For Kirkland, writing social gossip authorizes her to

describe and comment on her neighbors, while simultaneously educating and entertaining an implicitly eastern reader. Gossip functions as a mode Mary Clavers simultaneously performs and critiques. This complex negotiation similarly defines Kirkland's often self-deprecating portrait of the female epistolary author as cultural conversationalist and social gossip whose fusion of styles represents a democratic experiment. Within the context of nineteenth-century epistolary culture, this chapter will investigate Kirkland's creation of Mary Clavers as a performative letter writer who derives her narrative authority from her status as social gossip, explore the text's use of realism as an function of its epistolarity, and investigate how the text's narrative addresses attempt to educate the reader while affirming Clavers's affectional ties to the East. Kirkland artfully combines the seemingly contradictory rhetorical strategies of sentimentalism and satire, inherent in all well-intentioned gossip. This interpretive shift enables us to reinterpret A New Home as an innovative epistolary performance of woman's emerging role as cultural conversationalist, a rhetorical position that represents a complex negotiation of the discursive boundaries separating public and private, literary and nonliterary, sentimentalism and realism.

I

Born in 1801 to a genteel New York family with modest

literary pretensions, Caroline Matilda Stansbury enjoyed an education rivaling Margaret Fuller's celebrated intellectual upbringing.²⁰ A precocious child, she was educated at her Quaker Aunt Lydia Mott's celebrated school "where she excelled in studies that included French, German, Latin, music, drawing, and dancing" (Spencer 135). Mott's favorite pupil eventually became a trusted colleague. Caroline Stansbury began teaching and was soon contributing crucial financial support to her family. In fact, she returned to teaching and educational administration intermittently until her death. When in 1828 she married William Kirkland, a Hamilton College Latin instructor, Kirkland gained a devoted and loving husband, an intellectual equal, and a professional partner. Biographers concur that this companionate relationship was uniformly happy (Zagarell xvi). The Kirklands founded a school for girls in Geneva, New York, and quickly established themselves as respected educators. Throughout her life, Kirkland would alternate between teaching and writing as her primary profession.²¹

After the opening of the Erie Canal in 1828, Michigan experienced a tremendous land boom as settlers flocked to the Great Lakes region. Educators and entrepreneurs were in high demand and William Kirkland aspired to be both. In 1835, the Kirklands, with their growing family in tow, traveled to Detroit where they directed the Detroit Female Academy, William acting as principal and Caroline as head-

teacher. Local journalists heralded their arrival as a harbinger of increased educational opportunities and cultural refinement for pioneer families. A Detroit newspaper reported that Mr. and Mrs. Kirklands' tutelage would guarantee "that the advantages of the Female Academy in this city will be equal to those of any similar institution in the West" (qtd. in Keyes 119). Despite their warm welcome and relative professional security, the Kirklands were soon on the move slightly farther west.

When, in 1837, the Kirklands, caught up in the land speculation fever sweeping Michigan, decided to buy approximately 800 acres in Livingston County, Caroline embarked on a frontier adventure which would supply her literary career's defining subject matter. "As to publications -- I little thought of becoming an author before I lived in the wilderness -- there, the strange things I saw and heard every day prompted me to description," Kirkland would later explain, "for they always presented themselves to me under a humorous aspect" ("Letters" 212). The sixty-mile journey from Detroit represented a much greater cultural relocation than Kirkland must have initially believed possible. For the next six years, the Kirkland family, which eventually included seven children, four of whom -- Elizabeth, Joseph, Cordelia, and William -- survived childhood, struggled to establish the frontier town of Pinckney and to live through their recurrent bouts of "Michigan malaria." The well-

educated Kirkland family never fully assimilated and were ultimately psychologically disillusioned and financially troubled.

When railroad officials chose nearby Dexter in which to locate the regional train depot, Pinckney seemed destined to remain a small village with limited potential for economic development. In addition, when victimized by the same type of speculating land agents whom Kirkland depicts with contempt in A New Home, the Kirklands' fragile financial situation worsened. During this period, Kirkland's letters suggest that the family "longed for more congenial society" and that they recognized that their children would soon require a higher level of scholastic and social education than rural Michigan afforded ("Letters" xxxix). Kirkland expresses this sentiment beautifully in a letter to her daughter Elizabeth who had already been sent back East: "your general improvement in health, habits, character and manners, we think much more of. Books you can study almost any where -- but society is necessary to your education in a much higher degree" ("Letters" 19).

The escalating national financial crisis combined with growing familial debts may have contributed to Kirkland's decision to publish A New Home, and the text's surprising critical success undoubtedly prompted her to contribute more "western" sketches to the Knickerbocker, Godey's, Graham's, and The Gift, a popular literary annual.

Although the success of A New Home was never equaled, her two subsequent collections of western sketches, Forest Life (1842) and Western Clearings (1845) were generally well received and provided additional financial relief. After enduring frontier life for six years, the Kirklands moved back to New York where they soon secured a place in the flourishing literary scene. Once re-established, they quickly engaged New York society, developing friendships with Lydia Maria Child, Lydia Sigourney, Ann Lynch Botta, William Cullen Bryant, Evert Duyckinck, Catharine Sedgwick, Anne Stephens, Edgar Allan Poe, Horace Greeley, Nathaniel Parker Willis and other prominent literary and political figures. However, their happiness was short-lived. In 1846, William's tragic drowning death left Kirkland to fend for herself and her four dependent children.

In 1847, she became the editor of The Union Magazine of Literature and Art (later Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art). During this prolific period, Kirkland wrote more than a hundred and forty works including "numerous introductions, reviews, editorials, stories, and essays . . . clearly defining herself as a literary professional" (Kreger 299). From this cultural vantage, Kirkland carefully crafted a public role for herself. Without overtly transgressing ingrained cultural expectations for feminine decorum, Kirkland managed to become an outspoken public figure who actively championed abolition, progressive prison reforms, and increased

educational opportunities for women. In 1853, she served as a board member for the Women's Prison Association and published The Helping Hand, Comprising an Account of the Home for Discharged Female Convicts . . ., a social cause which Lydia Maria Child and Margaret Fuller also embraced. She wrote essays decrying capital punishment, commented freely on political issues, and offered moral guidance to readers, male and female alike. Her final publication, an ambitious biography, Personal Memories of Washington, attempts to re-conceptualize George Washington as both a public figure and a private man who was a devoted son, husband and father in order to support abolitionist causes by publicizing his strong antislavery opinions.²²

At the time of her death in 1864, she was busily organizing a Metropolitan fair for the United States Sanitary Commission to benefit wounded Civil War soldiers.²³ Kirkland died suddenly of a massive stroke and her public funeral, well attended by prominent citizens and famous literati, attests to her status as a public figure.²⁴ Sandra Zagarell notes that Kirkland "appears to have conducted herself with extraordinary skill, and without the kind of ambivalence which Mary Kelley finds to have characterized so many of the women of the time who moved beyond the domestic into the public sphere" (xxi). This civic dedication to social justice and cultural reform manifests its beginnings in the major themes of A New Home.

Feelings of cultural dislocation combined with

encroaching financial pressure seem to have provided the impetus for Kirkland's first venture into the literary limelight. According to an 1851 letter to John S. Hart, the desire for a more sympathetic intellectual community prompted Kirkland to write a series of letters back home to absent family and friends. Caroline Gebhard notes that "the six or so extant letters she wrote from Pinckney to friends in New York city . . . show her intense desire to be in contact with the literary world she has lost" (160). Reflecting on her career, Kirkland herself described A New Home as an exercise in transforming private epistolary discourse into public rhetoric. "Finding my letters amusing to my friends," she explains, "I thought of 'more of the same sort' for a book -- but always felt very serious doubts whether it would be possible to find a publisher for such stuff" ("Letters" 211).²⁵ Kirkland acknowledges the letters' entertainment value but expresses doubt about their public currency. This often cited claim and the obvious historical correspondence between Mary Clavers, a middle class mother transported from the "civilized" east to the Michigan woods by her enterprising yet unsuccessful husband, and Caroline Kirkland, the frontier author, fuel the critical tendency to interpret A New Home primarily as autobiographical document. Scholars -- including Keyes, Osborne, McCloskey, and Kolodny -- label it a specialized autobiography and then use the text to extrapolate details about Kirkland's life as well as

women's daily frontier experiences. Since only one letter and no corroborating journals, diaries or historical documents from the crucial period between 1835-40 survive, the accuracy of the text as autobiographical document cannot, and, I will argue, should not be an issue.²⁶

"Although the book is clearly based on the author's real experiences," Gebhard effectively argues, "the 'realism' of this extraordinary text does not lie in the revelation of a personal self (autobiography), nor in the strict reporting of day-to-day events (travel diary)" (162). The fictional persona "Mary Clavers" may reflect elements of Kirkland's actual frontier experiences; however, A New Home is neither a simple autobiography nor a new hybrid genre, blending "household realism and the ironic acculturation story" (Bray 12).

Kirkland's professional and private correspondences communicate an entrenched desire to shield her personal life from public scrutiny. "There is absolutely nothing to say about me that the world should know," she protests to John Hart ("Letters" 211). After a terse three-sentence-long autobiographical summary, Kirkland wryly explains that "it strikes me as absurd to give biographical notices while people are alive. Only wait till I am dead, and I shall make no complaints" ("Letters" 211). While private letters and Kirkland's experiences on the frontier inform A New Home, it seems unlikely that the text constructs an unvarnished autobiographical portrait. As Caroline Gebhard

notes, "the autobiographical quality of this work is a much more complicated issue than is often admitted" and, by extension, so is her creation of her mouthpiece Mrs. Mary Clavers (160).

The decision to publish A New Home anonymously may reflect acquiescence to cultural notions dictating feminine decorum. Within antebellum women's literature, A New Home represents an anomaly. As Sandra Zagarell explains, "one reason for the scarcity of satire or large scale sociocultural critique by women is that the scope and irreverence of satire were incompatible with prevailing ideas about white middle-class femininity" ("Introduction" xv). This reading can be supported further by drawing out the notable correspondences between her cultural position as middle-class mother and teacher, and the careers of contemporaries like Lydia Sigourney and Catharine Sedgwick, who, as noted earlier, also began publishing anonymously.²⁷ Although Kirkland shed her pseudonym at the same time that she emerged as a professional writer, she remained acutely aware of cultural imperatives urging female anonymity. In an 1843 letter, written after achieving literary prominence, she extrapolates on this stance to Rufus Griswold, then editor of Graham's Magazine:

Now a lady always feels under a certain degree of restraint when she feels that the world is looking her in the face all the time -- Many a thought "funny, free and flashy" is checked

through a feeling of diffidence or pride -- I shall probably never write anything as amusing as my first effort, because I accomplished that with the assured belief that the author would never be discovered. ("Letters" 21)

According to Audrey Roberts, Kirkland remained "cautious about her 'image' and sought anonymity" throughout her career ("Additions" 346).²⁸ This reluctance expressed in private letters transcends conventional feminine apologia and suggests that Kirkland remained intensely cognizant of her public image.

By appending the pseudonym "Mrs. Mary Clavers -- An Actual Settler" to her title page, Kirkland ostensibly participates in a tradition of female anonymity.²⁹ However, her qualifying definition, "an actual settler," playfully challenges the conventional "by a Lady" by-line and displaces her narrative authority from the domestic drawing room to the more discursively porous frontier. The name "Mrs. Mary Clavers" immediately alerts the reader that Kirkland is setting up her narrator as a potential satiric object.³⁰ The combination of "Mrs." -- signifying her culturally revered status as a married woman -- and "Mary" -- a very common nineteenth-century Christian name connoting her role as representative woman/mother -- highlights her narrator's unusual surname. "Clavers" is a verb of Scottish derivation meaning "to talk idly, or with little sense, to gossip, or prate" (OED III, 287). This

fictional name serves a dual function. By creating a pseudonym that calls attention to its own fictionality, Kirkland identifies her narrator as a comic female type, easily recognizable to her readers. Since "gossip" functions linguistically as both a noun and a verb, the name signals a clue for understanding her rhetorical mode. Mary Clavers reveals gossip's public power. The female gossip forges public opinion, thereby participating in community building while educating an implied eastern reader, an education she effects by modeling her own learning process. As Gebhard notes, she is a "self-consciously constructed literary persona that enables the satire to cohere" (164). In addition, "gossip" functions as a rhetorical mode in masculine periodical travel narratives. For example, The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science and Art (1869) includes serialized letters entitled "Gossip from Egypt" in which the narrator converses about unusual cultural customs and exotic sights.

Mary Clavers represents neither a static character nor a conventional nineteenth-century female narrator. Sandra Zagarell, Robert Bray, and Annette Kolodny, among others, have effectively argued that Clavers undergoes gradual acculturation; however, they remain divided about the extent to which she truly transfers her self-identification from allegiance with her presumably eastern and educated readers to her Michigan neighbors. Zagarell reads this acculturation process as a revolutionary approach "unique

in the protoethnic literature of the period. Mary Clavers's cultural biases and her gradual acculturation are conveyed through her own self-observation" ("Introduction" xxiv).³¹ In other words, Kirkland projects Mary Clavers's awareness of her class limitations to the textual center.

At the same time, Kirkland constructs Clavers as a unique nineteenth-century ideal. As Daniel Riordan points out, Kirkland's satire depends upon her depiction of Clavers as "a person of the highest intellectual and moral caliber" (99). The daily routines of raising and protecting children, baking, housekeeping, and finding suitable domestic help figure most prominently in the earlier letters. As the narrative progresses, Kirkland increasingly minimizes Clavers's role as both wife and especially mother, the traditional roles her very name seems to signify, thereby downplaying the domestic nature of the letters and blurring the demarcation between Clavers's public and private gossip.³² It is important to note that Kirkland does not adopt the potentially politically empowering rhetoric of republican motherhood that Lydia Sigourney favors nor does she assume the rhetoric of Christian sisterhood that Lydia Maria Child occasionally employs. She locates her narrative authority in Clavers's daily experience and her position as community witness and epistolary gossip.

In the opening chapter, Kirkland de-politicizes her satire of frontier life by locating her rhetoric safely

within the tradition of private letters and oral female discourse. After clarifying the source for the narrative as "letters" to "our friends in the 'settlements,'" Clavers delivers a variant of the standard apologia for writing:

Tis true there are but meagre materials for anything which might be called a story. I have never seen a cougar -- nor been bitten by a rattlesnake. The reader who has patience to go with me to the close of my desultory sketches, must expect nothing beyond a meandering recital of common-place occurrences -- mere gossip about every-day people, little enhanced in value by any fancy or ingenuity of the writer; which, deriving no interest from colouring, can be valuable only for its truth. (3)

Within the context of nineteenth-century novels, this statement appears to represent another tacit deferral to the dictates of feminine decorum. However, William Merrill Decker identifies the apology as "endemic to the epistolary task, in which to apologize in anticipation of a letter's failure is to plead the terms of its success" (19).³³ Within letter writing conventions, the apologia is not necessarily gender-coded as female. Charles Fenno Hoffman's A Winter in the West opens with a similar rhetorical move, an apology coupled with a claim for absolute veracity:

with whom . . . can I better commence my little narrative than with one who will only regard its

details with the eye of affection -- unmindful of their want of intrinsic interest, and the unattractive form in which they may be conveyed, so they be but a faithful record of my wayfaring?

(1)

The apology motif enhances the illusion that Kirkland's text is comprised of unvarnished private letters and underscores their "truth"; moreover, it may represent her deft manipulation of the dialogic method which hinges on the creation of an imaginary intimate relationship with the reader. As Decker's comments suggest, nineteenth-century readers may have recognized this "apology" as a sign of epistolary expertise.

At the same time, Kirkland adroitly diffuses the potential political and sociopolitical ramifications of her satire by trivializing her topic as "mere gossip" about quotidian events and people. The tongue-in-cheek apology solidifies Kirkland's commitment to letter-writing rhetoric in which story is subordinate to detailed descriptions of daily life drawn to amuse and educate a distant reader. Moreover, her tone slyly exposes how her apology may be less than earnest. As a textual motif, these feigned apologies cohere as set pieces of epistolary rhetoric, add to the text's thematic unity, and complicate Kirkland's status as female letter writer. By mid-century, letter-writer manuals and conduct literature codified letter writing as an important daily duty while claiming that

letters, due to their brevity, style and familial subject matter, are particularly well-suited to women's sphere.

"There is no solemn thread of Fate to spin when we take up our correspondence -- no thread, indeed, that we may not comfortably lose, and find again half an hour later," Edith Schel, a nineteenth-century periodical writer, explains (523). Kirkland constructs herself as author within this tradition and simultaneously aligns it with oral story-telling culture. This rhetorical move re-defines her text as non-literary and even, to some extent, as non-textual:

I know this rambling gossiping style, this going back to take up dropped stitches, is not the orthodox way of telling one's story; and if I thought I could do any better, I would certainly go back and begin at the very beginning; but I feel conscious that the truly feminine sin of talking "about it and about it," the unconquerable partiality of wandering wordiness would cleave to me still; so I proceed in despair of improvement. (82)

Metaphoric references to her narrative's "dropped stitches" and to her "effort to regain the floating end of my broken threads" punctuate Clavers's self-satirizing commentary on her writing process, thereby emphasizing her marginal status as private female letter writer and not public historian (112).³⁴ "Yet rather than an admission of

failure," Nancy Walker rightfully argues, "Kirkland's comments should be read as an invitation to discern her revisionary method" (Disobedient 96). What emerges is "a radically different kind of frontier narrative: one that brings women's experience to the center" (Walker 96). Although Walker dismisses Kirkland's use of "gossip" as posturing, her comments correctly suggest how Kirkland's overall approach disrupts standard notions of history and linearity. This disturbance creates rhetorical space for her epistolary rhetoric to enter and, in some cases, correct masculine public social practice, as well as frontier cultural customs, while simultaneously satirizing conventions governing feminine epistolary style.

Before discussing how Clavers participates in and satirizes Montacute gossip, it is important to understand the social position and narrative perspective she uses in her cultural conversations. In the first half of A New Home, Clavers functions primarily as the bemused newcomer who comically laments the lack of conventional literary material and establishes herself as an outsider "who must try to describe something of Michigan cottage life" (115). Her neighbors' abhorrent table manners and unsanitary housekeeping prevent Clavers from embracing them as equals and reinforce her prejudices rooted in middle-class cultural ideals. Lori Merish has insightfully identified a civilizing impulse behind Kirkland's rhetoric. She argues that in the text's "configuration of separate spheres, the

opposition between female civility and male savagery is grafted onto a spatial distinction between domesticity and marketplace" (510).³⁵ However, despite her critique of masculine opportunism, Kirkland does not establish a corollary separate sphere based on harmonious ideals of "true womanhood." Instead, her domestic gossip reverberates with repeated episodes of fierce culture clash which begin in the privacy of feminine drawing rooms and culminate in the public spectacle of a makeshift courtroom.

Clavers talks about frontier culture from the prescriptive point-of-view characteristic of conduct literature; however, she recognizes that etiquette and formal customs cannot be uniformly applied to frontier life. The introduction of Mrs. Rivers marks an important transition in Clavers's role as Montacute gossip and budding social critic. In Chapter XVII, Clavers describes herself suffering through "one of our superlatively doleful ague days" within the "half-civilized state" of her temporary log home when the educated and genteel Mrs. Rivers enters. Critics have noticed how this arrival marks an important stage in Clavers's gradual shift in personal definition from being an outsider to being an experienced and, on some level, an integrated villager. Kirkland casts Clavers as teacher and cultural guide for the newly arrived Rivers: "I assumed the part of Mentor on this and many similar occasions; considering myself by this time quite an old resident, and of right entitled to speak for the

natives" (66). However, Clavers spends more much time speaking about Mrs. Rivers than for her neighbors.

The chapters devoted to Mrs. Rivers rely upon a rhetorical shift natural to intimate gossip: they alternate between creating sympathy for Mrs. Rivers and criticizing her "flights of sentiment" and her inability to "make friends of her neighbors" (54-5). After attending a Montacute wedding, Mrs. Rivers can only see the "outré" aspects of the event. Clavers, on the other hand, positions herself as cultural conversationalist and social critic:

I who had begun to claim for myself the dignified character of a cosmopolite, a philosophical observer of men and things, consoled myself for this derogatory view of Montacute gentility by thinking, "All city people are so cockneyish!" (66)

Kirkland uses Mrs. Rivers and her refined eastern sensibility as a double for the reader, and not necessarily for Clavers, whom at first glance she seems to resemble. Through their friendship, Kirkland demonstrates how female relationships and conversations are essential survival tools for frontier women of all classes. Clavers teaches Mrs. Rivers that "however we may justify certain exclusive habits in populous places, they are strikingly and confessedly ridiculous in the wilderness" (111).

In addition, while Clavers's stories about how she

encourages Mrs. Rivers to assimilate seem safely within the bounds of female gossip, they interrogate male prerogative in general and masculine notions of community specifically:

In this newly-formed world, the earlier settler has a feeling of hostess-ship toward the new comer. I speak only of the women -- men look upon each one, newly arrived, merely as an additional business-automaton -- a somebody more with whom to try the race of enterprize, i.e. money-making. (64)

Mr. Rivers embodies the same nefarious dualism Kirkland shows in the rapacious Mr. Mazard. Although he seems to be an agent for aiding Montacute's development, he acts as a genteel front for the Tinkerville wildcat bank and he profits from the bank scandal that costs many villagers their life savings. Rivers represents a lust for personal financial gain that supersedes dedication to community building. Kirkland clearly gender-codes this trait as masculine. For Kirkland, this lack of public morality naturally manifests itself in the domestic sphere. Clavers exposes him as a profligate, intemperate and potentially abusive husband with an "appearance of absence, of indifference which spoke volumes of domestic history" (64). Ultimately, Mrs. Rivers's life story operates as a cautionary tale exemplifying how middle class gentility, beauty, and manners are no protection from a ruthless, neglectful husband. Clavers's recognition of Mrs. Rivers's

plight serves as a marker of her growing recognition that she belongs to a community undermined by masculine competition, a force ostensibly integral to its development. The masculine thirst for westward expansion and upward social mobility destabilizes the community bonds which feminine gossip solidifies. As cultural conversationalist, Clavers counteracts this tendency and questions the underlying conventional reading of westward expansion as an integral stage in America's progressive history.

Chapters XXXIV, XXXV, and XLIV deal extensively with the epistolary gossip motif and showcase Mary Clavers performing the very mode she ostensibly critiques. For example, when the Brents, an English couple "belonging to the class who have emigrated by mistake," quickly become the subject of Montacute gossip, Clavers wryly comments that

I might repeat what I heard at a Montacute tea-party; I might give Mrs. Flyter's views of the probable duration of Mr. Brent's means of living on the occasion of having learned from Mrs. Holbrook that Mrs. Brent did not see to the butter-making, and had never milked a cow in her life. . . . But I shall only tell what Mrs. Nippers said, for I consider her as unimpeachable authority in such matters. (140)

While figuring her rhetoric as speculative, Clavers reveals

in the comic retelling. Gossip disseminates information and creates public opinion, and one of Kirkland's most compelling characters, Mrs. Nippers, generally plays a central part in the dramatic process.

When first introduced, Mrs. Nippers appears to be yet another satiric type, an exaggerated example of the comic elderly gossip and rural busybody:

no man sneezes at opening his front door in the morning; no woman sweeps her steps after breakfast; no child goes late to school; no damsel slips into the store; no bottle out of it; no family has fried onions for dinner; no hen lays an egg in the afternoon; no horse slips his bridle; no cow is missing at milking time; and no young couple after tea; but Mrs. Nippers, and her niece, Miss Artemisia Clinch, know all about it, and tell it to everybody who will listen to them.

(132)

Kirkland's description elevates Mrs. Nippers to mock-heroic status, a gossip of tall-tale proportions. She and Clavers seem destined to function as dialogic opposites, the coarse Michigander with her backwoods vernacular and out-moded dresses and bonnets who embodies the Jacksonian republican versus the educated, fashionable, and eloquent Clavers who personifies gentility, middle-class refinement, and Whig politics. However, Kirkland constructs the two as thinly disguised foils. After all, Mrs. Nippers like Mrs. Clavers

derives her authority from her association with "a sewing society in a certain village at 'the East'" (133). While Mrs. Nippers represents the "spiteful" social gossip, in contrast to Clavers -- who usually relegates her gossip to "private" letters -- Clavers clearly relishes out-gossiping her neighbor. David Leverenz notes that "while Mrs. Nippers talks of Mrs. Clavers to the town, Mrs. Clavers displays Mrs. Nippers to the world" (152). This dynamic exposes an important tension in the text between the public and private uses of gossip. Private gossip can be used to educate, trade information, and build community; however, when private prejudices are made public, gossip erodes integral social bonds and threatens community cohesion.

In Chapter XXXIV, Mrs. Nippers plots to impeach the newly elected President of the Ladies Beneficent Society because she planned and then canvassed heavily to rule the Society. The society symbolizes Montacute's gradual evolution from a few scattered log cabins to a more cohesive town, and shows the female community preparing to take up a key attribute of nineteenth-century middle class women's society, benevolent philanthropy. However, Montacute does not emerge as a female-centered domestic Utopia in opposition to a masculine-ruled capitalist marketplace:

This Association is the prime dissipation of our village . . . the stronghold of caste, the test of gentility, the temple of emulation, the hive

of industry, the mart of fashion, and I must add, though reluctantly, the fountain of village scandal, the hot-bed from which springs every root of bitterness among the petticoated denizens of Montacute. (132)

Kirkland's humorous depiction highlights the potentially disruptive nature of community building and showcases a variation on masculine competition. The myriad frontier women work together but not without exposing the cultural, educational, and class divisions which separate them, and the social climbing and jockeying for position which can also consume them.

When Mrs. Nipper is not elected President, she attempts to regain control by manipulating Montacute's unstable class relations. She secretly visits those women who were not invited to join, women still living in log cabins on the social and class margins, and ignites their social insecurities. While Clavers wryly satirizes her own participation in the drama, "my curiosity began to be troublesome" she admits, Kirkland exposes the importance of the underlying class system (134). "Public opinion is nowhere so strongly felt as in this country, among new settlers," Clavers explains, "And as many of the present company still lived in log-houses, a tender string was touched" (136). Even though Mrs. Nippers is duly chastised, and the crisis evaporates, Kirkland shows how public gossip has the power to disrupt as well as create

community.

In Chapter XLIV, Kirkland makes this point explicit. The Female Beneficent Society's members are called as witnesses in a slander case to be decided by a country court. The scene follows a pattern Kirkland uses throughout the text: she uses the occasion to satirize local manners and the townspeople's exaggerated self-importance. For example, she notes that "the squire opened the court by blowing his nose without calling upon his handkerchief" (174). Critics have noted that the scene parodies Jacksonian democracy for creating a contentious, and endlessly litigious society "where you would find it impossible to persuade a thorough-bred Wolverine, that here was any thing unfriendly in suing his next door neighbour for a debt of however trifling amount" (176). Although the dispute is truly a tempest in a teapot -- a husband repeats his wife's gossip that the tailor has cheated her, and the tailor prosecutes a slander suit -- it demonstrates the permeability of the boundaries between private and public discourse. When the ladies are called as witnesses, "to ask one question, [the Justice] elicited never less than one dozen answers; the said answers covering a much larger ground than the suit itself and bringing forward the private affairs and opinions of half the village" (175). The comic mock trial reveals how private gossip can disrupt public relations. Ladies "who had been trembling under the consciousness of conversational 'sins unwhipped of

justice,' . . . made vows, sincere, whether well-kept or not, to let their neighbours' business alone for some time" (176). While women settle their disputes communally, as in the scene in which the sewing circle women chastise Mrs. Nippers for meddling, gossip involving men spreads to the public judicial system. This practice is another favorite satiric target, for it is men who cannot differentiate between public and private affairs. "To think of bringing a woman into trouble for what she happened to say after tea!" Mary Clavers exclaims, "I began to consider Mr. Shafton as no more than the ninth part of a man, after all" (175). Clavers suggests that men fail to recognize how gossip constructs and deconstructs community.

In the final letters, Clavers reiterates her conventional epistolary appeal that the entire project has failed and re-inscribes herself using sentimental and domestic terms:

I can no more resist following a new train of thought, than a coquette the encouraging of a new lover, at the expense of all the old ones
This attempt to write one long coherent letter about Montacute, has at least been useful in convincing me that History is not my forte.

(177)

This apology re-inscribes the narrative as private, nonliterary, and a paragon of sentimental culture, the very classifications the text has successfully destabilized.

Clavers delivers a dramatic disavowal: "I give up the account in despair, and lower my ambition to the collection of scattered materials for the use of the future compiler of Montacutian annals" (177). Kirkland completes the depiction of Clavers as epistolary gossip who is nothing more than "a midge-fancier" (187). Nevertheless, this seemingly self-deprecating remark can be interpreted as another sign of epistolary mastery. According to "Female Letter-Writers": "the female letters in which we delight are such as . . . genuine records of the daily business, interests, and pleasure of domestic life; no matter how trifling the details" (198). Capturing minute details is a hallmark of the accomplished letter writer. In closing, Clavers delivers a summary of Montacute's improvements, the benchmarks of community building. Her conversational tone moves quickly through short paragraphs summarizing local domestic gossip and detailing the main characters' current health and activities. This concise delivery of the village news represents a standard practice of frontier letters, which inevitably include community news and updates on mutual friends and acquaintances.

Ultimately, Mary Clavers emerges as a new type of democratic letter writer, one who vacillates between speaking for and gossiping about her neighbors. Despite her assertion that she is "now a denizen of the wild woods," it is an oversimplification to state without reservations that Clavers becomes thoroughly acculturated

(186). Nevertheless, one of the secondary definitions of "gossip" is "to make oneself at home" (OED VI, 700). In the complex final paragraph, Clavers repeats the apologia motif and constructs herself as "rustic damsel" while maintaining a vantage point of bemused cultural superiority:

As some rustic damsel who, in her simplicity . . .
. . . finds that she has already outstaid the
fashionable limit, yet hesitates in her
awkwardness, when and how to take leave; so I --
conscious that I have said forth my little say .
. . . have prolonged this closing chapter. . . .
But such simple and sauntering stories are like
Scotch reels, which have no natural ending, save
the fatigue of those engaged. So I may as well
cut short my mazy dance and resume at once my
proper position as a "wall-flower," with an
unceremonious adieu to the kind and courteous
reader. (189)

By having Clavers metaphorically compare her current status to a "rustic damsel," Kirkland highlights her awareness that she is not completely acculturated. She has not lost her sensitivity to middle-class social conventions. At the same time, by characterizing her former position as a "wall-flower," Kirkland invites the reader to recall that Clavers has been anything but a passive observer. Instead, Clavers represents an outgoing socialite, a cultural

conversationalist, who may be increasingly "at home" in Michigan, though only occasionally depicted within her domestic setting.

II

For twentieth-century critics, A New Home has consistently defied neat generic categorization. The text has been variously labeled a village sketch, a travel narrative, an emigrant's guide, a frontier autobiography, a factual conversion or acculturation narrative, and a freewheeling satire of both American individualism and masculine romantic frontier myths. Various generic hybrids of these genres have also been used to describe the text. While these standard definitions identify important components of the narrative, each is problematic. Kirkland's comments identify village sketches and western travel narratives as important antecedents.³⁶ Clearly, Mary Mitford's Our Village, a source Kirkland acknowledges in her "Preface," is a textual influence. However, the text is not a conventional village sketch since, as Zagarell notes, "she is not writing about an established village and culture but about the creation of both" ("Introduction" xxvii). Similarly, although Kirkland incorporates travel narrative techniques, the text is not a true travel narrative, an experimental genre that conventionally incorporates sub-genres, because Kirkland is not merely passing through Michigan, and actual travel descriptions

are few.

In contrast, I classify the text as an epistolary settlement narrative. Epistolary travel narratives were a staple in the early republic and in the nineteenth-century a vigorous market for western narratives emerged. Travel narratives such as Anne Royall's Letters from Alabama, James Hall's Letters from the West and Charles Fenno Hoffman's A Winter in the West, which also attribute their derivation to private letters re-addressed to the public, were popular enough to be republished in book form. Many of the major periodicals printed short runs of serialized "letters home" from the West.³⁷ These American travel narratives should not be confused with another popular antebellum literary phenomena, travel narratives written by Americans describing European adventures, a highly formulaic genre, to be discussed later in relation to Margaret Fuller's New York Daily Tribune dispatches. In fact, Kirkland's own European travel narrative, Holidays Abroad, or Europe from the West, woefully lacks the vibrant depictions, fluid style and humorous narrative perspective that invigorate her forest narratives.³⁸

Published in 1839, A New Home reflects two important and mutually reflexive trends in American epistolary culture, one private and one public. According to Nathaniel Lewis, "Kirkland is doubly situating herself at once within (at least) two different literary conventions, one often associated with women's writing [the private

letter], the other with western (and other forms of travel) writing" (64). Within the private sphere, familial and friendship letters from the frontier take on increased importance as the primary means for promulgating family relationships and maintaining cultural ties. Catharine Sedgwick's Home: Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truth (1835), for example, includes a chapter on "Family Letters" which invites the reader to eavesdrop on a domestic conversation about the absolute necessity for estranged family members to reconnect and maintain familial ties through letter writing. Fanny Fern explains the power of letters to sustain familial ties as a female talent:

Still everyone of us must remember, when absent, letters from some female member of the family, which were worth more than all the collected male intellect of the household could furnish. You, and you, and you -- have them now we dare say, stained by time and perhaps tears, yet still precious above rubies. (Folly 320)

Letters were idealized for their ability to transcribe reality and make the letter writer and her milieu present for the reader:

They place us in the midst of past generations, as if we lived among them; they lift the curtain which separates the illusive from the true; place us by the parlour fireside, or in the dressingroom of the beauty of lost ages; unlock

the most secret repositories, and give us a key
to the most hidden thoughts. (Schel 198)

This ability was consistently gendered as female. At the same time, periodical publishers seem to have recognized the potential public appeal this type of ostensibly private letter could wield in the literary marketplace.

Although A New Home was never serialized, its publication coincided with the emergence of periodical "letters home" which were exceedingly popular.³⁹ These letters are important early examples of social realism and often include stories, sketches and more direct cultural critiques. "Such letters implied textual immediacy, an unvarnished relationship with the land and the people, and thus legitimized the author's work (and self) as authentic," Nathaniel Lewis explains (64). The reading public's desire for "fresh" and uniquely American literary material created a ready market for "authentic" frontier literature (Cyganowski 127). These public letters render graphic depictions of distant lands and often transcribe and occasionally translate American regional vernacular speech.⁴⁰ Kirkland's opening sentences align the text with this emerging periodical publishing phenomena, while attempting to retain the cultural allure of their "private delectation":

Our friends in the "settlements" have expressed so much interest in such of our letters to them, as happened to convey any account of the peculiar

features of western life . . . that I have been for some time contemplating the possibility of something like a detailed account of our experiences. And I have determined to give them to the world, in a form not very different from that in which they were originally recorded for our private delectation. (3)

This introductory statement positions the text on the literary margin between the public and private spheres, thereby granting Kirkland a unique narrative authority. At the same time, Kirkland's satire and relentless mixing of styles and genres complicates the text's representational discourse.

A New Home capitalizes on these two epistolary trends. Kirkland's recording of Michigan vernacular and her dedication to documenting and, of course, satirizing Michigan manners and society align the text with an overarching cultural desire for a distinct American literary idiom, an impulse which appears in periodical letters heavily laced with vernacular speech.⁴¹ Kirkland frequently satirizes two cultural movements associated with Jacksonian republicanism: excessively bombastic political rhetoric and the intense pride Michigan residents derive from ascribing to a rather radical egalitarianism. However, her epistolary style imbibes heavily from the spirit of 1830s political rhetoric. Kirkland's epistolary rhetoric represents an adept intermixing of discursive

styles ranging from prose filled with Latinate-laden allusions and French phrases to dialogue heavily laden with vernacular phrases, grammatically incorrect sentences and amusing malapropisms. The resulting style closely resembles an emerging cultural rhetoric which championed a new democratic or "middling" style "pioneered by Jacksonian politicians and journalists in the late 1820s and early 1830s" and evident in the oratory of public speakers like Henry Beecher (Cmiel 58).

It is this conversational style derived from both ultra-literary and lowbrow sources that Kirkland's nineteenth-century reviewers praise as "fresh and natural." According to Kenneth Cmiel, the "middling style" represents a "complex mixture of cultural styles" in which "speakers might shift from the formal to the folksy" (58).⁴² This "shift" defines Kirkland's style. For example, Mary Clavers describes herself wandering in the woods on a "'splorification" with her husband,

I had never ventured far from Montacute in my strolls with the children, or with my female friends. To say nothing of my *sad pause*, I hate it in English; but "'tis not so shocking in French:" not to mention that at all, there are other "lions in the way;" Massasaugas for instance, and Indians, and blue racers, six or eight feet long, and as thick as a man's arm; "harmless," say the initiated, but *j' endoute*,

and my prime and practical favourite among
mottoes and maxims, is "'ware snakes!" (150)

Kirkland excels at this "middling" style and uses it throughout the text and in her personal letters. Michigan vernacular provides rich satiric fodder; however, it also lends veracity to her rhetorical mode. This shifting style contributes a unique linguistic realism to Clavers's gossip and by extension to her cultural critiques. Clavers recognizes that this style may offend some readers and that

a veracious history of actual occurrences, an unvarnished transcript of real characters, and an impartial record of every-day forms of speech (taken down in many cases from the lips of the speaker will be pronounced "graphic," by at least a fair proportion of the journalists of the day.

(3)

In fact, the three reviewers -- an anonymous writer for Godey's Lady's Book, one for the London Athenaeum: A Journal of English and Foreign Literature, and the famous N.P. Willis -- who do call it "graphic," use the term as a compliment, equating "graphic" with the original combination of humor and "truthfulness." Constantly shifting her style also allows Kirkland to blur repeatedly the boundaries conventionally dividing literary and non-literary texts. As an anonymous writer for The New York Mirror explains, A New Home is written "in infinite simplicity, purity and beauty of style -- with all the

skill of an artist, yet perfectly easy and natural" (127).

This "middling" oratorical style closely resembles the "natural and conversation" style letter-writing conventions dictate as essential to writing personal letters which will engage the reader. Critics note how Kirkland satirizes sentimental literature and lady novelists through her humorous treatment of Eloise Fidler without recognizing how her style may be interpreted as yet another implicit corrective. Direct comparisons provide the best method for understanding the glaring stylistic differences between Kirkland and her most widely read contemporaries.⁴³ For example, A New Home may be read as a remedy to James Hall's highly euphemistic, overly ornate and occasionally bombastic style.⁴⁴ A short quotation from Hall's opening letter speaks volumes about the whole text:

The horse is my favourite among quadrupeds, and I find no music so inspiriting as the cracking of a coachman's whip; even the creaking of cordage and the howling of the ocean blast, though they intimate danger, have often charmed me into forgetfulness, by harmonizing with my locomotive propensities. (2)

In Letters from the West, Hall's style detracts from the immediacy of his account, marks his text as ostensibly literary, and ultimately expose his awareness of the letters as public documents. On the other hand, as Lori Merish suggests,

the conversational ideal A New Home embodies is that of . . . "mere gossip about every-day people" (3) a rhetorical style that characterized much of antebellum women's writing and mobilizes both the emotional immediacy of "feminine" private language and romanticism's valuation of impulse and discursive fluidity. (493)

Kirkland's fluid, conversational style is more reader-friendly and her rhetorical shifts resemble the type of linguistic code-shifting characteristic of everyday speech patterns. This conversational rhetoric enables Kirkland to forego plot and construct her narrative as a series of gossip-filled letters which alternate between satiric sketches, sentimental stories, cautionary tales, and "graphic" vignettes to report on frontier life.

It is important to note how the introductory chapter describes Clavers's first trip into the Michigan wilderness and encapsulates a miniature paradigm for interpreting the textual whole. Clavers, like the presumably eastern readers she addresses, must learn to decipher a new natural environment and a novel social community. From the onset, Kirkland identifies her main satiric targets, offers practical advice, and delivers exemplary tidbits of gossip about Michigan life, in general, and the status of Michigan women, in particular. Kirkland positions her narrator as a reluctant observer who initially interprets her experiences against "official" narratives about frontier life which

promulgate nothing "but incorrect notions of a real journey through Michigan" (6).

Clavers alludes to how masculine propaganda about the frontier can lure unprepared settlers into difficult and even dangerous situations. She immediately creates a dialogue between her own observations and "pictures touched by the glowing pencil of fancy" that present "incorrect notions of a real journey" (6). For Clavers, immediate experience quickly displaces written accounts as a source for "truth" about the frontier and yet she cannot quite free herself from the allure of sentimentality when describing native flowers and the freedom of traveling through the wilderness. "We must have a poet of our own," Clavers wryly remarks (5). This mixture of styles signals the reader that Clavers's realism includes "glosses, and colourings, and lights, if not shadows, for which the author alone is accountable" (1).

Kirkland's clever allusions to romantic poetry quickly give way to an imbedded story about the underbelly of frontier life whispered from woman to woman. Throughout the text, Clavers pauses to recount stories detailing women's trials on the frontier. In the opening chapter, Clavers recalls a "desolate woman" who recounts "her change of lot" from a sheltered life in the East to a "wretched den in the wilderness" where she and her children are plagued by recurrent illness and her husband's descent into alcoholism, violence and death (7). "So much for turning

our fields of golden grain into 'fire water' -- a branch of business in which Michigan is fast improving," Clavers sardonically comments (7). While critics like Kolodny have identified this impulse to reveal the "truth" about women's experience as a manifestation of Kirkland's commitment to literary realism, it may also be read as a function of the text's epistolarity.

By identifying her mode as epistolary gossip, Kirkland is able to aggressively expose violent private behavior as public spectacle and social problem by collecting women's gossip and reporting it. She remains free of the stigma associated with discoursing on an "unwomanly" subject since epistolary gossip by definition authorizes describing "the activities of other people, their comments on the judgment and moral standards of others, represented a means of establishing mutually accepted standards of behavior" (Motz 67). This distinction is important because it connects Kirkland's realism and didacticism through her epistolary mode.

The text coheres around a conglomeration of women's stories with shared thematic motifs, including the legacy of "bad" marriages, the destructive influence of alcohol and gambling, physical abuse, and the fate of that "class who have emigrated by mistake, they [seem] so well-off, so amiable and so unhappy" (140). A pattern emerges in which Clavers meets a frontier woman, strikes up a conversation, and repeats her story. "I was sure that like so many

western settlers, the fair and pensive matron had a story . . ." Clavers explains, "I determined to make a brave push to ascertain the truth of my conjecture" (88). Judith Fetterley argues that Kirkland's approach "signals a realism in American fiction designed not simply to counter previous romanticism; it is designed equally to counter that masculine 'realism' that believes the whole story has been told when the man's story has been told" (123). For example, Charles Fenno Hoffman's depictions of the average Michigan resident are idealized and completely one-dimensional compared to Kirkland's:

The population of Michigan generally, -- as I believe I have before observed, -- is much superior in character to the ordinary settlers of a new country. The ease with which a man can here support a family as a farmer, induces a great many persons of all professions, in other states to abandon their former pursuits and become tillers of the soil. The alteration of life, I should judge by the contentment I everywhere witness, is almost always for the better. (191)

Kirkland not only challenges this uniform endorsement, her democratic style gives voice to frontier women as she relates their conversations and daily gossip in their native vernacular. As cultural conversationalist, Clavers discusses Michigan culture and transcribes women's

conversations while commenting on both.

As the narrative progresses, Kirkland increasingly uses gossip to expose the "unwomanly" dark side of frontier life while underscoring the importance of female friendships and attachments. Mary Clavers's first frontier friendship develops with the down-home and folksy Mrs. Danforth, a literary antecedent for Sarah Orne Jewett's Mrs. Todd in The Country of the Pointed Firs (1896) and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Grandmother Badger in Oldtown Folks (1869) (Donovan 36). Mrs. Danvers functions as Clavers's first mentor. Despite her primitive living conditions and ungrammatical speech, heavily spiced with Michigan vernacular, Mrs. Danforth represents an ideal. She is clean, honest, hardy, competent and kind. Her role is to indoctrinate Mrs. Clavers primarily by telling numerous stories about the trials of frontier life which demonstrate the need for female community. By describing the telling of Mrs. Danforth's "lucky" life story as a "broken thread" interrupted by the need to cook dinner for the "menfolk," Kirkland reveals the kinship between women's friendships, oral storytelling, and domesticity. Mrs. Danforth shares her "early history, the prosy flow of which was just in keeping with the long dreamy course of the afternoon, unbroken as it was by any sound more awakening than the ceaseless click of knitting needles" (19). And yet her story is heartbreaking. After surviving a tough life as a fostered orphan, she is victimized by unscrupulous men and

then forced into a life of perpetual westerly emigration by her restless husband. This theme of the debilitating effects produced by men's desire to push ever westward recurs, and there is a tension between settlers' desire for upward mobility and social stability. "The habit of selling out so frequently makes that *home-feeling*," Clavers explains, "which is so large an ingredient in happiness elsewhere, almost a nonentity in Michigan" (22).

If Mrs. Danforth represents a positive role model for surviving the frontier experience, the Newland family exhibits how life beyond clearly defined social norms can be potentially corruptive. For Kirkland, a transitory lifestyle intensifies the disintegration of social and communal ties and contributes to the rise of a class she considers beyond redemption, "a class but too numerous in Michigan, . . . a vicious and degraded one" (111). Initially, Kirkland depicts the Newlands -- with their symbolically charged surname -- as a stereotype of those settlers who fail to prosper materially because of their moral failings. Clavers justifies talking about their private affairs because they offer an important moral lesson which she immediately defines as of a piece with the "thread" of her gossip:

But I am running into absolute homily! I set out to say only that we had been warned at the beginning against indulging in certain habits which darken the whole course of country life;

and here I have been betrayed into a chapter of sermonizing. I can only beg pardon and resume my broken thread. (78)

Kirkland's representational discourse complements her didacticism which is almost completely devoid of conventional sentimental expostulations. For Kirkland, the simple clarity of graphic depictions relayed in a conversational tone creates a connection with the reader which transcends over-used platitudes and religious rhetoric. Instead, she positions her narrative authority within the immediacy of her epistolary style.

As an epistolary gossip, Clavers violates a nineteenth-century literary taboo when she documents Amelia Newland's death from a botched abortion:

Struck with horror I almost hesitated whether to proceed, but the door was opened, and I went in. Two or three neighbours with terrified countenances stood near the bed, and on it lay the remains of the poor girl swollen and discoloured, and already so changed in appearance that I should not have recognized it elsewhere. (110)

Community gossip plays an important role in the episode. First, Clavers identifies it pejoratively as a reason for the abortion: "I have been assured . . . this was but one fatal instance out of the *many* cases, wherein life was perilled in the desperate effort to elude the 'slow

unmoving finger' of public scorn" (110-1). Second, she cites it as a source for her narrative authority: "I can only repeat, 'I say the tale as 't was said to me,' and I may add that more than one instance of a similar kind, though with the results less evidently fatal, has since come under my knowledge" (111). In this episode, gossip also exerts a cleansing influence on the community as the Newlands and their ilk are continually pushed ever westward further from society as Clavers idealizes it.

After the text's mid-point, Clavers's gossip turns increasingly toward a "second class of citizens," those genteel Easterners and well-educated English families who struggle and generally fail to assimilate. For some critics, Kirkland's decision to lapse into romantic stories replete with stock sentimental conventions -- especially her extended five chapter treatment of Cora Mansfield's romantic history -- read like excerpts from nineteenth-century woman's magazines and represent a breach in textual realism.⁴⁵ They cite the stories as proof of Kirkland's ongoing investment in promulgating middle-class ideals and domestic norms. However, as examples of epistolary gossip, these sentimental narratives are presented as equally "true" and their idealized love relationships may be interpreted as another type of corrective model. Annette Kolodny reads these stories as Kirkland's attempt to sugar-coat her didacticism:

But in order to make the sobering counsels

usually reserved for emigrants' manuals palatable to readers bred on sentimental novels, she employed the two sure devices she knew would prove familiar and compelling: plot and character, with women always at the center.

(134)

Thematically, these stories support one of Clavers's main contentions, firmly established in the opening pages, that when living on the boundary of civilized society, reading - - from any genre -- cannot replace experience, which is the only authority for survival. This holds especially true for women.

When her narrative begins, Cora is depicted as beautiful, accomplished and hopelessly romantic: "she lived entirely in an ideal world" based on reading and daydreams (156). The plot adheres to standard story conventions for women's magazines. Cora and her equally idealized Everard defy their parents and elope in order to experience their dream of living as "denizens of the wild." Their story includes many stock conventions: scenes of tearful regret, a series of misinterpreted letters, mistakenly addressed letters, and finally their first child's near-death experience, all of which set the stage for a fortuitous reunion with forgiving parents. The obligatory tearful reconciliation and the lovers' repentant confessions complete the scene. However, the story does not end on an entirely conventional note:

[They] confessed that they had imbibed a taste for the wilderness, an unfashionable liking for early rising and *deshabille*; a yearning, common to those who have lived in the free woods. . . . Visionary still! [s]ays the reader. Perhaps so, but to Michigan they came, and with a fine large fertile tract, managed by a practical farmer and his family, they find it possible to exist, and are, I had almost said the happiest people of my acquaintance. (169)

The Mansfields, free from the daily drudgery of subsistence farming, represent a class-coded ideal and their decision to create a "new" home offers a remedy for the Newland "plague." They function as a genteel model for their neighbors. In addition, their companionate marriage also presents a remedy for the many unhappy stories Clavers relates about ill-suited and abusive spouses.

In the very next letter, Kirkland switches from sentimental story telling to sharp satire in order to teach a variation of the same lesson Cora learns about "book-learning" versus practical experience. The episode involves one of Kirkland's favorite satiric targets, Mr. Jenkins, who embodies Jacksonian egalitarianism, rabid patriotism, and self-promotion through civic duty. When Clavers corrects his spelling of his newly acquired position as "Justas of Piece," Mr. Jenkins proudly replies that

"Book-learning is a good thing enough where there aint too much of it. For my part, I've seen a good many that know'd books that din't know much else. The proper cultivation and edication of the human understaning from the original creation of the universal world to the present day, and there has been a good many ways tried besides book-learning." (172)

While Kirkland's presentation of Jenkins undercuts democratic notions of the *vox populi; vox dei*, a favorite slogan in Jacksonian America, as the source of civic good, Jenkins's folksy assertion reiterates what Cora Mansfield has just painfully learned through experience.

Clavers repeatedly exposes western anti-intellectualism and identifies the need for more well educated teachers and better schools as central components of community building. Ironically, she also perpetuates the cultural myth that some emigrants may be too well read to survive frontier life. For example, Clavers describes the "very intelligent" Mr. Brent, who with his "very dependent and very gentle" wife ultimately leave Montacute, as "a hand some, noble-looking man . . . well-read, and passionately fond of literary pursuits; no more fit to be a Michigan farmer than to figure as President of the Texas Republic" (140). Clavers de-politicizes her critique by shifting her remarks back toward domestic affairs. For example, she explains that Jenkins is a reformed man who

has shunned all vices except smoking: "But as his wife, who is one of the nicest women in the world and manages him admirably pretends to like the smell of tobacco . . . I am not without hopes of his thorough reformation" (173).

Kirkland conventionally stylizes Mrs. Jenkins as a source of moral influence, and she does so without adopting the highly charged Christian rhetoric of women's philanthropy.

Mary Clavers's epistolary gossip uses representational discourse to explore social problems within the context of individual female stories and local episodes. Although her neighbors and fellow settlers are targets for Kirkland's satire, they are also sympathetically portrayed. This complex perspective complicates how Kirkland constructs an inclusive multi-vocal text that gives voice to myriad women's stories across customary class divisions, a divide which Clavers continually struggles to negotiate and occasionally uphold. Kirkland's inherently fluid style and her ability to align the text with published texts and private letters enables her to experiment with crossing the metaphoric boundary between public and private discourse.

III

In A New Home, Kirkland exploits reigning cultural connotations about letter writing to create an epistolary text that strives to be both edifying and entertaining, a conventional dictum for women's writing, with an unusual satiric twist. For nineteenth-century letter writers and

readers, correspondences often function as private conduct literature. These epistolary exchanges were meant to be mutually instructive while preserving familial intimacy and strengthening affectional ties.⁴⁶ For example, in a letter sent from Pinckney, Kirkland encourages her daughter to share "general intelligence," but with a caveat:

We do not wish to make the least mystery of our letters, but only to reserve the privilege of expressing ourselves unrestrainedly to you on all points connected with your improvement -- and the moment letters are expected to be shewn, all freedom is gone -- ("Letters" 49)

As parental surrogates, private letters entertain, instruct, and attempt to bridge temporal and spatial dislocations.

Kirkland does not envision her audience in terms of the parent/child dyad Sigourney favors, and the text reveals a different investment in educating the reader and nurturing an increasingly tenuous cultural connection. Unlike the travel narrative letter writer who consistently changes the geographical distance between self and home, once settled in Montacute, Clavers remains physically, if not psychologically, fixed. For Clavers, removal to the frontier substantially increases the value of letters. "I never before knew the value of a portable desk, or realized that a bottle of ink might be reckoned among one's treasures," she explains (46). As Montacute develops,

Clavers identifies their most important community milestone: the newly established and "sacred" weekly mail, "that sweetener of our long and delicious winter evenings—that rich atonement for all that we lack of fresh scandal and new news" (177).⁴⁷ The mail route serves as a conduit for gossip and a substitute for eastern cultural advantages. However, this "atonement" ironically underscores Clavers's isolation. Similarly, her narrative addresses acknowledge an ever-widening cultural and temporal gap between herself and her highly idealized reader, and this tension informs the text's didacticism. Clavers's longing for sympathy from the reader complicates her rhetorical attempts to reform the reader's views about frontier life, and her Jacksonian neighbors' egalitarian attitudes toward class divisions and social mobility.

In Forest Life, Kirkland provides an interesting meta-critical commentary about the writing process as a reflexive relationship founded on sympathy, a rhetorical orientation she shares with other nineteenth-century authors:

People write because they cannot help it. The heart longs for sympathy, and when it cannot be found close at hand, will seek it the world over. . . . If the desire for sympathy could lie dormant for a time, there would be no more new books, and we should find leisure to read those already written. (9)

This description resonates with sentimental conventions depicting the author's relationship to her reader in affectional terms, and yet Kirkland emphasizes the "absence" of sympathy. Conduct literature, like Letters to Young Ladies, for example, builds on the assumption of shared sympathy as the basis for creating cultural norms. In stark contrast, a desire for sympathy informs Clavers's addresses. This tension is important because gossip, like satire, depends upon an intimate collusion between the letter writer and the reader.

By alternating between satiric descriptions and sympathetic portrayals, A New Home models a complex relationship between Clavers, the reader, and the other characters. In an ironic twist, as Clavers feels increasingly at "home," the narrative addresses highlight the growth of perceived differences between Clavers and her reader rather than erasing them:

A home on the outskirts of civilization -- habits of society which allow the maid and her mistress to do the honours in complete equality . . . such a distribution of the duties of life as compels all without distinction, to rise with the sun or before him . . . to be ready for tea at four, and for bed at eight -- may certainly be expected to furnish some curious particulars for the consideration of those whose daily course almost reverses this primitive arrangement . . .

and who are apt occasionally to forget, when speaking of a particular class, that "those creatures" are partakers with themselves of a common nature. (4)

For Clavers, the blurring of social lines on the frontier is not a function of an increased sense of democratic egalitarianism -- as many proud "Wolverine" neighbors boast -- but rather a recognition of communal inter-dependence that in turn fosters an increased sympathy and understanding. At the most basic rhetorical level, each "letter" tries to mitigate the growing sympathetic distance between author and her eastern audience, as well as negotiate the class-based "distance" between the narrator and her subjects. As Daniel Riordan has aptly argued, Kirkland "had a double attitude toward her subject matter: she is intellectually and socially distant from it, but she is emotionally sympathetic to it" (101). Ultimately, the text's rhetorical patterns depend upon the seemingly incongruous combination of sentimental and satiric discourse strategies inherent in all well-intentioned gossip, which depends upon just such a "double attitude" based in perceived cultural superiority and human sympathy.

In comparison to epistolary conduct literature like Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies, Mary Clavers uses her epistolary addresses sparingly. She reserves them for rhetorical and humorous emphasis. These epistolary addresses deflect anticipated criticism, interpret frontier

sayings and events, inject irony into Clavers's self-deprecating narrative posture, and pose rhetorical questions, all the while arousing and directing the reader's sympathy. Sharing gossip acts as a rhetorical strategy for educating an ideal reader through repeated stories while re-kindling a shared intimacy based on shared values and sympathy. In the addresses, Kirkland metaphorically locates her idealized reader within an oral conversation. The reader, with a "delicate organization of 'ears polite'," often needs to be protected from the harsh reality of Michigan manners (114-5). The reader represents an "uninitiated" friend who belongs to the genteel "eastern-based culture . . . which is also Mary Clavers's culture of origin" (Zagarell xxxii). This dissonance also serves as a source for Kirkland's humor. One of Clavers's favorite motifs is how her neighbors express their republicanism by enforcing an rigid borrowing system. While this habit is initially repulsive to Clavers, she recognizes, in a society of limited resources, its practical communal purposes and endless comic value.⁴⁸ In one humorous episode, an uncomfortable nursing mother asks to borrow a neighbor's hungry baby. When the horrified neighbor refuses, the mother's husband must ask Clavers for what is apparently a primitive breast pump: "but I shall not tell what he calls it. The reader must come to Michigan" (72). The naive reader must be educated about Michigan manners and customs; however, some things can only

be understood through first-hand experience.

Repeatedly and conventionally, Clavers addresses her audience as "my friends." The possessive case stresses the importance of the implied personal relationship and the plural case creates the sense of a readerly class (114). The reader symbolizes a potential future settler who must be disabused of any romantic ideals about the frontier and protected from shamelessly promotional travel narratives. "I offer my counsel to such friends as may be removing westward," she explains (34). Within this role, Clavers establishes herself as a female authority on two important levels. On the practical level, her mission is to correct other "Emigrant Guides," and the misleading and misinformed advice she received from eastern friends whom she now sees as overly invested in "making a 'genteel appearance'" (60). Clavers explains, for example, how she "had never happened to see alluded to in any of the elegant sketches of western life which had fallen under my notice" advice for enduring the summer time trials of cooking meals on an open fire in a stifling log cabin. Her narrative addresses include detailed directions for making bread, a long disquisition on gardening, an exhaustive inventory of essential household items, and, perhaps more importantly, a list detailing which items should be left behind. This role also brings Clavers back to a central theme: book learning versus practical knowledge. In Cora Mansfield's case, Clavers humorously suggests that Cora should trade

Chateaubriand's Atala and Italian love poetry for imminently more practical texts like The New Domestic Medicine: or Universal Family Physician or Child's The Frugal Housewife.⁴⁹

Throughout her career, Kirkland emphasizes how manners and social customs are especially relevant within a democratic society. "We cannot persuade anybody to consider our national ideas as a separate thing from our national manners," she explains in "What Shall We Be?" (106). For Kirkland, manners are not solely a domestic issue, but a public performance of democratic values, ideals, and national health. In a sense, Kirkland legitimizes conduct literature's public value. Ultimately, she does not endorse what she sees as the "downward leveling" effect resulting from Michigan society's emphasis on upward mobility and class fluidity. Kirkland establishes Clavers to speak for her neighbors whose manners and social customs incessantly sin "against Chesterfield" (65). By devoting entire chapters to frontier customs and manners, Kirkland establishes Clavers as a local conduct expert, and locates the text in relation to contemporary conduct literature in order to show how democratic ideals on the frontier have eroded social manners and customs. Clavers's comments suggest that "the republican ideal upon which frontier society is founded does not magically raise the intellectual and social activities of the people who live there," a viewpoint

Kirkland repeatedly expresses in later periodical essays (Riordan 100-1). Kirkland's text suggests the need for frontier conduct literature while ironically predicting that any attempt would be ultimately ineffectual.

Kirkland's preferred satiric subjects are frontier social customs, local fashions, and, more importantly, western pretensions and local pride. Her addresses playfully highlight her humorous depictions: "Let no one read with an incredulous shake of the head, but rather let my sketch of these peculiar habits of my neighbours be considered as a mere beginning, a shadow of what might be told" (51). After compiling a shocking list of indigenous habits which violate etiquette rules, basic hygiene, and class-based assumptions about social relations, Clavers warns the reader how to behave: "You may say any thing you like of the country or its inhabitants: but beware how you raise a suspicion that you despise the homely habits of those around you. This is never forgiven" (53). Clavers suggests that some aspects of private behavior should not be made public. In Summer on the Lakes, Margaret Fuller's ethnographic narrator seems to have benefited from adhering to these rules:

The narrative might have been made much more interesting, as life was at the time, by many piquant anecdotes and tales drawn from private life. But here courtesy restrains the pen, for I know those who received the stranger with such

frank kindness would feel ill requited by its becoming the means of fixing many spy-glasses, even though the scrutiny might be one of admiring interest, upon their private homes. (109)

Fuller's narrator represents a much more accepting and, in many ways, a more realistic approach to documenting frontier life. Beyond eastern society's boundaries, the reader must be educated to understand emerging social customs and be forewarned against naïve sermonizing about etiquette's fine-points. Clavers acknowledges that the reader is "accustomed to the more rational arrangements of the older world"; however, her language suggests an inevitable, if somewhat lamentable change.

As cultural conversationalist and social gossip, Mary Clavers's addresses create community with her female readers based, in part, on their mutual differences from the Michigan social milieu. She elucidates her designs for civilizing neighbors and improving her husband (in general, husbands are a favorite satiric object).⁵⁰ Whimsical sketches depicting colorful characters like Cleory Jenkins the "school ma'am," who sits on Clavers's stoop and smokes "turning ever and anon to spit at the hearth," abound (56). However, these satiric vignettes serve an important rhetorical function. At first, her neighbors' abhorrent table manners and unsanitary housekeeping prevent Clavers from embracing them as equals, thereby reinforcing her middle-class prejudices. When Cleory turns from spitting

to smoking, Clavers remarks, "Incredible again? Alas, would it were not true!" (56). Clavers seems to be commenting primarily upon Cleory's vulgar manners and distasteful personal hygiene; however, by quoting her directly, Kirkland exposes Cleory's ungrammatical speech patterns, parochial attitudes, and deplorable lack of cultivation and education. She represents Lydia Sigourney's ideal republican teacher's antithesis. As Kirkland explains, "the best result of the best school-teaching is to *show us how to learn and inspire us with a love of improvement*" ("Education" 43).⁵¹ Clavers exposes Cleory in order to disparage Michigan's deplorable schools and, by extension, criticize frontier educational practices more generally.

Kirkland's satire has a didactic component; however, she is not -- unlike Sigourney, Child, and Fuller -- actively trying to reform or convert the reader. When Clavers refers to her readers as "those who live in the world," she equates spatial and cultural distance and establishes this separation as the narrator/reader relationship's defining characteristic (1).

Initially, Clavers and her reader share a common ignorance regarding Michigan social customs, the local dialect, and indigenous species. Together they explore Michigan through their imagined correspondence. Kirkland creates an idealized and genteel reader as a palliative to Clavers's unrefined Michigan neighbors. Clavers must learn

to read the Michigan "hieroglyphics which would be readily decyphered by any Wolverine we should meet, though perchance strange to the eyes of our friends at home" (8). Kirkland ultimately documents how Clavers does learn to understand if not completely accept her neighbors, a lesson she attempts to transfer to the reader.

Lori Merish argues that this author/reader relationship creates textual unity using a technique common to travel narratives in which the reader "serves to stabilize the narrative by sustaining a community of shared values vs. the shocks of travel" (494). The reader remains stable in comparison to the narrator's evolution. However, Merish fails to account for the fact that Clavers questions the viability of these "shared values" and seems hyper-aware that she could alienate the reader. For example, in her opening apologia, Clavers talks about her humble subject matter and "warn[s] any fashionable reader that may have taken up my book, that I intend to be 'decidedly low'" (4). This humorous banter takes on a more serious note later:

But I am aware that I have already been adventurous, far beyond the bounds of prudence. To hint that it may be better not to cultivate too far that haughty spirit of exclusiveness which is the glory of the fashionable world, is, I know, hazardous in the extreme. I have not so far forgotten the rule of the sublime *clique* as

not to realize, that in acknowledging even a leaning toward the "vulgar" side, I place myself forever beyond its pale. (186)

Clavers has become metaphorically doubly marginalized; she occupies a discursive space "beyond the pales" of her readers' and her neighbors' spheres. In a sense, the reader remains as uneducable and unsympathetic as the most stubbornly independent Michigander who irritates Mary Clavers. For Kirkland, sympathetic bonding does not necessarily guarantee reform and epistolary distances -- spatial, cultural, and emotional -- may be impossible to span.

Sandra Zagarell is correct to focus on how Kirkland participates in community building; however, gossip and humor as rhetorical strategies always run the risk of alienating their audience by breaching and parodying social norms, thereby potentially disrupting community formation. "Next to talking about ourselves, the pleasantest thing is talking about our neighbors," Kirkland explains, "this is a fact which everybody concedes in general, yet nobody is willing to apply in particulars; so I trust I shall secure a reputation for candor by confessing that my foible (if I have one) is love of gossip" (Forest 31). While Kirkland's satire and her playful depiction of Mary Clavers as social gossip drive the text's humor, Kirkland's Michigan neighbors were not amused. In the "Preface," Clavers admits that the text is not "without glosses, and

colourings, and lights" and prophetically identifies this lurking peril: "Journals published entire and unaltered, should be Parthian darts, sent abroad only when one's back is turned. To throw them in the teeth of one's every-day associates might diminish one's popularity rather inconveniently" (1). Ironically, the text's local reception reveals the potentially disastrous consequences of addressing community gossip to an idealized imaginary reader without recognizing the possibility of provoking a real audience of irate neighbors.

Kirkland failed to anticipate the possibility that the text's success would compromise her anonymity and that A New Home would be read in Michigan. The text's admiring critical reception generated greater exposure because reviewers reprinted entire chapters and long passages. As in the fictional episode in which a grievance letter from an offended serving girl astounds Clavers, Kirkland seems surprised that her neighbors are literate. A contemporary letter recounts the ensuing scandal:

[the] sketch of a meeting of the female society raised against [Mrs. Kirkland] a whirlwind of indignation among her Pinckney neighbors. In that sketch she drew her pen portraits, not too flattering of the inhabitants of the place, their oddities, bad manners and vulgarities The result was that all the persons thus truthfully depicted, were exasperated almost to frenzy. One

woman threatened to have her put under bonds, and the life of the Kirkland family in Pinckney thereafter was the reverse of agreeable. (qtd. in Osborne 44)

This reception exposes social gossip's inherent danger. The Pinckney reception confirms Kirkland's ability to blur the lines between fact and fiction. The ultimate irony of this scandal is its critical legacy. Critics, like Kirkland's disgruntled neighbors, continue privileging the text for its realism at the expense of recognizing its discursive complexity.

IV

Kirkland's subsequent western sketches renounce the playful humor and engaging immediacy of A New Home. She seemed destined to apologize endlessly for wounding her neighbors' pride and sense of community. In Forest Life and Western Clearings, Kirkland replaces humor and satire with a conventional stress on providing moral uplift and educational content. A more self-consciously literary tone replaces her conversational style. Stripped of Mary Clavers's persona as a sheltering fictional device and less inhibited alter-ego, Kirkland's narrative voice tends toward more overt moralizing, thereby diminishing the illusion of intimacy between author and reader. Critics attribute the rhetorical differences between A New Home and her later works (especially her other "forest" narratives)

to a diffidence about attaining personal notoriety, an acquiescence to culturally derived norms for feminine decorum, or a trepidation about renewed neighborhood hostility.

However, an epistolary analogy may best explain the stylistic, tonal, and subject differences between A New Home and Forest Life. A New Home reads more like a "private" letter conveying friendly gossip through its unrestrained commentary and playful self-deprecations. Kirkland's ability to creatively imagine her reader inspires the text with a spontaneous and conversational tone. On the other hand, Forest Life resembles an explicitly "literary" letter carefully crafted for publication with its meta-critical observations on authorship and its careful normalizing of the female narrator. The reader is no longer a personalized correspondent but a hydra-headed critic who must be placated and entertained. This radical shift in narrative voice, combined with Kirkland's meta-commentary on her writing process, have invited critics to focus on Mary Clavers as a thinly veiled self-portrait, an "autobiographical projection" (Kolodny 145). However, this reading simplifies Mary Clavers as a narrative persona. Moreover, it tends to operate concomitantly with interpretations that privilege the text's documentary realism at the expense of exploring its rhetorical complexity and connections to nineteenth century epistolary

culture.

Through Clavers's persona, Kirkland satirizes conventional romantic and sentimental subject positions. Mary Clavers is a revolutionary epistolary narrator, a social gossip who comments freely on matters both public and private while blurring the lines between realistic and sentimental representations, literary and non-literary discourse, and, to the chagrin of her neighbors, the tenuous line between fact and fiction. A New Home represents a transitional moment in American women's ongoing epistolary experimentation between conduct literature conventions and professional periodical writers' more overtly sociopolitical public letters. Sigourney is able to create a public space for women to begin moving beyond strictly defined gendered roles discursively; however, she relies upon conventional tropes and her rhetoric defines women primarily in relation to cultural ideals. A New Home exerts considerable cultural significance as an early experiment in creating a democratic epistolary style, a mode which allows Kirkland to explore formerly "unwomanly" subjects and focus on "real" rather than "ideal" American women. In turn, she emerges as a public letter writer documenting cultural history, and problematizing notions of individualism. "American women writers early concentrated on describing the social context that shapes the individual self," Judith Fetterley explains, "and thus they created a literature

concerned with the connections between manners, morals, social class, and social value" (9).

Kirkland creates an intimate epistolary conversation motivated by a longing for sympathy and colored by satire while reporting on women's lives, a stance authors like Lydia Maria Child, Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern, Jane Swisshelm, and Elizabeth Drew Stoddard would later adopt for their popular periodical letters. While both Kirkland and Sigourney encourage their audiences to engage in active critical reading, Lydia Maria Child and Margaret Fuller urge their readers to begin interpreting American culture as the first step toward social reform. In Letters from New-York, Child's performative letter-writer addresses her audience from the bustling metropolis where Mary Clavers longs to reside. However, Child reveals that the cultural homogeneity and republican unity which Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies seems to celebrate is also fracturing along the borders of urban class divisions. While Sigourney concentrates on teaching her audience how to read history and biography as the first step toward self-culture, and Kirkland encourages the reader to learn to decode manners and read critically, Child moves the reader toward interpreting the cultural signs, spiritual daguerreotypes, in the service of personal and social reformation.

WOMEN'S ADDRESSES: EPISTOLARY STRATEGIES IN
ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN LITERATURE

VOLUME II

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Chapter 3

Addressing Reform: Lydia Maria Child's

Letters from New-York

Dear Mrs. Sigourney,

It was with great pleasure that I received your kind letter, and agreeable volume. Through Various changes, outward and inward, I have preserved the kindest remembrances of you.

I am glad that you found anything pleasant in my volume of Letters. It is not easy to keep hope always fresh, in this arid and dusty pilgrimage. Perhaps the plaintive note in my character is heard too often in the book. I wish never to speak to others unless I can speak joyfully and strong.

I beg you to accept the accompanying volume in lieu of the one which you gave away.

Yours very respectfully,

L.M. Child (CC May 20, 1844)¹

Lydia Maria Child perpetually exchanged letters and "volumes" with friends, fellow reformers, political antagonists, and occasionally even strangers, thereby creating a vast correspondence dedicated to cultivating "various changes, outward and inward" through engaging her correspondents' sentiments. Child's copious correspondence charts her growing reliance on letter writing to maintain

important personal relationships and to construct a veritable paper pulpit for espousing her increasingly radical opinions on cultural questions. For example, in the early 1860s, Child launched a one-woman letter-writing campaign and mailed hundreds of unsolicited copies of her political tract, Correspondence Between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia, to Southern slave holders whom she knew only by reputation. Child's biographers have surmised that from 1838, when she initially left Boston, until her death on October 20, 1880, Child depended more and more on her correspondences to maintain significant personal ties and to bolster her relationship with her often estranged husband, David Lee Child. Moreover, Child cultivated a vigorous private correspondence with a wide range of important political and literary figures and a sustained public correspondence with the editors and readers of various periodicals. The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child assembles three hundred and thirty-two surviving letters Child wrote to newspapers alone.² In these letters, Child voices her ideas about controversial current events -- for example, the Amistad trial and John Brown's raid -- and divisive cultural debates -- for example, emancipation and women's suffrage -- which contradict her often demure self-portrait.

In an 1837 letter, Child converses about the abolitionist movement: "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" (CC 5/121).³ This playfully ironic comment underscores how Child assiduously avoided public speaking; however, she chafed against public admonitions that she should "much better attend to her household concerns."⁴ In essence, Child did "lecture" to promiscuous public audiences by using the periodical press as a medium for voicing her opinions. She was considered a formidable public figure.⁵ Bruce Mills accurately portrays her career as an uncompromising search for an appropriate format to publicly espouse her political views, and a constant working toward literary excellence.

Letters from New-York represents Child's most compelling and sustained literary experiment. Like Caroline Kirkland who is reporting from the frontier, another social margin, Child posts her letters from the urban frontier, a rapidly changing and equally emergent social milieu. The individual letters originally appeared as columns in the weekly National Anti-Slavery Standard before Child published select letters as a unified volume in 1843. Letters from New-York was an immediate success. According to Carolyn Karcher, "it sold out its first print run of 1,500 copies within four months and went through ten more printings in seven years" (309). Frank Luther Mott lists Letters from New-York as an 1843 "better seller" meaning that it sold just under 175,000 copies (Golden 307).

Throughout Letters from New-York, Child characterizes the nineteenth-century as the "Age of Reform," a period of staggering social change, which she feels compelled to document.⁶ Travel narrative, advice manual, art review, romantic allegory, memoir, and political diatribe, Letters from New-York does not conform easily to twentieth-century generic categories. Most critics describe the text as serialized essays, and append a qualifier.⁷ For example, Mills uses the term "journalistic transcendental essays" to highlight the significant cultural and rhetorical connections between Child and Emerson. Stephanie Tingley defines the letters as superlative examples of the "familiar essay." According to Carolyn Karcher, who prefers the term "journalistic sketches," the significance of Letters from New-York is Child's "pioneering depiction of the modern city -- pioneering both as social critic and as literary genre" (302). However, Judith Fetterley remarks that the letters share the same genre, "that of the relatively informal 'letter home,'" with Caroline Kirkland's A New Home: Who'll Follow? (163).

Child's contemporaries concur with the latter view. They interpret Letters from New-York as exemplary familiar letters. The one preponderantly negative review published in The American Review excitedly denounces Child for falsely capitalizing on her readers' fond associations with their own beloved personal letters:

If we were ever to take it into our head to write

a book, and should wish as we surely would, to make its sale great, we would call it -- what do you think? -- Letters from Home! Who in the wide world would not buy Letters from Home? But all letters are not letters. . . . And then what in the [letters] before us? No address -- no kindly word -- no *care* or *carissime* -- no half-line? No, surely these of Mrs. Child's are no real letters. (61-2)

Clearly, for this nineteenth-century reviewer, the title Letters from New-York conveys considerable cultural weight; however, contemporary critics have not yet focused on the text's epistolary strategies.

Critics did not begin seriously re-evaluating Child until the 1980s. Most criticism falls into three broad categories. The first class includes four full-length biographies that organize Child's life story around her historical role in the abolitionist movement.⁸ The second group consists of brief historical references to her early advice manuals -- The Frugal Housewife (1829) and The Mother's Book (1831) -- which tend to present Child as a conservative proponent of separate spheres ideology.⁹ More recently, critics have evaluated her historical romances -- especially Hobomok (1824) and Romance of the Republic (1867) -- and interpret her reliance on sentimental tropes, language, and characterization in order to appraise her personal politics.¹⁰

Despite Child's nineteenth-century renown and a general consensus that Letters from New-York (1843) represents her best work, contemporary criticism on Child, and especially on Letters from New-York, remains limited. Carolyn Karcher's exhaustive The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child (1994), and the recent republications of Hobomok (1991), An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans (1996), A Romance of the Republic (1997), and Letters from New-York (1998) have generated a slight increase in critical attention. However, Child's prose fails to conform neatly to feminist critics' theoretical frameworks for studying nineteenth-century women writers and their texts. Child remains a peripheral and enigmatic figure.¹¹ T.W. Higginson first immortalized Child as a cultural paradox with his quip that "she seemed always to be talking radicalism in a greenhouse" (Eminent 54). Critics ever since have struggled to reconcile Child's "ultraisms" with her carefully constructed public image as an icon of Victorian propriety.

Critical interest in Child's personal letters and biography, with a decided emphasis on her abolitionism, overshadows sustained textual readings. In spite of her nineteenth-century status and the complexity of her work, Child remains on the margin of critical discourse.¹² As Carolyn Karcher notes,

if literary scholars' neglect of Child can be

ascribed to the persistent identification of women writers with sentimentalism -- and to the tenacity of modernist aesthetic canons that prevent readers from discerning the subversive art veiled by decorous linguistic codes and idioms -- the dearth of articles, chapters, and books on Child by feminist historians appears more puzzling. (609)

A few recent and noteworthy investigations into abolitionist, sentimental discourse in relation to the interplay between class, race, and gender constructions cite Child as an example of how sentimental authors ultimately fail to signify blackness and instead reinscribe racist hegemonic social norms.¹³ In Conceived by Liberty, Stephanie Smith remarks that she is "puzzled by readings that regard Child as a writer who (for being politically incorrect, racist, or heterosexist) deserves a critical beating. Why such rhetorical interest in tongue-lashing an already largely invisible object?" (36-7).¹⁴ While these attacks usually focus on Child's fiction, Child's champions tend to defend her by valorizing the personal and professional sacrifices she made for the abolitionist cause without referring to her voluminous non-fictional archive which deals extensively with issues of race, class, and gender. These texts, in Karcher's words, exhibit Child's "subversive art."

A fresh historical perspective is needed to re-

investigate both Child's "greenhouse" radicalism and her epistolary rhetoric. Letters from New-York represents the apex of Child's career as a cultural conversationalist and purveyor, a vocation which includes her more well-known abolitionist prose, as well as her largely forgotten First Settlers of New England ... As Related by a Mother to her Children (1829); the various uncollected "Letters from New-York" columns published in the National Anti-Slavery Standard and the Boston Courier; Letters from New York, Second Series (1843); and the political tract Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia (1860). As a group, these texts comprise a lively public letter-writing campaign. Child's epistolary strategies present an ideal site for examining how the gradual shift from a learned, classical rhetoric to a more informal conversational style evolved in nineteenth-century periodical discourse. Child monopolized on this shift in rhetorical authority as she radically re-interpreted both the open letter text and popular conduct literature's conventional epistolary format.

In this chapter, I will argue that Child masterfully manipulates reform rhetoric and conduct literature's conventionally gendered language while incorporating representational discourse, thereby creating an innovative public epistolary style and a unique authoritative narrative persona.¹⁵ Child's letters represent a complex rhetorical strategy. She exploits her reader's immersion

in familiar letter-writing practices as she experiments with writing letters which reconcile the ideals of Romantic individualism and the Christian rhetoric of promoting philanthropic duty to create a revolutionary democratic "open letter" form. She expresses her didactic intentions by combining moral suasion -- predicated on a shared sense of sympathy and moral justice -- with powerful images and tropes she calls "spiritual daguerreotypes." Child assimilates conventional images in startling new ways. This experiment with representational discourse attempts to create a spiritually revitalized reader who will be able to read these novel images as cultural signs and then act appropriately. In other words, Child's letters are propaedeutic; she prepares her readers to reinterpret their culture and experience "inward and outward" change.

Examining how Child constructed herself and her audience within her "Letters from New-York" and exploring how Letters from New-York resonates with her other epistolary works, I emphasize Child's status as a professional writer and cultural conversationalist who was adept at projecting her public image. Child cultivated an intimate relationship with her audience by manipulating common cultural assumptions about letter writing. Within the context of nineteenth-century reform rhetoric and Transcendental self-reliance, this chapter will investigate how Child creates a first-person performative letter writer, an astute cultural conversationalist, who derives

her narrative authority from her self-performance as a Romantic individual and sentimental model; explore the text's narrative addresses in relation to Child's "real" and "imagined" readers in order to reveal its propaedeutic design; and investigate how the text blurs the lines between sentimental discourse and representational "daguerreotypes" while commenting on public policy issues. Child artfully negotiates the frequently contradictory rhetorical impulses of sentimentalism and Romanticism in order to promote a new discourse meant to revitalize the reader spiritually. This interpretive shift enables us to reinterpret Letters from New-York as an innovative epistolary performance of woman's emerging role as a cultural conversationalist actively engaged in widening women's sphere of public duty.

I

Child's career begins as a traditional success story; however, her commitment to abolitionist principles and activism radically alters her professionalization. Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times (1824), launched her public career.¹⁶ Early praise for Hobomok, combined with the unprecedented popular success of Child's two advice manuals, The Mother's Book and The Frugal Housewife, promised to guarantee continued critical acclaim and financial prosperity. With the patronage of the influential publisher James Ticknor and of her brother

Convers Francis, who frequented Emerson's "Transcendental Club," Child was poised to join Boston's elite literati. When the illustrious Boston Athenaeum granted her unlimited borrowing privileges to research her ambitious The History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations, Child's status escalated.

However, 1833 represents a watershed year. Child published An Appeal for that Class of Americans Called Africans, a polemical text endorsing immediate emancipation that was based upon a thoroughly researched history of slavery and free Africans, interspersed with contemporary accounts of northern racism and southern slave owners' brutality. The consequent public outrage alienated Child's most influential connections, cost her first the readership and then the editorship of her enormously popular and lucrative children's magazine, the Juvenile Miscellany, as well as her valuable Athenaeum membership, and indelibly labeled her as a radical abolitionist. British abolitionist Harriet Martineau describes Child as "a lady of whom society was exceedingly proud before she published her 'Appeal,' and to whom society has been extremely contemptuous since" (qtd. in Osborne Lydia 127).¹⁷

Child's deepening financial difficulties and David Lee Child's ceaseless insolvency exacerbated the resulting personal and professional ruptures.¹⁸ Enduring three years of farming experimental sugar beets in rural Northampton with David, Child often found herself too disillusioned and

exhausted to write. Then, in 1841, the American Anti-Slavery Society offered the Childs editorship of The National Anti-Slavery Standard and promised a \$1,000 annual salary, a tidy sum which they never received in full. Ultimately, David Lee Child decided to contribute political columns from Northampton while Lydia Maria Child moved to New York and accepted the onerous editorial responsibilities for the financially strained and politically embattled weekly. Thus, Child achieved relative financial security but at a price: tedious editorial responsibilities, isolation from her husband and her Boston roots, and utter immersion in the constant abolitionist wrangling between Garrisonian radicals and the emerging New Organization faction. Loneliness and isolation quickly emerge as central themes permeating Letters from New-York and Child's personal letters from this period. Many letters express a mood consonant with Kirkland's frontier correspondences; both women felt they were writing from the social margins. "I want a letter -- a letter! You can't imagine how lonely I am in this big New-York. I have literally no intellectual or spiritual communion," Child explains (CC 13/326). This professional move also severed Child's connections to Boston's "literary" elite and ensconced her in the "non-literary" periodical publishing industry and in the abolitionist radical fringe. This move necessitated a new narrative persona. In the final "Letter from New-York," Child

succinctly describes her performative letter writing persona:

When I began to write these letters, it was simply as a safety valve for an expanding spirit, pent up like steam in a boiler. I told you they would be of every fashion, according to my changing mood; now a mere panorama of passing scenes, then childlike prattle about birds or mosses; now a serious exposition of facts, for the reformer's use, and then the poet's path. . . . (243)

Child emerges as a radical individualist whose narrative performance blurs the boundaries between sentimental and representational discourse, as well as between reform rhetoric and romantic musings, while exploiting the divide between conventionally literary and non-literary rhetorical modes.

Child's commitment to using dialogic discourse to examine cultural problems and social issues began early in her career. Critics, when they mention Letters from New-York at all, focus on specific letters addressing slavery and interpret them as the center of Child's reform literature, a lineage often represented as beginning with Child's famous Appeal. However, emphasizing these letters and their abolitionist content narrows Child's comprehensive reform agenda and buries her literary roots. In 1829, Child published The First Settlers of New-England:

or, Conquest of the Pequods, Narragansets and Pokanokets: As Related by a Mother to Her Children, and Designed for the Instruction of Youth under the genteel pseudonym "by a Lady of Massachusetts." This largely forgotten work marks Child's "debut as a political writer," and shows how Child, like Sigourney and Kirkland, began her career publishing anonymously (Karcher 86). Structured as an educational parent/child dialogue, First Settlers establishes a question and answer cycle which elicits outrage and disbelief in the children over the brutal mistreatment of Native Americans. Carolyn Karcher asserts that First Settlers was

unnoticed by reviewers, politicians, and the Cherokee themselves. Its hybrid form as a book addressed to mothers and children while aimed at promoting action in the public sphere indicates that Child had not yet made the transition from feminine to masculine discourse, from domestic advice to political advocacy. (Reader 28)

Karcher's statement fails to recognize both the strong "masculine" advice literature tradition Child draws on, and the unique rhetorical strategies Child brings to her advice literature. Moreover, the important transition is not from "feminine" to "masculine" discourse, but rather from a conservative neoclassical model to a more democratic rhetorical style characterized by a broader conception of her audience's diverse composition. In addition,

throughout her career, Child continues to experiment with "hybrid" dialogic forms in order to engage the reader in an ongoing conversation promoting active self-education as the basis for broad social change.

In her early didactic texts, Child begins experimenting with conduct literature conventions, and starts moving toward creating her own signature style. In First Settlers, Child relies upon a traditional format in which a genteel republican mother guides her daughters through a series of difficult moral lessons. Child's reinterpretation of the dialogic form is notable because it invites these daughters to question conventional historical accounts describing Anglo-Indian relations. For Child, the shared social values supporting Lydia Sigourney's celebration of republican motherhood are fracturing. Careful comparisons of The Frugal Housewife (1829) and The Mother's Book (1831) to other advice manuals of the period -- for example, Catharine Beecher's Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (1855) and Mrs. Virginia Cary's Letters on Female Character (1828) -- starkly illuminate Child's egalitarianism and her relative secularism. Child shuns the heated and often pious rhetoric which exalts marriage and motherhood as the twin pinnacles of women's achievement and abstains from depicting women's roles in glorified and sentimentally charged language. She recognizes that not all American women enjoy middle-class financial status. "Books of this kind have generally been

written for the wealthy," Child asserts in The Frugal Housewife, "I have written for the poor" (6). Although Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies acknowledges that young women should acquire potentially useful accomplishments in case they must work, only Child documents how social stratification determines women's radically divergent domestic roles. She confirms women's daily struggles living in grueling poverty.

Child's advice literature adopts a straightforward personal style which engages this "common" reader in an intimate conversation:

Perhaps some will think there is egotism and presumption in the frequent repetition of "I think," and "I believe," and "It is *my* opinion" - - but it must be remembered that this could not well be avoided in a work where familiarity and directness of expression were particularly required. I have endeavored to give the result of my own reading and observation in maxims of plain practical sense, written with earnestness and simplicity of style. (Mother's vi)

Child's accurate self-assessment of her style resonates with the standard letter-writing conventions governing the appropriate conversational style which should be "easy and unaffected, without forced or unnatural sentiments, and free from any affectation of fine words, conceits, or overstrained witticisms" (Seaforth 20). Child's decision

to preface The Frugal Housewife with a maxim by Benjamin Franklin highlights her apparent debt to Franklin's own homespun style, a style she perfects in Letters from New-York.

At the National Anti-Slavery Standard, Child further hones this "simple" and "familiar" first-person style as she moves beyond the mother-daughter dyad toward a more egalitarian epistolary model and begins crafting a performative letter writing persona which will complement her public editorial position. Accepting the editorship plunged Child into the core of the heated debate over the abolitionist movement's political future. From the onset, Child attempted to distance herself politically and rhetorically from the polemical editorial style of her forerunners at the Emancipator and the Liberator, a stance for which she was harshly criticized.¹⁹ As "the first woman editor of a journal of public policy, which happened also to have an abolitionist slant," Child was thrust into the public eye as a policy commentator (Clifford 158).²⁰ Child's name appears prominently on each issue: underneath the masthead at the left margin is printed "L. Maria Child, editor," with the motto "Without Concealment ... Without Compromise" separating her name from "David Lee Child, Assistant Editor" at the right margin. In addition to adopting a less partisan editorial style, Child attempted to woo readers from beyond the abolitionist inner-circle by extending the weekly's literary department beyond polemical

abolitionist tracts. In her "Farewell" editorial, Child explains her overall editorial design:

My aim, therefore was to make a good *family* newspaper. The large proportion of literary and miscellaneous matter was not inserted for personal popularity; had *that* been my object, I should not have edited anti-slavery paper at all. . . . Thus have I brought some to look candidly at anti-slavery principles, by drawing them with the garland of imagination and taste. It was an honest and open trick, and I think may be easily pardoned. (1)

The decision to favor early regionalist texts which combine fictional plots with social documentation may reflect her desire to reconnect her career to the literary world and maintain the paper's social content. For example, on June 30, 1842, Child began serializing Kirkland's popular Forest Life.²¹ In the same vein, Child clearly began writing "Letters from New-York," a more literary feature capitalizing on the popular "letters home" format, in order to revitalize flagging readership.

Epistolarity is the dominant rhetorical mode of National Anti-Slavery Standard. Child's editorial duties included compiling abolitionist notices and current events, reporting on American Anti-Slavery Society activities and meetings, soliciting relevant Capitol Hill political updates, gleaning appropriate fictional and non-fictional

essays from other periodicals, serializing provocative fiction, writing a weekly editorial column -- a task David also occasionally assumed -- printing testimonial letters (often from the deep south), and responding to readers' often contentious letters to the editor. Letters define each issue: "Letters from the South" signed by "Delta" testify against slavery's horrors; letters from prominent abolitionists respond to internecine debates; conversion letters written by grateful readers attest to abolitionist rhetoric's persuasive power; and political letters adhering to Neo-classical conventions and signed with pseudonyms like "Publius" equate abolitionist principles with republican virtue. As a group, these letters create a vibrant, ongoing, poly-vocal conversation about slavery and abolitionist politics. Within this context, Child's editorial letters are noteworthy for their measured style and decidedly non-confrontational addresses to her readers. They are especially marked in comparison to David Lee Child's polemical editorials which frequently attack national politicians and other abolitionists by name. As Child turns away from abolitionist topics, her "Letters from New-York" deviate even further from the common rhetorical strategies found in the weekly's other "letters."

In her inaugural editorial "To the Readers of the Standard," Child constructs herself as an autonomous epistolary conversationalist and accepts complete

responsibility for her public role without apology.²²

Child's carefully measured language and conciliatory approach contrast sharply with the Garrisonian rhetorical style of her predecessor, Nathaniel P. Rogers. Child uses metaphors which underscore her commitment to abolitionist principles and personal autonomy:

Such as I am, I am here -- ready to work,
according to my conscience and ability; promising
nothing, but diligence and fidelity; refusing the
shadow of a fetter on my free expression of
opinion, from any man, or body of men; and
equally careful to respect the freedom of others,
whether as individuals or societies. (193)

Child's language performs a professional declaration of independence and draws special attention to her desire to distinguish herself from patriarchal models. This statement strikes the keynote for the narrative stance Child adopts in numerous signed editorials and in her "Letters from New-York." Child speaks as an individual conversationalist whose narrative authority on cultural matters is derived from her experiences.

As a woman in an unusual public position, Child grounds her narrative authority in her civic duty, thereby carefully protecting herself from any censure about unwomanly activities or an "unnatural" (read "masculine") lust for fame. In a December 2, 1842, editorial, Child predicts the abolitionist Liberty Party's imminent decline

and makes a rare acknowledgment of her unusual position in gendered terms:

Many a lip will curl in scorn to read this warning from a woman's pen; I am conscious of this; but it takes nothing away from my power to say the true word in calmness and freedom. This task was disagreeable to me and I have been compelled to it from sense of duty. (101)

Child does not derive her narrative authority from blind allegiance to either abolitionist faction, but rather from her own "power" to speak the "truth." By consistently grounding her authority in her personal autonomy, Child claims a basic tenet of American citizenship not commonly extended to women; moreover, her language reveals an inherent tension between her intellectual "freedom" and a sense of civic duty. Gradually, the cultural ideal that northern middle-class women had an essential duty to perform philanthropic work evolved to include a commitment to abolitionist principles; a rhetoric of benevolence supporting this ethic emerged and solidified.

As a working editor and a vocal participant in the first "Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women" held in 1837, Child was fully conversant with these rhetorical practices which relied heavily on proclaiming women's innate moral superiority.²³ For example, the Philadelphia poet Elizabeth Margaret Chandler published "Letters on Slavery to the Ladies of Baltimore" and a series of essays

entitled "Letters to Isabel" for The Genius of Universal Emancipation which urged other women to adopt abolitionist principles.²⁴ The 1837 delegates addressed their "Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States" to their "Beloved Sisters":

The wrongs of outraged millions, and the foreshadows of coming judgments, constrain us, under a solemn sense of responsibility to press upon your consideration the subject of American Slavery. The women of the North have high and holy duties to perform in the work of emancipation -- duties to themselves, to the suffering slave, to the slaveholder, to the church, to their country, and to the world at large, and above all to their God. (1)

The "Appeal" resounds with scriptural references and grisly accounts of slavery's horrors, punctuated by relentless rhetorical questions that force the reader to confront her own moral stance. The text continually constructs an ideal sympathetic woman reader steeped in Christian principles who acts as a touchstone for the reader's forced self-evaluation. The emotionally charged addresses to "our sisters" entreat women to recognize slave women's shared humanity: "They are our country women -- *they are our sisters*, and to us, as women, they have a right to look for sympathy with their sorrows, and effort and prayer for their rescue" (20).

In Letters from New-York, Child does not claim her authority from her moral status as a woman; however, she positions herself in relation to the emerging reform rhetoric. According to Lori Ginzberg, middle-class women "shared a language that described their benevolent work as Christian, their means as fundamentally moral, and their mandate as uniquely female" (1).²⁵ Child uses this language to some degree in the preface to her own An Appeal for that Class of Americans. She presents herself as a "supplicant," thereby using "available 'women's discourse' to enter a public debate" (Yellin 55).²⁶ In the only "New-York" letter in which Child discusses women and children's perceived moral superiority, she argues that these are not essentialist traits but cultural constructs:

Blessed be God, that custom forbids women to electioneer or fight. May the sentiment remain, till war and politics have passed away. Had not women and children been kept away from this polluting influence, the medium of communication between heaven and earth would have been completely cut off. (108)²⁷

In her private letters, Child seems keenly aware of how her public position is unusual for a woman. When summarizing Child's impressive career, Judith Fetterley asserts that her correspondence, as impressive a "work" as anything else she wrote, reveals a person who, while fully aware of the disability of being

female in her culture, firmly believed she had both the right and the capacity to evaluate and affect the major events of her time. (163)

On April 26, 1842, Child wrote to fellow abolitionist Maria Chapman describing her editorial duties:

I suppose you are aware that, from the beginning, I have had the entire charge of the paper, unassisted by any individual; and you may well suppose that a woman is obliged to take more pains than a man would do, in order to avoid any inaccuracy or oversight in state affairs. (CC 14/365; Child's emphasis)

Child assiduously avoids directly discussing national politicians and their policies; moreover, the sole reference to Congress (made in "Letters from New-York -- No. 17") does not appear in the book version.²⁸ In spite of the cultural dictate that women should not comment on governmental affairs, Child consciously avoids adopting the abolitionist rhetoric of sisterhood as well as the conventional female gendered "dear reader" common to advice literature.

While Child writes outside these dominant female paradigms, scriptural references, millennial predictions, and celestial metaphors punctuate her rhetoric. Many "Letters" include poignant parables with overtly Christian morals. Child bolsters her narrative authority with Christian doctrine; however, she abstains from adopting the

inflammatory and condemnatory rhetoric popular with nineteenth-century reformers. Writing in response to powerful inner convictions, Child positions herself within the Protestant spiritual autobiographical tradition. Bruce Mills succinctly explains how Child interprets her writing as religious duty:

For Child and others seeking to reform through literature, works of the imagination served to purify the affections. Achieving eloquence in essay, conversation, letter, and fiction was not solely an artistic enterprise but, at heart, a religious action that undammed celestial waters. Words could anoint with truth, and truth would change the world. (Cultural 73)

Historians argue that this tradition initially validated women's public participation in reform movements.

According to Barbara Epstein, "this religiosity simultaneously gave encouragement to two contradictory impulses: deference to superior authority and the need to take action on the behalf of cherished values" (87).²⁹

Child's aforementioned intellectual independence depends upon a spiritual dictum that she must speak for herself.

Child's religious rhetoric, with its emphasis on revealing "inner truth," complements her seemingly artless performance of a genuine narrative persona. Maintaining the narrative artifice that she is publishing essentially private letters enhances this narrative perspective. In

fact, most nineteenth-century reviews praise Child's self-depiction for being sincere and authentic.³⁰ However, Child carefully crafts the letters' controlling "I" persona. In a lengthy letter to T.W. Higginson, Child plainly demarcates the discursive boundary between her public persona and a private self:

To read my own biography seems too much like being dissected before I am dead. I have always been talking, more or less, to the public; but I have never talked about myself. And I am strangely sensitive about any personal introduction to the public. (CC 75/1982)

In other words, Child acknowledges her "public" self as performative. Nevertheless, Child's rhetorical strategy depends upon reproducing "genuine" emotional responses for the reader.

Her public letters adopt an epistolary narrative stance which Michael Bell explains in The Sentiment of Reality:

There is always an essential confidante within. In short, the letter is typically composed in a crucial and ambivalent mid-point between the spontaneously lived self and an ideal self projected in the activity of writing. The writer is committed to this constant, demanding interplay of the spontaneous and the chosen selves. (16)

In other words, Child cultivates the illusion that she is unself-consciously channeling impromptu emotions and perceptions while simultaneously constructing her performative letter-writing persona as a public cultural commentator. Child frequently articulates this conflict as a contest between two discursive roles: the practical reformer and the literary romantic. Stephanie Tingley describes this multi-vocality as "three distinct and different voices--the activist/reformer, poet/storyteller, and analyst/philosopher--that alternate and connect" (46). However, to a nineteenth-century reader familiar with Transcendental rhetoric, these voices probably were not radically contradictory.

Child creates a performative narrator who cultivates an intensely interactive and self-reflexive relationship with the reader. As the individual letters progress, and often digress, following the organic style of familiar letters, Child uses her own emotional responses as a dynamic model for the reader. The letters are reflexive because Child claims to be transformed by the letter writing experience. She carefully delineates her performative function: to teach the reader how inward sentiments can dictate perception. At various key junctures, Child pauses to legitimize her tone. In "Letter XVII," she apologizes for her sadness:

The fault was in my own spirit rather than in the streets of New York. "Who has no inward beauty,

none *perceives*, though all around is beautiful."
Had my soul been at one with Nature and with God,
I should not have seen *only* misery and vice in my
city rambles. (74)

Tacitly affirming the cultural dictum that women should write from the "sunny side," Child consistently foregrounds her efforts to combat the impulse to write in either a sad/dejected or mystical/prophetic tone. This rhetorical move highlights Child's manipulations of an "ideal" versus a "spontaneous" self, thereby enacting the very perceptual adjustment she wishes to teach the reader. For example, Letter XXXII begins with Child's reactions to a recent public execution:

To-day, I cannot write of beauty; for I am sad
and troubled. Heart, head, and conscience, are
all in battle-array against the savage customs of
my time. By and by, the law of love, like oil
upon the waters, will claim my surging
sympathies. . . . But today, do not ask me to
love governor, sheriff or constable, or any man
who defends capital punishment. I ought to do
it. . . . (137)

As the letter continues, Child methodically works through her philosophical and emotional reconciliation with society.

As a cultural conversationalist, Child's epistolary narrator performs two primary duties: public critic and

sentimental soother. In the opening letter, Child describes how living in New-York has tempered her initial impressions of the city by transforming her perceptions:

There was a time when all these things would have passed by me . . . but I have lost the power of looking merely on the surface. . . . Do I see crowds of men hastening to extinguish a fire? I see not merely uncouth garbs, and fantastic flickering lights . . . but straightway my mind is filled with thoughts about mutual helpfulness, human sympathy, the common bond of brotherhood, and the mysteriously deep foundations on which society rests; or rather on which it now reels and totters. (10)

For Child, New-York and nineteenth-century America are composed of troubling dichotomies. Child attempts to show the reader urban New York -- the ugly and the beautiful -- through her sympathetic gaze while clarifying her position as cultural critic. Hailing the nineteenth century as the "thinking, toiling Age of Reform," Child nevertheless extols the absolute necessity for the "cheering voice of poetry and song":

Therefore blame me not, if I turn wearily aside from the dusty road of reforming duty, to gather flowers in sheltered nooks, or play with gems in hidden grottoes. The Practical has striven hard to suffocate the Ideal within me; but it is

immortal and cannot die. (12)

In this epistolary closing, Child depicts herself metaphorically synthesizing her two dominant performative modes: benevolent duty and Romantic idealism. The constant merging of experiential scenes reported with acute attention to realistic details, sentimental musings, and digressions into philosophical idealism aligns Child with the American Transcendentalists and European Romantics.³¹

Critics tend to foreground Child's connections to Transcendentalism by noting her affinities with Emerson; however, Margaret Fuller may have exerted a more direct influence on Child's epistolary style. Biographers have documented Child's friendship with Margaret Fuller, noting her attendance at Fuller's famous 1839 Boston "conversations," and their frequent visits while both resided in New-York.³² They also actively promoted each other's literary careers. Child sent Fuller a copy of Letters from New-York which Fuller reviewed in the Dial. Fuller cites Child's History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations (1835) as an important resource for compiling Woman in the Nineteenth-Century (1845), which Child reviewed favorably prior to publication to pre-empt the negative criticism both women anticipated. However, critics have not explored how Fuller's 1840 translation of Gunderode, a series of letters written by Bettina von Arnim and sent to Karoline von Gunderode, may have influenced Child's performative letter writing persona in Letters from

New-York.³³ Although Bettina von Arnim has become an obscure footnote in Romantic literary history, Gunderode and Goethe's Correspondence with a Child were popular texts with American Transcendentalists.³⁴ In January, 1842, Fuller published an extensive article in the Dial entitled "Bettina Bretano and Her Friend Gunderode," in which she characterizes Bettina as "Nature" and applauds the extravagant and childlike power of her epistolary voice. On August 23, 1844, Child sent a letter to Fuller explaining her exuberance for the German letter writer: "Shall you ever translate the remainder of Gunderode? Bettina has been such a full and flowing fountain of inspiration to me, that I cannot bear to lose a word she has uttered. No writer has ever made me so wild with joy, as Bettina" (SL 212). Child's exuberant style and extended raptures describing nature's beauty echo Bettina's organic and densely descriptive epistolary style. Child's references to Bettina in Letters from New-York re-establish her connections to the Bostonian literary circle while reiterating her dedication to transcribing genuine emotions and impressions.

Child's most important debt to Bettina may be her consistent self-depiction as a wise child candidly reporting her feelings and experiences. She constructs herself as a visionary who derives narrative authority from her own experience. In "Letter XVIII," Child asserts her desire to be free from social constraints:

It is so pleasant to run and jump, and throw pebbles, and make up faces at a friend, without having a platoon of well-dressed people turn round and stare, and ask, "Who is that strange woman, that acts so like a child?" Those who are truly enamoured of Nature, love to be alone with her. (77)

This "childlike" stance accentuates Child's quest for a natural and "truthful" style. By tapping into reigning cultural beliefs sanctioning "the moral purity of children, the holiness of the heart's affections, [and] the divinity of nature," Child enhances her narrative authority while reaffirming her individualism (Sensational 18). Child's performative self does not depend on domestic imagery common to women's discourse but rather resides in expressly romantic metaphors:

there are three points on which I am crazy -- music, moonlight and the sea. There are other points, greatly differing from these, on which most American juries would be prone to convict me of insanity. You know a New-York lawyer defined insanity to be a "differing in opinion from the mass of mankind." By this rule, I am as mad as a March hare. (12)

Child defines her narrative persona as a self-reliant American in the Emersonian tradition. Fuller prized a similar "madness" in Bettina's letters. She describes

Bettina as "drawing new tides of vital energy from all, living freshly alike in man and tree, . . . bounding over the fences of society as easily as over the fences of the field, intoxicated with apprehension of each new mystery, never hushed into silence" (64). Fuller, like Child, celebrates a vital individualism that challenges nineteenth-century gender boundaries.

While rigorously editing Letters from New-York, Child sought to make the letters more "literary." At this juncture, she opted to re-enforce the rhetorical connections to Bettina. The letter explores Child's internal war with her urban environment. "I was making a desert within," Child characteristically remarks, "to paint its desolate likeness on the scene without" (103). After describing how a ragged girl restores her equilibrium through sympathetic tears, Child urges the reader to emulate the girl's innocence and love of nature: "Let us strive to be like little children" (103). As in other sentimental texts, tears act as an "effective expression and communication of moral feeling resulting in moral action" (Fred Kaplan 45). Child embarks on an experiential exploration in which moonlight and Nature overcome the "hot and crowded" city. In the collected letters, Child appends a paragraph in which her narrative persona performs Bettina's ingenuous naiveté:

You will smile, and say the amount of all this romancing is a confession that I was a tired and

wayward child, needing moonlight and a show to restore my serenity. If I am not too perfect to be in a wayward humour, I surely will not be too dignified to tell of it. I say, as Bettine does to Gunderode: "How glad I am to be so insignificant. I need not fork up discreet thoughts when I write to thee, but just narrate how things are. Once I thought I must not write unless I could give importance to the letter by a bit of moral, or some discreet thought; now I think not to chisel out, or glue together my thoughts." (106)

Child's determination to represent "how things are" and her capture of a fleeting immediacy align the letters with private epistolary discourse. By performing the rhetorical decision to resist the moralizing impulse, Child openly confronts the public expectation that women validate their narrative authority through morally uplifting messages. For Child, adopting this narrative stance positions her epistolary style firmly within sentimental culture's demand for letters expressing "genuine" feeling, while downplaying their didacticism and reinforcing her ideological connections to Transcendentalism.

II

Biographers and critics have documented Child's awareness that the letters, as they were originally printed

in the National Anti-Slavery Standard, could not, despite their proven popularity, be reprinted without substantial editing to downplay their abolitionist and political messages, thereby conforming, to some degree, to conventional expectations for women's writing.³⁵ Janet Altman argues that when public letters are collected for publication, they are reinscribed and

readdressed to a new readership and often redressed (corrected, revised, truncated, contextualized) by the publisher (be it original author, reader, or a new publisher), who negotiates a new, more perdurable relationship between the letter and the reading public for whom the correspondence is now intended. . . . It will become clear that these literary values [implicit in the re-inscription] are not separable from other social and cultural values.

(19)

In this case, Child's editorial decisions sanitize her more extreme abolitionist statements. Reading the individual letters in their original context reveals how Child ultimately deleted many passages which locate the letters within the larger cultural correspondence of The Anti-Slavery Standard and address a more specific readerly class. For example, "Letter V," describing a Highland Scotsman in traditional costume, manifests her diatribe against religious clans and originally includes this

opening: "I trust you do not keep the rapid sketches I send you, for materials to compose some future Gazetteer; if so, I must be more heedful how I guide my pen. "A Reader of the Standard" takes me to task" (212).³⁶ By editing out references to her editorial duties, Child sacrifices some of the text's immediacy as a compendium of "open" political letters, and makes them ostensibly more literary.³⁷ Her decision to translate the letters into a more durable and literary form also prompted her to omit those openings providing anecdotal biographical details. If the finished project represents a compromise between Child's anti-slavery sentiments and mainstream views about abolitionists, it also represents a tension between Child's tacit awareness that cultural expectations dictate that female correspondences should be personal rather than political and her own intense desire to guard her personal privacy. By re-addressing the letters, Child expresses her desire to make her "letters from New-York" more culturally acceptable and more literary without calling attention to their context as she targets a more general reading audience.

In Letters from New-York, Child discards the conventional poise of the genteel woman, softly entreating a "dear reader" as she cultivates the illusion that the letters are actual private responses. Her rhetoric relies upon constantly creating and recreating a sympathetic reader who is perpetually present and interactive. Child

induces the general reader to meet her expectations while drawing them into her private circle:

I did not *intend* to write thus mystically; and I feel that these are thoughts that should be spoken into your private ear, not published to the world. To some few they may, perchance, awaken a series of aspiring thoughts, till the highest touch the golden harps of heaven But to most they will seem an ambitious attempt to write something, which is in fact nothing.

(114)

Child accentuates the difference in intimacy levels between private speech and public letter and opens up her audience to include both a familiar friend and a potentially unknown class of public readers. Child repeatedly concedes the possibility that this wider reading public will misinterpret her "private" polysemic messages; however, Child mitigates this possibility by actively addressing her reader. Child repeatedly pre-empts the reader's response - a standard rhetorical gesture common to familiar letters -- and then interprets this anticipated response. Generally, Child, like Caroline Kirkland, uses these addresses to construct the letters as spontaneous effusions written, like personal letters, swiftly and without forethought or time for revisions: "You will at least, my dear friend, give these letters the credit of being utterly unpremeditated; for Flibbertigibbet himself never moved

with more unexpected and incoherent variety" (44).³⁸ These entreaties with their confidential tone differ sharply from adjacent public letters published in The Standard, as well as from Garrison's inflammatory rhetoric, without depending extensively another stock response: cathartic tears.

Many letters begin with the convention that they are, in fact, friendly responses, creating the sense that they comprise an ongoing, albeit frequently interrupted, conversation. These openings repeatedly provide Child with opportunities to propose loaded rhetorical questions and to direct the reader's sentiments. By 1843, the conventional rhetorical addresses to a "dear reader" which punctuate advice literature like Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies may have become associated with insincere social custom. While Child consciously avoids overusing this rhetoric of sentimental friendship, her intimate tone suggests that she imagines her reader as a sympathetic friend. Child repeatedly frames her public letters as direct responses to her reader's entreaties and curiosity, a rhetorical move which may be a feint toward justifying her often eccentric or controversial stances, and which enhances the feeling that the letters are ongoing conversations. She alludes to her intimate relationship with the reader as a safeguard against potential misinterpretations or to verify extraordinary personal experiences. For example, in "Letter XI," Child describes her extreme emotional response to watching Julia Pell, a

fugitive slave, whom Child presents as a powerful
"spiritual daguerreotype," preach:

You know that religion has always come to me in stillness and that the machinery of theological excitement has ever been as powerless over my soul, as would be the exorcism of a wizard. You are likewise aware of my tendency to *generalize*; to look at truth as *universal*. . . . Yet combined as my religious character is, of quiet mysticism, and the coolest rationality, will you believe me, I could scarcely refrain from shouting Hurra for that heaven-bound ship. . . . (50)

By invoking a shared knowledge of her own discerning incredulity, Child undercuts the reader's potential skepticism and re-enforces her dramatization's authenticity. Child inexorably intertwines an implied friendship with the reader with her narrative authority. This complex negotiation depends on invoking an illusion of personal communion which personalizes her epistolary discourse.

Another distinct tactic Child relies upon repeatedly for rhetorical emphasis is replacing her ubiquitous use of "you" with "thee" and "thou." In a personal letter, Child balks at Ellis Loring's editorial suggestion that she eliminate these arcane pronouns:

I shall follow nearly all your suggestions exactly; but my attachment is rather strong to

the "thee and thou." Moreover, if I am to copy anybody, why should I not copy Carlyle as well as Dr. Channing? For in this instance, there is certainly no grammatical incorrectness. I did not think of Carlyle when I "thoued it," though I doubtless caught it unconsciously from my great admiration of his writings. (CC 17/484)³⁹

It seems at least equally likely that she "caught" this phrasing from her close association with Quaker abolitionists, including the Hopper family with whom she was living. Those letters, especially "Letter XII" and "Letter XXX," in which Child extensively uses "thee and thou," share a common didactic objective: to teach the reader to see "Truth" beyond social prejudice. This pronoun substitution lends the letters a scriptural tone while increasing their intimacy and immediacy.

By using "thee and "thou," Child assumes an apostolic rhetorical mode within the spiritual autobiographical tradition wherein personal religious experiences justify narrative authority. For example, John Woolman's Quaker autobiography was an influential abolitionist text with which Child was undoubtedly acquainted. This association emphasizes Child's contention that the truth is universal and resides within the individual whose perceptions are free to see it. "Benevolence, like music, is a universal language," Child urges, "It cannot freely utter itself in dialects, that belong to a nation, or a clan. In its large

significance, the human race is to thee a brother and a friend" (59). Child's opening statement to the reader alludes to Paul's letter to the Phillipians: "you ask what is now my opinion of this great Babylon; and playfully remind me of former philippics, and a long string of vituperative alliterations" (9). Bruce Mills reads this opening as a sign of her "forced confinement" in New York and her quest for editorial freedom: "Child would have found reason to turn to Paul's letter and would have been comforted by his exhortation to look to 'whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just. . .'" (74). Child interrogates her readers. One reference sounds pointedly aimed at the National Anti-Slavery Standard readership. Child asks, "'Art thou a Reformer?' Beware the dangers of thy position" (53). Although Child often speaks prophetically and infuses her figurative language with scriptural allusions, she does not adopt the apostolic model's customary hierarchical relationship with the reader.

Salient textual references -- personal and private -- seem to confirm different individuals as Child's historical correspondents, and her intended "real" reader. An 1842 letter to Ellis Gray Loring suggests that Child envisioned him as her correspondent. Her decision to appoint Loring as working editor for transforming the diverse letters into book form, as well as their extensive and emotionally intense private correspondence, appears to corroborate this

interpretation. Child writes, "I thought I addressed [the letters] to an abstraction; but I find you are always in my mind as the person addressed" (CC 13/326). Carolyn Karcher asserts that Child's "column in the Standard had originated in a imaginary conversation with Loring" and she documents how Loring and Child sparred over the relative merits of living in New York or Boston throughout their private correspondence (299). Moreover, in other letters, Child implicitly characterizes the reader as a judgmental Bostonian.⁴⁰

As a newcomer to New York, Child in her letters reflects a pervasive feeling of deracination similar to Mary Clavers's isolation in A New Home, as she attempts to connect with the geographically distant reader. Child positions herself as a cultural outsider writing back to Boston. Although she clearly acknowledges Boston as the nation's venerable established cultural center, her tone is not obsequious. Child confirms New York's rising cultural and commercial status while indicting Bostonian elitism. "You have none such [open public gardens] in Boston; and they would probably be objected to, as open to the vulgar and the vicious," Child chastises her reader, "I do not walk through the world with such fear of soiling my garments" (12). For Child, New York is raw, sprawling, and democratic. Nevertheless, she experiences New York as an alien, and often potentially threatening, world. In her Preface, she refers to New York as a "city of strangers," a

phrase which recurs in her private letters.⁴¹ In fact, modern historians have documented how New York experienced unusually rapid social change during a time generally characterized by urban development. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "the nineteenth-century city was, as Stuart Blumin argues, more process than geographic place. Even within cities, transience predominated" (Disorderly 85).

However, these references to Loring should not foreclose debates about how Child actively constructs her reader. After all, Child dedicates Letters from New-York to John Hopper, her New York host's handsome young son who was an outspoken Quaker abolitionist, thereby invoking epistolary conduct literature's traditional format: an inter-generational dialogic, as in Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies. In her inscription, Child describes the younger Hopper as "a cautious and energetic 'business man'" who may seem an unlikely recipient of letters "so deeply tinged with romance and mysticism." This description establishes a duality foreshadowing a central textual theme: the clash between rampant commercialism and sentimentalism. Child embodies Hopper as an ideal reader who can mitigate this polarity:

But in a city of strangers you have been to me as a brother; most of the scenes mentioned in these Letters we have visited together; and I know that the young lawyer, busily making his way in a

crowded world, has not driven from his mind a love for nature and poetry, or closed his heart against a most genial sympathy for the whole family of man.

Child reconfigures the mother-daughter dyad as a more egalitarian foster-sibling relationship involving a joint exploration of public space. Child's intimate conversational tone resonated deeply with Child's actual audience. "Whomever Child imagined as her audience," Karcher notes, "what charmed her readers was their sense that she was speaking personally to each of them" (First 300).

Child's addresses inform her construction of the reader/author relationship as grounded in an intimate friendship and a shared dedication to reform causes. Hypothesizing about Child's historically verifiable "real" reader reveals her decision to invoke directly two male correspondents, thereby deviating substantially from conventional female addresses. By choosing not to address her letters to either the abolitionist sisterhood or a "gentle female reader," Child performs a conscious break with culturally ingrained patterns for women's writing. For example, one of Child's outspoken contemporaries, Sarah Grimke, a more radical feminist and abolitionist, adopted two more conventional epistolary strategies in her influential "open" letter texts. In An Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States (1836), Grimke adopts an

apostolic prophetic model as she attempts to wrest authority from her audience, while in Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman (1837) she writes as a concerned woman speaking to her sisters in an idiom resplendent with the conventional rhetoric of benevolence.⁴²

As she stretches the familiar letter format to address social issues, Child's reform rhetoric depends upon the persistent identification between her self-performance and her reader as kindred free-thinking individuals. Moreover, by dedicating the letters to a single male who is an intimate friend, Child effectively extends her influence into the "masculine" sphere. Mills suggests that "given the division between Boston and New York abolitionists, the title hints at the difficulty of both attempting to heal severed relationships and needing to picture a sympathetic readership" ("Introduction" xiv). Child works within two public epistolary traditions to construct a reflexive correspondence. As the references to Loring and Boston suggest, Child frequently evokes associations with travel narrative's conventional "letters home" format in order to position herself as a cultural outsider. These highly descriptive letters focus upon New York's defining landmarks as well as novel "scientific" discoveries. On the other hand, many of the letters seem to follow the patterns established in epistolary advice literature, as the inscription to John Hopper suggests. These more openly

didactic letters interrogate social problems more directly and often adopt a more prophetic tone. Within these traditions, women writers, as we have seen in Sigourney's and Kirkland's careers, conventionally establish their narrative authority as essentially private and familial. For example, Lydia Sigourney habitually represents herself as seated with pen poised gazing upon home, hearth, and family. In Godey's Lady's Book, Sarah J. Hale consistently emphasizes that her editorial power emanates from her household domain. Child consciously avoids fashioning her writing desk as an explicitly domestic space. To the contrary, a plaintive desire to return home and a recognition of homeless poor people are common themes. If Kirkland's epistolary strategy evokes a fear that she has lost sympathetic friends, Child, like Fuller in her European dispatches, laments the loss of a stable home. Child's stance interrogates an essential ideological assumption supporting separate spheres rhetoric, the cultural truism that all women are safely protected within the static domestic sphere.

Child's performative narrator is a cultural explorer open to experiencing her dynamic cultural milieu. As a narrator who intrepidly ventures out into a constantly changing urban environment and interacts with Americans across social class boundaries, Child's narrator consistently travels beyond middle-class women's appointed realm. On the rhetorical surface, Child cultivates the

illusion that she is writing her letters as events unfold, thereby aligning herself with the domestic letter writing tradition; however, the action she depicts consistently happens outside, quite literally on the New-York streets. One "real" reader, a reviewer for "The Christian Examiner," recognizes how Child may be accused of transgressing the ideal image of the genteel woman writer:

We should not be surprised if some readers, knowing her through her books alone should have formed a conception of her as a home-forsaking person, with a weather-beaten bonnet, double-soled shoes, a green umbrella, and a huge portfolio, plunging and prying about all the corners of New-York for materials to correspond about. She is no such being but a true genuine woman. The passion, for a wider sphere, as they call it, does not unsex her, nor render her neglectful of domestic duties. (132)

By first constructing a vivid masculine picture of Child and then countering with a generic idealized icon, this reader unwittingly demonstrates how Child derives her narrative authority from those actions which take her beyond private sphere boundaries, and how she inscribes her individuality. Only once, in "Letter XXVI," does Child significantly configure her work using domestic imagery. The letter explores how flowers "are the hieroglyphics of angels" symbolically manifesting "individual and universal

progress," Child's favorite sentimental motif (113). Child uses domestic work and home as metaphors for worldly duty and heaven respectively:

 this which people call the real world, is not
 real to me. . . . I live at service in it, and
 sweep dead leaves out of paths, and dust mirrors,
 and do errands, as I am bid; but glad am I when
 work is done, to go *home* to rest. Then do I
 enter a golden palace, with light let in only
 from above. (115)

In this passage, Child metaphorically describes her "public" work using domestic tropes, which diminish its importance while elevating the "private" sphere of home; however, throughout Letters from New-York, there is a persistent sense that the narrator feels dislocated and that this "heavenly" home has become a threatened space.⁴³

By depicting domesticity as vulnerable and imperiled, Child reveals to the reader how cultural transience and urban poverty threatened culturally sanctioned ideals of domesticity. In "Letter XVI," Child describes a "great fire" which raged through her neighborhood during which "one hundred houses were burned, and not less than two thousand persons deprived of shelter for the night" (70).⁴⁴ Child unleashes multiple rhetorical techniques in her direct addresses to promote readerly identification and prevent misunderstanding. She evokes the scene and attempts to draw the reader into its sublime beauty: "Were

you ever near enough to a great fire to be in immediate danger! If you were not, you have missed one form of keen excitement, and awful beauty" (70). The fire's sublime devastation offers an opportunity to reflect upon a favorite truism, "money is not wealth," and to lament the destruction of the neighborhood's gardens and trees (71). The fire mesmerizes Child. While she is sympathetic to the fire's victims, she does not seem to regret the burning of their homes. "Will your kind heart be shocked that I seem to sympathize more with Jane Plato for the destruction of her little garden-patch, than I do with others for the loss of houses and furniture?" Child asks the reader (71). Child aligns houses and domestic goods with commercialism and materialism and forces the reader to calculate wealth in more spiritual terms. For Child, domesticity's intrinsic value resides -- like the potential worth of Child's own rhetoric -- in how much "the heart ha[s] invested" (71). "Although profoundly isolated by urban life," Judith Fetterley notes, "Child retains her sense of community with 'strangers'" (165).

Child's epistolary addresses attempt to de-mystify these "strangers" for the reader as the first step toward broad-based social reform. Through her addresses, she creates an emotional intimacy with the reader based on their epistolary communion. She gently conducts an educational dialogue repeatedly urging the reader to acknowledge the humanity of "strangers." Her addresses to

the reader are, in essence, performative. She uses them to entice the reader into unfamiliar situations and experiences in order to teach the reader to question the relationship between the individual and society. Child's attitudes about reform are based upon her staunch belief that "society makes its own criminals," and she extends her theory of social constructionism to undermine separate spheres ideology. In numerous letters, Child's imaginary dialogues challenge the reader to identify with criminals and other social outcasts:

The temptation which most easily besets you, needed, perhaps, to be only a little stronger; you needed only to be surrounded by circumstances a little more dangerous and exciting, and perhaps you, who now walk abroad in the sunshine of respectability, might have come under the ban of human laws, as you have into frequent disobedience of the divine. (144)

Ultimately, Child attempts to engage the reader's sentiments; however, her rhetoric does not depend upon blind devotion to dogma.

Child's addresses are important because she uses them to promote an individualism grounded in identification with a larger social identity as the basis for social reform, a tactic which nineteenth-century and twentieth-century scholars criticize as overly sentimental. According to one "real" reader, an anonymous US Magazine and Democratic

Review reviewer, Child's sentimentalism undermines her social commentary's efficacy:

It is a glorious failing -- yet a womanly failing, and a real failing -- that sympathy with the oppressed which warps reason to a justification of its claims. . . . Such appeals [to sympathy], which abound in the book, are, if we may use the expression, the fungal growth of an over-sensitive heart. (68)

Writing for a conservative journal sympathetic to the Southern cause, this reviewer attempts to de-politicize Child's social critique by privileging her femininity at the expense of her rationality. This reading negates Child's deep conviction that sympathetic identification stimulates social reform and performs important cultural work. For Child, kindling sympathy in the reader enhances rather than "warps" individual reason. Child's varied intimate addresses target her reader's sympathy, and comprise a significant component of her larger rhetorical strategy which argues for the value of conventionally private sentiments in public discourse.

III

Immersed in the contentious abolitionist culture and privy to the political debates threatening the Union, Child could no longer envision a republic held together by a commitment to common cultural values and shared religious

and political beliefs. She interpreted the abolitionist movement's inability to move beyond bitter political struggles -- including the debates surrounding women's public role as reformers -- as a synecdoche for the troubled nation. Child documented American society's prolific ethnic and racial diversity, providing eyewitness accounts of various religious services, ethnic festivals and traditions, as well as poignant depictions of New York's burgeoning urban poor. In response, she developed a central theme: the tendency for sectarianism to destroy individual freedom. In Private Woman, Public Stage, Mary Kelley argues that, in response to a rising fear of egalitarianism and individualism, middle-class women assumed moral superiority as the inevitable by-product of their culturally elite identity, a stance frequently attributed to Sigourney and Kirkland. Sigourney and Kirkland voice a persistent concern that Jacksonian-style democracy erodes essential social customs and etiquette, thereby contributing to a weakening of American culture. However, Child embraces this new egalitarianism and individualism and Letters from New-York represents her tacit acknowledgment that any attempt to chronicle this deeply fragmented society will require a new public discourse.

Child's thematic polyphony reflects New York's escalating diversity and accelerating social change. The individual letters address myriad topics -- from the Croton

waterworks to Blackwell's Island to the Catholic Church -- however, when read as an aggregate, the text develops a central core of basic recurring themes related to Child's stance on "universal reform" issues: the need to dissolve sects and sectarianism, the power of religious faith, the healing power of nature, the individual as a product of social forces, the correlation between inner spirituality and outer perception, New York and the nineteenth century as the place/time of eternal change, the belief that society "*makes its own criminals*" (13), and a firm conviction that Christian history is inevitably progressive. Child insistently addresses these issues from a variety of perspectives, thereby gradually preparing the reader to recognize the "spiritual in the material." Child develops a highly associative style to document her New York explorations as she pursues other "universal reform" causes such as the plight of fallen women and children living in poverty, the need for temperance, the inhumane living conditions of the incarcerated, and a call to end capital punishment.⁴ "The style of free association Child invented," Karcher argues, "verges on stream of consciousness" (306). Child's often digressive style may be interpreted as generic license: she exploits the standard convention that the best letters represent a spontaneous emotional effusion. However, the letters are carefully crafted around clustered images and each develops a central theme. Child exploits the orthodoxy that the

"best" letters report daily life's minute details by grounding her themes in concrete representations which run the gamut from startling urban images to established conventional icons. In the age of the daguerreotype, Child's imagery reflects the developing desire of American photographers to capture nineteenth-century social history.

In virtually every letter, Child supports her themes through visual pictures, or in her words, "spiritual daguerreotypes," creating a rhetoric which teaches by combining sensory experience with sentimental response and spiritual communion.⁴⁶ Child frequently begins with a deft description of an object or scene which seems to elicit the letter's subject and concomitant emotional response, thereby mimicking a standard letter-writing convention. According to Marilyn Ferris Motz, nineteenth-century women's letters often detailed their physical surroundings "with both the writer and the reader frequently placed in specific settings. Women often wrote that they wanted their readers to visualize their activities, to share their lives vicariously" (65). Child creates discrete discursive moments in which she communes with the reader, thereby further enhancing the feeling of reciprocity underlying their epistolary conversation.

As a devotee of scientific innovations, Child is deeply interested in the connections between material and spiritual progress. The daguerreotype represents the possibility that social history could be documented through

images as well as language. In 1839, a Knickerbocker reviewer enthusiastically reporting on his experience viewing the first daguerreotype display conveys the cultural excitement this innovation generated: "their exquisite perfection almost transcends the bounds of belief" (560). For Child, this technology represents the potential for immortalizing real as opposed to ideal pictures of society.

Is your memory a daguerreotype machine, taking instantaneous likenesses of whatsoever the light of imagination happens to rest upon? I wish mine were not, especially in a city like this -- unless it would be more select in its choice, and engrave only the beautiful . . . but the aforesaid daguerreotype will likewise engrave an ugly, angular building . . . 'Tis a caricature likeness of the 19th century and like the 19th century it plagues me; I would I could get quit of it. (76)

This quotation encapsulates Child's predominant theme: the tension between her desire to document only the "beautiful" and her compulsion to depict the often sordid reality she sees. Child recognizes that commerce and industry seem to be inevitable, if lamentable, byproducts of social progress.⁴⁷ Moreover, in many letters, Child's rhetoric juxtaposes descriptions of flora and fauna which sound as though they were culled from a popular domestic novel with

descriptions of urban settings and city dwellers which seem to anticipate later realist experiments like Rebecca Harding Davis's gritty "Life in the Iron Mills" (1861).

Child uses representational discourse supported by sentiment in order to teach the reader to interpret these cultural emblems or "spiritual daguerreotypes" which represent the possibility for capturing realistic images infused with romantic significance. Bruce Mills has appropriately defined this process as "urban exegesis":

Child sought to transform the troubling and very real turmoil of the city into cultural emblems. Through skillfully transfixing such urban emblems of social disruption and transitory values, she fosters the reflection necessary for private and public reform. (Cultural 73)

Mills carefully delineates how Child attempts to revise Transcendentalist rhetoric in order to accommodate her spiritual belief that "the self-reliant individual, the free soul, creates change" with the sobering reality of New York's social problems. Through accentuating the similarities between Child's belief in a Transcendental "God within" and Emersonian philosophy, Mills interprets the letters as "transcendental essays," thereby glossing over Child's unique rhetorical innovations. Child does not adopt Emerson's dense, elliptical, erudite style, but rather repeatedly emphasizes that her letters are "spontaneous" expressions of natural emotion and

experiences. Invoking concrete experiences and conjuring up facsimiles of New York life, Child's discourse does not depend upon an assumed set of shared values but rather on the illusion of shared experience. Although Child quotes Emerson, and her debt to his philosophy is manifest, her clarion call for widespread intellectual self-reliance is inextricably coupled with a clamor for broad-based social benevolence and cultural reform.

Child critically observes how rigid social conventions dictating genteel behavior, especially for women, create insurmountable class barriers as she constructs a rhetoric of familiarity which challenges these artificial boundaries. In Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform, Len Gougeon convincingly resurrects Emerson's inner conflicts as he struggled to reconcile his absolute belief in individual spiritual reformation with the need for comprehensive social reform. In "Self Reliance," Emerson enacts this dilemma as he confronts the cultural call for social benevolence directly:

Are they my poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent, I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong. There is a class of persons to whom by all spiritual affinity I am bought and sold; for them I will go to prison, if need be; but your miscellaneous popular charities . . . and the thousandfold

Relief Societies; -- though I confess with shame
I sometimes succumb and give the dollar, it is a
wicked dollar which by and by I shall have the
manhood to withhold. (262-3)

Emerson, like Fuller, derides entrenched philanthropic actions as social conformity rather than genuine action. Child also acknowledges the hypocrisy inherent in some philanthropic acts. After painstakingly describing a poor immigrant woman and her emaciated sons, Child, however, reaches a very different conclusion:

Pence I will give thee, though political economy reprove the deed. They can but appease the hunger of the body; they cannot soothe the hunger of thy heart; that I obey the kindly impulse may make the world none the better -- perchance some iota the worse; yet I must needs follow it -- I cannot otherwise. (61)

Child once again configures social duty as compulsion, an absolute imperative. For Child, personal spiritual reformation and civic duty are not in opposition; social benevolence creates spiritual enlightenment. Letters from New-York seems to answer Emerson's rhetorical question, "are they my poor?" with a resounding affirmation. Child examines her own persistent social question: "Why do we thus repress our sympathies, and chill the genial current of nature, by formal observances and restraints?" (122). Child's rhetoric challenges Emerson's sectarian

construction of "my poor" to suggest the need to reinterpret them as "our poor."

For Child, New York operates as a dynamic metaphor for nineteenth-century modernity which she simultaneously praises as progressing toward social perfection and castigates as suffering from horrific growing pains, monstrous injustices and social inequities. Child appropriates women's rhetoric of Christian benevolence and progress with a twist: she does not openly attempt to indoctrinate the reader into a specific political stance, but plunges them into her experiences. "Letter III" combines many common elements of Child's strategies for using representational discourse to explore a philosophical point. She begins with an unpretentious opening topic, a popular staple in familiar letters, the weather. She describes the sultry summer heat and paints a representative "spiritual daguerreotype":

Oh, these damp sultry days of August! how oppressive they are to mind and body! The sun staring at you from bright red walls, like the shining face of a heated cook. Strange to say they are painted red, blocked off with white compartments, as numerous as Protestant sects, and as unlovely in their narrowness. (16)

The image suggests a favorite theme: the need for a universal Christianity. Child frequently dismisses the ensuing philosophical discussion -- the ideological heart

of the letter -- as a spontaneous digression:

Whence came all this digression? It has as little to do with New-York, as a seraph has to do with Banks and Markets. Yet in good truth, it all came from a painted brick wall staring in at my chamber window. . . . It was ungrateful in me to complain of those walls, for I am more blest in my prospect than most inhabitants of cities; . . . I always see much *within* a landscape -- 'a light and a revealing,' everywhere. (16)

And yet the point is the "revealing," the connection between angels and commerce, as well as between religion and social progress. Using the "sectarian brick wall" as a central trope, Child waxes poetic about a small garden -- "in the absence of rippling brooks and blooming laurel, I am thankful for its marigolds and poppies" -- while lamenting the human misery found in the adjacent Five Points neighborhood (17). The descriptive passages frame a single paragraph in which Child acknowledges her debt to blending rhetorical strategies, and suggests that she envisioned herself as a Christian and transcendentalist writer:

But I must quit this strain; or you will say the fair, floating Grecian shadow casts itself too obviously over my Christianity. Perchance, you will even call me "transcendental;" that being 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. (17)

Child recognizes her debt to transcendentalist thinking while highlighting a point Emerson himself enumerates: the term "transcendentalism" quickly became an overused and widely misunderstood appellation.⁴⁸

Like the best familiar letters, Letters from New-York attempts to transcribe New York's sights and sounds and includes a polyphony of voices. Child often uses characters as spiritual daguerreotypes. "In a great metropolis like this," Child remarks, "nothing is more observable than the infinite varieties of character" (43). Child establishes the pretext that she is introducing her distant reader to new and mysterious character types, and compiles a composite range of vernacular voices from the street vendor's lilting cry advertising "Lily white corn" to a Florida slave-trader's ironically self-conflicting defense of slavery.⁴⁹ In "Letter XV" about Macdonald Clarke, New-York's well-known "Mad Poet," Child uses Clarke to personify the plight of urban "lunatics." She extols Clarke's remarkable gentleness, simplicity, and piety as social virtues. Child begins with an admission:

it may seem strange to you that among the mass of beings in this great human hive I should occupy an entire letter with one whose life was like a troubled and fantastic dream; apparently without

use to himself or others. Yet he was one who has left record on the public heart. (63)

Clarke becomes a cultural emblem of the "public heart" and symbolizes Child's belief that sympathy can still be used as a conduit to affect public sentiments, in this case to defuse public mistrust of the insane and to advocate more humane treatment for asylum inmates.

Child relentlessly grounds her sentimentalism in a harsh condemnation of social policy infused with a millennial urgency. Little ragged girls, emaciated women, tattered siblings sharing a single pair of shoes, and random acts of spontaneous sympathy between poor New Yorkers punctuate the letters. As Child focuses on immersing the reader in immediate sensory images, she also adopts a visionary rhetoric expressing a millennial fervor that resonates with abolitionist women's fiery rhetoric and Emerson's and Fuller's oracular voices. However, Child's vision consistently transcends the immediate controversies. "Yet in the far-off Future I saw a gleam. For these too Christ has died," Child asserts, "For these was the chorus sung over the hills of Judea; and the heavenly music will yet find an echo deep in their hearts" (18). This belief in millennial redemption does not absolve the reader because the letter ends with a scathing indictment explaining how social policy aimed toward eliminating violence and crime actually generates more.

Child's epistolary discourse does not celebrate

emotion over reason; her rhetoric advocates reason empowered by emotion and spirituality. In the final letters, her voice becomes increasingly prophetic. These letters often incorporate prosaic sentimental tableaux that can be read as exquisite models for, in Jane Tompkins's terminology, Child's staunch belief in "sentimental power." Child often develops her emblems into short cultural parables.⁵⁰ When read out of context, Child's heartfelt expressions may seem like generic examples of women's rhetoric of benevolence.

In "Letter XXXII," Child extols the virtues of extending universal kindness: "And so I return, as the old preachers used to say, to my first proposition; that we should think gently of all, and claim kindred with all, and include all without exception, in the circle of our kindly sympathies" (145). She next develops a litany of images which encapsulates Victorian iconography. For example, she depicts Nature's healing power as a beatific child who can transcend language and speak directly to "the heart": "lo, she has shown me a babe plucking a white clover, with busy, uncertain little fingers, and the child walked straight into my heart, and prophesied as hopefully as an angel" (145). Child then lists those "tokens of a friendly heart-warmth" which fill her rooms -- a sheaf of flowers, a bird of paradise, engravings of children, and other "beautiful" natural specimens -- as concrete examples of how material things can be inspirational. For Child, these keepsakes

function as spiritual daguerreotypes, images with powerful imaginative resonance, which the reader can access visually and emotionally. The keepsake trope recurs as a standard motif in nineteenth-century fiction and small tokens were often folded inside friendship and familial letters (Motz 65). She exploits these cultural connotations and "tap[s] into an enduring tradition in the sentimental imagination; the sentimental keepsake constitutes a vivid symbolic embodiment of the primacy of human connection and the inevitability of human loss" (Dobson 273).⁵¹ Child's rhetoric represents the apex of belief in the power of sentiment to redeem the world: "And the love that helps me to be good, I would have you bestow upon all, that all may become good. . . . Believe me, the great panacea for all the disorders in the universe, is Love" (146). For Child, these sentiments are not meant to deny the possibility of evil but rather to awaken the reader to experience the "law of love" which extends human sympathy (146). Child's ideal reader is open to this "law of love" which extends human sympathy. These excerpts are taken from a letter which opens with a harsh denunciation of recent public capital punishments:

Society has done my spirit grievous wrong, for the last few weeks, with its legal bull-baitings, and its hired murderers. They have made me ashamed of belonging to the human species; and were it not that I struggled against it, and

prayed earnestly for a spirit of forgiveness,
they would have made me hate my race. (143)

The "beautiful" and, by extension, conventionally sentimentalized images offer more than a simple escape from reality; they extend to the reader a rational choice.

Child seeks to instruct the reader through this relentless synthesis of sentimental trope and public critique:

The disagreeable of New-York, I deliberately mean to keep out of sight, when I write you. By contemplating beauty, the character becomes more beautiful; in this wearisome world, I deem it a duty to speak genial words, and wear cheerful looks. Yet for once, I will depart from this rule, to speak of the dog-killers. (15)

Thus, Child frames her letters in conventional expectations about appropriate content for women's writing only to explode those same boundaries. A case in point is that although Child frequently invokes the aforementioned angelic child, a staple of women's discourse, she also compassionately depicts women and children living outside the comfortable confines of middle-class domesticity.

"Letter XIV" contains multiple images of poor women and children living on the streets which she contrasts with the middle-class security Child shares with the reader. "As I turned into the street where God has provided me with a friendly shelter, something lay across my path. It was a

woman, apparently dead; with garments all draggled in New-York gutters, blacker than waves of the infernal rivers," Child observes (62). The representational image creates a discursive snapshot intended to stimulate the reader's, as yet latent, sympathy.

Child thrusts these spiritual daguerreotypes on the reader and exposes how the same society which uses separate spheres rhetoric to exalt women trenchantly fails to protect women across class divisions. For Child, social progress hinges on ameliorating social injustices, emancipating American slaves, and allowing women an increased public role. She argues that the growing international abolitionist movement represents the beginning of wider reform. "Women, too, on whose intellect ever rests the warm light of the affections, are obviously coming into a wider and wider field of action," Child explains, "All these things prophesy of physical force yielding to moral sentiment; and they all are agents to fulfill what they prophesy" (152). Child's observation suggests that her own epistolary experiment in widening women's sphere through nurturing the reader's affection participates in this prophesy.

IV

Child's decision to resign her editorship marks a new stage in her literary career, one in which epistolarity continues to play an essential public role. She stages her

departure as a declaration of authorial independence: "the freedom of my own spirit makes it absolutely necessary for me to retire. I am too distinctly and decidedly an individual, to edit the organ of any association" ("Farewell" 1). Child's resolution to transform her popular periodical letters into a bound volume, a literary artifact, reflects her desire to re-enter the literary world, and address a larger general audience. In an 1843 letter to Loring, Child expresses her intention to resume her professional literary career:

I feel a great sense of happiness at the idea of returning to literature, after so long an absence. The road is crowded, and a great dust flying; but I think there will be a call, "Make room there! Let Mrs. Child's carriage pass." Such powers as I have, are in their maturity now, and I feel a resolution I never felt before to cast from all the fetters of sand which have so miserably bound me down to unprofitable drudgery. David has agreed to part partnership as far as pecuniary matters are concerned; and I know I can more than support myself. (CC 35/470)

In this second declaration of independence, Child's intention to free herself from her editorial duties and her financial obligations to her husband signify her confidence in her professional status and the text's potential marketability.⁵²

After resigning her editorial commission, Child continued publishing "Letters from New York" in the less politically charged Boston Courier and she concentrated on re-dedicating her public writing career to more ostensibly literary outlets; however, her private epistolary practice soon positioned her at the vanguard of abolitionist agitation, and exposed the tenuous divide between public and private letter writing practices. As abolitionist sympathy spread, Child's political views in regards to slavery became more mainstream. In October 1859, John Brown led a small band of insurgents in a raid against the Harper's Ferry arsenal to obtain weapons for their insurrection. Despite their eventual capture, the action provided Brown with a public platform to espouse immediate emancipation even if it caused violence. According to Karcher, Brown's status as abolitionist martyr re-ignited Child's activism.⁵³

Child's initially private interest in Brown resulted in a public letter-writing contest in which Child manipulates sympathetic discourse and constructions of womanhood to out-debate two influential pro-slavery opponents, Governor Wise of Virginia and Mrs. Mason, wife of a powerful Virginia senator. This exchange ultimately validates Child's belief in the power of women's sympathetic letters as a performance of individual integrity and personal sympathy to stimulate public reform causes. A nagging question surrounded the Harper's Ferry

incident: "What responsibility do women have in a public crisis?" In response, Child wrote a private letter to Brown in which she voiced a desire to nurse him while he awaited trial. The letter expresses her heart-felt sympathy and her self-depiction resonates with cultural ideals of woman as ministering angel. "I think of you night and day, bleeding in prison, surrounded by hostile faces, sustained only by trust in God, and your own strong heart," Child writes, "I long to nurse you, to speak to you sisterly words of sympathy and consolation" (SL 324).

At the same time, she enclosed a politically savvy letter to Governor Wise of Virginia who held Brown prisoner, asking for permission to visit him because of "sisterly sympathy." Child guaranteed that her visit would be strictly private and she "would use such permission solely and singly for the purpose of nursing your prisoner" (SL 326). In his exceedingly polite and condescending reply, Wise faulted Child and her fellow abolitionists for the recent bloodshed, calling it "a natural consequence of your sympathy, and the errors of that sympathy out to make you doubt its virtue form on the effect on his conduct" (SL 326). Wise, convinced that he had scored an important point, published this exchange in the New York Tribune without Child's consent. On Nov. 10, 1859, Child responded and the ensuing flurry of letters debate the political role of sympathy and by extension the public role of women. According to Yellin, it represents "Child's major

contribution to the ongoing debate over definitions of true womanhood" (62).

In her New York Tribune rejoinder, Child positions herself as domestic ideal, a woman whose private correspondence has been violated and whose private sympathy for a suffering man has been exploited. "My intention was to slip away quietly, without having the affair made public. I packed my trunk and collected a quantity of old linen [for bandages] and waited" (Tribune 5). Child appended a letter from Brown which stirred public sympathy, exposed Wise to imputations of un-gentlemanly behavior, and opened up a new Southern audience for her views. "Thanks to Wise," Karcher explains, "Child's offer to nurse Brown, which she had meant as a private, womanly gesture, ended up attracting as much notoriety as had Brown's interview, and serving the antislavery cause almost as effectively" (421).

The whole affair may have blown over if Mrs. Mason had not attempted to best Child by attacking her personally. In her letter, Mason chides Child to "take a lesson in true charity from the slaveholding matrons of the South" and poses a series of rhetorical questions aimed at undermining Child's personal philanthropy with which Mason is clearly ignorant (Karcher 421-2). Child's eleven page answer, also published in the New York Tribune, represents some of Child's finest epistolary writing. In a direct violation

of feminine conventions, Wise's letter begins, "Do you read your Bible, Mrs. Child? If you do, read there, 'Woe unto you hypocrites,' and take to yourself with two-fold damnation that terrible sentence" (243). In return, Child renounces the rhetoric of personal attack and instead combines well-reasoned examples with sympathetic appeals. "I have no disposition to retort upon you the 'two-fold damnation,' to which you consign me. On the contrary, I sincerely wish you well, both in this world and the next" (243).

By remaining true to notions regulating proper feminine behavior, Child performs the two key cultural virtues -- personal integrity and Christian sympathy -- thereby discrediting Mason. "I readily believe what you state concerning the kindness of many Virginia matrons. It is creditable to their hearts: but after all, the best that can be done in that way is a poor equivalent for the perpetual wrong done to the slaves," Child scolds (251). In response, she amasses a Scriptural argument against slavery; quotes Jefferson, Grimke, eminent law Professors, and former slave holders; reveals Southern economic motivations for maintaining slavery; and finally responds to the personal charges in the name of all "the women of New England" (Reader 251). "I have never known an instance where the 'pangs of maternity' did not meet with requisite assistance; and here at the North, after we have helped the mothers, we do not sell the babies," Child replies.

Aligning herself with Channing, Bryant, Whittier, Emerson, and Stowe, Child rallies an impressive cultural counterattack to prove that "the whole civilized world proclaims Slavery an outlaw, and the best intellect of the age is active in hunting it down" (253).

Reprinted in numerous newspapers in northern and southern states, this correspondence elicited a vigorous response and stimulated a massive fund-raising campaign for Brown's family and the relatives of other Brown's Ferry's martyrs, including the slain African Americans. In 1860, the American Anti-Slavery Society published the letters between Child, Brown, Mason, and Wise in a five-cent pamphlet that sold 300,000 copies, making it Child's most widely read text (SL 333). In form, Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia showcases Child's mature epistolary style and represents a complex negotiation of public and private letter writing strategies. Karcher quotes Garrison's gleeful assertion that "'Mrs. Child has 'pulverized' Governor Wise ... and thoroughly 'used up' Mrs. Mason'" (423). As a cultural conversationalist, Child proves that she can effectively combine reason and sentiment to best both masculine and feminine rhetors.

During a time when periodical reviews and editorials were generally anonymous and the periodical publishing industry was predominately masculine, Child's presence as a strong, independent voice represents a powerful assertion

of cultural authority. Her assertive and self-reliant narrative performance represents an empowering paradigm for later women writers. From a historical perspective, she may be credited with helping to shape a new profession for women writers as cultural commentators while reinventing and reinvigorating the public "letter form" advancing it from a didactic form to a more actively propaedeutic model. Child's celebration of individualism and her belief in interpreting visual culture to unlock spiritual truth resonate deeply with Margaret Fuller's dispatches from Europe in which Fuller's epistolary experimentation also challenges the boundaries between sentimental and representational discursive strategies, and between women's public and private roles.

Coda

We believe it is generally admitted that a woman of even average acquirements can write a better letter than a man.

Fanny Fern

Within the nineteenth-century American public letter-writing tradition, other rhetorically complex epistolary texts can enrich our understanding of how women participated in cultural conversations. This wider scope highlights how epistolary practice permeates nineteenth-century literary culture. Broadening the range of texts outward from the initial three main chapters suggests how the interpretative approach I have pursued facilitates new interpretations of epistolary texts generally categorized as non-literary. In addition, it can be used to recover authors and texts which defy twentieth-century genre categories, and it reveals the potential for posing provocative juxtapositions between epistolary texts. Finally, it suggests how an individual literary career can be re-interpreted in relation to the author's investment in epistolarity, an especially rich endeavor when complementary personal correspondences have survived.

In addition to the literary careers of Sigourney, Kirkland, and Child, the textual corpora of Margaret Fuller, Fanny Fern and Emily Dickinson rely heavily on epistolary practices and are ripe for a critical re-

evaluation.¹ Letter-books, correspondences collected by editors, are another epistolary genre which merits focused critical attention. Letter-books generally construct, to use Decker's terminology, a "thesis driven" biography, and may be used to read individual letters on a case-by-case basis or may be interpreted as a crafted collection which reveals the editor's cultural values and ideology.² Nineteenth-century letter-books were compiled using the letters of Sigourney, Kirkland, Child, Fuller, Gail Hamilton, Jane Swisshelm, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louisa May Alcott, and, in the early twentieth-century, Emily Dickinson. Letter-books provide an unusually rich source for investigating how nineteenth-century letter readers actively edited, juxtaposed, and "readdressed" letters to construct biographies which purport to reveal the "truth" about their subjects' public and private lives by making their ostensibly private thoughts and emotions public.³ For my concluding example, I will turn briefly to Margaret Fuller's European dispatches, another case of public letters which have been read with a sometimes myopic focus on recovering biographical detail, in order to discuss her public letters as a defining performance of woman's role as an emerging type of cultural conversationalist, the professional epistolary journalist.

This study opened with epistolary conduct literature for two main reasons. First, writing conduct literature provided a crucial stepping-stone for literary women to

gain both the cultural credibility and financial clout they needed to start building professional careers. Second, conduct literature's complex rhetoric and tropes have, with a few notable exceptions, remained outside critical discourse. In contrast, as my exploration of Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies suggests, nineteenth-century conduct literature may be read to explore how women writers both resisted and codified separate sphere ideology, while using epistolarity to enter public debates and widen women's roles. Male-authored texts, such as Josiah Gilbert Holland's Titcomb's Letters to Young People, Single and Married (1858) and William Alcott's Letters to a Sister; or Woman's Mission (1850), could also further complicate and enrich our understanding of the epistolary conduct literature tradition. In practice, foregrounding epistolary practice provides an interpretative framework for deepening our understanding of epistolary conduct literature as a rhetorical site, including diverse styles, tropes, rhetorical strategies, and frequently conflicting relationships to hegemonic constructions of gender.⁴

For example, texts with diametrically opposed politics and epistolary strategies like Catharine Ward Beecher's Letters to the People on Health and Happiness (1855) and Jane Swisshelm's Letters to Country Girls (1853) can be fruitfully compared. Writing from her social position within the New England literary and clerical cultural elite, Beecher's work is politically conservative, and her

audience is implicitly middle-class, or at least striving to attain middle-class social status.⁵ However, her epistolary style is an unusual blend of feminine letter-writing conventions and scientific discourse. Beecher incorporates scientific evidence including skeletal drawings, diagrams revealing spinal compression caused by corsets, and statistics documenting American women's deteriorating health. Beecher's letters are a female jeremiad predicting increased American enfeeblement and illness due to unhealthy domestic practices. While Beecher constructs herself as a paragon of "true womanhood" in order to address domestic concerns as a means for commenting on wider public issues, her overtly literary letters rely on incorporating epistolarity as social convention and feminine rhetorical mode. However, she side-steps conduct literature tradition and sternly addresses her "facts" toward American parents rather than its youth. "I think I shall be able to show," Beecher asserts, "that the majority of parents in this nation are systematically educating the rising generation to be feeble, deformed, sickly, and miserable; as much so as if it were their express aim to commit so monstrous a folly (7). Beecher calls for widespread involvement in the American Woman's Educational Association, whose "board of managers" she spearheads and whose august members include Sigourney, Kirkland, Stowe, and Sedgwick. The Association's mission is to reform female education to

include "physiology and calisthenics" and "secure the reading of these Letters by every man and woman in this nation who can understand them, and to enlist in the effort the co-operation, not only of their own sex, but of their clergymen, physicians, and editorial friends" (192). Beecher directly addresses nineteenth-century America's cultural and intellectual elite. As a cultural conversationalist, Beecher's public letters voice a strong personal authority supporting her social mission to train women to be teachers for frontier schools and to effect broad-based public health policy reforms.

In direct contrast, Swisshelm, an outspoken feminist, abolitionist, and social reformer, delighted in shocking her reading public.⁶ She is politically radical, her style is witty and satiric, and her audience is, originally, derived from the middle and working class readers of her independent weekly, the Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter. Her conversational letters, full of colloquial expressions, read more like private letters recounting her daily activities, and dispensing advice to a younger friend or relative. Swisshelm provocatively addresses the reader as a familiar, and frequently foolish, "you" who is susceptible to becoming a slave to cultural fads and social follies. At the same time, she validates their experiences at the expense of middle-class authorities like Sigourney and Beecher:

Dear Girls, -- There has been a great deal of

paper spoiled writing lectures about women's duties, to teach them how to behave . . . few people write much to you country girls, who make butter and milk cows; or, if they do, they are sure to put a string of long words which neither you nor I understand. (10)

Positioning herself as female gossip engaged in a public correspondence with her audience, Swisshelm, like Kirkland, parodies herself as author, her reader's attitudes and past times, nineteenth-century culture, and conduct literature's conventions and assumptions. Her wit undermines separate spheres ideology and contemporary gender constructions. Although divided on the issue of suffrage for women, Beecher and Swisshelm do agree on some fundamental practical reforms: both advocate healthful outdoor exercise, temperate eating habits, daily bathing, dress reform, temperance, the "water cure," abolition, domestic activity, and the importance of female social activities. However, as didactic instructors and epistolary stylists, they represent two radically divergent pedagogical approaches and performances of the female letter writer working within the conduct literature tradition.

In "Addressing Gossip: Caroline Kirkland's A New Home; Who'll Follow?," I highlight two important uses of epistolary rhetoric: American women's humor, and "letters home" as cultural phenomena. Nineteenth-century women's personal correspondences often voice a witty and irreverent

tone less common in published texts. The satire of writers like Kirkland, Swisshelm, Stephens, Fanny Fern, Gail Hamilton, and Frances Whicher documents how women publicly questioned conventional gender roles, used humor to interrogate social norms and practices, and experimented with traditionally non-literary narrative voices. In general, American women's humor has received scant critical attention; however, humor plays a key role in nineteenth-century private correspondences, and parody and social satire are powerful rhetorical strategies for engaging in cultural critiques. In Swisshelm's Letters to Country Girls and Ann Stephens's High Life in New York, American vernacular is used to parody social conventions with an eye toward the "public letter writer" and letter-writing practices.⁷

Letters to Country Girls represents a unique cross-over between conduct literature and satiric humor, making it, to use Baym's phrase, a "halfway" text resonating with Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies, as well as Kirkland's A New Home. As Swisshelm's title suggests, she positions herself as a country every-woman addressing common "girls" as opposed to a more proper audience of "ladies." Her conversational style uses language and phrasing resonate with a spoken idiom. She defends her right to indulge in "a little friendly gossip," and to write letters "that will contribute to the general improvement or stock of knowledge" (8). Swisshelm's satire targets "public letter

writers" who talk endlessly about conventional subjects and tirelessly about their own parochial experiences.

You see we are not mere scribes, any more than pharisees, for we talk as "one having authority," and then we talk on, and never think of quitting because we have nothing to say. It is quite impossible one of us can ever get out of a subject for we never get out of ourselves. Then, people whose letters are printed for others to read, must, of course, be great people, unless they are great asses or owls. . . . (124-5)

Swisshelm privileges practical information over philosophizing. She juxtaposes an exaggeratedly solipsistic first-person account of traveling through a completely conventionalized pastoral scene with her own practical and unassuming gardening advice. N. P. Willis's "Letters from Under a Bridge," with its repetitive use of "I" and its inflated language, represents the type of text Swisshelm parodies. "When I had made up my mind to write to you, I cast about for a cool place in the shade; for besides the changes which farming works upon my *epidermis*," Willis explains, "I find some in the inner man, one of which is a vegetable necessity of living out-of-doors" (297). Willis writes as no man speaks. Swisshelm deflects the "high" seriousness and moral tone of conduct authors, like Beecher and Sigourney, and the highbrow rhetoric of magazine writers like Willis. As a cultural

conversationalist, she demonstrates how public letter writers have accrued enough cultural clout and potentially hackneyed conventions to be easily recognizable, and that satire is a rhetorical tool women can wield.

In High Life in New York (1843), Ann Stephens shifts her satire toward male letter writers and social etiquette. She creates an even more unusual performative letter writer, a country bumpkin, Jonathan Slick, who bumbles his way through the complex New York social scene. Written entirely in dialect, the text represents an important epistolary experiment. By eschewing rules of grammar, punctuation, and spelling, Stephens creates an incredibly uniform voice in dialect that effectively parodies social conventions, male/female gender roles, and sentimental culture. As public letter writer, Slick vacillates between authorial and personal pride and expresses a comic ignorance of social and literary conventions. "Wal, yes, I ain't asamed to own it, I am tickled eenamost tu death with the idee of my letter being printed in a harnsome book with top-top picters int it . . ." (iv-v). Furthermore, through her performance as male letter writer, Stephens challenges the nineteenth-century belief that literary style can be read as an essential function of gender and class. In fact, High Life in New York performs Slick's persistent determination to find "truth" and genuine sentiment in a culture which seems to have reduced these ideals to empty conventions and smoke-screens for deception. Fruitful

comparisons can be made to male-authored texts in this tradition, a trend especially prevalent in periodical literature. For example, in many ways, Stephens's "New York" letters resonate with Dr. George William Bagby's "Letters of Mozis Addums to Billy Ivbins," a series of letters written in dialect and published in the Southern Literary Messenger in 1857.

A New Home participates in another emerging epistolary tradition: "letters home" written from the frontier which flourished in periodical literature. I classify these letters into two categories: the settlement narrative and the travel narrative. The important distinction is that settlement narratives do not document an ongoing journey. They create the illusion that the author is writing each letter spontaneously in order to detail her new daily routine, chronicle her frontier adventures and trials, and document her relationship to an emerging social scene set on the mainstream culture's margins. These letters are characterized by the author's desire to re-connect with her "home" culture through the act of writing and addressing the reader while describing in detail a "new" community and its social practices. Epistolary "settlement" narratives have been read primarily as historical documents; however, as carefully crafted texts, they also merit recognition as early experiments using representational discourse which introduce the female letter writer performing new roles: wilderness survivor, domestic innovator, and culture

creator.

For example, Catharine Parr Traill's The Backwoods of Canada: Being Letters from the Wife of an Emigrant Officer, Illustrative of the Domestic Economy of British America (1836) and Louise Amelia Knapp Smith Clappe's "Dame Shirley Letters" (1851-2) differ dramatically in epistolary style and tone from A New Home, and from each other, while developing many of Kirkland's central themes. Written as highly conventional familial letters to her mother, Traill envisions an utterly sympathetic audience and includes descriptions of keepsakes sent with letters. "I know my little domestic details will not prove wholly uninteresting to you; for well I am assured that a mother's eye is never weary with reading lines traced by the hand of an absent and beloved child," she explains (92). Traill juxtaposes domestic details and familial anecdotes with ethnographic accounts of local flora, fauna, and customs. She includes meticulously drawn sketches of indigenous species and botanical descriptions and analysis. Many letters read like chapters from a textbook tucked inside personal letters. Like Kirkland and Dame Shirley, Traill is concerned with women's special plight on the frontier; however, while acknowledging the homesickness and isolation of her neighbors, she embodies self-reliance:

The [frontier] women are discontented and unhappy
. . . . I know I shall find plenty of occupation
within-doors, and I have sources of enjoyment

when I walk abroad that will keep me from being dull. Besides, have I not a right to be cheerful and contented for the sake of my beloved partner?

(90)

By combining wifely duty, motherhood, and an adventuring spirit, Traill's letters suggest how "true womanhood" was being transformed on the frontier.⁸ Moreover, since many of her detailed letters are rhetorically structured as responses to parental questions, they reveal how representational discourse functions concomitantly with epistolarity.

Kirkland, Traill, and "Dame Shirley" write as middle-class women transported by entrepreneurial husbands to the margins of "civilized" society; however, Traill and Shirley embrace the acculturation process, and their letters demonstrate how some women enjoyed greater personal freedom on the frontier. Written as series of letters from a New England lady transported to California at the height of the Gold Rush, Clappe addresses the letters to her sister back home, and draws out the comparisons between their two geographical and social positions. Nevertheless, the letters' careful style and the lag-time between their posted dates and publication in two California newspapers, the Marysville Herald and The Pioneer, suggests that these letters were carefully "readdressed." Stylistically, the letters, like Kirkland's, are highly allusive, and full of French and Latin phrasing; however, like Traill's, the

letters are amazingly detailed and are rich in ethnographic accounts. Writing about her experiences in a mining camp, Shirley turns her gaze outward to document the miners' hardships and the plight of immigrant women and children. Unlike Kirkland, Shirley revels in the opportunity to recreate herself in a society where women are allowed to be independent and self-reliant. Writing about other frontier women, Shirley notes that

But is it not wonderful, what femininity is capable of? . . . But, as is often said, nothing is strange in California. I have known of sacrifices, requiring, it would seem, superhuman efforts, made by women in this country, who at home were nurtured in the extreme of elegance and delicacy. (40)

For Shirley, the raw power and beauty of nature and the "primitive" mining life represent an opportunity for western women to evolve beyond their eastern sisters. As frontier letter writers, Shirley and Traill recount their novel experiences and challenge "civilized" gender roles for women.

As "letters from" exotic places garnered public attention and periodical publishers rushed to meet public demand for fresh material, women writers began writing periodical letters from the nation's urban centers.⁹ In "Addressing Reform: Lydia Maria Child's Letters from New-York," I touch upon two important aspects of this.

tradition: urban letters that describe the social center and its rapidly changing social milieu, and reform letters that address social issues. Women's antebellum periodical letters represent the beginning of a tradition which, by the century's end, had accumulated considerable cultural significance. As David Hill notes in The Elements of Rhetoric (1884) some letter writers were recognized professionals:

They make letter-writing a profession, and devote themselves to it with enthusiasm. Their letters are usually brilliant rather than profound, dealing chiefly with current events in politics, religion and literature. They are often full of humor and fancy, and the predominant style is what is sometimes called *picturesque*, for the graphic character of the diction. (172)

These letters combine both advice literature's overt didactic intentions and the representational strategies of "settlement narratives" and exploit the letter format's fluid discursive boundaries. Thematically, women's public urban letters resemble settlement letters because they are similarly filled with a sense of the letter writer's isolation, cultural deracination, and fascination with describing their social scene. Male writers who also adapted the epistolary format for periodical writing include N.P. Willis, Donald Grant Mitchell (Ik Marvel), George W. Curtis, and Mortimer Thompson.¹⁰

Two very different two sets of serialized letters -- Harriet Farley's "Letters from Susan" published anonymously in The Lowell Offering (1844) and Elizabeth Drew Stoddard's "Letters from a Lady Correspondent" (1854-58) -- reveal how women writers used the periodical press to comment publicly on divisive public issues, women's work, and urban social conditions." In direct contrast to Anne Stephens's fictionalized Jonathan Slick, Harriet Farley's letter-writing persona, Susan, is a well-educated, articulate New Hampshire country girl who has mastered the art of polite letter writing. Published in The Lowell Offering, a journal dedicated to publishing the writings of factory "girls," "Letters from Susan" describes a rural farm girl's acculturation to urban society, millwork's daily routine, and boarding house life. The letters adhere perfectly to letter writing conventions, including the religious closing and the obligatory apologia: "You, I know, will excuse all my 'up-country' phrases, for I have not yet got the rust off, and to you, and all my old-fashioned friends, I shall always be rusty. My egotism I will not apologize for -- it is what you request" (46). Written to a younger sister who is still at home, Farley's performative persona enacts an ideal of true womanhood and re-inscribes the familial, social, and religious values which her relocation to an urban work environment might compromise. While dramatizing how work and womanhood are compatible, Farley complicates separate spheres ideology:

I cannot advise you to come. You must act according to your own judgment. Your only reasons are a desire to see a new place, a city, and to be with me. You have now an excellent home. . . . But tell Hester that I advise her to come. She has always lived among relatives who have treated her as a slave. (61)

Farley suggests how many women are forced by situational and financial contingencies to enter the working world, thereby challenging the underlying premise of separate sphere ideology. Meanwhile her self-depiction re-inscribes the ideal of "true" womanhood's defining virtues. Farley, like Child, documents urban women working and struggling to survive outside the conventional perimeters of women's sphere.

Writing from inside New York's upper middle-class society, Elizabeth Drew Stoddard wrote seventy-five highly literary and increasingly popular letters to the Daily Alta California between October 8, 1854 and February 28, 1858, a project which marks the beginning of her literary career.¹² Writing from the nation's urban cultural center to the frontier margins, Stoddard, like Kirkland and Child, expresses a longing to connect with the letters' ostensible "real" readers, in this case, her brothers living in California. She writes as a cultural critic who describes familiar cultural events from a frequently sardonic perspective. Stoddard's letters, while anti-slavery,

repeatedly vocalize her mistrust of philanthropic institutions and reform movements predicated on individual self-reform, the very approach which Child enacts. Blending theater, music, and book reviews, descriptions of society events, cultural phenomena, fashion news, society gossip, domestic upheavals, and political commentary, Stoddard directs her satiric comments at entrenched social customs while playfully performing as social gossip. She relentlessly exploits the convention that letters should express the writer's unique voice and individuality, thereby creating an unusually assertive and outspoken public female persona. In one letter, she notes that "an officious person has suggested to me that perhaps I make these letters too personal; . . . that it would be better to make myself more newspaperish" (qt. in Matlack, 196). Interestingly, Stoddard, like Kirkland, was censured by her neighbors for her irreverent depictions. However, she cultivates, and seems to thrive on, her unorthodox style and opinions:

I debate in my mind how to appear most effectively, whether to present myself as a genuine original, or adopt some great example in style; such as the pugilisms of Fanny Fern, the pathetics of Minnie Myrtle, or the abandon of Cassie Cauliflower. (2)

Her letters dramatize an adversarial relationship to the rhetoric of romantic love and to women's genteel and highly

euphemistic language. She advocates a more hard-hitting and direct journalistic style with a personal flair. In the Oct. 16, 1854, issue of the Daily Alta California, her column appears next to a letter "From our New-York Correspondent," a feature delivering more unadulterated political news, which reveals nothing about the author's personality or tastes, and is signed "Hamlet." This juxtaposition reveals how startlingly innovative Stoddard's personalized narrative voice was in its original context and suggests yet another point of comparison for interpreting how periodical letter writers manipulated public and private writing strategies.

Female reform writers seized upon the sentimental power of private letters to add their voices to public causes, especially the abolition movement. Fanny Kemble's Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839 represents an abolitionist text grounded in feminine epistolary practice and "readdressed" to a public audience. Kemble, a famous actress and a celebrity, delayed publishing the letters for twenty years for fear of a familial reprisal. In her Journal, Kemble reprints a series of private letters written to a friend which record how her husband's attempts to transform her into a proper plantation mistress actually strengthened her commitment to abolition. Her epistolary text resonates with Child's and Grimke's reform letters, with women's settlement letters, and with private friendship letters. Writing from the deep

South, Kemble finds herself confronting an alien culture. Her letters juxtapose the southern landscape's lush beauty with the horrific treatment of slaves, especially acts of cruelty against women and children. She records her inability to intervene to help the slaves. Appeals to sentiment fail to reach her obdurate husband:

I appealed to him not to commit so great a cruelty. How I cried, and how I adjured, and how all my sense of justice, and of mercy, and of pity for the poor wretch, and of the wretchedness at finding myself implicated in such a state of things, broke from my eyes. (52)

Kemble gradually shifts her identification to the slave community and begins educating and helping them. Her personal correspondence provides an emotional and intellectual connection to a more civilized society. While her letters re-inscribe some nineteenth-century racial prejudices, they also sympathetically depict the plight of American slaves. She documents her personal powerlessness, a state she genders as female:

I went out to try and walk off some of the weight of horror and depression which I am beginning to feel daily more and more, surrounded by all this misery and degradation that I can neither help nor hinder. (110)

Publishing her letters enables Kemble to transgress the boundary between public and private discourse. This act

becomes a source of power on which she stakes her personal, moral, and political independence against her husband's patriarchal domination and her political disenfranchisement.

Using more overtly confrontational rhetorical strategies, the Grimke sisters experimented with blurring the lines between public and private epistolary practice in order to agitate for emancipation and women's rights. As in Child's Letters to New-York and her Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason, of Virginia, Sarah Moore Grimke's Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States (1836) and her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women (1838) exploit the cultural connections between female epistolary narrative authority, Christian rhetoric, and private sentimental appeals to construct dialogic public debates.¹³ The two texts mount complex arguments for women's full participation in public affairs based on Grimke's re-interpretation of Christian tenets. In the Epistle, Grimke performs as a public apostolic teacher who derives her narrative authority from Scripture and contemporary accounts of slavery. She addresses southern clergy members as equals, thereby challenging both the church's hierarchy and conventional attitudes about female decorum:

It is because I feel a portion of that love glowing in my heart towards you, which is infused into every bosom by the cordial reception of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ, that I am induced to address you as fellow professor of this holy religion. (90)

Writing as a female apostle, Grimke grounds her narrative authority in Christian morality and public duty. Although these are culturally sanctioned female virtues, Grimke establishes an adversarial relationship with her readers and her decision to transgress gender boundaries to speak as an apostle may have undercut her rhetorical effectiveness. In contrast, her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women retreats from this masculine rhetoric and repositions her political agenda safely within the context of women's personal correspondences. Grimke's title mimics titles common to the epistolary conduct tradition and women's histories like Child's The History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations. Written as a series of letters to Mary Parker, president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, Grimke's letters create the illusion of an intimate conversation between friends, a mode she fosters by signing each letter with the same familiar closing: "Thine in the bonds of womanhood." This closing evokes abolitionist rhetoric while affirming a class-based cultural connection between the author and her audience. By positioning her rhetoric within women's sphere, Grimke demonstrates how women can address public issues without violating strictures regulating feminine decorum:

I shall depend solely on the Bible to designate the sphere of woman, because I believe almost every thing that has been written on this subject has been the result of a misconception of the simple truths revealed in the Scriptures, in consequence of the false translation of many passages of Holy Writ. (204-5)

Grimke establishes herself as an epistolary translator who will re-interpret the Bible within the rhetorical mode of a female correspondence in order to correct social injustices and expose cultural prejudices.

The Grimke sisters were not, however, without detractors of both sexes. When Catharine Beecher chastised them for speaking publicly on reform issues, Angelina Grimke Weld wrote Letters to Catharine Beecher (1838).

Addressing Beecher as a "dear friend," Weld argues that if Ecclesiastical and Civil governments are ordained of God, then I contend that woman has just as much right to sit in solemn counsel in Conventions, Conferences, Associations and General Assemblies, as man -- just as much right to sit upon the throne of England, or in the Presidential chair of the United States. (177)

Grimke answers Beecher's individual charges and constructs a dialogic conversation that uses women's innate morality and religious nature as the grounds for their full participation in every "sphere" of human activity.

Epistolary travel narratives provide a trenchant example of how antebellum women were actively extending their geographical sphere of influence. Recently, travel writing has garnered sustained critical attention; however, epistolarity, when it is discussed, tends to be dismissed as an empty convention.¹⁴ Granted, as a popular form, the epistolary travel narrative had become highly conventionalized by mid-century. However, especially for women writers, epistolarity functioned as an empowering rhetorical mode by enhancing the author's narrative authority through its power as a cultural trope and by authorizing her to comment on public issues and cultural events.

American women's epistolary travel narratives generally fall into two categories. Early in the century, travel narratives -- like Caroline Elizabeth Cushing's Letters, Descriptive of Public Monuments, Scenery, and manners in France and Spain (1832) and Sarah Haight's Letters from the Old World. By a Lady of New York (1839) - tend to be written by literary amateurs, middle-class women, whose letters were originally intended for private, generally familial, reading and were later collected for publication.¹⁵ Like Child's Letters from New-York, these letters also undergo an important transformation when they are "readdressed" and collected for publication to reach a broader audience. Early travel literature helped to open up journalism as a profession for women. One notable

example is Anne Newport Royall, who between 1826 and 1831 wrote ten travel narratives about her US travels. From 1831 to 1854, Royall published her own Washington DC penny newspaper, Paul Pry, and is acknowledged to have been the first "professional" muckraker. Royall's Letters From Alabama, 1817-1822 reveals a decidedly intrepid lone female traveler who decries religious hypocrisy, and seems motivated to travel by her love of adventure and social gossip:

I was going on, however, to say, that [nothing] gives me more pleasure than to seize my pen at night, sitting comfortably, as I just observed, and talking to you on paper; and here follows another catalogue of every day incidents, appalling ones indeed, but you *will* have them.

(169)

Royall's conversational letter writing style places her on a literary continuum somewhere between the dialect conversations she records and the more polished literary letters of later travelers and represents a defining early example of the "graphic" journalistic style which would predominate in later periodical writing.

The second tradition of female travel writers are literary professionals, female authors, for whom publishing epistolary travel narratives signifies their status as professional writers and cultural conversationalists whose opinions interested readers, and could increase periodical

profitability. Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home (1841), Lydia Sigourney's Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands (1842), Caroline Kirkland's Holidays Abroad; or, Europe from the West (1849), and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands (1854) are all epistolary travel narratives published serially in newspapers or periodicals, presumably by publishers eager to profit from their authors' established literary reputations.

As the titles Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands and Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands suggest, professional status did not mean that women travel writers were automatically liberated from conventional standards for women's writing; however, there are significant differences between these "professional" travel letters which reflect their authors' individual political agendas. For example, Sunny Memories purports to be a morally uplifting collection of private letters sent to various friends and family and includes a preface written by her husband, Calvin. This rhetorical move underscores Stowe's self-performance as demure female traveler and retiring lady letter writer who only appears with her husband and does not dare to speak in public. The letters are "introduced" by a series of anti-slavery addresses delivered by Calvin Stowe and prominent English anti-slavery activists. Nevertheless, while in Europe, Stowe was touted as a literary and abolitionist celebrity and she met many

prominent authors and politicians. On one level, she writes familiar letters about social occasions describing famous places and people and relating how they were entertained and feted. On another level, she writes forceful political letters in which she depicts slavery as a sign that America has yet to fulfill its republican promise.

I felt pleased and sorrowful. I felt sorrowful because I knew, if all true Christians in America had the same feelings, that men, women, and children, for whom Christ died, would no more be sold in my country on the auction block. (197)

Almost every letter mentions slavery, develops a comparison between English and American social institutions, and incorporates affectional appeals to the reader. In Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands, Stowe effectively exploits the public/private sphere boundary, celebrates her professional status, and promotes abolition. For Stowe, the most compelling "travel" subject is American culture, a perspective Margaret Fuller adopts.

As a composite, these diverse epistolary texts showcase how American women writers addressed important cultural issues and questions. Moreover, it suggests that American women used epistolarity to document local social practices and customs and to grapple with a prevailing sense of cultural dislocation characteristic of the antebellum period. One resultant motif is the theme of

acculturation. These letter writers return again and again to the problem of how to forge intimate connections with their readers as they wrestle with the significant stresses caused by the necessity, or the desire, to reconcile themselves to cultural change and novel social situations. These letter writers experiment with synthesizing representational discourse and affectional appeals in order to educate the reader to understand their uniquely inflected authorial claims for women's self-culture. As cultural conversationalists, they use dialogic rhetorical strategies to claim a rhetorical space for women which complicates the conventional boundaries between the public and private spheres.

Popular with the public and highly visible in published periodicals travel narratives helped to create an enlarged discursive space for women to write as public commentators. Suzanne Scriber is correct to point out that travel writing granted women access to the wider realm of journalistic writing and helped them address larger audiences:

Journalism constituted a scene of writing that offered women alternative definitions of writing and writer. Journalism created space in which women could imagine themselves in a variety of writing roles: as reporters on topical matters, as muckrakers, as political analysts, and eventually as advice columnists. Or if a woman chose to seek entrée to genteel publications

addressed to an elite or highbrow audience, she could adopt the persona of art critic. (135)

In her European dispatches, Margaret Fuller plays with all these various "journalistic roles": she writes as reporter, muckraker, political analyst, advice columnist, art critic, and the lonely American letter writer abroad. Paid in advance to write for the Tribune, Fuller was the first American foreign correspondent and her dispatches appeared prominently on the front-page.

In conclusion, I will briefly address the four defining questions posed in my introduction in relation to Fuller's European dispatches written for the Tribune.¹⁶ How does she create herself as public rhetor? How does she imagine and attempt to influence an ideal audience through her direct epistolary addresses? How do her letters combine sentimental and representational narrative strategies to create educational dialogues? How does she manipulate the letter's ambiguous status as an ostensibly non-literary and private genre to enter public sphere debates? Answering these questions shows how Fuller, as a performative letter-writer, liberally borrows from the broad epistolary tradition I have been exploring.¹⁷ By experimenting with various journalistic voices and narrative approaches, Fuller extends women's self-culture to include an expanded public role for women as social and cultural critic whose epistolary conversations teach the reader to interpret American society and to accept Fuller's

expanded narrative authority.

Written over a four-year period characterized by tumultuous historical and personal upheavals, during which Fuller experienced profound personal changes, including the concealed birth of her illegitimate son, Fuller's dispatches reveal how she experimented with myriad "journalistic" roles.¹⁸ Fuller's letter-writing persona is an independent cultural observer who models for the reader how to be a "thinking" American abroad. Initially, Fuller positions herself as an itinerant cultural critic reporting on various reform and social experiments, and commenting freely on art, literature, and theater in England, Scotland, and France. In a New Year's letter, Fuller explains how "the American in Europe, if a thinking mind, can only become more American" (161). She models this transformation and then turns to discussing American slavery:

I do not know what I have written. I have merely yielded to my feelings in thinking of America; but something of true love must be in these lines -- receive them kindly, my friends, it is, by itself, some merit for printed words to be sincere. (166)

Fuller consistently aligns herself with female letter writing conventions. She validates sentiment and genuine emotion; however, Fuller does not apologize for her gender. She reclaims sympathy as a powerful tool for understanding

culture and reading history. Fuller's narrative person is a self-reliant American who grounds her narrative authority in the combination of her American identity and her European experiences. "Here things are before my eyes worth recording, and, if I cannot help this work, I would gladly be its historian," Fuller writes (230).

Once settled in Italy and actively involved in the 1848 revolution, Fuller creates a persona frequently at odds with her self-depiction in personal letters. "Whereas the Tribune persona is bold, resolute, optimistic, the persona of the private letters is frightened, uncertain, and pessimistic," Larry Reynolds explains (76). She performs the type of revolutionary spirit and dedication to reform she hopes to instill in the reader while claiming her authority to report on important public events:

The Soul of our nation need not wait for its Government; these things are better done by the effort of individuals. I believe some in the United States will pay attention to these words of mine, will feel that I am not a person to be kindled by a childish, sentimental enthusiasm, but that I must be sure that I have seen something of Italy to speak as I do. (161)

As eye-witness, patriot and Romantic author, Fuller -- like Sigourney, Child and Grimke -- asserts her right to interpret politics and act as a cultural spokesperson. "Give me a lonely chamber, a window from which through the

foliage you can catch glimpses of a beautiful prospect, and the mind finds itself tuned to action," Fuller writes (93). She advocates individual action motivated by sympathy as the proper American response to the Revolution in Rome. "Another century, and I might ask to be made Ambassador myself . . . but woman's day has not yet come," she explains (245). Despite this recognition of socially imposed female limitations, Fuller's letters publicized for the first time the political sentiments of Italian revolutionaries and documented their struggles. She acted as a de facto American ambassador to Rome intent on enlisting American sympathies.

In fact, Fuller's composite works and her professional career evince a deep interest in engaging the reader. They may be interpreted as a quest for both a genuine self-culture for women and an experimental form to express her fascination with creating cultural conversations in which she presides as the guiding moderator. From her Boston salon conversations for women, to the highly dialogic and polyphonous structure of Summer on the Lakes and Woman in the Nineteenth-Century, to her front-page editorials for the New York Daily Tribune, Fuller experiments with reaching out and involving her readers. She challenges them to be more intuitive, insightful, and self-reliant cultural critics. Teaching her audience to be better readers was, for Fuller, only the first step.¹⁹ She regarded literature as

the great mutual system of interpretation between all kinds and classes of men. It is an epistolary correspondence between brethren of one family, subject to many and wide separations, and anxious to remain in spiritual presence of one another. (Art 178)

This passage from "Poets of the People" introduces key phrases for understanding Fuller's formal experimentation. She sought to increase "mutual interpretation" between author and reader by simulating an active "correspondence" in order to mitigate her intellectual "separation," and foster a "spiritual" self-culture.

In her dispatches, Fuller discovers a flexible discursive medium for this ongoing experiment, and her epideictic addresses imagine the reader as a synecdoche for America. Fuller's addresses attempt to educate readers to become "thinking" travelers as the first step toward becoming more engaged, informed, and politically active citizens. In a private letter, Fuller explains newspaper writing as a means to converse with "America":

we address not our neighbor, who forces us to remember his limitations and prejudices, but the ideal presence of human nature as we feel it ought to be and trust it will be. We address America rather than Americans.²⁰

Fuller uses a basic epistolary conduct literature technique common to texts like Sigourney's Letters to Young Ladies:

she imagines the reader whom she hopes to create. Her addresses frequently depict the reader in conventional terms as a "dear" and distant friend. However, Fuller recognizes that her demotic newspaper readership represents a larger cross-section of the American public and her addresses repeatedly create, like Sigourney's, the sense of a shared culture based on mutual sympathy, affectional ties, and patriotic values:

Please think of this, some of my friends, who still care for the eagle, the 4th of July, and the old cries of Hope and Honor. See, if there are any objections that I do not think of, and do something if it is well and brotherly. Ah! America, with all thy rich boons, thou hast a heavy account to render for the talent given; see in every way that thou be not found wanting.

(161)

Virtually every letter ends with this type of patriotic appeal in which Fuller attempts to connect with the reader. As Bell Gale Chevigny notes, "she draws on an ideal of America as the source of revolutionary independence," an ideal she attempts to transfer to the reader (141). Fuller's addresses do, however, enact an important deviation from epistolary convention. Fuller frequently establishes an antagonistic relationship with the reader and with American culture:

My country is at present spoiled by prosperity,

stupid with lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of Slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten by individuals, the aims of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal. (230)

This rhetorical move shifts responsibility back to her readers and challenges them to live up to the promise of America's republican ideals. By severing the connection she has carefully forged, Fuller upsets the complacency of the reader/writer relationship and the reader's affections and sympathy become a contested discursive site.

While Fuller attempts to refashion American patriotism through her addresses, the letters combine her personal and often sentimentally conventional responses to vividly recorded images and scenes. Critics like Larry Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith discuss how Fuller's final letters dramatically depict Italian events during the siege of Rome. Moreover, Fuller uses representational discourse to support her major themes in almost every letter. While she adheres to travel narrative convention and describes significant works of art, her descriptions are decidedly eclectic. She continually explores how gender circumscribes women's lives and pays special attention to working-class women, poor children, and philanthropic institutions. Fuller repeatedly praises European women and reserves her tears for the plight of women, children and the under-privileged. After visiting a "School for

Idiots," Fuller writes, "I wept the whole time I was in this place a shower of sweet and bitter tears, of joy at what had been done, grief for all that I and others possess and cannot impart to these little ones" (124).

Fuller consistently challenges the reader to see the act of reading her European letters as an invitation to look more closely at American culture. America becomes a touchstone for her European observations. For Fuller, America has failed to realize "her" political promise. While Child, Grimke, Stowe, and other prominent female reformers tend to use Christian rhetoric to validate their political statements, Fuller re-evokes a romantic nostalgia for a purer American society that she imagines the founding fathers envisioned. In one letter, she reveals how she mistakes an emaciated working-class woman for a beatific child:

My sweet little girl turned out to be a wife of six or seven years' standing, with two rather sickly looking children. . . . This poor, lovely little girl, at an age when the merchants' daughters of Boston and New-York are just making their first experiences of "society," knew the price of every article of food and clothing that is wanted by such a household to a farthing.

(128)

Fuller turns this representation back toward America, holding it up as a mirror to reflect American society.

Like Child, Fuller returns to these haunting images which she interprets for the reader. Fuller also includes more idealized portraits as in her overt idolizing of her close friend, the princess Belgiojoso, who, according to Reynolds, "acted the [revolutionary] part Fuller wished for herself" (74).

Fuller manipulates the rhetoric of letter writing's ambiguous status as public and private, literary and non-literary, in order to translate the essential letter writing condition -- separation and distance -- into a powerful cultural critique. Geographical, temporal and cultural separation are the primary aesthetics of Fuller's letters. She positions herself beyond American society: "so far am I from home, that even steam does not come nigh to annihilate the distance" (184). Fuller's reference to steam travel suggests that she envisions this condition as somehow modern, a condition only letters can mitigate. She stresses the importance of letters: "letters are too important to happiness; we cannot afford to be without knowledge of your thoughts; your lives" (247). Letters form the basis for Fuller's coveted state of mutual interpretation.

As public letter writer, Fuller uses conventional letter-writing rhetoric for effect and emphasis. The customarily ubiquitous apologia is scarce and is primarily used to amplify a letter's immediacy.

I have written too carelessly -- much writing

hath made me mad of late. Forgive if the "style be not neat, terse, and sparkling," if there be nought of the "thrilling," if the sentences seem not "written with a diamond pen," like all else that is published in America. Sometime I must do better. For this time "Forgive my faults; forgive my virtues too." (273)

In this passage, Fuller satirizes American literary critics and their hackneyed language while establishing herself as an epistolary stylist. As in private correspondences, Fuller attributes the fluctuations in her style and tone to unfolding events and her personal reactions and emotions. Accordingly, the later letters make frequent reference to her dejection over the Italian revolutionaries' failure to establish a lasting republic: "Let not my friends be surprised if they do not hear from me for some time. I may not feel like writing. I have seen too much sorrow, and alas! Without the power to aid" (308). Not only do Fuller's dark moments counter the cultural injunction that women write from "the sunny side," they perform her deep political commitment and signify her growing isolation. Moreover, Fuller hints that the frequent "interruptions" conventionally said to characterize female letters may have potentially serious and debilitating causes. For example, in her own case, Fuller's concealed pregnancy significantly interrupted her correspondence with the Tribune readers.

Fuller consistently performs her role as cultural

conversationalist in opposition to travel narrative conventions. She repeatedly corrects the imprudent rush to judgment she deplores in other travel narratives. For example, after seeing Venice, she exclaims, "It seems to me as if no one ever yet had seen it -- so entirely wanting is any expression of what I felt myself. Venice! On this subject I shall not write a word until time, place and mode agree to make it fit" (144). In general, she presents a scene, appends her commentary, the reactions of a fellow traveler, or an appropriate and immediate political text, and then steps back to evaluate the scene. For example, after celebrating the return of Mazzini, a political exile with whom Fuller was friendly, she begins discussing the inevitability of social revolution, only to retreat from the subject: "Of this more anon, but not to-day nor in the small print of The Tribune" (225). Using this technique, Fuller creates a rhetoric of gestation, as if she is challenging the reader to stop and ruminate. This technique also makes a sharp distinction between writing for periodical publication and more literary writing; however, Fuller's letter continues. She returns to documenting how Pope Pius IX distanced himself from the nascent Italian republic. Fuller teaches the reader to measure her thoughtful political opinions against more reactionary travel narratives that she vilifies. Mrs. Trollope, author of Domestic Manners of the Americans, serves as Fuller's favorite example of the traveler who

speaks without adequate reflection. Fuller reports that Trollope is in Rome and being paid "two thousand pounds a year to trail her slime over the fruit of Italy. She is here . . . after having violated the virgin beauty of America" (171). Fuller takes it upon herself to give measured and thoughtful accounts, thereby protecting Italy from becoming, in her word, "Trollopified" (172).

In the final letters, Fuller details the siege of Rome and the intricate political maneuvering surrounding the revolution. Her main rhetorical strategy becomes her ability to exploit epistolary immediacy to document political upheavals while establishing her authority in opposition to other accounts being published in American newspapers: "To write from Italy is now become a sorrowful business. Yet I will send a few words, which may, at least serve to contradict the falsehoods promulgated by the now enslaved and hireling press" (312). Fuller relates her personal experiences during the Roman siege in order to redeem the revolutionaries, thereby adopting the role of public defender. "I am eye-witness to all that they did," Fuller asserts (314). For Fuller, public letter-writing provides a propaedeutic space in which she repeatedly demonstrates how women can write literary, public and historically significant letters. She exploits the readers' expectations that the letters are non-literary, private, and sentimental while her dialogic rhetorical model challenges her audience to become better textual and,

by extension, cultural readers. With each successive letter, Fuller becomes less of a traveler and more of a settler, just as her main topic becomes less about European and more about American culture, and identity.

In their public letters, American women writers blur the lines between public and private spheres; literary and non-literary styles; critical interpretations and nonliterary immediacy; sentimental appeals and representational truth. In an 1844 letter, Margaret Fuller thanks Lydia Maria Child for sending her a copy of Letters from New York. This exchange of volumes signifies a renewed intimacy. Fuller reminisces about their friendship and evokes a model of female mentoring steeped in the rhetoric of affectional friendship:

In former days, you used to tell me much which I have stored in memory as I have in my heart the picture of your affectionate, generous, and resolute life. Now, if we were to meet, we might have more topics in common; At least I ought to have something to impart, now so many pages of the great volume have been opened to my eye.

(Letters III 183)

This letter is noteworthy not only for its allusion to how Child may have influenced Fuller's emerging radicalism but for Fuller's metaphor for life as a "great volume," and reading as a trope for experience. Fuller consistently

defines criticism as an ongoing public conversation: "Essays entitled critical, are epistles addressed to the public, through which the mind of the recluse relieves itself of its impressions," Fuller explains. This definition resonates with all of the public epistolary texts in this study. Through their addresses and epistolary strategies, female letter writers perform as cultural conversationalists reaching out to engage and educate the reader.

Feminist critics have contested many dismissive constructions of American women's literary history as found in now out-dated texts such as Herbert Ross Brown's The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860. However, some prejudices endure. Brown discusses the appeal of letter-writing as a genre well-suited for "Beginners" and as a means for "exploring the heart" (52). This equation of letter writing with amateurism and private emotion defines letter writing as essentially private and non-literary. Moreover, epistolarity is common to conduct literature, travel and "settlement" narratives, and periodical writings which all tend to be similarly classified as less "artistic" or literary. For example, Judith Fetterley, one of the foremost scholars devoted to recovering nineteenth-century American women writers, claims

that nineteenth-century American women found it easier to write well in forms that appeared less literary, artistic, and serious because such

efforts more accurately coincided with their sense of who they were and what they could do; aiming lower enabled them to produce better work.

(15)

I believe that professional women writers did pursue literary excellence using the "short" epistolary form in their literary and periodical publications and that its fluid discursive boundaries fostered rhetorically elaborate formal experimentation. These texts represent how American women writers performed as cultural conversationalists, cultivated narrative authority, and used epistolary rhetoric to aim higher than the culturally prescribed norms for female writers. When the nineteenth-century periodical press recognized their efforts, they were lauded as "women of genius."

Epistolary practice plays a defining role in antebellum American literary culture. A ubiquitous nineteenth-century cultural activity, letters challenge the reader/writer binary because many "real" readers of epistolary texts -- both public and private -- also enact their own personalized performances of self as letter writer addressing myriad audiences during a lifetime of letter writing. A national pastime, the primary mode for communicating and maintaining relationships, and a culturally accepted mode for female expression, epistolary practice opens up a discursive space between public and private for nineteenth-century woman writers to engage in

ongoing cultural conversations.

Just as epistolary practice provides a discursive wedge for women writers to write between conventional boundaries, it also furnishes a crucial critical wedge for investigating nineteenth-century literary practices between established generic boundaries. Interpreting how epistolary texts blend rhetorical strategies, engage the overarching letter-writing and oratorical culture, and participate in separate spheres ideology, my study invites comparisons between politically and generically divergent texts. Epistolary tropes and rhetorical strategies, with their rich cultural associations, provide women writers with a discursively fluid writing practice ripe for formal and rhetorical experimentation. What emerges is a diverse tradition of women writers performing as public letter-writers and conversing on key cultural questions and issues which still awaits further exploration.

Notes

¹ I will be discussing critical work on the sentimental traditional in detail later in this section.

² Self-culture played an integral role in the construction of modern notions of individualism in relation to capitalism and the emerging middle-class. In antebellum America, the terms self-culture, self-knowledge, self-help, self-creation, and, in Transcendental circles, self-reliance, were used to describe the idea that individuals could effectively educate themselves, generally through sustained reading programs, as an integral step toward achieving upward social mobility. Lydia Sigourney, Caroline Kirkland, Lydia Maria Child, and Margaret Fuller, among others, wrote extensively about self-culture for women as the first step toward financial independence and eventually expanded social freedom.

³ Although William Charvat's once definitive The Profession of Authorship is now decidedly dated, Charvat -- despite his omission of women authors -- does provide historical analysis of the relationship between professionalization, literacy, and periodical publishing. Susan Coultrap-McQuin's Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century examines how women established mentoring relationships which furthered their professionalization. She argues that professional writers' careers are distinguished by business acumen, artistic autonomy, personal relationships with publishers, and commitment. Professional authors usually tried to compose texts that

were morally uplifting, although the emphasis on morality gradually decreases during the century. Coultrap-McQuin's study provides an essential model; however, her argument jumps from Susanna Rowson to Harriet Beecher Stowe with startling alacrity. This move essentially ignores the important early antebellum writers who, I will argue, also aspire to professional status and who significantly influenced later writers. Lawrence Buell's New England Literary Culture asserts that women writers were the first professionals (382). For a more complete discussion of this issue, see Buell, 23, 57-64, and 375-99; and Patricia Holland, "Lydia Maria Child," 157-67. The arguments of Buell and Holland inform my decision to reclaim professional status for these authors.

⁴ Ironically, this focus on the novel originates in the very same tradition -- perpetrated by critics like Herbert Ross Brown and Fred Pattee who denigrated, misinterpreted, and summarily dismissed nineteenth-century women's novels -- which Baym confronts. Baym does briefly acknowledge that some women writers were using realist techniques (34). In her later work, Baym explores how women were invested in writing history and in formal experimentation. See American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860. Judith Fetterley calls attention to how antebellum women writers were experimenting with representational discourse (Provisions 8-9).

⁵ In summary, Tompkins's celebration of "sentimental power" argues that sentimental texts perform important cultural work and that they empowered female authors. This interpretation directly confronts Douglas's earlier critique of sentimentality, and by extension, women's

culture as the debased perpetrator of an emerging "feminized" mass consumer culture that eroded the New England religious and literary culture. Despite the subtle nuances of this antagonistic debate, a surprising consensus emerges. Both critics assert that sentimental writers exerted considerable cultural force and that their primary goal was instructing the growing literate middle class.

⁶ Romero's critical project examines the basis in nineteenth-century domestic fiction of the twentieth-century critical tendency to define American literature against a feminized mass culture. She argues that "the reign of woman is a cultural artifact produced by the antebellum period: a domestic fiction whose plot unfolds across a range of fictional and nonfiction sources, a narrative which critics have unwittingly reified" (14).

⁷ My thinking about realism as a contested literary category is based primarily upon Michael Davitt Bell's The Problem of American Realism, Amy Kaplan's The Social Construction of American Realism, and Nancy Glazener's Reading for Realism.

⁸ See also Judith Fetterley's "Introduction" to Provisions. She suggests that "nineteenth-century American women found it easier to write well in forms that appeared less literary, artistic, and serious because such efforts more accurately coincided with their sense of who they were and what they could do; aiming lower enabled them to produce better work" (15). I disagree with this statement. Fetterley's claims rest on an unexamined hierarchy of literary genres based on twentieth-century definitions of "literary" vs. "non-literary" texts. Lauter also accurately identifies Sarah Grimke's Letters on the Equality of

the Sexes (1838), Jane Swisshelm's Letter to Country Girls (1853) and Emily Dickinson's letter poems as important epistolary experiments. These three authors could easily be included in this study and are discussed in the coda. See Lauter 293-4.

⁹ In Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications, William Merrill Decker documents how the popularity of letter-books containing important political figures' correspondences were gradually overshadowed by the more overtly literary correspondences of authors. Examining a wide range of personal letters written by Americans from diverse educational and class backgrounds, Decker identifies common themes and "narrative possibilities that literally and theoretically astute writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Emily Dickinson, and Henry Adams could realize with high degrees of self-consciousness" (11).

¹⁰ The phrases "letter-book" and "letter-writer" are not synonymous. The term "letter-book" refers to published collections of personal correspondences or single letters. For a discussion of eighteenth-century English and French letter-books and an overview of their publication history, see Janet Altman "Letter-Books." The term letter-writer describes "a manual that combined advice on letter form and language with an anthology of fictional letters intended to serve as models for a complete range of epistolary situations" (Bodenheimer 8). For a more complete discussion of how letter-books could function as conduct literature, see Bodenheimer's The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction. Katherine Gee Hornbeak, "The Complete Letter-Writer" provides the most complete bibliography.

Hornbeak identifies two hundred and thirty nine English letter-writers, thirty-six of which had American editions. According to Hornbeak, the first letter-writer, ostensibly intended for the daily letter-writing needs of the "unlearned," was published in 1586. For an annotated bibliography of nineteenth-century letter-writers, consult Harry B. Weiss's American Letter-Writers, 1698-1943. Weiss's study summarizes the history of letter-writers and includes diverse representative model letters. Weiss claims that from 1785 through the twentieth-century, American letter-writers have derived many models from sundry editions of Samuel Richardson's Familiar Letters.

¹¹ The first English letters-writers were pioneers in vernacular composition and their model letters form the basis for the art of English letter writing. These letters are written in a conversational vernacular; however, their structure seems derived from Classical and French models.

¹² For a discussion of these twin trends, see Motz, True Sisterhood, 62-5.

¹³ In "The Female World of Love and Ritual," Carol Smith-Rosenberg reads the passionate language and sexual metaphors common to women's correspondence as evidence of an empowering separate female culture. Ruth Perry in Women, Letters, and the Novel has provided another influential study. Perry outlines the social role of letter writing in eighteenth-century middle class women's lives and the connections between private letter-writing and the success of epistolary fiction as integral components of the birth of the novel. For an important discussion of the female letter writer in eighteenth-century fiction,

see Mary Favret, Romantic Correspondences. More recently, Robert Zboray's A Fictive People (1993) constructs a history of antebellum reading practices as the basis for an emergent sense of American identity. Zboray argues that as Americans scattered across the continent, letters replaced conversations. "The text gained dominance over the underlying human connection, until eventually the symbolic community of the printed word replaced or compromised much direct personal contact" (xx). These investigations suggest that letter-writing played an integral role in nineteenth-century literary culture.

¹⁴ For a more complete discussion of the epistolary novel's decline, see Blythe Forcey, "Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity"; and Ruth Perry, Women, Letters and the Novel. For more on the cultural importance of letter writing, see Zboray, 110-21 and William Merrill Decker, 1-16.

¹⁵ In "The Democratic Critics: An Alternative American Rhetorical Tradition of the Nineteenth Century," Christine Oravec establishes the importance of the periodical press in formulating public opinion on political issues. She uses the term "practical public discourse" to designate identifiable rhetorical practices that exist outside classical rhetorical theory.

¹⁶ In Letters of the Republic, Michael Warner discusses how late eighteenth-century periodicals published anonymous open letters as a means of direct agitation for democratic reform through fomenting debate and building consensus. According to Warner, the American national political consciousness solidifies around a public discourse which is "impersonal by definition" (38).

¹⁷ For a succinct historical overview of nineteenth-century periodical publishing, see Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, 3-16.

¹⁸ Nineteenth-century women writers understood how separate spheres ideology could be used metaphorically as a powerful trope while remaining acutely aware of its cultural power to circumscribe women's public influence. Examples abound. In Woman and Her Needs (1851) Elizabeth Oakes Smith argues forcibly for women's "right to individuality":

They tell us much about a "woman's sphere" -- can they define this? As the phrase is used, I confess it has a most shallow and indefinite sense. The most I can gather from it is, the consciousness of the [male] speaker, . . . it is a sphere by which every woman creature, of whatever age, appending to himself, shall circle very much within his own -- see and hear through his senses, and believe according to his dogmas, with a sort of general proviso, that if need be for his growth, glorification, or well-being, in any many, they will instantly and uncompromisingly become extinct. (28)

Smith uses separate spheres rhetoric to call for increased political participation for women; however, authors like Mrs. Virginia Cary in Letters on Female Character attempt to use the trope more literally to circumscribe women's public activities: "I do not hesitate to declare that the moral and religious improvement of mankind, depend in a great measure upon the exertion of women, within their appropriate sphere of action" (24). For a detailed analysis the evolution of the historical

and critical use of separate spheres rhetoric and its political ramifications, see Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds."

¹⁹ My ideas on this shift were clarified by reading Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran's well argued and detailed account of how this shift affected oratorical practice; see "Introduction" 1-26.

²⁰ Unfortunately, biographical criticism has tended to dominate discussions of nineteenth-century women authors. Since this study is an attempt, in part, to rectify this orientation, biographical descriptions are brief. Elizabeth Goldsmith charts the historical legacy of reading women letters as "natural," "authentic," and "nonliterary" (x).

²¹ My use of "performative" notions of identity is derived from Judith Butler's definitive Gender Trouble, especially her idea that performative identities "suggest a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning," and is informed by Stephen Railton's Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance (139). Railton's work has contributed to my sense of nineteenth-century authorship as constructed performance.

²² A number of important critical works contributed to my thinking about "readers" and reception history: Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception; Jane P. Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response;" Stephen Mailloux, Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction; and James L. Machor, "Introduction: Readers/Texts/Contexts."

²³ Gerald Prince draws out the distinctions between the "narratee," the "virtual reader," the "ideal reader" and the "real reader": in the

case of the texts at hand, each of these distinctions is relevant as fictionalized letter texts often play with all implied listeners simultaneously (9).

²⁴ Dobson thoughtfully addresses how sentimentalism has been read as a "sub-literature, as a moral philosophy, or a hegemonic discourse" (282). For an overview of these three positions, see Dobson, "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature." Whenever possible, I will try to draw out the differences between sentimental literary conventions and the dictates of sentimental culture. My thinking about how these texts use sentimental rhetorical strategies to construct an intimate relationship with the reader is also based, in part, on Barnes, States of Sympathy. My argument about epistolary texts complements her claims about sentimental novels: "sentimental narratives typically foreground examples of sympathetic bonding in their story lines as a model of the way in which readers themselves are expected to respond" (5)

Chapter One

¹ This letter was written to James Hart during the period when Hart and Caroline Kirkland were working together to edit Sartain's Magazine (Schultz 102).

² Sigourney's letters have not been collected. According to Mary De Jong, the largest archives housing Sigourney's letters, manuscripts, and journals are at Yale University, the Connecticut Historical Society, and the University of Virginia. For a more complete listing see her "Legacy Profile: Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney"; American Literary Manuscripts, ed. John A. Robbins; and especially Betty Harris Day, "'This Comes of Writing Poetry': The Public and Private Voice of

Lydia H. Sigourney."

³ For the complete listing of these requests, see Letters of Life, 369-76.

⁴ See, for example, Grace Lathrop Collins, "Lydia Huntley Sigourney"; and Kenneth R. Andrews, Nook Farm: Mark Twain's Hartford Circle. Andrews derisively summarizes Sigourney's career: "Though her own international fame established her supremacy, dozens of Hartford housewives competed with her during the sentimental forties and fifties in the manufacture of pathos out of weddings, funerals, and little babies, dead or alive, whose tiny shoes were never put away" (147).

⁵ See, for example, Ann Douglas Wood, "Mrs. Sigourney."

⁶ In New England Literary Culture, Buell discusses Sigourney's contributions to the Hartford literary scene (33-35).

⁷ According to De Jong, Sandra Zagarell was the "first to take her seriously as a social critic" (40). See Zagarell, "'Expanding America.'"

⁸ Baym develops this argument further and discusses Sigourney's long poems in American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860. She also briefly mentions Sigourney's Letters of Life, Letters to Young Ladies, Letters to Mothers, and Lydia Maria Child's Letters from New York.

⁹ Emily Stipes Watts's groundbreaking study The Poetry of American Women from 1632-1945 provides an excellent overview of Sigourney's poetic reputation from the height of her popularity as the "American Hemans" and "The Sweet Singer of Hartford" to her twentieth-century dismissal. Watts contextualizes her poetry and contributes a balanced

assessment. "Her resolution of problems and many sentiments are traditional ones, but she opened new areas for poetic exploration and she showed a sensitivity to the roles of women in the quickly industrializing society of her time" (96). Recent arguments augment Watts's reading and reinterpret Sigourney's poetry within the context of current work on sentimental culture. See Annie Finch, "The Sentimental Poetess in the World," and Elizabeth Petrino, "'Feet so precious charged.'"

¹⁰ Scant historical and bibliographic work has been done on Sigourney's publishing career. In Letters of Life, she lists her works chronologically with brief annotations; however, the entries vary in length and do not include publication information about texts originally published in periodicals. To date there is no bibliography of her periodical publications; much of this work will probably remain un-recovered.

¹¹ According to Mott, Sigourney made substantial contributions to Union Magazine, Christian Parlor Magazine, Colombian Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine, Miss Leslie's Magazine, Hesperian; or, Western Monthly Magazine, United States Magazine and Democratic Review, Ladies' Garland, Southern Literary Messenger, Parley's Magazine, New England Magazine, American Monthly Magazine, Graham's, and American Literary Magazine. For a complete list, see Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850, Vol. I.

¹² For a comprehensive overview of Sigourney's nineteenth-century reception and her often tumultuous relationship with the North American Review and the Southern Literary Messenger (especially during Poe's

editorial reign), see Betty Harris Day, 22-24.

¹³ Other texts which combine prose sketches and stories with poetry include Whispers to a Bride (1849); The Coronal (1850); and Olive Leaves (1851). Her travel narratives, Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands (1842) and Scenes in My Native Land (1844), alternate between poetry and prose.

¹⁴ Sigourney edited the Religious Souvenir, a popular annual, from 1837-1839, and published many popular writers just emerging on the national scene. After resigning, Sigourney showed her business savvy. She retained the engraving plates and re-issued the texts privately.

¹⁵ This quotation is from Kenneth Price and Susan Belasco Smith, "Introduction," 7. They outline a comprehensive and compelling overview of how periodical publishing practices between 1830-1890 "transformed the American literary marketplace" (3). They argue that "the periodical -- far more than the book -- was a social text, involving complex relationships among writers, readers, editors, publishers, printers, and distributors" (3).

¹⁶ For a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between periodical publishing and the emergence of the professional author, see Cyganowski, Magazine Editors, 1-40. She argues that "income and audience from magazine publication were essential to writers who had not caught fire with the popular fancy and whose talents were not oriented toward promotion through subscription booked agents. Especially before the Civil War, few writers could rely on trade book volume sales of their works" (10).

¹⁷ Sigourney re-visits this topic in "Address to Young Ladies," 181-2.

She focuses on assuring "young ladies" that formal education and domestic education are complementary endeavors.

¹⁸ For an overview of this rhetoric and its ideological implications, see Linda Kerber, Women of the Republic; and Mary Beth Norton, Liberty's Daughters.

¹⁹ Biographical information for this chapter is derived primarily from Gordon Haight, Mrs. Sigourney: The Sweet Singer of Hartford; and Dorothy Bowles, "Lydia H. Sigourney," 264-74.

²⁰ For more on this clandestine activity, see Haight, 34.

²¹ Gordon Haight and Ann Douglas Wood mention Sigourney's marital problems; however, the best discussion of their tumultuous relationship and its effect on Sigourney's career is in Harris Day's dissertation.

²² In the next chapter, I will discuss Caroline Kirkland's response to Hart's same request. The two women represent a diametrically opposed attitude toward publishing biographical information.

²³ Baym discusses this critical tendency in Novels, Readers and Reviewers.

²⁴ Critics have described Sigourney's European tour as a "literary lion" hunt and have castigated her for insinuating herself into relationships in order to exploit these connections to promote her career. Rarely is this criticism leveled at male authors indulging in the same activity. For example, see Dorothy Bowles, "Lydia H. Sigourney," 264-74.

²⁵ The injunction against publishing private letters is a staple topic in nineteenth-century letter-writers. See Eliza Leslie, "Letter-Writing," in Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book, 169-70.

²⁶ For examples of how Sigourney was celebrated as an ideal woman and female author, see Ann Stephens, "Visit to Mrs. Sigourney;" and three anonymous reviews: "Rev. of Letters of Life," 546-65; "Lydia Huntley Sigourney," 387-400; and "Letters to Young Ladies. By Mrs. L. H. Sigourney," 301-18.

²⁷ Douglas over-simplifies Sigourney's public image and her advice literature as unadulterated celebrations of marriage and then contrasts those ideals with Sigourney's personal marital woes. See Douglas Wood, and Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture, in which she cynically suggests that Sigourney's last words were consciously chosen to dramatize a scene she memorializes in Margaret and Henrietta (206).

²⁸ For an early example, see Fred Lewis Pattee's The Feminine Fifties. Ann Douglas Wood has contributed to the hardening of this portrait. She constructs Sigourney as a ruthless hypocrite hiding beneath the mantle of "true womanhood." "Thrown back on her moral virtue as the proffered explanation for her success, one discovers that it does not bear up much better than her literary pretensions" ("Sensibility" 164).

²⁹ Critics, following Douglas's lead, tend to interpret statements like these as a patently insincere genteel deferment masking an underlying lust for fame.

³⁰ In Cultures of Letters, Brodhead argues for a Foucauldian re-reading of literary depictions of corporeal punishment and the debate surrounding domestic and educational disciplinary styles. He analyzes conduct literature as historical evidence for his interpretation of middle-class character formation. For his discussion of Letters to Mothers, see 20-28.

³¹ It is interesting to note that Letters to Mothers, which does glorify motherhood, shies away from expatiating on wifehood with the same enthusiasm. The text relies upon much more conventional tropes, as well as heightened emotive expressions and rhetoric, when compared to Letters to Young Ladies. She writes in the present tense, presenting an image of herself writing intimate letters with one hand while the other gently rocks a cradle.

³² Sigourney's reviewers applauded her patriotism.

³³ For examples, see Decker, Epistolary Practice; and Motz, True Sisterhood.

³⁴ This rhetoric is explored within a wider historical context in Karen Lystra's Searching the Heart and Carroll Smith Rosenberg's Disorderly Conduct.

³⁵ For an example of a characteristic etiquette manual emphasizing letter writing, see Thornwell, Lady's Guide. For an example of a domestic advice manual, see Beecher, Letters to the People.

³⁶ For an extended discussion of Richardson's text as an ethical rather than rhetorical handbook, see Hornbeak, "Richardson's 'Familiar Letters.'"

³⁷ For a discussion of the history of conduct manuals in the early republic, see Newton, "Wise and Foolish Virgins," and Arthur Schlesinger, Learning How to Behave, 8-14. Interestingly, Schlesinger only briefly mentions Sigourney.

³⁸ The Ideology of Conduct (Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, eds) represents the single most comprehensive and critically rigorous historical investigation into British conduct literature. In the

"Introduction," they argue that conduct literature for men has been "regularly mined for historical insights" while women's conduct literature remains virtually unread (4). For some exceptions to this observation, see Cott, Bonds of Womanhood; Ryan, Womanhood in America; and Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women.

³⁹ For example, Welter, Dimity Convictions, and Cogan, All-American Girl cite conduct literature as evidence for their competing models of "true" vs. "real" womanhood. For an insightful analysis of their arguments which compares how both critics over-generalize and tend "to identify such ideals without attempting to understand the function or purpose they serve," see Jane E. Rose, "Conduct Books for Women, 1830-1860" (42).

⁴⁰ For a complete discussion of this important shift, see Margolis, Mothers and Such, 118-24. Margolis analyzes how "motherhood had been transformed into a mission so that the entire burden of the child's well-being in this life and the next was in the mother's hands . . ." (33).

⁴¹ This composite resonates with Halttunen's portrait of the ideal American man as he was constructed for male readers: "through personal exertion and resolve applied steadfastly to molding his character, the youth was told, he might overcome his lack of endowed faculties and advantages to triumph over circumstance and become anything he chose" (28). For a more detailed discussion of male advice writers, see Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women, 28.

⁴² Harper and Brothers began publication in 1837 with the third edition. Eugene Exman refers to Sigourney as one of Harper's "seasoned

and professional" authors (105). According to Exman, her contract for Letters to Mothers was one of the first to designate semi-annual (rather than annual) payments. Her ten-year contract for Letters to Young Ladies was based on the "half-profits formula," a Harper's standard for their most highly valued authors (105).

⁴³ Another interesting example of this genre which attests to its enduring popularity is the Young Lady's Parental Monitor (1790) which includes four conduct manuals written between 1727 and 1774. The collection includes both male and female authors from a range of social classes.

⁴⁴ These strategies are particularly common in male-authored texts. For examples, see Rose, 37-58.

⁴⁵ In Means and Ends, or Self-Training, Catharine Sedgwick advocates educating middle-class women to work.

⁴⁶ See, for example, Letters to Young Ladies (1841), 87, 194, and 217.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of how advice literature promoted female literacy, see Baym, "Women as Students of History" in American Women Writers and the Work of History, 11-28.

⁴⁸ For an overview of this rhetoric and its ideological impact, see Kerber, Women of the Republic; and Norton, Liberty's Daughters.

⁴⁹ In the Mother's Book, Child claims that reading is important for women, and derides novel reading in favor of more serious fare: "I think a real love of reading is the greatest blessing education can bestow, particularly upon a woman. . . . To prevent an exclusive and injurious taste for fiction, it is well to encourage in them a love of History, Voyages, Travels, and Biography" (17).

⁵⁰ Linda Kerber documents more inflammatory remarks against women reading romantic fiction, and, in some cases, against women reading (235-64). For another interpretation of the eighteenth-century taboo against novel reading, see Cathy Davidson, Revolution and the Word, 38-54. Emily Newton discusses how novelists incorporate these warnings into their fiction.

⁵¹ For an intriguing example of how these negative stereotypes were codified, see Marie Louise Hankin, Women of New York, especially her chapters on "Lillie Bell: The Female Writer," 171-174 and "Martha Benton: The True Woman," 161-168.

⁵² Written as a cultural parable, The Youth's Letter-Writer chronicles the story of a young boy's first journey and his education into the fine art of letter writing. Coached by an older female cousin and a benevolent uncle, Henry learns not only a genteel style and command of an appropriate subject but how to sharpen his pen, and to fold, seal and subscribe a letter.

⁵³ For a general overview of this cultural practice, see Zboray, Fictive People, 119-21.

⁵⁴ In "Sarah Josepha Hale, Lydia Sigourney, and the Poetic Tradition in Two Nineteenth-Century Women's Magazines," Patricia Okker examines how Hale's editorial policy and Sigourney's magazine verse directly confront the genteel poetics espoused by highbrow journals like The North American Review. For an appraisal of Hale's work and public causes, see Ruth Finley, The Lady of Godey's: Sarah Josepha Hale.

⁵⁵ The review states that "the names of Mrs. L.H. Sigourney and Mrs. E.C. Embury are too well known and widely appreciated to enquire a

requisition of the literary qualifications. . . . Their charming productions have added lustre to our national literature, and their reputations are identified with the progression of this country to that position in the 'world of letters' to which they have been signally instrumental in advancing it" (308).

Chapter Two

¹ Audrey Roberts has painstakingly collected and annotated Kirkland's extant correspondence. All quotations from Kirkland's correspondence are cited from her dissertation "The Letters of Caroline Kirkland," unless otherwise noted. Parenthetical citations follow Roberts's numbering system.

² For a more complete discussion of this phenomena, see Decker, especially 44-8; Motz, True Sisterhood, 53-5; and Zboray, "The Letter and the Reading Public," in A Fictive People, 110-120.

³ Roberts discusses this aspect of Kirkland's correspondence and provides numerous examples (xxxvi-iii). My own reading is based primarily on Letters #12 and #19.

⁴ See Roberts, xxxvii-ix; and Letters #8, #9, #21, and #30.

⁵ The most important twentieth-century editions with informative introductions are A New Home--Who'll Follow?, edited by John Nerber (1953); and A New Home--Who'll Follow?: Glimpses of Western Life, edited by William S. Osborne (1965), based on the second edition. Subsequent citations are from A New Home--Who'll Follow?, edited by Sandra A. Zagarell (1990). For a complete listing of editions, see Erika M. Kreger, "A Bibliography of Works by and About Caroline Kirkland." Kreger provides both a concise literary biography and an

exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Her most significant contribution is her thorough bibliography of Kirkland's periodical writings.

⁶ See Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York;" Rufus W. Griswold, The Prose Writers of America; and John S. Hart, The Female Prose Writers of America. For a more complete discussion of Kirkland's nineteenth-century reception, consult Langley Keyes, 330-336.

⁷ Of course, Smith and Kolodny arrive at divergent conclusions about the text; however, some of their basic critical assumptions concerning the narrative as autobiography and its historical importance are remarkably similar. See Smith, Virgin Land, and Kolodny, The Land Before Her.

⁸ The best single best source is Audrey Roberts's dissertation, which includes a concise and well-researched biography. Additional biographical information for this chapter was derived from William S. Osborne, Caroline Kirkland; Stacy Spencer, "Legacy Profile: Caroline Kirkland (1801-1864)"; and Joel Myerson, ed., Antebellum Writers in New York and the South. When biographers disagree, I defer to Roberts as the current definitive source.

⁹ Zagarell's "Introduction" challenges earlier editions primarily by expanding Kirkland's historical significance not only as an innovative realist but as a "sophisticated cultural critic who engaged in wide-ranging, often satiric commentary on the sociocultural conventions and codes . . ." (xi-xii).

¹⁰ Forest Life, Western Clearings, and Kirkland's periodical writings provide an important meta-critical commentary on her writing process

and thoughts about the essential social role American literature should play. These works document Kirkland's maturation as a writer, and her professionalization as a literary and social critic.

¹¹ The only article full-length article devoted entirely to analyzing Kirkland's later periodical stories and essays is Scott Peeples, "'The Servant Is as His Master.'" Peeples argues that "Kirkland's tales and sketches ultimately reaffirmed the prevailing myths of equal opportunity and prosperity for all honest, hard-working Americans who were willing to go West" (315).

¹² The best examples of this approach are Fetterley, "Introduction" in Provisions, 1-38; Josephine Donovan, New England Local Color Literature; and Kolodny, The Land Before Her.

¹³ In addition to Spencer, Zagarell and Kreger are vocal proponents of moving beyond Kirkland's influence as a realist to examine her importance as a leading literary woman, an influential editor and a "sophisticated cultural critic" (Zagarell xi). The most important re-contextualization to date is Nathaniel Lewis, "Penetrating the Interior: Recontextualizing Caroline Kirkland's A New Home, Who'll Follow?.

¹⁴ This viewpoint has been used to undermine Kirkland's narrative authority. For examples of this reading, see especially Smith, Virgin Land; and Osborne, Caroline Kirkland.

¹⁵ A complete list of reviews appears in the appended works cited list.

¹⁶ Nathaniel Lewis argues that "recontextualizing Kirkland within -- and sometimes against -- the mid-century market for western writing ... offers a reconsideration of her authorial strategies, and moves toward

a broader understanding of the claim of authenticity in early western fiction" (63). Lewis's argument reveals yet another way in which critics engaged in recapturing the text's realism have been responsible for over-simplifying Kirkland's narrative strategies.

¹⁷ Nathaniel Lewis contests this reading (64). Cf. Kolodny (155) and Zagarell, "Introduction" (xxvii).

¹⁸ Brigitte Georgi-Findlay, The Frontiers of Women's Writing; and Dawn Keetley, "Unsettling the Frontier" have begun contextualizing Kirkland in response to western travel writing, while examining her relationship to nineteenth-century constructions of racial identity and gender roles. For detailed investigations of Kirkland's humor, see Ann Caroline Gebhard, "Comic Displacement: Caroline Kirkland's Satire of Frontier Democracy;" and Nancy Walker, The Disobedient Writer, and "Wit Sentimentality, and the Image of Women in the Nineteenth Century."

¹⁹ In Gossip, Patricia Meyer Spacks devotes a chapter to two genres -- the familiar letter and twentieth-century popular literature -- which exist in a generic "borderland" between gossip and literature. Spacks's assertion that "gossip as a phenomenon raises questions about boundaries, authority, distance, the nature of knowledge; it demands answers quite at odds with what we assume as our culture's dominant values" has informed my own thinking about how to approach epistolarity in Kirkland's text (12).

²⁰ Stacy L. Spencer briefly makes this comparison. She also notes that "as oldest children in large families, they both also assumed great familial responsibility when their fathers died" (138).

²¹ James Stronks identifies a letter in which Kirkland declines an

invitation to write for The Gift because she is devoting herself to teaching. "I believe the same intellect and the same industry which authorship requires, will pay better when exerted in almost any other way," Kirkland explains (550). Stronks notes that since Carey and Hart did manage to secure stories by Kirkland, an agreement must have been reached. The letter documents Kirkland's shrewd business acumen, and the financial circumstances which compelled Kirkland, Sigourney, Child, Fuller, and other women writers to teach.

²² See Zagarell for an interesting discussion of Kirkland's biography as "a fairly comprehensive sociocultural critique" addressing two important issues "gender reform and abolition" (Introduction xxii).

²³ For a more detailed look at Kirkland's involvement in benevolent social causes, see Lori Ginzberg, 128 and 167.

²⁴ For a more detailed account of the funeral and an excellent contemporary obituary, see William Cullen Bryant, "The Death of Mrs. Kirkland."

²⁵ This letter is often cited by critics; however, they generally fail to discuss the entire letter.

²⁶ For more information on this issue, see Audrey Roberts, especially xxxiv-xxxviii. Gebhard also argues forcibly against a "simply autobiographical" reading (157). Gebhard explores how Kirkland avoids motherhood, childrearing, and marriage as she searches for a comic form to convey her "social and psychic dislocation" (163).

²⁷ Nancy Walker compares Kirkland's career to Fanny Fern's, emphasizing how relinquishing authorial anonymity may have affected their careers (Disobedient 89). One important difference is that, later in her

career, Sigourney relentlessly promoted herself as a commodity while Kirkland consistently shielded her private life from public scrutiny.

²⁸ Roberts has begun the arduous task of recovering Kirkland's anonymous periodical writings ("Additions" 346).

²⁹ For an interesting discussion of how anonymity was also used as a publicity stunt, see Gillian Brown, 6. For a more detailed account of anonymous writing by nineteenth-century women, see Mary Kelley, 124-37.

³⁰ I am indebted to an anonymous English reviewer writing for The Athenaeum who first alerted me to the Scottish derivation of "Clavers," thereby significantly altering my interpretation (981).

³¹ Zagarell reads A New Home primarily within the village sketch tradition. She focuses on "the slow process of community and cultural exchange" in relation to Clavers's unique narrative position ("Introduction" xxix).

³² For two divergent readings of the omission see Gebhard, 162-163; and Leverenz, 155-156. Leverenz's critical project prevents him from reading this omission as anything but an affront to Clavers's fictional husband. On the other hand, Gebhard interprets Clavers as "a witty authorial persona, a narrative self-invention that enables the painful experience of moving to a distant place with few amenities and often uncongenial neighbors to be transformed into social comedy" (163).

³³ Decker applies his observations to private correspondence in which "a true letter is communication that figures successfully in an interpersonal relationship"; however, Kirkland clearly locates the text within a fictionalized framework (19).

³⁴ Nancy Walker dismisses the importance of gossip to Clavers's

rhetoric by stating that "she equates her style to the supposedly female penchant for gossip and wordiness." She does not note that this too could be seen as a revisionary re-positioning of women's rhetoric (Disobedient 94).

³⁵ Merish's central thesis that the text "registers in detailed form the role of women and material refinement in the civilizing process and illuminates the ideological underpinnings of American consumer culture" presents an engaging reading of the text (492). However, by overstating the text's depiction of class relations as a simple binary opposition between Jacksonianism and Whiggism based on economics, a "conflict between liberal-capitalist and republican attitudes toward luxury," Merish diminishes the complexity of Kirkland's social critique. Clearly, Clavers's own values and attitudes are also presented as satiric targets.

³⁶ For a thorough investigation of A New Home in relation to travel narratives and their conventions, see Georgi-Findlay, The Frontiers of Women's Writing, 21-58. Findlay positions the text "within an expansionist context as narratives of the contact zone" (26). For Findlay, Kirkland's realism is indebted to travel narrative conventions but is complicated by her status as a female writer.

³⁷ In general, these texts tend toward romantic generalization which foregrounds picaresque landscape descriptions and detailed accounts of travel experiences.

³⁸ I would also classify Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Maria Child, and Lydia Sigourney as women who experimented with this genre and failed to transcend conventional subjects, mundane observations, and a rather

stilted style. Interestingly, these women, like Kirkland, excelled at writing engaging and entertaining private letters, and were highly valued as correspondents.

³⁹ For discussion of letter writing as "a firmly established genre for writing about the west" and a more comprehensive list of authors writing in this tradition, see Lewis 64.

⁴⁰ Ann Stephens's High Life in New York (1843) participates in this tradition. Written as a series of humorous letters from a rustic greenhorn back to his agrarian home, Stephens's satire includes a more highly developed vernacular and a more extreme example of the self-satirizing narrator than Kirkland uses.

⁴¹ For another example of how dialect was used to create humor and satire, see Dr. George William Bagby, "Letters of Mozis Addums to Billy Ivvins."

⁴² For a more complete discussion of "the democratic idiom" in nineteenth century oratory, see Cmiel, Democratic Eloquence, 55-93.

⁴³ For example, in Changing Scenes, Containing a Description of Men and Manners of the Present Day with Humorous details of the Knickerbockers, an anonymous publication written "by a Lady of New York" (1825), the author describes her writing process: "It was in one of those moments, when the mind is at rest, and no unwelcome thoughts intrude upon our solitude—when it is delightful to regale the soul by the contemplation of past enjoyments, and compare them and trace their various and meandering influence from the stately and gorgeous palace to the straw thatch of cottage, still finding the human heart the same—sordid, avaricious, credulous" (1).

⁴⁴ In 1846, W.A. Jones's "Tales of the South and West" highlights this important distinction: "Mrs. Kirkland, the cleverest sketcher of western manners we have, and the best western raconteur, at the same time; not in the same line as Judge Hall or any other western writer, but in a class unique and individual" (472).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Findlay and Merish.

⁴⁶ For a more detailed historical discussion, see Zboray, 110-115.

⁴⁷ Zboray stresses the weekly mail's cultural importance. He quotes an interesting passage from Henry Hiram Riley's The Puddleford Papers (1857) which echoes Kirkland's sentiments (112).

⁴⁸ Critics relish interpreting Kirkland's humorous treatment of backwoods "borrowing." For other treatments of this topic, see Merish; and McCloskey, "Jacksonian Democracy " and "Back-Country Folkways." The etiquette of borrowing appears as a topic in nineteenth-century conduct literature. See, for example, Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book in which Leslie devotes an entire chapter to detailing proper borrowing practices (225-42).

⁴⁹ For references to these texts, see 49 and 160.

⁵⁰ See Leverenz; and Fetterley, 121-3.

⁵¹ In "Thoughts on Education: Addressed to Young Women Who are Finishing," Kirkland discusses teaching as a vocation and advocates a liberal educational program for women.

Chapter Three

¹ Betty Harris Day briefly quotes the Sigourney letter which occasioned this response. According to Day, Sigourney thanked Child for sending her Letters from New-York and assured her that she had "read [it] with

pleasure, and with a renewal in some measure of that romantic friendship which used to mark the intercourse of those earlier days, when we met in spirit on the pages of your sweet 'Juvenile Miscellany' " (124).

² Patricia G. Holland and Milton Meltzer, eds, The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880 amasses an impressive array of her public and private letters. For a smaller sampling of Child's personal letter writing style, consult, Milton Meltzer, Patricia G. Holland, and Francine Krasno, eds., Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters, 1817-1880; or Harriet Winslow Sewall, Letters of Lydia Maria Child with a Biographical Introduction by John Greenleaf Whittier and an Appendix by Wendell Phillips. In the latter, many letters suffer from extensive editing; however, it includes the letters used for the political pamphlet Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason of Virginia (1860). A detailed description of Child's extant correspondence may be found in The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child: Guide and Index to the Microfiche, which identifies letters sent to Maria Weston Chapman, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Mrs. Brown, Angelina Grimke Weld and Theodore Weld, Charlotte Forten, Frederick Douglass, Charles Sumner, George W. Julian, and Abraham Lincoln (12). The editors list letters published in the weekly Liberator, National Anti-Slavery Standard, The Independent, The National Standard, the New York Daily Tribune, and the Southern Workman (11). In addition, I will be citing letters published in the Massachusetts Weekly Journal and the Woman's Journal. Child scholars unanimously agree that compiling a

complete bibliography of Child's public letters remains a daunting and ongoing task; however, Carolyn Karcher provides the most comprehensive bibliography to date in The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child (1994).

³ In all parenthetical citations from The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, the first number corresponds to the microcard number while the second refers to the letter number.

⁴ This quote was taken from "The Preface" to An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans in which Child beseeches her Readers to heed her argument despite their prejudices and the subject's unpopularity. For a more complete discussion of how Child presents herself as a supplicant in "The Preface," see Jean Fagan Yellin, Women and Sisters (1989).

⁵ Child supported the right of women abolitionists -- such as the Grimke sisters -- to lecture to "promiscuous" audiences. In fact, controversy surrounding this issue peaked just as Child resigned her editorial position at the National Anti-Slavery Standard and may have contributed to her decision to leave.

⁶ All citations refer to Bruce Mills's excellent scholarly edition of Letters from New-York (1998) which is based on Child's first edition. The first edition follows the hyphenated spelling which corresponds to the National Anti-Slavery Standard usage. This spelling helps to clarify the important distinction between Letters from New-York (1843) and Letters from New York, Second Series (1845), which primarily assembles letters written for the Boston Courier from late 1843 through 1844. Mills's edition collects those letters from the National Anti-

Slavery Standard Child decided to exclude. Mills meticulously documents the editorial changes between the newspaper and book versions for each letter.

⁷ In addition to full-length chapters in Karcher, "The First Woman in the Republic," and Mills, Cultural Reformations: Lydia Maria Child and the Literature of Reform, there is only one recent critical essay devoted entirely to Letters from New-York: Stephanie A. Tingley, "Thumping against the Glittering Wall of Limitations": Lydia Maria Child's Letters from New York."

⁸ The three early biographies are Helene G. Baer, The Heart is Like Heaven: The Life of Lydia Maria Child (1964); Milton Meltzer, Tongue of Flame: The Life of Lydia Maria Child (1965); and Deborah Pickman Clifford, Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child (1992). These biographies tend to valorize "Maria" as an abolitionist and proper Victorian woman without integrating textual interpretations. However, they do offer relatively succinct overviews of her professional career and personal struggles. Clifford was the first biographer to rely primarily on Child's personal correspondences for historical evidence. For a sample of how Child's contemporaries constructed her biography as a hagiography, see John G. Whittier, "Biographical Introduction," in Letters of Lydia Maria Child (1882). In direct contrast, Carolyn Karcher's "The First Woman in the Republic" integrates readings of Child's work and provides the most comprehensive working bibliography of her periodical publishing. Karcher argues persuasively that Child remains largely un-recovered and unread because she challenges our current dominant critical paradigms for women

writers. "Precisely because Child resists pigeonholing, eludes generalizations, and stretches the bounds of theory," Karcher asserts, "she offers an exceptionally rewarding subject for cultural biography-- the exploration of a culture through an individual life" (610).

Karcher's early essays have been incorporated into the biography's individual chapters. The biographical information in this chapter is derived from these main sources with a special debt to Karcher's impressive work.

⁹ It is interesting to note that the only two book-length critical studies of Child gloss over these two early works. In Lydia Maria Child (1980), William Osborne dismisses these texts, among others, as "ephemeral" (116, 124). In "Chapter Six: The Frugal Housewife: Financial Worries and Domestic Advice," Karcher discusses how Child initiated the practice gearing of advice literature toward a lower middle-class audience who could not necessarily afford servants while depicting domesticity as a "science." For an extended discussion of how Child skillfully combined anti-slavery lessons with middle-class moral precepts in her children's fiction, see Carolyn Karcher, "Lydia Maria Child and the Juvenile Miscellany," 67-84. For documentation regarding the unprecedented popularity of The Frugal Housewife, see Herbert Edwards, "Lydia Maria Child's The Frugal Housewife." Favorable reviews may have enhanced this reception. For a historically significant example, see Sarah J. Hale, "The Frugal Housewife," 189.

¹⁰ For two conflicting readings of Child's historical romance Hobomok, compare Stephen Carl Arch, "Romancing the Puritans: American Fiction in the 1820s," and Carolyn Karcher, "Introduction" in "Hobomok" and

Other Writings on Indians. For the best example of how Child has been criticized for using sentimental language, see Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body (1993), 14-49

¹¹ For example, Child's career and attitudes about authorship do not conform to Mary Kelley's group of "literary domestics" nor does her fiction follow the overarching plot pattern and characterization norms established in Nina Baym's ovular Women's Fiction. Child's status as a token writer who is mentioned but receives scant attention is best summarized by her treatment in Susan K. Harris's 19th-Century American Women's Novels (1990). Harris uses a letter Child wrote describing her response to reading Jane Eyre as the primary model for explaining her theory of a "conflict between the private and public reader" (19). However, Child and her work are never cited again.

¹² Most early criticism uses her personal letters to delineate her personality or construct a model of her as a prominent abolitionist. See James Barnes, "Letters of a Massachusetts Woman Radical to an Indiana Radical"; Gerald McDonald, "A Portrait from the Letters: Lydia Maria Child, 1802-1880"; and Nancy Slocum Hornick, "The Last Appeal: Lydia Maria Child's Anti-Slavery Letters to John C. Underwood." All three articles include trenchant examples of Child's straight forward and forceful epistolary style. However, Child is more often mentioned briefly as a historical figure and prolific author. Blanch Glassman Hersh mentions Child as an influential "feminist-abolitionist" in The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America (1978).

¹³ For example, see Sanchez-Eppler, Touching Liberty; and Dana Nelson,

The Word in Black and White. For an example of how Child has been depicted as inscribing racist cultural attitudes about Native Americans, see Louise K. Barnett, The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790-1890.

¹⁴ One notable exception is Jennifer Fleischner who defends Child's short story "The Octoroons" as a successful political affirmation of interracial sisterhood while acknowledging her tacit acceptance of romantic racialism. In "The Family Romance of Antislavery Women Writers," Fleischner argues that Child "legitimizes northern women's authority to be historians of the South by locating slavery's wrongs in the history of its wrongs against womankind, for which the quadroons become a synecdoche" (127).

¹⁵ Since considerable critical attention has been paid to Child's abolitionist texts and her historical role in the abolitionist movement, I concentrate on her depictions of women and focus on those letters which deal with gender issues and call for universal reform. For more information on Child's influence as an abolitionist see Robert Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination; Ethel K. Ware, "Lydia Maria Child and Anti-Slavery"; and Jean Fagan Yellin, Women and Sisters.

¹⁶ In "Lydia Maria Child as a Nineteenth-Century Professional Author," Patricia Holland provides an excellent overview of Child's career and its vicissitudes. However, Holland incorrectly states that Child originally wrote her "Letters from New-York" columns for the Boston Courier, thereby eliding their important initial context.

¹⁷ Much criticism on Child clusters around this cataclysmic event and

discusses her ensuing career and tumultuous marriage in relation to her abolitionist writing.

¹⁸ For a thorough investigation of how Child's marriage affected her career, see Kirk Jeffrey, "Marriage, Career, and Feminine Ideology." Jeffrey attempts to explain how Child could be "a radical abolitionist without becoming a radical critic of American family life and the position of women" by comparing the "idiom" of her private letters about her marriage and the idiom of her public writing about domesticity (124). However, Jeffrey fails to address Child's public participation in important cultural debates.

¹⁹ Mills mentions this discontent briefly in Cultural Reformations, 87.

²⁰ For an excellent overview of women's contributions to reform literature, see Bertha-Monica Sterns, "Reform Periodicals and Female Reformers, 1830-1860." Sterns notes that abolitionist women editors--including Child--were unusual because "they expressed disapproval of distinct publications of any kind for women, believing that whatever was suited to educated man was equally suited to educated woman" (686). Sterns documents how after 1840 women editors increasingly targeted their reform periodicals to an exclusively female audience.

²¹ In 1850, Kirkland reciprocated. During her stint as editor of the Union Magazine, Kirkland solicited stories from Child (Baer, 204).

²² Child reiterates this self-representation in her Thursday May 27, 1841, editorial, "Organizations."

²³ For a more detailed account of Child's association with women's anti-slavery societies, see Debra Gold Hansen, "The Boston Female Anti-Society and the Limits of Gender Politics," in Abolitionist Sisterhood,

45-65. For more on nineteenth-century women's groups see Lori Ginzberg, Women and the Work of Benevolence.

²⁴ For a more complete discussion of Chandler's contributions to abolitionist poetry and iconography, see Yellin, Women and Sisters, 12-15.

²⁵ In Women and the Work of Benevolence (1990), Ginzberg explores how the ideology of female benevolence was used by various women across class lines. She traces a transformation in benevolent rhetoric from the antebellum belief that women were morally superior to the idea that women were morally responsible for helping control the urban poor. Ginzberg's analysis also relies on interpreting women's separate sphere rhetoric as a metaphorical construct which nineteenth-century women manipulated.

²⁶ Jean Fagan Yellin devotes an entire chapter in Women and Sisters to Child's prose. She concentrates on her depictions of two aspects of the antislavery emblem: "enchained supplicants and the chain-breaking liberators" (54).

²⁷ Child clarifies her stance on this issue in an 1869 editorial letter series in the Independent:

I have always thought that some writers assume too much with regard to the moral superiority of women. It seems to me that the average of women are better than the average of men, in some respects, simply because the relative situation of the sexes places one in the midst of more temptations than the other; while, on the other hand, the average of women are more defective in some points of

character than the average of men, because the laws and customs of society have always tended to stunt the growth of such qualities in the souls of women. (405)

²⁸ The reference occurs in the letter's opening paragraph:

Weeks have passed since I wrote you; not from want of inclination, but because the wrangling at Washington leaves no room for gentle thoughts and poetic fancies. I know not whether you long as earnestly as I do to have Congress stop its discord, and the birds begin their harmony. . . .
Patience yet a few months longer, and Congress will disband; I do not think it will ever rise, until slavery is abolished. (224)

The passage is striking because Child carefully intertwines her political statements with metaphoric references to spring.

²⁹ Epstein argues that religious movements and especially "the Woman's Crusade" for temperance formed the ideological basis for the suffrage movement.

³⁰ See, for example, the following reviews: "Rev. of Letters from New York, Second Series," in Broadway Journal, 295-6; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Mrs. Child's Letters from New York," in The Present, 8-10; and John Sullivan Dwight, "Review of Letters from New York," in The Harbinger, 41-3.

³¹ For a more complete discussion of how Transcendentalists experimented with style, see Buell, Literary Transcendentalism, especially 55-75.

³² For an overview of Child's participation in Fuller's conversations,

see Baer, 211-220; for a discussion of their friendship and its impact on their political viewpoints, see Karcher, "Margaret Fuller and Lydia Maria Child: Intersecting Careers, Reciprocal Influence," 75-89.

³³ For a brief biography of Von Arnim and a discussion of her influence on T.W. Higginson, Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, Emerson, and Fuller, see Barton Levi St. Armand, "Veiled Ladies: Dickinson, Bettine, and Transcendental Mediumship," 12-14.

³⁴ In "The Reception in England and America of Bettina Von Arnim's Goethe's Correspondence with a Child," Collins and Shelley contrast Transcendentalist enthusiasm with English distaste for Bettina: "there is said to have been a veritable cult, which included besides Albert Brisbane and Lydia Maria Child also Caroline Sturgis, John Sullivan Dwight, George William Curtis, and Mrs. Eliza Buckminster Lee" (164). They document Emerson's appreciation and Fuller's translations.

³⁵ Carolyn Karcher has argued that this pressure from publishers amounts to a form of self-censorship ("Censorship" 288).

³⁶ Similarly, "Letter XXXIV" originally begins: "I have of late received two or three epistles, expressing a strong wish that I would "come out" as a branch of Anti-slavery" (250).

³⁷ Child's biographers contribute to this erasure. As early as 1883, a critical review, "Lydia Maria Child and Mary Russell Mitford," discusses the "Letters" serial popularity without ever mentioning the National Anti-Slavery Standard: "The Letters from New York, ranging from 1843 to 1845, created a literary sensation as they appeared. They were published, if we remember rightly, twice a week. The counting-room of the Courier was filled by an eager crowd, half an hour before

the proper time ...” (526).

³⁸ Addressing the reader in order to interrupt the dialogue is a standard letter writing technique. Child frequently anticipates the reader’s negative interpretation and injects her commentary to reaffirm her narrative control. For more examples, see 10, 17, and 42.

³⁹ I am grateful to Bruce Mills for citing this letter in his introduction as an example of how Child corresponded with Loring about editing individual letters for publication in book form. While Loring cites Carlyle as a possible influence, it is at least as likely that Child is emulating Emerson who also adopts this usage.

⁴⁰ See Letters I, XVI, and XXXV.

⁴¹ See, for example, The Collected Correspondence (21/595).

⁴² Kristin S. Vonnegut has explained this dramatic shift in Grimke’s rhetorical persona as a response to cultural pressure: “for a woman [rhetor] to appear ‘credible’ she must find a role that reaffirms her femininity or adopt a genderless persona” (78). Vonnegut’s argument is insightful; however, she fails to recognize that Grimke’s decision to adopt a male persona in the Epistle conforms to an eighteenth-century tradition wherein women writers gratuitously adopted masculine pen names even when their identities were well-known. I decided not to devote an entire chapter to Grimke because she does not conform to my criteria for identifying “professional” women writers; however, both her Epistle and Letters contribute to my understanding of how women writers successfully negotiate the open letter form. Grimke often cites Child’s Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations (1835) as a major influence and important historical

reference. For a more complete discussion of Sarah Grimke, including her public and private letters, see Gerda Lerner, The Feminist Thought of Sarah Grimke (1998). For another example of how feminist-abolitionists used the rhetoric of sisterhood to emphasize women's particular role in the anti-slavery cause, see Angelina Grimke, Letters to Catherine E. Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, Addressed to A.E. Grimke (1838).

⁴³ Karcher notes how this motif pervades Child's personal correspondences from New York during this period (272, 310).

⁴⁴ For an interesting comparison of how this letter was edited for inclusion in the text form, see Mills's commentary in Letters from New-York, 226-8

⁴⁵ Tingley mentions the digressions without adequate explanation. Reading them as transcriptions of Child's thought patterns, Tingley depoliticizes her rhetoric (55).

⁴⁶ For another reference to Child's use of "spiritual photographs," see "Letter from an Old Woman" (Reader 123-8):

As the season of Nature's renovation advances, it multiplies within me spiritual photographs, never to be destroyed. Last year I saw a striped squirrel hopping along with a green apple in his paws, hugged up to his pretty little white breast. My mind daguerreotyped him instantaneously. It is there now; and I expect to find a more vivid copy when my soul opens its portfolio of pictures in the other world. (125)

⁴⁷ For another example of this tension at work, see the opening of

Letter XXVII: "I wish I could walk abroad with out having misery forced on my notice, which I have no power to relieve" (121).

⁴⁸ For more on Emerson's views on transcendentalism's heyday, see "The Transcendentalist." Child develops her opinions about transcendentalism and its practitioners more fully in Letters from New York, Second Series.

⁴⁹ For more on how Child using this technique in her historical fiction, see Ian Marshall, "Heteroglossia in Lydia Maria Child's Hobomok," 1-16.

⁵⁰ In another example, Child relies even more heavily on sentimental conventions: "Then my heart blessed flowers from its inmost depths. I thought of the beautiful story of the Italian child laid on the bed of death with a wreath among his golden ringlets, and a bouquet in his little cold hand" (115).

⁵¹ In "Reclaiming Sentimental Literature," Dobson promotes a "more traditionally literary approach" to sentimental literature. She focuses on the rhetoric and tropes of sentimental discourse in order to explore the linkage between this specific "idiom" and its cultural work. Dobson defines it as "an idiom whose tropes are designed to elicit feelings of empathy and concern, and whose language, like the language of realism, is intended to communicate meaning with minimal impediment" (268). Dobson's comments are particularly relevant to Child's desire to write accessible letters:

An emphasis on accessible language, a clear prose style, and familiar lyric and narrative patterns defines an aesthetic whose primary quality of transparency is

generated by a valorization of connection, a impulse toward communication with as wide an audience as possible. (268)

⁵² Child remained tenaciously dedicated to reform throughout her long life. In an 1871 letter to T. W. Higginson, she anoints him as her literary executor. After promising to leave him her letters as a legacy, she adjures him to accept a suitable compensation for their publication and then to donate any proceeds to the "Free Religious Association," or any other Association of similar purpose and tendency: "It would be a pleasant thought to me that I could thus continue to help a little the cause of truth and freedom, when the hand that now obeys the impulse of my mind shall have become ashes" (CC, 75/1982).

⁵³ For more on Child's involvement in this historic event, see Karcher, especially 416-42.

Coda

¹ The complex relationship between Dickinson's letters and her poems has begun receiving critical attention. As the new edition of her letter manuscripts show, she frequently blurred the boundary between the two genres. See Decker, 141-175.

² Letter-books were constructed using the letters of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin. However, nineteenth-century Americans quickly developed an interest in authors' more ostensibly literary letters.

³ William Merrill Decker charts how letter-books, which began as eulogistic tributes, have been used primarily as a research tool by historians and literary scholars. See, Decker, 28-9; and Bodenheimer, 7-14.

⁴ Jane West's Letters to a Young Lady in which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered (1806); and Virginia Cary's Letters on Female Character addressed to a young lady on the death of her mother (1828) also belong to this early tradition.

⁵ The definitive study of Beecher is Kathryn Kish Sklar's Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity. For another excellent treatment of Beecher in relation to the construction of gender roles, see Nicole Tonkovich, Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern and Margaret Fuller.

Tonkovich continues to break new ground in the study of women's non-fiction and conduct literature.

⁶ For a more complete discussion of Swisshelm in relation to periodical reform literature, see Bertha Monica Sterns, "Reform Periodicals and Female Reformers: 1830-60."

⁷ For a recent evaluation of Stephens's career, see Paola Gemme, "Legacy Profile: Ann Sophia Winterbotham Stephens's." High Life in New York has received scant critical attention. For a reading of Stephen's letter-writing performance, see Beatrice Jacobson, "Literary Cross-Dressing in Old New York: Ann Stephens as Jonathan Slick."

⁸ For an interesting and humorous re-reading of Traill, see Margaret Laurence's The Diviners (1974), in which Traill epitomizes an ideal womanhood which Laurence's protagonist cannot achieve.

⁹ There is a wealth of epistolary material in periodicals: letters to the editor, travel letters, advice letters, and epistolary fiction.

¹⁰ I am indebted to James Matlack for mentioning Curtis and Thompson (293).

¹¹ Harriet Farley's "Letters from Susan" are reprinted in The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women, 1840-1845, ed. Benita Eisler, 44-63.

¹² Stoddard's career is finally beginning to receive the critical attention it deserves. For a discussion of her newspaper letters, see James Hendrickson Matlack, "The Alta California's Lady Correspondent," 280-303; and Sybil B. Weir, "Our Lady Correspondent: The Achievement of Elizabeth Drew Stoddard," 73-91.

¹³ In "Poison or Panacea?" Kristin Vonnegut "analyzes Grimke's struggle to empower herself and others by bridging the space between public and private spheres" and "sheds light on why and how she adapted the letter from to different audiences" (75).

¹⁴ Travel narratives are experiencing a vogue with contemporary critics. Recent studies of American travel writing by men and women include Terry Caesar, Forgiving the Boundaries: Home as Abroad in American Travel Writing (1995); Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (1992); and William Stowe, Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture (1994). For a comprehensive bibliography of nineteenth-century travel narratives, see Harold Smith, American Travelers Abroad: A Bibliography of Accounts Published before 1900. For an insightful discussion of women's travel writing in relation to constructed gender roles, see Mary Suzanne Schriber, Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920 (1997).

¹⁵ For a later example of this genre, see Lucy Bronson Dudley's Letters to Ruth (1896).

¹⁶ All citations are taken from the definitive edition: "These Sad but Glorious Days": Dispatches from Europe, 1846-1850, eds. Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith.

¹⁷ In recent years, scholars have been slowly moving beyond their intense fixation on Fuller's biography toward reading individual works, contextualizing her career, and analyzing her rhetorical strategies; however, as Larry J. Reynolds notes, "Fuller's approaches to letter writing, autobiography, short fiction, travel writing, journalism and history all await close study" and "her contributions to the epistolary mode seems especially ripe for consideration" (8). For a comprehensive overview of recent Fuller scholarship, see Reynolds, "Prospects for the Study of Margaret Fuller."

¹⁸ Critics continue to debate the origins of Fuller's radicalism, a task that extends well beyond this brief treatment. I agree with critics like Christina Zwarg who see the roots of Fuller's radicalism in her early work.

¹⁹ For more on Fuller's investment in reading and cultural interpretation, see Zwarg, Feminist Conversations.

²⁰ I am indebted to Larry Reynolds's "'The Cause' and Fuller's Tribune Letters" for this quote from Perry Miller's Margaret Fuller, American Romantic (248).

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