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"The Future Good and Great of Our Land": Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England

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IN an 1830s review of Lydia Maria Child's *Good Wives* published in Sarah Hale's *Ladies' Magazine*, the enthusiastic commentator quoted above sets Child's latest book within a thriving literary culture that values didactic literature. Acknowledging the importance of a genre I call the domestic literacy narrative, the reviewer confidently asserts that "the prevalent rage for reading" promises to promote not only familial but national well-being—promises, that is, if more books like Child's are regularly published to help train women to direct their fam-

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ily's reading and extract from it principles and behaviors consonant with their country's "future good."¹

Written by New England authors like Child, Lydia Sigourney, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, domestic literacy narratives adapted a well-established British tradition of didactic literature to address the needs of the new republic and, not incidentally, to affirm a meaningful social role for middle-class American women.² Although earlier volumes of Child's *Ladies' Family Library* series had portrayed such continental luminaries as Madame de Staël and Madame Roland, the *Ladies' Magazine* reviewer insists that they "are not examples for the daughters of republican America."³ Instead, Mrs. Howard, Mrs. Fletcher, and Mrs. Winthrop—all profiled in the volume under review—are better suited to exemplifying American women's special instructional responsibilities. By drawing female readers into a shared public work based in home literacy, Sedgwick, Sigourney, and Child not only elevated the role of mothers in the national project but promoted their own significance to it. Other scholars, of course, have spoken eloquently about the expanding literary marketplace for female, especially New England, writers⁴ and the evolving ideology of republican mother-

¹"Literary Notices," *Ladies' Magazine*, May 1833, pp. 237-39.

²For connections between English domestic didactic writing and the American antebellum domestic literacy narrative, see my "Re-making Barbauld's Primers: A Case Study of the 'Americanization' of British Literary Pedagogy," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 21 (1996-97): 158-69.

³"Literary Notices," p. 237.

⁴Nina Baym has argued that Sigourney should not be known "primarily as a poet of mortuary verse," when, in fact, Sigourney's work included historical and political writings that have received insufficient attention ("Reinventing Lydia Sigourney," in *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. Joyce W. Warren [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993], p. 55). Carolyn Karcher's biography of Child emphasizes the writer's interventions in public life (*The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1994]). Mary Kelley has placed Sedgwick's authorship within a family and regional culture that viewed female influence as having significant social power (see "Negotiating a Self: The Autobiography and Journals of Catharine Maria Sedgwick," *New England Quarterly* 66 [September 1993]: 366-98; reprinted as the introduction to *The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, ed. Kelley [Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993]; see also Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1984]).

hood. The domestic literacy narrative helps ground our understanding, for it convincingly illustrates how these two powerful phenomena converged and, moreover, how they helped shape contemporary debates about women's learning and the need for enhanced educational opportunities.

Shaping and Marketing Republican Motherhood

Historians Nancy Cott, Linda Kerber, and Mary Beth Norton have outlined the traits of a post-colonial, American, middle-class role for women. Given their special moral attributes, women were assigned the responsibility of preparing young males for their future duties as citizens in the new republic.⁵ The explanatory power of the republican motherhood model, however, has sometimes obscured the fact that this role was neither immediately created nor uniformly embraced upon word of the military victory at Yorktown or the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention. Rather, as Cott has reminded us, republican motherhood, like other cultural developments of the post-colonial era, evolved over time, aided by the dissemination of an associated rhetoric through the literary marketplace.⁶

Norton's ongoing work on American white women's identities has, moreover, stressed the need to historicize concepts such as republican motherhood and to account for the array of factors shaping them. In political terms, for example, the Revolutionary War encouraged Americans to begin "a public dialogue on the subject of women and their proper roles"—a conversation that eventually differentiated between colonial women's rather limited social influence (reforming husbands or training children) to a more fully articulated responsibility for providing "civic education." In economic terms, republican

⁵See Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

⁶See Nancy Cott's preface to her twentieth-anniversary edition of *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), where she notes "that notions of gender are continually mutable—historical products always in the making and remaking—in every time and place being forged, disseminated, contested, reworked, and in some guise reaffirmed" (p. xxviii).

motherhood helped reunite the "state and family," which had begun to diverge during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the growth of industrial capitalism. The political belief system playing out through the Revolution, in other words, foregrounded the relationship between a "successful republic" and "virtuous families," thereby promoting a socioeconomic and political responsibility for mothers as reproducers and nurturers of civic virtue.⁷

Norton and other scholars have indicated that this civic education was, at least initially, conducted solely in the home, and its primary beneficiaries were sons (and/or fathers, brothers).⁸ Still, as Nina Baym has shown, the domestic setting did not unduly restrict the project's reach. "[T]he home would seem to be an obvious site for [a] kind of public sphere," she notes, in a Habermasian analysis that distinguishes not public from private spheres but public culture from the official activities of the state.

[F]rom the earliest years of the republic men and women progressives defined [the home] as the place where citizens and citizenship were produced, and they expanded traditional maternal duties to encompass instruction of the young not only in basic literacy (which had been part of women's work since the seventeenth century) but also in the rudiments of patriotism, republican values, and an understanding of civic virtue.⁹

Baym's investigations of individual authors such as Elizabeth Peabody and Emma Willard follow this line. She has argued,

Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 616-18. See also her *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997). Norton's introductory discussion of the Filmerian versus the Lockean theories of family and political life provides especially helpful background on gendered social roles in America's colonial era.

⁷Norton, "White Women's Experience in Early America," pp. 609, 616. See also Nancy Theriot, who offers a more expansive view of women's agency, even in the earliest years of the early Republic (*Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity* [Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1995], p. 25).

⁸Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 6.

for example, that despite the general perception that Sarah Hale was "firmly committed to keeping women out of politics" and to using "the concept of women's sphere to further this goal," Hale was actually "a profoundly political writer throughout her career."¹⁰

In characterizing Hale as a politicized author, Baym focuses on the novels *Northwood* and *Liberia* and on the *Woman's Record*, Hale's biographical compendium of over fifteen hundred exemplary women. The famous ladies' magazine for which Hale wrote and that she edited for many years provides similarly compelling evidence that she was convinced that women's activities at home, especially their domestic teaching, would have a profound influence on the nation. As early as 1830, a *Ladies' Magazine* essay was already insisting that a "family is society in miniature"; "whatever destroys its primary features must disturb the tranquillity of its joys," causing suffering not only for the "woman," the family's "presiding spirit," but also for "all its members," and therefore, ultimately, for "the whole community of which it forms a part." Another antebellum *Ladies' Magazine* piece on "The Influence of Manners" described the ill effects of Roman matrons' flagging dedication to their home teaching during the imperial era to warn the American woman that she must, for the good of the nation, devote adequate energy to "the instruction of her children and the regulation of her family."¹¹

As women's role within the family was evolving, so too was the concept of citizenship. Whereas the eighteenth century emphasized the personal role of rural, property-holding gentlemen (enacting a "politics of assent"), Michael Schudson has argued,

¹⁰Nina Baym, "Onward Christian Women: Sarah J. Hale's *History of the World*," *New England Quarterly* 63 (1990): 249-70, later appearing in revised form as "Sarah Hale, Political Writer," a chapter in her *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), pp. 167-68. Baym does see Hale's politics as evolving and sometimes, in fact, "oscillating . . . between a residual republican rationalism" and a more Victorian emphasis on gendered spirituality (p. 173). See also "Women and the Republic" and "The Ann Sisters," chapters on Willard and Peabody (pp. 121-35 and 136-50).

¹¹"Woman," *Ladies' Magazine*, September 1830, p. 441, and "The Influence of Manners," *Ladies' Magazine*, May 1834, p. 217.

the nineteenth century stressed interpersonal action through a more urbanized system of affiliations (often involving groups such as political parties). Middle-class women's work was shifting toward educating citizens, then, because the nation was redefining what it meant to be a citizen, a pervasive, ongoing process Schudson characterizes as a "broad and deep social transformation." Between 1800 and 1865, Schudson continues, a "battle between deference and democracy" (or, initially, between Federalists and Jeffersonians) raged, and it was fought "in all spheres of life: in the family, in religion, in conflict over economic development and change, in contention over language, culture, and education, and in constitutional struggles in the states."¹² Meanwhile, Robert Wiebe and Karl Kaestle have argued, many early-nineteenth-century Americans were anxious about the democratizing of political participation, as access to the ballot box became increasingly widespread, and this concern suggests a more specific rationale for the calls for middle-class mothers to become civic educators.¹³ Prominent commentators and educational theorists like Judith Sargent Murray and Benjamin Rush argued that the fate of the republic rested with its women, charged as they were with instilling a proper understanding of the demands citizenship would place upon America's sons once they matured.¹⁴

Literacy management was one mechanism by means of which middle-class women effected their nation-shaping enterprise and, as essential cultural agents, simultaneously raised

¹²Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 91. Schudson pays particular attention to the relation between this sociopolitical transformation and the development of the "common school" curriculum, whereas my analysis focuses on education in the home. Maternal teaching at home and new pedagogies for the schools increasingly overlapped as the century progressed and more women worked as schoolteachers. In the twentieth century and to the present, a relatively impersonal and frequently suburbanized model privileging citizens' rights has dominated.

¹³Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 62–63, and Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), p. 5.

¹⁴See, e.g., Lora Romero's *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 14.

their importance to and status within the republic. As Bruce Burgett has demonstrated in interpreting the famous letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams, women readers and writers could exploit "the egalitarian promise of the literary public sphere" even if they remained constrained by "the inegalitarian practices of the political public sphere."¹⁵ As the uses and definition of literacy were expanded, literary production, though still dominated by New England authors, became national in scope. In the 1820s and 1830s, loose networks of local readers and publishing houses had not yet been overtaken by an organized, national mass market, but the trend in that direction was already evident, especially in the northeast. For writers like Child, Sedgwick, and Sigourney, multiple, (nearly) identical editions of their texts were issued by affiliated printers in different cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Books produced in New England, sometimes as popular as English imports, were already asserting an expansive claim to be America's literature.¹⁶ In addition, although many periodicals were aimed at relatively small audiences (e.g., James T. Hall's *Western Magazine*), others were aggressively seeking a broader circulation (e.g., the *Ladies' Magazine*, which later became *Godey's Lady's Book*). Women readers were at the center of this transformation from scattered local audiences to larger regional and national ones. And, of course, the emergence of a national publishing industry facilitated maternal literacy management by regularizing the texts used in literacy's delivery and

¹⁵Bruce Burgett, *Sentimental Bodies: Sex, Gender, and Citizenship in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 87. Burgett's analysis of connections between the eighteenth-century salon and the involvement of American women in the domestication of politics is especially salient. He proposes that "the historical significance of the . . . salon lay in its status as an unofficial public space of literary and political debate," and he links that space to the development of "a republican model of the literary public sphere" (pp. 101, 111).

¹⁶According to an entry on "Literature" in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (ed. Charles Reagan Wilson and William M. Ferris [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989], p. 865), by the early 1800s, it was likely that a book "published in the North would receive a national distribution, but southern-issued books were rarely even read in neighboring states." In the years just before the Civil War, Southerners objected to Northerners' domination of the school textbook market because it gave abolitionists undue access to the minds of Southern children.

by circulating narratives that depicted that home-based enterprise as socially significant.

It is important to stress, however, that women were valued as readers long before they were accepted as authors. In the colonial era, girls were taught to read largely so that, once they became mothers, they could teach their children to do so. Frequently, however, girls were not taught to write. Jennifer E. Monaghan has contrasted enrollment numbers for boys with those for girls in late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century New England town schools, where masters often built upon reading instruction that had been initiated in dame-run home schools. According to Monaghan's research, though some middle-class families were already agitating for their daughters to be taught writing at school, many towns resisted, in part because women's need to write was limited by men's priority as signers of legal documents.¹⁷ This division in literacy instruction was reflected in the literary realm, where the few women (like Anne Bradstreet) whose work was published felt compelled to apologize for their intrusion into the male world of print.¹⁸ As the nation moved from a rural toward an urban economy, though, and shared farm labor gave way to a division of work between business and home, women assumed primary responsibility for educating their young children, especially in the years before sons were old enough for the town school or a tutor. In addition, when some members of New England families migrated west, as several members of the Beecher clan did in the 1830s, another benefit of women's being able to write became increasingly clear—an ability to stay in touch with relatives and friends as the population dispersed over greater dis-

¹⁷Jennifer E. Monaghan, "Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England," in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 53–80, esp. pp. 68 and 73.

¹⁸Self-effacement lingered on even among the highly successful authors of the antebellum era I explore here. In the "Preface" to her anthology of biographical pieces on *Good Wives* (Boston: Carter, Hendee and Co., 1833), for instance, Child apologizes: "I shall be asked, with a smile, what I hope to do to alter the current of public feeling, and change the hue of national character? Truly, I expect to do but little" (p. xi). See also Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 15–16.

tances. Still, even in the 1820s–30s, when the majority of middle-class New England women would certainly have been classified as literate, their use of print was linked more to consumption than production,¹⁹ and the kinds of texts they did create were closely tied to gender roles.

As the home gradually became the (white, middle-class) woman's domain of influence, texts designed to help her with her various domestic duties proliferated, as did the assumption that such texts should be written and/or edited by other women charged with the same responsibilities. Women-authored home management and child-rearing manuals sold well. Lydia Maria Child's *The Mother's Book* is just one example from a flourishing field.²⁰

At the same time, as Nina Baym has ably shown, women claimed a prominent place in the literary marketplace as authors of historical works—both school textbooks and historical “texts for family reading,” which were often composed in “a dialogue or conversational form” that cast the mother as an informed teacher of children (both girls and boys) of various ages. With their “interactive” brand of dialogic pedagogy, these historical writings contributed substantially to the ongoing social construction of middle-class mothers as teachers, and the texts’ domestic settings, as Baym notes, made “teaching seem women’s natural work” during a period when the site of education was shifting from home to school.²¹ Meanwhile, women writing *as women on women* frequently crafted biographies of

¹⁹Lydia Maria Child complained in “Old Bachelors,” a story in her *Looking Toward Sunset* anthology, that “Until within the last half-century, books have been written almost entirely by men” ([Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865], p. 225).

²⁰Mrs. [Lydia Maria] Child, *The Mother's Book*, 2d ed. (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1831). According to Carolyn L. Karcher, the first edition of “*The Mother's Book* sold out in six weeks and ran through five printings in two years,” before Child scuttled her popularity with middle-class arbiters by publishing her *Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* in 1833 (*A Lydia Maria Child Reader*, ed. Karcher [Durham: Duke University Press, 1997], p. 99).

²¹Baym, *Women Writers and the Work of History*, pp. 35–36. Baym counts among the women writing such historical texts a number who also wrote in the overlapping genre of the domestic literacy narrative—e.g., Hannah Foster, Lydia Sigourney, and Judith Sargent Murray.

female role models that emphasized their capacities and contributions as educators for the nation.²²

Along similar lines, male cultural arbiters, though not always welcoming female excursions into other literary forms,²³ praised women writers' unique ability—even their responsibility—to write for children (and, by implication, for mothers). An anonymous male reviewer, commenting in an 1828 *Ladies' Magazine* essay on Susanna Rowson, one of the earliest framers of the domestic literacy narrative's rhetorical strategies, spoke to the point.

It is a singular fact that by far the greater proportion, both in number and usefulness, of the publications intended for the young, are the productions of the softer sex. Their situation peculiarly fits them for the task. Conversant with the earliest development of character, their keener vision enables them to discern those nicer shades which are beyond the observation of our own sex. . . . Their influence therefore upon the early mind as writers, is second only to their agency as mothers, in pointing out the commendable qualities of the heart, in teaching the tendency of natural bias, and in warning the young of the dangers by which they are surrounded, from the operations of feeling and passion.²⁴

The argument advanced in this review, and elsewhere, helped women writers claim a special niche in the literary marketplace. Women's very natures gave them unique access, this reviewer claimed, to "the earliest development of character," and their superior powers of observation helped them identify and draw out the best from children. Women were, then, better suited than men to compose "publications intended for the young." The reviewer was, however, careful to subordinate such literary

²²See Baym's "Sarah Hale, Political Writer," pp. 176–82. Baym notes Hale's emphasis on post-Revolutionary America as "a miracle of national advancement" thanks to mothers' sanctioned teaching of their sons (p. 178).

²³Patricia Okker has noted that "those women who spoke to (or were perceived to speak to) audiences other than women and children at times" generated "harsh rebukes" (*Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995], p. 16).

²⁴"Critical Notices." *Ladies' Magazine*. April 1828, p. 191.

pedagogy to motherhood. Women writers of children's works were qualified for the task first and foremost because they were mothers (in reality or potentially). By insisting that the essential aim of their writing, as of their motherhood, was regulation—directing natural tendencies, warning about dangers—the male reviewer drew conservative boundaries around women's writing even as he granted them (limited) influence through their production of instructive print texts.

Embracing such empowering (if also constraining) opportunities, then, New England's most prolific women writers—Sigourney, Child, and Sedgwick—helped create a specific literary genre to support American mothers' astute management of domestic literacy and, hence, of national civic values. They did not, of course, break entirely new ground, nor were they confining their writing to domestic literacy narratives. The didactic form was distinctive, nonetheless, in its insistent emphasis on motherhood's cultural work and in positioning that work between the poles of conservatism and reform. Although conducted within "the sanctuary of home," the education of the young during their "first formation" was a project that spread into and affected every public realm.²⁵

Numerous writers, many of whom were prolific in other generic forms, contributed to defining the domestic literacy narrative. Early on, for example, Judith Sargent Murray (*The Story of Margareta*, 1798) and Hannah Foster (*The Boarding School*, 1798) set out topics and rhetorical strategies for the genre. From the early 1800s through the Civil War, building on British texts like Anna Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (which

²⁵Lydia Sigourney, *Noble Deeds of American Women; with Biographical Sketches of Some of the More Prominent* (Auburn and Buffalo: Miller Orton & Mulligan, 1854), pp. xxii-xxiii. An apt example of the careful positioning these writers sought is Sigourney's introduction, where she praises the power of her countrywomen's contributions to the nation yet cautions that they should avoid redirecting their energies into non-domestic, un-feminine channels. Insisting that "Her patriotism is, to labor in the sanctuary of home, and in every allotted department of education, to form and train a race that shall bless their country, and serve their God," Sigourney avers that the "Creator has assigned different spheres of action to the sexes" and that the "true nobility of Woman is to keep her own sphere" (pp. xx-xxiii).

appeared in hundreds of Americanized editions), northeastern women writers gradually refined the form. Especially once she began teaching young ladies in her innovative academy, Susanna Rowson exemplified the continuing interrelationship between U.S. and English women's didactic prose while at the same time challenging her countrywomen to make their own writings more self-consciously American. (Rowson's texts anticipating the genre include *Reuben and Rachel: Tales of Old Times* [1798], *Sarah; or, The Exemplary Wife* [1803-4], and *Biblical Dialogues between a Father and His Family* [1822]). Sarah Josepha Hale, whose editing allowed her to regulate other women's writing (and reading), created her own domestic literacy narratives, such as the two-part "Sketches of American Character" in an 1828 issue of the *Ladies' Magazine*.²⁶ African-American writer Susan Paul adapted the genre in her 1835 biography of model student James Jackson to cast his education within a race-based framework of shared, communal motherhood.²⁷ But the American writers whose work exercised the greatest influence on the genre's early process of definition were Lydia Sigourney, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child.

Sigourney, Sedgwick, and Child all wrote free-standing narratives that helped establish the form's recurring traits, and they also embedded brief versions of the genre within expository prose essays for their advice books, such as Sigourney's series for young ladies and mothers.²⁸ A number of the biographies in Child's *Good Wives* and Sigourney's *Examples from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* were presented as cele-

²⁶[Sarah Josepha Hale], "Sketches of American Character. No. V. The Village Schoolmistress," *Ladies' Magazine*, May 1828, pp. 202-19; [Sarah Josepha Hale], "Sketches of American Character. No. XI. William Forbes," *Ladies' Magazine*, November 1828, pp. 489-504.

²⁷*Memoir of James Jackson: The Attentive and Obedient Scholar, Who Died in Boston, October 31, 1833. Aged Six Years and Eleven Months. By His Teacher, Miss Susan Paul* (1835), ed. Lois Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²⁸L. H. Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Hartford: Hudson and Skinner, 1838); L. H. Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 3d ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837).

brations of maternal literacy management.²⁹ Similarly, these authors' stories for children often made effective use of the genre to teach young middle-class girls and boys about their proper social roles, as in Sedgwick's *A Love Token for Children* collection and Sigourney's *The Book for Girls* and *The Boy's Book*.³⁰

Mother-Guided "Literacy Events"

Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* begins with a proposition that "the problem of literary canon formation" is best understood as grounded "in the constitution and distribution of cultural capital, or more specifically, a problem of access to the means of literary production and consumption." Guillory views the "'means' in question [as] provided by the school, which regulates and thus distributes cultural capital *unequally*," and he suggests that the school's role in "the *reproduction* of the social order" is centered in its work to "[regulate] access to literary production by regulating access to literacy, to the practice of reading and writing." For Guillory, therefore, the "literary syllabus is the institutional form by means of which knowledge is disseminated," and he argues that it "constitutes capital in two senses," linguistic and symbolic. Guillory defines "*linguistic capital*" as "the means by which one attains to a socially credentialed and therefore valued speech, otherwise known as 'Standard English,'" and he defines "*symbolic capital*" as "a kind of knowledge-capital whose possession can be displayed upon request and which thereby entitles its possessor to the cultural and material rewards of the well-educated person."³¹

²⁹Lydia Maria Francis Child, *Good Wives* (Boston: Carter, Hendee and Co., 1833); Lydia Sigourney, *Examples from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1857).

³⁰Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *A Love Token for Children, Designed for Sunday-School Libraries* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1838); Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney, *The Book for Girls, Consisting of Original Articles in Prose and Poetry* (New York: Turner and Hayden, 1844); Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, *The Boy's Book; Consisting of Original Articles in Prose and Poetry* (New York: Turner, Hughes & Hayden; and Raleigh, N.C.: Turner & Hughes, 1845).

³¹John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. ix (italics in original). Guillory's use of

I agree with Guillory that literary texts are "the vector of ideological notions which do not inhere in the works themselves but in the context of their institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way they are taught." However, as Guillory allows but does not explore in detail, the school has not always been the primary teaching/distribution site for literary cultural capital.³² Because we have imperfectly investigated the nineteenth-century home as a location of literary pedagogy, we have obscured the public influence of women's educational writing in general and of the domestic literacy narrative in particular, especially as it was produced by antebellum New England women writers positioning their work in a literary marketplace not yet dominated by formalist separations between the aesthetic and the didactic. Our task, then, is one of recovery, and our findings will have significance for our understanding of how literature functioned in the daily lives of a middle-class, antebellum citizenry.

The work of Shirley Brice Heath is useful to this recovery project. In her ethnographic study of several communities clustered around a southern mill region in the Piedmont area of South Carolina, Heath observed literacy in action across racial lines and along a socioeconomic spectrum stretching from groups barely claiming working-class status to those in an upper-middle-class bracket. Analyzing a "literacy event," an occasion when socially productive "talk revolves around a piece of writing,"³³ in various settings, she found that various groups used reading and writing differently according to their distinctive cultural practices and values. For example, in one group individuals rarely read a bound book; instead, a literacy event

class as an analytical category is, like mine, more closely aligned with Bourdieu's than with Marx's.

³²Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, p. ix. Guillory characterizes the transmission of "school culture" as only one "part of a total process of acculturation" which "has many other institutional sites" (p. 43), and he points to "the family" as one agent/site for the "reproduction" of culture (p. 58). He does, however, deemphasize the home as a site of social reading, which allows his relatively quick dismissal of Jane Tompkins's and other feminists' arguments about the "moral grounds" for evaluating literary texts (pp. 24-25).

³³Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 386 n. 2.

would typically involve a number of individuals discussing a piece of writing, like a letter from a friend, and arriving at a collaborative construction of its meaning. As such literacy events are repeatedly reenacted by group members, they become regularized as literacy practices defined by an informal set of rules, and understanding and practicing those rules reinforces the individual's identification with his or her social class.

While authors of antebellum domestic literacy narratives did not, of course, use such theoretical terminology, they did depict social scenes of reading and writing like those Heath observed in the twentieth-century south. That is, authors such as Child, Sigourney, and Sedgwick demonstrated ways in which domestically situated literacy events could become recurring literacy practices, managed by motherly domestic teachers to shape middle-class, and by extension, national values. A conversation between a motherlike "Aunt Lottie" and her niece in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *The Poor Rich Man* is just such a scene. When "little Ruth" declares that her family's recent acquisition of a house reminds her of the "story about Aladdin's lamp," her aunt suggests that a better comparison would be "those words in the Bible, 'The liberal man deviseth liberal things; and the good that he purposeth, that he doeth quickly.'" By attributing the family's improved living situation to a reward for their good deeds rather than to a stroke of luck, Aunt Lottie advances a favorite theme of domestic literacy narratives—that Christian morality can support economic advancement. Ruth responds admiringly that her aunt is "always" able to "remember something in the Bible that seems to suit," and Lottie explains that this is so because she reads "the Bible more than all other books."³⁴ By the end of the exchange, Ruth, Lottie—and Sedgwick—have alerted readers to the power of literacy events that are associated with regularized literacy practices. Lottie's "love" of the Bible, her repeated oral sharing of knowledge from it,

³⁴Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *The Poor Rich Man, and the Rich Poor Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), p. 173. Sedgwick, herself single yet continually fulfilling a maternal role as aunt, easily assumed the ability of sisters, aunts, and other unmarried women to exercise motherly literacy management. Similarly, though the author of *The Mother's Book*, Child had no children of her own.

and the potential of such exchanges to reshape participants' understanding of lived experience are essential elements of the domestic literacy narrative.

Overall, among the writers and readers of domestic literacy narratives, guided conversation (what today's sociolinguists would term "oral literacy") was at least as valuable to learning as solitary, silent study of a text.³⁵ Indeed, many of the narratives included transcript-like dialogues—what Sedgwick called "records" of conversations—between mothers and their children. As in Sedgwick's anthologies *Facts and Fancies* and *Stories for Young Persons*,³⁶ mother and child are portrayed as social readers discussing writing together. That activity of formulating interpretations is intended to teach the child correct language patterns (Guillory's *linguistic capital*), convey information and expectations about "real" middle-class life experience (*symbolic capital*), and offer guidance on discriminating between appropriate and inappropriate social behavior (what I call *moral or ethical capital*).

To be more specific, modeling effective language use (*linguistic capital*), the mother also manages reproduction of *symbolic capital* insofar as she directs the child reader's understanding of an array of social phenomena depicted in texts—information that will eventually provide access to class-appropriate employment and sociopolitical influence. Moreover, because a mother is controlling this conversational pedagogy and because her particular area of influence is ethics, the literature-centered literacy she purveys necessarily distributes *moral capital*. And this explicit emphasis on maternal moral

³⁵An important difference between early-nineteenth- and late-twentieth-century print-reading practices should be noted here. Our own tendency to dichotomize "oral" literacy practices and the consumption of print text is closely related to our common practice of reading silently and privately. As Joan Hedrick has reminded us, white, middle-class reading in antebellum America was very often a social act, as family members gathered in parlors to "hear" books together. See "Parlor Literature: 1833–1834," in Hedrick's impressive biography, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 76–88.

³⁶Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Facts and Fancies for School-Day Reading, a Sequel to "Morals and Manners"* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1873); *Stories for Young Persons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841).

teaching—this enthusiastic use of literary texts for ethical (versus aesthetic) purposes—is the fundamental trait that sets the domestic literacy narrative apart from other American literary forms.³⁷

To inculcate broad moral concepts, authors of domestic literacy narratives employed rhetorical patterns closely associated with nineteenth-century ideas about feminine ways of thinking and learning. Privileging narrative (versus exposition), concrete examples (versus abstract ideas), and sensibility (versus abstract argument) were considered appropriately feminine means of understanding the world and interacting with others. As Deborah Fitts has pointed out, children (including young males) were assumed to hover in this (putatively underdeveloped) cognitive state and to have but an imperfect (if any) glimpse of the mature, rational thought of adult men. Therefore, as some republican leaders argued, women could more effectively teach children at their level and, by means of moral suasion and its gendered rhetorical tools, direct them to their future roles—if girls, motherhood, and if boys, education in school and training in the marketplace.³⁸ That is, females were thought to have more skill at feeling-based teaching of the young precisely because they were emotional beings. Recovering and appreciating the social usefulness of such reductive gendering of thought processes as well as of the instructional, as opposed to the aesthetic, intent of a text are two important prerequisites for placing the antebellum domestic literacy text in its proper moment in literary history.

³⁷See my "Gendering the History of the Antislavery Narrative: Juxtaposing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Benito Cereno*, *Beloved* and *Middle Passage*," *American Quarterly* 49 (1997): 531–73. Nineteenth-century Americans did not see "didactic" and "literary" writing as separate, mutually exclusive categories. Since the formalist notion of aesthetics had not taken hold, readers and writers viewed "belles lettres" as a broader body of writing than literary critics do today and often classified texts as "good" based on their ability both to "delight" and to "improve"—to please aesthetically and to teach.

³⁸See Deborah Fitts, "Una and the Lion: The Feminization of District School-Teaching and Its Effects on the Roles of Students and Teachers in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts," in *Regulated Children/Liberated Children: Education in Psychohistorical Perspective*, ed. Barbara Finkelstein (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1979), pp. 140–57.

Elizabeth Sedgwick's *Lessons without Books* provides a case in point. As daughter Emily reads aloud to her young brother, her mother presides over the domestic activity. Emphasizing that a child's moral growth is dependent upon a mother's willingness to foster language development, the scene also suggests that individual *literacy events* implicitly argue for maternal management of *literacy practices* in the home.³⁹

Emily often read aloud to her mother, and Frank, because he liked to do what she did, would listen and try to understand what she read. Some passages from the life of Lord Nelson were one day selected for her, and among others, that in which his father says that in whatever situation Horatio might be placed, he would always get to the top of the tree. "Do you know what that means, Emily?" said [her mother].

"Is it not figurative language, such as we were talking about the other day, mother?"

"Yes, dear, but what does it mean?"

"I don't think I can tell," said Emily.

"Well I guess that I know," said Frank; "it means that no boy will ever beat him in climbing."

"You have come pretty near the meaning," said Mrs. Cleaveland, "though without understanding it. —Nelson's father intended to express this opinion, that whatever might be the occupation or profession of his son, he would be first in it. . . . Do you understand me, Frank?"

"O yes, mother; but I hope the tree that I have to climb, won't be as slippery as that pole in father's gymnasium."⁴⁰

Simultaneously managing both Emily's reading to Frank and Emily's and Frank's interpretations of that oral text, Mrs. Cleaveland cleverly distributes both linguistic and symbolic

³⁹In distinguishing between individual literacy events and recurring literacy practices, I draw on Heath's *Ways with Words* and Brian V. Street's *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education* (New York: Longman, 1995). The power of any single literacy event derives in part from its being recognized by participants as representative of a recurring literacy practice that accords with their beliefs about language and its use for social purposes.

⁴⁰[Elizabeth Dwight] Sedgwick, *Lessons without Books: By the Author of "The Beatitudes"* (Boston: L. C. Bowles, 1830), p. 80 ff. The Sedgwick who authored these domestic literacy narratives was wife of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's beloved brother Charles and, like her sister-in-law, an avid domestic teacher.

capital. While she models the idea that figurative language is not literally representative, this astute literacy manager uses the event of shared reading to direct Frank's attention to a future time when he will take up an "occupation or profession," thus performing an essential service in the ongoing mission of perpetuating the middle class. Furthermore, by following up her explanation with a query to her son ("Do you understand me, Frank?") and listening to his response, she signals that once he reaches maturity, Frank will be expected, as Guillory has suggested, to display and circulate his symbolic-knowledge capital.

Also embedded in Mrs. Cleaveland's explication of the figurative analogy is a more overtly moral lesson—that to be "first" is a goal worth striving for, one closely associated with positive role models. When Frank crafts a final comparison between climbing to the top of the tree and reaching the top of "that pole in father's gymnasium," Sedgwick's readers—especially middle-class mothers presumably teaching this text at home—are alerted to the multiple dimensions of this little lesson and offered means to direct children's attention beyond the linguistic and symbolic levels to the moral. Linguistically, Frank is able to pattern his own example of appropriate striving on the diction and structure of the original text; symbolically, he translates the literary analogy into an incident from his own life. Although Frank's use of language is precocious, it is unlikely that his moral understanding (as with the comment about Lord's Nelson's climbing) is equally sophisticated. His joke about "the pole in father's gymnasium" is an apt metaphor: being "first" may necessitate tackling "slippery" (i.e., complex) challenges in a man's world. Insofar as Mrs. Cleaveland first modeled the mother's proper response in her gentle correction of Frank's earlier translation of figurative language—"You have come pretty near the meaning . . . though without understanding it"—the text prompts the reading-teaching mother to enact the same scene with her children in the second instance. Sedgwick's text serves, then, to teach the mother not only what but how to teach her children.

Mrs. Cleaveland later encourages both children to share some of their favorite stories about Lord Nelson, and she com-

ments that "this relating of anecdotes is a very useful exercise for you, as it accustoms you to the use of language and also to acquiring clear ideas of what you read; for unless they are first clear and distinct in your own conception, you cannot communicate them." This emphasis on using literacy for instructional work that promotes interpretation ("conception") and redistribution of cultural capital elements ("communicate them") is a hallmark of New England's early domestic literacy narratives. Moreover, the mother's careful use of her own language to shape her children's literacy connects her home-based teaching—and therefore such authors' literary work—to a network of related social literacy practices like *conversaciones*, family parlor reading, and the participatory text-making of literary clubs (e.g., at nineteenth-century women's academies). In antebellum domestic literacy narratives, in other words, home-based reading, writing, and conversation were meaningful public acts that furthered social values consistent with their authors' and readers' middle-class identities and their views about the proper goals of an American national culture.

Educating the Mother-Teacher

Directing her family's literature study was an intellectually rigorous activity, and domestic literacy narratives routinely portray the maternal teacher as demanding of both herself and her young students. In biographical *Examples from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, for instance, Lydia Sigourney notes that Martha Laurens Ramsay supplemented her children's Bible-centered home study with "Astronomy, Chronology, Philosophy, and an extensive course of voyages and travels." Her domestic teaching program therefore "conducted her daughters . . . through the studies and accomplishments taught at boarding-schools, and her sons through a course of education fitting them to enter college."⁴¹ Such portrayals of white,

⁴¹Lydia H. Sigourney, *Examples from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1857), pp. 204–5. Notable for its focus on a Southern matron, the story is a rare case of a New England author looking outside her own region for national models. Mrs. Ramsay develops a coordinated instructional program combining reading, discussion, and writing, all of which were continually enhanced by her

middle-class mothers' literacy building as intensive mental work reinforced the primacy of their role as educators of children and thus served to justify their reliance on the physical labor of others and on improved domestic technologies.⁴² Depictions of the travails of domestic literacy delivery also supported ongoing calls to bolster women's education, for mothers could hardly be effective teachers unless they had been well taught themselves.⁴³

Lydia Sigourney was a particularly enthusiastic purveyor of this justification, especially in such advice pieces as *Letters to Mothers* and *Letters to Young Ladies*. Her "On Female Education," a chapter in *Letters to Young Ladies*, offered a fairly comprehensive argument for enhancing mothers' training for their home teaching duties. Having begun with an affirmation that "the vocation of females is to teach," Sigourney proceeds to the proposition that "It is in the domestick sphere, in her own native province, that woman is inevitably a teacher," with her students not only "her dependants" (i.e., her children) but also "her companions, every dweller under her own roof." Especially noteworthy in this text (as in so many others addressing this theme) is Sigourney's direct correlation between republican governance and the need for outstanding female education. She points out that, in the American system, the "intelligence

ongoing self-education. Sigourney explains, for instance, that, for her children's benefit, Ramsay "studied the Greek and Latin classics until she was qualified to be a profitable instructor in these languages"; with equal enthusiasm, "she prosecuted Botany to considerable extent" so as to aid their study of science. Mrs. Ramsay regularly spent the Sabbath "catechising and instructing her children and servants . . . , examining them respecting the sermon, of which she frequently wrote an abridgement from memory." She also "prepared questions for them in the various departments of history," "read with them verses or sentences, in poetry or prose," and memorized Psalms and prayer books to be able to quote key passages (pp. 204-7).

⁴²See Jeanne Boydston's *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴³Margaret A. Nash ("Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 [Summer 1997]: 171-91) has suggested that historians "have greatly overstated the extent to which the concept of republican motherhood justified female education in the new nation" (p. 188). However, in focusing primarily on the writings of Benjamin Rush and speeches by pupils and officials associated with the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia to support her argument, Nash ignores the important role that literary pieces like the domestic literacy narrative played in building the ideology.

and virtue of its every citizen have a heightened relative value," since the country's "safety may be interwoven with the destiny of those whose birthplace is in obscurity." Having acknowledged the privileged classes' anxiety over democracy's inclusiveness, Sigourney then declares that "Teachers under such a form of government" have responsibilities ranging from character building to keeping "the life-blood" coursing "to the heart of the nation," that is, maintaining America's moral direction by regulating its citizens' passions. And no teacher, Sigourney maintains, deserves more attention than the motherly home-based educator:

Of what unspeakable importance then, is *her* education, who gives lessons before any other instructor—who pre-occupies the unwritten page of being—who produces impressions which only death can obliterate—and mingles with the cradle-dream what shall be read in Eternity. Well may statesmen and philosophers debate how *she* may be best educated, who is to educate all mankind.⁴⁴

Through its reiteration of diction associated with literacy acquisition and development ("lessons," "read," "educated"), the passage simultaneously emphasizes the centrality of a mother's home teaching and the high price American society would pay if she were not adequately prepared for her duties, a theme Sigourney sustains throughout the rest of the chapter. She worries, too, that American women may succumb to corruption if "ease and affluence," "sloth and luxury" are not "neutralized by a thorough and laborious education." She concludes by calling upon those (largely male) "Guardians of Education" who "prescribe its limits, conduct its details, or rule the mighty engine of public opinion" to "complete [their] bounty" by providing American women with the best possible education so that they might serve the nation to the best of their abilities.⁴⁵

Such pro-education polemics were so intertwined with the didactic agendas of domestic literacy narratives that we can

⁴⁴Lydia H. Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 3d ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837), pp. 11, 12–13.

⁴⁵Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, p. 15.

hardly understand the persistence of one literary form without examining the other. In fact, the two genres frequently appeared *together* in periodicals aimed at the middle-class, domestic reading audience. The ultimate hybrid publication was, of course, Sarah Hale's magazine, which consistently employed an array of interrelated genres in its ongoing campaign for improved female education. Along with her numerous stories lauding women's home-based teaching, Hale published various speeches on female education by men and women leaders, usually adding her own commentary to guide the reader toward the appropriate interpretation. She also exhibited exemplary curricula from women's institutions (e.g., Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary); ran reviews of books on education that accorded with her philosophies; printed readers' correspondence favoring female education; and wrote editorials including descriptions of model seminaries and arguments for improving existing institutions or creating new ones.⁴⁶

Hale and other proponents of enhanced women's education sometimes drew arguments from English writers (Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* was a perennial favorite), but in so doing, they always stressed that the uniqueness of America's political system imposed a special, national obligation to educate women. Whereas English advocates of female learning tended to rely on assertions that women's mental capabilities were equal to men's, the British writers' antebellum New England counterparts based their protestations in the needs of republican culture.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, in extending their calls beyond colonial New England demands that mothers (and/or dame school teachers) be able to read well enough to provide children with access to the Bible, post-colonial pleas for

⁴⁶For a few of many representative examples, all from the *Ladies' Magazine*, see "How Ought Women to be Educated," November 1832, pp. 508-15; "Female Seminaries I," March 1833, pp. 139-42; "Female Seminaries II," April 1833, pp. 176-79; "Troy Female Seminary," September 1833, pp. 402-5.

⁴⁷See Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen, "Monitoring Columbia's Daughters: Writing as Gendered Conduct," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23 (Summer/Fall 1993): 51; Averil Evans McClelland, *The Education of Women in the United States: A Guide to Theory, Teaching, and Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), esp. "Education for Hearth and Home," pp. 56-57.

improved female instruction still tended to base women's own education and their guidance of home learning on a Protestant religious foundation. Thus, an 1833 *Ladies' Magazine* essay that praised "Miss Fiske's School for Young Ladies" for preparing its students to be molders of children for "our Republic," attributed the academy's success to its dependence on "Christian virtues."⁴⁵

Like the concept of republican motherhood, the agenda for female education developed incrementally. Gradual progress in access and quality was, despite the issue's nationalized rhetoric, rather uneven and localized, with the west and the south lagging behind the northeast.⁴⁶ Given this caveat, we still have much to learn from New England writers, who continued to dominate the national conversation and, thus, to affect how the country at large understood itself. If we trace the developing case for female education in conjunction with the evolving, and associated, domestic literacy narrative, we can more fully appreciate the related shifts in the characterization of the teaching mother from the early republic through the 1850s. Three stages, I believe, can be distinguished in the antebellum literary discourse supporting female education. While the arguments of any one period certainly recurred in later phases, different concerns tended to mark each succeeding cluster of texts addressing the central issue.

⁴⁵*Ladies' Magazine*, December 1833, pp. 552-56; see also "Convents Are Increasing," *Ladies' Magazine*, December 1834, pp. 560-64, which calls for improved women's education in the west to provide wives for Protestant ministers being trained there. Complaining that the "Catholics have endowed private seminaries, or convents, and they are reaping the reward of their efforts in their increasing influence," the anonymous author worried about the fate of the republic (pp. 560-61). From a more positive perspective, Nina Baym describes Elizabeth Peabody's vision of "Christianized republicanism" (see "The Ann Sisters," in *Feminism and American Literary History*, pp. 139-40, 146).

⁴⁶A rural-urban difference, on the other hand, may not have been as pronounced—at least within New England. Arguing that the "mass culture of the printed word" pushed rural New England into "the modern world," William J. Gilmore notes that such relatively remote regions were active in the movement to create new institutions for female learning—e.g., Windsor Female Academy—and enhancing female learning in the home. See his *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), pp. 44-45.

In the first period (running through the turn into the nineteenth century), apologists concentrated on establishing the *right* of women to be educated. Mothers' responsibility for guiding childhood behavior and, thus, molding the character of future citizens required that they be adequately educated. So, Benjamin Rush urged, "Let the ladies of a country be educated properly and they will not only make and administer its laws [indirectly, of course], but form its manners and character."⁵⁰ Sarah Pierce agreed that "as well as bearing children, republican mothers were required to instruct them . . . in the virtues that would sustain the nation and the patriotism that would defend it."⁵¹ Despite these heady duties and the education advocates insisted was necessary to effect them, many of those same advocates also maintained that the needle could and should be plied along with the pen.

Susanna Rowson's 1811 Boston publication *A Present for Young Ladies* offers a noteworthy example of this attempt to diminish the possible threat of educating young women. For its time, the curriculum at Rowson's academy was innovative, but her packaging of student exhibition dialogues into the text of *A Present for Young Ladies* demonstrates the former actress's keen awareness that she was marketing female education to a potentially reluctant audience of paternal tuition-payers. Although she included some of her own writing on education (e.g., "Sketches of Female Biography"), Rowson astutely spotlighted her students in the volume, as she did at their annual academy exhibitions, and closely controlled the product she was advertising. She "transcribed" playful performances from the early 1800s, when various star students "debated" such topics as how to balance book-based learning with domestic duties and what readings were especially appropriate for "Young Ladies" like those attending her school.

⁵⁰Quoted by Glenda Riley, in her *Inventing the American Woman: A Perspective on Women's History* (Arlington Heights, Ill: Harlan Davidson, 1987), p. 51.

⁵¹See Baym's "From Enlightenment to Victorian," in *Feminism and American Literary History*, p. 105, as well as her discussion of Emma Willard's teaching and writing in the "Women and the Republic" chapter, esp. pp. 121-22.

In one conversation, three girls ponder novel writing and reading, implicitly connecting debates about female school curricula with long-standing concerns, in England and America, about middle-class females' leisure-time literacy. Identifying a cluster of English women writers (Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Hannah More), Lucy, Caroline, and Ellen mingle commentary on their own reading with affirmations of good literature's didactic responsibility. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the dialogue (certainly edited, if not written, by Rowson) is that it underscores the continued maternal management of young ladies' literacy—even after they attend school. At the same time, in discussing books their own mothers apparently have not read, the girls also lay the groundwork for schools like Rowson's to become shapers of domestic literacy for a new generation, whose learning experiences differ from their mothers'. Along those lines, Ellen suggests that her friends "tell Mamma" about the worthwhile novels they discussed in the hope that she might approve "some few" such texts for her daughters' reading in their rare "moment of leisure" not devoted to "reasons or labours," "religion and virtue." Caroline chimes in that, once made aware of texts such as "Calebs in search of a wife," even her "severe" aunt would "not . . . pass sentence on all" novels but instead approve reading of those "where nature speaks out, / And religion is honoured." Such novels, surely, could "be read with advantage." Ellen agrees that such a novel "would be allowed by my mother" as "a lesson for me" to "peruse o'er and o'er." To justify both her own novel writing and her literature-oriented teaching, Rowson could hardly have asked for better endorsements.⁵²

In the second stage of the campaign for female education, dating from roughly the 1820s to the mid-1830s, the shift from good wife to good mother as the primary role for middle-class women was fully articulated. Furthermore, the concept of republican motherhood expanded to include more overt, detailed

⁵²Susanna Rowson, *A Present for Young Ladies: Containing Poems, Dialogues, Addresses, &c. as Recited by the Pupils of Mrs. Rowson's Academy at the Annual Exhibitions* (Boston: John West, 1811), p. 40.

discussion of institutional characteristics (e.g., resources, curricula) associated with the ideal training of American mother-teachers. That is, supporters moved from affirming the right of young girls to attend schools (first common schools and then seminaries) to debating what female education programs should involve and how they should be delivered.⁵³ In 1818 Emma Willard sent a proposal for improving female education to the governor and legislature of New York. Her "Sketch of a Female Seminary" described "Suitable instruction" for women's home teaching duties (i.e., what Willard called the "four heads" of instruction for young ladies: "Religious and Moral," "Literary," "Domestic," and "Ornamental").⁵⁴ Assigning traditional courtship-related "accomplishments" to her "Ornamental" branch, Willard elsewhere signaled an emphasis on training for maternal teaching. Although Willard was not successful in acquiring state funding, by the early 1820s her private Troy Female Seminary was already recognized as a national model for women's education.

In January 1828, when publishing the first issue of her *Ladies' Magazine*, Sarah Hale could look backward and forward with some confidence that "Female Education" was being taken seriously in the United States. "Had any one," Hale observed in tallying progress to date, "calculated on the improvements . . . in female education," he "would have been thought an extravagant visionary."⁵⁵ No longer compelled to argue that women *should* be educated, Hale could focus her remarks and the accompanying excerpts from a speech by the Reverend Charles Burroughs on *ways* in which seminaries for girls could be extended and improved. An early 1834 reprinting of one of Willard's pieces on female education presented under headings including "Existing Defects in Female Education" and "Princi-

⁵³ McClelland, in *The Education of Women in the United States*, notes that by the end of the 1840s, coeducational common schools were the norm; earlier, girls generally attended only in the summer, when boys were busy doing farm work (p. 56).

⁵⁴ Much of Willard's plan is reprinted in Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori's *Pedagogy: Disturbing History, 1819-1929*, along with a helpful introduction (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), pp. 74-84.

⁵⁵ *Ladies' Magazine*, January 1828, p. 21.

ples by which Education should be Regulated" clarified that Hale's support of female education extended only insofar as it would not "make ladies dissatisfied with their circle of domestic duties, which it should be their pride to understand and discharge." Yet she confidently joined Willard in insisting that to be good mothers (versus well-adorned husband-catchers), women clearly needed education beyond the common-school level:

What would be the condition of the men of America if their education was as scantily provided for [as women's]? . . . [C]onsider what vast sums, millions of dollars and rich grants of lands, have been expended for their support! And not one cent has ever been bestowed for the exclusive education of woman! Is this . . . the mode in which the greatest improvement and happiness of a christian community can be secured?⁵⁶

Third-stage antebellum apologists continued to insist that home-based teaching of children was the primary responsibility of middle-class women, a claim that continued to drive the need for their education.⁵⁷ However, from the mid-1830s through the 1850s, proponents more vigorously pressed their demands that women's education be broadened to include what had traditionally been male-only subjects. Courses like mathematics stretched a woman's mind, all to the benefit of her children, and an appreciation of philosophy informed the cultivation of character. By 1834, attuned to such justifications, Mary Lyon and Zilpah Grant added the following texts to their New England seminary curriculum: William Sullivan's *Political Class Book*, Joseph Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the In-*

⁵⁶"Mrs. Willard on Female Education," *Ladies' Magazine*, April 1834, pp. 162-63. Baym cites statistics ("Women and the Republic," in *Feminism and American Literary History*, p. 247, n. 10) showing that only a small percentage of Willard's students were trained for paid teaching and suggests that the home-based instruction elite women would provide for their children was Willard's main focus (pp. 127-28).

⁵⁷See, e.g., "Perseverance" and "Easy Studies" in Lydia Sigourney's 1838 *The Girl's Reading-Book; in Prose and Poetry. For Schools* (New York: J. Orville Taylor, at the "American Common School Union," 1838), where female studies, imagined as including difficult subjects like Latin even at an early age, were still being conceived of as preparation for proper domesticity.

tellectual Powers, William Paley's *Natural Theology*, and Joseph Butler's *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed*.⁵⁸

As women's education grew more rigorous, a hierarchy of need and ability became far more explicit than in the earlier discourse favoring women's learning. An 1834 polemic by "S. F. W." called for a few females with unusual abilities to receive advanced schooling, including in formerly male-only fields, so as to "devote themselves to the education of their sex." There are "ladies among us, who are qualified to superintend such seminaries," the commentator admitted, but almost all of them would "need a more critical knowledge of the sciences to engage as instructors." The pace of progress had to be maintained. "A Willard, a Beecher, a Child, and a Sigourney, have done much to raise the standard of female attainments; but we want many others who shall tread in their footsteps, and *improve* upon their example."⁵⁹

Even as these arguments for enhanced female education developed further over the remainder of the century, the authors of domestic literacy narratives never lost sight of home. While their narrative versions of domesticated instruction broadened to include depictions of women's literary clubs, mixed-gender lyceums, and even institutions of female higher education (academies, seminaries, and eventually colleges), writers would continue to view the home as the key site for children's learning and for women's most influential teaching.

Building on the work of Sigourney, Child, and Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe experimented with writing domestic literacy narratives in the 1840s. Moving on from magazine pieces to a more overtly politicized adaptation of the form, she composed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the early 1850s.⁶⁰ Post-Civil War women writers like Frances Harper would further adapt the genre to depict and justify race-based feminized teaching of

⁵⁸See Elizabeth Alden Green, *Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1979).

⁵⁹See "Female Education," *Ladies' Magazine*, November 1834, p. 500.

⁶⁰See my "Gendering the History of the Antislavery Narrative."

African Americans.⁶¹ Late-century and turn-of-the-century publications touting the foreign mission movement—such as the periodical *Woman's Work for Woman* and a biography of missionary Laura Haygood—would again reshape the genre to present female leaders as motherly teachers courageously instilling Christian values.⁶² Sharing a set of assumptions about the public power of maternal literacy management, all these later manifestations of the genre helped safeguard an American tradition that assigned responsibility for children's moral education, and hence for defining national ethical values, to American mother-teachers. Given this long-standing heritage, recovering a clear understanding of the cultural work of antebellum New England writers' genre-defining domestic literacy narratives is no mere academic exercise; rather, that act may well encourage and facilitate future analyses of the power and the pressures still evident today in ideologies of American middle-class motherhood.

⁶¹See my "Gendering the Debate over African Americans' Education in the 1880s: Frances Harper's Reconfiguration of Atticus Haygood's Philanthropic Model," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, forthcoming.

⁶²*Woman's Work for Woman*, a periodical chronicling the foreign mission activities of northeastern and midwestern Presbyterian women involved in the movement in the 1870s and 1880s, had many denominational and interdenominational counterparts. For an example of the genre, see Mrs. Tracy, "Woman's Work," *Woman's Work for Woman*, October 1882, pp. 333–34. Haygood's, like other early-twentieth-century missionary biographies, drew on her letters: Oswald Eugene Brown and Anna Muse Brown, *Life and Letters of Laura Askew Haygood* (Nashville: Smith & Lamar, 1904).

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