

**“Engendering” the American Novel:  
Toward a Sociology of  
American Reading and Writing**

Cathy N. Davidson

## 要 約

### アメリカ小説の「誕生」 ——アメリカの読み書きについての社会学のために——

Cathy N. Davidson

多くの批評家は、ジャンルとしてのフィクションは、初期アメリカの出版物、雑誌や教育論のパンフレット、説教や大統領演説の中において、嘲笑の対象であったことを指摘している。1789年から1820年までに200以上にのぼるフィクション弾劾の文書が刊行されたが、その中には、小説を読むと貧者は良い労働者になれなくなる、また女性は良妻になれなくなるといった主張を幾つも見つけることができる。フィクションについてのこうした批判には一理あった。1820年代までにアメリカで最も人気のある文学のジャンルとなった小説は、決してラディカルとはいえない形式ながら、アメリカ文化の創造における女性の役割を示したし、さらに次の世紀の様々な社会改革運動の多くに、その象徴的表現を与えたのである。

初期のアメリカ小説は、単に娯楽であっただけでなく、アメリカの女性教育の向上を擁護するものであった。それは、小説を手に取り始めた読者に、無知の代償の大きさについて教訓となる実例を示すのみならず、読み書き能力の向上のための役割モデルを与えたのである。加えて、初期アメリカ小説は、社会の様々な主義主張を取り上げ、自由主義及び自由意志論の原理を推進し、有資格の男性に制限する狭い法に反対して民主主義的国家の規範を唱え、合衆国憲法がしなかったやり方で、つまりある意味で本当に、「婦人達」の存在を十分に認めた」のである。一言でいえば、初期アメリカ小説は、民主主義国家が取るべき形についての議論に貢献し、個人の自由、特に女性の自由についての新しい定義を唱道したのである。それはまさしく、このジャンルについての最も厳しい非難者達が警戒し、恐れた通りであったのである。

Is it not a little hard [as Jonathan Swift asked], . . . that not one gentleman's daughter in a thousand should be brought to read or understand her own natural tongue, or be judge of the easiest books that are written in it? . . . If there be any of your acquaintance to whom this passage is applicable, I hope you will recommend the study of Mr. [Noah] Webster's Grammatical Institute, as the best work in our language to facilitate the knowledge of Grammar. I cannot but think Mr. Webster intended his valuable book for the benefit of his countrywomen; for while he delivers his *rules* in a pure, precise, and elegant style, he *explains* his meaning by *examples* which are calculated to inspire the female mind with a thirst for emulation, and a desire for virtue.<sup>1</sup>

Although the above quotation reads as if it might come from an early American advice book, pedagogical work, or sermon, it actually appears in William Hill Brown's novel, *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), widely accepted as the "first American novel."<sup>2</sup> Equally surprising, this recommendation for Webster's popular spelling book interrupts a sensational story of the young lovers, Harriot and Harrington, who learn, shortly after this lecture on female education, that they have the same father. A wealthy, dissipated lawyer, the Honorable J. Harrington, had seduced and subsequently abandoned Harriot's mother, Maria Fawcett, a young woman with no fortune of her own and limited marital prospects. She died in childbirth. A generation later, the daughter of that illicit union, Harriot, dies too, of grief, when she realizes that it would be incestuous to marry the younger Harrington, the man whom she loves. And then that young man also expires, by his own hand, providing a final testimony to the evils of seduction. But a problem remains: What is the relationship between literacy and secret sin, between Webster's speller and Harriot's unfortunate family history?

That question deserves our attention precisely because it would not have been posed by the early American novel reader. *The Power of Sympathy*, like many of the novels written in America between 1789 and 1820, assumes that there is an obvious and causal connection between poor female education and sexual vulnerability. It even states this connection in its preface. "Of the Letters before us," the author notes, "it is necessary to remark, that . . . the dangerous Consequences of SEDUCTION are exposed, and the Advantages of FEMALE EDUCATION set forth and recommended."<sup>3</sup> Well over half of the approximately one hundred novels written in America between 1789 and 1820 overtly or covertly assert a similar relationship between women's intellectual and sexual well being.<sup>4</sup> In the two best-selling novels of the early national period, for example, we have variations on William Hill Brown's theme. The poor fifteen-year-old schoolgirl in Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Charlotte, A Tale of Truth* (1791; later and popularly known as *Charlotte Temple*), is seduced by an army officer largely because she is misled by the false precepts of a lascivious and evil French teacher, Mademoiselle La Rue. Charlotte herself lacks the knowledge and self-confidence necessary to discern the falseness beneath the

slick rationalizations of La Rue or the sentimental (but empty) promises of a handsome young soldier. Or in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), an upper middle-class woman, Eliza Wharton, has a typical genteel, female education which in no way prepares her to support herself but does lead her (rightly) to scorn the idea of marriage to a dull, pompous minister. Yet still unwed at thirty-seven years of age, with little income of her own and no suitors on the scene, Eliza disheartedly acquiesces to the sexual advances made by Major Sanford, a dissolute army officer who, we are informed, loves Eliza but had rejected her in order to marry a wealthier woman. Eliza Wharton also dies in childbirth—like Maria Fawcett, like Charlotte Temple.

As is clear from even these simple plot summaries, early American novels acknowledged the economic foundations of matrimony in the early national period and suggested that a solid, worldly education was one way that even the poor woman could protect herself on the marriage market where she might have no other bargaining power. Had Maria or Charlotte known more, they might not have been taken in by the seductive arguments of wealthier suitors concerned only with their own pleasure. Had Eliza been prepared by a useful education to support herself, she might not have acquiesced to a man so obviously her intellectual and moral inferior. Nor are these three novels exceptional. Virtually *every* novel written in America before 1820 at some point includes either a discourse on the necessity of improved education (often with special attention to the need for better female education) or a description of the deplorable state of mass education in America or, at the very least, a comment on the educational levels and reading habits of the hero and the heroine.<sup>5</sup> The sounder the education (and, again, especially for women), the sounder the marital choices characters make and the more happily ever after they live.

The question of how to educate the populace to citizenry in a republic was a key social issue of the time and the indigenous fiction grappled with this issue in particularly interesting ways. Again and again the nation's first novelists showed the ways in which a woman's intellect had to be improved if women were going to be able to cope with a social situation in which they were clearly at a disadvantage. To generalize, the novels warn that women need not just a proper, domestic education, but an education that will allow them the intellectual independence and the self-confidence necessary to protect themselves against a host of articulate, better educated, and, invariably, wealthier American men (the stock seducers in early sentimental fiction). The implicit but insistent point behind this educational agenda is that, because women continued to be, for all practical purposes, economically and legally powerless in postrevolutionary America, they *needed* all the advantages of an excellent education in order to survive in the real world. In short, at a time when many of America's leading citizens boasted of the glory that was the new nation, the novelists tended to look at the actual status of the women in this new nation. And because they focused on the plight of women, the novelists tended to paint a more sinister portrait of the new nation than did the Founding Fathers.

The portrait painted by the first novelists is also interesting because it originated virtually as the nation was working out its own identity, its own definition of itself.

Parallel with nonfictional assessments of the character of the new nation (in sermons, speeches, or editorials) we also find a fictional projection of what the nation is and should be like. William Hill Brown, for example, wrote the *The Power of Sympathy* the same year that General Washington was inaugurated as President Washington.<sup>6</sup> Previously novels had been imported into America in great numbers from England and Europe, but, for all intents and purposes, the twenty-three year old Brown, son of a Boston clockmaker, was the first American to try his hand at writing one.<sup>7</sup> He writes with all the self-consciousness of one trying to create a new art form for his new nation, and the plot of his novel is continually diverted into democratic discussions of such topics as the evils of class consciousness, the contradiction of slavery in a free land, and, as we have seen, the necessity for improved female education. Equally important, in 1789, Isaiah Thomas, one of early America's most prosperous printers, advertised Brown's novel as the "FIRST AMERICAN NOVEL" in a series of newspaper advertisements designed to play off the excitement of Washington's inauguration and to profit from the nationalistic enthusiasms at that exhilarating moment in American history.<sup>8</sup> Many subsequent novels also emphasized their "Americanness" and their authors often attempted to retool older, European fictional forms to the specific social, political, and geographical situation of the new nation. Like others in the early national period, American novelists attempted to sort out, imaginatively, the possibilities and the problems facing the new nation.

But the novel was not universally welcomed as an important addition to American print culture. On the contrary, many authority figures derided fiction (in both its imported and indigenous forms) and expressed alarm at the increasing popularity of the genre especially among women and middle and lower class readers. What did it mean, the critics asked, when a literary form *chose* the non-elite and often marginally educated for its audience? What did it mean when these readers flocked to the local lending libraries to borrow books in which beggar girls, factory girls, emigrants, and orphans (all featured in the titles of sundry early American novels) triumphed against greedy and promiscuous aristocrats?<sup>9</sup> Many authority figures feared that novels would cause dissatisfaction with the new nation. Would not the new genre unfit the poor to be good workers and women to be good wives? For many of early America's most respected political, religious, and social leaders, the novel seemed an innately subversive form that would have deleterious effects on a new nation still struggling to define itself.

With so many important Americans making a point of deriding the harmful effects of fiction, many authors resorted to a defensive posture in their novels. Virtually every American novelist was aware that she or he was writing something socially suspect. Thus many American novels written between 1789 and 1820 begin as defensively as did the first one: "Novels have ever met with a ready reception into the Libraries of the Ladies, but this species of writing hath not been received with universal approbation."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, those "ladies" who sought novels for their "libraries" were also aware that the very act of reading fiction was, on some level, an act of defiance. The proscription against fiction did not keep them from flocking to the booksellers and to the circulating

libraries to buy or borrow the latest novels, from sharing their novels among family and friends, or from reading novels aloud in communal gatherings such as quilting bees or mending sessions. But, as we shall see, many women felt guilty about the novels they read—even as they read them.

Yet, despite feelings of guilt, women read novels for the simple reason that the novel was the first major literary genre to designate women as a primary audience and subject. It is no coincidence that women's literacy levels were improving throughout the western world, and especially in America, at the same time that the novel began its ascent as the dominant form of mass culture. Women were reading more and more, novelists early responded to the interests of a new female audience, and, at the same time, novels helped to cultivate that audience by stressing the importance of literacy and improved education. *The Power of Sympathy* is unapologetically dedicated "to the YOUNG LADIES OF UNITED COLUMBIA."<sup>11</sup> Susanna Rowson, in *Charlotte Temple*, addresses the "young and unprotected woman in her first entrance into life."<sup>12</sup> Samuel Relf, in the Advertisement to *Infidelity, or the Victims of Sentiment* (1797), assumes that the "generality" of his readers "will be of 'the mild, the soft and gentle formed of soul.'"<sup>13</sup> A female novel readership was so much a given in the early national period that those novelists who chose not to address women tended to specifically announce their intention to write for men, as did Hugh Henry Brackenridge in the Introduction to *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815): "My [novel] will be useful especially to young men of light minds intended for the bar or the pulpit."<sup>14</sup> While other forms of republican discourse simply assumed a male audience, the novel assumed a female one. Quite simply, the majority of early American novels are written about women, for women, and are often by women as well. Furthermore, the most damning critiques of the novel stressed the damage—moral, psychological, social—that the genre was likely to inflict on its female readers.

It is the thesis of this essay that the novel was read—and cherished—by its women readers precisely because it alone, of all the available literary and cultural forms, was dedicated to the proposition that women's lives were worthy of detailed, sympathetic, and thoughtful attention. Novels situated the specific events of women's lives—from childhood education to adolescent sexuality to adult decision-making, marriage, childbirth, childrearing, and death—within a larger social and political context in which women were shown to have little power and few rights. Novels also argued that a practical education (of a kind rarely supplied by the rudimentary female schools of the time) was necessary if women were to survive in a nation in which they were, for the most part, invisible. In this essay I will, first, discuss the cost of novels and the mechanisms by which novels were made available to a general readership; second, I will examine some of the reasons why the popularity of fiction caused alarm among one segment of the American population; third, I will survey women's social and political status in the early national period and show the ways in which that low status mirrored the most misogynistic aspects of the critique of fiction; fourth, I will show how specific novels offered up a different vision of the potentialities for poor readers and females of all classes; and, finally, I will turn to a number of actual novel readers to examine the ways

in which they reacted to the books in which they read about characters very much like themselves. From these early novels, the contemporary reader can gain a unique sense of the emotional, intellectual, and social dilemmas confronting women in the early national period—dilemmas rarely represented in the founding documents of the new nation.

## I

In the preface to *The Algerine Captive* (1797), Royall Tyler describes a change occurring in American culture during the seven years in which his protagonist, Updike Underhill, has been held captive in Algiers:

When he left New England, books of biography, travels, novels, and modern romances were confined to our seaports; or, if known in the country, were read only in the families of clergymen, physicians, and lawyers: while certain funeral discourses, the last words and dying speeches of Bryan Shaheen, and Levi Ames, and some dreary somebody's *Day of doom*, formed the most diverting part of the farmer's library. On his return from captivity, he found a surprising alteration in the public taste. In our inland towns of consequence, social libraries had been instituted, composed of books designed to amuse rather than to instruct; and country booksellers, fostering the new-born taste of the people, had filled the whole land with modern travels and novels almost as incredible.

This wandering son of the New Republic come home again is especially struck by the "extreme avidity with which books of mere amusement were purchased and perused by all ranks."<sup>15</sup>

Numerous literary historians have corroborated the phenomenon that Tyler here describes, and have documented an increasing prevalence of fiction among women of all classes as well as among working class and lower class readers of both genders.<sup>16</sup> Yet in 1797 when Tyler wrote, owning a novel was still a luxury. Before the invention of the Napier-Hoe cylinder press, the mass production of machine-made paper, and other technological advances had brought down the cost of books, ordinary people rarely owned more than a few precious books.<sup>17</sup> A typical early American novel, for example, cost between 75 cents and a dollar in 1790, while a day laborer in Massachusetts earned 50 cents to a dollar a day. A serving girl earned that much in a week. Even a schoolteacher, who might well have a vocational propensity to read books, often received his or her wages in "country pay," not cash, and when a cash salary was paid, the sum was generally modest, typically even more modest for women than for men. For example, a "qualified woman teacher" in Connecticut could earn \$.67 per week (board with local families being included in the salary) whereas, at the same time, a "man of culture and experience" might receive as much \$20 per month in addition to board in an affluent community.<sup>18</sup> Wages were fixed by individual communities and tended to fluctuate markedly according to the size and wealth of the community as well as the experience and gender of the teacher. Diarist Ethan Allen Greenwood, for example, earned only

three dollars a month at his first teaching job, and, at his most lucrative post, only fourteen dollars a month.<sup>19</sup>

How could an industrious young man or woman like Greenwood or schoolteacher Elizabeth Bancroft, eager to expand their own intellectual horizons, possibly afford novels?<sup>20</sup> *The Power of Sympathy*, for example, cost 89 and 1/2 cents. For the same amount one could spend an evening at the theatre (usually considered an upper class or upper middle-class entertainment) or could buy a season's worth of the imported French watermarked blue ribbons that signified the height of fashion in Boston in the late 1780s. For the less affluent the choice would be between *The Power of Sympathy* and a bushel of potatoes and a half bushel of corn or between Charles Brockden Brown's *Jane Talbot* (1801) and enough homespun to make dresses for a woman and for two or three of her daughters.<sup>21</sup> For most Americans, this was not really a choice at all.

When the fictional Updike Underhill returns in 1797 from seven years' captivity in Algiers, he notes not just a proliferation of books among the poor and in rural communities but also a change in the primary mechanism by which a new group of readers came to peruse books. That mechanism was the lending library, the single most important agency for making books (and especially novels) accessible to all but the very lowest class of Americans. In the 1790s, coincident with the "invention" of an indigenous fiction, lending libraries proliferated at a rate never seen before in America.<sup>22</sup> For six dollars a year, payable in installments, a reader could borrow up to three novels a day from the nearly 1500 novels that Hocquet Caritat stocked in his Circulating Library in New York.<sup>23</sup> A laborer in Philadelphia, a serving girl in Pelham, Massachusetts, a mechanic in New Haven, a farm hand in the small village of Harwinton, Connecticut, or even a pioneer on the frontier of Belpre, Ohio, thanks to the local lending library, could all borrow the books they could not afford to buy.<sup>24</sup> As Robert B. Winans has argued, "the increase in the number of circulating libraries was largely the result of the increasing demand for novels; the general growth of the reading public was caused primarily by the novel."<sup>25</sup> Libraries made novels affordable and accessible to a new audience. These new readers identified with the middle-class and lower-class young men and women who populated such novels as Martha Meredith Read's *Monima, or the Beggar Girl* (1804) or Sarah Savage's *The Factory Girl* (1814), the first novel of factory life in America and a novel in which the heroine organizes the other factory girls into a study group.<sup>26</sup>

Numerous early American novelists—including Read, Savage, and Tyler, as well as Charles Brockden Brown and Helena Wells—noted that many Americans read no other kinds of books besides novels, read their favorite novels over and over again, and, indeed, relied upon these novels for a kind of education into the world. Novels, numerous novelists asserted, were good for readers. They educated, of course, but they also kept the lower classes away from more disreputable activities such as horse racing or cock-fights. By 1804, Hocquet Caritat had assembled America's largest circulating library of novels. In a pamphlet he produced to both advertise and apologize for his holdings, Caritat even noted that "the decrease in drunkenness in this country is, perhaps, owing to the introduction of circulating libraries, which may be considered as temples erected by



literature to attract the votaries of Bacchus,"<sup>27</sup> Not until the mid-nineteenth century would novels be cheap enough to be purchased by virtually any American citizen. But already in the early national period, through the mechanism of the circulating libraries, novels found their ways into the hands, hearts, and minds of all classes of American citizens.

## II

Not all Americans were sanguine about the prevalence of novels among America's lower classes and among women of all classes. In fact, at precisely the same time that the libraries made novels widely available across class, gender, and, to a lesser extent, regional lines, the critique of fiction also reached its highest level of vehemence. For many of America's most respected citizens, the novel, available through the circulating libraries, epitomized not only a major shift in American culture, but symbolized the most fearful possibilities of "mobocracy."

Before turning directly to the critique of fiction as present in America, it is important to emphasize that the novel, as a literary genre, was early and universally deemed subversive. The literary historian and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that the literary form itself was what was seen to be threatening. Bakhtin shows that the novel was initially condemned in virtually every Western country into which it was introduced. It was considered subversive of certain class and gender notions of who should and should not be literate; subversive of notions of what is or is not a suitable literary subject matter and form and style; subversive of the term *literature* itself.<sup>28</sup> Because the novel did not rhyme or scan, because it required no prior knowledge of Latin or Greek, it seemed to many elite commentators that anyone could write one and virtually anyone could read one. The form required no intermediation or interpretation by cleric or critic, and neither did it require on the part of its authors or readers any special training or classical erudition since, by definition, the novel was new, novel. Indeed, formalistically, the novel at once absorbed a host of familiar forms of "street literature" (associated with the lower classes) such as chapbooks, penny histories, and almanacs as well as travel, captivity, and military narratives and social, political, and religious tracts. Not only did it thus blur traditional literary class lines, it also confused the distinction between truth and fiction. How could any one reading a novel sort salutary truth from misleading lie—especially when so many novels (particularly in America) were often based on lightly fictionalized accounts of local scandals among the highborn with names only slightly changed to protect (while accusing) the guilty? What was the social *result* of such reading?

Equally perturbing, the novel "fit" into the routines of life by appropriating such nonliterary forms as letters (almost one third of the novels written in America before 1820 were epistolary) or diaries as well as traditionally oral forms of culture such as local gossip, rumor, hearsay, and folktales. Psychologically, the novel also embraced a new relationship between art and audience, writer and reader, a relationship that replaced the

authority of sermon or the Bible with the unbridled enthusiasms of sentiment, horror, or adventure, all of which relocate response in the individual, reading self. To summarize Bakhtin's complex argument, the novel was feared precisely because it seemed a literary form that, on every level, could not be controlled.

While the novel was widely censured in Europe, the criticism was more pervasive and prominent in America. It was most vehement in the years after the Revolution, the same time, coincidentally, when Americans began writing novels of their own and when the circulating libraries increasingly made both imported and indigenous novels available to a wider spectrum of readers than ever before. Here the critique of fiction must be seen within a larger social context. It was a time when significant questions on the limits of liberty and the role of authority were very much at issue in the republic, as is especially obvious in the often acrimonious Constitutional debates. It was also a time when polarized party politics fostered bitterness and rivalries, and when political radicalism still residual from the recent Revolutionary War seemed, to many of those in authority in postrevolutionary America, to threaten the very fabric of a newly laid republic. "We are fast verging to anarchy and confusion!" the father of nation, George Washington, worried in the late 1780's after Shays' Rebellion.<sup>29</sup> "This is an age of Folly, Vice, Frenzy, Brutality, Daemons, Buonaparte, Tom Paine, or the Age of the Burning Brand from Bottomless Pit: or *anything* but the Age of Reason," John Adams fulminated after his Presidential defeat.<sup>30</sup> Or somewhat more succinctly, Alexander Hamilton spoke for many of the nation's Founding Fathers when he observed, sadly, after the defeat of the Federalists, "this American world was not made for me."<sup>31</sup>

In such a place, at such a historical moment, the novel became, in effect, a cultural scapegoat, representing for many elite Americans precisely those tendencies that they feared most in the new Republic. Might not the American novel, by addressing precisely those people hitherto largely excluded from the political process (and especially women) persuade them that they should have a voice in that society? Wasn't the novel itself thus the literary equivalent of a Daniel Shays or a Thomas Paine leading its followers to riot and ruin? Many of America's best educated and most illustrious citizens thought so, and the genre provided a locus for their apprehensions about mobocracy on both the cultural and political level. Timothy Dwight took time out from presiding over Yale, Dr. Benjamin Rush from attending to his medical and philosophical investigations, Noah Webster from writing dictionaries, and Thomas Jefferson and John Adams from presiding over a nation—and all to condemn the novel.<sup>32</sup> But even that formulation devalues the seriousness of such attacks by differentiating the censure of fiction from the official duties of these Founding Fathers. Denouncing the novel, they would have insisted, was integral to their civic, religious, or educational mission. "Culture," as Raymond Williams has persuasively argued, was not defined as separate from the larger fabric of Anglo-American society until the middle of the nineteenth century. For the social spokespersons of the new Republic, an aberrant form of literary culture *equaled* an aberration in the very design of America.<sup>33</sup>

The passage from *The Algerine Captive* quoted earlier sets forth—as do over two

hundred other denunciations of fiction published in American magazines, newspapers, and sermons between 1789 and 1820—a kind of Gresham's law of texts or reading. Bad new works would supposedly drive out good old ones, so that a print world dominated by the Bible, the *Day of Doom*, sermons, tracts, and sundry other religious works well might be superseded by a new world of predominantly secular reading, of texts designed merely to amuse, not to instruct.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, as the critics of the novel well understood, changes in the primary reading of an increasingly greater number of people presaged far more than a faddish redeployment of leisure time.

The crucial matter was not so much a question of how common citizens invested that time allowed for reading but the question of where the society vested the voice of authority. The censure of fiction represented, then, a somewhat futile attempt by an elite minority to retain a self-proclaimed role as the primary shapers and interpreters of American culture. The critics of fiction, again and again, attempted to recall—or invent—an idyllic time when the minister, not the novelist, commanded the public's attention; when the Bible, not *Charlotte Temple*, lay on every bedtable. The novel, to many, seemed the unfortunate reverse of that earlier model of patriarchal discourse, sage oratory descending down from the pulpit to constrain the audience's unruly passions, not falsehoods (fictions) emanating out from a book to inflame them.<sup>35</sup>

The sermon model of discourse emblemized a hierarchical society in which the minister served as the officially authorized translator of texts who thereby mediated between the finally unfathomable authority of God and the all too human limitations of his audience. As expert witness to the world and the Word, the minister interpreted science, philosophy, and other forms of learning as well as theology for his congregation /audience. Wills and estate inventories show that at least until late in the eighteenth century, the local minister often possessed the largest (and sometimes the only) personal library in his community. He typically was the only citizen in a small town or village who had received a classical education at one of the prestige colleges.<sup>36</sup> As novels became increasingly available to the public (both because of their own linguistic simplicity and their readers' improved literacy), they were increasingly perceived to be in direct competition with the local minister for authority within the community and thus were accused of eroding the pulpit model of erudition and authority. Moreover, the novel, by definition, undermines an oligarchical and patriarchal model of authority—ministerial or, by extension, political—precisely because the form itself rules out the intermediation that the preacher was professionally prepared to provide. While other forms of literature can be paraphrased, novels must be *experienced*: the content or meaning is never the sum total of a novel. On the contrary, the full impact of novels derives from the private, emotional experience of decoding the plot and thus cannot be separated from the act of reading itself. Sitting in a church pew listening to the local minister expound certain religious and social truths is ultimately a communal event which supports the values of the community of listeners within the church. But in a very real sense, a novel is no more nor less than the sensations aroused by its reading, and that reading must finally be private and personal.

The power of fiction to absorb fully the reader's attention and imagination seemed to many commentators a kind of seduction or even a satanic possession. The critics of the novel—ministers, educators, political leaders—strove to dispossess readers of the novel in order to repossess themselves of their “elect” status and role. The critic's stand in striving to perpetuate a posited and essentially nostalgic myth of a stable social order reinforced the position from which they believed they spoke, the stance of a superior dismayed by another's reading habits, but still willing to warn that other of the grave consequences of his or her unfortunate literary tastes—novel reading today, licentious riot and senseless revolution tomorrow. Unwary readers still might be saved from that unfortunate end through the generous intermediation of the critic. The critique of fiction thus emphasized the *need* for the critic, the *need* for the very social authority that the novels themselves presumed to question.

Many of the same critics who most denounced fiction as a genre also read it. Nor would they have seen their actions as hypocritical. As Gordon S. Wood has shown, most of the Founding Fathers believed discourse worked “situationally.” According to the classical rhetorical models and exercises practiced at the nation's colleges, one tailored one's style and even content depending on the understanding (or “susceptibility,” to use an eighteenth-century word) of the auditor.<sup>37</sup> For example, Thomas Jefferson was an avid collector and reader of novels. When a young gentleman, Robert Skipwith, wrote to him for advice on what to include in his private library, Jefferson included several novels in his recommendations for what formed the essential library of a gentleman. Yet with the same vehemence, Jefferson castigated the novel for its effects on women and the poor.<sup>38</sup> Jefferson understood that no literary form can be evaluated apart from the reader to whom it is addressed—that the same novel can support or subvert the status quo depending upon the class or gender expectations of its readers. In this same context it might also be remembered that Thomas Paine was not prosecuted for treason in England when *The Rights of Man* (1791–1792) was sold swathed in calf and sold at high prices, but only after the book was condensed, printed on cheap paper, published unbound and in mass quantities for journeymen, apprentices, and poor tradesmen who could then afford it and had little to lose by literalizing its implicit call for revolution. Treason was in the text that stirred the underclasses, not in the one appreciated by an elite.

Jefferson was most concerned about the potentially deleterious effects of fiction on the female reader. In this respect Jefferson was very much a man of his time. Women were the chief targets in the censure of fiction just as women were, not coincidentally, the implied readers of most of the early novels. Almost hysterically, ministers and politicians pleaded with women to abandon their irrational attraction to this new genre. Critics insisted over and over again that the novel would lead women to ruin, and, once women strayed from virtue, the whole Republic would surely fall too.

### III

The preoccupation with the female novel reader must be understood within the much larger political and ideological situation of women in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. Since many fine historians have already documented women's inferior status in telling detail, it is necessary here only to summarize conclusions offered by Nancy F. Cott, Carl Degler, Linda K. Kerber, Mary Beth Norton, Joan Hoff Wilson and others.<sup>39</sup> Briefly, women had taken an active role in keeping the domestic economy alive during the Revolutionary War. Many women, forced in the most dire circumstances to maintain a farm or a family business, realized both that they were capable of being independent and that the laws of the time made that independence extremely difficult. In most states, women could not legally inherit property or businesses. Their names frequently carried no legal weight on documents. Unmarried women were, for all intents and purposes, the property of their fathers, wives of their husbands. As Linda K. Kerber has noted, "one well-known element in British common law, which few Americans questioned, was coverture, the absorption of a married woman's property into her husband's control during the life of their marriage. Since only the citizen with independent control of property was thought to be able to exercise free will, it seemed to follow that married women had no independent political capacity."<sup>40</sup> The War pointed up the liabilities—political as well as economic—of coverture. Yet, as numerous historians have also shown, in the aftermath of the War, while politicians hammered out both state and national constitutions that would define a new citizenry, the inequitable status of women under British common law was translated virtually in tact into an American legal and political system in which women remained, for the most part, invisible. As American jurist St. George Tucker indicated in 1803, American judicial practices preserved the inequities between men and women. Women were, *de facto* and *de jure*, victims of "taxation without representation; for they pay taxes without having the liberty of voting for representatives." As his very phrasing emphasizes, the Revolution freed America from an oppressive Colonial status but it had not freed American women from their subservient status. As Tucker summed up the matter, "I fear that there is little reason for a compliment to our laws for their respect and favour to the female sex."<sup>41</sup>

Married or single, women had virtually no rights within society and no place within the political operations of government, except as the symbols of that government—Columbia or Minerva or Liberty. This symbolic role was proffered almost as the consolation prize for the low status women held in society. As Mary Beth Norton notes, an ideology of Republican motherhood and virtue posited that women need not clamor for legal or political rights, since they were "actually" far more powerful than men.<sup>42</sup> Thus the Reverend William Lyman, for example, could argue in 1802, that "mothers do, in a sense, hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and glory. Yea, they give direction to the moral sentiment of our rising hopes and contribute to form their moral state."<sup>43</sup> Or writing in 1808, the Reverend Samuel Miller could

even heave a sigh of relief that "Wollstonecraftism" (a common term for the feminist activism of the great British philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft and her American followers), had happily passed away. Women had realized that they were not suited to "the Academic Chair . . . the Senate . . . the Bench of Justice . . . [or] the train of War" but had finally realized that, as virtuous mothers, they were actually the most powerful citizens of the nation (even if the nation did not politically recognize them as citizens).<sup>44</sup>

According to numerous social authorities, female virtue was far more "powerful" and significant than either legal or political reform. And here is where the novel had a particularly pernicious effect, these authorities insisted. For the novel threatened to undermine female virtue even more insidiously than did the "new philosophy" (especially as propounded by Wollstonecraft or Paine or William Godwin). "Of all the artillery" which can "soften hearts" and thus undermine virtue, one "Leander" wrote in 1791, "the most effectual is the modern novel."<sup>45</sup> Or, wrote another commentator, "Novels . . . are the most powerful engines with which the seducer attacks the female heart, and if we judge from every day experience, his plots are seldom laid in vain."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, an anonymous essayist in the *Weekly Magazine* in 1798 noted that novels give women "false ideas of life, which too often make them act improperly."<sup>47</sup> Still more explicit in its charges and histrionic in its tone is an 1802 jeremiad portentously titled, "Novel Reading, a Cause of Female Depravity" in which novels are accused of instilling "poison . . . into the blood" of females and making them "slaves of vice." This same article then details the pathetic case of a young lady who, after reading novels, seduces her best friend's husband and causes dishonor and even death to her "poor disconsolate parents" and "several relative families."<sup>48</sup>

In the various critiques of the novel, female sexuality was defined in the strictest of terms and possible offenses against female virtue became public, not private, lapses (crimes, in effect, against the whole nation). A Yale graduate and a Federalist, the Reverend Enos Hitchcock, for example, included within his didactic novel, *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrrove Family* (1790), a sustained critique of the novel as a genre and noted that women's education and women's reading had to be carefully monitored lest women take into marriage "expectations" that are "above the drudgery of learning the necessary parts of domestic duties." Novels, he argued passionately, would dissuade women from fulfilling their crucial social role: "In a free country, under a republican form of government, industry is the only sure road to wealth; and economy the only sure means of preserving it. . . [Thus] we see the necessity of educating females in a manner suited to the genius of the government."<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the Reverend Timothy Dwight of Yale also warned that novels prevented women from leading a "useful life" while the Reverend Samuel Miller, a teacher at Princeton, noted that novels take "every opportunity . . . to attack some principle of morality" and "ridicule the duties of domestic life."<sup>50</sup>

To summarize, the condemnation of fiction barely concealed a condemnation of any woman who did not fill her expected, domestic role. Woman's aspirations (what she read and what she thought of what she read) had to be controlled so that her sexuality could be curbed—all for the good of the nation. Her reading had to be monitored so that her

efficiency as a domestic laborer would not be curtailed. In a sense, woman's productivity (as childbearer and household worker) both become, in the critiques of fiction, a national resource, not a matter of individual choice. In the two scenarios most common in the critiques of fiction—engaging in sex or engaging in reading—what might be regarded as an ultimately private, personal experience is publicized and politicized and is therefore (the main point) subject to social restriction, censorship, and control. To control female minds and feminine sexuality, the novel (its critics unanimously agreed) had to be kept out of women's hands.

#### IV

What, the contemporary reader well might ask, could possibly be so threatening in novels? How could anyone think a mere work of fiction could in anyway destabilize the status quo? To begin to answer those questions let us imagine a hypothetical young woman, living in, let us say, Leicester, Massachusetts in 1820. She enters a local circulating library where she has access to the one hundred novels written in her native land. (No library could boast such a collection, it must be emphasized; this example is purely hypothetical.) Our reader has the liberty to browse at will through the volumes on the shelves in order to choose a book or two that might interest her. What might she find?

There are surprising fictive possibilities for her to select from this imaginary library shelf—far more possibilities, it must be noted, than she would be allowed within American society. Our young reader could peruse Herman Mann's *The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady* (1797) or the anonymous *The History of Constantius and Pulchera; or Constancy Rewarded* (1794), each, in part, the story of a brave woman who dressed like a man to fight in the Revolutionary War—a fictively liberating fantasy for a young woman who, under the normal course of events, would move quietly (and always in proper feminine attire) from her father's house to her husband's house, from the role of subservient daughter to the role of *feme covert*. *The Female Review* would be a particularly inspiring novel for our reader since she would have known the popular story of the real Deborah Sampson who, apparently, had—like her romanticized alter ego—dressed and fought like a man.

The same reader who might never in the course of an entire lifetime leave the small burg in which she was born could also, through picaresque adventure tales such as James Butler's *Fortune's Foot-ball: or, the Adventures of Mercutio* (1797–98), Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Trials of the Human Heart* (1795) or S. S. B. K. Wood's *Ferdinand and Elmira; A Russian Story* (1804), travel to exotic places around the globe. Or she might ride along with Captain Farrago in Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* and thus experience life along the various highways and byways of America. Or in Gothic novels such as Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) or Isaac Mitchell's *The Asylum; or Alonzo and Melissa* (1811) the reader could imagine herself brave enough to fend off even the most evil (and well-armed) of villains—while yet remaining alluring enough (as in

contemporary Gothic romances) to procure for herself a happy marriage at the end of her exotic trials.

More is provided in these novels than mere escape and entertainment. Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*, for example, or the anonymous *Humanity in Algiers: or, The Story of Azem* (1801) would allow her to travel, imaginatively, to North Africa; to experience, vicariously, captivity in another culture; and to understand, in a specific and immediate way, the horrors of slavery—whether practiced by Barbary pirates of North Africa upon captive Americans or by Americans upon captive African slaves. Similarly, William Williams' *Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman* (published in 1815) would take the reader to Nicaragua where she would live among the Native Peoples and meet Quammينو, a brutalized slave escaped to the Mosquito Coast. When Penrose asks Quammينو why he has never become a Christian, the slave responds: "How can [Whites] expect Blacks to be good and No Christians when they who say they are Christians Are worse than we who know not the books of God as they do?" Mr. Penrose sits "silently puffing" after Quammينو's speech then quietly responds that he "had Little to answer in behalf of my own colour, but told him that I believed him a much better man than many Thousands who call'd themselves Christians."<sup>51</sup> This implicit and explicit criticism of both Christianity and the American institution of slavery would be heady fare for any young lady of the time, and small wonder many wanted to keep her (protect her?) from such books.

But what might be deemed most subversive in these novels was also what might be, for this hypothetical reader, most mundane and most appealing—the fictional rendering of one crucial aspect of her own life. The implied reader of most American novels is young, unmarried, white, and of New England stock, as is the typical protagonist of an early American novel. Socially, those protagonists range from Martha Meredith Read's beggar girl in *Monima; or the Beggar Girl* (1802) to the well-educated "coquette" in Hannah Foster's novel, a character modeled after the poet Elizabeth Whitman, a descendant of Connecticut's prominent Stanley family and one of the most learned and respected women of her day. But rich or poor, character and reader still face the same dilemma. Given woman's lack of social or legal power in early America, her choice of a husband could, quite literally, be a life-or-death decision.

Dozens of early American novels allow this reader the opportunity to work out, in the safe context of her imagination, just what she wanted from men and from marriage. These fictions dramatize how a woman can protect herself from the deceptions of male suitors, and why she should make sexual and marital decisions based on a rational weighing of all alternatives rather than based on the passions of the moment or the persuasions of a silver-tongued seducer. Again and again the novels implicitly or explicitly emphasize woman's powerlessness in America, especially the married woman's status as a *feme covert*, and the absolute necessity for a woman to take the question of matrimony with extreme seriousness. Lacking political or legal power, the married woman has only her wits to protect her from the various evils men are capable of inflicting in these early novels. To cite one notable example, the plot of Sukey Vickery's



*Emily Hamilton, a Novel* (1803) is almost exclusively about how a group of young women separately make their marital choices. Women who choose wisely are briefly described and ranged against a contrasting catalogue of women who do not. The most pathetic of the latter, a Mrs. Henderson, is brought to the verge of death by a violent, alcoholic, profligate, and emotionally abusive husband. Tellingly, Mrs. Henderson had a real-life counterpart, Mrs. Anderson, a neighbor of the twenty-four year old woman who penned *Emily Hamilton*, the only novel Vickery wrote before retiring into her own marriage, into intermittent poverty, and the birth of nine children.<sup>52</sup> Even without knowing the factual basis for the portrait of Mrs. Henderson or the sad biography of the author, the early American reader could sympathize with a married woman who, through no fault of her own, endures a life of relentless misery.

In even the first American novel, as we have seen, our hypothetical reader would find lectures on the importance of a sound education and self-esteem, especially for women of the underclasses who seem constantly at the mercy of men both mercenary and lascivious. As in *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*, this reader would learn that men love women for their beauty, marry them for their money (money that, it should be remembered, that typically became the husband's after marriage). The mercantile basis for American marriage (and the disadvantage at which the woman is put in such a system) is one of the most common themes in American fiction before 1820. The theme reaches something of an apotheosis in Rebecca Rush's powerful novel, *Kelroy, a Novel* (1812) in which Mrs. Hammond, widowed, with little income and no financial resources except the marital prospects of her two beautiful daughters, deceives the young men of Philadelphia into believing her daughters have excellent financial prospects. Mrs. Hammond even feigns inconsolable grief at her husband's death in order to justify taking herself and her daughters into hiding for several years, where they can all live frugally until the eldest daughter reaches marriageable age. Mrs. Hammond then puts on an elaborate coming-out-party for her daughters at which no expense is spared. Rush's novel is a devastatingly cynical portrait of American manners and mores in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia, a portrait which totally reverses the image of the virtuous Republican Mother.

If our hypothetical female reader in the circulating library in 1820 were shocked by Rebecca Rush's critique of the dual injustices of economic and sexual subjugation, she well might turn to novels by two of American's most socially conservative women writers, Helena Wells and S. S. B. K. Wood. Here she would find diatribes against Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist principles, including Wood's assurance, in *Amelia; or, The Influence of Virtue* (1802), that Amelia "was not a disciple or pupil of Mary Woolstonecraft [sic] . . . . She was an old fashioned wife and she meant to obey her husband: she meant to do her duty in the strictest sense of the word. To perform it cheerfully would perhaps be painful, but . . . it would most assuredly be best."<sup>53</sup>

No doubt, the humor in that description of the "old fashioned wife" is unintentional. But, ironically, the socially conservative books present an even darker view of the Cult of Domesticity than overtly feminist novels such as Judith Sargent Murray's *Story of*

*Margaretta* (1798). Murray, one of America's foremost feminist essayists as well as a novelist, shows how Margaretta Melworth, armed with a suitable education and a strong sense of her own worth, is able to discern the duplicity in the advances made by an ominously named suitor (and would-be seducer), Sinisterus Courtland. She rejects him, only to discover later that he is already married and the father of three children. Her intelligence and self-assurance prevent a bigamous relationship and allow her, later, to accept a proposal from Edward Hamilton and enter into a marriage based upon "mutual affection." In graphic contrast, Mrs. Hayman in Helena Wells's *Constantia Neville; or, The West Indian* (1800), possesses a poor education, low self-esteem, and a philosophy of wifely submission. For much of the book the reader must witness the consequences of Mrs. Hayman's commitment to feminine servitude. Her husband is physically and emotionally abusive. She is forced, ignominiously, to raise his illegitimate offspring (there are apparently several). She lectures the reader on the necessity of being a dutiful wife, but enjoys none of the rewards that are supposed to follow from such virtuous living. Amelia, too, in Mrs. Wood's novel, is virtuous, innocent, patient, perfect—and must stand silently by as her husband continues an extended affair with the woman he loves but could not (for economic and parental reasons) marry. It is hard to imagine that the young woman in the circulating library would ever *choose* to model her life on the sad circumstances of Amelia and Mrs. Hayman, especially when Murray's novel presents a far more satisfying portrait of a marriage both egalitarian and happy.

This is a crucial point. Given the legal and social restrictions on the life of our hypothetical woman reader, it is virtually impossible to write, for her, a novel that supports the status quo. Wells and Wood tried but the very medium of the novel worked against the socially conservative message they wanted to convey. Whereas a tract might extol the virtues of submission in the face of all trials, a novel must *create* trials to which the heroine virtuously submits. But those trials fully visualized give us not an inspiring icon of feminine virtue but an extremely perturbing portrait of the Republican mother and virtuous wife as a perpetual victim. A tract can lecture in the abstract, but the conservative novel, portraying through concrete example, evokes (quite inappropriately for its explicit social purposes) the legal, social, and political status of the average female reader, and that reader is not apt to applaud the tortured image of her own condition. Fictions such as *Amelia* and *Constantia Neville* set forth the sad truths of many women's lives in the late eighteenth century perhaps even more graphically than the overtly reformist novels, for the simple reason that they depict the essential powerlessness of women in the new Republic, a powerlessness that seems even more horrific when glossed by the conventional rhetoric about the omnipotence of feminine virtue.

## V

This hypothetical reader in the circulating library could read about characters like herself, characters who faced the most important decision of their lives. But what of real

readers? How did actual women of the time respond to books? Throughout this paper, I have assumed that novel reading is an important activity. But is there any way of knowing *how* important it was in the actual lives of actual readers?

In order to answer that question, I have read extensively in diaries and letters of the time looking for any references to early American novels. I have also examined almost 1200 extant copies of early novels for signs of the readers who originally read, borrowed, or owned these books.<sup>54</sup> Obviously these findings are both preliminary and impressionistic, since there is nothing statistically controlled about the percentage of copies that happens to survive, nor have I seen every extant copy of every early American novel. Nonetheless, early American readers left their marks. From marginalia, inscriptions, and even the material evidence of book use and repair, one can begin to "see" the novel's first readers and to appreciate how much they cherished their books as prized and vital possessions. Torn pages neatly hand-sewn back into the volume, dog-eared corners carefully trimmed, thumb papers (little tabs of vellum or wallpaper) secured in the spines of books to prevent a reader's fingers from soiling the pages all suggest the care early readers took to preserve even cheap, badly produced novels and, by inference, suggest the ways in which early readers valued their books.

In the early novels I have found, women's signatures outnumber men's by roughly two to one. Considering the restrictions on women's economic power in the eighteenth century and the proscriptions against female novel reading, this is an unusually high number of women readers.<sup>55</sup> The female readership implied in the front matter of many novels thus seems to correspond to an actual female audience. But men read and cherished novels too. Writing in Pittsburgh on March 10, 1872, in a copy of *Charlotte Temple* published in 1824, William T. Dunn noted: "This book was presented to me by my grandmother Dunn, about the year 1830." The vestige of the boy-reader who received the novel from his grandmother forty years earlier is still there on the end papers, where an unformed hand does math calculations and records distances between various Ohio towns.<sup>56</sup> Or sometimes a story is hidden in the inscriptions. Written on the inside front cover of one copy is "Susan Smith Property Bought October the 9 1806" but on the back we find, "William Smiths Book Bought October the 4 1806," along with two signatures of William Smith. Did she buy it from him (sister/brother? wife/husband?) so that it would be her book, or did he use the back inside cover to claim prior purchase and consequent ownership? We cannot answer that question, but in either case the significance is the same; the two dated declarations attest to the importance of the book as a possession, literally and figuratively an object of identification. A more obvious battle over book ownership takes place within the covers of an 1833 edition of *Charlotte Temple*: "Mrs. Ewell" writes her name in a rather elegant hand on the inside front cover. On the back flyleaf, however, "Joseph Ewell His book" is countermanded by "Sarah Ewell *Her* Book." Furthermore, Joseph then signs his name twice, but Sarah three times, her fancy S's covering the back pages. And she, subversively, also writes her name inside the book, at the blank spaces at the end of a few of the chapters. Or witness the family drama in another edition of that best-seller where Jane, Jacob, and Eileen Drake all

proclaim book ownership (Jane staking her claim twice)—a small community of readers in contention for possession of the text.<sup>57</sup>

Novels were often bequeathed across generations: different copies of *The Coquette* were given by mothers to daughters or by a son to his father. Other copies passed between brothers and sisters, wives and husbands, between lovers, among friends. I have found over twenty signatures in single copies of early novels and one copy of *Charlotte Temple* has passed down through four generations, to the present one, along with the family Bible. Nor is there necessarily a relationship between the physical object of the book and the way in which it was valued by a reader. Betsey Sweet/Betsey Garbor, for example, accurately sums up the tawdry physical object of an 1802 edition of *Charlotte Temple* that she read and owned: “The paper is Very Poor but No matter for that, it Will do Very Well to Scrabble Over when I have Nothing Else to be about.” And scrabble she did. At the front of the book is an elaborate handmade and hand-colored bookplate with the name “Betsey Sweet” carefully hand-lettered and all framed by blue, yellow, and red borders drawn with unusual care and skill. More elegant panned designs adorn the back cover, which includes the following legend: “If I this Book to you do Lend / and you the Same do Borrow / I Pray you Read it through / today and Send it home tomorrow.” What is singular here, however, is that Betsey kept this notably cheap book (so carelessly manufactured that the title page designates the author as “Mrs. Rawson” [sic]) for most of her life, carrying it with her into marriage, and reinscribing it with her married name (which strongly suggests that she reread it at various points in her life) and did not merely throw it away as one might, today, discard a cheap paperback.<sup>58</sup>

“So true a tale,” Sally B[owles?] wrote after the last sentence of her volume of *Charlotte Temple*. Another reader inscribed a brief poem on the endpapers of another edition of the same novel: “The rose will fade / the truth withers / But a virtuous mind / will bloom forever.” The verse echoes the “innocent flower” metaphors associated with Charlotte throughout the novel. This same reader also drew a rather crude illustration of a young girl in a long dress, presumably a rendition of the heroine. Similarly moved to poetry by Charlotte’s plight, still another reader wrote (with more sincerity than clarity): “She was fair and sweet as the Lilly Inosentas [sic] / the young lamb folly misled / her love betrayed her misery / Cros’d the awful final ocean / in the twentieth year of her age—so ended the unfortunate Charlotte.” Or W. M. Green in 1823 apparently saw clear connections between Charlotte’s life and death and some sad event in his or her own life, and, with a page-long poem, filled the back cover of the book with bitter admonitions about the “pang that rends in twain my heart” and friends who “have daggers cold & green” and who “know how to plunge them too.” Another reader wrote but two words in an otherwise pristine 1809 edition of *Charlotte Temple*: “My Treasure.”<sup>59</sup>

Clearly novels were not simply expendable commodities, escapist fantasies that had no bearing on their readers’ “real” lives. Given the restrictions on women’s mobility and experiences in the early Republic, for many a reader a novel may have provided the adventure, opportunity, maybe even love that life lacked. Similarly, for many readers,

these novels provided a kind of education, and perhaps even an education better than the rudimentary one offered to girls in the early national period. As Mary Beth Norton has shown, after the Revolution, and partly because of the new emphasis on Republic motherhood, there was increased attention to the educational needs of women. Whereas in the colonial era, "if a girl knew the rudiments of learning, that was thought to be more than sufficient for her limited needs," after the Revolution, "public education at the elementary level was opened to female as well as male children, and private academies founded in the 1780s and 1790s greatly expanded the curriculum previously offered to girls."<sup>60</sup> However, as Norton also indicates, the academies were, for the most part, restricted to affluent girls and often were less institutions of higher learning than elite "finishing" schools offering subjects such as embroidery, dancing, drawing, oratory, and other genteel arts. In rural areas and among the poor, women's education continued to be rudimentary in the early national period, and, correspondingly, women's literacy levels also lagged significantly behind that of men in the postrevolutionary era.<sup>61</sup>

The early American novel also played a significant role in expanding the educational horizons of its readers. It overtly inspired its female readers to greater literacy, often by including simplified "book reviews" of important philosophical works right within the text of a lurid seduction story, often translating complex philosophical and scientific ideas into a simple vocabulary that a poorly educated novel reader might be able to understand. More important, the novel in general assured its female readers that writing—and writing well—was a virtue; that an unblemished prose style was as proper to a would-be heroine as a spotless reputation or a winsome smile. The characters in numerous early American novels comment, breathlessly, on the beauty of another's discourse; the fine form of a poem or letter; the grace and strength of a clear hand; the excellence of another's learning, intelligence, and expression. In contrast to the numerous contemporaneous attacks against intellectual women and the widespread fear that education would "unsex" females, novels championed the female intellect and, in a very real sense, provided, by its own example, a kind of education to its women readers.<sup>62</sup>

"Copy well!" English novelist Hannah More admonished her readers in 1799. Elaborating upon this method of self-education, she observed: "Ladies, though they have never been taught a rule of syntax, yet, by a quick facility in profiting from the best books and the best company, hardly ever violate one; and . . . often exhibit an elegant and perspicacious arrangement of style, without having studied any of the laws of composition."<sup>63</sup> Or as Judith Sargent Murray noted, "I have thought that many a complete letter writer has been produced from the school of the novelist."<sup>64</sup> Precisely this kind of informal learning by imitation is what Margaret Smith advises for her younger sister, Susan, in a letter written on June 6, 1797. The older sister notes that "it is by constantly reading elegant writing" that one learns the "rules of grammar" and that "our ear becomes accustomed, to well constructed and well divided sentences. I always find I write much better immediately after reading works of an elegant and correct style."<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes we can even catch, within the covers of an early American novel, a reader writing her or his way to improved literacy. Often, one finds a name, "E. D. Robinson,"

or one statement of ownership, "Harriet Wilkins Shaftsbury Her Book," sometimes in a fine, clear hand, sometimes in an unfinished one. Sometimes there is not a name but a name repeated; three or four times, six or seven times a reader, now forgotten, rewrote her or his name, usually at different times and with an evolving signature. With one name there might be an added flourish on the W, with another a crude little scroll under the family name. On a flyleaf of a sentimental novel, Harriet Shaftsbury aspired to be John Hancock, her declaration more modest but no less independent than his.<sup>66</sup> Or an anonymous reader who paid one dollar for the first edition of Hannah Webster Foster's best-selling novel, *The Coquette*, underlined difficult vocabulary words throughout the text and recorded, in a notably shaky hand, a number of these words on the blank pages at the end. This reader not only vicariously participated in learned Eliza's cruel betrayal and inevitable death, but also picked up the meaning of such words as "volability," "satire," and "misanthrope" along the way. We see here, in short, a novel-reader aspiring after improved literateness—inspired, perhaps, by Foster's insistence, throughout the novel, on the unparalleled importance of sound education.<sup>67</sup>

Even such rudimentary scribblings should remind the sophisticated historian that these novels were written for the readers of the time and they played a vital (if unquantifiable) role in those readers' lives. These novels were cherished; they were shared among friends and relatives; contended over by brother and sister; or bequeathed across generations. Amazingly even two centuries later, occasionally one of these early readers still seems surprisingly vivid, such as the anonymous reader of a notably scrappy version of *The History of Constantius and Pulchra*, an edition issued in paper covers by Edward Gray of Suffield, Connecticut, in 1801. It is hard to imagine a less impressive volume. Some of the pages are printed on blue paper, some on white. Possibly there were two separate printings and the book was made up of signatures from each, possibly the printer merely ran out of one cheap paper and substituted another (the blue paper typically used for inexpensive book covers). Typos abound. Yet what is most striking about this book is the contrast between the artifact as published by the printer and the artifact as embellished by the reader. The book has been covered in decorated paper stamped with a geometric design, perhaps a small piece of wallpaper. Inside the back cover is a beautiful little drawing of delicate buds in different stages of blossoming. In a few places in the book, the reader has been moved to poetry, some copied, some original. The novel itself—a story of lovers imprisoned, shanghaied, shipwrecked, abandoned, and finally reunited—might move the contemporary reader only to a condescending smile, but it moved one early reader to poetry and art.

"To the Young Ladies of Columbia, This volume, intended to inspire the mind with fortitude under the most unparalleled Misfortunes; and to Represent the happy consequences of Virtue and Fidelity, is Inscribed, with Esteem and Sincerity, By their Friends and Humble Servants, The publishers."<sup>68</sup> Most of America's first novelists wrote for young ladies, and America's young ladies repaid that authorial attention. Miss Susan Heath of Boston, for example, in 1812 repeatedly escaped from the dull round of visitors and suitors brought before her by retreating into the more interesting world of fiction.

Feigning fatigue, the affluent young woman “stole upstairs under the pretense of going to bed—when I sat down and read an hour in Temper—at last I heard Mama coming and jumped under the coverlid with my clothes on and she thinking I was asleep took away my light.” As Susan Heath continues, in words that could apply to thousands of readers of America’s first fiction: “Being this day seventeen years old and feeling fully my own ignorance and the importance of time I am determined to avail myself of every opportunity of improving my mind and if possible not let a day pass without spending a few hours in reading and writing.”<sup>69</sup> Ms. Heath’s resolution was shared by many women in the first years of the Republic. The novel formed a major part of that increased attention to female reading because, of all available literary forms, only the novel took seriously the issues, problems, and limitations placed upon women’s lives in the new republic.

\* This essay is partly drawn from *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). The author would also like to acknowledge the generous support of the American Council of Learned Societies and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

#### Notes

1. William Hill Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*, ed. William S. Kable (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 95.
2. Kable discusses this designation in his “Editor’s Introduction” to *The Power of Sympathy*, pp. xi–xxxii.
3. Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*, p. 5.
4. The exact number of early American novels is difficult to specify for several reasons. First, some authors and printers avoided using the term “novel” before 1800 because the form was not considered respectable; however, since the form was increasingly popular, other publishers and library proprietors applied the same term indiscriminately to virtually any lengthy, prose work. Second, the very nature of the genre makes it difficult (and perhaps foolish) to try to demarcate an exact boundary between early novels and, for example, fanciful “travel books” (such as Elkanah Watson’s *A Tour of Holland* [1790]). I prefer a loose, rather than a strict, definition of the form. Finally, the whole question of national origins (what is American?) is as much ideological as actual. For excellent discussions of this issue, see William C. Spengemann, “The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 38 (1984), 384–414; and his “What Is American Literature?” *Centennial Review*, 22 (Spring 1978), 119–38. Although several new titles have come to light since it was compiled, the best bibliography of early American fiction remains Lyle H. Wright, *American Fiction, 1774–1850*, Rev. Ed. (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1948). See also Henri Petter, *The Early American Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971).
5. Most of the novelists about whom anything is known (over two-thirds of the novels were originally published anonymously and approximately one-third remain anonymous today) also published separately essays, poems, or books on education: Jeremy Belknap, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, Charles Brockden Brown, William Hill Brown, Hannah Webster Foster, Charles Ingersoll, Herman Mann, Isaac Mitchell, Judith Sargent Murray, Susanna Haswell Rowson,

- Rebecca Rush, Sarah Savage, Benjamin Silliman, Tabitha Tenney, Royall Tyler, Sukey Vickery, and Helena Wells.
6. The first novel written on the North American continent was Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), partly set in Quebec. Other early contenders for the honor of being the "first American novel" are Charlotte Ramsay Lennox's *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1751), Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau's *Father Bombo's Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1770; first published, 1975), Francis Hopkinson's *A Pretty Story: Written in the Year of Our Lord 2774* (1774), Thomas Atwood Digges's *The Adventures of Alonso* (1775), the anonymous *The Golden Age* (1785), and Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787). *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) is the first novel written by a native-born American, set in America, and advertised as the first American novel.
  7. For excellent discussions of how novels were imported (and often reprinted in separate editions for readers with different literacy levels), see Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See also, Robert B. Winans, "Bibliography and the Cultural Historian: Notes on the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 174–85.
  8. The first advertisement for *The Power of Sympathy* appeared in the *Herald of Freedom* on January 16, 1789, the second on January 23, 1789. The "First American Novel" ads ran in the *Massachusetts Spy, or Worcester Gazette* on January 29, February 5, and February 12, 1789, and in the *Massachusetts Centinel* on January 28, 1789.
  9. Novels which feature the underclasses even in their titles include: [Adam Douglass?], *The Irish Emigrant* (1817); [John Finch?], *The Soldier's Orphan* (1812); the anonymous *The Hapless Orphan; or, Innocent Victim of Revenge* (1793); Enos Hitchcock, *The Farmer's Friend, or the History of Mr. Charles Worthy* (1793); Gilbert Imlay, *The Emigrants, & C. or The History of an Expatriated Family* (1793); Martha Meredith Read, *Monima; or, the Beggar Girl* (1802); Susanna Haswell Rowson, *The Fille de Chambre* (1794); and Sarah Savage, *The Factory Girl* (1814).
  10. Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*, p. 5.
  11. Brown, *The Power of Sympathy*, p. 3.
  12. Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 5. This edition is based on the first American edition published by Mathew Carey in 1794.
  13. Samuel Relf, *Infidelity, or the Victims of Sentiment* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1797), n.p.
  14. Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin (New York: American Book Company), p. 4.
  15. *New York Magazine*, n.s., 2 (1797), 398.
  16. See, David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly*, 28 (Summer 1976), 262–71, and app., and Robert B. Winans, "The Growth of a Novel-Reading Public in Late-Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Literature*, 9 (Winter 1975), 267–75. For excellent work on reading among working class and poor readers in Colonial and Revolutionary America, see Elizabeth Carroll Reilly, in "The Wages of Piety: The Boston Book Trade of Jeremy Condy," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, pp. 83–131; and her unpublished paper, "Cheap and Popular Books in Mid-Eighteenth-Century New England," which she was kind enough to make available to me. See also Victor E. Neuburg, *Chapbooks: A Bibliography of References to English and American Chapbooks of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Vine Press, 1964).



17. For overviews of the American book industry, see Milton Hamilton, *The Country Printer* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936); Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt et al., *The Book in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1951); Douglas C. McMurtrie, *The Book: The Story of Printing and Bookmaking* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1937); Charles Madison, *Book Publishing in America* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969); Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967); John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1972); and Mary Ann Yodelis, "Who Paid the Piper? Publishing Economics in Boston, 1763-1775," *Journalism Monographs*, 38 (1975): 1-49. For a comparative analysis of the relationship between book costs and readership, see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Rolf Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500-1800* (Stuttgart: Metzlerlesche, 1974); and Albert Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public, 1740-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
18. Carroll D. Wright, *History of Wages and Prices in Massachusetts: 1752-1883* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1885), pp. 63-65; and U. S. Department of Labor, *History of Wages in the United States from Colonial Times to 1928* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929), pp. 53, 57, 133-34, 137.
19. Diaries of Ethan Allen Greenwood, log at the end of the diary for December 30, 1805 to February 9, 1806, Manuscript Department, American Antiquarian Society.
20. Diary of Elizabeth Bancroft, Manuscript Department, AAS.
21. Wright, *History of Wages and Prices*, pp. 63-65. For a discussion of the class affiliation of theatre-goers, see Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), esp. pp. 545-54. It should also be noted that the same novel could be produced for different classes of readers. For example, the anonymous *The History of Constantius and Pulchra* sold for as much as \$1.00 when bound in calf on relatively good paper and, in a crude edition, for as little as a quarter.
22. Winans, "Growth of a Novel-Reading Public," passim; and Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).
23. George Raddin, *An Early New York Library of Fiction, with a Checklist of the Fiction of H. Caritat's Circulating Library, No. 1, City Hotel, Broadway, New York, 1804* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1940), pp. 14-16.
24. A bookplate listing the bylaws of the Philadelphia Circulating Library is affixed within the covers of the American Antiquarian Society's copy of Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (Philadelphia: H. Maxwell, 1799). An advertisement in the *Massachusetts Mercury*, April 18, 1797, p. 3, includes the terms for the Pelham Library. See also, *Records of the Union Harwinton Library*, ed. Terry Belanger (New York: Book Arts Press, School of Library Service, Columbia University, 1977); and, for a fascinating description of the first social library in Belpre, Ohio (a town settled in 1788, its library founded in 1796), see William H. Venable, *Beginnings of Literary Culture in the Ohio Valley* (New York: R. Clark, 1891), p. 135.
25. Winans, "Bibliography and the Cultural Historian," p. 176.
26. Sarah Savage also wrote *Advice to a Young Woman at Service: In a Letter from a Friend* (New York: New York Book Society, 1823), in which she recommended that the young woman "reserve one hour a day for reading and writing" and suggested that from the one dollar she earned each week, she would be able to save enough to purchase one book a year and, in time, "get a pretty collection" (pp. 1-4).
27. Raddin, *An Early New York Library of Fiction*, pp. 24-25.

28. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), esp. pp. 3–40.
29. George Washington to James Madison, November 5, 1786, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1931–44): 39:51–52.
30. John Adams to Benjamin Waterhouse, *Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Knopf, 1946), p. 148.
31. Quoted in Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), pp. 322, 342.
32. See especially Timoth Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, 4 vols. (New Haven: T. Dwight, 1821), I: 518; Benjamin Rush, "Plan on the Establishment of the Public Schools" (1786), in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press [Belknap], 1965); and Noah Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America" (1787–88), in Rudolph, *Essays on Education*.
33. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), esp. pp. 41–43.
34. The censure of fiction in America has received extensive attention. See Jean-Marie Bonnet, *La Critique Littéraire aux Etats-Unis, 1783–1837* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires, 1982), pp. 97–156; William Charvat, *The Origins of American Critical Thought, 1819–1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), esp. chps. 2, 7; Harrison Orians, "Censure of Fiction in American Romances and Magazines, 1789–1810," *PMLA*, 52 (1937), 195–214; Ormond E. Palmer, "Some Attitudes Toward Fiction in America to 1870, and a Bit Beyond," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1952; and Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel, 1793–1903* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 4.
35. See, Emory Elliott, *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725–1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 30–35; Terence Martin, *The Instructed Vision: Scottish Common Sense Philosophy and the Origins of American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).
36. The cultural and social role played by the local minister has been discussed by Christopher M. Jedrey, *The World of John Cleaveland: Family and Community in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York: Norton, 1979); and, recently, by Harry S. Stout, *New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
37. Gordon S. Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution," in *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, 2nd ed., Robert H. Horwitz, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), pp. 102–28. See also, Wilbur Samuel Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and Warren Guthrie, "The Development of Rhetorical Theory in America, 1635–1850," *Speech Monographs*, 13 (1946), 14–22.
38. Thomas Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771, repr. in Gordon S. Wood, *The Rising Glory of America, 1760–1820* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), pp. 170–74. Jefferson was also positive in his letter to novelist Charles Brockden Brown, quoted in David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1952), p. 164. For a very different evaluation, however, see *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1905), 12:91.
39. My discussion of women's status in the eighteenth century is especially indebted to Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven:

- Yale University Press, 1977); Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); and Joan Hoff Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution," in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), pp. 383-445.
40. Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, p. 9.
  41. St. George Tucker, ed., *Blackstone's Commentaries: With Notes of Reference, to the Constitution and Laws, of the Federal Government of the United States; and of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: Wm. Birch and Abraham Small, 1803), 2: 445.
  42. Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, pp. 242-50.
  43. William Lyman, *A Virtuous Woman, the Bond of Domestic Union and the Source of Domestic Happiness* (New London, Conn.: S. Green, 1802), pp. 22-23.
  44. Samuel Miller, "The Appropriate Duty and Ornament of the Female Sex," in *The Columbian Preacher; Or, A Collection of Original Sermons, From Preachers of Eminence in the United States. Embracing the Distinguishing Doctrines of Grace* (Catskill: Nathan Elliott, 1808), p.253.
  45. "On Modern Novels, and their Effects," *Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum*, 3 (1791), 663.
  46. "An Essay on the Modern Novel," *Port Folio*, 2 (April 10, 1802), 107.
  47. "Character and Effects of Modern Novels," *Weekly Magazine*, 1 (March 10, 1798), 185.
  48. "Novel Reading, a Cause of Female Depravity," *New England Quarterly*, 1 (1802), 172-74. A headnote accompanying the article indicates that it was originally published in the *Monthly Mirror* (British) in November, 1797.
  49. Enos Hitchcock, *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family. In a Series of Letters to a Respectable Citizen of Philadelphia*, 2 vols. (Boston; I Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1790), 2:29.
  50. Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, I: 518; and Samuel Miller, *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*, 2 vols. (New York: T & J. Swords, 1803), 2: 179.
  51. Originally published posthumously and in bowdlerized form, *Mr. Penrose: The Journal of Penrose, Seaman* has recently been republished with an excellent introduction and notes by David Howard Dickason (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 358-59.
  52. The story of Mrs. Anderson is related in Sukey Vickery's letter of July 19, 1799 to Adeline Hartwell, Sukey Vickery Papers, Manuscript Collection, American Antiquarian Society. See also, Cathy N. Davidson, "Female Authorship and Authority: The Case of Sukey Vickery," *Early American Literature*, 21 (Spring 1986), 4-28.
  53. S. S. B. K. Wood, *Amelia; or, The Influence of Virtue. An Old Man's Story* (Portsmouth, N.H.: William Treadwell, 1802), p. 103.
  54. The only other study I know to make use of the impressionistic evidence of readers in extant copies of old books is Clifton Johnson's delightful *Old-Time Schools and School Books* (1904; repr. New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 155-66. Others, however, have recently turned their attention to readers. For example, in the Spring of 1984 Roger Stoddard of Houghton Library, Harvard University, mounted an exhibition "Marks in Books." At Michigan State University, Jannette Fiore and Anne Tracey have begun to record and identify readers who left inscriptions in the 2000 volumes of the Pedagogy Collection in the Russel B. Nye Popular Culture Collection. And at AAS, the North American Imprints Program (NAIP), a computerized updating of Charles Evans's *American Bibliography* (Chicago: Printed for the author by the Blakely Press, 1903-34), includes citations of inscribers' names in AAS volumes.

55. One indication of how little women exercised discretionary control over family income can be seen in account books such as those of Mathew Carey or Isaiah Thomas in the Manuscripts Department, AAS. Carey, for example, recorded seven transactions with the irresponsible William Rowson, none with William's wife, Susanna Haswell Rowson, Carey's single best-selling author. Similarly, of the 1,445 names William J. Gilmore has found in the account books from the Upper Valley district of rural Vermont (recorded between 1755 and 1851), only 21 are female. See his, "Elementary Literacy on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution: Trends in Rural New England, 1760-1830," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 92 (1982), 116. And Mary Silliman, in her diary, notes that her husband, a state's attorney, would not even discuss with her the mounting debts that directly affected her and their children. See Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr., *The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 198-200.
56. William T. Dunn's copy of *Charlotte Temple* (Boston: Charles Ewer, 1824), is a multiple monument to the social role played by books: It was given to me by another scholar who shares my fascination with America's first best-selling novel.
57. These copies of *Charlotte Temple* can all be found at the American Antiquarian Society. They were published, respectively, in: New Haven: Increase Cooke, 1805; Cincinnati: U. P. James, 1833; and Cincinnati: William Conclin, 1831.
58. Betsey Sweet's copy of *Charlotte Temple* (New York: John Swain, 1802), is at AAS.
59. The first four copies are at AAS. They were published, respectively, in New York: Samuel A. Burtus, 1814; Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1832; Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1812; and Philadelphia: Benjamin Warner, 1818. The 1809 copy of *Charlotte Temple* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1809) was found in a bookstore in New York in 1979.
60. Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, p. 256. For different treatments of education in early America, see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1975); Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, pp. 189-231; Walter H. Small, "Girls in Colonial Schools," *Education*, 22 (1902), 533; Thomas Woody, *A History of Women's Education in the United States*, 2 vols. (New York: Science Press, 1929); and Michael Zuckerman, *Peacable Kingdom: New England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1970), esp. pp. 72-83. Working on the Salem School Committee in 1790, the Reverend William Bentley noted that "all the girls [are] unprovided for, as upon the Boston establishment." See *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D., Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Mass.*, 4 vols. (Salem: Essex Institute, 1905-14), 1:188; also 2:96.
61. Although most historians agree that women's literacy was lower than men's in colonial America and did not approach men's levels until the second portion of the nineteenth century, there are widely different figures on just how much a discrepancy there was between male and female literacy. See, for example, Linda Auwers, "The Social Meaning of Female Literacy: Windsor, Connecticut, 1660-1775," *Newberry Papers in Family and Community History*, 77-4A (Chicago: Newberry Library, 1977); Ross W. Beales, Jr., "Studying Literacy at the Community Level: A Research Note," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 9 (1978), 93-102; Harvey Graff, *The Literacy Myth* (New York: Academic Press, 1979); and Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1974), esp. pp. 38-42, 57-58. For overviews and interpretations of the various literacy studies, see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press,

- 1986), pp. 56–70; David D. Hall, *On Native Ground: From the History of Printing to the History of Book* [pamphlet] (Worcester, Mass.: AAS, 1984); and Carl F. Kaestle, "The History of Literacy and the History of Readers," *Review of Research in Education*, 12 (1985).
62. Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, pp. 257–294. Cf. Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, pp. 101–25; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, pp. 185–231; and Wilson, "Illusion of Change," pp. 410–14.
  63. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (1799; repr. New York: George Long, 1813), 2:26.
  64. Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production. In Three Volumes. By Constantia* (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 3:221.
  65. Margaret Smith quoted in Shirley Brice Heath, "Toward an Ethnohistory of Writing in American Education," in *Writing: The Nature, Development and Teaching of Written Communication*, ed. Marcia Farr Whiteman, 2 vols. (Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum, 1981), 1: 29.
  66. E. D. Robinson signed in Rebecca Rush, *Kelroy, a Novel* (Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1812); Harriet Wilkins Shaftsbury signed in *Charlotte Temple* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1808). Both copies are at AAS.
  67. AAS copy of Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1797).
  68. AAS copy of *The History of Constantius and Pulchera* (Suffield, Conn.: Edward Gray, 1801).
  69. Diary of Susan Heath, September 11 and October 6, 1812, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Received November 30, 1987