Secularizing Sentiment, Democratizing Virtue: A Genealogy of the Liberal Subject Over the Long-Nineteenth Century

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by

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In honor of Amelia Barry Lynch, William Minos Lynch, Emelyn Shattuck Corbin, and Gertrude Shattuck:

“May our hearts ever beat in mystic sympathy.”
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Sean Micheal Epstein-Corbin

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English University of California, Riverside, June 2012 Dr. Jennifer Doyle, Chairperson

My dissertation tracks the dialectical development of liberal subjectivity from eighteenth-century cultures of sensibility to the development of pragmatist-feminism at the turn of the twentieth century. Scholars have recently developed models for understanding transatlantic circuits of exchange and their importance in the development of interiority. Secularizing Sentiment, in focusing on the shift from sensibility and sentiment to pragmatism and feminism, participates in these discussions by framing liberal discourse in terms of affective conflict and aesthetic innovation. In particular, it anatomizes the generative contradictions of liberal subjectivity, on the one hand enamored of the text’s power to order experience, on the other terrified of the threat to selfhood posed by iteration. Secularizing Sentiment theorizes the shift from sentimentalism to pragmatist-feminism as transatlantic states struggle with economic liberalization, industrialization, and growing rates of literacy. It emphasizes literacy as a technology accompanied by predictable conflicts, providing new lines of inquiry across an expanding archive of print and material culture made available by digitization.
Chapter One considers Bluestocking sociality and Della Cruscan poetics by way of Sarah Wilmot nee Morris, a presumably unpublished poet whose manuscript miscellanies I found while doing archival research at Chawton House Library. Chapters Two and Three, through close attention to transatlantic novels and poetry of sensibility and sentiment, characterize sentimental subjectivity in terms of manic literacy, referred to by Jacques Derrida as the pharmakon, and how manic literacy gives rise to regulatory hermeneutic regimes. These regimes of interpretation – such as sensibility, sentimentalism, realism, and pragmatism – check the free play of the text according to powerful social and institutional structures. Chapters Four and Five complicate my theorization of liberal subjectivity, considering how the Civil War and the rise of clinical discourse threaten sentimental presumptions. Chapter 6, through readings of John Dewey, Jane Addams, and William James, demonstrates how pragmatist-feminism emerges as a sentimental critique of clinical discourse, thus placing it in the broader genealogy of liberal subjectivity explicated in Chapters One through Five.
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Introduction

We are thus brought to a conception of Democracy not merely as a sentiment which desires the well-being of all men…but as that which affords a rule of living as well as a test of faith. (Addams *Democracy* 6)

Pragmatism has experienced a renascence that began in the 1970’s with the diverse work of Susan Haack, Hilary Putnam, and Richard Rorty. Morris Dickstein, in his introduction to *The Revival of Pragmatism*, writes, “By the middle of the twentieth century, pragmatism was widely considered a naively optimistic residue of an earlier liberalism, discredited by the Depression and the horrors of the war, and virtually driven from philosophy departments by the reigning school of analytic philosophy” (1).

Attempting to explain its recent popularity, Dickstein speculates that “[pragmatism] has appealed to philosophers moving beyond analytic philosophy, European theorists looking for an alternative to Marxism, and postmodernists seeking native roots for their critique of absolutes and universals” (1).

Despite their diversity, neopragmatists have tended to place themselves in a fairly predictable historical narrative, extending from Emerson and Thoreau to C.S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and F.C.S Schiller. At its heart, as Rorty has claimed, pragmatism is seen as emerging out of transatlantic cultures of Romanticism (Dickstein 22). Rorty, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, locates the roots of pragmatism in two historical contingencies: the French Revolution and the Romantic Movement. The French Revolution “had shown that the whole vocabulary of social relations, and the whole spectrum of social institutions, could be replaced almost overnight” (3). Simultaneously,
“the Romantic poets were showing what happens when art is thought of no longer as imitation but, rather, as the artist’s self-creation” (3). These two waves together instilled in Europeans “the idea that truth was made rather than found” (3). In the United States, this tradition is traced most commonly to Emerson and Thoreau, with occasional reference to other writers of the American Renaissance (Dickstein 3-4). Narratives of this kind are given in *Contingecy, Irony and Solidarity* by Richard Rorty; *The American Evasion of Philosophy* by Cornel West; and *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism* by H.S. Thayer.

Readers might believe, having read histories of this sort, that women have little to do with pragmatism, or that pragmatism has little to do with feminism. They might further believe that women had little to do with Romanticism and hence little to do with the genealogy of pragmatist thought. They would be incorrect. Fortunately, feminist historians and philosophers have begun reclaiming the role of Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the formation of classical pragmatism; similarly, decades of feminist history and literary scholarship have helped reclaim the profound involvement of women writers in the development of literatures of sentiment, sensibility, and romanticism.

Charlene Haddock Seigfried in *Pragmatism and Feminism* has begun the difficult work of uncovering women’s contributions to pragmatism. She has most forcefully demonstrated that Jane Addams has been unjustifiably excluded from pragmatist history, relegated, through the routine but no less pernicious machinations of gender politics, to the history of social work. Instead, Seigfried rightly demonstrates her philosophical complexity and her deep influence on the thinking of John Dewey. Erin McKenna,
treating the importance of utopian thought on the progressive movement and political liberalism, urges a closer look at the pragmatist thought of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the ethics of care she shared with Jane Addams. Shannon Sullivan, drawing on transactionalism in John Dewey, articulates the continued importance of pragmatism to feminist cultural work. Each suggests that pragmatism and feminism bear more than a tangential or passing relationship to one another. Cornel West, despite his relative occlusion of pragmatist women from *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, has further claimed that pragmatism, exemplified by John Dewey and W.E.B. DuBois, is the default American philosophy for voicing oppression and championing democracy. In the literary-historical register, Jerome McGann, Anne Mellor, Elizabeth Eger, Adriana Craciun, Jane Tompkins, Cathy Davidson, Mary Poovey, and many other others have reformed the history of the Romantic period to include both divergent romanticisms and related but distinct cultures of sentiment and sensibility, each inflected through histories of women’s writing and cultural involvement.

Taken together, these two strains of feminist scholarship drive the purpose of my dissertation, which is to reform the history of pragmatism so that it might pay proper attention not only to contributions of female pragmatists but also to the complex, gendered aesthetics that drive the cultures of sentiment, sensibility, and romanticism so often depicted as rooting pragmatism’s development. Hence, in answering a fairly straightforward scholarly question – how and why did pragmatism emerge? – this dissertation must trace an at times overwhelming and complex transatlantic genealogy of intersecting cultures and myriad social forms. Doing so provides new insight into the
sentimental roots of pragmatist writing, as well as new models for understanding related aesthetic movements, such as sensibility, sentiment, naturalism, realism, and feminist-utopian fiction. But, doing so also means sometimes skating over the profound complexity of different cultural forms – such as Bluestocking sociality or Darwinian feminism – in favor of a revised sketch of pragmatism’s long pre-history.

Within this general movement, where I attempt to apply the insights of pragmatist feminism and literary scholarship on sentiment and sensibility to print culture surrounding pragmatism’s emergence, I also apply a powerful but sometimes slippery theoretical framework. This framework draws on complementary studies of the historical formation of liberal subjectivity by Nancy Armstrong, Lauren Berlant, Cathy Davidson, Nancy Fraser, and those responding to their work. At heart, these theorists share the position that competing representations of gender and heteronormativity play an integral role in driving the evolution of transatlantic society during the long nineteenth century. The porous boundaries between private and public spheres; the myriad ways by which gender, race, class, sexuality might be coded; and the strategies men and women used to navigate this cultural terrain form central interpretive questions for my project.

I further enrich this archive by incorporating Jacques Derrida’s theory of literacy and anxiety in *Dissemination*, where he re-writes the term “pharmakon” as the text that both poisons and cures. Inspired by Judith Butler’s adaptation of the pharmakon in terms of gender performativity, I argue that the pharmakon is a movement in the development of liberal subjectivity and can help explain the generative anxieties that attach to literacy and the regulatory regimes that evolve to organize it. Hence, as a term in models of
(counter-) publicity and desire, I make use of the pharmakon only to theorize the dialectic of literacy in liberal experience. Where sentimentalism might help sculpt domestic desire and initialize women’s literary agency, it also constrains the horizon of liberal being in order to neutralize inauthenticity and hermeneutic relativism, which pose threats to its stability. The pharmakon tropes the anxieties central to material practices of literacy. Just as iteration – whether in scribal or print circulation – generates the possibility of liberal subjectivity, so too does it leave open the constant threat of misreading and miswriting. The subject formed through literacy finds itself desiring publicity even as publicity exposes it to the myriad threats of sophism, libel, piracy, and misappropriation. To control these threats, liberal subjects institute various regulatory mechanisms, most importantly the legitimation of some hermeneutic projects over others.

The movement of the pharmakon, in turn, helps animate the dialectics of intimate publics and national imaginaries so important to liberal subjectivity. Since its movement is raced, gendered, and classed – these various rhetorical constructs forming the tropic boundaries of liberal consciousness – close attention to the pharmakon’s myriad forms helps complicate narratives concerning the function of print in the development of civic identities. As such, it allows new strategies for understanding the material practices of literacy, the political stakes in aesthetic change, and the cultural work involved in rhetorical performance. It is in this sense that my dissertation delineates the genealogy of liberal subjectivity over the long nineteenth century, focusing specifically on those forms of liberal subjectivity that prove integral to the later development of pragmatist-feminism.
Chapter One to Chapter Three survey how classical schemas such as virtue, duty, and mania are marshaled in political conflicts over gender and authorship. Modern writers adapt classical texts to the context of liberal Enlightenment. Chapter One investigates the previously unpublished poetical notebooks of Sarah (Morris) Wilmot, attending to the tensions between polite, Bluestocking sociality and Wilmot’s evocative Della Cruscan poetics. Wilmot, a member of the wider Bluestocking circle that helped pioneer forms of literate female sociality in the eighteenth century, circulated her poetic identity through scribal exchange at a time when print circulation became dominant. I suggest that this decision is driven by two competing desires: the wish to circulate a somewhat controversial Della Cruscan poetic identity coupled with the wish to participate legitimately in Bluestocking sociality. To fulfill both desires, Wilmot presumably refrained from print publication, relying instead on older forms of social authorship to develop her poetic identity. Her notebooks also provide evidence of the rich generational function of literacy, for it is her daughter who compiles, edits, and preserves Sarah’s poetry. As such, Chapter One defines a fundamental conflict explored throughout the dissertation: the power of texts to create and authorize identity coupled with the ever-present danger of dissemination.

Chapter Two builds on the framework developed in Chapter One, arguing that Bluestocking sociality provides the initial models of sentimental literacy that circulate in the works of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth. These models construct a sentimental subjectivity founded on the ability of virtue to regulate both sexual desire and literary dissemination. Having elaborated the themes of virtue and the sexual contract in
Frances Burney, Maria Edgworth, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, the chapter turns to the haunted and haunting poetics of Felicia Hemans and Lydia Sigourney. Detailing how these poets explore conflicts between desire, domesticity, piety, and grief, I suggest that sentimental subjectivity often tropes the dialectic of desire and virtue in terms of haunting and revelation. Christian domesticity, far from mindlessly pious, provides a rich aesthetic ground for developing a sentimental interiority shot through with ghastly nightmares and catastrophic sexual grief.

Chapter Three continues to develop my model of sentimental subjectivity, exploring what I call “the disordering of sentiment,” which intensifies in the late antebellum period. Looking at the dialectic movement of sympathy and madness in Edgar Allan Poe – inflected as it is through a narrative of incest – I posit that racialized sympathy begins undermining sentimental theories of sympathy. This manifests in nightmares of incest, racial violence, and male impotence and disfigurement. While not directly engaged by Melville or Poe, I argue – following Toni Morrisson, Lori Merish, and others – that racial difference lay at the heart of the disordering, incestual anxieties animating “The Fall of the House of Usher” and Pierre. I further explore the importance of racial difference in sentimental literature through a consideration of Jane Eyre and The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, arguing that, along with Pierre, these texts represent attempts to sidestep the recursive madness caused by disembodied sympathy. These attempts to fashion alternative forms of sentimental subjectivity are particularly important for the later emergence of pragmatist subjectivity, which is itself an attempt to negotiate the threat posed to sentimental subjectivity by clinical discourse.
While Chapters One, Two, and Three witness sentiment’s predominance in literature and culture, Chapter Four theorizes the trauma visited upon it by the U.S. Civil War. Through analyses of Henry James’ and Louisa May Alcott’s fiction, sentimental grief culture, the Gettysburg National Cemetery, and selected poetry by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, this chapter considers the impact of martial law and clinical discourse on sentimental subjectivity. As racial difference does, martial law and war violence confront sentiment’s conventional stance that human sympathy allows for knowledge of others and knowledge of the self, each of which lead to a healthy civilization. War trauma severs women from men, neither being able to properly sympathize with the others’ experience, and rattles sentiment’s heteronormative function.

Martial law undercuts liberal political philosophy, challenging the values of liberty and open democracy, each of which circulate within sentimental literature as complements to healthy homes. Situated in prevailing theories of domesticity, countermonumentalism, and affect, Chapter Four asserts the integrity of sentimentalism as war transforms culture. Without itself disappearing, sentimentalism also provides the ground for the development of literary realism and philosophical pragmatism. Understanding sentimentalism as a robust intellectual culture generative of and available to liberal subjects throughout the nineteenth century allows us to theorize realism and pragmatism as adaptations of existing literary and philosophical conventions, not as radical breaks from inauthentic predecessors.

While the closing section of Chapter Four introduces the importance of clinical discourse’s emergence during the Civil War, Chapter Five fully realizes the threat posed
to sentimental subjectivity by clinical discourse and intimates the strategies authors begin
to use to evade or neutralize this threat. Through close-reading of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A
Country Doctor*, Henry James’ *The Bostonians*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *
Herland/Ourland*, as well as a consideration of William Dean Howells and the “Art of
Fiction controversy,” this chapter both anatomizes clinical discourse and explains its
complication of sentimental culture. Far from displacing or destroying sentimentalism,
Howells’ literary projects exist in concert with still-extant modes of sentimental writing,
including James’ adaptations of the genre. Nonetheless, clinical discourse – and the
naturalism and realism that grow from it – threatens sentimental subjectivity in
productive ways, leading to aesthetic innovations that lay the groundwork for
pragmatism.

Chapter Six represents the culmination of the genealogy of nineteenth-century
liberal subjectivity laid out in Chapters One through Five. By analyzing the writings of
Jane Addams, John Dewey, and William James, this chapter demonstrates how
pragmatists often drew on sentimental culture in their attempts to circumvent clinical
discourse and the way in which such discourse sought to objectify human bodies and
hierarchically order knowledge. Favoring democratic inquiry and modes of sympathetic
experience that allow for transsubjectivity, pragmatists figure knowledge as a form of
social action and direct inquiry geared toward practical experience. Through use of
phrases like “social adjustment” and the “sentiment of rationality,” pragmatists are self-
consciously drawing on sentimental rhetoric in order to construct a new form of liberal
subjectivity well-adapted to a secularized, democratized modern society. Tropes of
virtue, knowledge, ethics, desire, and futurity are marshaled from sentimental rhetoric and used in a new philosophical language focused on democratic action and evolutionary humanism.

Having traced the genealogy of liberal subjectivity from sensibility and sentiment at the turn of the nineteenth century, to pragmatism at the turn of the twentieth century, my dissertation provides both a feminist history of pragmatism and a robust theorization of liberal aesthetics and culture over the long nineteenth century. Born from tropes of manic literacy, virtue, domesticity, contract, desire, and sexual and racial difference, liberal subjectivity evolves in myriad, sometimes divergent trajectories. While my dissertation by no means provides an exhaustive account of all types of liberal subjectivity over the long nineteenth century, nor even an exhaustive account of sentimental or pragmatist-feminist subjectivity, it does lay out a framework and an initial overview of the formation of liberal culture to the turn of the twentieth century. In doing so, it not only revises former omissions in the history of pragmatism, it also expands and elaborates many previously unattended niches within nineteenth-century transatlantic literature.
Sarah Wilmot, Social Authorship, and the Bluestocking Circle

In a 1777 letter to her sister, Hannah More describes the life and estate of Henry and Sarah Wilmot:

We reached this place yesterday morning. You will judge of the size of the house when I tell you there are eleven visitors, and all perfectly well accommodated. The Wilmots live in the greatest magnificence; but what is a much better thing, they live also rationally and sensibly. On Sunday evening, however, I was a little alarmed; they were preparing for music (sacred music was the ostensible thing), but before I had time to feel uneasy, Garrick turned round and said: “You are a Sunday woman, I will recall you when the music is over.”…The Great Seal [Henry] disappointed us, but we have Lady Bathurst, Lady Catherine Apsley, Dr. Kennicott, the Hebrew Professor at Oxford, his wife, a very agreeable woman, (though she copies Hebrew!) besides the Garricks and two or three other very clever people. We live with the utmost freedom and ease imaginable, walking together, or in small parties, chatting.

Though she had some reputation for her pleasant Farnborough parties and her comfortable residence at Bloomsbury-square in London, Sarah Wilmot is not much-recorded in the history of Bluestocking culture. She may not have published a single word of poetry and seems to have been only a minor friend of Elizabeth Montagu and Hannah More. Yet, in her poetical manuscripts, Bluestocking identity organizes Sarah Wilmot née Morris’s subjectivity and defines her role in a social network of scribal exchange. By analyzing several of Wilmot’s manuscript miscellanies – which may
represent but a small part of her total writings – I seek to understand how a decidedly Whiggish member of the lower gentry negotiated three competing desires: intellectual recognition, domestic fealty, and fame. I contend that Wilmot utilized norms of manuscript circulation in order to create a poetic identity at once enriched by Bluestocking rhetoric and animated by Della Cruscan decadence.

Scholars who study The Bluestockings tend to emphasize the productive capacity of the women involved in Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Delany’s colloquy. Elizabeth Eger emphasizes their intellectual heft and their centrality to evolving terms of Enlightenment culture.¹ Deborah Heller accents how unpublished writing, like Elizabeth Vesey’s letters, helps us understand Bluestocking self-awareness.² Emma Major focuses on the rich political and philosophical potential that lurks in practices of the Bluestocking’s polite conversation.³ Behind each treatment of Bluestocking culture lay the understanding that they were born from, and integral to the further development of, something like “liberal subjectivity” or “Enlightenment interiority.”

Yet, Bluestocking women are not often depicted as admirers of or participants in Della Cruscan culture. On the contrary, the program of Bluestocking sociality was committed to the transformation “of court libertinism and paternalism based on patronage and property” by way of “gentry and middle-class values” (Pohl 6). Polite sociability governed by regulated sympathy, virtue, reason, and charity was integral to the circulation of these middle-class values. Della Cruscanism, however, sought to “abolish

¹ See Eger.
² See Heller.
³ See Major.
the distinction…between polite sociability and the anarchy of the crowd” (Mee “Reciprocal” 104). The Bluestockings, while not assenting to every particular of Lord Shaftesbury’s notion of polite sociability, generally depicted their circle as opposed “to the artificiality of courtly politeness” but equally opposed “to the vulgar ‘enthusiasm’ of the mob” (107). Emma Major goes further, arguing that the Bluestockings “might be seen as constructed within and against a series of opposed terms: upper rank and mob, Anglican and dissenter, public and private” (177). Hence, Della Cruscan enthusiasm, in its attempt to perform “the delirium of sensation” needed for “the Freedom of the Mind” (Mee “Reciprocal 109), is not only antipathetic to Bluestocking values but has no place in polite Bluestocking society. I contend that Wilmot’s desire to both participate in Bluestocking sociality and circulate a Della Cruscan poetics leads her to prefer forms of scribal exchange and social authorship over the modes of print publication used by many Bluestocking figures.

Attending closely to Wilmot’s manuscripts provides several unique opportunities. First, while sometimes shared with correspondents, her poems remain largely unchanged by editorial intervention. Second, while they often include Bluestocking figures, her poetry resists any obvious self-publicizing, written by one who saw herself as sometimes inside and sometimes outside the Bluestocking Circle. Third, though she sometimes attended Bluestocking parties, she was certainly not a central figure. Because of all this, we are able to witness how a certain kind of literary consciousness comes into being. Though distinctively liberal, her notebooks chart the course away from publicity and circulation as a literary commodity and toward a type of recognition allowed by practices
of scribal circulation depicted by Margaret Ezell in *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*. Ezell writes, “If we accept the notion that there was a class of writers and readers for whom print and general commercial readership were neither the goal nor the norm, we need to consider how that affects our reading of the texts they produced” (141). She continues, “if we…also accept the possibility of an inevitable time lapse between the availability of a technology and its widespread use and application, we may find that there are other stories of the book and its relationship with print, of the relationships between author and reader” (141). Taken together, Ezell’s comments guide an interpretation of Wilmot’s poetical manuscripts, in which social authorship provides an ironic critique of publication – ironic because Wilmot’s particular scribal practices presume and enthusiastically embrace the very print culture from which she seeks to isolate her authorial identity.

As an element in a domestic circuit of friendship and duty, literacy appears essential to the development of liberal subjectivity. Imagining oneself as an author and developing one’s identity in strikingly literary ways becomes for Wilmot a necessary mode of subjective being, one she viewed as often in conflict with her national and domestic roles. Unlike those women included in Gary Kelly’s expansive anthology of Bluestocking women, Wilmot presumably chose not to publish, not to circulate her poetry widely, not to present herself “publicly” as an author, even as she routinely imagines herself as an author and attempts to present herself within her social network as a literary woman. Norms of manuscript circulation provide Sarah with the ability to

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4 See Kelly.
develop an authorial identity and participate in Bluestocking sociability without engaging in forms of print circulation and literary commodification common to the women of her circle. By conceiving of her poetry as ornamental and circulating it only amongst “near friends and acquaintances” (Ezell 42), Wilmot is able to perform the “poetical mania” of Della Cruscanism while still fundamentally containing it within “the regulated sympathies imagined by Shaftesbury as the basis of Whiggish sociability” (Mee, “Reciprocal” 109).

During the Enlightenment, manuscript circulation provided a form of respectable leisure for those of the middle and upper classes. It helped create and strengthen friendships while also circulating tropes of respectability and virtue. In a period heavily invested in print circulation, however, social authorship became a way of cultivating consumer sentiments and extending print culture into a wide array of older social forms. For Wilmot, social authorship is partly a way of identifying with and gaining recognition from her widely published female acquaintances. It is also a way of adapting earlier forms of literary exchange to a print environment. In coterie circulation, readers were expected to contribute their own writing to the circle, as any participant in a conversation both speak and listen. Print culture in its commodified forms tends to complicate this structure of social exchange. For Wilmot, social authorship was a way of capitalizing on print culture without circulating ones authorial identity in it. She does this by on the one hand ravenously consuming print texts – she appears on dozens of subscription lists, perhaps as a form of patronage – while on the other hand only circulating her poetic identity amongst near friends and acquaintances. The fundamental insight here is that
social authorship complements and intertwines itself with growing cultures of print, requiring a more nuanced appreciation of the literary and social practices of women like Wilmot, who in terms of print publication were strictly consumers, but who were actually engaged in complex practices of scribal exchange. These practices, I contend, shape Wilmot’s responses to pressing issues of eroticism and domesticity.

I emphasize the role of authorial identity so heavily in my reading of Wilmot in order to highlight what I think is a central aspect of liberal subjectivity: the development of selfhood around the anxiety and pleasures of the pharmakon. It is not just for those widely revered and published authors whom we often study that authorship is so central a part of identity. Even for the anonymous or illegible writers who write only for themselves or their friends, the dignity and excitement that control over one's subjectivity through writing provides seems central to liberal being. Yet, as Derrida reminds us by analyzing a scene of manuscript circulation from the *Phaedrus*, the dignity and empowerment of writing entails the anxiety of circulation and erasure long before print technologies are developed. Of interest in Wilmot’s case is the extent to which fame – of a particular kind common to practices of manuscript circulation – can organize desire even in a context still tied to literary commodification. Rejecting celebrity, she nonetheless desires recognition from her small but influential group of readers.

Sarah Wilmot’s Poetical Notebooks

Sarah Wilmot’s poetical notebooks are archived at Chawton House Library in Hampshire County. The manuscript is presumably in her daughter Elizabeth Sarah

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5 See Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy.”
Wilmot Seton’s hand, as judged by handwritten notes in the manuscript. They are a part of a larger collection of family papers, including cross-written letters penned by Elizabeth; a travel log written by Sarah Caroline Christopher née Seton, Elizabeth’s daughter; a letter of condolence to Sarah Caroline from the commanding officer of her son, Lieutenant Wilmot Christopher of the British East India Company, who was killed during the Siege of Multan, which took place during the Second Anglo-Sikh War; and newspaper clippings that reference his valiant death. In short, the collection of materials seems to be the personal effects of Elizabeth Sarah Seton née Wilmot, daughter of Sarah Wilmot née Morris, and Elizabeth Sarah’s daughter, Sarah Caroline. The poetical manuscripts themselves are written by Elizabeth in three volumes of identical notebooks. The first volume includes a table of contents inclusive of each volume’s contents but with some gaps. Throughout the volumes are editorial notes from Elizabeth concerning family events, important dates, and nicknames. Some of them are interpretive of the poems; some of them connect the poems to Sarah’s personal history.

Through biographical research, I confirmed Sarah and Elizabeth’s identity and lineage. Both are buried in the vault of St. Peter’s Church in Farnborough, Hampshire. Sarah Wilmot lived between 1724 and 1793, and the poems transcribed by Elizabeth cover nearly all of her mother’s adult life. The first poem, “To Lady Beauchamp on her marriage” is dated 1744. It is hard to tell whether or not Elizabeth transcribed every one of her mother’s poems, but it seems likely that she excluded many poems, lest we assume four to eight-year gaps in Sarah’s literary production. The title Elizabeth gives the collection, “Verses written by my dear Mama Sarah Wilmot at sundry times,” I take as
indicating her biographical intentions. Each notebook includes approximately fifty pages though the third notebook is not entirely filled. The marginalia is regular and in a consistent hand though with varying colors of ink, indicating that notes were made at various times, leaving the possibility of later editors.

The poems serve myriad functions but tend to relate either to personal events or relationships significant to Sarah – such as the birth of her daughter, her love for her husband, her fondness for certain house servants, the imprisonment of her brother, and his loss of their family home – or themes in common circulation amongst the Bluestockings – such as retreats to Tunbridge Wells, the classical myth of Iphigenia, and her identity as a poet. The topics in her collected poems elucidate both domestic life amongst the affluent gentry and the social network of educated women we refer to as the Bluestockings. Together with Elizabeth’s annotations, the poetical manuscripts offer a nexus for understanding Sarah Wilmot’s social milieu between 1744 and 1793, as well as the fruitful poetic collaboration between mother and daughter.

In many ways, Elizabeth and her mother were participating in a common set of social practices described by Martha Ezell. Elizabeth, as I have indicated, copied a few dozen of her mother’s poems from various sources. One of the poems was originally a letter written to David Garrick, who mentions Mrs. Wilmot several times in his correspondence.⁶ Along with letters, there is some reason to believe that Sarah circulated individual poems amongst friends during social gatherings. In short, the poems were originally written down as “single sheets” or even “scraps” before they were copied by

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⁶ See Garrick.
Elizabeth as a “manuscript miscellany” defined as “a homogeneous collections [sic] of poems with perhaps some related prose pieces, likely to reflect careful selection and arrangement” (Ezell 25). In other words, Elizabeth’s role as an editor and scribe must be kept in mind throughout my discussion of Sarah’s poetry and my argument concerning her poetic identity. It is, in this instance, Elizabeth who has provided a manuscript through which Sarah’s authorial identity is expressed. It is unclear how many poems Sarah penned that Elizabeth either did not choose to include or had no record of. What is clear, however, is that Elizabeth compiled the poems to serve a complex familial function, both as biography and testament.

The title – “Verses written by my dear Mama Sarah Wilmot at sundry times” – requires interpretation. On the one hand, the familial relationship is privileged, indicating the context of Elizabeth’s editorial care. These poems are a part of family history, and it is her intention to preserve and – in at least some restricted sense – circulate them. It is unclear how widely the volume was circulated though the presence of several crossed-out poems suggests, following Ezell, that this was a “working text” that may have preceded a presentation copy. The familial context remains important, and Elizabeth clearly understands her mother as a poet. From the hundreds of letters her mother had presumably written over her lifetime, a small portion of them are included in the manuscript: only those considered by Elizabeth as of high enough quality to circulate in manuscript form to friends or acquaintances. This is just to say that Elizabeth is clearly

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7 See Garrick. Her role as the wife of the Keeper of the Seal and her documented friendship with Hannah More, not to mention common letter-writing practices of the time, implies an unseen world of rich correspondence Elizabeth chose not to include.
concerned with her mother’s poetic reputation and understands herself in relation to that reputation.

Keeping in mind the material context of Sarah’s poems, two selections from the poetical notebooks highlight the tension between domesticity and intellectual recognition that drives her poetic identity. The first poem, “From Mrs. Wilmot in the Country to Mr. Wilmot in Town, Dec. 11\textsuperscript{th} 1754,” was composed when Mrs. Wilmot was around thirty years old.\textsuperscript{8} It is an epistle to her husband, Henry Wilmot, esq., while he is in town on business – presumably Bloomsbury-Square, London, where he was a solicitor attached to Gray’s Inn – while she remains at their country house in Farnborough Park, Hampshire. It is, in a certain respect, a poem singing Henry’s virtues and the value Sarah places on their relationship. It is also an assertion of her poetic identity in the domestic sphere, where she will routinely concede to being under Henry’s “command” even while using poetry to control his attention and adorn domestic routine. A poem running nearly 200 lines, it chronicles, upon Henry’s request, a day in the life of Sarah, her mother, and her sisters at Farnborough. It alludes to dozens of classical figures and stories, including Pegasus, Socrates, Scylla, Minerva, Diana and Venus, adorning country life at Farnborough with the imagery and history of antiquity. Thus, it serves three purposes: 1) a domestic report of the estate’s business during his absence, 2) a playful, prodding tribute to her beloved, permissive husband, and 3) an assertion of her poetic skill and intellectual potency.

The second poem I treat in detail is “Iphigenia,” a shorter but no less ambitious

\textsuperscript{8} Presumably Elizabeth-Sarah Wilmot, Sarah’s daughter, writes on the first page of the notebooks, “Mrs. Wilmot of Farnborough Park Hants ob 25 Mar. 1793 at 69.” Hence, my assertion that she was around thirty years old in 1754.
work, one not addressed to anyone in particular, seeming to serve no domestic or communicative purpose akin to “From Mrs. Wilmot.” Instead, the poem deals with the classical fable in which Agamemnon decides to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, so as to hasten the Greek’s journey to Troy: “That she the fleet will not detain,/If Iphigenia dies;/If Agamemnon will agree,/His child to sacrifice.” The poem sets a clear conflict between paternal love, female sacrifice, and national survival. It is an open question whether Iphigenia embodies some similar conflict in Wilmot’s life; more importantly, the poet creates dramatic tension through Agamemnon’s decision to sacrifice his daughter against his own “Nature” and against Clytemnestra’s protestations. Diana, having secured submission from Agamemnon, spares Iphigenia’s life. The poet admonishes us: “Submission to the will of Heav’n,/In this example see;/Will meet with its reward on earth,/By fates all-just decree.”

These two poems press us to consider the development of a poetic subjectivity ordered around heteronormative values and domestic virtue, one obsessed by scenes of female sacrifice – indeed, the sacrifice of poetic identity altogether – in deference to a valued domestic life. Agreeing in general about the presence of such discursive formations, Wilmot opens an important way of viewing domestic poetry during the long transition from social authorship to publication; specifically, Wilmot uses poetry as much to ornament and enrich her experience of domesticity as she does deploy domesticity to secure a measure of respectability from her coterie. In this respect, it is questionable if the mapping of domesticity as a necessarily oppressive disciplinary regime is entirely reliable even if one admits Elizabeth Eger’s legitimate criticism that “eighteenth-century women
writers were highly aware of the need to promote the notion of domestic virtue (or virtue in distress) in order to achieve commercial success and public respect” (24). In Wilmot’s case, social authorship, and not publication, allows for a strong, feminine poetic identity in ways that lessen the imperative to constantly affirm one’s domestic fealty. While domesticity certainly operated as a disciplinary regime, in so doing it opened up new vistas of pleasure for those, like Wilmot, who could use conventional images of self-sacrifice and feminine duty as fuel for poetic creation. Without rejecting or dismissing domesticity – or the sort of limitations it imposed – Wilmot uses it to assert a poetic identity that transverses domestic subjectivity with a complex, at times decadent poetic ornamentation, one that engages in Della Cruscan effusiveness – which Jerome McGann describes as “self-conscious and erotic” (79) – without losing sight of the restrained ideal of Bluestocking sociability.

There is, in a middle-class country estate like Farnborough, legitimate space for decadence justified by classical paradigms of art and harmony, a decadence that must finally be understood as pleasurable if not as openly erotic. Harriet Guest writes, “It is these educated classes that I am concerned with, and I suggest that it is the very need to recognize and preserve the distinction between the literary and the political publics—in conjunction with the fiction that the same individuals play the same roles in both—that produces the possibility of Bluestocking feminism, with its ambivalently political edge” (63). While Wilmot is in some ways socially conservative—eschewing even the most restrained print publicity—social authorship allows her to disseminate an erotic poetics to a curtailed but distinguished literary public. Her poetics, in this context, constitutes a
burgeoning feminist sensibility animated not simply by an embrace of sexuality but also by a self-conscious move to create and control her literary identity. These dynamics can be explored in her poem, “Iphigenia,” which begins:

He sent to beauteous Iphigene,

That he would join her hand;

To young Achilles, & cement,

Their loves by Hymen’s band.

With joy the gentle maid receiv’d,

His father’s high command;

And instant haste to Asia’s coast

To yield her willing hand.

But Oh! what hapless fate attends?

Atrides’ harsh decree;

She sees a sacrifice prepar’d,

The guiltless victim she.

Just as the sacred priest upheld,

The knife aloft in air;

By certain & undoubted signs,

The holy priest declare.

Diana’s anger is appeas’d,

They instant make it known;
And straight the beauteous maid is freed

By this obedience shown.

Primed by my suggestion that domestic sacrifice can be a motif of pleasure, the series of reversals that lead from Iphigenia’s impending murder to her marriage are charged with erotic potential. Agamemnon, against his “paternal love,” sends for Iphigenia on the pretense that she is to be married to Achilles. Her anticipation of this marriage, we are left at liberty to assume, is filled with imagined desire for her love. Instead of yielding her willing hand, she finds a scene of sacrifice, of her imminent death. She is thrown into a gyre of violence enacted by her own father, one that will sever the consummation of her love for Achilles. But, just as the knife is raised aloft, “Diana’s anger is appeas’d” by virtue of “obedience.” This obedience further leads to “Achilles’ faithful hand” receiving “the all-transcendent fair,” Iphigenia. It is perhaps contrary to critical convention to highlight the potential pleasure always lurking within domesticity, the sexual pleasure always possible between husband and wife. Yet, Wilmot forces us to question whether – along with the pleasures of food, conversation, and intellect – she is here ornamenting the sexual pleasure enjoyed in her marriage. That the reward of obedience is the union of “their loves by Hymen’s band” indicates that, in the limited context of the poem, domestic virtue connects with sensual pleasure, for “Submission to the will of Heav’n./In this example see;/Will meet with its reward on earth,/By fates’ all-just decree.”

The text’s eroticism gains value as we consider Wilmot’s poetic identity in a social network of Bluestocking intellectuals. While rejecting publication, she does not
shrink from fame, instead using accepted practices of manuscript circulation to install herself as a legitimate artist. The text’s eroticism, drawing on Della Cruscan poetics, provides a means for adorning domestic space while securely accepting its limitations and upholding its patriotic value. It is in this sense that Wilmot is a Bluestocking feminist with an “ambivalently political edge.” Her feminism lay not in political agitation or the sort of republican radicalism commonly associated with Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine Macaulay; instead, it lay in her creation of a masterful poetic voice circulated through scribal conventions, a voice recognized by her family and friends as intellectually sophisticated and artistically provocative. Further, this poetic life explores the theme of pleasure in sexuality, bringing her in some ways closer to Wollstonecraft and Macaulay.

To bolster this argument, let us look closely at “From Mrs. Wilmot,” where Sarah writes about their reading, following a poetic catalog of pleasures, including a bath, breakfast, walk, and tea:

Something to make us fit for bed
Which being either _Sung_ or _Said_
Compose the Thoughts & lull the sprights
To downy sleep & peacefull Nights
Nor think I fail with gratefull heart 25
In words untutor’d void of art
To give my thanks on bended knée
To that all wise great Deity
That pow’r supreme that God that soul
Who governs this amazing whole
Yet condescends to watch and see
The footsteps of this Reptile me
But chief I bless his gracious hand
That plac’d me under thy command

It is neither the tea nor the coming of sleep that brings pleasure or becomes a spectacle of pleasure; instead, it is the intimate voyeurism Sarah composes for her husband. There is on display throughout the poem Sarah’s pleasure in language, her construction of rhyme and image, and her provision of these pleasures to Henry. There is an almost absurd decadence in adorning a walk through Farnborough – its mild hills and gentle brooks – with references to Pegasus, Sea Nymphs, and Scylla’s Rocks. Yet, the seductiveness of doing so for Henry, transmuting what would otherwise be a dull report of the day’s affairs into a spectacle of classical learning and poetic invention seems itself a form of abandon, not to mention a conspicuous instance of her abundant leisure time, provided by Henry’s professional success. The care and thoughtfulness evidenced in spending such time composing a poem for her husband joins with the relative audacity and control of having it run nearly 200 lines. Further, the reference to God’s “gracious hand” having placed Sarah under Henry’s “command” bears a striking resemblance to the imagery of “Iphigenia,” where obedience to paternal authority results in the pleasures of the marital bed.

The point here is not to compose a biography of Wilmot’s marriage, nor to draw
hasty conclusions about it from a small sampling of poems; instead, it is to gain some warrant for the argument that domesticity, in Wilmot’s poetry, means a kind of pleasure open to poetic elaboration. If such warrant can be gained, then we must further press that liberal subjectivity, formed by literacy and elaborated through circulation, while inflected for women through domestic constraints, was also animated by an erotics at whose heart lay domestic pleasure. Domesticity for the leisured middle-class was, to a great extent, a parade of such gentle pleasures.

So it is that Wilmot’s Della Cruscan style bears further analysis. In “Day, An Ode 1773,” the poet describes the rising of the sun, its concourse, and its succumbing to the shadowy reign of night in classical terms adapted for domestic ornamentation:

Array'd in saffron-color'd vesture light,
The dewy-finger'd fair Aurora bright
The rosy portals of the East unlocks;
And Phoebus rising from his cristal bed,
Raises his wat'ry, ever-radiant head,
And shakes his golden, dew-besprinkled locks.
The feather'd throng in harmony divine,
Their sweet, melodious laws in concert join,
And with their song reviving Nature cheer;
Each flow'r & plant, their tender leaves disclose,
The purple violet & blushing rose,
In fresh, luxuriant bloom now gay appear.
Each gentle zephyr, on his airy wings,
To cheerful Nature, the glad tidings brings,
That Phoebus 'gins, his destin'd course to run;
The stately trees, their verdant foliage show,
And ev'ry tender bud begins to blow,
Each insect moves, cheer'd by the splendid sun.

Jerome McGann, in *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*, observes that, attached to sensational instead of faculty psychologies, Della Cruscan poetry enacts the maxim: “everything is as it is perceived” (78). Wilmot’s ode does not hide deep within itself a sublime, mystic revelation about the nature of God or man. Instead, the poem plays with surfaces, calling the reader to in a single sensation consider “each insect,” “each flow’r & plant,” and “the feather’d throng” as they awake to the morning sun. The classical tropes used – Phoebus, Zephyr, Aurora – are meant as personifications that can bear an abundance of sensual detail. Wilmot’s poem bears a strong resemblance to both Robert Merry’s poem, “Ode to Summer” (1785), which postdates Wilmot’s “Ode” by about fourteen years, and William Collins’ “Ode to Evening” (1746), of which Merry’s poem is an imitation. Collins’ poem reads:

O Nymph reserv’d, while now the bright-hair’d Sun
Sits in yon western Tent, whose cloudy Skirts,
With Brede ethereal wove,
O’erhang his wavy Bed:
Now Air hush’d, save where the weak-ey’d Bat,
With short shrill Shriek flits by on leathern Wing,
Or where the Beetle winds
His small but sullen Horn…(5-12)

Collins’ poem closely resembles Wilmot’s, replete with cascading allusions to antiquity, the close description of animals and their qualities upon the setting of the sun, and the effusive use of modifiers. Robert Merry’s ode demonstrates the same qualities:

Joy to thee, bright hair’d Summer! Much I love
To gaze upon thy full-blown beauty’s pride,
As thro’ Val d’ Arno’s gloom,
I take my lonely way.

What time dun-vested Night her deep repose
Reluctant leaves, chased by the jocund dawn,
And incoherent song
Of Wild Pan’s restless reed.

Now the fierce Sun uprears his flaming shield,
And mounts in martial pomp his eastern car;
Forests, and tow’ring hills,
Start from the golden blaze. (1-12)

Merry’s aesthetic, even more than Collins’, bears comparison to Wilmot’s. They share a description of the sun beginning its journey, mounting detail after detail of the
many insects, leaves, and creatures that rise to greet the allegorical sun. The effusion of
detail creates also the sense of “delirium” marked by Jon Mee and Jerome McGann as
essential to Della Cruscan poetics.

Returning to Wilmot’s poetry, as day gives way to night, the dominant mood
shifts, but the emphasis on the play of surfaces does not:

Pale Cinthia now her feeble rays does glance,
And fairies light, in airy wing 'gin dance,
And on the murm'ring fountain's side they play;
Thus all night long their revels they repeat,
And o'er the plain they trip with nimble feet
But fly at the approach of dawning day.

In shadows dark envelop'd are the skies,
Now wearied Nature in sweet slumber lies,
And o'er the earth dark night her sable veil has spread;
From whose grim presence, cheerful day takes flight,
No trace remains, no glimmering of light,
But all retire unto their peaceful bed.

The universe immense in silence rest,
In gloomy horrors sable night is drest,
And makes the wide world subject to her sway;
No gleam of light, her gloomy shadows break,
Save now and then the feeble, trembling streak;
That Cinthia sends, with pale, unsteady ray.

Here, the night is described through the same abundance of sensual detail used previously though the mood is now “gloomy” and “grim.” McGann has suggested that for the Della Cruscans, “the primary forms of nature are inward, imaginative: human” (79). His insight proves fruitful in Wilmot’s case, her ode concerned primarily with exploring human moods through an elaboration of imagery attached to night and day. Instead of a concern with the day’s rhythms implying a meditation of life and death, Wilmot’s poetry seems more concerned with the rhythms of human mood, from jubilant to somber, as they track the sun and moon’s mirrored concourse. It is in this sense that nature participates in an aesthetic of regulated sympathy: it provides ready imagery for surface play intended not to pursue the sublime but to provide inside into the relationship between ornament, mood, and change.

As McGann demonstrates, the Della Cruscans were problematically imbricated in eighteenth-century sensibility, which organized virtue in terms of regulated sympathy attached both to aesthetic form and a sexual order central to Bluestocking sociability. Wilmot, drawing on the Della Cruscan style to form her own poetics, can be said to perform a style of Bluestocking feminism that privileged artistic creation even as it bore an anxious relationship to politics and publicity. Wilmot’s style fits her motives: to circulate a poetic identity founded on the ornamentation of domestic life in order both to secure social respectability and intellectual recognition. The play of surfaces so
prominent in her poetry belongs to a culture of sensibility deeply loyal to classical
notions of virtue and beauty even as it allows space for women like Wilmot to fashion
socially-legitimated intellectual identities.

Yet, if her poetic identity seems formed around the pleasurable tension between
the desire for fame and its curtailment within a stable domestic life, its double is the
melancholy of lacking intellectual prestige in the eyes of those women Sarah most
admired. In “The Mistake Rectified, April 1770,” Wilmot describes – through an
extended analogy to Apollo and the Muses on Mt. Parnassus – a scene in which many
members of the Bluestocking Circle attempt to guess who of those present wrote a
praiseworthy poem just introduced to them. Those present take turns guessing, and
proceed to name over a dozen different members of the circle, none of them Wilmot. The
poem ends on the one hand with Wilmot’s exposure to her circle and on the other with
Montagu’s admonition to avoid publication. The thrust of the poem is the tension
between Wilmot’s desire to be known as a poet and her refusal to risk domestic stability
to do so. The compromise lay in social authorship: to be known to her circle as a poet but
to refrain from circulating her poetry in print.

“The Mistake Rectified” is staged as the nine muses trying to guess the identity of
a young “female” drinking from the spring of inspiration:

1

Apollo saunt’ring with the Nine

About his fam’d Parnassian mount
Observed a Female near his shrine

Who freely quaffed the sacred fount

2

Fair Clio said ‘tis Spencer’s air

I know her mild majestic style

Thalia cryed I must declare

‘Tis Egremont’s attractive smile

Here, Wilmot constructs a peculiar allegory between being identified as one who

drinks from the fountain and being identified by Bluestockings as a poet. At the same
time, the poem plays with the gap between the two, the possibility of mistaken identity,

the chasm between the social circulation of the poem and the social circulation of Wilmot

as a poet. It further exposed the tension between manuscript circulation and publication.
The young female who drinks from the fount is visible to all, her actions legible, leading

it seems to some expression of an essential character whose identity can be voiced. The

muses act in the poem as critics, and it’s important that what is at stake is not the quality

of the act – drinking from the fount, creating the poem – but the identity to be attached to

the act. From the first, the young female is beautiful in the deepest sense, her movements

graceful, her style majestic, her smile attractive. Yet, is this grace Egremont’s, is this

style Spencer’s, is this sure heart Denbigh’s?

The names mentioned by the Muses are, with the exception of Elizabeth Carter,

not Bluestockings proper, meaning those women like More and Montagu, whose artistic

skill had already been vindicated. Instead, they are names much like Wilmot’s –
tangential, peripheral, novitiate. They are the names of domestic women, wives of successful or titled men, who nonetheless identify as female intellectuals and engage—like the master chess player, Mrs. Howe—in those mental pursuits often considered the exclusive arena of men. With each missed guess, Wilmot manages to accrue compliments in a chimerical way: the “well-bred ease” of Howe, the grace of Egremont, the wit of Walshingham all belong to this “young female” in the poetic act. Wilmot creates herself as the perfect Bluestocking: well-bred, witty, attractive, tasteful, maternal, soft, passionate, learned, and serene—her moral virtues enlightened by intellectual virtues, the ideal of learned sensibility.

12
Then Shakespear who unseen had been
Reposing on a bed of Roses
Listening to all this comic scene
The mystery at last discloses

13
Aonian maids ‘tis very strange
That ye whose downy feathered feet
Trip dayly o’er this velvet range
And know each Votary’s retreat.

14
And you bright Phoebus stranger still
Whom all the Deities declare
The master of this forked Hill

Should so mistake his* learned Fair.

The “Shakespear” who discloses the mystery of the poet’s identity is possibly David Garrick, a close friend of the Wilmots who used to frequent Farnborough, sometimes bringing with him distinguished guests, such as Hannah More.9 Garrick was the predominant actor and theatrical figure of his day, well-known for popularizing and memorializing Shakespeare as a national hero. “Phoebus” is likely Henry Wilmot, “the master of this forked Hill,” whose “learned fair” is indeed the young female drinking from the fount. Yet, it is unclear whether Shakespear rightly disclosed the poet’s identity. That Aonian maids and “you bright Phoebus stranger” should “so mistake” Wilmot could refer to their mistaking her intentions in composing the mysterious poem, or to their mistaking her identity. The following stanzas imply a resolution:

15

Who erst in beautys bud was led

Full oft to sip your hallow’d spring

The Syren voice of flatt’ry fled

Herself your praises her to sing

16

Nor has her ripen’d mind e’er burn’d

For titles wealth ambition vain

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9 Taylor 19: “On one occasion they made a hasty excursion into Hampshire, to Farnborough Place, the seat of Mr. Wilmot, where they met a large and splendid party. The intimacy thus commenced between the Wilmot family and Miss More was a source of comfort to both parties, and continued unimpaired through life.”
But from them all has frequent turn’d
To join your scientific train.

17

Let me however gratefull prove
And pay my Tribute just her claim
To Montagu whose gen’rous love
Has from the critic saved my Fame.

In a single resolution, Wilmot secures poetic recognition and signals an evasion of publicity while in each instance relying on the publicity and prestige of the Bluestockings. The gap between manuscript circulation and publication is the gap between Garrick announcing her poetic identity to the coterie and Montagu discouraging her from publication. Importantly, a desire for fame never disappears; it is instead resituated in still persistent practices of social authorship centered on polite circulation of manuscripts. Montagu thus “saved [her] fame” in two senses: keeping it from publicity allows it to circulate more freely in her coterie. Her admiration for the Bluestockings, her desire for their recognition, rests alongside her preference for manuscript culture and the social forms attached to it. In an age of growing publication, Wilmot chooses to situate her ornamental poetry in spaces of friendship and domesticity, signaling on the one hand the profound potential of print for widening women’s artistic role while signaling on the other hand a deep affinity for the domestic tranquility provided by older forms.

Bluestocking Rhetoric, Bluestocking Sociability, and Wilmot’s Critique
Elizabeth Eger has noted that the Bluestockings, aside from any individual artistic achievements, succeeded in innovating a new kind of conversation and a form of sociability to surround it. Building on this idea, I’d like to add the insight that they also opened up a form of social authorship previously foreclosed: they gave a context for women in which the techniques of poetry and history could be used for the purpose of negotiating a life of both virtue and pleasure that would meet with social sanction precisely because of the public reputation of women like Hannah More and Elizabeth Montagu. The intimacy created by Bluestocking sociability is distinct in the history of women’s reading because it drew its energy from the intellectual flux of English politics prior to the French Revolution, a historical position that allowed a brief but fecund period of innovation. Further, it is this intimacy that allows Wilmot to engender her poetic project.

While I seek to uphold the social importance of Bluestocking rhetoric and the political importance of Bluestocking sociability, I would like to do so in recognition of Wilmot’s critique of each. Without rejecting the basic values of Bluestocking sociability, Wilmot adapts them to her practices of social authorship in a way that undermines the implied social value of Bluestocking conversation. Instead of More’s cultural force, Montagu’s public esteem, or Macaulay’s political image, Wilmot participates in social authorship in order to perpetuate Whiggish ideals of sensibility. By eschewing publicity, Wilmot makes a social claim: authorship’s primary function is to decorate domestic life. Yet, at the same time, Wilmot decorates domesticity in a Della Cruscan fashion that seems at odds both with her Whiggishness and with Bluestocking rhetoric. Wilmot’s
critique is therefore double-edged: by eschewing publicity, she removes herself from the
gendered politics of publication into the gendered sociability of scribal exchange,
allowing a more decadent poetics than she would have permitted herself in print. The
conceits of social authorship allow her a poetic identity not available to published
Bluestockings. Exploring these claims requires a closer look at Bluestocking
conversation.

More’s *Bas Bleu* presents a theory of conversation based on growth, commerce,
and literacy in its fullest sense. Conversation, as a method, circulates thought, increases
knowledge, and disciplines taste. In its contours, Bluestocking conversation resembles
three models borrowed from antiquity: one Socratic, one Platonic, one Epicurean. More
argues that conversation is “wisdom’s friend,” its ultimate end being “moral truth.” Her
assertion of conversation’s ability to nurture moral growth resonates with the *elenchus*,
Socrates’ method of questioning in order to stimulate the soul to birth knowledge from
ignorance. It implies that conversation is not, in its elevated form, a pleasant distraction
from life’s problems; instead, conversation is a method for avoiding error and nurturing
the mind to knowledge of virtue. More means this in a practical sense as what “tends…to
use.” Conversation is a technique for delineating useful from useless moral and practical
knowledge when confronted by the contingency of experience. She does not delineate a
set of precepts or proverbs: doing so would assume a static notion of truth and life. She
delineates, instead, the practical utility of the kind of conversation invented by Vesey and
Montagu. She provides a conversational rhetoric by which – whatever the contingencies
of individual life – one may come to greater wisdom and virtue.
It’s essential to resist the idea that speech is privileged over writing in the Bluestocking’s conversational rhetoric. Instead, conversation is both a model for discourse and a supplement to literate culture, a scene of action where textual knowledge – whether print or scribal – can be demonstrated, challenged, perfected, and vivified. Conversation without literacy would be as morose as literacy without conversation would be hollow. Yet, Bluestocking rhetoric is also distinctly Epicurean, tempering its Socratic emphasis on moral truth, emphasizing its casual ease and reliance on friendship, and serving as a balm, a cure for mental anguish. More describes previous methods of conversation thus:

Where the dire Circle keeps its station,

Each common phrase is an oration;

And cracking fans, and whisp'ring Misses,

Compose their Conversation blisses. (102-5)

The implication here is that conventional, highly structured and formal conversational circles inhibit the free flow of ideas, stifling the true powers of conversation in the Socratic sense. Instead, conversation becomes a form of “oration,” presumably a series of epideictic ones seeking to praise or blame according to prevalent taste. In the Circle, conversation is wrongly transformed into a performance, a form of flattery, echoing the Platonic critique of rhetoric in *Phaedrus* as mere cookery. In its place:

See VESEY’s* plastic genius make

A Circle every figure take;
Nay, shapes and forms, which would defy
All science of Geometry;
Isoceles, and Parallel,
Names, hard to speak, and hard to spell!
Th' enchantress wav'd her wand, and spoke!
Her potent wand the Circle broke:
The social Spirits hover round,
And bless the liberated ground.
Ask you what charms this gift dispense?
'Tis the strong spell of COMMON SENSE. (176-187)

The moral stakes are clear: Vesey’s innovation of loosely-arranged small groups engaging in informal conversation liberates discourse from divisive social strictures, allowing “commerce” to begin with the “merchandize” of “mind.” That More perceives the shift as one from decorous formality to “common sense” says more about the nature of Bluestocking rhetoric than it does forestall the assertion that Vesey’s parameters for conversation are as much a technique of social discipline as the ones she displaced. What changes are the values to be privileged and the kind of socializing to be engaged in. Instead of a Circle that reinforces social hierarchy and disciplines aristocratic taste, Vesey’s blended circles encourage friendship in the Epicurean sense: a flowing of fellow-feeling that provides a respite from politics and social warfare while stimulating personal growth. It is, as Jon Mee implies, “a vision of polite sociability indebted partly to Shaftesbury’s Whiggish ideal. Mee writes that “the dialogue that takes place within the
self was...Shaftesbury’s model for culture. In place of the authoritarianism of the court or the church, Shaftesbury imagined a society in which truth would be discovered by the exchange of views in conversation” (Mee, “Reciprocal” 106). Vesey’s circles provide just such nuanced toleration: a space devoid of social danger but rife with intellectual tumult. The Socratic  

*elenchus* is tempered by the retreat of Epicurean friendship, which provides a technique for achieving ataraxia, or the absence of mental anxiety:

Taste thou the gentler joys they give,

> With HORACE, and with LELIUS live.*

> Hail, CONVERSATION, soothing Power,

> Sweet Goddess of the social hour!

> Not with more heart-felt warmth, at least,

> Does LELIUS bend, thy true High Priest; (255-9)

> While indebted to classical rhetoric and ethics found in Socrates, Plato, and Epicurus, the Bluestocking theory of conversation is one deeply enmeshed in an exploding print culture and an expanding world economy.

> But 'tis thy commerce, Conversation,

> Must give it use by circulation;

> That noblest commerce of mankind,

> Whose precious merchandize is MIND! (296-99)

> Conversation, it seems, plays a role in naturalizing class divisions by leveraging cultural capital in a transhistorical theory of mind. The troping of Conversation in terms of commodity circulation is neither accidental nor benign. Reification – the permeation of
the commodity form throughout capitalist society – for the wealthy gentry and emerging bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century was a process already underway. Vesey’s innovation is to restructure conversation according to liberal principles, opening up the formulation of the mind as merchandise, as a commodity to be circulated outside the constraints of a vestigial aristocratic order. Importantly, under the influence of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers, commerce would be viewed by More and Vesey as a natural result of human sociality, a process that inevitably increases affluence and solidifies social bonds. Yet, it also seems fair to interrogate an easy acceptance of More’s equitable presentation of Bluestocking sociability. Inclusion in their “scientific train” seems highly selective, based on conditions of polite learning and intellectual heft largely tied to class. It is open knowledge that Elizabeth Carter maintained her home and single life largely through the generous patronage of Elizabeth Montagu while Hannah More was one of five daughters educated by her father, a schoolmaster of adequate means. Sarah Wilmot was the daughter of a landed colonel and husband to Sir Henry Wilmot, educated at Cambridge and member of Gray’s Inn.

For Shaftesbury, their conversationalist compatriot, there is a more explicit class element tied to conversation. Mee writes, “Sensitive management of the self was [Shaftesbury’s] model for polite sociability, but only certain kinds of people, he assumed, were able to carry out this process themselves. The enthusiasm of the crowd ought not to be persecuted perhaps, but it could not be relied upon to manage itself” (107). Shaftesbury, remarking on the kindness of Englishmen, writes in Characteristicks, “But how barbarous still, and more than heathenishly cruel, are we tolerating English men!
For, not contented to deny these prophesying Enthusiasts the honour of a persecution, we have deliver’d ‘em over to the cruellest contempt in the world” (19). The “cruellest contempt” mentioned, sarcastically, is that enthusiasts get made fun of in puppet shows at “Bart’lemyfair.” Shaftesbury’s toleration is founded more on his perception that the mob is hapless and easily controlled by those of higher rank and education than by any presumption of their ability to reason clearly or manage themselves well. More importantly, polite conversation allowed the landed classes to pursue truth outside the hierarchical constraints of court or church. Bluestocking rhetoric therefore circulates tropes of commerce bound by underlying assumptions about class character. Friendship itself, in this scheme, functions freely and equitably outside hierarchical constraints only because of firm regulations concerning decorum, self-management, and taste built upon the exclusion of the rabble.

Nonetheless, the Bluestocking’s conversational model invites play and promotes the learning process as the stated goal of polite society. Bluestocking readers were invited as equals into a model of sociability built on the recognition of conversation as a vehicle for cultivating virtue and aiding learning. Similarly, the relationship between reader and author performed in Bluestocking writing is neither hierarchical nor aristocratic; it is a fundamentally civil and pedagogical relationship. The reader is being invited into conversation by authors like More and Montagu, pressed into a conception of the text based on conversational rhetoric. Even as texts like Montagu’s An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shaekspear, More’s Slavery, or Carter’s All The Works of Epictetus are meant as definitive accounts, each is crafted as an element in ongoing conversation, a set
of beliefs to be offered up to the technique of conversation – however constrained by class this conversation may be.

This points toward prominent features of Bluestocking sociability, described by Martha Nussbaum as “a new mode of elite rational sociability” (85). This mode, unlike Shaftesbury’s, is not concerned exclusively with conversation between male landowners, but marshals polite sociability in the effort to create conversational spaces for women that could serve as a technique for managing the self and improving knowledge. As Nussbaum indicates, it is a model that leverages class divisions in order to subvert gender divisions. This also helps us understand More’s educational program: while concerned with literacy and the power of conversation, it nonetheless rests on the assumption that the crowd, replete with its often dangerous enthusiasm and lack of discipline, cannot manage itself.

While practicing and assenting to many of the features of Bluestocking sociability here described, Wilmot’s Della Cruscanism nonetheless troubles the issue of publication. As Mee writes, “compared to Shaftesbury and many of his followers, Wordsworth included, Della Crusca paid scandalously little regard to the question of regulation, defining his muse in terms of an ‘enthusiasm’ seemingly oblivious to the boundaries of politeness, and ultimately inviting the participation of the crowd into the public sphere” (107). As a Whig and wife to the Keeper of the Seal, Wilmot was likely not interested in “inviting the participation of the crowd into the public sphere,” nor did she seem particularly prone – as evidenced in what correspondence we do have – to pressing “the boundaries of politeness.” Yet, as evidenced by her poetical manuscripts, she does seem
to define her muse “in terms of an enthusiasm,” specifically in the Della Cruscan play of
surfaces. Here rests the ambivalence at the heart of Bluestocking feminism, animated by
Wilmot’s ironic decision not to publish. Since her Della Cruscan enthusiasm is restricted
by scribal circulation, her poetics can evolve within polite Bluestocking sociability.
Publishing represents an untenable social contradiction for Wilmot: give up her preferred
poetic identity in print, or risk scandalous charges by her Whig friends. To uphold
Bluestocking sociability and Della Cruscan enthusiasm, she mustn’t publish except
through accepted modes of social authorship. If she does, she will end up like Robert
Merry during the turmoil of the French Revolution, who by 1795 “was cut off from the
resources of polite sociability on which he had previously thrived” (114). His poetics,
much like Mary Robinson’s, had marked him political as a subversive and radical, some
going so far as to label him as “treasonous” (114).

Wilmot is not alone in her uneasiness: Montagu routinely laments her own
publicity in her correspondence, and Elizabeth Carter has crises of faith when she reflects
on the possible anti-social effects of her translations of Epictetus. Yet, the comparative
restraint of their writings – particularly the lengthy introduction and footnotes Carter uses
to justify much of the heathenism in her translations – seems necessary for public
reception of printed texts. Whereas Wilmot maintained a certain level of erotic freedom
in her manuscripts, published Bluestockings had to contend with an entirely different
level of public scrutiny. Still, as Elizabeth Eger reminds us, this scrutiny – as well as the
economic and rhetorical strategies deployed to shape it – should not lead one to consider
Carter or Montagu as less potent examples of Bluestocking feminism. As she writes,
“The majority of eighteenth-century women writers managed their own careers, conscious of their ability to manipulate public opinion” (25). Montagu and Carter are no exception. Further, as I previously alluded to, Wilmot’s poetic identity amongst her coterie is only made possible by the success women like Montagu had in navigating public scrutiny. It is in this sense that Wilmot’s critique of Bluestocking sociability is ironic. She seems unable to construct her mode of sociability without those very phenomena she implicitly criticizes. It might thus be said that Wilmot represents but one strain of Bluestocking sociability, a strain that views with uneasiness the social effects of publication on friendship and female intellectual development.

A Sociable Family

Elizabeth Eger has detailed the generational influence of the Bluestockings in the Romantic period, writing that “a significant female tradition of rational argument emerged from the bluestocking circle – a tradition that became increasingly concerned with questions of liberty and education” (165). Similarly, Wilmot’s inflection of Bluestocking sociability exerts enormous influence over her children’s lives. Before exploring this influence, it will be necessary to briefly detail her children’s lives and accomplishments.

Valentine Henry Wilmot, named after Sarah’s brother, marries Barbarina Ogle, who, after their separation, marries Lord Dacre, becoming Barbarina Brand, the Lady Dacre. Lady Dacre, of course, published two volumes of Dramas, Translations, and Occasional Poems as well as some sonnets appearing in Ugo Foscolo’s Essays on Petrarch. Ina, a Tragedy in Five Acts was produced at Drury Lane in 1815 by Richard
Brinsley Butler Sheridan. Before their separation, Valentine and Barbarina had a daughter, Arabella Sullivan, several of whose works Lady Dacre edited and helped publish. These included *Recollections of a Chaperon* (1831) and *Tales of the Peerage and Peasantry* (1835). Arabella’s daughter, Lady Barbarina Charlotte Grey, and Lady Grey’s niece, Gertrude Lyster, would publish *A Family Chronicle*, primarily an account of Arabella Sullivan and Lady Dacre’s lives. It is worth mentioning that Lady Barbarina Charlotte Grey née Sullivan, great-granddaughter of Sarah Wilmot, also published *A Man Without a Name V2: A Tale* (1852) and *Better Never Than Late, and Other Stories: For Our Girls and Their Parents* (1883), a collection of children’s stories generally concerned with women’s equality in polite culture that bears a striking resemblance to the politics of her great-grandmother.

Elizabeth Sarah Seton née Wilmot, Sarah and Henry’s daughter, aside from being the editor of her mother’s poetical manuscripts, marries James Alexander Seton. They have one daughter, Sarah Caroline Christopher née Seton. Sarah Caroline has five children, including a son, Lieutenant Wilmot Christopher of the British East India Company, who dies in The Siege of Multan. A letter from Wilmot Christopher’s commanding officer appears in the family materials at Chawton House Library where Sarah Wilmot’s verse manuscripts also appear. Also in these materials are several cross-written letters by Elizabeth describing her many travels, including trips to Tunbridge Wells, Bath, France, and Italy. It is also implied, in “From Mrs. Wilmot to her Daughter Elizabeth Sarah Wilmot in answer to some verses,” that Elizabeth engaged in practices of
social authorship. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any other trace of her literary practices.

_A Family Chronicle_ further elucidates the social practices of Sarah and Henry. A letter included from George Penn, son of William Penn, to Frederick Sullivan reads:

Old Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot, Mrs. Sullivan’s grandfather and grandmother, were most intimate friends of my father and mother, and of different branches of our family and particularly of Lady Charlotte Finch, governess of the children of George III...Old Mr. Wilmot was my father’s solicitor, and solicitor also for the affairs of Pennsylvania under my father’s government, so long as that province remaind in the possession of the British Crown.

…Old Mr. Wilmot made himself a great favourite with all the young generation. He was remarkably cheerful and fond of us all. He lived much, not only with the high in rank, but with the wits of his day. He was an enthusiastic of Shaekspear, and loved to read his plays aloud to a circle of friends. Being corpulent…he took particular pleasure in presenting the character of Falstaff. (Lyster 5-7)

Also included in _A Family Chronicle_ is a 1777 letter from Hannah More to her sister that supports this description of Henry and life at Farnborough:

We reached this place yesterday morning. You will judge of the size of the house when I tell you there are eleven visitors, and all perfectly well accommodated. The Wilmots live in the greatest magnificence; but what is a much better thing, they live also rationally and sensibly. On Sunday evening, however, I was a little
alarmed; they were preparing for music (sacred music was the *ostensible* thing), but before I had time to feel uneasy, Garrick turned round and said: “You are a Sunday woman, I will recall you when the music is over.”…The Great Seal [Henry] disappointed us, but we have Lady Bathurst, Lady Catherine Apsley, Dr. Kennicott, the Hebrew Professor at Oxford, his wife, a very agreeable woman, (though she copies Hebrew!) besides the Garricks and two or three other very clever people. We live with the utmost freedom and ease imaginable, walking together, or in small parties, chatting. (3-4)

William Roberts writes in Hannah More’s memoirs that “At this visit to Mr. Wilmot, a friendship commenced between Hannah More and every individual of the party, which lasted during their respective lives” (113-114). In a 1781 letter, More upholds this assertion: “We dined at Mrs. Wilmot’s the other day, and the Provost of Eton entertained me much with his wit and humour” (213). There is also an April 1787 letter, which reads: “We have been a whole week at Hampton, which I spent in strolling and reading. I enjoyed it prodigiously, and returned quite well; poor Mrs. Wilmot was with us, and made it very pleasant. She is so famous a reader of Shakspeare and Spencer, that we were quite poetical and pastoral” (57). As I hope is clear, the Wilmots were immersed in the Bluestocking circle, and the literary identity Sarah developed was important to her reception by members of the circle.

It is worth noting at this point, in relation to the social circle of Sarah Wilmot, that she was close friends with Elizabeth Howe, and is reported to have played chess with her quite frequently. Wilmot is mentioned in *Chess* (1787) by Richard Twiss, in reference to
a large chess gathering that included men and women. In *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* (1848), Jared Sparks recounts an infamous event where Elizabeth Howe, notorious for her skill at chess, challenged Benjamin Franklin to a match as a ruse for diplomatic talks between Franklin and Lord Howe. Further, Sarah writes a poem entitled, “To Mrs. Howe on her challenging Mr. Morris to a game of chess,” where she recounts in exquisite poetic detail Mrs. Howe beating Sarah’s brother, Henry Valentine Morris, one-time Governor of St. Vincent, in a game of chess. In this instance, the incursion of women like Howe and Wilmot into the realm of chess enters also into Wilmot’s general project of social authorship, helping cultivate an image of intellectual consequence.

As I hope is clear from my report of *A Family Chronicle*, available correspondence, and the poetical manuscripts indicate that Sarah Wilmot engaged vigorously in Bluestocking sociability and sought to install herself as a poet and intellectual in her circle. Between Farnborough and Bloomsbury-Square, she had access to a social network that included many of the most prominent figures of her day, including David Garrick, Hannah More, Elizabeth Montagu, and Joshua Reynolds – not to mention dozens of titled aristocrats. Letters record not only Henry and Sarah’s talent for cutting Shakespearean figures, but also Sarah’s gift for stimulating poetic discussion, and their participation in festive dancing. Brian Robins writes in *Catch and Glee Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*:

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10 Mrs. Howe is an interesting figure in Wilmot’s life and poetry due partly to her illustrious brothers-in-law: Earl Richard Howe, Admiral of the Fleet during the American War of Independence, and William Howe, commander-in-chief during the same. The breadth of these relationships points toward the transatlantic connections likely enjoyed by Sarah. Minor evidence for this exists in some of her husband’s correspondence insofar as his duties as Keeper of the Seal included administering various legal disputes with the colonies.
[Lord Sandwich] was among the guests at another social evening recorded by James Harris in his journal in April 1775 at the Bloomsbury Square home of Harris’s friend Mrs. Wilmot. Apparently devoted wholly to the singing of catches and glees the ‘large appearance of the best company’ included, in addition to Sandwich, Lord Apsley (the Lord Chancellor) and Lady Apsley, Lord and Lady Delawar, Lady Canteloupe, Lord and Lady Denbigh, and Baron Smythe. (103–4)

Robins makes a point of noting the relative rarity, prior to the 1780’s, of having a woman host a party devoted to singing catches, indicating not only Wilmot’s active involvement in carving out practices for women in polite society, but also indicating the relative privilege she enjoyed as the wife of the Keeper of the Seal. Yet, because of her social status, Wilmot perceived publication as an unnecessary threat to her Della Cruscan poetic identity. Scribal circulation allowed her to enact this poetic identity in a vibrant social network. Further, the value of her poetic identity helped to shape other aspects of her life. As Stuart Curran writes, “poetry also had the capacity to transcend the limitations of the domestic enclosure, allowing its practitioner a sense of her self-worth as an individual creator as well as a shared ethos with others pursuing similar paths both in and beyond the domestic circle” (575).

It is in this context that we must understand her daughter Elizabeth and son Valentine’s upbringing. The poetic identity Wilmot was able to fashion through scribal circulation, coupled with the active circles she associated with, helped her identify as, and helped others identify her as, a female intellectual and artist. Her children, exposed to the same circle of illustrious wits and creators (Garrick even penning a poem for Valentine
when he was a boy), cultivated their identities under a different set of gender assumptions than would have been possible even several decades previously – or that were possible for less privileged groups in British society. Valentine’s marriage to the literary talent later to be known as Lady Dacre, and the eventual literary accomplishments of his daughter Arabella, indicate that Bluestocking sociability had at least some influence on the formation of his attitude concerning women’s proper role in social life. Elizabeth, as her mother’s editor and literary biographer, seems also to have been influenced by her mother’s poetic identity. Sarah writes the following to Elizabeth:

‘From Mrs. Wilmot to her Daughter Elizabeth Sarah Wilmot in answer to some verses’

The Dearest child my much loved Treasure
Your lines I read with rap’trous pleasure
To see the sacred sisters thus inspire
Your early mind with their poetic fire
Oh may you catch their bright their heav’nly flame
And caroll sweet fair Virtues hallo’d name
Then shall you feel taste that she alone
Gives joy & grace for truth & beauty still are one.

Unfortunately, the poem that Elizabeth wrote her mother, and that Sarah is here responding to in verse, is not in the materials I found at Chawton. Still, the example of social authorship shaping the relationship between mother and daughter holds particular importance for Bluestocking rhetoric. Conversation, attached to practices of social
authorship, creates the very discursive context by which Bluestocking feminism exerted its most profound influence. As Stuart Curran writes in reference to Mary Whately Darwell: “The very naturalness by which the family circle, across three generations, is recomposed by poetry is the underlying, and clearly symbolic, point. The generation of daughters is synonymous with the generation of the verse by which they create and mirror a family likeness, an articulated communion, a community of affection” (580).

This is not only suggested by *A Family Chronicle* published two generations later; it is also suggested in the language Sarah uses. As Curran has pointed, Sarah and Elizabeth would have viewed the sacred sisters differently than their male counterparts would have. For Sarah, they represent not only artistic empowerment, but also a promise of life’s greatest happiness: the joy and grace derived from true beauty. Sarah’s wish that her daughter “catch their bright their heav’nly flame” is meant in two senses: that she become inspired by them and that she pursue them as an ideal. Literary commodification is not at play here; instead, Sarah is communicating to her daughter an image of the good life, one in which poetry acts as a vehicle for virtue and as a technique for self-improvement. Interestingly, Sarah and Elizabeth are engaging not only as mother and daughter, but more importantly, as poets engaged in social authorship. They are exchanging poetry through the scribal conventions that will facilitate Elizabeth’s poetic identity and that have so facilitated Sarah’s. They are engaging in the “generation of verse by which they create and mirror a family likeness” as well as “an articulated communion.” In the same sense that Sarah’s friendships with the Bluestockings did not precede but were generated through scribal circulation, so too Sarah and Elizabeth’s
familial relation does not here precede but is generated through the exchange of verse. The exuberance of Sarah’s poem attests to the value she places on this literary exchange and the clear social function she believes it serves. The poetry of sensibility, through social authorship as much as through print, provides a method by which the literate enact virtue through disciplined writing and reading.

Conclusion

Though steeped in the material forms of social authorship and inflected through the powerful mechanisms of Bluestocking sociability, Wilmot’s poetry inaugurates a thematic tension central to my dissertation: the generative anxiety produced by literacy, an anxiety that at once founds liberal subjectivity and spurns elaborate social mechanisms for its regulation. We see such anxiety in Wilmot’s Della Cruscan poetics but demurral from publication, and we see such social regulation in the elaborate rituals of Bluestocking sociability that allow her to reconcile her poetic identity with her social position. Because of these tensions – not in spite of them – Wilmot was able to perform complex social identities across multiple registers, a heritage she was able to bequeath to her daughter and granddaughters.

The erotic tension evinced in Wilmot’s poetry, and her evident awareness of its conflict with prevailing notions of polite society and Bluestocking sociability, forms a heuristic for understanding the role of literacy in liberal subjectivity. Having traced Wilmot’s fraught negotiation of conflicting social forms, one can begin to glean the role played by aesthetic innovation in the formation of sentimental subjectivity. Though the following chapters deal primarily with the intricacies of print culture – only occasionally
returning again to issues of scribal or coterie exchange – the social negotiation required of female authors is of a similar quality. Desiring on the one hand a lively and meaningful social network and on the other hand a successful publication career, many woman writers must negotiate the very issues of gender, domesticity, sexuality, and class that drove Wilmot’s poetic production.
Fashioning Sentimental Subjects: Reading for Virtue, Writing with Faith

As Elizabeth Eger has argued, the first generation of Bluestocking feminists provide valuable discursive traditions that women writers like Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Maria Edgeworth draw on in order to develop their attitudes toward gender and the state (169-170). While Dissenting culture complicates any interpretation of Bluestocking sociality, the Bluestockings’ emphasis on female education, their bolstering of women’s literary authority, and their attention to friendship is central to the formation of liberal subjectivity in the long nineteenth century. In this chapter, I argue that virtuous reading, haunted poetics, and anxious literacy – each indebted to but not restricted by Bluestocking sociality – form a nexus through which sentimental subjectivity generates and endangers itself. Further, these writerly and readerly strategies are wrapped up in various structures of desire and (counter-) publicity detailed by Nancy Armstrong, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, and Lauren Berlant.

Nancy Armstrong argues that “written representations of the self allowed the modern individual to become an economic and psychological reality” (6). Analyzing Jane Austen’s Emma, she writes, “misreading entails a miswriting of sexual relations that misleads desire.” She further suggests that “In this way, [Austen] raises the question of how language may provide an accurate indication of an individual’s value” (150). As she implies in discussions of Rousseau, Richardson, and Austen, female virtue is the central term organizing middle-class structures of heterosexual desire. Building on this, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that “as the ground of political agency, then, the sexed body bears a great deal of theoretical weight within liberalism. Yet, liberalism does not
simply deploy the terms of a preexisting ontological division between men and women; rather, it works to effect this division” (14). She continues, “because the liberal subject emerges from the private sphere, and bears constant reference to that sphere in his public activity, privacy (and femininity) is not located resolutely in the past…but must be repeatedly invoked (resignified) in order to serve as the ground of liberal identity” (24). Correcting Jürgen Habermas’ model of the public sphere, Dillon suggests “that the public sphere has never operated as a disinterested realm of reasoned debate. Rather, private subjects do not exist in advance of their entry into public debate with fully formed agendas ready at hand…public sphere culture is not only directed toward monitoring the state…but toward shaping or constituting private subjects who seek to emerge into public recognition” (6).

In a complementary account, Lauren Berlant formulates the female complaint as a recurring trope that structures the formation of the intimate public of “women’s culture” (5). Berlant argues that the “unfinished business of sentimentality – that ‘tomorrow is another day’ in which fantasies of the good life can be lived – collaborates with a sentimental account of the social world as an affective space where people ought to be legitimated because they have feelings and because there is an intelligence in what they feel” (2). Further, “this very general sense of confidence in the critical intelligence of affect, emotion, and good intention produces an orientation toward agency that is focused on ongoing adaptation, adjustment, improvisation, and developing wiles for surviving, thriving, and transcending the world as it presents itself” (2).
Taking Armstrong, Dillon, and Berlant together, the norms of Bluestocking sociality, adapted early by various women writers to print circulation, help to found a liberal subjectivity organized simultaneously by the sexual contract and structures of domestic desire fashioned through aesthetic innovation and circulated through intimate publics. The circulation of domestic desire in turn constitutes the circulation of femininity as a genre (Berlant 5), the iterations of which also mark the dissemination of aesthetic power insofar as it shapes liberal subjectivity. Further, literate culture during the long nineteenth century persistently uses tropes of women’s reading inaugurated by the Bluestockings to define and circulate a hermeneutics of virtue in which liberty, contractarianism, and complementary heterosexuality constitute the regulatory ideals of sentimental subjectivity.

As a term in these models of (counter-) publicity and desire, I make use of Derrida’s interpretation of the pharmakon only to theorize the dialectic of literacy in liberal experience. Where sentimentalism helps sculpt domestic desire and initialize women’s literary agency, it also constrains the horizon of liberal being in order to neutralize inauthenticity and hermeneutic relativism, which pose threats to its stability. The pharmakon, Derrida formulates in *Dissemination*, is the text as both poison and cure; that is, it tropes the anxieties central to material practices of literacy. Just as iteration – whether in scribal or print circulation – generates the possibility of liberal subjectivity, so too does it leave open the constant threat of misreading and miswriting. The subject formed through literacy finds itself desiring publicity even as publicity exposes it to the myriad threats of sophism, libel, piracy, and misappropriation. To control these threats,
liberal subjects institute various regulatory mechanisms, most importantly the 
legitimation of certain hermeneutic projects over others. For sentimental subjects, 
controlling the pharmakon means reading virtuously, which in turn means defining and 
carefully regulating what “reading virtuously” entails and how it shapes and is shaped by 
the sexual contract.

Rhetorics of Reading in Sentimental Fiction

The various scenes of domesticity and publicity in *Evelina* – from her seclusion in 
her guardian’s home, to her circulation at “the ridotto” (32), to her boarding with 
Madame Duval in London, to her near-rape while walking through Marylebone – 
dramatize the formation of a liberal subject whose virtue, gained and demonstrated 
through experience, ground her matronly authority over domestic space. Borrowing from 
Lockean psychology (Barker-Benfield 2-6), the discourse of sensibility marries the 
notion of a blank state impressed by evolving forms of experience to a gendered 
conception of social space and mystical drama of true love. In turn, this conception 
depends upon Christian notions of the holy spirit and the time of conversion, which were 
transformed by the shift from Calvinism to a more consumeristic and permissive 
Protestant culture (Leach 100-102).

Evelina’s publication tracks many of these transformations. In the move from a 
patriarchical haven to the liberalized space of London, Evelina dramatizes the anxiety 
sparked within ideologies of domesticity when republican virtue confronts a social space 
transformed by consumer culture. In its broad outlines, such anxiety mirrors that 
experienced by adherents to agrarian republican ideology when confronted by commerce
and capital in Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (Carlson 262-267). The education Evelina undergoes represents a compromise between republican ideals of virtue and legitimate sovereignty and the realities of a liberal economic system prone to consumerism and print circulation (both of money and of texts). Unlike *Letters from an American Farmer*, however, *Evelina’s* sentimental aesthetic successfully balances complementary heterosexuality and republican virtue.

G.J. Barker-Benfield suggests that Evelina’s “entrance into the world” represents a “rebirth” from the seclusion imposed by her father. Under the alibi of maintaining her childish innocence, Villars prevents Evelina from coming to self-consciousness, to a knowledge of good and evil that brings with it the moral imperative to choose between them. As Barker-Benfield puts it, “For whatever reason one did so, to leave home was to see the world ‘as it really is,’ experience vital to the development and individuation of human consciousness” (305). As Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has pointed out, it is precisely this process of individuation that marks the discourse of sensibility and its role in the project of liberal subject formation. If, as Dillon argues, “the sphere of privacy—of sexual intimacy—became a central site of modern liberalism” (1) by the end of the nineteenth century, and if sexual intimacy as privacy inaugurates the modern liberal subject according to the “sexual contract,” then it is one’s entrance into the world of experience – the gaining of moral knowledge – that allows for the mutual consent necessary to consummate marriage and create virtuous domestic space (Margolis 1-14). Further, it is precisely this form of consensual marriage that stabilizes the anxiety-
inducing forms of liberal government that gain ground at the turn of the nineteenth century (Dillon 118).

Evelina’s experience with different men – as possible lovers, objects of charity, or simply allies or foes – provides her an education in what Dillon calls “an epistemology of desire.” Most texts of sensibility and sentiment, including Evelina, are concerned with knowledge, specifically, with the living knowledge of virtue. By gaining experience, and by cultivating those virtues inculcated in the patriarchal home of Mr. Villars, Evelina develops an epistemology of desire, according to which the virtuous lover is to be preferred to the unvirtuous lover; further, she learns to differentiate the two, to place each in its proper genus and order each according to his nature. That Evelina gains this knowledge is proved by her marriage to Lord Orville, which is only solidified after the demonstration of his judgment concerning the “fake” Miss Belmont’s fate as co-heiress. This is the final demonstration needed to secure his place as Evelina’s husband.

Further, while Evelina is in many ways a comedy of manners, it is her ignorance of London’s social niceties, such as the flattery necessary in social jockeying, that in part demonstrates her knowledge and enactment of virtue to Lord Orville. The knowledge Evelina has gained by the end of the text is both self-knowledge – in a classical sense – and the knowledge of a philosopher, of one who knows how to discern the nature of the soul in others and has the discipline to act in accordance with this knowledge toward the creation of the good life. In so far forth does Mr. Villars pronounce Evelina’s redemption of Caroline Evelyn’s life – and his own errors – and instill the hope of “some yet surviving Evelina” (Burney 336).
Yet, the main drama played out between Evelina and her father, Sir John Belmont, is primarily a legal drama inscribed in the text in its entirety through the letters exchanged between the two parties. Dillon again is instructive, arguing that “we see a recursive loop between privacy and publicity in which the intimate sphere “prequalifies” certain subjects for participation in the political public sphere, and in which the public sphere in turn produces the very privacy understood as the predicate of public sphere participation” (35). Evelina’s mother is disqualified from liberal subjecthood – or perhaps represents liberal tragedy – when Sir John Belmont burns their marriage certificate, which, due her failure to have witness present, is the only evidence of the ceremony. Evelina, in turn, is only able to secure liberal subjecthood insofar as her legal suit against Sir John reaches a satisfactory conclusion. Thus, the legal guarantee of her inheritance and the publicizing of her noble blood secures her marriage with Lord Orville, which is itself a juridical scene of publication. The publication of their marriage both testifies to and enables the reproduction of liberal subjectivity in accordance with complementary heterosexuality and republican virtue.

As with Crèvecoeur, the Lockean theory of property rights enacted by agriculture, which also gives rise to contractarian theories of property that enable commodity circulation, animates the conflict between virtue and circulation in *Evelina*. This occurs on multiple registers: the circulation of her body on the marriage market in London, the circulation of her paternity through letters, and the circulation of her right to inheritance through juridical dispute. Epistolarity allows the reader to encounter each of these scenes of circulation as itself a circuit of exchange between characters (Cook 5-13). It also
allows Evelina to remain connected to Villars – and the republican virtue and simplicity his epistolary presence represents – through a circuit of rhetorical exchange between the two, where they bandy about arguments and evidence toward a shared end: maintaining Evelina’s virtue and securing her paternal inheritance.

To understand the rhetorical importance of virtue and circulation, and how the tension between them animates sentimental subjectivity, one must walk briefly through the garden of antiquity. In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates clarifies the ethical dangers posed by textual circulation. In it, Lysias’ text is suspect for two reasons: the text cannot answer questions—a clear flaw for the midwife of the *elenchus*—and the text allows the author to hide his face, to say what he might be embarrassed to say in person. The former is pointed out clearly by Socrates (Plato 117). The latter is indicated by Socrates covering his eyes during his first – and sacrilegious – speech, which is an imitation of Lysias’ published speech as read aloud by Phaedrus. Here, Socrates covers his eyes to fully imitate Lysias’ text, to speak without being seen. This reading is reinforced by Socrates’ observation that those who write speeches are often ashamed at having done so (Derrida 68) and his explanation that he covers his own eyes (and asks Phaedrus to cover his) in order to avoid embarrassment at imitating Lysias’ speech. Further, the rapidity with which Socrates declares this imitated speech an affront to the gods makes us question Socrates’ sincerity in attempting an imitation.

*Phaedrus* depicts the pharmakon as a problem for virtue: circulation tempts the author by allowing her to hide her face and possibly hinders proper education by removing the possibility of a reader’s questions. In short, the text functionally prohibits
dialectic and *elenchus*, thus paralyzing living knowledge. Socrates’ strategy for compromise is to regulate the pharmakon by requiring the author to defend his text in public through speech and questioning. Only by first doing this, and being judged knowledgeable and virtuous, may his texts then be called proper. Further, only those who are themselves virtuous and experienced in the subject of the text are allowed to read texts, using them as aids to memory in the instruction, through speech, of their students. Hence, access to a text is firmly regulated and dissemination firmly controlled under the logic that “engraving” knowledge on “the soul” is the ultimate form of writing, and that texts can only aid this process by aiding the memory of those who have already reached a mature knowledge of virtue and truth.

Under this scheme, the anxiety produced by the pharmakon is precisely the danger to virtue posed by circulation. The Platonic strategy of regulating circulation in order to defend virtue is the strategy promoted by Lady Howard and accepted by Rev. Villars:

Do not start at this proposal; it is time that [Evelina] should see something of the world. When young people are too rigidly sequestered from it, their lively and romantic imaginations paint it to them as a paradise of which they have been beguiled; but they are shown it properly, and in due time, they see it such as it really is, equally shared by pain and pleasure, hope and disappointment. (13)

The plan is to place Evelina within a virtuous circle of mentors – Lady Howard and Mrs. Mirvan – and circulate her through public life with proper guidance. This is only after she has been “sequestered” in Villars’ rural sanctuary and provided an
education entirely under his supervision with the express goal of keeping her from the same fate as her mother. As with the pharmakon, the mania produced by sociality can only be cured by regulated sociality, which in Evelina takes the form of her circulation in London. Evelina ends with the successful circulation of Evelina’s body through each register: she successfully gains knowledge of virtue, identifies the virtuous lover (Lord Orville) from the unvirtuous (Sir Clement)\textsuperscript{11}, marries him, and gains her paternal inheritance by law.

If Evelina is a character who is able to gain the good life by gaining the living knowledge of virtue, Charlotte Temple is of a kind with Caroline Belmont nee Evelyn, a figure of liberal tragedy, of she who fails to understand the nature of the lover’s soul or to gain the self-knowledge requisite for virtue. Further, Charlotte Temple shows that at the heart of the sexual contract fundamental to the project of liberalism lay persuasion, seduction, deception, and epistemic violence, assaults against a legitimate epistemology of desire. As such, it is not surprising that rhetoric itself becomes a volatile site of contention within the discourses of sensibility and sentiment, with ample examples of young women who fall prey to unvirtuous persuasion.

The initial opening of Montraville’s seduction of Charlotte, a letter he slips into her hand, is described thus, “the letter was made up of encomiums\textsuperscript{12} on her beauty, and vows of everlasting love and constancy” (24). Montraville is repeatedly described as “eloquent” (37), and as having an art of “rhetoric” that would “persuade Charlotte to go

\textsuperscript{11} Coincidentally, it is precisely the question of distinguishing the virtuous from the unvirtuous lover that is taken up in Lysias’ speech and Socrates’ later iterations of it.

\textsuperscript{12} An allusion to Gorgias’ Encomium to Helen. Gorgias was the subject of another Platonic dialogue, Gorgias, and appears either by reference or in person in several others.
with them” (36-37). In chapters XI and XII, Montraville and Mme. La Rue are frequently engaged in persuasion, conversation, intercourse, and argument bent on convincing Charlotte to elope with Montraville to America. In the final scene of Charlotte’s seduction, when she is intent on leaving Montraville and adhering to the duty owed her parents (when she begs him to “cease…to persuade”), he insinuates suicide if she flees, and she succumbs. Charlotte herself provides the fundamental question posed by the text:

“Alas! My torn heart! […] How shall I act?” (48)

As I have shown, _Evelina_, Plato’s _Phaedrus_ and Derrida’s gloss of it provide insight into the functioning of truth and sentiment, desire and action, and virtue and the sexual contract in sentimental novels. If we recall, the _Phaedrus_ provides a theory of rhetoric and writing based on an exposition concerning the nature of soul and Eros. At center, it argues that only the virtuous lover – the lover who has both self-knowledge and knowledge of the nature of the soul – can serve the best interests of the beloved. Further, in this scene of persuasion, the lover acts as rhetor, beseeching the beloved with words, and the beloved acts as simultaneously as judge and audience, by necessity weighing the merits of the lover according to his knowledge of the good. The danger of choosing the non-lover lay in heresy, offending Eros. The danger in choosing the unvirtuous lover, the dark horse of vulgar desire, lay in torment in the after-life, of the loss of one’s divine wings.

This is precisely the scene of persuasion in _Charlotte Temple_. Charlotte must weigh her “love” with filial “duty” (47), and determine both the authenticity and sincerity of Montraville’s promises while also trying to discern his knowledge – or lack of
knowledge – of virtue. In a quite literal sense, the book is a pronouncement on Charlotte’s epistemology of desire, the accuracy and potency of her erotic theory, as was true with *Evelina*. The difference, and it makes all the difference, is in Charlotte’s failure and Evelina’s success.

Rowson is quite clear about what is responsible for Charlotte’s failure – and it is what Lady Howard urged Villars to rectify in Evelina – namely, her innocence\(^\text{13}\) and the “deceitfulness of her own heart” (24-26, 37). Without the benefit of experience outside the filial home – without the individuation necessary for the legitimacy of the liberal sexual contract – Charlotte has no ability to resist the rhetoric of the unvirtuous lover. The remedy to this – the vaccine against the pharmakon – is not seclusion but regulated publicity, the circulation of one’s discursive body in heterogeneous social contexts under the guidance of a worthy mentor. As discussed in this chapter’s introduction, the pharmakon is merely a heuristic for understanding the dialectical nature of literacy in the formation of liberal subjectivity through the circulation of domestic desire through intimate publics. As such, Charlotte’s regulated publicity should be understood – in a very real sense – as a strategy for fashioning domestic desire in the public sphere.

*Contra* Wollstonecraft’s general criticism in *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* that novels are a poison to female intellect and morality – to be remedied by the genres of history and political economy – many sentimental novels – including Wollstonecraft’s

\(^{13}\)That is, the underdevelopment of her intellect, leading to the inability of Reason to reign in the dark horse of vulgar passion or follow the light horse of enlightened Eros. It is no accident that Charlotte “bridles” against Mme. La Rue’s attempt at persuasion (48).
own *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* – already stage the same paradoxical cure\(^\text{14}\). To ameliorate the danger of romantic writing as poison, one imbibes the tragedy of sentiment – the failure of romance – the infinite and destructive deferral of the liberal subject’s becoming.

The recursive nature of this mania, including attempts to control the anxiety of profligate scenes of romantic reading, is central to women’s fiction during this period and is entangled with the gender politics described by Armstrong and Berlant. Cathy N. Davidson’s analysis of women’s reading, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, has been elaborated by Heidi Brayman-Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly in their recent *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. Hackel and Kelly write in their introduction:

> The protean expansion of female readership shaped the history of publishing and the development of literary culture. We can see its impact in the steadily increasing numbers of texts aimed at least partly at female readers-cum-consumers and in the popularity of novels whose plots revolve around heroines who are *themselves* avid readers: fictional readers such as Jane Eyre, Dorothea Brooke, and Jo March resulted from and encouraged a capacious culture of women’s reading. (2)

Representations of women’s reading were not simply registered in terms of consumption and commodification. The moral attacks on novel reading, and the rhetoric of representing virtuous female readers in fiction, have been amply documented in

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\(^{14}\) This is the argument Rowson lays out in Chapter VI: An Intriguing Teacher.
scholarly writing. Emma Clery’s *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*, and Jacqueline Pearson’s *Women’s Reading in Britain, 1750-1835: A Dangerous Recreation*, each chart contemporary debates over the moral standing of novels and the possible moral uses of novels in women’s reading. Katherine Binhammer, in “The Persistence of Reading: Governing Female Novel-Reading in Memoirs of Emma Courtney and Memoirs of Modern Philosophers,” problematizes popular moral attacks on female novel-reading: “Rather than indicating a cultural consensus that novels corrupt, the escalating attacks on the novel marked the predominance and popularity of the latest literary genre…the prescriptive discourse on the novel indicates that young females did not abstain from taking the drug” (3). She speculates as to the aesthetic function of representation of female reading, writing. “The female reader of the novel reads a novel about a woman reading a novel; and these *mise en abymes*, or embedded scenes of novel-reading, provide internal mirrors for how the reader ought to read” (2).

To summarize the relevant scholarship, then, the material production of woman readers – especially novel-readers – becomes a central trope in novels by and about women. Tropes of women’s reading concern themselves with questions of women’s virtue, sexual propriety, and intellectual capacity. Specifically, representations of reading women tend to animate debates over the connection between virtuous reading and virtuous sociality. Reading women can signify differently depending on the political, culture, and sexual context of a novel, and the same reading woman can signify differently to different factions of Atlantic society. Regardless, the moral question of women’s reading is central to the formation of liberal subjectivity, and the various
responses to this question – whether sentimental or radical – help form readers’ subjectivity.

Hence, *Charlotte Temple* depicts or represents a scene of reading while being able to do so only as, itself, a scene of reading. The recursive nature of this mania, the controlling of the anxiety of profligate scenes of romantic reading, points back upon Charlotte’s failure. Two possibilities emerge: Charlotte’s moral failure – her succumbing to deception and seductive persuasion – becomes for the reader either a cause of “delight in misery” (Ellis 87), or a cautionary tale, an antidote against the mania of the pharmakon. Charlotte’s seduction by Montraville’s letter christens the organizing paradox of sentimental fiction: it is not merely romantic, yet it leverages romance in order to properly order the reader’s desire in favor of virtue and against vulgar passion. This quality is frequently noted by some theorists, but it can be easily overlooked in favor of a conflation of the romantic and the sentimental.

Properly speaking, the novel of sensibility, in a harmonious scheme of reading, would enlarge the intellect and move the soul to love and desire virtue. It would provide proper instruction in the epistemology of desire, which alongside one’s reading of history, science, and political economy, would provide the sympathy necessary for public participation and the judgment necessary for liberal subjecthood. It is this scheme that Wollstonecraft – and other radical feminists at the turn of the nineteenth century – advocates. As one technique of Enlightenment, the novel’s place is in providing a dialogic questioning of desire that will lead to self-knowledge and the perfection of social responsiveness. As early as 1785 in *The Progress of Romance*, a book of historical-
literary criticism framed in a series of fictitious dialogues, Clara Reeve is intimating the argument that the private scene of reading produces the moral apparatus for just public participation, and that the cultivation of taste (“discrimination”) allows for the self-regulation of reading (7-9).

In this scheme, Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* presents a difficulty, first of generic classification, second of interpretation. It has been variously called a “counter-sentimental novel” (Batchelor 157), a “precursor to the psychological novel” (Thame 271), a “comedy of manners” (Rosenberg 575), a “novel of development” (Kirkpatrick ix), and a satire (Lightfoot 117). Each of these seems partially warranted. The dissolution of the question seems to depend upon the critical perspective one adopts. Yet, in denying *Belinda*’s inclusion in the series of iterations deemed “sentimental,” one seems to define sentimental fiction too narrowly, making it nearly synonymous with romance. Further, in presenting the sentimental novel and satire as mutually exclusive, one misreads the often complex and internally contradictory heart of sentimental writing, a point most critics mentioned above intimate. In my view, *Belinda* is properly termed a sentimental satire – both sentimental in its cultural politics and its psychosocial assumptions and critical of the clear excesses of sentimentality as it slips into blind passion or romantic folly. But, its satire extends also to those male critics who, in Wollstonecraft’s words, think female reformers want women to increase their “ardour in hunting, shooting, and gaming” (Craciun 110). In this sense, *Belinda* is amongst the most complex and aesthetically able of those novels properly viewed as sentimental, alongside Austen’s corpus, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Melville’s *Pierre*. 
The preoccupation of many sentimental novels with classical tensions is not coincidental. The common scheme of liberal arts education in Britain and the U.S. up to the 1860’s was indebted to classical formulations of the trivium and quadrivium, including an emphasis on training in Latin and reading texts by Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian – the latter of whose writings double as an entire scheme of moral education for decorous citizenship. The influence of Quintilian on some notable nineteenth century figures – such as Benjamin Disraeli and John Stuart Mill – is noted by James Jerome Murphy (xliv). Benjamin Kolstad points out the “Platonic overtones” of Rousseau’s Julie, going so far as to say that “the debate between R. and N. centers around questions of rhetoric and referentiality” (36). Those excellent women writers of the long nineteenth century were themselves products of some version of this educational scheme, whether classical texts were read in the original or in translation. More directly, as Nan Johnson has persuasively argued, the New Rhetoric of Hugh Blair and George Campbell was widely read and incorporated into standard education in the nineteenth century (65). Yet, as Peggy Kamuf points out in her analysis of feminine desire in Julie, the persistence of classical tropes should enliven our consideration of sentimental eroticism, not foreclose it (103-107).

In the case of Maria Edgeworth, these more general arguments are unnecessary. In Practical Education, her two-volume work with her father, Robert Lovell Edgeworth, Maria Edgeworth references Blair, Cicero, and Quintilian in the same breath (329). The entire scheme of Practical Education is to turn the “art of education” into an “experimental science” (iii). The authors routinely refer to the moral and mental
education of children as being fundamentally more important than them gaining “useful articles of knowledge” (vol. 2, 155), a position supported throughout by reference to works of classical rhetoric and Hugh Blair’s synthesis. In light of this educational milieu and Edgeworth’s attitudes on the topic, Belinda is more than a “novel about how a reasonable woman ought to behave” (Kirkpatrick x), it is a novel about the development of a virtuous rhetor in the Quintilian sense, the total citizen, as inflected through Rousseauvian sensibility.

Lady Delacour is one who has been corrupted by ambition and the imitation of improper models. Harriet Freke, as a “mimicker of slogans” (xix), is the realization of Plato’s fear of writing (she who repeats dead words without knowledge). Belinda is simultaneously the virtuous rhetor leading Delacour to knowledge and the virtuous beloved who can distinguish the nature of her lovers’ souls.

To bring up these comparisons to texts of antiquity is to point out two things: the habits of reading deemed legitimate for and defining of “educated people” and to call attention to an organizing anxiety at the heart of the liberal subject educated in republican texts of antiquity, an anxiety nonetheless inflected through the cult of sensibility. That some female reformers clearly saw themselves as bringing into existence a paradigmatic republic of virtuous citizens – thus risking deep anachronism – does not detract from the ways in which this rhetoric was adapted to a form of liberal subject formation integral to modern state capitalism and completely impossible in antiquity. The fear of dissemination and dissipation that accompanies self-publication and circulation in the market economy has no corollary in the ancient world, except in the philosophical
musings on writing in Plato and Aristotle. This scheme is further complicated by the generative and regulating power of Christian metaphysics in sentimental writing; indeed, Wollstonecraft’s argument for the equality of women is based foremost on the equality of souls before God and only secondarily on the necessary equality of Reason in order to allow moral culpability to women in this spiritual framework.

Yet, the preoccupation with madness, enthusiasm, and textual reproduction in the nineteenth century—glossed by Foucault in *The Order of Things* as “that strange, stationary anxiety, which forces upon [modern thought] the duty of repeating repetition” (362-365) – seems deeply connected to textual anxiety, of what becomes of the self, the soul, in an age of mechanical reproduction, confused origins, and commodification. The dual-edge of this discursive system comes into view as the dialogic struggle of the liberal, Christian subject to maintain authenticity against the manic iteration of pharmaka. Money itself, as value circulated both as copy and as original, value created in its circulation as copy, is such a pharmakon, as can be inferred from the Romantic anxiety with both commerce and publication. The difficult but fruitful critical exigency before us is to understand the tension between authenticity and iteration – between the “private” and the “public,” “domestic” and the “foreign” – as generative of the liberal subject. Each attempt to bring order to dissemination, iteration, and the anxiety-producing machine of justification in the absence of certainty is also an attempt to close the boundary loss of a

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15 For a thorough discussion of madness, Methodism, and the rhetoric of enthusiasm, see Mee, *Romanticism*; also, Edgeworth presents Methodism as either a cause or symptom of Lady Delacour’s passion in Chapter XXIII.

16 See Newlyn and Fanta’s introduction to *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*. 74
disordered and disordering self. Further, in this attempted closing, in this imposition of order that never quite holds, the liberal subject finds its *chiasmic* nature in being one who publishes authentically, who circulates the real through copies, whose political authority as citizen derives from her ability to be an authentic copy of the universal citizen, for whom no original actually exists. Liberal subject formation – especially in the sentimental novel – is a type of violent metonymy.

One has therefore provided an explanation for Edgeworth’s choice of title. Many critics have asked why – when most of the book is dedicated to Lady Delacour privately publicizing her life story to Belinda as a corrective to Lady Delacour’s passion, the book doesn’t bear the more accurate title of *Lady Delacour*? If this is, partly, a novel of development, and if the formation of the liberal female subject requires the formation of individual conscience through a social process of regulative identifications and disidentifications, then what is of importance during the scenes of Delacour’s narration is not the publisher, but the reader, Belinda. Of importance to the text is not Delacour’s story, per se, but the *use* of her story, Belinda’s interpretation of it, which itself recursively draws the reader to a self-awareness of her own interpretation of Belinda’s reading. It would, indeed, *not* be a novel of development if it were titled *Lady Delacour*. The scene of the regulated pharmakon, the text of Delacour’s life under Belinda’s incorruptible gaze, is what organizes the novel as a novel of development, the development of the self-critical sentimental reader, the ironic sentimentalist that Belinda

17 See McClintock. While McClintock discusses boundary loss as a feature of male anxiety in the tropics, which results from one’s confrontation with a seemingly disordered erotic system and one’s loss of place in one’s own erotic system, I think the term fits well in the current discussion.
is and Lady Delacour becomes.

As a supplement to this function of the novel is its purpose as a satire of the male liberal subject, which involves the correction of male expectations and the education of men as competent sentimental readers. Brilliantly, this education gains its full force from several scenes of gender parody and cross-dressing involving Delacour and Harriet Freke. While these scenes of cross-dressing play on the fear of equivocality delineated by Claudia Johnson, they also act to first unsettle the regulatory regime of sexual difference, then reiterate sexual difference under a thoroughly liberal conception of heterosexuality as complementary (contra the supplementary – though as often sentimentalized – conception of heterosexuality prevalent prior to the nineteenth century). To reiterate sexual difference under the regulatory regime of complementary heterosexuality – its “regulatory ideal” being companionate marriage, which is achieved by Belinda and Delacour by the novel’s close – is to risk a great deal. It is, at its deepest level, a project of feminist becoming in the nineteenth century, a project that builds out of the female complaint, and gives rise in time to fantasies and nightmares of lesbianism, sexual perversion, and national impotence.

Despite the clearly revolutionary potential of Edgeworth’s sexual politics, and perhaps owing to its current conventionality, it is hard to ignore the centrality of complementary – and racially unitary\(^\text{18}\) – heterosexuality to the modern state, or to avoid connecting this fact to certain contours of sentimental writing. For, what is parodied by Edgeworth but Harriet Freke, butch par excellence, and what is erased by deleting the

\(^{18}\) See Goldberg, Chapter 5.
cross-racial marriage of Juba than the legitimate possibility of such a racial transgression?

As a technology, then, for the reproduction of the heterosexual liberal subject, the sentimental novel both liberates subjectivity from the Great Chain of Being, supplementary heterosexuality, and the intellectual marginalization of femininity, and reiterates subjectivity in a modern cosmopolitan form. According to this modern form, the contractarian liberal subject regulates the disorder of iteration by writing pure ideals of sexual and racial harmony onto the body politic, then stretching this harmony across gendered spheres. In short, the sentimental novel becomes a form of social sanitation, the pharmakon as a means of producing racial harmony.

The complexities of “racial harmony” in sentimental writing, and its role in romantic cosmopolitanism, have been detailed by Anne Mellor and Adriana Craciun. Mellor writes that instead of being a simple “exercise in ideological imperialism, an expression of ‘civilized’ Christian outrage” at the rituals of subaltern cultures, sentimental writing can also, through “inter-racial romance,” demonstrate “its anxious commitment to a cosmopolitan, international peace” (294). She further claims that “staged representations of inter-racial love and marriage can thus be seen as producing liminal a contact zone that can function politically as an utopian imperative, a cosmopolitan, transnational boundary crossing that constructs a new form of subjectivity” (297). This “new form of subjectivity” is sentimental subjectivity, but the extent to which it enacts an “embodied cosmopolitanism,” and whether or not this cosmopolitanism erases or assimilates racial difference, is unclear. As Craciun writes in a discussion of Charlotte Smith’s “Henrietta,” “Henrietta’s recurring fascination with, and repulsion
from, the sexual and racial heterogeneity evident on her father’s plantation illustrates how in the age of abolition movements…it became increasingly important to distinguish white women as a privileged group embodying virtue” (54). Here, the sentimental subjectivity that engages in cosmopolitan fantasies of inter-racial romance seems to either contain racial difference within a “universalizing Christianity” (55), or else assimilate it within raced and gendered codes of virtuous sociality.

It is in these terms of racial difference and cosmopolitan femininity that Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie must clean – arrange, sanitize, decorate – the “interior space” (Castiglia) of the liberal subject. How – and if – it is to be cleaned becomes the central question of the novel. To call Hope Leslie a domestic novel seems hopeless, yet it is undeniably a sentimental text. Cast back into the seventeenth century, the narrative oscillates between criticizing Christian treatment of Native Americans and idolizing the suffering and sacrifice of the Puritans. To call it a historical romance seems to lay upon the romance too many aesthetic and narrative features, but to call it simply an historical novel seems to betray the reality of its circulation as a sentimental text amongst a familiar sentimental audience. In many ways, it is a sentimental history in two senses: it conforms to certain plots conventions and stylistic devices familiar to the sentimental novel, and it provides a history of and to the sentimental reader. That is, it provides an historical narrative that allows the sentimental reader continuity and identification with its Puritanical past. It allows the sentimental reader to stage indignation at the treatment of Native Americans and grief for the suffering of Puritans.

As Ezra Tawil has convincingly argued, Hope Leslie – along with other frontier
domestic romances – participated in an ideology of “sympathetic racialism” (94). Instead of presenting a rebellious anti-domestic plot meant to critique traditional domestic fiction, or provocatively representing interracial desire as acceptable or inevitable, *Hope Leslie* “should be understood in part in relation to the problem of slavery and the unprecedented pressure put on the culture to come up with some account of relations of domination and how they might be related to the differences among groups of people” (94). Specifically, the figure of the indomitable Indian that refused to be enslaved “always potentially gestures towards the unnamed slave.”

While this is an essential intervention that helps critics gain deeper access into frontier domestic fiction, conceiving of *Hope Leslie* as sentimental history is important because it allows us to see how the sentimentalized liberal subject required a history that would enable patriotic identification. That is, in composing a sentimental history that allows Sedgwick to both properly mourn Indians and properly honor Puritan forebears, she provides the liberal subject with a form of national history that, while critical, enables patriotic identification and inclusion within the national body of print culture. Further, it provides a scheme in which interracial romance ends up facilitating the reproduction of the white national body.

While it’s easy to be overcome with interest by Magawisca’s relationship with Everell and Faith’s relationship with Oneco, the beginning of the text sets the terms of the final resolution quite clearly: William Fletcher falls in love with Alice, the daughter of a nobleman, Sir William, amidst the religious turmoil of the seventeenth century. Sir William succeeds in preventing the marriage by forcing Alice to marry Charles Leslie,
and William Fletcher voyages to the Americas as a part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. William Fletcher marries while in the colony and has several children. The initial chapters of the novel tell us that Alice has died and that her children, Hope and Faith Leslie, are to travel to the colony to be placed under the care of William Fletcher.

The novel ends with Everell Fletcher marrying Hope Leslie, thus staging a recuperated love in the New World disallowed by the Old. The other primary tension in the text has to do with the destruction of Magawisca’s tribe and her imprisonment at the Fletcher house, where she is routinely subjected to Christian proselytizing. The raid on the Fletcher house that results in Martha, Fletcher’s wife, and their infant son being killed is also the raid that reunites Magawisca with her father, who has also witnessed the murdering of his wife at the hands of the Puritans settlers. Two things are important in this domestic mirroring: Sedgwick seems to depict Magawisca’s tribe and Winthrop’s colony with equal sympathy, and she seems to leverage domestic affection to critique war, not to break down racial boundaries or critique racializing discourse. The first is important insofar as the colonists are depicted by Sedgwick as having legitimately settled in the New World even as they unjustly attack Indians when they ought to have been “converting” (41) them. This allows her history to cast the violence between Indians and Puritans as a profoundly unfortunate accident, wherein each side suffers the trauma of domestic catastrophe. Sedgwick begins each chapter with a quote, either from a Puritan colonist (Cotton Mather and Roger Williams being prominent) or a sentimental author, including Felicia Hemans and William Cullen Bryant. These quotes are sufficient to gather the mood of her history: it was a tragedy that Indians were murdered before they
could be shown the glory of Christianity, the ensuing war ought to be criticized because it destroyed domestic tranquility, and the recuperation of this domestic tranquility is a primary aim of the text.

In Sedgwick’s vision, the text is a call for the organization of American society around domestic affection and true Christian values (domestic virtue being one of these) and a ritual mourning of the loss of Indian life and culture insofar as it could have been assimilated within this domestic ideal. Sedgwick routinely likens Magawisca to a Roman and depicts Indian domestic life as akin to that of Greek and Roman life, which could be – as Roman life was – perfected by Christian Enlightenment. Indeed, it is not the safeguarding of Indian life nor the mourning of the loss of Indian culture that Sedgwick’s text urges; instead, it is the lost opportunity of peaceful Indian assimilation that is mourned even as the virtue of white heterosexuality organized by sentimental tropes is affirmed (as in the closing marriage of Everell and Hope).

The sentimental reader is thus left with an affirmation of the universality of domestic affection, a recuperated national history that rightly mourns violence against Indians even as it affirms the superiority of Christian values, a set of Puritan heroes who can be lauded (Everell and Hope) even as their sinful counterparts can be chastised (Sir Philip Sidney). The text circulates as an attempt to both criticize U.S. policies toward Native Americans in 1820 and present a perfected vision of Christian domesticity as the primary means of rejuvenating the national body. The multiple iterations of the sentimental tropes of virtue, domesticity, and complementary heterosexuality just
considered set the stage for an increasingly interiorized liberal subjectivity to take form through innovations in sentimental aesthetics.

Sentimental Poetics: Felicia Hemans and Lydia Sigourney

Speaking of the Romantic poetess Mary Robinson, author of *Sappho and Phaon*, Jerome McGann writes that “Robinson wants to argue with Wollstonecraft about the social, philosophical, and intellectual power of ‘sensibility.’ Robinson does not disagree with Wollstonecraft about the terms or issues at stake; what she contests is Wollstonecraft’s recurrent tendency to denigrate the importance of ‘passion’, ‘love’, and the philosophy of sensibility that underpins those ideas and experiences” (106-7). While McGann indicates, rightly, that Wollstonecraft’s views concerning the passions are complex, there is the tendency in Wollstonecraft’s writings – and in *Belinda* – to favor a rationalist scheme of female development that seems anxious about passion, emotion unrestrained by intellect. In his further treatment of Robinson, McGann posits her poetics as a way of articulating the nobility – perhaps even divinity – of passion by contending that the passion of love, if dangerous, is an indication of social failure or dysfunction, not personal failure. That is, the obsessive control of passion is only necessary for women in a dysfunctional society of masculine egotism, misogyny, and deceit.

The place of poetry in sentimental discourse is hard to overvalue. Sentimental novels often include epitaphs at the beginning of each chapter, presenting poetry as a rubric for understanding the representation of sentiment in novels\(^1\). Sentimental figures are often seen reading poetry to one another, quoting poetry aloud, or referencing poetry

\(^1\) See Cummins.
as a source of authority. As in Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry,” the poet, by shaping doxa through shaping sentiment, serves a distinct social role: one who creates or reforms the soul in accordance with an aesthetics that has moral, political, and religious significance. At the same time, poetry is dangerous. In Melville’s Pierre, it undoes the younger Glendinning, a predisposition for it must be disciplined out of Belinda’s Clarence Harvey, and it is depicted in Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman as a force that displaces social pleasure with a “sickly sensibility” (2.140).

Understanding sentimental poetics means understanding both the place of poetry in sentimental discourse and the dynamics of sentimental subjectivity itself. For the sake of brevity, the first can be treated cursorily by pointing out the already extant legitimacy of poetic genres at the advent of sentimental discourse. Unlike women novelists, who were simultaneously justifying the act of female writing and the genre of the novel, women poets primarily had to press against the conventional restriction placed on women writing anything other than lyrical or elegiac poems, secure all the while in the cultural legitimacy of the lyric and elegy as forms of art. In this sense, poetry acted more broadly as a possible model for other literary genres, while also lending authority to other genres through quotation. As Wollstonecraft does in Letters on Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (Poovey 89-91), Cummins frames her chapters with sentiments drawn from sentimental poetry, placing Hemans, Barbauld, and Landon in a sequence with Wordsworth, Milton, and Coleridge. Insofar as sentimental poetry led and lent authority to the sentimental novel, sentimental poetics ought to be regarded as the avant-garde in

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See Poovey.
sentimental discourse, experimenting with sentiment and providing new models of subjectivity for other genres to implement. By analyzing the dynamics of sentimental poetics as it shifts through different phases, one can understand – if not predict – larger shifts in the character and temperament of sentimental discourse.

Hemans’ dynamic involvement with domesticity, empire, motherhood, and femininity is widely acknowledged. On the one hand, her poetry seems to construct a domestic ideology that enables the proper functioning of empire through the maintenance of imperial masculinity. On the other hand, poems like “Domestic Affections,” which could fall prey to the former reading, seem to mobilize a conventional domestic space in order to undercut justifications of imperial violence. She does this by positing domesticity and empire as mutually unsustainable: empire destroys the home necessary for its continuance. Similarly, she often seems to unambiguously support the ideology of separate spheres and the regulatory ideal of femininity it entails; however, the consequences of this ideology are often violent and unpredictable – leading to infanticide, poverty, and the destruction of domesticity. Further, in her historical sketches – *Records of Woman* – she both deigns to write history, interpret and criticize social formations, and posit the heroic action of women as equal in historical importance to the heroism of men.

There is, As McGann briefly suggests, an “evaporating imagination” central to Hemans’ poetry, a ghostly presence that hides no secrets even as it provides nothing to hold on to. The domestic space in “Domestic Affections” is just such a ghostly presence, simultaneously existing in the minds of wayward sons and fathers who will die during

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21 See Wolfson and Lootens.
their imperial excursions, and evaporating before the imagination of the home maker
whose experience of domesticity is both absolutely fundamental to her identity and a
functional absence:

But who may charm her sleepless pang to rest,
Or draw the thorn that rankles in her breast?
And while she bends in silence o’er thy bier,
Assuage the grief, too heart-sick for a tear? (343-46)

In providing a domestic sanctuary that functions for men as a place of refuge and
a fantasy of escape, Hemans is highlighting the artistic nature of domesticity, the role of
woman as an architect of domestic space, one who builds comfort in the mind through the
seamless integration of physical decoration, bodily performance, and discursive
propriety. Through the woman’s domestic art, the domestic space is impressed upon the
heart, unforgettable, generative, an organizing sentimental force even – perhaps
especially – at great distance. The domestic space is portable and exportable, a trope
organizing social value:

Can war’s dread scenes the hallow’d ties efface,
Each tender thought, each fond remembrance chase?
Can fields of carnage, days of toil, destroy
The lov’d impressions of domestic joy?

Ye day-light dreams! That cheer the soldier’s breast,
In hostile climes, with spells benign and blest;
Sooth his brave heart, and shed your glowing ray,
O’er the long march, thro’ desolation’s way;
Oh! Still ye bear him from th’ ensanguin’d plain,
To that lov’d home, where pure affection glows,
That shrine of bliss! asylum of repose! (111-22)

In this scene, the soldier is borne from the ensanguined plain not literally but imaginatively; the glowing, fantastic home pulses in his imagination like a beacon, directing his thoughts and feelings away from the pain and suffering of war, toward memories and prophecies of domestic peace and pleasure. The second stanza answers the question placed by the first: the blood of empire, the labor of war cannot destroy the impression of domestic joy. It is permanent, unchangeable, a holy refuge promising the fantasy of mental and emotional redemption. For the aged father, the home is a concrete space of calm, an antidote the fear of imminent death through the poet’s rhetorical representation of heaven (301-2). For the dying infant, the mother sits in vigil, a witness to its brief life and swift death (326). The clearly morbid function served by the domestic space and by its artist-in-residence – to provide comfort in terror – comes into a strange tension with her evaporating imagination:

But who may charm her sleepless pang to rest,
Or draw the thorn that rankles in her breast? (343-4)

The question gestures toward the impossibility of any answer: she is the last surviving member of the household. She is utterly alone in a domestic space whose sole meaning to her was in the provision of domestic comfort for others. Her purpose now, in
the absence of others to care for, is to weep for the dead (not for herself). The only hope for her comfort is in ghostly visitations from the dead:

Ye gentle spirits of departed friends!
If e’er on earth your buoyant wing descends;
If, with benignant care, ye linger near,
To guard the objects in existence dear;
Of hov’ring o’er, ethereal band! ye view
The tender sorrows, to your memory true;
Oh! in the musing hour, at midnight deep,
While for your loss Affection wakes to weep;
While ev’ry sound in hallow’d stillness lies,
But the low murmur of her plaintive sighs;
Oh! then, amidst that holy calm, be near!
Breathe your light whisper softly in her ear![…]
When slumber folds her in his magic vest!
Around her, smiling, let your forms arise
Return’d in dreams, to bless he mental eyes! (371-400)

Just as the domestic space she had created appeared as a ghostly presence to those afar, penetrating them with calm affections and generating fond memories of home, her only hope for comfort comes from the imagined presence and whispers of departed friends. Significantly, this possibility of comfort is posed in the conditional, an “if” that seems desperate in its urgency. Yet, this earthly presence of the dead shortly gives way to
an image of heaven as perfected domesticity, a space where violence, war, and death
cannot threaten domestic tranquility:

“Oh! Still be near! When, darting into day,
Th’ exulting spirit leaves her bonds of clay;
Be yours to guide her flutt’ring wing on high,
O’er many a world, ascending to the sky!
There let your presence, once her earthly joy,
Tho’ dimm’d with tears, and clouded with alloy;
Now form her bliss on that celestial shore,
Were shall sever kindred hearts no more! (415-422)

Here, one encounters heaven as perfected domesticity and as a place of reckoning
for the homemaker’s labor on earth. The final reward for her suffering is to be led by
those she nurtured into heaven, where the bonds formed on earth shall persist in heaven,
exalted by the absence of death and pain. One cannot even say that this heaven will be a
perpetual childhood – a time of uninterrupted domestic bliss – for the infant’s death
annihilates any such teleology. Instead, heaven is the domestic fantasy that – while never
existing as an actuality on earth – gives meaning to domestic ideology as a constant
futurity. Indeed, the domestic tranquility experienced in heaven is only experienced by
figures in the poem as a reconstructed memory or hoped-for heaven: domesticity is
presented as a presence in absence, as that which exists (in the mind) by never quite
existing (in experience).

Paradoxically, the poem has difficulty articulating what this heaven would be like,
for the very value of domesticity on earth is “To sooth our cares, and thro’ the cloud diffuseth/Their temper’d sun-shine, and celestial hues.” The value of domesticity is in providing an antidote and/or vaccine to suffering and terror. In a heaven without death or pain, domesticity itself seems useless and restricting. Nonetheless, the poet delineates its features:

“Yes! In the noon of that Elysian clime,
Beyond the sphere of anguish, death, or time;
Where mind’s bright eye, with renovated fire,
Shall beam on glories—never to expire;
Oh! there, th’ illumined soul may fondly trust,
More pure, more perfect, rising from the dust;
Those mild affections, whose consoling light
Sheds the soft moon-beam on terrestrial night;
Sublim’d, ennobled, shall for ever glow,
Exalting rapture—not assuaging woe!” (423-432)

Thus, the poem ends with the antithesis of domesticity as heaven’s promise: instead of an ameliorating force, domesticity will itself transform into an art of increasing perfection. In this sense, domesticity is split in two. On the one hand is domesticity as effect: an amelioration of suffering. On the other hand is domesticity as techne: an art for the production of such an effect. Domesticity in the first sense is annihilated in the ecstasy of Christian resurrection in heaven. Domesticity in the second sense – as an art –
is apparently adaptable to a world without misery as that which exalts God. Specifically, in heaven, domesticity becomes a means for amplifying the pleasure of beholding God.

If we recall the trope of home as a permanent, indestructible sanctuary, we immediately see that this conceit – however important to the shipwrecked sailor or far-flung soldier – is at once impossible and necessary. Domesticity’s value lay in the foundation it provides to civilized society; specifically, imperialism requires domesticity as both the site of imperial reproduction and imperial goal. To admit its destructibility would undercut the comfort it is able to provide at a distance; further, its centrality as a universal and universalizing trope of civilization requires this aspect of its permanence on earth. However, for the homemaker, domesticity is experienced as an absence, as what one produces but cannot consume, as pure alienation from her own art.

Elsewhere, the trope of domesticity undergoes even stranger variations. In *Forest Sanctuary*, for instance, the usual vision of the home as sanctuary from the wilderness gives way to its inversion: the wilderness provides the hero with sanctuary from the violence of religious persecution in British civilization. Of more importance to us, however, is how *The Forest Sanctuary* compares to *Pocahontas* by Lydia Sigourney, often referred to as “The American Hemans” (Wolfson xviii). Both poems iterate a sentimental poetic of particular importance to antebellum femininity. As when Hemans, in *Domestic Affections*, describes heaven as the mind beholding glories, accompanying the soul in rapture, Sigourney conceives of mentality and spirituality in conflated terms. Contrary to prior formulations of the mind/body split, both women conceived human being as material mentality with a bodily excess. That is, the soul accompanies and
responds to the feeling mind (McGann 117), a union of intellect and emotion, without any indication of a breech in knowledge between the physical and mental worlds. The whole problem of a mind/body split, in sentimental poetics, seems absent.

While the organizing problem of sentimental novels is moral propriety’s relation to the conflict between reason and passion, the organizing problem of sentimental poetics is one of temporality, specifically, the psyche’s relation to the conflict between time and presence. In Hemans’ poetry, this conflict is most often worked out in motifs of vision and voice, of the mind’s eye and the soul’s sensitive ear. What makes these metaphors so powerful, and what makes sentimental poetry so slippery, is the extent to which they erase the boundaries of the body and the self. In the flux of sentiment – of moving and being moved – the world, the self, and the other blend together and disappear, reappearing in memories or ghostly whispers, images of a future forestalled and a past driving forward. As a paradigmatic stanza, take III of The Forest Sanctuary:

And find my ark!—yet whither—I must bear
A yearning heart within me to the grave.
I am of those o’er whom a breath of air—
Just darkening in its course the lake’s bright wave,
And sighing through the feathery canes—hath power
To call up shadows, in the silent hour,
From the dim past, as from a wizard’s cave!—
So must it be!—These skies above me spread,
Are they my own soft skies?—Ye rest not here, my dead.
The complex blending of breath, vision, and multiple temporalities – unified loosely by the dead as both future and past – creates a confused if overwhelming temporality, the present as a bright wave darkened by sighing air in a silent hour. The poetic “I” here, a Protestant in self-exile from the Inquisition, is enacting a sentimental poetics that haunts presence by collapsing substance into shifting time.

Sigourney, in *Pocahontas*, takes up similar Spenserian stanzas used by Hemans in *Forest Sanctuary*. While she also takes up the psyche’s relation to the conflict of temporality and presence, her metaphors are, less disordered and less jarring. Her preferred effect is of juxtaposing vision with tremulous metaphors:

> On sped the seasons, and the forest-child
>  
> Was rounded to the symmetry of the youth;
>  
> While o’er her features stole, serenely mild,
>  
> The trembling sanctity of woman’s truth,
>  
> Her modesty, and simpleness, and grace:
>  
> Yet those who deeper scant the human face,
>  
> amid the trial-hour of fear or truth,
>  
> Might clearly read, upon its heaven-writ scroll,
>  
> That high and firm resolve which nerved the Roman soul. (37)

In this scene, Pocahontas, having been captured, is undergoing both an education and a process of conversion. Sigourney’s difficult task is to depict some *essential* Pocahontas as moving forward into a transformed Christian presence. Further, she does this in order to use Pocahontas as a stabilizing figure in Christian history: as the lost
dream of a sacred meeting between the Puritans and the Wampanoag, as the metaphorical savior of white Protestant masculinity, and as the sentimental conduit through which her admonition of present violence against Native Americans will gain force. Pocahontas cannot get lost in the play of text precisely because her undeniable, but always shakable, presence is what allows the text to function as prophetic Christian history.

If Sigourney’s work is less unsettling than Hemans’ to those of us sensitive to Romantic ideology – which appears the case – it is due to a more straightforward didactic purpose in her poetry, a moralizing tendency that orders violence and tragedy in an unambiguous religious system. Her aesthetics, while indebted to Hemans’, is less fraught with the ambivalence of Romantic consciousness: Sigourney’s is no evaporating imagination. Yet, to leave it at this would be unjust. Sigourney’s aesthetic is one of prophesy in its conventional Judeo-Christian sense: as divinely inspired witnessing, interpretation, and foretelling. Her prophetic femininity, therefore, constitutes a different but cognate epistemology of desire from Hemans’ sentimental poetics, as well as implying a different model of gender reformation. This gender reformation extends, as does Hemans’, from tropes of domesticity, but it does not envision heaven as a transcendent domesticity; instead, heaven is a time of ecstasy, and domesticity is simply one earthly good represented allegorically in order to lead the reader in a prophetic reimagining of Christ’s kingdom on earth.

Yet, it is in their accepted public personae that Sigourney and Hemans were often paired as substitutes for one another; however, the extent to which each of them were

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22 For a thorough treatment of the various uses and versions of Pocahontas, see Tilton.
23 For a discussion of feminism and Christianity, see Fox-Genevese.
pursuing divergent aesthetic and philosophical projects overshadows – or ought to overshadow – this public image when looked at with a critical eye. I submit that it is the discourse of sentiment itself that renders the two ‘poetesses’ interchangeable. The shared project of building a transcultural sympathy rooted in domestic structures centered on maternal love and self-sacrifice – and of utilizing this feminine warrant to garner greater public power for women – sufficiently codes Sigourney and Hemans as identical to most readers. That Hemans circulates a tragic consciousness with deep doubts about the possibility of domesticity coexisting with empire and the possibility that domesticity itself can provide anything but a negative, ultimately self-destructive subjectivity for women – is beside the point to most of her contemporaries. As Susan J. Wolfson comments, “The conflicts that appear in and across her work more directly reflect the complexity of the period—its international politics, its views of war, its attitude toward domestic and gendered life—than the orthodoxies into which her critics, for a variety of ideological motivations, have tried to place her” (xxv). When her tragic consciousness is noticed, it is expelled from her corpus as a defect or the limitation of a morbid mind. Similarly, that Sigourney is enacting a deeply unsettling prophetic temporality that calls upon women to witness social injustice and individual misery in order to redeem the national soul at the expense of assimilating “forest-girls” and “red-chiefs” into a totalizing Christian history is beside the point to those readers consuming objects of

24 For Hemans’ reception, see Wolfson. For example, a critic for The Monthly Review (Dec 1819) writes, “Mrs. Hemans’s talents, however, are not of the highest order. Her poetry is graceful, and in many parts rises into the finer and more impassioned soundings of the lyre: but her verses do not possess that uniform deep colour of poetic feeling, by which the touch of a master-poet is so easily distinguished: they contain little of the “breathing and burning,” or of that powerful strength of expression which stamps itself on our imagination” (530).
commodified sentimental art. McGann’s point that Modernist critical practice can often make us blind to the organizing dynamics of sentimental poetics holds, but it needs to be joined to fact that sentimental discourse itself often rendered nineteenth-century consumers blind to the self-contradictions and troubling absences of their most beloved poetry.

Conclusion

Issues of reception aside, Hemans and Sigourney exert an enormous influence on sentimental aesthetics. Circulated through intimate publics, their poetic innovations help form a readership whose sentimental subjectivity both critiques and enacts a raced and gendered domesticity that intersect divergent national and imperial projects in the U.S. and Britain. While local differences in politics, law, and culture problematize any transatlantic theory of sentiment, the tropes I have traced in this chapter underwrite the ongoing transatlantic circulation of sentimental subjectivity across the long nineteenth century. Tropes of women’s reading, haunted feminine domesticity, prophetic Christianity, racial harmony, and companionate marriage operate as terms in the conversation of sentimental culture.

Further, rhetorics of sentiment and sensibility, partly formed by ideologies of publicity, domestic desire, and republican virtue that emerge from earlier Bluestocking sociality, ground liberal consciousness. I have here delineated central features of sentimental rhetoric and aesthetics in order to theorize its evolution over the long nineteenth century. Inescapably, there are gaps in my genealogy, areas where culture operates outside my view, niches of material change of which I remain ignorant.
Nonetheless, the basic model of liberal subjectivity I have sketched provides valuable insight into the political, cultural, and aesthetic changes one witnesses in sentimental culture. Liberal subjectivity – whether sentimental or pragmatist – is at heart fashioned from the internal conflicts of literacy, the anxieties produced by these conflicts, and the projects initiated to contain or assimilate these anxieties. Through the early novels and poetry of sensibility and sentiment, the anxieties of circulation are primarily contained through gendered domesticity, codes of sexual virtue, and – increasingly – the rhetoric of racial difference. In the following chapter, partly based on the poetic innovations I elaborate in Hemans and Sigourney, new anxieties and new attempts to contain these anxieties will emerge in sentimental culture.
Gender, Aesthetics, and the (Dis)ordering of Sentiment

Secularizing and democratizing both sentiment and virtue become significant projects in the antebellum United States. On the one hand, feeling threatened by Jacksonian masculinity and increasingly uncertain economic fortunes, sentimental women were attempting to develop more robust spheres of political and cultural agency, and they politicized tropes of feminine virtue taken from sentimental culture to do so (Merish 154). On the other hand, the peculiar institution of slavery both challenged basic tenets of republican liberty central to sentimental subjectivity and inspired the rhetoric of “white slavery” central to suffragists’ campaign for enfranchisement. Sentiment, still tied to Christian teleologies and Christianized notions of virtue, but having become increasingly commodified as a signifier of middle-class status, is pressed simultaneously into competing projects. To be a political force for women’s enfranchisement, sentimental identification must become widely available to groups outside the “polite society” usually associated with it, a fact partly driven by the desire for larger and more lucrative sentimental markets, but partly driven by the need to build suffragist networks. Yet, to be a political force in the cause of abolition, sentimental writing must generate sympathy for a group largely closed off from it. That is, the market forces behind sentimental influence cannot adequately extend the intimate public to include male and female slaves because of compulsory illiteracy.

The racial asymmetry of sentimental markets leads to aesthetic and rhetorical forms of sympathy that have been widely critiqued. As Saidiya Hartman has argued, “the value of blackness resided in its metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as
the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves” (7). For white sentimental readers, blackness represented just such an “imaginative surface” through which they could understand themselves. “The slave population,” Toni Morrisson writes, “it could be and was assumed, offered itself up as surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom, its lure and its elusiveness” (37). Speculations about slaves’ subjectivity, representations of their suffering, and defenses of their fundamental humanity serve in sentimental print culture to both legitimate the ethicality of feeling and bolster arguments in favor of white women’s suffrage. Lori Merish puts a finer point on the issue:

Sentimental abolitionist literature, by staging the dialectic of sentimental subjection and enlisting ‘civilized’ emotional performances by/of white readers, worked to constitute the forms of sentimental subjectivity described so persuasively by critics. Texts such as Stowe’s are as invested in inscribing forms of feminine political agency (‘influence’) as in protesting the horrors of the peculiar institution; indeed, these investments are inseparably conjoined. In particular, by racializing (the threat of) ‘enslavement’ and proprietary dependency, an identification both acknowledged and disavowed, these texts inscribe, and could help readers feel, the agency and proprietary power of liberal civil subjectivity. (154)

Instead of deploying sympathetic representation in bad faith, Merish describes how enslaved black bodies provide the figurative soil in which white women’s politicized sentimental subjectivity could grow. The complex racialization of bondage and suffering,
and the aesthetic and political functions such racialization served, are not merely effects of sentimental aesthetics; they are constitutive of sentimental subjectivity in the late antebellum period. Toni Morrison theorizes that “there is no romance free of what Herman Melville called ‘the power of blackness,’ especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated” (37). In the context of sentimental subjectivity, blackness allows the white imagination a site where feminine virtue, religious enthusiasm, and democratic futurity can coalesce.

To elaborate these theoretical concerns, I would like to first consider the role of haunting and mirroring in what I call “the disordering of sentiment” that intensifies after the 1820’s. I have previously elaborated the importance of Adam Smith’s model of sympathy to the development of sentimental subjectivity. Here, I would like to add Christopher Castiglia’s problematization of sympathetic mirroring in relation to racial difference:

Unlike other racializing logics in antebellum America, what is striking about sympathetic discipline is that it is not predicated on marked bodies. In fact, Smith’s formulation of sympathetic difference requires the absence of bodies….Translated to the racial context of antebellum America, Smith’s observation has conflicting implications. On the one hand, it suggests a way for whites and blacks to merge through the imagination, suggesting an affective “sameness” once the burden of marked bodies is removed; in this sense, sympathy
is consistent with other universalizing…forms of liberal humanism. On the other hand, racial difference moves inward, naturalized as the product and sign of individual affect. (124-5)

Castiglia’s model is quite useful, but it needs mild correction. Instead of bodies being “absent” in Smith’s formulation, they are simply unraced. Rather, the problem racialization poses to sympathetic imagination goes entirely untheorized in Smith. Sympathy is sympathy of “unmarked” white subjects with other “unmarked” white subjects. Further, the logic of sentimental representation that Castiglia describes is quite different than the embodied sympathy Smith describes in The Theory of Moral Sentiments. The primary example Smith gives is of witnessing a man’s body being tortured, not of reading about torture in a book. In fact, Smith’s theory of sympathy requires bodies and embodiment: it is the automatic sensibility of the suffering body that gives rise to our imaginative reproduction of it. It is only this imaginative reproduction – and the aesthetic forms built from it – that Castiglia’s model rightly complicates. That is, racial difference moves inward in sentimental print circulation precisely because the intimate public created by sentimental texts largely excludes the slaves whose depiction is so important to sentimental subjectivity. This is why novelistic sympathy so frequently entails racial assimilation – the embodied other is not experienced in the sympathetic circuit: the white abolitionist does not sympathize with the embodied torture of a Southern slave; she sympathizes with the representation of such torture.

This correction aside, Castiglia’s observation that racial difference moves inward through acts of sentimental reading, coupled with an exploration of the epistemological
and ontological commitments of sentimentalism, is invaluable in analyzing Edgar Allan Poe’s aesthetic. Jerome McGann has intimated Poe’s importance to sentimental poetics (96-7), and others have noted a similar aspect to Poe’s writing. For our purposes, Poe’s status as both a guiding critic in the formation of American literature, a shaping force in his role as editor of the Southern Literary Messenger, and exemplar of a particular “Gothic” aesthetic makes him the ideal figure with which to begin a discussion of sentimental disordered and the challenge this disordered puts to the notion of the unmarked self operative in sentimental writing. This selfhood is not precisely the selfhood traced in Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments; it is not quite the selfhood developed in Mill’s On Liberty; it is not the various selfhoods of the Romantics (though it is perhaps most cognate with these myriad selves). The sentimental subject is created as at once a criticism of the skeptical subject and a criticism of the positivistic subject – each of which is a type of liberal subject to begin with.

The sentimental subject critiques skepticism the way Stanley Cavell tells us Emerson does: “Since the existence of the world is more doubtful than my own existence, if I do not know that I exist, I even more evidently do not know that the things of the world exist. If, accordingly, Emerson is to be understood as describing the life left to me under skepticism—implying that I do not exist among the things of the world, that I haunt the world” (6). That is, the skeptic, in denying – or placing a prohibitively high requirement for justification upon – the existence of the world insofar as its existence is

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25 See Elmer Reading at the Social Limit and “Terminate or Liquidate? Poe, Sensationalism, and the Sentimental Tradition.”

26 See Gross.
questionable under Cartesian skeptical method, becomes a ghost haunting an unknown world. The solidity of the world is required for the solidity of the self, and the solidity of each is produced through a sound epistemology, through one’s security in knowing that.

On the other hand, the sentimental subject is a critique of the metaphysical or positivistic subject – what William James would later refer to as those who wield “hard-headed, hard-hearted, heard-fisted methods” (*Varieties* 262) – through a critique of the separation of reason from emotion, the union of which provides the very definition of sensibility (as an epistemological faculty) for Robinson, Poe, Hemans, and the Romantics. That is, sensibility is “that peculiar structure, or habitude, of mind, which disposes a man to be easily moved, and powerfully affected, by surrounding objects and passing events” (*The Enquirer* 707), which also allows for “accurate [judgment] in the fine arts” and the “moral sensibility which can supply the flame of parental affection” (708). Sensibility allows for a subjectivity foreclosed by skepticism, which would unjustly disregard wisdom provided by emotion, or positivism, which would unwisely reduce human cognition to a matter of indifferent and testable facts.

The emphasis on self-creation, or perhaps the problem of the formation of one’s selfhood, is central to sentimental writing. For Robinson, to build on McGann’s reading, the self is formed in the disharmony of one’s erotic potential – this eroticism figured as both virtuous and sentimental, in the sense of a unified mind and pure soul uplifted by the pleasure of a worthy other – when confronted with failed masculinity. The self, if it is not destroyed – as in *Charlotte Temple* – by the degradations of an unworthy lover, and if it does not destroy itself – as in *Sappho and Phaon* – by a refusal to exist in a compromised
epoch, will orient itself toward futurity. In Robinson, this takes the form of a poetic prophesy that points toward a future epoch where Sappho’s genius can speak itself once more and be known. In Rowson and Hemans, it takes the form of a fetishistic mourning. In Fanny Fern, Louisa May Alcott, and Lydia Sigourney, it takes the form of utopian visions, whether redemption comes through the market, perfected feminine communities, or wholeness through revelation.

This orientation toward futurity announces itself in the sentimental self through hauntings, for the unredeemed past is what forces the self outward to a not-yet-extant future. Whether the voices of massacred Indians wafting through the wilderness (Hope Leslie), disembodied male voices beckoning across the night (Jane Eyre), images of the dead hovering around the living (“Domestic Affections”), the channeling of a dead domestic angel through a young girl (The Wide, Wide World), or Poe’s “Annabel Lee,” the ubiquity of haunting in nineteenth-century discourse has been much-noted. Of equal importance, however, is the relation of haunting to selfhood, the extent to which haunting is necessary for a sentimental consciousness formed through the disharmony of Eros and masculinity, the rejection of the skeptical cogito, the racialization of feminine agency, and the extension of value into an unlivable future.

In the antebellum context, haunting also emerges as a figuring of racial difference and its relation to liberal futurity. Dana Luciano, speaking of the “romance of the Vanishing American,” writes:

The ‘vanishing narrative’ permitted the citizens of the new nation to retain certain aspects of this fantasy of primal sonic vitality as a means of enlivening emergent
sexual arrangements. The ability of the voice to signal both interiority and anteriority, that is, structured the spatiotemporal fantasy that would come to characterize middle-class domesticity, which also posited its affective interiors as coming before the historical time of public life (71).

Molly McGarry has similarly theorized that “Spiritualists saw Native Americans as powerful spiritual predecessors, evincing romantic attachments to an ideal or imagined Indian that sometimes translated into an unexamined cultural appropriation” (67). Further, what she calls “this projection of racial difference into the ethereal realm” allowed “nineteenth-century subjects [to produce] themselves as Americans through an engagement with national fantasies of a ‘white man’s Indian’” (67). McGarry implies that racialization of sympathy is not contained to literary representation; instead, it extends also into realms of religious and spiritual practice, structuring imagined national histories by internalizing racial difference. Luciano assents to this characterization, adding that tropes of orality are markers of these haunting, and that representations of voice track tensions in the sexual contract. Evangelical enthusiasm, which McGarry shows to be deeply intertwined with African and spiritualist practices (10), reorders each of these rhetorical modes according to the prophetic futurity I described in my consideration of Felicia Hemans and Sigourney. The vanishing Indian and the suffering slave – and representations of their ghastly presence – function as tropes that allow white sentimental subjects to meditate upon the national future by mourning, feeling, and at times critiquing an imagined past and present.
These forms of catastrophic haunting resound throughout Poe’s poetry and prose and point toward the epistemological anxieties that underwrite them in the sentimental imagination. As Cavell provocatively argues,

The first half [of “The Black Cat”] is, as Poe says about certain of Hawthorne’s tales, not a tale at all but an essay. The essay argues for the existence of perverseness as a radical, primitive, irreducible faculty or sentiment of the soul, the propensity to do wrong for the wrong’s sake, promptings to act for the reason that we should not—something it finds overlooked by phrenologists, moralists, and in great measure ‘all metaphysicianism,’ through ‘the pure arrogance of the reason.’ This phrase, ‘the pure arrogance of the reason,’ to my ear, signals that Poe is writing a critique of the arrogance of pure reason—as if the task, even after Kant, were essentially incomplete, even unbegun. (20)

The intuition, on Poe’s part, concerning the limitation of “metaphysicianism” by perverseness introduces into our discussion a distinct form of violence found throughout sentimental writing: that violence precipitated not by a corrupted reason or a twisted heart but by what I would like to call the madness of Echo. This madness is what leads Sappho to jump from the “the dizzy precipice” and what structures both “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Haunted Palace,” which lay at its center. Specifically, I would like to define the madness of Echo as the perversion of sentiment brought on by the selfsame perpetuity of the feeling mind, theorized in Adam Smith as fundamentally self-enclosed and alienated from others: “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we
ourselves should feel in the like situation” (11). Smith continues, “[Our senses] never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations” (11). The madness of Echo, then, is a uniquely sentimental madness, borne from the internal contradictions of its racialized subjectivity. Formed through the knowledge of virtue provided by the feeling mind, but gaining this knowledge only through self-fashioned sympathy, the sentimental subject’s unique form of despair comes when it can no longer resist skeptical attacks to its epistemology.

Poe theorizes just such a catastrophe in “The Haunted Palace.” The first half of the poem depicts a “happy valley” (19) within “Thought’s dominion” (5). The king, Thought itself, is initially given high praise. But, in the fourth stanza, Poe introduces a haunting break:

And all with pearl and ruby glowing

   Was the fair palace door,

Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing

   And sparkling evermore,

A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty

   Was but to sing,

In voices of surpassing beauty

   The wit and wisdom of their king. (25-32)

As Scott Peeples has pointed out, “The Haunted Palace” appears in the center of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a “mise en abyme, a miniature of the story that
contains it” (180). This doubling is ubiquitous throughout Poe’s story, and “The Haunted Palace” is an internally consistent mirror for the story’s larger structure. In the poem, the ‘appearance’ of echoes directly precedes the king’s destruction though no explanation is given for his destruction. Stanza V begins:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,

Assailed the monarch’s high estate

(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow

Shall dawn upon him, desolate!); (33-6)

The poem, published separately prior to the publication of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” does not give an explanation of what, precisely, these evil things are, how they destroy the monarch Thought’s high estate, or why they do so. The reader is left with what seems like only one reasonable option: the appearance of the Echoes somehow causes the appearance of the evil things. In the story, the “echo” of the narrator’s recitation of the “Mad Trist” of Sir Launcelot Canning immediately precedes Usher’s realization – or at least his admission – that they had buried his sister alive, which is followed quickly by her appearance, her death, the narrator’s flight, and the implosion of the house.

Some critics have argued that Usher’s downfall is either the result of incest or the lack of incest, each leading to the impossibility of the family’s future.\(^{27}\) Others have argued that “‘Usher’ finally records not merely Poe’s rejection of the two particular theories of sublimity [Burke’s and Kant’s], but of the possibility that the sublime can

\(^{27}\) See Allison..
provide a meaningful or even competent accounting of terror” (27). Pahl argues that “One of Poe's best-known domestic sites—the House of Usher—is a place of music and poetry and romance literature. Yet at the center of Roderick Usher's house, in his otherwise peaceful inner sanctum, we discover not a realm of reason, harmony, and refinement but rather one of unsettling sounds and physical and psychological instability” (47). This leads to the disunity of the self (48).

While each of these accounts has merit, understanding sentimental discourse and theories of sensibility in the nineteenth century help us read Poe’s story of self-destructive mirroring as the madness that comes from the inflation of a self-sustaining, isolated imagination that simultaneously figures fears of miscegenation and racial isolation. This is not simply a romantic figure destroyed by any old type of madness; instead, it is a romantic figure destroyed by a “morbid sensibility,” (The Enquirer) by the perverting and disordering echo of the self produced through racialized sympathy. As Smith theorized, Roderick’s feeling mind (Thought itself) can only gain access to others’ emotions through the creation of simulacra in his mental theater, in which he places himself in order to read the experience of those to which he can never, due to the closed nature of perception, have direct access.

It is important here, partly because of Hartman’s attachment of racialized sympathy to the erotics of slavery, to note the sexual valences of the myth of Echo and Narcissus. In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, because of her talkativeness, Echo is condemned to only speak the last words uttered by another. Narcissus, having rejected both the sexual advances of Echo and of all others who pursue him, is condemned by Jupiter to love only
himself. While in some ways Echo and Narcissus mirror/echo one another, they symbolize different iterative anxieties. Echo, a mere copy of others’ words with no “voice” of her own, able to speak only through assimilation, slowly dissipates and dies once rejected by Narcissus. Narcissus, on the other hand, entranced by his own unobtainable subjectivity, dies in the hopeless attempt to halt iteration, to possess his tangible self. Roderick’s madness is the conflation of Narcissus and Echo, the dissipation that comes from infinite assimilation and the paralysis that comes from infinite iteration. Sexual love, a persistent theme in Poe’s text and in sentimental discourse, is thus threatened by sympathetic recursion. A woman, who gains presence and identity only by assimilating the words of others, desires a man who desires only himself. Ironically, it was Narcissus’ fear of his words in another voice – of repetition with a difference – that drove him away from Echo while it is his (impossible) desire for flawless iteration that leads to his death.

We can therefore read the appearance of Echoes in “The Haunted Palace” as the initiation of a self-consuming process of racialized sympathy, where each song in praise of Thought (is Thought through and through), reflects his own being back at him. As in the myth of Echo, this narcissistic loop is highly unstable and leads to eventual destruction precisely because of the slippage of iteration: the diffusion of copies erases the legibility of the original as an original. In this chaotic scene, Thought is a diffuse, diaphanous echo without any legible form. The figure of incest in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is not, as I can see, the point of the story; rather, it is a clue to the aesthetics of disordered sentimentality, of the danger of a morbid sensibility closed off from the
experience of Otherness, Thought’s confrontation with that which cannot be assimilated into the racialized sympathetic circuit without causing violence. Or, perhaps more terrifyingly, Poe gives us a scene in which Thought becomes its own racial Other through the displacing echo; thus, by the logic of Castiglia’s racial difference turned inward, it becomes unable to sympathize with itself since it has no reliable self with which to enact the mental theater of sentimental reflection.

Three Critiques of Sentiment

We are now able to glimpse the madness of Echo, the structured disordering of sentiment, across a wide field of mid-century literature. As three important iterations of disordered and disordering sentiment, I would like to briefly consider *Jane Eyre*, *Pierre*, and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Together, they represent a grouping of three prominent forms of liberal subjectivity that will continue thriving into the twentieth century, located at the intersection of different race, gender, class, and sexual tropes. Confronted with the dysfunction of racialized sympathy, each text suggests a possible evolution of sentimental subjectivity that will sidestep the madness of Echo.

Each text ends with a tragic forestalling: *Jane Eyre* ends with a grotesque domestic space in which Rochester’s mangled body represents the possibility of Jane’s liberation, *Pierre* ends with the death of the entire love triangle only given a possible future through a recursive beckoning to the reader, and *The Narrative* ends with Douglass freed but a fugitive, his own liberation deferred until the actual abolition of slavery. Each text represents a rupture in sentimental consciousness, a violent rending of the episteme occasioned by new technologies of social reproduction and new sciences of knowledge.
Together, they hint at a period of profound social disjointedness across the Atlantic that posed deep problems for the formation of a functional liberal subjectivity at mid-century, a period of trauma not just for disenfranchised racial and gendered others, but also for a white masculinity subjected to economic turmoil, globalized commerce, and the reformation of power.

If, as I previously demonstrated, Hemans regulated a troubled domesticity through the invocation of a transcendent domesticity in heaven, and if Sigourney regulated a temporally-chaotic, prophetic femininity through the invocation of a stabilizing theology, then the loss of faith in religious and republican order poses a threat to sentimental discourse. As we see in Poe, the weakening of religious and republican tropes throws theories of sensibility into a structured collapse. At an aesthetic level, these ordering tropes provide ways of regulating the pharmakon and braking the mania produced by literacy.

As Christopher Castiglia argues, “Nervousness…was both symptomatic and descriptive in antebellum literature, charting the isolation of citizens from various and variable social relations” (168). He proceeds to delineate the progress of theories of human nerves, which culminate in the following view: “By mid-century, then, external stimuli produced by social relations (“sympathy”) had been interiorized within a self-contained network, the agitation of which…caused shutdowns of stimulus intake…and various forms of bodily paralysis” (169). Castiglia relates these nerve theories to a movement toward self-management at mid-century as social institutions are increasingly viewed as out of control. While my interpretation of the period does not exclude this
reading, it does insist on attending to the broader theories of sensibility in which these nerve theories were situated, as well as the tropic conventions that help frame aesthetic productions.

Where our interpretations intersect is in the view that interiorization gives rise to an obsession with self-management – the regulation of the pharmakon – which is itself a form of social management. In this sense, the pharmakon is tangled up in what Foucault terms biopower, “the new technology of power” that “is directed not at man-as-body but at man-as-species” (Society 243). The social management of reading, modeled partly on previous regulatory mechanisms like the virtuous sociality of the Bluestockings, gets tied up in the national project of “healthy-mindedness” (James Varieties 101). It is in order to control populations through regulated hermeneutics that various critical enterprises emerge, and this method of regulation operates at the level of undifferentiated readership (man-as-species), not the level of differentiated, complementary parts (as in older norms of social authorship). The primary difference between literary productions in the early-nineteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century is not necessarily a shift toward more and greater institutional control of social life – though this was clearly occurring. Instead, it is due to the weakening of domestic tropes that were once able to regulate and ameliorate social contradiction through the structured dramatization of these contradictions in liberal subject formation. The weakening of these tropes is partly related to the bureaucratization necessary for biopower, but it is not reducible to greater institutional control of social life; hence, it serves our purpose to focus simply on the weakening of these tropes and the strategies different liberal subjects brought to
reforming generic conventions to either re-affirm the regulatory possibilities of writing (as with *Jane Eyre* and *The Narrative*) or critique the possibility of such rejuvenation (as with *Pierre*).

*The Narrative* provides both an instance of older notions of republican virtue central to sensibility and the disordering threat posed to sympathy – even self-sympathy – by the reality of slavery. In composing his narrative, Douglass had two primary aims: to circulate his textual presence as evidence of the intelligence and perfectibility of black folks and to create sympathy in his audience for the plight of slaves in order to secure abolition. He does the first by composing a rhetorically expert autobiography that demonstrates black intelligence and virtue by performing the appropriate conventions of the genre.\(^{28}\) He does the second by fashioning scenes of suffering according to conventions of sensibility.

We may be tempted, when analyzing his account of literacy, to draw too straight a development from his reading in *The Columbian Orator* to a subjective formation indebted to the New Rhetoric of Blair and Campbell I gloss earlier in this chapter. While the influence of the New Rhetoric is palpable in Douglass’ writing and speaking, its inflection through Douglass’ experience leads to a material view of language far less amenable to such a genealogy. Douglass writes:

The reading of these documents [Sheridan’s speeches] enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than

\(^{28}\) See Blassingame.
the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and
detest my enslavers…As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! That very
discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to
read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. (35)

Douglas depicts the process of gaining literacy in terms of pain and anguish, as a
process of enlightenment that both facilitated self-expression and generated profound
distress. While he could finally speak his own experience in terms legible in a broader
culture – and defend abolition against the usual arguments of slavery, thus providing a
rhetorically legitimate self-image – he also fell prey to a deeper hatred for those who
oppressed him. As opposed to the highly structured treatments of literacy in educational
tracts of the nineteenth century, Douglass’ description of literacy is visceral, productive
of an enlightened but deeply sorrowful subjectivity. He continues:

As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse
rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without
the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to
get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have
often wished myself a beast…Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It
was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. (35-36)

Here, Douglass is intoxicated by the pharmakon. The knowledge gained through
literacy causes not just hatred of his oppressors but also an acute agony at the awareness
of his own subjugation and the limited ability he has to mitigate it. Further, it gives rise to
both self-loathing and condescension toward his fellow-slaves, whom he envies for their
ignorance. He privileges literacy as a site of intelligence and a form of knowledge, which in turn compels him to denigrate the illiterate slaves around him. Thought becomes a quite material form of torture in this section, described in terms more evocative than those used to describe his pain when starving or his treatment under Mr. Covey. Indeed, his body seems to writhe more under literacy than under Covey’s whip. He does not consider suicide under Covey’s violence; it is only under his newfound enlightenment that suicide enters his mind: “I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wished myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed” (36). As with Sappho, the sentimental subject could not survive the social change it desired, and it is the glimmer of this existential undoing that promotes the thought of suicide.

Further, for Douglass, Hemans’ trope of a transcendent domesticity is necessarily foreclosed. So to, given his belief in the hypocrisy of Southern religion, is Sigourney’s prophetic temporality. Douglass, it seems, has no way, or no desire, to regulate his mania under the sign of complementary heterosexuality as Edgeworth’s Belinda does. The lack of these ordering tropes endangers sensibility in fantasies of suicide provoked by Douglass’ social isolation, by the madness of racialized sympathy. Douglass, initially, provides himself a remedy through gaining a mastery of writing thus in many ways ameliorating the pharmakon through opening up the possibility of self-circulation. He does this through trickery depicted in hauntingly material terms:

The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing,
and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended…I soon learned the names of these letters [SLAF], and for what they were intended…I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, ‘I don’t believe you. Let me see you try it.’…During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. (37)

The materiality of Douglass’ literacy, depicted through metaphors of timber marking and writing on common city objects, is altogether foreign to the scenes of literacy depicted in most sentimental novels, where tutors or benevolent fathers and substantial libraries of bound books are the usual vehicles. Instead, like Olaudah Equiano in his own narrative of slavery and liberation, Douglass’ literacy is a less polite social process worked into the material life of the city and deeply imbricated with labor. The materiality of this process – and Douglass’ depiction of literacy’s effect on his body – cannot be severed from the reality of slavery and the ordering trope – abolition through writing and speaking – that Douglass finally settles upon to regulate his mania.

He tells the reader in the final chapter, “[‘The Liberator’] became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds…sent a thrill of joy through my soul” (80). He continues, “[I] never felt happier than when in an anti-slavery meeting…From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my brethren” (80). It is sympathy with slaves and the concrete actions of
abolition that finally regulate the pharmakon for Douglass. His reading, his writing, and
his oration are ordered according to the various shifting needs of abolition and are guided
by theories of sensibility and republican justice common to the texts we’ve looked at
throughout the chapter. Sentimental writing, for Douglass, is rescued from the
disordering force of slavery by recasting language as a material force to be directed
toward emancipation and enfranchisement, thus sidestepping the madness of recursive
sympathy.

Lara Freeburg Kees has taken up the rhetoric of racialized sympathy in *Jane Eyre*,
suggesting that “the racial language of *Jane Eyre*” constitutes “Brontë’s attempt to find a
replacement for both religious faith and the morality founded thereon” (873). Amit Rai
further argues that the “sympathetic call is the fundamental mystery that the narrative
grapplies with: not race (Bertha and the heathen Hindu), not ghosts (the hideous laughter
that terrifies Jane), not sexual abandon (Rochester’s temptation), not the colonies
(Jamaica, India, Madeira)—all these are finally explained, reintegrated through a
rigorous, one might even say colonizing realism. No, what remains beyond all
explanation is, precisely, sympathy.” Rai delineates two types of sympathy. One “is that
paradoxical mode of power that writes itself on the body, that reinscribes inequality at the
very moment it seems to obliterate it” (89). But, “it is also an effect of a certain call of
otherness, of an irreducible difference” (89). Instead of the power sympathy accords Jane,
Rai finally contends that Brontë’s purpose is to fashion a “displacement of (racial and
cultural) difference, and its final assimilation in Jane’s vision of companionate love and
domestic bliss” (90).
While assenting to these interpretations, I contend that Charlotte Brontë’s recuperation of sentimental writing after confronting the disordering threat of Echo seems at once more haunting and less productive than Douglass’ political engagement. Ashly Bennett provides a provocative reading of *Jane Eyre*, in which she calls for critics to attend to the role of shame in developing Jane’s interiority and as a possible form of identification amidst “sympathy’s breakdown” (306). While I disagree with Bennett that this shame somehow stands outside of, or in contrast to, the conventions of sympathy so important to sentimental discourse, I do agree that the presence of shame in the text is a clue to understanding the unique dysfunction of sympathy in Jane’s relationship with Rochester. Further, it is of a piece with the structured disordering of sentiment in the novel that I have been theorizing. But, instead of shame or irony undoing sentimental discourse, they appear as strategies for preventing the madness of Echo by envisioning forms of identification that don’t rely on the recursive self-iterations within the mental theater sketched by Smith. I assent to Bennett’s notion that “From the shamings of Jane and Helen Burns at Lowood School to the shame-charged maiming and healing of Rochester’s body, Brontë employs a shame-inflected narration that intersects with physical spectacles of shame both to structure *Jane Eyre* and to fashion – in lieu of a sympathetic sameness – intimate relations of difference among the novel’s characters…” (301). But, I would add that the cause of Brontë’s need to perform such a restructuring of identification rises from the weakening of religious and republican tropes that would otherwise have provided the regulative tropes necessary for the novel’s composition. That is, the disordereding of sentiment at mid-century – for reasons already discussed – provokes
an aesthetic reformation that relies on shame to provide identification without selfsame sympathy. Shame allows sympathy to continue its work without the danger of self-iteration that leads to madness; it provides a subjective break in the circuit of imaginative sympathy, initiating a rejuvenation of sentimental discourse, albeit one that is fundamentally tragic and traumatic.

In my reading, the period of St. John’s attempted ‘courtship’ of Jane is precisely a meditation on the trope of prophetic femininity that so frequently brings resolution to sentimental novels. The entertainment of this possible resolution does not last long; her repeated rejection of St. John as a husband – but admission that she could go as his “fellow-missionary” (454) – are given their meaning by an initial, metaphoric failure following St. John’s proposal:

‘Then I must speak for it,’ continued the deep, relentless voice. ‘Jane, come with me to India: come as my help-meet and fellow-labourer.’

The glen and sky spun round: the hills heaved! It was as if I had head a summons from Heaven – as if a visionary messenger, like him of Macedonia, had enounced, ‘Come over and help us!’ But I was no apostle, – I could behold the herald, – I could not receive his call. (448)

Here, a conventional trope for ordering the contradictions of sentimental discourse – the dedication of one’s life to God’s labor – is depicted as impotent and inaudible: she cannot hear its call. The rhetorical force of the trope has dissipated and become insufficient for Jane. She can go as a friend, an individuated and independent missionary, but she cannot subsume her flesh to John’s will even in the performance of
God’s work. The narrative requires a different order.

It is important to note here that both prophetic feminism and supplementary heterosexuality have been denied by Brontë as sufficient resolutions to the plot. Marriage to Rochester and his overbearing masculinity – emblematized by his closeting of Bertha – is rejected. A similar subsuming under St. John’s patriarchal Christian prerogative is also rejected, as is a union for the performance of God’s work, which will lead to resolution by the invocation of his sublime temporality. In short, the possible resolutions of a sentimental plot have been radically limited. In the end, we don’t even get complementary heterosexuality, in the sense that Rochester’s masculinity has been so thoroughly mutilated as to foreclose that reading.

As Jane approaches Thornfield, she provides the reader with “an illustration” (471) of what she confronts: “A lover finds his mistress asleep on a mossy bank; he wishes to catch a glimpse of her fair face without waking her [...] He thought his love slept sweetly: he finds she is stone-dead” (472). She offers this as an illustration for her situation upon reaching Thornfield: “I looked with timorous joy towards a stately house: I saw a blackened ruin” (472). Brontë literally provides an analogy – through her use of colons – between the approach of a lover and his discovery of the beloved’s death, and her approach to Thornfield and her discovery of its ruin. Instead of a stealthy approach resulting in physical contact with an un molested lover, Jane experiences the disillusionment of a destroyed romance, one made manifest by the description of Rochester’s deformity by an unnamed “host” (475). The scene of a stealthy approach is repeated immediately at the beginning of the next chapter as Jane reaches Ferndean.
Upon seeing his form: “I stayed my step, almost my breath, and stood to watch him – to examine him, myself unseen, and alas! To him invisible” (479). She goes on in a long description of how his form had changed, how his daring was gone.

Here, we have Rochester humbled, deformed, blinded, and made dependent on others for his survival. The novel ends, as is widely recounted, with Jane becoming Rochester’s eyes, his guide and master. Shame certainly has its hand in this depiction: his deformity is a direct punishment for his treatment of Bertha. It does, as Bennett gestures toward, evoke Smith’s theorization of a man about to be hanged for crimes: we sympathize not with his guilt or his fear, but with his awareness that no one sympathizes with these things. That is, Rochester and Jane, if they are said to sympathize with each other at the end of the novel, primarily do so only after they reinstate a mutual identification based on a shared awareness of Rochester’s justly earned deformity. It is an identification that allows for individuation, a union based on Rochester’s recreation through Jane’s stewardship.

The trope of a traumatized heterosexuality reorganized through shame and female leadership seems a strange way of recuperating sentimental writing from racial disharmony. Nonetheless, it has a certain precedent in novels of sensibility at the turn of the nineteenth century. Indeed, what is Belinda but the reformation of Clarence Harvey under a style of masculinity amenable to companionate marriage? Yet, this reformation required no catastrophe (Clarence has his own Bertha in the character of Virginia) and it does not operate according to an aesthetics of shame, trauma, and recuperation. The need for this aesthetic is, again, occasioned by the loss of Belinda’s ordering trope of
republican domesticity. In the absence of this, and the faith in virtue it entails, Brontë negotiates perhaps the only resolution she can fathom for the adequate formation of a liberal subjectivity still dependent on the sexual contract.

If *Jane Eyre* and *The Narrative* each provide a way of recuperating writing through new regulatory tropes that ameliorate the mania of the pharmakon, which in turn allow for the fashioning of functional liberal subjects, *Pierre* is a story about the failure to recuperate writing within a sentimental economy, which is represented through tropes of authorial impotence, incest, and parricide. Speaking of why *Pierre* fails where *The Lamplighter* succeeds, Weinstein writes, “One decisive reason is that the plots of many sentimental novels depend upon their protagonists’ ability to create new affections based on the voluntary bonds of contract, which allows the scope of the novel to extend beyond the limitations of consanguinity. By contrast, Pierre tries and fails to generate contractual relations, painfully constricting the novel to a world of ‘blood relation’” (159).

Weinstein’s interpretation is instructive, staging *Pierre*’s dual failure to be either a sentimental or anti-sentimental novel as a dual failure of both the contractarian presumptions of sentimental subjectivity and any alternative to those presumptions. Pierre, seeking an escape from “consanguinity” (162) and from the tyranny of his heredity, first tries two versions of romance (Lucy and Isabel), then the commercial extension of his identity through writing, which is tied up with his ability to support Isabel and Lucy through the money he makes as a writer. Each attempt fails, and through such failure, absent any suggested alternative, stages an ironic sentimental subjectivity that remains important in literary culture throughout the century.
Speaking of liberal irony, Richard Rorty has written:

I shall define an “ironist” as someone who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one’s way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old. (Contingency 73)

Pierre is not an ironist, but Pierre is written by and for such an ironist. Pierre, the character who moves from sentimental romance to gothic romance to the promise of authorial commerce, is a ‘serious’ liberal subject through and through. He grounds his identity in Republican ideals of contractarianism, heteronormativity, commerce, and masculine authorship; further, he develops his subjectivity through repeated scenes of reading, including explicit reference to “Flaxman’s Dante,” the tale of Lancelot, and Hamlet. Yet, the representation of Pierre’s many failures, and of the many contingencies that threaten him, uphold both criticisms that the novel is too sentimental and assertions that it is entirely anti-sentimental: it is a critique without an alternative. In

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29 See Melville 54-5; 224-32.
this way, Melville fashions a sentimentality that, while still generative, can be enacted ironically, mocking the sexual and ethical presumptions of sentimentality without being able to fully reject them.

The pharmakon’s dual nature is on dizzying display in *Pierre*, which is provocatively subtitled, *The Ambiguities*. As he often does, Melville here meditates on the impossibility of interpretation and the ineffable mystery of life and language. The unknowable difference between “Truth and Error” (235) is central to Pierre’s anxiety, and the object of his interpretation is the possible kinship he may share with his lover, Isabella. The mystery to decipher, the mystery that cannot be definitively resolved, is whether or not he has succumbed to sexual passion for his half-sister.

That hermeneutic and epistemological conundrums should be organized under the sign of incest is not particularly shocking to Weinstein:

The closed economy of incest, in other words, registers Pierre’s attempted revolt against a variety of disciplinary regimes, including the sentimental family and sentimental fiction, in the name of individualism, or “his own self will”…Such atrocious doctrines were, however, not solely a feature of Melville’s fictional domain. They were standard fare in the antebellum debate about family reform…The fact is that while the family home was being coronated as “the sanctuary of all is most sacred in humanity,” in the words of E.H. Chapin…that same sanctuary was being condemned as the primary source of “apathy and intellectual death.” (173-4)
Family reform, insofar as it sought to reorganize the terms of the sexual contract and of gender relations in general, ineluctably threw sentimental subjectivity into turmoil. In *Pierre*, as in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” incest represents the fear of dissipation through infinite iteration, but it also represents a sin against the sexual order and the very terms of power central to the regulation of hermeneutic regimes. Pierre cannot read himself, his passion, or his own family history precisely because the terms of interpretation – the sexual contract of sentimental domesticity – have become haunted by the specters of infidelity, incest, and parricide.

The specters of incest and parricide are intimated through several portraits in the novel: three of Pierre’s father (95-115; 477-9), two of Pierre (97), one of The Cenci of Guido (479-81), and one of Pierre in skeleton (488). The two earlier-introduced portraits of Pierre’s father form a symbolic diptych, compared to two similar paintings of Pierre, playing off of one another in Pierre’s imagination as he tries to decipher the meaning of his father’s paternity and past:

Even to Pierre these two paintings had always seemed strangely dissimilar. And as the larger one had been painted many years after the other, and therefore brought the original pretty nearly within his own childish recollections; therefore, he himself could not but deem it by far the more truthful and life-like presentation of his father. So that the mere preference of his mother, however strong, was not at all surprising to him, but rather coincided with his own conceit. Yet not for this, must the other portrait be so decidedly rejected…

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30 See Creech Ch. 4 for a discussion of the erotics of textual cruising and the many portraits in the text.
Here, certainly, large allowance was to be made in any careful, candid estimation of these portraits. To Pierre this conclusion had become well-nigh irresistible, when he placed side by side two portraits of himself; on taken in his early childhood…the other, a grown youth of sixteen…If a few years, then, can have in me made all this difference, why not in my father? thought Pierre. (96-7)

The two paintings of his father, the reader is informed, were painted at different times. The first was painted when the father was “a brisk, unentangled, young bachelor, gaily ranging up and down in the world” (97). The second was painted when he was “a middle-aged married man” (97). In a long section devoted to the “chair-portrait” of the young bachelor, it is revealed that Ralph, Pierre’s cousin, painted it secretly during a period of visits Pierre’s father had made to an indigent family with a beautiful daughter. The speculation that haunts Pierre later in the text is whether this beautiful young woman is Isabel’s mother and whether the chair-portrait represents for her what the later portrait represents for Pierre: a visual representation of the father’s final identity to the child (and the child, as an iteration of the father, tied up in that identity). The chair-portrait, at two separate moments in the text, operates as Pierre’s primary evidence that Isabel is his sister: “But the portrait, the chair-portrait, Pierre? Think of that. But that was painted before Isabel was born; what can that portrait have to do with Isabel? It is not the portrait of Isabel, it is my father’s portrait; and yet my mother swears it is not he…and yet, at the same time, [Pierre is] persuaded, strong as death, that in spite of them, Isabel was indeed his sister” (189). Later in the text: “The chair-portrait, that was the entire sum and substance of all possible, rakable, downright presumptive evidence” (482).
While the placement of the earlier portrait in Pierre’s closet supports Creech’s interpretation of Pierre’s erotic attachment to his father (and, one might easily add, his mother), the question of how to interpret the many iterations of his father’s, Isabel’s, and his own image also open up the interpretation I present here: that the portraits introduce the specters of incest and parricide. The narrator makes the point clear in the gallery scene where an anonymous portrait, presumed by Isabel to be her father, is found:

Lucy had thus passed the strange painting, without the least special pause, and had now wandered round to the precisely opposite side of the hall; where, at this present time, she was standing motionless before a very tolerable copy (the only other good thing in the collection) of that sweetest, most touching, but most awful of all feminine heads – The Cenci of Guido. The wonderfulness of which consists chiefly, perhaps, in a striking, suggested contrast, half-identical with, and half-analogous to, that almost supernatural one—sometimes visible in the maidens of tropical nations—namely, soft and light blue eyes, with an extremely fair complexion, vailed [sic] by funereally jetty hair. But with blue eyes and fair complexion, the Cenci’s hair is golden—physically, therefore, all is in strict, natural keeping; which, nevertheless, still the more intensifies the suggested fanciful anomaly of so sweetly and seraphically blonde a being, being double-hooded, as it were by the black crape of the two most horrible crimes (of one of which she is the object, and of the other the agent) possible to civilized humanity—incest and parricide. (479)
Lucy’s observation of The Cenci of Guido takes place at the same time as Isabel’s observation of “No. 99. A stanger’s head, by an unknown hand” (477), about which Isabel exclaims, “see! see!...only my mirror has ever shown me that look before!” (478). Shortly after, the narrator remarks, “to Isabel, in the eye and on the brow, were certain shadowy traces of her own unmistakable likeness; while to Pierre, this face was in part as the resurrection of the one he had burnt at the Inn” (479). This final portrait of “a stranger,” having been brought to exhibition from Europe by American art dealers, is for Isabel an image of her long-lost father (she has yet to see any of Pierre’s father’s other portraits) and is for Pierre further evidence of his father’s infidelity and his own incestuous marriage to Isabel.

Further, the text presents “A Stranger’s Head” and The Cenci of Guido as pairs: “Now, this Cenci and ‘the Stranger’ were hung at a good elevation in one of the upper tiers; and, from the opposite walls, exactly faced each other; so that in secret they seemed pantomimically talking over and across the heads of the living spectators below” (479). The secret they pantomime has both a personal and general character. They pantomime the secret of Pierre’s father’s infidelity and his incestuous marriage with Isabel; however, the lofty placement of this pantomime also bolsters Weinstein’s previous assertion that family secrets of infidelity and incest were common occurrences in antebellum culture. That the two portraits pantomime the secret of incest above the heads of the living spectators implies that these spectators – the public at large – is no less controlled by the fate of “romantic filial love” (7) than are Pierre, Lucy, and Isabel.
Following this scene of iteration and interpretation governed by a haunted form of 
sentimental domesticity, Pierre’s thoughts veer once again toward the pharmakeion:

Then, the original of this second portrait was as much the father of Isabel as the 
original of the chair-portrait. But perhaps there was no original at all to this 
second portrait; it might have been a pure fancy piece; to which conceit, indeed, 
the uncharacterizing style of the filling-up seemed to furnish no small 
testimony…With such bewildering meditations as these in him, running up like 
clasping waves upon the strand of the most latent secrecies of his soul, and with 
both Isabel and Lucy bodily touching his sides as he walked; the feelings of Pierre 
were entirely untranslatable into any words that can be used. (482)

His interpretive regimes under assault, Pierre clamors about for ways to 
understand “the wonderful coincidences” (481), framing his interpretation in terms of 
copies and originals. The “original,” in this instance, is not meant as “the original 
painting,” but as the origin of the painting, the living man whose visage there remains. 
Phrasing it this way further leads the reader to understand “the copy,” not as a copy of 
painting but as the copy of a man, some resurrection of his very being. This sense of 
original and copy provides insight into Pierre’s anxiety and Isabel’s joy, for the paintings 
represent the reincarnation of their father. Yet, by introducing the possibility that the 
second portrait could be a copy with no original – aside from seeming to anticipate Jean 
Baudrillard’s definition of simulacra and Judith Butler’s description of gender31 – the 
narrator introduces Pierre’s fundamental anxiety: is he himself, his identity, a copy with

31 See Baudrillard and Butler.
no original? This anxiety, I have argued, is at the heart of liberal subject formation. Iteration – both in terms of him being a blood copy of his father, a subjective copy of the texts he reads, and a copy unable to copy himself – is what has given Pierre his identity but is also what spurns his impotence and fear.

This theme is elaborated just pages later when Pierre stumbles upon Lucy, who is beginning to sketch his portrait:

The marble girl sat before her easel; a small box of pointed charcoal, and some pencils by her side; her painter’s wand held out against the frame; the charcoal-pencil suspended in two fingers, while with the same hand, holding a crust of bread, she was lightly brushing the portrait-paper, to efface some ill-considered stoke. The floor was scattered with the bread-crumbs and charcoal-dust; he looked behind the easel, and saw his own portrait, in the skeleton. (488)

Here, Lucy has taken it upon herself to sketch a secret portrait of Pierre, just as Ralph had sketched one of his father so many years ago. Her “wand,” given the magical powers of creation, presents the same problem of iteration Pierre has been grappling with throughout the text. Can he escape consanguinity and invent a new version of himself, an original, autonomous will that can be extended into the world? Her erasure of Pierre’s skeleton alludes to the erasure of Pierre, the annihilation of the copy recursively annihilating the simulacra (as in The Picture of Dorian Gray just under forty years later). To bolster this reading, consider the previous pairing of Lucy with the Cenci of Guido, who was the victim of incest but the agent of parricide. Lucy, already a victim of incest, must become the agent of parricide to keep faithful to this description. The text achieves
this through the recursive relationship between copies and originals. Pierre’s reaction to his erasure further supports the reading: “Dead embers of departed fires lie by thee, thou pale girl; with dead embers thou sleakest to relume the flame of all extinguished love! Waste not so that bread; eat it—in bitterness!” (488). Aside from recoiling from his own erasure, Pierre rejects any possibility of rekindled love so as to avoid any future iterations of the Glendinnings.

The strange recursion in the text not only reminds the reader of “The Fall of the House of Usher” and its own emphasis on incest and madness; it also sets the terms for the text’s staging of ironic sentimental subjectivity. Just prior to walking in on Lucy and the incomplete portrait, Pierre receives a pair of letters that he will later use as wadding in the pistols that kill Glendinning Stanly. One is from his publisher, denouncing Pierre as a swindler and informing him that they will take legal action to recuperate his advance. The other is from Glendinning Stanly and Frederic Tartan, announcing their hatred of Pierre. Prior to opening them, Pierre exclaims, “I see not the writing; know not yet, by mine own eye, that they are meant for me; yet, in these hands I feel that I now hold the final poniards that shall stab me; and by stabbing me, make me too a most swift stabber in the recoil” (486). Aside from the absurd comedy of this whole section, Pierre’s exclamation replays his entrapment within both iteration and consanguinity. Even the cause of his death will be his own blood, and even his murder of Stanly will come about purely as an unwilled recoil, a copy of the previous act.

Directly following the opening of the letters and the discovery of the incomplete portrait, Pierre storms out: “He turned, and entered the corridor, and then, with out-
stretched arms, paused between the two outer doors of Isabel and Lucy. ‘For ye two, my
most undiluted prayer is now, that from you’re here unseen and frozen chairs ye may
never stir alive;—the fool of Truth, the fool of Virtue, the fool of Fate, now quits ye
forever!’” (488). Fitting for my analysis, Pierre characterizes himself as the fool of three
central terms in liberal subjectivity: truth, virtue, and fate. He is their fool insofar as he
has failed in his attempt to embody them – and thus gain an authentic identity – and he is
their fool insofar as he amuses both them and the readers of Pierre through his absurd
and seemingly inevitable failures to institute an authentic sentimental identity. In the
text’s final act of irony – killing Stanly with his own letter – the materiality of the word
presses the reader back upon herself, allowing Pierre to perform an ironic sentimental
subjectivity, one that relies on sentimental tropes even as it uses narrative distance to
critique them; that is, the ironic sentimental subject is the negation of the negation of
sentimental subjectivity. Melville, I contend, is just such a sentimental ironist, and Pierre
is just such an ironic sentimental text. The pistol scene reads as follows:

Wrenching open the locked drawer, a brace of pistols, a powder flask, a
bullet-bag, and a round green box of percussion-caps lay before him.

“Ha! what wondrous tools Prometheus used, who knows? but more
wondrous these, that in an instant, can unmake the topmost three-score-years-and-
ten of all Prometheus’ makings. Come: here’s two tubes that’ll outroar the
thousand pipes of Harlem.—Is the music in ‘em?—No?—Well then, here’s
powder for the shrill treble; and wadding for the tenor; and a lead bullet for the
concluding bass! And,—and,—and,—ay; for the top-wadding, I’ll send ‘em back their lie, and plant it scorching in their brains!”

He tore off that part of Glen and Fred’s letter, which more particularly gave the lie; and halving it, rammed it home upon the bullets. (489-90)

The madness that has taken hold of Pierre is evident in his hasty repetition and outlandish allusions to Prometheus and the pipes of Harlem. It is the very recursive madness I detailed in “The Fall of the House of Usher” that comes from a sympathy that cannot escape consanguinity, which I have already connected to the racialized sympathy in Poe and Jane Eyre. Pierre, as does the Narrative, seeks to sidestep this madness through highlighting the materiality of language. Doing this, as I have already shown, allows for a sympathy not hopelessly iterated within the Cartesian theater of Smith’s sympathetic model. By using their letter as wadding in the guns Pierre intends to kill them with, Stanly and Frederic get wrapped up in the inauthentic recoil of Pierre’s incestuous madness. The murder scene is thus described:

…Glen leaped toward Pierre from front, and with such lightning-like ferocity, that the simultaneous blow of his cow-hide smote Pierre across the cheek, and left a half-livid and half-bloody brand.

For that one moment, the people fell back on all sides from them; and left them—momentarily recoiled from each other—in a ring of panics.

But clapping both hands to his breasts, Pierre, on both sides shaking off the sudden white grasp of two rushing girls, tore out both pistols, and rushed headlong upon Glen.
“For thy one blow, take here two deaths! ‘Tis speechless sweet to murder thee!”

Spatterings of his own kindred blood were upon the pavement; his own hand had extinguished his house in slaughtering the only outlawed human being by the name of Glendinning;—and Pierre was seized by a hundred contending hands. (491)

Here, the “white grasp of two rushing girls” not only entangles the text in the rhetoric of racialized sympathy previously discussed, it also exposes Isabel and Lucy, who have followed Pierre to the street without his apparent knowledge. In killing the only “unoutlawed” Glendinning, Pierre has also terminated the future possibility of consanguinity and iteration of his own family. His penultimate attempt to escape the madness of Echo and the incestuous power of blood is to kill all the copies that might copy themselves. The threat posed by iteration is finally neutralized through the deaths of Lucy, Isabel, and Pierre. At the “wailed words from Isabel,” where she announces that Pierre is her brother, Lucy “[shrinks] up like a scroll” (492) and falls dead at Pierre’s feet. Pierre, for his part, “seized Isabel in his grasp—‘in thy breasts, life for infants lodgeth not, but death-milk for thee and me!—The drug!’ and tearing her bosom loose, he seized the secret vial nesting there” (492). Here again, the materiality of language (Lucy shrinking up like a scroll after hearing Isabel’s pronouncement) joins with eroticized representations of incest in a narrative of impotence and death (the death-milk in Isabel’s breast). The text destroys every copy of the Glendinnings and does so while alluding to the morbid power of incest and the material force of language.
These scenes and their evocation of materiality and incest already imply the ironic sentimentality I have been urging. The closing scene further supports the interpretation that the reader is being called upon to adopt an ironic stance toward the text, to internalize it as the negation of the negation of sentimental subjectivity. After they drink the poison, Pierre and Isabel begin to die slowly, allowing Frederic and Millthorpe time to come to the dungeon. Frederic embraces his dead sister, Lucy, while Millthorpe – supporting Creech’s queer reading of the text – comes to embrace Pierre:

The dark vein’s burst, and here’s the deluge-wreck—all stranded here! Ah, Pierre! my old companion, Pierre;—school-mate—play-mate—friend!—Out sweet boy’s walks within the woods!—Oh, I would have rallied thee, and banteringly warned thee from thy too moody ways, but thou wouldst never heed! What scornful innocence rests on thy lips, my friend!—Hand scorched with murderer’s powder, yet how woman-soft!—By heaven, these fingers move!—one speechless clasp!—all’s o’er! (494-5)

The equivocal phrasing of Pierre’s “woman-soft” hands, the attribution of innocence, the disassociation of Pierre from “murderer’s powder” implies a sentimental attachment common to “men of feeling” even as it strikes the reader, in this particular context, as an absurd obfuscation of Pierre’s actions. Isabel provides the final pronouncement of the text:

“All’s o’er, and ye know him not!” came gasping from the wall; and from the fingers of Isabel dropped an empty vial—as it had been a run-out sand-glass—and shivered upon the floor; and her whole form sloped sideways, and she feel upon
Pierre’s heart, and her long hair ran over him, and arbored him in ebon vines.

(495)

Isabel tells the sentimental reader, figured as Millthorpe, that he/she does not know Pierre even after having read nearly five-hundred pages of stilted prose about him. One wonders whether Isabel knows much about Pierre given her apparent ignorance of the attachment he shared with Millthorpe, but the injunction remains, urging the reader to develop an ironic distance from Pierre’s incestuous tale. In the terms of my present analysis, this ironic distance is meant as a way of both sidestepping the madness caused by crises in racialized sympathy and a way of coping with the ambiguities of iteration. The reader, like Pierre, may be but a copy of copied art, but she can be a copy with a difference by performing sentimental irony. The “ebon vines” that finally conceal Pierre are an allusion to Dante’s *Inferno*, specifically to Pier della Vigne, who like all suicides turns into a living tree (Alighieri 139). Their transformation into symbolic objects at the close of the text allows their figuring as ironic tropes. The intertextuality the inflects any reading of *Pierre* in turn inflects the representation of materiality and incest, directing the sentimental reader toward an ironic interpretation. In a similar move, Cindy Weinstein argues that the death of all the consanguineous characters, and the survival of Delly and Charlie Millthorpe, implies “the possibility of a sentimental novel to come” (184). While I submit that any such sentimental novel, founded through a “fallen woman” and “devoted bachelor,” would be complicated by the powerful homoerotic valences detailed

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32 See Wright for a more extensive treatment of the many allusions in *Pierre* to Dante’s *Inferno*.  

by James Creech, her basic insight coheres with mine: the ending is meant as a beginning when viewed in terms of the sentimental reader’s consciousness.

Conclusion

In the late antebellum period, sentimental subjectivity becomes haunted by racial difference and begins to doubt the harmonizing capacities of sympathy. In the milieu of family reform, sectarian division, abolition, suffrage, and temperance, aesthetic conventions that once provided a coherent hermeneutic program fall under scrutiny. As a result, the intimate publics formed through sentimental writing undergo a period of instability, ambivalence, and disharmony. In this chapter, I have described this disordered sentiment by reference to the madness of Echo and the racialization of sympathy. Doing so, I have highlighted a central contention of this dissertation: liberal subjectivity, formed through literate praxis, copes with social strife partly through aesthetic innovation and partly through developing new interpretive paradigms. In analyzing “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the Narrative, Jane Eyre, and Pierre, I have demonstrated both how and why sentimental subjectivity becomes disordered in the late antebellum period, and how some authors attempted aesthetic innovations to cope with this disorder.

This pattern continues during the Civil War, despite its own unique and contingent profile. In fits and starts, liberal subjectivity evolves along divergent but always recognizable paths. Sentimental subjectivity is not the only form of liberal subjectivity extant during the antebellum period, but it is a particularly widespread and powerful cultural form, and it is the form from which pragmatist-feminism emerges, as I
will later argue. To that end, the critiques of sentimental subjectivity first formed through writers like Frederick Douglass, Charlotte Brontë, and Herman Melville – and organized around issues of materiality, embodiment, and queerness – are integral to my understanding of pragmatist-feminism’s emergence.
Martial Sentiments: Gender and Mourning in the American Civil War

Upon a hard-won battle-field,
Whose recent blood-stains shock the skies,
By hasty burial half-concealed,
With death in his dear eyes,
My soldier lies. (Allen 1-5)

Henry James cobbles together a question, “My story begins as a great many stories have begun within the last three years, and indeed as a great many have ended; for, when the hero is despatched [sic] does not the romance come to a stop?” (3). Elizabeth Chase Akers Allen traffics in nightmares, “In dreams I see him fall again, /Where cannons roar and guidons wave, —/Then wake to hear the lonesome rain” (20). President Lincoln transforms the terms of democratic belonging, “Now, therefore, be it ordered, first, that during the existing insurrection and as a necessary measure for suppressing the same, all Rebels and Insurgents, their aiders and abettors within the United States, and all persons discouraging volunteer enlistments, resisting militia drafts, or guilty of any disloyal practice…shall be subject to martial law” (“A Proclamation” n.p.). In setting James, Allen, and Lincoln in conversation, I explore a question: how do sentimental subjects confront martial law?

My question draws into an intimate space the contributions of sentimental and transnational studies, liberal subject theory, and histories of mourning and memorialization. The outcome is two figures. First is the virtuous, necessarily male soldier endangering himself for the Cause, earning perpetual memorialization in a
fraternity of undifferentiated heroism. Second is a lover infected by nightmares of heteronormative deferral, masculine disfigurement, and feminine disgrace. The former disrupts heteronormative rituals and alienates sentimental women from their conventional function in national reproduction. The latter animates complaints that monumentalizing soldiers in antipathy to women’s suffering undermines domestic stability, sexual privilege, and republican rhetoric.

By militarizing civil society, displacing men from the home, and privileging male camaraderie, martial discourse appears in the archive as the site generating sentimental complaints. The figure of the lover beset by patriotic nightmares is itself an adaptation of the conventional figure of the sentimental lover, who regulates the conflicts of romance by enacting feminine virtue. Instead of finding a virtuous husband or reforming a cad into a companion, the lover during wartime gets stuck in a paradox: remaining faithful requires constant remembrance, but constant remembrance provokes nightmares of the beloved’s death or disfigurement.

Henry James’ “The Story of a Year” capitalizes on the absence of men from domestic space to both stage the palpable crisis of liberal subjectivity spawned by the war and to assuage it through aesthetic innovation. Where James innovates, Elizabeth Akers Allen confounds. Her “My Soldier” presents in painful, circuitous detail the threat posed to domestic romance by war violence, performing a tortured aesthetic that haltingly recuperates sentimental subjectivity by casting it in a tense and subversive relationship to the nation. Necessitating each are Lincoln’s wartime executive orders, which institute
martial law, enact conscription, and suspend habeas corpus, throwing the contractarian grounds of liberal subjectivity into turmoil.

While on their “sentimental stroll” (3), Mr. John Ford’s presence brings “some of the reality of war” to temper the “rumor” of war that “was an old inhabitant” of “these peaceful hills.” The conflict between rumor and reality – truth and mere appearance – is a mainstay of realism, and the seemingly insurmountable task of reproducing reality in the novel is its raison d’être. What James is doing here, however, is growing realism out of sentimental culture. The “sentimental stroll” they’re on is marked by James as an intervention into “rumor,” and the conflict between Crowe’s ideas of romance and Ford’s refusal to play the romantic script are an attempt to adapt sentimental conventions to the circumstances of a war that make such conventions seem perverse and inadequate.

James’ aesthetic challenge in the opening question receives its answer first in John Ford, then in Lizzie’s haunted domestic life, and later in the stuttering attempt at a repeated romantic turn with Robert Bruce. John “Jack” Ford, by all measures, is the virtuous lover a sentimental heroine must learn to identify and accept if tragedy is to be avoided. He is cognate with Mr. Darcy, Clarence Percival, and Lord Orville insofar as his virtuousness, marriageability, and rationality are concerned. He demonstrates both his wisdom and his affection by advising Lizzie to keep their – unconsummated – marriage a secret. He demonstrates his virtue and selflessness by entreating Lizzie to accept another lover – Robert Bruce – as her husband. According to convention, he is, like his historical counterparts, the man our heroine is meant to marry.

Thus, his absence from domestic space, and hence from the regime of
complementary heterosexuality, is at once the common “unwritten history” (12) that James is interested in and the central discursive problem for sentimental subjectivity during wartime. To maintain a heterosexual regime in an entirely homosocial space, Lizzie and Mrs. Ford haunt their consciousness with Ford’s disembodied presence. Through newspaper stories of the war, photos of him, and their obsessively iterated memories, each woman tries to maintain heterosexual meaning by inverting the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’:

Often with a beating heart, I fear, but still with resolute, elastic steps, she revisited Jack’s old haunts; she tried to love Nature as he had seemed to love it; she gazed at his old sunsets; she fathomed his old pools with bright plummet glances, as if seeking some lingering trace of his features in their brown depths, stamped there as on a fond human great; she sought out his dear name, scratched on the rocks and trees, and when night came on, she studied, in her simple way, the great starlit canopy, under which, perhaps, her warrior lay sleeping…So she led for some months a very pleasant idyllic life, face to face with a strong, vivid memory, which gave everything and asked nothing. (13)

Ford’s presence in Lizzie’s imagination is what counts as real, whereas the daily actions of their bodies seem unreal, and domestic time seems to either freeze or disappear. In this way, presence must mean heterosexually structured presence, and time must mean heterosexual time, a fact announced ever-presently by the title – “The Story of a Year” – insofar as this story and this year are a part of James’ “unwritten history.”

When Lizzie “[receives] an invitation” to “Leatherborough,” it suits “Mrs. Ford’s
purpose,” which the narrator “[has] not space to elaborate” (16). It becomes clear that Lizzie has been invited by Mrs. Littlefield to a series of amusements, including the ball where she meets Robert Bruce. Given Mrs. Ford’s distaste for Jack and Lizzie’s engagement, her “purpose” seems clear: entangle Lizzie with another lover. That Lizzie “sparks” (16) upon receiving the invitation indicates her “love and hope” for Ford “[had grown] to be an old story” (15). In place of a homosociality haunted by Jack’s absence, Lizzie seems to desire a lover’s presence. With Bruce, the conventions of the sentimental novel re-appear: the ball, the dance, the social call, the change meeting at her departing train (17-19).

Yet, amidst this sentimental revival, as Bruce sits beside Lizzie on the train, Ford’s discursive presence intrudes. After reading in his newspaper that Ford’s regiment had seen battle, Lizzie asks, “Do you think the New York papers would have any names?” (20). Once Bruce tells her that “There is such a name among the wounded,” Lizzie “[takes] the paper, and [holds] it close to her eyes…her temples had turned from white to crimson” (21). Following Bruce’s platitude – “I sincerely hope it’s nothing very bad” – Lizzie simply whispers the word “severely,” as in severely wounded.

The interjection of a representation of Ford’s bodily pain into this sentimental scene was a conceit of much romantic writing and sentimental poetry of the period. It occurs in Akers’, Dickinson’s, and Cary’s poetry, to name just a few instances. The conceit, itself a new sentimental convention caused by the war, is that dancing and frivolousness are despicable during wartime. Yet, as in James’ story, the more pressing objection is that to participate in courtship rituals under the general suspension of such
heterosexual norms for soldiers is both unvirtuous and unpatriotic. The soldier’s absent, wounded body is in every sense a crisis for the sentimental subject:

She had enough to do to think, or rather to feel...Jack’s name stood printed in that fatal column like a stern signal for despair. Lizzie felt conscious of a crisis which almost arrested her breath. Night had fallen at mid-day: what was the hour? A tragedy had stepped into her life was she spectator or actor? She sat in a half-stupor. She had been aroused from a dream into a waking nightmare. It was like hearing a murder-shriek while you turn the page of your novel...A hundred ghastly fears and fancies strutted a moment; pecking at the young girl’s naked heart, like sandpipers on the weltering beach. Then, as with a great murmurous rush, came the meaning of her grief. The flood-gates of emotion were opened.

(21)

James frames this crisis of sentimental sexuality away from homosocial space.

Upon the return to domestic space, Lizzie and Mrs. Ford share a strangely touching moment of “grim pathos” (21), following which Mrs. Ford announces, “I am going to him” (22). Lizzie’s desire to accompany her is met with, “Nonsense! A pretty place for a young girl! I am not going for sentiment; I am going for use” (emphasis mine, 22). One may read this rejection of sentiment in favor of utility as a small example of the cultural rejection of sentimentality during the Civil War. However, throughout the history of sentiment and sensibility in literature, there has always been the conflict between feeling and working, conflict that tracks the two central functions of the homemaker: to facilitate

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(A likely allusion to “The Fall of the House of Usher.”)
familial love through maternal/marital affect as well as sanitize and beautify the home through domestic labor. The scene of Mrs. Ford’s condescension exemplifies the marshalling of women’s working bodies during wartime, perceiving their feeling bodies as a threat to national survival even as they are the longed-for reward of peace.

A feeling body in wartime, Lizzie’s consciousness – as in much sentimental war poetry – is permeated by nightmares:

One night Lizzie had a dream, – a rather disagreeable one, – which haunted her during many waking hours. It seemed to her that she was walking in a lonely place, with a tall, dark-eyed man who called her wife. Suddenly, in the shadow of a tree, they came upon an unburied corpse. Lizzie proposed to dig him a grave. They dug a great hole and took hold of the corpse to lift him in; when suddenly he opened his eyes. Then they saw that he was covered with wounds. He looked at them intently for some time, turning his eyes from one to the other. At last he solemnly said, “Amen!” and closed his eyes. Then she and her companion placed him in the grace, and shoveled the earth over him, and stamped it down with their feet. He of the dark eyes and he of the wounds were the two constantly recurring figures of Lizzie’s reveries…These were the data of her problem. (23)

Note that the usual courtship competition between men is haunted by the battlefield. The crisis of Lizzie’s consciousness is a crisis of heterosexual teleology and ethics, of choosing between “he of the dark eyes and he of the wounds.” In the nightmare, the love match has already been made: Lizzie has married “the tall, dark-eyed man who called her wife,” who is in turn “the courteous Leatherborough gentleman,” Robert
Bruce. That together they bury John on the battle-field – his “unburied corpse” being a common image (and fear) of Union soldiers – is a haunting endnote to heterosexual competition. As he will later in the story, here Ford offers a benediction to Bruce and Lizzie’s coupling. Lizzie’s body and subjectivity are sites of dispute in the regime of national reproduction. That Ford would die childless in a war often thematized as rebirthing the nation from the blood and graves of the dead inflects a haunting ethical challenge to wartime heteronormativity: if the best and bravest fight and often die, what sort of men are left to reproduce the nation?

The reader returns to a domestic space where Lizzie “roamed about the empty house with her footsteps tracked by an unlaid ghost” (24). Her masochistic fantasies of marrying Ford’s mangled body “served to dissipate time – heavy, weary time” (25) as she waits for Ford’s possible return. She continues wavering between the two “knights” (26) until she is given by Bruce a choice:

There he stood before her, in the glow of the firelight, in all his gentlemanhood, for her to accept or reject. She slowly rose and gave him the hand she had withdrawn. ‘My Bruce, I shall be very proud to love you,’ she said. And then, as if this effort was beyond her strength, she half staggered back to the sofa again. (30-1)

We see here two competing desire: the desire to choose Ford, the better man who will maintain the integrity of her conscience, and the desire to choose Bruce, who seems a mere vehicle for reinstating normal domestic time. Her exhaustion – linked earlier to her being “tired of war” (28) – is apparent when, upon accepting Bruce’s love, she half
staggered back to the sofa. Immediately after this, John returns home, wounded and near
death. In the death-bed scene, a commonplace of sentimental fiction, James introduces a
troubling swerve. Where the death-bed scene usually involves the dying urging the living
toward a more virtuous or pious life, often attached to Christian millennial teleology,
Ford’s death functions to remind Lizzie of death’s imminence and urge her to marry
Bruce so that “we shall all three be happy” (36).

Here we have a strange instance of Sedgwick’s gender asymmetrical “erotic
triangle” (Between Men 25), which serves to create a “special relationship between male
homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and
transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially
active structural congruence” (25). Ford supports his rival insofar as doing so signifies
and justifies his own sacrifice in the reproduction of the national body. In his language,
he creates a strange polygamy: Lizzie will have two husbands, presumably the one to sire
biological children, and the other (Ford) to inseminate national rebirth through his death,
a figure disseminated widely in funeral orations, including Edward Everett’s at
Gettysburg.

To this point, we’ve been given by James a recalibrated sentimental plot in which
the rivals for Lizzie’s love exist in divergent wartime spaces. Though tortured, haunting,
and complex, the plot seems to reinstate obligatory and complementary heterosexuality,
both in the context of marital reproduction and national rebirth. Lizzie’s response to
Ford’s dying wish, however, deeply troubles – in a productive way – our reading.

The morning of Ford’s death, Lizzie meets Bruce. “Bruce’s first movement was to
put out his hands, as any lover might; but as Lizzie raised her veil, he dropped them.

‘Yes, Mr. Bruce,’ said Lizzie, ‘I’ll give you my hand once more,— in farewell!’” (36). Against Bruce’s protestations, she replies, “‘I mean well. I mean kindly and humanely to you. And I mean justice to my old – old love.’ She went to him, took his listless hand…shook it passionately, and then…opened the gate and let it swing behind her” (36). Lizzie’s renunciation is powerful. It evinces an aspect of sentimental discourse – the love of virtue, the inculcation of justice in matters of the heart – even as it seems to conflict with our usual understanding of sentimental discourse as disseminating heteronormativity. The slippage in discourse is palpable: she shakes Bruce’s hand, as Ford had asked, but for a contrary purpose, a “justice” the eminently reasonable (12) Ford wouldn’t have comprehended. While explaining her purpose as “[meaning] justice to her old – old love,” the hue of anger and rejection in her final meeting with Bruce implies instead a more radical refusal to participate in national rebirth or complementary heterosexuality. Her disgust with the war, Ford’s death, and Bruce’s life transfers to a disgust for the mechanisms of national reproduction and her subjectivity’s role in it.

But, it wouldn’t be a Jamesian story if there weren’t one final complication: “‘No! no! no!,’ she almost shrieked, turning about in the path. ‘I forbid you to follow me!’ But for all that, he went in” (36). And so it ends. Here, our reading of Lizzie’s renunciation holds firm. Her adoption of discursive authority – the power to command – is clear, but James’ narrator tells it slant, leading us to question if Lizzie will be able to maintain her renunciation amidst the barrage of patriarchal injunctions that emit from compulsory heterosexuality. However tenuous or compromised, Lizzie’s renunciation of
heterosexuality and of women’s role in national reproduction following the Civil War represents a common outcome of the sentimental subject’s postbellum crisis.

Two Versions of Sympathy and Bodily Pain

To generalize my comments on “The Story of a Year,” I’d like to consider more general theories of sensibility, sentiment, and imagination. Elaine Scarry has argued that a central quality of bodily pain is its inexpressibility. In the history of sensibility and sentimental culture, the opposite has been posited. In Adam Smith’s explication of the imagination, it is suffering – the suffering body specifically – that is offered as an axiomatic example of sensibility’s power: “By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them” (2-3). That is, seeing a body in suffering is sufficient to witness – by the power of imagination – a body in suffering. Our imagination acts almost by reflex, allowing us to vicariously experience the pain of another who suffers before us though that pain may be different in degree

It is on the basis of this model that Smith attempts an entire theory of moral sentiments according to which the immediacy of our vicarious experience of bodily suffering provides the ground for our cultivation of the vicarious experience of what Elaine Scarry terms “psychological suffering” (11). Yet, in Scarry, it is psychological suffering – the pangs of love, longing, or alienation – that is more readily expressed in discourse. For her, being in pain is the sign of certainty while seeing pain is the sign of
doubt (4). This is, as I hope is clear, contrary to Smith’s formulation: the certainty of imagining pain upon seeing physical suffering is what allows for more “refined” forms of moral sentiment. In Smith, the imagination acts like a camera obscura, reproducing in diminished scale an exact copy of the sufferer’s pain: sympathy allows me to experience a slightly less powerful copy of your pain. In Scarry, no such copy is produced: another’s physical pain is foreign and indecipherable, a cause for doubt.

From this angle, it seems that the crisis in political representation pointed out by Timothy Sweet, and that I attach to a crisis in sentimental representation, was caused by the inexpressibility of slaves’ suffering, and the way in which this contradicted sentimental theory. If we take Smith as one of several architects of sentimentalism, or at least as an insightful writer on the subject, it seems that if seeing suffering bodies does not automatically result in the vicarious experience of suffering – such is Scarry’s view – then the entire intellectual ground of sentimentalism liquefies. We see this disordering in Poe et al – the seeming internal contradictions of the sentimental subject – and its roots in models of the imagination as a mental reproduction of the world insofar as this model can cause an infinite, self-destructive regress. Yet, in light of Scarry’s analysis, it is equally true that imagining the confines of the body as a limit defining interior and exterior gives rise to the possibility of sentimental failure: the failure of vicarious suffering. If sympathy is possible, a narcissistic regress may occur; if it is impossible, sentimentalism’s moral

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34 Sweet 1: “The American Civil War arose from a crisis in political representation[…]With the outbreak of war, the critical question – whether physical violence could produce a legitimate ideological consensus where language had failed – became relevant not merely to certain sparsely populated territories but to the American nation(s) at large.”

35 See Sanchez-Eppler.
system crumbles.

However, we must entertain the inversion of Scarry’s analysis: are political crises initiated or facilitated by the inexpressibility of bodily pain, or do political crises so erode discursive stability that they block the expressibility of bodily pain? To put it more simply, do crises in political representation denude or destabilize discursive conventions that legitimate the successful communication of bodily pain and the vicarious experience of suffering (both physical and psychological)? Is the ability of one to accurately sympathize with another’s physical pain culturally and historically variable?

The larger framework of my project provides a direction for these questions: pragmatism – I am arguing – is an attempt to recuperate sentimental discourse after the martial trauma of the Civil War and its proliferation of clinical discourse. The need to recuperate liberal subjectivity is not only occasioned by a crisis in political representation but also by a crisis in epistemic authority: the legitimacy of certain axioms or assumptions in settling disputes over sociolinguistic meaning. As with the north and south in the Civil War, James casts his arguments as forms of mediation between disputing camps.\textsuperscript{36} Instead of a dispute over slavery and political authority, James describes a dispute over meaning (i.e., the truth of statements) and epistemic authority, namely, which foundational theories of meaning hold the legitimacy to settle disputes before people “reach for their guns” (Rorty 13), i.e., rely on the ability of violence to settle disputes over sociolinguistic meaning when language has failed to do so.

What pragmatism does philosophically at the turn of the century comes only after

\textsuperscript{36} See William James’ story of the squirrel going around the tree in \textit{Pragmatism} 25-6.
attempts made by funerary art and literary art to rehabilitate sentimental culture amidst war and Reconstruction. That is, Henry James’ gesture toward literary realism in “The Story of a Year,” as well as the aesthetics of mourning, attempt to stabilize the sentimental discourse of pain by producing more effective technologies of vicarious suffering. James’ realism does this by first acknowledging the remoteness of wounded bodies from peaceful domestic spaces – and the problems posed to sentimental representation by this haunting trauma – then by bringing the wounded body into the domestic space so that its presence might allow a recuperated meaning to emerge (though one wonders if any such recuperation actually occurs in James’ text). Indeed, Scarry’s observation that language better represents psychological suffering than bodily suffering makes sense of James’ choice to place war – and the moment of Ford’s wounding – out of the reader’s view, instead providing her with detailed scenes of Crowe’s psychological suffering.

If, as I argued previously, sentimental poetics articulates the instability of domesticity and feminine consciousness that is provoked by biopower in a transatlantic context, the Civil War is a particularly sticky problem for my analysis. The commonplace that the Civil War rendered sentimentality impotent – that it exposed sentimentalism’s vapidity and vulgarity – won’t do. Not only does this belief fail to account for the continued prominence of sentimental poetry during and after the war – in such esteemed publications as The Atlantic Monthly – it also rests on a fairly one-dimensional understanding of sentimentalism in the first place. The more pressing question, given the heterogeneity of sentimentality, is which forms of sentimental aesthetics persist and why?
Which forms seem to dissolve? Of the varieties of the sentimentalized subject I characterized previously, which thrive, which flounder, which fail? Given the discursive field, which sentimental practices are legitimated and which disavowed by an increasingly bureaucratic nation?

Understanding the sentimentalized subject’s intersection with the Civil War requires a delicate balance between material practices of burial, grief, and monumentalization on the one hand, and specifically literary practices on the other. It is my contention that the sentimentalized subject, struggling for his/her place in the catastrophic domesticity produced by the Cause, asserts the ability of the feeling body to properly mourn national trauma as the remaining purpose served by the domestic in heterosexual ideology.

Citizenship, the Body, and Martial Discourse

Amidst disputes concerning national identity, scientific naturalism, sentimental aesthetics, and the history of ideas, Foucault admonishes us to focus on biopower, the discursive practices that form, circulate, regulate, destroy and open up the body. This admonition is invaluable in trying to understand how the liberal subject evolves between 1855 and 1877. Two things become clear: the Civil War cannot be ignored, but it’s impact has only been tangentially understood in the field of aesthetics. This is so because of confusion over the status of the body during the Civil War – a confusion present at the time and one increasingly jumbled in historiography since. Even more fascinating, however, is the extent to which the war, while forever transforming the circulation of primary terms of embodiment – citizen, soldier, wife, brother – simultaneously draws the
citizen under tighter state control even as it nominally deletes an entire category of embodiment – the slave – from the legal archive.

Similarly, martial discourse – including the suspension of *habeas corpus*, conscription, the mobilizing of the War Department and the creation of the Sanitation Commission – completely reshapes heterosexual and homosocial structures in the North during the war. I’d like to consider how several of the Lincoln administration’s orders challenged – or destroyed – prized political beliefs held by middle-class liberal subjects. I’d also like to analyze the discursive formation of bodies in these orders in the hope that doing so will open up new insights into liberal aesthetics during and following the war. My main assumption is simple: discourse is diffuse but interconnected, so shifts in conceptions of the body at the level of federal law and national propaganda may have powerful if unpredictable effects on spheres like aesthetics and rhetoric. Before coming to my treatment of Elizabeth Allen Akers’ poetry, I’d like to analyze the Emancipation Proclamation, suspension of *habeas corpus*, and conscription orders.

As Burrus Carnahan notes, “In its final form, the Emancipation Proclamation was based on two of the government’s belligerent rights under the law of war. It relied on the right to seize and destroy enemy property for reasons of military necessity, and on the right to seek allies through promising liberty to an oppressed people” (117). Further, as Lincoln explicitly states in the Proclamation, emancipation can be secured “by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States” (sec. 4). Ergo, it is misleading to say that Lincoln ‘freed the slaves;’ more
directly, he confiscated slaves as the property of an enemy during wartime then declared them no longer property but citizens (with the expectation of becoming soldiers) in his capacity as commanding military officer of a belligerent force. Slaves were thus, certainly, freed (on the ongoing condition of Union victory), but the discursive method by which they were freed bears an anxious and troubling relationship to their prior status as property. Thus, the more immediate genealogy for the emancipation proclamation is not necessarily the Declaration of Independence, nor any set of philosophical writings on natural liberty, but the two prior Confiscation Acts and the military commonplace of dominion by force.

Benedict Andersen in *Imagined Communities* has pointed out the epistemic necessity of vernacular print culture to the formation and continuation of the nation-state. It not only allows for “horizontal-secular, transverse-time,” (37) but it also facilitates “calendrical coincidence” (33) as an organizing national principle in market societies and the administration of state power through bureaucratic structures. Lincoln, while rhetorically acting as Commander-in-Chief is, from the standpoint of our genealogy, also Editor-in-Chief of a vast war archive. By deleting “slave” from possible present-tense usage, by ejecting it forever into the “past” – in an image reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History – Lincoln is reshaping the temporality of liberal subjectivity. Slavery, placed in sentimental subjectivity (insofar as it was religiously liberal) as a stain of sin preventing millennial teleology from progressing and as a malformation preventing secular history from progressing, was suddenly re-temporalized in the same lateral “past space” as the Revolution and American Indian genocide
The most terrifying aspect of martial power becomes its ability to rapidly transform discourse through edict under the shadow of liberal-democratic nationalism.

For slaves, this freedom-in-discourse only becomes “actual” freedom through the Reconstruction amendments, which literally delete – represented by official copies of the constitution as a strikethrough – slavery from the constitution while, of course, leaving its trace.

Yet, what it means to be “free” and a citizen in the United States was already profoundly compromised – even for the most privileged group – prior to emancipation.

On April 27, 1861, “Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus and declared martial law in Maryland” (Stone 220). Mark Neely notes that suspension of the writ and martial law were intended to be fairly limited in scope to areas of ‘actual rebellion,’ but the order itself implies a different limitation on the status of a citizen:

Now, therefore, be it ordered, that during the existing insurrection, and as a necessary measure for suppressing the same, all rebels and insurgents, their aiders and abettors within the United States, and all persons discouraging volunteer enlistments, resisting militia drafts, or guilty of any disloyal practice affording aid and comfort to the rebels against the authority of the United States, shall be subject to martial law, and liable to trial and punishment by courts-martial or military commission. (n.p)

As is clear from this passage, while the use of military tribunals may have been limited, and while civilian courts were certainly openly functioning throughout the North, the conditions and limitations of citizen’s rights were bound inside the logic of military
necessity. Your rights as a citizen were no longer just curtailed by existing civilian law; you ran the ever-present risk of being classified a rebel, insurgent, or abettor, the consequence was being displaced from civilian legal discourse into martial legal discourse. Also carried out in the order is the prerogative for conscription, which directly precedes the designation of those offenses for which martial law will be instituted:

Whereas, It has become necessary to call into service, not only volunteers, but also portions of the militia of the States by draft, in order to suppress the insurrection existing in the United States, and disloyal persons are not adequately restrained by the ordinary processes of law from hindering this measure, and from giving aid and comfort in various ways to the insurrection. (n.p.)

The call for national conscription has a complex history, well-summarized and extended by Rachel Selden, that weaves together state militias, governors, the federal government, and factional politics. Nonetheless, conscription itself is a fundamental challenge to the meaning of the term “citizen” in a liberal vocabulary, partly evidenced by the New York Draft Riots of 1863 (Bernstein). The deletion of slave, the redefinition of citizen, and the opening of previously impossible discursive classifications – rebel, insurgent, abettor – attach to the redefinition of heterosexual embodiment and the radical change in the national-domestic complex. Taken together, it seems straightforward to claim that liberal subjectivity, and hence sentimental subjectivity, underwent far more profound and destructive forces than the simple accumulation of dead bodies.

When we set the context of emancipation amidst the transformation of the rights of citizens and the regimes governing the soldier’s body, what we see is that the
liberation of slaves means the hollowing out of Republican ideology. It is the radical undermining of Republican ideology, and not primarily the proliferation of death, that provokes a crisis in the sentimentalized liberal subject. This is significant, for it is a historiographical commonplace that the trauma of the Civil War caused widespread distaste for sentimental convention. The heart of trauma, in this narrative, is the death of citizen-soldiers on a large scale. Yet, this narrative seems strange given the history of sentimental culture, which is from the outset a culture of elegy, grief, and ‘the female complaint.’ Death, violence, grief, and commemoration are the lifeblood, the very discursive function of sentimentalism. What is truly traumatic about the war is twofold: it undermines the rhetorical foundations of sentimentalism (rooted, as I have shown, in notions of Republican virtue, liberal contractarianism, etc.) by demolishing *habeas corpus*, instituting the draft, and militarizing national consciousness; further, it produces a mountain of bodies whose ability to be grieved and commemorated properly is thrown into flux by the undermining of sentimental discourse’s elegiac power. This is to say that had the terms “citizen” and “liberty” not been ravaged by militarization, sentimental culture would have *thrived* and not been rendered illegitimate by the widespread death of the war. If, as I have argued, sentimentality is an outcropping of Republican ideology and a general extension of the development of liberal subjectivity, then it is only a profound shift in the terms of liberalism and republicanism that could produce the decline in intellectual support for sentimental culture that one does, in fact, observe following the Civil War.

Yet, even here one must pause and acknowledge the persistence of popular
sentimental culture well past the turn of the century – indeed, in many loose forms, to the present day. Realism and rationalistic feminism, as I will show more conclusively later, do not displace sentimentalism from culture; they simply press it to the margins of intellectual legitimacy.

Elizabeth Chase Akers Allen and the Poetics of Trauma

It is on this basis that the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* operates as a heuristic for understanding the peculiar crisis of the sentimentalized liberal subject during the Civil War. As I have written previously, the sentimental subject underwent a disordering prior to the Civil War, one already initiated by the rise of commodity culture and the proliferation of the pharmakon. The sentimental subject was only stabilized in recursive dissimulation, that is, by the interjection of ironic disavowals. The suspension of the writ allows “a law without law” (Agamben 39) to reign, permitting legal discourse to function in the absence both of the body and the justification for the body’s detention. Martial law is nothing other than law’s ability to function by immediate appeal to individual judgment in the absence of discursive counterbalance: the very definition of tyranny. The justification for this tyranny is purely utilitarian. One must suspend the writ in order to preserve the nation.

That sentimental philosophy and literature had already staged this tyranny as the madness of Echo is fitting when one considers the way the suspension of the writ was narrated by contemporaries. {find citations where people talk about lawlessness, absent bodies, power unchecked, etc.}. Indeed, what is sometimes thought of as the *foundation* of legal discourse – the production and witnessing of the body – becomes instead simply
another term in the movement of supplementarity, the ability of the pharmakon to iterate the body even in its absence.

Yet, and this is crucial, it is precisely the pharmakon’s ability to iterate the body in its absence that allows for acts of patriotic commemoration that rehabilitate mourning, the narration of haunted domesticity we saw in “The Story of a Year,” and the restoration of the elegiac role of sentimental discourse. Amongst many examples, Elizabeth Chase Akers Allen’s poem, “My Soldier,” is the most useful for grafting our discussion of the national discourse of embodiment onto previous discussions of domestic temporality:

Upon a hard-won battle-field,
Whose recent blood-stains shock the skies,
By hasty burial half-concealed,
With death in his dear eyes,
My soldier lies. (1-5)

Here, the absence of the soldier and the presence of the poet are in crisis. While the scene of Union battle is evoked – and wrapped into natural space – the more pressing dynamic is between the poet-lover’s presumed sentimental obligation to bury and mourn the dead appropriately and the obstruction of that obligation by the then familiar mechanisms of war: death and hasty burial (Faust 4-10). Significantly, the familiar refrain of “my [lover]” is replaced by “my soldier,” hinting at the inescapable effect of militarization on conventions of romance and sentimental courtship. The poet’s absence from the battle-field but presence in voicing the poem, and the soldier’s absence from the poet’s presence but presence on the battle-field, is toyed with by the immanence of death
in his eyes.

Oh, thought more sharp than bayonet-thrust,---

Of blood-drops on his silken hair,
Of his white forehead in the dust,
Of his last gasping prayer,
And I not there! (6-10)

Here, the same tension of presence/absence drives the poem, and the same jarring juxtaposition of images like “silken hair” – clearly pulled from familiar sentimental love poems – and “blood-drops” serve to make visible the rupturing effect of war on sentimental subjectivity. The final exclamation of “And I not there!” in the stanza making emphatic the obstruction of her obligation – and all that that obligation means – to properly attend to the dying, especially to ensure their peace with God. Even as the stanza announces the conflict between domestic duty and war, it evinces the trace of Hemans’ “Graves of the Household” and its similar staging of the conflict between presence/absence, war, and domestic duty.

I know, while his warm life escaped,
And his blue eyes closed shudderingly,
His heart’s last fluttering pulses shaped
One yearning wish for me,---
Oh agony! (11-5)

One must pause on this passage. Two questions immediately emerge: whose “agony” is being articulated and/or referenced and what do we make of the simultaneity
of “life escaping” and the shaping of “one yearning wish for me”? To the first, it seems clear that the reader cannot decide. It could alternately be the agony that knowledge of his death causes in the poet, the agony he felt upon dying, the agony he felt upon longing for her while he was dying, the agony of knowing he longed for her upon dying, or the agony of knowing he longed for her upon dying and the fact that she was not there to assuage his yearning. This is not a trivial point; instead, it is a point foisted upon us by then prevalent theories of sympathetic representation and the danger of assimilation posed by such forms of representation. In short, that we cannot decide the momentum of “Oh agony!” means that we can’t form an attitude about the poem’s involvement with sentimental theories of the imagination. At best, we can say that the scene provokes the sentiment of agony and that the reader is meant to identify with this agony however interpreted.

Further, as Dana Luciano has instructed us, the poem’s temporality must necessarily impinge upon its materiality. That is, the rhetorical structure of sympathy in the poem relies foremost upon the time of “fluttering pulses,” “yearning wishes,” and “shudderingly” closing eyes. Here, his “heart’s last fluttering pulses” seem to materially “shape” his “yearning wish” just as life escapes him. Of importance for my analysis is whether this temporal (dis)order lends itself to a monumental or countermonumental impulse (Luciano 170).

For I, in cruel ignorance,

While yet his last sigh pained the air,

I trifled,---sung or laughed, perchance,
With roses in my hair,
All unaware. (16-20)

Extending this temporal (dis)order, while his life was escaping him, his last sigh pained the air, and his heart’s last fluttering pulses shaped a yearning wish for her, she “in cruel ignorance…trifled.”37 We are tempted at this point to assign a countermonumental impulse to the poem. Its collapsing of domestic frivolity and romance into the same time as war violence seems to bear a familiar critique of nationalism that one finds in Hemans. Yet, it could also simply be a common sentimental critique – by writers like Wollstonecraft, Burney, Austen, and Edgeworth – that haunts the poem, one that seeks to undermine romantic illusion with examples of virtue.

In dreams I see him fall again,
Where cannons roar and guidons wave,—
Then wake to hear the lonesome rain,
Weeping the fallen brave,
Drip on his grave. (21-5)

As though the temporality of the poem weren’t tortured enough, now the (dis)ordered simultaneity of the soldier’s death, yearning, and poetic representation along with the poet’s trifling and her imagining of the soldier are all thrown into a recurring nightmare. The dreams, plural, serve as a recursive loop for the poet’s traumatized memory of her soldier’s absent (imagined) death. Her waking to the lonesome rain, mirroring her own probable weeping, is immediately followed by the temporally

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37 The same conceit I mentioned when discussing Lizzie’s visit to Leatherborough in “The Story of a Year.”
distended image of her hearing rain that somehow simultaneously falls on his grave, which exists in some unknown and unknowable location (probably several locations, given the previously alluded to “hasty burial” to which he was subjected). To say that the poem is haunted by (counter)memory, or that it haunts the reader with the same, is to only begin to understand how the sentimental recurs and reforms throughout the war and its many re-writings.

Nonetheless, a monumental impulse begins to animate:

Since treason sought our country's heart,

Ah, fairer body never yet
From nobler soul was torn apart;
No braver blood has wet
Her coronet.

No spirit more intense and fine
Strives where her starry banners wave;
No gentler face, beloved, than thine,
Sleeps in a soldier's grave,---
No heart more brave. (26-35)

The line “since treason sought our country’s heart” provokes a quickly remedied confusion. Does “since” mean “because” or is it a marker of time? Even as it seems that it is a marker of time, the assignation of causality tints the reading, both placing blame on the South for initiating war and creating (especially in this poem) an absurd linear time of
commemoration: the war is a beginning of death, and her soldier is among the noblest and bravest who has died. The awkwardness with which the poet seems to wipe away previous images of blood upon silken hair and a white face in the dust, attempting to replace them with “no gentler face,” resists reading this poem as a monument to national ideology. Though the poet attempts to say that there was “no heart more brave” than her soldier’s, one cannot forget the “fluttering pulses” of his heart that had previously been seen to shape a yearning wish for her.

Of course, what is being depicted in the poem is the attempted transition from grief to an elevated, pacified commemoration. The slippage between this attempted transition and the inevitable fall back into the recursive dream of his death marks the poem’s inability to actually participate in the process of nationalist monumentalizing.

And, though his mound I may not trace,
Or weep above his buried head,
The grateful spring shall find the place,
And with her blossoms spread
His quiet bed.

The soul I loved is still alive,
The name I loved is Freedom's boast;
I clasp these helpful truths, and strive
To feel, though great the cost,
Nothing is lost; (36-45)
The full extent of the poet’s countermonumentalism is exposed here. While she tries to “clasp these helpful truths” – that the soul is immortal and that his name will be written into the history of freedom\textsuperscript{38} – the very word “clasp” indicates a failed attempt and a desperate act of will. She “strive[s] to feel” but does not feel that “nothing is lost.” Her desire to allow monumentalism to assuage her grief by appeal to patriotism evidences an imperative, an option for grief held out as a remedy for pain, just as there’s an imperative to allow piety to assuage her grief. In her evocation of spring, there’s also an implied imperative to allow sentimental poetry itself – with its convention of natural time – to assuage grief. All three – patriotism, piety, and poetry – fail to remedy her pain.

Since all of him that erst was dear
Is safe; his life was nobly spent,
And it is well. Oh, draw Thou near,
Light my bewilderment,
Make me content! (46-50)

The final stanza, especially the final two lines, evidence the ultimate failure of patriotism, piety, and poetry. She is bewildered; she is not content. The poem, in its disjointed structure, casts in elaborate and potent detail the scene of death, the visage of yearning, the contours of a nightmarish and recurring pain produced by the absence of a body, and the temporality of grief. Yet, it fails to portray any discursive option as a respite, instead simply detailing the story of open mourning, unhealed wounds. It is in

\textsuperscript{38} As is depicted with the Soldier’s Monument at Gettysburg National Cemetery, where an allegorical History etches the name of the Union dead into her book.
this way that the poem’s countermemorial impulse becomes so important, both as a recurrence of the sentimental-domestic critique of war I demonstrated in Hemans, and the recurrence of disordered and/or failed sentimental imagination that had gained prominence prior to the Civil War.

When placed with my reading of “The Story of a Year,” Allen’s poem seems to gesture toward a recurrent thematization of heterosexual nightmare in Civil War aesthetics. The poet’s dream and Lizzie’s dream are doppelgangers, each figure of male absence cast onto the battle-field, wounded, dying, waiting for burial as his lover rests in a negated domestic space, haunted by the effect of war violence on marital possibility. Thanks to Allen, we can also make in-roads to understanding the importance of funerary art to the recuperation of the liberal subject during the war, and the extent to which sentimental aesthetics – intersected by Egyptian revival and Palladian architecture rooted in the sentimental sublime – is imbued throughout this network of grief culture.

Laurel Hill

The Civil War was not the first circumstance when liberal subjects confronted overwhelming death. In the early 1830’s, as urban areas grew and became more dense, church-yards could no longer accommodate the number of dead bodies being produced. Speaking about Walt Whitman’s early “This Compost,” Maria Farland writes, “Such preoccupation with decaying organic matter was hardly an abstraction – it was quite possibly the single greatest concern of New Yorkers and other urban dwellers in these years. Problems of bodily decay and decomposition in Whitman’s New York spawned what one historian of medicine has called ‘some of the world’s worst health statistics’”
(800). This pressure led to what has become known as the garden or rural cemetery movement, which was both transatlantic and multi-national in scope. This movement created what are now some of the most beautiful and frequently visited cemeteries in the Western world: Pere Lachaise, Laurel Hill, The Magnificent Seven, Greenwood, and Mt. Auburn.

In each instance, the pressure to form these garden cemeteries was the same: increased urban density produced ever-increasing counts of bodies (dead and alive); church grounds were increasingly put to multiple uses, their grave sites too modest to accommodate increasing numbers of corpses; and public health and sanitation officials were compelled to acknowledge the need to quarantine the dead from the living the prevent the spread of disease. What is remarkable is how consistent the response to these contingencies was. In nearly every case, the decision was made to plan and design a rural cemetery on the outskirts of urban centers, where plots would be sold as a partial source of funding for construction of the cemetery, along with public allotment of lands (Pike 55).

For my purposes, far more interesting than the intricacies of private grave sales and public health planning is the aesthetic response to the creation of these rural cemeteries, and how anxiety over separation from loved ones was assuaged. As Thomas G. Connors had observed, “Romantic ideas about death and landscape shaped antebellum America’s solution to the practical problem of urban burial” (187). I would simply extend this further and say that cemeteries like Laurel Hill participate in what Nicola Watson has described as “literary tourism,” specifically, the complex relationship between reading,
authorship, and monument that began in the eighteenth century but continued – perhaps even crystallized – into the design and execution of cemeteries like Laurel Hill. One can’t help but notice that the primary aesthetic intention of Eastern rural cemeteries was to reiterate a certain set of relations between the landscape, individual monuments, and metaphysical epistemology first theorized and laid out by the Romantic and sentimental poets at the turn of the nineteenth century: to make the space of burial like those quaint, picturesque landscapes described by Wordsworth and Barbauld (note on shift away from English vegetation in American cemeteries).

At the heart of this aesthetic lay the archive of Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, an archive that includes the canonical Romantic poets as well as the more recently rehabilitated sentimental poets or “female Romantics,” depending on one’s terminology. Julie Ellison, in her recent “Redoubled Feeling: Politics, Sentiment, and the Sublime in Williams and Wollstonecraft.” has surveyed the difficulty in defining precisely what we mean, or what they meant, by the terms beautiful and sublime, except to always keep in mind the dynamic use of each term across a discursive field perpetually remade through political and cultural conflict, and often gendered, raced, and classed. Nonetheless, Jerome McGann and Anne Mellor provide a working theory of how to carve up the sentimental and romantic sublime (or perhaps simply how to gender the beautiful and the sublime). In short, the sentimental sublime seeks sociality and communion through the experience of art and nature; whereas the Romantic sublime seeks an escape from sociality and communion, using art and nature as vehicles for transcendence and solitude.
What a perusal of Laurel Hill cemetery, replete with Egyptian Revival obelisks, Palladian tombs, and picturesque landscaping does, however, is cast into even more doubt whether we can (or ought to) excise the romantic sublime from sentimental poetry, or the sentimental sublime from romantic poetry. Of more interest to me here is how various inflections of the sublime get rolled into a distinctly domestic ideology of sentiment and grief.

In *Pleasant Memories of Pleasant Lands*, a strange hybrid text that is part travel writing, part memoir, part poetry collection, Lydia Sigourney takes her reader through a tour of England and France. Fittingly, a quarter of the sections treat visits to cemeteries or notable places of dead authors or female historical figures, such as Ann Boleyn. Preceding her section on Pere Lachaise, and shedding some light on the importance of Egyptian revival architecture in the nineteenth century, is a section on “The Obelisk of Luxor,” an illustration of which is one of two frontispieces to the 1842 edition. Two generalizations can be made about Sigourney’s treatment of the obelisk: its primary majesty belongs to its oldness and its size and its historical function is to recuperate the Place de la Concorde (formerly Place de la Revolution and Place Louis the Fifteenth) from its ignominious past. In this sense, Sigourney’s meditation on the Obelisk, meant either for the enjoyment of a distant reader’s imagination or as a stimulus for the traveler’s imagination while viewing the object in Paris, affects a collapsing of time quite similar to that performed in Allen’s “My Soldier,” but purely for the effect of creating a sublime moment through ekphrasis, much as Keats famously does in “Ode on a Grecian

39 See Carrott.
Her poem on the Obelisk of Luxor opens up our understanding of the significance of Egyptian Revival architecture in places like Greenwood and Laurel Hill. At first, it is tempting to view the many obelisks of a rural cemetery as somehow conflicting with Victorian mausoleums or the more traditionally sentimental-domestic scenes available there. Yet, as one can quickly glean from Barbauld, Hemans, Sigourney, Poe, or Dickinson’s corpora, the fetishization of antiquity serves distinctly sentimental ends: the beautiful and sublime are created through motifs of ancient otherness that provide a sufficiently jarring contrast to the minuteness of the individual character’s psyche. It is the genius of the author that allows the lesser being’s to mingle with the being of past time encapsulated in ancient objects. It simultaneously produces continuity and discontinuity, a distinctly sentimental iteration of the uncanny, of allowing oneself to be both part of, yet entirely incommensurate with, a common history as manifested in monumental objects or places. One could argue that the gendering of sentimentalism attaches to this form of uncanniness, because in the gendered ideology of public and private spheres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the domestic can have no comfortable place in public monumental space or in official history. Indeed, it is precisely the attempt by women poets like Hemans and Sigourney to draft a common history that eschews a firm distinction between private and public that so often creates a haunted poetics.

This uncanniness must also be read back onto the discourse of virtue and affinity for rhetorical theories of antiquity. The particular problem of women’s place in the
Anglo-Latinate educational tradition, particularly in how to interpret domestic time in relation to the Renaissance and Enlightenment, cannot be underestimated in attempting to explain the distinct temporal fissures that seem to erupt in sentimental histories and epics.

We can further see the uncanniness of the sentimental sublime in Sigourney’s “Pere La Chaise.” It begins:

I stood amid the dwellings of the dead,
And saw the gayest city of the earth
Spread out beneath me. Cloud and sunlight lay
upon her palaces and gilded domes,
In slumberous beauty. (253)

Immediately, the rural cemetery is cast as a necropolis, a city of the dead existing amongst the “gayest city of the earth,” i.e., Paris. In what would be a conventional Romantic scene of the sublime transcendence of the masses, we’re presented a temporal (dis)union: a city of life overlaid upon a city of death. “Look up! Look up!/Mont Louis hath a beacon…Wheresoe’er/Ye seem to tend…a secret spell/Is on your footsteps” (253). Here, Sigourney interjects her awareness of death, gained from being in its supposed presence, into the scene of common city life below, beckoning the living to take notice of their fate. She gives no reason why the living would be well-served by remembering death’s inevitability, except an implied wider view that such awareness gives the viewer, or perhaps a sentimental belief in the value of suffering in cultivating moral virtue.

Yet, in this strange overlay of two cities, she immediately softens the dichotomy
between the biopolis and the necropolis, perhaps attempting to represent what I call a zoepolis, a city of both temporal and eternal being:

Methinks the monster Death

Wears not such visage here, so grim and gaunt

With terror, as he shows in other lands.

Robing himself in sentiment, he wraps

His dreary trophies in a maze of flowers,

And makes his tombs like temples, or a home

So sweet to love, that grief doth flee away. (254)

The power to make death flee, here charted as Death robing himself in sentiment, is in actuality the power of sentimental aesthetics, of both the poet and architects of Pere Lachaise to soften Death through the iteration of picturesque domestic tropes, either visual or textual, the distinction being often confused, as in the inclusion of epitaphs from extant tombs in Sigourney’s summary comments following the poem. She continues:

— I saw a mother mourning. The fair tomb

Was like a little chapel, hung with wreath,

And crucifix. And there she spread the toys

That her lost babe had loved, as if she found

A solace in the memory of its sports.

Tears flowed like pearl-drops, yet without the pang

that wrings and rends the heart-strings. It would seem
A tender sorrow, scarce of anguish born,
So much the influence of surrounding charms
Did mitigate it. (254)

Here, the inhabitants of the biopolis are brought into the necropolis, placed amongst the dwellings of the dead through the poet’s mediating presence, and circulated as an image along with the presumed memories of the beloved. The ameliorating effect of sentimental aesthetics necessarily exists along two axes: the power of poetry to inspire the imagination toward vicarious experience – including vicarious sympathy: the sympathizing of the reader with the poet’s imagined sympathy with the griever’s imagined sympathy with the dead child\(^{40}\) – and the power of architecture to inspire pleasant memories, domestic affections, and religious faith.

The complex ekphrasis continues:

[The young female] had put off her sabots at the gate,
Heavy with clay, and to a new-made grave
Hasted alone. Upon its wooded cross
She placed her chaplet, and with whispering lips,
Perchance in prayer, perchance in converse low
With the loved slumberer, knelt, and strewed the seeds
Of flowers among the mould. A shining mass
Of raven tresses ‘scaped amid the toil

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\(^{40}\) See Smith, Chapter 1, for a sentimental theorization of the dead and infants.
From their accustomed boundary; but her eyes,

None saw them, for she heeded not the tread

Of passers-by. Her business was with those

Who slept below. (255).

The collapsing of the biopolis and necropolis is complete in this section, creating the zoepolis, a city of both temporal life and eternal life in the absence of actual death. The living communicate with the “sleeping” below, to the extent that the young woman here “has business” with the buried beloved as though on a social call. The passers-by, not the dead, are the ones who seem superfluous and marginalized. This theme – the collapsing of the biopolis and necropolis into a zoepolis – continues as Sigourney describes the tomb of Abelard and Heloise, the “Russian Demidoff,” several Americans, and a few French generals. Time, space, history, and class are collapsed into the zoepolis, evoking the Christian doctrine of equality before God. Note that this entire scene is rendered possible by the sentimental convention of elegy, the legitimacy of the sentimental poet to speak authentically on behalf of the dead.

It’s important to remember the centrality of complementary heterosexuality in sentimental aesthetics, such as we saw problematized in “The Story of a Year.” The mother, the lover, and the infamous Abelard and Heloise serve to structure the zoepolis under the sign of ‘legitimate’ heteronormative time. It seems that even the city of the dead must conform to the imperatives of heteronormative reproduction. The paradisical

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41 See Kamuf.
collapsing of all difference into the space and time of the cemetery, however, soon meets a limit:

There is the lowly haunt

Where rest the poor. No towering obelisk

Beareath their name. No blazoned tablet tells

Their joys or sorrows. (257)

Here, the countermonumental impulse we see twenty years later in Allen’s civil war poetry finds a companion. While the sublime – the sun upon Parisian domes, Death’s gaunt visage – was used to place the reader in a receptive state for the coming beautification of death, the treatment of the poor – while certainly a conventional trope in sentimental literature – seems to resist the collapsing of class and time in the zoepolis. Evoking Thomas Gray, she laments the namelessness and lack of memorial for the poor. In her summary comments, she quotes Gray explicitly, shudders at the common practice of recycling the “fosses communes” every five years once the bodies decompose. It seems the zoepolis risks allowing the prejudices of the biopolis into eternal life. To forestall this move, however, Sigourney immediately switches to the trope of Nature’s memorial:

Yet ‘t is sweet to muse

Around their pillow of repose, and think

That Nature mourns their loss, though man forget.

The lime-tree and acacia, side by side,

Spring up, in haste to do their kindly deed

Of sheltering sympathy, as though they knew
Their time was short.

Sweet Nature ne’er forgets
Her buried sons, but cheers their summer-couch
With turf and dew-drops, bidding autumn’s hand
Drop lingering garlands of it latest leaves,
And glorious spring from wintry thraldom burst,
To bring their type of Immortality. (257)

Here, two underlying assumptions of sentimental memorialization emerge: the desire is for permanence and the vehicle is the living’s memory. In the tense – and seemingly hypocritical – substitution of Nature’s memory for the architectural solidity of permanent tombs that permit the living to memorialize the dead themselves, the epistemic trace of bureaucratic inequality is covered over by natural imagery, which allows even the poor to participate in compulsory heterosexuality as Nature’s “buried sons.” What is most fascinating, however, is that the landscape of Pere La Chaise, as with other rural cemeteries, is entirely designed. The “nature” of the space is an artifice, an aesthetic production involved in the very discursive systems that give rise both to the urban density that necessitates the rural cemetery, and the ideological commitments that drive its design toward sentimental motifs.

Hence, we can see that sentimental aesthetics, in the field of visual rhetoric, seeks to harmonize domestic space – and the functions attached to that space – with a common secular history and Christian teleology. In the specific context of a Greenwood or Pere La Chaise, we get a particularly profound and economical visual representation of
sentimental aesthetics’ infusion into bureaucratically structured space, the ideology of the private being grafted onto the nominally public space of a cemetery (literally, in terms of legal status and metaphorically, in terms of visibility). It is this image of grafting, this ability to mingle sentimental ideology with public/national ideology into “hybrid” aesthetic forms that I’d like us to keep in mind as we discuss burial and monumentalism during the Civil War.

Patriotism, Mourning, and The Clinic

The Civil War amplifies the problem of bodies along several lines: the burial, transport, and reburial of corpses; the conscription, transport, and mobilization of soldiers; and the representation of both living and dead bodies in multiple discursive fields. The immediate condition of bodies in the American Civil War was one of chaos, discontinuity, fear, jingoism, and general unrest. Aside from instating conscription, suspending habeas corpus, giving extensive powers to the Department of War, and forming the United States Sanitary Commission, over the first two years of war hundreds of thousands of bodies had to be moved, buried, fed, and tended to.

As I’ve already argued, at the heart of the liberal subject lay anxiety, specifically, the generative tension between authenticity and iteration. Authenticity requires discursive regimes of secular and religious epistemology, which in turn require constraint of which texts can be deemed legitimate by intimate publics. If complementary heterosexuality is a regulatory ideal in the antebellum period, one that orders iteration, the undermining of heterosexual order and domestic time during the Civil War throws both the sexual system into flux and the possibility of stable iteration into danger. The
integrity of the discursive body of the liberal subject, its uniqueness and authenticity, is violently disrupted by the war. Iteration seems to take on a strange new shape, one for which complementary heterosexuality is an unfit regulator.

Instead, patriotic death – which has no space for women – becomes the regulatory ideal of liberal subjectivity. Where before, complementary heterosexuality regulated even dying and grief, now even complementary heterosexuality is structured, however tragically and violently, under the sign of patriotic death. Not national reproduction but national survival becomes the organizing logic of embodied experience. This is a partial explanation for the discursive proliferation of death poetry, memorial rhetoric, and the figure of the dying soldier. A sleight-of-hand, upon the close of the war, is needed to shift discourse away from the regulatory ideal of patriotic death and back under the sign of complementary heterosexuality, hence, the proliferation of images of the soldier’s graveyard giving birth to a renewed nation.

If, as Yeats puts it, the purpose of Romanticism is “to hold reality and justice in a single vision,” then the purpose of sentimentalism – as I have been arguing – is not primarily about feeling, imagination, moral sensibility, domesticity, aesthetics, or femininity. The purpose of sentimentalism is to hold beauty and justice in a single vision, and to allow oneself the belief that experiencing beautiful and sublime works of man and God somehow helps one toward recuperating social life and preserving justice. Believing that reading novels in which heroines suffer but are redeemed, or men are led from vice to paradise by the tender hand of woman, is somehow cognate with reading novels in which slaves are freed or mill workers vindicated, is to believe that the sympathy created
through art is a necessary condition for the growth of social justice.

Understood this way, the Civil War traumatizes sentimental subjectivity because it calls into question the possibility of social justice, or that the sympathy created through art is a necessary condition for social justice. The sentimental preference for cosmopolitanism, transnational sympathy, and global justice ran up against the fact of secession, rebellion, slavery, and industrial warfare. In these troubled times, on these horrifying battle-fields, perhaps sympathy, art, and social justice didn’t mean anything – or worse, perhaps they were lies working in the service of power.

What mutates in sentimental aesthetics is not the belief that the sympathy produced by art is necessary for human thriving but the belief that human beings aren’t properly viewed as dense surfaces open to “the medical gaze” (*Birth of the Clinic* 9). The network of beliefs and the conditions for their appearance that I have been calling sentimentalism drop out of intellectual legitimacy precisely as the gaze takes over social space. What began in the clinic enters public health, sanitation, sociology, and economic theory. The antebellum shibboleth that human beings were holistic creatures imbued with moral sensibility and driven by passions in turn restrained by the will, and that art was a technology by which the imagination was trained toward moral virtue, is crushed upon the rocks of Marx and Darwin by the wave of War.

Yet, as I have been attempting to show, sentimentalism does not disappear as an orientation toward justice or an ethical justification for art. Instead, it attaches to literary realism, philosophical pragmatism, popular spiritualism, scientistic feminism, and
Marxist sociology in the reformation of the liberal subject, one that arguably persists through the Cold War.

The place of the feminine in heterosexual war culture is in nursing and mourning. The rejection of “sentimental love” (Whitman 236) during war-time is not the rejection of femininity in general (as I argued with “The Story of a Year”); it is the specific rejection of peacetime femininity codified in terms of heterosexual courtship rituals and domestic duty. Successful wartime femininity in a heterosexual culture revolves around one’s ability to re-themazte heterosexual relations around a soldier/nurse dynamic instead of a lover/beloved dynamic. Queerness, under wartime, means nothing other than failing to conform to a re-structured heteronormativity that would expel sentimental courtship as other to the needs of national survival – as can be seen in the many images of women guilting themselves over being frivolous while a soldier fights.

The United States Sanitary Commission is the codification of this reformed femininity. Instead of perpetuating some spurious distinction between the public and private spheres, wartime heteronormative culture draws all relations into public utility even as it attempts a dichotomous publicity along gender lines. In the American Civil War, this means creating a cabinet-level organization that will govern female efforts during the war, siphoning them into coded activities like nursing, Christianizing, fundraising, and domestic production. It is in this sense that a woman like Louisa May Alcott, so queer in postbellum America, would serve as a representative model of femininity during the war, as can be seen by the popularity of her Hospital-Sketches. It is in this similar vein that Whitman’s “adhesiveness,” so often viewed as excessive or dangerous –
in a word, queer – after the war allows for his fecund thriving in the public eye during the war.

Of greater importance, perhaps, than this recalibration of heterosexual regimes under wartime, is the extent to which this recalibration transformed women’s experience of time, secularity, and the clinical gaze. As Foucault writes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, “Considered on an over-all basis, the clinic appears – in terms of doctor’s experience – as a new outline of the perceptible and utterable: a new distribution of the discrete elements of corporal space (for example, the isolation of *tissue* – a functional, two-dimensional area – in contrast with the functioning mass of the organ, constituting the paradox of an ‘internal surface’)” (xx). It is this shift in the mapping of the body itself, and the relation of the body to different systems of knowledge, that marks the conditions by which sentimentalism mutates into some other network of beliefs, this “some other network” being the subject of the close of this chapter, after a brief but necessary segue through the somber rows of Gettysburg.

Gettysburg

In 1863, Edward Everett, a reverend and popular apologist for the Union cause, was chosen to deliver the keynote address at the consecration of The National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Though we remember Lincoln’s terse but powerful dedication, it was Everett’s oration that was often mentioned as an historical event. In an edition of the proceedings at Gettysburg, commissioned by the Cemetery Monument Fund and named in honor of Everett’s speech, several letters are included testifying to the efficacy of his oration: “Whilst [your oration’s] delivery commanded the closest attention of the vast
assembly who listened to it,—thus giving evidence of their intense interest and entire appreciation,—this portion of your Oration, preserved in an authentic form, will descend to posterity as a production of permanent historical value” (1). Yet, it stands fairly understudied, despite its seemingly crucial function: to monumentalize the war dead, justify the Union cause, and move the audience to soldier on. As a rhetorical performance, its complexity offers a microcosm of discursive practices, epistemes, and gestures in flux during the nineteenth century.

Letters thanking Everett for speaking at Gettysburg, a bird’s-eye map of the cemetery outlining its social function for readers, and other ephemera adjoin Everett’s speech. The Soldier’s Monument was to be placed at the center of a semi-circle of identical and individual soldier’s graves, with “a space at either end reserved for unidentified soldiers” (10). The practice of placing soldiers in individual, identical graves harkens back to practices during the French Revolution (Grant 513-4). This identical individualism before the law participates in what Robyn Weigman has referred to as “the abstract white masculine” (92) of citizenship and relies on print exchangeability to create the “nationally imagined community” (Andersen 45).

Andersen has also noted the particular importance of the cenotaph in liberal-democratic nations: “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one know who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times” (9). In the context of

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42 For two good readings, see
Gettysburg, we can see the cenotaph functioning precisely to commemorate the male body in a narrative of national rebirth. Melville, that other, rarely-mentioned historian of the Civil War, iterates numerous symbolic cenotaphs in “Verses Inscriptive and Memorial” from his *Battle-Pieces*. Melville repeatedly casts his poems either as monuments or has the monument itself narrate its own inscription to the dead, as he does in “An uninscribed Monument on one of the Battle-field of the Wilderness”:

Silence and Solitude may hint

(Whose home is in yon piny wood)

What I, though tableted, could never tell—

The din which here befell,

And striving of the multitude.

The iron cones and spheres of death

Set round me in their rust,

These, too, if just,

Shall speak with more animated breath.

Though who beholdest, if thy thought,

Not narrowed down to personal cheer,

Take in the import of the quiet here—

The after-quiet—the calm full fraught;

Thou too wilt silent stand—

Silent as I, and lonesome as the land. (n.p.)

It has been noted by Susan-Mary Grant that Everett’s speech fits neatly into
Benedict Andersen’s model of the cenotaph and nationalism, especially in the ubiquitous appeal to the lost, unnamed, or unclaimable dead (515-6). Katharine Derderian makes a more interesting point about the funeral oration and mourning practices in general, pointing out the deep connection between mourning practices and the advent of literacy in Ancient Greece (3-7). In the context of my study, mourning and the pharmakon bear a strange but necessary relationship: the discursive body longs for iteration, and mourning is often a way that a society testifies to the permanence of the Word even as this permanence is always under the threat of annihilation or misinterpretation. Fixing the social meaning of dead bodies means attempting to fix the bodies in language and sculpture – the only media thought capable of such permanence; yet, to do so opens up the constant threat of erasure, illegibility and invisibility.

To properly mourn the dead in the service of national identity, Everett follows a traditional funeral oration structure with one distinct difference: in between the exaltation of the war dead and the epilogue, Everett includes a forensic oration detailing the causes of the war and who is to blame for it and its subsequent violence. As a part of this subsidiary forensic oration, Everett’s main concern is rebuking any legitimate justification for secession, whether put forth by Southern leaders or other national governments. This anomalous section of the oration points to the complex and difficult function Everett’s speech had to fulfill: it had to perform the usual work of a formal funeral oration during a time of rebellion, which removes the presumption of national unity usually undergirding national mourning.

The allusions to Pericles and Athens resound throughout, the last coming near the
final sentences of the speech: “‘The whole earth,’ said Pericles, as he stood over the remains of his fellow citizens, who had fallen in the first year of the Peloponnesian War, ‘the whole earth is the sepulchre of illustrious men.’ All time, he might have added, is the millennium of their glory” (Everett 82). In this iteration of Pericles’ historical simultaneity, Everett intersperses the American jeremiad, a graft of millennial temporality upon the national cause not at all foreign to American national discourse prior to the Civil War.43 Instead, this grafting or admixture of national mourning and Christian millennialism produces the phenomenon of *secular apotheosis*, as seen both in famous national art – such as Constantino Brumidi’s *The Apotheosis of Washington* in the U.S. Capitol Building – and satirical works used to subvert what were perceived as threats to the nation, such as “The Apotheosis of Suffrage,” a cartoon by George Coffin in *The Washington Post* January 26, 1896. In it, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton sit on either side of Washington in his classic figuration from *The Apotheosis of Washington*.

As Dorothy Ross has noted in “Historical Consciousness in Nineteenth-Century America,” “When independence was won, fervent Protestants identified the American republic with the advent of that millennial period, which was to usher in the final salvation of mankind and the end of history. American thus represented a radical break in history and radical breakthrough of God’s time into secular history. The country’s progress would be the unfolding of the millennial seed, rather than a process of historical change” (912). We see this figure of national-millenial time exploited throughout

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43 See Berkovitch.
Everett’s oration, used as a definitive critique of secession and a tool for steeling Unionist conviction. It is also used to facilitate strange figures, such as the soldier’s rising with the dead audience of Everett’s speech upon rapture (Everett 81), and the figure of the polis-congregation moving across a lateral and discontinuous geography marked by cites of death: “Seminary Ridge, the Peach-Orchard, Cemetery, Culp, and Wolf Hill, Round Top, Little Round Top, humble names, henceforward dear and famous, — no lapse of time, no distance of space, shall cause to be forgotten” (82).

That national territory is figured as a part of the national body, along with the constituent discursive bodies of the polis, makes the elaboration of historical-millennial time and the polis-congregation body, the definitive rhetorical trope of the Civil War in the North. National space is made into a nexus of simultaneity made possible by literacy, a simultaneity that allows for the co-presence and co-identity of the living, dead, citizen, and saved. Any given individual is given a three-fold, conditional and simultaneous identity in two registers – the national and Christian – that revolves around ones past, present, and potential future. One’s actually being at once the origin of national justice and God’s love, the potential of history and revelation, and the existing sign of national and religious sacrifice, is contingent upon a test of authenticity in belief – that is, of believing and affirming the dual national and religious teleology provided by Everett. If you are a true believer and a true patriot, then you shall not perish from either history or eternity, and in so being, you share a metaphorical presence with all other true believers and true patriots, living or dead, spread out across a lateral space made possible by textuality.
It has taken this far to be able to state the primary issue: the memorial space of Gettysburg is, as I hope is clear, fundamentally different from the space of Laurel Hill because of its complete *expelling* of female bodies from its boundaries, except as allegorical figures like History. What was fairly explicit in rhetorical treatments of war violence, edicts of national discourse, and pronouncements by officials is made *materially* unavoidable by Gettysburg: women, while they may toil in domestic seclusion or the relative privacy of hospital rooms, have no place in public history. Their attempt to participate in national mourning or war history as equals or complements is simply not discursively permitted. All that we have said about the structure of Everett’s speech, its relation to Greek funeral orations, and its fetishization of the unknown soldier is meant define unambiguously the space women are only allowed to inhabit as impotent spectators. As we consider Whitman, Alcott, and Dickinson, we’ll see various strategies for coping with this exclusion of women, and sentimentalism, from official national discourse.

As I had mentioned, the emergence of a new way of mapping the body, laid out by Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic*, had a profound effect on cultures of sentiment and sensibility, given the centrality of embodiment, imagination, and moral virtue to such cultures. It is perhaps fitting that a discourse that began with a material discourse on psychology and mental faculties – sensibility and sentiment – was finally displaced by the emergence of another material discourse, this time on the body and illness. In the discourse of the clinic, “the human body defines, by natural right, the space of origin and
of distribution of disease: a space whose lines, volumes, surfaces, and routes are laid
down, in accordance with a now familiar geometry, by the anatomical atlas” (1). Further:

The space of the configuration of the disease and the space of localization of the
illness in the body have been superimposed, in medical experience, for only a
relatively short period of time – the period that coincides with nineteenth-century
medicine and the privileges accorded to pathological anatomy. This is the period
that marks the suzerainty of the gaze…The ‘glance’ has simply to exercise its
right of origin over truth. (2)

We can see the effect of the anatomical body on national discourse most clearly in
Whitman and Alcott’s works. The ability of the gaze to map a discourse of knowledge
onto the body is precisely what allows for the emergence of literary realism in the first
place, and this gaze is precisely what makes the old sympathies of sentimental literature
seem so amorphous, vague, and dangerous. Sentimentalism deals with interpenetration,
imagination, and a holistic moral life, of all those things shut off from the gaze’s ability
to know by visually mapping. The outward signs of sentiment – tears, blushes, and
shudders – are figures of a shared discourse between conversant bodies; if one sees the
tear and knows it, then the one weeping also knows you: there’s a symbiosis of
knowledge and visuality. Seeing and being are coextensive. The gaze of the clinic erects
a break in this sympathetic loop: to see is to order and know, not to experience
vicariously. The diseased body is not experienced vicariously by the clinician; it is
analyzed, charted, and – if lucky – healed. To see and know the disease by seeing and
knowing the body is not allow the diseased body entrance into the clinician’s sympathies;
it is a strictly hierarchical, discontinuous relationship. The body of the subject is read like a map, not a pair of emoting eyes.

Whitman encounters this discourse anxiously in “The Wound-Dresser.” The poet writes: “I am faithful, I do not give out/The fractur’d thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen./These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my/breast a fire, a burning flame.)” (56-9). He previously describes the “rows of the hospital tent” (29) and the “long rows of cots,” (30) twice evokes his “hinged knees” (23, 35), and likens “open hospital doors” to “open doors of time” (39). Sympathy and the clinical gaze are in tension in this poem, each persistently displaced by the other in a series of discontinuities and threats aptly symbolized by Whitman’s impassive hand but burning breast. Where sympathy would seek vicarious experience, the poem provides a series of failed – necessarily failed – attempts at such experience. The wound-dresser seems stuck trying to fall into the conventional sentimental nurse, one who nurses body and soul as it passes through the doors of time, but Whitman can only manage a private, uncommunicated sympathy (which is no sympathy at all) and coldly efficient corporeal treatment of bodies.

While providing the imagery of dressing wounds, Whitman routinely places his feelings in parentheses, typographically charting the division between internal space and external vision/visibility:

   On, on I go, (open doors of time! Open hospital doors!)

   The crush’d head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the
   bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,

Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,

(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!

In mercy come quickly.) (39-44)

Encapsulated in this stanza is the emerging isolation of sentiment and feeling within the boundaries of the clinical body, and the power of the gaze to chart knowledge onto the body. Visibility and vision become the means by which sentiment is erased from the text of the body: such signs as tears, blushes, and smiles become inadequate and illegible as rubrics of the soul even as the gaze provides an alternative corporeal reality within which to trap feeling and isolate it from knowledge. As Foucault puts it, “The new structure is indicated – but not, of course, exhausted – by the minute but decisive change, whereby the question: ‘What is the matter with you?’, with which the eighteenth-century dialogue between doctor and patient began (dialogue possessing its own grammar and style), was replaced by that other question: ‘Where does it hurt?’, in which we recognize the operation of the clinic and the principle of its entire discourse” (Birth xxi.). I would further add that the question “where does it hurt?,” in the vocabulary of sentimentality, would have a necessarily double answer: wherever it hurts in the patient, it hurts sympathetically in the imagination of the doctor. The ability to map the pain onto the patient’s body and keep it there is the central shift in bodily representation that allows for realism’s rise and sentimentalism’s fall.
Whitman’s poem offers us this strange alchemy: the poet walks from patient to patient, gaining knowledge of illness by a glance so rapid no words are used to denote its mechanics, but unable to communicate with the dying soldiers sufficiently to facilitate sentimental discourse or the moral universe it calls into being. So effective is the clinical gaze at severing sympathy’s reciprocal loop that in the final lines of the poem, Whitman must place in parentheses what would it seem possible to include in purely visual clinical description:

This in silence in dreams’ projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier’s loving arms about this neck have cross’d and rested,
Many a soldier’s kiss dwells on these bearded lips.) (59-65)
These conventional sentimental signs – the embrace, the kiss – are contained within the parentheses because they do not conform to the clinical gaze or the episteme that underwrites it. Yet, Whitman’s strategy of making his feelings and his sentimental attachments to the soldiers a sort of open secret has the ultimate effect of over-riding the supremacy of the clinical gaze. Still, as an epistemological regime, the clinic clearly has the power of controlling discourse in the hospital setting: the embrace and the kiss must

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44 See Davis, R.
be an open secret, a permitted but excessive moment of emotion in what is otherwise a structure of visual knowledge and action.

While some place the birth of realism in the Civil War, I’d like to place it more firmly in the impact of clinical discourse on women’s sentimental writing. Along with Rebecca Harding Davis’ *Life in the Iron Mills* and *Waiting for the Verdict*, Alcott’s *Hospital-Sketches* provides an intimate case of the tension between clinical beliefs about bodies and sentimental beliefs about bodies, and how an author struggles to narrate the two together.

On page 69, Alcott describes her desire to tend the wounded, “I spent my shining hours washing faces, serving rations, giving medicine, and sitting in a very hard chair, with pneumonia on one side, diphtheria on the other, five typhoids on the opposite, and a dozen dilapidated patriots, hopping, lying, and lounging about, all staring more or less at the new “nuss,” who suffered untold agonies, but concealed them.” Alcott falls into the same clinical habits of description that Whitman uses in the “Wound-dresser.” Illnesses, *pace* Foucault, become localized to the body as an object of the clinician’s gaze, allowing their metaphorical independence as objects: the illnesses stand in for the bodies who have them and can be thus placed in relation to Alcott. The one moment of communicative intrusion – the patriots staring at her – is concealed behind her “matronly aspect,” refusing to participate in a scene of sympathy.

“The sight of several stretchers, each with its legless, armless, or desperately wounded occupant, entering my ward, admonished me that I was there to work, not to wonder or weep” (71). Again, the ideology of Mrs. Ford, the dichotomous choice
between working and feeling, crops up again, urging Alcott away from sympathy and toward public utility, specifically, the utility of the clinic. Soldiers are reduced to occupants as they enter the ward, losing their national status even as Alcott presses her bureaucratic prerogative and authority.

In co-optation of the Romantic sublime, Alcott recasts the “Charge of the Light Brigade” by Tennyson:

Beds to the front of them,
Beds to the right of them,
Beds to the left of them,

Nobody blundered,
Beamed at by hungry souls,
Screamed at with brimming bowls,

Steamed at by army rolls,

Buttered and sundered,

With coffee not cannon plied,
Each must be satisfied,
Whether they lived or died;

All the men wondered. (75)

Instead of cannons there are beds, instead of gunshots there are brimming bowls, instead of chaos, a meticulous order. Far from having a degrading effect – though there is certain humor in the adaptation – Alcott seems to conceive of the hospital beds, sick men, and duties of the nurse as very much akin to the struggles of soldiers on the field. The
same fear, duty, and uncertainty hangs over her as any soldier. The clinical space, with its particular vocabulary of work and science, provides Alcott with an aesthetic for managing patriotism and national belonging outside the domestic space and heterosexual ideology. Despite occasional references to being matronly, or certain evocations of the sentimental duty of tending the dying as they suffer, Alcott’s aesthetic eschews the sentimental aesthetic, its concern for displays of affect, and its predilection for placing women in metaphors of impotent nightmares. To be Mrs. Ford instead of Lizzie, it seems, means being able to discursively contain death and patriotism within the discourse of clinical work and regimes of sanitation.

Alcott’s death-scene, *contra* James’, reads so:

The kind soul was full of trouble, as the choke in his voice, the grasp of his hand, betrayed; but there were no tears, and the farewell of the friends was the more touching for its brevity.

“Old boy, how are you?” faltered the one.

“Most through, thank heaven!” whispered the other.

“Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?”

“Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best.”

“I will! I will!”

“Good bye, Ned.”

“Good bye, John, good bye!”

They kissed each other, tenderly as women, and so parted…(92)
It’s impressive that Alcott, who is beside these men, is not called upon to grieve, mourn, or nurse the dying. It’s equally strange that they would, in the absence of any interest in female presence, kiss each other – “tenderly as women,” Alcott puts it so uncannily – and fulfill for each other, in homosocial love, the duties conventionally attached to women. What’s more impressive, perhaps, is that Alcott, as nurse, is able to both witness this scene, fail to actively participate in it, and write about from the same position of administrative authority she adopts throughout the chapter. In each scene, we see the line between the body of the clinician and the bodies of patients, and all that this new theorization of the body means for liberal subjectivity and sentimental discourse.

Contrary to the clinical discourse in Whitman and Alcott, Emily Dickinson’s poetry stages a dark and masochistic struggle against patriarchal war discourse.45 While this clearly places her within the sphere of sentimental discourse, it helps explain her singular queerness in relation to that discourse in and following the Civil War. In Dickinson, we have the madness of Echo I described in relation to Poe in Chapter 3, but one inflected through the battle between liberal Christianity and scientific naturalism as lodged in an interioristic subjectivity.46 Dickinson, like Melville, is a liberal ironist, one whose reliance on sentimentalized liberalism is total but whose stance in relation to sentimentalized liberalism is one of ironic disavowal.47 We see this irony in poem 1581:

Those – dying then,

Knew where they went –

45 See Noble.
46 See Farrell Chapters 2-3.
47 See Renegar.
They went to God’s Right Hand
That Hand is amputated now
And God cannot be found – (1-5)

Aside from the rich allusions to “God’s right hand” charted by Helen Vendler (496-7), the image here presents a vague group – “those” – who in their death had both faith in millennial tropes of the placement of the saved beside God and certainty about such placement. That God’s Right Hand is amputated, of course, signals both a sacrilegious literalization of God’s body and its dismemberment, along with a cutting off of certainty about the placement of the saved. That God cannot be found confounds the image, raising the question beyond the relation of the dead to God’s presence toward the question of God’s absence.

The abdication of Belief
Makes the Behavior small –
Better an ignis fatuus
Than no illume at all – (6-9)

Here, two connected objections are given to abdicating belief in God’s presence and the certainty of the placement of the saved: doing so seems to undercut the meaning of action, and one could always maintain a compromised belief even in the face of apparent uncertainty. Aside from the irony of writing a seemingly apostate, or at least agnostic, poem in hymnody, there’s the additional irony that asserting a belief in an ignis fatuus (a false fire) undercuts the certainty of “those” who “knew where they went,” leaving the poet with an ironic belief in an admitted illusion.
But, a secondary motif emerges from the poem in the context of post-Civil War medicine. The amputation of God’s hand evokes images of the war and its many amputees while also forcing the body, even a poetic representation of a symbolic religious body, to be subject to the discourse of the clinic. I am not, however, arguing that Dickinson’s poetry can be placed into the same discursive shift toward clinical representations of bodily ontologies and anatomies that Whitman and Alcott can be placed in. Indeed, what’s so singularly queer about Dickinson is the extent to which she resists getting wrapped up in that clinical shift. Instead, her subjectivity is primarily torn by fits of disbelief in liberal Christianity’s promise of being able to accommodate scientific naturalism into a holistic system of action. What she increasingly finds, and what pragmatism seeks to facilitate, is that the two discourses can’t be commiserated or synthesized, that the subject must partition religious belief and scientific knowledge without neurosis.

In sentimental culture, death gives rise to grief, and grief gives rise to mourning, which in turn gives social meaning and order to private pain. In Dickinson’s poetry, this cycle is traumatized. Grief and fear give rise not to mourning, but to inquiry – not to the placement of death into a meaningful social order, but the struggle to give death, actual or potential, some private ground and unshakable certainty.

Yet, to characterize Dickinson’s poetry, however difficult it is to interpret, as entirely private is no longer possible. What Ryan Cull called Dickinson’s “lyric sociality” and what Marianne Noble has called her “masochistic sentimentality,” I would like to inflect through Dillon’s model of liberal female subjectivity’s formation through and by
the marriage contract. Dickinson’s poetry is at once a disavowal – what will be in Henry James a renunciation – of heterosexual subjectivity and an ironic recognition of her inability to live outside the social space of patriarchy. The scene of God’s amputation and subsequent disappearance seems, in this view, consonant with an act of poetic castration followed by ironic belief in a false light.

Conclusion

The impact of war trauma on the national imagination and on various intimate publics is hard to overestimate. Here, I have but traced a single dialectic movement of mourning and heteronormativity. The war, by undermining common heteronormative conventions both troubles gender politics and, in so doing, provides many sentimental authors with the opportunity to imagine new forms of gendered sociality. James staging of heteronormative renunciation and Allen’s circulation of a sentimental subjectivity haunted by martial violence are but two modest examples of the importance of sentimental aesthetics to war culture.

I have just begun, in the present chapter, my consideration of clinical discourse and its impact on sentimental subjectivity. This conflict becomes the site of emergence for pragmatist discourse and a central problematic in the formation of pragmatist-feminist subjectivity. Nevertheless, sentimental culture’s ability to adapt to ever-changing social circumstances attests not only to the nimbleness and creativity of those authors classed under its auspices, but also to its centrality to the formation of liberal subjectivity through the sexual contract. Far from a shallow or pernicious aesthetic form, sentimentalism helped liberal subjects, confronted by the terror of war, to fashion new beginnings and
new identities in relation to family, society, and the state.
Realism, Feminism, and the Clinic in *A Country Doctor, The Bostonians*, and *Herland/Ourland*

Referencing war’s traces, Whitman writes in “The Wound-Dresser,” “I am faithful, I do not give out/The fractur’d thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen./These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my/breast a fire, a burning flame.)” (56-9). Dickinson writes in poem 1581, “They went to God’s Right Hand/That Hand is amputated now/And God cannot be found –” (3-5). As mentioned in chapter three, clinical discourse gains widespread legitimacy following the Civil War, in part due to the violence of war and the attention required by so large a group of nurses, doctors, and aides. Explaining the clinic’s significance, Foucault remarks:

> Considered on an over-all basis, the clinic appears – in terms of doctor’s experience – as a new outline of the perceptible and statable: a new distribution of the discrete elements of corporal space (for example, the isolation of *tissue* – a functional, two-dimensional area – in contrast with the functioning mass of the organ, constituting the paradox of an ‘internal surface’). *(Birth xx)*

He further contends that the nineteenth century witnesses the “suzerainty of the gaze” (2). In the context of sentimental aesthetics, the suzerainty of the gaze means both a new type of knowledge available to liberal subjects and a troubling threat to the relationship between affect and virtue. While in sentimental discourse motifs of vision already held a privileged place, its schematization was thoroughly sympathetic, not clinical. The blush or streaming tears a reader gazes upon – and in gazing, knows – reliably signify a character’s mental state as well as her relative value in an affective
scheme that connects feeling with moral character. By contrast, the “glance” theorized by Foucault does not participate in the blush or the weeping. The glance demarcates the boundary between the clinical observer and the sympathetic reader. The ability for tears to signify without exciting sympathy threatens the recursive nature of sentimental theories of mind and judgment. Insofar as women adopt the clinical gaze, they act as agents of its suzerainty, authorized participants in a scientifically underwritten project of knowledge and power. Nursing, instead of being a natural path by which women could leave domestic space and enter professional space, in fact troubles underlying rhetorical and aesthetic principles of sentimentality, provoking a subjective tension that longs for resolution. Such tension is generative, pressing agents to balance conflicting desires and expectations through what John Dewey calls ‘creative intelligence.’

The sort of power Nan Prince longs for in A Country Doctor is organized by forms of scientific knowledge and utility privileged in clinical discourse. Exercising medical power requires adopting an affect other characters deem inappropriate for women – at least the sort who would involve themselves in a romantic plot. The same affective alienation appears in the character of Doctor Prance in Henry James’ The Bostonians, whose role as woman doctor necessarily negates her involvement in romantic plots even as she tacitly receives praise and respect from other characters in the text. Charlotte Perkins Gilman stages the clinical gaze differently in Herland, where the clinical gaze becomes the hegemonic position of authority in an all-female utopia. It organizes social relations, promotes health and reason, and allows for harmony both amongst women and between women and nature. As Whitman and Dickinsons’
representations show, clinical and sentimental discourse are both troubled by amputation and the relation between embodiment and selfhood it disrupts. Clinical discourse thus opens up a new way of theorizing embodiment and subjectivity in the nineteenth century even as it unsettles related sentimental theories. At the site of these tensions rest women, heteronormativity, and patriotism.

Doctoring & Romance in A Country Doctor

Sarah Orne Jewett’s representation of a young woman turning her back on marriage in order to pursue a career in medicine bears autobiographical features. Jewett’s father was indeed a country doctor, and she used to help him in his practice, acting as either nurse or apprentice, bandaging wounds, helping set broken bones, and attending to anxiety. Jewett was a regular patient during her childhood, beset by many illnesses. After her death, a friend wrote that had she had the physical strength, Jewett would certainly have attended medical school and become a physician (Letters 6). Her weak constitution instead turned her toward writing fiction, both as an outlet for her unmet desires and as an alternative way of participating in a vibrant intellectual life. It is interesting that Jewett, much like Gertrude Stein, found authorship as a fitting alternative to a medical career.

Judith Bryant Wittenberg has situated A Country Doctor in the context of “American medical history,” comparing it to “contemporaneous autobiographies by actual female physicians” of the nineteenth century (123-124). She frames the text as a “border case,” relying on Mary Poovey’s description of gender ideology to read A Country Doctor as a way of both supporting and concealing the radicalism of women.
entering the medical profession. To her credit, Wittenberg situates the text in a detailed discussion of antipathy in the medical establishment to incursion by both female doctors and the folk practices they sometimes relied upon to gain legitimacy. Yet, her analysis lacks a significant engagement with the very sentimental literary discourse out of which Jewett’s novel emerges. Wittenberg is correct to claim Jewett’s strategic purpose in framing the narrative of a woman’s professional success as the conflict between her experience and the marital pressures foisted upon her. It is my intention in what follows to explore the discursive strategies employed by Jewett more closely, noting the sentimental tropes she relies upon in order to draw the reader into Nan’s straightforward choice: marriage and sexual pleasure or an ethic of care articulated through professional ambition.

_A Country Doctor_ opens with “The Last Mile,” which depicts a nameless mother and child trekking through the dark wilderness, seeming to emerge out of a dark and ancient past. The mother happens upon “a primitive spot enough, where the graves were only marked by rough stones, and the short, sheep-cropped grass was spread over departed generations of the farmers and their wives and children.” What had once appeared an ancient, solitary respite soon becomes haunted by “a legion of ghosts which had been wandering under cover of the dark.” They “had discovered this intruder” and “were oppressing her from every side.” The past, at once ancient, spectral, and rural, surrounds the mother, filling the scene with danger and urgency. Amidst her “unnatural strength of terror,” she catches “sight of a light in a far-away farmhouse window.” Desperately walking toward the farmhouse, the reader begins to suspect that her journey
is in fact fraught with death. The chapter’s final paragraph makes the journey’s significance clear: “At last she was close to it; at last she gave one great sigh, and the child fell from her grasp; at last she clutched the edge of the worn doorstep with both hands, and lay still” (4).

By opening the novel with a woman sacrificing herself to save a child, Jewett embroils the succeeding plot in the genealogy of sentimental writing. Undergoing a haunted wilderness – haunted, we later learn, by her own ancestors – to sacrifice her life for her child’s conforms to a familiar trope, perhaps best formulated by Felicia Hemans in her *Records of Woman*. Maternal urges draw their strength both from nature and from ancient, spiritual forces. Fittingly, the infant girl is delivered unto a farmhouse itself filled with women, in this case knitting and exchanging stories. Ancient, maternal time gives way immediately to domestic time. The chapter ends with the convergence of each temporality, with Mrs. Thacher answering the knock on the door first encountered by the reader a chapter earlier.

Chapter Four –“Life and Death” – brings with it a death-bed scene. A staple of sentimental novels, the death-bed scene usually comes later in a plot, at a pivotal moment in the protagonist’s development. Its function is usually to urge reformation, pressing the protagonist toward a more virtuous life. Jewett, however, composes a more complex and challenging death-bed scene. Surrounding Adeline, the nameless mother from the first chapter, are her mother, Mrs. Thacher; her aunt, Mrs. Martin; their husbands; a few others from town; and the country doctor, Dr. Leslie. Adeline uses the bully pulpit of the death-bed to reveal the purpose of her journey: to leave her daughter, Nan Prince, in Dr.
Leslie’s care. While she wants Nan to “stay here with mother, long as she wants her,” Adeline advises that Nan “will need somebody that knows the world better by and by,” something neither Mrs. Thacher nor her husband John seem qualified for in Adeline’s opinion. Dr. Leslie promises to care for Nan. Adeline dies shortly after.

Adeline’s death-bed scene provides a contrast that will persist throughout the text. The narrator asserts that “Next to the doctor himself, [Mrs. Martin] was the authority on all medical subjects for that neighborhood” (29). Tracking an established norm in American medical history, according to which women’s role as folk-nurses and herbalists legitimizes their early incursions into medicine, Mrs. Martin is presented as the folk-nurse counterpoint to Dr. Leslie’s authoritative position in the community. The difference between them – marked by Dr. Leslie’s worldliness and experience of city life – is the difference between what Foucault calls “the medicine of species” and “the hospital clinic” (Birth 135). While he describes the medicine of species as relying on “nature” as a fundamental category of analysis, the clinic exposes it “to be merely the discontinuity of heterogeneous and artificial conditions” (135). Though Jewett often describes the rich social practice of folk medicine in her fiction, the decision to have Nan put under Dr. Leslie’s care – as opposed to Mrs. Martin’s – with the express intention that she become a “useful woman” (34) signals the status of clinical discourse in the United States following the Civil War. While Foucault dates the epistemic break with the medicine of species to the late eighteenth century, most medical practice outside urban centers in the U.S. continued to rely on folk practice and concomitant epistemologies well into the nineteenth century.
Indeed, it seems clear in Jewett’s fiction – and this is supported, I will show, in James and Gilman’s fiction – that in the American context, clinical discourse – while certainly already prevalent as a mode of knowledge and analysis in teaching hospitals prior to the U.S Civil War – only begins infecting other discourses in the 1860’s (Davis 13-7). Cynthia Davis has been quite forceful in connecting the rise of literary realism to the epistemic assumptions underlying clinical discourse, and she has been equally forceful in casting this shift as in conflict with sentimental modes of knowing and feeling. In *A Country Doctor*, the tension between nature and clinic tracks the tension between country and city:

But while death seems far more astonishing and unnatural in a city, where the great tide of life rises and falls with little apparent regard to the sinking wrecks, in the country it is not so. The neighbors themselves are those who dig the grave and carry the dead, whom they or their friends have made ready, to the last resting-place. With all nature looking on, – the leaves that must fall, and the grass of the field that must wither and be gone when the wind passes over,— living closer to life and in plainer sight of death, they have a different sense of the mysteries of existence. (38-9)

Foucault sites the “unnaturalness” of the hospital clinic as precisely that which, for the clinician, provides continuity, regularity, and the grounds for relating clinical observation with medical knowledge: “By showing itself in a repetitive form, the truth indicates the way by which it may be acquired” (*Birth* 135). By being embedded in nature’s cyclical time, the medicine of species sacrifices claims to truth even as, in
Jewett’s estimation, it provides a more reasonable approach to death and dying. Subjecting death to the clinical gaze produces knowledge but also alienates grief. Jewett’s attempt throughout *A Country Doctor*, especially in her characterization of Dr. Leslie and Nan Prince, is to reconcile clinical discourse’s legitimate claims to truth with its negative effects on sentimental grief and natural harmony.

Dr. Leslie is the reader’s first model of the appropriate union of clinical knowledge and sentimental knowledge even as his attitude still poses a threat to sentimental theory. On the one hand, “There was something singularly self-reliant and composed about [Dr. Leslie]; one felt that he was the wielder of great powers over the enemies, disease and pain, and that his brave hazel eyes showed a rare thoughtfulness and foresight” (33). On the other hand, “from [Dr. Leslie’s] great knowledge of human nature he could understand and help many of his patients whose ailments were not wholly physical. He seemed to read at a glance the shame and sorrow of the young woman who had fled to the home of her childhood, dying and worse than defeated, from the battle-field of life” (33). Here, Jewett depicts the incursion of the clinical glance into fields of sentimental knowledge. He not only knows at a glance the cause of physical ailments but also emotional ones. The narrator presents as virtuous Dr. Leslie’s ability to “read” the emotions of his patients through his gaze even as she’s quite clear to negate any empathetic response attached to this gaze. Put simply, sentimental knowing is sympathetic. To discern Adeline’s suffering would be to feel it oneself. The reader is given no evidence that Dr. Leslie participates in Adeline’s suffering. He simply knows
her suffering and can assuage it through the application of the right words and gestures as though these were strategies of clinical practice.

As is expressed through Nan and Dr. Leslie’s relationship, master and pupil are central to the dissemination of clinical discourse: “There is, therefore no difference in nature between the clinic as science and the clinic as teaching. A group is thus formed consisting of the master and his pupils, in which the act of recognition and the effort to know find fulfillment in a single movement” (Birth 135). While there are corollaries to the relationship between Dr. Leslie and Nan in sentimental literary history – that between Evelina and Reverend Arthur Villars is particularly instructive – Nan’s ambition to join the medical profession provides a rare dynamic in which the pupil seeks to become the master as opposed to simply forming virtuously under the masters’ influence. Nan must be, like Evelina, concerned with her own entrance into the world, but this entrance has an entirely different structure due to the fact that she is not simply Dr. Leslie’s ward but also his apprentice. She is a part of the “single movement” that unite her and Dr. Leslie in the pursuit of clinical knowledge and the activity of clinical practice.

Notwithstanding the influence of clinical discourse on Nan and Dr. Leslie’s relationship, sentimentality exerts its own visible influence. On one of their joint visits when Nan is young “her eyes looked up into his, and her simple nature was so unconscious of the true dangers and perils of this world, that his very heart was touched with compassion, and he leagued himself with the child’s good angel to defend her against enemies.” Here, the guardian-ward relationship is framed in terms of sympathy and circulated in reference to “good angels.” Her preferred activities in childhood include
wandering through the doctor’s garden, observing different species of birds and flowers, and reveling at the energy of bees.

Despite these natural affinities, usually associated in sentimental fiction with a certain type of compassionate character that will later translate into marriageability, domestic space for Nan is decidedly heterogeneous. On the one hand are the activities of Marilla, Dr. Leslie’s housekeeper, and the usual trappings of middle-class culture: a garden, a study, an abundance of comfortable chairs for leisure. On the other hand, there are her many incursions into others’ domestic spaces, where she and Dr. Leslie often turn from guests into authorities. In their own home, the doctor’s guests often double as patients, making rituals of home-calling awkward (44-47). In short, Dr. Leslie’s professional status reconfigures domestic encounters in ways not true for folk nurses such as Mrs. Martin. All this ruptures for Nan the conventional gender dynamics of a rural home.

At the center of these ruptures in the sentimental script stands Nan’s reading. While entertaining an old medical school friend – largely an excuse for expositions on theories of women and education – Dr. Leslie remarks, “She’s showing a real talent for medical matters. It is quite unconscious for the most part, but I find that she understands a good deal already, and she sat here all the afternoon last week with one of my old medical dictionaries. I couldn’t help looking over her shoulder as I went by, and she was reading about fevers, if you please, as if it were a story-book” (105). This remark had been telegraphed earlier in a joke made by Dr. Ferris, Dr. Leslie’s guest: “Grown up naturally indeed! I don’t doubt that you supplied her with Bell’s ‘Anatomy’ for a picture-
book and made her say over the names of the eight little bones of her wrist, instead of
‘This little pig went to market.’”

The question of Nan’s reading, and its relationship both to her sex and capacity for cultivating medical expertise, belongs to an archive of educational theory extending back to eighteenth-century Britain. Amongst other arguments, it marshals forth the claim that reading and environment have a greater influence on mental and emotional development than sex. Dr. Leslie stands in a long line of actual and fictional “radical” paternal figures, including Godwin, Arthur Villars, and J.S. Mill, whose educational programs met with success even as they encountered skepticism and anxiety from those who, like Dr. Ferris, viewed them as inhumane “experiments” (103). It’s particularly interesting to witness Jewett so visibly replace sentimental discourse with clinical discourse by replacing the objects of Nan’s attention. Figuring discourse in terms of the texts that disseminate it, Jewett represents Nan’s education in clinical culture by staging sites of reading conventionally reserved for historical or romantic texts only to fill them with icons of clinical knowledge like medical dictionaries and Bell’s Anatomy.

Having received an introduction to both clinical discourse and clinical practice, including exposure to Sydenham, whom Foucault credits with defining “geographical consciousness of disease,”48 Nan’s trajectory begins to diverge dramatically from her sentimental antecedents. Still, heteronormativity structures Nan’s adolescence: “She was filled with energy and a great desire for usefulness, but it was not with her, as with many of her friends, that the natural instinct toward marriage, and the building and keeping of a

sweet home-life, ruled all other plans and possibilities” (159). Yet, Nan “showed no sign of being the sort of girl who tried to be mannish and to forsake her natural vocation for a profession.” Further, “she did not look strong-minded; besides she had no need to work for her living, this ward of a rich man, who was altogether the most brilliant and beautiful girl in the school” (160). Nan, compelled by a close-knit rural community into certain rituals of femininity, still retained a high level of tolerance – if not admiration – for her scholarly pursuits. Nonetheless, heteronormativity begins to obfuscate her ability to imagine a future outside marriage and homemaking, figured in terms of natural vocation: “But after all, it seemed as if everybody, even the girl herself, had lost sight of the once familiar idea” (160-1) that she would become a doctor.

Her previous desires and experiences, however, quickly re-assert themselves: “after school-days were over [Dr. Leslie] was not amazed to find how restless and dissatisfied the girl was; how impossible it was for her to content herself with following the round of household duties which were supposed to content young women of her age and station” (162). The stakes of her desires are made perfectly clear to the reader: “It amazed her to find the certainty take possession of her mind that her vocation had been made ready for her from the beginning. She had the feeling of a reformer, a radical, and even of a political agitator, as she tried to face her stormy future in that summer morning loneliness” (174).

This period of forgetting spawned by heteronormativity ends with the revelation of her desire represented in purely sentimental terms. That is, the split between sympathy and clinical knowledge that animates earlier scenes in the text is marginalized in the
several chapters treating her childhood, adolescence, and awakening. The scene where Nan communicates her desires to Dr. Leslie proceeds thus: “the doctor, in spite of himself, of his age, and experience, and sympathy, and self-control, could not resist a smile. [Nan then said] ‘I hate to talk about myself or to be sentimental, but I want to throw my whole love and life into whatever there is waiting for me to do’ (171). Clinical discourse is a threat to sentimental theory insofar as it recalibrates emotional knowledge in non-sympathetic terms and insofar as it functionalizes bodily care outside the domestic sphere. It is an indirect threat insofar as women’s participation in it undermines heteronormative expectations concerning femininity and marriage. It is a striking decision on Jewett’s part to sublimate Nan’s desire to enter clinical discourse professionally into the terms of sentimental awakening, lodging Nan’s desire for the clinic in conventional sentimental language.

However “sentimental” her decision was to pursue the doctoring profession, her apprenticeship follows directly. Francesca Sawaya has argued that “even as Jewett calls upon the idealized agency of domestic woman, she subordinates domestic ideology temporally to, and combines it with, what she figures as newer ideas about woman’s role.” Sawaya describes these newer ideas as having to do with “leisure and educated understanding of the (supposedly) unifying power of culture, of art” (21). While such a reading provides valuable insight into Jewett’s writing – especially Country of the Pointed Firs, to which Sawaya was directly referring – the way “leisure” is framed in A Country Doctor bears special interest. Terms like “use,” “useful,” and “practical” are used as terms of absolute value in the text, framing the legitimate expectations readers
may have of Nan’s decisions and behavior. Adeline wishes that her daughter above all will be “useful woman” (34). Dr. Leslie routinely describes Nan’s virtues and future in terms of use and purpose. Nan describes her desire as chiefly having to do with being “really of use in the world, and to do work which the world needed” (164).

While it’s reasonable to interpret the language of utility as a means by which Jewett frames opportunity for leisure toward a professional political vision for women, it seems that we ought first to take the text seriously as a treatise on the professionalization of medical women. Insofar as “leisure time” is spent studying anatomical textbooks with the express intention on the part of the child doing the reading and the adult encouraging the reading that it will lead to a socially useful profession, the term “leisure” seems disingenuous, meaning at most freedom from subsistence toil. Nonetheless, Sawaya’s point does make sense of Jewett’s decision to provide Nan with Dr. Leslie’s inheritance and economic support, making her decision to pursue medicine one of passion instead of necessity. More importantly, as I will demonstrate later, the language of practicality is a primary means by which the liberal subject resists positivistic claims to truth, the highest example of such strategies being pragmatist-feminism. In this scheme, the practical – of which Dr. Ferris considers Dr. Leslie an exemplar – is contrasted with the theoretical, which tracks the distinction between experience and abstraction so important to Jane Addams, William James, and John Dewey.

Nan’s apprenticeship reinstates the focus on clinical discourse present previously in the text, now taking the form of extended meditations on the nature of medical

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49 See A Country Doctor, Ch. 12.
practice, the virtues necessary in a successful doctor, and the relationship between mind, body, and soul. Specifically, Jewett’s clinical vision requires a physician to cultivate the instinct “that recognizes a disease and suggests its remedy, as much as an instinct that finds the right notes and harmonies for a composer of music” (184). Further, it places doctoring in an appropriate relationship to God and death: “It is not to keep us from death, it is no superstitious avoidance of the next life, that should call loudest for the physician’s skill; but the necessity of teaching and remedying the inferior bodies which have come to us through either our ancestors’ foolishness or our own” (184).

Ordering the physician’s character is the tension between progress and tradition. The text reads, “There was, even in those days, a haphazard way of doctoring, in which the health of the patient was secondary to the promotion of new theories, and the young scholar who could write a puzzlingly technical paper too often outranked the old practitioner who conquered some malignant disorder single-handed” (187). Still, such “truly progressive younger men were rendering” a clear service “to the profession” (187).

Experimental medicine – the clinical method proper – sometimes conflicts with the everyday practice of medicine, at which point it is necessary to rely on older folk remedies and tools for assuaging patients, whether psychologically or physically.

Further, what the reader receives, in order to properly represent the process of professionalization, is an introduction to the institutional processes by which doctors are trained. Dr. Leslie’s networking trips to Boston where he can lecture on topics of expertise are explained, the circulation of medical knowledge through journals and letters is described, and Nan’s immersion in this entire culture is made clear. To her credit,
Jewett’s description of the formation of a female country doctor is in every sense the description of multiple levels of institutional power as it exerts itself in the circulation of multiple modes of discourse, ranging from the informal exchanges with patients, to the semi-formal exchanges with Dr. Leslie, to the formal exchanges with young doctors who seek out Dr. Leslie in the country.

Despite her immersion in clinical discourse and practice, and her complete assent to it, the power of heteronormative constraints on her legitimacy become apparent when she goes away to medical school. The text reads, “If a young man plans the same course, everything conspires to help him and forward him, and the very fact of his having chosen one of the learned professions gives him a certain social preeminence and dignity. But in the days of Nan’s student life it was just the reverse...She found little encouragement either from the quality of the school or the interest of society in general” (192). Tellingly, while her ability to perform the necessary studies gets taken for granted, and her ability to self-motivate in an indifferent institution also seems secure, the compulsion to marry reappears as the primary threat to Nan’s medical success.

The rapidity with which *A Country Doctor* moves from Nan’s time in Oldfields to a summer vacation after several successful years in medical school almost necessitates discussing the last third of the book as its own novel. Point of view changes to the Prince’s of Dunport and Mr. Gerry, the young lawyer who will become Nan’s love interest, and Nan is represented as having become a “gleam of cosmopolitan sunshine” when she finally appears again walking up “the broad aisle of St. Ann’s church” (293). At this point, the novel turns away from a consideration of Nan’s struggle to achieve
success in the medical profession and turns explicitly toward the tension between clinical virtue and sentimental expectations as expressed through her romance with Mr. Gerry and her antagonistic debates with her spinster aunt, also a “Miss Prince.” While Aunt Prince serves as a foil for Nan – an example of what independent-minded women of independent means might become before professions opened up for women – the impossibility of fulfilling sexual and emotional desires for Mr. Gerry while maintaining her career offers a meditation on still-extant limitations.

The first pivotal scene concerns a dislocated shoulder at a friendly picnic. During a romantic scene where Gerry and Nan are exchanging “confidences,” a stranger appears requesting medical attention. Gerry and Nan go to them. Instead of seeking out Dr. Bent, Nan swiftly assesses the ailment and engages a solution: “With quick fingers a look of deep interest [Nan] made herself sure what had happened, when she stood still for a minute and seemed a little anxious, and all at once entirely determined.” After telling her patient to lie down, “Nan pushed the spectators into the doorway of the kitchen, and quickly stooped and unbuttoned her right boot, and then planted her foot on the damaged shoulder…gave a quick pull…there was an unpleasant cluck as the bone went back into its socket, and a yell from the sufferer, who scrambled to his feet” (265).

When confronted with the archive of sentimental literature, a great deal needs to be articulated about this scene. On the one hand, the romantic soiree that precedes it sets up courtship rituals that have predictable power in sentimental discourse. While strong, rational women are common in such narratives, their ability to enact virtue rests squarely in their ability to sympathize with others and discern hidden motivations. Nan’s virtue
here, alternatively, is precisely her ability not to sympathize with the sufferer or the people looking on. To perform her useful work, she must restrain her emotions from affecting experience, relying instead on practical knowledge and skill to heal her patient. While the sufferer remarks, “You’re the smartest young woman I ever see” (265), and the wife looks at her “admiringly,” Mr. Gerry – while impressed – seems shocked into a pensive silence. The cause of his alienated affect becomes clear soon enough: “But the young man did not like to think yet of the noise the returning bone had made. He was stout-hearted enough usually; as brave a fellow as one could wish to see; but he felt weak and womanish, and somehow wished it had been he who could play the doctor” (266).

Specifically, as one closed off from the clinical gaze, engaged instead in sympathetic observation, Gerry and not Nan was the one to vicariously experience the sufferer’s pain, an experience that somehow unmans him even as it makes Nan seem “gayer and brighter than ever.”

The subversive potential of a woman enacting the clinical gaze becomes evident. The narrator provides the reader with the condescending inner life of Mr. Gerry, who “had a great prejudice against the usurpation of men’s duties and prerogatives by women, and had spoken of all such assumptions with contempt” (294). The reader is also provided with multiple scenes of scheming on the part of Mrs. Farley, Miss Prince the elder, and Mr. Gerry to win Nan’s hand – schemes based entirely on the assumption that a woman not interested in marriage is a woman confused or perverse.

The final pivotal scene involves yet another romantic soiree between Mr. Gerry and Nan. The reader has learned that Nan, while in love with Gerry, has already made up
her mind not to marry him and has communicated this to Miss Prince the elder. In a scene full of sentimental images of setting suns, reflecting ponds, and “sobbing” water, Gerry puts the question of marriage to Nan. After she refuses, events turn vicious. Petulantly, Gerry accuses Nan of “spoiling [his] life” and of thinking little of his love (325). Facing her reasoned and insightful objections to their marriage or her abandonment of a medical career, he retorts, “I don’t want you for my friend, but for my own to keep and to have. It makes me laugh to think of your being a doctor and going back to that country town to throw yourself away for the fancies and silly theories of a man who has lived like a hermit” (325). Nan, again referencing a catalog of sentimental heroines since the eighteenth century, returns, “If you love me you must help me do what is best…I hope you will be friends with me by and by…The great gain and purpose of my being alive is there; and I must not mind the blessings that I shall have to do without” (325-6).

In many ways, Nan’s responses to Gerry are entirely conventional. The job of a sentimental heroine is to decipher the nature of a suitor’s soul, assess its virtuousness in relation to companionate marriage, and act accordingly. Her reasons for rejecting Gerry are the very reasons given by Belinda in rejecting Clarence Hervey the first time, before he reforms himself according to virtue. Yet, that her rejection is final and directed explicitly toward professional success, that it involves a total renunciation of marriage, constitutes its status as a break from previous sentimental literature. Codes of sentimental virtue remain intact, replete with their reliance on discerning “God’s purpose” for one’s life, but the vehicle for fulfilling this purpose becomes doctoring outside the domestic context. As a firm signal that Gerry’s rejection serves such a purpose, the text reads, “this
girl, who had been his merry companion in the summer holidays, so sweet and familiar and unforgettable in the midst of the simple festivals, stood nearer to holier things than himself, and had listened to the call of God’s messengers to whom his own doors had been ignorantly shut. And Nan that night was a soul’s physician, though she had been made to sorely hurt her patient before the new healthfulness could well begin” (328).

That becoming an agent of clinical discourse should be robed in sentimental tropes of Providence and virtue attests to the careful way in which Jewett crafted *A Country Doctor* to both participate in the sentimental tradition while adapting its conventions to pressing political needs. At the level of style, Jewett’s realism certainly articulates the slippage between “clinical realism” and the “sentimental mode it sought to displace” (Davis 14). Placing Gerry as Nan’s “patient,” and depicting Nan as “a soul’s physician” serves two functions in the text. First, it presses Nan to occupy the clinical gaze, taking for herself its power. Second, it severs the usual circuit of sentimental response. Instead of sympathizing with Gerry’s pain, she stands outside sympathy, using her admonitions as curatives that heal even as they inflict pain. In standing outside sympathy while involved in a conventional romantic liaison, Jewett carves out a particularly potent function for clinical discourse to serve in feminist fiction. Finally, however, she does not do so by rejecting out of hand the legacy of sentimentalism; instead, she shifts the terms of sentiment, creating for women a space outside sentiment when necessary, even as the nominal justification for this position relies on conventional notions of Providence and sentimental virtue.
That realist texts can utilize clinical metaphor systems to reform sentimentalism without entirely rejecting it forms the heart of this chapter’s argument. By these lights, it is not surprising that so many realist authors and so many feminist writers following the Civil War were involved in clinical practice. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, as evidenced by *Herland*, took clinical discourse as an integral site of power shaping women’s experience at the turn of the century. Once realism and feminism are adequately understood in terms of the interaction between emergent systems of clinical discourse and the persistent culture of sentimentalism, critics will be able to view fin de siècle literature outside prevailing binaries of truth/excess, romance/reality, and masculine/feminine. Naturalism, pragmatism, realism, and feminism are each, in variant but cognate ways, reactions against the rapid rise of clinical claims to knowledge and positivistic claims to universal truth. The extent to which sentimentalism retains its pull on culture seems to dictate the extent to which democracy is kept at the heart of literature’s relationship to social life.

**Clinical Realism in James and Howells**

Few realist authors engage as explicitly or as complexly with sentimental ideology as does Henry James. While I have already considered one of his works of short fiction in relation to the Civil War, his rapid evolution as a stylist and intellectual allows one to also treat *The Bostonians* in relation to feminism and clinical discourse. Before engaging *The Bostonians*, however, we can gain useful insight by first considering The Art of Fiction controversy, which happens to bring James into conversation with William Dean Howells, and both into conversation with the very issues of clinical realism at stake in this chapter.
Mark Spilka, in the winter 1973 edition of *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, usefully summarizes “The Art of Fiction” controversy that began when Walter Besant delivered a lecture by that name at the Royal Institution in London in 1884, sparking a series of transatlantic responses that extended into the early 1890’s (101). Spilka depicts Besant as “an amiable fool” prone to composing “lunacies” (102). He cites comments to that effect by Mark Twain and some modern critics. More recent criticism has cast Besant as a “practical man” (Neetens 248) involved in numerous professional organizations for authors as well as being “one of the most consistently successful English novelists in the last quarter of the nineteenth century” (Law 71). Regardless of critical disagreement concerning the value of Besant’s work, James uses his lecture as the pretext for his own essay on “The Art of Fiction.”

Where Henry James, William Dean Howells, and Walter Besant agree is that literature is better off with a theory behind it, a set of convictions, a reliable set of conventions that can govern critical assessments and readerly reception. The myriad ways by which a writer is instructed to go about composing lasting, honest, and truthful fiction stand in such self-contradiction that it’s questionable whether theorizing about fiction might help authors compose it any better. Nonetheless, the ‘common sense’ about literature James and Howells are in the business of trying to construct is certainly worth considering, not least because of each authors’ influence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While critical appraisals of American realism cast it as variously “elitist,” “democratic,” and “imperialistic,” my concern with it has specifically to do with its utilization of the epistemic presumptions of clinical discourse, specifically with a
valuing of the suzerainty of the gaze and the collapsing of common observational insight into the possibility of a democratic literary culture at once inclusive and discerning.

Specifically, Howells schematizes the project of literature on the clinical model of doctor and pupil, hoping to fashion a literary discourse based on clinical models. As Foucault remarks concerning the formation of medical perception: “A group is thus formed consisting of the master and his pupils, in which the act of recognition and the effort to know find fulfillment in a single movement. In its structure and in its two aspects as manifestation and acquisition, medical experience now has a collective subject it is no longer divided between those who know and those who do not; it is made up, as one entity, of those who unmask and those before whom one unmasks” (Birth 135). In his criticism, Howells seeks to construct a similar “collective subject” for literary experience, one that while nominally democratic has its perception regulated first by an elite composed of those with “accomplished mind[s]” who can separate “the wheat from the chaff” (Davidson 21). But, as “the scientific spirit” makes “men progressively more and more conscious” of what is “solid and positive,” then a common readership “shall come to comprehend what is simple, natural, and honest, welcoming with gladness all artistic products that exhibit these qualities” (Howells 2).

Thus, while Howells casts his project as intrinsically open to any “healthy person,” and uses nature as the only source of experience necessary for a reader to judge the quality of well-written fiction, becoming this “natural man” will require a progressive education in “the laws of evolution in art and society” (2) – that is, a vision of human life emerging out of medical and biological knowledge. Howells’ purpose for criticism is to
set up critics as masters of literary knowledge, able to guide common readers through the acquisition of such knowledge so as to create a “collective subject” of literary knowledge governed by foundational principles of life articulated by the medical sciences.

The creation of a unified system of literary knowledge integrated into the science of life and “human nature” is explicitly opposed to sentimentalism and romanticism: “It was inevitable that in their time the English romanticists should treat, as Senor Valdes says, ‘the barbarous customs of the Middle Ages, softening and disfiguring them, as Walter Scott and his kind did;’ that they should ‘devote themselves to falsifying nature, refining and subtilizing sentiment, and modifying psychology after their own fancy,’ like Rousseau and Madame de Stael, not to mention Balzac, the worst of all that sort at his worst” (75). Predictably, Howells depicts previous paradigms of literary knowledge founded on taste, fashion, and art as the imitation of models in thoroughly clinical terms: “This was the natural course of the disease” (75). The disease of romanticism, presumably, will be cured by the progressive integration of literary and scientific knowledge, which will itself allow readers to discern the quality of literature at a glance. The key facet of Howells’ clinical realism is transposing the suzerainty of the diagnostic gaze, which knows by seeing in a certain way, into a critical apparatus made possible by popular print culture.

Clinical realism need not, however, operate in the way proposed by Howells. A reviewer in The Atlantic Monthly describes the difference between Howells and James in this way: “Mr. James is bound to find out all he can about his characters, and he performs a vast number of experiments with them, extremely ingenious and very satisfactory to the
scientific mind. Mr. Howells is not a vivisectionist; he is a naturalist, who makes use of the microscope occasionally, but ordinarily depends upon his own highly developed organ of sight, for a study of the habits and variation of a few species which have come to interest him” (Aldrich 851) I can imagine no clearer example of the importance of clinical discourse both to the realism of James and Howells, and to the public understanding of their work, at least amongst “accomplished” minds.

In James’ “Art of Fiction,” however, the “vivisectionist” seems nearly absent. While it is fair to describe James’ painstaking realist descriptions as akin to “experiments” or to figure his aesthetic as one indebted to clinical notions of observation and anatomization, his thoughts on what fiction ought to be, or how authors ought to write, bear a much more striking resemblance to his brother’s radical empiricism and pluralism than they do Howells’ utopian image of an integrated system of literary knowledge. For Henry James, literary experiments are necessarily open-ended, amorphous, resistant to both rules and systematization. His only requirement for a novel is that “it be interesting” (60), a delightfully useless anti-rule. In response to Walter Besant’s injunction to only write from experience, James writes, “It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience…What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end?” He immediately falls into a meditation on experience that could well be taken out of his brother William’s A Pluralistic Universe: “Experience is never limited, and it is never complete, it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web, of the finest silken threads, suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue” (64).
Further, while James readily assents to the notion that “solidity of specification” is “the supreme virtue of the novel,” he quickly adds that the success of the author consists in having “produced the illusion of life” (66). Amy Kaplan’s insistence that realism “be examined as a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change—not just to assert a dominant power but often to assuage fears of powerlessness” (10) is particularly important when discussing clinical discourse in James. She writes that for Howells “realism is not to reflect passively a solid reality; it is to face the paradoxical imperative to use fiction to combat the fictionality of everyday life; unable to anchor itself in a stable referent, it must restore or construct a new sense of the real” (20). To illustrate this paradox, shortly after James represents the successful novel as producing the illusion of life, he writes that “a novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts” (68).

The question of a discontinuity between art and life, or between real and unreal experience, or between sincere and insincere prose, or between a novel and the social life it seeks to depict animates “The Art of Fiction” controversy for Howells, James, and Besant. It seems, if we are to follow Kaplan, that it animates the very institution of realist fiction and its anxious relationship to social change. This question allows us to capitalize on the presumed anti-sentimentalism at the center of clinical realism. Sentimentalism organizes social life as a series of sympathetic continuities, flattening out possible social differences – class, race, nationality – by appealing to presumably ancient, trans-cultural heteronormative structures of meaning. Social life can achieve harmony and overcome
the violence of history precisely because cultivated sentiments allow for mutual progress toward a perfected Christian nation.

The Civil War, industrialization, and urban life – all those monikers of realism’s advent – cast suspicion upon such sentimental dreams. Paradoxically, clinical realism attempts to adapt literary language through a model of institutional medical practice according to which the only relevant distinction – that between master, pupil, and patient – is irrelevant to the progress of knowledge. The one who unmasks disease and the one for whom disease is unmasked, the who one rightly interprets texts and the one for whom texts are rightly interpreted, participate equally in the perfection of institutional perception. Nonetheless, the attempt to dissolve class strife and social disharmony by subjecting discourse to realist techniques utterly fails, reproducing the very anxiety realism was supposed to have ameliorated.

Yet, the most striking feature of James’ response to Besant is the seeming lack of anxiety that results from discarding the possibility or necessity of rules that could meaningfully guide the novelist’s art. If Howells perceives social disharmony as a threat to national life (as Kaplan intimates), and if his ideology of organic unity and literary evolution are anxious attempts to stabilize a particular vision of middle-class democracy, then James’ relatively easy elitism and ready acceptance of disjunction, variation, and questions for which answers fail implies a decidedly different “realist” vision, one indebted far more to pragmatism and sentimentalism than to Howells’ naturalism.

Kaplan helps the reader pause on Howell’s vitriolic attacks on romance, helping one question why he “would attack the loser” in literary evolution “so fiercely” (17). She
offers two contradictory explanations, one being that Howells feared the anti-social
tendencies promoted by romance, the other being that he feared the enormous socializing
potential afforded by romance. She concludes later that a more fundamental issue
underwrote Howells’ antipathy to romance: “Class conflict for Howells posed more than
a problem of social justice; it questioned the existence of a cohesive and coherent social
reality, posing a problem of social cognition, of knowing others” (20). Paradoxically, the
possible conflicts introduced by a discontinuity between popular fiction and high brow
fiction, and the social divisions they mirror, only register as epistemic problems because
realist discourse severs the sympathetic circuit of sentimental reading. Social cognition –
knowing others – is no grave problem for sentimental fiction even as it is a persistent
theme of conflict. Knowing others means cultivating sensibility and virtue as well as
meditating deeply on each individual’s fundamental relationship to God. Pluralism –
while certainly not an explicit ideal of sentimental culture – is not a challenge to it. For
Howells, the consummate hard-headed monist (to borrow William James’ categories),
pluralism cannot square with the suzerainty of the clinical gaze. It is a constant threat to
both knowledge and being.

Ironically, it is a painter turned scientist and philosopher who provided the late
nineteenth-century with a pluralistic alternative to both sentimentalism and realism. For
William James, a thoroughgoing naturalism undercuts any possible claim to objectivity or
monism. Unlike Howells, James holds the position that a teleological view of evolution is
absurd, and that a naturalistic view of human knowledge negates the possibility of final
truths.\textsuperscript{50} In the next chapter, I will go into detail about Jamesian pragmatism, pluralism, and radical empiricism, highlighting the relevance they hold for both aesthetics and democratic politics, connecting them also to cognate ideas propounded by Jane Addams and John Dewey. Here, I only note the pluralistic alternatives allowed within realist discourse – with the brief aside that they tend to privilege models of clinical and experimental diffusion over theoretical unification – in order to provide a scaffolding for understanding Henry James’ idiosyncratic hybrid of realist and sentimental techniques in his fiction, and his routine critical disavowal of monism in favor of a disjunctive pluralism.

\textit{The Bostonians}

Since the emergence of clinical discourse in American fiction coincides with the radicalization of the women’s movement, James’ \textit{The Bostonians} provides a fecund site for analyzing the intersections of multiples modes of discourse and the ways liberal subjects reconciled them. Given our current discussion, the most troublesome and insoluble question is whether \textit{The Bostonians} is best considered a realist novel or a romance. It certainly employs “solidity of specification,” with \textit{The Atlantic Monthly} writing that “The astounding array of particulars invites one to pause and see if he cannot abstract the generals. Indeed, one stands in amazement before the delicacy of workmanship” (852). On the other hand, his brother writes in an 1866 letter upon finishing the book, “Really the \textit{datum} seems to me to belong rather to the region of fancy, but the treatment to that of the most elaborate realism” (Berkeley 180). That it bears a

\textsuperscript{50} See Rorty, \textit{Consequences of Pragmatism}. 

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family resemblance to other realist texts in terms of style seems clear, but its depiction of Verena Tarrant causes some readers to liken it to *The Blithedale Romance*, and its ambiguous involvement in ‘the woman question’ further complicates things. The stakes are made clear by Christopher Castiglia: “If the romance never quite achieves revolution, it nevertheless releases readers from what James describes as “the inconvenience of a related, a measurable state, a state subject to all our vulgar communities” (261). “In the romance,” Castiglia goes on, “human solidarity consists of not a settled social order of conventional intimacies,” but of possible intimacies formed either by chance or common purpose (261). Framed in this way, one is satisfied to assent to William James’ view – that it is a romance composed with powerful realist techniques.

Yet, squaring Henry James’ art of “vivisection,” by which he subjects his characters to various “experiments,” with romance’s capacity to imagine alternative social relations and to, as in many paradigmatic sentimental novels, voice the lament of “vulgar” suffering bears its own difficulties. The monist would perceive James’ clinical techniques as an invitation to seek out unity in the text, some “contribution to the study of the woman question” (852). Instead, James’ text opens up into a plurality, provoking “curious meditation” in the reader that does not end with what Howells would call the “instinctive certitude” that comes once “a healthy person…has made himself acquainted with the laws of evolution in art” (2). On the contrary, James’ reader – as she nearly always does – ends conflicted, confused, contending with the seemingly incompatible moral implications of the work. Somehow, James manages to deploy clinical observation in the service of sympathy, pressing minuteness of detail not into certainty but into an
overabundance of interpretation. James’ glance is certainly knowing, but the effect of this glance undoes the reader, severing her from the collective subject of clinical knowledge. That is, James does not use the clinical gaze to unmask, and the reader does not finish *The Bostonians* having witnessed an unmasking. How, then, are we to understand the type of knowledge provided by James’ texts, and the type of experience modeled by them?

It would be tempting, initially, to depict James’ texts as operating in a fundamentally sentimental way, or at least according to a fundamentally sentimental fashion. Yet, the vindication of moral virtue so often provided by sentimental fiction is nowhere to be found in James. There are intimations of a related moral reticence and haunting anxiety in the poetry of Elizabeth Akers Allen and Felicia Hemans, but James’ discourse does not slide into the madness of echo, shifted as it has away from purely sentimental theories of sympathetic knowledge. Indeed, here is the vital insight: James’ moral vision requires both sympathy and its failure, both the romantic possibility of new intimacies and the clinical injunction to know by excepting oneself from them. For James, this moral vision takes its highest form in renunciation – not of sympathy but of the very structures of desire sentimentalism attempts to recuperate.

The two icons of renunciation in *The Bostonians* are not Verena Tarrant and Olive Chancellor; they are Miss Birdseye and Doctor Prance. Miss Birdseye, an “ascetic,” one of the “old Abolitionists” (19) whose experience of “waves of sympathy, of enthusiasm, had wrought upon [her features] in the same way in which the waves of time finally modify the surface of old marble busts, gradually washing away their sharpness” (25).
Miss Birdseye had renounced taste, fashion, and love in favor of political romance, making “all her history …that of her sympathies” (27). As the novel progresses, Basil comes to admire Miss Birdseye more and more as a type of moral agitator, a “battered, immemorial monument” of “the heroic age of New England” (212). Having “given herself away so lavishly all her life” becomes a part of the general depiction of a certain model of political commitment that every character in the novel, as well as the narrator, seems to admire. Her unquestionable virtuousness, in fact, sets the terms for judging Basil’s rejection of Olive and Verena’s political commitments, as well as considering Doctor Prance’s relation to other women. Indeed, it is only after Olive’s (forced) renunciation of Verena that she becomes able to speak in her own voice.

Doctor Prance, for her part, shifts fairly rapidly in the novel from a “doctress” (24) to a “genius” (38) to a “Yankee female” (39) to one who “looked like a boy, and not even like a good boy” (39). Her unsexing seems primarily to allow her occupation of the medical role James sets out for her: “It was evident that if she had been a boy, she would have ‘cut’ school, to try private experiments in mechanics or to makes researches in natural history.” The narrator plays further with gender identity, first describing Prance as “a little medical lady,” but later remarking, “It was true that if she had been a boy she would have borne some relation to a girl, whereas Doctor Prance appeared to bear none whatever” (39). Throughout the text, Doctor Prance’s clinical education and temperament seem to sever her completely from the circuits of sympathy that bind together every other character in the novel. The way she looks at people with her “little, sharp, fixed pupils” (38) further reinforces the problem gender – especially heteronormative, sentimental
models of gender – poses for the suzerainty of the clinical gaze. Indeed, compared to
Basil’s racialized Southern manners and perversely abstract adherence to an outmoded
chivalry, Doctor Prance may be the closest thing in the text to a representation of
‘normal’ Northern masculinity, a status shot through with its own delightful ironies.

Viewing the text in these terms allows us to make sense of a review of The
Bostonians in The Atlantic Monthly: “We have intimated that the book is not in the least a
contribution to the study of the woman question, so called. It is rather a study of the
particular woman question in this book” (852). The reviewer goes on to make clear that
“Instead of the old, familiar predicament of one heroine and two heroes, the two heroes
are a man and a woman, but the struggle is of the same general character” (852). Just how
much the reviewer seems to think “the struggle is of the same general character” becomes
clear shortly after: “the details of the first interview between Olive and Verena in Olive’s
house carry these young women to dangerous lengths, and we hesitate about accepting
the relation between them as either natural or reasonable” (853). The text’s ending “in its
almost indecent exposure of Miss Chancellor’s mind” leads the reviewer to speculate that
“Mr. James is, we fear, somewhat contaminated by the people whom he has been
associating with in this study” (853).

Despite the reviewer’s reticence to discuss, or permit James to intimate, Olive’s
‘unnatural’ desires for Verena, he still decides to interpret the text as a “vivisection”
concerned with the particularity of a strange set of Bostonians, especially as they appear
from Basil’s outside perspective. Taking seriously James’ clinical method and its focus
on particularity allows us to recalibrate our interpretation of the more general issues of
desire, gender, and political commitment raised by the text. It is difficult not to assent to The Atlantic’s reviewer when he states that Verena is a “girl” of “innate vulgarity,” or that Olive’s inability to see Verena’s vulgarity because of the “cataract over her inner eye…is not surprising” (852). It is even refreshing that Basil Ransom is perceived as similarly “stone blind” concerning Verena’s fundamental vapidity. Reading James’ text in this way may lead to the hasty generalization that in The Bostonians, women’s political commitments are illegitimate, or that women’s desire for other women is indeed unnatural. Yet, there are Mrs. Farrinder, Miss Birdseye, and Doctor Prance to undermine such interpretations. Instead, a feminist reading of James’ text may permit the argument that the three characters involved in an unorthodox romantic competition betray in James a fundamental incompatibility between ascetic political commitment and sexual desire, a position that both affirms James’ commitment to the moral value of renunciation – whether of heteronormative or queer desire – and opens up the figures of Doctor Prance and Miss Birdseye to feminist recuperation.

If we can glimpse in certain forms of clinical realism “the medical bipolarity of the normal and the pathological” (Foucault Birth 35), James’ “ambivalent realism” (Coulson 8) represents a profound aesthetic troubling of clinical discourse even as it incorporates certain naturalistic assumptions into a failed romantic plot. Foucault writes that “by linking medicine with the destinies of states, they revealed in it a positive significance. Instead of remaining what it was, ‘the dry, sorry analysis of millions of infirmities,’ the dubious negation of the negative, it was given the splendid task of establishing in men’s lives the positive role of health, virtue, and happiness; it fell to
medicine…to exalt calm emotions, to watch over what was read in books and seen in theatres, to see that marriages were made not out of self-interest…but were based on the only lasting condition of happiness, namely, their benefit to the state.” He goes on,”

Medicine must no longer be confined to a body of techniques for curing ills and of the knowledge that they require; it will also embrace a knowledge of healthy man, that is, a study of non-sick man and a definition of the model man” (34).

It is here that James’ use of clinical methods and metaphors becomes least reliable. James, the prophet of renunciation, of ambivalence, of experience’s resistance to schematization or regulation, of art’s fundamental liberty from any dogmatic conception of reality cannot but help to resist the notion that the purpose of knowledge is health, or that the institutions of literature and drama ought to be subjected to the diagnoses of medical experts concerned with creating “healthy” men who can serve the state. James’ radical empiricism, his intense – perhaps even absurd – nominalism, his piling up of selective particularities to create “illusions of life” that seem to imply a fundamentally dialectical, self-negating, paradoxical movement of culture and history – all this seems to betray a rift in clinical discourse, a slippage in the movement of the episteme, an immanent critique necessitated by sentiment’s persistence in culture. The circuits of sympathy that short-circuit the clinical gaze, the depthless passions that disrupt attempts to control social change, and the infinite varieties of human experience (which for James demand an accounting) rupture the clinical gaze again and again in James’ fiction.

No scene presents the friction between sentimental and clinical literary discourse more palpably than Basil’s “victory” (436). James notoriously hated readers’ clamoring
for happy-endings, and he resists pleasant resolutions in *The Bostonians*. Even as he undercuts any possibility of a sentimental resolution, he finds himself unable to pile up the solidity of specification necessary for his clinical realism without also playing on sentimental conventions to secure the desired ambiguity. In representing Verena’s hushed tears, Olive’s anxious assumption of the stage, Basil’s fleeting and melancholy mistrust of his own triumph, James must necessarily assume the proper functioning of the sentimental circuit. For the reader to respond, for James’ clinical techniques to work, there must be an assumed sympathy between author, reader, and text. This assumption of such sympathy – specifically of the alternation between sympathy and its absence – animates Verena’s relationship with both Basil and Olive. The term “sympathy” alone appears no fewer than fifty-three times in the text.

A fitting sentimental ending is stifled by James in three ways. First, Basil, having demonstrated at no point in the text that he was capable of virtue or empathy, excludes himself from consideration as a suitable partner for Verena. Second, Verena, having not learned how to discern virtue in a suitor, is herself unfit for companionate marriage. Third, Olive, in demonstrating her sympathy with Verena – and Verena having demonstrated her sympathy with Olive – is cast as the appropriate but excluded love match for Verena. James thus sets up a situation according to which the only possible conventional sentimental ending would be Olive and Verena’s Boston marriage. This, of course, by the very heteronormative regulations imposed by sentimental fiction, would itself be unacceptable. Yet, it would be incorrect to imply that if only Verena had left with Basil in a mood of joy and hope the plot would have delivered a happy-ending. The
ending, for a sentimental readership at any rate, would not have been happy at all, given that both Basil and Verena were “repellant” characters (Aldrich 852), unvirtuous, incapable of the ideal companionate marriage emphasized in sentimental romances. The “melancholy” produced by James’ ending consists in providing readers with a “next best” ending, whereby Verena – prevented by heteronormative codes from remaining with Olive, and Olive, prevented by sentimental codes from uniting with the unvirtuous Verena – unites unhappily with Basil. As they flee the auditorium, Verena cries, “Ah, now I am glad!,” a statement to be undercut when Basil discovers “that, beneath her hood, she was in tears.” The narrator rejoins, “It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed” (436).

In the gesture to sentimental theories of affect and aesthetics, James has Verena’s tears signify an entire future of female complaints. Olive, conversely, finds in her forced renunciation of an unvirtuous partner the possibility of renewed sympathy in the form of a passionate political life akin to Miss Birdseye’s. Strangely, James relies upon the codes of sentimentalism to both underwrite his clinical realism and provide the frame for his melancholy ending.

I have attempted thus far to both demonstrate the impact of clinical discourse on literary conventions while theorizing that the sentimental subject both undergoes and underwrites these changes. Originating in both epistemic shifts initiated by changing medical paradigms and social tensions created by gendered trauma caused by industrialization and the Civil War, the increasing involvement of liberal subjectivity
with clinical modes of knowledge disrupts sentimentalism and the democratic sympathies involved in its enactment. Having somewhat evaded issues of temporality, nationalism, and feminism in my discussion of Jewett and James, I would like to discuss them directly in the fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Specifically, the threat posed to democratic practice by clinical ideology, and the threat it poses to feminist projects, are ameliorated in Gilman’s fiction by adopting a utopian stance.

_Herland_, Feminism, and Process Utopia

Using alternative temporalities, Gilman attempts to envision clinical structures of knowledge outside misogynistic and anti-democratic contexts. In other words, Gilman replaces the Howellsian question, “How does evolution require literature and society to behave?” with the question “How does the scientific method allow us to imagine unseen forms of sexuality, intimacy, and solidarity?” Unlike James’ literary experiments, which present ambivalence and renunciation as moral imperatives – despite its potential for liberating individual consciousness, a somewhat atrophied political program to be sure – Gilman’s literary experiments operate as feminist clinics, attempting to construct speculative futures that will provide models for progressives of a time beyond domination. In doing so, Gilman takes from the sentimental tradition a focus on the female complaint and dreams of affective harmony, but chastens it with a radical feminist ethic that negates usual structures of sentimental heteronormativity. With Gilman all variations of heterosexual union fail to bear the weight of utopian desire. Marriage simply cannot recuperate national violence; domestic love simply cannot perfect social relations or ameliorate suffering. In its place, she – as does Jane Addams – offers a utopian social
vision dependent on collective action and radical democratic practice only indirectly connected to the gender paradigms of domestic sentiment. Nonetheless, the role of sentiment in a pragmatist-feminist political vision eventually becomes apparent: its proper function is to resist the totalizing violence of positivistic epistemologies, not to of itself provide the ground for perfecting social relations.

Herland is at once a fictional first-person account given by a male sociologist of a society of women who reproduce parthenogenetically and a subtle critique of “the assumptions and practices of patriarchal sociology” (Deegan n.p.). His ability to write a full account is limited by having lost “whole books full of notes, carefully copied records, firsthand descriptions, and the pictures” (Gilman Herland 1). In having to write purely “from memory,” Gilman presents from the beginning a conflict between clinical observation, sympathetic involvement, and utopian satire. The internal tension between Vandyck’s sociological gaze – not meaningfully different in the text from the clinical gaze described by Foucault – and his deeply held assumptions about gender form a powerful portion of the text’s momentum. The problem in the text is precisely Vandyck’s struggle to adequately understand and describe Herland, including his struggle to represent precisely those aspects of Herland he is unable to comprehend.

Two oversights tend to undermine readings of Gilman’s utopian fiction, especially Herland. The first is to consider Herland in isolation from its sequel, Ourland, as though the monolithic Herlandian utopia was meant by Gilman as a model for democratic practice. The second is to overlook the deeply satirical mode adopted through much of her utopian fiction, which often leads to exaggerated charges of racism and
heterosexism (Squier 194-196). If Herland is viewed apart from Ourland and without a healthy appreciation for the underlying satire of scientific adventure narratives that runs throughout the text, Gilman’s racism and heterosexism do indeed appear troubling. Without dismissing these productive interventions into Gilman’s fiction – which do point to a tendency to “reatreat from enforced heterosexuality” in a way that “makes possible the flight from racial heterogeneity into a queer racial purity” – I would like to highlight the definitive stance against colonial racism, heteronormativity, and juridico-medical universalism that Gilman takes in her fiction.

Situating Herland/Ourland in this chapter’s focus on the relationship between clinical, sentimental, and national discourses requires a proper framing of Gilman’s utopian feminism. Instead of end-state models of utopia – attachment to which sometimes cause critics to misread Herland’s feminist epistemology – Gilman’s fiction intimates what Erin McKenna has called “the process (pragmatist and feminist) model of utopia” (3). According to this model, utopias are not states of affairs imagined as the end result of successful political action, as future societies it is desirous to bring into existence; instead, process utopias are speculative models to revivify the process of democratic change, models intended to inspire reflection, to place what is into a state of strangeness, and to articulate unmet desires and intimacies.

Process utopias imagine futures in order to guide and inspire the present – not toward the creation of the utopian society but toward the ongoing process of progressive change, which must mean in a pragmatist model the amelioration of cruelty and the widening of human solidarity. That Herland/Ourland fits the process model is upheld by
two simple facts: it’s unlikely Gilman wanted to bring about an all-female society that 
reproduced parthenogenetically, and the prevailing method of *Ourland* is to investigate 
“the extraordinary problem of surveying Ourland and the complex, real world task of 
integrating and applying the positive lessons of Herland to the lived realities of Ourland” 
(Deegan n.p.). Indeed, that *Herland* should serve as a utopian prelude to what is in 
essence a realist novel (*Ourland*) suggests that Herland is not meant as an end-state 
toward which humanity should strive, but as an experiment whose positive lessons should 
be used to improve existing democracy.

Viewing *Herland/Ourland* in this way helps us to better understand Gilman’s 
feminism and its relationship to her still unsettling racial beliefs. It also allows us to 
consider the ways in which pragmatism-feminism strategically deploy clinical and 
sentimental discourse for different but convergent ends: the one to liberate liberal 
subjectivity from tyrannical heteronormative injunctions, the other to liberate liberal 
subjectivity from the violence of clinical structures of knowledge that would seek a final 
language for human life and an end to intellectual pluralism.

As we saw in Henry James’ *The Bostonians*, clinical discourse provides a 
powerful method by which heteronormativity might be troubled even as it raises its own 
troubling reliance on the violent rhetoric of universalizing science. Herland extends these 
conflicts into a radical futurity. The Herlandians are depicted as eminent clinicians: “I 
wish I could represent the kind, quiet, steady, ingenious way they questioned us. It was 
not just curiosity – they weren’t a bit more curious about us than we were about them, if 
as much. But they were bent on understanding our kind of civilization” (57). Each of
their social planning decisions is concerned with health and utility, primarily the healthy rearing of children toward useful social ends. They were “inconveniently reasonable, those women,” Vandyck says, meaning of course, in light of Gilman’s wit, that their clinical presumptions clashed with his own, often leading him into confusion or self-doubt.

It is Vandyck’s clinical attitude that allows him to understand Herlandians better than either Terry, the misogynistic engineer, or Jeff, the doctor who would have been better suited as “a poet, a botanist – or both” (2). The paradigmatic man of feeling, Jeff seems incapable of understanding the Herlandians, opting instead for devotion and admiration. Terry, unable to adopt Vandyck’s comparative method and unable to evade or reform his own gender assumptions, fails both to understand and get along with the Herlandians. Tellingly, the very comparative method that allows Vandyck to entertain a certain tolerance for cultural relativity – and thus to understand the Herlandian social structure and identity to a certain extent – is what most often comes across as racially condescending: “I rather liked [their short hair] myself, after I got used to it. Why we should so admire ‘a woman’s crown of hair’ and not admire a Chinaman’s queue is hard to explain, except that we are so convinced that the long hair ‘belongs’ to a woman. Whereas the ‘mane’ in the horses is on both, and in lions, buffalos, and such creatures only the male” (34). Here, the comparative method uses racial and animal stereotypes figured as relative cultural norms to question and ultimately undo binary gender norms. Still, the criticism that flattening a women’s hair style to a “Chinaman’s queue” and a
horse’s mane is racially demeaning seems justified, whether expressed through Vandyck or not.

The Herlandians’ clinical emphasis on health and utility further negates their ability to comprehend the “natural” domestic relations desired by Terry, Jeff, and Vandyck after their coupling with Herlandians. The Herlandians understood love and friendship – though sexual desire seemed foreign to them – and “that we should pair off together in our courting days was natural to them; that we three should remain much together, as they did themselves, was also natural” (108) Yet, as the three men begin expressing their desire for separate homes, the Herlandians become confused:

But when we began to talk about each couple having ‘homes’ of our own, they could not understand it. ‘Our work takes us all around the country,’ explained Celis. ‘We cannot live in one place all the time.’ ‘We are together now,’ urged Alima, looking proudly at Terry’s stalwart nearness. (This was one of the times when they ‘on,’ though presently ‘off’ again.) ‘It’s not the same thing at all,’ he insisted. ‘A man wants a home of his own, with his wife and family in it.’ ‘Staying in it? All the time?’ asked Ellador. ‘Not imprisoned, surely!’ ‘Of course not! Living there – naturally,’ he answered. (108-9)

The evocation of the “natural” things Herlandians readily understood and the “natural” things they could not understand undermines the patriarchal assumptions underwriting sentimental domesticity in the first place. The Herlandians, in their clinical perspective, focus on collectivity and work, and are resistant to the notion of a private world and to the notion that in such spaces work isn’t work. Gilman’s feminism relies on
a thoroughgoing scientific conception of knowledge to undermine the sexist presumptions of heteronormative ideology, at the forefront of which is the ideology of separate spheres. Herland has no private space, all labor and activity subject to public view and opinion. Collectivity replaces the intersecting worlds of public politics and private sentiment. I only belabor this now commonplace assertion of feminist literary studies of the fin de siècle to point out again that clinical epistemology offers a double-edged sword to Gilman: one edge allows her to sever womanhood from heterosexist sentimental ideologies while the other edge draws her into reinscribing racial difference.

Yet, even if sentimental conventions of the separate spheres and heteronormative romance are satirized and occluded by Gilman, the centrality of motherhood and the superiority of feminine virtues take prominent places. In Herland, Motherhood is both their “religion” and the ordering principle of all social life. That it does has deep ties to Gilman’s underlying sociological beliefs, articulated by Mary Jo Deegan as a belief in “cultural feminism” shared with Jane Addams. In Gilman’s view, “traditionally defined feminine values are superior to traditionally defined masculine values,” and that “women were the earliest and most important members of society” (Deegan n.p.). These beliefs find their earliest expression in the writings of English Bluestockings and enjoy routine evocation throughout the history of sentimental literature. In Gilman and Addams, they take a new, scientifically-underwritten form. Unlike Addams, however, who blended her cultural feminism with “critical pragmatism” to the extent that she viewed feminine traits as entirely learned, Gilman adopted a “reformed Darwinism,” according to which the intellectual and moral superiority of women is biologically-based, produced through
evolutionary processes. Despite this – which is important for interpreting

_Herland/Ourland_ – she believed that men ought to enjoy social and political equality with women.

‘Motherhood,’ while seemingly ripped from the pages of a sentimental miscellany, becomes in _Herland_ the collective expression of intimacy and human solidarity, as well as a model of ideal social relations. Despite womanhood’s superiority, in the text cast in literal evolutionary terms, Herlandians like Ellador are convinced that masculinity has some positive role to play in society, the consideration of which becomes important in _Ourland_. As a process utopia, _Herland/Ourland_ is concerned with both representing ideal states of affairs and using those representations to inspire democratic society with possible lines of flight. For Gilman, Motherhood, re-envisioned in collective as opposed to private terms, and embodying intimacy and solidarity at a public level, is just such a line of flight. The evolved superiority of femininity presents a totalizing social aspiration, not an end-state to be eugenetically produced. For Gilman, what can be done with eugenics is constrained by democratic pluralism, evinced by the superiority of education as a mechanism for social change in Gilman’s writing. Indeed, is the specter of Jane Addams’ critical pragmatism and democratic epistemology in Gilman’s writing that seems to push Van and Ellador into _Ourland_.

_Herland_ ends with the successful marriage of both Vandyck and Ellador and Jeff and Celis, as well as the failure of Terry and Alima’s coupling. Jeff, entirely devoted to the life of Herland, stays with Alima. Terry is exiled. Vandyck and Ellador venture out to Ourland together, Ellador having the privilege of being the first Herlandian explorer in
their history, whose mission is to understand Ourland. Further, it is in Ourland that we see glimpses of the democratization of science so central to pragmatist-feminism in Gilman, as well as her clear indebtedness to tropes borrowed from sentimental literature and rhetoric.

Ourland deals with three inter-related themes: the nature of Vandyck and Ellador’s marriage, Ellador’s critical self-education concerning Ourland, and meditations on the hope Herland might represent for Ourland. The first, our protagonist’s marriage, is perhaps the least interesting and complex, functioning in many ways as a repetition of sentimental notions of companionate marriage. Its primary interest lay in Ellador having to be the party who comes to a knowledge of companionate love, socialized as she had been in norms of collective friendship that eschew structures of private affection. It is the sentimental inheritance Gilman seems least interested in problematizing.

Ellador’s experience of Ourland is comparatively more compelling. The utopian Herland had been satirically unadventurous, undercutting the reader’s presumed desire for exciting events: “It is no use for me to try to piece out this account with adventures…There were no adventures because there was nothing to fight” (49) – a fact that never ceases to annoy Terry. Ironically, it is the realist depiction of Ourland that provides the reader with excitement and adventure, including a journey through scenes of imperial violence and the Great War. The primary function of Herland – which is “only a sample: a little bit of a local exhibit” (Ourland sec. 2424) — is clarified in Ourland: to provide speculative beginnings for the rejuvenation and progression of human society. Herland is meant as both critique and inspiration, not as a complete paradigm for human
society. Ellador’s excitement over the possibility of creating “new men” in Herland testifies to the tenuous, incomplete utopia Herland represents.

Ellador sees the violence of Ourland as originating from men’s “misunderstanding and misuse of Sex” (sec. 2424). Echoing Wollstonecraft’s critique, penned over a hundred years earlier, Ellador says, “You men ought to feel proud of the real world work you have done, even crippled as you were by your own excessive sex, and by those poor, dragging dead-weights of women you had manufactured.” Picking up on Ellador’s condescension, Van writes, “In spite of all the kindness and honest recognition she showed, I could not help a feeling of inner resentment at this tone. Of course, we three men had been constantly impressed with all that they had done in Herland – just women, alone – but that she thought it equally wonderful for men to do it was not wholly gratifying” (sec. 2441). Here, Gilman stages a critique of the reality created by masculinist ideologies by reflecting the structure of misogyny back on itself, further negating critiques of “those poor, dragging dead-weights of women you had manufactured” as bearing any representativeness for women as a whole.

Further, Ellador’s self-education in the affairs of Ourland serves as a critical education for the reader in what pragmatist-feminist history and social critique looks like. Each facet of modern life is considered in relation to the positive example of Herland, and each facet is critiqued in a thoroughly socialist, feminist, and democratic fashion. The text reads:

Now here was Ellador, daring traveler, leaving her world for mine, and finding herself, not as we three had been, exiled into a wisely ordered, peaceful and
beautiful place, with the mothering care of that group of enlightened women; but as one alone in a world of which her first glimpse was of hideous war. (sec. 894)

The comparative stance allows utopian vision to operate simultaneously as social critique, using Herland as a mode of utopian discourse, not as an end-state to be pursued.

Gilman’s decision to bring utopia into a realist novel hints at what I consider pragmatist-feminism’s distinct contribution to modern thought, one that draws equally on sentimental and clinical structures of knowledge and value. As Lisa Long writes, “We can see that Gilman’s initial depiction of Ellador’s research method takes issue with familiar masculinist notions that sever intellect from emotion” (177). As in William James and Jane Addams’ writings, truth is best envisioned as a sentiment, a structure of feeling guided by experience and shaped by the goals of inquiry. Ellador’s unified knowledge, at once sympathetic and clinically meticulous, can be seen as a totality in Herland, where every person experiences universal social sympathy. Indeed, the feminist vision in Gilman and Addams can be seen explicitly as the transformation of the ideal of private sympathies into collective sympathies in the context of democratic participation.

Conclusion

All this is to say that Gilman’s ideas have a genealogy, and that this genealogy takes us back through sentimental culture even as it takes us through changing clinical paradigms. Her aesthetic style in Herland/Ourland bears comparison to James’: the accumulation of solidity of specification creates the illusion of life even as the reliance on sympathetic models of reading founds her progressive vision. Yet, in Gilman, the detailed working up of a utopia that is brought into contemporary social life results in a clear
moral imperative. Unlike James, who emphasizes the moral value of renunciation, Gilman views “enthusiasm” and political passion as productive of healthy heterosexual union (as in the case of Van and Ellador). Further, insofar as she is able to schematize moral action in terms of collective solidarity and democratic intimacy, she is not thrown into the recursive anxiety of Jamesian subjectivity.

More importantly, Gilman provides a more robust model for what might be called progressive liberal subjectivity, replete with its dialectical movement between clinical objectivism and sentimental hope. In their tense aesthetic, James, Jewett, and Gilman provide exemplary models for liberal subjectivity at the fin de siècle. Sentimental theories of virtue and knowledge having given way to the clinical episteme, pragmatism and feminism become central strategies by which the liberal subject – still dedicated to democratic government, contractarianism, and heteronormativity – attempts to harmonize affect with social change. The following chapter will look more closely at the specific epistemologies of pragmatist-feminism, their relationship to fading sentimental epistemes, and their ongoing importance to democratic practice.
Pragmatism, Feminism, Sentiment: Social Democracy and the Liberal Subject

In transitioning from a primarily literary account of sentimental history and theory to a primarily philosophical account of pragmatist-feminism, certain dangers emerge. One is to evacuate the significance of literary writing to pragmatist thought. The other is to unintentionally privilege the genre of philosophy over the genres of poetry or sentimental fiction. My hope is that the preceding chapters help prevent any such interpretation of my project. Another danger is that pragmatism will emerge too cleanly from a discontinuous, dynamic, anxious, and tense print culture organized loosely around sentimental theories of art and affect. It certainly emerges from the political tradition associated with Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Sojourner Truth. It certainly belongs to the liberal genealogy I’ve been tracing from the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment, through the rise of the sentimental novel, to the intervention of clinical discourse in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Yet, it belongs also to academic philosophical traditions and debates, rhetorical conventions having to do with the professional classes, and — as always – unnamed and perhaps un-nameable contingencies.

The contemporary writings of Cornel West, Richard Rorty, Erin McKenna, Charlene Haddock Seigfried, and Shannon Sullivan have exerted enormous influence over how I interpret the works of so-called “classical pragmatism.” These writers emphasize pragmatists’ sidestepping of dualism, their overt pluralism, their privileging of ethics in epistemology, their privileging of democracy in action, and their healthy appreciation of irony. Cornel West and Richard Rorty have specifically linked
pragmatism to the literary milieu of Romanticism around the turn of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{51} West has highlighted the importance of prophetic modes of knowledge in pragmatism that bring it close to certain strands of Christian thought.\textsuperscript{52} Seigfried and Sullivan insist on the deep interplay between feminism and pragmatism at both the levels of theory and practice.\textsuperscript{53} My own modest contribution is to say that pragmatism both draws on powerful tropes and conventions within the sentimental tradition and transmogrifies them into social epistemologies that are wholly unique and remain theoretically powerful. Further, ignoring aesthetics in pragmatist feminist thinking not only leads one to confusion but also cuts off an accurate understanding of pragmatism. Understanding the sentimental tradition, for example, allows one to make sense of the strange fact that Charles Peirce, following Friedrich Schiller, “grants aesthetics as one of the three normative sciences and a foundation of the other two, logic and ethics” (Barnouw 607).

In the following chapter, I attempt three difficult tasks. I wish to analyze the writings of classical pragmatist-feminists (as expansively defined by Charlene Haddock Seigfried) for defining tropes and relations that can be attached to the sentimental tradition. I wish to elaborate how these tropes are changed and utilized toward the ends of democratic life. Lastly, I wish to fold the writings of pragmatist feminism into the lengthy genealogy of liberal subjectivity I have here constructed. Before engaging Jane Addams,
perhaps the arch-pragmatist-feminist, I need to explain John Dewey’s profound intervention into clinical discourse.

*John Dewey, Futurity, and Creative Intelligence*

John Dewey, in *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*, writes, “And experience is not identical with brain action; it is the entire organic agent-patient in all its interaction with the environment, natural and social” (36). This quote must be associated with two aspects of the archive this dissertation has been calling up: the roots of sentimental theory in Enlightenment thought concerning the nervous system and the evolving discourse of nineteenth-century thought concerning medicine, experience, and clinical knowledge. Because even in its sublimated forms, sentimental theory was at heart about the relationship between knowing, feeling, and acting as they related to embodied life, discursive change that altered terms of knowing and feeling in turn placed tension on sentimental systems of meaning and metaphor. As I explained in the previous chapter, clinical systems of knowledge threaten sympathetic circuits by severing the clinician from experiencing whatever suffering she gazes upon. Turning bodies into objects of knowledge undermines sentimental epistemology.

In turn, Dewey – recognizing the danger posed to democracy by clinical paradigms of knowledge – annexes the figure of the patient, attaching it inextricably to that of the agent. He asserts along with the clinician that the patient – as patient – undergoes the world and endures suffering (13). Yet, he completes the sentimental circuit by refusing a simple active-passive distinction: the patient anticipates the future, forming plans of action, engaging in diagnosis. The agent-patient, that is, at once endures and
enacts: “What is going on in the environment is the concern of the organism; not what is already ‘there’ in accomplished and finished form. In so far as the issue of what is going on may be affected by intervention of the organism, the moving event is a challenge which stretches the agent-patient to meet what is coming” (13). By including endurance as an active process of being, Dewey short-circuits the clinical gaze, allowing the clinician and patient to each function as agent-patients in the clinical context, participating in a shared project of anticipation and adaptation directed toward future circumstances. Using the clinical context in such a metaphor flips the “body” of medical knowledge on its head. The patient does not exist to further medical science and its pursuit of accumulated knowledge; instead, medical science exists as a tool to help agent-patients imagine possible states of affairs in their ongoing confrontation with the environment.

When Dewey writes, “This description of experience would be but a rhapsodic celebration of the commonplace were it not in marked contrast to orthodox philosophical accounts” (14), it is important to keep in mind that these orthodox philosophical accounts include the accounts of medical scientists and scholars. When Dewey and William James sometimes rail against hard-headed realists, they’re including in that group doctors, clinicians, and other scientists – not simply academic philosophers writing about realist epistemology. I belabor the point because Dewey’s attempt to undermine medical epistemology – itself a variety of positivist epistemology – is an attempt to forestall the violence of clinical systems of knowledge as visited not just upon patient’s bodies, but more importantly, upon the psyches of individuals in society who – as in Foucault’s
model – slowly internalize the terms of expert knowledge in the formation of their own subjectivity. The bifurcation of individuals into doctors and patients – experts and objects – is hostile to democratic life because it lodges knowledge in hierarchies of institutional power antipathetic to the sort of lateral *demos* envisioned as the democratic ideal.

More importantly, Dewey’s theorization of the agent-patient seeks to sidestep subject-object divisions that had plagued philosophical debates throughout the Enlightenment, and that seeped into common language by way of terms like “unreality,” “mere subjectivity,” and “illusion.” The artifice of the subject-object divide – and the way in which it authorizes the subordination of feeling to reason and desire to power – is for Dewey an impediment to accurately understanding human life, especially human life in a democratic context oriented toward progress. Temporality – or rather, its occlusion in Western thought – is for Dewey the root of many misunderstandings, “The habit of ignoring reference to the future is responsible for the assumption that to admit human participation in any form is to admit the “subjective” in a sense which alters the objective into the phenomenal” (40). In this way, the subject-object controversy tracks the intervention of the clinical gaze into sentimental circuits. That is, the sorts of arguments concerning subjectivity and objectivity taking place during the nineteenth century have everything to do with the relationship between power and desire, subjects and their location in systems of regulation, and the relative balance between democratic legitimacy and God’s dominion.

Dewey’s strategy of reframing questions of knowledge in terms of futurity – of the organism’s attempt to endure the future by analyzing the past and present –
constitutes but the recognition of a tension present in liberal subjectivity since *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was published. Pragmatism appears as but the secularization of prophetic time.\(^{54}\) My assertion in Chapter 2 that in Felicia Hemans’ “Domestic Affections” we see domestic ideology as a constant futurity haunts Dewey’s holistic epistemology. The perpetual movement of the sentimental subject through circuits of sympathy oriented toward future action is for Dewey the default state of organic experience. Futurity organizes experience in a way that overrides origins: “Anticipation is therefore more primary than recollection; projection than summoning of the past; the prospective than the retrospective…hope and anxiety (which are not self-enclosed states of feeling, but active attitudes of welcome and wariness) are dominant qualities of experience” (13).

Futurity, in Dewey’s scheme, necessitates an ethical stance. What we know is always already tied up in the projects we imagine as necessary to the fulfillment of our plans. Put even more simply, as William James does in *The Will to Believe*, “This feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment, of its absoluteness,—this absence of all need to explain it, account for it, or justify it,—is what I call the Sentiment of Rationality. As soon, in short, as we are enabled from any cause whatever to think with perfect fluency, the thing we think of seems to us *pro tanto* rational” (64). Later, I will examine in more detail James’ extraordinary statement. Here, its relevance consists in highlighting Dewey’s position that futurity, knowledge, and ethics are tied up in the same ongoing adaptation response. Rational philosophy, as a project, consists in seeking the fulfillment

\(^{54}\) See West.
of desire, of what one might even call an aesthetic impulse to bring one’s beliefs into fluency with one’s actions, and each into fluency with the consequences of one’s actions. For Dewey, such attempts at harmony are routinely undermined, not only because human desires are in tension, but also because the environment is itself under a state of constant change, both by the actions of others and by natural movement.

The means by which social life gains continuity Dewey names education:

“Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication” (Democracy 3). Sentiment and sympathy play a crucial role in Dewey’s educational program. He writes, “For sympathy as a desirable quality is something more than mere feeling; it is a cultivated imagination for what men have in common and a rebellion at whatever unnecessarily divides them” (96). Knowledge itself is given meaning through sympathy: “Knowledge is humanistic in quality not because it is about human products in the past, but because of what it does in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy. Any subject matter which accomplishes this result is humane, and any subject matter which does not accomplish it is not even educational” (183).

Despite his valorization of sympathy, Dewey often disparages sentimentality, conceiving it in the narrow sense of private feeling or frivolous imagination directed toward hopeless desires. Yet, keeping in mind the history of sensibility, sentiment, and sympathy, he seems ambivalent concerning such divisions. He writes that stifling conditions “force many people back upon themselves. They take refuge in an inner play of sentiment and fancies. They are aesthetic but not artistic, since their feelings and ideas
are turned upon themselves, instead of being methods in acts which modify conditions. Their mental life is sentimental; an enjoyment of an inner landscape” (109). While he seems to slip momentarily into the same subject-object divide he criticizes so harshly elsewhere, he continues: “This state of affairs must exist so far as society is organized on a basis of division between laboring classes and leisure classes” (109). The example of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* seems to bely his hasty divisions of “aesthetics” and “art,” and elsewhere he readily acknowledges the power of literary art to produce action, but in his somewhat idiosyncratic usage, he attributes this power to the growing of sympathy. From the perspective of sentimental theory, the distinction is meaningless insofar as he understands “sympathy” as the public enactment of identification that informs or leads to action. Even for Dewey, the point seems unimportant, “It amounts to something only in the degree in which pupils happen to be already animated by a sympathetic and dignified regard for the sentiments of others” (280).

Yet, dismissing the discrepant usages would cause us to lose an opportunity. As I discuss in my analysis of Edgar Allan Poe, sentiment becomes enmeshed in the threat of racialized, imaginative sympathy – the mental theater that leads to the madness of echo. Dewey here seems aware of the requirements of his own empirical pragmatism. By shifting to terms like experience, environment, and action, his agent-patient can only metaphorically be drawn into the sentimental paradigm of sympathy provided by Adam Smith, where the imagination produces automatic and reliable projections of others’ sentiments, which one in turn experiences as simulacra. For Dewey, this leads us into the same subject-object problem he wants us to avoid. Instead, he emphasizes sympathy, a
seemingly holistic response not reliant upon mental images or imagined affect, instead reinforced by habit and familiarity. The difference in the two conceptions marks— as I have argued— the influence of clinical discourse on liberal subjectivity. In many ways—as will become clearer in my analysis of Jane Addams— pragmatist social theory seeks to publicize sentimentality, drawing affective relations into conditions of democratic visibility. Drawing together the insights that pragmatism attacks the subject-object distinction intentionally, attaches knowledge to futurity, and justifies knowledge in terms of growing sympathy helps us understand both the debt pragmatism owes to sentimental culture and the unique contribution pragmatism provides to democratic life.

Our previous forays into sentimental virtue ethics also help us understand why, near the end of Democracy and Education, Dewey turns to a lengthy tangent on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. He writes, “At the other end of the scale stands the Socratic-Platonic teaching which identifies knowledge and virtue— which holds that no man does evil knowingly but only because of ignorance of the good” (280). Here, he seeks to disentangle two conceptions of knowledge as they relate to virtue. On the one hand, Dewey argues that Socrates’ position is clearly wrong. If you consider knowledge as an abstracted notion that something is wrong, apart from the context of our unique experiences, then Socrates is mistaken. I can know that stealing is wrong, yet steal nonetheless. On the other hand, Dewey seeks to make a fine distinction between rules “devitalized” and unattached to experience and the possibility “that man could not attain a theoretical insight into the good except as he had passed through years of practical habituation and strenuous discipline. Knowledge of the good was not a thing to be got
either from books or form others, but was achieved through a prolonged education” (281). The similarity of this view to that propounded in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* is notable and suggests that Dewey is not so much making a whole system of thought anew out of his genius – as is often depicted in academic histories of his thought – but is weaving together evolutionary science, radical empiricism, and sentimental theory into a vision of democratic life liberated from positivism.

It is these insights that have proved so fruitful to both Cornel West and feminist interpreters of Dewey. Shannon Sullivan, for example, attempts to create a philosophy of “transactionality” – as opposed to interaction – based on Dewey’s writing, one that conceives human beings as living across and through skins. “To think of bodies as transactional, then, is to conceive of bodies and their various environment as co-constituted in a nonviciously circular way. It is to realize that bodies do not stop at the edges of their skins and are not contained neatly and sharply within them” (1). This is relevant because pragmatism “sees knowledge as a tool for enriching experience; is pluralistic, experimental, fallibilist, and naturalistic; and rejects the quest for certainty while taking a meliorist attitude – an attitude that human action sometimes can improve the world” (5). As is true of Charlene Haddock Seigfried, Sullivan perceives pragmatism and feminism as ideally sharing these philosophical assumptions even though “feminism also has important contributions to make to pragmatism…feminism reminds pragmatists that such pluralism itself proceeds from a particular perspective, with its own hidden assumptions and blind spots that are in need of critical examination” (5). In particular, as Rorty has noted, feminism provides an historical account of gendered power asymmetries
that bring along profoundly important insights to any project concerned with melioration and expanded sympathy. In many ways, pragmatism provides a rhetoric of knowledge, and feminism provides a rhetoric of history. Together, they make sense of the liberal subject’s project of future-building under conditions of contingency and constrained agency.

Jane Addams, Domesticity, and Social Action

Jane Addams has received her long-deserved recognition in the past twenty years. Dozens of articles have appeared in journals of feminism, social theory, philosophy, and literature extolling her many intellectual and rhetorical virtues. Yet, in this renascence, an anxious relationship to the sentimental tradition can be seen. A recently-acclaimed biography celebrates Addams as being distant from middle-of-the-road sentimentalism. While I assent to the spirit of this characterization – which seems to say merely that her intellect is formidable and her will fierce – it seems to unduly discard Addams’ deep indebtedness to the sentimental tradition, which can count proudly amongst its numbers abolitionists and suffragists. The source of Dewey’s complaint against sentimentalism and critics’ well-intentioned desire to distance Addams from sentimentalism lay in the gender politics of domesticity, a struggle Addams makes central to Democracy and Social Ethics: “To attain individual morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride one’s self on the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation” (3). Throughout the text, she places the reader in a state of crisis: the old domestic codes of caring and fealty while

55 See Rorty, “Feminist, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist Perspective.”
56 See Knight.
honorable are no longer sufficient. At best, they point toward social need. At worst, they
distract from the duties of a wider social life.

Addams frames the crisis more finely: “We are thus brought to a conception of
Democracy not merely as a sentiment which desires the well-being of men, nor yet as a
creed which believes in the essential dignity and equality of all men, but as that which
affords a rule of living as well as a test of faith” (4). Here, Addams’ default rhetorical
strategy emerges. While casting sentimental virtues as insufficient in a time of industrial
organization, she then sublimes those virtues into democratic ideals that guide action
and provide the ground of a new patriotism. The sentiments extolled in Harriet Beecher
Stowe’s writing become a means by which individuals are folded into a collective
mission directed toward a future of renewed national – and at times international – health.

The connection of this social vision to the sentimental tradition is made explicit
by Addams: “Literature, too, portrays an equally absorbing though better adjusted desire
to know all kinds of life. The popular books are the novels, dealing with life under all
possible conditions, and they are widely read not only because they are entertaining, but
also because they in a measure satisfy an unformulated belief that to see farther…is a
preparation for social adjustment” (8). The sentimental function of literature is
characterized as a beneficial precursor to social action, a way of perfecting the
imagination. In short, she depicts the novel – in particular the sentimental novel – as a
technology for producing democratic sympathy, the precondition for the “remedying of
social ills” (8).
Beyond recognizing sentimentalism’s value in producing intimate publics – and the importance this holds for democratic life – Addams by necessity engages in a direct rhetorical refutation of domestic ideology. In Chapter III, “Filial Relations,” Addams writes, “This chapter deals with the relation between parents and their grown-up daughters, as affording an explicit illustration of the perplexity and mal-adjustment brought about by the various attempts of young women to secure a more active share in the community life” (72). She goes on to analogize the struggle of women to challenge filial relations by reference to Ibsen’s “Nora” and George Eliot’s “Romola.” In contrast to these “selfish and captious” examples, Addams draws upon antiquity – a prevalent strategy in the history of sensibility and sentiment – reminding the audience of “the tragedy set forth by the Greek dramatist, who asserted that the gods who watch over the sanctity of the family bond must yield to the higher claims of the gods of the state” (76). As she had done in her first chapter, she attempts to convert traditional feminine virtues – filial love, loyalty, duty – from domestic complements to resources of vital import to democracy. To do so, she must also displace paternal duty from the father to the state while simultaneously reframing the state as an arbiter of the social good and manifestation of “the democratic impulse” (76).

Yet, it is clear that Addams sees no easy relationship between feminist reform and old filial codes of conduct. She casts the conflict as the inevitable result of changes in women’s education and an evolution in the social order: “This assumption that the daughter is solely an inspiration and refinement to the family itself…worked very smoothly for the most part so long as her education was in line with it.”
finishing school harmoniously and elegantly answered all requirements,” then “she was fitted to grace the fireside and to add luster to that social circle which her parents selected for her” (82). Under a different social order, there was a presumed harmony between women’s opportunities, education, and social roles. Yet, “this family assumption has been notably broken into, and educational ideas no longer fit it.” Specifically, “modern education recognizes women quite apart from family or society claims, and gives her the training…for independent action” (82). What Addams means by modern education is no doubt closely related to the education she received at Rockford Theological Seminary and in her one year of medical training at the University of Pennsylvania.

Her solution to the conflict between women’s increasingly social role and their parent’s continued desire to place them within conventional domestic roles is quite simple: fathers should recognize “the higher claim” – in this instance the social good and universal duty – and should be “willing to subordinate and adjust his own claim to it” (80). The power and controversiality of Addams’ ethics is sometimes occluded by her rhetorical skill and amelioristic tone. While she details to near excess the emotional and intellectual conflicts between college-educated daughters, their outmoded fathers, and conventional domestic ideology, she states quite briefly and succinctly the solution: fathers must submit to the higher duty their daughters rightly perceive. It is only in this way that domestic harmony can be resolved and only in this way that a harmonious gender dynamic can be reinstituted – namely, by reforming every heteronormative relation in circulation and immediately placing intelligent, capable young women in roles of authority and utility.
The extent of her plan for social reformation slowly becomes apparent. First, she shifts from a discussion of parent’s misguided expectations to the internal emotional and intellectual conflicts of educated young women, advising them to master their own conflicts in the interest of social progress. Next, with the same ease she advises fathers to submit to their daughter’s superior moral knowledge, she narrates the beneficial progress being made in child-rearing. “Young mothers,” she writes, “who attend ‘Child Study’ classes have a larger notion of parenthood.” The primary value of this larger notion lay in “this attempt to take the parental relation somewhat away from mere personal experience” (93). As in Gilman’s *Herland*, parenthood and childhood gain meaning primarily in relationship to social progress. The sentimental ideal of static reproduction – of women reproducing domestic space and relations to provide continuity – gives way to a communitarian and progressive ideal of democratic parenting. The social relation, for Addams, organizes and helps us understand the significance of all other relations.

In focusing on Addams’ rhetorical displacement of domesticity, I seek both to draw her into relation to the sentimental tradition and mark her adaptation of it. It bears repeating that the ideal democratic life for Addams resembles the harmonious sympathies of the ideal domestic life for sentimentalists. It is, in some ways, sentimentalism as transformed by socialism. It maintains an emphasis on the cultivation of personal virtue, but adds that personal virtue must have social ends and must finally be legitimated in reference to a total vision of social action. It seeks the extension of sympathy and virtue – a fitting translation of what Addams means by ethics – to a social scale large enough to support industrial democracy as a vital force for human flourishing. It is, in this sense, at
once anti-sentimental – as rigidly bound to domesticity and heteronormativity – and entirely sentimental – as characterized by acting according to knowledge of virtue in order to enact a caring relationship between all citizens.

The most significant philosophical achievement of classical pragmatist feminism is the settlement-house movement. Hull House, which Addams co-founded, integrates the philosophical assumptions of pragmatism and feminism into the total life of the community, utilizing creative action to extend social life toward a meliorated future.

Addams’ *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, long valued in the social sciences as a catalogue of attempts to generate social progress and alleviate poverty, has been less studied as a work of autobiography, in no small part because it tends to deal little with the sort of introspective psychological analysis usually attached to the genre. With a proper understanding of pragmatist-feminist theory, however, it seems only fitting that Addams’ text be considered an autobiography, given the meaningless bifurcation of the self and others so long opposed by pragmatist thought. If the self is always already transsubjective – as Shannon Sullivan would argue – and if ones actions are always enmeshed in collective life and the changing environment – as Dewey and Addams maintain – then Addams could have written no more perfect autobiography of her life than one ostensibly concerned with the being and becoming of Hull House.

Reading *Twenty Years at Hull-House* as a pragmatist autobiography opens an immediate insight often ignored in discussing pragmatist feminism: the optimistic attitude toward pleasure and the hopeful attitude toward suffering found in its early writings. Addams writes, “I have always objected to the phrase ‘sociological laboratory’ applied to
us, because Settlements should be something much more human and spontaneous than such a phrase connotes.” She comments elsewhere, “Probably no young matron ever placed her own things in her own house with more pleasure than that with which we first furnished Hull-House” (94). On nearly every page, Addams recoils at some suffering, anticipates some pleasure, sympathizes with the triumph of a working mother. She writes that her text is an attempt to “analyze the motives which underlie a movement based, not only upon conviction, but upon genuine emotion, wherever educated young people are seeking an outlet for that sentiment of universal brotherhood, which the best spirit of our times is forcing from an emotion into a motive” (115).

Erin McKenna theorizes the pleasures and uses of utopia, and Maurice Hamington explicitly analyzes Hull House as a “process and feminist” (159) utopia. Just as Charlotte Perkins Gilman provided a process-feminist utopia in Herland, Addams’ autobiography can be seen as utopian. One ought to view it in that way not simply for the productive avenues opened up by the effort; one is compelled to view it that way to make sense of the unique and complex life Addams lived. Richard Rorty’s point that the difference between literature and philosophy is predominantly conventional and generic, and that the boundary between texts and people is usually overstated, tracks Shannon Sullivan’s point that our skin seems like an arbitrary and unnecessarily restrictive place to draw the boundaries of a transsubjective being. Following pragmatist thought places one in the unenviable position of having to analyze Hull-House as a utopian project in order to understand Addams’ subjectivity – insofar as her subjectivity organizes itself around the perfectible future as a guide to social action.
In describing the problems of poverty, Addams explains to her reader the dismal situation of elderly women kept at the Cook County Infirmary. She writes, “The poor creature who clung so desperately to her chest of drawers was really clinging to the last remnant of normal living – a symbol of all she was asked to renounce” (156). In narrating a death-bed scene concerning one of these old women, Addams writes, “I recall the dying hour of one old Scotchwoman whose long struggle to ‘keep respectable’ had so embittered her, that her last words were gibes and taunts for those who were trying to minister to her.” This old woman chastises her attendants: “Don’t try to warm my feet with anything but that old jacket that I’ve got there; it belonged to my boy who was drowned at sea nigh thirty years ago, but it’s warmer yet with human feelings than any of your damned charity hot-water bottles.” Though Addams reports she was “shaken and horrified” at the woman’s death, the sentence directly following it reads, “The lack of municipal regulation already referred to was, in the early days of Hull-House, paralleled by the inadequacy of the charitable efforts of the city and an unfounded optimism that there was no real poverty among us” (157-8). For Addams, no simple personal-social binary can make sense of her experiences. The personal is social – the social, personal. The horror at witnessing death circulates with concerns over charity reform and state poverty policies. The depressingly vulgar realization of their interconnectedness perhaps lay in the artificial boundaries one is used to erecting between them. For Addams, no such boundary is in place. The story of Hull-House is the story of a utopian project that at once animates her own intense desires and receives its confirmation and rejection in the suffering and flourishing of its wards.
It is of particular significance that both Addams and James operate so routinely in clinical contexts and in contact with medical patients. Here, Addams’ response is – I argue – distinct from the clinical response of figures like Louisa May Alcott in her *Hospital Sketches* or Nan in *A Country Doctor*, refusing to sever the sympathetic circuit between observer and patient. Instead, the suffering of patients and wards – the very marginalized subjects central to political action in pragmatism – provokes first sympathy, then reflection, then a program for amelioration. Holism defines the experience of the Other in pragmatism, a holism that cannot make sense of artificial disruptions in sympathy precisely because the intellectual underpinnings of subject-object distinctions have been demolished. Addams and the old woman exist together in a shared social environment, and her suffering presses a claim on Addams that is at once intensely personal and generalizable. The sentimental response – to sympathize and comfort in death – does not appear; instead, the pragmatist response – to sympathize and use such sympathy as a form of knowledge in ameliorating social cruelty – prevails.

To this point, I’ve avoided an explicit discussion of pragmatism and the liberal subject, except perhaps to imply that the pragmatist-feminist is a form of liberal subjectivity born as an adaptation of the sentimental tradition. With a sufficient grounding in the qualities of classical pragmatist-feminism, however, it is now possible to make some general claims about pragmatist subjectivity. Pragmatist subjectivity is organized – as other versions of liberal subjectivity we’ve considered – around a set of generative tensions. In this case, and of particular importance, the pragmatist subject has no anxiety associated with dissemination or textuality; instead, the pragmatist subject
embraces as an ethic the iterability of subjectivity across media and specifically refuses the notion that a genuine self means an isolated and irreproducible self. The absence of this anxiety, however, provokes another anxiety: the adoption of futurity as a supreme guide to action, coupled with the insistence on an organic conception of human agency and the rejection of a foundational ethic to anchor reproduction, presses the pragmatist subject into sympathetic exhaustion. Where the sentimentalized liberal subject routinely risked the madness of echo due to the infinite iteration of sympathy in the mental theater, the pragmatist subject inverts the trajectory of dissemination. Rejecting the subject-object divide leads to the assertion that there is no inside to the universe – all things are a networked exteriority, an infinite plurality of connections.57

If a regulatory regime governs pragmatism, it consists in subjecting ones beliefs to a series of experiential tests that extend forever into an uncertain future. Richard Rorty attempts to evade the sort of mental exhaustion William James was notoriously prone to by erecting a dubious division between the public and private spheres (shorn, he would hope, of any gendered quality). The private sphere, he contends, is where a person imagines herself in a radical project of self-making. In this sphere, the individual alone judges, in relative isolation from public justification or responsibility to Addams’ “social claim,” the value of her own made life. The entire purpose of this retreat, I contend, is to avoid the manic iteration of one’s self through social spaces, a reprieve from the “undergoing” Dewey talks about when he refers to experience and inquiry. It bears a resemblance to the primary function William James attributed to belief in God – the

57 See James, A Pluralistic Universe.
convenience of being able to take a moral holiday, to imagine that one’s choices had little bearing on the course of the universe.

The manic iteration of the self, and the infinite subjection of the self to processes of social justification – justification being in Rorty’s view the highest claim made by democratic societies in the public sphere – placed against the desire for rest and _uselessness_, is I argue the generative tension of the pragmatic liberal subject. It is seen in the proliferation of the progressive movement into every sphere of human activity. Ones choices in diet, drink, politics, sex, clothing, media, leisure, work, purchasing, friends, transportation, and religion are not just subjected to a moral calculus but are considered in relation to the utopian impulse, the admonition that one choose according to the bringing into being of the world one finds ethically preferable.

This point bears clarification. It is not simply subjecting ones choices to a moral program that defines the pragmatist subject. After all, activists and reformers since the Enlightenment have conceived of the future as the possible sight of a perfected human world. Sentimental Christian subject had already conceived – for example, in the abolition movement – the future as a site of action, but their teleology allowed them to consider the future as a site of _unfolding_, as the extension of a fundamentally just and natural set of human relations, ordained by God, into the future. In folding the human body inside-out – so to speak – pragmatism allows no space for an essential self that can unfold itself into the future. In unsettling binaries, advocating pluralism, and placing God in the realm of future action, pragmatist subjects have no recourse to foundational principles or moral holidays. By sidestepping determinism, pragmatists have no grounds
upon which to argue their own uselessness or irrelevance, another version of disallowing ones potency in order to earn a moral reprieve from vigorous action in the political realm.

To reiterate, what is unique about pragmatist subjectivity is that it concerns itself with the continuous revision of itself in light of experience, with the admonition to act always as to bring into being the future one desires, but with a prohibition on settling ahead of time on rules as to how the future reached ought to be judged. It is a perpetual crucible in the literal sense. William James, perhaps the pragmatist most aware of this conflicted set of imperatives, was also least able to develop the compromise formation necessary to balance his own activity. As I said, Richard Rorty uses a certain vision of private life as a reprieve from public justification. John Dewey relies on expounding the various process-rules one can apply to experience in order to invent and assess lines of inquiry (in the absence of fundamental truths, he settles for consistent procedures). Jane Addams and Cornel West, for their part, adopt a vague prophetic Christianity to guide action and supply a sustaining faith in the midst of uncertainty.

As I have argued with sentimental subjectivity, such generative tensions and their regulatory strategies are not forms of contradiction; instead, they’re the means by which liberal subjectivity stabilizes its own reproduction. Of particular interest – and partly why neopragmatism has received such attention and interest in the past two decades – is that pragmatist subjectivity seems the least anxious about iteration, having thematized perpetual change as the natural state of organisms in complex ecosystems. The text – whether in James, West, Dewey, Addams, Gilman, or Rorty – poses no threat to social reproduction or systems of knowledge. More often, the text is regarded as a primary
metaphor for human subjectivity, an extension of liberal subjectivity and the values that underwrite it. As such, pragmatist subjectivity finds a certain fluency in late capitalism, a sphere of mediated action that extends in every direction but always toward a future of its own becoming.

The Rhetorical Context of William James

While Dewey theorized most fully the connection between futurity and knowledge, and Addams theorized most fully the process-utopian enactment of social ethics, William James theorizes most fully what Cornel West calls personality. Not surprisingly, James is the classical pragmatist most enmeshed in the sentimental tradition. By way of Charles Sanders Peirce, he elaborates a pragmatic model inspired by writings of Friedrich Schiller, the eighteenth-century philosopher largely credited with theorizing sensibility and sentiment in both moral and aesthetic terms.

For William James, philosophical concepts didn’t just matter for philosophers; they were, in various forms, a part of modern culture, and the outcome of conversations over these concepts carried with them general importance. While he is sometimes criticized as being one of the least politically-active of the pragmatists, such criticisms often overlook the effort he put into popularizing and disseminating his lectures and writings to a general audience. Bertrand Russell put it aptly: “[James] retained from his Puritan ancestry a deep-seated belief that what is of most importance is good conduct, and his democratic feeling made him unable to acquiesce in the notion of one truth for philosophers and another for the vulgar” (812). Extending this insight, one might say that

58 See West 54.
59 See McGann 119-126.
his emphasis on practical moral questions – including agency, consciousness, and commitment – was his attempt at a democratically-engaged life in the sphere of culture. His continuing relevance in debates over democracy, justice, and truth indicates that his attempt isn’t a Platonic retreat from politics but the attempt of someone embroiled in cultures of expertise to legitimate “vulgar” beliefs and inoculate the demos from philosophical brow-beating.

The question of audience permeates James’ writing. Most of his books, including *Pragmatism*, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, and *A Pluralistic Universe*, are collections of various lecture series he gave in the U.S. and U.K. They are intended explicitly for popular audiences and generally engage some popular topic with an eye toward clarifying philosophical problems and ameliorating academic confusions in the interest of mediation. At heart, the mission of his popular philosophy is to legitimize democratic forms of inquiry, undercut hierarchical claims to knowledge that stifle such inquiry, and open up space for experimental living. As Rorty often claims, James “sets aside questions about both the will of God and the nature of man and dreams of creating a hitherto unknown form of society” (*Contingency* 3). In James’ view, this unknown form of society comes into existence through the experimental inquiries entered into by individuals as they attempt to instill their actions with moral relevance.

Rorty finds James’ primary relevance in bringing an ethical turn to epistemology. James famously writes, “Let me now say only this, that truth is one species of the good, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it.

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60 See James, *Pragmatism* 18-21.
The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief, and good, too, for definite, assignable reasons” (75-6). Truth, in a stroke, turns from an absolute imperative under which we must submit our beliefs – whatever our feelings in the matter – and becomes a species of the good, a tool in our attempts to create the future, a partner in always-incomplete inquiries. Truth, in this way, becomes temporalized and naturalized. It is a quality of human agency, neither a “mere illusion” nor a super-human object to end imperfect projects, but one relation among many in what James calls “pure experience” (Russell 813).

For James, arguments over truth gain their value only in truth’s relation to action, particularly in the experimental relation between hope and knowledge. Echoing Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading, Recuperative Reading,” James writes, “There are then cases where faith creates its own verification” (Pragmatism 96). This statement has sometimes been interpreted to mean that if we believe something, believing it makes it true – as though believing that one will not die makes it so. What James means, however, is clarified by the example he uses:

Suppose, for example, that I am climbing in the Alps, and have had the ill-luck to work myself into a position from which the only escape is by a terrible leap. Being without similar experience, I have no evidence of my ability to perform it successfully; but hope and confidence in myself make me sure I shall not miss my aim, and nerve my feet to execute what without those subjective emotions would perhaps have been impossible. But suppose that, on the contrary, the emotions of fear and mistrust preponderate; or suppose that, having just read the Ethics of
Belief, I feel it would be sinful to act upon an assumption unverified by previous experience,—why, then I shall hesitate so long that at last, exhausted and trembling, and launching myself in a moment of despair, I miss my foothold and roll into the abyss. (97)

In those instances where one lacks previous experience as a guide, or when the outcome hinges partly on the attitude adopted toward it, the question of hope or doubt becomes epistemologically relevant. That is to say, ones attitude toward the future becomes materially relevant to the actual future created. For James, to throw out such considerations as irrelevant to the “real” question of truth is to abandon holistic empiricism and treat a whole quadrant of reality—namely, human experience—in an irrational way. He makes the point finer in his discussion of Bergson and Zeno’s paradox:

Thought deals thus solely with surfaces. It can name the thickness of reality, but it cannot fathom it, and its insufficiency here is essential and permanent, not temporary…The only way in which to apprehend reality’s thickness is either to experience it directly by being a part of reality one’s self, or to evoke it in imagination by sympathetically divining someone else’s inner life…Could we feel a million years concretely as we now feel a passing minute, we should have very little employment for our conceptual faculty. (Pluralistic 251)

Here, it becomes clear that the question of the good relates primarily to how time, sympathy, and action intersect. Feeling is, for James the psychologist, a datum as important as the surface understanding of mathematical infinity. Understanding the value
of conceptual knowledge – i.e., that knowledge conventionally regarded as the only concern of truth – lay in its relationship to sympathy and action. Conceptual knowledge – certainty of certain kind regarding abstract relations in time – matters to subjects because it helps guide action. But, such knowledge cannot guide action alone in a human universe. Instead, one must understand how sympathy and conceptual knowledge interact in guiding action toward a desired future. Knowing how to attain multiple futures does not tell one how to choose between them, but more, we only know how to attain multiple futures through conceptual knowledge and imaginative sympathy. Without sympathy, there would be no “thick reality” for one to project into the future, and the selection of a goal would be hollow and meaningless. For James, utility means sympathetic reasoning directed by imagination toward a desired future.

The importance of this notion lay not only in its attachment to the sentimental tradition – and the specific strand of Enlightenment thought it brings with it – but also in the holistic theory of knowledge it affords democratic life. It gives democracy – in an age of science – an ethics and a teleology that fully express human desire. It undercuts scientistic claims to absolutism that would have democratic belief subjected to “objective truth.” It rejects the expert’s attempt to create of democracy an oligarchy of coerced consent, wherein individual belief regulates itself to the shifting imperatives of scientific discovery. Instead, James conceives of popular belief as a partner to scientific inquiry, each progressing along different lines toward a wider and richer understanding of human potential.
At center, James’ thought envisions democratic knowledge rhetorically. That is, popular conversation and belief in a democracy have to do with persuasion, conceived as the dissemination of personality through expository art with the aim of educating each other collectively in virtues that will be productive of the good. James’ great criticism of “intellectualist” philosophers and pedantic scientists is that they lack the virtues of humility, fellowship, and magnanimity in regard to inquiry.⁶¹ In nearly every case – as he does with Bergson in A Pluralistic Universe – his advocation of a philosopher’s views is preceded by an exaltation of his virtues, especially his generosity of intellect. James routinely ameliorates philosophical disputes by appealing to “mood,” “character,” or “temperament.”⁶² His famous dichotomy between the sick and healthy soul in Varieties rests on a similar appeal to folk psychology.

This point is important because it places James in conversation with the sentimental tradition and helps us make sense of the value he places on thick reality and embodied experience. Though he rarely talks explicitly about gender or sexuality, his frequent move to words like mood in discussing philosophically contentious issues suggests the resistance to attempts to disemboby knowledge, which he attacks in detail elsewhere. The seemingly intractable argument between the ascetic and the hedonist in religious matters can be reduced to how apt one is to fall into a “strenuous mood” (Pluralistic 116). Beneath sometimes flippant characterizations like this, there is a profound rhetoric at work, one that – like Socrates’ – is concerned as much with justifying beliefs as with disciplining the soul. Virtue in intellectual life is so important

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⁶¹ See James, A Pluralistic Universe 242.
⁶² See Pragmatism 109-122.
because it is a part of a common project of becoming as expressed through culture, and
the admonition to always be mindful of one’s holistic stance – ones temperament, biases,
blindness, etc. – is a democratic admonition: doing so prevents against the dangerous
belief that our rationalistic mental pictures take privilege over our embodied experiences
in deciding the outcome of human action. It is in this regard that Cornel West refers to
American pragmatism as the evasion of philosophy: it is the attempt to sidestep perennial
Platonic problems in order to get on with the work of democratic becoming, to leap
hopefully into a desired future.

Yet, as I have already detailed, such an orientation to time, knowledge, and
democracy provokes its own anxieties even as it ameliorates the “theoretic” anxieties
folks like James so abhor. As in his example of the mountain climber, pragmatism seeks
to alleviate the anxieties associated with fear of falsehood (skepticism) in order to
provoke enthusiasm for the possibilities associated with experimentation (optimism). For
James, Addams, and Dewey, the difference is both cultural and political. Fear of
falsehood makes sense under totalitarian regimes governed hierarchically. The goal is to
avoid offending or betraying the edicts of power. Conformity to dogma serves a
necessary social function: it maintains power’s sovereignty and affords a specific kind of
limited cooperation. It is knowledge as regulated by monarchs and popes. Enthusiasm for
experimentation, on the other hand, is for the pragmatists a fitting paradigm for inquiry
under open democracy. Their position is meant to be both descriptive and utopian: an
accurate depiction of the cultural difference concerning justification in tyrannies and
democracies and an ideal for the continual liberation of belief through democratic progress, a nullification of the “spectator theory of knowledge” (Dewey qtd. in Bacon 1).

Nullifying the spectator theory of knowledge, however, leads to an existential injunction similar to the one popularized by Jean-Paul Sartre half a century later: agency, however constrained, defines human life. Choices, however conditioned, matter. This move is made not to afford a logic for retributive justice, but to forestall the nihilism and complacency that accompanies moral skepticism. The effect, as can be seen in the almost compulsively active lives of James, Dewey, and Addams, is a subjectivity that “lives forward,” habituated to constructing and revising projects according to personal commitments based on social claims. This “living forward,” however optimistic its energy and intent, can also be interpreted as a direct attempt to avoid the future promised by pessimism. As Robert Richardson in a recent biography recounts, William James experienced a terrible vision in 1870 that had a profound impact on his life and thought. James writes:

I went one evening into a dressing room in the twilight to procure some article that was there: when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches…He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. (117)
James goes on to identify the figure of the green idiot with his own potential future. Richardson aptly characterizes the figure as the Other, and casts James’ reaction as a willingness to approach and endure it. James continues, “There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear” (118). James’ experience marks the beginning of a lifelong struggle with what was then known as neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion, which its most apt clinician considered a problem of “brain-working households” (119). The recurring fear that his future would bring madness and despair, and that the way to avoid this fate was to cultivate a sense of freedom by first acting as though one were free. For James, the libratory projection, a sort of utopian act in itself, was a way to avoid realizing a future of pessimism, of jammering like the green idiot.

As in the many scenes of sentimental reading we’ve analyzed, James’ greatest fear is realized in madness, and his great salvation lay in the experience of reading: “If the sudden spasm of identification with the green-skinned idiot was representative of the worst of William’s bad moments, [another episode] illustrates his peculiar absorptive resiliency, his uncanny ability to pick up redemptive ideas from his reading” (120). What separates James from Belinda, Douglass, or Hemans are both clinical discourse and a specific notion of the will that was not exclusive to pragmatists in the late nineteenth-century even though they fashioned a particularly powerful response to it. Describing scientific attitudes toward the will – which included James’ own work – Anita and Michael Fellman write, “The will, not merely a hedge against physiological determinism,
was also a bulwark against the possibility that nature herself and all elements of the human makeup lower than the will were disordered. The will was approached ambivalently: the highest result and best defense of civilization, it was also viewed as an imposed compensation for the loss of good instincts” (116). While nature itself is thematized as a possible threat to human dignity, the perceived need to compensate psychologically for “the loss of good instincts” must be understood specifically in relation to the belief systems in which humans have such benevolent instincts – sentimentalism foremost among them. As I detailed previously, sentimentalism rests on the belief that we are by nature endowed with both a sympathetic reflex and a sort of pre-history that ensures virtuous action and legitimates moral choices. The benevolent mother, the virtuous herder, the all-justifying fireside each rest on the belief that we have instincts that can be cultivated into moral sentiments. That a scientific paradigm in which this is not the case would provoke compromise formations is not strange, but it makes the particular function of the will in relation to base instincts and inherited nature all the more relevant to pragmatism. In James, the will not only compensates for the loss of good instincts (and the moral sentiments these could support), it counterintuitively reinstates these sentiments. The will, through reformed belief and implemented habits, allows human beings to cultivate moral sentiments – in fact, requires them to – even in the absence of instinct or a sustaining nature.

Of particular interest to my project is how James’ sympathetic response to the asylum patient, his identification with the Other, both challenges Adam Smith’s example of “illegitimate sympathy” in Theory of Moral Sentiments, and short-circuits the clinical
assumptions underwriting what Foucault called the suzerainty of the gaze. James, in a nightmare, has the sympathetic relationship between himself and that patient thrust back upon him as a horrifying future that must be avoided. Unlike spectator theories of knowledge that presume patients as objects of clinical knowledge, James imagines the patient as a terrible reminder of the precariousness of his own life and rationality, as warning against moral pessimism, and as evidence of the importance of faith and will. That the green-skinned idiot should function as a shadow of medical rationality’s oversight is given particular force by the weight James gives to it. He recalls it as a founding moment in his own intellectual commitments, which I here interpret as the intervention of sentimental knowledge into clinical discourse, the result being a pragmatist subjectivity entirely unique in history.

The liberal subject, still formed primarily through literacy amidst commercial dissemination, contends in this era also with Darwinian science. The pragmatist subject, comfortable with iteration as viewed organically, requires of the will what the sentimental subject was content to deliver unto God: a generative role in imagining and producing the future. The compensation for alienation from a perceived natural order is a will that can choose its own destiny. This contrasts with the common sentimental and Romantic response, which is to install Nature as a spiritual force that can be reinstated in social life, or which can serve as the goal of human will. In pragmatism, naturalism serves only to liberate will and conscience from authoritarian models of truth and ethics; it is not a goal that can organize social life, nor is it a spiritual order perceived as having been lost through some version of original sin. As I have argued, such a model avoids
anxiety over iteration only by creating anxieties over one’s ability to act so as to bring about a desired future. Iteration, instead of being regulated according to heteronormative regimes or Christian teleologies, is perceived as an expression of pure human agency, controlled in a thoroughly pluralistic fashion, and possible only due to the accretion of technological capacity witnessed in the nineteenth century.

Viewing pragmatist subjectivity in this way not only allows more fruitful connections to the print culture of the nineteenth century to emerge, it also resists the prevailing myth of creative genius, one that James and Rorty both seem enamored of while allowing us to reconsider it as part of the pragmatist strategy for resisting determinism and disembodied knowledge. James resists the notion that genius is inevitable: “A given genius may come either too early or too late” (Will 237). Rorty, in turn, tends to characterize the history of philosophy as the history of individual genius coming along and developing a novel vocabulary that reshapes human society. While it could be seen as an unfortunate residue of unjustified Enlightenment individualism creeping into pragmatism, it usually functions instead as a way of injecting contingency into histories of ideas by appeal to thick human intellect. By way of genius, pragmatists like James fashion a defense against historical determinism in much the same way that they use the will to fashion a defense against scientific determinism. By allowing the redemptive social function to manifest as a contingent and unpredictable spark of genius – by way of “causes acting in the invisible and molecular cycle” (237) – the Hegelian impulse to historicize in a disembodied, idealist way is resisted. On this point, pragmatists have nothing to say about genius – no thought on its origins, operation, or
qualities – except to say that it, like mutations in genetic code, just happens. Further, once it happens, the novel path of the genius becomes available to all.

This account, I think, poses little danger of leading one back into atomistic individualism. Further, it can be reconciled to my more Foucauldian account in a fairly simple way: genius in this model is simply the attribution of discursive shifts to the author function. Yet, it seems an open question whether approaching rapid historic change in terms of an epistemic break caused by discursive revolution or the eruption of genius serves a particularly beneficial service to democratic action. While the Foucauldian point that “genius” seems to retroactively assign ownership over the flux of ideas, thus reifying capitalist epistemologies, seems important, the Rortyan point that poststructuralist theories of society seem to lead on into the very moral skepticism and inaction resisted by James et al also deserves consideration. The point might also find some warrant in Foucault’s later writings.

For our project, it seems clear that pragmatism is a novel and valuable adaptation of the sentimental tradition as intersected by clinical discourse, one that both bears resemblance to antebellum sentimental writing and transforms the vocabulary of sympathy into a tool for experimental democracy as against the attempted hegemony of scientific positivism. John Dewey adapts futurity from the sentimental and Romantic contexts, using it as a way to govern inquiry and defend agency from the clinical gaze. Jane Addams adapts domestic virtue ethics to what she perceives as the changed social reality of industrial capitalism, converting women from homemakers to utopian

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architects. William James adapts the sentimental will to an evolutionary epoch, re-describing faith as a tool for action in the face of existential uncertainty. In fairness, each drew on and adapted the thought of the others, creating a more fluid and shifting discourse. Still, as James would say, their temperaments led them toward different but cooperative futures.

Conclusion

Emerging out of the tensions between clinical discourse, scientific progress, and sentimental subjectivity, pragmatist subjectivity represents a novel and valuable historical contingency. On the one hand embracing scientific discourse and secular culture, on the other hand defending the reasonableness of spiritual belief and the virtues of pluralism, pragmatist feminism is both the outcome of a long process of liberalization and discursive change and an important reference point for twenty-first century liberal subjects. Drawing on the sentimental tradition to reform clinical discourse, pragmatism interprets this tradition – rightly I think – as providing a potent even if problematic aesthetic and ethical framework for democratic life.

Theories of sensibility, used at the turn of the nineteenth century to pioneer polite female sociality, as in the Bluestocking circle, find their corollary in theories of sentiment in the antebellum period, theories that similarly drive women into various reformist causes. In this way, pragmatist theories of truth and feeling, drawing on a tradition of politically-charged sentimental politics, give rise to a new generation of political reformers who marshal complex rhetorical and aesthetic forms in the service of the suffrage, peace, labor, and educational reform movements. Contrary to the prevailing
histories of pragmatism, which would portray the movement as entirely male and rooted in similarly androcentric literary genealogies, I have shown not only the centrality of women like Jane Addams to philosophical pragmatism, but also the essential role played by women writers throughout the genealogy of pragmatist subjectivity. Doing so, I hope, exposes new lines of flight for future studies in sensibility, sentiment, and pragmatism over the long nineteenth century.
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