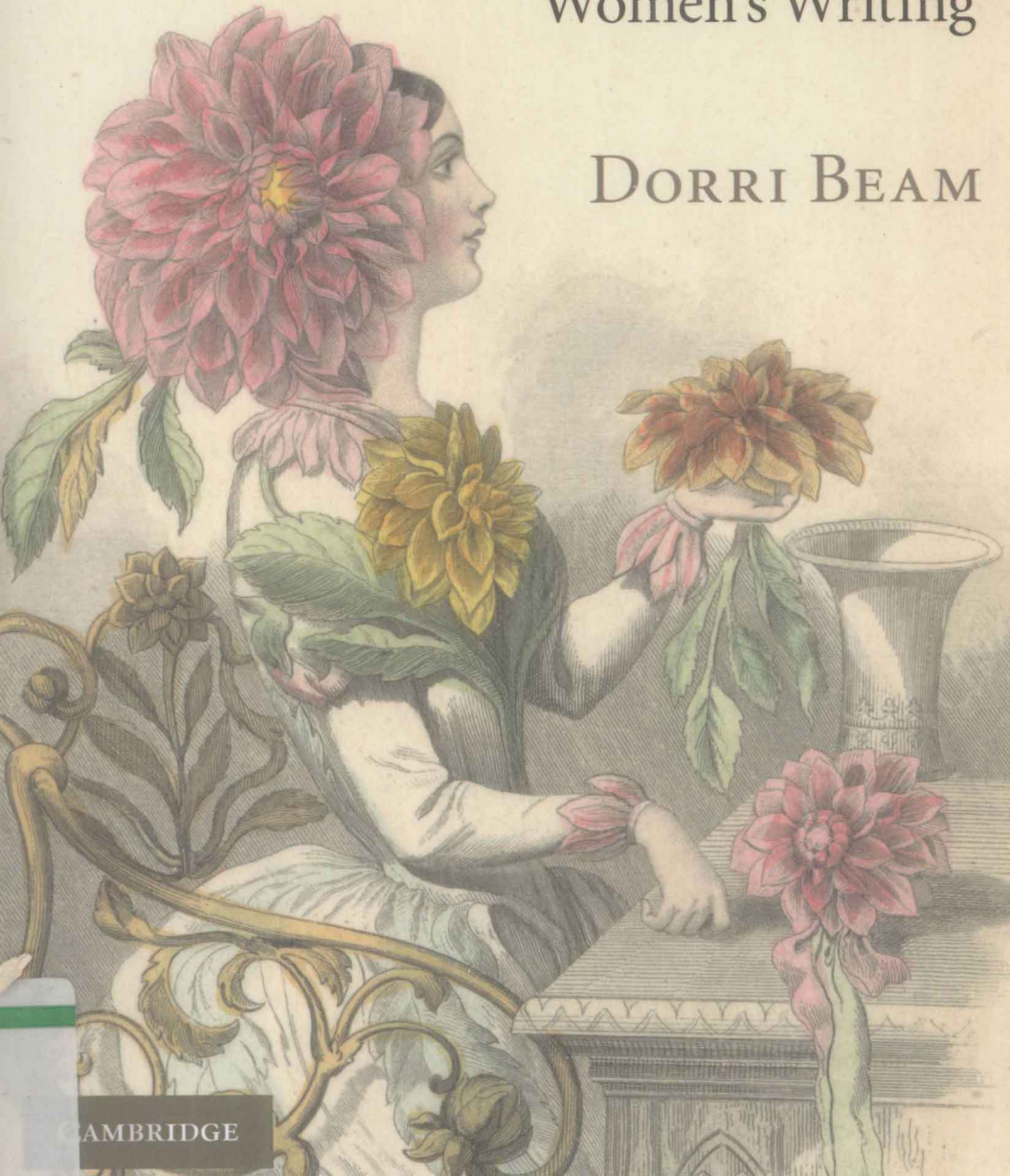


Style, Gender, and Fantasy

in Nineteenth-Century American
Women's Writing

DORRI BEAM



STYLE, GENDER, AND
FANTASY IN NINETEENTH-
CENTURY AMERICAN
WOMEN'S WRITING

DORRI BEAM

University of California, Berkeley



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521769686

© Dorri Beam 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-76968-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Acknowledgements

This book was many years in the making and owes a great deal to the colleagues and friends who have offered their support along its winding path. It began as a dissertation, with a fine team of advisors. I thank Eric Lott for his unflagging faith in my work and for the freedom to pursue my interests, without which this book would be something different, and I thank Susan Fraiman for her critical support at crucial junctures. Other teachers shaped my vision and read incipient drafts, especially Deborah McDowell, Jessica Feldman, and Roger Stein. I thank former colleagues at Randolph-Macon College for their professional support during a very formative period, especially the English Department and my former chairs, Mark Parker and Ritchie Watson.

Colleagues at Berkeley have guided this book with care and attention. One of my greatest debts is to Samuel Otter whose interest, patience, and intelligence guided every step. Dorothy Hale's incisive critical acumen helped me find my way. I counted on Mitchell Breitwieser to provide both utterly clarifying insight into thorny issues and warm collegial support. Elizabeth Abel always asked the right questions about my writing and validated my endeavors. Katie Snyder's comments on the manuscript at various junctures proved critical to the goals I hoped to achieve in this book. The friendship and insight of Kent Puckett and Bryan Wagner were invaluable. Marcial Gonzales, Joanna Picciotto, Gautam Premnath, Michael Rubenstein, Hertha Wong, Ashley Barnes, and Steve Goldsmith generously provided perceptive responses to my writing that shaped my approach and sustained my progress. Students at Berkeley have proved a source of inspiration and reminded me of what's important about teaching and research. My research assistants, Trane Devore, Peter Goodwin, Emily Hilligoss, Paul Hurh, Karen Liebowitz, Katie Simon, and Arielle Simmons, contributed immeasurably to this book.

Research for this project received support from an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation fellowship in residence at The Library Company of Philadelphia,

a W. M. Keck Foundation fellowship in residence at The Huntington Library, a Doreen B. Townsend Fellowship in the Humanities, two UC Berkeley Humanities Research Fellowships, a Hellman Family Faculty Grant, and a University of California Regents' Junior Faculty Fellowship. Portions of Chapter 4 were published in an earlier version as "The Flower of Black Female Sexuality in Pauline Hopkins' Winona" in *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women*, edited by Michael Bennett and Vanessa Dickerson, and published by Rutgers University Press in 2001.

The insights of two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press provided generative readings of the book that were a pleasure to engage in my final revisions. I thank Ross Posnock and Ray Ryan for their patience with those revisions and their support of my project. Joanna Garbutt and Sarah Price expertly guided this book through the final stages of production. Carrie Pickett proved copy-editor and indexer extraordinaire.

I thank Ashley Barnes, Michael Bennett, Kim Chabot-Davis, Vanessa Dickerson, Jeffrey Steele, and Cindy Weinstein for reading and commenting on various stages of this book. Christopher Looby, Robyn Wiegman, and Ivy Wilson have also been important interlocutors along the way. Emily Todd has read much of the book, often at a moment's notice, and helped me hone my prose. Kirsten Saxton has been an absolutely essential resource at pivotal junctures. I thank all of these friends for their generous advice and support.

Without the support of family and friends, book writing would be a lonely endeavor. Jessica Reynolds and Mike Jacob, and Alex Petrakis and Bill White, have sustained my endeavors with their warm friendship and hospitality. Liz Lauck has been an important support line. Scottie and Richard Bowditch and Bob Beam have provided generous east coast warmth and hospitality to my family and me. Two special women, Dorothy Steger and Betsey King Beam, passed away before this book was completed, but the memory of their strength and grace has often heartened me. My sister, Megan Fulcher, and brother, Adam Rabung, and their wonderful families have been sources of wit, camaraderie, and loving support. The love and encouragement of my parents, John and Marybeth Rabung, has been a necessary foundation for all of my endeavors. My sons, Max and Jonah, were born during the period I wrote this book, and they have generously shared their mother with this distracting sibling. Without the immense patience and indulgence of my husband, David, who allowed me significant release time from parenting during crucial periods of writing, this book would not exist. This book is dedicated to David, Max, and Jonah, with my love.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page vii</i>
Introduction. Highly wrought style	i
1 Florid fantasies: Fuller, Stephens, and the “other” language of flowers	37
2 Sensing the soul: mesmerism, feminism, and highly wrought fiction	81
3 Harriet Prescott Spofford’s philosophy of composition	131
4 Pauline Hopkins’ baroque folds: the styled form of <i>Winona</i>	164
Coda. The value of ornament: Gilman and Wharton	189
<i>Notes</i>	196
<i>Bibliography</i>	235
<i>Index</i>	254

Introduction. Highly wrought style

Before my second inmost sight it stood in the trance of a summer noon. The mountain summits burned in smouldering clouds of electric crimson. The cascade fell in sheets of crystallized sunshine – trailed its glory over blistering rocks, dropping at last on the cool hearts of purple mosses which waited its coming in the humid gorges below. Again the fruits in the hands of Ceres flushed with mocking mellowness. More than ever the redolent flowers blushed above the mirrors of the fountains. Waters trickle in the throats of marble lilies – tinkled, gurgled in myriads of murmurous jets.

(Mary Clemmer, *Victoire*)

October now. All the world swings at the top of its beauty; and those hills where we shall live, what robes of color fold them! Tawny filemot gilding the valleys, each seam and rut a scroll or arabesque, and all the year pouring out her heart's blood to flush the maples, the great empurpled granites warm with the sunshine they have drunk all summer! So I am to be married to-day, at noon. I like it best so; it is my hour.

(Harriet Prescott Spofford, *The Amber Gods*)

This book argues for the aesthetic pleasures and feminist politics of ornament, profusion, and verbosity in nineteenth-century America by recovering a sensuous and extravagant style of writing by women that reviewers often termed “highly wrought.” The nexus of stylistic, aesthetic, and political commitments that link the diverse writers examined in this study has been obscured by critical preoccupation with sentimental domestic writing on the one hand and long-held aversions to elaborate or ornamental modes on the other. “Highly wrought” is not synonymous with “overwrought.” Technically, the term indicates a high degree of detail, finish, or craft rather than indexing the emotional outpourings or irrational excesses with which nineteenth-century women’s writing is often associated. In fact, reviewers of the period very frequently referenced the apparent labor or craft of the texts that are the subject of this

study. Reviewers also labeled this style “fine” writing: it is finely worked (*wrought* being the past participle of *work*), thus troubling our expectation that reviewers insisted on finding women’s writing uniformly spontaneous rather than artful. Both “fine” and “highly,” however, incorporate an ambiguous judgment toggling between admiration for the surface finish and concern about excessive elaboration, labor that had become a luxury in its excess, or a surface that had become inappropriately labored.¹ The authors in this study exploit this evaluative ambiguity: they present the voluptuously turned language, the textured layering of sensual detail and image, and a syntax of endless accrual as the occasion for twinned aesthetic delight and (equally pleasing) aggression toward any aesthetic experience figured as transcendence of the feminine or material, as the artistic process is often figured in the romantic mythos they engage.

The quotations above, from two key texts in this study, display the stylistic floridity that characterizes highly wrought style. Both passages invite a trance-like entrance into worlds intensified by a noonday sun: fruits flush, waters brim and cascade, color pulses, and light saturates – even granite is “empurpled” in this wordscape of ripened prose; it is fully “done,” wrought to the *n*th degree. The place that words have made simmers and throbs – for these are visionary worlds instinct with possibility for the female narrators who articulate them; in fact, the above passages specifically present alternative tableaux to the marriages the respective speakers face. The personified elements of nature – sun, rocks, and flowers – take on lives of their own and speak to alternative sensual ways of being in the world that marriage will imperil. Such possibilities are rendered palpable for the reader by the rich massiness of the words that demand a pause, by the voluptuous play of alliteration and by the self-reflexive imagery that robes, gilds, and empurples the description. “Mellowness” is indeed “mock[ed]” by the energy and intensity brimming in this passage. *Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing* reconceives long-abjected and feminized modes – verbosity, ornament, redundancy – as having a particular aesthetic and feminist rationale. This book demonstrates the ways in which the use of such style allowed women writers to generate alternative models of gendered self and desire. Rather than positioning these women writers as writing in a separate generic tradition, I seek to demonstrate the centrality of highly wrought writing to a variety of debates at the crux of romantic literary production.

Nina Baym’s intriguing report in *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* that reviewers made a clear distinction between “highly wrought” and “domestic” fiction written by women

inaugurated my interest in the category.² Highly wrought fiction, Baym claims, was “a feverish, florid, improbable, melodramatic, exciting genre” in contrast to “quiet pictures of domestic life” that provided the reader with “a calm, soothing time” (208, 205). Yet Baym dismisses reviewers’ sense of distinction between the two classes of fiction to make room for both within the “overplot” – “the story of female trials and triumph” – of women’s fiction, as she defined it in her landmark *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (209). Though I am skeptical of Baym’s conflation of the domestic and highly wrought novel, my goal is not to survey and resuscitate a generic countertradition to domestic sentimentality, but rather to probe the distinctions Baym dismisses as *merely* stylistic. This study asks what is at stake in heightened style in fiction by women of the period and begins a conversation on how style operated within texts, in the literary field, and in constructions of gender.³

Like Baym, nineteenth-century reviewers often characterized the fictions I consider here as a separate class or genre – as “passionate fiction” and of the “intense school,” for instance. But while style, plot, and reader are identically worked up in Baym’s description, reviewers carefully singled out style for distinct treatment. In his review of Spofford’s *Azarian*, Henry James opined that “the word *intensity* expresses better than any other various shortcomings, or rather excesses” of what he dubbed “the Azarian school – for, alas! there is a school.” His concern was with stylistic extravagance, with describing “simply for the sake of describing,” with “chromatic epigrams” and a “thick *impasto* of words,” and with “*bric-a-brac*” in narrative. James’ own late (high) style was yet many years down the road; in this early paean to realist style, it was “the majority of female writers ... [who] possess[ed] in excess the fatal gift of fluency.”⁴

While James’ complaints underlie the ambivalence of reviewers, they also reverse the final judgment of most preceding commentators on Spofford and the authors who came before her. Reviewers were frequently attracted to the “power” and “richness and brilliancy of imagination” of the prose while often deploring the more transgressive subject matter.⁵ Reviewers commended Ann Stephens’ “remarkable talent of description, which in a great degree compensates for what we deem the inherent defects of her plot.”⁶ The reviews consistently disarticulate the evaluation of content from the evaluation of style, indicating that the two components were perceived to bear some independence from each other. Spofford’s “style ... is of itself a delight. In mere description she has no living rival,” asserted *Harper’s*. “No person, we think, ever painted in words such pictures”

but “she often wastes her wonderful word-embroidery upon a worthless fabric.”⁷ The regard for technique across reviews is notable and unexpected from our critical standpoint, which still attaches women to current and past histories of dismissive judgment. The reviews nonetheless point to tensions and ambivalences about how women should write and whether they could or should be judged by the same literary values as men. Thomas Wentworth Higginson captured reviewers’ ambivalence when he claimed of Spofford’s *Azarian*, “It is the style of the book, however, to which one must revert with admiration, not unmingled with criticism, and it may be, a trifle of just indignation.”⁸ In the same breath that reviewers find something arresting in the prose, they very frequently call on the author to chasten it. Publisher Charles Peterson claimed Stephens “has no rival ... in the higher walks of passionate fiction,” though her style “is sometimes too gorgeous, and would, now and then, bear softening.”⁹

This brief digest of reviews already demonstrates the complex ways in which style was gendered. Language that was not transparent, that did not grant immediate access to the text or to the author, was inappropriate for a woman writer. Language that seemed to evidence labor worked against the limited purview of women’s expression as both spontaneous and generic, as without reflection or ambition, without art. Literary style, often regarded as the textual embodiment of personality, its display evidencing the “will” of the writer, would invalidate the generic femininity of the production by displaying the art and the individuality of the writer. The term *wrought*, used most frequently to describe work on material goods, crafted or manufactured, such as wrought iron, spun silk, or hammered metal, itself suggests the materiality and decorative nature that is assigned to women’s labor through the label “highly wrought.” Yet women staked a position in the literary field by breaking the codes that were to function as their point of departure – by, for instance, transforming appropriate styles of description and ornament into an agencied and purposive mode.

To exceed the convention of feminine form – to write with opacity or flourish, to body forth in writing any kind of recalcitrant textuality or uncongenial narrative manner was, as a woman writer, to have style, a dubious accessory. We might turn, for instance, to the theatrical exasperation of Margaret Fuller’s critics upon encountering the difficult extravagance of her writing, registered primarily as material overabundance – vaguely imposing as entrancing ornament or amassing substance. “Why [might not] the lady ... keep on talking in the same strain until doomsday?” exclaimed Orestes Brownson.¹⁰ Her writing was “abounding with eloquent passages, and affluent in illustration,” Lydia

Maria Child demurred, but such features led less sympathetic reviewers to suspect “she was too conscious of style,” that “her rich wares are ... displayed to the admiring gaze of her astonished auditors.”¹¹ Affirming while allaying such suspicions, Emerson assures readers of his *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* that, in conversation, Fuller was “very well able to dispose of all this pile of native and foreign ornaments.”¹² Fuller’s fictional analogues also leap to mind: Hawthorne’s Zenobia and Poe’s Ligeia – intellectual, writing women of (frighteningly) prepossessing personal style. It seems that when an affluence of creativity and knowledge take up residence in the female figure, a breaching of artistic form occurs, registered in these characters’ mesmerizing stories, extravagance of expression, and luxury of dress, all of which overwhelm the social bounds for decorous feminine speech, flesh, or manner. Their lush vitality of person and speech seems to challenge, in different ways, the storytelling of the narrator but ultimately yields to bring his story to fruition. Style itself is a figure and theme here, made charged and palpable by its proximity to the feminine; Hawthorne and Poe examine the relation of style and gender with an eye to the milieu they share with women writers.

My aim has been to understand the style’s role in relation to the gendered desire with which it is insistently associated within the text and in reception. My readings link the plot’s presentation of the barriers to women’s desire with the style’s registering of that desire on another textual level, but find that it is frequently played out in tension with the formal drive of the text toward closure. It is as if the transgressive, adventurous content motivates the authors to capture its excesses stylistically. Through style they reformulate residual and unaccommodated feminine doubt, ambition, anger, longing, and pleasure as essential, substantial, and palpable. The quickening of style that seems to occur in highly wrought writing – its quasi-embodiment of impersonal feminine will, its expressive agency, and its fecundating textures, sounds, and images – is a surface event. But while florid writing is often considered as itself a cover for more authentic expression or as an impoverished substitute for something that cannot be said, among these experimental writers, florid writing emerges as the seat of expression, and it stages the central dramas of the text.

Thus along with the striking stylistic patterns that emerge over the course of my selections, this book also gathers a fair proportion of works that feature first-person female narrators who are already authors of transgression within the story. Marriage is often the antagonist rather than the goal – a mistake the narrator seeks to escape or the crisis around

which the fiction revolves. Generally the plot turns on a division between a youthful period of naive presumption about one's power to pursue sexual and social desires, and an ensuing disillusionment about the gendered and raced barriers to such a design. While that might describe a version of Baym's overplot for women's fiction, or indeed any narrative, these texts are not mistakable as domestic. They contain elements of what Susan K. Harris calls "overt thematic radicalism" – adultery, free love, interracial marriage, female rule, and withdrawal from society are all entertained and indulged. Yet the fictions' very failure to conform to domestic lines has made these texts illegible within recent frameworks; furthermore, they disappoint a feminist critical practice that seeks to chart a trajectory of characterological self-determination. This study thus continues in a direction first opened by Harris' insistence on attention to the "formal level as well as thematic" in nineteenth-century women's writing, but establishes nothing so concrete as a picture of "female independence, competence, emotional complexity, and intellectual acumen" that Harris finds in the "middles" and under the covers of contemporaneous domestic "exploratory" novels.¹³ Style offers something different from a glimpse of expanded arenas of action or transformed social roles.

The women I present here used highly wrought style to make a series of overlapping gendered claims: on the literary culture in which they participate, on the genres in which they write, and on the ideological presumptions of the reader. Across my chapters, these claims fall into three categories. First, the writers imitate and amplify presumptions about women's writing and their access to style by embracing a "gorgeous" style of writing and enhancing the prosiness and mass of their writing. Second, they overproduce the features of the feminine within literary romantic modes to call such features into question and thus to locate a new position for such feminized discourse, one that frequently disturbs the reading experience. Third, they offer, through an aesthetic experience of sensual language, a sense of an alternative ontology – a mode of pleasure and way of being that is not rooted in gendered anatomy. My archival reconstructions of the writers' appropriations of flower language, mesmeric discourse, and theories of ornament contextualizes their stylistic choices, the particular experiences they imagine generating, and the feminist solutions they wish to impart.

The textual experiments I portray help us to better understand, and perhaps differently place, other texts that I have not had space to treat at length. For example, though Elizabeth Stoddard's style seems more condensed and taut than elaborately wrought, her concern in *The Morgesons*

with undercutting the woman's plot of self-cultivation and acculturation in favor of indulgences in a sensual style that renders the world opaque and strange rather than assimilable and interpretable, is another version of the experiments I describe here. Through different techniques, Stoddard achieves similar effects to those I depict, forcing the reader to pause and savor her language.¹⁴ That Stoddard, in Jessica Feldman's construction of her aims, uses words that "announce themselves as words rather than as transparent windows through which realistically portrayed scenes are to be used" or that she (like Stephane Mallarmé, here quoted by Feldman) "aims to 'describe *not the object itself, but the effect it produces*'" does not make her a lone modernist *avant la lettre*, but rather part of a significant formation of women writers testing the links between style, literary effect, and gender.¹⁵ We might also consider the pronounced aesthetic and affective investment in descriptive language in women's later regionalist writing. Like the writers I study, Constance Fenimore Woolson uses an intensive descriptive mode to offset and even challenge the expressive primacy of plot and character.¹⁶ When, as Katherine Swett argues of Woolson's "scenery fiction," she attempts to "paint' a place with words" and charges her endeavor with a sense of aesthetic and even sexual transgression (163), Woolson reveals her link to the predecessors I discuss, despite their clear generic differences.

Sandra Zagarell, faced with the way *The Morgesons* troubles critical assumptions, including her own, about what women wrote, calls for us to address "'nineteenth-century American women's writing' as a question or a set of questions, rather than taking it for granted as cultural terrain about which we already pretty much know what we need to."¹⁷ Zagarell speaks for recent, general restlessness with our understanding of the forms that nineteenth-century literature took, and the inadequacy of our attention to their actual textual productions and contexts. Cindy Weinstein has returned to the archive of sentimental-domestic literature to redefine the terms, value, and form of its investment in family. Mary Louise Kete and Elizabeth Dillon have illuminated the formal workings of sentimentality, a mode long assumed to be without aesthetic rationale. Julia Stern calls for a "post-sentimental genealogy" to move beyond the sentimental novel's exclusive claim on interpretive categories. Virginia Jackson, Mary Loeffelholz, and Eliza Richards, among others, abolish any sense of complacency we may once have harbored about the category of Victorian poetry and its production.¹⁸

My attention to highly wrought style in women's writing is also motivated by a wish to intervene in gendered literary historical constructions

of nineteenth-century America and to engage the aesthetic dimension of texts while doing so. My work joins a recent trend in American studies toward “no more separate spheres,” but works on a different front by revealing women’s integral participation in and gendered recasting of literary romanticism, rather than arguing for men’s investment in literary sentimentalism as have many of these studies. I use the archive to rethink the position of women in the literary field through the historical and textual archaeology of an overlooked aesthetic mode and then bring that mode to bear on previously separate field formations. I return to the archives, not to recall forgotten authors for the sake of a rote representational politics, but to fundamentally reconstitute in deeply historical terms, the nature of literary endeavor, values, and forms for the nineteenth century.

This book’s engagement with the highly wrought writing of Margaret Fuller, Ann Stephens, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, Margaret Sweat, Mary Clemmer, Harriet Spofford, and Pauline Hopkins shifts the contours of the nineteenth-century literary field and allows us to rechart the imaginative life of both black and white women to show that aesthetic experiment, literary ambition, adventure, and fantasy were the province of women as well as men in nineteenth-century America. Women and men interact across a field in which women embraced the idealism of American romanticism and they responded creatively to the gendered binaries that underwrote it, while simultaneously shaping male approaches to shared dilemmas. The writers in this study were intellectual women at the center of nineteenth-century literary enclaves such as New York salon culture, the young *Atlantic Monthly*, and *The Colored American Magazine*, where many acted as magazine editors and book reviewers, and their fiction reveals their investments in shaping the literary culture and values of their milieu.¹⁹ My revisionist history begins in the dynamic literary setting of antebellum New York, where writers featured in this study mixed with Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, as well as social reformers and intellectuals of all stripes, from the late 1830s to the early 1860s. I track shared stylistic interests across locations to the Boston of Harriet Spofford and Pauline Hopkins, and across periods as well, for Hopkins turns to highly wrought style at the turn of the twentieth century to innovate a form of African American romance. This group of women writers, some unread today, others better known but mistakenly considered anomalous, share with each other and with male writers romantic techniques of anti-mimeticism and self-reflexivity. I discuss, for instance, Fuller’s revisionist Transcendentalism vis-à-vis Emerson, Hawthorne’s anxious defense of the nature of the “romance,” and Spofford’s arch

appropriation of Poe's philosophy of composition. What has been missed is the depth and shaping force of the interaction – by turns, contentious and appreciative, playful and transformative – between women and men who share in a debate about the romantic project.

I seek to restructure relations between women writers as well, by bringing the feminist theory and prose experiments of salon attendant and Transcendentalist luminary Margaret Fuller (long in her own separate sphere) into a central and formative relation with a contemporaneous body of fiction by women. As the following section suggests in more detail, placing Fuller in the context of fiction by women serves to dismantle an accompanying divide between fiction and nineteenth-century feminist politics as well. Recovery of highly wrought style reveals that literature itself was a primary site of feminist articulation – that Fuller and her contemporaries needed literary language and figure, and modes of fiction and fantasy, to fully develop and embody their feminist political views. Exposing the points of mutual constitution in three conventionally unrelated fields – fiction by women, feminism, and romanticism, I aim to demonstrate that women used highly wrought style to promote an equivalence between literary and social experiments, and to suggest the challenge from within romanticism presented by highly wrought style's particular kind of literary world-making. Fuller's existence across all of these often oppositionally configured spaces makes her an ideal exemplum for my study.

FULLER, FANTASY, AND "SEPARATE SPHERES"

George Foster's *New York in Slices* (1849) is interesting, but not unusual, for its presentation of Fuller as only one of a number of iconoclastic intellectual women. Hypothetically scanning the room at Anne Lynch's famed literary salon, Foster observes that the "ladies are scattered all about as thick as stars; yet we do not know how to approach them." One is certainly struck by the redundancy of luminescent women in the room and by the quality of Foster's response, so similar to the kind of mixed attraction and repulsion Fuller's biographers record as the special burden of her particular public presence. He notes the "stately" Oakes Smith "talking in a bright, cold, steady stream, like an antique fountain by moonlight." Farther on, "nestled under a light shawl of heraldic devices" is the "spiritual and dainty" Fanny Osgood. Next to her, the eyes of a "Mrs. –" (perhaps Stephens) are "humid with the light of some brilliant fancy she has just been caging," while Fuller's eyes are likewise "lamping inspiration" and Grace Greenwood is casting "bright glances of lambent defiance

around her".²⁰ This revealing vignette allows us to think of reconnecting Fuller to New York's *bas bleu*, often referred to as the "starry sisterhood." The epithet itself recalls Fuller's signature asterisk in the *Tribune*; its editor, Horace Greeley, was fond of calling her "the star" of the *Tribune*, and her biographer, Joan von Mehren, notes one reader criticized the "starry" literary editor for her abstract idealism.²¹ Foster's description of a constellation of intellectual women, isolated and ridiculous in their radiant intensity, is echoed by Perry Miller when he claims, "one factor in our settling a public image of Margaret Fuller is that she cannot be dissociated from the hyperbolically female intellectualism of the period, the slightest invocation of which invites our laughter".²² Apparently Fuller can be dissociated, however; certainly other New York intellectual women did not appear in Miller's foundational *The Raven and the Whale*, a crucial exclusion still shaping our perception of the antebellum literary field.²³

The terms under which Fuller's segregation from women writers transpired suggest much more than her own critical fate. Those terms provide a key to the elisions in the inaugural recovery of American women's writing that help to account for the critical eclipse of highly wrought writing by women. Ann Douglas' *The Feminization of American Culture* in particular has determined our treatment of both Fuller and nineteenth-century women writers, which is to say that they are treated separately and dichotomously. In contrast to women fiction writers, Fuller's "characteristic crusade was against the myths so integral to status oppression: ... that all women are incapable of intellectual effort and naturally seek domestic life".²⁴ Fuller faces down a whole mob, as it seems, of scribblers from the flanks of Douglas' book. This is the same role Fuller performs in other 1970s' studies such as Barbara Welter's *Dimity Convictions* and Susan P. Conrad's *Perish the Thought: Intellectual Women in Romantic America 1830-1860*. Central to the framework of these books is the notion that popular novelists, espousing a feminine ethos, reinforced the problems faced by female intellectuals endeavoring in masculine realms of knowledge. It is thus that another, less remarked, configuration of the separate spheres rubric is mobilized. To modify Baym's phrasing from her ironic description of masculinist literary history, women fiction writers are the villains in these 1970s' melodramas of beset intellectual womanhood.²⁵ Fuller has no role in subsequent studies of women fiction writers because 1980s' and 1990s' critics were concerned with either a transvaluative or deconstructive assessment of the feminized sphere from which Fuller had already been excluded.²⁶ Revisionist critics who have since deconstructed the notion of separate spheres have failed

to register the role Fuller was made to play in the critical construction of the separate-spheres rubric.

Because the excision of Fuller from the field of popular women writers was a definitional moment that determined the shape and content of our current notion of separate spheres, Fuller's role is key not only to the archive we turn to, but to the terms we bring to it. When Douglas writes that "Fuller's life can be viewed as an effort to find what she called her 'sovereign self' by disavowing fiction for history, the realm of 'feminine' fantasy for the realm of 'masculine' reality" (262), she creates a hierarchical divide between fantasy and "reality" that privileges the "real." This unfantastic Fuller had been the preferred Fuller ever since her brother Arthur amputated certain sections (about one-fifth) of the posthumous edition of her *Summer on the Lakes* in an attempt to circumvent speculation that the excised stories about passionate, magnetic women were semiautobiographical. Because these sections included her flirtations with a mystical feminine difference – and admittedly because just such an identification with sibylline magnetism was also used to limit and belittle Fuller's personal and political life, as well as her afterlife in history – her enthrallment with mystical discourses has generally been anathema to the project of resurrecting Fuller as an intellect and activist.²⁷ The recent work of Julie Ellison and Christina Zwarg does much to rebuild connections between feminist politics and romanticism within Fuller's career and argues for a continuity between Fuller's early writing (*Dial* essays and *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*) in Concord and her later *Tribune* journalism written in New York and then Europe. In doing so, they rightly seek to correct a division in Fuller's career, a division that is marked as stylistic and critically invoked at the expense of the earlier writing. The earlier writing is frequently considered, most notably by Larry Reynolds, as florid and politically evasive in comparison to the greater social realism and perceived radicalism of the *Tribune* dispatches.²⁸ Ironically, such a narrative of Fuller's career internalizes the feminine fantasy and masculine reality bifurcation that her work had been used to project onto the literary field. What this critical history reveals is that it was not Fuller who disavowed fiction or "feminine" fantasy, but her critics, and their implicit aim was to isolate Fuller from women writers.²⁹

The Fuller/fiction dichotomy had implications for the recovery of women fiction writers as well. Given the increasingly narrow archive I have described, a constellation of related terms have remained outside the sphere(s) of the debate over women's fiction: these include radical reform, sexuality, feminism, fantasy, and, until recently, aesthetics. Critics