

PLOTS AND PROPOSALS

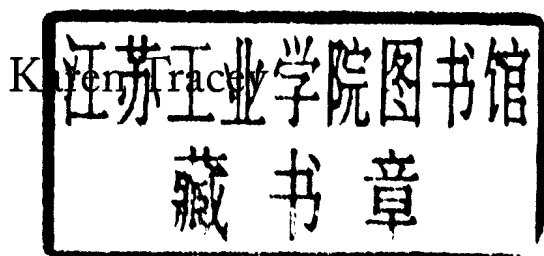
American Women's Fiction, 1850-90

KAREN TRACEY



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INTRODUCTION

The Renegotiation of Marriage

IN 1857 the British novelist Wilkie Collins, disingenuously posing as a family man who avidly reads novels, protested the tendency of contemporary women novelists to create aggressive heroines and to place those heroines in peculiar proposal plots. In an unsigned column entitled "Petition to Novel-Writers," which was printed in both Britain and the United States, Collins celebrates the conventional heroine of the popular novel, characterizing her as the "old-fashioned Heroine, who has lived and loved and wept for centuries. I have taken her to my bosom thousands of times already, and ask nothing better than to indulge in that tender luxury thousands of times again. I love her blushing cheek, her gracefully-rounded form, her chiselled nose, her slender waist, her luxuriant tresses which always escape from the fillet that binds them" (183). He then complains about a new heroine who appears to be replacing the yielding and responsive traditional one: "[We] now protest positively, even indignantly, against a new kind of heroine—a bouncing, ill-conditioned, impudent young woman, who has been introduced among us of late years. I venture to call this wretched and futile substitute for our dear, tender, gentle, loving old heroine, the Man-Hater; because, in every book in which she appears, it is her mission from first to last to behave as badly as possible to every man with whom she comes in contact" (183).

What makes this "Man-Hater" so different from the old-fashioned heroine? Her bad behavior primarily consists in taking control of her own courtship plot by denying the initial advances of the hero she is in love with, by directing her life course by some star other than "being in love": "When her lover makes her an offer of marriage, she receives it in the light of a personal

insult, goes up to her room immediately afterwards, and flies into a passion with herself, because she is really in love with the man all the time—comes down again, and snubs him before company instead of making a decent apology—pouts and flouts at him on all after-occasions, until the end of the book is at hand—then, suddenly, turns round and marries him!" (183).

What new plot is this? Heroines have always turned down unsuitable suitors, so that cannot be Collins's complaint. These new heroines are aggressively turning down the very heroes they are eventually to wed; they are presumably finding something better to do (for a while, at least) than marry their destined mate, the (un)fortunate suitor they humble for chapter after chapter before relenting and accepting a proposal after all:

If we feel inclined to ask why she could not, under the circumstances, receive his advances with decent civility at first, we are informed that her "maidenly consciousness" prevented it. . . . Every individual in the novel who wears trousers and gets within range of her maidenly consciousness, becomes her natural enemy from that moment. If he makes a remark on the weather, her lip curls; if he asks leave to give her a potato at dinner-time . . . , her neck curves in scorn; if he offers a compliment, finding she won't have a potato, her nostril dilates. Whatever she does, even in her least aggressive moments, she always gets the better of all the men. (184–85)

What is wrong with this new plot?—not merely the heroine's bad manners, but the disturbing fact that she "always gets the better of all the men." In this reading of popular fiction, plots are not just stories to while away the time. They may represent reality, perhaps may even wield the cultural power to change reality. In the case of this new heroine and this new plot, Collins attempts to laugh the significance away, to mock the writers and their heroines in an attempt to disempower both and to force them to retreat into the more comfortable old-fashioned courtship mode.¹

Collins shifts his concern to the relationship between novel conventions and real life, between fictional characters and real people. He objects to the "new-fashioned heroine" because, he insists, she "is a libel on her sex. As a husband and a father, I solemnly deny that she is in any single respect a natural woman" (184). And yet he fears she may reflect or inspire a change in actual female behavior, because the opposition heroine is set up "by lady-novelists, who ought surely to be authorities when female characters are concerned. Is the Man-Hater a true representative of young women, now-a-days?" (184). If she is, then as a father he fears for his sons. In his assumed persona, Collins considers the horrors his son may face when he becomes of

marriageable age, if he is confronted with a woman who dares to assert her dignity by controlling her own courtship:

My unhappy offspring, what a prospect awaits you! One forbidding phalanx of Man-Haters, bristling with woman's dignity, and armed to the teeth with maidenly consciousness, occupies the wide matrimonial field, look where you will! Ill-fated youth, yet a few years, and the female neck will curve, the female nostril dilate, at the sight of you. You see that stately form, those rustling skirts, that ample brow, and fall on your knees before it, and cry "Marry me, marry me, for Heaven's sake!" My deluded boy, that is not a woman—it is a Man-Hater—a whited sepulchre full of violent expostulations and injurious epithets. She will lead you the life of a costermonger's ass, until she has exhausted her whole stock of maidenly consciousness; and she will then say (in effect, if not in words): "Inferior animal, I loved you from the first—I have asserted my womanly dignity by making an abject fool of you in public and private—now you may marry me!" Marry her not, my son! Go rather to the slave-market at Constantinople—buy a Circassian wife, who has heard nothing and read nothing about Man-Haters, bring her home . . . and trust to your father to welcome an Asiatic daughter-in-law, who will not despise him for the unavoidable misfortune of being—a Man! (184)

However ironically the passage is cast (the comic mask slips from the diatribe with the phrase *whited sepulchre*), the article betrays a fear that women who "hear and read" about the fictional Man-Haters might become more like them: "Ever since I read the first novel with a Man-Hater in it, I have had my eye on [my daughters'] nostrils, and I can make affidavit that I have never yet seen them dilate, under any circumstances or in any society. . . . In men's society, their manners (like those of all other girls whom I meet with) are natural and modest; and—in the cases of certain privileged men—winning, into the bargain" (184). Despite such reassuring observations, Collins's persona finds this new paradigm of marriage so horrifying that he falls back on imperialism and racism to invoke a preferred model of silence and submission. His son should take the drastic measure of buying himself a slave of another race rather than encourage displays of womanly dignity. By drawing, however facetiously, an analogy between wife and slave, Collins sets up the very comparison used by feminist crusaders in their efforts at marriage reform.² The passive, clinging feminine nature represented in the "old-fashioned heroine" permits the husband's dominance; the assertive new heroine challenges that dominance at a vulnerable point: the proposal scene that should ensure the transference of woman from father to husband.

In this study I will excavate and reconstruct the American wing of the

countertradition in popular nineteenth-century women's novels identified and critiqued by Wilkie Collins. Double-proposal novels, as I call them, can be identified by the heroine's rejection and acceptance of proposals from the same suitor, and they can be analyzed according to how their authors deploy two specific opportunities created by the double-proposal device: the opened space between rejected and accepted proposals and the inherent contrast between rejected and accepted marriage conditions. The unique grammar of the double-proposal plot offers unusual opportunities for a study of literary history. Because of the force of regional sociopolitical identities and the major historical epochs marked off by the Civil War, American double-proposal novels published between 1850 and 1890 render a particularly compelling story of how popular fiction can generate a longitudinal and lateral dialogic relationship with the particular literary, social, and political conditions within which it is produced and read. Each writer considered in this study writes double-proposal narratives that manifest both how she is determined by her historical circumstances and how she is determined to change those circumstances. The novels in this tradition are not ready to shun marriage as the heroine's best long-term option, but through their double-proposal plots they argue for more egalitarian concepts of marriage and for greater autonomy for women both without and within marriage. When American writers deployed the British-born double-proposal plot, they demonstrated how literary adaptations may become, perhaps inevitably, cultural negotiations.

Several double-proposal novels have already been given readings as potentially powerful feminist texts, though the function of the double-proposal plot as central to that power has not been specifically identified. But they all share the strong heroine, countertraditional courtship plot, and interest in marriage reform that Wilkie Collins discerned with such apparent dread. The most recognizable double-proposal stories are from the British side of the Atlantic: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. The American version best-known today is probably Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis*, which specifically invokes *Aurora Leigh* as its inspiration, but several of the most successful nineteenth-century writers also used the plot, among them Augusta Evans and Caroline Hentz, who attempt in their novels to negotiate a balance between loyalty to the antebellum southern polity and desire for increased freedom for privileged white women. Some double-proposal novels, including *Jane Eyre* and Evans's *St. Elmo*, were phenomenal popular successes, while others, such as Laura J. Curtis Bullard's overtly feminist *Christine*,

received little notice and no reprintings.³ As I reconstruct this plot and its cultural history, I look at particular authors, texts, and contexts, examining the books themselves and any records I could uncover of how they were read, reviewed, or critiqued. At times the intertextual dialogue is clear and specific, at other times it is more oblique. At times readers and reviewers specifically noted their reaction to the courtship plots, at other times they were silent.

Because this study tells the story of a plot, my arguments are rooted in close readings of the novels, readings that then open out into questions of reader response, literary traditions, and social history. Judith Fetterley has expressed concern that studies of nineteenth-century writers that are not grounded in such close reading may be functioning to re-exclude women writers from scholarly consideration rather than to forward the work of recovery and reevaluation. She suggests that the negating slant of much criticism and the scarcity of large-scale studies of nineteenth-century women's writing may be attributed in part to "the dismantling of the interpretive strategies developed during the 1950s and '60s to establish the current canon of American literature, the strategies of close reading and thematic study":

While a variety of new interpretive strategies less interested in textual analysis may be performed on works already canonized without affecting their canonical status, it is not clear that such strategies can substantially affect the literary status of noncanonical works. . . . Those of us interested in nineteenth-century American women writers may need to find ways to revitalize modes of criticism no longer fashionable because these modes may represent stages in the process of literary evaluation that we cannot do without. (605)

By drawing on theories of the intertextual and dialogic workings of texts, my study of these novels is a venture toward this revitalization. Throughout the formal analyses of particular novels, I work to retain a continuous sense of the texts as dynamically interacting with readers and critics, both contemporary and historical, and with various regional, cultural, and political realities. The result poses one response to the contradiction Fetterley has noticed between her students' enthusiastic response to reading the work of nineteenth-century American women writers and critics' persistent tendency to dismiss the same work as irrelevant: "I puzzle over the juxtaposition of, on the one hand, a powerful connection between the contemporary reader and the texts of nineteenth-century American women, a connection that offers one strategy for making these texts central to the discourse on nineteenth-century American literature, and on the other, a critical climate that

seems, whether by design or not, to undermine that connection and interpretive strategy" (606). One rich site where we can investigate the connection between these texts and the readers who are enthusiastic about them (then and now) is provided through the dialogue produced by double-proposal fiction. This dialogue is generated at the level of plot but, because the inherent structural elements of the double-proposal plot themselves open up literary and cultural debates about women's work, courtship, and marriage, the conversation also incorporates extratextual literary and cultural voices; as a result, these courtship narratives provoke discussion at multiple levels: the intratextual, the intertextual, and the contextual.

Within each text, the debates generated by the double proposal are sometimes left implicit between the bifurcated plot lines, but at other times they are articulated by narrators and characters, producing a multivocal dialogue that lends itself to analysis in terms of Bakhtin's heteroglossia: "Each character's speech possesses its own belief system. . . . Thus it may also refract authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second language for the author" (315). Double-proposal authors apparently have many such "second languages," which makes it difficult to fix on a single message in their texts. That difficulty becomes a power rather than a fault because the novels are then more compelling as cultural artifacts of American history in a time of rapid change. As Diane Price Herndl has suggested, the critic, like the text, can establish a dialogic stance by looking "for points where disagreeing discourses do not cohere and examin[ing] what those points of contradiction can tell about the boundaries themselves"; the goal is to "emphasize the plural meanings—even contradictory meanings—in the text" rather than to privilege a single reading ("Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic" 18). Double-proposal novels frequently lead readers toward contradictory conclusions because the impetus of the development plot is derailed or muffled by the apparently incompatible movement of the courtship plot. This derailing and muffling, I believe, becomes a crucial part of the story of women's lives as told by the novels.

The conversations that I identify between double-proposal texts and their cultural milieus take place both through explicit allusion and through more subtle intertextual means. The grammar of the double-proposal plot provides the intertextual poetics that relate these novels to one another and to other narratives to which they are both similar and dissimilar. To borrow the terminology of Jonathan Culler, the "rhetorical or literary presupposition" (116) inherent in these novels helps us articulate ways in which texts engage

one another and the discursive space of their historical moment without requiring evidence of direct influence. Double-proposal novels address each other, and they also presuppose the existence of other versions of courtship plots: the single-proposal plot, the double-suitor plot, and the seduction plot (or, the courtship plot gone awry). They also, typically, anticipate a reader's familiarity with certain recurring character types, in particular the Byronic hero and the domestic heroine. But even more intriguing than the literary intertextuality is the historical contextuality of double-proposal novels because, taken as a group, they generate an ongoing dialogue that replicates within a defined body of texts what Hans Robert Jauss argues is the general story of literary history: "The historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work that can be conceived in the relations between message and receiver as well as between question and answer, problem and solution" (19). Double-proposal novels pose questions and problems about courtship and marriage in the rejected proposal(s) and then partially answer those questions or solve those problems with the accepted proposal. The marriage endings of these novels always contain within themselves the seeds of new questions, present renewed problems (sometimes identified as "tensions"), which subsequent double-proposal novels then take up. When a double-proposal protagonist accepts the very suitor she rejected earlier, the novels draw attention to the contrasted potential marriages and suggest a view of love as a relative rather than an all-subsuming value for women and of marriage conditions as negotiable. Doubling proposals allowed authors to explore competing ideologies about women's roles while containing some of the potential disruption through marriage conclusions.

As Collins's review of the double-proposal form demonstrates, the double-proposal plot could profoundly challenge a reader's expectations; in the conventional courtship story, heroines do not turn down heroes unless a misunderstanding or insuperable barrier interferes. When a double-proposal heroine refuses the hero not because of misunderstanding but because she prefers to remain unmarried or because she disapproves of the hero, readers are frustrated and puzzled, and the cognitive dissonance they experience may lead to a change in their thinking. Terry Eagleton suggests that criticism should "seek to explain the literary work in terms of the ideological structure of which it is a part, yet which it transforms by its art: it would search out the principle which both ties the work to ideology and distances it from it" (19). For the novels I study, the double-proposal plot is itself the "princi-

ple" that ties the novels to marriage ideology and distances them from it, that creates dissonance within the reader that is not entirely resolved by apparently harmonious happy endings.

Literary theorists speculate that both writers and readers are aware of changing ideologies at unconscious levels and that such awareness may call out questions or resistances within writers and readers that can be expressed and responded to through literature; if this is true, then popular literature must be both voice and instrument of social change. Jauss argues that when a reader confronts texts which break his or her literary or cultural horizon of expectations, that reader undergoes a "change of horizons" through negation of familiar experiences or through raising newly articulated experiences to the level of consciousness" (25). We may think of Jauss's "newly articulated experiences" as existing within author and reader as Raymond Williams's "structures of feeling," an unarticulated set of "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs" (132). Because the double-proposal plot enabled writers and readers to have their independent heroine and marry her off as well, and therefore to deny or turn back or ignore the very challenges that give life to the protagonists' plots, I would guess that the ideological negotiations apparent in the dialogue generated by double proposals may have often worked at unconscious levels. The double-proposal novels provide an example of how a literature that appears in its surface structure to offer no challenge to literary or cultural expectations, to be what Jauss would dismiss as merely "culinary" or entertainment art" because it fulfills expectations and "confirms familiar sentiments," may, for a reader more carefully engaged with characters and plots, in fact be challenging and altering the very conventions it appears to blandly reproduce (25).

To make informed guesses about how double-proposal novels may have influenced or spoken for or challenged or pleased readers, I attempt in this study to historicize readers as much as limited information permits. Some scholars have provided compelling social histories of women in the nineteenth century that enable me to reconstruct some of the cultural circumstances that would have influenced the writing, publishing, and reading of these novels. In addition, adapting James Machor's approach to reader-response criticism allows me to consider how nineteenth-century discourses construct groups of readers and then to examine how specific novels invoke and respond to such groups. Machor argues that criticism should identify and analyze "assumptions about the way reading should proceed and the types of readers that existed, as well as assumptions about the way fiction engaged

its audience and the roles it implied for its readers" ("Fiction and Informed Reading" 326). This approach partially brackets the question of whether the posited audiences are "real," but yet, Machor argues, "Examined in light of interpretive strategies of the time . . . the relation between antebellum fiction and its audience can be seen as a process of reconciliation and disruption that depended on the conventions readers were expected to bring to fiction" (342). Grounded in public discourses and literary conventions, Machor's "process of reconciliation and disruption" correlates with Jauss's more general pattern of "question and answer." When I speculate about how authors may have anticipated and addressed certain groups of readers—for example, the reviewers as self-styled cultural arbiters, the avid consumers of fiction (widely presumed to be young and female), the moral guardians (parents or clergy of those avid consumers)—I adapt Machor's strategy while keeping in mind the cultural and literary horizon of expectations I have defined through historical and literary research.

To pause for an example of how a text may confirm one reader's set of expectations while challenging another's, consider the case of *Ruth Hall* (1855) by Sara Payson Willis Parton (Fanny Fern). Nina Baym identifies Parton's work as angry, containing "the fiercest repudiation of kin and blood ties in women's writing of the time," and the most cursory review of *Ruth Hall*'s plot bears out that statement (*Woman's Fiction* 251). Parton's heroine, widowed and impoverished early in the novel and neglected by in-laws and blood relations, forges an independent career, rejecting marriage. One of *Ruth Hall*'s first reviewers managed, however, to read it as a conventional domestic novel, in fact as the quintessential domestic novel, a paradigmatic example of "the miracle of *inspired mediocrity*," which is described as follows:

It is rather everybody's experience; it is pious, pathetic, funny, and dramatic—it is equal from first to last—never rising above the key note, never sinking below it; always intelligible; always correct and proper; not one new thought is introduced from first to last; the heroine is within the scope and reach of every honest woman, the hero is within the grasp of every honest man. The villains, are every day villains, to be met with in every square and on every wharf; there is nothing astounding, nothing incredible, and to crown all, virtue is seen to bring its own reward. (Rev. of *Ruth Hall* 443)

This *Southern Quarterly Review* critic claims that this list includes "all the conditions demanded by the middle class" (443) from whence comes the mass of readers with their "small intelligences" (449), identified as four-fifths female and only moderately educated (440). This group is contrasted to "an

audience of taste, more appreciative, more rewarding, than even the massed enthusiasts of inspired mediocrity . . . the audience that turn abashed and insulted from the presumptuous littleness of 'Ruth Hall' (450). The writer appears not to notice the obvious contradiction implied by the claim that the audience of taste contrasted to the "small intelligences" once "thrilled to *Jane Eyre*" (450). A huge popular success, *Jane Eyre* must have been enjoyed by many of the readers who this reviewer wishes to believe could not have responded to it: "What has Nancy [a hypothetical reader of inspired mediocrity] to do with the storm-gusts of passion that heave and vex the pale governess of Miss Brontë?" (441-42).

Working with these assumptions about readers, and operating within an interpretive strategy that allowed for only those readings of women's novels that affirmed the domestic sphere and the imperatives of marriage, this same reviewer denies that a person like Ruth Hall could be both an engaging character and a public success: "From the commencement of her literary career to the publication of 'Life and Sketches,' Ruth Hall ceases to be an interesting woman" (449). Thus negating the possibility that a reader might identify with a career woman, the reviewer concludes that the author makes Ruth Hall a heroine by "marrying her to literature and making her the mother of a book" (450); Ruth Hall is accorded heroine status only insofar as her career plot can be read as a conventional domestic story celebrating marriage and motherhood.

Other reviewers were either less obtuse or not as clever in relegating *Ruth Hall* to a safe spot on the sentimental bookshelf because the book attracted controversy as well as readers. When the novel was read as autobiography, reviewers interpreted the anger in it as distinctly unfeminine and unconventional. An editor at *Putnam's Monthly* explained that "most of its readers" had discovered that the work was largely autobiographical, and on these terms it is interpreted: "Very seldom has so angry a book been published. It is full and overflowing with an unfemininely bitter wrath and spite" ("Editorial Notes" 216). A critic for the *Knickerbocker* reacted similarly: "If 'Ruth Hall' be really an autobiography, as seems to be inferred by many of our contemporaries, it is without exception the most 'out-spoken' production of its kind we ever encountered" ("Literary Notices" 84). When understood to be portraying real people, "Fanny Fern" came under attack for breaking with conventional gender codes: "[*Ruth Hall*] appears to have been exploded in a fit of desperation, to revive the writer's sinking fame, and to revenge herself on her relatives, and everybody she imagines ever injured her" (Moulton 61). The editor for *Harper's* seemed befuddled: "The whole book is embittered. It is

not easy to say why, nor to what good result." This reviewer explains that "private experience" is valued by readers only if "it becomes historical and of universal meaning," and *Ruth Hall* is not such a story: "If it be such an autobiography, . . . are we instructed, or helped in any way? are we even entertained by the stories?" ("Editor's Easy Chair" 551). And as if to complete the dismissal of the book from critical notice, the *National Era* announced: "We do not happen to ride in the troop of admirers of Fanny Fern. Her *Ruth Hall* . . . is a book not to be commended or justified" ("Literary Notices" 55). *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* refused to discuss the novel at all: "As we never interfere in family affairs, we must leave readers to judge for themselves" ("Literary Notices" 176). Nathaniel Hawthorne, operating on a different interpretive tack from the didactic reviewers, professed to admire Fern for the anger that drives her writing: he excepts her from his general condemnation of women authors, complimenting her for writing "as if the devil was in her . . . the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading" (78).

Here then are at least six possible nineteenth-century reading groups: the reviewer who sees even a patently angry and rebellious book in conventional, placid terms; the conventional, placid mass reader as constructed by such a reviewer; the other reviewer-constructed audience (presumably including the reviewer) who appreciates genius but rejects *Ruth Hall*; reviewers who treat the work as autobiography and condemn it accordingly for breaking with gender and genre conventions; the male literary artist who recognizes the feminist impulse behind the rebellion but who is not part of the reviewing or consuming reading groups; and, unrepresented in print but strongly represented in book sales and subscriptions, the target reader who does ride "in the troop of admirers," who eagerly identifies with the heroine and enjoys the book immensely.

We may venture a few possible conclusions concerning these disparate groups of midnineteenth-century readers, "real" and "posited." Hawthorne's example shows that subversive elements in the text could be appreciated by nineteenth-century readers as well as by later critics. The reviewers themselves, however, whether treating the novel as conventional fiction or as autobiographical satire, are using different interpretive strategies from Hawthorne and certainly from the target readers. The self-styled gatekeepers of appropriate literature are imagined by the critic for the *Southern Quarterly Review* to be "gigantic porters keeping watch and ward at the castle gates against all comers of ordinary size" (450). Women novelists were usually categorized as "comers of ordinary size" and given only cursory reviews. One

such reader is John Reuben Thompson, a *Southern Literary Messenger* reviewer who often claims to have only glanced at the novels casually recommended to young readers: "We have not yet heard the opinion of the little lady to whom, after a cursory examination, our own copy was presented, but feel quite justified in commending the tale to all" ("Notices of New Works" [1854] 772). The author of a *North American Review* article entitled "Female Authors" explains that most reviewers treat women writers with a "half contemptuous leniency," and if they "have the good fortune to be brought under notice at all, they are the theme of neatly turned compliments and ingenious congratulations" (Abbot 163).

When reviewers either refused to employ or lacked the interpretive strategies necessary to process the disruptive elements of texts they assumed would fit a predetermined and harmless genre, women writers could produce subversive works that would predictably be relegated to standard, nonthreatening categories. The mass of readers of popular fiction are strikingly different from the reviewing audience. Operating within assumptions that trivialized women as readers and women as writers, reviewers in effect could be neutralized by a book that, in its broad outlines, fit the expected schema for women's novels. If we may assume that writers and consumers of popular fiction identified with the heroines and took them seriously, and if we may infer from the popularity of *Ruth Hall* that such readers reveled in the story of a heroine who married a career and gave birth to a book, we may also be justified in assuming that these readers indeed were employing different heuristic strategies from those of gatekeepers who professed not to enjoy women's novels and different heuristic strategies yet again from those that the gatekeepers, who professed strong faith in the "good and pure imaginations" of the middle classes (Rev. of *Ruth Hall* 442), thought they were using. We have to infer those strategies rather than demonstrate them because the mass of readers were not running the periodical presses or otherwise leaving much record of how they read novels. Part of my project in the following chapters is to do some of that inferring, although here and there I have located evidence of excited and engaged readers who may be identified as belonging to the target reading group. I work such evidence into the dialogic history of the double-proposal novel whenever possible.

Ruth Hall is the story of a woman's life plot fulfilled outside of marriage; as such, it did not escape criticism from establishment readers even though one entrenched reviewer was able to domesticate it. The many, many disguised women's plots, under which broad definition I would include the double-proposal novels, were approved by the gatekeeper audience under one