Pray don't tell any body that I write politics: Private expressions and public admonitions in the early republic

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Abstract
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Uncertain about the cultural authority invested in the written word, correspondents self-consciously explored the meaning of writing as they composed their letters. As they wrote about writing, reading, the contrasts between rural and urban living, politics, and refinement, they invoked published rhetoric at the same time that they manipulated that vocabulary to arrive at contrary messages. They echoed denunciations of novels, for example, even as they read, recommended, and praised novels as an important component and nurturer of a polite, virtuous society.

Recent scholarly analyses of women's ideological relationship to the state, assuming the confining or oppressive nature of a private sphere, have focused on the publicly significant political role that women played in their capacity as mothers and wives. Indeed, such figures as Benjamin Rush had insisted that women's reading and writing served only as skills enabling them to raise virtuous citizens. Correspondents such as Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Abigail Brackett Lyman, and Eliza Southgate Bowne, in contrast, explored the possibility of a liberating private sphere marked by reading, writing, and sociability. Rush and others decried this impulse as threatening to the survival of the republic itself.

Analyzing letters as cultural forms reveals that the act of composing letters presented correspondents with broad possibilities of expression. Familiarly tapping a variety of discourses, their letters constituted a middle ground between lived experience and published rhetoric. As a result, their letters demonstrate the complexity of women's political relationship to the state and the ambiguity of the categories of male and female, writing and conversing, rural and urban, public and private.

Keywords
History, United States, Women's Studies
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"PRAY DON'T TELL ANY BODY THAT I WRITE POLITICS": PRIVATE EXPRESSIONS AND PUBLIC ADMONITIONS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

May, 1997
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ABSTRACT

"PRAY DON'T TELL ANY BODY THAT I WRITE POLITICS": PRIVATE EXPRESSIONS AND PUBLIC ADMONITIONS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

by

Elisabeth B. Nichols
University of New Hampshire, May, 1997

This dissertation explores the intersection between personal letters and published admonitions during the decades following the American Revolution. Based on the analysis of letters and diaries composed between 1776 and 1830 by elite white women situated in the northeast, it reveals the extent to which correspondents appropriated, manipulated, or rejected the vocabulary and messages they discovered in novels, magazines, etiquette manuals, and social experts' pronouncements.

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Analyzing letters as cultural forms reveals that the act of composing letters presented correspondents with broad possibilities of expression. Familiarly tapping a variety of discourses, their letters constituted a middle ground between lived experience and published rhetoric. As a result, their letters demonstrate the complexity of women's political relationship to the state and the ambiguity of the categories of male and female, writing and conversing, rural and urban, public and private.
INTRODUCTION

When the nineteen-year-old Betsy Phelps appended the words "Pray don’t tell any body that I write Politics—for they say 'tis not feminine" to a 1798 letter, she responded to an undefined "they" whose diffuse prescriptions persistently decried political content in young women’s correspondence.¹ In spite of such admonitions, she wrote about politics, articulately and at length, even as she begged her reader not to tell. This dissertation asks what it meant for female correspondents to write during the early national period. What did Phelps mean by the term "politics?" What did she mean by the term "feminine?" What circumstances or understandings about letter writing compelled her to plea for secrecy? Were such pleas reflexive, formulaic demurrals, or were letters understood to be public documents that recipients shared with others? Indeed, what did it mean to write?

Determining what it meant for ordinary people to write in this era raises a host of questions about women’s role in the early republic. Since most of the scholarship on women in this period has either explored women’s ideological relationship to the state or examined their everyday tasks, little is known about how ordinary people reacted to the prescriptive rhetoric pervading their world. Analyzing letters and diaries as cultural forms, this dissertation argues that rhetoric about women promoting virtue in their capacities as wives and mothers oversimplifies both women’s political relationship to the

¹ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798, Porter-Phelps-Huntington Family Papers (Box 12, Folder 17), Amherst College Archives and Special Collections (hereafter PPH).
state and the categories of male and female, public and private. Indeed, the conflation of such categories in the expressions of ordinary correspondents and diarists helps us account both for the shrill prescriptive rhetoric delineating women’s roles and the relative lack of a "feminist" consciousness at the time. For female correspondents, liberty resided in sociable activities like writing letters as well as in political rituals. Published pronouncements reacted to celebrations of a sphere of activity marked by writing, reading, and sociability rather than public-spirited virtue by connecting aspects of that sphere to the public. Women needed to read and write to better instill virtue in their sons and husbands, they insisted. The fear of activities either disassociated from or negatively influencing the public prompted anxious tirades that insisted on the inseparability of such activities from the political order and labeled anything not obviously promoting virtue an evil destined to undermine the republic itself. Everyday diarists and correspondents ignored such assessments. Their expressions reveal a liberating private sphere in which men and women read, wrote, and socialized, and a participatory, but not necessarily preferred, public sphere of political events, celebrations, and rituals. The space that connected or separated these two sites was often elusory, and it is in this middle ground that letters enable us to see how ordinary people made sense of their experience in the new republic.

Women like Phelps engaged regularly in the heated debates attending the social, political, economic, and cultural upheaval besetting the newly independent American states. Their letters informed and manifested broad social controversies about the role of women, the role of men, the source of virtue, and the meaning of print. Having
successfully thrown off the yoke of British political control, Americans embarked upon a tumultuous few decades replete with internal rebellions, armed conflict abroad, and the development of contentious political partisanship. Coming to terms with the opportunities and the risks of their new political and social order, they set to defining, delineating, propounding, and refuting. They struggled to agree on fundamental issues like the relationship of the people to the state and the relationship of family members to each other. They wrestled with the basic categories that defined society, the individual, and the relationship between the two.

While much scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the composition, ratification, and implementation of the Constitution, to analyzing literature of the period ranging from the Federalist papers to the novels of Charles Brockden Brown, and to assessing the impact of both law and literature on women ideologically and socially, much remains to be learned about the participation and responses of everyday women to the debates that defined their world. Indeed, as Betsy Phelps's entreaty suggests and this dissertation argues, female correspondents and diarists remarked comfortably and confidently on broad cultural issues, engaging with and challenging the "they" who thought women ought to be otherwise occupied. Through their letters and diaries, female writers both confirmed and challenged the distinction between private reflections and public admonitions. When Phelps placed her individual letter into the broad context of a "they," she confirmed and challenged that dichotomy. Sometimes she and others suggested that the "private," "domestic sphere" manifested a kind of "liberty," rather than being inherently confining. But they simultaneously melded the characteristics of both
public and private spheres in their expressions. Their "private reflections" and "public admonitions" overlapped and informed each other in a complicated way because they comfortably located "liberty" and its curtailment in both arenas.

On the one hand, then, the evidence analyzed in the following chapters reveals the slipperiness of descriptive terms like "private" and "public." On the other, it suggests that the value judgments later historians have placed on those "spheres" may be too presentist and therefore drastically oversimplify the understanding that historical figures themselves brought to those categories. Letters and diaries furnish historians with a wonderful, rich window through which to view past lives. Grateful for a glimpse of the lives of otherwise invisible individuals, however, we often overlook the meaning that writing itself, the source of much of our evidence, held for our subjects. Clearly the act of putting pen to paper preoccupied correspondents and diarists in the decades following the American Revolution, for they wrote with extraordinary self-consciousness. Consistently enumerating both compositional and interpretative challenges, they confirmed, at the very least, that these supposedly private modes of expression were both contested and fashionable. By analyzing letters as letters, rather than as sources documenting women's material lives or ideological relationship to the state, we learn what reading and writing meant to historical figures, and, as a consequence, profoundly enrich our understanding of women's reactions to and participation in the public debates about their role in the newly independent republic.

This project analyzes the content of letters and diaries penned between 1780 and 1830 in terms of the vocabulary and messages that permeated contemporary published
material such as magazines, novels, and social experts’ prescriptions. I came to this topic as a result of my earlier work on the parameters of the cultural debate about women’s role in the early republic. Focusing primarily on the Boston Weekly Magazine, a miscellany published from 1802 to 1805, but incorporating novels such as Susanna Rowson’s Charlotte Temple (1791) as well as Mercy Otis Warren’s History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution (1805), I examined these contemporary (if very different) texts in light of broader cultural issues such as the relationship between women and politics, women and education, and women and virtue. Careful to read such literature as prescriptive rather than descriptive, I found argument and contradiction rather than simple formulae. Readers in the early republic were bombarded with advice and postulations asserting both that women’s education should and should not be identical to men’s, that feminine virtue inspired virtue in men and that male virtue inspired virtue in females, that women should approach marriage as a companionable enterprise shared by equals while simultaneously being wary of (or resigned to) a dangerously inequalitarian situation.

While other scholars examined this material and identified models of women’s political relationship to the state, I instead discovered contradictions, upheavals, and anxiety. Linda K. Kerber, for example, would certainly have discovered evidence in the Boston Weekly Magazine to support her theory about republican mothers being charged

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with the task of raising virtuous citizens. Jan Lewis would likewise have found the influential republican wife. Ruth H. Bloch could have cited the Weekly to buttress her contention that a government structured on competing branches (interests) would survive regardless of how women behaved. Nancy F. Cott would have discovered evidence of both the affective "bonds" of sisterhood shared by women and the legal, economic, and social bonds that oppressed them. In fact, the Weekly confirmed all of these theories. In addition, the magazine featured articles castigating novel reading at the same time that it incorporated serial novels, and ran columns denouncing votaries of fashion alongside tips and illustrations of the latest styles. Historians intent on learning about woman's role in the new republic, or what kind of education was recommended for females, or the appropriate motivations for marriage (affection or material considerations) would be hard pressed to find consistent responses. In the Weekly, almost every article that addressed any of these issues was countered by another that absolutely contradicted the premises and conclusions forthrightly aired in the initial column. The inconsistency with which the Weekly (and other contemporary publications) dispensed advice means that such literature reveals little about ordinary lives. Such publications do, however, expose contemporary social issues and identify the prevailing rhetoric that everyday people


responded to, and worked within.

To the extent that such publications can tell us anything about how actual people behaved, it is only to the extent that we can assume that prescriptions reacted to actual behavior. If most mothers seemed to be manifesting the values and skills of republican mothers, for example, there would be no need to include columns devoted to insisting that women do just that. Articles assailing excessive attention to fashion likewise would be meaningless in a society peopled by moderate, sensibly attired men and women. Columns promoting the latest European fashions, on the other hand, suggest that Americans sorely lacked a sophisticated knack for adorning their bodies. The other fact about magazines of this period that further limits their ability to tell us much about the behavior, attitudes, and deportment of newly-independent Americans is that they consisted to a great extent of copy lifted from English publications. Certainly the lengthy defense of Mary Wollstonecraft and the long biography of the Chevalier d’Eon, along with innumerable columns on cures, scientific observations, travel narratives, and fashion, originated in imported material.7 While this practice seems to confirm a deficiency of American initiative and imagination, in fact it substantiates the continued association between cosmopolitan London and America and conceptions of refinement on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Popular seduction novels likewise originated in England or were modeled on the works of English authors. Epistolary tales such as Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) and *The Boarding School* (1798) were clearly patterned on mid-century novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa Harlowe* (1747-1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). *Charlotte Temple*, the first American best-seller, was likewise modeled on Richardson’s popular seduction theme. Its author, Susanna Rowson, wrote and first published this tale (in 1791) in England, where it attracted negligible attention. Upon being published in America in 1794, however, a year after Rowson herself came to Philadelphia as an actress (a career she gave up in 1797 to concentrate on writing and running her well-respected Young Ladies’ Academy near Boston), it enjoyed legions (and generations) of devoted American readers. Clearly resonating with male and female American readers in a way that it utterly failed to do for English readers, *Charlotte Temple* also celebrated characters whose traits often contradicted each other. Rowson encouraged her readers to sympathize with the sheltered and naive Charlotte and admire the charity of her mother’s conjugal and filial devotion at the same time that she clearly wanted readers to revere and emulate worldly (yet eminently respectable) characters like Julia Franklin (the eventual wife of Charlotte’s seducer) and Mrs. Beauchamp (who magnanimously tried to alleviate Charlotte’s distressing situation). Unlike Cathy N. Davidson, who argues that popular novels of the period appealed to disenfranchised Americans because they criticized the status quo, I would argue that the status quo itself was in such flux that novels (and other published material) could only mirror and
contribute to prevailing, and therefore unresolved, debates.  

One way for historians to make sense of this prescriptive literature is to look at it in terms of language, to consider the terms of the debates. To what extent did the language discovered by readers (who subsequently invoked that vocabulary as they penned their own expressions) react to and inform pressing cultural concerns about the source of virtue and the relationship between men and women? How did the vocabulary itself encode structures of power? In her path-breaking article, Joan W. Scott urged scholars to approach historical evidence in terms of questions and methodology that targeted the gendered implications of historical sources. Arguing that gender operates as one of the "recurrent references by which political power has been conceived, legitimized, and criticized," she encouraged scholars to find meaning for both the past and the present in an approach that would reconcile contradictory messages by looking at the terms and focus of the debate itself.  

In the case of published material in the early republic, the pervasiveness of the rhetoric about gender roles, fashion, and virtue make it clear that ideas about commercialization and consumerism existed only in great tension with notions about the disinterestedness deemed essential for a virtuous and successful republic.

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But how did real people respond to the rhetoric that pervaded their world? How did they react to ideas about republican motherhood or the necessity of homes being nonpartisan? What did they have to say about the controversy surrounding Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) or the increasingly frequent delineations of separate male and female spheres of activity? Did they agree that reading novels threatened the viability of the new republic? Did rural living in fact best promote virtue? Would fashionable excess actually be the downfall of America? Predictably, letters and diaries composed during the early national period frequently explored these issues, regularly tapping prevailing prescriptive language about virtue, independence, freedom, fashion, and sociability. The vocabulary and arguments that ordinary people read and reflected upon both informed and were informed by their own expressions.

The following chapters analyze letters and diaries not as evidence delineating women's ideological relationship to the state (intellectual history) or records of everyday tasks and material culture (social history), but as cultural forms. These documents reveal imagined worlds, but imagined worlds created within a concrete social context. Correspondents and diarists constructed a world of meaning through their writing, and this study explores the possibilities they realized and the limitations they faced as they penned those constructions. Cognizant of the prescriptive literature that pervaded their world, I examine the similarities and contrasts in message and language between the two forms.

An exploration of the intersection between everyday writing and published rhetoric naturally mandated an exploration into what writing meant to those wielding
pens. What motivated diarists and correspondents to keep journals and write letters? Did they consider their letters and diaries private? Did they sit down with pen, ink, and paper with familiar ease or with self-conscious awkwardness? Since very little scholarly attention has been devoted to analyzing letters as letters—as a form of written communication that connected people by crossing geographic space at the same time that it confirmed their separation (the impossibility of sharing a conversation)—chapter one probes the act of writing itself. Taking as its point of departure the words correspondents and diarists themselves devoted to discussing letters and diaries (in their letters and diaries), this chapter illustrates the unsettled nature of letters during this period, a circumstance revealed most obviously by the explicit self-awareness with which correspondents put pen to paper. Explaining, apologizing, and correcting as they wrote, they worried at length about both the form and content of their epistles. Sometimes entire letters were devoted to discussions about writing letters. Charles Phelps devoted well over half of a two page letter (188 words out of 307) to his daughter, to cite just one example, to discussions about receiving letters, summaries of other letters, delivery problems with letters, and an apology for not writing more often.10

The attention to letter writing in letters went beyond accountings such as Charles Phelps's, however. Correspondents worried about how to formulate expressions, what tone to adopt, and what words would best communicate the meaning they intended for their missives. When the return mail indicated that their letter had been given a different reading, they wrote back in frustration, sometimes accusing the recipient of misreading

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10 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Feb. 28, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.
the epistle, and other times accepting blame for writing an unclear, unintended message. This was all explicit in the letters themselves. When Eliza Southgate demanded to know how she "could have written anything to bear such a construction as you have put upon a part of my letter" to her cousin, she revealed the extent to which missives could be miswritten and misread, and the extent to which correspondents wrestled with the medium of written correspondence to express what they wanted to express. On the other hand, letters permitted the creation of an imaginative world that took advantage of the uncertainty about what letters meant. A forlorn hope by a correspondent that he might "find" his ideal correspondent "again in her letters," acknowledges the welcome possibilities that confusion about the import of the written word afforded.

In addition to "writing about writing," everyday correspondents and diarists often referred to books or the act of reading in their letters and diaries. One diarist's note that she "spent part of the eve in writing and part in reading" neatly confirms the interrelatedness of the two activities. While readers echoed the vocabulary they discovered in published material in their own writing, they nevertheless comfortably and confidently manipulated that rhetoric as they sought to make sense of their own experience with pen and paper. They might copy passages from their reading because they felt a published sentiment best expressed their feeling on a particular subject—a conservative, receptive approach to reading—but they might also argue with the material

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they read, even as they adopted the vocabulary invoked by the offending author. Those who insisted that novels provided both instruction and amusement, for example, tapped a pervasive rhetoric that judged the reading of novels as anything but instructive. The intricate relationship between reading and writing means that an exploration of the convergence and divergence of "private expressions" and "public admonitions" demands attention to publications such as novels, which are used as sources alongside letters and diaries in the following pages. A corollary of the ambiguity inherent in writing letters is that reading (whether letters or published material) manifested some of that same ambiguity. Did the words on a page reveal the author’s "true" character, or could the written word be distinguished from the wielder of the pen? If the writer’s relationship to the word was uncertain, what about the supposed effect of the written word on the reader?

Happily, much more scholarly attention has been devoted to the topic of reading, the focus of chapter two. A burgeoning literature helpfully elucidates questions about who could read, what they read, when they read, book distribution, and so forth. Fewer studies have focused on "reader response," although some historians have recently looked at the comments of ordinary readers to discover how they read what they read. This

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14 See, for example, Mary Kelley, "Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America," Journal of American History 83 (1996): 401-24, Naomi Tadmor, "In the Even my wife Read to me": Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth Century," and John Brewer, "Reconstructing the Reader: Prescriptions, Texts and Strategies in Anna Larpent’s Reading," in
chapter considers the reaction of ordinary readers and writers to prescriptions about what they should be reading, which was essentially anything but novels. Lumping the other genres (history, biography, devotional works, etiquette manuals, etc.) together as recommended reading in contrast to the reportedly disastrous but nevertheless pervasive novels of the period, this chapter argues that everyday readers generally agreed with denunciations of novels (adopting prescriptive rhetoric) but read them anyway (undermining prescriptive rhetoric) because novels constituted an important topic of refined conversation. Because they brought people together in polite, articulate, educated, conversant circles, novels promoted a desirable sociability. Indeed, as one correspondent averred, reading novels promoted a "similarity of sentiments" and thereby contributed significantly to the achievement of "that happiness we are all in pursuit of."15

Writing and reading in the context of a society fiercely debating the merits of an individualistic, hard-working yeoman farmer versus a well-read, sociable, commercially-oriented urbanite, these correspondents and diarists unwaveringly promoted the sociable model. Indeed, given that letter writing itself extended and promoted sociability, the complicated relationship between writing and reading clearly validated a vision of the new republic as refined. But writing and reading also occurred in solitary moments, moments of withdrawal from society. As one correspondent complained, "society, bustle, 

15 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 101, 100.
and noise" distracted her from writing. At the same time that writing and reading involved women directly in "public" pursuits of communication and cultural debate about the nature of the new republic itself, therefore, they raised the possibility of a liberating, empowering "private" arena of activity and contemplation.

After exploring the multi-faceted activities of writing and reading in the first two chapters, the remainder of the dissertation considers the effect of those activities on women's expressions about the debates permeating prescriptive literature. One of the central issues they found in published literature had to do with whether country or city living best benefited individuals and, as a consequence, the society in which they lived. The third chapter, therefore, considers the debate about whether rural or urban living best promoted and manifested virtue, the crucial ingredient to the new republic's success.

Discovering recommendations and criticisms of both milieux alongside each other in their novels, magazines, and instructional treatises, diarists and correspondents likewise enumerated both the benefits and the hazards of both environments. If they echoed prescriptive literature in all its contrariness, they further confounded the debate by moving familiarly between and residing comfortably within both the city and the country. Furthermore, the process of writing and sending letters collapsed the literal and ideological distance separating the two environments. If reading provided a vocabulary through which to make sense of their experience (even as it presumed to tell them what they should be thinking about their experience), the act of writing, which promoted sociability and inculcated refined sentiments, resulted in a contradiction between the

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16 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, July 17, 1801, Bowne, 65.
vehicle of communication and its message whenever that message extolled rural solitude. Betsy Phelps's complaint about being left alone in the solitude of a small town in western Massachusetts, for example, occurred in a letter which, by definition, alleviated that solitude by enabling her to engage in a written conversation.

Phelps's complaints about the lack of sociability in the Connecticut River valley were juxtaposed with celebrations of her home as an inviting, "serene" retreat. She countered expressions of boredom with passages effusing happy contentedness in her letters, mimicking novelists' portrayals in both instances, as she explored the possibilities open to her as she filled her own sheets of paper. For the most part, the solitude that correspondents complained about had less to do with being literally alone than with enjoying a particular kind of companionship. They especially sought the type of companionship that correspondence afforded them by collapsing geographical separation. Hadley fared especially well in Phelps's letters when she enjoyed the conversation and proximity of well-read, conversant family and friends, the same people with whom she most often corresponded.

The request that her friend desist from "tell[ing] any body that I write Politics," concluded a long discussion about the sorry absence of much in the way of improving society in her part of Massachusetts. Phelps's extraordinary assessment that a reference to "gentlemen . . . not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them" constituted a political discussion, however, reveals the complicated interplay of writing, politics, and sociability.17 The fourth chapter, therefore, builds on the exploration of rural

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17 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
and urban attributes by considering the explicit political content of letters and diaries. Frequently commenting upon political figures, international events, domestic disturbances, and patriotic celebrations, female correspondents and diarists, although disenfranchised, displayed the depth of their familiarity with politics. In addition, their habitual invocation of politically invested terms such as "disinterested," "independence," "virtue," and "Federalist" in discussions otherwise far removed from traditional political subjects, indicates the extent to which political discourse imbued life in this period. Given the ambivalent nature of "private" writing itself, this chapter analyzes the politics of writing as well as the writing of politics.

If letters and reading promoted sociability, and discussions about sociability and politics merged in correspondence and diaries, then the nature of expression and communication became "political." Indeed, female correspondents were quick to note instances when those who trumpeted rhetoric of "independence" behaved in a rough, impolite manner. For them, the terms "liberty" and "independence" entailed a certain kind of polite deportment, a deportment marked by the same qualities manifested by written correspondence and conversing about books. Indeed, Phelps's "Pray don't tell any body that I write Politics" operated on several levels. First, her plea exposed the confusion about whether letters operated in a private or public realm. Second, it echoed prescriptive admonitions denouncing women's political involvement. Third, it ignored such pronouncements by pursuing a lengthy discussion about Federalism and independence anyway. Finally, it suggested that reading aloud a letter that discussed politics might result in an argument rather than a conversation among those with whom
the letter was shared. That possibility prompted correspondents such as Phelps to request that letters be viewed as vehicles of "private" communication. Politically, therefore, correspondents promoted a refined, sociable culture by penning letters that connected people across space at the same time that they advocated a limited, "private" connection to others because of the discord their missives might cause.

The uncertainty about whether one's remarks ought to be shared with a circle of family or friends tapped a pervasive debate about the advantages and disadvantages of social activity and its accompanying accoutrements. The final chapter assesses reactions to the contradictory advice insisting either on the improving tendencies of fashion and sociability or denouncing such propensities as dangerously corrupting. Upon describing one of her companions as manifesting a "vast deal of fashionable independence," Eliza Southgate took pains to explain how her phrase both criticized and commended its (male) subject. Writing about socializing, conversation, manners, fashion, and balls, diarists and correspondents engaged directly in debates about the relationship of refinement to gender roles and ultimately to the survival of the new republic itself. Did socializing foster a well-spoken, well-read, sensible, and therefore virtuous citizenry? Or did it seduce the unsuspecting into the treacheries of misplaced values and priorities, a circumstance harrowing for the individual and society alike? Correspondents and diarists wrestled mightily with this debate. One of the difficulties they faced as they put pen to paper to address this issue, however, was the fact that writing itself constituted an important manifestation of refined behavior. Because of the fundamental affinity of their expressions to a particular kind of interpersonal deportment, they struggled to make sense
of the terms and parameters of a debate within a medium that was itself integral to the
debate. The ambiguities befuddling assessments about what it meant to write (to return to
the focus of chapter one) means that "writing about refinement" only compounded those
uncertainties, as revealed in the astonishing self-consciousness with which that topic was
addressed.

One way for correspondents and diarists to address the issue of sociability,
therefore, was in terms of the increasingly familiar (although still evolving) rhetoric about
private and public, domestic and political, female and male spheres. While they helped
themselves to this prescriptive vocabulary, they nevertheless confounded its intent by
overlaying such categories with values not propounded by the literature they read. If the
public, male sphere was the guarantor of liberty, while the private, female sphere ensured
harmony, the former manifested the individual and social promise of the Revolution,
while the latter promoted peace--among family members, neighbors, and competing
interests. The achievement of this harmony, of course, meant sacrificing individual
"liberty." Harmony resulted from compromising, deferring, and valuing concord above
all else.

Scholars, therefore, have seen the "private sphere" as a confining arena that people
sought to leave in favor of the "public sphere." The evidence cited in this dissertation
suggests another way of thinking about private and public spheres. On the one hand, it is
quite clear that male and female correspondents rarely gendered those spheres in the way
that nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians have. Indeed, notions about the
definitions of "private" and "public" themselves were fluid to the extent that it would
have been nearly impossible to make sense of the gendered implications of those categories. On the other hand, the judgment about the "private" sphere being confining in comparison to the "public" sphere appears much more in nineteenth- and twentieth-century evaluations than in the expressions of the figures studied here. Instead, these correspondents and diarists often celebrated an inherent liberty in such private pursuits as reading, writing, and conversing. In terms of whether those pursuits were associated with the female or not, Eliza Southgate's expression about "fashionable independence" has much to teach us. "Fashion" is generally considered a feminine pursuit (and women were encouraged to be "fashionable" to promote commerce, itself often gendered female). "Independence," in contrast, is a masculine attribute exuding a sometimes fierce, uncompromising individuality. For the twentieth century historian, the phrase "fashionable independence" contradicts itself. For correspondents at the turn of the nineteenth century, it manifested wonderful, scary, exciting possibilities.

While letters are the focus of the dissertation, I have also occasionally used diaries, and the differences between the two genres are often noteworthy. Some diarists conceived of their expressions as letters and shared them with "correspondents" in chunks. One of the better-known examples of this type of journal-letter is the exchange shared by Esther Edwards Burr and Sarah Prince during the 1750s. Other journals, however, such as those kept by Elizabeth Porter Phelps and Hannah Williams Heath, two

18 For the evolving definitions of the private, public, and intimate spheres in the early modern and modern eras, see Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), esp. 1-108.
of the subjects frequenting the following pages, were kept as daily records of social and economic activity or introspective reflections on worldly and spiritual matters. Elizabeth Porter Phelps, for example, penned decades of brief, crisp, factual diary entries that resembled those comprising the diary of Martha Moore Ballard, the now-famous Maine midwife whose journal Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has researched and analyzed. ¹⁹ Phelps's letters, in contrast, were long, chatty, effusive missives filled with emotion, humor, advice, and opinions.

The sources utilized for this study consist of women's letters and diaries composed between 1776 and 1830. Geographically, the correspondents and diarists lived as far north as Scarborough, Maine, and as far south as Virginia, although the primary focus is the northeast. The major players in this story are the Phelps family of Hadley, Massachusetts, the Southgate family of Scarborough, Maine, the Lyman family of Northampton, Massachusetts, the Heath family of Brookline, Massachusetts, and the Shippen family of Philadelphia. All were relatively well-to-do white families, part of the establishment of the northeast. Since much of the analysis is based on collections of family papers, a variety of married and unmarried men and women frequent the following chapters. Nevertheless, a few figures enjoy particular prominence. Since both her letters and journal have survived, Elizabeth Porter Phelps (1747-1817) of Hadley has proven an especially rich source. Most of Phelps's extent letters were written to her husband, her son, and especially to her daughter. A prosperous farmer, lawyer, and representative in

the Massachusetts legislature, her husband's frequent absences spurred the composition of many letters. On the other hand, Phelps herself frequently traveled to Boston, Litchfield (Connecticut), and Brimfield (Connecticut), leaving her husband at home in Hadley. The rich exchange shared by Phelps and her daughter, Elizabeth (Betsy) Whiting Phelps Huntington (1779-1847) has been especially illuminating for some of the themes addressed in the first chapter. Although they enjoyed a very close relationship and wrote frequent and lengthy letters to each other, mother and daughter nevertheless wrote circumspectly about issues they deemed inappropriate for letters, apologized for the length, content, and appearance of their missives, and regularly corrected each other's interpretation of a previous letter.

Eliza Southgate Bowne's beguiling correspondence boasts a wonderful irony, an easy sense of humor, astute observation, and unusual eloquence. Born in 1783 to Robert Southgate (a physician) and Mary King Southgate of Scarborough, Maine, she wrote letters from Boston, where she attended Susanna Rowson's boarding school, Saratoga and Ballston Springs, New York, where she enjoyed spa holidays, and finally New York City, where she lived upon marrying Walter Bowne in 1803. A lively correspondent whose letters burst with both gossip and extended explorations into the manners and morals of society, Southgate sadly succumbed to tuberculosis in 1809. Abigail Brackett Lyman was likewise deprived of most of her adulthood, a victim at age 24 of a scarlet fever epidemic that swept through Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1803. A voracious reader of novels during the early years of her marriage, and probably before, her extent letters and journal were penned after she married Erastus Lyman and moved from Boston to Northampton in
1796. In them, Lyman pondered her relationship to writing, reading, and refinement, and explored and evaluated the contrasts and similarities of rural Northampton and urban Boston.

The journal of Hannah Williams Heath (1771-1832) of Brookline, Massachusetts, which survives for the years 1805 to 1812, documents a hectic pace of housework, socializing, and child-rearing. Treating her journal as an outlet for complaints about excessive chores and the tribulations of her stormy marriage, Heath frequently tried to console herself by either focusing on her spiritual state or reminding herself of the worldly advantages she did enjoy. Nancy Shippen Livingston (1763-1841) of Philadelphia likewise spilled her woes into her journal, indulging in self-pity over her disastrous marriage, the pain of being separated from her daughter, and the worry occasioned by her mother's illness. Her letters, on the other hand--lively, engaged, relatively cheerful, and sometimes gossipy--reveal a woman enthusiastic for knowledge and conversation and blessed with impressive powers of observation and description.

The documents penned by these people have not been approached as records of biographical information or chronicles of the details of quotidian life in late-eighteenth-century America. Instead, they have been read to determine the extent to which everyday people engaged with broad cultural debates about such weighty matters as virtue and the survival of the republic and such seemingly minor issues as fashion. The focus on what these people wrote means that readers of this document will not get a very clear sense of who these people were. My own familiarity with their surviving expressions means that I know some of them quite well. I know, for example, that Eliza Southgate Bowne
suffered quite a bit before she died at age 25, that the young father Charles Porter Phelps
lost several children in the first decades of the nineteenth century and wrote heart-
breaking letters to his parents, that Mary Anna Whiting Boardman probably wrote as
much as she did in part because she suffered from deafness from a very early age, and that
Betsy Huntington and Hannah Heath always seemed overwhelmed with housework and
children, about which they complained bitterly, the former in letters, the latter in her
journal. Some of my knowledge about the daily challenges and joys that generated
comment in letters and diaries in terms of topics not otherwise featured undoubtedly
resonates in the vocabulary surrounding their quoted expressions. But again, this project
is by no means intended to be a work describing the daily lives of several people living at
the turn of the nineteenth century. Instead, this is a cultural exploration of how they
constructed their lives. It analyzes the language and form through which they created
meaning out of their lives in a specific historical context.

While there are sometimes great differences in what these figures wrote, I have
looked for broader patterns in their reflections. To a certain extent, these private
expressions have been approached in the same manner in which published rhetoric has
been examined. When I saw contradictions, I looked for the underlying issue. Although
distinctions between correspondents and diarists are underscored at times with
suggestions about why expressions contradicted each other, generally this dissertation is
about people of pretty much the same class, living in the same culture—if in different
geographic areas and across several decades—and seeks to reveal patterns that help us
understand crucial categories—such as individualism, public, female, political, reading,
and writing—from the point of view of ordinary people.

Finally, one of the consequences of looking at collections of family correspondence is that I've read expressions composed by both men and women. While women's historians have elucidated both the promise and the limits of organizing society in terms of gender, my research has raised questions about some of our assumptions about the impact and definition of a separate spheres ideology for this period. Men and women lived together, wrote letters to each other, and socialized together, and those places where their activities overlapped have been largely ignored by historians. Like the other dichotomies addressed in this dissertation, the habitual polarization of the categories of male and female and public and private obscures a more subtle relationship between both women and men and "private expressions" and "public admonitions."

By looking at the expressions of ordinary people as cultural forms, the following pages challenge models about republican mothers, republican wives, and male and female spheres by exploring the meaning of the evidence itself. Female correspondents often conflated the activities of writing letters and republican politics, but generally discovered a liberty in writing letters that they did not find in politics. Cultural wrangling over the significance of letters themselves, of course, meant that topics addressed in that medium were likewise in flux. For correspondents and diarists anxiously seeking to define the legacy of the American Revolution, the struggle to situate their letters had everything to do with broader issues about the source of republic virtue.

For late twentieth century historians, the models of republican motherhood and republican wives have confirmed the importance of women's roles to the survival of the
newly independent republic. Written in the context of a woman's movement insisting that the personal is political, these historians discovered a similar kind of rhetoric in the early republic. What they failed to see, however, was the defensive nature of that rhetoric. Prescriptions admonishing women to attend to their roles as wives and mothers emerged out of the context of ordinary diarists and correspondents exploring and exposing an apparently non-political sphere of activity characterized by writing, reading, and sociability. As they put pen to paper, correspondents discovered and articulated a separation between public and private—a distinction they assessed with sometimes painful self-consciousness, that had to do fundamentally with the authority invested in the printed and penned word. For recent historians, a private sphere means a confining sphere. It is this assumption that correspondents and diarists belied in their expressions as they explored the categories of writing and conversing, male and female, rural and urban, public and private.
CHAPTER I

"PROBABLY I SHALL FIND HER AGAIN IN HER LETTERS": WRITING ABOUT WRITING

"How long it appears since I've made you a writing visit, but not so as to mental ones," Elizabeth Porter Phelps wrote her daughter in 1801.1 Reminding Betsy that she continued to play a central role in her life even though she now lived 70 miles away with a family of her own, Phelps's letter embodied a significant emotional avowal. In an effort to bridge geographic distance, she and her daughter wrote regularly to describe the joys, sorrows, toils, and news of their lives, as well as to ask for and offer advice. Indeed, Phelps and her daughter Betsy nurtured a voluminous correspondence, sending each other "pacquets" between Hadley, Massachusetts, and Litchfield, Connecticut, nearly every two weeks. They penned their letters in increments, often across several days, with the closing cramped lines running up the sides of the paper. As Phelps noted to her daughter in one letter, "the clock has struck 12 & I must write a letter to your father too, to send on by tomorrow's mail . . . --tho' neither of the letters will be clos'd tonight for we never know what a day (or a night) may bring forth."2 For mother and daughter, writing and reading each other's letters permitted a reassuring level of day-to-day intimacy. Born of

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1 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, June 23, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

2 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 26, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH. All spellings and emphases appear as in the original unless otherwise noted.

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physical separation, they substituted for daily contact, existing at the intersection of
literacy, distance, and connection. Like her mother, Betsy also associated letters with
"mental visits." "I have been with you in imagination," she comforted her mother, "ever
since I had your letter, and think you arrived at Hadley last night, you are now again
beginning to attend to your family--and doubtless find many things that want your care."3
Through their letters mother and daughter shared weekly and daily routines, travel plans
and experiences, impressions of books, husbands’ schedules and activities, local and
national news, family happenings, and religious sentiments.

As the correspondence between Phelps and Huntington demonstrates, letters
satisfied a variety of needs for Americans at the turn of the nineteenth century. And, as
people condensed their experience into words intended for a specific reader, they amassed
a rich trove of evidence documenting the myriad details of daily concerns and chores.
But the letters also expose generational change and conflict, highlight intricate levels of
social hierarchy, reveal subtle layers of cultural debates, and offer assessments about what
reading and writing meant in the early republic.4 As historian Jan Lewis has reminded us
in her study of letters composed by members of the eighteenth-century Virginian gentry,
however, there are limits to what letters can tell us about people’s lives in the past. As
sources, letters privilege elite, white members of society and they may tell us less about

3 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 27, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

4 Letters restore, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich observed in the case of Martha Moore Ballard’s diary, a "lost substructure of eighteenth-century life" and thereby "transform the nature of the evidence upon which much of the history of the period has been written." Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale, 27, 34, 343.
how people felt than about how they thought they were supposed to feel. When diarists and correspondents filled sheets of paper, they did so with a specific audience in mind whose values and social and historical context shaped the resulting epistle. That did not mean, however, that their expressions resulted in mere catalogs of prevailing mores or idiosyncratic personal records. On the contrary, as Jane Tompkins has argued in terms of sentimental fiction and I would extend to apply to letters and diaries as well, the invocation of expected and conventional forms "both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time." The "literature" these everyday writers produced "operate[d] as instruments of cultural self-definition" and as "agents of cultural formation." When

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5 Jan Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), xiv-xv. Richard H. Brodhead also reminds us that "literary production is bound up with a distinct social audience" in his discussion of nineteenth-century published works. Richard H. Brodhead, Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5, 66. Steven M. Stowe agrees that although "much remains to be accomplished in linking what women wrote to the way they lived," extent letters and diaries make the goal a realistic one because "the themes that saturated women's writing are at once specifically personal and broadly cultural." Steven M. Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," in Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston, ed. Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 319. Marlene Kadar notes that feminist scholars especially "are collecting and interpreting letters [because] in many cases they represent the only literature we have by women." But such scholars, she adds, must remember that "by all rights, we should not be allowed to see them" which puts us "in the vicarious position of knowing too much and so little at the same time." Marlene Kadar, introduction to Reading Life Writing: An Anthology (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), xv. Sharon M. Harris has also forcefully argued that without women's voices, "we have only a partial picture of early America and, more dangerously, we run the risk of perpetuating our new but still partial picture as a universal one" since it "is evident [from] many early women's private writings . . . that to articulate one's thoughts on paper is often to move toward a sense of self as distinctive from the prevailing cultural conceptions about women." Sharon M. Harris, "Early American Women's Self-Creating Acts," Resources for American Literary Study 19 (1993), 225.

6 For a discussion on the distinction between an "audience" that "is there before a writer begins to write" and a "reader" who "comes along only afterward," see Stephen Railton, Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3-20, quoted, 8, 9.

7 See Jane Tompkins, Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), quoted, 126, xvi, xvii. In her study of twentieth century narrative strategies Rachel DuPlessis likewise argues that while "narrative structures" embody the "assumptions, the conflicts, the patterns that create fictional boundaries for experience," and hence must be
J. G. A. Pocock observed that language is a "cultural resource for actors in history," and that one "cannot get out of a language that which was never in it," he acknowledged both the conservatism and the potential for change embodied in these documents. The multiple discourses--rational, sentimental, dutiful, romantic, imaginative--that correspondents invoked locate letters at a crucial intersection where the fluidity of language challenged efforts to communicate at the same time that it profoundly expanded the possibilities inherent in that communication.

At the close of the eighteenth century, male and female letter writers put pen to paper very self-consciously. In addition to discussing events, relaying news, and dispensing advice and concern, they wrote to each other about writing letters. The sheer abundance of references to reading and writing letters within letters themselves confirms that this was by no means a form of communication taken for granted, although little scholarly attention has been devoted to the significance of letters as letters and the relationship between letters and broader cultural debates. That correspondents granted so much attention within their missives to discussing the process of writing and reading letters points to the uncertainty of what letters meant as a personally directed form of written correspondence. Letter writers wrestled regularly with the task of reconciling words as private conveyers of sentiment and public bearers of behaviorally-invested

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negotiated by all who compose works, it is possible to "write beyond the ending," to "express critical dissent from dominant narrative." Rachel DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 3, 5. See also DuPlessis, 40-41, 196.

authority. In turn, these epistolary reflections connected to broader concerns in the early republic about appropriate gender roles and the significance of the written word itself, whether published or hand-written.

In sharp contrast to the concerns of early national correspondents who wrestled with these issues, however, current scholarship has tapped extent family correspondence almost exclusively as a valuable source for information by and about women.\(^9\) In the early republic, letters between male and female family members and friends operated as a site where notions about separate male and female "spheres" overlapped and interacted, where the emerging model that separated the "private female" from the "public male" collapsed.\(^10\) In spite of the possibilities and promise of reading these letters as documents in which women and men explored cultural issues together, current scholarship has tended to adhere to a paradigm that relegates and analyzes these sources as "separate," as records that tell us information primarily about women. Although commendable and invaluable for retrieving and recovering women’s voices, this approach has resulted in the paradox of late-twentieth-century scholars creating and buttressing our own "separate sphere" based on historical evidence that contradicts rather than supports that division.

As the reference notes to this chapter attest, students intent on discovering how letters


worked for Americans in the early republic will find themselves reading about women and women's letters with scant mention of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. This chapter begins to correct that imbalance by analyzing letters as letters rather than as sources for other kinds of information.

That correspondents self-consciously, sometimes excruciatingly so, put pen to paper at the turn of the nineteenth century is evidenced most obviously by the prevalence of statements begging the reader's pardon for errors in style, expression, content, or timeliness. Otherwise disparate letters in terms of mood and purpose almost always included self-deprecating remarks about length, elapsed time since the last letter, composing missives worthy of perusal, and so forth. Elizabeth Porter Phelps concluded a long letter to her daughter, for example, by asking her to "forgive and excuse all mistakes & blunders,"11 and closed letters to her husband by asking him to "pardon all omissions & commissions"12 and "excuse all blunders."13 Betsy Huntington wondered to her mother, "I suppose you thought I answered your dear letter too soon,"14 and later reminded her, "Do not forget to tell me to stop writing when I am too expansive."15 Apparently her mother worried about expounding in too much detail as well, for she too

11 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 2, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.
12 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, May 4, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.
13 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, May 22, 1803 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.
14 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH.
15 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 11, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
wrote, "after the receipt of my two last letters you will not ask me to write more particulars I presume—if I weary your patience, you must give me a hint." But if mother and daughter worried about the length of their letters, they also expressed concern about the sense of their compositions. The young Betsy confessed to her mother, "I fill my paper before I have said hardly what I want to—and at the last end of my letter my ideas are all in a jumble." And her mother, in a later letter, likewise observed, "I have been looking over what I have written & it appears like a strange heap of incoherent stuff."

This insistent awareness of the process of writing and the act of reading letters mirrors the contemporaneous cultural dialogue about the implications of the written word (as opposed to the spoken word) and imbeds correspondents explicitly in that broad debate. At the very least, concerns about "jumbled" expressions reveal the assumption that letters were supposed to be orderly, balanced, and rational compositions rather than spontaneous effusions about disconnected events, sentiments, and requests.

This acute awareness of the reader's reception and comprehension of letters was by no means confined to Phelps and Huntington or to female correspondents generally. Charles Phelps expressed similar consternation. "I was much mortified after I had sent my last Letter," he wrote his wife, "on recollecting I had not sent any respects to our

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16 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 16, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

17 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

18 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 16, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.
Children--I was in the utmost hurry which I hope will be sufficient apology,"¹⁹ and in another apologized for his "many errors both in spelling and composition."²⁰ In a letter to his parents, Thomas Lee Shippen abruptly concluded a lengthy description of Westover by acknowledging that his reader must be "hear[tily] tired and I am sure my arm is."²¹ Similarly, Samuel Whiting confessed to his younger sister that he was "but little gifted" in "fluency of thought" and "fluency of expression," the "essential qualification[s] in the art of letter-writing."²² After announcing the birth of his child, another correspondent wrote his sister-in-law that "the novelty of my situation must be my apology for the slovenly manner of my writing."²³ In letters to Nancy Shippen of Philadelphia, Louis Otto likewise feared "tiring you by a long letter," begged her to "correct my bad Stile," and worried that he was "always at a loss how to express myself to you."²⁴ Even after corresponding familiarly for several years, Otto still fretted, "I am constantly checked by the apprehension of saying too much or too little--too much for you to read; too little for my feelings. This naturally introduces in my Letters an ambiguity or perhaps a stiffness,

¹⁹ Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 10, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 3), PPH.
²⁰ Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 30, 1802 (Box 4, Folder 4), PPH.
²² Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, June 22, 1785, in John Frederick Schroeder, Memoir of the Life and Character of Mrs. Mary Anna Boardman (New Haven: Privately printed, 1849) (hereafter Boardman), 94.
²³ Senator Charles Cutts to Mary Carter Cutts, Aug. 17, 1813, Cutts Family Collection, Essex Institute (EI).
²⁴ Louis Otto (b. 1754) to Nancy Shippen (1763-1841), in a series of letters written between 1779 and 1781, Shippen, 87, 86, 98.
of which I am sensible without being able to remedy it."25 For Otto, whose graceful letters generally evinced an easy and effective use of language, the process of writing to his adored Nancy—potentially an indulgent pleasure—sometimes degenerated into a torturous process of wrestling with pen, paper, vocabulary, and style. And it became enough of a grueling exercise that he shared his worry and agony with his intended reader.

If Otto worried excessively about burdening Nancy Shippen with stiff and ambiguous letters, Shippen’s brother, who agonized far less over his correspondence—at least to his sister—nevertheless appended apologies to his missives as well. He closed one letter, for example, by asking that his sister "Please excuse my Scrawl as I have a very bad pen and not time."26 Similarly, Eliza Southgate, a contemporary of Betsy Phelps, admitted to her sister that "my letters are of too little consequence to send by Post,"27 and

25 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1789, Shippen, 259.

26 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, May 11, 1777, Shippen, 44.

27 Eliza Southgate (1783-1809) to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 14, 1800, Bowne, 31. According to historian Richard R. John, the post tended to be used primarily by merchants sending letters having to do with business matters. (40, 158) One of the reasons for this, he argues, is that it was very expensive to post a letter. A formula taking into account miles crossed and number of sheets resulted in a very high price for utilizing the post’s services. To send a single sheet of paper from New York to Buffalo, for example, some 300 miles, cost 25 cents. If the letter contained two enclosures, the cost would be 75 cents. (159) Newspapers, on the other hand were subsidized. As John notes, "Letters were so much more expensive to send that one postal officer estimated that if newspapers were charged a comparable rate the cost of their transmission would increase by almost 700 percent." (39) Richard R. John, Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). Michael S. Foley agrees that few used the post office during the early decades of the nineteenth century, but argues that the cost of posting a letter was not the prohibiting factor. Instead, most people simply did not need to communicate with people across great distances and for relatively "local" exchanges (within ten or twenty miles), they utilized informal means of delivery. Michael S. Foley, "The Post Office and the Distribution of Information in Rural New England, 1821-1835, Journal of the Early Republic (forthcoming). Anecdotal evidence contained in the collections of correspondence studied suggests that elites who wrote back and forth regularly across distances up to 300 miles, combined the postal service and informal methods to deliver their epistles. They often hastily closed letters because a traveling friend was on the verge of departing, for example, or contacted visitors from places they sought to contact and entrusted them with
concluded to her cousin that "I have said not half I meant to." Confirming Betsy Phelps's chagrin about composing letters full of jumbled thoughts, Southgate likewise acknowledged ruefully that "unfortunately my ideas never begin to flow until I have filled up my paper," and that she had "positively not said one single thing which I intended when I sat down." Similarly, Elizabeth Heath pronounced one of her letters "dreadfully silly."

Some correspondents' apologies confirmed a rushed composition; for others, such as Eliza Southgate and Betsy Phelps, efficient use of paper seemed to be the issue. But these remarks go beyond such practical matters. They also entreat the reader to participate in the process of composing a letter. They ask the reader to join with the author in the struggle to reconcile vocabulary with sentiment, to help hurriedly fulfill a duty, or to engage in the process of letting thoughts evolve as ink flows onto the sheet of letters. In a letter to his daughter in Litchfield, Connecticut, 70 miles from Hadley, for example, Charles Phelps explained that he "put the Letter I wrote you last week in the Post Office on Tuesday, it was to be put in the Mail for Harford on Friday, but I hope Mr Lyman will go on his Journey before the Mail is closed and shall engage him to take it out of the Office and carry it himself." Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Sept. 3, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.

28 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 1801, Bowne, 54.
29 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, July 17, 1801, Bowne, 67.
30 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 1801, Bowne, 57.


32 In their introduction to the Oxford Book of Letters, Frank and Anita Kermode observe that a correspondent would "write diagonally across a completed page in order to save postage," a habit that persisted when the expense of posting a letter was no longer prohibitive. Frank Kermode and Anita Kermode, introduction to The Oxford Book of Letters, xxi-xxii. During the war for independence from Britain, paper was indeed in short supply. Thomas Lee Shippen promised his sister that "I will bring you some paper... as you stand so much in need of it." Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, May 11, 1777, Shippen, 44.
paper. Correspondents encouraged their readers to engage vicariously in the writing of epistles to better read the final product.\footnote{The frequent apologia discovered in letters penned in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries was not new. On the contrary, well before the Revolution, such hopes for the recipient's patience and forgiveness graced the likes of Esther Edward Burr's journal. Burr, writing in the 1750s with her friend Sarah Prince in mind as the intended reader, belittled herself and worried that Prince would be "displeased." In November of 1754, for example, she said that "my writing, and in such haste two [sic], is but scratching." A month later she berated herself more harshly: "in my haste I have made a most Egregious blunder which I never discovered till this minute, but you will pardon this and all others. But I am really ashamed. . . . I would burn this, but I cant possibly write it over again for want of time." The "egregious blunder" consisted of writing upside down on the page. Quoted in Sharon M. Harris, American Women Writers to 1800 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25, 26.}

Unlike Betsy Phelps, whose letters to her mother often featured apologetic remarks, Eliza Southgate's self-deprecating inserts are found in letters to people her own age, such as her sisters and her cousin, but not in the many letters she wrote to her parents. For Southgate perhaps, letters commanded by duty, in this case filial duty, stood on their own merit, while more "voluntary" expressions demanded a statement acknowledging the self-conscious process of penning a letter to a known reader. Or, since her first letters were presumably those she wrote to her parents, perhaps she had not yet learned that such remarks were customary and expected. Since letters to her sisters, cousin, and other relatives rarely omit apologia, however, even while later letters to her parents often continue to do so, Southgate's correspondence suggests that different audiences required different degrees of formulaic self-deprecation. To her uncle the "Hon. Rufus King," she very formally confirmed that she "cannot conclude this without earnestly intreating you to receive it with the candor of an Uncle rather than the severity of a critic. I feel I do not write as I ought to, yet I entreat you not to think me deficient in
that respect and esteem with which I shall ever remain Your niece Eliza Southgate."34 Abigail Brackett Lyman wrote very staidly to "Mrs Revere" as well, assuring her that "a consciousness of my own inability to address one of your superiour merit, is I assure you the only reason which could deter me from the pleasure I have long anticipated in writing you."35 As these obsequious comments confirm, apologia was formulaic and expected, but since it graced even very informal expressions as well, it also operated as a means of encouraging readers to be forgiving and to interpret letters in keeping with the author’s intent.

Eliza Southgate’s letters to her parents, in which she apparently assumed her readers’ affinity, tended to be shorter than Betsy Phelps’s and to emphasize more practical concerns. While Phelps naturally wrote of mundane matters in epistles to her parents as well, she nevertheless devoted considerable space to emotional explorations. She described how her "heart beat violently" at the "extremely disagreeable" prospect of having to present herself to heretofore unknown family acquaintances, for example, and later proudly described her newfound assertiveness: "I have alter’d so wonderfully that it

34 Eliza Southgate to Rufus King, Aug. 6, 1801, Bowme, 69. A recent study of letter-writing confirms that "the typical letter to a high-status person contained more markers of formality" and that "sex difference in the composition of the letters" was not "statistically significant." This study confirms that "subjects adjust their letters as a function of the supposed status of the intended recipients," "resulting in a correspondence between letter-writing and face-to-face behavior." As will be seen, the correlation between face-to-face behavior and the content of letters was not always so prevalent." M. J. Homzie, Miriam E. Kotsonis, Carol C. M. Toris, "Letter Writing Differences: Relative Status Effects," Language and Speech 24 (1981), 383, 384.

takes me but a short time to become acquainted now."³⁶ Southgate, on the other hand, seemed to approach the exchange of letters in terms of a balance sheet. In a letter to her parents written when she was 14, she calculated, "It is a long time since I received a letter from home, and I have neglected my duty in not writing to you oftener."³⁷ In this sense her letters conformed to an older, dutiful form of correspondence whereas Phelps's exemplified a more modern tendency to see relationships—all relationships—in terms of sentiment and affection.³⁸ Contemporaries who both lived in Boston periodically during their teens, Phelps invoked a sentimental, emotionally exploratory discourse in letters to her parents, while Southgate relied on a rational, pragmatic, dutiful discourse. Phelps’s mother wrote in both veins to her son. On the one hand, she demanded, "why dont you write? this is the third pacquet we have sent off, since we have had one line from you,"³⁹ and on the other effused that she was "glad you have written when you know of no opportunity to send—and continue to do the same—indeed I hope you are now writing."⁴⁰ As will be seen, however, the rich correspondence of all these women attests to their shared ability to tap various discourses at will.

Apologies and self-deprecating remarks in keeping with formulaic and ritualistic

³⁶ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 20, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH; Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

³⁷ Eliza Southgate to Robert and Mary Southgate, Aug. 11, 1797, Bowne, 7.

³⁸ According to Jan Lewis, the tone and content of letters and diaries (and the relationships they articulated) shifted in the eighteenth century from the practical demands of economic and behavioral responsibility to increasingly introspective explorations of whether one was worthy of or deserved a much less concrete emotional affirmation. See Lewis, The Pursuit of Happiness.

³⁹ Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Nov. 25, 1794 (Box 5, Folder 14), PPH.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 16, 1789 (Box 5, Folder 14), PPH.
expressions characteristic of epistolary exchanges were composed differently depending on the correspondent's familiarity with or social disparity from the letter's intended reader. Southgate's assessment that her inconsequential letters did not merit the attention of the Post and perfunctory "I suppose I ought to commence my letter with an humble apology" at the beginning of a letter to her sister, for example, indicate that all correspondents were expected to demur to each other. Abigail Brackett Lyman too, might curtly append an expected "haste will excuse to you the numerous errours which cannot escape observation" in her letters. These apologies can be seen in another context, however, as they also echo the frequent defensive remarks introducing contemporary novels. Susanna Rowson, for example, observed that her novel, Charlotte Temple, was a "trifling performance" that may "merit not applause" and neither presumed nor aspired to be "the most elegant finished piece of literature." Indeed it was quite common for authors in the early national period, especially female authors, to apologize both for the quality of their public expressions and for presuming to make those expressions at all. As such, these seemingly demure apologies confirmed the novelist's marginal status to literary endeavors--this is but a "trifling performance"--at the same time that they asserted the author's insistence upon participating in such cultural performances.

41 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 14, 1800, Bowne, 29.
42 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, Lyman, 219.
44 See Harris, ed., American Women Writers to 1800, 6; and Davidson, Revolution and the Word, 30-34, 40, 50.
published collections of letters tended to be prefaced with claims that "the letters had never been intended for publication" as well, again confirming the potential subversiveness of both the form and the content and at the same time demanding the reader's attention.\footnote{Kenyon, ed. \textit{800 Years of Women's Letters}, xv.}

Everyday correspondents regularly participated in this same tradition.\footnote{The similar strategies invoked by novelists and correspondents was not coincidental since the letter is often viewed as both a predecessor to and imitator of novels. See Ronald J. Zboray, \textit{A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 114-21; Cathy N. Davidson, "The Novel as Subversive Activity: Women Reading, Women Writing," in \textit{Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in American Radicalism}, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 296, 306; Terry Eagleton, \textit{The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson} (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), esp. 49-77.} They insisted on the right to write while simultaneously disparaging their ability to do so. Lyman judged that her "abilities are wholly inadequate" to the task of "expressing" her "sentiments,"\footnote{Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mrs. Jerusha Catlin, Feb. 12, 1798, \textit{Lyman}, 200.} for example, and Elizabeth Porter Phelps considered one of her letters a "strange heap of incoherent stuff." That both correspondents fully intended to send their missives, however, indicates that they clearly expected their "trifling performances" to be read attentively. That both male and female correspondents engaged in this ritual, however, is significant. While it was a new phenomenon for many women to be writing letters at the end of the eighteenth century, male exchanges occurred within and perpetuated a long tradition.\footnote{While the title of Olga Kenyon's anthology of primarily European women's letters, \textit{800 Years of Women's Letters}, seems to suggest that women in the eighteenth century joined a long, rich tradition, Kenyon too confirms the breadth and richness of eighteenth-century female expressions particularly (xiv). Also see Frank and Anita Kermode's introduction, \textit{Oxford Book of Letters}, xxii-xxiii. Gloria Main's analysis of female literacy also supports the notion that it was new for many women to be writing letters. She found that the "demand for writing skills soared dramatically in the 1750s" in New England, as}
heretofore described to highlight their similarities, therefore, are also subject to contrasting interpretations. Female correspondents’ apologies might affirm the novelty of the endeavor of composing letters, expose uncertainty about performing adequately, and express concern about being criticized for participating at all. Since most of the letters handled by the post were written by merchants performing business, Southgate’s demeaning of her letters as unworthy of the post underscored her marginal, uncertain relationship to an entrenched tradition. On the other hand, by writing letters at all, she participated in that tradition and belied her marginal status by not only assuming her intended reader’s attention but asking him or her to become engaged in the process of composing the letter. Indeed, British historian Amanda Vickery, curious about who wrote what kinds of letters, argues that in mid-eighteenth century England "letter writing was a key component of female business" since through letters women "sustained relations, . . . gathered information about business and apprenticeship opportunities, . . . kept a finger on the pulse of the local labour market for servants, [and] helped provision the household."  

The apologia also highlight changes underway in the practice of letter-writing itself. If letters were posted primarily by merchants, letters shared by friends, siblings, and even parents and children modified that tradition significantly. Presuming to send "a


49 See note 27.

50 Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?” 409.
strange heap of incoherent stuff" and "ideas all in a jumble" was a far cry from the orderly, purposeful missives circulating among merchants. While family members had certainly written to each other prior to the end of the eighteenth century, the growing number of these letters and their changing content from addressing the "business" of reciprocal parental and filial duties to exploring emotions and affective links added significant new dimensions to what it meant to write a letter. To some extent those dimensions crossed gender boundaries. The similarity in tone, content, and vocabulary in male- and female-authored letters suggests that letters themselves functioned as an arena where gender was sometimes obviated. It was one means of performing cultural work that both men and women could access.

Male apologia then, while adhering to formulaic traditions, might also admit to perceived shortcomings in engaging in a mode of correspondence whose meaning was

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52 On the increase of letters traveling by post, see John, *Spreading the News*, 4; on the changing emphases in letters between parents and children, see Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. Letter manuals changed during the eighteenth century from including letters written only by men and/or only women’s letters that were love letters to a more egalitarian representation of men’s and women’s letters. See Janet Gurkin Altman, "Women’s Letters in the Public Sphere," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 111-12. Painter John Singleton Copley was apparently uncomfortable about women wielding pens since none of his female subjects are pictured with one. For him, "quill and ink were still too closely associated with masculinity to fit comfortably into a female portrait." Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Furniture as Social History: Gender, Property, and Memory in the Decorative Arts," in *American Furniture 1995*, ed. Luke Beckerdite and William N. Hosley (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1995), 45-46.

53 As Nina Baym has discussed with regard to nineteenth-century female historians, certain kinds of genres were available to women because they were women, specifically letters and fiction. Men, on the other hand, had other kinds of genres available to them: history, theological tracts, etc. Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
shifting as they too corresponded with classmates, friends, and family and not simply with fellow merchants or perfunctorily with parents. Thomas Shippens's curt request that his sister excuse his "scrawl" indicates a confidence about being included in the tradition of written communication at the same time that it reveals an awareness that his letter might be lacking in appropriate elegance. Similarly, Charles Phelps's assertion that he "was in the utmost hurry which I hope will be sufficient apology," reflects self-assurance and a sense of independence at that same time that it acknowledges erring in neglecting the expected niceties. If letters as something different than business transactions were required, males may have been less well equipped--or perceived that they were less well equipped--to produce the desired affective missives. Their apologies, unlike those of some of their female contemporaries, were sometimes less intent on winning the reader's vicarious participation in writing the letter in quest of a sympathetic reading than on simply not alienating the reader by failing to conform to required standards of politeness. That both male and female correspondents invoked this formulaic style and vocabulary, however, indicates the changes underway in both the content and conceptualization of correspondence. While literary scholar Sharon M. Harris has discussed this phenomenon in terms of women's writings, arguing that women's experience resulted in written expressions marked by an "interruptive mode of discourse" and "fractured syntax," her concentration on women's expressions exclusively means that she failed to address the

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54 On "the eloquence of familiarity" coming "more naturally" to women than to men, see the Kermodes' introduction, *Oxford Book of Letters*, xxxi-xxxii.
significance of men writing in that same manner. The circularity of the gendered ways in which the apologia of correspondents of both sexes can be read reveals the extent to which conceptions about writing and communicating were shifting in this period.

If authors of letters often admitted to shortcomings in their products, they nevertheless refused to accept total responsibility for misconstrued meanings. Sometimes, in their judgment, the reader was at fault. Southgate asserted forthrightly to her cousin, for example, that "I am positive you have mistaken my meaning." She conceded that his misunderstanding might have been partly her fault--"perhaps I did not express myself so clearly as I ought to have done"--but, upon further reflection, placed the blame squarely on her reader: "how could I have written anything to bear such a construction as you have put upon a part of my letter, I know not." Charles Phelps likewise intimated that his son-in-law had misconstrued a letter which "caused some apology in your last Letter" and hoped his daughter's husband would "not give yourself any uneasiness about it for I considered it as a joke." Betsy Huntington likewise wrote anxiously to her mother that "it will be best to say nothing more of it--I must however ask

55 Harris, American Women Writers, 20-24.


57 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, April 8, 1801, Bowns, 50, 51.

58 Charles Phelps to Dan Huntington, Oct. 23, 1802 (Box 4, Folder 1), PPH.
your pardon for writing in a style to wound your feelings."\textsuperscript{59} Eliza Waite likewise "confess\[ed\] I was surpris\'d when I heard my letter had that effect for I thought that I only answer\'d her in her own way," and found herself "confessing" in another letter that her correspondent\'s expression "appears mysterious to me."\textsuperscript{60} Sometimes Louis Otto read his adored Nancy Shippen\'s letters with trepidation and uncertainty. He once complained to her, for example, that one of her passages was "very hieroglyphic and I read in vain a thousand times your dear note; I can not guess what is the meaning of that expression."\textsuperscript{61} Otto, often vexed during his long correspondence with now Nancy Shippen Livingston, was keenly aware of the possible misconceptions and misreadings that correspondents might inflict on each other. After ten years of correspondence, he still struggled:

"notwithstanding my care to remove every sentiment that might displease you I have every reason to believe that in my last Letter I have not been equally successful. The answer you gave me seemed to confirm my apprehensions. . . . To write to you . . . is not so easy a task as you suppose."\textsuperscript{62} Acutely aware of his audience, he anguish ed over the understanding she would take from his efforts and fretted when her response indicated an unintended reading of his expressions. For Otto, the "audience" he imagined as he wrote

\textsuperscript{59} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 3, 1802 (Box 13, Folder 6), PPH.

\textsuperscript{60} Eliza Waite to Susan Kittredge, Dec. 29, 1791, and Eliza Waite to Nancy [unknown], Nov. 2, 1791, Eliza Waite Correspondence, Ei.

\textsuperscript{61} Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, prob. 1779, Shippen, 86. Also see Henry Beekman Livingston to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 5, 1784, 170-71.

\textsuperscript{62} Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1789, Shippen, 259. Prior to this, he wrote Livingston, "I now discover to my great satisfaction that I have put a false construction on the meaning of my charming Correspondent." In another letter, he wrote, "If you have well understood my last Letter . . . ." Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Feb. 25, 1789, 277.
turned out to be different from the "reader" who perused his missive—even though audience and reader were the same person—marking the failure of his self-depreciating apologies to secure a sympathetic reading.

Indeed, correspondents often acknowledged that meanings of letters could be quite fluid. Elizabeth Porter Phelps confirmed the subjectivity of reading letters by admitting to her daughter that a deeply moving letter one day became far less affecting on another: "I send you a coppy as it appeared to me rather gloomy moving, the tears run like rain when I read it perhaps my feelings were different but no tears offered their service this day." 63 And, responding to her daughter's comments about a previous letter, she wrote defensively, "as to any thing of malloncholy in my letter--I dont know anything about it--nor can I recollect a single sentence." 64 Clearly annoyed that Betsy had misread a portion of her letter, she defiantly resisted the sympathy expressed in the returning "pacquet." This fluidity of expression and interpretation rendered letters both conservative and subversive. Writers worried about how to express themselves effectively and readers wondered how to read correctly, and the return letter might concede error on either side of that exchange. Hence, letters could be written and read to confirm cultural mores and at the same time slowly undermine the foundations of those mores. If they could be misread and miswritten with such frequency, even by regular correspondents, they represented a very fluid and hence potentially threatening—or

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63 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 16, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

64 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, July 5, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.
liberating, depending on one's perspective—mode of discourse indeed.⁶⁵

That correspondents of the early republic penned their missives in the context of heated debates about ratifying the Constitution is no coincidence. Proponents and detractors of the Constitution—a written document—wrestled with the very same issues. When James Madison, for example, criticized the "unhallowed language" of anti-Federalists who sought to undermine the Constitution by labeling it "a novelty in the political world" that " rashly attempts what it is impossible to accomplish," he recognized opponents' fears of the subversive possibilities contained in that document. On the other hand, his simultaneous musing about whether "the experiment of the extended republic [is] to be rejected merely because it . . . is new" confirmed those "unhallowed" remarks about the novelty of the document (as well as the political order it recommended).⁶⁶ Like the words comprising both the Constitution and the debate it occasioned, the vocabulary invoked in letters both confirmed the existence of unsettled controversies and participated in and sometimes inflamed those debates because they too were culturally fluid and

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shifting.\textsuperscript{67}

In spite of the potential subversiveness inherent in unsettled language, or maybe because of it, letters were asked for and welcomed warmly. From London, Thomas Shippen tempered his hurt with humor when he exclaimed to his sister, "Thirteen vessels from Philadelphia and New York and not one line from Mrs L. to T.L.S. How unaccountable! how unfriendly! how unsisterly!\textsuperscript{68} "My dear wife," Charles Phelps more tenderly addressed Elizabeth, "I have been to NHampton and have received a Treasure--The receipt of your Letters give Me real Joy."\textsuperscript{69} On another occasion, his wife expressed equal happiness: "What a day this has been--almost too much--two large pacquets the post brought."\textsuperscript{70} And their daughter Betsy similarly assured: "My dear mother, you cannot think how happy the perusal of your letters made me."\textsuperscript{71} Eliza Southgate also joyfully received her mother's letters--"With what pleasure did I receive your letter"--and later her sister's, "Your letter, my dear Octavia, was the first thing to welcome me on my

\textsuperscript{67} On writing as conservative (confirming cultural mores) and subversive (writing as "multiform transactions that have taken place" between texts and contexts), see Brodhead, \textit{Cultures of Letters}, 7-9, 66, 116-117. On the fluidity and exchange of language, vocabulary, and changing definitions, see Pocock, "State of the Art," 18-26.

\textsuperscript{68} Thomas Shippen to Nancy Shippen Livingston, January 1786, \textit{Shippen}, 244.

\textsuperscript{69} Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 22, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 3), PPH.

\textsuperscript{70} Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 16, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH. In her autobiography, Catharine Maria Sedgwick recalled excitedly the "arrival of those packets!" in the 1790s, when she and her siblings "all gathered about our mother, each expecting, and very often receiving, a letter 'from papa!'" Mary Kelley, \textit{The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick} (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 65.

\textsuperscript{71} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, March 14, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
arrival at this City. I cannot describe to you my sensations when it came." Abigail Brackett Lyman likewise described the "many pleasing emotions which were excited by your sweet letter" and effused that "nothing could have been more welcome" than "a Letter from Rebecca." Even though they feared that their own missives were insensible or too long, recipients valued letters as treasures that brought joy and happiness.

Correspondents often explicitly confirmed the connection generated by letters and regarded them as symbols of affection. Betsy Huntington, for example, seeking letters from her mother, expressed her hope "that I shall still be remembered by you, and that you will continue to grant me some token of your love." A few weeks later, basking in the closeness and intimacy afforded by their recent correspondence, her mother comfortably wrote back, "Well child how rapidly we hear from one another." Phelps likewise wrote her husband that he "need not wonder I write so often it is the nearest to seeing you of anything I can attain too," and later wrote that she "must begin a letter, for it seems long since I have had a conversation with you." Charles Phelps, on the other hand, hastened to assure his daughter that her "Ideas of our forgetfulness of you my

72 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, June 13, 1797, Bowne, 6; and Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 1, 1803, 148.

73 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Aug. 23, 1796, Lyman, 190.

74 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 22, 1800, Lyman, 135-36.

75 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 22, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

76 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 13, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

77 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, June 2, 1780 (Box 5, Folder 13); May 16, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.
Daughter are without any just foundation—you know I am as poor a hand at Letterwirting—as at visiting—and you must not think my not writing Oftener is any proof of disregard.” This last remark raises a couple of different possibilities about what letter writing meant to men and women. If the business of maintaining familial contact fell to females, Charles Phelps may have responded to his daughter’s request for more letters with a reminder that while he wrote (and visited) occasionally, his irregular habits meant no "proof of disregard" since that proof could only be found in his wife’s failure to attend to her correspondence. On the other hand, his daughter clearly failed to recognize a gendered division of responsibility in terms of correspondence and assumed that epistolary neglect by anybody bespoke "disregard."

Other correspondents also gratefully acknowledged receiving letters. Abigail Lyman happily received an epistle "truly expresive of Affection" from her "much Loved friend, R.S.," thanked another friend for her "Affectionate Letter," and observed that engaging in "corresondance" could "preserve the 'Link' and strengthen & cement the union" between friends. Nancy Shippen’s beau invested letters with similar significance

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78 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Feb. 28, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

79 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 20, 1800, Lyman, 133.

80 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, Lyman, 216. See also, ABL to Mrs. Jerusha Catlin, Jan. 1, 1801, 212; ABL to Mrs Jerusha Catlin, Feb. 12, 1798, 200; ABL to Mary Grew, Aug. 23, 1796, 190; ABL journal March 30, 1800, 152; April 27, 1800, 171.

81 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, n.d., probably 1802, Lyman, 227. Lyman’s correspondence, as well as that of Eliza Southgate, Betsy Phelps, and Nancy Shippen, accords with the "bonds of womanhood" and the "female world of love and ritual" so ably described by Nancy Cott and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. It is important to remember, however, that this discourse of tender female intimacy was only one of several discourses available to and exercised by female correspondents. Cott, The Bonds of Womanhood: Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian
and complained about the scarcity and brevity of the epistles he received from his favorite correspondent: "I have only a small collection of small notes, written on very small paper and sometimes with a very small degree of Sensibility," Otto protested. "These notes send you an humble petition for some sisters to keep them Company. Would you be so cruel as to refuse your own Children?"82 And, some years later, he wrote, "If . . . you remember your absent Friend think that you can not more effectually return his tender regard than by writing him very often."83 Likewise, Martha Bland, a friend of Shippen's, affirmed that she "shall wish as ardently for a letter from you . . . as a lover wishes for a sight of his mistress."84

In addition to demonstrating the value letters held for their recipients as symbols of affection as well as vehicles for news and the transit of necessary communications, these solicitations placed letters squarely at the center of raging cultural debates. The remarks of Louis Otto and Martha Blandgendered letters female, as "sisters" in one case, and as "mistresses" in the other. This gendering of letters underscores indeterminateness of the individual and cultural significance of letters at the same time that it highlights the hotly debated issue of appropriate gender roles in the early republic. Otto's "sisters" were children--powerless in a patriarchal family--but they assumed the prerogative of the

America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53-76.

82 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, written between 1779 and 1781, Shippen, 100. Eliza Southgate once referred to her own letters as "Children," observing that "we have such a partiality for our own offspring we rarely ever treat them with the severity they deserve." Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Nov. 10, 1801, Bowme, 80.


84 Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen, October 23, 1785, Shippen, 237.
petition and presumed to demand a reformulation of the family. Otto's invocation of the familial model in terms of letters occurred within the context of efforts to reconcile a participatory republic, in which the people were sovereign, with the family, which most agreed should remain patriarchal, a severing of the family and state as models for each other occasioned by the overthrowing of the English monarchy. Otto's "sisters" negotiated those two poles by respectfully petitioning for redress (accepting the patriarchal order) but presuming to have a say in what that order was. As will be seen, Eliza Southgate behaved in the same manner in an exchange with her father.

Furthermore, Otto's invocation of the mother-child construct tapped a culturally resonant debate about the survival of the republic itself. Otto complained that if Shippen refused to send more "notes," thereby denying her "children" love and attention, she would fail to fulfill a powerfully invested female role. She would be the antithesis of the "republican mother." Contemporary discussions about women sought to politicize their role as mothers, while simultaneously denying them direct political participation, by affirming the crucial need for children to be raised as virtuous citizens. A mother's attention,

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guidance, example, and devotion were considered indispensable to that process. Hence, when Otto asked Shippen whether she "would be so cruel as to refuse your own Children," he invoked a cultural controversy that simultaneously sought to empower mothers at the same time that it politically disempowered them. Letters manifested that ambiguity as well. Composed of hand-written words, were they powerful purveyors of authority and truth, or fluid, shifting expressions of intimate and possibly fleeting sentiments? Or both?

Martha Bland's association of letters with "mistresses" evoked a passionate and perhaps temporary relationship potentially disruptive and unsettling to a social order that demanded constancy, virtue, and rational thought and behavior. On the other hand, courted mistresses often became wives, another female role heavily laden with cultural meaning. Just as the republican mother was to raise virtuous citizens by being apolitical herself, the "republican wife" was presumed to wield impressive "influence" over her husband and render him a good republican citizen. A wife's influence, however, was sorely constrained by the necessity of requiring her husband's cooperation because of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of influencing someone resistant to such efforts. As a reader, Bland proclaimed herself "male" and ready to be "influenced" by her "mistress," the written words comprising a letter. By privileging the letter, she both confirmed the potential disruption a mistress could cause and awarded power and "influence" to a

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87 See Lewis, "The Republican Wife."
vehicle whose power could only be exercised with the acquiescence of the subject.

Correspondents regularly tapped a variety of discourses to compel remiss recipients to reform. The young Betsy Phelps, like Eliza Southgate, wrote her mother in terms of reciprocal duties, "I have a great mind to say I shan't write any more till I have a letter . . . shall I think you have forgotten me?"88 A few years later, however, she switched tactics: "I begin to fear," she wrote forlornly, "that those friends, around whom my affections have clung with so much fondness, have entirely given me up . . . as unworthy of the favor, what else can account for this long silence?"89 Nancy Shippen's mother forthrightly scolded her daughter for not writing: "Surely you should not omit any opportunity of writing to me, but to neglect such a one was inexcusable, but I shall say the less to you now, because you have been taught your duty & I take it for granted Mrs Rogers has already reproved you for so great an omission."90 The difference of nearly 25 years in Ann Shippen's remarks and Betsy Phelps's sorrowful pleading highlight again the contrasts in generational expression from practical to emotive, as well as indicate the different stations each woman occupied in relation to her correspondent. In 1777, the 42-year-old Ann Shippen assumed that her daughter would write to her and berated her for neglecting her duty. In 1801, the 22-year-old Betsy Huntington made an emotional plea to her mother, asking for attention and love. There are two explanations for this difference. One is that expressions from a mother to a daughter and from a daughter to a

88 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 5, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

89 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 17, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

90 Alice Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, Sept. 22, 1777, Shippen, 40.
mother would naturally be conceived of and formulated differently. Ann Shippen certainly would not have written in such a manner to her own mother. The other, as Jan Lewis has explained, has to do with the general increase in emotional content found in letters written after the Revolution in comparison with earlier expressions. But, as we have seen in the case of Eliza Southgate, and to some extent with Betsy Phelps herself, numerous exceptions challenge the chronological explanation, favoring a reading that acknowledges the simultaneous existence of contrasting discourses in the same time period, generation, and individual.

While letters sometimes rewarded correspondents with sensations of connectivity and proximity and signified affection and concern, they might also struggle but fail to bridge geographic and discursive distance. When "repeated rains . . . wither'd [her] fondest hopes" for a visit from her friend Mary Grew, Abigail Lyman confessed her "sad disappointment" and tried to console herself that writing letters, "this only method of

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91 The difference between a mother and daughter's sentiments written at the same time is exemplified by the similar but somewhat differently weighted apologia shared by Phelps and her daughter. While Betsy Huntington encouraged her mother to "tell me to stop writing when I am too expansive," her mother suggested that her daughter "give me a hint" if her letters were too long (see above). And when Elizabeth Porter Phelps remonstrated her daughter, she took a much different approach than Ann Shippen had some 25 years earlier. "What a naughty speech you made in your letter," she scolded, "I will tell you what it is--for I dont believe you remember it--& should 'I ever be in that situation I have no friends to be interested about the event--but my other self' now I do think tis too bad--do you suppose us all dead, or worse, void of natural affection." (Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Sept. 18, 1801 [Box 6, Folder 1], PPH) Phelps's reprimand, like Ann Shippen's upbraiding, reveals different relational expectations between mother and daughter. But the difference in sentiments expressed by the two mothers exposes the distance between generations in terms of form as well as content. Commanding a much less polished penmanship than her daughter, Phelps's sentence structure (or lack thereof) testifies to the fact that in some respects writing meant something different to her than it did to her daughter. While Nancy Shippen's mother revealed generational distance (both in terms of her relationship to her daughter and her being generation older than Phelps) in her terseness, Phelps exposed familial relationships—mother and daughter—by her form. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'From the Fair to the Brave': Spheres of Womanhood in Federal Maine" in Agreeable Situations: Society, Commerce, and Art in Southern Maine, 1780-1830, ed. Laura Fecych Sprague (Kennebunk, Maine: Brick Store Museum, 1987), esp. 217, 221.
communication[,] must yet prove a substitute," but she still wished ardently that it would "soon be made unnecessary."  Mary Anna Whiting Boardman likewise assured her husband that "so much do I think of you, . . . that I frequently wish to be saying something to you" and Hannah Tracy Emery announced travel plans without an explanation, admitting to having made arrangements "for reasons which I can better tell you than write." Elizabeth Phelps wrote her daughter after a visit that "last Wednesday we had your letters—nor could I hardly believe that it was not two weeks after you left us—it seems now like 2 months—how can I be so foolish—there is now twenty questions I want you to answer, which I dare not ask—you can guess what they are—for you can exactly tell what I wish to know—only can you commit it to paper that's the thing." In this case, sitting down to address her daughter not only deepened Phelps's sense of separation, it underscored the limitations of written correspondence in maintaining intimacy. She likewise asked her son to "give me some of the particulars you mention reserving for verbal communication" since it would be "an old story" by the time they could discuss it together. To her husband she "once more" sat down to "say a few words to one with whom at this time . . . I used to be sitting at the table partaking of a social meal—yet now

92 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, Lyman, 216.

93 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Elijah Boardman, Sept. 13, 1800, Boardman, 150. Also see her May 15, 1805, letter to her husband, 150.

94 Hannah Tracy Emery Abbot to Mary Carter, April 8, 1793, Cutts Family Collection, EI.

95 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Dec. 17, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH.

96 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Nov. 6, 1792 (Box 5, Folder 14), PPH.
how distant." In another letter, she curiously wrote, "dost you remember when we were going home from here last march I mentioned something to you . . . and that I dare not mention one word of it to [Eliza]--I can now tell you that the affair wears a fine aspect." Betsy Phelps dramatically wrote her mother that "the much loved employment of conversing--must be exchanged for that of writing," a "great favour tho' far inferior," and in another wrote defensively that "certainly I do not say all I should face to face." Louis Otto succumbed to a similarly evasive strategy in a letter to Nancy Shippen when he wrote, "I hope you will easily guess what I mean and--tell me if I am right."

These circumspect remarks confirm historian Michael Warner's findings about print in the eighteenth century which, he argues, was tied to public activity. Any written expression, even that contained in a letter or diary, was considered a "public" expression. Correspondents, therefore, wrestled--in their letters--with the inherent contradiction of composing an apparently intimate message with written words that were associated with the public domain. Elizabeth Phelps's "can you commit it to paper" was both a direct question and a rhetorical question. What would happen to the answer if it was committed to paper was the issue. Either its non-public status would be betrayed or writing it down would bestow an inappropriate finality to a topic still in flux. If correspondents agonized

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97 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, April 24, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.

98 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, May 7, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.

99 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Dec. 13, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), Dec. 20, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

100 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, written between 1779 and 1781, Shippen, 85. Likewise Henry Livingston wrote to his estranged wife Nancy Shippen Livingston that he would "not lengthen out this Scrawl because I do not . . . chuse to Animadvert upon the exceptionable parts of your Conduct or Letters." Henry Beekman Livingston to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 5. 1784, 170-71.
over the correct interpretations of the sentiments they did commit to paper, other topics
were apparently still so unsettled that writing them down would sway the matter in ways
potentially disruptive to the "natural" (unwritten) evolution still unfolding. Indeed, as she
began a new journal in 1800, Abigail Brackett Lyman remembered with horror that the
"greatest fault" with her previous "extremely defective" effort, which she burned, "was
that the language was too strong. It express more than I ever [experienced & it m]ight
lead one to 'think more highly of myself than I ought.'"101 Elizabeth Porter Phelps took
care not to express more than she experienced, a resolve that resulted in numerous
tantalizing journal entries about "soure tryal[s]," "bitter portions," "new discoveries--
bitter! Cruel," a woeful "Oh what a day and night was the last," and looking back over a
"peculiar" year marked by "some new sorrows."102 Hannah Williams Heath, on the other
hand, wrote clearly and at length about the "shameful abuse" she endured from a husband
who "delights to make his [wife] miserable." Given that "Mr Heaths disposition & mine
are so widely different," Heath saw "no prospect of ever feeling much interest in any
thing here below" and believed that "a desart would be more agreeable to me, than his
society." In 1809, she reflected on the "long eighteen years I have lived" with a man she
subsequently described as "appear[ing] like a log of wood," who "has no concern for
me."103 While both Phelps and Heath divulged feelings of sadness, anger, grief, and

101 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 1, 1800, Lyman, 107.
102 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 27, 1788, New England Historical and Genealogical Record
(NEHGR) 119 (1965), 297; Aug. 31, 1788, NEHGR 119 (1965), 299; Aug. 24, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966),
213; July 20, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966), 212; Nov. 23, 1788, NEHGR 119 (1965), 300.
103 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 28, 1807, June 21, 1807, May 16, 1808, Jan. 25, 1809,
reform in their journal entries, the different styles in which they wrote of life's problems indicates the persistence of older forms of circumspect expression alongside increasingly revelatory description. Interestingly, Phelps reserved different forms of expression for different vehicles of expression. In contrast to her diary, her letters were effusive, emotional, descriptive, and long. For both Phelps and Heath, however, the exercise of writing about unhappy circumstances was intended to sway their own behavior, to "compose my spirit" and "not be given over to a hard heart" in Phelps's case,104 and to bear her "lot with cheerfulness and christian fortitude" and feel gratitude for "many blessings which I did not expect" in Heath's case.105

Since "print," whether published or hand-written, was considered a public mode of communication with "performative" consequences—the written word was presumed to "influence" readers' behavior—revealing circumstances as yet undetermined in letters, and even in journals, might be risky indeed. Or, perhaps the emerging distinction between private and public written expression resulted in a fluidity of meaning that made "guessing" a better method of communicating than trying to reconcile notions about public print with private correspondence.106

104 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 20, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966), 212; Aug. 31, 1788, NEHGR 119 (1965), 299.

105 Hannah Williams Heath diary June 21, 1807, May 16, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

In spite of sometimes painfully self-conscious efforts to find persuasive vocabulary and discourses, correspondents occasionally penned letters that simply did not perform as they wished, and that gap between expectation and realization also generated rumination in their missives. Less explicit about the circumspection demanded by writing letters than the authors of some of the previous examples, but equally astute with regard to either the limitations or power of written words, Betsy Huntington wrote: "My dear mother, how much happier should I be if instead of addressing you at a distance, I could see and converse with you face to face."\textsuperscript{107} For Louis Otto, writing about the inefficacy of letters was a way of affirming his devotion to Nancy Shippen: "I am always at a loss how to express myself to you. . . . Read in my Eyes . . . when I look on you . . . read in the same time in my heart."\textsuperscript{108} In a letter to her cousin Moses, Eliza Southgate addressed the disjunction between face-to-face conversation and sharing letters across space: "I recollect in a former letter you asked why I did not say more of particular characters, and . . . give you a few character sketches," she wrote. "The truth is--I felt afraid to. . . . I am always willing to speak my opinion without reserve on any character, because I should take care that I spoke it before those who would not abuse the frankness; but letters may be miscarried, may fall into hands we know not of."\textsuperscript{109} Like Lyman,

\textsuperscript{107} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 10, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

\textsuperscript{108} Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, written between 1779 and 1781, Shippen, 98.

\textsuperscript{109} Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, March 18, 1801, Browne, 48. Although Southgate's letters were not intended for publication, her comments to Moses Porter confirm assessments about the changing significance of published works. As Larzer Ziff notes, "As print culture expanded, . . . the authority texts had once derived from the person of their authors--an authority inherited from oral culture, wherein speaker and spoken were inseparable--would be transferred to the reader who absorbed the replicated text at a physical and temporal distance from its producer." Larzer Ziff, A Silent Revolution: Benjamin Franklin
Southgate feared the reader's interpretation of an idea or sentiment that acquired a
certainty on paper that it lacked in conversation. Her concern about the letter miscarrying
probably had more to do with her cousin misreading her expression (and her distance
from him made it impossible to quickly amend his misperception) than the letter being
held by "hands we know not of" although that was a likelihood too since letters were
regularly shared. The correspondence she shared with her cousin was replete with
misunderstandings and certain items were simply too risky. Mary Carter likewise wrote
that "I have a thousand things to say, some more proper to be spoken than written (I find I
have express'd myself as if they were very important, but you must not expect them too
much so)." Like Southgate, Louis Otto, and Betsy Huntington, Carter agreed that
letters embodied a finality and sense of permanence that was hard to challenge and
difficult to correct or amend. Letters, as vehicles of the written word, these four agreed,

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110 Letters during this era often included instructions about who may or may not view them. Every
once and a while, the point would be underscoring with a formal, "I need not tell you my dear Madam that
this is a confidential Letter" (Margaret Beekman Livingston to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1788, Shippen,
266), or a concluding "Your own discretion will suggest to you the propriety, or rather necessity of burning
this letter after you have read the beginning" (Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, May 16, 1789, Cutts
Family Collection, El; see also Emery to Carter, Oct. 17, 1791). Samuel Whiting encouraged his sister to
show her boarding school tutor "your letters as you send home, that contain nothing private, to obtain his
corrections," a request he repeated a week later. (Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, June 26, 1785,
and July 2, 1785, Boardman, 87) Hannah Tracy Emery, startled at not finding an expected letter in "the
bundle," asked her recipient to "look at home & see if you have not mislaid it, for I am very anxious of my
property of that kind." (Hannah Tracy Emery Abbot to Mary Carter, 1791, Cutts Family Collection, El. See
also Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, Aug. 1787, Cutts Family Collection, El.) Eliza Southgate's
handling of letters was much more sophisticated and savvyy than the heroine of Rowson's novel Charlotte
Temple, who trusted in the sanctity of letters to the extent that it never occurred to her that perhaps hers had
been intercepted.

111 Mary Carter to Hannah Tracy Emery, April 30, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, El.
were invested with more authority than conversation.\textsuperscript{112}

Hence, correspondents often invoked that authority to relay instructions or suggestions to their recipients. Charles Phelps wrote to his son at Harvard, for example: "I hope you will behave yourself so as to get the Esteem of your Tutor . . . and behave yourself with decency and good order."\textsuperscript{113} In subsequent missives, he admonished Charles to "Improve your Time well,—habitate yourself to decent conversation, and behavior," "be particular in learning to write, these long Evenings,—Much time may be lost in foolish Company," and "improve your Time Well—much may be done by you now —to furnish yourself with knowledge for your future usefulness in Life."\textsuperscript{114} The recipient of this advice sent his own instructions to his sister with the hopes that "these lines may possibly induce you . . . to be cautious in forming intimacies in your friendships."\textsuperscript{115} Charles received instruction from his sister in turn, who admonished him to "guard

\textsuperscript{112} On the other hand, Mrs. Shippen took a different tact on this issue. When she told her daughter she would "say the less to you now, because . . . I take it for granted Mrs Rogers has already reproved you," she affirmed the power of face-to-face communication over written communication. Her letter, however, conforms to an older understanding of letters as vehicles of duty between her and her children, for she continued, "do remember my dear how much of the beauty & usefulness of life depends on a proper conduct in the several relations in life, & the sweet peace that flows from the consideration of doing our duty to all with whom we are conected." Nancy's mother felt that nothing was unsettled or being negotiated in this circumstance and wrote in that tone. Alice Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, Sept. 22, 1777, Shippen, 40.

\textsuperscript{113} Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Aug. 31, 1787 (Box 4, Folder 5), PPH. John Quincy Adams likewise wrote a series of instructional letters to his sons during the second decade of the nineteenth century which he asked his mother, Abigail Adams, to "interpret 'everything that [they] may find to hard.'" See Edith B. Gelles, Portia: The World of Abigail Adams (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 145.

\textsuperscript{114} Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 22, 1787 (Box 4, Folder 5); Dec. 11, 1787 (Box 4, Folder 5); June 1, 1789 (Box 4, Folder 5), PPH.

\textsuperscript{115} Charles Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps, Oct. 10, 1791 (Box 10, Folder 2), PPH.
against "the "custom of profanity in conversation." William Shippen wrote in this vein to both his son and his daughter while they were away at school. "My dear Nancy," he wrote in 1777, "was pleased with your french letter which was much better spelt than your English one, in which I was sorry to see four of five words wrong. Take care my dear girl of your spelling and your teeth." To his son, he issued a more forthright statement: "You are blessed with capacity & it will be your own fault if you dont make a great & useful man." His wife likewise proffered instruction, encouraging her daughter to "improve in your work, in writing & drawing," in addition to demanding unambiguously that she never neglect opportunities to write to her.

In her letters, Southgate acknowledged both giving and receiving instruction. To her father, she guiltily admitted that "the contents of your letter surprised me at first; it may sometimes be of service to me, for while I have such a monitor, I never can act contrary to such advice. . . . Your letter shall be my guide from home." Another letter confirmed that remonstrances had again arrived via the post for she wrote her parents that "expressing your disapprobation . . . was enough." Clearly, Southgate found these letters distressing and took them very seriously (or at least knew she should), but her

116 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Oct. 8, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 15), PPH.
117 William Shippen to Nancy Shippen, 1777, Shippen, 36.
118 William Shippen to Thomas Lee Shippen, August 1778, Shippen, 66.
119 Alice Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, Nov. 8, 1777, Shippen, 41.
120 Eliza Southgate to Robert Southgate, Jan. 9, 1798, Bowne, 14-15.
121 Eliza Southgate to Robert and Mary Southgate, May 12, 1798, Bowne, 19.
responses also suggested a potential fluctuation of familial authority. Although Robert Southgate participated in a long tradition when he sent written instructions to his children, his daughter's subsequent assurance that his "letter shall be [her] guide from home," meant that assumptions about the written word were shifting to the extent that she felt obliged to assure him that she read his remonstrances seriously, that she recognized his authority. As long as Southgate and other children granted the written word authority, let it influence their behavior, such guides would be very effective. Indeed, in a 1776 letter to his son who had just enlisted in the army, Sherman Boardman explained that the reason he sent written advice rather than having spoken to him before his departure was that he feared his son "might forget all, should I merely say what I wished." Written words, however, would be more persuasive, in part because of their permanence. As Boardman concluded his instructions: "When you have nothing else to read, read this letter."

Sherman Boardman's son addressed a similar letter to his own son William 26 years later, warning that "to economize time, and learn how it would be advisable for you to spend the early part of your life, will form a subject for future letters from me." Charles Phelps confirmed the power of actually reading letters as well when he wrote his son that he had "only heard them [the letters] read whilst I was at Supper and therefore can't write a proper answer." Hearing the contents of a letter involved a different


123 Sherman Boardman to Elijah Boardman, 1776. Boardman, 127, 128.

124 Elijah Boardman to William Whiting Boardman, Oct. 10, 1802, Boardman, 147.

125 Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Aug. 27, 1794 (Box 4, Folder 6), PPH.
process and heralded a different result than actually seeing and reading the written words.

The melding of the written word with a form of communication sometimes
gendered female, as seen in the examples of Louis Otto's "republican mother" and Martha
Bland's "republican wife," as often as not, however, boded ill for the triumph of this
strategy, as Eliza Southgate's father undoubtedly realized. Eliza too, he understood,
could write letters. Just as Louis Otto had spoken of Nancy Shippen's letters as children
who petitioned for more sisters, presuming to have a voice in family matters, Southgate's
letters challenged her father's authority by virtue of the medium they both used to
communicate. Although Sherman Boardman hoped his letter would be more influential
than his speech, he too acknowledged limits to the relationship between the written word,
authority, and behavior when he emphasized that his son should repeatedly "read this
letter." 126

Confirming the potential of the written word to subvert as well as reinforce
familial authority, Eliza Southgate did indeed place herself at the other end of an
instructional exchange. She wrote her sister that "Martha tells us you were in Boston last
Sunday. Mamma thinks, Octavia, you are there too much, we do not know how often, but
we hear of you there very often indeed." 127 Beginning by relaying somebody else's
instruction ("Mamma's"), Southgate then assumed authority herself ("we hear of you . . ."
[emphasis added]). In effect, she appropriated the role her father had attempted to claim

126 Louis Otto also assumed the power of the written word, writing to Nancy Shippen Livingston:
"I shall not repeat the contents of my last note. I flatter myself you will not easily forget them." Louis Otto
to Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 24, 1784, Shippen, 209.

127 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 14, 1800, Bowne, 29.
as his own only two years previously and, by invoking the authority of the written word, undermined familial deference. The previously discussed exchanges between Nancy Shippen and her mother, Betsy Huntington and her mother, and Elijah Boardman and his father also expose the tension between understood familial hierarchies and access to and the authority invested in the written word. The fact that Elijah Boardman explained to his son that he communicated instructions via writing rather than in a face-to-face exchange because he feared his son "might forget all, should [he] merely say what I wished," suggests that even as its authority foundered, the written word still enjoyed significantly more persuasiveness than oral conversation.

Naturally, correspondents wrote about other letters in their own letters. Charles Phelps devoted nearly half of a letter to his daughter to summarizing a letter he had recently received from his wife,\textsuperscript{128} and William Shippen assured his son that "Your Mamma is well & expects the next letter. Nancy will write by the first private opportunity & both send much love."\textsuperscript{129} In a 1781 letter, Louis Otto queried Nancy Shippen about a letter written by her mother that they had both read, asking her to "Please tell me which words you did not approve of in your Mamma's letter."\textsuperscript{130} While journals could at times approximate letters,\textsuperscript{131} they also often served as outlets for an accounting of letters received and dispatched. In her otherwise devotedly religious diary, the young

\textsuperscript{128} Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 30, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.

\textsuperscript{129} William Shippen to Thomas Shippen, Nov. 9, 1780, Shippen, 95.

\textsuperscript{130} Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, 1781, Shippen, 104.

\textsuperscript{131} As in the case of Esther Edwards Burr; see note 33.
Betsy Phelps once observed that "last Wednesday I wrote to Mr H-- and Miss H--." In her diary, Julia Cowles of Farmington, Connecticut, regularly noted the course of her correspondence. On Friday she "wrote to Cousin Horace," on Tuesday "finished my letter to Horace," a month later "had 2 letters from home," a couple days after that "wrote 3 letters home," and on Monday "recieved [sic] a letter from Cousin Horace containing news of the death of his beloved classmate, melancholy news indeed." Similarly Abigail Brackett Lyman regularly noted if she "wrote two letters" or "received a number of Letters." Hannah Williams Heath documented occasions of writing or receiving letters as well, observing when she "wrote to Betsy" or "received a letter from John." In her journal, Nancy Shippen Livingston, who noted both writing and receiving letters almost daily, wrote on one such occasion that her friend Eliza Livingston "receiv'd a packet the other day . . . from my friend [Otto] . . . She shew'd me the letter in confidence." A month later, she sorrowfully confirmed that she herself had "Reciev'd a

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134 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 3, 1800, Lyman, 124; April 27, 1800, 171. See also Feb. 4, 1800, 125; Feb. 11, 1800, 129; Feb. 18, 1800, 130; Feb. 19, 1800, 130; Feb. 20, 1800, 133; Feb. 22, 1800, 135-36; March 12, 1800, 142; March 23, 1800, 148; March 30, 1800, 151-52; April 12, 1800, 163; April 15, 1800, 169; May 11, 1800, 175.

135 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 15, 1805, March 3, 1807, Heath Family Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS). See also, March 26, April 21, June 12, Oct. 8, 1805; Feb. 15, 1808; April 30, 1808; Sept. 17, 1808; Nov. 11, 1808; Jan. 23, 1809; May 20, 1809; Nov. 19, 1809; and several undated entries in March, April, and June 1810; Jan. 5, 1811; n.d. Jan 1811, n.d. Feb. 1811; March 1, 1811, plus two other entries that month, two in April 1811, one in May, two in June, and one in September 1811, in addition to several in her journal for 1812, which has survived the years in much less order than her other journals.

136 Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 18, 1784, Shippen, 191.
letter from [Otto], as a last testimony of his friendship. It was very affecting. he is gone! I am glad I did not take leave of him, it wou’d have affected me too much."\textsuperscript{137}

While letters served a number of different functions for people at different stages in their lives, and consisted of comments about writing letters, reading letters, wanting letters, or sending letters, sometimes they could become more than the relationship they were presumed to sustain. Nancy Shippen’s assertion that she was glad Otto had sent a farewell letter rather than appearing in person to perform the "affecting" exercise at first belies the authority of the written word because she seems to have suggested that a face-to-face encounter would have been too much, even more distressing than the "very affecting" letter. A closer look at the correspondence she shared with Otto, however, refines or maybe even undermines that initial interpretation.

From 1779 to 1781, Nancy Shippen was courted by Louis Otto and Colonel Harry Livingston. In March 1781, she consented to marry Otto, a match her mother approved. Her father, however, considered Colonel Livingston a more promising suitor and a wedding was speedily arranged and dutifully performed on March 14, 1781.\textsuperscript{138} The marriage was troubled from the start, and after a tumultuous two years of enduring her husband’s jealous accusations of her infidelity and being repeatedly confronted with the many obvious proofs of his own, she ran away to her parents’ home in 1783. Her correspondence with Otto resumed, although apparently in keeping with the propriety that

\textsuperscript{137} Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 25, 1784, \textit{Shippen}, 203.

\textsuperscript{138} Ames, ed., \textit{Shippen}, 105-111.
her married state demanded.  Otto himself married in 1787 only to have his wife die in childbirth shortly thereafter, marking another resumption of his correspondence with Nancy. For both, the exchange of letters appears to have served as an emotional centerpiece and relief. Otto lived in New York and Livingston in Philadelphia. They finally met again in 1789. This was apparently a mutually unsatisfactory visit, for Otto subsequently wrote his "amiable Friend" that he was "embarrassed" about "the manner in which I was obliged to behave during your stay in town" as "so much reserve seems to be incompatible with Friendship." Perplexed by the contradictions between their correspondence and their actual meeting, he concluded that the Nancy "whose letters I can not peruse too often is not the same to whom I spoke and if those letters are the deceiving images of a dream, let them continue to make me happy without ever informing me that I am mistaken." He solved the dilemma by privileging the letters over their meeting, by trusting that "probably I shall find her again in her letters: probably?--no there is no doubt."  

While Nancy Livingston's letters do not survive, we learn of her response in Otto's next letter, in which he confessed that he was "disappointed in your behaviour to me," and further admitted that while he "wanted very much to write," and indeed enclosed a previously penned letter in this packet, he had hesitated to write until he heard from her, "untill I knew the true motives of your conduct," as he said. He feared that their

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139 For a discussion about a correspondence the married Abigail Adams maintained with a man other than her husband John, see Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," chap., in Portia, 57-71.

140 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, prob. 1789, Shippen, 280.
correspondence had led Nancy to "frame[] exagerated ideas of his amability," and that she had been "disappointed" upon seeing him in person. Whatever she wrote in her letter "entirely cured" him, however, and left him "more impatient than ever to see whether you are less ceremonious at home than you have been here." Desperate to try again, he struggled with the medium of letters, admitting that "I think I have a great deal to say to you, which I can not commit to the paper; but let us not be disappointed a second time; let us be mutually convinced of our sincerity and take hold of the first opportunity for a complete explanation."\textsuperscript{141}

For both Otto and Livingston, the process of writing and reading letters had become distinct from the people--themselves--and the relationship the endeavor was intended to augment.\textsuperscript{142} Their correspondence seems to confirm Abigail Lyman’s later concern about language being so "strong" that it "exprest" more than actual experience warranted. Hence, Livingston’s earlier relief that Otto had departed without a personal confrontation may well have been relief that their apparently very close, affectionate, and caring written relationship was spared the test (or realization) of its actual basis and

\textsuperscript{141} Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Aug. 15, 1789, \textit{Shippen}, 280-281.

\textsuperscript{142} For a discussion of the "abstraction" writing could become see Gelles, Portia, ch. 2, esp. 36. In her discussion of late-nineteenth century shared diaries, Jane S. Hunter confirms that writing "became a way of confessing, protecting, or creating secrets too private for speech." Jane S. Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America," \textit{American Quarterly} 44 (1992), 66. Similarly, Ellen Rothman also discovered that late nineteenth-century courting couples found writing, rather than talking face-to-face, was the way to learn "'everything' that went on inside the other's head." Ellen K. Rothman, \textit{Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America} (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 224. The dialectic between writing being shaped by life experience and life experience being shaped by writing is discussed by Margo Culley, Introduction, \textit{A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present} (New York: Feminist Press, 1985), 14.
extent. Livingston and Otto found the discrepancy between the contents of their letters and the reality of their situation bewildering because the acts of writing and reading were invested with a meaning and authority that ill accorded with their unhappy realization that writing was not as connected to actual activity as they had assumed. Hence, they struggled to deny what their meeting had revealed in favor of privileging their long, touching correspondence. Or, in Martha Bland's terms, they granted the "mistress" influence.

Another way to look at this exchange is in terms of the possibilities and limits that male and female correspondents faced as they worked with pen and paper to cover geographic space and close emotional distance. If correspondence existed at the intersection of separation and connection, at an in-between place rendered unsettled by its very function of bridging opposing circumstances, it operated as a liminal place, a place where social boundaries blurred and collapsed. Perhaps Livingston and Otto, therefore, were confounded by the contradiction of enjoying a relationship in words that they could not possibly consummate in person, as both realized. Letters permitted the expression of affections that were liberating, but the words that permitted such warm intimacy, by virtue of their unsettled nature, also invited chaos, as revealed in the exchange quoted above. In rendering inconsequential the usual social boundaries, letters were both profoundly liberating and threatening. Letters that concluded with pleas for secrecy likewise confirmed the radical possibilities understood to reside in the medium itself.

143 Ultimately Nancy Livingston initiated and lost a suit for divorce from Colonel Livingston. Otto subsequently married the daughter of the Chevalier de Crèvecoeur in April 1790.
When Eliza Waite "cautioned" her correspondent "not to let any one see this letter . . . for I am always unguarded when I write to you & tell you all my heart," and knew in another that she "need not plead for secrersy since that which is reposed with you is prohibited from the inspection of any other," she comprehended both the freedom and the risk entailed in letter writing.\(^{144}\) Eliza Southgate articulated the possibilities and the limits inherent in putting pen to paper even more clearly when she confessed to her cousin that whenever "I feel dissatisfied at anything which I have not the power to alter,--to sit down and unburthen them on paper; it never fails to alleviate me, and I generally give full scope to the feelings of the moment, and as I write all disagreeable thoughts evaporate, and I end contented that things shall remain as they are."\(^ {145}\) In the case of Livingston and Otto, the meeting they bravely attempted revealed the stark discrepancy between their written relationship and what was possible in reality. In spite of--and because of--their warm, close, written exchange, Livingston hastily re-erected social barriers and boundaries, restored order, and conformed to rules of propriety. In that sense, in the disassociation of the written word and behavior, letters were also profoundly conservative.

While letters could connect correspondents by serving as "mental visits," as

\(^{144}\) Eliza Waite to Susan Kittredge, Dec. 29, 1791, March 2, 1789, Eliza Waite Correspondence, Essex Institute (EI). Betsy Phelps warned her mother that some of her expressions "will not be proper for [her father] to hear perhaps, if so omit to read them to him." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, March 18, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH. In 1774, when Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn berated Benjamin Franklin for his part in publicizing the letters of Thomas Hutchinson and Andrew Oliver, he argued that because "private correspondence has hitherto been held sacred . . . [Franklin] has forfeited all the respect of societies and of men." Quoted in Robert Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 127-28.

Elizabeth Porter Phelps wrote her daughter, they could also become a kind of participatory fiction and indeed resemble fiction, as the Otto-Shippen correspondence attests. From the apologia designed to engage the reader in the process of the letter’s composition to disputes about desired comprehension, letter-writing as a topic for discussion suffused correspondence of the early republic. Invested with shifting gendered connotations following the American Revolution, letters themselves offered correspondents a topic through which to wrestle with cultural issues about authority, duty, sentimentality, and legitimacy. Above all, letters existed in a complicated way at various intersections, creating spaces for expression, thoughts, and affections that belied clear distinctions between parents and children, men and women. As correspondents put pen to paper they wrestled with the medium of letters itself as they explored the possibilities and limits of their own expressions.
CHAPTER II

"THE PAGE OF ROMANCE NEVER PRESENTED ITS EQUAL": WRITING ABOUT READING

If the correspondence shared by Nancy Livingston and Louis Otto sometimes bordered on fiction, fiction of the era generally denied its imaginative origins, claiming instead to be collections of edited letters or narratives of events that had actually happened. Charlotte Temple, for example, Susanna Rowson's wildly popular tale of seduction (and its dire consequences, for the heroine at least, if not for her seducer), presented itself as a "Tale of Truth," while other novels of the early republic revealed their plots, morals, amusements, and warnings through a series of letters. Epistolary novels packaged to look like a collection of edited letters, such as Hannah Webster Foster's The Coquette (1797), invited readers to peruse the "correspondence" of the main characters and interpret the story from the emotions and descriptions they revealed to each other. Readers of the letters comprising The Coquette learn that Eliza Wharton's quest for freedom from the snares of domesticity (evidenced by her rejection of the roles of daughter and wife) ends in the disaster of being seduced by the gallant Major Sanford, a scenario attended by the usual social ruin and subsequent death.¹ The reader knows

¹Hannah Webster Foster, The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1797; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). It is expected (or conventional) for even twentieth-century equivalents of characters such as Eliza Wharton to die "when she has a jumbled, distorted, inappropriate relation to the 'social script' or plot designed to contain her legally, economically, and sexually. Death is the result when energies of selfhood, often represented by sexuality... are expended outside the 'couvert' of marriage or valid romance: through adultery,... loss of virginity or even suspected
what Eliza may not about Major Sanford because his letters to people other than Eliza leave no doubt about his deceitful intentions. Another popular novel of Foster's, The Boarding School (1798), combines narrative and epistolary text. It begins with the school matron advising her pupils on proper behavior as they prepare to leave "Harmony-Grove" and concludes with a series of letters subsequently exchanged by these former boarding school students.

Contemporary readers often commented upon or quoted from The Boarding School and other reading material in their letters and diaries, evaluating instructive and entertaining qualities or acknowledging emotional engagement. In 1800, Abigail Brackett Lyman copied several paragraphs of instruction from The Boarding School in her journal. To a certain extent, everyday readers and writers engaged in a circular exercise of writing letters and diaries about novels that consisted of letters in the same way that authors such as Hannah Webster Foster wrote novels comprised of letters. While Nancy Shippen Livingston's correspondence with Louis Otto sometimes approximated fiction as it explored possibilities inconceivable in face-to-face situations, other diarists and correspondents invoked published fiction and other kinds of works as they formulated their own expressions. The confluence of these different but related forms of published and unpublished writing reveals the extent to which reading and writing informed each other. In the process of negotiating published rhetoric with their own written expression, diarists and correspondents constructed themselves as readers

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*impurity.* See DuPlessis, Writing Beyond the Ending, 15.

2 Abigail Brackett Lyman, 1800, Lyman, 236.
and writers while simultaneously engaging in larger cultural debates about appropriate gender roles and the source of republican virtue.³

Correspondents and diarists devoted significant attention to the published material they read.⁴ They recommended and loaned reading material to each other, praised and criticized works they had perused, fretted about the time they devoted to reading, and sought relief and sometimes escape in published work. They considered reading a form of instruction as well as amusement, an occasional substitute for ministerial preaching, and an index of domestic calm and order. They let their reading inform their writing in many ways, often quite self-consciously. For example, they might copy entire passages from published material, discuss the merits and limitations of an author’s expressions and character, and acknowledge the benefit gained or the harm suffered from a particular reading. They often wrote about reading to describe events and chores that seemingly had little to do with reading, such as courtship rituals, assessments of productivity, descriptions of scenery, illness, and the deaths of loved ones. Some writers invoked reading in their letters and diaries as a counterpoint to other topics they addressed; others simply assumed a general knowledge of reading material and used that understanding as a shorthand to convey their own sentiments. Reading everything from advice manuals to


⁴ Although this chapter focuses on what readers wrote about their reading, reading of course comprised only a portion of the experience that was recorded in letters, diaries, and journals, or, as Steven Stowe has put it, “reading played only a supporting role in their activity as writers. Their intellectual lives are most importantly seen as efforts to make meaning in the full pattern of their experience, not as mere linear transactions between their mature reading and their writing.” Steven M. Stowe, “City, Country, and the Feminine Voice,” 302.
newspapers to biographies to sermons to novels, they availed themselves of the form and vocabulary of the material they read as they formulated their own expressions.¹

In their own hand, readers exposed the limitations and explored the latitude within which they could address contemporary issues. Although they frequently adopted the rhetoric they discovered in their reading, they just as often transformed that vocabulary into messages contrary to those intended by the author. Additionally, as they reflected on their reading they wrestled with prevailing assumptions about whether the published word transparently revealed the character of its author and whether the act of reading could be severed from the messages espoused within the text itself. They struggled—sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully—to accept the published word on its own merit (rather than in terms of what was known about its author) and to distinguish the exercise of reading from the messages promulgated by the pieces they read. They addressed not only the relationship between published print and their own penned constructions, but the relationship between print and republican virtue. Even if they sometimes found novels boring or insipid, they justified perusing such works because social conversation often centered on fictional plots and characters. As they sought to reconcile denunciations of novels with the social necessity of reading such "dangerous" works, they engaged in debates about the authority of the printed word (versus the activity of reading), and pondered the characteristics of a virtuous citizenry. The negotiations in which these

¹Mary Kelley has addressed reading in relation to some of these issues in terms especially of academy-educated women who invoked reading material to construct an ideal of and themselves as "learned women." Kelley, "Reading Women/Women Reading." Also see Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers."
readers participated and the constructions and conclusions that resulted from their explorations situated them firmly within a vision of republican virtue characterized by refinement, politeness, and well-read conversation.

One of the topics readers frequently encountered in their reading was advice about what they should be reading. In Foster's *The Boarding School* (1798), for instance, the boarding school preceptress warned her students that "'Novels are the favourite, and the most dangerous kind of reading, now adopted by the generality of young ladies.'" Novels, Mrs. Williams persisted, "'fill the imagination with ideas which lead to impure desires, a vanity of exterior charms, and a fondness for show and dissipation, by no means consistent with that simplicity, modesty, and chastity, which should be the constant inmates of the female breast.'" 

6 Virtually all publications in the early republic, including novels like Foster's, condemned novels for corrupting impressionable readers. Indeed, the more popular and prevalent novels became, the more they were denounced as a pernicious and subversive manipulator of vulnerable readers, and they were said to be

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especially threatening to female readers whose excitable imaginations might be inflamed
to the extent that they would behave improperly. As social commentator Benjamin Rush
put it, novels "blunt the heart to that which is real."8 Susanna Rowson likewise warned
that novels "vitiate the taste and corrupt the heart."9 Another problem with novels was
that they were said to divert readers from necessary work because, as one contemporary
warned, they "never fail to inspire those who read them, with romantic ideas, to give
them a disgust for all serious employments."10 Mercy Otis Warren likewise instructed
her niece to "Throw away no part of your time, in the perusal of . . . the puerile study of
romance."11 As Foster's Mrs. Williams worried to her students, the "impure desires,
"vanity," and "dissipation" that novel-reading could inspire were dangerously inconsistent
with "simplicity, modesty, and chastity," the defining characteristics of the virtuous
republican woman.12 Far from decrying all reading, however, social authorities strongly

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8 Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," in Essays on Education in the Early

9 Susanna Rowson, The Inquisitor; or, Invisible Ramble (Philadelphia: William Gibbons, 1793),
155.

10 William Gaston to Mrs. Gaston, January 4, 1792, quoted in Kerber, Women of the Republic,
240. These warning about reading and household chores vying with each other for women's time were not
indigenous to America. Eighteenth-century German authors similarly warned "even upper-class women
against letting their reading interfere with their household tasks" and, conceding the difficulty of persuading
women to concentrate on the latter, "one designed a special reading platform for women so that they could
spin, sew, or knit while they read." Merry E. Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe

11 Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) to Rebecca Otis, n.d., 1776, quoted in Kerber, Women of the
Republic, 240.

12 Such denunciations persisted in published reviews until about 1850, although they appeared
primarily in sectarian journals. Nina Baym found "only a handful of attacks on the novel as a type" from
1840 to 1860 in the other numerous journals she researched. In terms of mid-nineteenth-century readers,
Baym notes that critiques of novels in terms of morality assume that the "reader's imagination was not
inherently prepared to defend itself against 'vice.' " Nina Baym, Novels, Readers, and Reviewers:
encouraged readers to focus on works of "history, travels, poetry, and moral essays," as well as biography and the Bible. Indeed, as Benjamin Rush promised, these other categories of reading would not only be of direct benefit to readers in the early republic, they would have the happy indirect effect of "subdu[ing] that passion for reading novels which so generally prevails among the fair sex." 13

Historians have discussed the pervasive denunciations of novels in the early republic in terms of the relationship between "publication and public discourse," the concern that readers would succumb to fictional fancy at the expense of social and political reality; in terms of young girls being trained to be "republican mothers" and "republican wives," that is, being imbued with the glorious task of inculcating their sons and husbands with a virtuous morality that would ensure the survival of the newly independent republic, and in terms of the contested sources of authority in America following the revolution. 14 Foster's warning about the "impure desires," "vanity," and "dissipation" that novel-reading would inspire exemplified all of these approaches. First, she assumed that reading and behavior had a direct cause and effect relationship, that the written word impelled the reader to behave in a certain way. Hence, readers exposed to tales of frivolous, vain young women and gallant, insincere fops would become frivolous,

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13 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 29, 31. In her novel, Foster is especially adulatory about these other kinds of works. See, for example, Foster, The Boarding School, pp. 125, 152, 179, 201, 205, 206, 225. The advice geared toward female readers indicates that women were reading just as much as men. In his discussion of books about traveling, natural history, and botany, Larzer Ziff notes that "the readership for such a book was visualized as the family, not the individual, with the female at least as prominent as the male reader." Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 53.

vain, and manipulative themselves. Benjamin Rush agreed that novels would result in excessive and misplaced sentimentality by creating "young ladies who weep away a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Werter."\(^\text{15}\) Both assessments link reading and subsequent behavior.\(^\text{16}\)

By focusing on virtue, modesty, and simplicity in her castigation of novels, Hannah Webster Foster also addressed the issue of "republican motherhood." She argued that women needed to be exemplars and teachers of "virtue," especially within the family circle. Rush too fretted over the image of enraptured novel readers "turning with disdain ... from the sight of a beggar who solicits in feeble accents or signs a small portion only of the crumbs which fall from their fathers’ tables."\(^\text{17}\) Although the definition and source of "virtue" was disputed in the early republic, it was generally considered the antithesis of excessively ornamental and social women and men who were lazy, vain, and frivolous.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 31. The novel he cited is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774; first American edition, 1784). Indeed, what Rush feared is exactly what happened to readers of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. As Robert Darnton has recorded, "ordinary readers from all ranks of society were swept off their feet. They wept, they suffocated, they raved, they looked deep into their lives and resolved to live better, then they poured their hearts out in more tears—and in letters to Rousseau, who collected their testimonials in a huge bundle." Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," 242.

\(^{16}\) Jane Tompkins takes a different tact than Michael Warner when she addresses the relationship between text and reader, arguing that "novelists have designs upon their audiences, in the sense of wanting to make people think and act in a particular way" (xi) and that literary texts ought to be "conceived as agents of cultural formation rather than as objects of interpretation and appraisal." (xvii) Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*.

\(^{17}\) Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 31.

\(^{18}\) One scholar has labeled Foster's boarding school preceptress, Mrs. Wilson, a "republican mother." See Claire C. Pettengill, "Sisterhood in a Separate Sphere: Female Friendship in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* and *The Boarding School*," *Early American Literature* 27 (1992), 189. Pettengill argues that *The Boarding School* and *The Coquette* address the "fate of the powerful female circle—bound by an ideology of 'sisterhood.'"
The fear of what would happen to individuals and society if novel reading persisted resulted in panicked denunciations of novels that confirmed their prevalence and popularity at the same time that it condemned them as disastrously inappropriate sources of cultural authority.\textsuperscript{19} Foster played both sides of the debate about novels of course, since she denounced novels in her own novel, confirming—even as she denied—that novels played a significant role in the early republic (although not, perhaps, in the "ideal" republic).

One of the charges against novels was that they lacked instructional merit. Instead of helping readers build character, develop intellect, or increase knowledge, they were said to be romantic, sentimental, and engrossing. Indeed, readers who sought "amusement" only were maligned and feared as persons who by intent or happenstance would undermine the republic itself. Publications vulnerable to the charge of lacking any instructional merit, therefore, such as contemporary magazines and novels, defensively declared themselves vehicles of edification and entertainment. To cite one example, the editors of the\textit{ Boston Weekly Magazine} promised in 1802 that "the utmost care will be taken, to copy such [selections], as are calculated to afford instruction, as well as amusement."\textsuperscript{20} As early as 1711, Joseph Addison had introduced the\textit{ Spectator} with the


\textsuperscript{20} "To Our Correspondents,"\textit{ Boston Weekly Magazine}, Dec. 11, 1802, 27.
hope that it would "contribute to the Diversion or Improvement" of its readers,\textsuperscript{21} and authors of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels regularly, even reflexively, invoked the same formula. In her preface to \textit{Charlotte Temple}, for example, Susanna Rowson hoped that her tale might "be of service" and assured that she "[wrote] with a mind anxious for the happiness of that sex whose morals and conduct have so powerful an influence on mankind in general."\textsuperscript{22} Similarly, Samuel Richardson felt that his novels had readers' "moral interests at heart" and would be both instructive and amusing.\textsuperscript{23}

These recommendations promised to "improve" a growing market of readers who had at

\textsuperscript{21}The \textit{Spectator}, March 11, 1711, reprinted in Gregory Smith, ed., \textit{The Spectator}, Vol. I (New York: Dutton, 1967), 5. The \textit{Tatler}, which preceded the \textit{Spectator}, also sought to achieve "that compromise between moral edification and literary merit which Ian Watt cites as the most significant development in eighteenth-century literature." See Kathryn Shevelow, "Fathers and Daughters: Women as Readers of the \textit{Tatler}," in \textit{Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts}, ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 107, 121. Shevelow argues that female readers brought a "social competency" to such didactic literature as the \textit{Tatler}, rather than a literary competency, because such works "invoke a powerful literary tradition [conduct writing] that was aimed at shaping behavior [by] exert[ing] a rhetorical effect based not only on the conduct book's didactic content but also on readers' internalization of the terms of that content: the authority of the paternal voice." (109) Sarah Emily Newton has agreed that eighteenth-century texts such as Foster's \textit{The Boarding School} "combined behavioral advice with fiction." (140) She calls this hybrid "conduct-fiction." Sarah Emily Newton, "Wise and Foolish Virgins: 'Usable Fiction' and the Early American Conduct Tradition," \textit{Early American Literature} 25 (1990). British historian J. H. Plumb has observed that "Improvement" was the most over-used word of eighteenth-century England" (332) and that the increasing availability of cheap books meant that even the lower classes could realize the "possibility of self-education" and understand "leisure" as something that "could be turned to profit." (267). J. H. Plumb, "The Acceptance of Modernity" and "The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England," in \textit{The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England}, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{22}Rowson, \textit{Charlotte: A Tale of Truth}, 5-6.

\textsuperscript{23}Richardson's intents are summarized in Lynne Vallone, \textit{Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 34-36. For a discussion on novelists of the early republic promoting their works as instructive, see Davidson, \textit{Revolution and the Word}, 50-51. As Sharon M. Harris has argued, novels like \textit{Charlotte Temple}, which proclaimed themselves "tales of truth," did so to assert their legitimacy in the context of "social attitudes toward the novel that deemed it an immoral and dangerous literary form." She adds that "this emphasis on factuality also had a political objective for women novelists: to legitimize women's experiences and their modes of communication." Harris, \textit{American Women Writers to 1850}, 171.
least some leisure to devote to amusing but edifying literature.  

The assumption about the insoluble link connecting reading and behavior that so preoccupied social arbiters such as Benjamin Rush has also preoccupied subsequent scholars. Only recently have historians begun to distinguish prescriptive rhetoric from the expressions of everyday readers to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding about how readers read in the eighteenth century. Cathy N. Davidson initiated that process in her path-breaking Revolution and the Word, although the readers' marginalia she cites functions primarily as justification for exploring the sometimes subversive political messages readers might have discovered in "non-canonical" novels. More recently, historian Mary Kelley has discovered that primarily academy-educated women in the early nineteenth century belied constant strictures denouncing the "learned woman" by discovering models of such women in their reading and emulating them in their writing. British historians Naomi Tadmor and John Brewer have demonstrated that reading was tied to "a routine of work, . . . religious discipline," and sociability, and that reading contributed significantly to expressions later penned in letters and diaries. Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray have taken that analysis one step further by asserting that just as reading informed experience, "everyday life inform[ed] reading." In their study of a mid-nineteenth century diary composed by an elite Boston couple, they conclude that reading was undertaken "less often for the sake of reading (i.e., because they valued the

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24 On female readers as consumers see Shevelow, "Fathers and Daughters," 107, 121; Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating 'Virtue';" Zagarri, "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother."
experience for its own virtues) than to reflect, reinforce, or enhance other experiences. 25
This chapter builds on these approaches by asking how writing about reading informed
and was informed by broader cultural and political debates about the authority manifested
by the written word and the source, or sources of republican virtue. Because prescriptive
assessments of reading tended to separate novels from all other types of reading—whether
sermons, travel literature, philosophical works, history, etc.—this chapter works primarily
within that dichotomy as well in order to demonstrate the extent to which everyday
readers engaged with and manipulated the terms of the debate itself.

Clearly aware of the anxious admonitions delineating appropriate reading matter,
readers in the early republic invoked the vocabulary of that controversy in their own
assessments of published material. 26 In terms of novels, they sometimes agreed with
novelists' assertions about tales providing both amusement and instruction. After
copying several paragraphs from The Boarding School, Abigail Brackett Lyman
commented that "the foregoing remarks are extracted from the 'Boarding School'—written
by Mrs. Foster of Little Cambridge—a book which does honor to the heart & head of its
Author & must be useful to all who attentively peruse it." "Calculated more particularly
for young Ladies," she continued, "the correct sentiments & pure morality which it

25Davidson, Revolution and the Word; Kelley, "Reading Women/Women Reading"; Tadmor, "In
the Eve my Wife Read to me," quoted 165; Brewer, "Reconstructing the Reader," in The Practice and
Representation of Reading. ed. Raven, et al., Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Reading and
(forthcoming).

26To the extent that readers invoked the language of prescriptive rhetoric in their own evaluations,
they revealed their "dependence on cultural authority" by being compelled to invoke "the narratives of
dominance" in which "structures of seeing, feeling, knowing, and telling" are embedded. See Elizabeth
Long, "Women, Reading, and Cultural Authority: Some Implications of the Audience Perspective in
uniformly enforces are admirably adapted to the benefit of the [reader].”

Similarly, Nancy Shippen pronounced Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa "a charming book fraught with instruction” and Julia Cowles noted that she had "read in the Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove family, which [she] found very entertaining as well as instructive." In these evaluations, readers did indeed rate novels as amusing and instructive and hence dismissed claims, like Foster's, that novels were "dangerous." As even the fictive Mrs. Williams proclaimed from the pages of Foster's The Boarding School, she "would not be understood to condemn all novels indiscriminately. . . . Some of them are fraught with sentiment; convey lessons for moral improvement; and exhibit striking pictures of virtue rewarded; and of vice, folly, and indiscretion punished." Indeed, another character in The Boarding School confirmed Nancy Shippen's assessment of Clarissa, exulting, "What a surprising command has [Richardson] over our feelings! It is happy . . . that he

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27 Abigail Brackett Lyman, 1800, Lyman, 236.

28 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Feb. 11, 1784, Shippen, 178. The novel is Samuel Richardson, Clarissa. Or the History of a Young Lady (1748). John Sitter has argued that works such as Clarissa and Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones bridge the age of Pope and Swift, ending about 1740, and the age of Johnson, beginning in the 1750s. This "experimental" period marked authors' increasing consciousness "of themselves as solitary writers writing for solitary readers." John Sitter, Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 9. The formulaic "entertaining and instructive" assessment might be applied to circumstances other than reading of course, as Nancy Shippen Livingston wrote that her "Mamma seem'd so much better today it revived in a manner my drooping spirits. She held a long conversation with me today equally instructing & entertaining." Livingston, July 30, 1784, Shippen, 207. Elizabeth Whiting Phelps also invoked this vocabulary beyond the confines of reading material, as she wrote her brother: "I write now, my dear brother, not because I have anything either new or entertaining to communicate, but merely to improve a good opportunity." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 5, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 15), PPH. Similarly, Eliza Southgate initiated her correspondence with her cousin Moses Porter intending to "reap both instruction and amusement from an undisguised communication of sentiments." Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, July 17, 1801, Bowne, 67.

29 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 31. The book is Enos Hitchcock, Memoirs of the Bloomsgrove Family (1790), a didactic novel that strongly criticizes the novel as a genre.

embarked in the cause of virtue.\textsuperscript{31}

Lending credence to warnings about reading influencing behavior, however, Shippen’s good opinion of Clarissa went so far as to suggest that since Clarissa’s "character is fine & her letters are full of sentiment--I must adopt some of her excellent rules."\textsuperscript{32} And, in a 1784 entry anticipating Benjamin Rush’s worst fears, she noted that "Emilia read to us the Sorrows of Werter while we work’d. It is a very affecting little history, & made Grace & myself sob & cry like Children."\textsuperscript{33} Eliza Southgate agreed that reading could excite the imagination, or at least thought such an idea might amuse her cousin. On a stormy night in 1801, she wrote him that "our old windows here clatter so" that "I shall begin to think the candle burns blue, and that I hear the groans of distress between the blasts of wind." "Even now," she continued dramatically, "the shadow of my pen on the wall looked like a man’s arm." "Oh these hobgoblin stories!" she exclaimed, they "sometimes . . . get my imagination so roused, that I look in fearful expectation that the tall martial ghost of Hamlet will stalk before my eyes, or that some less dignified one

\textsuperscript{31} Foster, The Boarding School, 160.

\textsuperscript{32} Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 7, 1784, Shippen, 171.

\textsuperscript{33} Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 9, 1784, Shippen, 185. The novel is Johann von Goethe, The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774). Her phrase "the luxury in some kinds of sorrows" confirms Karen Halttunen’s discussion of the "culture of sensibility" in which "sentimental sympathy was said to be a ‘dear delicious pain,’ . . . an emotional experience that liberally mingled pleasure with vicarious pain." Karen Halttunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture," American Historical Review 100 (1995), 308. Elizabeth Huntington also called weeping a luxury, but was more stoic about it than Livingston, writing "I must not indulge in the gloom--weeping is a luxury, but it does us no good." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 8, 1802 (Box 13, Folder 6), PPH. Goethe’s popular novel was also read and commented upon seven times between 1785 and 1806 by Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald, who wrote to one of her correspondents that she "might do worse than write on the famous story of Werter." See Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed From Writers," 117-18. Although there’s no mention of The Sorrows of Young Werther in Mary Anna Whiting Boardman’s memoir, she did write a poem titled "Knowst Thou the Land: In Imitation of Goethe’s ‘Kennst du das Land,’” which she "apparently sent to three of her grandchildren," probably in the 1830s. See Boardman, 297.
will step through the keyhole."34 As denunciations of novels warned, readers might
indeed succumb to the drama and emotion of a tale and perhaps have their hearts
"blunt[ed] to that which is real"35 because they confused bookish portrayals with reality.
As one of Foster's fictional boarding school students attested, she was "more than ever
convinced of the great caution which ought to be used in perusing [novels]. How
secretly, how insidiously may they undermine the fabric of virtue, by painting vice and
folly in the alluring colours."36

Like Foster's boarding school graduates, real readers tended to reserve unqualified
commendations for a broad range of other types of reading. Livingston, for example,
commented that she had been lent a "book call'd Voltaire's Henriade, I read part of it this
Morning & admire it much; The style is Elegant, & the descriptions lively."37 A few days
later she "read some of Ganganelli's letters--they are ful of wisdom & instruction."38

34 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Dec. 4, 1801, Bowne, 85. Jane Hunter has discovered that girls
in late-Victorian America invoked published literature as models for their own expressions and behavior.
See Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family," 62. In her discussion of women's letters, Olga
Kenyon similarly notes that eighteenth-century fiction and letters influenced each other. Kenyon, 800 Years
of Women's Letters, xiv, 76. Also see Stella Tillyard, Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah

35 In her study of contemporary women who read romance novels, Janice Radway found that these
"women . . . believe the stories are only fantasies on one level at the same time that they take other aspects
of them to be real." Because such readers "draw more or less on the language [they] use[] to refer to the
real world, the fictional world created in reading bears an important relationship to the world the reader
ordinarily inhabits." Janice A. Radway, Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature


37 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 17, 1783, Shippen, 167. The book is Voltaire's La Henriade
(1728).

38 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 31, 1783, Shippen, 169. The book is Pope Clement XIV,
Interesting Letters of Pope Clement XIV (c. 1776).
Likewise Julia Cowles remarked that she "read in 'Reflections on Death'; found it very interesting as well as instructive."39 Cowles also enjoyed the "History of Deborah in Hunter's 'Sacred Biography'" which she judged "interesting and almost inimitable."40 Similarly, Elizabeth Porter Phelps assured her daughter Betsy that "the reading of Mr John Newton’s work will be for my good & comfort, & greater usefulness,"41 and Abigail Brackett Lyman was "much delighted" with the "first Vol of Blairs Sermons."42 Other readers confirmed the formulaic goal of edification and amusement as well. In an 1801 letter, Eliza Southgate assured her cousin that she had "been entertained with Johnson’s life."43 Hannah Williams Heath explained in 1805 that she "took up Abbo May, journal early in the morning--knowing it, to be both entertaining and instructing."44 Similarly she returned "Mr Goddards book laws serious call which gave me much pleasure to read and I

39 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 33. The book is William Dodd, Reflections on Death (1765).

40 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 67. The book is Henry Hunter, Sacred Biography (1783); the history of Deborah was first included in the fourth edition, published in 1792.

41 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, June 13, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH. The book is probably John Newton, An Authentic Narrative of Some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of Mr. Newton (c. 1788). Historian David Hall has argued that while the eighteenth century did witness changes in reading practices, new products (fiction) "coexisted in the marketplace with products that had been around for decades [especially religious subject matter], if not centuries." Some readers, like Elizabeth Phelps and her daughter, wrote about reading the older kinds of texts, while others, like Cowles, read a combination of these two "competing cultural systems." David D. Hall, "Books and Reading in Eighteenth-Century America," in Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), quoted, 355, 356. Merry Wiesner sees less of a conflict between "competing cultural systems" in her analysis of reading material in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than simply "a wider variety of materials in 1750" than before. Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, 124.

42 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 18, 1800, Lyman, 129. The book is Hugh Blair, Sermons, Volume the First (1792).

43 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Dec. 4, 1801, Bowne, 85. Presumably the English writer Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), and perhaps specifically James Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson.

44 Hannah Williams Heath diary, April 4, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
hope profit," and a few months later wrote, "I have been reading Paley and must copy a few lines that please me very much." Agreeing with prescriptive admonitions about the benefits of reading history, biography, and religious tracts, these readers confirmed and reinforced assessments about what people of the early republic should be reading. Still, the tendency of readers to agree with prescriptive assertions that certain works could amuse and instruct while others were dangerously seductive in no way confirms that readers were passive receptors of published admonitions, whether articulated in novels or espoused by social authorities like Benjamin Rush.

On the contrary, while readers praised certain texts as "amusing and instructive" and condemned others as corrupting and manipulative, they more often located their reading material on a continuum between these two extremes. Novels might be useful and subversive (just as novels themselves included both warnings of the dangers of reading novels and promises of the instruction to be had from that particular tale) and other works might contain real merit along with noteworthy limitations. Abigail Brackett Lyman, for example, wrote in 1800 that she was "much pleased" with Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*, "a most interesting Novel and free from many

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43 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 19, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. The book is probably William Law, *An Extract from Mr. Law's Serious Call* (1793), although it may be the original *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729).

44 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 11, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She is probably referring to William Paley (1743-1805), an English theologian whose most popular work was *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802).

47 As Frances Murphy Zauhar has argued, "the reader's choice to listen to the speaker in the text is not a matter of subordination but of cooperation." Frances Murphy Zauhar, "Creative Voices: Women Reading and Women's Writing," in *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism*, ed. Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, Frances Murphy Zauhar (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 107.
unnatural and unpleasing scenes which are too frequent in such Books--still I do not think it faultless but too much we are apt to expect."48 Matthew Gregory Lewis’s Ambrosio, or the Monk, however, she declared to be "like all novels—an entertaining rather than a useful Book."49 Yet she qualified or maybe even contradicted this assessment by proceeding to summarize some of the lessons gleaned from Lewis’s novel which, she wrote,

may teach us the violence of human passions unrestrain’d. The danger attendant on the first approach to vice—the fatal consequences of the first misstep—& the infamy & sorrow which closes the career of iniquity. It also warns us that all is not gold that glistens—that the Bold pretender to Religion is not always the possessor of it. We should [n]ot believe a man a saint nearly from the Robe of his Office [or] the coulor of his garb & forbear trusting those who presume on the strength of their own virtues—as well as whose principals do not influence their conduct.50

She was ambivalent about the play Wives as they were and Maids as they are as well, judging it a "tolerable thing tho’ founded on an error viz.—that the more severe the husband the better the wife."51

She offered a much harsher review of another work, however, noting that "Yesterday for amusement perused a small volume intitled Arthur Myrven or Memoirs of

48 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 169, 171-72. The book is Regina Maria Roche, The Children of the Abbey (1798). This popular novel was also referred to in a letter by Eliza Southgate Bowne (to her sister Octavia Southgate, Sept. 24, 1803, Bowne, 183) and found on the shelves in the Porter-Phelps-Huntington house. See Ruth Huntington Sessions, "A Lady’s Reading Eighty Years Ago," New England Magazine (1899), 152.

49 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 30, 1800, Lyman, 123. The book is Matthew Gregory Lewis, Ambrosio, or the Monk (1796).


51 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 169-70. The play was by Elizabeth Simpson Inchbald and published in Boston in 1797.
1793--written in Philadelphia." She scorned that since "this book, like most of its kind is made up of wonders destitute of truth for their foundation--the authors are obliged to call in the aid of remarkable events & extravagant characters in order to keep alive the curiosity of their readers." Distressed that novelists failed to "observe due bounds in this respect," she felt that Arthur Mervyn was "worth reading only as it gives--I believe--a just idea of the situation of that afflicted city in the time of the fever." Indeed, one of the problems with Arthur Mervyn was that reading it had not been enjoyable. As she wrote, "reading of the history of the misery of some of my fellow creatures & the villany & wickedness of others--I confess did not give me any pleasure." On the other hand, she did credit the novel with being "interspersed with many humane & tender actions which could not have been perform'd were the situation of the people in general less pitiable than it was that time." Drawing a general lesson from this specific experience, she owned that "In future I think I prefer reading truth unadulterated & clear fiction separate as they never can be well connected." 52

The distinction between "truth unadulterated & clear fiction" could be elusive of course, as even Lyman admitted that Arthur Mervyn offered a "just idea of the situation of [Philadelphia] in the time of fever." The ire generated by Brown's novel impelled her to prolong her discussion even more. Confirming prescriptive admonitions that condemned novels as dangerous because they seduced readers by raising their passions (like Southgate with her Gothic imagination and Livingston weeping over The Sorrows of

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Young Werther), Lyman confessed that her "curiosity was excited & therefore I prest through the volume."53 Somewhat unexpectedly, she finally concluded her diatribe by admitting that "To erase the impresion I began to read another of the same kind--call'd Advertisement for a Husband--as foolish a thing as ever was written--I throw'd it aside disgusted & blamed myself for consuming so much precious time in such an unprofitable manner."54

Several weeks after her scathing review of Arthur Mervyn, Lyman noted her growing powers of judgement in terms of rereading "Bennetts Letters," a "book I once perused with enthusiastic pleasure," she remembered, "& which I still think may be read with advantage--but I do not view it as faultless--as I once did."55 What is especially interesting about this comment is that it came from the same diarist who enthusiastically praised and copied lengthy extracts from Hannah Webster Foster’s The Boarding School. In The Boarding School, Bennett’s Letters enjoy an unqualified recommendation: "As a moral writer," one of Foster’s characters observes, "the precepts and observations of [Bennett] are excellent; as a religious one, his piety is exemplary, and his instructions improving."56 In qualifying her own earlier good opinion of Bennett, Lyman privileged her reading (or rereading) of Bennett over Foster’s recommendation, even though she


55 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 4, 1800, Lyman, 156. The book is John Bennett, Letters to a Young Lady (1793).

56 Foster, The Boarding School, 179.
clearly found much merit in The Boarding School. Nancy Shippen Livingston offered a mixed review of a different work, noting that she "read Madame de Maintenons advice to the D--- De B---g" and would "transcribe so much of it as relates to the woman, because it corresponds so much with my Ideas on that subject." But she was critical of some of Maintenon's conclusions, acknowledging that while "Madame de Maintenon must be allow'd to have known the heart of man[,] I cannot agree with her that Women are only born to suffer & to obey." 57 Hannah Heath could also be quite critical of reading material. In 1810 she wrote in her journal that she "went into Miss Mays Chamber to wake her for a morning ride, I picked up a piece of poetry which belonged to her Ladyship which I never saw before, which put me out of spirits all day." 58 Heath's use of the title "Ladyship" in this entry was probably sarcastic, for she noted a few weeks later, apparently still affected by this literature and its possessor, that "Mr Heath carried Miss May home to day which is a great relief to me." 59 Presumably the poetry that put her out of spirits found its way into her house with Miss May in published rather than manuscript form.

Not surprisingly, readers of the early republic invoked the language of cultural debates when they negotiated prescriptive edicts and their own impressions of published material. They also used that language to formulate compliments and criticisms contrary to the judgments propounded by cultural arbiters. Indeed, Livingston was deeply affected

57 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 13, 1783, Shippen, 143-45. She is commenting on a work by Madame de Maintenon (1635-1719).

58 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

59 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
by Goethe’s tragic love story The Sorrows of Young Werther because it spoke so directly to her own situation. After admitting that the novel "made Grace & myself sob & cry like Children," she added, "but I forgot to write that we convers’d at intervals about our dear absent friend [Otto], & I dare say it was reflecting on his absence that affected us as much as the novel."60 For Livingston, the power of this particular novel came from its pertinence to her own situation, its ability to tap and define emotions she experienced as a result of her relationship with Louis Otto. While Livingston indulged in the "luxury" of sorrow occasioned by Otto’s absence and triggered by Werther’s sorrows, Benjamin Rush would dismiss the notion that books mattered because they spoke to readers’ own experience and instead condemn both the novel and Livingston the reader for being excessively morose and romantic.61 On the other hand, it was clearly not the case that novels were read to the exclusion of all else. Shippen liked Richardson and Goethe but also read and enjoyed Voltaire, Maintenon, and Ganganelli. Lyman enjoyed Foster and Roche and criticized Brown, but also read "Bennetts letters" and "Blairs sermons."

One aspect of the debate about reading novels, that they distracted readers from and gave them a "disgust for all serious employment," was indeed an issue for readers.

As Abigail Brackett Lyman wrote after reading Arthur Mervyn and Advertisement for a

60 Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 9, 1784, Shippen, 185.

61 One of Jane Austen’s characters in Northanger Abbey (written in 1798-9 although not published until 1818) admitted when asked if she was fond of novels, "I do not much like any other" kind of reading. Although she qualified her remark by adding that "I can read poetry and plays, and things of that sort, and do not dislike travels," she persisted that "history, real solemn history, I cannot be interested in" because "it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all—it is very tiresome." Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey (1818; reprint, New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983), 123 (page references are to reprint edition). Cathy Davidson agrees with Austen, arguing that novels appealed especially to those who were excluded by the political process. Davidson, Revolution and the Word.
Husband, she "blamed [her]self for consuming so much precious time in such an unprofitable manner." Usually, however, readers struggled to reconcile everyday demands with reading of any kind, even the recommended sermons, biographies, and moral essays. If Elizabeth Porter Phelps read "Mr John Newton's work . . . for my good & comfort, & greater usefulness," for example, she nevertheless worried about finding time to accomplish this edifying task. As she wrote to her daughter, "three volumes I brought home the day before your father left us one & half almost I've read & done all needful to be done besides. . . . good night tis after .8. the milk is coming, I must attend-- & fold the cloaths--but I love too--perhaps have a little time to read."62 In another letter, she wrote about "reading a book Mr Emoms has lately published upon some of the first principles & doctrines of true religion." Rating Emons a "great reasoner," she acknowledged nevertheless that her "dull head gets left sometimes, tho' I love to read him & understand what I can--as the clock has just struck .9. & all a bed but Juda, one more sermen I will try to read, so wishing us both a good Sabbath I bid you adieu."63 For Phelps, even edifying reading competed with household tasks and writing to her children. While her reading became fodder for her writing, sometimes finding time for either was a challenge. Indeed, she had begun this particular letter by assuring Betsy that "the more I

62 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, June 13, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH.

63 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 2, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH. The book is probably Nathaniel Emmons, Sermons on Some of the First Principles (1800). England's Anna Larpen likewise persisted with challenging books, noting in the case of one that "There is too much classical learning in it to allow me to form a Judgment of it, as a learned work. Indeed it is not to be supposed I understood it in a followed manner[.] Yet I never throw aside a book because it makes me feel an ignorance. . . . I read on with humble attention & often reap much information from the mere introduction to scholars." Quoted in Brewer, "Reconstructing the Reader," in The Practice and Representation of Reading, ed. Raven, et al., 237-38.
write, the more I want too,"\textsuperscript{64} only to abruptly conclude the pleasurable exercise--and
duty--of letter writing in order to read.

Like Phelps, Hannah Williams Heath found that her round of daily activities
restricted her reading. Mondays, as she never failed to record in her diary, were devoted
to washing, a grueling job that allowed little time for anything else. Although she rarely
mentioned any other diversions or tasks on Mondays, she once wrote that "John Goddard
came in about 4 to read to me--but I was washing and could not attend him until 6."\textsuperscript{65} Some wash days went better than others of course, especially when there was plenty of
help, and on one propitious Monday she wrote that she "assisted about washing until it
was most done then took up a sermon to read which I admired very much."\textsuperscript{66} Tuesdays
were generally devoted to ironing the freshly laundered clothes, an activity that could be
combined with reading, for she once noted that she "ironed part of the things Susan
read."\textsuperscript{67}

The context in which Heath discussed finding time for reading differed
significantly from the expressions of Elizabeth Phelps. While both struggled to juggle
household tasks and other duties, Phelps's diary and letters describe reading in terms of
performing "needful tasks," whereas Heath's journal often devolved into a litany about

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 2, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 16, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Hannah Williams Heath diary, April 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
\end{itemize}
finding time for reading in the face of constant visitors and visiting.\textsuperscript{68} On one Thursday in 1805, for example, she had hoped to "devote the greater part of the day to reading and meditation" since "Mary [her daughter] so unwell did not go to meeting," but was thwarted by the appearance of her "Brother & Sister Williams little Frances, came in to spend the day." Although she "was very happy to see them" she "was sorry I had not devoted the morning to some other reading."\textsuperscript{69} In other more rushed entries, she simply observed, "a very confused day no time for reading or reflection"\textsuperscript{70} and "nothing but confusion to day no time to read or think."\textsuperscript{71} Still another entry on a Sunday in 1808 complained that "our Friends returned to tea" after attending meeting, and grumbled, "our friends are rather to [sic] kind, I should have liked the evening to my self if I could have had it but I could not find any time to read or think."\textsuperscript{72} On another Sunday, she "arose early to write and read but was prevent [sic] by Mr Butterfield who came at 6 to spend the day and night with us."\textsuperscript{73}

Relatively quiet periods in Hannah Heath’s household resulted in satisfied entries:

\textsuperscript{68} Differences in geography, demographics, and age undoubtedly informed some of the differences in these women’s expressions. Heath resided in a more populous area (Brookline, Massachusetts, next to Boston, in contrast to Phelps’s Hadley, Massachusetts, about 100 miles west of Boston) which meant that visiting was easier and more frequent. Heath was also quite a bit younger than Phelps (born in 1771 as opposed to 1747), so that while Phelps increasingly had visitors after the turn of the century too, she was in her fifties by then while Heath was a mother of six in her thirties.

\textsuperscript{69} Hannah Williams Heath diary, April 4, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{70} Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 7, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{71} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 1, 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{72} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 23, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{73} Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
"no Company we spend the day doing a little of every thing the girls paint a little read a little, write a little and work a great deal," or "we all staid at home to work and reading the girls have a novel." Elizabeth Phelps sometimes found that her schedule permitted reading without guilt or worry about accomplishing "needful" tasks as well. In 1787, she calmly wrote, "Monday and the rest of the week went about some and read some." And on a Sunday a few weeks later, she similarly recorded, "This day tarried at home again--been able to read much." Similarly Nancy Livingston wrote in 1783 that she "work'd at my needle this morning as usual, & read," and on another day, "Spent the morning as usual read & work'd," or simply, "At home reading Gibbons on the decline & fall of the roman Empire" or "Worked a little at my needle, read, sang, play'd upon the guittar &c &c in the morning."

Sometimes reading became the focus of intimate gatherings. In 1783, Livingston noted that she "spent the rest of the day at home with [her mother]--I read Milton to her

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74 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Nov. 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
75 Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
76 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 20, 1787, NEHGR 119 (1965), 291.
77 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 24, 1787, NEHGR 119 (1965), 292.
78 Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 16, 1783, Shippen, 139.
79 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec.1783, Shippen, 166. See also, Jan. 4, 1784, where she noted that she "Spent the day with the family as usual, without any thing Material happening--read, meditated &c." (169)
80 Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 3, 1784, Shippen, 183. The book is Edward Gibbon, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776).
81 Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1785, Shippen, 228.
while she work'd."82 And on another occasion she confirmed that she "spent a happy
Even8 with my parents. My Papa read while I work'd."83 This type of scenario apparently
afforded great satisfaction, for in a letter to her sister, Eliza Southgate Bowne imagined
just such calm days as Phelps, Heath, and Livingston described. Anxious to set up
housekeeping several months after marrying Walter Bowne and moving to New York
City in 1803, she assured Octavia, who would be joining the new household once it was
established, that "I long for a comfortable fireside of my own. What a sweet circle!
Octavia, my dear Husband, and myself; when we are alone we'll read, and work like old
times."84 Likewise, Barnabas Bidwell "fanc[ied]" that Mary Anna Whiting was "very
happy . . . at this pleasant season of the year" and could "almost see you sitting in your
chamber . . . engaged in some domestic employment, or perusing the pages of some
instructive book."85 Later in her life, the now widowed Mary Anna Whiting Boardman
confirmed that peaceful scenario in a letter describing how she and her sister sat "reading
at the fire, . . . we begin to feel like winter."86

82 Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 24, 1783, Shippen, 141. John Milton (1608-1674), presumably
Paradise Lost (1667).

83 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 10, 1784, Shippen, 172. Also see Dec. 26, 1783, 168; Jan. 11,
1784, 173; May 6, 1784, 195; May 9, 1784, 196. Catharine Maria Sedgwick fondly remembered family
reading sessions during her girlhood as well. Looking back some 50 years to when she was eight, she
reminisced that "my father, whenever he was at home, kept me up and at his side till nine o'clock in the
evening, to listen to him while he read aloud to the family." Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 74.

84 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 24, 1803, Bowne, 182. Mary Ann Archbald
Wodrow also enjoyed group reading "at least as often as she read privately." See Scott, "These Notions I
Imbibed From Writers," 131-32.

85 Barnabas Bidwell to Mary Anna Whiting, June 27, 1786, Boardman, 102.

86 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman letter, no addressee, c. 1830, Boardman, 278.
For younger women, the balance between work, sociability, and reading might be weighed differently than for their mothers. The fifteen-year-old Julia Cowles confessed in 1799, for example, that she had "been so much engaged read[ing] 'Grandison' that other things have been neglected, especially my journal." Neglecting a journal is a far cry from failing to perform pressing household tasks, however, indicating a far different set of priorities than those preoccupying Phelps. Cowles apparently devoted large chunks of time to reading and often emphasized the quantity rather than the quality of her reading. In entries throughout 1799, she summarily listed titles: "I have read the 'Boarding School' and am now reading the 'Idler'"; "I have read 4 books, 2 volumes of Henry, one vol. of Charlott's letters, 1 vol. of 'Adventures of Innocence';" "Bought 2 books, 'Genuine Experience' and 'Unfortunate Lovers.'" Similarly the young Peggy Livingston (probably 11 or 12 years old) invoked the vocabulary of industry and improvement when she explained to her mother that "I had not enough work, I therefore read 2 to 3 sections in E. of Criticism. I have not been idle I assure you." She also assured her grandmother that she "read the chapters you mention in proverbs often but I

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87 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 39. The book is Samuel Richardson, Sir Charles Grandison (1754).

88 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 25.

89 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 34. She probably referred to Matthew Henry here, an English nonconformist minister. "Charlott's letters" is undoubtedly The Letters of Charlotte During her Connexion with Werter (1797).

90 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 35. The works she cited are The Genuine Experience, and Dying Address of Mrs. Dolly Taylor (1795) and anonymous, The Unfortunate Lovers: A Short, Beautiful Poem (1769).

91 Margaret Beekman Livingston (b. 1781) to Nancy Shippen Livingston, probably 1792, Shippen, 286.
have not yet learned them."92 Congruently, to assure her mother that she engaged in more
than social visits while staying in Boston, Betsy Phelps wrote, "Thursday morn--8 oclock
--I have been up some time reading your favorite book--the rise and progress of
religion."93 Abigail Brackett Lyman, whose 1800 journal, like Cowles's, is sometimes
little more than a record of her extensive reading, and who had complained about
"consuming so much precious time in such an unprofitable manner,"94 admitted that she
"stole time from my work to read a play called 'Wives as they were & Maids as they
are."95 On another day, she confessed to "being very indolent I only put my Shepherdess
in the fraim--& spent the rest of the day in reading Bennetts Letters to my friend Sarah."96
Nancy Shippen Livingston confessed a similar transgression in her journal: "This
afternoon Grandpapa came to see me & not finding me in the parlour came up stairs,
where Louisa & myself were setting on the bed in deshabille. I was reading & she

92 Margaret Beekman Livingston to Alice Lee Shippen, 1790, Shippen, 281. Catharine Maria
Sedgwick remembered her father admonishing her to "find it in your power to devote your mornings to
reading" as "there are few who can make such improvements by it [referring to the leisure her class position
afforded] and it would be to be lamented if this precious time should be lost." Theodore Sedgwick to
Catharine Maria Sedgwick (then in her teens), April 23, 1806, in Kelley, ed., The Power of Her Sympathy,
21.

93 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.
The book is Philip Doddridge, The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul (1749). In his later
reflections, Betsy's husband praised his wife's character by remembering that "she maintained a constant
daily habit of reading the best books." Dan Huntington, Memories, Counsels, and Reflections (Cambridge:
Metcalf and Company, 1857), 76.

94 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 22, 1800, Lyman, 135.

95 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 20, 1800, Lyman, 170. The play was written by Elizabeth
Simpson Inchbald in 1797.

96 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 4, 1800, Lyman, 156.
For these women, reading could simultaneously tempt them from needful tasks, an admission that confirmed dire prescriptive warnings about women who swooned over novels rather than engaging in household chores, and function as an index of productivity, in that they had not yet reached the stage in their lives when there were pressing household tasks. For these younger women, however, little—if anything—was lost, even if they did worry about wasting "precious time." Indeed, this may be a case where prescriptive language about reading as a dangerous diversion was invoked in form even when it did not apply to the given situation. Julia Cowles was a student attending boarding school and Nancy Livingston resided with her mother in the country. Abigail Lyman was newly married but not yet a mother, and her journal gives no indication that her household suffered from either her reading or her writing. Peggy Livingston sought to assure her mother that she improved her time by reading since little else demanded her attention. For these women, reading represented useful employment, while for older women it was a luxury that competed with daily tasks and responsibilities.

A time when reading could be enjoyed without guilt or self-reproach, even by busy matrons, was during an illness. A moderate illness, while nobody's first choice, prohibited visiting or performing demanding tasks, but certainly allowed for quiet reading. As Elizabeth Phelps noted on one Sunday in 1801, "Sun. Communion day, but a

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Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 23, 1784, Shippen, 199. At this point Livingston was married and the mother of a two-year-old but she had left her abusive husband and been forced to leave the child with its paternal grandmother in New York.
very sick one for me . . . been able to read some for which I desire to be thankful for." 98 Similarly, Nancy Shippen Livingston noted that she was "not very well today therefore cou’d not attend divine worship, but contented myself with reading Blairs Sermons; they are delightful indeed--sound doctrine dressed in the most elegant style." 99 In another entry a couple of months later, she wrote, "Not very well today, read Swifts works." 100 Other people’s injuries or illnesses also resulted in welcome reading sessions. When her mother was ill, Livingston read to her, recording, "This morn§ I set in Lady W’s Chamber; & read to her. She has been sick for some time but is getting better." 101 On one Sunday in January 1775, Elizabeth Phelps "tarried at home to take care of Phillis," adding "Lord what a mercy it is that altho’ I am at home yet I may find such good Books." 102 In 1805, she noted that on "Fryday Chester Gaylords wife & Betsy came here . . . Mrs. Gaylord . . . broke her wrist a month ago & cant do any work. She read a great deal for us we had a charming time." 103 A couple weeks later, Mrs. Gaylord’s wrist still prohibited work and Phelps wrote cheerfully that "Mrs Gaylord read to us--good stories in the Magazine." 104

98 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 2, 1801, NEHGR 122 (1968), 65.

99 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 24, 1784, Shippen, 176. She referred to Hugh Blair (1700-1800) who published several volumes of sermons. Several years later, Abigail Brackett Lyman referred to the same author (see above).


101 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 26, 1783, Shippen, 168. Another similar entry occurred in 1785: "Spent part of this day in read[ing] to my poor Mamma who is much better than she has been but is still afflicted with the most strange affection of the mind." (1785, 228)

102 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 15, 1775, NEHGR 118 (1964), 224.

103 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 24, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 303.

104 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, March 10, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 303.
There were occasions other than illness when reading conflicted with neither household tasks nor requisite socializing. The weather sometimes granted readers a respite from the usual daily pressures. On a frigid day in January 1784, Nancy Shippen Livingston wrote contentedly, "Spent the day at home, reading, & hearing delightful music; the Day extremely cold." If it rained too hard to go to meeting, reading might substitute for preaching. As Elizabeth Phelps recorded in 1801, "Sun. very rainy, all at home, read much in John Newton’s works. I pray God it may profit me." Or, if bad weather restricted the constant rounds of socializing documented in Hannah Heath’s diary, reading might take its place. During a period of heavy snow in February 1811, for example, she observed that "Betsey is obliged to pass her nights with us the time glides along pleasantly reading the Scottish Chiefs." The next day, "Betsey finished the scottish Chiefs we are all glad both hearers and lookers on too."  

As some of these references to reading in letters and diaries of the early republic indicate, quantifying reading was one way of evaluating productivity, the orderliness of homes, and accomplishment and well-being. Those words might mean different things to the different readers and writers considered here, but reading (and writing about their reading, or lack thereof) helped diarists and correspondents make sense of their daily lives. Statements about trying to read "one more sermon" before bed or having "no time

105 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 1, 1784, Shippen, 169.

106 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Dec. 27, 1801, NEHGR 122 (1968), 68.

107 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She refers to Betsey reading the Scottish Chiefs on four different days in February. The book is Jane Porter, The Scottish Chiefs (1800).
to read or think," indicate hectic, if not frantic days, while "went about some and read some" and "spent the morning as usual read & work'd" connote scenes of calm competence. When Heath noted as she prepared for a wedding to be held at her home that "I made cake & puffs for the Wedding. . . we were all very much engaged indeed at both houses, I had not time to read or think," presumably she knew that preparing for a wedding would prohibit any reading at all and instead used reading to highlight her productivity rather than to express real disappointment or surprise that reading was impossible. In either case, Heath posited work and reading as incompatible activities. The fact that she set reading apart from visiting, household tasks like washing, and exceptional events like preparing for a wedding, rendered it a trusted barometer with which to gauge productivity.

Comments about reading in letters and diaries highlighted situations other than productivity and orderliness of course. When Nancy Shippen Livingston suffered from a "bad tooth ach which was so violent . . . I went to bed almost distracted with pain," in 1784, she chronicled her recovery in terms of reading. To her "great joy," she wrote a few days later, her "face [was] entirely easy" and she "cou’d read, & work alternately without pain." While Livingston linked work and reading in this entry, in contrast to Heath’s disassociation of the two activities, for her "work" undoubtedly referred to needlework rather than to housework such as cleaning or laundry. Livingston later suffered from a different malady and again used to reading to evaluate her condition: "my

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108 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 1, 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
eyes so painful that I can't read," she wrote.\textsuperscript{109} Her uncle suffered from eye troubles as well, as Nancy's brother postscripted a letter to his father declaring that "My Uncle William . . . wishes to know what you would advise him to do for his eyes which he finds are beginning to grow exceedingly weak insomuch that he can't read at all by candle light."\textsuperscript{110} Similarly, in 1809, Hannah Heath observed in two different entries that "my eyes are so poor I could not see to read"\textsuperscript{111} and again, "my eyes are very poor I cannot read much."\textsuperscript{112} And we know about Mrs. Gaylord's ailing wrist through Phelps's references to the reading it occasioned. In her old age, Mary Anna Whiting Boardman comforted herself that "I am much more favored than many people of my age. I have little pain; can see to read as much as I wish; and rest quietly at night."\textsuperscript{113}

While these readers and writers comfortably invoked reading as a device to gauge seemingly unrelated events, they also discussed reading much more substantively. Trying to understand why people read what they read is difficult but the sources analyzed here provide some clues. "Reading," Abigail Brackett Lyman observed in 1800, "may inform our minds."\textsuperscript{114} For Hannah Heath, it was an essential means of informing her children's

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{110} Thomas Lee Shippen to William Shippen and Alice Lee Shippen, Dec. 30, 1783, \textit{Shippen}, 308.

\textsuperscript{111} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 22, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{112} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 17, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{113} Mary Anna Whiting Boardman, March 4, 1839, \textit{Boardman}, 234. In the 1780s, Theodore Sedgwick hoped reading might be a cure for his wife's "mental malady," and wrote letters encouraging his children to "read to her, or persuade her to read diverting books." Theodore Sedgwick, quoted in Kelley, \textit{The Power of Her Sympathy}, 62.

\textsuperscript{114} Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 1, 1800, \textit{Lyman}, 104.
\end{footnotesize}
minds as well. As she reflected in 1822, "it has been my desire to make my Children read the scriptures at an early age . . . and may they so read and so understand them—as to see a particular Providence guarding, and directing them at all times."\textsuperscript{115} And indeed, when her children were younger, she occasionally noted whether or not that goal had been achieved. In 1807, for example, she "did not go to bed happy because I had not spent the evening to my satisfaction I had neglected to hear the Children read and say their prayers."\textsuperscript{116} On one Sunday she wrote that "Aunt White and John Goddard drank tea here & spent the evening I had no opportunity to hear the Children read or say their hymns which I lament very much indeed."\textsuperscript{117} On a different occasion, however, she happily noted that "no body came to tea which gave me an opportunity to hear the Children read &c."\textsuperscript{118} In a letter to his sixteen-year-old son who had recently joined the army, Sherman Boardman admonished him to "spend your leisure hours as profitably as you can, by reading and writing."\textsuperscript{119} Likewise a self-satisfied Charles Phelps wrote his son at Cambridge that "the disposition of your money I like well, had I known you would have wanted so many Books, should have left you more Money."\textsuperscript{120} Samuel Whiting,

\textsuperscript{115}Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 31, 1822, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{116}Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 11, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{117}Hannah Williams Heath diary, April 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{118}Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 14, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{119}As discussed in the previous chapter, he continued this train of thought by suggesting to his son that "when you have nothing else to read, read this letter." Sherman Boardman to Elijah Boardman, 1776, Boardman, 128.

\textsuperscript{120}Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 22, 1787 (Box 4, Folder 5), PPH. On the other hand, he was less enthused about the trouble and expense of shipping his son's books from Cambridge to Hadley, writing to Charles that "it is not worth while to bring home a load of Books." Charles Phelps to
frustrated by his sister's "diffidence" with regard to the "exercise of composition,"
encouraged her to consult the "ease, elegance, smoothness, and propriety of a Mrs. Rowe"
for a suitable example to imitate.\footnote{Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, July 2, 1785, \textit{Boardman}, 87. He is referring to
Elizabeth Singer Rowe's \textit{Friendship in Death: In Twenty Letters from the Dead to the Living}, 1731 (31
more editions were published by 1800). Susan Kittredge complimented a letter she had received from Eliza
Waite by observing that "I have lately been reading a very pretty book it is Mrs Rowes work [torn] of it is
from the Dead to the living I dare say it would please you if you have never read it what put me in Mind of
it is because I think your letter is a good deal like the last story in the Book." Susan Kittredge to Eliza
Waite, 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El. Catharine Maria Sedgwick remembered that "Rowe's
'Letters from the Dead to the Living' . . . had a strange charm" due to the "little mystification . . . that
excited my imagination." Kelley, \textit{The Power of Her Sympathy}, 83.}
When Peggy Livingston was just seven years old, her
great Uncle Arthur Lee likewise asked, "how fares it with our little Peggy? Does she
continue to be a good girl & improve in her reading, music, friends, & dancing? If she
does, kiss her & thank her for me."\footnote{Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 1788, \textit{Shippen}, 263.}
And one of Peggy's aunts complimented her on her
"fine understanding" and "tast[e] for books."\footnote{Janet Montgomery to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1797, \textit{Shippen}, 296.}
In the absence of a "taste for books," a
little bribery might be used to motivate youngsters to read. In a letter to her mother,
Betsy Phelps referred to a young servant in the household, urging her mother to "ask
[Mitty] if she remembers the time when she read to me--& you told her she must not eat
any fish till she had read well."\footnote{Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 20, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.}
Borrowing instruction from a well-known author,
Elijah Boardman urgently wrote his son, "let no time be lost . . . Dr. Franklin said 'Time
is money;' and, if well spent, it is \textbf{better} than money. This you may lose; but learning will

Charles Porter Phelps, Oct. 14, 1790 (Box 4, Folder 5), PPH.
be your constant companion, and never-failing friend."\textsuperscript{125}

But it was more than the children that adults hoped reading would inspire. In 1808, Heath wrote in her journal that "Mr Heath read the story of Daniel to the Children last evening and the story of Joseph the night before, I really hope he will go on reading one story after another from the Bible to his Children untill he shall be impress with the beauty and importance of it, and read it dayly for his own edification."\textsuperscript{126} This earnest hope was apparently disappointed, however, for two weeks later she wrote angrily and anxiously, quoting Philip Doddridge's \textit{Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful} that "I pity Mr Heath with all my heart, \ldots every thing I behold is murmuring and complaining, from the beginning of the year to the end." "One thing is needfull," she reminded herself, "and what is this one thing, but the care of the soul? \ldots I have just read the above, felt its force--and wrote it down, and may I ever bear in mind, that one thing is needfull."\textsuperscript{127} Since reading failed to instruct her husband, presumably because he simply did not read as opposed to having read texts that left him unmoved, she turned to reading herself as an activity that would help her accept her lot. A few months later, she noted more tranquilly that "happy would it be if we could arrive at that state of perfection that a

\textsuperscript{125}Elijah Boardman to William Whiting Boardman, undated, probably 1820s, \textit{Boardman}, 147.

\textsuperscript{126}Hannah Williams Heath diary, Nov. 16, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{127}Hannah Williams Heath diary, Nov. 30, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She had been reading Philip Doddridge, \textit{Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful} (1761), a work reprinted many times. Upon reporting to her husband on the "most remarkable news" of the "extraordinary seriousness which taken place among the scollars at New Haven" in 1802, Elizabeth Porter Phelps likewise cited Doddridge's title, hoping that the students' example "may be a means of awakening other to attend to the one thing needful." Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, May 16, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH. In a letter expressing concern about her daughter's "being prepared to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ," Mary Anna Whiting Boardman likewise begged her daughter, "Oh, choose the one thing needful!" Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Cornelia Elizabeth Boardman, Feb. 7, 1828, \textit{Boardman}, 184.
celebrated Author recommends whom I have been reading this Morning—that we may
look for nothing in this world—claim nothing; that we may go through all the actions and
accidents of life, calmly and quiteitly [sic], as in the presence of God.  

Some 35 years earlier, Elizabeth Phelps had also sought instruction from her
reading. On the day that she "tarried at home to take care of Phillis," she wrote, "Lord
what a mercy is it that altho' I am at home yet I may find such good Books thou art able
to seal instruction." Nearly twenty years later, she still found reading a benefit, writing
"Something of a calm frame but not lively—but in time of reading before prayers at night
was much moved by heavenly effections I hope." After copying a poem in her Ladies'
Remembrancer, Abigail Lyman observed that "I admire the simplicity & ease of the
above lines—they convey an important lesson—and strongly recommend that lenity in
judgment—which it is the duty of every one to practice when any of the actions or words
of another are scrutinized—we are too greatly desposed to overlook or extenuate our own
foibles—and severely cencure others for similar conduct—yet the inconsistency is never
perceived by the person herself." Elizabeth Bowen also "love[d] to read other's diarys
and think it serves many good purposes and doubt not but reading of good mens
characters might make some good Impression on others." She especially "admire[d] Mrs
Osbornes book . . . and Mrs Brery and many Others I am much pleased with But above all

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128 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 13, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
129 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 15, 1775, NEHGR 118 (1964), 224.
130 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 10, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966), 212.
131 Abigail Brackett Lyman, 1800, Lyman, 231.
Mr Branard seems to suit me best."132 And Hannah Tracy Emery wished that "some of our Ministers who have more zeal than wisdom, would learn meekness, and moderation" of "Dr. Dodridge."133

While these readers viewed reading as instructional, educational, or reverential for themselves and their immediate household, they also recommended and borrowed books from each other, letting their reading operate within and perhaps extend established social networks.134 Elizabeth Phelps's recommendation of "Mr John Newton's works" compelled her daughter to reply a bit ambiguously, "I almost wish to read Mr Newton's works as you seem so pleased with them."135 Phelps mentioned other selections to her daughter as well, telling her about "a book Mr Emons has lately published upon some of the first principles & doctrines of true religion" which she hoped Betsy "will have it some way or other,"136 and she queried her son, "did you ever read the history of Clarissa Harlowe. tell me in your next."137 Often reading material was discovered and acquired through friends and acquaintances as well as through family connections. Susan

132 Elizabeth Bowen diary, March 10, 1805, EI. This last is probably An Account of the Life of David Brainerd (1749), Jonathan Edward's popular missionary memoir based on the diary of David Brainerd.

133 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, March 19, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, EI.

134 This was the case in the mid-eighteenth century English household of Thomas and Peggy Turner as well. See Tadmor, "In the Even my Wife Read to me," 167-68.

135 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 22, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

136 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, March 2, 1801 (Box 5, Folder 3), PPH.

137 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Nov. 6, 1792 (Box 5, Folder 14), PPH.
Kittredge wrote Eliza Waite, "I wish my Dear Friend you would send me that little Poem Ermine & Elving" in 1791,¹³⁸ and "Mr Clark [the school master] call left another of his books"¹³⁹ with Hannah Heath in 1807. He repeated the favor again, as she later wrote, "Mr Clark came up in the afternoon . . . brought me another book."¹⁴⁰ Heath marked the end of Mr. Clark’s tenure as school master by observing that "Mr Clark dined with us said he should take leave of this part of the world next week and should hold me to my promise which was to make him a present of some book."¹⁴¹ Another school master exposed Heath to literature as well, since she later recorded that "Mr Prentice spend the day in town got home at dark—he brought—thinks says & to my self and began to read it aloud."¹⁴² The reigning school master was not her only source for reading material, however, as she once noted that "Mr Goddard came in the evening brought me Laws serious call to read."¹⁴³ Two weeks later, she "went over to the other house to leave Mr Goddards book laws serious call."¹⁴⁴ Nancy Shippen Livingston likewise noted that "Col. Miranda lent me a book call’d Voltaires Henriade"¹⁴⁵ and was thanked in a letter from

¹³⁸ Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, March 9, 1791, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

¹³⁹ Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 5, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

¹⁴⁰ Hannah Williams Heath diary, Nov. 9, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

¹⁴¹ Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 18, 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

¹⁴² Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

¹⁴³ Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 1, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. The book is William Law, Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (1729), or possibly An Extract from Mr. Law's Serious Call (1793).

¹⁴⁴ Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 19, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

¹⁴⁵ Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 17, 1783, Shippen, 167.
Bushrod Washington on behalf of his sister who "will be much indebted to you for the Ballad of 'One fond Kiss' &c." Charles Porter Phelps was reminded by his mother to "get [Polly Cooley] some little book," and Eliza Southgate Bowne sent a packet home that included "sugar things, toys for the children, . . . The Children of the Abbey, and Caroline of Lichfield for Mamma." Bowne also sent "a piece of Mr. Blouvell's poetry on the Miss Broomes' country seat at Bloomingdale" to her sisters which she thought "will amuse you." Abigail Lyman, echoing the letters comprising Hannah Webster Foster's The Boarding School, noted that Mrs. Chapone's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind "was first recommended to me by My friend Rebecca Salisbury--I last week lent it to Miss [Martha] Henshaw--with the earnest desire that she may attend to its instructions--follow its recommendations--& enjoy happiness as the result." A month or so later, she noted that she "Receive'd a valuable present from my friend Rebecca--

146 Bushrod Washington to Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 28, 1784, Shippen, 311.

147 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Nov. 6, 1792 (Box 5, Folder 14), PPH.

148 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 24, 1803, Bowne, 183. The book is Isabelle de Montolieu, Caroline of Lichfield (1795).

149 Eliza Southgate Bowne to her sisters, Aug. 24, 1804, Bowne, 191.

150 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 23, 1800, Lyman, 147. The book is Hester Mulso Chapone, Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Lady (1772). One of the correspondents in The Boarding School, having read Mrs. Chapone's Letters, wrote that she was "much gratified by the perusal, and flatter myself that I shall derive lasting benefit from it." (Foster, 152) The practice of loaning books with such good wishes for the reader as Lyman expressed is also exemplified in Foster's novel, particularly by the correspondent who sent her friend a copy of Bennett's Letters enthusing that "the precepts and observations of its author are excellent . . . his religious piety is exemplary, and his instructions improving. Foster, 179; also see Foster, 201. In her study of Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald, Alison Scott concluded that Archbald copied passages from books that she did not own, since there would have been little point in going to the trouble of transcription for texts she could consult easily and particularly as she was "in the habit of marking important passages in the books she did own to facilitate re-reading and reflection at leisure." Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 111-112. If this was the case with Lyman as well, the fact that she copied lengthy extracts from The Boarding School may indicate that it had been loaned to her temporarily.
Professor Tappan's discourse on the death of Gen Washington."¹⁵¹ Julia Cowles likewise noted in 1799 that "Mr. Woodbridge . . . was so kind as to present me with a book, the title is 'Reflections on Death,' some good advice which I never shall forget."¹⁵²

Sharing information on reading material could involve more than exchanging titles or books, however. It could also be a means of initiating and sustaining intimate relationships. In recording a sorrowful farewell to Louis Otto as he embarked for France, for example, Nancy Shippen Livingston forlornly wrote, "O! . . . to be separated from him, never to see him, never to spend with him any more happy cheerful days in conversing, hearing him read while I work'd, singing with him, & playing on the harpsichord for him."¹⁵³ Hannah Heath documented a courtship in her household when she wrote that "Mr Hunt went over to read to Miss Betsey," a circumstance repeated at least four times. Apparently reading failed to create a viable relationship, however, because she subsequently noted that Mr. Hunt read "to the Ladies," which he did at least twice in March.¹⁵⁴ Even if "the Ladies" included Betsey, the earlier sense of intimacy and discovery had evidently passed, but in either case, reading served as an important social link, and, for diarists such as Heath, provided a vocabulary and frame of reference through which to chronicle the nature of social gatherings.

¹⁵¹ Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 171. This was a printed version of David Tappan, A Discourse in English, delivered before the University in Cambridge, Mass., Feb. 21, 1800. In solemn commemoration of Gen. George Washington; in Stillwell's Washington Eulogies #232.

¹⁵² Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 32. The book is William Dodd, Reflections on Death (1769).

¹⁵³ Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 8, 1784, Shippen, 184.

¹⁵⁴ Hannah Williams Heath diary, Dec. 1810, Jan. 1811, Feb. 1811, March 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
References to reading as an activity that brought people together (rather than encouraging solitude) appear frequently in letters and diaries. Livingston read with Otto, Louisa, and her parents, and in one entry happily described an evening she and Louisa shared with Bushrod Washington which passed "in a very agreeable manner, us three alone--chatting, reading & singing till ten o'clock." Similarly Mary Anna Boardman noted that "Miss E.F. spend the evening with me, and I read to her Bishop Dehon's Sermons for the season," another described in a letter how she "went out a strawburying" with "Orlando" "& in the afternoon he read to me," and Hannah Tracy Emery recounted being "very graciously entertained" during a visit where the host read part of "Cato's Tragedy," "which, intermixed with sea phrases and observations of his own, had a very laughable effect." Another correspondent abbreviated a letter in favor of listening to a book being read aloud, explaining hastily that "we have a noval call'd Sophia Sternheim. Carroline is going to read so adieu." As has already been discussed, Heath read with her children and servants, Phelps with Mrs. Gaylord and others, and so forth.

As a face-to-face activity, reading often involved more than small circles gathered around a book or magazine. It might also serve as the focus of public gatherings or

155 Nancy Shippen Livingston, March 27, 1784, Shippen, 182.

156 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman in a letter probably to one of her daughters, Dec. 1828, Boardman, 267.

157 Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, June, prob. 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, Ei.

158 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, May 16, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, Ei.

159 Mary Greene to Eliza Waite, 1786, Eliza Waite Correspondence, Ei.
substitute for a minister's sermon. In 1785, Elizabeth Phelps related that a book constituted the subject of her minister's discourses. Her revered minister Mr. Hopkins, who she referred to as "Mr. Hop.," began "Discourses to confute a Book lately Published by Dr. Chauncey of Boston in favour of the Everlasting Happiness of all men," a topic worthy of at least three more sessions. In keeping with entrenched tradition, reading often went beyond serving as the subject of animated ministerial discourses by substituting for an absent minister. On one Sunday in Hadley when "Mr. Hop. [had] gone to preach at Northfield," Phelps's husband stood in his stead and "read both parts of the day in president Davies' works." On another occasion that found Mr. Hopkins in Boston, Phelps noted that "two sermons read from Dr. Weatherspoons works." Still another absence of her preacher resulted in "Mr Phelps read[ing] two sermons in Dr. Dodridges works." Mr. Phelps himself thought little of this arrangement on at least one occasion, for he wrote his daughter that with "Mr Hopkins . . . absent 4 weeks, . . .

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160 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 13, 1785, NEHGR 119 (1965), 216. Her minister spoke on a work by Charles Chauncy (1705-1787).

164 The other two references to this topic in Phelps's diary occur on Dec. 18, 1785, and Jan. 1, 1786, NEHGR 119 (1965), 217.

162 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 5, 1795, NEHGR 120 (1966), 294. Probably Samuel Davies (1723-1761). In her study of Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald, Alison M. Scott noted that reading often substituted for religious services when inelement weather prohibited attendance. See Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 100.

163 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 19, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 304. The author Phelps referred to was John Witherspoon (1723-1794), clergyman, theologian, and president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) from 1768-1794.

164 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 21, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 306. This is Philip Doddridge, author of what her daughter Betsy called her "favorite" book (p. 91), The Works of Philip Doddridge, D. D. (1802). Mr. Phelps's selection would certainly have pleased Hannah Tracy Emery who wished that "some of our Ministers . . . would learn meekness, and moderation" of "Dr. Dodridge." Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, March 19, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, El.
Labouring Oar has fallen chiefly on me—if the Selectmen dont procure preaching in
future, I think I shall ship myself over to Hatfield on Sundays.165

In contrast to the public, shared nature of reading as an activity consisting of
speaking and listening, reading could also be an intensely private experience meant to
serve not as a means of connecting readers to others but as a way of severing them from
their everyday lives, if only for little while.166 Books helped some readers escape or
forget their own circumstances by transporting them to another world and for others
functioned as a source of comfort—a known, predictable, trusted means of helping the
reader ease his or her mind, heart, and soul. Nancy Livingston, for example, noted that
when "my Brother read to me while I work’d. . . . It diverted me & made me for a time
forget my unhappiness."167 Another time she "spent this day entirely alone, except having
the company of Books. I read, & meditated upon what I read . . . & upon the whole spent

165 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 30, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.
During a period of religious enthusiasm in western Massachusetts in 1804, Elizabeth Phelps recorded that
"Monday night my husband and I up to praying at the Mills—he prayed & read. A number appear to be
awakened & some are hopefully converted," and again a few months later, "last evening we went to praying
meeting. Mr. Phelps read a book called the Refuge," a book he read again in the same circumstances on
July 28, 1805. Sometime later, Phelps noted, "in the eve: we attended meeting Mr Phelps read several
pieces in the Evangelical Magazine." Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 27, 1804, NEHGR 122 (1968), 223;
Nov. 25, 1804, NEHGR 122 (1968), 227; July 28, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 306; Nov. 3, 1805, NEHGR
122 (1968), 308. The book is William Giles, The Refuge (1804). Although reading had traditionally
functioned as a substitute for ministerial preaching, it was nevertheless commented upon by the Boardmans
as well as by Elizabeth Porter Phelps. See Henry Mason Boardman to Mary Anna Whiting Boardman, Oct.
18, 1835, Boardman, 250.

166 Roger Chartier has argued that "the ability to read was an essential prerequisite for certain new
practices around which people built their private lives" and "cultivate[d] an inner life." (116) The private,
silent reader "is free, master of his time, of his leisure or study." (136) Roger Chartier, "The Practical

167 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 21, 1783, Shippen, 147.
the day much to my mind.\textsuperscript{168} Two weeks later, she "amused myself with a book till just now, I am going to rest, & expect a more comfortable night than I have had this long time.\textsuperscript{169} Disconsolate about Shippen’s impending marriage, Louis Otto confided forlornly that even reading failed to provide a much needed reprieve from the distressing turn of his courtship. "All my gayety is gone," he wrote Nancy, "I am dead for company and afraid to see any body. I spend my time only with Books, and even these old Friends of mine, often appear to me stupid."\textsuperscript{170} For her part, Livingston’s extreme agitation upon Otto’s return to the United States in 1785 provoked a remonstrative "my tranquility is fled, I am absent, thoughtfull & unhappy; I make a thousand mistakes a day. . . . I can’t fix my attention to read."\textsuperscript{171}

A month later, however, Livingston recovered some composure after embarking upon a regimen that included reading. As she wrote, "Another month has pass’d & no alteration has taken place in my situation; I am however more reconciled to it than ever I was I find an infinite pleasure in trying to improve myself & my mind is much more composed since I have determin’d to employ every hour of my time usefully. . . . Music &

\begin{footnotesize}
168 Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 27, 1784, \textit{Shippen}, 204.

169 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 12, 1784, \textit{Shippen}, 205. In other entries she confirmed that she "enjoy’d myself in reading, & meditating without being disturb’d--& 2 or 3 hours pass’d away charmingly; a delightful silence prevail’d all around me," and "I read the divine Hervey’s meditations in the morning. I enjoy’d the calm serenity of this morning in a particular manner," or "took my book & went to stroll in the orchard." Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 18, 1784, 206; Aug. 29, 1784, 211; July 18, 1784, 207. She cited James Hervey, author of both \textit{Meditations and Contemplations} (1750) and \textit{Meditations among the Tombs} (1774).


\end{footnotesize}
reading & writing fill up half the day."\textsuperscript{172} Another reader sought comfort from comedies, writing "I wish you would get Sally Landers Comedy for me if you can but you . . . like Tragedies better I think it is full tragedy enough to part with our Friends therefore I wish you to send me Comedies."\textsuperscript{173} Elizabeth Porter Phelps found reading comforting as well, particularly devotional reading. Towards the end of March 1772, she noted that "Thursday been in some trouble on account of some temporal affairs. . . . Sunday . . . more composed this after-noon--read 7 sermons upon Christ's Humiliation--7 upon his exaltation in Mr. Wylards Body of Divinity, a sweet Book and soul Ravishing Discourse."\textsuperscript{174} In 1805, Elizabeth Bowen "was much comforted Reading Isa62,"\textsuperscript{175} and Hannah Heath noted in 1808 that she felt "uncommonly happy the reason is--I have read, and reflected on the goodness of my Maker to me all my life long."\textsuperscript{176} Ranging from secular works such as Livingston's Voltaire and Gibbons and Kittredge's coveted comedies to the devotional literature so admired by Phelps and Heath, the variety of reading that comforted different readers at different times further demonstrates the broad ways in which readers incorporated reading into their lives and expressions.

Sometimes readers reinforced the comfort or lessons derived from published material by transcribing pertinent passages. In 1808, for example, Hannah Heath had

\textsuperscript{172} Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 15, 1785, Shippen, 234.

\textsuperscript{173} Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, June, prob. 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.


\textsuperscript{175} Elizabeth Bowen diary, April 6, 1786, Essex Institute (EI).

\textsuperscript{176} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 2, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
"been reading some lines that are applicable to my situation at present which I shall copy" followed by eight lines of a hymn and then immediately copied four lines "from a different hymn that pleased me."\textsuperscript{177} For Heath, methodically transcribing comforting lines fully engrossed her in the text's message and rhythm and helped her achieve some degree of serenity. Heath turned to reading with a mixture of fear and resignation in 1812 as well, confessing that once she had heard the "long dreaded news that our Government have declared war with Great Britton,"\textsuperscript{178} she "read more than I used to do I delight to read the scriptures more & more."\textsuperscript{179}

A different manifestation of reading as a mode of comfort and solace appeared in a letter from William Browne to Eliza Southgate Bowne's parents in 1809. Entrusted with sending the "dreadful intelligence" from South Carolina that Eliza had succumbed to tuberculosis, he sought to comfort his parents-in-law by assuring them that "She knew us, and listened with apparent satisfaction to a prayer I read only an hour before the sad moment."\textsuperscript{180} Similarly, in a letter to his sister describing the death of their father, William Whiting Boardman described how he "read some selected prayers from the Prayer-Book" at his father's bedside yesterday and "the same were repeated this morning. It appeared to soothe and comfort him."\textsuperscript{181} These correspondents sought to assure grieving relatives of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{177} Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 25, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
\item \textsuperscript{180} William Browne to Robert and Mary Southgate, Feb. 21, 1809, Browne, 236. William Browne was married to Eliza's sister Octavia.
\item \textsuperscript{181} William Whiting Boardman to Caroline Maria Boardman, Aug. 15, 1823, Boardman, 170.
\end{itemize}
the deceased's spiritual acceptance of death in terms of oral performances of reading.

A different relationship between reading and death occurred when a friend accompanied a condolence letter to Mary Anna Whiting Boardman with "such books as I have preferred reading in affliction's night."\(^{182}\) In eulogies and obituaries, references to reading underscored the piety of the deceased. When Mary Anna Whiting Boardman's grand-daughter died at the age of eleven, her minister remarked on her "fondness for reading," her habit of "devoting most of her leisure hours to religious biography," and her memorization of the "richest strains of devotional poetry." The indisputable evidence of her piety, however, lay in the discovery of "two miniature volumes; . . . 'Is it Well?' and . . . 'Pay thy Vows,'" in the "pocket of her apron."\(^{183}\) As these examples indicate, various manifestations and descriptions of reading were deeply enmeshed in descriptions of events that seemingly had little to do with reading. Published words helped ease sad or alarming events and at the same time served as a mechanism (or strategy) for highlighting the tragedy of those occurrences. Reading would not bring Eliza Bowne back to life, but the scene her brother-in-law described of reading prayers in a circle of loved ones at her death sought to assure her parents that in her last moments she was connected

\(^{182}\) Gratia Merwin to Mary Anna Whiting Boardman, May 12, 1822, Boardman, 157. Merwin sent this package upon learning of the death of Boardman's eighteen-year-old daughter. After one of her son's deaths in 1825, her brother wrote Boardman that "agreeably to your request, I send you a parcel, containing sermons of Mr. Bostwick." Boardman, 179-80.

\(^{183}\) Rev. William G. French eulogy for Mary Anna Boardman Schroeder (1830-1841), Boardman, 198. Likewise her grandmother, Mary Anna Whiting Boardman, was remembered for "her long established habit, religiously to improve, by a recurrence, however casual, to some verse or two of Holy Scripture, or some sentences of choice modern reading, thus lightening present cares and duties. . . . And to this admirable habit may be attributed, in a great measure, the uncommon terseness and practical wisdom of her ordinary conversation, and the sententious golden maxims in letters to her friends." Obituary of Mary Anna Whiting Boardman, Boardman, 416.
comfortably with her family and at peace with herself. For Livingston, the ability to "fix her attention to read" indicated her success in regaining her composure in the face of emotional strain. Reading helped Heath reconcile herself to the dreaded events of 1812 by enlarging her perspective and permitting her to focus on a different world, the spiritual world.

While Heath underscored the distress she felt about war by discussing it in terms of reading, other readers and writers used reading as a rhetorical device, a composition strategy, to highlight exceptional circumstances. In describing her introduction to General Knox, for example, Eliza Southgate Bowne began by situating herself: "I was walking the room and reading, perfectly unsuspicous," she wrote her sister. After painting this portrait of relaxed solitude, she then proceeded, "when the opening of the door and Mr Bowne's voice--'Gen'l Knox, my love,' quite roused me."184 Everything was perfectly normal, that is, until she was startled by the unexpected, exceptional occurrence of greeting General Knox. Betsy Phelps used the same kind of strategy when she excitedly wrote her mother about a coveted guitar. "After breakfast," she began calmly, "I took up the last volume of Camilla--and have continued reading till Charles came in with a guiltar in his hand."185 Bowne and Phelps's remarks appeared in letters; Hannah Heath wrote in an identical manner in her journal. On March 15, 1808, she began her journal entry much as Bowne and Phelps had introduced their tales--"Tuesday a

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184 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, May 30, 1803, Bowne, 146-47.

185 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH. The bulk of the letter is a plea to her mother to pay for the guitar (about twenty dollars) and a few lessons. The book is Fanny Burney, Camilla, or, a Picture of Youth (1796).
beautiful day. I was reading quietly in my Chamber"—and used this peaceful scene to launch into the description of a near crisis, continuing, "when John came in—very much frightened said he thought his grand Ma-ma was dying. . . . to my great joy I found she was only faint—she fainted and fell from her chair and hurt her head—it has given us all a serious alarm." In a letter to Sarah Parsons, whom he was courting, Charles Porter Phelps worked within this same model of dramatic expression. "While my father & Mother have crossed the river over into Hatfield," he began, "while my Grand mother is safely stowed away in a farther corner of the house, wrapt up in rather noisy slumbers to be sure," he continued, proceeding to further detail the activities of his sisters, as well as "Lydia & Polly," and "John, the Scotch gardener," who sat "by the kitchen fire side . . . managing the 'Gentle Shepard' as well as could be expected." Not content to interrupt the rhythm of his letter once all inhabitants had been accounted for, he further described his physical surroundings. Sarah might envision him in "an inner room—of which the greatest ornament is an old family clock at my left hand corner" and "an oldfashioned desk" at which "sits the form and figure of a man." But, he continued, finally reaching the climax of all this scene setting, "the heart with all its tenderest sensations . . . where are they? bound within the silken costus that encircles the loveliest of her sex." Devoting almost all of his letter to describing his immediate context, Phelps set a scene in order to convince his reader of the sentiment that backed his romantic discourse.

In contrast to putting the exceptional in relief, reading might also be used to

186 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 15, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

187 Charles Porter Phelps to Sarah Parsons (Box 10, Folder 6), Dec. 15, 1796, PPH.
underscore the trivial. Nancy Shippen Livingston's uncle had been charged with overseeing the delivery of a hat to Nancy in Philadelphia and the delay in the hat's arrival occasioned a few letters, one of which revealed Arthur Lee's exasperation with the whole episode:

That hat—that charming hat—my dear Nancy, where shall we find it. I have searched Ancient & Modern history for it, in vain. Certainly, said I, we shall find it among the Ornaments which Venus furnished to Juno, when they plotted to enchant poor Jupiter. . . . After having read 12 volumes of Ancient history, with 24 German commentaries and illustrations in folio, I have not been able to determine whether such a hat was among the imperial ornaments off Semiramis or of Queen Zenobia. . . . The books of Chronicles and of Kings with the assistance of Josephus, would not inform me whether the amorous Queen of Sheba, wore this hat.\textsuperscript{188}

Another epistle expressed increasing impatience. "When it arrives & arrive it will," he wrote resolutely, "I hope it will be announced by a general ringing of bells & discharge of artillery & be carried in procession through the streets . . . & Dr. Rush deliver a lecture on this wondrous work of the milliner."\textsuperscript{189}

In addition to highlighting singular or common events, references to reading operated as a kind of shorthand. A shared understanding of the contents of different types of publications enabled correspondents to abbreviate their own descriptions, and at the same time augment or highlight their own evaluations of a scene or event, by dropping references to reading. Eliza Southgate, for example, began describing an unusually lively assembly in Portland, Maine, to her cousin by exclaiming, "Such a frolic! Such a chain of adventures I never before met with, nay, the page of romance never presented its equal."

\textsuperscript{188} Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1787, \textit{Shippen}, 252-53.

\textsuperscript{189} Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1787, \textit{Shippen}, 252.
Indeed, she continued excitedly, "I have since heard of several events that took place that Assembly night much more amusing than mine,—nay, Don Quixote's most ludicrous adventures compared with some of them will appear like the common events of the day." In another letter, composed in an entirely different mood, she introduced a lengthy and reproving response to her cousin's desire to retire to the country with his sweetheart by couching her argument in terms of novels. She scolded Moses that his "new plan of life does not appear to me so delightful as to you, it sounds well, ... cuts a pretty figure on paper and would form a delightful chapter for a novel." But, she wrote impatiently, "our novelists have worn the pleasures of rural life threadbare, every lovesick swain imagines that with the mistress of his heart he could leave the noisy tumultuous scenes of life and in the shades of rural retirement feel all the delightful serenity and peace ascribed to the golden age." "Yet," she urged Moses, "let us judge for ourselves,—we all have seen what the pleasures of rural life are, and whatever Poets may have ascribed to it, we must know there is as much depravity and consequently as much discontent in the inhabitants of a country village as in the most populous city." On the one hand, published works failed to do justice to a lively assembly, although they worked well as a foil to dramatize her own expression; on the other, novelists' inordinate sentimentalization of country living sorely tried her patience. In both cases, however, she invoked assumptions about reading material to buttress her own description and

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190 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, March 1, 1802, Brown, 92, 96, 97.

191 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Brown, 99-100. See chapter three for an analysis of this letter in terms of the rural-urban dialectic.
argument.

Others referred to reading in a similar manner. Martha Bland agreed with Southgate that literary descriptions of rural living fell short of reality, for example, when she wrote that "there is so much calm and passive Happiness in my Situation it some time fills me [with] ennui, and at the same time my reason reproves me for it, for do not the poets paint the very life I am leading, as the summit of all earthly joys?"\textsuperscript{192} On a different subject, another correspondent confirmed that "indeed I know of no one that answers the poets description."\textsuperscript{193} Ellen Coffin, on the other hand, observed to her sister that "The \textit{Hermitage} more than answered my expectations. It is everything which we see described in novels, and which I thought was not to be found in reality."\textsuperscript{194} For Southgate and Bland, novels came up short of reality; for Coffin they gained credibility if they helped her with her own expressions. For all, references to reading material served as shorthand devices for expressing their own reactions. These comments, it should be noted, further belie the danger of reading novels so feared by Benjamin Rush and others because they demonstrate the ability of readers to cite published works for ends not necessarily intended by the authors of those works.

Another way that reading might be used as a rhetorical device in the expressions of everyday writers was as a mechanism to juxtapose their own style and vocabulary. In a description of Bath, Maine, for example, Eliza Southgate began by asking her reader to

\textsuperscript{192} Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 23, 1785, \textit{Shippen}, 236.

\textsuperscript{193} Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, c. 1790, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El.

\textsuperscript{194} Martha Coffin to Ellen Coffin Derby, June 29, 1800, \textit{Bowie}, 116.
join her as she admired the landscape. "The window at which I now sit commands a most
delightful water prospect," she wrote contentedly, as "the opposite banks are neither
sublime nor beautiful." She then switched tactics, wondering "What if I for a moment
should take a poet's license, and by the force of imagination project steep and rugged
rocks! bid them stoop with awful majesty to reflect their gloomy horrors in the wave!"
Satirizing Gothic novels, but at the same time affirming both that she read them and that
she too could imagine and command a dramatic vocabulary, she nevertheless eventually
forsook her "poet's license" and returned to her seat at the window. "To leave fiction for
reality," she wrote, "the surface of the water is a perfect mirror." 195 By assuming the
poet's mantle she portrayed the river in contrasting tones and vocabulary to explain why
she found the river such a "delightful prospect," commanding disparate discourses in
order to engage her reader in the process of capturing the scenery with pen and paper. In
a later letter, also talking about rivers, she mingled scenic description and "poets" in a
different way. Instead of playing serene and dramatic renderings off of each other, she
wrote about the lack of poets, especially American poets, and presumed to assume that
role herself, at least to do justice to the landscape in a letter to her sister. In describing a
trip to Ballston Springs, New York, in 1803, she effused that "the romantic and beautiful
scenery on the North River as we rode up was most charming to me," and she was "sure
the Hudson wants nothing but a Poet to celebrate it" just as "the Thames and the Tiber

have been sung by Homers and Popes.\footnote{196} By invoking literary traditions and masters and highlighting the absence of such work in America, she took it upon herself to extoll the beauty of the American landscape in a passage that confirmed both the grandeur of New York state and her understanding that written celebrations played an important role in establishing and verifying that grandeur.\footnote{197}

On a more mundane level, everyday writers used reading to abbreviate their own epistles by quoting or referring their recipients to published material. In one of her letters, for example, Susan Kittredge wrote touchingly, "Once more my Dear Eliza I hold the pen of sweetly familiar scribbles sitting down quite at my ease to chat with a friend who I am assured by the charming consciousness which plays about my heart is prepared with indulgent candour to listen." Like a good academic, however, she acknowledged her source, assuring Eliza that "these lines so expressive of my feelings I have borrow’d from a Magazine I delight to see flow from another pen the sensations I feel but am unable to express."\footnote{198}

\footnote{196} Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 179. Hannah Williams Heath, who always wrote with less grace and expressiveness than Southgate, also struggled to do justice to nature’s magnificence after visiting Nahant (near Boston). She wrote that she "was perfectly astonished to see the variety—the beach, the terrible rocks, and indeed every thing was so entirely new that I wanted language to express my feelings." Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 24, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\footnote{197} Indeed, this was not the only time she played with the idea of herself as poet. In one letter to her cousin, she left off writing with some exasperation, saying "I am called—dinner; oh this eating seems to clog all my faculties, I never write with half so much ease as when I’m half starved. I believe it is true that poets ought not to live well." Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Oct. 29, 1801, Bowne, 79. Another diarist flirted with the possibility of writing a diary for publication. After acknowledging how much she enjoyed "reading other’s diaries," she added, "but as for myself I don’t think it necessary for many reasons one is I should not be willing the world should know the difficulties and trials I have to go through as it is very unfashionable at this day to be zealous for the Lord of host." Elizabeth Bowen diary, March 10, 1805, El.

\footnote{198} Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, March 24, 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El.
In lieu of formulating her own description of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Eliza Bowne assured her sister that she "may find one in some of the Boston magazines," and, should Miranda want even more information, Bowne added that "We had a little book called a 'Tour to Bethlehem,' which if I can find I will send you. It will give you a very correct idea of the place, society, and customs." Similarly, rather than depicting Independence Day celebrations in New York City, she promised that "I have quite a packet of newspapers which I shall send . . . to amuse you; they contain all the public amusements and shows in celebration of 4th July." Unable to resist the temptation to mention visiting "Davis Hall Gardens" that evening, she nevertheless interrupted herself and again deferred to the newspapers: "the entertainment there you will see by the papers." In a similar manner, Elizabeth Phelps began to tell her daughter about how the Porters' house in Dalton (Mass.) "was struck with lightening [sic] on Wednesday the day, before, considerably damaged, dolly felt the effects of her shock sometimes," only to stop rather suddenly upon realizing, as she told Betsy, "but I think it probable you will have the particulars in the newspapers."

199 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Miranda Southgate, March 1804, Bowne, 190.

200 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 14, 1803, Bowne, 166.

201 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, June 13, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH. Newspapers were a ready and utilized source of news in this period. Hannah Heath also read at least one newspaper for she noted in 1808 two sources of news: "We heard yesterday the Governor was dead--by the paper I see Mr Jackson is dead also." Hannah Williams Heath diary, Dec. 11, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS. In her description of a party she attended in Newburyport, Massachusetts, Hannah Tracy Emery noted that one "Dr Hale of Newtown . . . read me the contents of 2 newspapers." Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, Feb. 10, 1788, Cutts Family Collection, El. In her journal covering the year 1791, Elizabeth Fuller of Princeton, Massachusetts, then 15 years old, regularly noted the arrival of the newspaper. On January 12, she wrote, "Nathan Perry here, this to divide newspapers." Two months later, Nathan Perry was "here for the newspaper." And in May of 1791, she wrote that "Pa went to Worcester to get the newspaper," and added the expected, "Nathan Perry here this eve." Elizabeth Fuller,
In addition to remarking on the content of their reading or referring to reading to highlight other events, readers sometimes commented explicitly on the language and style of the works they perused. Nancy Shippen Livingston, for example, concluded her positive assessment of "Voltaires Henriade," a book about France's Henry IV, who converted to Catholicism in order to assume the throne, by adding that "The style is Elegant, & the descriptions lively." Julia Cowles bestowed the same commendation on a very different kind of work, praising the "History of Deborah in Hunter's 'Sacred Biography,'" particularly because "the language is elegant." Eliza Southgate could be intensely aware of vocabulary both in terms of her reading and her writing. She once observed to her cousin, for example, that she had "often in reading been disagreeably struck by the epithets used for the motions of the gods." Although she found fault with "glide" and "solemn step" she could not herself "at present think of any words that would answer better," but "glide," she insisted, should be "properly applied to fairies; something light and airy" while "for a god to step--that seems too grovelling, too like us mortals." 

1791, Fuller, 305, 307, 310. For information on elite northeastern women reading newspapers for political news during the two decades preceding the Civil War, see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Political News and Female Readership in Antebellum Boston and Its Region," Journalism History 22 (1996): 2-14. Occasionally magazines were mentioned in journals too, as when Abigail Lyman observed that she was "much pleased with reading the Gentlemans [Miscellany]" Abigail Brackett Lyman, January 20, 1800, Lyman, 119. The magazine was probably the Gentleman's Magazine. Elizabeth Porter Phelps likewise recorded that "Mrs Gaylord read to us--good stories in the Magazine." Elizabeth Porter Phelps, March 10, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 303. The magazines of this period look like the newspapers of the 1730s-1750s which has interesting implications for the evolving relationship between gender and reading during the eighteenth century.


203 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 67.

204 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Sept. 13, 1801, Bowre, 72.
Sometimes it was more than the vocabulary, style, or message of reading material that garnered attention in letters and diaries of the early republic. Readers also wrestled with the relationship between the character of an author and the sentiments of his or her works. Naturally this struggle was all the more urgent because it resonated so obviously in terms of their own expressions as well. Eliza Southgate’s cousin had apparently criticized a work of poetry along with the poet himself, for example, because in an 1801 letter Southgate took exception to his assessment: "Your opinion of Story’s Poems I think very unjust; as to the man, I cannot say, for I know nothing of him, but I think you are too severe upon him; a man who had not a ‘fibre of refinement in his composition’ could never have written some passages in that poem." Although they disagreed about the merits of this poet and his verses, neither Southgate nor her cousin succeeded in denying the transparency between a writer and his or her expressions. For both writing reflected character; the two could not be separated. When it came to Mary Wollstonecraft, Southgate struggled mightily with the possibility of separating the author from her work:

I am aware of the censure that will ever await the female that attempts the vindication of her sex, yet I dare to brave that censure that I know to be undeserved. It does not follow (O what a pen!) that every female who vindicates the capacity of the sex is a disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft. Though I allow her to have said many thing which I cannot but approve, yet the very foundation on which she builds her work will be apt to prejudice us so against her that we will not allow her the merit she really

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205 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 1801, Bowne, 57. The poet is Isaac Story (1749-1816). Robert Darnton has described how the late eighteenth-century "bourgeois reader Jean Ranson" always connected Rousseau the person with Rousseau’s works: "The man and the works, they always went together in Ransom’s letters." Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," 235. Jean Marie Goulemot agrees that the "truth (or, more properly, truth-effect)" of the epistolary novel "derives in part from the fact that it presents itself as nonfiction and in part from the fact that letters are a strictly private, intimate medium." Jean Marie Goulemot, "Literary Practices: Publicizing the Private," in A History of Private Life, vol. III, Passions of the Renaissance, ed. Chartier, 386.
deserves,—yet, prejudice set aside, I confess I admire many of her sentiments, notwithstanding I believe should any one adopt her principles, they would conduct in the same manner, and upon the whole her life is the best comment on her writings. Her style is nervous and commanding, her sentiments appear to carry conviction along with them, but they will not bear analyzing.206

Southgate’s letter predates by two years a very similar criticism of Mary Wollstonecraft published in the Boston Weekly Magazine. Like Southgate, the author of this article labored to reconcile Wollstonecraft’s actual life with what he or she considered the very real merits of her writings. To accomplish this, the article criticized William Godwin for broadcasting Wollstonecraft’s unconventional living arrangements (in his Memoirs of the Author of "The Rights of Woman" [1798]) and focused on earlier works that Wollstonecraft had penned when her life was as exemplary as her theories.207 This strategy could work only to a point, however, and ultimately even this favorable article failed to dissolve the link between behavior, reputation, and ideas that Eliza Southgate wrestled with as well. Private activity and public expression were not two facets of a life that could be talked about separately; they were one and the same. Hannah Williams Heath confirmed the insolubility of print and character in terms not only of the author and his or her words but in terms of the link between the reader and what he or she read when she wrote about the "great relief" she experienced upon Miss May and her

206 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, June 1, 1801, Bowne, 62. Southgate is referring to Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792). Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald commented upon Mary Wollstonecraft in her writings as well. Although Scott concluded generally that Archbald "did not combine her comments upon literary merit with references to the circumstances, personality, or public character of authors" (120), her later discussion of Wollstonecraft confirms that Wodrow too wrestled with reconciling Wollstonecraft’s character and works. (149-153) Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed From Writers."

"piece of poetry . . . which put me out of spirits" quitting her house.²⁰⁸

This assessment of the relationship between the person, the expression, and the ability of the expression to turn the reader into someone like the author undergirds much of the "writing about reading" found in the letters and diaries analyzed here. It also helps account for the diatribes against novels and novelists' assertions that they wrote "tales of truth" intended to instruct readers. If words reflected the author and shaped the reader, what was read and written in the early republic was crucial indeed to explaining and creating the idea of a citizen of the newly formed United States. Since for eighteenth-century Americans, literature, art, politics, and economics were not distinctive categories that could be talked about separately, but were understood to be one and the same, reading, political identity, and virtue were all deeply entangled.²⁰⁹ That this pervasive understanding affected "private," unpublished writing as well was seen in the previous chapter. The change from Elizabeth Phelps's extreme circumspection to Hannah Heath's emotional explorations in their respective journals indicates a dissolution between writing as public—as "published," as Benjamin Franklin believed—and writing as potentially private.²¹⁰ It also indicates a change in how reading was understood and the beginning of the practice of separating ideas from their creators. As historian David Hall has argued,

²⁰⁸ Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1810, June 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.


²¹⁰ For Franklin, as Larzer Ziff has argued, "only the unwritten can remain private" because "to write was, in effect, to publish even if print were not the goal, and he regarded all writing as public property." Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 124, 102, also 193. For another discussion of conceptualizing writing as a "public gesture, not as a private act," see Ralston, Authorship and Audience, 3-20, quote, 4.
the "vernacular tradition" of reading" rested on a "conception of authorship that denied
the role of individual talent (good writers spoke the Truth)." This tradition, however, was
increasingly undermined in the eighteenth century by authors of fiction who "divested the
printed word of its sacramental aura." Both understandings of reading existed
simultaneously in the early national period. One question this raises is whether readers
approached different kinds of reading, say novels and sermons, with different methods of
reading. Would the same person who interrogated a novel also respond critically to a
devout work? The evidence cited in this chapter suggests that to some extent that was
true, particularly in the case of applying the "vernacular tradition" to pious works. On the
other hand, readers comfortably challenged nonfictional works such as "Bennets Letters"
and "Madame de Maintenons advice to the D--- De B---g." That these two examples of
overlapping approaches to reading consist of advice manuals to women, however, is
probably not coincidental. Indeed, the types of works generally assumed to be more
attractive to female readers may have encouraged a more critical reading than other kinds
of works, such as history and biography, that were not gendered so apparently by social
experts. If that was the case, then Rush's fears about novel readers may have been both
accurate and realized. People who read novels may indeed have developed a more
individualistic sense of self, a self with which they became increasingly comfortable as
they interrogated and wrote about certain kinds of reading.

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211 Hall, "Books and Reading in Eighteenth-Century America," in Of Consuming Interests, ed.
Carson, et al., 367, 371. Robert Darnton has argued that Rousseau conflated these two approaches to
reading: "Rousseau taught his readers to 'digest' books so thoroughly that literature became absorbed in life.
... His public probably applied an old style of religious reading to new material, notably the novel, which
had previously seemed incompatible with it." Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," 251.
It took readers themselves some time to sort out these different approaches to reading, resulting in a period of uncertainty about the authority of the printed word. Old, vernacular reading practices overlapped onto fiction and vice versa.\textsuperscript{212} Indeed, in her 1797 epistolary novel \textit{The Coquette}, Hannah Webster Foster maintained a traditional connection between the printed word and Truth. The seducer Peter Sanford is glaringly honest in his letters about his intentions with regard to Eliza Wharton, but his letters are addressed only to his confidant Charles Deighton. Hence, his behavior is duplicitous but his writing is not, and Foster thereby reinforced the notion that writing reflected true character.\textsuperscript{213} In \textit{Charlotte Temple}, however, Susanna Rowson began to dissolve the notion of writing as truth (in a novel she declared to be "A Tale of Truth"). Her heroine admits that her "mother has often told me, I should never read a letter given me by a young man," and Rowson, in this part of the tale, substituted "sensible motherly admonitions" for the text of the letter since "maybe the novel's readers would read the letter wrong," that is, maybe they would assume that it reflected true character.\textsuperscript{214} Abigail Lyman was beginning to understand the possibility that words and truth could diverge as

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\item \textsuperscript{212} On the differences between and overlap of "intensive" and "extensive" reading practices, see Robert Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," 249. Also see Alison M. Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 97-99.
\item \textsuperscript{213} For Foster, the concern about duplicity was manifested in Sanford's actual behavior with Eliza Wharton and her acquaintances. Larzer Ziff has observed the frequency of deception as a major theme in literature of the early republic and concluded that it reveals a "concern with the destructive consequences of the discrepancy between what another represented himself as and the self he truly was" in a society in which "self-representation" was increasingly replacing "traditional guides to an individual's worth" such as long acquaintanceship. See Ziff, \textit{Writing in the New Nation}, 56.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Rowson, \textit{Charlotte Temple} 31. See Blythe Forcey, "\textit{Charlotte Temple} and the End of Epistololarity," \textit{American Literature} 63 (1991), 231-35. "Rowson," Forcey explains, "emphasizes that readers must learn to distinguish between honesty and dishonesty themselves." (238)
\end{itemize}

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well. Among the lessons she gleaned from Matthew Gregory Lewis's The Monk was one that taught that "we should . . . forbear trusting those . . . whose principals do not influence their conduct."\textsuperscript{215}

For Lyman and other readers in the early republic, resolving castigations of novels with the practice of reading them revolved around these issues. In spite of frequently condemning novels as excessively sentimental, boring, or fanciful ("our novelists have worn the pleasures of rural life threadbare," "an entertaining rather than a useful book," "as foolish a thing as ever was written"), and seeming to agree with those who criticized them, readers persisted in reading such works. In exploring her own motives and seeking to justify such behavior, Abigail Lyman wrote defensively in 1800 that "Novels are entertaining and some few may be read with advantage--I never read many--and perused those few merely as an amusement--and because I disliked my feeling when unable to give my opinion of a Book spoken of in company." Still she did "not feel anxious to continue uninterruptedly this course of reading--Books of infinitely greater importance are soliciting my perusal--and will I trust ever receive my preference."\textsuperscript{216}

Although Benjamin Rush was convinced that "the subjects of novels are by no means accommodated to our present manners"\textsuperscript{217} in 1787, by 1800 such reading was indeed demanded by polite society, even in Lyman's rural Northampton, Massachusetts.

\textsuperscript{215} Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 30, 1800, Lyman, 124.

\textsuperscript{216} Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 172. England's Anna Larpent was likewise ambivalent about novels, which she read extensively at the same time that she agreed with prescriptive literature warning of their dangers. See Brewer, "Reconstructing the Reader," in The Practice and Representation of Reading, ed. Raven, et al., 232-33.

\textsuperscript{217} Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 31.
That Lyman "disliked [her] feeling when unable to give [her] opinion of a Book spoken of in company," attests to both the prevalence of novel reading and the likelihood that novels often served as the focus of polite conversation. 218 Indeed, when Charles Porter Phelps warned his sister that she must "get wisdom" in order to avoid being "obliged to sit mute and silent . . . and utterly unable to join in any conversation" upon being "called forth into company," he confirmed the same justification for reading that Lyman so beautifully articulated in her journal. 219 Eliza Southgate would heartily agree with this assessment. Exasperated by novelists' inordinate sentimentalization, she nevertheless read novels, wrote about them in her letters, sent them to her mother, and presumably discussed them "in company." Nancy Livingston, it will be remembered, concluded her remarks about weeping over Werther's sorrows by explaining that she and her friend had "convers'd at intervals" while reading the Goethe's tragic love story. Novels, then, as these readers attested in their writing, constituted an important component of refined conversations. 220

218 See Brown, Knowledge is Power, 170-72.

219 Charles Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps, Oct. 10, 1791 (Box 10, Folder 2), PPH.

220 Confirming the connection between reading and sociability, Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald (1762-1841) was also "deeply gratified when her husband, James, read Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield and Thomson's The Seasons, since this indicated his desire to improve himself and to participate in the society into which he had married." Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 107. In a facetious letter describing his life in France, Louis Otto confirmed the ordinary by highlighting the extraordinary. The oddities he had discovered in Paris included: "an Attorney, [who] pretends never to receive money but when he has gained his cause. An other, an old husband, is allways of the opinion of his wife, and his wife does never talk of books though she has read a great deal,. . . a Merchant, that offers his money at one per cent," etc. Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 4, 1784, Shippen, 223. Similarly, in his "Notes on Elizabeth Willing Powel, Wife of the Mayor of Philadelphia," the Marquis de Chastellux wrote in 1783 or 1784 that "Mrs. Powel has not travelled, but she has read a great deal, and profitably: it would be unjust perhaps, to say, that in this she differs from the greatest part of the American ladies; but what distinguishes her most is, her taste for conversation, and the truly European use she knows how to make of her understanding and information." Quoted in Shippen, 309.
The collapse of the understanding that writing reflected character, or that writing embodied truth, whether in letters, novels, or moral essays, occurred in part as a result of the contradiction between the constant admonitions decrying novel reading and the social necessity of doing just that. As much of the testimony in this chapter reveals, correspondents and diarists negotiated messages in published material with their own experiences and perceptions through their writing. Shippen’s sobbing over the "Sorrows of Werter," Southgate’s impatience with sentimental portrayals of rural life, and Lyman’s frustration with novels filled with "wonders destitute of truth for their foundation" leave no doubt that one criteria for praising and criticizing reading material had to do with its relationship to the reader’s own experience. Hence, messages such as Rush’s that scolded readers of novels might have little behavioral impact on readers themselves. Rush’s authority was undermined by the discrepancy between his admonitions and the possibility of realizing them. Indeed, none of the figures studied here indicated that they sought or responded to recommendations for reading material from people they did not know personally. Heath read books suggested by John Goddard and the local school master, Betsy Phelps read her mother’s "favorite" book, and Mary Southgate received books from her daughter. Abigail Lyman, frustrated beyond endurance for "consuming so much precious time" reading Arthur Mervyn and Advertisement for a Husband, concluded her negative remarks and self-recrimination by asserting that "it would certainly be a great advantage to have books of every description recommended by an intelligent friend--that
we might not read so much in vain."

While social experts and novelists themselves might denounce novel reading as a dangerous activity, and readers might adopt the vocabulary of those denunciations in their own assessments of reading material, the act of reading—as distinct from the messages promulgated by the text—connected readers both to each other and to larger social issues. That reading constituted a topic of conversation and connected people in face-to-face situations as well as in written correspondence was an aspect of reading that Rush and Foster and others disregarded. While their one-dimensional entreaties were familiar to readers and taken seriously enough that readers adopted that vocabulary in their own evaluations of reading material, they expose more about the changing relationship between print, character, and the reader than they tell us about actual behavior in the early republic. The challenge for readers and writers of the early republic was to reconcile the different messages they received through their reading (novels are "dangerous," "puerile," "blunt the heart," "vitiate the taste," and should be forsworn in favor of "history, travels, poetry, and moral essays") with the very real functions that their reading performed for them. Whether reading operated as fodder for participating in society, helped them make sense of their own circumstances, or provided solace and escape, its significance for

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221 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 22, 1800, Lyman, 135. Within The Boarding School, two of Mrs. Williams’s former students ask for advice on marrying, and Mrs. Williams responds by recommending a conduct book, The American Spectator, or Matrimonial Preceptor, which the young women pass on to each other. But after reading the book they ask Mrs. Williams again for her thoughts on marriage as the book itself, even though recommended by the revered Mrs. Williams, is not enough. See Newton, "Wise and Foolish Virgins," 161.

222 Radway discusses the distinction between the "meaning of the act" of reading and the "meaning of the text as read," arguing that for late-twentieth-century female readers of romance novels, the "act of reading itself might ... contradict, undercut, or qualify the significance" of the message within the story itself. Radway, Reading the Romance, 210-211.
readers lay as much in the activity of reading as in the message of the text.

Ruminations on reading in letters and diaries reveal the extent to which reading—an activity now generally regarded as "private"—could connect people to and inform larger cultural dialogues. In this case, in the old debate that pitted a rural, fiercely independent, male virtue against a polite, commercial, feminine virtue, these readers unquestionably advocated a polite, sociable virtue. They did so by incorporating reading material into their discussions and thereby participating in and promoting that particular manifestation of republican virtue—even if they sometimes found novels dull or excessively sentimental and other works not as "faultless" as they hoped.²²³ In this case the juxtaposition of the novel as consumer item and the novel as vehicle of certain moral admonitions exemplifies some of the themes of a pervasive cultural debate and reveals the extent to which broad philosophical questions about virtue became enmeshed in the activities and expressions of ordinary people.²²⁴ Indeed, as Eliza Southgate wrote her


²²⁴ If, as Michael Warner has argued, "printed artifacts took on the investment of the disinterested virtue of the public orientation, then women as readers of those publications participated in and perpetuated a particular kind of virtue. Warner, quoted in Ziff, "A Silent Revolution," 53. For Benjamin Franklin, Ziff argues, "to write was to publish"; there was "no such thing as private correspondence." (53-
cousin, self-consciously invoking the language of the Declaration of Independence, "]'tis only in delightful sympathies of friendship, similarity of sentiments, that a genuine happiness ["that happiness we are all in pursuit of"] can be enjoyed."225 By couching her rebuke to Moses about rural life in terms of fiction and the Declaration of Independence, she argued that novels themselves promoted "happiness" and virtue because readers of novels achieved a "similarity of sentiments."226 Southgate and Lyman both addressed explicitly the relationship between novels (and reading generally) and contemporary debates about the sources of republican virtue. Far from agreeing with Foster that reading novels was "by no means consistent with that simplicity, modesty, and chastity, which should be the constant inmates of the female breast," they argued that novels promoted virtue--"that happiness we are all in pursuit of"--by operating as a sociable link in polite society.

Prevailing cultural questions about what the printed and penned word meant suffused these readers' expressions. They read critically, sometimes alone, sometimes in gatherings, and wrote about their reading and thereby participated in, manipulated, and criticized both the values espoused within the pages and the values represented in the

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226 For a discussion about women in the newly independent republic understanding the "resonance" between "their gender identity and the iconography of nationhood" and how they wrote "through the political and social," see Fizer, "Signing as Republican Daughters."
material artifact itself. In prevailing discussions about commercialism and republican virtue, women were encouraged to consume (gratifying others’ self-interests as well as their own) and at the same time offset the ill effects of the commercial culture in which they participated by being modest and chaste. As Foster’s Mrs. Williams admonished in *The Boarding School*, young women should not be characterized by "a vanity of exterior charms, and a fondness for show and dissipation." In their letters and diaries, readers at the turn of the nineteenth century confirmed that they did indeed read (including novels), which meant that they were active members of the commercial and social network, and hence involved more directly in debates about virtue than contemporary and current ideologies about republican wives and mothers suggested. By making novels and other reading matter the subject of thoughtful conversation as well as the focus of reflective expression in their letters and diaries, they challenged those who

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228 As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg explains in her analysis of the intersection of classical republicanism and the new capitalism, "Middle-class men displaced onto middle-class women criticisms the gentry had leveled against them." As the "gentry had denied that commercial men, living in the fantastical, passionate, and unreal world of paper money, stocks, and credit, could achieve civic virtue," so "middle-class men endlessly accused bourgeois women of being untrustworthy and incapable of virtue because they lived in another fantastical, passionate, and unreal world of paper—the world of the novel and the romance." See Smith-Rosenberg, "Domesticating ‘Virtue’,” 160-84, quoted, 166. Karen Haltunen has argued that one way to reconcile those demands was through the "culture of sensibility." "The philosophers of the Scottish enlightenment ... [found] sensibility the best way to counteract the perils of rampant self-interest and preserve moral community in a rapidly commercializing society." (305) "A substantial body of English novels, plays, and poems ... proved an important medium for popularizing the basic tenets of sentimental ethics," she notes, although by the end of the eighteenth century there were "doubts about the underlying virtue" of this culture. (307-308) Haltunen, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain."


warned of the effect of reading on readers. Their own expressions belied the affinity between reading and reader that so concerned Benjamin Rush. Hannah Webster Foster's boarding school preceptress may have been right about novels "fill[ing] the imagination with ideas," but those ideas would not necessarily be "impure desires," "vanity," and "dissipation." Readers in the early republic read critically and wrote thoughtfully, but were also captivated by their reading and worried about succumbing to "hobgoblin stories" and wasting "precious time." As they wrestled with their reading and the rhetoric about reading that swirled about them, they assessed their own relationships to the material they read, as well as the relationship between reading and the controversies about virtue and commercialism besetting the newly independent republic.
CHAPTER III

"OUR NOVELISTS HAVE WORN THE PLEASURES
OF RURAL LIFE THREADBARE":
WRITING ABOUT THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY

When Eliza Southgate wrote in exasperation that novelists had "worn the
pleasures of rural life threadbare" in response to her cousin's romantic scheme of retiring
to the countryside, she tapped an issue deeply resonant to readers and writers in the early
republic. The exchange she shared with her cousin leaves no doubt about the contested
nature of the relative merits of rural and urban living, and even her own assessment
ultimately bogged down in a mire of ambiguity and contradictions.¹ Raised in rural
Scarborough, Maine, but familiar by now with Boston, where she attended boarding
school, Southgate considered herself qualified to remark with some expertise on her
cousin's romantic scheme of "leav[ing] the noisy tumultuous scenes of life" and finding
"all the delightful serenity and peace ascribed to the golden age" in the "shades of rural
retirement" accompanied by the "mistress of his heart." Only two kinds of people "could
paint the sweets of retirement with such enthusiasm," she laughed, "a lovesick swain" and
a "novelist," the latter having entirely "worn the pleasures of rural life threadbare."² On
the other hand, she remained "convinced that a country life is more calculated to produce

¹ On the evolving categories of the country and the city, particularly with regard to industrialization

² Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100, 103.

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that security and happiness we are all in pursuit of than any other" even though she considered the "inhabitants of a country village . . . ignorant, illiterate," and consumed by "envy and discontent."³

In their exchange, Southgate and her cousin wrestled with a broad cultural debate in terms of their own immediate contexts. It is clear, for example, that Moses was satiated with the "pleasures of high life" when he broached his plan to Eliza and that Eliza was bored with her life in Maine when she reacted to his romantic visions. Like the other figures studied for this project, both Southgate and her cousin traveled and therefore corresponded as travelers in their own right and, when at home, with other travelers. When Southgate urged Moses to "let us judge for ourselves,--we all have seen what the pleasures of rural life are," she was right. Neither she nor her cousin had resided exclusively in the city or the country. They moved familiarly within and between both environments. Indeed, much of the evidence tapped for this study exists because of the extensive travel undertaken by privileged Americans. Correspondents wrote to each other inquiring about friends and family, to share news about themselves and those they were with, to request items to be shipped, and so forth. This chapter considers their comments about the contrasts between rural and urban spaces in light of prevailing cultural debates about whether virtue was to be discovered in the simple, agricultural countryside or in the worldly, widely-read, sociable and professional milieu of the city. Articulated most familiarly by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, but pervading contemporary novels and advice manuals as well, this debate preoccupied correspondents and diarists of

³ Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100.
the early republic who approached it in terms of their own experience, observations, writing, and reading. The issue was more than just a rhetorical or ideological exercise, however. The decades immediately following the Revolution constituted a period of profound social unrest characterized by backcountry yeoman resistance to "gentlemen" holding large land grants and thereby threatening independent farmers with tenancy and undermining their "independence."

The very real economic and political challenges faced by post-Revolutionary Americans translated into a struggle to define the legacy of the American Revolution in terms of land ownership, a debate that imbued the literature of the period.

Diarists and correspondents who engaged in that debate befuddled its parameters by the very act of writing. Letters that traversed the miles separating the city and the country underscored physical distance at the same time that they negated that distance by connecting people otherwise separated. Indeed, discussions about the city and the country, it must be remembered, occurred during the very era when some of the distinctions between rural villages and urban cities were disappearing, in part through the agency of social elites like the figures studied here.

For a discussion of literary conceptions of the country and nature versus the city and society during this period, particularly by Crévecoeur, Bartram, Franklin, Filson, and Cooper, see Ziff, Writing in the New Nation. These ideas were also explored by early romantics like Rousseau, and coincide with the flowering of English romanticism (1789-1832), although they predate American romanticism, or transcendentalism. Charles Brockden Brown, however, whose novel Arthur Mervyn Abigail Lyman so roundly criticized (see chapter two), is generally considered an early American romantic writer.


Richard D. Brown has argued that the "expansion of urban society in Massachusetts preceded large-scale commercial and industrial development" since "the inhabitants had already embraced values [like self-improvement] and patterns of community life [like voluntary associations] that would promote
themselves can be viewed as embodying and bridging urban and rural qualities and spaces. If correspondence promoted a polite sociability identified with the "gentlemen" feared by independent farmers, letters that celebrated the virtue of the countryside nevertheless inherently challenged its advantages. Likewise, the act of reading novels that celebrated rural characteristics belied that message if reading novels functioned to a great extent as the focus of refined conversation. When correspondents mimicked novelists' portrayals of the country as bountiful and healthy, they did so via a medium associated with trade, merchants, gentlemen capitalists, and the city—a place often portrayed as the seedbed of moral sloth and physical debilitation. On the other hand, writing letters and penning diary reflections encouraged thoughtful contemplation of the characteristics defining the country and the city and befitting citizens of a newly independent republic.

Invoking the contentious vocabulary of rural, land-based versus urban, commerce-oriented virtues, correspondents and diarists generally agreed that the country promoted health and industry but questioned whether those attributes translated into virtue. They compared the abundance of food, fresh air, and time for reflection afforded by rural situations with the availability of consumer goods and sociability in urban locales and noted advantages and disadvantages to both. They enthused about tranquility at the same time that they considered rural inhabitants ignorant, irritable, and jealous; they celebrated

city growth." (48) Relevant population figures for the period in Massachusetts indicate that in 1776, less than a dozen cities had populations of 5,000 or more. By 1850, however, there were 147 such locales, which, although by no means equal, "did all possess . . . newspapers, post offices, churches, political groups, libraries, professional organizations, and other voluntary associations." (32) Richard D. Brown, "The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts, 1760-1820," Journal of American History LXI (1974).
the gaiety of the city at the same time that they worried about the scandal that accompanied it. The expressions of these well-read, well-traveled people recommended a mix of the understood attributes of each locale. The country can neither be appreciated nor promote virtue unless it is inhabited by refined, thoughtful, and sensitive residents. The city, understood to manifest ill-health, sloth, and dissipation, nevertheless served as the seat where qualities essential to an appreciative understanding were formed. Even though the distance between rural and urban destinations, both the literal distance and the figurative ideological distance, was traversed regularly and usually comfortably by these writers, whether intent on a frequent destination or engaging in sightseeing, it nevertheless occasioned frequent description and comment.7 Their resulting expressions reveal imbibed prejudices that reflected their elite social status and the terms of the debate in which they were schooled, and ultimately present a complicated, often contradictory assessment of the contrasts between and the advantages and disadvantages of rural and urban milieus. As figures who traversed between the city and the country both physically and discursively, these correspondents and diarists formulated ideas about their own identities at the same time that they engaged in the cultural debate over which

7In her study of the "Origins of the Sightseeing," Judith Adler notes the shift from "auricular knowledge and discourse, identified with traditional authority, Aristotelianism and the School-men" that informed travel in the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries to emphasis on the "eye" in the eighteenth-century, which was "believed to yield direct, unmediated, and personally verified experience." (11) By the end of the eighteenth-century, "travelers were less and less expected to record and communicate their observations in an emotionally detached, impersonal manner. . . . In its aesthetic transformation, sightseeing became simultaneously a more effusively passionate activity and a more private one." (22) In terms of written descriptions of travels, she notes that is has been "established that a travel literature which never assumed book form (unedited diaries, letters, handwritten manuscripts) was widely circulated among intellectual elites and held a prominent place in private libraries," a fact that helps us understand "the seriousness with which amateur travel, and its outgrowth in private letters and diaries, was discussed." (17) Judith Adler, "Origins of Sightseeing," Annals of Tourism 16 (1989).
environment promised success for the new republic.  

Correspondents very often described their actual traveling adventures both because they often were adventures and, since letters themselves were born of geographical distance, because it seemed natural to describe how that separation occurred. Just as letters might serve as a link or bridge connecting correspondents to each other across space and to different milieus in imagination, traveling itself acted as a literal geographic bridge, a transitional experience, a period of limbo from here to there. As such it was noteworthy. While correspondents devoted much explicit attention and discussion to the process of writing, therefore, they also ruminated at length on their travel. The recently married Betsy Huntington wrote about the trip to her new home in Litchfield, Connecticut, describing "impassable" rivers, snow that prohibited travel by chaise, and the "kind providence" of "Mr Wolcott's sleigh," which unhappily "turned over three times" leaving Betsy to "wallow in the snow." Eventually the "sleigh broke" and

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8 For a discussion on how elite southern ante-bellum women connected and interspersed conceptions of the city and country with appraisals of "woman's sphere," see Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice." See also Lynne Vallone's discussion of the association of rural with private and female and urban with public and male in terms of fictional young unmarried women traversing between the two in a "moment of autonomy" that novelists portray as "the most dangerous in a young woman's life," in Vallone, Disciplines of Virtue, 49.

she "[got] up behind Mr Gould." Mr. Gould agreed that "the weather & the roads rendered our return extremely uncomfortable," adding that "between Hartford & Litchfield the bride was tumbled into five snow-drifts!" "Mrs. Huntington," he marveled, "is one of the finest of women." Elizabeth Porter Phelps related an easier trip between Hadley and Litchfield: "after we left you the snow did very well till toward the middle of the day when many spots of ground appeared . . . we got to westfield about half after .5. & set out this morn: about .9. & had a hard storm of snow hail & rain all the way & got home about: 12." Abigail Brackett Lyman more succinctly wrote her mother that she "eagerly imbrace[d] an opportunity "to inform you of our safe arrival in this place." Another traveler announced that "I shall now proceed to give you an account of our journey which was very agreeable for it was a fine afternoon." Some trips were easier, some more difficult, but the attention to the process itself was consistent.

As a transitional state, travel (like letter-writing) offered possibilities for

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10 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 6, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH. She and Mr. Gould rode "to the next tavern," an indispensable way station for travelers during this period. See Garvin and Garvin, On the Road.

11 James Gould to Uriah Tracy, Jan. 12, 1801, Ransom Collection, Litchfield Historical Society.

12 Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Feb. 7, 1801 (Box 6, Folder 1), PPH. In the northeast, the winter season offered mixed possibilities for travelers. On the one hand, storms obviously prohibited or impeded travel; on the other, snow made for easy sleighing which could result in what Crèvecoeur called "the season of merriment and mutual visiting," an "idyllic life" that lasted only until "spring thaws mire the roads and disrupt travel." Likewise for consummate traveler Timothy Dwight, "winter is a time to enjoy leisure without guilt, a time to meet old friends and remember good times." Bernard Mergen, "Winter Landscape in the Early Republic: Survival and Sentimentality," in Views of American Landscapes, ed. Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peabody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 168.

13 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Abigail Pong Brackett, Dec. 18, 1798, Lyman, 203.

14 Eliza Waite to unknown, n.d., probably written between 1786 and 1791, Eliza Waite Correspondence, Ei.
expanding horizons (literally as well as figuratively) and discourses. Sometimes correspondents addressed the potential and the hazards inherent in such experiences. Eliza Southgate Bowne, for example, enjoyed "rambling about," and laughed to her mother that "My husband is so fond of roving, I don’t know but he’ll spoil me," but on at least one occasion she suffered some from travel. She interrupted a lively description of the society she discovered at Ballston Springs, New York, in an 1803 letter to her sister, when she realized that "I have hurried you along to the Springs... in a much easier manner than I got here myself. Oh the tremendous Highlands! I thought to my soul I should never hold out to get over them--such roads! But I lived over it, tho’ it made me sick fairly, with fatigue." While the physical terrain pushed Bowne to exhaustion on that trip, Julia Cowles described a journey from Farmington to Litchfield (both in Connecticut) in terms of its social aspects. As she noted in her journal in 1802, "went in the stage with Aunt Lewis and her little girls, also Gov. Treadwell, whose conversation was truly excellent and interesting. Here at L. I spent two weeks." Pleased to have enjoyed the governor’s conversation, she nevertheless added that her "health was poor, my mind troubled, and I almost sunk under it."

While it is not clear whether the traveling or the visit itself (or both) so wore out Cowles, something about the experience of traveling away from home was upsetting.

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15 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, Aug. 9, 1803, Bowne, 176.
16 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 178-79.
17 Julia Cowles, July 1802, Cowles, 90. In 1808, Sarah Connell Ayer was enthralled by a political discussion during a stage ride in New Hampshire, observing that "on the federal side passion seemed to predominate over reason." Quoted in Garvin and Garvin, On the Road, 73.
Possibly it was the stage itself. Situated in a place, albeit moving, characterized by persistent proximity but not familiarity, travelers may have been unsure about how to behave. In describing a trip from Hadley to Boston, a two-day journey, Betsy Phelps addressed this circumstance when she wrote her mother that "there were three ladies in the stage, and two gentlemen--but you know my reserv’d disposition--and I did not wish to be too sociable, for fear they would be too familiar."18 That Phelps and Cowles described similar circumstances indicates that traveling on the stage was exceptional in terms of the social situation it presented. A temporary interlude between the points of origination and destination, its transitional nature meant that to some extent rules could be suspended without retribution. Phelps assured her mother that she tried not to be "too sociable" (emphasis added) but what constituted overly sociable behavior in that setting with those particular fellow passengers would be impossible to assess, both for us and probably for Phelps’s mother as well.19

Phelps wrote about her experience on the stage once she arrived in lively, urban Boston from rural Hadley. The trip itself, along with Phelps’s letters, linked the two contrasting environments at the same time that it highlighted the differences between them. Similarly, another traveler highlighted both the connection and contrasts between

18 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 20, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH.

19 Indeed, Donna-Belle Garvin and James L. Garvin have observed that "conversation was the primary pastime of the passengers," and that "travel companions . . . also shared life stories." A passenger traveling from Portsmouth, N.H., to Portland, Me., for example, noted that "when travelling in a stage coach, nothing is more common than for one traveller to ask another the history of his life, and it is hardly possible to evade answering without incurring the displeasure of the whole company. . . . Before we had proceeded one-eighth part of the journey, we knew each other as if we had been educated in the same college." Carl David Arfwedson, The United States and Canada in 1832, 1833, and 1834 (1834), 1:192, quoted in Garvin and Garvin, On the Road, 73.
city and country when she described a journey from Boston to Wells, Maine, as "a pleasant journey of two days, I met with nothing remarkable on the road, except at Newbury were [sic] the people gazed at us with astonishment and cried out a balloon! balloon! indeed had it have been a balloon that we were in it could not have excited so much curiosity." She was not, she concluded, "much pleas'd with N--y," but admitted, that "I could not form a just Idea of it as I only rode through the town." Discomfited by becoming a spectacle as she traveled up the coast, this correspondent found the process of linking different environments trying. When Philadelphia's Nancy Shippen Livingston wrote about a trip she made from the Livingston "country seat" back to the city, she addressed dangers and vulnerability in that transitional stage that went beyond anxiety about rough terrain, behaving with propriety, and becoming a spectacle. She and her friend Louisa, she recorded

sett off for Town about 7 o'clock, & had a charming ride by moonlight untill we reach'd the suburbs of the city, where we were stop'd by a couple of highwaymen; as there was no gentlemen with us, not even the footman behind the carriage, we determin'd not to resist but give all the money we had about us. The Coachman attempted to defend us with his whip, but we call'd to him, & order'd him to be quick. Louisa gave all the change she had about her, & it satisfied the Robbers, after which we drove very rapidly into the Town."

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20 Mary Greene to Eliza Waite, 1786, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

21 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 2, 1784, Shippen, 204. Three days later, however, she returned, recording that she "Set off about nine o'clock this morning for our retreat accompanied by Zeleida & Evelina in the chariot, & my Brother & Doct' James on Horse Back." (July 5, 1784, 205) On other occasions, the trip merited far less of a description: "I arose at 5. o'clock this morn'g & set off to my dear Mamma in the country" (Aug. 19, 1784, 210), "I came from Town about 10 o'clock" (Aug. 27, 1784, 210), "I arose at about 5 o'clock this Morning, & went to Town on Horseback accompanied by my Uncle" (Aug. 30, 1784, 211), and "I set out this Morn' at six o'clock for the country on horseback, alone, excepting a servant behind." (Aug. 31, 1784, 211) On an occasion when she went to pick up her mother and bring her back to Philadelphia, she wrote, "Ordered the Carriage early this morning & went to Quid viis to bring home my dear Mamma. I went alone." ("Quid viis" was the name of the Shippen country house.) (Oct. 15, 1784,
She vividly contrasted the "charming ride by moonlight" in the countryside with lurking highwaymen in the intermediary "suburbs" and the necessity of hurrying "rapidly into the Town" for safety. For Nancy and Louisa the transition from here to there, from rural to urban, was physically dangerous. Safety lay in both the city and the country but getting from one to the other could be fraught with danger, both physical and social.

Nevertheless, such trips were made frequently and for a variety of reasons. Just as reading was sometimes undertaken for spiritual and emotional sustenance, a trip to the countryside was understood to be advantageous physically. Indeed, until the turn of the nineteenth century, health was generally the only justification offered for travels not connected with business.22 Writers usually associated robust health with rural living and insipid sickness with urban living. As a result of his wife's illness, for example, William Shippen let his family's large house in Philadelphia and rented a smaller one next door where "he was to live . . . alone" while his daughter Nancy was "to live with my sick Mamma in the Country."23 The country failed to work its wonders for Alice Shippen, however, as Livingston subsequently recorded that "nothing I cou'd do wou'd raise her spirits"24 and "Mamma worse."25 Occasionally her mother did find the country


23 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 1, 1784, Shippen, 192.

24 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 7, 1784, Shippen, 195.

25 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 18, 1784, Shippen, 198. Also see May 26, 1784, 200; Aug. 19, 1784, 210; Aug. 27, 1784, 210; Aug. 31, 1784, 211; Sept. 9, 1784, 212; Oct. 1, 1784, 215; Oct. 21, 1784, 219.
recuperative, for Livingston observed on a different day that she "rode out with Mamma to Chaillot & for the first time since she has been ill made her smile. We walk’d the Garden, & brought home a great many flowers." Nevertheless, after spending nearly six months in the country, her mother was, to Livingston, "worse in my opinion tho she thought she was much the same." On this occasion, her mother was persuaded to return to town, and her daughter thought "the ride did her some service." That is to say, being in that in-between state, neither here nor yet there, was exhilarating for Livingston herself and, she wanted to believe, invigorating for her mother as well. Another traveler facetiously tapped the understanding about travel being beneficial when she observed that "I arriv’d at home very well, the riding was very rough that I was shaken finely. You cannot think how much good such a jaunt would do you, it would be better than all the oatmeal you have taken this month. I would advise you to think seriously about trying it." 

These recommendations notwithstanding, travel in and of itself was not usually considered palliative; a stay in the country was. When Livingston, who doubted the country’s recuperative power in light of her mother’s experience, consulted a friend about her daughter’s illness, she was "advised . . . to try the country Air for the reestablishment

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26 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 14, 1784, Shippen, 197.

27 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 21, 1784, Shippen, 219.

28 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 21, 1784, Shippen, 219. Hannah Tracy Emery likewise observed that she "follow’d Mrs Hoppers prescription to let one cold drive out another, & rode to Mr Tracy’s farm, on horseback, . . . It had the desired success, & I am much better." Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, Aug. 1787, Cutts Family Collection, El.

29 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, Nov. 18, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, El.
of the Childs health.\textsuperscript{30} The same advice was proffered nearly 40 years later by Mary Anna Boardman who anticipated the pleasure of seeing her grandson "playing in the yeard and garden, and inhaling the pure air. Every respiration would improve his health, and deepen the rosy tinge upon his cheek."\textsuperscript{31} As expected, the benefits of rural stays also appeared in letters and diaries in terms less of the country's advantages than in terms of the city's unhealthiness. Although extremely anxious to visit Boston in 1797, Betsy Phelps wondered to her brother whether she should make the trip, writing that "our good mother, I think feels a little anxious about my going to Boston at this season of the year, as it is sometimes unhealthy--if you think it will be dangerous I hope you will write word."\textsuperscript{32} Hadley on the other hand, boasted a hardy environment, as she perfunctorily wrote Sarah Parsons that "we are all in health,"\textsuperscript{33} and her father likewise summarily wrote that "we enjoy good health."\textsuperscript{34}

For a little while the newly married Eliza Southgate Bowne enjoyed a wholesome glow in her new home city of New York, for she wrote her sister that "the City air has not stolen my country bloom yet, for every one says--'I need not ask you how you do, Mrs.

\textsuperscript{30} Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 8, 1783, Shippen, 152.

\textsuperscript{31} Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Caroline Maria Boardman Schroeder, April 17, 1830, Boardman, 188.

\textsuperscript{32} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, July 31, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. Although his response hasn't survived, presumably he calmed the fears of Betsy and her mother for she did travel to Boston shortly thereafter.

\textsuperscript{33} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, July 12, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

\textsuperscript{34} Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Phelps Huntington, Aug. 30, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.
Bowne, you look in such fine health." The assumption undergirding this remark of course is that both women associated city living with a wan pallor and Eliza merely anticipated her sister’s concern. Her report that she had "some fine peaches and apricots on the table before me; Mr. Bowne brings me a pocketful of fruit every time he comes home. I have ate as many as I want to," may also have been intended to allay her family’s fears about her health and diet. The fever descended upon New York soon thereafter, however, for Bowne subsequently wrote her mother from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, that "if the alarm of the fever continues in New York we shall not return there again, but go in the neighborhood. Send in for a trunk, which I packed up for the purpose, in case I feared going in the City—and set off for the Springs or somewhere else." "'Tis very uncertain when we go to housekeeping," she added, "the alarm of the Fever hurried us out of town without any arrangement towards it, and may, if it continues, keep us out till middle of Autumn." Apparently she and her husband did indeed continue their travels for she subsequently wrote her sister from Ballston Springs, a destination resort featuring spacious views and urban amenities and therefore situated somewhere in between the country and the city. As Bowne reported, they "found the place much crowded, and were fearful of not getting good accommodations" as a "great

35 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 18, 1803, Bowne, 159.

36 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 23, 1803, Bowne, 171-72.

37 Indeed, a couple of years later, she beseeched her sister to "ask Papa if he could send us 6 or 8 barrels of potatoes, there is like to be a great scarcity in New York; put them in the hold of the vessel or anywhere. Col. Barclay has sent to Nova Scotia for a vessel load." Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Oct. 6, 1805, Bowne, 201.

38 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, Aug. 9, 1803, Bowne, 175-76.
many New Yorkers have taken refuge here from the fever."39 Upon learning that Octavia had not received an expected package from New York, Eliza supposed that "the fever which broke out immediately after [she had sent it] induced [the Commission Merchant] to shut up his store, or perhaps prevented any Portland vessel from coming near the City, and that it now lies in his store."40 The fever had finally run its long course by November when Eliza wrote Octavia that "we go in town next Monday, every body is moving in; for the last 3 days there has been no death, and for 5 no new cases."41 As is clear from Bowne’s references to the fever in New York and the crowds at Ballston Springs, for the privileged, a contagious epidemic resulted in a speedy, but comfortable sojourn away from the city.42 While potentially fatal for everybody, those with resources could spare their lives in plush, popular resorts, liminal spaces lacking the diseases of the city and the ignorance and hard living of the country.

The next year, in 1804, when Eliza Bowne’s own health failed, her sister Octavia decided to bring her home to Maine in the hopes that the country air and familial

39 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 177-78. And again, the interruption to establishing her own household surfaced, as she promised Octavia that "we shall be at Housekeeping as soon as possible after the fever subsides." Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 24, 1803, Bowne, 181-82. Three weeks earlier she had cussed to Octavia, "when we shall be to housekeeping Heaven knows; not even a napkin made, just getting a woman to work,--fixed the things already, when the fever came and we all left the city; so here I am--perfectly unprepared as possible." Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 180.

40 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 24, 1803, Bowne, 183.

41 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Nov. 2, 1803, Bowne, 185.

42 While spas near large cities such as Boston and Philadelphia had been promoted since before the Revolution, both Saratoga Springs and Ballston Spa were relatively new destination resorts. Both were unknown during the colonial era and the "first rude tavern" did not go up in Ballston until 1787. It wasn’t until several years after Eliza Bowne’s sojourns there that the grand Sans Souci Hotel was built and aggressively promoted. Carson, "Early American Tourists," in Of Consuming Interests, 390-93.
companionship would be restorative. In the mean time, the sisters lodged in Flushing, New York, which, Octavia wrote her mother, has "a fine, bracing air." They would "stay there a few days till Eliza is smart enough to travel 10 miles a day. I place full confidence in this journey." Octavia continued optimistically, "I am sure that the change of air and scene, and more than all, the prospect of home, will render it truly beneficial." New York itself was much healthier that summer, however, for she assured her mother that "the city is quite deserted, though it never was more healthy. There are as few deaths as there were in the winter." Two years later, New York endured another outbreak, compelling Eliza to write, "we have left Rockaway more than a week ago, still exiled from our home by this dreadful calamity. We are lodging in Jamaica, where we shall probably remain until 'tis safe removing to the City." New York was not alone in its susceptibility to epidemics of course. Abigail Lyman had read with distress Charles Brockden Brown's description of Philadelphia, "that afflicted city in the time of the fever" of 1793 (see previous chapter), and Hannah Heath likewise observed from Brookline that "we ought to rejoice that we are all restor'd to health again," and underscored her good fortune by observing that "it is very sickly indeed in Boston and the towns all round, Roxbury in particular."

Tied to understandings about the relative healthfulness of the city and country,

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43 Octavia Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 30, 1804, Bowne, 195.

44 Octavia Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 30, 1804, Bowne, 195.

45 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Oct. 6, 1805, Bowne, 198-99.

46 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 16, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
whether those notions proved to be true for individuals or not, was the notion that the city encouraged sloth while the country forced industriousness. The example of Benjamin Franklin's hard-working urban social climber as portrayed in his Autobiography notwithstanding, most agreed with this assessment.47 As Eliza Southgate wrote her cousin in response to his dream of living "in the shades of rural retirement," she very much doubted that a "lovesick swain" like Moses was "qualified for the laborious life farmers generally lead" and she reminded him that "it requires a little fortune to live an independent farmer without labor."48 If Moses Porter would make a poor farmer, little could be expected from a product of the city faced with the "real" work of the farm. Catharine Maria Sedgwick remembered in her autobiography that her father's second wife, a "Boston woman," was "totally unfitted" for her new situation as "she knew nothing of the business of country domestic life" and indeed found the "reality and

47 Even Franklin's hard-working, rags to riches model succumbed to some extent to this common perception, however, as Franklin sometimes stressed the importance of appearance over actual behavior, writing that it was important "not only to be in Reality Industrious & frugal, but to avoid all Appearances to the Contrary" (68) and that the "industry visible to our Neighbours began to give us Character and Credit." (62-63) Benjamin Franklin, Autobiography and Other Writings (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

48 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 103. If Moses envisioned his happy rural future in Maine (he hailed from Biddeford), the possibility of living in ease as an "independent farmer," at least according to James Sullivan's The History of the District of Maine (1795), would be remote since the Maine climate demanded "industry and toil" by proprietors. Sullivan celebrated this aspect of Maine and scorned the "idleness, profligacy, and dissipation of manners" that resulted from leisureed oversight of established wealth. See Charles E. Clark, "James Sullivan's History of Maine and the Romance of Statehood," in Maine in the Early Republic, ed. Charles E. Clark, James S. Leamon, and Karen Bowden (Hanover, N,H.: University Press of New England, 1988), quoted 190, 191. In spite of the realities of rural living cited by Southgate and demonstrated by others, a tradition continued in the early republic that "large landholdings... make a person 'gentle.'" Before the American Revolution, "a colonial gentleman had been someone who did not have to support himself by direct manufacturing or commerce or tilling his own land." Although both Henry Knox and Robert Morris sought to realize this ideal after the Revolution, the latter found himself in debtors' prison and the former enjoyed only slightly better success." See Edward Countryman, Americans: A Collision of Histories (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 93.
simplicity" of it "insupportable." Even Hannah Heath of Brookline (just outside Boston) had imbibed the notion that people who lived in the city would be incapable of applying themselves to hard work. As she noted in 1808, "Polly Hatch brought Sally Somebody but I dont know what up to stay a day or two to help us work." The low expectations with which she greeted "Sally Somebody" found expression the next day: "a very hot day--Sally has done better than I expected being a Boston Lady and unused to Country work." Issues of work and labor revolved around one's age and responsibilities at least as much as location, however, because even for a woman reared in rural Hadley the work demanded in running a household, in this case a minister's household in Litchfield, Connecticut, could be painful and fatiguing. As the now married Betsy Huntington wrote her mother, "I have a very troublesome back which complains loudly if I spend all day upon my feet" though "I hope I am willing to exert myself to the utmost and not mind an aching back or head." Her tasks were different from those Moses Porter would have faced had he realized his romantic dream, but maybe not so different.


50 Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 15, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

51 Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 16, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.


53 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Dec. 20, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH. After this sentence, a section of about 12 lines is very carefully cut out of the letter, a very unusual circumstance in this collection.

54 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 25, 1802 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
from the tasks expected of "the mistress of his heart" once she became his wife.

When Eliza Southgate chastised her cousin's fanciful notions about the
countryside, she responded to a pervasive ideal. The result of "novelists . . . [wearing] the
pleasures of rural life threadbare" was that she was forced to confront the excessive
sentimentalization found in novels and Moses's letter with a matter-of-fact rebuttal. She
sarcastically summarized (but did not exaggerate) the fictional portrayals of rural life
mimicked by her cousin, exclaiming, "here, say they, we can contemplate the beauty and
sublimity of nature free from interruption; . . . here all is peace and love! no discord can
find a place among these innocent and happy beings . . . their every action teems with
benevolence and love."55 Always capable of invoking sentimental discourse herself,
Southgate understood that it would hardly serve here, and shifted tones dramatically,
continuing with reason (and a little venom) that she and Moses both "know there is as
much depravity and consequently as much discontent in the inhabitants of a country
village as in the most populous city." The countryside, she reminded Moses, was
definitely not a place where "innocent and happy beings . . . live but to promote the
happiness of each other."56 Indeed, she persisted uncharitably, denizens of the country
"are generally ignorant, illiterate, without knowledge," and full of "envy" and
"discontent."57 In this case, negotiating printed matter and her own experience through

55 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 99.

56 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100.

57 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100. In his effort to connect
scholarship on blacks and Indians with "traditional" emphases (a "new consensus history"), Edward
Countryman offers a surprisingly sentimental assessment of life in the country, among the urban poor,
among Southern slaves, and among squatters of the frontier: "individuals could not get by on their own, and
writing involved recognizing and invoking an appropriately rational, matter-of-fact discourse to refute ridiculously romanticized portrayals of rural living.

Moses Porter was not the only one to succumb to idealistic visions of simple country living. Another correspondent described rural Andover as a "delightful place where the loves & graces seem to have rec’d their residence you can . . . better imagine than I can describe the beauties of the country at this charming season when the blossoms are just expanding their perfumes & nature is clad in her gayest attire wherever we turn the eye a rich variety of sweets." In a lengthy journal entry, Nancy Shippen Livingston described how she and her friend Louisa had looked for and found such sparse bliss when they went to visit one or two of our poor neighbors. The first we went to see was an old man & his wife, very old indeed. They live in a very small house, & keep a good garden for a living. Their whole family consists of, besides themselves, a dog, a cow, & a few fowls; they gave us a very welcome reception, spread a clean white cloth upon a little clean table, & put on it some milk, some bread, dutch cheese, & redishes, the old woman put on a clean cap & apron, & the old man his new hat, & then placed himself to wait upon us. After we had finish’d our repast (& we ate very heartily) they shew’d us their garden, their spring, & pick’d us a bunch of flowers, & thank’d us for visiting them. They appear’d as happy & contented as if they inhabited a palace.

As susceptible to romantic notions of country living—even when confronted with "poor" neighbors living in "small" quarters—as Eliza Southgate’s cousin, Livingston’s charmed description anticipated Susanna Rowson’s portrayal of Charlotte’s parents in the novel

[footnotes]

58 Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, May 1791, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El.

59 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 25, 1784, Shippen, 199.
Charlotte Temple. Upon falling in love with Lucy Eldridge, Charlotte’s father, Rowson explained, "found a cottage suited to his taste [and] thither . . . the happy trio [he, Charlotte’s mother, and his father-in-law] retired; where, during many years of uninterrupted felicity, they cast not a wish beyond the little boundaries of their own tenement" in which "Content reigned in each heart."60

There was some truth to the belief that abundance lay in the country. Elizabeth Porter Phelps churned lots of cheese in Hadley, her husband happily reported that "our farm produces abundantly,"61 and their daughter fondly imagined her family enjoying a "wholesome repast."62 From her boarding school in Boston, Eliza Southgate wrote home to Scarborough, Maine, that she "never missed our closet so much, and above all things our cheese and Butter."63 Nancy Shippen Livingston described how she and Louisa spent the morning in the country "eating fruit which we have in abundance."64 While these edible abundances appealed to urban residents and visitors, the tendency to idealize surely exaggerated such descriptions. What the country most often, and most abundantly provided correspondents and diarists was happy memories. Expressions about missing the larder from home may have been less about food than assuring family that they themselves were missed and remembered. But such expressions went even further than

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60 Rowson, Charlotte Temple, 25-26.
61 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 30, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.
62 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.
63 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 25, 1797, Bowne, 10.
64 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 2, 1784, Shippen, 204.
that. They also touched upon childhood experiences, now transformed into happy recollections and couched in terms of place, a rural place. When Nancy Livingston and her friend walked through a house in the countryside that they had visited as children, Livingston’s journal fairly gushed that the house "reminded me of the happy hours I had once spent there with my dear Maria for I staid with her part of a summer." And when they "walk’d in the garden & went to the summer house & the fish pond[,] The sight of them brought tears into our eyes; the remembrance of a thousand little sports & Teapartys we had together, & the tete-a-tetes & even’g walks all rush’d in upon my mind." Hetty Boardman likewise remembered "Barrington, where I have spent so many happy days" and described how she indulged her recollections by sitting "on a little hillock, where I could listen to the soft murmurings of the stream, and indulge myself in recollecting those past scenes, with which I was delighted."

In novels of the day, educated, respectable women thrived in the countryside. The celebrated Mrs. Beauchamp in Charlotte Temple, for example, whom Rowson praised as

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65 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 25, 1784, Shippen, 199. Also see Esther Farrand’s letter in which she fondly remembered the "happy hours" she spend in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Esther Farrand to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., prob. 1780s, Boardman, 103.

66 Hetty Boardman to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., prob. 1786 or 1787, Boardman, 103-104. Also see Caroline Maria Boardman Schroeder to John Frederick Schroeder for a lengthy description of her childhood home in New Milford, Connecticut, and the memories the "scented breeze" of "this sweet spot" triggered of a "scene dear from my childhood." June 16, 1848, Boardman, 294. Catharine Maria Sedgwick wrote in the 1850s about how she "enjoyed unrestrained the pleasures of a rural childhood" when she went "nutting, and berrying, and bathing by moonlight, and wading by daylight," and "loved the hills and mountains that I roved over." Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 73. Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald admitted that when she saw "instances of averse & chicane" in America, she would reflexively think, "how different the people at home" in Scotland, from where she emigrated, but she "did not think these same people at home perfect whilst . . . among them-- . . . absence was like death their faults were buried or softened, & their good qualities only remembered." Archbald quoted in Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 124.
"mild and engaging" and an "early riser" with "goodness of heart and known humanity," "loved not the hurry and bustle of a city." Willing to brave the "sneer of contempt and ridicule" to help the pregnant, deserted Charlotte, Mrs. Beauchamp’s type found a place in Hannah Webster Foster’s _The Boarding School_ as well. As one of Mrs. Williams’s former students wrote, after encountering a female "of youth and misfortune" while strolling through the "serenity and beauty" of the "rural scene": "to know she really needed charity, was a sufficient inducement with me to bestow it, without," she added, "scrupulously inquiring whether she deserved it or not." The country, with its peace and freshness was said to have a "powerful tendency to soothe and tranquilize the mind," and, by "afford[ing] charms . . . which the giddy round of fashionable amusement can never equal" bring out the "goodness" in its inhabitants.

Actual elite, educated women did not always share this assessment, however. Livingston recorded her persistent boredom with the countryside in her journal: "We

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67 Rowson, _Charlotte Temple_, 73, 74, 76.

68 Rowson, _Charlotte Temple_, 74. This is the same Charlotte who was raised in a country cottage, a seclusion that resulted in a dangerous (and ultimately fatal) naiveté.

69 Foster, _The Boarding School_, 227.

70 Foster, _The Boarding School_, 227, 155.

71 In his discussion of the gendered attributes of the city and the countryside by elite, ante-bellum southerners, Steven Stowe argues that men wrote about finding comfort in the country while women discovered "debilitating isolation." "If such men and women had been granted their respective wishes," Stowe surmises, "it seems they would have passed each other on the Charleston road, women streaming into the city in search of company and conversation, men fleeing to the country in search of respite from the consequences of their own desire for power and position." Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," 322.
spent but a dull day,"72 "Pass'd this day solitary & alone,"73 "As usual,"74 "The country grows more & more disagreeable to me every day,"75 and "This retirement begins to be very tiresome."76 One of Livingston's friends, Martha Bland, now living in Virginia, shared Livingston's frustration with rural living. Echoing Livingston's dread that she would not "see much company" in the country, Bland wrote in 1785 that "As to my situ[ation] it is as pleasing as my Country will admit of. I want nothing to make me Happy in this life but a little more agreeable society."77 Indeed, as she further complained a few months later, "There is so much calm and passive Happiness in my Situation it some times fill me [with] ennui . . . such a sameness, nothing to agitate my Spirits."78 Jeremiah Mason likewise dreaded departing from New Haven, and "all the pleasures of sociability," for the "obscurity" of Vermont, which he understood to be a "wilderness" consisting of "people wilder and more rough than the country itself."79

These observations about the dullness of country living contributed to and

72 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 7, 1784, Shippen, 195.

73 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 12, 1784, Shippen, 197.

74 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 13, 1784, Shippen, 197.

75 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 17, 1784, Shippen, 206.

76 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 29, 1784, Shippen, 207. See also May, 17, 1784, 198; May 18, 1784, 198; May 26, 1784, 200; July 5, 1784, 205, and Aug. 19, 1784, 210. The editor of Livingston's journals and letters noted that many pages from her journal covering this period "have been omitted" because "Nancy's laments at having to live alone with her mother in the country--a life which she found so dull--were likewise dull in reading." Armes, ed., Nancy Shippen: Her Journal Book, 28.

77 Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 12, 1785, Shippen, 232.

78 Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 23, 1785, Shippen, 236-37.

79 Jeremiah Mason to Mary Anna Whiting, Jan. 3, 1790, Boardman, 109.
participated in a long tradition. In his early "Silence Do-Good" essays, Benjamin Franklin had expressed only contempt for country folk and, as historian David Hall has observed, such disdain "was present well into the nineteenth century." When Livingston and others encountered such opinions in their reading, they found them in the expressions of those who wrote in the "new mode of 'extensive' reading that was private rather than communal and that fed on change" rather than pious memorization.80 One participant in this new mode of writing was Susanna Rowson, who, in spite of valorizing the exceptional Mrs. Beauchamp, agreed with Franklin about the deficiencies of the rural reader. Although she celebrated the countryside itself as the seat of the "purest pleasures" and the only place to enjoy the "charming" sight of the "beauteous orb of day, rising supremely bright, to enliven nature, and tinge with gold the lofty mountains' tops," she was skeptical if not disdainful of its inhabitants.81 "These people seem happy," she conceded, "but are not to be envied; they work hard for their bread, and if their rude, unpolished minds are callous and unfeeling to distress, they are likewise insensible to many of the pleasures that await them." Their main failing, she stressed, lay in their inability to "read" either nature, their own experiences, or books. "They are . . . insensible to many of the pleasures that await them; the works of nature afford them no satisfaction, because they cannot contemplate their beauties; yet their minds are suited to their station . . . the best security the peasant has for happiness is ignorance."82

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81 Rowson, The Inquisitor, 144, 21.

82 Rowson, The Inquisitor, 21.
The problem with these people was that self-improvement was impossible (or at least unlikely) given what Richard Brown has described as their "cultural isolation." Rowson's novel Charlotte Temple also featured an example of this type. When a "farmer's wife" entered Charlotte's quarters demanding rent, the "unfeeling wretch" was entirely unmoved by Charlotte's pitiful plight and ordered Charlotte not to "stay another night in this house, though I was sure you would lay in the street." As Southgate had written to her cousin, such people were "ignorant, illiterate, [and] without knowledge to discover the real blessings they enjoy." Rural inhabitants simply lacked the resources and skills required to fully comprehend their "blessings." Their inability to read or write relegated them to a rough, unhappy, bitter existence.

When ordinary people reflected on the countryside in their letters and diaries they spoke less of others than of themselves. They wrote of too much solitude or too little sociability. The changing subjectivity of these assessments, however, even by the same individual during the same day, indicates the extent to which rhetoric about the countryside was invoked to organize and conceptualize the writer's own perceived or expressed circumstances. Livingston's discontent with the countryside, for example, emerged from much more than mimicking recently read authors, although her invocation of a similar vocabulary suggests that her reading provided one avenue for evaluating her situation. For Livingston, the combination of her mother's illness, the lack of sociability

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83 Brown, "The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts," 46.
84 Rowson, Charlotte Temple, 102-104.
85 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100.
afforded by the country, and her daughter's absence rendered the country almost intolerable at times. As she wrote in one entry, following a discouraged, "This retirement begins to be very tiresome," "My poor Mamma's state of health is not the greatest of my troubles. Alass my heart is ill at ease with regard to my lovely Child who I have not heard from this long long time. what can be the reason? Is she ill? Is she, alass--I know not what to think. Sure nobody has so many troubles as I have." Undoubtedly her assessment of her "retirement" would have improved remarkably had she received a letter from her mother-in-law about her child or had the satisfaction of seeing her own mother in better spirits.

Finally, after a long four months, she wrote with relief that she "received a letter from Papa desiring me to come & live in Town with him, as Mamma is so fond of solitude & I am not." She apparently had no trouble weighing her duty to her mother with her distaste for the country for she thought "to comply with his desires [and] leave her in the Country with some clever elderly person," and indeed was "Busy all day moving & packing up." The very next day witnessed her departure: "Finished packing & moving this morning & went to Town in the afternoon." She did, however, return to the country the day after that "to bring some necessaries to Town" and "dined in the country," but "return'd to Town in the Evening." She and her father tried to persuade her mother to

86 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 29, 1784, Shippen, 207.
87 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 7, 1784, Shippen, 212.
88 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 8, 1784, Shippen, 212.
89 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 9, 1784, Shippen, 212.
join them in Philadelphia, having undoubtedly concluded that the country seemed to do her health no favors, but "they found her low" and Livingston wrote that "she won't hear of coming to Town but prefers the Country because she can be entirely alone." 90 Livingston probably failed to understand her mother's inclination for solitude since for her the retirement of the country only aggravated and added to her worries and misery.

Transplanted from Boston to Northampton following her marriage to Erastus Lyman in 1796, Abigail Brackett Lyman struggled to reconcile her loss of Boston society with the need to create a new and happy life for herself in Northampton. Various letters reveal this tension. During one of her husband's visits to Boston from Northampton, for example, she wrote him hoping that her "(perhaps unexpected) scrawl will meet a welcome reception," and struggled to squelch her doubt by continuing that "it would be ungenerous (& injure your feelings as well as mine) to suppose that your engagements in bussiness entirely excluded every other concern, or that the noise & bustle of Boston would not permit you to think on your Abby. I feel very lonesome since you left us, it seems as if all was gone--were it not for the prospect of your speedy return Northampton would have but few charms for me." 91 In a letter to a Boston friend, Lyman thought it best that Mary postpone her visit to Northampton until the summer months. As she laboriously wrote, "It is true the Country is not in my opinion stript of all its advantages and pleasures by change of seasons--tho' there are numerous--& most refined enjoyments--far beyond their power to affect the pleasures of friendship & society cannot


91 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Erastus Lyman, May 29, 1797, Lyman, 195.
be less'n'd by such revolutions the dreary reign of desolating Winter--can never chill the ardours of sincere Affection." Still, while "wherever we have friends--there we must be happy," she hesitated to test that proposition, and instead worried that she would "illy supply the place of the many friends you have acquired in Boston. . . . This conviction has confirm'd me in the opinion I have advanced that your Journey would prove productive of much more pleasure if perform'd in the Summer." With regard to assemblies in Northampton, she reported that "our young Gentlemen seem to have lost their animation--& this Winter we have none." In contrast to the labored assessments contained in her letters, Lyman admitted straightforwardly in her journal that the process of engaging in "reflection at the beginning of a new year always . . . lead me to reflect the Loss of the society I have quited." 

Sociability is relative, however, for at the same time that Lyman regretted quitting Boston for dull Northampton, Betsy Phelps wrote her brother from Hadley anticipating a visit to Northampton where "they live in style" and she knew he "cannot wonder that we wish to enlarge our acquaintance beyond the bounds of Hadley." But like Lyman, Phelps had little positive to say about the young men in the Pioneer Valley. As she wrote in one letter, "the gentlemen" in nearby Amherst "are not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them--they are, however, tolerable--& that will do in these days of

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92 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, Lyman, 216-218.

93 Abigail Brackett Lyman, 1800, Lyman, 230. Presumably, she is talking about her move from Boston to Northampton in 1796 occasioned by her marriage to Erastus Lyman.

94 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 7, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
scarcity."\textsuperscript{95} Eliza Southgate had little complimentary to say about the young men in Scarborough, Maine, either, writing that "I long to go to Portland and then I shall see some being that looks like a beau."\textsuperscript{96} For elite rural inhabitants, population scale could dramatically effect the prospects for sociability. Rural Hadley, Amherst, and Scarborough might only have one or two elite families while urban Northampton (relatively speaking), Portland, and Boston would have a much larger group. The isolation experienced by rural elites probably contributed in no small way to the abundance of conversational correspondence. For someone living in tiny Hadley, Massachusetts, reading and writing could maintain connections across space and make a small town seem not so small.

While Lyman, Phelps, and Southgate agreed on the merits or lack thereof of local "gentlemen," their adoption of the language of rural discontent served different ends. Lyman grew up in Boston and moved to Northampton as an adult, but Phelps had spent her whole life in Hadley and her expressions of boredom were sometimes adopted more as rhetorical devices than as admissions of genuine tedium or frustration. In a letter to her brother in Boston, for example, she playfully asked, "Will you permit me dear Charles once more to greet you in the language of affection and friendship? or have you quite forgotten your kindred in this western world?"\textsuperscript{97} While not necessarily a slur on Hadley, her comment does underscore the difference she perceived between the two worlds, a

\textsuperscript{95} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

\textsuperscript{96} Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, June 12, 1800, Rowe, 26.

\textsuperscript{97} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 17, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
difference that the "language of friendship and affection" as well as the physical letter itself might bridge. Indeed, although Betsy Phelps sometimes found her life as uneventful as Virginia's Martha Bland, her tone was far less dejected. As she wrote her brother several months later, "I have nothing particular to write you--at present--but as there is so good an opportunity--I cannot resist the temptation."98 Maybe something worthy of narrating would happen soon, but "at present" she could think of nothing. Still, writing to Charles signified her attempt to bridge rural and urban environments. Another western Massachusetts correspondent agreed that the "uninterrupted tranquillity which I at present, as usual, enjoy, is not the most propitious to the spirit of epistolary intercourse. It affords me nothing more, than the dull reiteration of what is in itself but indifferent."99 But he too wrote and sent the letter anyway, engaging in a correspondence primarily social rather than newsworthy.

Sometimes, however, Betsy was less cheerful about her life in Hadley. When her mother traveled to Boston and left her at home, she complained to her brother, "I wish very much to see you, but am going to be left at home alone--in solitude."100 Anxious to go to Boston herself, she nevertheless worried in another letter that her "country cousin"

98 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 19, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. This was a fairly common tactic for Phelps who also wrote that she did not "have anything either new or entertaining to communicate" and that reading her letters might "prove but a dull task." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 5, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 14), and July 1, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.

99 Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, June 22, 1785, Boardman, 94-95.

100 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 30, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
ways would be both apparent and embarrassing. More confident after residing in both Boston and Newburyport, she teased Charles that "next Tuesday—will restore me to the attention of my dear brother—don't you dread it?" Upon returning to Hadley after spending a few months in Boston, the bored tone of her earlier letters lost its former playfulness and assumed some of the discouragement found in Bland's expressions about sameness and ennui. "Nothing has transpired since last I wrote," she moped in one letter, "our time here, in this obscure corner of the world glides smoothly on—unnurled by the dissipation which reigns in your great town." And to Sarah Parsons, her brother's fiancee, she couched her plea for letters in terms of the tedium of living in Hadley: "do not my good girl withdraw your favors after I leave Boston but consider I shall then need them more than ever—in the country—in solitude." Echoing one of Hannah Webster Foster's boarding school students who sought connection to a person and a place through

101 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, July 12, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. Eliza Waite also expressed concern about her lack of sophistication, writing to a friend from Salem, Massachusetts, that "I am so little used to gallantry in this part of the world that I had like to have taken [the flattery of Mr. L.----n] seriously & thank him for his good opinion of me untill I recollected that it was the ton in [illegible] over to say smart things." Eliza Waite to Susan Kittredge, 1792, Eliza Waite correspondence, El.

102 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Oct. 11, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.

103 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Jan. 2, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. Subsequent letters assured him that "there is nothing going forward in this quarter of the world—which would give you the least pleasure in the recital," and "I have nothing to relate—a week being too short a time for anything worth communicating to transpire in Hadley." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Feb. 16, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 14), and March 18, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. She assured her brother's fiancee as well that "as to news I have none that can afford the least satisfaction in the recital" and again "I can hardly say whether you will thank me for continuing this uninteresting scrawl for so unvarying is the stream of life, that nothing occurs the recital of which could give you any satisfaction." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), and July 12, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

104 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Nov. 12, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
letters by urging her friend, "pray omit no opportunity of writing and favour me with your observations on the polite world," Phelps sent a similar but more dramatically embellished plea to Sarah Parsons: "forget me not Sarah . . . but in this cold stormy season, think of me, who, envelop'd in snow—& shivering round the fire, asks the favor of a cheering letter." She presumed to invoke the sameness of life in Hadley even in a letter to her parents in which she sought to persuade them to let her purchase a guitar and take a few lessons. As she entreated, her playing would "charm away [her father's] long tedious winter evenings."

Apparently it had been agreed that once her brother married and set up housekeeping with Sarah Parsons, Betsy would join them in Boston. The delay in this event sorely tried Betsy's patience, and she queried Charles anxiously, "I should like to know if you ever intend to get married--for I shall want to go to Boston again . . . and I had almost determined not to--till you had given me a home there--which I shall take advantage of--if have ever an opportunity." She pressed the matter with her future

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105 Foster, The Boarding School, 121.

106 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Jan. 5, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

107 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH. The guitar was indeed purchased [Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 5, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH] and became a Sabbath evening ritual, for she wrote some years later from Litchfield, Conn., where she lived with her husband, that the evening of the Sabbath is spent "in playing upon my guitar--to perpetuate a custom which I adopted at Hadley, and which on that account, will be ever dear to me." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 20, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH. After a lengthy absence from her home in Scarborough, Maine, Eliza Southgate imagined a similar scene in a letter to her mother. She "long[ed] to sit me down by the instrument some evening after the business of day is over, with you, my Father, and all round me, or to hear Octavia sing and play." Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 22, 1802, Boone, 131.

108 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, March 18, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
sister-in-law as well: "believe me my dear girl, a great part of my happiness will depend
on a certain event."¹⁰⁹  "For this event," she persisted in a later letter, "I cannot help daily
offering my petitions to the beneficent disposer of all good."¹¹⁰ Since Charles and Sarah
inconsiderately delayed the anticipated ceremony until 1800, Betsy was indeed obliged to
visit Boston again before they married and wrote sadly as that stay drew to a close that "as
the time of my return to my native land approaches, you cannot wonder if I feel rather
depressed in spirits."¹¹¹ Even Betsy's mother found herself out of spirits in Hadley from
time to time, writing to Betsy that "never did home appear so gloomy as now, to your
parents."¹¹² And her husband sympathized with Betsy in Litchfield: "It seems by your
letter you are now in a lonely condition--I know how in some measure to sympathize with
you--as your Mother left us for Boston, last Monday morning."¹¹³ Scarborough, Maine,
hardly escaped unscathed by negative assessments either. Eliza Southgate characterized
her home town as "cold," "comfortless," and "gloomy" enough to make her "selfish and
cross,"¹¹⁴ and whined about "Scarborough--desolate, dreary Scarborough,"¹¹⁵ where "we

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Nov. 22, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
¹¹⁰ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, May 26, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
¹¹¹ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Feb. 21, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
¹¹² Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Feb. 7, 1801 (Box 5, Folder
3), PPH.
¹¹³ Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington, Aug. 30, 1801 (Box 4, Folder 2), PPH.
¹¹⁴ Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Dec. 4, 1801, Bowne, 84, 85.
¹¹⁵ Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Feb. 1, 1802, Bowne, 88.
For the young Betsy Phelps, Hadley became increasingly dull, particularly when compared to Boston, and Scarborough fared similarly in Southgate's expressions. For Lyman, Livingston, and Bland, all raised in the city, the country also compared poorly to urban living. For their mothers, however, the country was comforting and "home." Livingston had gushed in relief when her father asked her "to come & live in Town with him, as Mamma is so fond of solitude and I am not." Her mother sometimes battled mightily with her daughter and husband to escape the bustle of Philadelphia for the solitude of the country. A day after Livingston retrieved her in the fall of 1784, her mother obstinately "ordered the carriage to take a ride. . . . & to my great surprize . . . gave orders to be drove out of Town." Livingston "spent the remainder of the day in the greatest anxiety for her, indeed all the family were anxious upon her account. In the even'g the coachman return'd & said his Mistress was in the country & said she chose to be there alone; what a dreadful situation to be in!" A few days later, however, Livingston "prevail'd on her to return with us to Town, & I think the ride did her some service." It seems unlikely that her mother would have shared her daughter's optimistic report.

Less dramatically, but consistent with the generational contrast exhibited by

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116 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Jan. 24, 1802, Bowne, 88.

117 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 7, 1784, Shippen, 212.


Livingston and her mother, were observations between and about members of other families. Mary Anna Whiting Boardman confessed to her son in Ohio that "were it not for the great distance, I would visit you in your seclusion, with as much if not more pleasure, than I now do Caroline [her daughter] in the great city. I like the country, the country life, and country manners, far better than I do New York with all its fascinations." The elder Phelps discovered fewer attractions in Boston than the younger set, as a series of entries in Elizabeth Porter Phelps’s journal of 1797 confirms. She and her husband "set out for Boston," a two-day trip from Hadley, on a Friday with their children "Mr. Hitchcock & wife." They duly "set out for home" on Monday, but without their traveling companions, for she remarked that "our children not ready to come." Indeed, the Hitchcocks spent another full week in the city, as Phelps noted on the following "Tuesday Mr. Hitchcock & wife came home." Similarly, Mary Southgate questioned her children's proclivity for the city as revealed in a letter Eliza Southgate wrote to her sister. Having heard from a mutual acquaintance that Octavia was "in Boston last Sunday," she scolded, "Mamma thinks, Octavia, you are there too much, we do not know how often, but we hear of you there very often indeed." And upon setting

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120 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Henry Mason Boardman, Sept. 8, 1831, Boardman, 245. Catharine Maria Sedgwick likewise observed in 1834, "I feel too my love growing stronger to the country and to country life." Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 147.

121 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 28, 1797, NEHGR 120 (Jan. 1967), 60. "Mr. Hitchcock" is the husband of Thankful, a woman brought up in the Porter household as one of their own.

122 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 4, 1797, NEHGR 120 (Jan. 1967), 60.

123 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 11, 1797, NEHGR 120 (Jan. 1967), 60.

124 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 14, 1800, Bowne, 29.
out for Middletown, Connecticut, Julia Cowles conceded that "Mama is something unwilling I should go, for fear that the pleasures of the world and its fashionable enjoyments will gain an ascendancy over me and raise ambitious views and lead me to the circle of an unthinking crowd." The city's dangers, as Cowles's comments indicate, were often couched in the same rhetoric used to denounce novels.

While these examples suggest a tendency for mothers of adolescent children to prefer the countryside over the city, this was a tendency only. Hannah Heath, who lived very near Boston, went regularly to enjoy its shopping and visiting, and Mary Southgate was no stranger to urban pleasures herself. Indeed one parent sent his daughter to New Haven to, as he put it, "acquaint[] yourself with those of the politer sort of both sexes" so that she would not fall for the "polite address and gaudy tinsel" that "often recommend[s] and conceal[s] flirts and coxcombs, and give[s] them an advantage over their betters."

Because of the "retired manner" in which she grew up in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, his daughter could not learn that lesson without travelling to a more populous area. The transition could be difficult, however, as one visitor to Boston wrote that she "had been the subject of conversation in every place I had visited, on account of my dress . . . and several ladies begged Mrs Pierce to talk seriously to me and persuade me to alter my dress." Having succumbed to this pressure, she confessed: "I have got me a monstrous Bonnet, that I feel ashamed to wear . . . and were you to meet


126 William Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, Aug. 14, 1785, Boardman, 80. Her brother also encouraged her to beware of "those illiberal spirits, not the most propitious to refined society." Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, July 2, 1785, Boardman, 85.
me, you would hardly know me, after having been accustomed to see me in plain
dress."127 With more confidence and a sense of humor, Betsy Phelps agreed that the
trappings of the city could certainly be out of place back in rural environs such as Hadley.
As she wrote delightedly to her brother upon appearing in Hadley bedecked fashionably
in new city clothes, their mother feared that such garb "should frighten some out of the
house of worship."128

One mother discouraged her twelve-year-old daughter from visiting a cousin in
New York City in 1809, because if "she were to marry in this part of the country
[Creekvale, New York] she would find this cultivated mind . . . to be rather a misfortune
--a Dutchman wants not a sensible & enlightened Friend & companion . . . he wants only
a woman to scrub & cook for him--no matter tho' she know not a from b."129 Life in the
city, this mother bitterly concluded, would not be dangerous because of its gaudily
tinseled flirts and coxcombs, but because her daughter would become "sensible &
enlightened," she would "know a from b," which would ill suit her for life as a rural wife.
At the very least, the experience would demand that she engage in written correspondence
(if only with her mother), an activity that would immediately begin to collapse the two
categories of space. Her mother feared that once her letters, like her person, moved
comfortably between the literal and figurative distance separating the city and the
country, she would refuse to condescend to marry someone she might judge "illiterate,

127 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, July 2, 1789, Cutts Family Collection, EI.

128 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Dec. 18, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.

129 Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald to John Ruthven, April 1809, quoted in Scott, "These Notions I
Imbibed from Writers," 161.
ignorant," and "depraved," as Eliza Southgate characterized rural inhabitants.

Given the emphasis on the lack of sociability in complaints about rural living rather than gripes about hard work or harsh weather, it comes as no surprise that the country fared well in assessments when that primary handicap was overcome. Although Nancy Shippen Livingston dreaded that "we shall spend a very rural day" at Chaillot in 1783, for example, she subsequently wrote with a tinge of amazement that "it was one of the most agreeable jaunts I ever had in my life. The day fine, the Company agreeable, & the best rural dinner I ever eat. We walk'd by the River delaware--we sung--we rambl'd about the woods; play'd at Chess--in short the variety of the scene, & the sociability that prevail'd throughout the company serv'd to make it a delightful full day." Even the long four months she spent caring for her ill mother in the country the next year were broken up by a few days of pleasure for Livingston, especially when she had company of some sort. After two or three weeks of "dull days," she wrote happily, "Louisa came here this Morning to my great delight. . . . Spent a charming day." And, in spite of inclement weather, the next day nevertheless compelled a cheerful "Tho' this was a very rainy day we pass'd our time delightfully. I read while Louisa work'd. In the afternoon I answer'd the letters I reciev'd yesterday from Virginia." Another visit by Louisa resulted in another gratified entry: "Louisa & myself spent the morning rambling about the meadows and the shady groves" and then "went to Belmont to see the beautiful Mrs Peters" and all

130 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 14, 1783, Shippen, 144.
131 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 20, 1784, Shippen, 198.
132 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 21, 1784, Shippen, 198.
in all "spent a very agreeable afternoon."

Louisa's departure, however, left Livingston feeling "very dull & dismal the remainder of the day," although "towards evening my spirits return'd & I enjoyed the sweetness of the country air" in spite of being left alone again with her mother who was "still the same very low & dejected in mind."

On another occasion Livingston very much anticipated a rural jaunt at "our Country retirement" with "Miss Stockton, Louisa, Major North, Major Jackson, & myself," and the pleasure of "one happy day—When Lo! (as usual) I was disappointed—for Louisas Mamma was so ill this Morn'g that she cou'd not leave her & so broke up the party." Still, even though obliged to "set off for the country by myself," she consoled herself by reflecting that "this was by far the hottest day I felt this year so that I enjoy'd the cool country air tho' I was alone." On another occasion, the planned party materialized into a "charming day" spent with "Zeleida & Evelina . . . my Brother & Doct' James" who "laugh'd, sung, play'd, walk'd talk'd & in short were as merry as possible."

Unfortunately, however, though not unexpectedly, "they left me in the Evening to enjoy my own reflections," which she summed up with an affected "Dear me! I'm quite tir'd of the country."

Although happiest when joined by fellow Philadelphians, sometimes even rural

133 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 2, 1784, Shippen, 204.

134 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 26, 1784, Shippen, 200. Susan Kittredge likewise wrote about the "usual amusement in the Country riding reading & singing," but assured her correspondent that "nothing supplies the loss of my Dear Friend," adding that "it is tragedy . . . to part with our Friends." Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, June 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El.

135 Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 1, 1784, Shippen, 201.

136 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 5, 1784, Shippen, 205.
society could rescue Livingston from tedious solitary days. In an uncharacteristic journal entry, Livingston described how she "enjoy'd myself in reading, & meditating . . . & 2 or 3 hours pass'd away charmingly; a delightful silence prevail’d" until "at length I was roused by a number of people who pass by & who were going into a neighboring wood to gather huckle berries." Drawn by the "simplicity, & mirth which seem'd to reign among them, but above all," she admitted, by her "love of society," she allowed herself to be "tempted . . . from my solitary employments to join them." Had the whole day been spent "reading, & meditating," of course, Livingston's journal would have recorded another dull day in the country. The combination of reading and sociability, however, resulted in a summary: "They were delighted, and I no less happy, in perceiving the emotions I excited in these innocent people." After this pleasing rural conviviality, albeit couched in affected and condescending language, she "dined alone, & then took my book & went to stroll in the orchard."  

Another pleasurable afternoon was spent riding "with a young lady that lives in the neighbourhood, thro' a most delightful wood" and calling "upon a country neighbour." Still another noteworthy event occurred when she and her Uncle Arthur Lee spent a day in the country "very merrily & happily." Sauntering through the fields, they "perceived a small house at the foot of the hill with a little green lawn before the door & a very little garden on the right hand fully of vegetables & a few flowers."

Obviously pleased with the unexpected "neatness of the place," they were "tempted . . . to

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137 Nancy Shippen Livingston, July 18, 1784, Shippen, 206-207.

138 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Aug. 31, 1784, Shippen, 211.
walk in, [and] we found a venerable old man & his wife, & dog which made the whole of this poor family." But the smallness of the household only compelled Livingston to continue that "the old man was too old to work, & so the wife, who is not much younger, gathers wild herbs & carries them on her head to the market which is five mile[s] from where she lives—in order to get a living." "I asked her what she lived on," Livingston reported, and "she said a little bread when she cou’d get it, or any thing else."

Notwithstanding these desperate sounding circumstances, "in a very hospitable manner she offer’d us some of a very brown loaf she had just made," and she and her uncle "accepted it because it wou’d give her pleasure." After this wholesome rural repast, her "Uncle laid a piece of silver on their clean wooden table, which the old woman did not perceive till we were just going away when she honestly offer’d it to us, thinking it was left by mistake. It was return’d to her with assurances of our good opinion of her. It was late before we got home, & we talk’d much of our little adventure."

Even in this apparently positive report of mingling with country folk, Livingston revealed her prejudices. She understood rural inhabitants to be poor, dirty, and ill-mannered and therefore remarked with happy surprise on exceptions to that triumvirate. To her astonishment, not all indigenous country folk were the mean-spirited, ignorant,

139 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 1, 1784, Shippen, 211-12.

140 In a similar entry she had been surprised that her "poor neighbors" covered the "clean table" with a "clean white cloth," remarked that the "old woman put on a clean cap & apron, & the old man his new hat," and were pleased "to wait upon us" after giving them a "very welcome reception." Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 25, 1784, Shippen, 199. Catharine Maria Sedgwick observed that at the turn of the nineteenth century, she had seen her father's "brow lower when a free-and-easy mechanic came to the front door," a manifestation of social hierarchy that, she argued, would never occur in the country in the 1850s, when "there are no barriers between you and your neighbors." Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 78, 77.
callous malcontents described by Southgate and Rowson. In part, Livingston's romanticization of country life, or, as Southgate put it, "wearing the pleasures of rural life threadbare," served to ease guilt or anxiety about her own cultural and economic privileges. That her expressions (and those of Southgate's cousin) mimicked novelists' portrayals further underscores the ability of everyday readers to invoke and manipulate published rhetoric for their own purposes rather than passively digest (in their own expressions or behaviorally) published rhetoric. Furthermore, the process of writing about the country, whether in terms of "dull days" or cheerful conviviality, enabled Livingston to separate herself from the "ignorance" and "illiteracy" she knew to characterize rural inhabitants. In journal entries that invoked the themes and vocabulary of novels read by sociable, polite society, she confirmed her eligibility and participation in that circle.

For Livingston, the rural experience was temporary, an interlude in her otherwise cosmopolitan existence. For Abigail Brackett Lyman, the switch to rural Northampton from urbane Boston was permanent and her assessments of the possibilities and limitations she discovered seem far less romantic, if not always more hopeful than Livingston's. Instead of anticipating ill-tempered poverty and exclaiming with pleasure when finding something else, Lyman surveyed Northampton expecting to find people like her. Like Livingston, however, the very process of writing helped Lyman negotiate and collapse the distance between the two milieus. As she wrote in a letter inviting Mrs. Revere to visit her, "We promise ourselves much pleasure from a visit from you next

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141 See Ulrich, "From the Fair to the Brave," 219.
spring—you will find it a pleasant part of the Country. . . . There is a sociable circle of friends here who will unite their endeavours to promote your happiness, and enhance the funds of amusement."¹⁴² In part mimicking her beloved novel The Boarding School, in which one character remarks that in the country "We can easily collect a social circle; and persons of taste, politeness and information . . . [to] enjoy a rational and enlivening conversation, which is at once refined and improving,"¹⁴³ Lyman more than hinted that Northampton’s social scene was not totally foreign to that of Boston. Other writers stressed the complementary aspects of rural solitude and sociability if in somewhat convoluted or affected language. One woman wrote, for example, that she "preferr[ed] the country to the city life" because "the noise and dissipation of the latter . . . ill suit my temper. I was ever fond of retirement, "she continued, "and I take more satisfaction in listening to the melancholy murmer of rivers, and the pensive music of groves, than in being amidst the gay circles of belles and beaux. But . . . I am fond of society; and think, that happiness is to be found in a small circle, rather than among the multitude."¹⁴⁴ Another correspondent agreed that "the pleasure of agreeable companions easily coincides with that which is derived from the surrounding beauties of creation," adding that as "the latter afford me an entertainment; and they so agreeably contribute to sweet and interesting contemplation, that solitude in the enjoyment of them is very far from

¹⁴² Abigail Brackett Lyman to Rachel Revere, Dec. 22, 1796, Lyman, 193-94. Rachel Revere (b. 1745) was the wife of the silversmith and patriot Paul Revere (1735-1818) who was a close friend of Lyman’s father (see Kessler, The Worlds of Abigail Brackett Lyman, 193).

¹⁴³ Foster, The Boarding School, 158.

¹⁴⁴ Patty Williams to Mary Anna Whiting, July 3, 1785, Boardman, 96.
being intolerable.  

Other writers stressed the contrasts rather than the similarities between rural and urban life. A little nervous about leaving her home in Farmington, Connecticut, to attend "school with my Cousin Fanny" in Middletown, Julia Cowles found herself "so strongly attached to my native place that it is not without some regret that I leave it. From these calm scenes of pleasure, into a busy crowd of extravagant people. I have been forewarned of my danger. My Mama is something unwilling I should go."  

Betsy Phelps too, expressed her comfort with Hadley. In a letter to her brother comparing Brimfield, Connecticut, to the "abode of our infancy," she confessed that "[Brimfield] I find much pleasanter than I expected—tho' the inhabitants are unpolished and rather more rustical (if possible) than those of Hadley—yet I believe they are honest, industrious, clever people in general." Her letters from Boston to Hadley often featured fond recollections of comfortable scenes at home. In a letter to her mother, she wrote nostalgically, "I fancy you are eating dinner—assembled round that jovial table." The excitement of household improvements could lend a wonderful aura to "rustical" Hadley, as Betsy effused in a letter to Sarah Parsons: "you would not know this solitary antique habitation; the house is undergoing a complete repair." She added tentatively, "and may I

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145 Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, June 26, 1785, Boardman. 84.


147 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, April 23, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.

148 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 1), PPH.
not hope you will soon make it your dwelling?" \footnote{149} and further tried to entice Sarah to visit by praising Hadley as a "serene retreat." \footnote{150} Indeed, once Betsy had married to Dan Huntington and moved to Litchfield, Connecticut, her estimations of Hadley grew amazingly. Litchfield supplanted her previous unflattering view of Hadley and assumed the mantle of "this distant land," \footnote{151} or "a land of strangers" where she was "alone" and "destitute." \footnote{152} She went so far as to confess that "now and then a tear will start when I remember that 70 miles separate me from my beloved home." \footnote{153} Hadley metamorphosed from "rustical" and "solitary" into that "dear spot which has always hail'd me, happiest of females," \footnote{154} "that dear spot which gave me birth, and which witnessed my youthful enjoyments," \footnote{155} and "that dear place where you live, once I could call it my home" where she looked forward to "tranquil" visits. \footnote{156} In retrospect, Hadley's dullness vanished in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{149} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, July 12, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
\footnote{150} Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, July 12, 1799 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
\footnote{151} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Charles Porter Phelps, Jan. 25, 1801 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
\footnote{152} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 2, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
\footnote{153} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 11, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
\footnote{154} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 10, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
\footnote{155} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 27, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.
\footnote{156} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 8, 1802 (Box 13, Folder 6) and Sept. 30, 1802 (Box 13, Folder 6), PPH. She also assured her brother "how often I think of my beloved home... [and] how often this recollection wrings sighs from my heart, and tears from my eyes" (to Charles Porter Phelps, Jan. 25, 1801 [Box 12, Folder 14], PPH), and confessed to her sister-in-law the difficulty of leaving Hadley: "shall I own to you my dear sister, I did not till then know what it was to leave my father's house, and consider myself a resident in a distant country." (to Sarah Parsons Phelps, June 28, 1801 [Box 12, Folder 18], PPH)
\end{footnotes}
favor of fond memories of comfort, connectivity, and familiarity.\textsuperscript{157}

Although known to sulk about the "salt marsh and flats" and the "stagnant water in a Scarborough salt pond,"\textsuperscript{158} Eliza Southgate also comfortably assured her mother in one letter that "I have not been out of the yard since I came home till this afternoon. I rode a mile or two on horseback just to smell the fresh air. I never was more contented in my life; tho' I have not seen anybody but Mrs. Smith these 3 weeks almost I have not had an hour hang heavily on me; 'tis charming to get home after being gone so long!"\textsuperscript{159}

Obviously the potential for boredom was there, however, since she couched her content in the negative context of "even tho' I have not seen anybody," a circumstance Livingston, Bland, and the young Betsy Phelps would certainly have sympathized with at different points in their lives. When writing from Boston, Southgate, like Phelps, remembered home as comfortable, relaxed, and cheery. She wrote happily to her parents about returning to "our own peaceful mansion,"\textsuperscript{160} and on another occasion exclaimed, "How charming will it be when I get home again!"\textsuperscript{161} She also admitted that she could not "but feel happy that I was brought up in retirement,—since from habit at least, I have

\textsuperscript{157} In his autobiography, Dan Huntington observed that his wife "had an ardent and intelligent admiration of nature, cultivated doubtless by the peculiar richness and beauty of the scenery about her paternal residence." Huntington, \textit{Memories, Counsels, and Reflections}, 76. See the earlier discussion on the connection between fond recollections and rural celebrations.

\textsuperscript{158} Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Sept. 13, 1801, \textit{Bowme}, 73.

\textsuperscript{159} Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, n.d., probably early 1801, \textit{Bowme}, 44.

\textsuperscript{160} Eliza Southgate to Robert Southgate, Jan. 9, 1798, \textit{Bowme}, 15.

\textsuperscript{161} Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 22, 1802, \textit{Bowme}, 131.
contracted a love for solitude."\textsuperscript{162}

A year and a half later, this same young woman would announce unequivocally that "solitary happiness I have no idea of."\textsuperscript{163} Although seemingly a contradiction, the crux of her statements rests on her definition of "solitude" which she invoked both times in the context of rural living, once as a benefit and once as a curse. The solitude she had "contracted a love for" enabled her to think, to read, to write, and to ponder scenes, people, and events. It was useful only in so far as she had books to read, letters to write, and vistas, visits, or company to remember or anticipate. Like Livingston, she considered forced or steady solitude the antithesis of the means to "improvement" or "happiness." That--"solitary happiness"--she had "no idea of." When Southgate wrote that she had "not seen anybody but Mrs. Smith these 3 weeks almost," she did not mean that Mrs. Smith was the only person she had literally seen. Presumably the Southgate household was as alive with servants and laborers as the Heath, Phelps, and Shippen households. Like Livingston, Southgate entertained a low opinion of country folk (whom she had described as ignorant, illiterate, and depraved) and revealed her prejudices in her comment about Mrs. Smith. The only company she saw worth mentioning was Mrs. Smith. As she wrote her cousin, those with "cultivated and enlarged" minds and "delicate and refined sentiments" can find "genuine happiness" "only in the delightful sympathies of friendship [and] similarity of sentiments."\textsuperscript{164} In the process of writing to her cousin, of

\textsuperscript{162} Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 3, 1800, \textit{Bowne}, 27.

\textsuperscript{163} Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, \textit{Bowne}, 101.

\textsuperscript{164} Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, \textit{Bowne}, 101.
course, she promoted and participated in "delightful sympathies of friendship."

If the country denoted "wholesome repasts" and triggered a trove of happy memories, urban areas boasted a profusion of consumer goods that sometimes transformed letters sent back and forth between the city and the country into shopping lists. Indeed, in this sense letters retained their traditional relationship to the business of trade. One historian has argued that "shopping was a form of employment and one which was most effectively administered by women," and another has pointed out that while towns are "often portrayed as playing a crucial role in changing consumer behavior in the pre-industrial era," a comparison of rural and urban household inventories "does not entirely fit with this, for the towns were not 'islands' of active consumption surrounded by 'traditional' values in the countryside." Indeed, the newspaper, which increasingly featured shopkeepers' advertisements, both informed potential customers about the quality and availability of goods and encouraged them to "adopt a more refined style of life." Considering the role of written correspondence in the consumption of material goods begins to address a gap in the historiography of women in the early republic. As Jeanne Boydston has recently pointed out, the tendency of historians to focus on the


166 Lorna Weatherill, "The Meaning of Consumer Behaviour in Late-Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England," in Consumption and the World of Goods, ed. Brewer and Porter, 209. In England, Weatherill found "few differences between town and country in ownership of goods like pewter, books and clocks." Some goods, such as "new and decorative goods were more common in towns," however, while "pictures and window curtains were scarce in rural areas but quite common in London; looking-glasses were twice as likely in towns as in rural areas." (209)

prescriptive and ideological relationship of women to the state in order to demonstrate women’s "efforts to enter and shape the new ‘public’ sphere" has resulted in studies that ignore both material life and "women in their daily market relations."\textsuperscript{168} Letters as shopping lists or shopping lists as letters indicates the convergence of business, consumerism, reading, and writing in women’s lives and expressions. Letters too were "consumed," and as they bridged rural and urban spaces and stereotypes, they naturally leant themselves to the task of collapsing those distinctions by means of material goods as well.

During one of her husband’s visits to Boston, for example, Abigail Brackett Lyman "troubled" him to "procure a few articles" including slippers, a "hair Slidor, a pair of ear-drops & necklace pearl . . . , 2 or 3 small size Camel hair pensils for painting & a drawing book or two" as well as two "Shakepear prints . . . for each of our front rooms, also an empty kniff case" and "a hat or a bonnet," whichever is "most fashionable and pritty." All of these items had been advertised in the \textit{Columbian Centinel}, dated May 24, 1797.\textsuperscript{169} A day later, from nearby Hadley, Betsy Phelps requested her brother, also in Boston, to purchase several items on her behalf. For her the city need not be tapped for its most exquisite merchandise, however, because, as she explained in terms of a hat, "a cheaper one would answer as well as any here in the country," although if she "should


\textsuperscript{169} Abigail Brackett Lyman to Erastus Lyman, May 29, 1797, \textit{Lyman}, 196. Helen Roelker Kessler discovered the similarities between Lyman’s list and the newspaper advertisements. See Kessler, \textit{The Worlds of Abigail Brackett Lyman}, 88-89.
ever visit Boston again—I should want a good one." 170 She did indeed visit Boston in the near future, where she now assumed the role of buyer for consumers back in Hadley. In a letter to her mother, she struggled to remember "whether aunt William's spoons were to mark'd A.P. or A.W.," but reported success with other commissions: "I have got your italian silk—and Mary's . . . muslin." 171 She was also entrusted with purchasing "ear-drops for Mrs. Shipman," "cloth slippers" for Aunt Warner, and "something for Mary." 172

Once Sarah Parsons married Betsy's brother Charles in 1800, Betsy did not hesitate to ask her for merchandise from Boston. For Sarah's convenience, Betsy sent her "a shoe that you may know the size of those which you purchase," and asked her to exchange a pair of gloves that were "so small at the top I cannot wear them." In addition, she wanted a "Purple and white plaid ribbon" and fashion advice: "if you know of any new way to make gowns, be so kind as to describe it to me." 173 Although she failed to say so in the letter, the several articles she commissioned from Sarah predated her own wedding by less than two months and she promised Sarah that "after a certain period—you will not so frequently be troubled with commissions." 174 Still, occasional "commissions" followed. Now married herself, Betsy informed Sarah that "the articles from Boston have arrived—nothing was injured excepting the Sofa, which had two legs broken . . . but can

170 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 30, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
171 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 30, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.
172 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.
173 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons Phelps, Nov. 9, 1800 (Box 12, Folder 18), PPH.
174 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons Phelps, Nov. 9, 1800 (Box 12, Folder 18), PPH.
be mended again without much difficulty."\textsuperscript{175} Shortly after Sarah gave a difficult birth to her son Charles, Betsy graciously sent her sincere good wishes, but added that "I have to request that you will purchase a few articles for me in Boston, of which I shall give you a list--your former kindness in this way induces me still to presume upon it for the future."\textsuperscript{176} In a letter to her brother she pondered the logistics of getting him money "to pay for the articles which I wished you to procure" as soon as possible, "as I much need the trimming for my cloak."\textsuperscript{177} When her mother visited Boston, she asked her to purchase "four yards, and half" of fringe and "of the binding two yards."\textsuperscript{178}

As these letters exchanged by members of the Phelps family indicate, being in Boston was the only requisite for assuming the role of purchaser for those in the countryside. Mothers bought for daughters, and vice versa, brothers for sisters, and in-laws for in-laws. This is not in the least unusual, as Abigail Lyman entrusted her husband to determine whether a hat or bonnet was most fashionable and select an appropriate one for his wife in Northampton. Eliza Southgate's family likewise entrusted each other with purchasing duties. If Boston offered residents of Hadley and Northampton attractive consumer goods, New York appeared to be a veritable treasure house. The newly married Eliza Southgate Bowne wrote her mother that New York was "very different . . . from

\textsuperscript{175} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Sarah Parsons Phelps, June 28, 1801 (Box 12, Folder 18), PPH.

\textsuperscript{176} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Sarah Parsons Phelps, Oct. 25, 1801 (Box 12, Folder 18), PPH. The baby Charles was born on Sept. 18, 1801.

\textsuperscript{177} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Charles Porter Phelps, Dec. 28, 1801 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.

\textsuperscript{178} Elizabeth Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Aug. 10, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH. She mentions this errand in a July 22, 1801, letter as well.
most any place, for there is no article but you can find ready made to your taste, excepting table linen, bedding, etc., etc." In the same letter she offered to purchase items for her family's new home in Portland, Maine: "I will purchase any kind of furniture you wish, perhaps cheaper and better than you can get elsewhere." In a later letter, she promised her engaged sister Octavia that "any purchases for the coming occasion will be executed with pleasure," and she hoped that her brother's fiancee would likewise enlist her services: "tell her I shall feel myself flattered by any commission she will give me either in clothes or furniture . . . 'twill gratify me." Apparently Octavia and Nabby took Eliza up on her offer for she later sent a list itemizing purchases of silver plate, a tea service, sheeting, linen, napkins, diaper, breakfast cloths, plated castor ("best kind"), a plated cake basket, pearl tea-pots, and a trunk. Even New York lacked some goods, however, for she reported that "There is not a piece of embossed Buff in New York, nor of plain either, there is not more than 2 pair alike, therefore I have done nothing about the trimmings. I fancy Boston is a better place for those things than New York." 

Correspondents and diarists praised cities for more than their abundance of material goods, however. What generated the most attention in their written expressions was the easy sociability afforded by the urban milieu. As Nancy Shippen Livingston effused during a welcome respite from her sojourn in the country during the summer of

179 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, July 4, 1803, Bowne, 164.
180 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, July 4, 1803, Bowne, 165.
181 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Oct. 6, 1805, Bowne, 201.
182 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Nov. 14, 1805, Bowne, 204-205.
1784, "Spent a most delightful day in Town. Papa had a very large company & he was pleased to say I graced the head of his Table. Pass'd a charming Even'g with Papa & Brother. set up till eleven oclock."183 After spending the following week back in the country, she returned to Philadelphia and again wrote with cheerful relief, "Dined in Town with a very large company."184 Both of these pleased observations precede dreary assessments of the country where she spent "as usual a solitary day"185 and "found my poor mamma as usual."186 Livingston begrudged her time in the country in spite of her sincere concern for her mother, and only very rarely succeeded in adopting a country persona. Indeed, the expressions in which she could reconcile herself to (or even celebrate) country life, functioned at least in part as affirmations of her city-related refinement. Only someone with sentiments generated and nurtured by polite sociable intercourse could do justice to the pleasures and glories of the countryside.

Betsy Phelps, on the other hand, happily catalogued the process of developing an urban (Boston) facet to her personality that both contrasted and coexisted with her rural (Hadley) demeanor. Some time after assuring her mother that her "reserv'ed disposition" prevented her from being too "familiar" on the stage from Hadley to Boston, she enthused, "You can't think, dear madam, how many new acquaintances we have form'd, . . . and I have alter'd so wonderfully that it takes me but a short time to become

acquainted now." Concerned that her mother would fear that she had transformed so much that Hadley had lost all appeal, however, she later penned a convoluted and unconvincing statement about wanting to return home. Referring to her new city acquaintances, she wrote, "when I think that I must leave them, perhaps, never to see them more--it makes me almost sad--yet when I reflect that the time which separates me from them, will restore me to you, every sensation by joy, leaves my heart--yet I shall regret leaving my friend Mary." Indeed, a month earlier, she had asked her mother, "on the whole, madam, don't you think it strange that I have not been homesick?" But this too, she struggled to qualify in a roundabout way by assuring her mother that "if I did not know I should return again . . . near the expiration of three months, I should be apt to feel unhappy" as her "heart [was] eagerly anticipating the time when I shall make one at the hospitable board." Still, these sentiments lost some of their force because she immediately interrupted herself with a perfunctory "we are called to breakfast--good morning."

Upon arriving at New York City in 1803, the newly married Eliza Southgate

187 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH. William Whiting encouraged his daughter to acquire the demeanor described by Betsy. As he wrote, "I . . . most heartily wish you to acquire that modest boldness, which may enable you, at all times, to act with a dignity suited to your age and situation in life." William Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, Aug. 14, 1785, Boardman, 80. See also Thomas Ives to Mary Anna Whiting, Boardman, 81.

188 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

189 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Oct. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

190 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Nov. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.
Bowne enthusiastically wrote her sister that she was "enraptured with New York."191 Like Phelps, however, she tempered such expressions in letters to her mother, writing staidly, "you must have perceived, my Dear Mother, from my letters, that I am much pleased with New York. I was never in a place that I should prefer as a situation for life, and nothing but the distance from my friends can render it other than delightful."192 Her sister likewise wrote happily to her mother that she was "much more pleased with New York on every account than with Boston. As a City it is much superior, the situation is every way as delightful as possible. The inhabitants to me are much more pleasing, more ease, more sociability and elegance, yet not so ostentatious."193 Upon realizing that her praise was perhaps too effusive, however, she hastened to assuage her mother by adding that "I am afraid you are too solitary—if you are, do, my Dear Mother, tell me, find any opportunity, and I'll be with you as soon as you say,—depend on it, I shall never get so attached either to the inhabitants or the gaieties of New York, as to feel reluctant to return home."194 She reassured her mother that she could live happily in both milieus and that one tugged on the other. These qualified accolades for the delights of the city are reminiscent of one of Mrs. Williams's former boarding school students in Foster's novel The Boarding School who "was happy at Harmony-Grove [a rural boarding school] . . . yet I find the gaiety of the town adapted to my taste," an admission that apparently

191 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 6, 1803, Bowne, 150. The letter includes extensive descriptions of Columbia Gardens, the Battery, and Mount Vernon garden.

192 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, July 4, 1803, Bowne, 163.

193 Octavia Southgate to Mary Southgate, Dec. 24, 1803, Bowne, 186.

194 Octavia Southgate to Mary Southgate, Dec. 24, 1803, Bowne, 186.
required and elicited a defensive "nor does even Mrs. Williams condemn the enjoyment of its pleasures." 195 In part Phelps, Bowne, and Southgate anticipated and tried to ward off parental fears about their children's excessive fondness for the city. But these hedged explanations also indicate that those who traveled and corresponded back and forth between the city and the country assumed different personas depending on their surroundings. Their expressions indicate the coexistence, if sometimes awkward, of urban and rural values and tastes.

An important element in estimations of both rural and urban living was the actual structure one inhabited. When Eliza Southgate's parents had decided to move from Scarborough to nearby Portland, she expressed her wish that the move take place as soon as possible: "I am extremely anxious to know how soon we go into Portland and what house we shall have. Write me immediately on the subject." Staying with friends in Salem, Massachusetts, at the time, she went so far as to suggest to her mother that she "feel[s] extremely anxious to hear you have moved into town, and shall most probably be here until then." 196 Even once she was married and living in New York, she intimated that she would not visit her family until they had moved: "Mr. Bowne and myself are talking of coming to see you next summer very seriously. How comes on the new house? We are to come as soon as ever that is finished." 197 The new house was mentioned again in a couple of years, when Eliza broached the subject to Octavia: "Has any progress been

195 Foster, The Boarding School, 124.

196 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Sept. 9, 1802, Bowne, 141-42.

197 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, July 4, 1803, Bowne, 165.
made in the new house? I am sorry to say I fear not—'tis pity,—I had almost said 'tis wrong. I am half mortified when I hear of any of my acquaintance visiting Portland."  

Similarly, Nancy Shippen Livingston was "petrified with astonishment & mortified to the last degree" when she returned to Philadelphia to find that her father had let their house and taken the one next door. When her "dear Papa" asked how she liked their "new habitation," she responded that she "thought it was rather small," whereupon he assured her that "it was a temporary habitation" while her mother recuperated in the country. When she "retir'd to [her] small apartment" Livingston "indulged [her] grief, & gave way to the sorrow I felt at the great change that appear'd to have taken place in our affairs."

Able to sleep "very little all night" due to her altered living conditions in the city, she tried, without much success, to reconcile herself to her impending move to the countryside by reflecting on the "pleasantly situated," "pretty large" house in which she would reside with her mother. She knew that "with all these conveniencys sure I ought to be contented altho' I shall not live in as grand a style as I have been used to—nor see

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198 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Oct. 6, 1805, Bowne, 200-201. A few years later, however, her father's dragging on the new house turned out to be to her parents' advantage. In an 1808 letter to her sister Miranda about the financial failure of Octavia's husband ("the melancholy change in their prospects" [222]), she realized that "Pappa too I fear will be quite a sufferer," but then consoled herself that "he is not in debt, has a good farm, and will always have all the comforts of life; indeed... he has always been determined on leaving such a sum untouched, and from that darling object has deprived himself of the comfort of a comfortable house for many years past." Eliza Southgate Bowne to Miranda Southgate, Jan. 13, 1808, Bowne, 223-24. From 1780 to 1830 "Portland was in the midst of an almost continuous building boom," as its population increased significantly and it became the leading port city in the District of Maine. In 1797, Timothy Dwight observed that Portland's "houses are new" and "many of them make a good appearance." A mere decade later, he wrote, "No place, in our route, hitherto, could for its improvement be compared the Portland. We found buildings extended quite to the cove, doubled in their number and still more increased in their appearance. Few towns in New England are equally beautiful and brilliant."


199 Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 1, 1784, Shippens, 192.
much company." Of course, neither the city nor the country could now offer Livingston her accustomed grand style. While she and Eliza Southgate Bowne fretted about the houses of their parents, Eliza and her husband devoted considerable time and thought to procuring their own house in New York. As she wrote to her mother, "we have not yet found a house that suits us. Mr. Bowne don’t like any of his own, and wishes to hire one for the present until he can build, which he intends doing next season; which I am very glad of, as I never liked living in a hired house." For Betsy Phelps too, the advent of major household renovations to her family’s home in Hadley added considerable allure and charm to a place heretofore described as "solitary" and "antique."

But structure alone rarely, or only momentarily, comprised the only ingredient in evaluations about charm or disillusionment with one’s surroundings. As has been seen throughout this chapter, the company and comfort of the correspondent or diarist intertwined intricately in assessments of rural and urban situations. The day after discovering her father in slightly humbler quarters in Philadelphia, the distraught and "mortified" Nancy Shippen Livingston enjoyed a pleasant dinner in that very house with her father, her cousin, and "Gen' Knox." Likewise, during one of her husband’s periodic journeys to Boston, Abigail Brackett Lyman confessed in her journal that "the absence of Mr L. makes me wish I had accompany’d him—and excites in me those desires to Visit Boston—which I labor to suppress. Such desires could not be gratified so


201 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, July 4, 1803, Bowne Letters, 164.

frequently without sacrificing to them my sense of propriety & my wish to be with my mother as much as possible." Northampton suffered because her husband absented himself, just as Charles Phelps found Hadley "lonely" without his wife, and not because of inherent deficiencies in rural settings.

If structures, companionship, and memories played heavily in informing judgments of urban and rural advantages and disadvantages, the reading and writing engaged in by these figures influenced their vocabulary and evaluations of their surroundings. More than her husband’s presence drew Lyman to Boston. In spite of the hesitations resulting from her concern for her mother and worries about behaving with propriety, Lyman proceeded to justify her "desires to Visit Boston" in terms of the vocabulary she used to describe and recommend various types of reading material—that they provided instruction. Comforting herself that she "may promise myself much more than pure amusement from such a journey," she elaborated that "the society I meet & the friendship I have form’d there--not only please--but benefit me. The conversation and example of my friends fill me with the Love of Virtue--improve my judgement & instruct my heart. If such are its advantages," she admonished herself, "let me then be careful to improve a priviledge I so often enjoy." Mary Greene likewise couched her reactions to Boston in terms of sociability. Writing that she was not "much Inraptured with Boston," and indeed "not so much pleas’d with the mall as I expected," she added that she did

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203 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 4, 1800, Lyman, 125. Lyman’s mother lived with her daughter and son-in-law in Northampton and indeed continued to live with Erastus Lyman after Abigail’s death.

204 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 4, 1800, Lyman, 125-26.
"think it a most Beautiful place indeed Julia it is very romantick!" and subsequently concluded that her indifference resulted from the possibility "that the party was not so agreeable for I have often thought that I could be happy any were [sic] if in good Company."\textsuperscript{205} Polly Pitkin agreed that "to converse with a friend, is, certainly, one of the most rational and pleasing employments in life; and it constitutes the greatest part of the happiness that I enjoy."\textsuperscript{206} She and Lyman shared Southgate's positive assessment of the "virtues" of urban sociability. As the latter had insisted to her cousin, ""tis only in the delightful sympathies of friendship, similarity of sentiments, that genuine happiness can be enjoyed."\textsuperscript{207}

If the sociability and availability of consumer goods made the city irresistibly attractive to some, those same qualities sometimes created their own kind of boredom or anxiety. And, again, the presence or absence of a loved one played heavily into evaluations of the city as well as the country. Mary Greene wrote from Boston that her friend's "absenting [her]self from town has made such a depression on my spirits as to render me incapable of writing or any thing else,"\textsuperscript{208} and a brief absence of Nancy Shippen's compelled a forlorn Louis Otto to write from Philadelphia that "The City is

\begin{footnotes}[205]{Mary Greene to Betsy Waite, 1786, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El. Still, she spent a "heavenly morning" on "baycon hill" which she found "much preferable to Gallows mount" and if she "had your descriptive pen in what glowing coulours could it be painted."}
\begin{footnotes}[206]{Polly Pitkin to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., 1780s, Boardman, 105. In a different letter, Pitkin offered a mixed assessment of her life in Farmington, Connecticut, in verse: 'I live retired, contented, and serene,
Forgot, unknown, unenvied, and unseen. '
Polly Pitkin to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., prob. late 1780s, Boardman, 106.}
\end{footnotes}

\begin{footnotes}[207]{Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowns, 101.}
\begin{footnotes}[208]{Mary Greene to Eliza Waite, n.d., c. 1786, Eliza Waite Correspondence, El.}
\end{footnotes}
dead for me since you left it, the finest houses appear to be mere cottages, and the largest
company is become a Sollitude to your Friend."209 And even Livingston herself, generally
steadfastly an "urban" person, revealed a rural proclivity when she remarked, upon
returning to Philadelphia from the country, that she "experienced a very great change
from the still life in the country to the noisy bustle of the Town... I wish'd again for the
retirement that yesterday I was wearied of."210

The "noisy bustle" of the city, frequently celebrated for its lively gaiety, could
indeed become bothersome. In a letter to her husband during one of his trips to Boston,
hers hometown, Abigail Lyman wrote about the "pleasures--as well as the inconvenience
of a visit to the Metropolis," and imagined Erastus finding himself "surrounded by
confusion."211 Eliza Southgate also wrote impatiently that "society, bustle, and noise
frustrate all my ideas. I cannot write anywhere but at home."212 In a later letter she
explained that the reason she could write at home was because in "Scarborough... 
nothing present engages my attentions, and I... have the leisure to turn over the rubbish
which I have collected from home--ponder on things past and anticipate those to come;
'tis something like dreaming."213 "Dreaming" may have been one way to describe the
pleasure she found in a setting not marked by constant socializing, but this comment also

209 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, n.d., 1779 or 1780, Shippen, 85.
210 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Aug. 2, 1784, Shippen, 208.
211 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Erastus Lyman, Oct. 18, 1801, Lyman, 222.
212 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, July 17, 1801, Bowne, 65.
213 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Feb. 1, 1802, Bowne, 88.
further confirms that reading and writing enabled her to transcend the "cultural isolation" experienced by some of her "ignorant, illiterate" neighbors.

The "society" and "bustle" of the city, almost always noteworthy for its contrast to the relative quiet and calm of rural environs, was sometimes feared for its unwitting seductiveness. As Susanna Rowson warned in The Inquisitor, "youth and innocence without friends or money . . . must have a hard struggle to keep free from vice," and even triumphant "youth and innocence" would "find it impossible to keep free from censure." But more than "youth and innocence" were vulnerable in the city. As the married, Philadelphia-bred Martha Bland wrote to Livingston from her rural home in Virginia, "I want nothing to make me Happy in this life but a little more agreeable society, such as a charming Evening in Philadelphia affords, what tho' it gives My Lady Scandal an opportunity, to thro' her shafts—yet innocence & true virtue hold her at arms length especially when Supported by the best of Husbands." Similarly, although Betsy Phelps knew her brother could not "wonder that we wish to enlarge our acquaintance beyond the bounds of Hadley," she ruminated on her upcoming visit to Northampton with some trepidation. "You know what a slanderous place it is," she confided to Charles, "and I almost dread to enter it—there are some who never know us—& there are others who appear to be quite our friends." Julia Cowles had likewise chronicled her mother's apprehension that "the pleasures of the world and its fashionable enjoyments will gain an

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214 Rowson, The Inquisitor, 111.

215 Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 12, 1785, Shippen, 232.

216 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Sept. 17, 1796 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH.
ascendancy over me,"\(^{217}\) and Mary Southgate worried that her daughter spent "too much" time in Boston.\(^{218}\) These fears echoed and may have even been inspired in part by novelists' portrayals of the city as "giddy," noisy, confused, and characterized by "the riotous mirth of a number of Bacchanalians, reeling from the haunts of intemperance and excess,"\(^{219}\) as Hannah Webster Foster rather heavy-handedly put it.

In the letter rebuking her cousin for his romantic notions about retiring to the countryside with his love, Eliza Southgate inverted the fear about the city's bustle, noise, and confusion seducing innocent but vulnerable visitors into an "ambitious" and "unthinking crowd." On the contrary, Southgate proclaimed, while the "busy scenes of life" may well leave one "disgusted by the duplicity or ingratitude of the world," it is nevertheless "only in the delightful sympathies of friendship, similarity of sentiments, that genuine happiness can be enjoyed." Indeed, she challenged Moses, "Were I a man, I should think it cowardly to bury myself in solitude,—nay, I should be unwilling to confess I felt myself unable to preserve my virtue where there were temptations to destroy it, there


\(^{219}\) Foster, *The Boarding School*, 155, 116. Part of the problem with urban areas was the increasing bowdlerization of spoken language. In a worried letter to her brother, Betsy Phelps wrote that the "wicked" and "impolite" "custom of profanity in conversation, is growing fashionable," and "such exclamations as—Good God—etc" heard from her brother's lips were very "disagreeable." Even though she knew that "nothing is more common—for ladies as well as gentlemen,... that does not justify it in my opinion." Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Oct. 8, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 14), PPH. In a different context, Sherman Boardman addressed the same topic in a letter to his son. Upon setting out to join the army in 1776, Boardman admonished his son to "never laugh at profane language, nor suffer yourself to use it. If you once begin you will hardly leave it off; and it will render you ridiculous, even to the profane. Although they practise it themselves, they inwardly condemn it in others, and would never give a vote for a profane swearer to be an officer." Sherman Boardman to Elijah Boardman, 1776, *Boardman*, 127-28.
is no merit in being virtuous when there is no struggle to preserve that virtue."  Her assault on Moses's manhood—"were I a man"—cleverly reverses the expected gendered associations of the country and the city. By arguing that virtue existed only in urban settings that demanded a self-conscious preservation of that quality, she located virtue in an environment generally viewed as soft, indulgent, corrupt, and excessively refined, qualities associated with the female. The country, on the other hand, inhabited by cowards burying themselves in solitude in Southgate's judgement, was generally promoted as the natural environment of the sturdy, independent yeoman, a figure eminently male. Agreeing with published pronouncements and numerous private expressions delineating the city's treachery, "duplicity," and "accumulated misfortune," she nevertheless concluded that people behaved well, or virtuously, only when tempted otherwise. As she wrote, "he must be base indeed who can voluntarily act wrong when no allurement draws him from the path of virtue." 221 The "base" characters she referred to were the illiterate, ignorant, depraved people she and her cousin both understood to inhabit rural dwellings and who Livingston was convinced she would find in the countryside surrounding Philadelphia.

Just as letters and travel bridged the rural-urban divide, the relatively new phenomenon of destination resorts was reported to combine the best of both worlds. 222


221 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 101.

222 While the first holiday destinations in England were spas because "eighteenth-century men and women . . . liked to have a sound moral excuse for their enjoyment," by the end of the century, "men and women began to accept frankly the idea of a holiday for holiday's sake." J. H. Plumb, "The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England," in The Birth of a Consumer Society, ed.
Tourist destinations, such as Ballston Springs, New York, boasted both the beauty of the rural landscape and the sociability of the city. Bath, Maine, likewise functioned as a summer playground of sorts for holiday seekers and in a letter extolling its beauty, Eliza Southgate wrote: "I think nothing can be more beautiful than a town built on a sloping ground ascending from so fine a river as this branch of the Kennebec." Indeed, "to one who has been brought up amidst salt marsh and flats, this large fine river affords much novelty and amusement, and I cannot confess but the sensations I feel in viewing it are more pleasing than those produced by a stagnant water in a Scarborough salt pond." As has been discussed, traveling itself also acted as an in between site or process connecting the city and the country. Beyond describing the process and progress of the journey, however, correspondents and diarists also revealed a tourist's appreciation for the landscape. On her way to Ballston Springs, Southgate praised the countryside of New York state, exclaiming that "The romantic and beautiful scenery on the North River as we rode up was most charming to me. I admire the wild diversity of nature--here we had it in perfection. . . . I don't believe there can be a greater variety, more sublimity or more

McKendrick, et al., 283. Barbara G. Carson has pointed out that Americans modified English models of tourism "to satisfy their different setting and different social order," (376) but agrees that health reasons for travel were gradually supplanted by curiosity about the world, an appreciation for landscape, the wish for sociability with a larger group of people than found in their own neighborhoods, and fashion. (398) Carson, "Early American Tourists," in Of Consuming Interests. For an account of primarily English female tourists from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, see Robinson, ed., Unsuitable for Ladies. For a discussion about how tourists impact their destination and how the destination impacts the tourist during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see David Engerman, "Research Agenda for the History of Tourism: Towards an International Social History," American Studies International 32 (1994): 3-31. For a discussion of the cultural needs nineteenth-century American tourism (one of the "important rituals of modern, democratic culture" [216]) fulfilled, see John F. Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

223 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Sept. 13, 1801, Bowms, 73.
beauty, than are to be found on the banks of the Hudson." On the other hand "the Delaware did not strike me at all—I crossed it several times."224 She did admire Passaic Falls, however, as "The falls—the rocks—the whole scenery partakes more of the sublime—almost terrific—than Glens Falls, but not so beautiful,"225 and the spectacular hills banking the Hudson River had compelled an ecstatic "Oh the tremendous Highlands!"226 Bowne also admired Pennsylvania, writing to her mother, "You can scarcely imagine any thing more novel and delightful than every thing about here, so entirely different from any place in New England." She explained that in "the State of Pennsylvania, the cultivation, buildings, and every thing are entirely different from ours,—highly cultivated country, looks like excellent farmers. Barns twice as large as the houses, all built of stone; no white painted houses, as in New England." The towns, however, she criticized: "the villages look like so many clusters of jails, and the public buildings like the Bastile, or, to come nearer home, like the New York State prison,—all of stone, so strong, heavy, and gloomy, I could not bear them."227

Occasionally diarists would contemplate their travels and the changing scenery explicitly in terms of their own self-exploration and expression. After driving to the country to pick up her mother, the 21-year-old Livingston wrote that upon riding "thro' the most delightful country, I cou'd not help admiring how faithfully nature fulfills the

224 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 179.
225 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 180.
226 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 178-79.
227 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, Aug. 9, 1803, Bowne, 172-173.
eternal laws which are prescribed it to be useful & to subserve the welfare of the creatures at all times, & in all seasons." Cataloguing seasonal cycles, she marveled that as "the winter approaches, the flowers disappear & even with the rays of the great lamp of day the earth hath lost its splendid appearance; but these despoiled plains still awoke in a sensible mind an emotion of pleasure. . . . Dropped are the leaves of all the fruit trees, faded is the herbage of the fields." "Here," she wrote, "I stopped, then bringing my Ideas home to my own bosom I said to myself, the smiling aspect which my destiny offered is now equally obscured, & my exterior splendor is fallen like the foliage that crown'd this youthful shrub." But "perhaps the lot of man hath also its seasons," she reasoned, "if it be so, I will during the mournful days of my winter, nourish and support my soul with the fruits that education and experience have amassed for me.\textsuperscript{228}

This dramatic description of the countryside mirrored portrayals discovered in reading material. In \textit{The Boarding School}, for example, one of the correspondents "surveyed the surrounding scenery with rapturous admiration; my heart glowed with inexpressible delight at the lovely appearance of nature. . . . Solitude affords a nearer and more distinct view of the works of creation; elevates the mind, and purifies its passions and affections."\textsuperscript{229} Another character "walked out . . . to enjoy the benefit of a cool and fragrant air, and the serenity and beauty of those rural scenes which have a powerful tendency to soothe and tranquilize the mind."\textsuperscript{230} It was the act of crossing the expanse of

\textsuperscript{228} Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 15, 1784, \textit{Shippen}, 217.

\textsuperscript{229} Foster, \textit{The Boarding School}, 138-39.

\textsuperscript{230} Foster, \textit{The Boarding School}, 227.
land that both separated and connected the countryside and the city that had compelled this particular reflection from Livingston, and in it she combined elements of both: the trees, fields, and foliage of the former, and the education and experience gleaned from the latter. She associated herself with what she saw as she moved from one environment to another.\textsuperscript{231} Another correspondent found a different way to combine elements of both the city and the country in her praise of a summer house. "From the front," she explained, "you have a view of the harbour & shipping together with the pleasantest part of the town & from the Back of it you have a most charming rural prospect that only with turning round you may imagine yourself either in the country or town which [ever] you prefer."\textsuperscript{232}

Like Livingston, the other diarists and correspondents cited here also constructed identity in terms of how they constructed place. As circumstances of their lives changed, so did their assessments of surrounding geography and society. For Betsy Phelps, Hadley was both rustical and serene and Boston was both sociable and dissipated. For Southgate, rural areas could be both charming and depraved, and urban areas both elegant and noisy. Travelers and correspondents saw themselves as all of these things too. Southgate and Phelps did not find themselves seduced either literally or figuratively by the fashionable world of Boston. Nor did they find that their rural (if elite) upbringings put them at a disadvantage in urban Boston or New York. They succeeded in negotiating between rural and urban spaces and personae without succumbing to sentimentalism about country life

\textsuperscript{231} In doing so, Livingston anticipated travel accounts by both men and women in which the movement across physical space served as a metaphor for exploring their own identities. See Robinson, introduction to \textit{Unsuitable for Ladies}, xvi, 4.

\textsuperscript{232} Eliza Waite to Susan Kittredge, January 1789, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.
or to the scandalous temptations of city life. Part of that negotiation occurred through reading and writing—bridges, like the stage, that allowed correspondents and travelers to explore and transcend the rural-urban dichotomy.
CHAPTER IV

"PRAY DON'T TELL ANY BODY THAT I WRITE POLITICS":
WRITING AND POLITICS

Betsy Phelps's 1798 request that her correspondent refrain from telling "any body that I write Politics" concluded a long exploration involving country living, fashion, prescriptive admonitions, the politics of writing, and the viability of the fledgling republic. After begging Sarah Parsons to forgive her "inexcusable neglect" for not writing sooner, the nineteen-year-old Phelps explained that she was visiting at Amherst for "a week or two," where "there are a number of fine girls." "But," she continued, "(there must be a but--) the gentlemen are not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them--They are, however, tolerable--& that will do in these days of scarcity." Not content to let the matter drop there, she persisted, "indeed the situation of our country is such (do laugh, to hear me write politics) that gallantry would illy become those, who are bound to support by their lives and fortunes the independence of America." "I sometimes feel my own bosom fired with the glow of Patriotism," she reassured, "& want [to] do all in my power to animate those over whom I have the least influence." "There Sarah," she demanded, "am I not Federal?" Yet suddenly struck by questions of propriety, she entreated, "pray don't tell any body that I write Politics--for they say 'tis not feminine," only to immediately challenge such categories by asserting "yet I think our sex is interested in the cause of liberty--& why should they not be proud to avow their
sentiments."¹

Ensconced one hundred miles west of Boston in the lush Connecticut River Valley, Phelps explored the contradiction between desirable beaus and the type of man needed to "support . . . the independence of America" in terms of politics, gallantry, writing, and her own expectations and assumptions about the roles of American males and females. Discovering a distinction between gallantry, a politeness marked by its attentiveness to the female sex², and unselfish patriotism, and preferring the former in her companions, she defensively assured Sarah of her own patriotism. Writing at a time when the French were brazenly plundering American ships and had insulted the federal government by demanding a bribe to initiate negotiations (a circumstance that became known as the XYZ Affair), a situation that ultimately degenerated into a "Quasi-War" with France, Phelps addressed practical political concerns and ideological questions simultaneously. The circularity of her arguments about male and female relationships to the state and to each other underscores the instability of the categories of gender and politics that permeated the discourse of this period.

Based primarily on prescriptive literature, recent scholarship on women and politics in the early national period explains that women, who were excluded from the usual rituals associated with active political participation, were supposed to participate indirectly by influencing those who did enjoy the privileges of direct participation.

¹ Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

² The Oxford English Dictionary cites Samuel Richardson's use of the term "gallant" in Grandison (1754) as an example of this definition, as well as Jane Austen's use of it in Northanger Abbey (written in 1798-79, although not published until 1818).
Phelps's letter offered evidence for this contention, associated historiographically with Linda Kerber's "republican mother" and Jan Lewis's "republican wife," because it included a promise to "do all in [her] power to animate those over whom I have the least influence." Gendered analyses of political discourse have demonstrated that while virtue was constructed discursively as female in both its classical republican and traditional Protestant versions, a government structured on balancing competing interests would survive with or without a virtuous citizenry, which meant that the importance of women's influence to the survival of a new republic was minimal at best. In terms of political partisanship—Federalists versus Republicans—it has been further demonstrated that the Federalist party included women both ideologically and in terms of encouraging actual women to participate in party rallies, etc., in contrast to the Republican party which "had little room for women, either in their rhetoric or their organizations." Furthermore, the fearful rise of partisanship in the 1790s, ultimately accepted (if not welcomed) as a permanent feature of the American political landscape, meant that both parties began to emphasize that the home, in contrast to the "public" arena, needed to be free of party conflict, a goal accomplished rhetorically at least through female nonpartisanship. The fact that prescriptive literature at the turn of the nineteenth century insistently and deliberately excluded women from party and electoral politics means that the political

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3 Kerber, Women of the Republic, Lewis, "The Republican Wife." These ideas are not indigenous to the political and social turmoil of the newly independent American republic, however. For a discussion of these ideas in terms of the European context, see Zagarri, "Morals, Manners and the Republican Mother," and Wiesner, Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, esp. 132.

4 Bloch, "Gendered Meanings of Virtue."
process itself, along with economic and social changes, played a crucial role in the development of the "separate spheres" trope. At the same time, the sheer quantity of ink devoted to insisting on women's nonpartisanship suggests that the perceived reality of women's relationship to politics was something quite different.

This chapter approaches women, gender, and politics from a different angle. Taking as its point of departure letters and diaries rather than prescriptive admonitions, it analyzes expressions that invoke political rhetoric and political events to determine what politics and writing about politics meant to everyday diarists and correspondents. As historian Rosemarie Zagarri's current work suggests, a layer or level of political action existed somewhere in between influence and direct political participation, or, to put it another way, the distinction between direct political participation and disenfranchisement in the early national period lacked the clarity we might assume from today's perspective. If letters both confirmed and challenged cultural mores, and the figures studied here

5 Zagarri, "Gender and the First Party System," in Federalists Reconsidered, ed. Barbara Oberg and Doron Ben-Atar (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming); Rosemarie Zagarri, "Female Politicians, Concurrent Patriots: Gender and the First Party System," paper presented at Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, Nov. 8, 1996. The Federalist Party of the 1790s was not the only instance, of course, of American women being incorporated in political activity as "both partisans and mediators in the public sphere." (495) As Elizabeth Varon has pointed out, elite southern women in Virginia in the 1840s were heavily involved in Whig politics and public rituals. Whig rhetoric justified this activity in terms of tenets of the cult of domesticity by arguing that "by attending political events, women could transform the public sphere, fostering 'domestic' virtues such as fairness, harmony, and self-control in a larger setting." (503) Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," Journal of American History 82 (1995). Economic and material considerations should also be considered in assessments of women's relationship to politics, as Jeanne Boydston reminds us. The increasing invisibility of women as producers in cultural rhetoric, in spite of their very real and important work, occurred because of the assumption that only "men, as creators and owners of wealth and property, would have sufficient stake in the new republic to act as its guides." Boydston, "The Woman Who Wasn't There," 198. Also see Joan Gundersen, To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 171.

6 Zagarri, "Female Politicians, Concurrent Patriots."
generally promoted a social, urban, and commercial definition of virtue at the same time that they conflated the rural-urban distinction through their own travel and correspondence, what can this tell us about the relationship between private expression and politics?

While it is true that women did not enjoy direct political participation in the early national period as manifested in the franchise, running for and holding public office, and the like, neither did many men during this period. The female readers and writers studied here, while sharing political exclusion with these other men, did not, however, share it with their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. Although not as well-known as figures such as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, their male relations served in Congress and participated in general courts and elections. On the other hand, the diaries and correspondence tapped for this project do not include those penned by such famed women as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray. Although members of the social elite, the Phelpses, Bownes, Lymans, and so forth were not exceptional in terms of the content and renown of their expressions. For these women, it was unusual, an event meriting comment, to meet General Knox.

An analysis of "private" writing about politics must be securely embedded in the context of the inability to separate political from literary discourse in this period. Novels, political rhetoric, and letters did not "occupy separate realms and fulfill separate functions," as Jane Tompkins and Larzer Ziff have reminded us.7 The expressions found

[7 Tompkins, Sensational Designs, 43-44; Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, x, 133, 193. Also see Ellis, After the Revolution, 24-25. The increasing separation of political rhetoric and literature is nowhere more apparent than in anthologies of American literature, which incorporate political expressions heavily]
in letters and diaries, like those in political tracts, were both literary and political. For these historical men and women, the personal was the political and vice versa. Furthermore, as both Tompkins and Ziff have pointed out, if in somewhat different contexts, literature—and I include letters and diaries in that category—enabled authors to appropriate cultural values for their own use. As Tompkins explains, writers transformed "the beliefs and customs that had molded them" to both "fulfill and transcend their appointed roles."\(^8\) Ziff's argument that culture functions as a "mediating ground upon which political ideals" intersect with "the inherited practices of a society" and "literary conventions are compelled to adjust to radical changes in social outlook" elucidates the contested nature of "culture" itself. Among the literary conventions reflecting and informing that cultural "mediating ground" were letters and diaries.\(^9\)

As Betsy Phelps's letter to Sarah Parsons demonstrates, politics intertwined with issues that seemingly had little to do with politics as usually defined. The subjects studied here refer to politics in letters and diaries, sometimes in expected ways, sometimes in surprising ways, but they do so as a means of contextualizing and writing about their own experiences. Like cultures of writing and reading, the culture of politics conflated what we understand to be the "public" and the "private." The expressions of Phelps and others tended to advocate a specific kind of political public (or public

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\(^8\) Tompkins, \textit{Sensational Designs}, 161.

politics), one marked by politeness rather than discord. Indeed, urging her friend to keep her political comments to herself may well have been Phelps's way of acknowledging (and warding off) the disagreeable conversation that might arise if her remarks were shared. Political references and rhetoric appear in letters and diaries as both experience and imaginative event, revealing the process[es] through which these writers conceptualized their relationship to the state. It should be stressed, however, that the relationship between private expressions and politics occurred not just in terms of diarists and correspondents invoking political topics as context and contextualization for their own compositions. The expressions they penned were political in themselves and informed political rhetoric. Operating within a sociable model, letters about politics manifested and stressed the link between writing, conversation, and politics. Given the reciprocal relationship between private expression and politics, this chapter considers both the writing of politics and the politics of writing.

Phelps's despair about the lack of "gentlemen" in Amherst (and we know that Amherst offered more possibilities than her own town of Hadley), was not unique. Abigail Brackett Lyman would observe a couple of years later that the "Gentlemen" in

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10 Sarah Purcell has discussed the convergence of self and country in her study of male-authored revolutionary memoirs, noting that the shared memory of the war served as the basis for subjective expressions of moral and religious instructions or requests for bigger pensions. Sarah Purcell, "I Was a Full-Blooded Yankee": National Identity in Revolutionary War Memoirs, 1776-1826 (paper presented at the New England Historical Association Conference, April 20, 1996, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts).

11 Presumably Amherst seemed to have more "gentlemen" than Hadley because its population was about one-third larger than Hadley's. While Hadley's 1790 census recorded 882 people, Amherst's registered 1,233.
nearby Northampton "seem to have lost their animation," and Susan Kittredge likewise "spent aagreeable Month at Haverhill" where she found "a very pretty circle of young Ladies . . . but a very small proportion of young Gentlemen." When "Mr. Ward" left Andover, she predicted in another letter, the "whole town" would miss him "for he seems to be the only gallant in it." Likewise Eliza Southgate complained to her sister from Scarborough, Maine, that she "long[ed] to go to Portland and then I shall see some being that looks like a beau."

Correspondents understood that beaux were to be found in cities like Portland, Boston, and certainly in Nancy Shippen Livingston's Philadelphia, but not in Scarborough, Haverhill, Hadley, Amherst, or even, upon Mr. Ward's departure, in Andover. When Mary Ann Archbald worried that New York City would instill social skills and proclivities ill-suited to the kind of life her daughter was likely to lead in upstate, rural New York, she confronted this same issue. These statements acknowledging (or bemoaning) the differences between rural and urban "gentlemen" also address men's and women's political relationship and responsibilities to the state. Phelps's assertion that "gallantry would illy become those, who are bound to support by

12 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, Lyman, 218.

13 Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, March 24, 1792, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

14 Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, n.d., Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

15 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, June 12, 1800, Bowman, 26. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, there were two prevailing definitions of "beau" during this period. A "beau" could be a "man who gives particular, or excessive, attention to dress, mien, and social etiquette" or "the attendant or suitor of a lady." Southgate probably combined these definitions in her complaint to Octavia, seeking a socially polished (but not necessarily excessively so) male companion who may or may not be a particular suitor of herself or another woman.
their lives and fortunes the independence of America" invests politics with gendered connotations and contradictions that go well beyond discussions about female influence and partisanship. Phelps understood that the task of "supporting" America’s independence fell to men, but by independence she seems to have meant more than political separation from England or persevering in the face of French threats to shipping. Her condemnation of "gallantry" argues for an "independence" based on the non-gallant—on "independent," land-owning, hard-working, virtuous men. For Phelps, Thomas Jefferson’s yeoman farmer embodied and supported the independence of America. Yet, she wrote proudly about her "own bosom fired with the glow of Patriotism," the "influence" she might wield, her "Federal," Hamiltonian sentiments, and her wonder that she should express herself on politics at all. Jefferson himself, of course, would disapprove of the entire discussion since he trusted that "our good ladies . . . have been too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics." 16

Eliza Southgate's judgement about the "depravity" and "discontent" in "a country village" coupled with her insistence that "a country life is more calculated to produce that security and happiness we are all in pursuit of than any other" stumbled on this same paradox. 17 In their letters, both Southgate and Phelps, writing from rural Scarborough and rural Hadley respectively, demonstrated a familiarity with what historian Richard Brown has called "supra-local concerns." As he has pointed out, "republican ideology


17 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Brown, 100.
emphasized information and communications as necessary for an enlightened citizenry; and it made adherence to abstract universals of freedom and justice crucial to American identity." A corollary of Brown's argument that the "old ethos of localism was fundamentally challenged . . . [as] cosmopolitanism was demanded from everyone,"\footnote{Brown, "The Emergence of Urban Society in Rural Massachusetts," 36-38. In more general terms Edward Countryman has recently made a similar argument, claiming that "the issue of who actually did belong to 'the people,' who actually could lay claim to the Americans' 'blessings of liberty,' admitted of no easy answer. But the people who comprised the Republic found themselves unable to let the question go, no matter what kind of Americans they were." Countryman, \textit{Americana}, 148. Brown assumes that the transformation of rural life involved the gradual implementation and acceptance of urban, 'cosmopolitan' assumptions and behavior. There may be more of a process, a give-and-take between the two types of environments than he suggests as discussed in the previous chapter.} is that local concerns, like the lack of beaux in a particular community, might be discussed in "supra-local" language and concepts.

That the young Betsy Phelps talked about "independence," "liberty," "Patriotism," "Politics," and "Federal[ism]" in a letter to another young woman attests to the pervasiveness of political rhetoric in private expressions. It does not, however, indicate a monolithic definition of those terms, and as Phelps and others invoked this language, they participated in debates about what those words meant, who manifested them, and what a society would look like given their adoption. As Edward Countryman has argued in the case of the word "liberty," the transformation of the definition and usage of that term during this period rendered it a "contested truth," which meant that whoever succeeded in attaching meanings to the term that others would accept would "acquire enormous power . . . to shape the tumult's eventual outcome."\footnote{Edward Countryman, "'To Secure the Blessings of Liberty': Language, the Revolution, and American Capitalism," in \textit{Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism}, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1993), 125.} Furthermore, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg
has argued, historians need to pay attention to "how real women, located in material
worlds, as well as in discursive fields, perceived and utilized the contradictions inherent
within liberal ideology and its construction of the liberal subject, and so subverted that
ideology and transformed that subjectivity." ²⁰

One way of responding to Smith-Rosenberg's challenge is to ask how Phelps and
others reconciled the apparently incompatible qualities of gallantry and independence.
Like Phelps, Eliza Southgate wrote comfortably about "virtue," the "pursuit of
happiness," and "independence" in exchanges with different correspondents about
different topics. She assured her parents, for example, that while in Boston she would be
"guided by my Parents' happiness,—their happiness shall be my pursuit," ²¹ invoking the
Declaration of Independence just as she would in response to her cousin's ridiculous
notion, in her opinion, of retiring to the blissful countryside. Quoting the Declaration of
Independence, a written document, lent authority to her assurances to her parents and her
argument with Moses. Couched initially in broad generalities—"When, in the course of
human events"—but becoming increasingly specific until culminating in a long list of
particular outrages committed by George III, the Declaration served as a model that
Southgate might emulate in her own expressions.

In the letters to her parents and to her cousin she couched specific points about
filial duty and her cousin's folly in the broad context of the "pursuit of the happiness." In

²⁰ See Linda K. Kerber, Nancy F. Cott, Robert Gross, Lynn Hunt, Carroll Smith Rosenberg,
Christine Stansell, "Forum: Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking About Gender in the Early
Republic," William and Mary Quarterly XLVI (1989), 570.

²¹ Eliza Southgate to Robert Southgate, Jan. 9, 1798, Bowne, 15.
addition, the letters she penned manifested an authority in themselves given the cultural understanding about writing. Invoking the language of the Declaration in her own written expression, therefore, conflated the authority of both documents. The coterminous relationship between print, both hand-written and published, and politics was invoked, manipulated, and exercised in such a way that even a private letter became "public" and "political." As Michael Warner has argued, "print ideology . . . valorized the general above the personal and construed the opposition between the two in republican terms of virtue and interest." When Southgate wrote that she was "convinced that a country life is more calculated to produce that security and happiness we are all in pursuit of than any other," but still yearned to "go to Portland" to "see some being that looks like a beau," she engaged directly with the polarization of "virtue and interest." Since letters functioned as a point of overlap between notions of writing as public and correspondence as private, and since her letters collapsed the distinction between the general (virtue) and the personal (interest)--as did the Declaration of Independence itself--the polarities Warner identifies converged in Southgate's (and others') correspondence.

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22 Michael Warner has addressed the relationship between public documents and individual persuasiveness in the case of the U.S. Constitution and Benjamin Franklin. As Warner put it, "It is with the constitution . . . that [Franklin's] lifelong effort to locate himself in the generality of republican letters finds its embodiment. In his well-known speech to the convention, Franklin submerges his own voice to the motion for unanimous passage, authorizing as his own the voice of the document, as publication comes literally to constitute the public in yet another pseudonymous text." Warner, "Franklin and the Letters of the Republic," 127.

23 Warner, "Franklin and the Letters of the Republic," 112. "In republican print ideology," he argues, "social authority . . . holds validity . . . in . . . publicity itself. Thus print--not speech--is the ideal and idealized guardian of civic liberty."

24 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 100; Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, June 12, 1800, Bowne, 26.
Tapping political rhetoric regularly, Southgate also wrote about the value of "concord and harmony" in families, warned that "the spirit of emulation . . . is destructive," and discussed various manifestations of "independence" regularly with her cousin. She hastily concluded one letter to her sister because "some ladies have just called," and if she failed to greet them immediately, they would "think I am Yankee." In the hope of engaging in correspondence with his now forbidden Nancy Shippen, Louis Otto likewise invoked political rhetoric to lend his plea a persuasiveness based on the convergence of the general and the personal. Promising to write frequently himself, he suggested that Shippen "adopt a depreciation of five [letters] for one" and "supposed" that she was "too good a Whig to refuse [his] request." Livingston's own comfort with political language and associations emerged in a bitter journal entry complaining that she was "doom'd to be the wife of a Tyrant." Unlike the British colonies who fought and achieved independence from Great Britain during her childhood, she was "doom'd" because of her inability to effect a successful challenge to the "tyrant." On the other hand, her correspondence with Otto, Martha Bland, and others permitted a form of

25 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, June 12, 1800, Bowne, 25.

26 See Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, April 8, 1801, Dec. 4, 1801, March 1, 1802, Bowne, 50, 84, 93-94.

27 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 14, 1803, Bowne, 169-70. This is an interesting usage of the term "Yankee," since it seems to suggest a failure to comply with the rules of socializing. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Yankee" was a tag of derision applied to New Englanders by Virginians angry that New England did not help them fight the Cherokee. It was also used by British regulars who felt they had been treated roughly by New Englanders.

28 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen, 1781, Shippen, 103.

29 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 6, 1785, Shippen, 233.
independence and contemplation that contributed to the courage she mustered to petition for divorce. The bill failed to pass, denying her "that happiness we are all in pursuit of," but her effort was nonetheless noteworthy.

Other correspondents likewise invoked political assumptions and expressions in their epistles, and often in considerably more light-hearted sentiments than Livingston’s. In 1787, Hannah Tracy Emery cheerfully assured her friend that she was "pleased to hear that you are so happy at Boston, tho’ it deprives me of your company, Am I not very disinterested?" And a dramatic Elizabeth Fuller congratulated herself in 1792 for having "wove five yards to-day got out the Piece, there is thirty six yards of it. Welcome sweet Liberty, once more to me. How have I longed to meet again with thee." Abigail Lyman expressed remorse about a fit of temper directed toward a servant by berating the "passion and rash resentment" of her reproof, and reminding herself that "the commands of tyrants are obey’d [out] of Slavish fear--& let me ask who would desire to be obey’d from such a principal." She further wrote about "the natural equality of man. . . . form’d of the same materials . . . united in society by the same wants & dependences subject to the same trials--govern’d by the same law of Heavens promulgation." All of this, she concluded, demands the "reign of reason . . . & teach[es] us the folly [of] rashness & injustice." In contrast to Lyman, when Charles Phelps experienced difficulties with a

30 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, 1787, Cutts Family Collection, El.

31 Elizabeth Fuller, June 1, 1792, in "Diary Kept by Elizabeth Fuller," chap. in History of the Town of Princeton, Francis Everett Blake (Princeton, Massachusetts: published by the town of Princeton, 1915) (hereafter Fuller), 315.

servant, he located insolence in the servant rather than unjustness in himself. As he wrote his wife in 1802, "Silas has left us his Father . . . told me Silas wanted more liberty—he said liberty of the house—I told him he could not have more liberty than he had and if he could not put up with such fare as he had, he was welcome to seek other quarters,—accordingly we concluded to quit after he had tarryed his month out." One of the explanations for the difference between Lyman's and Phelps's assessments of apparently similar situations may be that Phelps was a good deal older than Lyman and hence more accustomed to notions of deference, notions that persisted in fact if not in form in the early republic. On the other hand, the male Phelps would be at the head of that system of deference whereas the female Lyman occupied a lower station which may have made her more sympathetic to someone under her charge.

Notions about "private" and "public" spheres of activity were developing in this period, but were by no means agreed upon and the vocabulary permeating letters and diaries demonstrates the broad inclusiveness of a term like "politics." The fact that correspondents used political language to describe and comment upon seemingly non-political subjects such as domestic relations, accomplished tasks, and beaux reveals a comfortable familiarity with the vocabulary informing actual political debates during this period. By highlighting events seemingly peripheral to the broad ideological categories the language was intended to signify, correspondents and diarists confirmed that the topics subsumed by that vocabulary extended far beyond anticipated political subjects. Indeed, at least to some extent, they used the language of political discourse to highlight

33 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 30, 1802 (Box 4, Folder 4), PPH.
domestic issues and individual desires, manipulating that vocabulary to displace general, supra-local concerns to the periphery, centering domestic personal matters instead.\textsuperscript{34} Or, to look at it from a different angle, they confounded any categorical distinctions between politics, work, and family.

The figures studied here did not tap political terms only rhetorically or metaphorically, however. They engaged much more directly with political language and issues as well, demonstrating a political involvement that far exceeded formulaic prescriptive rhetoric about supporting revolutionary era boycotts or raising republican sons.\textsuperscript{35} The divergence between women’s political acumen and enthusiasm and prescriptive admonitions is brought into especially sharp relief when considered in the context of the expressions of both mid-nineteenth century figures and late-twentieth century historians. The tendency of these groups to neatly polarize politics (public) and domesticity (private) has drastically oversimplified a complex and contested interconnectedness and continuity between the two.

In her regular diary, Elizabeth Porter Phelps consistently noted the events of 1774, 1775, and 1776 in terms of disruptions to her own life in Hadley, Massachusetts, news from other sites, and the prospects generally. To cite just a few examples, her first reference in 1774 observed that "the People of this Land are greatly threatened with Cruelty and oppression from the Parliament of Great Britian [sic]--the Port of Boston is

\textsuperscript{34} Jane Tompkins has argued that nineteenth-century women writers discussed as central a subject many relegated to the periphery: domestic routines. Tompkins,\textit{ Sensational Designs}, 168, 169.

now and has been ever since the first day of this month shut up and greater Callamities are Daily expected."\textsuperscript{36} In July 1777, she confirmed: "very bad news this week our forts at Ticonderoga given up to our Enemies hand,"\textsuperscript{37} but a few months later she exclaimed happily that "Coll. Porter ... confirmed the good news of Byrgoines having surrendered up his whole Army, oh wonderful, wonderful!"\textsuperscript{38} With no comment, she observed a few months later that "Mrs. Barst--w here. Last night her Husband was taken by a warrant for being a 'Tory.'"\textsuperscript{39} Likewise Alice Lee Shippen enthused to her husband that "tho’ we are loosing thousands having loved (our) country and its interests invariably more than supports me under every difficulty."\textsuperscript{40} Like Phelps’s studied objectivity with regard to Mrs. Barst--w, however, Shippen feared that her son categorized too absolutely with regard to allies and enemies, and urged him "not [to] harbour any illwill against Tories or Britons--you ought to think America was to blame as well as england &c. &c."\textsuperscript{41} Shippen and Phelps expressed their patriotism at the same time that they appreciated that people like themselves comprised the categories of patriots and Tories and that a degree of

\textsuperscript{36} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 19, 1774, NEHGR 118 (1964), 220.

\textsuperscript{37} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 6, 1777, NEHGR 118 (1964), 299.

\textsuperscript{38} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Oct. 19, 1777, NEHGR 118 (1964), 301.

\textsuperscript{39} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 22, 1778, NEHGR 118 (1964), 303.

\textsuperscript{40} Alice Lee Shippen to William Shippen, Jan. 17, 1778, Shippen, 61.

\textsuperscript{41} William Shippen to Thomas Lee Shippen, 1786, Shippen, 249. In this letter, William Shippen explained that he was relaying a message from his wife: "she wishes you would not ..." William Shippen served as chief physician of the Continental Army during the Revolution and her Virginia family also favored a political separation from England. Her brother Richard Henry Lee served in the Continental Congress.
humility and humanity should inform their understanding of the war.

Once the war had ended, women contemplated the nature of the new state in their expressions. Pamela Dwight Sedgwick comfortably discussed the foundations of a successful government in a 1788 letter to her husband, observing that "the new government is yet untried. If I mistake not, the success of it depends more on the virtue and economy of the people than on the wisdom of those who govern, or the uncommon excellency that is supposed to attend the form."⁴² Some years later, Catharine Maria Sedgwick considered the same topic in reference to her reading, noting in 1827 that in The Prince, "Machiavelli seems to me to have considered virtue and power incompatible . . . and makes his Prince a perfectly selfish being--in the bad sense of selfishness."⁴³

Not surprisingly, the political disturbances rocking the country in its first few decades of existence found expression in letters and diaries. When diarists and correspondents wrote about events such as Shay's Rebellion, embargoes, George Washington, Fourth of July celebrations, and the War of 1812, they confirmed that war and politics impinged on their lives. But their expressions also shaped those events, made sense of them, and demonstrated the inclusiveness of political events, debate, and rhetoric. If writing was "public," then reflections in letters and diaries recorded and informed specific situations, and sought to control the meaning of those upheavals and their repercussions. The series of protests initiated by farmers up in arms about both local

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⁴² Pamela Dwight Sedgwick to Theodore Sedgwick, Nov. 18, 1788, quoted in Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 58.

and state tax collection efforts and subsequently referred to as Shay’s Rebellion, for example, warranted explicit comment in diaries and letters. Situated in the heart of the dispute in western Massachusetts, Elizabeth Porter Phelps worried in September 1786 that "publick affairs seem to be in a confused situation, many are gone to [Springfield to] prevent the sitting of the Court and many are gone to uphold the Court. . . Thursday Mr. Phelps returned in safety--no Lives lost."44 In December, she worried that "there has been a great deal of Disturbance of late among the people, how it will terminate God only knows."45 She noted when her husband and "David Johnson our Boy" went to Springfield to help subdue the rebels, adding that it "Looks as Dark as Night, a very great Army is coming from toward Boston and some are Collecting upon the other side."46 "Mr. Phelps" failed to get to Springfield the next week, however, compelling Phelps to note that he "killed two oxen set out with the meat--could not get to Springfield came back." Two days later, however, "one Lock (that has Lived here ever since last April) set out with Mr. Phelps for Springfield--I hear they got in safe." She reported on more than her husband’s activity, however, indicating when the "mob attempted to march into Springfield the Government fired the cannon Killed four,"47 and, closer to home, worried

44 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 24, 1786, NEHGR 119 (1965), 221. Previous to this, Phelps had recorded other alarming disturbances. During a time a "great commotion" in 1782, for example, confrontations "about a new State got to Bloodshed but none Killed yet as we know of," and two years later, "five men came . . . they abused my Husband . . . we had a most Dreadful fright." Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 8, 1782, NEHGR 119 (1965), 131; Jan. 18, 1784, NEHGR 119 (1965), 205.


47 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 21, 1787, NEHGR 119 (1965), 289.
that "the Mob in a large Body at Northampton--another party at Amherst--Just as the last meeting was done the Northampton body came into the Lower end of Hadley street marched thro to Amherst . . . Monday Gen. Lincoln came into Hadley with about three Thousand men."48 The next week, still "a confused time," "the Troops Marched last Eve., the stores and Baggage this day. Monday Mr. Phelps set out with some Loading belonging to the Army went to Petersham."49 And then sadness: "Wednesday went to Hatfield to the Funeral of one Walker Killed by the Insurgents . . . he was buried with the Honours of War."50

In contrast to Phelps's taciturn journal entries, Mary Anna Whiting, also living in the heart of the troubles in Barrington, Massachusetts, participated in an exchange with her correspondent Barnabas Bidwell that apparently focused less on what actually happened than on how Whiting felt about the disturbance. In one letter Bidwell comforted that "you are quite excusable for indulging in melancholy thoughts, and writing in a pensive strain" as the "situation in Berkshire is disagreeable."51 In other letters he wondered "how soon the voice of peace will again be heard among you,"52 assured her that he has "been anxious for my friends and acquaintances" during the "late

48 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 28, 1787, *NEHGR* 119 (1965), 289. General Benjamin Lincoln ultimately defeated the rebels after several engagements during the winter of 1787.


51 Barnabas Bidwell to Mary Anna Whiting, May 18, 1787, *Boardman*, 115-16.

tumults" of a "disagreeable winter in Berkshire,"\textsuperscript{53} and, a bit prematurely, congratulated her, having been "informed, that the troops are generally disbanded" resulting in "the complete restoration of order and tranquillity to the lately distracted and distressed commonwealth."\textsuperscript{54}

If the disturbances in the Berkshires resulted in "pensive" epistles from Mary Anna Whiting, an embargo in 1794 made it more challenging than usual for Charles Phelps to get money to his son studying law in Newburyport. As he wrote from Hadley, "I have sent my provisions on to Boston--& must attend to the sale of them if the embargo is taken off--if that should be the case shall furnish you with some money from that quarter--if I do not sell them shall help you to money some other way."\textsuperscript{55} The convergence here of international relations, market transactions, and paternal responsibility, like the comfortable familiarity with political rhetoric, indicates the extent to which the "public," as manifested in politics and business, and the "private," located in familial needs, affection, and obligations, conjoined in even the most mundane exchanges. Hannah Heath made a similar connection when she sadly noted in 1826 that "Dr. Pierce returned from the funeral of President Adams who had lived 90 years in the world to pray with our little grand son who lived 42 days."\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Barnabas Bidwell to Mary Anna Whiting, April 11, 1787, \textit{Boardman}, 115.

\textsuperscript{54} Barnabas Bidwell to Mary Anna Whiting, Aug. 14, 1787, \textit{Boardman}, 116.

\textsuperscript{55} Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, May 23, 1794 (Box 4, Folder 6), PPH.

\textsuperscript{56} Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 9, 1826, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Political events that seemingly had no effect on other priorities might be reported without comment as when Phelps concluded a short letter to his son observing, "Nothing new save Prince Edward son to King George 3rd arrived in town last evening from Canada." Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, Feb. 7, 1794 (Box 4,
In calling for national days of thanksgiving or fast, political leaders reinforced the link between politics and everyday life. In 1795, for example, when George Washington signed the Jay Treaty in an effort to alleviate tensions with England over trade and shipping, Elizabeth Porter Phelps noted that "Thursday Thanksgiving appointed by the President of the United States thro all the Union. God be forever praised for all the mercies shewn to the people of these states from the first arrival of our fathers to the present day." 57 Three years later, disputes between America and France resulted in an entry explaining that this particular Wednesday was a "Fast day . . . This is a continental fast appointed by the President of the United States John Adams on account of the dark aspect of our publick affairs with France--War is greatly threatened." 58 Hannah Heath demonstrated the impact of politics on everyday life and expression as well when she joined those disaffected by Thomas Jefferson’s Embargo Act, which restricted American exports (and functionally all imports as well), in an 1808 entry worrying that "every body appears out of spirits in consequence of the embargo, and we have all reason to apprehend danger and trouble." 59

Another welcome source of information about political policies and personalities was letters themselves. Since merchants began writing letters to negotiate and share

Folder 6), PPH.

57 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 15, 1795, NEHGR 120 (1966), 293.

58 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 6, 1798, NEHGR 121 (1967), 65. This was the period of an undeclared war against France. Although England and America were on the same side, they did not cooperate operationally.

59 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 7, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
matters of trade, which often included pertinent details about foreign relations, letters written by women in the early republic retained that traditional content if not the original function. Their letters acted as newspapers in that they shared information sought by and connecting participants in an informed community. As Eliza Southgate wrote her mother in 1802, she had received a "large packet of 5 sheets from Martha, dated Paris," which "speak[] almost in raptures of Buonaparte."\(^{60}\) And she later reported to her sisters that "Uncle Rufus [King] brings news that war has actually taken place, hostilities commenced. The King on the 14th sent a message to Parliament that he was determined to use every effort to repress the overbearing power of France, and hoped for their united assistance and exertions."\(^{61}\) In 1806, she asked her mother to "tell Father there was a meeting called last evening of the Federalists in the city, to make some further remonstrances on the defenceless state of the Port of New York, occasioned by an accident that has set the whole City in an uproar." The problem, as she explained, was that "there are 3 British Frigates at the Hook, a few miles from the City, that fire upon all the vessels that come in or go out, and search them."

Knowing that she need not explain the larger context of the role of American trade in the war between France and England to either of her parents, she continued with the particulars. "They have sent several on to Halifax, and yesterday," she exclaimed, "they fired in a most wanton manner upon a little coaster that was entering the harbor with only

\(^{60}\) Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Sept. 9, 1802, Bowne, 143.

\(^{61}\) Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 30, 1803, Bowne, 161. She is referring to the resumption of the Napoleonic wars the previous month.
three men on board, and before they had time to come to as they were preparing to do, they fired again, and killed one of the men dead upon the spot." The victim's body, she continued, "was brought up and . . . exposed to view on one of the wharves, where several thousand people were collected to see it." The whole spectacle had "put the City in great confusion, and this meeting was called in consequence," during which, she added proudly, her mother's brother, Rufus King "made a very elegant speech." But more news cut short this digression: "The British Consul had sent several boats of provisions down to the frigates—which as soon as 'twas known the Pilot-boats went after and brought them all back,—they were loaded upon carts and carried in procession thro' the streets to the poor house, attended by a prodigious mob—huzzaing, and the English and American colors fixed on the carts." The "prodigious mob" demanded that "the Commander of the frigate to be given up as a murderer by the British Consul," only to be rebuffed by his insistence that "he had no power over him." Concluding with an understatement, she assured her sister that the whole situation "has made a prodigious noise in the City, as you may imagine."62

The War of 1812 naturally elicited much discussion among correspondents and diarists as well. Mary Cutts observed to her sister that she had "just finished a long letter to brother Charles, we had one from him two days since, he thinks war will be declared before Congress is over." Anxious to pursue this discussion, but stymied by time constraints, she added, "I feel as if I had much to say but they say my letter must go

62 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, April 27, 1806, Bowne, 211-212.
now."\textsuperscript{63} A few months later, probably in June, Hannah Heath "received two letters from John [her son]," who "is almost discouraged—for War is inescapable our Government are bent upon it."\textsuperscript{64} Two days later, she acknowledged her own discouragement: "I spent the evening writing my heart is oppressed with care for my family but more for my beloved country."\textsuperscript{65} Lumping her "family" and her "beloved country" together, Heath's woeful remark demonstrates both the convergence of the "private" and the "public" and the divergence of everyday expressions and prescriptive admonitions. Charles Phelps shared Heath's gloom about this war, observing to his son that "What the event of the War will be no one can tell. There is a great dislike of the measures government are pursuing amongst the People generally—they are very much opposed to the War and will not be easily persuaded to support it. . . . the times appear gloomy."\textsuperscript{66}

Not surprisingly, sociability, politics, and writing converged in Hannah Heath's diary. In one entry she explained that upon calling at "Cap Williams, . . . Dugan their Son came in from Boston before we finish tea." "How differently," she continued dejectedly, "he appeared from every one else whom I have seen." "He rejoiced," she wondered, "at

\textsuperscript{63} [Illegible] Storer to Mary Carter Cutts, April 8, 1812, Cutts Family Collection, EI.

\textsuperscript{64} Hannah Williams Heath diary, n.d. [probably June] 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Unfortunately, Heath's journal for 1812 has survived less intact than for the seven years prior. The torn and disorganized pages make it difficult to put them in appropriate chronological order. The few entries that she specifically dates help, but we could wish she had been in the regular habit.

\textsuperscript{65} Hannah Williams Heath diary, n.d. [probably June] 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She soon found herself "In hourly expectation of War with great Briton. all Men look anxious," and finally despaired that she "heard the long dreaded news that our Government have declared war with great Briton it made my heart sink to hear the sad tiding."

\textsuperscript{66} Charles Phelps to Charles Porter Phelps, July 3, 1812 (Box 4, Folder 7), PPH.
the prospect of War" while "his Father looked Maloncholy beyond expression & so does every friend to his Country." She feared that "this Cumberland Dugan is a poor unprincipaled man, who with those of his party would plunge his country into ruin."

Even Heath's daily weather reports could be transformed into political assessments, for she noted on August first that "the weather has been uncommonly wet all summer and cold it really seems as if the clouds were weeping for our Countrys woes." The following day brought more troubling news: "every body is maloncholy at the dreadfull news which we have heard from Baltimore that a mob had destroyed many virtuous people in a shocking manner." And still the next day, "people cannot compose there minds to business the prospect of our country is so dreadfull all appear anxious to do something for the good of there country but knows not how." She conceded that "for my own part, I have no heart to work I am almost sick & washing dragged very hard to day the machien is out of order altogether we did not get the clothes out untill sunset." For Heath, it was no stretch to link the weather and the broken washing "machien" with the dire political situation.

67 Hannah Williams Heath diary, n.d. 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
68 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 1, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
69 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 2, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
70 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 3, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Presumably the washing machine Heath referred to consisted of a raised waterproof box that "either moved back and forth within a fixed framework or enclosed a series of rollers or paddles that could be turned to agitate the load." While these contraptions undoubtedly saved some labor, and decreased the risk of young children being burned by boiling water in large tubs, their inability to accommodate large loads of clothing and linens meant that laundry day still presented a formidable exertion. See Jane C. Nylander, Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 139-40.
In late August of 1812, Heath reported that "Mr Heath surprised us all by thinking a British fleet was pursuing the constitution," an alarm that caused people to run "hither thither hardly new what to do." After determining that the ships comprised "Commodore Rogers fleet," they "all went to work after two hours looking." At about the same time, she confirmed the efforts of political leaders to ensure that politics occupied everyday people--hardly necessary in Heath's case--when she reported that "this is a day that Madison has appointed for fasting and pray." Yet the immediacy of the war went beyond diet and devotion, for she "found when we got home Mr Munro & Lady had been here and a large company of Soldiers had passed up the turnpike." MILITARY strategy absorbed Mary Anna Whiting Boardman in an 1813 letter to her son. "I pray that we may have an honorable peace," she confided, "but I fear, that there is no prospect of it at present, unless our brave tars can strike a terror into the hearts of the enemy, that will subdue their pride and obstinacy." Indeed, she persisted, "We have great reason to bless God, who hath 'given us the victory,' in so many instances, in battles AT SEA. It is there that the British feel a defeat the most sensibly. It is there that they have tyrannized over our defenceless seamen. And it is there, I hope, that they may be made to tremble before the noble-spirited America." If diarists and correspondents could question governmental policy and military strategy, they could also reflect more abstractly on the relationship between "the people"

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71 Hannah Williams Heath diary Aug. 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

72 Hannah Williams Heath diary n.d. [probably Aug.], 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

73 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to William Boardman, April 3, 1813, Boardman, 280.
and the institutions of government, as Pamela Sedgwick had when she averred that a successful government rested more on "the virtue and economy of the people than on the wisdom of those who govern." This republican vision was questioned some years later by Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald, who entertained far less confidence in "the people." Critical of their subservience to political figures and legislation, she declared to her cousin that "The government are every day passing laws that might be thought arbitrary & oppressive, but all is pocketed without a murmur." "The People," she continued scornfully, "have got it into their heads that they are in possession of perfect liberty that all the laws & taxes are of their own making. Several round here have had their last cow sold to pay the tax, while their representatives are carousing & living like princes at Albany for 4 months in the year." Archbald derided the apparent capacity of her fellow citizens to assume that they were justly represented in spite of evidence to the contrary. Indeed, she seems to have dismissed her rural neighbors as "illiterate" and "ignorant" bystanders who simply ignored or failed to comprehend the excessive sociable and aristocratic tendencies ("living like princes") manifested by their political representatives. Her assessment that "the people have got it into their heads that they are in possession of perfect liberty," is wonderful testimony to the possible divergence between rhetoric and actual experience. If they think they have liberty, then they have liberty. They were not, in Archbald's opinion, "reading" the situation appropriately, a disastrous circumstance if

74 Pamela Dwight Sedgwick to Theodore Sedgwick, Nov. 18, 1788, quoted in Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 58.

75 Mary Ann Wodrow Archbald to Margaret Wodrow, 1820, quoted in Scott, "These Notions I Imbibed from Writers," 123.
they were selling their property (their "independence") to pay taxes.

Some twenty years later, in 1841, Mary Anna Whiting Boardman scolded not the
general populace but the representatives they elected and sent off to Washington to
manage national and international affairs. Writing to her son, a member of the U.S.
House of Representatives, she professed that she "should have few fears for my country,
if every member of Congress was possessed of the spirit of our late President [Harrison],
and if all had the good of the nation at heart, instead of sordid ambition and selfishness."76
The next year she wrote that "Some one observes, that, if temperance should prevail in
Congress, he would hope to see religion gain admittance. I should be sorry to believe,"
she added, "that, among characters of the first class in the United States, there is no
religion. Could I believe that, I should almost despair of my country."77

If correspondents and diarists sometimes relayed political news and opinions to
each other or recorded events in their journal entries, the more common manner of
engaging in discussions or reflections about local, national, and international political
affairs was to simply assume knowledge of the event or crisis just as they assumed
familiarity with various genres of reading material. The usually cryptic Elizabeth Porter
Phelps, for example, referred obliquely to the "dark aspect of our publick affairs," and
Hannah Heath felt no need to explore the causes or ramifications of the War of 1812.
Where the assumed knowledge of events is most obvious is in letters addressed to these

76 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to William Boardman, then a member of the U.S. House of
Representatives, July 10, 1841, Boardman, 282.

77 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to William Boardman, Jan. 15, 1842, Boardman, 282-83.
women. When Thomas Lee Shippen asked his sister, "what do you think of Lewis the 16th King of France's Conduct?" it did not even occur to him that Nancy might want an explanation of the King's conduct before she could offer an opinion. Nor did Louis Otto hesitate to omit political references in his 1784 satire on the characters he found himself amidst in France. These "curious Caracters," he wrote, included "an Attorney, [who] pretends never to receive money but when he has gained his cause, . . . a Republican, who thinks that virtue ought to be the principal foundation of a good Government; [and] a Baron who talks of the equality of mankind." Likewise, when Charles Phelps wrote his wife from Boston that "it was agreed on for the two branches of the Legislator to keep Thursday the sixteenth Instant as a Day of humiliation and prayer on account of the present alarming situation of Affairs," he assumed that she knew what he meant by "this important Crisis of Public Affairs."

This shared understanding of politics, however, was hardly a static phenomenon. These women's expressions and correspondence warrant detailed attention due to the tendency of both immediately succeeding generations and modern scholars to ignore or overlook the very real engagement with politics they experienced. By 1850, the change in the conceptualization of women's relationship to politics had been so great that Catharine Maria Sedgwick emphasized at length the differences between her childhood in the early national period and that of her niece in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, political

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78 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, May 11, 1777, Shippen, 44.
79 Louis Otto to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 4, 1784, Shippen, 223.
80 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 9, 1809 (Box 4, Folder 4), PPH.
matters had so preoccupied everyday women and men during the early national period that they remembered those years clearly long afterwards. The recollections they penned very often revolved around the themes of polite conversation, civility, and contentiousness. If readers and writers performed those activities in part as fodder for and extensions of polite conversation, the collapse of political discourse into political discord in the 1790s presented a challenging subject in retrospect. In part, that challenge was resolved by talking about the development of the Federalist and Republican political parties as if it happened a very, very long time ago, when the social and political context was far different.

"I remember well looking upon a Democrat as an enemy to his country, and at the party as sure, if it prevailed, to work its destruction," Sedgwick wrote her niece. "I heard my father's conversation with his political friends, and in the spontaneous expressions of domestic privacy, and I received the impression then," and, she added parenthetically, "(. . . looking back with a riper judgment, I feel assured of its correctness) that the Federal party loved their country, and were devoted to it, as virtuous parents are to their children." She accounted for the Federalists' decline by explaining that "their misfortune, and perhaps the inevitable consequence of having been educated loyal subjects of a monarchical government, was a thorough distrust of 'the people.'"[81]

Sedgwick further recollected, also in detail, that she had spent the "summer when I was seven or eight years old [1798 or 1799] . . . in Bennington, Vermont" during a "period of the most bitter hostility between the Federalists and Democrats. The whole

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nation, from Maine to Georgia," she explained, "was then divided into these two great parties. The Federalists," her family’s party at the time, "stood upright, and with their feet firmly planted on the rock of Aristocracy, but that rock itself was bedded in sands, or rather was a boulder from the Old World, and the tide of democracy was surely and swiftly undermining it." She accounted for the Federalist party’s defeat by Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr in 1800, by admitting that "the Federalists believed that all sound principles, truth, justice, and patriotism, were identified with the upper classes. They were sincere Republicans, but I think they began to fear a Republic could only continue to exist in Utopia." In spite of what she retrospectively considered their delusions, she rated the Federalists "honest and noble men" and confessed that she too "entered fully, and with the faith and ignorance of childhood, into the prejudices of the time." To even further emphasize her political sensibility, she added that at the time she "thought every Democrat was grasping, dishonest, and vulgar, and," therefore, "would have in good faith adopted the creed of a staunch old parson, who, in a Fast-day sermon, said 'I don’t say that every horse-thief is a Democrat, but I do say that every Democrat is a horse-thief!'"  

Sedgwick included lengthy passages about early national period politics in this 1850 work addressed to her niece because she knew that her niece lacked a similar understanding of and engagement with politics. Had she been writing an autobiographical piece in 1809, say, some ten years after that exciting stay in Bennington, Vermont, she would have devoted far less attention to politics because she would have

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assumed that her readers understood that even young female children paid attention to politics. Her niece’s relationship to politics in mid-century, however, she summed up by observing that "you do not seem now, my dear Alice, like one who will ever be curious to inquire into the shades of political virtue." In spite of Alice’s political complacency, Sedgwick justified inserting political discussions in this piece written to her niece not only because of their novelty (and probably to scold the present age), but in anticipation of the possibility that this information might be useful given that her niece "may some bright day to come have a son who will be prying into his ancestral history." \(^{83}\) For Sedgwick the discrepancy between her own childhood involvement with politics and her niece’s distance from politics could not have been more stark. \(^{84}\) Still, by grounding her political reminiscences on questions of civility, she exposed degrees of difference between her childhood and her niece’s rather than an utter reformulation of the dynamic between women and politics from the 1790s to the 1850s. When she wrote that "I heard my father’s conversation with his political friends, and in the spontaneous expressions of


\(^{84}\) Betsy Huntington’s husband likewise remembered his years in Litchfield, Connecticut (1798-1809), as a time when “Party spirit, in politics, was rampant. It was at a time when political gales, Federal and Democratic, were at their height.” Indeed, he found himself involved in a lawsuit which he later blamed on “rampant” partisanship. “Though a decided Federalist in politics,” he wrote, “I was not apprised of being a zealous partisan. But somehow I said something at the post-office. What, I could not now tell, for my life. It was denounced ‘a lie.’” It was first observed in *The Mercury*, the mouth-piece of the Democratic party, printed at Hartford; and was going, as on the wings of the wind, to the ends of the earth, much to the annoyance of my good friends, the Federalists, and my parishioners. It must be known if the minister of Town Hill was a liar. How? The editor of the Mercury must be prosecuted forthwith. Messrs. David Daggett of New Haven, John Allen and James Gould of Litchfield, as my attorneys, undertook the business in good earnest. They managed it well. In due time, a verdict of the jury in the Superior Court was obtained, in my favor, with the award of $1,000 damages, which was paid." Huntington, *Memories, Counsels, and Reflections*, 58-59.
domestic privacy" developed political sympathies (in this case Federalist), she affirmed not a direct effort to go out and seek political knowledge but the pervasiveness of political discussion in all "spheres" of life.

Just as Sedgwick looked back over a half century to explore the dynamic between men, women, and politics, so correspondents and diarists at the time contemplated the parameters of the intersection of women and politics. Contemporary males often addressed women's political role in the same terms--civility, sociable conversation--invoked by Sedgwick 50 years later. Upon learning of his sister's engagement to Colonel Harry Livingston in 1781, for example, Thomas Lee Shippen wrote that he would "with pleasure view my dear Sister at one time walking or fishing with her dear husband on the banks of the Hudson at another conversing with him about domestic or foreign affairs or playing with him at Draughts or Chess." A few years later, however, he reacted to the increasingly shrill rhetoric denouncing a political bent in women when he wrote that "I can't help wanting you to be a little of a politician and indeed I do most exceedingly and always have reprobated that fashionable notion of entirely excluding from political study or action, all your sex, on the pretence forsooth that they are too weak to be useful, too unsteady to be learned and because they I mean the men undertake to assert that God has intended you for an inferior place."  

The Shippen family correspondence is intriguing in its subversion of expected

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85 Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 63.

86 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, 1781, Shippen, 121.

87 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1785, Shippen, 232.
assumptions about how male and female correspondents discussed politics. In the process of seeking a divorce from her "tyrant" husband and attempting to gain custody of their daughter, Livingston was advised by her uncle Arthur Lee to "Try to interest the Ladies--particularly Mrs MaKean & Mrs Judge Shippen. It is the cause of humanity," he propounded in general terms, "& in that cause the female voice is irresistible." He added that he did "not know any man at your bar, so eloquent as the Attorney general [Aaron Burr]," who would, he assured Nancy, "do the cause justice," particularly if "supported by the general voice." Presumably Livingston had hoped to "interest" her powerful uncle in her cause. His reply about the "irresistible" female voice and the "eloquent" attorney general, however, seemed to argue that this was a matter better raised in conversation over tea than in court, which of course was not true, or true only to a certain extent. Livingston’s father likewise turned the tables on expected gendered subject matter in a letter to his son in which divulged that "Mr. Bingham & Nancy Willing married two weeks ago. . . . Nancy [was] Bridesmaid & dressed off in all her Plumes & [illegible] said she cut out ye Bride which did not please her a little." Having indulged in a description of his daughter’s participation in a wedding, he was subsequently too rushed to comment upon the latest political events, and concluded abruptly that "Your Cousin Ludwell will tell you all the news, political & domestic he is a very clever youth." Apparently William Shippen trusted "Cousin Ludwell" to relay important political knowledge, but doubted his ability to report on a wedding.

88 Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, March 21, 1789, Shippen, 273.

89 William Shippen to Thomas Lee Shippen, Nov. 10, 1780, Shippen, 92.
Nancy Livingston's custody case notwithstanding, when female pens recorded political activity, as opposed to political knowledge or rhetoric, they affirmed a clear division between male and female roles. Elizabeth Porter Phelps observed simply in 1788, for example, "Wednesday Training--the Little Girls went down--my Husband acted as Capt.--he was chosen last fall--misterious providence--why must it be thus." Excluded but not without an opinion, the usually reticent Phelps expressed her displeasure with her husband's official role at the same time that she confirmed that the "Girls" attended training as spectators, and definitely not as actors. In this case, it appears that Phelps herself did not join them. Never as reticent as Phelps, Hannah Heath noted some time later that "Mr Heath & General Gardner went to choose a Col. & they choose Bill Barns Col of the regiment much to the disgrace of the officers." Likewise Abigail Brackett Lyman informed her husband in 1801 that "A messenger from the troops at Springfield was here yesterday--to know when you could provide for them." "Capt Bissell not having received your Letter," she explained, "we inform'd him when you would probably be at home--& said no provission could be made previous to your return."

When Phelps noted in 1805 that "Mr Phelps & I rode into town, he met the selectman, I did arrands. We both took tea at Deacon Seths," she elucidated without

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90 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 1, 1788, NEHGR 119 (1965), 297.
91 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 15, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
92 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Erastus Lyman, Oct. 18, 1801, Lyman, 224.
93 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 5, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 304.
judgement sites where male and female activity intersected and diverged. While she and her husband shared the process of traveling into town, they parted to perform politics and "arrands" respectively, only to converge again at the tea table. In 1800, Abigail Lyman similarly observed that when she "drank tea & sup'd at Judge Henshaws," "the late Revolution in France furnished the Gentlemen with conversation for the evening," while "the Ladys were busy in desecting the character of a female stranger in town--which I am afraid will not bear such close inspection."\(^{94}\) Like Phelps's failure to denote the relative merits of meeting the selectman and running errands, Lyman was oblivious to notions about the relative value of discussing the French Revolution or a female stranger's character.

Hannah Heath's journal also exposes layers of political involvement in terms of men's and women's roles. In 1808, she confirmed that "we heard yesterday the Governor was dead,"\(^ {95}\) but a few days later, only "Mr Heath set off for Boston to see the Governor buried,"\(^ {96}\) and in 1809, "the Gentlemen all went to Choose a Governor."\(^ {97}\) In another entry suggestive of the dissolution between politics and polite conversation (a connection Sedgwick had tried to maintain a few years later), she noted that "the Doc came in from meeting with Mr Heath talking loud upon politics he staid an hour talking fast all time

\(^{94}\) Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 30, 1800, Lyman, 121-22.

\(^{95}\) Hannah Williams Heath diary, Dec. 11, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Emphasis added.

\(^{96}\) Hannah Williams Heath diary, Dec. 16, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\(^{97}\) Hannah Williams Heath diary, April 2, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
they both appeared mad almost."  

In 1812, "Mr Heath is from home most of the time to get a federal Representative," and finally, "all hands went to town meeting choose old Stephen Sharp representative." Although she often watched military training, just as she portrayed herself as a spectator to the loud conversation shared by her husband and "the Doc," on one occasion she demurred, writing that "Mr Heath got ready early to go to Dorchester to training or rather to see them train, I proposed going to Whitings to get Charles some clothes."  

Even comfortably writing about politics could be an issue for women of course, as Betsy Phelps’s 1798 entreaty not to "tell any body that I write Politics— for they say 'tis not feminine," attests. In her discussion of Abigail Adams’s correspondence, historian Edith B. Gelles concludes that Adams and her sisters apologized to each other for including political discussions in their letters because they understood that such expressions violated social conventions about proper spheres of activity for men and women. But there may have been a crucial distinction between proper spheres of

98 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

99 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

100 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS. In 1807, she noted without comment that "Col Gardner is become a Brigadier General," (May 26, 1807) and, a couple weeks later, "Mr Heath & General Gardner went to choose a Col. & they choose Bill Barns Col of the regiment much to the disgrace of the officers." (June 15, 1807) In 1812, she likewise reported that "Mr Heath carried Ann & Hannah into town to Election to day—Charles & Joseph went in the Morn—they all came home hungrey & tired—Strong is Governor." (May 31, 1812)

101 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 13, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. This suggestion, she added, "was treated with contempt as usual."

102 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.

103 Gelles, Portia, 128-29.
activity and proper spheres of reflection, and writing letters concerned with political
issues may not have transgressed prescribed female spheres of activity. As has been seen,
letters operated as a site where the spheres model folded into itself, where the parameters
of who could write what blurred and disappeared from time to time. Furthermore,
incorporation of apologia in letters was formulaic to the point of meaninglessness, given
that the offending letters were written, sent, read, and deemed worthy of a response in
spite of assertions about illegibility and inappropriate subject matter. It is more likely that
because letters functioned as a site of exploration and possibilities, female correspondents
wondered and fretted about penning politics.

While Gelles perhaps overstated the Smith sisters' concern about whether they
might appropriately reflect on politics, Betsy Phelps had clearly imbibed some of those
same notions when she asked her correspondent to resist divulging the content of her
letter. Mary Anna Whiting Boardman likewise qualified a forthright, "How mortified I
should be, if the Legislature of Connecticut should approve and applaud the
unconstitutional measures now proposed," by admitting to her daughter that "Perhaps I
take too great an interest in the politics of the day, for an old woman, whose race is nearly
run."104 This 1833 comment of Boardman's is interesting in light of Sedgwick's remarks
to her niece about women and politics. Still comfortable writing about politics,
Boardman nevertheless wondered about the propriety of doing so and expressed her
doubts in terms of age. Perhaps, she thought, it was old-fashioned for women to write

104 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Cornelia Elizabeth Boardman, April 11, 1833, Boardman,
280.
about politics. A long time ago, when she was a girl, such expressions were unremarkable, but now, in the 1830s, maybe it was a bit unseemly.

Others simply asked that correspondents keep shared political opinions to themselves without indulging in long explanations about why they made such a request. Martha Bland, for example, wrote Nancy Livingston that while she thought Louis Otto was "honest and upright" and would make a fine secretary to the embassy, she nevertheless longed to "hear of some Duke or Marquess, being sent . . . to take Charge of his affairs. Me thinks Merchants from Spain, and Secretaurs from France, make our Sovereignty but a poor Compliment. But this entre nous, my dear Nancy!"¹⁰⁵ Likewise Margaret Beekman Livingston praised Arthur Lee for the "goodness of his heart" and the extent of "his Mental and acquired Abilities," but wondered, "whence has that Gentleman so many Enemyes (this in confidence to you alone)."¹⁰⁶

Comfortable divulging politically charged sentiments to each other in letters, female correspondents nevertheless did not necessarily wish to be perceived as engaged with politics beyond their writing. Requests to respect the confidence of political sentiments, to let such opinions remain entre nous, and to refrain from telling anybody that politics had preoccupied the letter's author, while formulaic on one level, do suggest that in certain respects correspondents considered their missives "private" vessels of communication. While politics might appropriately be broached in letters, the content of those epistles should not be revealed in other social contexts. On the other hand, the

¹⁰⁵ Martha Bland to Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 23, 1785, Shippen, 236.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Beekman Livingston to Nancy Shippen Livingston, April 3, 1786, Shippen, 247-48.
apparent necessity of reminding one’s correspondent—repeatedly in some cases—to refrain from sharing divulged political opinions confirms the uncertainty about what writing a letter meant during this period.

Not all letters of course, adhered to this formula. The contents of two letters penned by Eliza Southgate Bowne to her sister and mother were devoted almost entirely to discussions about the resumption of the Napoleonic Wars in the spring of 1803, and the British assaults on American vessels in 1806. Writing to female family members, but including little else of substance, in both cases Bowne concluded her lively political descriptions with a curt "so much for Father," implying that she responded to her father’s request for political information via her mother and sister. Both of Southgate’s lengthy descriptions, however, also included news of her uncle Rufus King, although generally as asides, so that these letters relayed political information and family news simultaneously.

When Southgate and other female correspondents discussed political matters in their letters, they participated in a long tradition of women writing about politics, a tradition that Catharine Maria Sedgwick joined (if somewhat apologetically) when she incorporated such discussions into the autobiographical piece she addressed to her niece

107 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 30, 1803; Eliza Southgate Bowne to Mary Southgate, April 27, 1806, Bowne, 161, 212.

108 In this case, even political happenings constituted part of the "business" of female correspondence, although Amanda Vickery failed to identify that subject as one of women’s responsibilities in her discussion of the functions women’s letters performed. As noted in chapter one, Vickery argued that women’s letters "sustained relations, ... gathered information about business and apprenticeship opportunities, ... kept a finger on the pulse of the local labour market for servants, [and] helped provision the household." Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres?" 409.
in 1850. As historians Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray have documented, diaries and letters composed by non-activist Boston-area women between 1837 and 1857, when the cult of domesticity was in full force, "demonstrate a knowledge of political events reported in the news," and reflect matter-of-factly on "mainstream party politics and international affairs." Given the Zboray's discovery, the fact that letters composed during the early national period incorporated apologia about political content indicates less a decline in women writing about politics or a chronological aberration, than an exploration of the politics of writing about politics.

The Zborays describe how one woman, writing in 1840, "believed in 'the barriers Nature has placed between the sexes & their spheres' but read newspapers avidly for political news about the Whigs." This women clearly considered reading and writing about politics consistent with conforming to behavior that she understood to be appropriate to her proper "sphere." If even mid-nineteenth century believers in the ideology of separate spheres wrote about politics without apology, then women during the early national period, when notions about separate spheres lacked their later clarity or consistency, would not have considered themselves in violation of codes of female behavior. The cause of wariness and apologia, therefore, may have had far more to do with concerns about the genre of letters themselves, along with imbibing some of the messages they discovered in prescriptive material, than with disquietude about transgressing mores of female propriety. Mary Anna Whiting Boardman's assertion in

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1833 that her letter was old-fashioned because it was written by a woman and included political commentary probably echoes social pronouncements insisting that women not preoccupy themselves with such matters. Phelps’s 1798 request to "not tell any body that I write Politics" directly considers the dynamic of letters themselves as vehicles of communication along with acknowledging increasing prescriptive rhetoric about women and politics.

Indeed, the pervasiveness of politics in this period meant that it would have been surprising if female letters and diaries did not include political references. In addition to invoking political rhetoric metaphorically and referring explicitly to political events or personalities, correspondents and diarists revealed the pervasiveness of politics in their lives and thinking through discussions about social gatherings—events where people of both sexes gathered to commemorate, memorialize, or celebrate political events—and in terms of spectacles—elaborately staged presentations designed to rally the patriotism and harmony of all. Betsy Phelps’s discussion about politics, it will be remembered, began as a complaint about "gentlemen . . . not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them," a complaint about the lack of sociability in Amherst, Massachusetts, during the summer of 1798. While Phelps and others talked about social deficiencies in terms of politics, they also wrote about politics in terms of the great sociability it did afford, both in relatively small circles and in large public commemorations.

In her 1788 description of a dance, for example, Hannah Tracy Emery wrote that "Dr Hale of Newtown . . . asked me if I was a Polititian & upon my answering in the affirmative read me the contents of 2 newspapers, [and] expressed his approbation of the
Constitution." Persisting with this train of thought rather than with particulars about the
dance itself, she noted that she "was much pleased with the description of the procession
at Boston—it was a very proper way of showing their joy, & the utility they supposed
would result from the constitution—& it will tend," she thought, in terms of the rural-
urban split, "to convince the country people more, than the most elegant reasoning." 111
She enjoyed the sociability afforded by a discussion of the Constitution at a dance at the
same time that she bestowed encomiums on the spectacle of a "procession at Boston."

111 Hannah Tracy Emery to Mary Carter, Feb. 10, 1788, Cutts Family Collection, El. The
conflation between a dance and politics so aptly described by Emery was also remarked upon by foreign
observers. In Philadelphia in the 1780s according to the Marquis de Chastellux, "you could not make an
afternoon’s visit to a whig or tory family in the city, without being sure to meet with this political General or
one of his Aides de Camp. When he made a public entertainment, and the presence of the tory ladies gave
offense to those of the patriotic party, he always pleaded ignorance, contrived to shift the blame from
himself, and throw it on the Secretaries, who were left to fight the battle in the best way they could over the
tea table; but all this was carried on with undescrably address, and so managed as to keep all parties in
good humour with him." Quoted in Shippin, 77. Likewise he observed in 1780 that "At Philadelphia, as at
London, Bath, Spa, &c. there are places appropriated for the young people to dance in, and where those
whom that amusement does not suit, play at different games of cards; but at Philadelphia, games of
commerce are alone allowed. A manager, or master of ceremonies presides at these methodical
amusements: He presents (90) to the gentlemen and ladies, dancers, billets folded up containing each
number; thus fate decides the male or female partner for the whole evening. . . . These dances, like the
toasts; we drink at table, have some relation to politics: one is called the success of the campaign, another,
the defeat of Burgoyne, and a third, Clinton's retreat." Letter written by the Chevalier de Chastellux, 1780,
quoted in Shippin, 90-91. He further observed that "Dancing is said to be at once the emblem of gaiety and
of love; here it seems to be the emblem of legislation, and of marriage; of legislation inasmuch, as places
are marked out, the country dances named, and every proceeding provided for, calculated and submitted to
regulation; of marriage, as it furnishes each lady with a partner, with whom she dances the whole evening,
without being allowed to take another." Quoted in Shippin, 92. In 1832, Frances Trollope wrote about the
people of America that "The small patrician band is a race apart; they live with each other and for each
other; mix wondrously little with the high matters of state, which they seem to leave rather supinely to their
tailors and tinkers, and are no more to be taken as a sample of the American people than the head of Lord
Byron as a sample of the heads of the British peerage. I speak not of these, but of the population generally,
as seen in town and country, among the rich and the poor, in the slave states and the free states. I do not
like them. I do not like their principles, I do not like their manners, I do not like their opinions. . . . How
can anyone in their senses doubt the excellence of a government which we have tried for half a century, and
loved the better the longer we have know it?" Such is the natural inquiry of every American when the
excellence of their government is doubted; and I am inclined to answer that no one in their senses, who has
visited their country and known the people, can doubt its fitness for them, such as they now are, or its utter
unfitness for any other people." Frances Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832), quoted in
Robinson, Unsuitable for Ladies, 395.
She also underscored her belief that events that combined politics, ritual, and sociability would be much more apt to persuade "country people" than the most "elegant reasoning," agreeing with those who believed rural inhabitants lacked the rational skill of reading. Nancy Livingston's mother-in-law more generally envied her son's wife living in Philadelphia, the site of the Constitutional Convention, in 1788: "Your town is now I suppose the gayest of all the States," she wrote, "as all the wise men of the west are now met together. May God give them wisdom and direction for the good of the whole." Gaiety, wisdom, and weighty tasks all merged in this remark.

Travel destinations might also be selected for their political associations, which meant that writing, traveling, and politics often converged in letters. On her way to Ballston Springs, Eliza Southgate Bowne wrote that "Our first intention was to sail down the lake to Lake Champlain and visit the ruins of the fortifications at Ticonderoga, but some of our party dissuaded us from it." They did, however, see "the ruins of Fort George and the bloody pond--where so many poor wretches were thrown [and] stopt on our return at the field where Burgoyne surrendered his army." This scene of war, she wondered, "is now covered with corn and nothing to distinguish it from the surrounding fields." A year later, she wrote excitedly, "Oh, I have not told you!-- saw the tree Major

112 Margaret Beekman Livingston to Nancy Shippen Livingston, 1788, Shippen, 264.

113 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 22, 1802, Bowne, 130. Traveling European women also visited battlegrounds. Charlotte Eaton wrote in 1817, for example, that she visited "the field of the ever-memorable and glorious battle of Waterloo" where she saw "the remains of some tattered clothes, which had once been a soldier's," "cannon-balls [that] had lodged in trees." The whole field, she wrote, "was literally covered with soldiers' caps, shoes, gloves, belts, and scabbards, broken feathers battered into the mud, remnants of tattered scarlet cloth, bits of fur and leather, black stocks and havresacs, belonging to the French soldiers, buckles, packs of cards, books, and innumerable papers of every description. . . . The quantities of letters and of blank sheets of dirty writing paper were so great that they literally whitened the
Andre was taken under, and the house were Arnold fled from, left his wife and family."\textsuperscript{114} Once at the Springs, she reported mixing with "an abundance of queer, smart people."

"Last night at tea," she explained, "I found myself seated alongside Beau Dawson, 'Nancy Dawson,'--our envoy to France--you remember!" The same table seated "Gen. Smith of Baltimore and family, who it was said would succeed Uncle Rufus [King]; Mr. Harper and wife--the fine speaker in Congress; Herssa Madame Somebody--French lady; and a nobleman from nobody knows where."\textsuperscript{115} That political discussion as well as personalities graced resort gatherings was likewise confirmed by Bowne, who reported that "most of the Southern people whom we met at the Springs, think Uncle Rufus stands as good a chance of being President as any one spoken of."\textsuperscript{116}

In a letter penned several months later, Bowne's treatment of political events mirrored her belief that part of the grandeur of scenery consisted in written celebrations of its impressive or sublime qualities. If the Hudson only lacked "a Poet to celebrate it," just as "the Thames and the Tiber have been sung by Homers and Popes,"\textsuperscript{117} political celebrations such as a fête for her uncle also demanded textual recognition to bestow it the magnificence it deserved. In a letter describing a dinner held in honor of her Uncle

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\textsuperscript{114} Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 181.

\textsuperscript{115} Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 178.

\textsuperscript{116} Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Sept. 9, 1802, Bowne, 143.

\textsuperscript{117} Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, Sept. 4, 1803, Bowne, 179.
Rufus King in New York City, Bowne enthused that "'twas very superb, and 200 of the most respectable citizens of New York attended." It seems that her husband, "Tho' he has been at many entertainments given in honor of particular persons, . . . never saw one that was so complimentary, and never a person conduct himself on such an occasion with such ease, elegance, and dignity in his life." Indeed, the gala left Walter Bowne "quite in raptures" about King's "insinuating manners" and his "ease in receiving those presented and introduced." "He is a most amazing favorite here," Bowne wrote proudly. The ultimate proof of the regard bestowed upon her uncle and the efficacy of his refined manners was that "Democrats and Federalists and all parties attended. French Consul on his right--Englih Consul on his left." In this case an elaborate dinner attended by guests of exemplary manners rendered partisanship and international conflicts mute. Even during a time marked by bitter party conflict, an accounting of a grand political occasion privileged polite conversation over party rancor. Indeed, in this sense, Bowne's accounting of the dinner conformed to prescriptive admonitions insisting on woman's nonpartisanship. Bowne herself did not attend this dinner, however, although she "went to see the tables: very novel and elegant." As it is not clear why she failed to accompany her husband to this magnificent event, since she was well at the time and made no mention of conflicting engagements, presumably this dinner was a political activity that precluded actual female participation although it could certainly be discussed

118 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 14, 1803, Bowne, 168-69.

119 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 14, 1803, Bowne, 169.
with husbands and described in letters. Election days generally doubled as social events as well, although they found their way into letters and diaries more as an index of quantifying visitors and work than as events that merited extended comment and reflection. In 1805, Hannah Heath "undertook to make cake for election today--in the midst of it Mr Williams came to inform us we were to have a large party from Roxbury among others Col Williams, so all hands went to work to prepare." In 1807, she likewise observed "I made a cake for election," and a few days later, "It is election day the Children all spent the day at the other house." In 1808: "this is Election day--a day our Children think and talk much about," and, two weeks later, "the Children had Company . . . they danced and sung as it was election day." Likewise Charles Porter Phelps wrote his sister’s family in Middletown to invite them to "make us a visit at our approaching Election," and Julia Cowles explained that one Election Day in 1799

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120 Two weeks before this celebratory dinner, King had returned to New York in a blaze of triumph, compelling Bowne to report that "Uncle Rufus has just landed [from London where he had been minister to the Court of St. James]. The Hussas have ceased, the populace retired, and I hasten to give you the earliest information." "Several thousand people were on the wharf when he landed," she wrote, and "as he stept from the vessel they gave 3 cheers and escorted him up into Broadway to a Mr. Nicholas Lowe's (his friend); then three more cheers as he entered the door. He stood at the door, bowed, and they dispersed." Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 30, 1803, Bowne, 160.

121 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 27, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

122 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 23, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

123 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 27, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

124 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 25, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

125 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 6, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

126 Charles Porter Phelps to Dan Huntington, May 2, 1810 (Box 10, Folder 1), PPH.
found her and "Anna Mix... sailing with Cousin Horace."127

Training generated similar comments. "Rainy. Trooping & Training in this Town
to-day," Elizabeth Fuller noted in 1792, "Sally & I went to see them."128 A month later,
she reported "Muster at Lancaster."129 In 1806, Hannah Heath described a "fine day"
during which "we all hands went to see the training nobody at home except, Mary &
Betsey, we dine at Capt. Crafts."130 In 1807, "the hack came from Boston and carried all
the Ladies in the Neighborhood to see the parade. The Men all went of before light... the folk from the other house dine here--those that stayed from training,"131 and, in the fall
of 1808, "the Children all went over to see the Men train Betsey & I went also." Training
was followed by a dinner at "Mr Williams's," attending the parade, and visiting at "Sam
Heaths," where they "had a fine view of the troops." "It was very late," she summed up,
"before it was over."132 In 1809, on "a fine day or rather Morning," Hannah Heath went
"into town to see the parade," but unfortunately "it rained so hard that the Governor could
not take his seat on the Common so the multitude were disappointed."133

Sometimes the sociability afforded by political events was manifested in

128 Elizabeth Fuller, Sept. 5, 1792, Fuller, 318.
129 Elizabeth Fuller, Oct. 6, 1792, Fuller, 319.
130 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 8, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
131 Hannah Williams Heath diary, n.d., 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
132 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 11, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
133 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 5, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
spectacles—arranged, choreographed events that patriotic men, women, and children gathered together to witness and admire. As they wrote about such events, correspondents and diarists explored the meaning of such spectacles at the same time that they confirmed the grandeur that they manifested. In 1783, Nancy Shippen Livingston "spent a delightful Even" at the Concert, the music was fine, & the company agreeable." This particular "concert was concluded with a song to the praise of Gen'l Washington" who "retired while it was sung." Two days later, however, she "met with a great disappointment," upon being unable to attend a "grand ball given by the Merchants in compliment to Gen'l W---n," because "alas! the hairdresser did not come till seven." So grand was the occasion, in other words, that she could not possibly attend without devoting the necessary attention to her appearance. A few weeks later, she explained that there was to "have been a grand display of Fire works" for which a "frame was built at great expence" and "pictures of all the great men (with General Washington at the head) was hung up, & the frame illuminated, with more than a thousand lamps, & a great many elegant representations were to have been made." Unhappily, "an accident happen'd that put an end to all, for by the carelessness of the managers the gunpowder caught fire, &

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134 In this sense, politics operated as a "cultural commodity or product." (201) Historian John Brewer discusses this aspect of political commodification in terms of Wilkite politics in eighteenth-century England. He notes that "one of the paradoxes or ambiguities that was never truly resolved by the [Wilkite] radicals" was the use of "calendrical celebrations and ... feasting designed to support a radical cause" dedicated to undermining aristocratic privilege through industrious, sober, bourgeois responsibility. (261) Brewer, "Commercialization and Politics," in The Birth of a Consumer Society, ed. McKendrick, et al., 197-262.

135 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 8, 1783, Shippen, 166.

136 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Dec. 10, 1783, Shippen, 166.
blew it up in the air." This unplanned spectacle "was the largest bonfire that was ever seen in Market street." Sadly, "one man was kill’d & a great many hurt."\textsuperscript{137}

A different event materialized as hoped, however, for she wrote in May that she went to "see some fire works, that were to be displayed in Market street," a show she rated "very brilliant,--& vast crowds of people fill’d the streets." After the fireworks she "walk’d up to it with Papa & examined it minutely," only regretting that she lacked the "descriptive talent to do it justice." Not deterred by that admission, however, she continued that "It look’d like a large elegant house--painted and illuminated," with "four statues, representing the four cardinal virtues" on top and "pictures of General Washington the King of france &c. &c. . . . properly disposed." In addition, it featured "four elegant pieces of painting--emblematic of our liberty & independence--the 3 hundred lamps with which it was illuminated were still burning when I left it."\textsuperscript{138}

Sometimes women participated directly in military or political stagings, if in gender-specific ways such as symbolically presenting flags or banners to local militia. The banner celebrating such an occurrence in Stroudwater, Maine, in 1799, encapsulated the relationship of women to politics or the female to the military by simply stating, "From the Fair to the Brave." On the other hand, female presentations of banners and flags sometimes included a speech, a situation that concerned Zilpah Wadsworth in 1799. Her consternation resulted not from worry about the propriety of speaking in public, however, but from the newspaper publicity generated by the event. Disturbed that she

\textsuperscript{137} Nancy Shippen Livingston, Jan. 21, 1784, \textit{Shippen}, 175.

\textsuperscript{138} Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 10, 1784 \textit{Shippen}, 197.
herself could not control the significance of her participation, she defended her role in a letter to a friend, stating that she had not acted with a view toward publicity. On the contrary, she considered her part in the military ritual a "sacrifice" to the company of "young men" that happily was "very gratifying to them & inspired them with enthusiasm." Effective as symbol, she nonetheless felt betrayed upon becoming a subject of public print. The other noteworthy circumstance of this particular event, like similar events elsewhere, was that it was followed by a ball which, Wadsworth assured her correspondent, "gave us all a very agreeable evening." The convergence of soldiering and dancing reveals both the disparity between men's and women's involvement in matters political and a point of overlap, since "making a ball" required both males and females.\textsuperscript{139} It is surely no coincidence that both balls and military training involved a similar kind of individual and group physical discipline. Perhaps it can be argued that balls, with their dancing and regimens of polite intercourse, acted as a site where both men and women learned to move and mingle in keeping with the discipline and deference that marked the military as well. Likewise, the field of letters, seemingly open with possibilities, but sometimes hiding lurking dangers, operated as a site where both sexes might learn to explore, create, and communicate.

A grand spectacle occurred in Boston in 1797 with the launching of the Constitution. Betsy Phelps excitedly anticipated that "the frigate is to be launched a week from next Thursday--that is, they will make another attempt--and I want to see it go

\textsuperscript{139} Zilpah Wadsworth, 1799, quoted in Ulrich, "From the Fair to the Brave," 223.
off. She subsequently reported happily that her brother took her to "see the frigate launched--she went off with a show and majestic emotion." "Highly gratify'd--with the sight," she enthused that "after she had got off they fir'd ibguns--and gave three huzzas to the Constitution the name of the ship." To Sarah Parsons, she likewise wrote that she "was highly gratified at the Launch--such enthusiasm seemed to prevail--when with slow majestic motion she entered her distinct element--that your friend, stupid as she is--almost caught the Federal sentiment--and could hardly help joining in the loud 'huzzas for the Constitution." Indeed, if she demurely held her enthusiasm in check at the launching, she felt no compulsion to stem her excitement in letters describing the event. She appended no apologies or requests for confidence to these letters, however, as these sorts of events were staged for inclusive audiences of men, women, and children.

Hannah Heath's sister-in-law likewise attended the launching, writing that "Mrs Howe sent for me to go to Boston with her to see the launching," and explaining at length that her party "march'd about looking into every shop for Mr How," who was finally found, spurring them to "set out again, on a pretty round trott . . . till we arrived at the North end," where "Mrs Davis and the justice took the lead, and made their way through the crowd into the Navy Yard, & clear'd a passage for us." "Mrs D.," she added, "look'd

140 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Oct. 4, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH.

141 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Oct. 20, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), PPH. The Constitution, one of six frigates whose construction was authorized in 1794 following a vote split primarily between urban, northern, and eastern Congressmen for the act and rural, southern, and frontier congressman against it, was launched Oct. 21, 1797. See Michael J. Crawford and Christine F. Hughes, The Reestablishment of the Navy, 1787-1801 (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1995), 5-7.

142 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Oct. 28, 1797 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
elegantly." Indeed, "the Frigate itself did not move more majestic, she was drest as you have seen her sometimes in a stormy day at meeting." This digression aside, "after the launch we took leave of our party in order to do some errands" and in "the first shop we went in we were joined by Bob Holmes" who "paraded about with us the chief of the time till we met Abraham." "You will suppose," she assured, that "we made fine bargains, you know how clever it is to have gentlemen poping into every shop, no wonder I got so beautiful a habit." Betsey Heath's assessment of this event as primarily centered on socializing, the elegant and "majestic" presence of "Mrs D.," and the wonderful bargains to be had when men and women shopped together, beautifully demonstrates the complex interconnectedness of politics, socializing, shopping, writing, and men and women.

George Washington's death occasioned spectacles of a different mood, but equally deserving of written reflection. As Abigail Lyman wrote in January 1800, she heard "in the Afternoon [a] Funeral Sermon on the Death of General Washington." "This illustrious Hero," she explained, "departed this life on Saturday night between eleven & twelve o'clock 14th December 1799 [and] the news of this grievous event fills every American heart with sorrow." Washington, she knew, "has long been the pride of our nation & the Hero of the Age." One of the most astonishing results of his death, in Lyman's opinion, was the disappearance of fractious partisan discord. "It is an occurrence no less interesting than extraordinary," she wrote, "that the departure of a single man should command the unaffected & indiscriminate lamentation of five millions of people." Like Southgate's assessment of her uncle's celebratory dinner, Lyman

143 Elizabeth Heath to Mrs. White, Oct. 22, 1797, Crafts, 700-701.
described a truly grand political commemoration as one that lacked evidence of 
partisanship, the most common mark of contemporary politics. In more solemn phrases, 
she continued that "it is an event the like of which the world has never witnessed, that at 
the death of an individual joy of the heart should cease & the dance be turned into 
mourning." "The reason" for this "is obvious," she explained, as "'His deeds exceed all 
speech'—his fame is 'written with a pen of iron & with the point of a diamond,' his 
counsel is 'graven upon the tables of our hearts,' 'his deeds, his fame, & his council will 
endure till the great globe itself - yea all which it inherit - shall dissolve.'" "Extract from 
the 'Lay Preacher,'" she concluded responsibly, "my own powers being insufficient to do 
justice to the subject."¹⁴⁴

Much more efficiently, Elizabeth Porter Phelps observed in her journal in 
February 1800, "this day our rulers have set apart in memory of General Washington—his 
birthday. Died last December 14 day. This day to be observed throughout the whole 
United States."¹⁴⁵ Julia Cowles likewise noted that she "attended a meeting to 
commemorate the virtues of Gen. Washington deceased, as it was his birthday."¹⁴⁶ Eliza 
Southgate also wrote assuring her sister that "tomorrow we all go to hear Fisher Ames' 
Eulogy." Intrigued by the costume requirements occasioned by event, and also reporting 
on fashion from urban Boston to her sister in rural Scarborough, she added that "for 
mourning for Washington the ladies dress as much as if for a relation, some entirely in

¹⁴⁶ Julia Cowles, 1800, Cowles, 46-47.
black, but now many wear only a ribbon with a line painted on it." Abigail Lyman's more reverential reference read: "attended Meeting--this being the day directed by Congress to the memory of Gen. Washington. The prayers were pertinent & impressive - the music was solemn - the Discourse was excellent." Indeed, she "hope[d] it will be printed as I think Mr Williams was more particular in the History of his Life than any I have seen. He pointed out the most important & trying scenes of his Life & in many instances recited the very words he used on such occasions--these passages were truly affecting."  

The Fourth of July became an increasingly elaborate event during this period according to these observers. On June 30, 1799, Elizabeth Porter Phelps simply wrote: "Thursday Independence kept--Solomon Strong delivered an oration in the meeting house. . . . fine musick." She and "Mitte" "did not go," however, although "Mr. Phelps & Charles dined with a very large company in town." But in New York City four years

147 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, Feb. 7, 1800, Bowne, 22.

148 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 22, 1800, Lyman, 135. Mourners also found plenty to read about the revered Washington. As Abigail Lyman observed one day in February, "I was much delighted by perusing Mr. G. Blakes Eulogy on the Death of our beloved Washington. I think it surpasses his or any that I have yet read." Abigail Brackett Lyman, Feb. 19, 1800, Lyman, 131. The book is George Blake, A Masonic Eulogy on the Life of Brother George Washington. Lyman also "Receiv'd a valuable present from my friend Rebecca--Professor Tappan's discourse on the death of Gen Washington." Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 135. James Gould, however, intimated in a letter that the reverence for Washington had its limits. "I fear, that the appropriation of $200,000 for Washington's mausoleum will be generally unpopular in this part of the union. The sum is thought by most people, I believe, to be extravagantly large." James Gould to Uriah Tracy, Jan. 12, 1801, Ransom Collection, Litchfield Historical Society. In 1839, one mother wrote her grown daughter, who had recently visited Mount Vernon, "No true patriots can visit the tomb of Washington, without an emotion which it would be difficult to describe, if they duly estimate his character, and the services he rendered to his country. I fear, that the world will not produce another such man, in this degenerate age." Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Cornelia Elizabeth Boardman, April 19, 1839, Boardman, 281.

149 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 30, 1799, NEHGR 121 (1967), 97.
later Eliza Bowne promised that "We are in expectation of great entertainment on fourth of July—Independent day! as they laugh at us Yankees for calling it,—the gardens, the Battery, and every thing to be illuminated, fire-works, music, etc., etc."150 She later told her sister about the celebrations or, rather, sent newspapers to do the telling for her: "I have quite a packet of newspapers which I shall send... to amuse you; they contain all the public amusements and shows in celebration of 4th July." She added that "the Procession passed our house and was very elegant," and that "in the evening we were at Davis Hall Gardens" where "'twas supposed there were 4,000 people." To indicate just how elaborate the celebrations were, she explained that the tickets cost "half a dollar; and 'tis said he made very little money, so you may think what the entertainment was."151 The occasion also gained prestige of course, by the fact that Southgate devoted so much attention to it in her letter.

In 1805, Hannah Heath's husband "propose[d] going to Boston to see the fire works," and Heath, who thought she "could not possibly," let her self be "pursuaded" and "went with Aunt White." Although the "show was much better than I expected," she complained that she "was so tired I could not enjoy any thing," perhaps because "we first went to Mr Tildens &... Mrs Phillips's... after it was over eat supper then came home near two o'clock in the morning."152 The next year was quieter: "a pleasant Morning no Company except the Ladies from the other house they call in the evening to look at fire

150 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, June 30, 1803, Bowne, 161.
151 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Octavia Southgate, July 14, 1803, Bowne, 166-67.
152 Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 4, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
works from Boston."\textsuperscript{153} Due to an economic downturn, or "sad times," as she put it, the next year's celebration was comparatively muted, but Heath did write: "Sat a fine day the fourth of July—I have heard but little said on the subject althou I believe there has been some rejoicing in many places."\textsuperscript{154} In 1809, however, on "Tuesday July 4 independence, ... we all went to the other house had a pleasant time they all came here after tea to see the fire works."\textsuperscript{155} The next year was livelier, as "Mr Heath set of for Boston with Susan and Ann Eliza—Phipps went in the milk cart carried Jo, Charles, & Hannah—Mr Goddard & Lady came up to see the fire works—they took leave about ten the folks got home after 12—they were all tired."\textsuperscript{156} In 1811, it was "as warm as ever I knew it hotter I think in my life today is the fourth of July ... we had fire works sent up all round us in the evening and music also."\textsuperscript{157}

The political as spectacle, as manifested in Independence Day celebrations and national mourning over George Washington's death, and as a component of social activities, such as reading and discussing political newspaper stories at dances, indicates the extent to which politics imbued these women's lives. We know about the thought they gave to such matters because of the words they penned in their letters and diaries. If reading served as a means of connection in society, a basis of promoting virtue through

\textsuperscript{153} Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 4, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{154} Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 4, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{155} Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 4, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Her journal for 1808 does not mention Independence Day.

\textsuperscript{156} Hannah Williams Heath diary July 4, 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{157} Hannah Williams Heath diary July 4, 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
refined conversation, politics functioned in a similar way. But the relationship between politics and writing goes beyond confirming the dialectic between sociability and virtue. The contested nature of reading and writing becomes particularly charged when explored in terms of politics.

If "as what came to be regarded as 'literary' separated from other forms of written discourse" in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as Larzer Ziff has argued, and "literature" increasingly "drew sustenance from and promoted an America of conserved values rather than an America of expanding democracy," the relationship between private correspondence and "literature" begs a closer look. Ziff concludes that "the history of literary culture . . . took a different course from that of political culture,"¹⁵⁸ that as political culture became increasingly democratic, literary culture became increasingly conservative. As has been seen, correspondents and diarists engaged prescriptive rhetoric on several levels. Everyday writers confirmed, dismissed, and manipulated prevailing messages about what writing meant, what reading meant, and whether rural or urban living best suited citizens of a republic. In the case of politics, their expressions both confirm and diverge from the model posited by Ziff, indicating that their status as "literary" or "[another form[ of written discourse," as Ziff has labeled the dichotomy, had yet to be determined.

When manifested socially, politics engaged a much broader public than those entitled to participate directly in its formal mechanisms, institutions, and rituals. In that sense, letters and diaries encouraged and manifested the democratization of politics. One

¹⁵⁸ Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 133.
need not actually vote in an election to discuss election day and broach opinions about candidates. Indeed, some of the letters tapped for this study exist because politically active males corresponded with those at home while participating in courts, conventions, as so forth. The most famous correspondence resulting from this circumstance is that shared by John and Abigail Adams beginning in the 1770s. But letters functioned on a different level too. Eliza Bowne became the political informant for her family because she lived in New York City and could gather and then relate information to her family on the periphery in Scarborough, Maine. Letters bridged the rural-urban divide just as they bridged the franchised-disenfranchised divide. Letters, at least for these disenfranchised women, helped create a broader definition and understanding of politics and, as physical documents that crossed space and time, materially embodied that democratization. In this sense, letters and literature diverged then, because, as Ziff has observed, "literature" increasingly stressed a conservative, exclusionist approach to politics. In contrast, these letters, by virtue of their expansiveness, inherently promoted a more inclusive, participatory ethic. As Ziff has noted, "if American literature were ever to embody political liberalism, . . . the conventions of literature itself would have to be radicalized."

This point should not be overstated, however. The rules of propriety surrounding correspondence, invoked most frequently in formulaic apologia, indicate efforts to control the democratizing tendencies of the medium itself. Indeed, the discussions in the previous chapter about correspondents' assessments of rural inhabitants as ignorant and

159 Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 149.
illiterate confirms that such people were considered incapable of writing a letter, of participating in supra-local discussions such as politics. Probably most of those people could literally write, of course, but they would struggle in their efforts to compose a proper letter. In this sense correspondence confirmed and promoted a conservative, class-based social hierarchy.

As the references to "elegant reasoning," "gallants," "balls," "gowns," and so forth throughout this chapter indicate, political discussion and reflection was often imbued with expressions revealing an affinity for refinement as manifested in both material artifacts and social proclivities. Phelps's complaint about the lack of beaus in Amherst and Southgate's insistence that depravity thrived in country villages contradicted their accompanying statements about gallants being ill-suited to defend independence and the country being best qualified to generate that "happiness we are all in pursuit of." Alice Lee Shippen succeeded in reconciling these competing notions in a letter to her husband, chief physician of the Continental Army, when she exclaimed, "O! how good it is to do right, My dear Mr Shippen tho' we are loosing thousands having loved (our) country and its interests invariably more than supports me under every difficulty. I feel I love in my very heart the true liberty of America the liberty of saying & doing every thing that is beautiful & proper." Charles Phelps wondered at times if "proper" was quite the right adjective to describe the political process. As he wrote his wife in 1780 from Boston, where he attended Court: "We have Business before us of consequence from Congress which is not yet compleated altho--we sat from Eight in the Morning till after nine at

night yesterday—(which I much question the propriety off)." For Alice Lee Shippen "true liberty" meant the liberty to do "everything that is beautiful and proper." For Phelps, the political process itself would benefit from adhering to rules of propriety.

If politics engaged the fashionable world with elaborate spectacles and grand (or modest) dinners and balls, it also functioned as a component of one's social persona. Southgate warned about the distinction between the appearance and the reality of men broadcasting fashionable political tenets, complaining that she "hate[ed] this parade and nonsense about independence, which every gentleman of ton puts on" because "it always proves that the reality is small, when such a fuss is made for the appearance." Perplexed by "gentlemen who boast of never having made an apology, yet at the same time would say and do a thousand things much more derogatory to their dear independence than fifty apologies," she would be "glad to see our fine gentlemen more careful in avoiding anything that would require an apology, and not like cowards skulk behind their flimsy shield of independence for defence or security." Perhaps a man like Catharine Maria Sedgwick's father had prompted Southgate's tirade. Although Sedgwick proudly recollected "the good done by my father in contributing to establish government, and to swell the amount of that political virtue which makes the history of the Federal party the record of the purest patriotism the world has known," she nevertheless acknowledged that "my father was born too soon to relish the freedoms of democracy, and I have seen

161 Charles Phelps to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, June 5, 1780 (Box 4, Folder 3), PPH.

162 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, Dec. 4, 1801, Bowne, 84.

163 Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 63.
his brow lower when a free-and-easy mechanic came to the front door, and upon one occasion I remember his turning off the 'east steps' doorway... a grown-up lad who kept his hat on after being told to take it off." The problem was that men who spoke of independence and liberty failed to demonstrate their beliefs in appropriate social forms.

Indeed, if social behavior strayed too far from expected decorum, a harsh judgment might well result. The men Betsy Phelps complained about in Amherst were "not interesting," it will be remembered, because they sorely lacked gallantry. That is, they probably spoke and dressed roughly, had less of an appreciation for "cultural" pursuits like art, music, books, and conversing than Phelps would have liked, and had failed to master some refined elements of polite behavior. They were, however, Phelps intimates, admirably equipped to support the "independence of America." Eliza Southgate decried the counterpart to Phelps's unpolished men, men whose bad manners were based not on yeoman-like qualities, but on exaggerated refinement. Although they spoke a good line, Southgate conceded, ultimately the "flimsy shield of independence" was just empty rhetoric--fashionable discourse--when invoked only in form and not in fact.

Southgate wrote about this problem again when she regaled her cousin with the difficulties encountered upon quitting an assembly during a driving snow storm. Since

164 Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 78. Sedgwick retained some of her father's proclivities, however, observing in her journal in 1831, that she was "escorted by Mr. Secretary [Martin] Van Buren" when she "went to pay respects to the President. He received us politely--is simple, gentlemanly, and unaffected in his manners... We were shown through the damp cold rooms in the drawing room. The nation's drawing room--where the mobocracy assemble by the light of beautiful chandeliers and circulating amidst rich furniture--great men and accomplished women fancy they live in a country of equality as well as liberty. Query: do they ever feel their inequality more than on such occasions?" Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Feb. 20, 1831, in Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 129.
"none but ladies were permitted to get into the carriage," a "universal cry" arose, "a gentleman in the coach, let him come out!" "We all protested there was none, as it was too dark to distinguish," she explained, "but the little man soon raised his voice and bid the coachman proceed; a dozen voices gave contrary orders." The scene was "a proper riot, I was really alarmed," she added before laughing that "my gentleman, with a vast deal of fashionable independence, swore no power on earth should make him quit his seat." Notwithstanding this pronouncement of invincibility, "a gentleman at the door jump’t into the carriage, caught hold of him, and would have dragged him out if we had not all entreated them to desist." Her gentleman then "squeezed again into his seat, inwardly exulting to think he should get safe home from such rough creatures as the men, should pass for a lady, be secure under their protection." "None," he knew "would insult him before them, mean creature!!" Eventually, she concluded, the carriage "started full of ladies, and not one gentleman to protect us, except our lady man who had crept to us for shelter."  

Southgate's description of a "lady man" with his "fashionable independence" alongside Betsy Phelps's assessment of the "tolerable," but definitely not "gallant" male companions in Amherst exposes the complexity of the debate that pitted a refined virtue against a yeoman characterized virtue. What Phelps, Southgate, and other female correspondents and diarists stressed in their expressions was a politics infused with sociability. Passages praising a scene in which federalists and republicans joined each other in amiable conversation at a dinner for Rufus King, and pointed remarks about the

165 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, March 1, 1802, Bowne, 93-94.
wonderful ability of memorial events honoring George Washington to unite "five millions of people" argue that politics should be civil, polite, and decorous. Situations marked by discord, disagreement, and heated discussion resulted in remarks such as Heath's about "the Doc" and her husband "talking loud upon politics" and "appear[ing] mad almost."

or Phelps's refusal to write about "gentlemen" who were "not interesting enough to employ my pen." Indeed, Phelps urged her friend to desist from telling others that she wrote politics in part because she anticipated the discord and disagreement that might result in the ensuing conversation. In an era marked by fractious partisan disagreement, female correspondents sought to promote a politics characterized by propriety and civility. On the other hand, Southgate's "lady man" merited a lengthy description indeed because his behavior exposed the dangers of extreme sociability. If the "gallants" at the assembly in Portland became "rough creatures" compared to the "lady man" in the carriage, what did that mean for correspondents who promoted and participated in a political society marked by polite conversation?

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166 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
CHAPTER V

"A VAST DEAL OF FASHIONABLE INDEPENDENCE":
WRITING ABOUT REFINEMENT

Eliza Southgate’s description of revelers piling into a carriage after a March 1802 assembly incorporated a very specific but at the same time a very ambiguous language. Characterizing one of her company a "lady man" who possessed a "vast deal of fashionable independence," Southgate neatly exposed the dichotomies informing debates about the sources of republican virtue. Associating "lady" with "fashionable" and "man" with "independence," she tapped gendered associations about what constituted politics and who legitimately participated in politics at the same time that she turned those categories of contention on their head by explaining that her subject secured his independence "under [ladies'] protection." This passage is noteworthy on a different level as well. Initially labeling her subject a "gentleman" and "man" who then sought to "pass for a lady," she ultimately permitted that transition to occur to its full extent. Once the subject had "pass[ed] for a lady," she wrote, the "carriage at length started full of ladies, and not one gentleman to protect us, except our lady man who crept to us for shelter." Privileging gender over biology, Southgate stripped her subject of the title of gentleman, and even of man, because the carriage he occupied included "not one gentleman." In Southgate’s estimation, this peculiar creature had become a "lady man."

\[1\] Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, March 1, 1802, Bowne, 93-94. Emphases added.
On the one hand her "lady man" existed on a spectrum that evolved from "Gentleman" to "Lady" to "Lady Man" because he sought protection and shelter from ladies, just as ladies were presumed to do from gentlemen. On the other hand, Southgate's "lady man" existed somewhere between "Gentleman" and "Lady" because the protection he gained was freedom from being insulted, as "none would insult him before [ladies]." That is, a refined company of ladies could protect even one apparently well deserving of insult.

The two main approaches to refinement in the scholarly literature of the early republic focus either on describing the material trappings and social manners of refined living and behavior or analyzing prescriptive literature condemning fashion and consumerism as female traits and habits destined to undermine the newly independent republic.\(^2\) This chapter builds on these two lines of analysis by exploring everyday readers' reactions to and invocation of the language of refinement in their letters and diaries. There are two ways in which such language appeared. On the one hand, correspondents and diarists described actual social events, visiting, and costumes, invoking the relevant vocabulary directly to portray teas, balls, dinners, and visiting. But they also used the language of refinement, fashion, and sociability metaphorically, tapping a familiar language to comment upon otherwise unrelated episodes. Southgate's

passage exemplifies both scenarios. She chronicled the transportation challenges faced by assembly attendees during a snowstorm at the same time (and in the same language) that she reflected on male and female roles.

In contrast to politics, which female correspondents and diarists wrote about comfortably and familiarly, but whose formal structures excluded women, sites of refinement, such as tea tables and assemblies, required female participation. As Elizabeth Porter Phelps so succinctly noted in 1805, the tea table was a place where men, women, and children met to share conversation and refreshment. It is in this arena that male and female behavior, and debates about who influenced whom, gained so much attention in published literature. The *Boston Weekly Magazine*, to cite just one example, incorporated contradictory articles insisting on the one hand that women's exemplary behavior would result in the same in men, and on the other that if men attended to their own manners and decorum, they would induce a similar deportment in women. Such

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3 As quoted in the previous chapter, she observed that "Mr Phelps & I rode into town, he met the selectman, I did arrands. We both took tea at Deacon Seths." Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 5, 1805, *NEHGR* 122 (1968), 304.

4 "What is there so distressing in life," asked one contributor, "which the smiles and caresses of a loving and beloved woman cannot alleviate." Similarly, a list of "maxims" supported Rousseau's assertion that the weaker governs the stronger by noting that "inferiors, if they would be at the pains of governing themselves, would often govern their superiors." ("Picture of Matrimonial Felicity," *BWM*, June 25, 1803, 142.) On the other hand, one contributor blamed the "injudicious and reprehensible behavior of the other sex" for such female faults as "vanity, affectation, and frivolousness." ("On Female Conversation and Epistolary Correspondence," *BWM*, Aug. 18, 1804, 169.) Another assured readers that "when men cease to flatter, women will cease to deceive; when men are wise, women will be wise." Women "do not force the taste of men; they only adapt themselves to it. As they may corrupt and be corrupted, so they may improve and be improved." ("The Ladies Vindicated," *BWM*, Dec. 11, 1802, 26.) A contributor styling herself "Sarah" agreed that "If the males in general were to make a reformation in the deportment toward their female companions... they might then with some degree of grace, proceed to point out our many foibles." But "until such evils, such gross and glaring imperfections are pointed out and amended in your sex, never look for perfection in ours." ("The Gossip," *BWM*, April 30, 1803, 109.)
prescriptive expressions tell us little about who influenced whom; they do, however, 
serve to delineate the parameters of a cultural debate. Like writing, reading, and 
travelling, sociability functioned as a politicized site where the male and female worlds 
converged, if not always without comment. An examination of women’s expressions in 
terms of the rhetoric of refinement, therefore, has much to tell us about gender roles and 
republicanism in the early republic.

As they wrote about different aspects of refinement, female diarists and 
correspondents defined the constituent elements of that ambiguous term. They wrote 
about balls, dinners, outings, clothing, furniture, visiting, houses, conversation, and taking 
tea. They tended to approach these topics in terms of the necessity of curbing their 
inclinations for the finer things of life, by either berating themselves for being too much 
attached to things of this world, for example, or by assiduously resolving to stay home 
more in the future. But they also considered socializing a means of "improvement," and 
wrote about the instruction (and entertainment) they gained from participating in 
animated, sensible conversations. Furthermore, many believed that the best way to avoid 
the snares of coxcombs and fops (as published literature labeled such unsavory 
characters) was by mingling with people of fashion. References to polite social 
tercourse in terms of atonement and necessary training assumed that socializing was a 
"public" act connected to the state of society as a whole. A strong undercurrent in 
remarks about the polite world, however, celebrated a "private" sphere of visiting and 
conversing. Intimate gatherings centered around a book in front of a cheerful fire or 
confidential tête-à-têtes appeared in letters and diaries as welcome alternatives to a
"public" world. Both men and women welcomed this "private" space and the liberating potential it manifested. Like letters themselves, which rested ambiguously somewhere in between confidential missives and public documents, refinement functioned as a broadly public quality and an innovative site of interpersonal improvisation. The range of definitions applicable to both writing and refinement meant that writing about refinement posed a challenge. The self-consciousness with which correspondents wrote sometimes increased when refinement was the topic under discussion. The resulting prose might be labored, confused, or ornamented with peculiar terms like "lady man."

The excessive refinement characterizing Southgate’s "lady man" found expression in other letters and diaries as well. After she "went out asailing," Julia Cowles admitted that the outing left her "rather frightened" because "Cousin Fanny lost of her hat" whereupon a "very polite" "Mr. Collins . . . almost threw himself overboard to restore the hat," which "he very soon got . . . and very politely offered her his to wear till her’s got dry."\(^2\) One imagines a very different rendering of this incident if penned by Eliza Southgate, who would have laughed at both Mr. Collins’s absurdly directed bravado and Cowles’s faintheartedness. Nancy Livingston on the other hand, who took hats very seriously, or at least seriously enough to aggravate her uncle Arthur Lee, would have expected Mr. Collins (or any male) to rescue her hat but would have been charmed rather than frightened by the exertion.

Cowles’s timidity appeared again when she confessed to being "shocked to see the indelicacy with which some of my sex appeared" during a "Fielday." Particularly

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\(^2\) Julia Cowles, 1799, *Cowles*, 27.
offensive was the behavior of "a woman of 40, [who] went so far enough to use very vulgar expressions and even to strike a gentleman who sat upon his horse, with whom she was an entire stranger." If this astonishing conduct was not enough, it further "wounded [her] delicacy to see girls of 17 encircled in the arms of lads." "What a pity," she reflected, "that their reason could not have taught them better!" and "how ridiculous," she exclaimed, "must such appear in the eyes of persons of sense." Indeed, Cowles postulated that the entire spectacle "would quite degrade the whole sex in their opinion." Clearly identifying "persons of sense" as male, Cowles allowed for the possibility of sensible women in part by gendering them male and thereby exempting them from the degradation of "the whole sex."

Seemingly adopting prescriptive admonitions about the necessity of behaving with decorum and propriety, particularly in situations in which both sexes mingled, Cowles would be expected to condemn unseemly behavior in others and congratulate herself on her own mastery of comparatively "sensible" behavior. Surprisingly, she took a radically different approach to this problem and, fully self-conscious of her own privileged status, explored the intersection of class and gender as she forged a novel solution involving the redistribution of resources. "Girls who perhaps would have made (with a little education) fine women, good mothers, and happy wives, will now make neither," she declared, being "entirely destitute of the common rules of decency." But, she queried, "why should the rich spend a fortune upon dress and other outward equipage; why not share with the poor (whom Nature has given equally the same) and give us all a common education and wherewith to get a living by?" Under this improved arrangement, she concluded,
"happiness would take a seat in every breast and hush every rising murmur." For Cowles, the way to realize that "happiness we are all in pursuit of" (in Southgate's parlance), was to furnish everybody with the means to acquire a "common education." Indeed, she advocated universalizing her own codes of polite behavior, which meant that ultimately everybody would be able to write letters. For Cowles, democratization and virtue rested not in the franchise, but in shared polite sensibility. She pitied those of her sex who acted badly because they did not know better and accused the excessively indulgent for encouraging and perpetuating divisiveness by commanding a disproportionate share of resources.

Despite her disgust with unseemly female behavior, Cowles "repaired to the ball" after leaving the field, where she "was agreeably surprized at seeing Mr. Ely" who took her home "about 12." Not long after, she complained that an otherwise "excellent dinner" at "Langdon's" was spoiled for her because she "suffered some from fear, the lads behaved so bad." Nevertheless, that "Eve" too found her at the ball. One explanation for this rather peculiar pattern lies perhaps in Cowles's reflexive invocation of prescriptive

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6 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 36-37.

7 Crèvecoeur wrestled with the democratization of refinement in terms of letters in Letters from an American Farmer (1782), in which he noted that even if a farmer overcame the inability to write letters, he would still face the suspicions of his neighbors, who would accuse him of being "other than what he seems to be." From the point of view of the authorities, of course, "a writing farmer indicates a disordering of hierarchy." Ziff, Writing in the New Nation, 26-28.

8 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 36-37.

9 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 42. In her autobiography, Catharine Maria Sedgwick described the humiliation she endured upon being lectured by her brother following a dinner where she had asked for the "side bone" of the turkey, and being called a "wretched little chit that compelled a gentleman to cut up a whole turkey to serve her." "I cried myself to sleep that night," she confessed. Kelley, The Power of Her Sympathy, 92.
rhetoric to describe social experiences even if that vocabulary over-stated her revulsion.

On the other hand, something about balls—either the discipline and decorum they
inherently compelled, or her own fondness and knack for dancing—may have entirely
superseded her fear of or disgust with her "fielday" and dining companions.

On at least one occasion, Eliza Southgate recorded less success in reconciling
notions of propriety—in this case someone else's notions—with subsequent behavior.
While she could laughingly mock the "lady man" at the assembly, the pronouncements of
Susanna Rowson, the boarding school preceptress she and her sister shared, had to be
taken seriously. "I don't know what I shall do about writing Octavia," Southgate worried
to her mother, "as Mrs. Rawson told her I wrote on an improper subject ... and she
would not let her answer the question." "This," Southgate sputtered, "is refining too
much, and if I can't write as I feel, I can't write at all."10 Apparently Rowson feared the
liminal space that letters inhabited or promoted and sought to curtail certain tendencies of
the medium, particularly when the reputations of others hung in the balance. Southgate,
on the other hand, resented Rowson's interference, which she saw as undercutting her
freedom to "write as I feel." By "refining too much," Rowson curbed Southgate's
independence, a circumstance Southgate resisted by warning that "if I can't write as I feel,
I can't write at all." Rhetorically at least, she threatened that limiting the possibilities
afforded by written correspondence would push her to silence.

10 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 3, 1800, Browne, 27. She had asked her sister "if Mr.
Davis was paying close attention to Eleanor Coffin." She continued on the subject of appropriate subject
matter for letters: "now I ask you, Mamma, if it is not quite a natural question when we hear that any of our
friends are paid attention to by any gentleman, to ask a confirmation of the report from those we think most
likely to know the particulars. Never did I write a line to Octavia but I should have been perfectly willing
for you or my Father to have seen." (27-28)
Southgate's grappling with refinement and correspondence appeared in letters to her cousin as well. As she wrote him half jokingly in 1801, "I do think you are a charming fellow,--would not write because I am in debt, well, be it so, my ceremonious friend,--I submit, and though I transgress by sending a half sheet more than you ever did, yet I assure you 'twas to convince you of the violence of my anger which could induce me to forget the rules of politeness." In a later letter she returned to this theme with some exasperation: "Now, Cousin, don't you think it unpardonable, don't you think it a violation of all the laws of politeness, that you should neglect writing me merely because I owed a letter? I should not be surprised if you counted the words in yours and my letters and settled the account by some rule of Arithmetic." Like her irritation with Susanna Rowson, Southgate's impatience with her cousin (albeit in mocking tones) resulted from his presuming to limit the possibilities that she so enjoyed exploring in their correspondence. The rules and accounting of "politeness" infringed upon her written expression at the same time that her expressions--letters--exemplified one manifestation of refinement.

For Cowles, transgressions of polite behavior by both men and women generated worried comment, if not withdrawal from that company. For Southgate, too much "ceremony" and decorum, by both males and females, set her pen to scolding. Annoyed by rules of polite behavior based on strict formulas of reciprocity, she sought a more

11 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, 1801, Rowne, 36.

12 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, 1801, Rowne, 76.
"natural" form of sociability, a more relaxed code of social intercourse. Others joined Southgate in commenting with astonishment or worry about acquaintances who adhered to scripts of polite behavior too closely. Just as Southgate fussied about Rowson's exaggerated sense of propriety, Hannah Heath feared that her son was "to thoughtless and extravagant," and fretted that her sister-in-law's "taste leads to gayety and pleasure--she is never happier than when the mind is entirely engrossed in the pleasures of this vain, and uncertain life." Southgate encountered a like character in "Miss Ashley . . . a truly fashionable City Belle," she wrote in awe to a friend, "but, good heavens! Ellen, I had no idea of a fashionable girl before--one that devotes her whole attention to fashion." She promised that "I have much to tell you when I return, about the Miss Ashleys' french style of dress." Intrigued by Miss Ashley, but at the same time astounded, she joined Heath in mimicking prescriptive warnings about undue compliance to the dictates of fashion. By penning these expressions, she sought to assure herself of the relative tameness (or reasonableness) of her own proclivities even as she confirmed the appeal of extravagance, "gayety," and "fashion."

One of the problems with Miss Ashley, of course, was that she wore a "french

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13 Irene Fizer has noted that Southgate sought to create a "new kind of male-female discourse, through the free expression of feeling." Fizer, "Signing as Republican Daughters," 254.

14 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 26, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

15 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Betsey Heath and "Mr Brooks" spent that particular evening at Heath's house "amusing[ing] themselves talking of the Theatre."

16 Eliza Southgate to Eleanor Coffin, Aug. 8, 1802, Bowne, 133-34. In 1808, after having a few women over for tea, an appalled Hannah Heath likewise commented that "Mrs Patten was dressed as expensively as any Lady I ever saw in my life." Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 16, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
style of dress." After the revolution, newly independent Americans struggled to identify and celebrate an "American" model of social and personal deportment. In *The Boarding School*, for example, Hannah Webster Foster consistently denounced foreign imports of books, fashion, and knowledge. One of her characters gloried in the "spirit of Columbian independence [that] exults in her bosom" upon being able to learn world geography from "Doctor Morse's . . . Universal Geography" rather than through "recourse to the labours of foreigners." "Mortified exceedingly" upon discovering that American hat fashions conformed to imported European "memorandum-books" consisting of "cuts of ladies' head-dresses, hats, and other habiliments," another character agreed with Europeans who sneered that "Americans had neither character nor opinion of their own." She could not "but think it extremely ridiculous for an independent nation, which . . . glories in its freedom, and boasts of its genius and taste, servilely to ape exotic fashions. Have not," she demanded, "the daughters of Columbia sufficient powers of invention to decorate themselves?"¹⁷ Benjamin Rush likewise expressed his disgust at the absurdity of "our ladies" wearing "a hat and cushion which were calculated for the temperature of a British summer" in "the heat of ninety degrees." "It is high time," he proclaimed, "to study our own character . . . and to adopt manners in everything that shall be accommodated to our state of society and to the forms of our government."¹⁸ Indeed, Rush predicted pessimistically, "too soon [America] will follow the footsteps of the nations of Europe in manners and vices." "The first marks we shall perceive of our declension," he warned

¹⁷ Foster, *The Boarding School*, 225, 246-47.

¹⁸ Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 36.
ominously, "will appear among our women," whose "idleness, ignorance and profligacy will be the harbingers of our ruin."19 For Foster, adopting European fashions indicated a sorry lack of American "character"; for Rush, the republic itself would collapse if women failed to be industrious, sensible, and moderate, the antithesis of European "manners and vices."

Everyday correspondents and diarists, however, while often agreeing that indulging in the trappings and activities of refinement might be injurious to the individual, hardly judged such predilections as "harbingers" of the nation's "ruin." They joined social experts in condemning overly social tendencies, but only to a certain extent. Eliza Southgate Bowne worried that "Mrs Derby . . . is almost worn out with dissipation," but saw this as a problem for Mrs. Derby rather than a national calamity. "I greatly fear her constitution has suffered an injury from this kind of life it will never recover," she confided to her sister. On the other hand, she applauded Mrs. Derby's efforts at reform, noting proudly that she "has absolutely refused all invitations since her return, and means to rest for a few days." This hopeful prognosis notwithstanding, Bowne also revealed the intended brevity of this regimen, explaining that when Mrs. Derby departs, "she takes one of our belles to Boston with her."20 Bowne's assessment echoes Susanna Rowson's description of a fictional character in The Inquisitor who had "been whirled about from

19 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 37-38. Then, he continued, "will the . . . performance of a buffoon on the stage be the subject of more conversation and praise than the patriot or the minister of the gospel; . . . then will the history of romantic amours be preferred to the immortal writings of Addison, Hawkinsworth, and Johnson," he added, never willing to pass up the pleasure of condemning novels.

20 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Miranda Southgate, n.d. prob. 1806 or 1807, Bowne, 216.
one folly to another, and . . . witness to such scenes of shame as made me shudder." The problem here, however, Rowson intimated, lay in her character's faulty education, for she added defensively that she "was told it was usual for people of quality to lead a life of riot." 21

A character in Foster's *The Boarding School* associated such debauchery with the female, praying, "may I never be corrupted by that levity and folly, which are too prevalent among a part of my sex." 22 Like Rush, Foster saw the female as particularly susceptible to corrupt tendencies. At least one reader agreed with her, for Abigail Brackett Lyman criticized not just the adoption of European fashions, but the attention to external experience itself by labeling it female. "Would Heaven our sex in general spent as much time in improving their minds as in ornamenting their Bodies," she wrote, "then we should not only hear them celebrated for their Beauty & eligence in the Ballroom--but extol'd for their intrinsic merit in the daily walks of private life." 23 Others were less certain about associating dissipation and women. Southgate had been as appalled by her "lady man" as by Miss Ashley; Cowles fretted about both indecorous female behavior and "lads" that "behaved so bad," and Heath worried about both her sister-in-law's "taste" for "gayety and pleasure" and her "extravagant" son. Indeed, these writers invoked the language of refinement to express concern about, praise, and criticize others. The

21 Rowson, *The Inquisitor*, 64.


23 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 20, 1800, *Lyman*, 119. On another occasion she sermonized that the burning of a tannery "loudly proclaims the vanity of worldly treasures & warns us not to place our affections inordinately on such perishable things but to lay up our treasure in heaven & believe in that Word which Liveth & abideth for ever." (Jan. 4, 1800, 113)
vocabulary they tapped, however, by no means appeared in their expressions with any consistency in tone or judgement. Instead, it was manipulated depending upon the circumstances.²⁴

Just as readers struggled to negotiate pressing daily chores and responsibilities with the urge to read, they fretted about socializing impinging upon the performance of "needful tasks." In 1812, Hannah Heath complained that after having "Mr Pierce" and Mr Tappon" to "dine," she "tried to make up a bad weeks work--mending but found it impossible--I had not time and felt almost sick with frolicking about so much so went to bed & left my mending."²⁵ On a Monday that same year, an already "dreadfull wash" was made worse by the arrival, "jest as dinner was ready," of "Doc Prentiss and Wife." "It made me sick to think of my work and company," Heath wrote in frustration, "but they staid untill 4 o Clock I then went to work again as fast as possible was very tired at night indeed."²⁶ On a different occasion, she reconciled competing demands by forsaking a social event. "Invited to join a party," which she supposed she "should have liked . . . very much indeed," she declined because, as she wrote, she "thought home . . . might be attended with happier reflections--than mirth and gaiety--I have at present a clear conscince."²⁷ In a different entry she expressed the relief of "a day of rest from

²⁴ Amanda Vickery has likewise noted that the English woman Elizabeth Shackleton "was quick to call into question the sartorial motivation of those she disliked. Things which demonstrated dignity, civility and elegance in her friends, could in others just as easily represent foolish pretension." Vickery, "Women and the World of Goods," in Consumption and the World of Goods, ed. Brewer and Porter, 285.

²⁵ Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

²⁶ Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

²⁷ Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 3, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
Company," acknowledging that as much as she "enjoy[ed] the pleasure of society and the
Friendly intercourse of relatives and neighbours, . . . to be to much engaged in
amusements of that kind causes disgust."\textsuperscript{28} In an entry far less laudatory about the
benefits of social activity, she noted with a mixture of self-contempt and resignation that
"we fly from one scene of dissipation to another all to kill tedious time--poor mistaken
mortals."\textsuperscript{29}

Confirming prescriptive literature that berated decadent, overly indulgent
manifestations of social intercourse and excessive attention to modes of dress, diarists
and correspondents regularly criticized their own such proclivities. But even as they
invoked the vocabulary of prescriptive denunciations, they sometimes ignored the intent
of that vocabulary, just as they tapped rhetoric about harmful novels or improper political
involvement while simultaneously confounding those admonitions. In 1771, the newly
married Elizabeth Porter Phelps hoped that she may "never . . . value myself for
Grandeur." Like Bowne's description of the short-lived reformation undertaken by Mrs.
Derby, however, Phelps's very next line betrayed her resolution: "Fryday Becca
Dickingson to taylor."\textsuperscript{30} Since Rebecca Dickinson was a very accomplished taylor, the
very one who had constructed Phelps's elegant wedding dress, and gifted and appreciated
to the extent that she left everyday sewing tasks to other local seamstresses, it appears that

\textsuperscript{28} Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 2, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. A different kind of revulsion occurred in 1812 when she "felt almost stupid went to bed in the fournoon, it appeared to be a family complaint before night which we imputed to eating chocolate for breakfast." (Jan. 1812)

\textsuperscript{29} Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 31, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

\textsuperscript{30} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Feb. 17, 1771, \textit{NEHGR} 118 (1964), 112.
Phelps did not construe "grandeur" to include fashionable apparel. Nancy Shippen Livingston engaged in a similar exercise in her diary some years later, acknowledging that "I think it wrong for me to touch a card for I no sooner set down to them but I feel so great a propensity for gaming that I intend to make a resolution not to play at all." She nevertheless "Play’d with Gen. Gates & lost 3 dollars." Likewise, in a reflective entry on her heart-wrenching separation from her "only & beloved Child" and her mother’s "distressing" situation, Livingston observed that, as a result of her troubles, she "live[d] retired & confined," and subsequently commended herself on her simple tastes: "How much shou’d I have suffer’d in my present situation if those prejudices which are customary to people of my birth had holden their empire over me; if, for example, I had annexed much value to luxury & showy dress." She knew that if she succumbed to the priorities that preoccupied others of her class, she "shou’d now cast a doleful look on my plain suit; whereas their happy form join’d to neatness, abundantly suffice my vanity." A couple of weeks later, however, she penned a satisfied "pass’d almost all this morn’g in shopping, & made several pretty purchases." Lyman likewise admitted that upon


32 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 4, 1784, Shippen, 215. Lyman also struggled with card playing when she reflected that "as an amusement Cards may some times be admissible but when we become so attached to them as to think the hours tedious til the evening arrives that we may be playing them I think they then become criminal--such a propensity ought to be immediately conquer’d & resolutely opposed." Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 4, 1800, Lyman, 157. Without judgement, Julia Cowles observed simply in 1799 that she "played cards for amusement." Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 39.

33 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 5, 1784, Shippen, 216.

receiving "two invitations for the afternoon," she "discovered a fickleness with regard to choosing which I would accept—which I ought to be ashamed of." Still, she congratulated herself for having "at last . . . determined right, for I went where I was sent for first."35

For Livingston, writing itself served as a means of checking dissolute tendencies. "I intend from this time to continue my journal," she resolved in 1785, "which I have neglected doing for these (near) four Months past. I heartily pray that I may so spend my time as to make me here after happy in the reflection." "These last three months," she berated herself, "my time has passed in a continual round of insipid amusement, & trivial occupations."36 Eliza Southgate likewise connected writing (and reading) to attempts to curb her fondness for parties and gayety by stating that as "much as I enjoy society I never am unhappy when without it, . . . since . . . I never feel alone when I have my pen or my book."37 Indeed, a disgruntled Southgate later wrote that "society, bustle, and noise frustrate all my ideas. I cannot write anywhere but at home."38 Southgate used this vocabulary disingenuously, however, since she also proclaimed forthrightly that "solitary happiness I have no idea of."39 By readily availing themselves of the discourses of solitude and refined sociability, she and Livingston conceptualized their experiences in terms of both, testifying, at the very least, to the pervasiveness of admonitions

35 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 4, 1800, Lyman, 112.

36 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Feb. 24, 1785, Shippen, 226.

37 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 3, 1800, Bowne, 27.

38 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, July 17, 1801, Bowne, 65.

denouncing "levity and folly" in women. If they sometimes manipulated or confounded that language, they nevertheless confirmed its fashionableness.

The adoption of expressions about excessive social and "dissipated" behavior varied from individual to individual and from circumstance to circumstance. Livingston felt guilty about playing cards and neglecting her journal, but she also found relief from her situation in social play and shopping. As with reading, she characterized "insipid amusements" and "trivial occupations" as welcome reprieves or diversions from everyday pressures. Abigail Lyman too observed that while "it will not do for me to spend all or even the greater part of my time in embroidering drawing or music," she nevertheless "always engage[d] in them with pleasure--as an amusement and diversion."40 While we do not know exactly what warranted the title "insipid," in Livingston's expression, it is noteworthy that various aspects of her situation found expression in the language of sociability, refinement, and prescriptive denunciations of those inclined to "dissipation."

Upon her beloved Louis Otto's return to the United States in 1785, she wrote worriedly that "the strangest alteration has taken place in my feelings that can be conceived." "My tranquility is fled," she wrote anxiously, "I neglect my duties--I seek in the charms of dissipation for happiness. I find none--I return home more unhappy than before, displeased with every thing I have said or heard." To break this cycle, she resolved "I will for the future stay more at home, see less company; for two reasons, my Father wishes it, & I feel more than ever that retirement suits me best."41 Given Livingston's boredom

40 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 171.

41 Nancy Shippen Livingston, Sept. 15, 1785, Shippen, 233.
with "dull days" in the countryside, it appears that "retirement" recommended itself only as an antidote to the deepest throws of remorse. Furthermore, since she understood perfectly well that her situation hardly permitted much of a reprieve from expected rounds of social intercourse, her recriminations and resolutions can be seen as rhetorical exercises or efforts to temper certain tendencies, but not outright renunciations of society.

Other correspondents and diarists, however, characterized sociability as the best means of resisting "seduction" by its excesses. William Whiting recommended that his daughter avoid being duped by the "polite address and gaudy tinsel [that] often . . . conceal flirts and coxcombs" by "acquainting yourself with those of the politer sort of both sexes." He advised Mary Anna "to acquire that modest boldness, which may enable you . . . to act with a dignity suited to your age and situation in life." He advised Mary Anna "to acquire that modest boldness, which may enable you . . . to act with a dignity suited to your age and situation in life." Only by engaging in society could one avoid being victimized by it. This same young woman's brother worried about her mingling with "numbers of those illiberal spirits, not the most propitious to refined society," at the same time that he conceded that she actually risked little because "there is a dignity in virtue, that, when judiciously exercised, infuses both respect and admiration into the mind of even the most licentious and abandoned." Her example and influence, he felt, would shelter her from libertines. A friend likewise imagined that the young Mary Anna Whiting had succeeded in realizing these goals when she "fanc[jed] that you are among the happy number, who pass through life, untainted by

42 William Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, Aug. 14, 1785, Boardman, 80.

43 Samuel Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, July 2, 1785, Boardman, 85.
the follies and vices of mankind." These comments by Whiting's family and friend confirm the strongest lesson contained in Susanna Rowson's novel Charlotte Temple. Charlotte's deception, seduction, and death resulted from the retirement in which she had been raised by her naive and idealistic parents. Mrs. Beauchamp, on the other hand, the character Rowson wanted her readers to emulate, embodied wisdom, virtue, and familiarity with the ways of the world.

Different figures wrestled with the question of whether the virtuous should participate in and work to perfect society or withdraw from society so as not to be tainted by its evil ways. Eliza Southgate had been appalled by her cousin's desire to retire to the countryside because, begging the question of whether rural living promoted virtue or not, she saw "no merit in being virtuous when there is no struggle to preserve that virtue." In contrast, Julia Cowles refuted the supposed benefits of social behavior when she worried that those "who have ever felt a sense of religion and divine things will acknowledge that if they mix with those who have no sense or regard to them," their "easing ins[in]uating artful way" will have "influence" to the extent that "we lose in a short time our respect and may end in heedless ruin. It is necessary," she concluded warily, to "be cautious." Abigail Brackett Lyman also wrote with trepidation that "I pray to be kept from the influence of bad example," and Hannah Heath likewise hoped she would "not be too

44 Polly Pitkin to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., prob. late 1780s, Boardman, 106.

45 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, May 23, 1802, Bowne, 101.

46 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 69.

47 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 5, 1800, Lyman, 139-40.
much taken with" "Mr Ben Welles," who "lately return from Europe" and "was all
politeness and attention." It is necessary, she counseled herself, to "conduct at all times
with propriety."48

Mary Anna Whiting Boardman too, although the recipient of letters as a girl
encouraging her to ward off society's vices by mastering them through exposure,
hesitated to sanction such engagement in letters to her own children. In 1812, she
admonished her son, "do not, I beseech you, suffer any of the allurements and vanities of
this deceitful world to decoy you from the path of duty."49 She warned her daughter
likewise to "never . . . suffer the syren voice of pleasure to seduce you from your duty, . . .
[to] use every precaution, to preserve your health, and," she continued, "do not commit
suicide, for the sake of being in the fashion." This morbid remark was followed by an
entreaty to not "value yourself, nor believe that any one will value you, for your dress and
ornaments."50 This latter concern preoccupied Cowles as well who scolded herself for
thinking "too much of external appearance" and devoting "quite too much time in
ornamenting (or attempting it) that part which is frail, neglecting that part which lives

48 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 13, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She added that
"he insisted on our dining with him on Saturday" and, two days later, upon accepting the invitation, she
wrote, "we did not enjoy our visit much, being among strangers we came away as soon as tea was over." (Feb. 15, 1806)

49 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to William Whiting Boardman, Dec. 17, 1812, Boardman, 144.
She was especially concerned that he "not let his mind receive the least tincture of Socianism." (144)

50 Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Cornelia Elizabeth Boardman, n.d., c. 1825, Boardman, 182.
In a subsequent letter she added that she feared that her daughter "[d]id not improve as fast as you might"
because "a young mind is easily warped, dazzled, and diverted . . . to [things] . . . of comparatively little
importance." Mary Anna Whiting Boardman to Cornelia Elizabeth Boardman, c. 1825, Boardman, 183.
forever, which ought to be the greatest concern of every rational mind." Like Phelps and Livingston before her, however, her parenthetical "or attempting it" belies the sincerity of her remonstrance because even as she renounced external adornment, she critiqued her efforts, indicating that the effects achieved by such efforts still mattered.

In her journal, Abigail Brackett Lyman explored the impetus behind her proclivity for sociability just as she had wondered why she "consum[ed] so much precious time" reading novels (as discussed in chapter two). Reminiscent of her circular argument about reading a "few" novels "merely as an amusement--and because I disliked my feeling when unable to give my opinion of a Book spoken of in company," she awkwardly condemned excessive sociability at the same time that she valued friendship and concluded that sociability promoted rather than thwarted virtue. "Having an hour unengaged," she began, "part of it may be cheerfully devoted to reflection--which indeed appears the more rational & proper as I have been uncommon gay & thoughtless this day." Like Livingston, she turned to writing itself to atone for what she considered excessive sociability. "How foolish--how absolutely useless," Lyman wrote, "is the usual chit-chat of the times--the fashionable topicks of conversation--it is an evil--answer'd I to myself--which all complain of--yet none are resolute enough to oppose or wise enough to rectify." Indeed, she added, invoking the ubiquitous language of this period, "We all study to be agreeable & entertaining rather than useful companions. If this wish to please should chance to prompt us to do a good action--it is well--if not--why we must please if

51 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 70.

52 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 127. See chapter two.
possible." But, returning to her own specific case, she confounded the distinction between writing and conversing by intimating that she was merely transcribing a conversation she shared with herself. "Ever distrust your own abilities—said I to myself," she wrote, "& take the lowest seat in your opinion of yourself—& act yourself—I mean behave yourself—I mean," she stumbled, "do not be a hypocrite & you will be hopeful." Only then will you "find friends in those who like honesty & who abhor dissimulation--then setting before you a 'good' example of illustrious Virtue." With such companions, she promised herself, "your heart may be improved" and "your manners will of consquence." Just as reading novels spared Lyman the embarrassment of being "unable to give [her] opinion of a Book spoken of in company," consorting with the right kinds of friends would prevent her from enduring the mortification of being perceived as a "hypocrite" due to her preoccupation with improving her manners.

A friend's comment compelled Lyman to pursue yet another introspective evaluation in her journal. Recording that "a few cursory remarks made accidently by a friend has . . . given me a deeper view of my own evil heart," she confessed that "I now see in striking light the strength of my attachment to worldly good and [to be] conformed to this perishing world in all its vanities and show." With chagrin, she recorded that she had "been desirous of accumulating this superfluous fullness--and have freely gratified my taste in dress perhaps beyond the dictates of prudence." She tempered her self-recrimination, however, by observing that "the unlimited indulgence of fond Parents has

53 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 28, 1800, Lyman, 149.

54 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 28, 1800, Lyman, 150.
by no means taught me to deny myself." Still, she admitted, "the more I become acquainted with myself the more I am displeased." Turning to her journal to explore a lesson learned from a friend in a social situation (a "good action" resulting from social activity), Lyman accepted responsibility for her actions and admitted her faults at the same time that she placed some of the blame on her parents. The problem itself was described in language that permeated her reading; the solution, at least in part, rested in the reflective process of putting pen to paper.

Anticipating parental censure and responding to prescriptive rhetoric, Eliza Southgate carefully worded a letter confessing her fondness for the sociability and gaiety of resort living. "This scene of dissipation may please for a while by its novelty, but it soon satiates," she assured her mother, as "I have never been in the habit of spending my time in idleness." Heath likewise described sociability as a temporary event in her journal, to which she turned, like Lyman and Livingston, to reflect on her compliance to the codes of the polite world. In 1806, when "Mr Heath was going to Boston," she "thought I would improve the opportunity of calling to see some of the great folks." She returned home from this outing "satisfied with my humble home, compared to what I have seen." Shortly thereafter, she visited "Mr Morse" in Newburyport who "lives in an

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55 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Oct. 18, 1802, Lyman, 183-84.

56 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 22, 1802, Browne, 131. She added that "they say here that the Southern ladies seem more at home here than the Northern ladies and do not appear to think industry necessary to happiness."

57 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 25, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS. On a practical level these remarks of Heath's are a bit disingenuous given the constant fretting about money that pervades her journal. In 1806, for example, she expected to take comfort from "call[ing] to see Mrs Bartlett," who was "finely," but could not "feel in good spirits, the thoughts of getting money to supply our necessary
elegant house, elegant furniture had every attention that was possible to be paid to one, but still sighed for my own home."

Not always entirely convincing, statements decrying indulgent visiting and socializing leave no doubt that castigations of fashion, luxurious living, resort activities, and inordinate visiting permeated literature of the early republic. There was another side to this debate, however, and it is no coincidence that Hannah Heath considered calling on "some of the great folks" a means of "improv[ing] an opportunity," even if the experience left her "sigh[ing] for [her] own home." She and others were just as likely to challenge as to endorse warnings about excessive sociability being dangerous and a "harbinger of our ruin." In their letters and diaries they frequently discussed visiting, fashion, and furnishings in terms of self-education and improved civility, qualities they considered beneficial to themselves as individuals and to society as a whole. Just as Southgate had asserted to her cousin in terms of the rural-urban divide that the "happiness we are all in pursuit of" could only be discovered in company with those who share a "similarity of sentiments," and Lyman had insisted that she read novels because she "disliked her feeling when unable to give [her] opinion of a book spoken of in company," sociability, sharing sentiments, and engaging "in company" was characterized as both desirable and improving.

Upon reflecting on her wish to accompany her husband to Boston, for example, "wants weigh down every thing else." (May 10, 1806)

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58 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 3, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS. After visiting "Mrs Perkins who lives in Mr Sullivans house," however, Heath "came home . . . contented with my home--I can truly say I aspire to no higher stile of living in this vain world." (June 10, 1808)
Lyman contended in 1800 that she "may promise myself much more than pure amusement from such a journey. The society I meet & the friendship I have form'd there --not only please--but benefit me. The conversation and example of my friends fill me with the Love of Virtue--improve my judgement & instruct my heart." She likewise berated a time in her past when "from a mistaken principal of duty I once deprived myself of all the advantages by excluding myself from almost all society." Indeed, "it is a duty," she wrote on another occasion "to associate with our fellow creatures [since] experience evinces that we derive from it very great improvement and most refin'd delights. Were we doom'd to a solitary existence--denied the company & the friendship of our species," she posited, "of how many & rich Blessings should we be bereft." Indeed, in her *Ladies' Remembrancer: or, Polite Journal, for the Year 1800*, Lyman copied several paragraphs of social advice from Hannah Webster Foster's *The Boarding School*, including statements extolling the "benefit or instruction" to be derived "from all kinds of society."

Southgate agreed with Lyman's assessment of the merits and requirements of sociability. Pleased to have been complimented on her writing, she assured her brother that she hoped to "make as great progress in my other studies and be an 'Accomplished

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60 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 5, 1800, *Lyman*, 139-40.


A few years later, questioning the efficacy of her education, she admitted that she "left school with a head full of something, tumbled in without order or connection." But, still intent on realizing her goal, she "returned home with a determination to put it in more order, . . . of culling the best part to make a few sentiments out of—to serve as a little ready change in my commerce with the world." At the same time she wondered about the qualities said to characterize an "Accomplished Miss." "What is refinement?" she mused. Confirming that writing and reading contributed to mastering codes of social intercourse and enlightened sensibility, she wrote that she "thought it was a delicacy of taste which might be acquired, if not any thing in our nature." Unlike Cowles, however, who also thought attributes of propriety were acquired rather than innate, Southgate gave no indication that she sought the democratization of such codes.

For Southgate, travel constituted one important means of acquiring refinement and, although she regularly described life at Ballston Springs as "one continued scene of idleness and dissipation—have a ball every other night, ride, walk, stroll about the piazzas, dress,—indeed we do nothing that seems like improvement," she nevertheless insisted that "still I think there is no place where one may study the different characters and dispositions to greater advantage." In a different letter, she likewise noted that she had "received much delight in this tour, seen much elegant company, variety of character and manners" and was "sensible it will be a source of great improvement, as well as pleasure."


64 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, 1801, Bowne, 56, 58.

65 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, Aug. 22, 1802, Bowne, 128.
She explained that "I shall have seen that style and splendor, which has so many magic charms when viewed at a distance, divested of its false place, we find it mingled with as many pains as any other situation in life, nay, more poignant pain." Convinced that she "shall not be at all injured by this life; though I enjoy myself highly and mingle with these people with much delight," she promised that she "shall return happy and content." Like Heath, she professed to enjoy being with the "great folks" from time to time, but mostly sighed for home.

"Improvement," one of the most overused words of the eighteenth century, an observation made about eighteenth-century England that applies equally well to the newly independent American states, often connoted the development and maintenance of virtue, a loaded term in this period which different correspondents and diarists invoked in various ways. One of the topics that frequently overlapped discussions about virtue was the role of wealth or poverty in cultivating and preserving that elusive guarantor of the new republic. In contrast to Cowles, who considered general prosperity a means of creating a "decent" society, Elizabeth Porter Phelps noted without comment in 1802 that her minister "Spoke of the danger of prosperity & need of trouble." As might be expected, Abigail Brackett Lyman engaged in a much lengthier reflection on the same topic. Like Cowles, she agreed that "absolute want & thread bare poverty are certainly no

66 Eliza Southgate to Eleanor Coffin, Aug. 8, 1802, Brown, 137.


68 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, March 7, 1802, NEHGR 122 (1968), 68.
ways desirable & can never long be the lot of any who are industrious & frugal," and thought "a humble Cottage—a cheerful family . . . the most desirable situation. If we choose that which will ensure the most refined delight this life can afford," she continued, "in such a situation we should be equally removed from the snares attendant on extreme poverty or riches." Upon considering the results of her program, however, she conceded that "all have trials—wealth has 'bewitching' snares & the rich are often insensible of the strength of those silken chains that encompass them—temptations lay in ambush—everything wears a false appearance—the tinsel glistens & the real gold seems to have become dim—immersed in pleasant enjoyment." "The Cottage too," she realized, "we might be unwilling to quit—pride might creep under this humble roof—or ambition alone might animate the daily Labours. Urged on by poverty we might give way to temptation & commence the career of vice—defraud our neighbour & deceive the unsuspicous."

Unable to resolve this dilemma, she concluded that "whatever is our situation we may be assured it has its trials & peculiar temptations attendant on it—as well as its advantages."

Hannah Heath likewise explored the relationship between virtue and economic status, writing that she spent an "agreeable day" at "Mr Cabbots" in Boston, where, she wrote cautiously, she "saw a number of young Ladies of fashion and much of high life, but do not sigh to partake of their enjoyments may I ever be satisfied with my situation and feel greatfull . . . that my lot has been cast in the middle sphere of life—that I have everything necessary for my Comfort and happiness without livin in Luxury and

69 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 15, 1800, Lyman, 166-68.
Idleness." It should be remembered that when Heath, Cowles, Southgate and Lyman explored the relationship between economic status and virtue, they did so from the comfortable station of just one or two tiers below the very rich. The people Cowles had mingled with on "fieldday" were probably just as amused by Cowles's manners and deportment as she was "shocked" by their indecorous behavior. While Heath situated herself in the "middle sphere of life," she was undoubtedly better heeled than that. Still, these ruminations on refinement and wealth confirm prescriptive admonitions about the dangers of luxury. As Phelps's minister intoned, "prosperity" could be "dangerous."

The search for genuine, everlasting virtue compelled discussions in terms specifically of polite sociability as well. "The common civilities of life--politeness and proper attention to differances of characters and stations produce the appearance of much harmony & love," Abigail Lyman averred, "but these really abide only with those whose hearts are united by real friendship--who are actuated by similar principals cherish the same views desires and wishes--cultivate simular dispositions--habits and tastes." Unhappily, she concluded, agreeing with Southgate's assessment about ignorant, illiterate country inhabitants, "the corrupt propensities of the human mind so often preponderate over the poor remains of virtue--that the many appear utterly incapable of true affection unable to govern self or set bounds [on] its ambition." Although Lyman seems to have been talking about those "so organized that they are incapable of receiving a delicate impression," she also located resistance to acquiring desirable traits in the privileged.

70 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Feb. 19, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

71 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, 1801, Bowne, 58.
"We see many whose views are busied only about the comparatively trifling concerns," she continued, and although "apparently interested warmly in each others welfare," as soon as "the silken band is broken" by "some trifling fault [that] creates disgust—or fancied superiority [that] excites jealousy,"\textsuperscript{72} that caring humanity disappears like a chimera.

Notwithstanding the "corrupt propensities of the human mind," Lyman hoped for an improved world, a world made better through the good effects of regularly scheduled activities which encouraged the polite mingling of men and women. Like Southgate's "lady man" who slipped into an accepting, well-mannered company of ladies to avoid insult, Lyman too confirmed that women's presence resulted in a more civilized environment. In a letter to a Boston friend, she expressed "sincere[] regret" about the lack of assemblies in Northampton, "not mearly because I myself am fond of dancing," she assured, "but because I think they have generally a good effect on the Minds & Manners of both sexes." Convinced that "the Characters of our Young Men suffer . . . from this negligence & inattention," she asked rhetorically: "does it not prove that they are not supremly happy in the Society of the Ladies nor very solicitous to secure their approbation—or promote their pleasures?" Indeed, this distressing lack of male solicitation, she reasoned, "prove[s] their taste depraved—& they absorb'd in other employments (for I cannot call them amusements)—in which the fair Sex can never be desir'd to join."\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Abigail Brackett Lyman, Oct. 13, 1802, \textit{Lyman}, 183.

\textsuperscript{73} Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Grew, Jan. 11, 1801, \textit{Lyman}, 218.
This assessment of the desirable effects of assemblies echoes Hannah Webster Foster's *The Boarding School*, in which one character "imagines that society receives its greatest charm from a mutual interchange of sentiment and knowledge" and that "both sexes are reciprocal instruments of each other's improvement" since the "different qualities" of men and women, "intermingling, form a happy symphony."\(^7^4\) Julia Cowles wondered about this, however, putting most of the success or failure of a social outing on males. On an occasion when she "went to sleighing," she enjoyed a "very good" ride, but added that unfortunately "our lads got disappointed" and "if the lads don't enjoy themselves the ladies won't."\(^7^5\)

Notwithstanding all the reflections about polite acquirements in terms of excessively refined behavior or socially improving manifestations of fashion and civility, correspondents and diarists also refuted excoriations of refined trappings and activities by relating—without remorse or justification—instances of enjoying bountiful eating, luxurious fabrics, lively conversations, and gay parties. After exclaiming about the "profusion of the delicacies & luxuries of good living" to be found in his uncle's "castle" in a chatty letter to his father, Thomas Lee Shippen considered his relationship to the finer things of life: "this you will say is not among the most unpleasant circumstances of the business in your son's estimation. I acknowledge it my good father," he chuckled, "I acknowledge that from a strict observance of you and a constant endeavor from my youth to do as my father did, I have imbibed an Epicurean taste." Like Lyman's memory of the

\(^7^4\) Foster, *The Boarding School*, 176.

\(^7^5\) Julia Cowles, 1799, *Cowles*, 42.
"unlimited indulgence of fond Parents," Shippen rebutted arguments that his generation lacked the sacrificing virtue that marked the revolutionary generation (and thereby led the republic to ruin) by suggesting that he only behaved in keeping with his upbringing. Severing the link generally assumed to connect virtue and happiness (and quoting from reading material), he added that "[I] really think with Mons' De St Evremond whose expression I have just used, that even Cato's virtues without it [Epicurean taste] would not make us completely estimable or happy."  

Betsey Heath likewise reported enthusiastically that "twenty-four of us spent the day at the island" enjoying "an elegant dinner; turkey, chicken, goose, fresh venison," after which they "danced & sung." Pleased to have devoted an entire day to this revelry, she further recorded that after a "hot supper," they "played at pawns in the evening" until leaving at "ten o'clock." Likewise, one of the most noteworthy aspects of her brother's wedding to Hannah Williams in 1791, as she enthused delightedly, was a "side-board of cold meat," "a large cake dressed with an orange box of gold tip sugared almonds, sugar plumbs, citron & small gingerbread toys sugared over." In addition, "they had beef-a-la-mode and roast bacon, pork & tongue."

Eliza Southgate, who often tempered her descriptions of social pleasures with

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76 Thomas Shippen to William Shippen, 1785, Shippen, 229-230.

77 Betsey Heath, Jan. 18, 1791, Crafts, 697-98. Nobble's Island, now East Boston, was leased by the Williams Family and described as "a place of continual resort, and the scene of boundless hospitality." (697f.)

78 Betsey Heath, Jan. 11, 1791, Crafts, 698. Although less forthcoming with the details, Julia Cowles had likewise indulged happily in "an excellent dinner" at "Langdon's." Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 42.
assurances that she would be equally happy at home in Scarborough, did sometimes indulge in unqualified assessments. As she wrote in 1800, she had "been continually engaged in parties, plays, balls, &c. &c. since the first week I came to town [Boston]." Indeed, she proudly noted, "I have attended all the balls and assemblies, one one week and one the next." Since "they have regular balls once a fortnight," she explained, "I have been to one or the other every Thursday. They are very brilliant," she assured her sister, "and I have formed a number of pleasing acquaintances." Just last evening, she reported, she "dance[d] until 1 o'clock." She further heaped praise on the "charming suppers, table laid entirely with china" and her consistently "charming partners." Still wary of parental censure, however, she appended a rather formulaic "Give my best respects to Pappa and Mamma, and tell them I shall soon be tired of this dissipated life and almost want to go home already." Later, she "was almost tempted to wish to stay a week" in Portland, where "there were so many parties, and so gay every body appeared--that I longed to stay and take part." In another letter, she chided that "a great number of elegant gentleman are here [Albany], many from N.Y." Indeed, she teased a friend, "your Boston Mr. Amory and Mr. Lee would look rusty long side them." But "Hush, not a word!" she beseeched, just as correspondents expounding on politics sometimes inserted requests


80 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 3, 1800, Bowne, 27.

81 Eliza Southgate to Eleanor Coffin, Aug. 8, 1802, Bowne, 136. Southgate's sister likewise enjoyed the splendors of New York City, which she was "much more pleased with . . . than with Boston." She described New York as "superior" and "delightful," with "more sociability and elegance." Indeed, she was especially attracted by New Yorkers' habit of "dress[ing] with remarkable simplicity" in contrast to Boston where "every one dresses, and a person would look singular not to conform; but here there is such a variety, and the most genteel people dress so plain that one never appears singular." Octavia Southgate to
not to "tell any body that I write politics."

In 1805, even the usually contrite Hannah Williams Heath spent a delightful evening at "Mr Richardsons the first," where she found "everything in and about the house Elegant beyond description." "We had everything that can be name to eat and drink," she effused, confirming that "eating was the chief amusement," along with "some card playing--a little dancing, but everything in high stile." "We certainly had everything to make our happiness compleat," she gloated, and added happily that she "also felt in very good spirits." Still, the act of sitting down with her journal and a pen brought out the repentant in her and she continued that she "must with sincerity acknowledge there is not one half the real pleasure & happiness to be found in such parties of panache and show--as in the more obscure paths of life with religion for our guide."82 Notwithstanding this disclaimer, she reported cheerfully the next day that she "felt much better than I expected after my frolic."83 On the other hand, when deprived of expected accoutrements upon calling on "Mrs Hyslop, she "had a disagreeable time enough" with "nothing to eat or drink fit for a Man to offer of Mr Hyslops fortune."84 On a visit to "Mrs Rich," however, she saw "everything that is brilliant and expensive . . . Ladies and gentlemen in plenty--

Mary Southgate, Dec. 24, 1803, Bowne, 186.

82 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 16, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

83 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 17, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS. At another visit to Mr. Richardson's, she likewise found "everything in fine order, as elegant and handsome as possible." (Dec. 25, 1805)

84 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 4, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
cake and preserves of every kind. . . came home satisfied and tired."85 In August 1809, she and her party met "at the great Hotel in Linn, where we had a most beautiful breakfast."86

Conversing with others, of course, in addition to the joys of elegant food and "everything in high stile," constituted one of the primary pleasures and rewards of social gatherings. While it would be fascinating to compare a transcript of an actual conversation with the resulting construction that eventually appeared in a letter or diary, we must be satisfied with analyzing those written comments in terms of the vocabulary and context in which conversation was described. While Benjamin Rush underscored the importance of a "young lady" being qualified "not only for a general intercourse with the world but to be an agreeable companion for a sensible man,"87 Hannah Webster Foster wondered about the implications of that prescription. Although apparently seconding Rush's assessment, she also foresaw risks with his reasoning, as she revealed in terms of a character in The Boarding School who claimed that even though "our sex are often rallied on their volubility," she was "so averse to taciturnity, and so highly prize[d] the advantages of society and friendship, that I had rather plead guilty to the charge."88 The problem with encouraging young women to perfect conversational skills was that the

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85 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Dec. 23, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

86 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 24, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

87 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 29.

88 Foster, The Boarding School, 173. She then quotes a poem in which the last lines read: The births of intellect: when dumb forgot, Speech ventilates our intellectual fire; Speech burnishes our mental magazine. (174)
same cultural arbiters who encouraged them to do so would more than likely contradict themselves by subsequently accusing women of talking too much (both "with the world" and with their husbands).

Upon sending his daughter off to study with Jedidiah Morse in New Haven in 1785, William Whiting confirmed Rush's prescription for refining conversational skills when he hoped Mary Anna would develop enough intellectual breadth and polite accomplishments to allow her to be "free, among people of politeness, from the imputation of being awkward," "to converse about the world, with some general knowledge of it," and to "correspond with people of education, with propriety."89 Other diarists and correspondents likewise affirmed the pleasures and benefits to be derived from conversation. One young woman believed that "to converse with a friend, is, certainly, one of the most rational and pleasing enjoyments of life; and it constitutes the greatest part of the happiness that I enjoy."90 Abigail Lyman considered it palliative for her injured sister-in-law, who, "exercised with pain" (as Lyman helpfully reminded her), having fallen from a horse, must certainly benefit from the "refined delight" of "an expression of Love from . . . earthly friend[s]," which "no distress of body can ever lesson or impair."91 One of the main reasons that Southgate had found her cousin's plan to live in the countryside so preposterous, of course, was that he "could not expect to find many

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89 William Whiting to Mary Anna Whiting, Aug. 14, 1785, Boardman, 80-81.

90 Polly Pitkin to Mary Anna Whiting, n.d., prob. late 1780s, Boardman, 105. In contrast to this congenial intercourse, Pitkin declared that "that selfish attention and civility, which is often honored with the name of friendship, is not suited to my taste." (105)

91 Abigail Brackett Lyman to Mary Lord, Aug. 11, 1800, Lyman, 209.
with whom you could converse on a perfect equality,—or rather many whose sentiments could assimilate with yours."92 By living in the country, she knew, he would relegate himself to a lonely, solitary existence. Mary Anna Whiting Boardman probably would have agreed with Southgate. Deprived of conversation due to deafness rather than geography, she assured her husband that "it was not my desire, to hear all the trifling chit-chat, the news of the day, or the scandal of the neighborhood. To the last of these I ever wish to be deaf." But, she complained sadly, "when in company with those by whose conversation others are edified and delighted, to feel myself, in so great a measure, cut off from society, is almost insupportable."93

Eliza Southgate revealed the extent to which conversation itself was an evolving or fluid accomplishment when she reported that "Mrs. Lowell is a fine ladylike woman, yet her manners are such as would have been admired 50 years ago, there is too much appearance of whalebone and buckram to please the depraved taste of the present age." Mrs. Lowell's daughter, however, was "animated, sensible, enthusiastic, and very easy and pleasing in her conversation and manners, . . . [her] conversation [is] elegant and refined, she has no airs."94 Apparently Mrs. Lowell's "whalebone and buckram" translated into "airs," but Southgate's comment about the "depraved taste of the present age" came straight out of prescriptive rhetoric discovered in magazines and spouted by figures such as Benjamin Rush. Southgate likewise praised the company of "Mr. Samuel

93 Mary Anna Boardman to Elijah Boardman, n.d., prob. mid-1790s, Boardman, 177.
94 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, 1800, Rowne, 33.
Thatcher," with whom she "had a fine 'dish of conversation' served up with great taste, fine sentiments dressed with elegant language and seasoned with wit."95 She also considered it "quite a treat" to spend a "sociable day" with "Mrs Derby," having "seen so little of her but in mix't parties that it hardly seems like a visit."96 Hannah Heath likewise enjoyed a pleasant tête-à-tête with "John Godard [who] spent Chief of the day here--I was pleased with him, and shall remember his conversation a long time."97

An accomplishment capable of "polishing minds," as Abigail Lyman had averred, conversation could nonetheless be overdone to the extent that it lost its improving powers. As Lyman ruminated in 1800: "The ability to amuse a leasure hour or a talent of pleasing in Conversation is certainly highly desirable--every thing which can innocently contribute to the pleasures of Society--mitigate the sorrows--or soothe the cares of Life may be rationally aspired after." "Wit," however, she continued, although "universally admired," is "too often abused & prostituted by its possessors," "who . . . determined to be witty--hazard everything for the sake of saying a smart sentence." The potential pain that might result from such exercises bothered Lyman, who worried that "the ties of nature--the claims to compassion & pity--& even the common rules of politeness--are often forgotten--trampled on--by such persons without a strong & correct judgement & a just sence of what is right & may be said with propriety." "In fact," she concluded, "there are few subjects on which redicule may be lavish'd with impunity--or wit exercised

95 Eliza Southgate to Moses Porter, June 1, 1800, Bowne, 62.
96 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Miranda Southgate, n.d., prob. 1806 or 1807, Bowne, 216.
97 Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
without injury to the reputation or feelings of others & direct violation of the divine Commandments or precepts of Wisdom."  

Hannah Heath also wrote about the limits of the amusement and improvement afforded by conversing. On one occasion, she reported impatiently that she and some members of her family spoke, "among other subjects, . . . of the propriety of handkerchiefs for Children . . . but we differed very much in opinion as we usually do."  

Sometime later, she commented at length on a conversation that she "shall remember as long as I remember any thing."  Writing that "I consider myself very much insulted indeed," she explained that "[Sam Goddard] undertook to blame me for jesting at table as I did intimated that I did not do much work & that I wanted much to spend--and my own conscience tells me they are both unjust charges."  She resolved that "his unkind conversation shall and ought to be remembered by me--so far as never to let an unguarded word drop before him again, he has lost my confidence entirely."  

Like concerns about what kinds of information might be relayed in letters or confessed in diaries, the parameters of conversation also prompted explicit reflection. Clearly, Heath considered Sam Goddard's remarks much too derogatory and direct, and whether imparted in jest or not, resolved to limit the openness (or freedom) of her discussions with him. Like

98 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 4, 1800, Lyman, 157-58.

99 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 3, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

100 Hannah Williams Heath diary, July 1810, Heath Family Collection, MHS. "Mr Heath," she noted grimly, "and he are on very good terms today. Sam . . . is young & ignorant--and overbearing." In two subsequent entries she scorned that "Sam Goddard came to endeavour to enlighten me, he is a very wise Man in his own conceit," and "Sam dined & drank tea here he has got as much impudence as any young Man need have." (July 1810)
Southgate's threat to cease writing if disallowed the privilege to "write as I feel," Heath considered the implications of circumscribing her conversation. Her journal, however, imposed no such limits or constraints, as she freely expressed her anger and contempt for Sam Goddard, a satisfaction presumably denied to in conversation.

In spite of the risks accompanying excessive volubility, correspondents and diarists generally welcomed, enjoyed, and chronicled visiting and receiving company, just as they anticipated letters even as they worried about the form and content of the ones they themselves penned. Indeed, in some cases, journals seem to have functioned as an accounting of who went where. Only rarely did diarists explain the purpose for a call or divulge details about the discussions that animated these gatherings. Indeed, they might lump two very different kinds of social intercourse under the rubric of "visiting": those compelled by economic concerns (exchanging labor, bartering or buying and selling garden produce or home-produced goods, and so forth), and those designed to improve or maintain one's social status.101 During one of her son's visits home from Cambridge in 1790, for example, Elizabeth Porter Phelps succinctly noted, "Tuesday Fanny Lyman here--Jonathan Porter and Moses, John Hopkins in the Eve.--all here to see our Porter."102 Hannah Heath likewise simply documented, "Mr Mann drank tea here, Mrs Heath, Mrs White, Miss Betsey got home from Boston," or explained that she "went to Mr Morsons, there dined Mr Heath also--I then went to Mr Pirkens--after that call to see Mrs

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101 As Joan Gundersen has noted, the former "cut across class lines" while the latter generally occurred between individuals of the same class. Gundersen, To Be Useful to the World, 140.

Occasionally, diarists might be more effusive. In one such entry Nancy Livingston wrote happily that "Mr Mercer a delegate of Congress play'd chess & drank Tea with me." Likewise, in 1786, "a Company of learned men" dined at the Shippen household, leaving Nancy "very highly entertained." In 1805, Hannah Heath imparted more details than usual when she recorded that she "set out for Roxbury" where she had "every thing good to eat & drink, a fine dinner, a great deal of Company to drink tea, quite a variety, Ladies very much dressed--Children of all size and infants crying, all appear'd in good spirits." Regaled during an evening spent with other young women in 1800, Abigail Brackett Lyman observed in her journal that "I am always happy when my friends are so . . . I never laugh'd more heartily & as I think--with greater propriety than this evening." On another occasion, she enjoyed a "very pleasant sleigh ride in the afternoon & a very agreeable party in the evening," reveling particularly in the company of "Miss Henshaw," who "is largely possessed of that vivacity & good humor which is so enchanting to beholders & so useful in all the concerns of life." Although we know little about what occurred during a week of activities in January 1800, we do learn from

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103 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 20, 1805, Feb. 25, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS. The diary of Martha Moore Ballard accounts for visiting in the same manner. Ulrich, A Midwife's Tale, 91-94.


106 Hannah Williams Heath diary, June 4, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

107 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 28, 1800, Lyman, 84.

108 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 11, 1800, Lyman, 117.
Lyman's journal that the reason she was "engaged in so many & different employment that I find it difficult to recollect them--nor is it necessary," was because, "suffice it to say--it was Court week."¹⁰⁹

Unlike diaries, letters were more likely to give some explanation about the impetus for social visits as well as descriptions of the resulting entertainments. Since letters served to extend conversations by including even those removed geographically, or substituted for conversations (becoming "writing visits," as Elizabeth Porter Phelps observed in 1801), they naturally incorporated more information about social intercourse than journals which, while sometimes written with the idea of being read by others, did not participate in regular reciprocal exchanges. In 1784, when General Knox invited Nancy Shippen Livingston to visit him, he confirmed the link between conversation and correspondence when he familiarly asked his "dear Mrs L." if she was "engaged with all the world this evening," and "if not and you feel disposed to sit snug by a comfortable fireside and enjoy the chat of friendship--pray bring your work to the old rendezvous in my Cabbin."¹¹⁰ In 1789, Eliza Waite wrote a friend that she "past an afternoon at Mrs Browns in B. Lulia d----g rode with me & we had a very agreeable visit for Mrs Brown is still the same agreeable woman as when she was P----g B----ge." She further added that she "was quite charmed with her husband for he is a very likely man as well as [illegible] polite and agreeable, they live in the highest taste & have every thing elegant about them

¹⁰⁹ Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 20, 1800, Lyman, 118.

their garden is really delightful."\textsuperscript{111} Charmed herself by this portrayal of Mrs. Brown's situation, her correspondent gratefully acknowledged that Waite had "given me a most beautiful description . . . of Mrs Browns garden with such a husband and such a garden I think she must be very happy and I sincerely join you in thinking she is deserving of it."\textsuperscript{112} And, in 1789, Susan Kittredge assured her correspondent that her "gloominess was dispell'd" once she became "acquainted with the young Ladies (not mentioning the young Gentlemen whose company with the Ladies I have daily)."\textsuperscript{113} Eliza Southgate masterfully beckoned her correspondents into conversations, whether they be in a carriage full of ladies (and one "lady man"), at the breakfast table with General Knox, or alone with Mrs. Derby.

The process of preparing for anticipated company, however, sometimes resulted in harried journal entries. In 1800, for example, Lyman wrote hastily, "Fryday was busy all day preparing for the company which we had last evening." Since they "appeared to enjoy themselves," she added, "consequently [I] experienced all the pleasure I could rationally expect."\textsuperscript{114} Two years later, Elizabeth Porter Phelps wrote home to her husband informing him that "there are two pies in the tower shelf in the old closet" which she encouraged him to avail himself of "should [he] have smart folks to lodge."\textsuperscript{115} Early in

\textsuperscript{111} Eliza Waite to Susan Kittredge, January 1789, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

\textsuperscript{112} Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, 1789, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

\textsuperscript{113} Susan Kittredge to Eliza Waite, March 2, 1789, Eliza Waite Correspondence, EI.

\textsuperscript{114} Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 25, 1800, Lyman, 120.

\textsuperscript{115} Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Charles Phelps, Jan. 9, 1802 (Box 5, Folder 13), PPH.
1807, Heath "was fixing all day for Company made good fires upstairs and down--our house was fill'd--we had fine music, most all appear'd to enjoy themselves very much, they took leave about 12." On another occasion, she exaggerated that "Nancy came over to help me make cake, as we expect all the town of Brookline here next Tuesday." And on Tuesday, "we began to prepare early for our party" and "after dinner . . . we began to make good fires in both rooms and dress for the evening." "Our Company began to come at dark," she narrated, "but our room soon got full there were about forty in all." "I hope they enjoyed themselves," she concluded, appending a relieved "we got through better than I expected to."

"Anxious" about entertaining a "large party," Hannah Heath wrote with trepidation on the anticipated (or dreaded) day that she "got ready for Company expected a number but felt uncertain who would come." She further recorded that "it was quite dark and no body here but Mrs Goddard and Mrs Archbalk I concluded our party would be small had got tea ready when it was increased considerably our room was very well filled." The whole situation, she admitted, "appeared like confusion to me." The next day, "September the first," as she wrote out, "we began and ended the last Month with

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116 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 19, 1807, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

117 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 7, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

118 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 10, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She spent another day "preparing for Company to Morrow," and the following day "arose before sun to fix for the afternoon . . . we had a room full and they appeared in good spirits." (Feb. 24, and Feb. 25, 1809)

Company—and I am fairly beat out. I sincerely hope," she resolved, "that we shall have a peaceful & quiet September."  

120 Sincere hopes and genuine fatigue notwithstanding, two days later "the folks from the other house spend the evening here."  

121 Struggling to resist socializing, she reported a few days later that "Mrs Waley invited most of the town to visit her Mr Heath thought I had better go—not with standing my bad eyes and poor feeling so I went to meet a large party," where, unexpectedly, she "had a very good visit."  

122 Two days later, after listing all the visitors to her house, she griped that "it is our fortune to have Company always on the Sabbath from Morn to night."  

123 Her frank hopes for a quiet month now just a fond delusion, she wrote the following Thursday: "a Charming Morning again—and we engaged again, we seem to have nothing else to do but visit and receive visits."  

124 When her spirits finally improved, as she would have said, she wrote on a fine Saturday that "everything has invited us to partake of what the world call pleasure—I have enjoyed the week very much but not because I think visiting and Company of the first importance, but because I think the pleasure derived from society was intended by our kind Parent for our happiness and comfort in this life, therefore if rightly improved cannot be a crime."  

120 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 1, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.  

121 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 3, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.  

122 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 15, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.  

123 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 17, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.  

124 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 21, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.  

125 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Sept. 23, 1809, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
In addition to fretting about the actual preparations demanded by entertaining, diarists reflected on rules of propriety and concerns about inadvertently slighting others. When Lyman "visited my sister Lyman" and "met with Miss Parks & a large party," she opined that while "not in favour of these in general . . . sometimes I consider them as necessary" since "it is at least preferable to subject yourself to the inconvenience of entertaining at one time a large collection—than to offend any by neglecting to invite them." Still, she professed that social obligation and social pleasure were not necessarily one and the same, since "select partys of chosen friends alone can afford the social pleasures." 126 This sense of obligation and fear of offending may have had something to do with Heath's reference to inviting "all the town of Brookline" to descend upon her home in 1809 as well.

Along with worrying about social accountings, diarists sometimes explored the rules of engagement, as it were, with those assembled, just as they worried about appropriate content and expression in their letters. "When in Company," Abigail Brackett Lyman reminded herself in 1800, "we never should suffer our thoughts to roam" as "it is a miserable compliment to those we are with—& being absent in thought—they have every reason to think we would not be personally present if we could avoid it." Indeed, the necessity of paying attention "proves the importance of selecting those for our most intimate acquaintance from whom our most familiar thoughts need not be withheld." Only if one can speak the thoughts on one's mind, rather than spouting relatively meaningless social niceties, will "the sweetness & benefits of Society result from a

126 Abigail Brackett Lyman, March 5, 1800, Lyman, 138-39.
participation in the same enjoyments—union of sentiments & feelings as well as reciprocal attachment—for this last is the result of the former." The challenge, as Lyman saw it, was to realize "happiness . . . in [a] society where the noblest feelings--most honorable sentiments--are conceal'd from too great--even criminal--deference to the general opinion of the world."127

One of the most familiar and ubiquitous rituals of socializing during this period was taking tea. In Hannah Heath's extent diaries for the years 1805 through 1812, hardly a day goes by when tea is not mentioned. She indicated where she took tea, where "Mr Heath" took tea, where the children took tea, and so on. Although she rarely discussed the ritual or accompanying conversation, she almost never neglected to record who took tea where. Just as some diarists treated their journals as accountings of books read or letters written and received, others documented social occasions without fail. During a typical stretch of six days in March 1805, Heath noted that on Wednesday "Mr Fisher, Mr Lorn Eben Craft, Betsey Heath, drank tea here;" Thursday: "Mr Ackers, all his Children, and Aunt White drank tea here;" Friday: "Mr Heath drank tea at the other house;" Saturday: "I drank tea at the other house in the evening . . . Mr Heath drank tea tho none of the boys came out;" Sunday: no mention of tea; Monday: "stormy I drank tea at the other house."128 Occasionally, she would expound a bit on this exercise, such as the time when they "all went to Mr Goddards to tea every one of the Children except Frederick we

127 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 12, 1800, Lyman, 162.

128 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.
had a fine time, danced and played cards &c &c."^{129} Elizabeth Porter Phelps similarly recorded the participants and sites of afternoon tea in her diary. Some teas were more elaborate than others of course. In 1784, Livingston had noted simply that "Mr Mercer a delegate of Congress play'd chess & drank Tea with me."^{130} In contrast, in 1791, Betsey Heath gloated that "Fifty gentlemen and Ladies drank tea here . . . Bellstid & Granger here, one played on the fiddle & one on the clarionet. We danced in the kitchen. Had a-la-mode beef, roast chicken, & bacon for supper. Some stayed till four o'clock."^{131}

A pervasive act in the eighteenth century, the custom of taking tea was laden with familiar rules of etiquette and expectations. As British historian Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has explained, while both men and women frequented the tea table, the ritual itself had female gendered implications. The tea table "feminized" both sexes because it demanded that "certain kinds of brutish or animalistic behaviors [be] sublimated in favor of decorous restraint." Only the female, however, she added, was transformed into "an item of display, . . . part of the equipage; the narcissistic display of her body [became] part of the ceremony." On the other hand, conversation, engaged in by both men and women at the tea table, enabled women to resist that bodily control, which meant that speech, for women, became subversive across gender lines.^{132} The claim that taking tea

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^{129} Hannah Williams Heath diary, 1812, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

^{130} Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 1, 1784, Shippen, 215.

^{131} Betsey Heath, Jan. 26, 1791, Crafts, 697.

tamed both sexes but put only one on display makes Cowles's remark about "lads behav[ing] so bad" at an elegant dinner all the more intriguing, for Cowles seemed to suggest that the "lads" too were on "display," and, in this case, failed to perform adequately, much to the detriment of her dining experience. On the other hand, Kowaleski-Wallace's observation about the potential subversion of conversation assumes a hierarchy of gender that the tea table may not have evinced. In considering different spaces or spheres of female and male activity, the tea table, an eminently refined site, hosted both men and women comfortably and compatibly. Elizabeth Porter Phelps and her husband, it will be remembered, met at "Deacon Seths" tea table after attending to their respective chores. 133

Infused with mechanisms of control and discipline as it may well have been, taking tea was nevertheless a familiar and frequent act during this period, and children learned how to dispense and consume tea at an early age. When Heath mentioned that Frederick, her youngest, failed to join the Goddard's tea party, she did so because his absence was unusual. The fact that her other children all partook need not be chronicled. When she was just three years old, the privileged Peggy Livingston received an elaborate tea set from her uncle who explained to Peggy's mother that he had "sent Peggy a compleat tea-apparatus for her Baby. Her Doll may now invite her Cousins Doll to tea, & parade her tea-table in form. This must be no small gratification to her. It would be

133 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, May 5, 1805, NEHGR 122 (1968), 304.
fortunate if happiness were always attainable with equal ease."

Naturally one's appearance at the tea table and other social occasions also consumed a fair amount of diarists' and correspondents' ink. Nancy Shippen's mother included deportment among the attributes she wished her daughter to attain at boarding school, asking her to "write to me & tell me how you do & how you improve in yor work, in writing & drawing, in your address, in holding yourself & the Graces." A few years later, Livingston herself took the time to describe the outfit she wore to a "very large party," and, shortly after praising "Mr Wright's" portrait of her, elaborated that the artist had "dress'd Me in Leylack satin edged with gold, with a blue girdle--My hair thrown back negligently--& tied with pearls--ringlets in my neck--long sleeves with white satin Cuffs & cape." In 1791, Betsey Heath wrote approvingly a few days after Hannah


135 In addition, the physical settings for entertaining also garnered attention, as correspondents and diarists wrote about housing and furniture needs (as discussed to some extent in chapter three), and needlework and portraiture. In 1783, Nancy Livingston noted with satisfaction that "Mr Wright finish'd My Portrait," which she judged "a very strong likeness." (Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 4, 1783, Shippen, 154) In May 1811, Heath accompanied her husband "into Town to see Mrs Hows portrait it is a much better likeness than I had any Idea of seeing--it would be a very gratifying thing to me to leave a likeness of my self to my Children but that happiness will be denied me." Instead she left her journal. (Hannah Williams Heath diary, May 1811, Heath Family Collection, MHHS)

136 Alice Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen, Nov. 8, 1777, Shippen, 41-42.

137 She "was dressed," she wrote, "in pink with a gauze peticoat--and Elegant french Hat on, with five white plumes nodding different ways--a bouquet of natural flowers--& a white satin muff." Nancy Shippen Livingston, May 3, 1783, Shippen, 142.

138 Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 6, 1783, Shippen, 154.
Williams married her brother that "all go to meeting, wear silks, Hannah striped lutestring." Hannah Heath herself observed with acerbity some years later that the Masons's "Dog flew at me tore my gown very much," neglecting to mention the fright or bodily injury that may well have accompanied this attack.

The intricate process of dressing limited the possibility of spontaneous excursions, as Livingston verified when she wrote that "Mr Mercer . . . offer me a Ticket for the Concert this Evening but I was so much undress'd I cou'd not go." If the tea table operated as a site of discipline, fashion only reinforced those strictures, especially for elite, urban women who would require sufficient advance notice for a particular event in order to prepare themselves for display. Although well immersed in this culture, Livingston sometimes complained bitterly about the time dressing demanded. After making a bride's visit, she despaired, "it is a tedious employment this same dressing," which on this occasion "took me 3 hours at last, what a deal of time to be wasted! but custom, & fashion must be attended to." With satisfaction, however, she added that she "judg'd from the looks at the Company towards me I look'd tolerable; I was dres'd entirey in white except a suit of pink Beaus & had on a new Balloon Hat."

There were times when the desire to dress in keeping with the current mode

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139 Elizabeth Heath, Jan. 16, 1791, Crafts, 698. As Joan R. Gundersen has noted, the increasingly religious nature of the marriage rite during this period was manifested by the "attendance at meeting of a newly married couple," where the bride might be "dressed in her wedding clothes for her first appearance as a married woman in meeting." Gundersen, To Be Useful to the World, 111.

140 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Aug. 12, 1801, Heath Family Collection, MHS.


created tension. Disguising her trepidation with bravado, Eliza Southgate wrote her mother in 1800, "now Mamma, what do you think I am going to ask for?---a wig." She explained that "Elenor has got one just like my hair and only 5 dollars, Mrs. Mayo one just like it," and that she "must either cut my hair or have one," since she "cannot dress it at all stylish." Offering a more practical justification, she encouraged her mother to think "how much time it will save--in one year we could save it in pins and paper, besides the trouble." Still, the overriding concern was her appearance, for she confessed that "at the assembly I was quite ashamed on my head, for nobody has long hair. If you will consent to my having one do send me over a 5 dollar bill by the post immediately after you receive this, for I am in hopes to have it for the next Assembly." In another urgent, but tentative letter, Southgate apologized that she "must again trouble my Dear Mother by requesting her to send on my spotted muslin. . . . so long a visit in Wiscasset will oblige me to muster all my muslins, for I am informed they are so monstrous smart as to take no notice of any lady that can condescend to wear a calico gown."

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144 Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 17, 1800, *Bowne*, 28-29. While some clothing and accessories were constructed at home as when Julia Cowles "made a handkerchief for Cousin Horace" that "Betsey marked" (Julia Cowles, 1799, *Cowles*, 39), or by experienced seamstresses like Elizabeth Porter Phelps's Rebecca Dickinson, shopping also contributed significantly to the process of assembling a wardrobe. In 1783, Betsey Heath wrote that "Aunt White & I went to Boston. Bought blue, silk, quilt, cloaks, etc" (Elizabeth Heath, Oct. 21, *Crafts*, 696), and Livingston had happily reported in 1784 that she "pass’d almost all this morn’g in shopping, & made several pretty purchases." (Nancy Shippen Livingston, Oct. 20, 1784, *Shippen*, 219) As noted in the previous chapter, one of the exciting aspects of attending the 1797 launching of the *Constitution* for Betsey Heath was the shopping she accomplished as part of the outing. She gloatet to her Aunt White about her "many fine bargains, you know how clever it is to have gentlemen poping into every shop, no wonder I got so beautiful a habit." (Elizabeth Heath to Aunt White, Oct. 22, 1797, *Crafts*, 701) In 1802, Abigail Brackett Lyman wrote her husband in Boston that he will "find Black Bof[mast] for Mamas gown at Ann Bents No’ 50 Marlboro Street--if not at any other shop better," worried that the "bonnet mention’d in the Memorandum--I fear will trouble you to bring," and trusted that "the cool weather will remind you of your clothes--which I rather you would get than any thing I
Southgate tempered all of this, however, by sending a hilarious recitation of the indignity of having her wig fall off as she struggled to maneuver through several day’s worth of accumulated snow. "Think what a ludicrous figure I must have been," she regaled her cousin, "still standing at the gate, my bonnet half-way to the sleigh and my wig in my hand." Although this anecdote featured the trappings of refinement—a wig—which connected Southgate to well-mannered, polite society, she treated it simultaneously as an object of humor, and invited her cousin to join her in laughing at the "frolic" and foolishness of such accessories. "I was perfectly convulsed with laughter," she assured him. Had she written about this incident differently, complaining about the inconvenience of the weather, for example, she might have considered herself deserving of her own criticism that "this is refining too much."145 Indeed, her treatment of this incident mirrors her approach to writing letters. While the letters she penned connected her to and promoted a sociable, well-mannered society, they also permitted humor and

145 Eliza Southgate Bowne to Moses Porter, March 1, 1802, Bowne, 96; Eliza Southgate to Mary Southgate, July 3, 1800, Bowne, 27.
invited an expansion of the rules demarcating proper expression.

This attention to clothing and visual presentation in letters and diaries preoccupied more than young ladies and their mothers. After inviting Nancy Livingston to visit him in his "Cabbin," General Knox imagined that Livingston might be preparing for a grander event, and envisioned her "sacrificing to the fashionable world by standing perishing with cold before your mirror adorning your charming person." He wished her "success in all your endeavours, That your head may be dress'd in an unusual stile of Elegance—that every curl may encircle the heart of a swain, that your hat may be placed with as much grace as the one that shades the beauteous brow of the lovely Allen—that your handkerchief may be Buff'd to the exact point of Beauty." Quite taken by his vision, he further hoped "That your waist may be dress'd with uncommon neatness—that its size shape and appearance may exactly resemble Miss Peggy Allens, and that though so unusually small all the world may acknowledge it contains the Heart of Mrs Livingston—fraught with all the virtues which have ever been conspicuous to your friend H Knox." 146

The same Peggy Livingston who received a complete tea set from her Uncle Lee was also presented with a doll by her mother’s brother, which he described in minute detail: "this doll is to be ever memorable when finished," he predicted, as it will "unite all the taste and graces of a fashionable lady." Specifically, "the hair dresser is making for it a wig or chevelure, the whalebone man a pair of stays, the milliner a full dress, and the—shifts—petticoat and handkerchief divide the cares of the ladies." 147

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147 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Shippen Livingston, n.d., Shippen, 255.
The astounding attention devoted to dress in letters and diaries, as well as in magazines, advice columns, and etiquette manuals, prompted a vexed Hannah Webster Foster to create a character in The Boarding School who observed sardonically after attending Harvard commencement that she "never knew before that dress was a classical study; which I now conclude it must be, or it would not have exercised the genius of some of the principal speakers on this public occasion!" "The female garb," she grimaced, "seemed to claim particular attention." With even more venom, Foster added that "as for the follies of fashion, I think the gentlemen are under obligations to the ladies for adopting them; since it gives exercise to their genius and pens." Another character entertained "serious thoughts of declaring independence" from a practice that "occupies" so much "time" and "conversation," and is so mistakenly "viewed in so important a light."

Foster may well have been responding to Benjamin Rush when she published these remarks. Rush had noted that he had "sometimes been led to ascribe the invention of ridiculous and expensive fashions in female dress entirely to the gentlemen in order to divert the ladies from improving their minds and thereby secure a more arbitrary and unlimited authority over them." He nevertheless placed the responsibility squarely on women, or "Ladies, to correct . . . our sex . . . by demonstrating that the female temper can only be governed by reason and that the cultivation of reason in women is alike

148 Foster, The Boarding School, 142.
149 Foster, The Boarding School, 145.
150 Foster, The Boarding School, 247.
friendly to the order of nature and to private as well as public happiness."151 The association of fashionable female garb with published male pronouncements by both authors argues—circularly—that males controlled female preoccupations by decreeing elaborate costumes for their bodies (which was good for business too of course) at the same time that females controlled male expressions by wearing the prescribed garments.

The Shippen correspondence demonstrates both sides of this scenario. In a laughing, but nonetheless obliging letter, Thomas Lee Shippen wrote his sister in the third person from London: "He presents you on this occasion his sincere affection and brotherly love, and to your little feet and legs a half dozen of white cotton hose, which he hopes will not be unacceptable or uncomfortable. Remembering that you never wear silk," he teased, "he has chosen these for you to wear when other ladies do, and hopes that by their fineness and softness, they will confirm you still more in your preference to cotton which he thinks from experience to be by much the best wear." He added that "he would send you a hat also by this occasion, but as it is not yet determined what will be the fashionable one this winter, and as he wishes to let you know the fashions by what he sends, he waits with patience until their high Mightinesses the Dutchesses, the Marchionesses and the wives of Earls (commonly called Countesses) come to town, hold their Council and decide the knotty point."152 After a lengthy description of the


152 Thomas Lee Shippen to Nancy Livingston Shippen, January 1786, Shippen, 244-45. In essence, he promised to perform a task for his sister that newspapers performed for readers throughout England and across the Atlantic. The subtleties and whimsies of rapidly changing London fashions were reported in detail and eagerly received despite condemnations of imitating European fashions. On the commercialization and dissemination of fashion in eighteenth-century England, see McKendrick, "The Commercialization of Fashion," in Birth of a Consumer Society, esp. 92.
measurements, features, fabric, and so forth of a hat that he had shipped to his niece, Arthur Lee presumed to comment that the hat "is in my opinion—an absolute fright—but what is my opinion to the—fashion—a dear, fascinating word, that renders every thing charming. . . . Write me all that passes at the Convention," he added, referring to the Constitutional Convention then taking place in Livingston's Philadelphia.153

It was not just women who dressed in accordance with fashion, however. In 1785, Richard Henry Lee, then presiding president of Congress, wrote Nancy Livingston that "Mr de Barthold has by this time rigged me out in such a manner as to convert the old president into a young Beau Very well." "If for the good of my country I must be a Beau," he added obligingly, "why I will be a Beau."154 One wonders what Betsy Phelps would have made of this comment, since she determined some years later that the gallant who manifested the desirable beau differed from the type of man capable of "supporting . . . the independence of America." The trappings of refinement preoccupied both sexes. Arthur Lee went to the trouble of describing a women's hat in minute detail, even if he did consider it "an absolute fright," and by the return post he expected Nancy to devote as much thought and description to the political scene in Philadelphia.155 Through their

153 Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, June 3, 1787, Shippen, 251.


155 This hat, of course, is the very same hat that provoked Arthur Lee to express his exasperation with the unwarranted slowness of the hat's delivery in terms of reading, of searching, as he wrote, "Ancient & Modern history for it, in vain," and trusting that "Dr. Rush [will] deliver a lecture on this wondrous work of the millener" "when it arrives & arrive it will." Arthur Lee to Nancy Shippen Livingston, two separate letters both undated but in 1787, Shippen, 252-53. Perhaps Livingston's uncle failed to comprehend the urgency of acquiring this particular hat when he wrote so sarcastically about its slow journey. When Mary Carter wrote her sister from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, asking her to purchase a hat for a mutual acquaintance, she relayed that "a fashionable & dressy Hat" was sought and the recipient "will be oblig'd."
letters, through writing, fashion and politics interwove.

Refinement entailed more than exchanges about fashionable attire or sharing tea of course. Men and women also enjoyed the amusements of music and dancing together. In his remarks on female education, Benjamin Rush recommended singing, stating that "vocal music should never be neglected in the education of a young lady" because, in addition to "preparing her to join in . . . psalmody, it will enable her to soothe the cares of domestic life," by which he meant "the distress and vexation of the husband, the noise of the nursery, and even the sorrows that will sometimes intrude into her own bosom." Instrumental music, however, was "by no means accommodated to the present state of society and manners in America," not only because of the "extravagant fees demanded by the teachers of instrumental music" and the price of the instrument itself, but because of the time required to become proficient, which he calculated at "two to four hours a day, for three or four years." "How many useful ideas might be picked up in these same hours," he scolded, "from history, philosophy, poetry, and the numerous moral essays with which our language abounds."

Correspondents and diarists did indeed confirm that singing provided welcome

"Perhaps," she continued, "this trouble may be very inconvenient to you at this time, but necessity seems to require it. The price you will send with the hat." (Mary Carter to her sister, April 29, 1788, Cutts Family Collection, El) Abigail Lyman likewise instructed her husband to "consult your tast & the Fashion with regard to my bonnet & as I dont know wether a hat or bonnet will be most fashionable and pritty you must get ether just which is best." (Abigail Brackett Lyman to Erastus Lyman, May 29, 1797, Lyman, 196)

156 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 31. Indeed, singing promoted physiological well-being as well, since "the exercise of the organs of the breast by singing contributes very much to defend them from those diseases to which our climate, and other causes have of late exposed them." Rush further claimed that he had learned of "several instances of person who were strongly disposed to the consumption who were restored to health by the moderate exercise of their lungs and singing."

157 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 33-34.
entertainment and that aspiring vocalists regularly took lessons to perfect their skills. Betsey Heath "went to singing-school" in 1783,\textsuperscript{158} and Elizabeth Porter Phelps noted that "Thankful and Betsy joined the singing school" in 1791.\textsuperscript{159} In 1805, Hannah Heath recorded that "Mr Ackers came for me to go to singing school with his Lady I accordingly did."\textsuperscript{160} On a December day in 1804, Elizabeth Porter Phelps visited at "Dr. Porters, Young gentlmen there to tea & sing in the evening."\textsuperscript{161} Elizabeth Fuller also noted occasions of singing, writing that "Nathan Perry put our Horse into their sleigh and carried Me to the singing school & back again. I had a fine ride and a fine evening; they sung a great many Tunes, I sang with them."\textsuperscript{162} Julia Cowles likewise spent a delightful "evening . . . at Fanny's and was very much entertained hearing the ladies sing."\textsuperscript{163}

Notwithstanding Rush's concerns about the time it took to master instrumental performance, Betsy Phelps's brother purchased her a "guittar—a very excellent one," in 1797, and after she married she wrote her mother that she devoted Sabbath evenings to

\textsuperscript{158} Betsey Heath, Oct. 28, 1783, Crafts, 696.

\textsuperscript{159} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan., 16, 1791, NEHGR 120 (1966), 123.

\textsuperscript{160} Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 13, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS. She also confirmed that in December 1811, "the girls went to singing school" at least three times (Dec. 1811), and, early in 1812, she "went down to the meeting to hear the new singers." (Jan. 1812)

\textsuperscript{161} Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Dec. 16, 1804, NEHGR 122 (1968), 227.

\textsuperscript{162} Elizabeth Fuller, Jan. 21, 1791, Fuller, 305. A few months later "Leonard Woods . . . brought Holyokes singing Book. Left it here," (April 25, 1791, 309) and she subsequently "pricked some tunes out of Holyokes Singing Book." (April 26 and 29, 1791) Sometime later, "David stayed and sung with us an hour," (Oct. 24, 1792) and, on a livelier evening, "Sally Gleason, Nancy Hastings, Lucretia Mirick & John Brooks here this eve we Danced, Played, and sung all the evening, had an exceedingly agreeable evening." (Oct. 28, 1792)

\textsuperscript{163} Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 25. She enjoyed a similar evening also "at Fanny's," where she "heard beautiful musick." (39)
"playing upon my guittar—to perpetuate a custom which I adopted at Hadley." 164 On one such occasion "Colonel Talmadge and Mr. Gould . . . both very fond of musick" sang while she played "guittar" and "really we have quite a concert." 165 In 1799, Julia Cowles noted that she "took one lesson on my musick," among other activities, a fairly regular entry in her journal, 166 in which she occasionally wrote specifically, "practiced on my piano," 167 or simply, "practised." 168 Eliza Southgate also devoted a "morning . . . to look[ing] at some instruments," eventually settling on a "charming toned one and not made in this country" for an impressive "150 dollars." 169 A few months later, she proudly announced to Octavia that "I am learning my 12th tune, . . . I almost worship my Instrument,—it reciprocates my sorrows and joys, and is my bosom companion." 170 Abigail Lyman likewise "was much entertain'd with hearing [Miss McGeorge] play on the Piano & the Guitar," and sighed that she "could ever listen to Music— I stay'd till

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164 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Sept. 5, 1797 (Box 13, Folder 4), June 20, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH. Her husband reminisced many years later that Betsy "sang in an excellent musical voice, occasionally accompanied herself on the guitar. One of the great privileges of her children was to gather about her, and hear her sing sacred songs, on Sunday evenings." Huntington, Memories, Counsels, and Reflections, 76.

165 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps Huntington to Elizabeth Porter Phelps, Jan. 11, 1801 (Box 13, Folder 5), PPH.

166 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 27. See also, Cowles, 30, 31, 35.

167 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 31.

168 Julia Cowles, 1799, Cowles, 33.

169 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, Feb. 7, 1800, Bowne, 22.

170 Eliza Southgate to Octavia Southgate, June 12, 1800, Bowne, 24.
almost dark & came away unsatisfied—unwavered." 171 The Heath household boasted instrumental music as well as vocal performances, as Hannah Heath noted in 1805 that "Mr Heath went to Boston carried Miss Davis to get her a Gatar, & to take a lesson upon it." 172 On another occasion, "all the young ladies from the other house came over to hear Mr Heath play on his clarinet." 173

Benjamin Rush would heartily approve of Julia Cowles attending balls (if not the unseemly behavior she witnessed during "fielday") for he averred that dancing "promotes health and renders the figure and motions of the body easy and agreeable." Although he anticipated a time "when the resources of conversation shall be so far multiplied that the amusement of dancing shall be wholly confined to children," he asserted that it served, in the meantime, as "an agreeable substitute for the ignoble pleasures of drinking and gaming." 174 Dancing, an indicator of gentility and social standing as well as an outlet for physical activity, was indeed popular with diarists and correspondents. 175 On a busy day in December 1790, Betsey Heath "danced at Child’s. Twelve or thirteen couples

171 Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 6, 1800, Lyman, 159. A few weeks later she recorded that "Mr & Miss McGeorge were obliging enough to tune my Piano for me—for which I am infinitely indebted." (April 20, 1800, 170) Some years earlier, she had asked her mother in Boston to "request Harriet to get me some New Songs. I dont want the 'Green Mountian farmer' nor--’A Prey to Tender anguish’ as I have them." (Dec. 18, 1798, 206)

172 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Nov. 18, 1805, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

173 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Jan. 25, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS.


175 Joan Gundersen has pointed out that both sexes learned to dance and that dancing "provided a means of courtship." According to the correspondents and diarists studied here, however, it constituted a life-long activity. Gundersen, To Be Useful to the World, 43, 82.
there. In April 1794, Phelps's daughters "attended the dancing school for the first time" and a few months later "Porter and all the girls at Amherst to the last ball there." In a series of journal entries in 1797, Julia Cowles wrote that she "expected to dance this evening but was disappointed in my expectations," confirmed a week later that she was "going to dance this evening, but don't know but I shall be disappointed," and finally penned a satisfied "danced last evening, enjoyed that intended pleasure." In January 1800, after commenting on the "many & different employments" that occupied her during court week, Abigail Lyman noted that on Thursday "evening attended the Ball --had a very agreeable time." During a different "Court week" she likewise "attended the Ball" and "enjoyed the amusements very well, ... danced three times & return'd at eleven o'clock." In 1805, Hannah Heath "had a billet ... to attend Mr Richardson Ball next Thursday but do not feel spirited." In 1808, she reported cheerfully that "The

176 Betsey Heath, Dec. 23, 1790, Crafts, 697.

177 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, April 6, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966), 210.

178 Elizabeth Porter Phelps, July 20, 1794, NEHGR 120 (1966), 212. "Porter & the girls went to the Ball" held in November 1795 as well. Nov. 15, 1795, NEHGR 120 (1966), 298.

179 Julia Cowles, n.d. 1797, Cowles, 10, 12, 13. Disappointed again, however, she wrote that she "sat out once more to go to Dancing School, but rains." In 1799, she spent the "afternoon and eve, at Fanny's" where she "Danced." She also attended a few balls over the course of the year." (1799, 23, 39, 37, 42, 44)

180 Abigail Brackett Lyman, Jan. 20, 1800, Lyman, 118.

181 Abigail Brackett Lyman, May 11, 1800, Lyman, 175. The next two evenings she acted as hostess: "Had company to dine Fryday & Saterday." (175)

182 Hannah Williams Heath diary, Oct. 23, 1806, Heath Family Collection, MHS. Nancy White, a member of her household did, however, attend the Ball, and Heath subsequently reported that "she had a pleasant evening at Mr Richardsons, considerable Company." (Oct. 29, 1806)
Childrens dancing school has finished and she gave a ball—the Children appeared very well indeed." The next day "Betsey went to Boston to spend the week to get ready for Mr Richardson's ball."

The attention to different aspects of refinement in letters and diaries was consistent and pervasive. In addition to discussing dancing, music, tea, fashion, and conversation, correspondents and diarists mentioned shopping trips and attending entertainments such as lectures, stage presentations, and displays of curiosities. As noted in the previous chapter, some of these discussions confounded distinctions between politics and sociability. They also resonated with the vocabulary that permeated assessments of rural and urban characteristics. Obviously informed by reading material and cultural dialogues about the relationship between commercialization, consumerism, and the viability of the new republic, everyday readers and writers both mirrored and informed that larger debate in their own written expressions. Even if they denounced

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183 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 30, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS.

184 Hannah Williams Heath diary, March 31, 1808, Heath Family Collection, MHS. When the "Children had Company" on another occasion, "they danced and sung as it was election day." (June 6, 1808) The next year, she again noted "we had a housefull to day to see the Children dance," and a few days later, "there is a dance at Uncle Crafts to morrow all our Children are invited." (Feb. 1 and Feb. 7, 1809) A month later, "Mr Stimson & Schoolers came to dance, and most of the Parents to see them, and some of them staid to tea, I felt very tired before I went to bed." (March 6, 1809) Her fatigue undoubtedly occurred because March 6 was a Monday. Her entry began by noting that "we got through with a large wash with a new machine which we intend to keep." The machine first appears in the journal on Jan. 30, 1809, and graces weekly assessments of the efficiency or difficulty of wash day thereafter. Heath's enthusiasm for dancing soon waned noticeably, for she wrote that "Mr Stimson came about half after 3 give the Children an afternoon's instruction—they were very noisy before he came... had a sober day, we are all tired of the dancing school." (March 13, 1809). A week later, "Mr Stimson came for the last time we had all the Children & their Parents... every body appeared out of spirits, some for one reason, & some for another... the Children performed very well indeed & we got through the evening better than my fears." (March 20, 1809) Her fears must have been extraordinary, for the next day she complained, "I feel almost beat out with yesterday's exertion." (March 21, 1809)
excessive compliance with codes of social behavior, they did so within the context of an activity—writing—that was hopelessly intertwined with the very issues they addressed.

Besides mimicking prescriptive literature, worries about the dangers of excessive sociability reflected on the activities of reading and writing themselves. If diarists and correspondents justified reading novels because it enabled them to participate in polite conversation, how did they justify polite conversation if that became suspect? The tremendous preoccupation with visiting, conversing, and enjoying elegant trappings and soirees indicates a very real concern with questions of overindulgence. In their written expressions, female correspondents often feared becoming a "lady man," because such a character causes consternation or maybe even a "proper riot." Instead they worked with their pens to formulate a tempered, rational, convivial refinement, deploiring the extremes of discord and roughness on the one hand and excessive refinement on the other.
CONCLUSION

When Eliza Southgate penned a long narrative describing the circumstances attending her departure from an assembly—squeezing into a carriage "stowed so full" of ladies and one "lady man" "that the horses could not move"—she laughed at an absurd situation even as she expressed herself in a medium that, like the lady man, existed in limbo. Just as some of the attending gentlemen tried to drag the lady man out of the carriage (behaving like the "gallants" whose absence propelled Betsy Phelps into a political commentary), correspondents struggled to write with propriety at the same time that they resented the limits that such codes might impose on their expressions. As Southgate had noted in exasperation upon being scolded by Susanna Rowson for writing on an improper topic, this was "refining too much." An otherwise orderly assembly in Portland, Maine, at which men and women danced and conversed with decorum, degenerated into a "proper riot" because of the lady man’s assault on gender expectations. The "gentlemen" struggled to restore order by pulling the offending specimen out of the carriage, but the ladies "entreated them to desist." They protected their lady man from the strict observance of rules of propriety and thereby permitted a liberating fluidity of gender—"a vast deal of fashionable independence."

Those engaging in written correspondence also exhibited "a vast deal of fashionable independence." A form of communication that permitted (and even encouraged) the articulation of sentiments not always possible in face-to-face
conversations, letter writing granted its practitioners the freedom to explore, create, and comment on the rhetoric and events that delineated their social and cultural contexts. The trepidation with which they often put pen to paper attests to the sometimes anxiety-laden possibilities they faced. Writing in a society in which experts such as Benjamin Rush increasingly differentiated between men and women's spheres of activity, they wrote about travel, politics, reading, and refinement with authority and familiarity. Upheavals in the cultural significance of personal correspondence coupled with evolving notions about appropriate gender roles prevented the easy resolution of either of those contested sites. Increasingly democratic, inclusive, and expansive, everyday writing challenged and often subverted the developing separate spheres ideology. It did this in two ways. First, it used that rhetoric to express ideas inconsistent with its intent. When Betsy Phelps hoped the contents of her letter would remain confidential because writing about politics was not "feminine," she acknowledged prescriptive admonitions even as she ignored them by pursuing a political discussion about republican virtue. Second, it created a sense of freedom out of rhetoric intent on circumscribing women's activity and cultural relevance. Those who admonished that women's education ought to serve primarily as a tool for raising virtuous sons decried writing and reading for such trivial ends as promoting sociability by sharing chatty letters about novels.

The rhetoric characterizing the emerging ideology of separate spheres permitted intriguing possibilities for conceptualizing experience. Gender connotations aside, the possibility of creating a private space for reflection, conversation, reading, and social gatherings appears in letters and diaries as appealing and liberating. Structured by codes
of civility, themselves in flux in the years after the American Revolution, this space enticed ordinary readers and writers because of the opportunity it presented for reevaluating relationships. Letters may have constituted the most extreme manifestation of that private potential. Louis Otto’s wish that he might "find" Nancy Shippen Livingston "again in her letters," indicates the extent to which this liberating sphere could exist only on paper. The correspondence he shared with Livingston created a relationship confined to letters, but the freedom it gave them to imagine and realize an intimacy impossible at the tea table or at political spectacles should not be ignored. By putting pen to paper, they constructed meanings that defied social mores.

The divergence between the written word and what was possible in face-to-face interaction demonstrated by the Livingston-Otto correspondence highlights the range of possibilities available to ordinary readers and writers. As Eliza Southgate Bowne and others so insistently averred in their letters and diaries, only those who shared a "similarity of sentiments" could enjoy that "happiness we are all in pursuit of." One means of achieving a "similarity of sentiments" with others was reading novels. Abigail Brackett Lyman wondered at her habit of indulging in a pastime she often considered indolent, but explained that she read novels because she "disliked [her] feeling when unable to give [her] opinion of a Book spoken of in company."¹ When Benjamin Rush, novelists, and correspondents alike decried novel reading they assumed a direct correlation between reading and behavior. In at least one sense, they were right. Novels promoted a sociability that seemed at odds with the public-spirited virtue deemed crucial

¹ Abigail Brackett Lyman, April 27, 1800, Lyman, 172.
for the survival of the new republic.

The controversial relationship between sociability and virtue found its clearest expression in the dispute about the city and the country. Loaded with judgments about independence, honesty, and responsibility, the country was believed to be the antithesis of the city and its cultivated, effeminate dissipation. On the other hand, the city best promoted that "similarity of sentiments" that correspondents felt constituted "happiness we are all in pursuit of," because it encouraged the civilized gathering of well-read, well-spoken individuals. In this rendering, country denizens became illiterate, ignorant, and depraved. For correspondents and diarists, the city and the country functioned as categories that could be invested with various—even contradictory—values depending on the intent of their message. Their expressions reveal above all that whatever distinguished those categories (or connected them), like a stagecoach ride or a letter, manifested options for behavior, expression, and judgments that confused the neat juxtaposition of two diametrically opposed categories.

Letters themselves sometimes restored order to muddled categories and sometimes contributed to the confusion. "Gentlemen not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them," as Betsy Phelps wrote her friend in 1798, means that whatever male companionship she found at Amherst seemed to fit an easily definable category. No further explanation was required. Politics, on the other hand, merited considerable attention and Phelps expounded on the "independence of America," "Patriotism," "influence," and "Federalism," at length and a bit erratically, indicating that

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1Elizabeth Porter Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
the topic presented interesting possibilities. Politics generated extended comment because its parameters and vocabulary was not yet resolved. And, like traditional politics, writing letters compelled considerable attention because its significance too was as yet indeterminate. Phelps addressed both in her letter, confirming their interdependence.

The man who did generate a lengthy discussion was Southgate's "lady man," a fascinating creature manifesting all the ambiguities of the dichotomies of male and female, rough and refined, public and private. Here was a subject that created possibilities as he confounded assumptions. A man who presumed to join a private carriage intended for ladies, he remained silent so that the ladies might speak up to order the carriage forward, sheltering their "lady man." Southgate laughed and scoffed at this creature, but she simultaneously celebrated a character who manifested such a "vast deal of fashionable independence." Her long letter describing this intriguing character extolled the undefined space between categories. She lacked the vocabulary to label this specimen and simply strung two contradictory nouns together. Someone with a "vast deal of fashionable independence" was a "lady man."

The frequency, confusion, and yet sophistication with which correspondents worked with the rhetoric that permeated their reading and defined cultural issues reveals the tenuousness of categories habitually invoked to make sense of their world. They saw potential rewards in a sphere of activity that cultural arbiters did not even want to acknowledge as existing. Rhetoric about republican mothers and republican wives—women who worked within the family, outside the mechanisms of politics—insisted that women were political because they instilled virtue in future citizens and influenced their
husbands. In this formulation, propounded by social experts such as Benjamin Rush, and subsequently by late-twentieth century historians including Linda K. Kerber and Jan Lewis, the private and the political could not be distinguished. Prescriptive rhetoric of the era insisted on linking the behavior of the disenfranchised to political action, failing to recognize a sphere of activity not obviously political.

Benjamin Rush and his ilk feared the development of a social space not obviously manifesting public-oriented virtue. He denied the possibility of that space by talking about republican mothers and republican wives. Women who began to celebrate and manifest "manners and vices" contrary to the orientation he advocated would be "harbingers" of the nation's "ruin." Ordinary correspondents of the period, in contrast, comfortably distinguished between the private and the public, even as they sometimes melded the two. Eliza Southgate wrote about novelists, sociable gatherings of people who shared a "similarity of sentiments," rural vices, and the rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence without stumbling on the inherent contradictions Rush identified. She also noted when an acquaintance was "almost worn out with dissipation" without forecasting the republic's demise. Current historians, on the other hand, who see the private as fundamentally confining, looked at the prescriptive literature of the early republic in terms of women's relationship to traditional politics. They found a mixed message. Women claimed a "significant political role," but the "role remained a severely limited one," as Linda K. Kerber concluded. The tendency to concentrate on politics as

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3 Rush, "Thoughts Upon Female Education," 36.

4 Kerber, Women of the Republic, 12.
traditionally defined has obscured a larger social context of expression, reading, and sociability. Correspondents explored their relationship to politics, but they also appropriated political vocabulary to expand possibilities in other venues.

Looking at women's letters and diaries in terms of the issues they discovered in their reading reveals a nuanced world in which political rhetoric generated comment because of its diffuseness. Likewise, reading, writing, and sociability garnered extraordinary attention in published and hand-written expressions. Diarists and correspondents found new meanings and possibilities in that language. When Betsy Phelps assured Sarah Parsons that she would "do all in [her] power to animate those over whom I have the least influence," she confirmed Rush's highest expectations. Nor did she indicate that such a mission narrowed her field of activity or social relevance. What Phelps found confining was living in a place where "the gentlemen are not interesting enough to employ my pen in writing of them." She declared independence from that limitation by writing to her friend. The influence she would proffer, therefore, was undoubtedly something different than Rush had in mind. Like Eliza Southgate, Phelps associated the "cause of liberty" with being "proud to avow [her] sentiments." As they penned their letters and diaries, ordinary writers invoked a familiar language in a medium whose unsettled nature spurred them to create new meanings for basic categories like male and female, writing and conversing, rural and urban, public and private.

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5 Elizabeth Whiting Phelps to Sarah Parsons, Aug. 27, 1798 (Box 12, Folder 17), PPH.
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