

“What! Has she got into the ‘Atlantic?’”: Women Writers, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Formation of the American Canon

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The exclusion of women writers from the American literary canon has been the topic of much debate in the last two decades. Under primary attack in recent years have been the supposedly neutral standards of evaluation that have tended to favor the works of white, privileged men. In arguing for a revision of the canon to include a broader representation of society, scholars have recognized that such standards, which excluded women and people of color from America’s literary history, have had larger cultural implications beyond course syllabi. As Jane Tompkins declares in her ground-breaking study, *Sensational Designs*, “The struggle now being waged in the professoriate over which writers deserve canonical status is not just a struggle over the relative merits of literary geniuses; it is a struggle among contending factions for the right to be represented in the picture America draws of itself.”¹

Scholars have explored why women writers were left out of the canon in this century, but less attention has been paid to how and why they were excluded when the canon was formed at the end of the nineteenth century. If we look to the *Atlantic Monthly*, widely considered the apex of the literary world in the nineteenth century, we discover that women were among the most prominent contributors. Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rose Terry (Cooke) helped inaugurate the magazine in its first issue in 1857 and continued to be staples for many years. Harriet Prescott (Spofford) and Rebecca Harding Davis made sensational debuts in the magazine’s early years, leading many to forecast bright futures for them. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Caroline Chesebro, and Mary Murfree were other widely respected authors closely associated with the

Atlantic. Yet when the *Atlantic* commemorated its twentieth year and honored one of its chief male contributors, it invited not a single woman (contributor or otherwise) to the celebration, reminding many, in the words of the *New York Evening Post*,

that the *Atlantic Monthly*'s staff of writers is much more largely masculine than is that of any other magazine in the country. It is, in a certain sense, our masculine magazine, and has always been so. A bigoted bachelor insists that this is because the *Atlantic Monthly* confines itself more wholly than any other magazine does to literature in the strict sense of the term, neglecting all the little prettinesses of household interests and all the gushing sentimentality which . . . women mistake for literature.

Although, as the *Post* writer notes, "there are women contributors named in its index whose fame is country wide," the *Atlantic*, as the fountainhead of America's "literature," was seen by many to be essentially a man's magazine.² Given this assumption, it is hardly surprising that when the magazine played a leading role in forming the American literary canon at the end of the nineteenth century, the famous women associated with the magazine were eclipsed by its most illustrious male contributors who became the brightest stars of the American literary firmament—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. Although the constellation of authors in the canon would change significantly in the twentieth century, the association of "literature" with men and masculinity had been established.³

The 1850s-1870s were an important time of opportunity for women writers because when the *Atlantic* was created in 1857 the literary marketplace was not yet sharply divided between popular and serious literature. The magazine provided a new and distinctive venue for authors seeking serious recognition amid the sea of popular magazines, most of them aimed at female readers, but it had yet to define itself as an exclusive, "masculine magazine." Depictions of nineteenth-century literary culture tend to make a clear distinction between the emerging male high literary culture, on the one hand, and the realm of popular female literature on the other. But an examination of how women writers were treated by the *Atlantic* in its early years reveals that the gendered division of the marketplace played itself out *within* this hub of the emerging high culture. Rather than simply representing a certain side in the mid-century "struggle" Joan D. Hedrick describes "between the dominant women writers and the rising literary establishment of men who were determined to displace them,"⁴ the magazine could be described as the battleground itself. In its pages we find an elite circle of New England male writers who established the magazine's reputation competing for recognition with a group of younger writers, many of them women, who

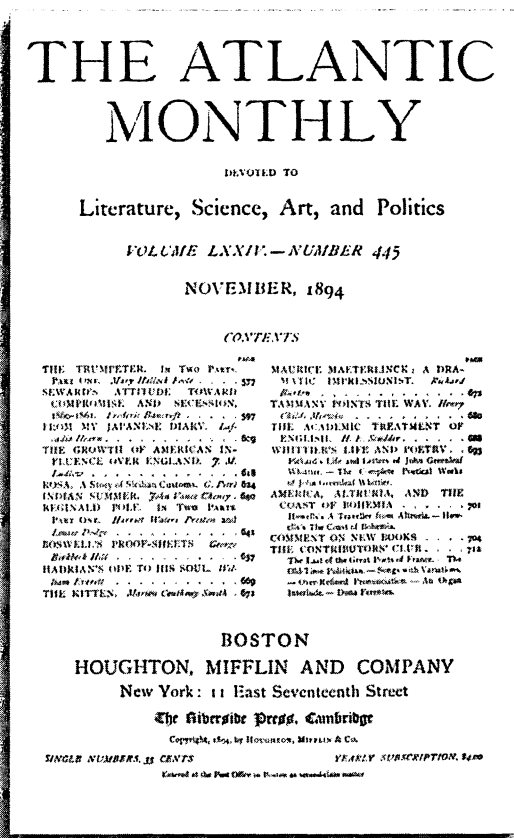


Figure 1: In keeping with its image as the authority on serious literature, the *Atlantic Monthly* presented an austere face to the world. In the 1880s and 1890s it claimed a niche in the increasingly competitive literary magazine market by refusing to illustrate and by creating a canon of select male writers who had helped establish the magazine's reputation.

desired entrance into the hallowed halls of literary prestige. By seeking acceptance at the *Atlantic*, many women writers were attempting throughout this period to make the leap into serious authorship and to increase their status in the literary world and, by extension, the larger culture. Although they had some initial success at establishing themselves, by the 1890s, such a feat had become even increasingly difficult as America's high "literature," with the guiding hand of the *Atlantic*, designated itself as the province of male writers. How and why women writers lost the battle for serious recognition in the pages of the *Atlantic* and beyond is the subject of this essay.

Some scholars of nineteenth-century American women writers have acknowledged the *Atlantic*'s leading role in the literary world in which women were trying to gain recognition and acceptance, but they have not examined the magazine's treatment of women writers in depth nor agreed on how to assess it. Some point to the advantageous effect of the *Atlantic*'s support of a handful of women writers, while others emphasize the magazine's repressive effect on women's careers and ambitions. Josephine Donovan, in particular, credits the *Atlantic*'s editors' "personal encouragement" of women writers with the growth of a distinctly women's literary tradition of local color literature, and Richard Brodhead insists that although the *Atlantic* relegated some women writers to a "disparaged condition," it also elevated others (namely Sarah Orne Jewett) to canonical status. In Brodhead's view, the magazine was not part of a blanket dismissal of women writers that feminist scholars have alleged to exist. But Susan Coultrap-McQuin suggests that the *Atlantic*'s treatment of women writers is more complex. She describes the "paradoxical" nature of women writers' position in the nineteenth-century literary world by describing how Henry Houghton, the publisher of the *Atlantic* beginning in the late 1870s, "published and paid well for literary works by women that accorded with his Victorian sense of morality. . . [but] never considered women's literature to be as important as men's." She places the *Atlantic* prominently among the forces of the male-dominated literary world that both made room for women and "rendered them invisible." In her biography of Stowe, Hedrick suggests that the *Atlantic*'s hegemony even had the power to make women writers invisible to themselves, convincing even the most highly respected and visible American female author that she did not belong in the male canon that the magazine would consecrate.⁵

Although these scholars do not explore in depth how women writers as a class were treated by the magazine, they do illustrate how powerful its influence was over the reputations and ambitions of its female contributors. What is needed now is a more detailed examination of how women writers were received by the magazine's male hierarchy and how their reputations were controlled by the *Atlantic*'s editors and reviewers, in order to understand why, despite their early successes, no woman writer—not even Jewett or Stowe—could ultimately ascend to the heights of the magazine's canonized authors. Keeping in mind Brodhead's argument that the magazine's treatment of all women writers was not the same, there are nonetheless significant patterns in how it dealt with its female contributors and reviewed women's writings that reveal a complex of assumptions about women that limited what they could achieve in the new high literary culture the *Atlantic* represented. Women writers who approached the magazine with high hopes of attaining the prestige it conferred on its writers eventually learned that their position in this emerging high culture would be a subordinate one. While the *Atlantic* could elevate them above the mass of popular writers and give them national exposure in America's most respected literary magazine, there was a glass ceiling, so to speak, beyond which women writers could not venture to achieve literary immortality.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, women writers, for the first time in American history, exhibited an ambition to be recognized not only by the American public but by the male editors, writers, and critics of the literary elite. When the *Atlantic* began publication in 1857, it provided an important testing ground for these new ambitions. Seeing their contributions in print next to Emerson and Longfellow gave women writers a new sense of opportunity and made them feel that they had arrived as serious writers. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps spoke for many when she recalled her early perception of the *Atlantic*: “I shared the general awe of the magazine at that time prevailing in New England, and, having, possibly, more than my share of personal pride, did not very early venture to intrude my little risk upon that fearful lottery.” When her first story was accepted by the *Atlantic* in 1868, her friends voiced for her the amazement she felt at being placed in the company of established writers she so admired: “What! Has she got into the ‘*Atlantic*’?” Her welcome reception at the magazine awakened new ambitions in her, as it did in the young Louisa May Alcott, who wrote in her journal in 1858 that she was beginning to feel confidence as a writer: “I even think



Figure 2: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, like other women writers, felt encouraged to pursue serious ambitions as an artist when she was well-received by the *Atlantic*'s male icons. But their high expectations for her did not result in a lasting literary reputation. [Courtesy of Andover Historical Society, Andover, Mass.]

of trying the 'Atlantic.' There's ambition for you! . . . If Mr. L. [James Russell Lowell, the editor] takes the one Father carried him, I shall think I can do something." Lowell did accept her story, giving her the encouragement she needed to devote herself to literature. Women writers, valuing recognition from the literary elite over the larger sums of money they could receive from other magazines, time and again chose to publish in the *Atlantic*. Like male writers, they were "eager to ally their names with the great memories and presences on its roll of fame."⁶

But while the magazine encouraged Phelps, Alcott, and other women writers to see themselves as valued contributors, it would continue to associate women with an inferior class of literature. Preconceptions about women as writers and readers often led the editors to think of the work of female contributors as "filler" or "leavening" meant to bolster the magazine's revenues, not its reputation. The *Atlantic* made room for women writers, and even suggested initially that it foresaw literary immortality for some. But in the 1880s and 1890s, as it responded to increasing competition in the literary market by reinforcing the reputations of its elite male writers, it closed off that possibility. Rather than encourage women writers to ascend to the ranks of Hawthorne and Emerson, it rewarded those who conformed to its assumptions about women inhabiting a separate sphere in literature and in life. Thus, women writers gained the highest praise from editors and reviewers for their local color literature, which was deemed of "minor" importance in comparison to the great works that would be enshrined as America's high literature.⁷

A brief look at Thomas Wentworth Higginson's assessments of women's writing can help clarify the *Atlantic*'s relations with its female contributors. In the magazine's early years, Higginson, who acted as an "unofficial" (but extremely "influential") editorial assistant, was given the job of bringing new young writers to the magazine, and many of them were women. He drew Helen Hunt Jackson, Celia Thaxter, Spofford, Phelps, and Cooke to the *Atlantic* by taking them under his wing.⁸ But while his encouragement of their early efforts helped these women feel welcome in a sphere dominated by larger-than-life male writers, editors, and critics, his published opinions on women's writing in general reveal what female contributors were really up against. Even Higginson, their most ardent supporter at the magazine, believed that the state of women's literature was very poor, and he saw little hope of improvement. His essay "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" is a response to those who protested women's entering the field of literature. While he identifies lack of education and encouragement as the culprits of "feminine inferiority," he nonetheless places much of the blame on women:

All generations of women having been bred under the shadow of intellectual contempt, they have of course done much to justify it. They have often used only for frivolous purposes



Figure 3: When Harriet Prescott Spofford began her literary career in the pages of the *Atlantic* in 1858, she received more encouragement than any other female contributor. She was hailed by the editors and reviewers as a genius in waiting, but she waited in vain for the literary immortality they predicted for her. [From William Dean Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1901.]

even the poor opportunities allowed them. They have employed the alphabet, as Molière said, chiefly in spelling the verb *Amo*. . . . And their conception, even of Art, has been too often on the scale of Properzia de Rossi, who carved sixty-five heads on a walnut, the smallest of all recorded symbols of woman's sphere.⁹

This sentiment that women have relegated themselves to a diminutive and insignificant realm of achievement is echoed in Higginson's review of the novel *Azarian* (1864) by Harriet Prescott Spofford, one of the magazine's most celebrated female contributors. He refers to "That fatal cheapness of immediate reputation which stunts most of our young writers . . . [and] dwarfs our female writers so especially that none of them, save Margaret Fuller, has ever yet taken the pains to train herself for first-class literary work." In other words, Higginson believed that some women writers were capable of literary greatness, but that they

did not pursue it with the necessary seriousness of their successful male counterparts. Hence, perhaps, the virtual absence of women in his 1862 “Letter to a Young Contributor,” the celebrated article that led Emily Dickinson to believe she might find an appreciative ear in Higginson. This essay of advice to aspiring writers, supposedly addressed to men as well as women, begins, “My dear young gentleman or young lady,—for many are the Cecil Dreemes of literature who superscribe their offered manuscripts with very masculine names in very feminine handwriting.” But the rest of the essay reveals very clearly why so many prospective contributors who were women used male pseudonyms: of the 47 great writers he refers to as examples to be followed, only three are women.¹⁰ The message to the young female writer is clear: what you attempt has been achieved by only a very small handful of women, and they have proven themselves to be exceptions to the rule. Although a number of celebrated women writers like Spofford, Phelps, and Woolson would make names for themselves in the pages of the *Atlantic*, the tone of Higginson’s comments were echoed repeatedly by the magazine’s editors and reviewers. Those women writers who did show promise early in their careers never measured up to the standard of lasting greatness, and women writers as a class were viewed as incapable of reaching that high mark.

The Social Networks Surrounding the *Atlantic*

The *Atlantic Monthly*’s founders sought to create a “scholarly and gentlemanlike magazine” with the highest literary standards. Among them were Emerson, Holmes, Longfellow, Hawthorne, Whittier, Lowell, and other prominent members of the Saturday Club. The cultural elite of their day, they have been called the “Boston Brahmins,” “Olympians,” “Old Saints,” or “high priests.” The close ties between the magazine and members of the Saturday Club illuminate how access to the magazine’s power structure and the recognition it conferred were denied to women writers.¹¹

The Saturday Club, the locus of the literary elite in Boston, was an exclusively male club (and remained so well into the twentieth century), as was its offshoot, the *Atlantic Club*. In fact, as Hedrick writes, “Boston society was organized around a series of overlapping men’s clubs, and the *Atlantic* was grafted onto this structure.” Well after the magazine’s formation in 1857, the decisions that charted its course continued to be made at club dinners from which women were excluded. As early as 1859, one disastrous attempt was made to include women at one of the *Atlantic*’s dinners. Although four women (Stowe, Spofford, Cooke, and Julia Ward Howe, the most valuable female contributors in the early years) were invited, only Stowe and Spofford attended. Stowe, concerned with “the character of the gathering,” requested that no wine be served, creating tension among the men, who felt that their genial gathering was being transformed by the presence of women. The men ended up drinking anyway. This attempt to include women, while made in good faith, appears to have failed in large part because the men continued to conduct the gathering on their own

terms rather than allow the women to contribute to the tenor of the evening. As a result, the women felt unwelcome.¹²

While Stowe’s presence may have been a damper on the men’s spirits, she was considered an honored guest and probably felt worthy of attending such a dinner. But Spofford, who had only recently received attention for publishing her first stories in the magazine, felt exceedingly awkward. That she was invited is a significant indication of the magazine’s respect for her. As John Townsend Trowbridge observed, “What Lowell [who was then editor] thought of the newly discovered writer may be inferred from the fact that she was nominated by him for the distinction of keeping Mrs. Stowe in countenance at the famous *Atlantic* dinner.” In letters to his mother, Higginson mused paternalistically about his affiliation with “men and women of the ‘*Atlantic Monthly*’” who “will one day be regarded as demi-gods” and his induction of “little Harriet Prescott [Spofford] into that high company.” He contemplated how Spofford must have felt as one of the two women in attendance: “Nothing would have tempted my little damsel into such a position, I knew; but now she was in for it.” She was then seated next to the formidable Oliver Wendell Holmes—“think of the ordeal for a humble maiden at her first dinner party!”¹³ Apparently, few of the other men in attendance delighted as Higginson did in the company of women at their hallowed events, for women were never again invited to an *Atlantic* Club dinner.

In 1877, when the *Atlantic* held a widely publicized event commemorating John Greenleaf Whittier’s seventieth birthday and the magazine’s first twenty years, fifty-seven men attended, including the illustrious Boston Brahmins who had started the magazine and a younger generation of men who, it was hoped, would carry on their legacy—William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Edmund Clarence Stedman, and Higginson, among others. No women were invited to the Whittier affair, but as the after-dinner speeches commenced, “the women who were staying in the hotel filled the entrances and were favored with seats even between the tables,” according to a newspaper account. Who these women were is not clear, but none were formally invited. Within the next few days, angry responses from excluded women writers were published in eastern and western newspapers. In one of these letters, which appeared in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, the writer contrasted the equality of women and men in “the republic of Letters,” where, she believed, “woman is a citizen,” with the scene at the *Atlantic* dinner, where the “brilliant women” who contributed to the *Atlantic* were “conspicuous only for their absence!” Most upsetting, though, was the complete lack of any mention of the magazine’s female contributors. She clearly perceived that women’s exclusion from the event indicated that women writers could just as easily be exiled from the “republic of Letters.” For, as Richard Lowry makes clear, the Whittier dinner was more than a chummy gathering of club men; it was a highly publicized step towards canonizing the *Atlantic*’s (male) contributors.¹⁴

Two years later, when Oliver Wendell Holmes was honored on his seventieth birthday, one hundred guests attended the event, and this time women were

among them. "The presence of ladies was something to be accounted for," Arthur Gilman noted in his reminiscences on the *Atlantic* dinners, "and Mr. Houghton said that they had always been wanted, but that the publishers had been 'too bashful' to invite them up to that time." The failed attempt in 1859 to include women in *Atlantic* dinners, however, suggests that the primary motivation for excluding them was not bashfulness but the feeling that the events themselves would be restricted, diluted, even ruined by the presence of women. Gilman himself lamented the changed quality of the later dinners to which women were invited: "The enlargement of the borders was like adding water to a cup of tea. There was a suggestion of the old times, but the strength of comradeship had been weakened." In other words, the elite male club meetings, with their "intimacies," imbibing of alcohol, and prestigious exclusivity, had been transformed into more formal gatherings in order to accommodate women. In 1882, Stowe became the first and only woman writer to receive the honor of an *Atlantic* party, this time a luncheon, to celebrate her seventieth birthday.¹⁵

Although women were left out of the elite clubs and dinners that characterized the magazine's first two decades, many of them were brought into the home of James Fields, the publisher and/or editor of the magazine during most of its first twenty-five years, and his wife, Annie. The Fieldses regularly hosted breakfasts and dinners that allowed the magazine's female contributors to mingle with some of its most illustrious male icons. "It was the one place," writes Hedrick, "that women writers, excluded from the network of male clubs, could meet on an equal footing with male writers and publishers." These occasions at the Fieldses' home and the personal attention women received from both James and Annie Fields contributed a great deal to their confidence as writers and their sense of belonging at the magazine. Phelps, Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Sarah Orne Jewett all received special encouragement through their friendships with Annie Fields. Given her strong influence on her husband's editorial decisions, her friendships with female writers helped to link them to an institution that in many ways attempted to keep them at arm's length. But she could only help them to a certain extent. Anne Fields' influence could not counteract that of the *Atlantic*'s editors and reviewers.¹⁶

The *Atlantic*'s Editors and Female Contributors

While women writers were excluded from positions of power at the *Atlantic* and were only reluctantly included in the public tributes to its contributors, they were quite visible in the pages of the magazine. Women contributed as much as, and sometimes more than men in the area of fiction. (Non-fiction, which made up about two-thirds of the magazine, was dominated by men throughout the period.)¹⁷ But overall, pieces by women generally constituted less than one-fourth of the magazine. More important than how many women were published in the magazine, though, are the many indications that women writers were treated as a special class. Their work was often viewed in a way that distinguished

it from the serious literature the magazine supported. While the magazine's editors were known for cultivating an impressive list of female contributors and encouraging some of them to write fiction of a more "serious" bent, the publication of many of their works was viewed as a lowering of standards by some readers and the editors themselves.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's association with the magazine indicates the level on which the *Atlantic's* editors and publishers valued women's writing, and their relationship with her set the tone for their dealings with other female contributors. The proposal to form the *Atlantic*, intended as a magazine to promote an antislavery stance, had first been submitted to John P. Jewett, the publisher of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But his firm's failure caused the project to be temporarily abandoned. When Francis Underwood, who had the initial inspiration for the magazine, and Lowell, who was to be its editor, proposed the magazine to Phillips and Sampson, the publishers were reluctant to undertake such a venture, "especially when suggested by authors and other persons of the artistic temperament," Caroline Ticknor writes. They needed assurance that the magazine would make money, which they received from "[t]he cheering news that Mrs. Stowe would be among the first contributors."¹⁸ From the beginning, Stowe was considered, as Carol Klimick Cyganowski notes, "the founding group's fictionist," and she appears to have been valued by the *Atlantic's* editors primarily because the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had made her a national literary phenomenon. One of James Fields' biographers, James Austin, contends that "Harriet Beecher Stowe was the least dignified of the important contributors to the *Atlantic Monthly* during its first decade. In a magazine with a reputation for 'austerity,' her presence among the contributors must be accounted for by her popularity with the reading public." While she is occasionally cited among the inner circle of those authors who "made" the magazine in its early years,¹⁹ and although she was the only woman author to receive the recognition of a birthday party, it is clear that she was not accepted as one of the magazine's literary greats (nor did she see herself that way.)

James Russell Lowell, the *Atlantic's* editor from 1857 to 1861, seems to have valued women's writing for much the same reason that Stowe's contributions were valued. He encouraged women writers like Alcott, Stowe, Cooke, Spofford, and Elizabeth Stoddard, accepting their realistic stories, steering them away from sentimentality and didacticism, and giving them the confidence they needed to take themselves seriously as authors.²⁰ Nonetheless, he knew that the magazine depended on light stories of romance and domestic concerns, primarily contributed by women, to keep its subscription rates at an economically viable level, and he received criticism from the Boston intellectual elite for publishing such stories. "The contemptuous Thoreau and the scholarly [Charles Eliot] Norton had their doubts about *Atlantic* fiction, especially that written by women," according to Ellery Sedgwick in his history of the magazine. "Norton warned Lowell that he heard the *Atlantic* roundly abused in some academic circles for publishing



Figure 4: Harriet Beecher Stowe was the *Atlantic's* most visible and valuable female contributor. She helped launch the magazine by lending her popular appeal to what publishers feared was a roster of mostly stodgy male contributors. Her role at the magazine set the tone for the editors' treatment of other women writers. [Courtesy of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, Conn.]

second-rate love stories.” The male literary elite’s opinions about such stories influenced its perception of women writers as a whole. The economically expedient decision to include women among the *Atlantic*’s contributors and readership compromised the magazine’s mission to provide a belletristic, intellectual forum that could be found nowhere else in America, these men believed. Whereas earlier scholarly magazines, like Boston’s *Monthly Anthology*, had failed, and the *North American Review*’s finances were for most of the magazine’s existence in the red, the *Atlantic*’s publishers were determined to make it “pay its way.” To do this the editors attempted to attract the large class of female readers by publishing fiction that they believed women wanted to read.²¹

It was essentially these two groups—scholarly, elite men and the general (female) reader—that the *Atlantic* tried, in a delicate balancing act, to please over the years. A striking example of how this influenced the magazine’s content can be found in the May 1858 issue, where a lengthy essay on “Intellectual Character”—“that discipline by which intellect is penetrated through and through with the qualities of manhood”—directly precedes “Loo Loo,” a melodramatic slavery romance permeated by stock scenes and characters like a virtuous Northerner (named “Noble”) who wants to save the beautiful, light-skinned mulatto Loo Loo from a life of slavery, and an evil, animalistic Southerner (named “Grossman”) who is determined to make her his concubine. The former piece is clearly reminiscent of the kind of works found in scholarly magazines like the *North American Review* and the latter of a tale from a popular magazine primarily for female readers, such as *Peterson’s* or *Godey’s Lady’s Book*. “Loo Loo” was one of many stories published in the early *Atlantic* that probably caused men such as Thoreau and Norton to accuse the editors of pandering to the public’s tastes. Especially in the early years, the desire to attract female readers encouraged the editors to publish women’s fiction that was dismissed by elite Bostonians as “sentimental” (i.e., inferior) and “domestic” (i.e., of little importance).²²

At least one of the magazine’s female contributors seems to have shared their views. Perceiving that the editors didn’t seem to require much of her (and perhaps other women fiction writers), Alcott wrote (after two years of contributing to the magazine), “it dont [sic] take much brains to satisfy the Atlantic critics [editors]. They like that flat sort of tale.” The magazine’s blatant attempts to interest female readers with work that it considered below its standards indicate that from the outset women’s writing (most of it fiction) was viewed as a separate category from the magazine’s primary content—the poetry of the Fireside poets and essays by Boston scholars. And by publishing and perhaps even soliciting this work, they essentially made it more difficult for women writers to be viewed as serious artists by the magazine’s readers, reviewers, and editors, who were inclined to view such stories as inferior and typical of women’s fiction in general.²³

When Fields took over the editorship in 1861, he was eager (as both publisher and editor) to bolster the magazine’s subscription rates. The way to do this, he believed, was by shortening the length of the heavy essays and by providing short,

light pieces—such as stories and articles from popular women writers like Stowe and Gail Hamilton—which would counterbalance the magazine’s more serious offerings. According to a number of scholars, Fields printed many of the women’s stories, some of which he considered second-rate, with the intention of providing both “leavening” and popularity for the magazine. Cyganowski claims that “Fields tended to use these writers [women] not only to balance the appeal of his magazine, but also to balance his budget.” In addition, during the Civil War, Fields was encouraged to provide his readers with a steady stream of stories and sketches that diverted their attention from the war. As a result of these pressures from the public and Fields’ own tastes, fiction, much of it by women, became a more prominent feature of the magazine.²⁴

A look at the prose in a typical early issue (November 1862) bears out the idea that men’s and women’s writings were to a large extent separate categories: the “heavier,” more serious pieces were contributed by men and the “lighter” pieces by women. Out of the thirteen prose pieces, nine were written by men, all of which were nonfiction and eight of which could be classified as “heavy.” They include a naturalist essay by Thoreau, an article about the installment of a trans-Atlantic telegraph cable, and two essays greeting the Emancipation Proclamation, one of them by Emerson. Out of the four pieces by women, three are fictional: “Blind Tom,” a story about slavery, by Rebecca Harding Davis; “Mr. Axtell,” a serialized romance, by Sarah Johnson Prichard; and “Two and One,” a domestic tale by Miss S. Hale. The only nonfictional piece by a woman was Elizabeth Peabody’s article defining the concept of the kindergarten, a subject which at that time was discussed by both men and women. The content of this issue, though, clearly reflects that the *Atlantic* under Fields mirrored the gendered split in the literary marketplace, leaving fiction and light topics to women writers.

In the mid-1860s, the percentage of contributions of fiction by women dropped significantly from 90-100 percent in the first seven years of the magazine to only 30-40 percent. A growing number of men were moving into the area of fiction, and by the time William Dean Howells became editor in 1871, men virtually dominated this department. Richard Brodhead claims that the *Atlantic* “underwent a palpable stiffening of its selection criteria” during this period, and Kenneth Lynn recognizes that the magazine “was in a state of transition in the mid-1860s.” Lynn attributes the shift to the changing literary marketplace: “the New England literary wave had actually crested a decade before and was now beginning to break,” and the *Atlantic* “had begun to feel the hot breath of the New York competition,” primarily from *Harper’s Weekly*.²⁵ In addition, two new competitors arrived on the scene: the *Galaxy*, which began publishing in 1866, and *Lippincott’s*, which began in 1868.

This competition created an even more pressing need for Fields to differentiate the *Atlantic* from the new upstarts, and its stiffening of standards, most likely a reaction to a diversifying market, had a profound effect on the presence of women in the magazine’s pages. It seems that, fearing the scales had tipped too

far in the direction of the mass-market magazines, the *Atlantic* strengthened its elitist position in part by publishing less fiction by women. Thus, the magazine cultivated a niche for itself in the market based on its reputation as the home of the most respected American authors: Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Hawthorne, and Whittier. Fields began the intense promotion of these authors, advertising their association with the magazine and marketing their portraits as special incentives to new subscribers. And whereas fiction in general had previously been relegated to an inferior position vis-à-vis serious prose, the *Atlantic* now began to distinguish between high and low fiction, favoring that by Henry James and John W. DeForest rather than the stories of romance and domestic concerns by women that had been popular in the late 1850s and early 1860s.²⁶

During this period of “stiffening” standards, Fields also dropped at least three of his female contributors: Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Julia Ward Howe. In 1862, Fields gave Alcott forty dollars, telling her, in her words, “to give up trying to write & stick to my teaching.” He did accept one more story from her, but Alcott eventually gave up trying to win his acceptance and went on to become the age’s most well-known female author by writing popular books for children. Although Davis had made a well-noticed debut in the magazine in 1861 with “Life in the Iron Mills,” she also had a difficult time pleasing Fields. When, in 1867, she published her novel *Waiting for the Verdict* (which she had first offered to Fields) in the new *Galaxy*, Fields dropped Davis from the list of regular contributors. In the same year that he let Alcott go, Fields also cut loose Howe, one of the *Atlantic*’s most prominent female contributors. He had been dragging his feet in publishing poems that Howe intended as a continuing series, setting off an argument between the two that ended their professional relationship. To her, his actions were a clear sign that she was no longer valued in the *Atlantic*’s circle and was simply being used as filler. Thus, she asked him to print her poems “with selection as to their *merit*, not their shortness.”²⁷ Although Fields (and his wife) had made all three women feel at home at the magazine, he now led them to believe that they didn’t measure up to the *Atlantic*’s standards. Perhaps their association with sub-literary magazines and newspapers indicated to him that their status as artists was questionable. While all three writers felt torn between the greater amount of money they could receive from other publishers and the recognition they could receive from publishing with Fields, they desired to retain the *Atlantic* as an outlet for their more serious work. But the message they received from Fields was that they could no longer straddle the two literary realms; they had to distinguish themselves as artists or be confined to inferior publications for the masses.²⁸

During William Dean Howells’ editorship from 1871-1881, the magazine began to cultivate a new crop of contributors. During the early years of his tenure, Howells was most concerned with maintaining the magazine’s reputation and pleasing his Brahmin mentors by continuing to publish and favorably review the

Boston literary lions who had made the magazine. But he was also keenly interested in promoting realism and the new writers who were producing it. Many of these were women, and in the 1870s the number of stories by women increased to about 70 percent,²⁹ but Howells was incorrect when he said that he thought “there were more women than men” among the new contributors he brought to the *Atlantic*. (His list of the best young writers he introduced to the magazine’s readers—59 in all—included only 19 women.) Nevertheless, Howells supported many of the women local colorists, some of them the first American women writers to view themselves as serious artists and to be acknowledged as such by a portion of the literary establishment. Howells’s encouragement of Sarah Orne Jewett, especially, is well-known, although some women writers suffered from his preference for his male literary friends, especially Henry James. Howells’s critical preference for realism also damaged the reputations of some women writers who dealt with the quotidian and domestic, or what were considered topics of lesser importance, and who were considered largely incapable of depicting the “real” world because it lay outside their limited sphere.³⁰

When Thomas Bailey Aldrich took over the editorship of the *Atlantic* in 1881, the percentage of stories and serials by women dropped to about half of all the fiction published.³¹ Aldrich was unable or simply neglected to cultivate relationships with new writers, relying primarily on tried and true contributors of the Old Guard, as well as more recently established writers such as James and Jewett. In his attempts to please the standard contributors, he reportedly raised their rates while lowering those of others, a policy “most often exercised against female contributors,” according to Cyganowski. Aldrich also significantly curtailed the editorial policy of broadening the magazine’s readership, which had included soliciting work from women writers. As Sedgwick argues, “The inability to compete with the illustrated monthlies for writers who commanded large audiences was to make the *Atlantic* more inclined during the eighties and nineties to embrace a purely high-culture niche and become content to address the few.” The magazine returned to its roots in Brahmin culture, and the ghosts of the *Atlantic*’s illustrious past loomed large in its pages, as is evidenced by the numerous poems and essays in the 1880s paying tribute to the legacy of the founding fathers. The nostalgic tone during this decade is exemplified by Holmes’ poem “At the Saturday Club,” in which the speaker recalls the intimate dinners of the past and the old members who now “wander in the mob of ghosts.”³²

In its remembrance of the Old Guard, though, Stowe, whose presence had been so vital to the magazine’s founding, was no longer included. Her last *Atlantic* contributions appeared in 1879, and her association with the magazine effectively ended in 1882 with her birthday party. While Aldrich continued to welcome the contributions of Lowell, Holmes, and Whittier (the last of the giants still alive), he responded with reserve when Stowe suggested submitting an article in 1886. Stowe’s alliance with the magazine, while originally a boon, had turned out to be a liability when her essay “The True Story of Lady Byron’s Life” had

created such a scandal in 1869 that the magazine never recovered from its loss of subscribers. That incident, combined with her declining reputation, ensured that she was not among the contributors immortalized by the *Atlantic*, effectively erasing women writers from the magazine's illustrious past. By the time Charles Eliot Norton, a prominent member of the Saturday Club, published his essay "The Launching of the Magazine" in 1907, Stowe's contributions to the *Atlantic* had been forgotten.³³

By retreating to an elitist position and an exclusionary policy that relied heavily on the reputation of the Boston Brahmins, the *Atlantic* could claim its own niche in the literary world rather than compete directly with popular yet respectable literary magazines like the *Century*, *Lippincott's*, and *Harper's*. (The *Galaxy* had since been swallowed up by the *Atlantic*.) Therefore, during the 1880s and 1890s the *Atlantic* used its offices and pages to canonize the men of the Saturday Club who had founded the magazine. Horace Scudder, the magazine's most prolific reviewer and its editor during the 1890s, was the most prominent force behind these efforts. He published a number of anthologies and reviews of the Old Guard's works and lobbied for their inclusion in school curricula. But the impulse to canonize these writers was more than an attempt to survive financially; it was also a reaction against an increasingly diverse culture that threatened the authority of the elite represented by the *Atlantic*. Kenneth M. Price sums up the magazine's stance during this period:

The *Atlantic* had always represented a relatively small cultural elite, but whereas an earlier elite formation was energized by what it saw as the powers and responsibilities of privilege, the post-Reconstruction *Atlantic* writers displayed the fears of an embattled few. Their political commentary in the 1880s displays a sense of estrangement and loss of power in a political process they felt had been debased by an uninformed majority.³⁴

While Price's focus is on the political stance of the magazine, the atmosphere of feeling "embattled" and representative of an ever smaller portion of society also influenced the *Atlantic*'s treatment of female fiction writers. For, along with the increasing number of immigrants and the "race problem," the "woman question" was a thorny issue in these years. Although the magazine has generally been seen as favorably disposed towards the cause of women's rights, by Aldrich's time, when the press furnished a constant stream of articles on the subject, the *Atlantic* appeared to have little interest in the issue.³⁵

Those few articles that did comment on "what is unpleasantly called the *woman question*" were notably conservative. Harriet Preston, for example, insisted that the "woman of genius" was so rare that higher education for women was largely unnecessary. And according to Charles Worcester Clark, it was

unfortunate that so many women were entering the public sphere, and giving women the vote would only “aggravat[e] the situation.” Women should continue to wield their “influence” in the home, he declared, rather than in the “forum, where they would be likely to be mischievous.”³⁶ Such conservative opinions of women’s abilities and spheres of action reflect the barriers women writers faced when seeking recognition as valuable contributors to the magazine and the national high literature it represented.

Even though many women writers continued to publish in the *Atlantic* at the turn of the century, and even though they had been deemed important contributors of local color and realism, the new climate of reactionary elitism that took over the magazine at the turn of the century encouraged those searching for successors to the Boston Brahmins to look to male writers. James, Howells, and Twain were most often viewed as the *Atlantic*’s future immortals rather than the generation of women who had become serious writers with the help of its publishers and editors. Those in charge of the magazine wanted to establish a small canon of writers who represented the nation’s highest literary achievements in an attempt to drown out the many voices that competed for attention in the increasingly democratic literary market. In order to more fully understand how and why women writers, despite having shown themselves to be valuable contributors and serious artists, were neglected when the impulse to canonize its male writers consumed the *Atlantic* in the 1880s, we must look at the reviews of women’s works that appeared in the magazine’s pages.

The *Atlantic*’s Reviewers and Women Writers

Reinforcing the *Atlantic* editors’ views of women writers, the magazine’s reviewers consistently treated women authors as a separate class, encouraging their efforts but ultimately deeming them deficient when measured by the standards set by the great male writers.³⁷ An examination of the reviews of books by women during the first thirty years of the magazine reveals many of the same critical attitudes that John Paul Pritchard and Nina Baym have found in their studies of nineteenth-century literary reviewers. According to Pritchard, in an effort to maintain their hold on the realm of high literature, nineteenth-century male critics “decided upon a policy of containment” that encouraged women writers to stick to themes appropriate to their sex: domestic life, “manners,” “the affections,” etc. In her study of book reviews during the antebellum period, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers*, Baym found that reviewers felt “women ought to write not as individuals, but as exemplars of their sex.” This meant that “the womanliness of a piece of writing was a matter for discrimination and praise in a way that manliness was not.” Very often the sex of the author was foregrounded, and the reviewers revealed certain expectations for women writers in terms of style (“diffuseness, gracefulness, delicacy”), subject matter (“the domestic, the social, the private”), and tone (“pure, lofty, moral, didactic”). As we shall see, many of these expectations are also evident in the *Atlantic*’s reviews, although

some qualities traditionally associated with women’s fiction, such as didacticism and what was perceived as overwrought emotionalism, were rejected. In addition, by expecting women’s writing to address only private and womanly subjects, the reviewers also effectively relegated it to an inferior status as domestic literature that was not in competition with the serious literature men published in the magazine. At the same time, novels that exposed discord or unhappiness in the domestic realm were labeled pernicious, thereby imposing another limitation on women writers.³⁸

Many of the *Atlantic*’s reviews of women’s works drew attention to the fact that the author was a woman. Sometimes the reviewer marveled that a woman had written such a book or pointed to the particular “feminine touches” that could be found in the novel. For example, the anonymous reviewer of Gail Hamilton’s book *Country Living and Country Thinking* (1862) commends the author for her individuality, but finds it to be of a specific rather than general kind: “The authoress . . . is not only womanly, but a palpable individual among women. Both sex and individuality are impressed on every page. That the book is written by a woman is apparent by a thousand signs.”³⁹ In the 1880s, Horace Scudder wrote two review articles solely on women’s books, pointing out the fact in his title. The first essay points to the “womanly hand” at work in each of three novels. For instance, Scudder praises Mary Hollock Foote’s novel *The Led Horse Claim* not for its “masculine scene” but for its feminine depiction of a woman’s suffering. In the second essay, Scudder expresses a clear preference for women’s literature that, like Mary Murfree’s *In the Clouds*, avoids the unrealistic, easy, happy ending that he seems to expect from women’s novels. And he condemns Miss M. G. McClelland’s *Princess* for ending with an easy solution to a difficult problem—“A genuine work of art would not leave the story at this point.” He also labels the work a “piece of sentimentality” and wishes she had addressed the problem in a more “robust” manner and with “strength.”⁴⁰

Work that remained within the sphere of traditional women’s writing in terms of subject matter was also viewed as inferior. The reviewer of Alcott’s *An Old-fashioned Girl* (1870) concedes that it is a “pretty story,” yet “[i]t is nothing, in fact, but the story of a little girl from the country, who comes to visit a gay city family.” Accounting for some readers’ interest in the book, the reviewer ridicules the conventional appeal of such a story: “people always like to read of kindly self-sacrifice, and sweetness, and purity, and naturalness.” Similarly, the novel *Red as a Rose is She* (1870) is criticized for “ever so much sentimental millinery of the kind that young girls delight in, when they write, and, we suppose, when they read.”⁴¹

But while *Atlantic* reviewers essentially criticized women writers for remaining within a traditional sphere of sentimental and domestic writing, they also exhibited discomfort with works by women that dealt with seemingly unwomanly topics. Women were encouraged to stick to what they knew best—the home and personal relationships—and to avoid subjects about which they should not know,

such as adultery or prostitution. In the aforementioned review, Scudder condemns McClelland for addressing “so grave, so momentous, a subject as marriage and divorce, and cover[ing] up a bad smell with a bottle of Lubin’s extract.” Likewise, the anonymous review of *Red as a Rose is She* begins, “Some things you do not like to have a woman do well, and these are about the only things which are well done.” The “wildness,” “wickedness and worldliness” of the plot are then condemned as unseemly and inappropriate for a woman’s novel. The unidentified reviewer of *Unforgiven* (1870) by Berriedale, who is assumed to be a woman, condemns the author for addressing “the sorrows of such a sinful experience as Hawthorne has depicted in ‘The Scarlet Letter.’” While Hawthorne’s portrayal of adultery had already become a classic, the reviewer wishes

that the ladies, when they write novels, would leave such cruel themes as the author of “Unforgiven” has chosen. We should like, now, to have a little of the amusing insipidity, the admirable dullness, of real life depicted in fiction. We would rather know what took place in a young lady’s mind on a shopping excursion than be told of the transactions of her soul after her ruin.

The reviewer concludes with the advice that if Berriedale should write again, she might take up subjects considered better suited to female authors, such as innocent flirtation or a young girl’s rejection by a suitor. That Berriedale would never achieve the stature of Hawthorne by addressing such mundane topics as “getting home a new dress spoiled by the dress-maker” is left unexamined. By expecting women’s writing to address only womanly subjects that were deemed frivolous and superficial, reviewers effectively relegated it to an inferior category of domestic literature that did not compete with serious literature by men.⁴²

Although reviewers had definite ideas about appropriate subject matter for women writers, they also praised women authors for avoiding what were seen as conventional approaches to those themes. The anonymous reviewer of Eliza Buckminster’s *Parthenia: or the Last Days of Paganism* (1858) wrote, “We are thankful . . . for a story with love and woman in it, which does not rustle with *crinoline*; that most useful of inventions for ladies with scanty brains, which has filled more than half the space in our drawing-rooms, and nearly as large a part of some of our periodicals.” More often than not reviewers were pleased to find women writers who did not replicate the women’s writing that, in their minds, had become the norm and that they dismissed as overly emotional, moralizing, and too idealistic in its depiction of romantic relationships. They characterized most women’s writing as inferior and unimportant and praised female writers who rose above their sex and set themselves apart from a literature which was at once “hysterical,” trivial, and predictable. In a direct attack on the sentimentality of conventional women’s fiction, the unidentified reviewer of Caroline Chesebro’s

The Foe in the Household (1871) sets the author apart from other writers of her sex: "It is so very quietly and decently wrought, that perhaps the veteran novel-reader, in whom the chords of feeling have been rasped and twanged like fiddle-strings by the hysterical performance of some of our authoresses, may not be at once moved by it."⁴³

But reviewers generally believed women writers were incapable of transcending their sex in the depiction of "reality," an aspect of fiction that became essential to the *Atlantic* reviewers. As Thomas Wentworth Higginson claimed, "The basis of all good writing is truth in details." But women writers were often found to be guilty of "excess," "exaggeration," "melodrama," or lack of fidelity to human nature precisely because they were women.⁴⁴ Reviewers indicated that they believed female writers were incapable of depicting characters in a truthful manner because of their sheltered lives, leading to the assumption that women's works possessed "immaturity." In a somewhat exaggerated example, Howells, in the wake of the Civil War, insisted that while "the heroes of young-lady writers in the magazines have been everywhere fighting the late campaigns over again, as young ladies would have them fought," John DeForest was "the first to treat the war really and artistically," the point being that women writers could only imagine the war and therefore could never create "art" about it. Especially when approaching masculine themes or characters, women's abilities were often deemed inadequate, and reviewers directly or indirectly suggested that female authors should stick to what they knew best. Thus, the emerging realist movement created new barriers for women writers in the pages of the *Atlantic*.⁴⁵

Despite these many limitations imposed on women writers, the *Atlantic's* reviewers, especially in the early years of the magazine, singled out some women's books as possessing exceptional merit, comparing them to those of the most respected male writers. For example, Stowe's *The Pearl of Orr's Island* (1862) was considered to "[rank] with the best narratives in American literature. Though different from the style of Irving and Hawthorne, it shows an equal mastery of English in expressing, not only facts, events and thoughts, but their very spirit and atmosphere." This comparison with two of America's highest ranking writers indicates a true respect for Stowe's abilities and accords her the status of an artist. Likewise, the reviewer of Chesebro's *The Foe in the Household* (1871) wrote, "To our thinking, it deserves to rank with the very best of American fictions, and is surpassed only by Hawthorne's romances and Mrs. Stowe's greatest work."⁴⁶

Indeed, some women writers began their careers with the highest approbation of the *Atlantic's* reviewers, who appeared to believe that they had discovered extraordinary new talents. But the reviewers often mixed such praise with a subtext of patronizing advice that encouraged (often young and unestablished) women writers while forever sending the message that they had not yet fulfilled their promise.⁴⁷ Usually the result was that, rather than take their rightful place next to the eminent authors with whom they were sometimes compared, women

writers continued to be viewed as naive, inexperienced, and in need of advice and encouragement. Such was the case for some of the magazine's most well-received female contributors, whose early successes did not materialize into lasting fame. For example, although Phelps' first work to be reviewed in the magazine, *Hedged In* (1870), was heralded as "a work of art," her reputation steadily declined over the decade as reviewers objected to her tendency toward excessive "darkness," a fault labeled as "feminine." When Phelps took on the subject of women's dissatisfaction in marriage in *The Story of Avis* (1878), the reviewer Harriet Preston took a decided stance against Phelps as representative of all that was deemed to be inferior and even dangerous in women's writing.⁴⁸ Woolson received similar treatment from the *Atlantic's* reviewers. When her first novel, *Anne*, was reviewed in 1882, Scudder favorably compared Woolson to James and Howells. He even reflected on the growth of Longfellow's and Emerson's fame over the years and suggested that Woolson could follow in their footsteps. But in his review of her next work in the following year, he seems to have forgotten his earlier predictions. He especially criticizes the "artificial" "construction" of the story, concluding, "We noticed in Anne something of the same tendency . . . , and we hope that it will not increase in her work." Subsequent reviews of her work continued to be negative, primarily faulting the implausibility of the plots or characters.⁴⁹

Spofford fell from perhaps the greatest heights in the *Atlantic's* eyes. She received a more encouraging reception at the magazine than any other young woman writer, yet the magazine's opinion of her eventually turned from its early astonishment at her abilities to a disappointment in her lack of development. In the review of her first novel, *Sir Rohan's Ghost* (1860), Lowell heaped lavish praise on the new author who had published her novel anonymously. Not until the third page of the review did readers learn that the novel was written by a woman; in fact, Lowell seems to forget the author's sex, referring to the author as "him" in the opening lines of the review: "It is very plain that we have got a new poet,—a tremendous responsibility both for him . . . and for us critics who are to reconcile ourselves to what is new in him, and to hold him strictly to that apprenticeship to the old which is the condition of mastery at last." The next page and a half contain an extended discussion of the overuse of the term "genius" in literary reviews, and he insists, "It is not, therefore, from any grudging incapacity to appreciate new authors" but from his desire to preserve the term's precious status that he will not use it to describe Spofford. Nonetheless, he judges her work against romances by Fielding and Hawthorne and although he finds some faults, he declares that "no first volume by any author has ever been published in America showing more undoubtful symptoms of genuine poetic power than this." But after this apparent gender-neutral discussion of the work, he admits that he knows the author is a "she," and that she has chosen to write a romance instead of a novel because her youth and sex have limited her experience. His only criticism is that she attempts some realistic character development that is beyond

her powers. But he ends with encouraging praise and predictions of a bright future for Spofford:

We have found all the fault we could with this volume, because we sincerely think that the author of it is destined for great things, and that she owes it to the rare gift she has been endowed with to do nothing inconsiderately, and by honest self-culture to raise natural qualities to conscious and beneficent powers.⁵⁰

From the time Spofford’s first story was published in the magazine, the *Atlantic*’s readers and inner circle were fascinated by her. In his essay “An Early Contributor’s Recollections,” John Townsend Trowbridge claims that one of the most memorable stories from the early days was Spofford’s (then Prescott’s) “In a Cellar” (February 1859). He writes that it was “altogether surprising as the production of a hitherto unknown hand. The surprise became wonder when we were told that the said hand was small, and feminine, and inexperienced,—the hand of a young girl who had never seen a foreign shore, and knew little of the world outside of books and her own magical imagination.” Higginson, who befriended and supported Spofford early on, wrote to his mother about the new discovery, referring to her as a “wonderful genius” and describing the editors’ astonishment that her story could have been written by a young woman. The story “is so brilliant and shows such an extraordinary intimacy with European life,” he wrote, “that the editors seriously suspected it of being a translation from some first-class Frenchman, as Balzac or Dumas, and I had to be called in to satisfy them that a demure little Yankee girl could have written it.”⁵¹

Yet by the time Spofford’s novel *Azarian* (1864) appeared, Higginson was already expressing disappointment with her lack of development as a writer. Although she had proven her remarkable talent, Spofford had also marked herself as a “sensation-writer,” Higginson claimed. He endeavored to dissuade her from giving in to this tendency: “There is no literary laurel too high for her to grasp, if her own will, and favoring circumstances, shall enable her to choose only noble and innocent themes, and to use canvas firm and pure enough for the rare colors she employs.” But he suggests that her immaturity, which he ascribes to her sex, is a barrier to her success. Ultimately, Higginson lays the blame at her own feet: “If [her fame] has not grown as was at first anticipated, it has been her own doing.”⁵² By not heeding the advice of the magazine’s reviewers, she has forfeited the *Atlantic*’s warm welcome.

Although Spofford continued to publish novels through the 1870s and 1880s, the *Atlantic* did not review them. Only in 1882 did George Parsons Lathrop review her *Poems*, and he did so without mentioning her earlier reputation as a writer of fiction. While the review is generally favorable, it contains nothing reminiscent of the earlier bright predictions for her career. Lathrop finds many

aspects of the poems to praise but concludes, "It may not be great poetry which these pages disclose. . . . But if it is not great, it is good."⁵³ Gone is the disappointment that Spofford hasn't fulfilled her promise or that she is not serious enough about her literary work. The *Atlantic* clearly no longer considered her to be an up-and-coming author worthy of serious attention and criticism. She had already come and gone.

The Disappearance of Women Writers

The inability of women writers to gain more than temporary recognition in the magazine is evidenced not only by the reviews of their works but also by the virtual absence of nearly all of the women writers who had made a name for themselves at the *Atlantic* from the new anthologies and critical studies that began to appear in the last two decades of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ While the actual deterioration of the quality of their work is always a possible cause for their falling out of favor, the fact that all of the female writers lauded in the magazine (except perhaps Jewett, whose case is discussed below) received the message that their success would go no further than initial recognition points to other factors beyond their control. While scholars of women's literature have already uncovered some important reasons for this neglect, the history of their reception at the *Atlantic* can help us more fully understand why women writers were so quickly forgotten.

Some scholars have found a fundamental preference for masculine themes in American literary criticism, which has not viewed women's writings as "art" because they often foreground topics of interest to women like courtship and domestic cares, rather than "important" or "serious" topics like whale hunting.⁵⁵ Although such scholarship has often focused on the biases of the New Criticism of the twentieth century, similar views of women authors and their works were prevalent in the 1870s and 1880s, when the proponents of realism attempted to establish authorship as a masculine profession and to usurp the seeming predominance of female writers and sentimental fiction in the literary marketplace.⁵⁶ The tide of literary taste was turning toward a more masculine type of fiction in the pages of the *Atlantic* and elsewhere largely in an effort to disassociate *belles lettres* from popular and "feminine" literary tastes. Indeed, praise for the more "vigorous" and "manly" fiction of male writers can be found in the *Atlantic's* pages during the same years that previously well-respected women writers were falling out of favor. "Vigorous" is a term that appears often as a token of the utmost praise, and it is usually applied to men's works. For example, Lathrop hails James' *The American* as a "vigorous full-length portrait," and Scudder finds Bret Harte's *In the Carquinez Woods* commendable for its "large, vigorous, imaginative vividness" and "vigorous and confident" characters who "never lack brawn." While a few women writers were praised for their avoidance of typically feminine techniques and subjects, as we have seen, they were still encouraged to remain in a more "womanly" sphere that was not valued as highly as the one that male writers like James, Harte, and Twain were establishing.⁵⁷

Another reason for the inability of the *Atlantic*'s female contributors to gain a lasting reputation was undoubtedly a result of their exclusion from the important social clubs, which not only helped form the *Atlantic* but also continued to dominate the Boston literary scene through the end of the century. As Nina Baym notes, “[o]bliteration of writing by women was not evidently part of the program [for the authors of the first literary histories]; but the focus on formal social networks of a masculine cast—Harvard, the Saturday Club—led inexorably to that result.” When the professors and publishers from those clubs began to write and publish the first American literature texts, it was inevitable that the writers they knew from their male social networks would form the focus of their understanding of the American literary landscape.⁵⁸

The *Atlantic*'s neglect of women writers as the canon was formed was, at base, due to the belief that women's works were not serious literature. According to the magazine's male hierarchy, women were either incapable of contributing to the scholarly and realistic literature enshrined by the magazine, or they did not take themselves seriously enough to produce, in Higginson's words, “first-class literary work.” The latter charge is one with which current scholars have tended to agree. Antebellum “literary domestics” insisted they had no ambition and merely wrote because they needed the money or because God wanted them to. And postbellum women regionalists—many of whom were regular *Atlantic* contributors—chose to write in this “inherently minor” genre, at least partially, the argument goes, because they did not want to threaten or compete with male writers who were the major authors. Whatever women writers' intentions, though, the *Atlantic* was most likely to support those who appeared the least threatening. Sarah Orne Jewett was certainly a writer who, although she may have taken herself very seriously as an author, was well-received because she was not perceived as a competitor of male writers. The reviewers' assessments of her works make clear why she was so respected. “It seems to us that Miss Jewett owes her success, which is indubitable, to her wise timidity,” Scudder wrote in 1885. “She realizes the limitations of her power, and knows that what she can do within the range of her graceful gift is worth far more than any ambitious struggle outside of it would be.”⁵⁹ The *Atlantic* rewarded “timidity” and lack of ambition in women writers, while, as we have seen, those who attempted to take on “serious” subjects and distinguish themselves as artists were put in their place.

Jewett's success offers a stark contrast to the fate of other women writers who ventured so much and ultimately failed to win the *Atlantic*'s lasting respect. Those who quietly wrote “quaint” stories on a “small” scale found a favorable reception precisely because they did not challenge male editors and reviewers to reassess their prejudices about what kind of writing was appropriate for women or what kind of writing women's talents were fitted for. Phelps, Woolson, and Spofford experienced a decline in their reputations at least partially because they tried to extend their powers beyond acceptable realms for women writers and because they exhibited an ambition to achieve lasting fame with the respect and admiration of the literary elite.⁶⁰

This brings us to perhaps a more fundamental reason for women writers's exclusion from the canon the *Atlantic* helped create: the male establishment's conservative reaction against the pluralist culture of which white women were a prominent part. Although the biases against female authors and the "feminine" in literature were deeply rooted in American culture, in the 1880s and 1890s they were reinforced with a new vigor as the genteel elite, many of whom were ensconced at the *Atlantic*, feared that a diverse culture was set to replace the one in which privileged Anglo-Saxon males had a monopoly on power. The male cultural elite's reaction against the new factions whose voices were clamoring for recognition was part of the struggle over defining the representative American authors and, by extension, Americans. As African-American males gained the ballot, Irish immigrants took over the political machines of Northern cities, workers staged strikes, and women demanded with increasing intensity the right to vote, the Old Guard and the younger men who saw themselves as their inheritors felt that their authority as the creators of America's culture was threatened.⁶¹ In 1907, Charles Eliot Norton, a prominent member of the Saturday Club, described for the *Atlantic*'s readers how the changes that had taken place in American society had affected the realm of culture: "A democracy was substituting itself for the older aristocracy and with the usual result: the general level was raised, while but a few conspicuous elevations lifted themselves above its surface."⁶² In other words, while more writers of a variety of backgrounds appeared on the scene, and a "democracy" was set to grant citizenship in the "republic of Letters" to women, Western writers, and African Americans, the rabble were turned away by the Old Guard, who reasserted their monopoly on literary prestige.

In an attempt to maintain its authority over the realm of high culture, the *Atlantic*'s elite conceived of an American canon with increasingly narrow parameters. Whereas many early attempts at literary history tended toward the encyclopedic, like Edmund Clarence Stedman's eleven-volume *Library of America* (1889-1890)—one of the last and certainly the most exhaustive of its kind—by the first decade of the new century, literary histories and anthologies narrowed their focus to a few representative authors, all male. In the *Atlantic*'s 1890 review of Stedman's work, the unidentified critic summarized the magazine's support of this trend: "The reputation of a nation for letters must depend upon its eminent authors, and arises rather from quality than quantity." In other words, a few "eminent authors" would have to be selected to represent America's literary tradition rather than a multitude of voices.⁶³

American literary discourse, echoing the conservative desires for social stability in the face of upheaval at the turn of the century, tended towards the nostalgic and homogenous. The increasingly conservative tendencies of the *Atlantic*'s editors, who retreated into an elitist position and attempted to maintain the magazine's highbrow niche in a diversifying periodical market, initiated a nostalgic idealization of the Boston Brahmins instead of an appreciation of the

diverse group of writers, including women, who had filled its pages. Canonization itself was essentially an attempt of the "genteel" forces in American letters to create an American literary tradition that was homogeneous and stable rather than diffuse and chaotic. The desire for a canon of American literature was by its very nature exclusionary rather than encyclopedic. Whereas the names of women writers like Stowe, Woolson, and Chesebro had been uttered in the same breath as Hawthorne and Emerson, by the end of the century there was only room for the handful of male writers whose reputations soared to ever increasing heights while all others were hidden from view. Certainly, many male authors suffered a similar fate, but as the *Atlantic* passed the baton, so to speak, to the next generation of literary greats, there were no women among them. This desire to find a generation of young writers to replace the *Atlantic's* founders was intense, and writers like Howells, James, and Twain were most often recognized as the new masters. An ever-narrowing circle of white, privileged men came to represent all of American literature in the pages of the *Atlantic* and beyond.⁶⁴

As a result of the coinciding factors outlined here, the successes of the *Atlantic's* female contributors were only temporary. The exclusion of women from the *Atlantic's* inner circle and the editors' and reviewers' perception of their works as less serious than men's sent the message (to women and to the larger culture) that women's place in America's high literary culture would be temporary, or secondary, at best. By the end of the nineteenth century, their achievements were completely erased as the impulse to create an exclusive canon removed from consideration all but Stowe and Jewett, who would sometimes appear on the increasingly narrow list of "minor" American authors. The initial favorable reception of female authors by that most formidable maker of literary reputations was no guarantee that they would be remembered alongside the male writers to whom they were sometimes compared and many of whom continue to comprise the core of the American literary canon today. The female contributors of the *Atlantic* would have to wait over a century for their inclusion in the picture of America to begin.

Notes

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1. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York, 1985), 201.

2. "The Absence of Women at the Whittier Dinner," *New York Evening Post*, reprinted in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 28, 1877, 2. Because the scholarship on nineteenth-century literary magazines lacks an extended analysis of women writers' status, it is difficult to speculate whether the *Atlantic* is representative in its unwillingness to consider women major authors. But a brief survey of some of the other prominent magazines of the day suggests as much. See, for instance, *Harper's* promotional volume, *The Making of a*

Great Magazine: Being an Inquiry into the Past and Future of Harper's Magazine (New York, 1889), which lists only fourteen women among its forty-five prestigious contributors of fiction (seven of unidentifiable gender by name). Samuel C. Chew's *Fruit Among the Leaves: An Anniversary Anthology* (New York, 1950), 81-98, indicates that women writers were similarly underrepresented and/or undervalued at *Scribner's* and *The Century Magazine*. The *Nation's* all-male staff and its consistent attacks on women writers would probably make it, rather than the *Atlantic*, the most "masculine" magazine of the postbellum period. See Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe, A Life* (New York, 1994), for a discussion of the *Nation's* "aggressively gendered criticism" (345-352).

3. On the influence of the *Atlantic's* editors and publishers on the formation of the American literary canon, see Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst, MA, 1994); Richard Brodhead, *The School of Hawthorne* (New York, 1986); William Charvat, *Literary Publishing in America, 1790-1850* (Philadelphia, 1959); and Nina Baym, "Early Histories of American Literature: A Chapter in the Institution of New England," in *American Literary History Reader*, ed. Gordon Hunter (New York, 1995), 80-110.

4. Hedrick, ix. See also Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture: From Revolution Through Renaissance* (Cambridge, U.K., 1986), 54.

5. Josephine Donovan, *New England Local Color Literature: A Woman's Tradition* (New York, 1983), 6. Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, 1993), 152-153. Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), 7, 5. Hedrick, 289-291, 314-315. Studies of the magazine itself have also failed to adequately explore women writers' status. See Sedgwick; Mark DeWolfe Howe, *The Atlantic Monthly and Its Makers* (Boston, 1919); and Helen McMahon, *Criticism of Fiction: A Study of Trends in the Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1898* (New York, 1973).

6. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters From a Life* (Boston, 1897), 78, 79. Louisa May Alcott, *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*, eds. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine B. Stern (Boston, 1989), 92. See also Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 80-81. Constance Fenimore Woolson wrote to editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich, "those of my sketches which have come out in its pages . . . have always had the air to me of having been presented at court" (quoted in Sedgwick, 180). For Rebecca Harding Davis' feelings about the *Atlantic*, see Sharon M. Harris, *Rebecca Harding Davis and American Realism* (Philadelphia, 1991), 139; and Tillie Olsen, ed., *Life in the Iron Mills and Other Stories* (New York, 1985), 112-113. That male writers viewed the *Atlantic* in much the same way as these women is exemplified by William Dean Howells. See Rodney D. Olsen, *Dancing in Chains: The Youth of William Dean Howells* (New York, 1991), 166-170. Final quote in the paragraph is from a speech by Mr. Howard at the *Atlantic-Whittier Dinner*; quoted in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 18, 1877, 1.

7. For a thorough discussion of the issue of "minor literature," see Louis A. Renza, "A White Heron" and the *Question of Minor Literature* (Madison, WI, 1984). On regionalism's minor status, see also Judith Fetterly, introduction to *Provisions: A Reader from Nineteenth-Century American Women* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985), 20; and Buell, 53-54.

8. For Higginson's role at the magazine, see Sedgwick, 78-79.

9. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?" *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (February 1859): 141, 142.

10. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Review of *Azarian*, by Harriet Prescott Spofford, *Atlantic Monthly* 14 (October 1864): 516. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Letter to a Young Contributor," *Atlantic Monthly* 9 (April 1862): 401.

11. Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915* (n.p., 1940), 12. James Russell Lowell, the first editor, described the magazine as "scholarly and gentlemanlike." He is quoted in Charles Eliot Norton, "The Launching of the Magazine," *Atlantic Monthly* 100 (November 1907): 579. According to Edward Waldo Emerson, in *The Early Years of the Saturday Club, 1855-1870* (1918; reprint, Freeport, NY, 1967), 128, in the first twenty years of the Club, half of its members contributed to the *Atlantic*.

12. Hedrick, 289, 290.

13. John Townsend Trowbridge, "An Early Contributor's Recollections," *Atlantic Monthly* 100 (November 1907): 587. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Letters and Journals of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1846-1906*, ed. Mary Thacher Higginson (1921; reprint New York, 1969), 106, 108.

14. "Whittier's Birthday," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 18, 1877, 1. "The Atlantic-Whittier Dinner—A Woman's Thoughts Thereon," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 20, 1877, 1. The *New York Evening Post* maintained that "custom ordains the presence of men only at public dinners"; see "The Absence of Women at the Whittier Dinner," 2. See also Richard Lowry, "Literary Man": *Mark Twain and Modern Authorship* (New York, 1996), 30-

40; and Coultrap-McQuin, 2-6.

15. Arthur Gilman, "Atlantic Dinners and Dinners," *Atlantic Monthly* 100 (November 1907): 654, 657. See also Coultrap-McQuin, 39; Donovan, 1-2; Hedrick, 393; and "The Birthday Garden Party to Harriet Beecher Stowe," *Atlantic Monthly*, supplement to 50 (August 1882): 1-16.

16. Hedrick, 294. See also Judith A. Roman, *Annie Adams Fields* (Bloomington, IN, 1990); and Donovan, chapter 3.

17. Sedgwick claims that throughout the nineteenth century, women were responsible for roughly half of the fiction the magazine published (36). While this is generally true, there are significant fluctuations in the number of female contributors, which will be discussed below. Because women writers were primarily valued as contributors of light fiction, I have focused on the department of fiction. In the area of poetry, women were also highly represented.

18. Caroline Ticknor, *Hawthorne and His Publisher* (Boston, 1913), 286.

19. Carol Klimick Cyganowski, *Magazine Editors and Professional Authors in Nineteenth-Century America: The Genteel Tradition and the American Dream* (New York, 1988), 237. James C. Austin, *Fields of the Atlantic Monthly: Letters to an Editor, 1861-1870* (San Marino, Calif., 1953), 266. William Dean Howells, in "Recollections of an Atlantic Editorship," *Atlantic Monthly* 100 (November 1907); reprint in *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays*, ed. Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolph Kirk (New York, 1959), 186; and Brooks, 10, both mention Stowe as among the founding members of the magazine.

20. See Sedgwick, 48, 55; James Matlack, "The Literary Career of Elizabeth Barstow Stoddard," (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1967), 184; and Alcott, *Journals*, 95.

21. Sedgwick, 56. On the pressure Lowell felt to "popularize" the magazine, see also Sedgwick, 50, and Martin Duberman, *James Russell Lowell* (Boston, 1966), 173-174. Approximately half of the magazine's readership was female, according to Sedgwick, 85-86. On the problems of the *North American Review*, see Ellen B. Ballou, *The Building of the House: Houghton Mifflin's Formative Years* (Boston, 1970), 177; and Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1938-1968), 2: 247. W. S. Tyrone, in *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Fields, Publisher to the Victorians* (Boston, 1963), 266, notes the publishers' determination to make the magazine "pay its way."

22. E.P. Whipple, "Intellectual Character," *Atlantic Monthly* 1 (May 1858): 791-800; quote on 791. Lydia Maria Child, "Loo Loo," *Atlantic Monthly* 1 (May 1858): 801-812, 2 (June 1858): 32-42. Other *Atlantic* stories that seem typical of a mass-circulation magazine aimed primarily at female readers include Elizabeth Haven Appleton's "Our Talks with Uncle John" (August 1858), Lucretia Peabody Hale's "Why did the Governess Faint?" (May 1859), E.W.'s "My Last Love" (February 1860), and Anne M. Brewster's "Lucy's Letters" (January 1866). A few such stories were also written by men from a male viewpoint; see, for example, John Townsend Trowbridge's "The Romance of a Glove" (August 1858). In my discussion of these "sentimental" stories, I do not wish to imply that such work is inherently inferior to other styles such as regionalism or realism. Rather, I wish to point out that these stories, by featuring character types and formulaic plots, would have been identified as "sentimental" and thus, inferior by the male literary elite of the Saturday Club and *Atlantic*. For discussions of how sentimentalism has been dismissed as feminine and inferior, see Tompkins, chapter 6, and Fetterly, 24-25.

23. Louisa May Alcott, *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*, eds. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, and Madeleine Stern (Athens, Ga., 1995), 67. Everett Carter, in *Howells and the Age of Realism* (Philadelphia, 1950), examines the *Atlantic's* association with "sentimental literature" (38-41).

24. Cyganowski, 54. See also Roman, 30; Sedgwick, 83; Austin, 111, 309; and Ballou, 46-47. Tyrone discusses the pressure that Fields felt to provide light fiction during the war (258-260).

25. Vol. 10 (July - December 1862) features eleven fiction pieces, eight by women and three by men. Vol. 15 (January - June 1865) features ten fiction pieces, four by women and six by men. Vol. 19 (January - June 1867) features thirteen fiction pieces, four by women and nine by men. Brodhead, *School*, 87. Kenneth S. Lynn, *William Dean Howells, An American Life* (New York, 1970), 140.

26. Sedgwick, 74-75, 89, 97-98.

27. Alcott, *The Selected Letters*, 106. See also Brodhead, 87-88. For a discussion of Davis' rejection by the *Atlantic*, see Harris, 138-139. (Davis did publish three more pieces in the *Atlantic* long after Fields' editorship had ended.) For Howe's quarrel with Fields, see Austin, 111-114. Quote from Howe in Austin, 111 (emphasis added).

28. Howe had lucrative offers from the *Continental Monthly* that she wanted to act on, according to Austin, 105-06. Alcott and Davis published sensational stories in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* and *Peterson's*, respectively, at the same time they wrote for the *Atlantic*. While

Fields probably did not know about Alcott's pseudonymous stories, he did find out about Davis'. See Harris, 126. Fields, concerned with the sale of the *Atlantic* and its reputation, did not like his writers publishing in other magazines. Because of her unparalleled popularity, Stowe was an exception. See Austin, 267. Fields also had quarrels with Gail Hamilton (Mary Abigail Dodge) and Sophia Hawthorne. See Austin, 312-313, and Gail Hamilton, *A Battle of the Books* (Cambridge, Mass., 1870).

29. Vol. 35 (January - June 1875) features thirteen pieces of fiction, eight by women and five by men. Vol. 44 (July - December 1879) features ten fiction pieces, seven by women and three by men.

30. Howells, "Recollections," 193, 187. In 1876, Constance Fenimore Woolson wrote to a friend about Howells' "'favorites.' Chief among them at present, Henry James, Jr. I suspect there is a strong current of favoritism up there." See Jay B., Hubbell, ed., "Some New Letters of Constance Fenimore Woolson," *New England Quarterly* 14 (1941): 730. Coultrap-McQuin indicates that "Howells asked [Elizabeth Stuart Phelps] to shorten her piece to make additional room in the *Atlantic* for Henry James." In response, Phelps complained that "there is so much of Mr. James" (187). On the lower status accorded regionalist writing, see note 6 above and the discussion of *Atlantic* reviews of women writers below.

31. Vol. 49 (January - June 1882) features ten fiction pieces, five by women and five by men. Vol. 57 (January - June 1886) features nine pieces of fiction, four by women and five by men.

32. Cyganowski, 148. Sedgwick, 158. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "At the Saturday Club," *Atlantic Monthly* 53 (January 1884): 68-71.

33. Hedrick discusses Aldrich's response to Stowe on 395 and the publication of her Lady Byron article on 354-370. Sedgwick comments on the loss of subscribers on 109-110. Stowe's essay defended her late friend from attacks by countering that Lord Byron had engaged in incest. Norton, 581.

34. On the "cultural conservatism" of Aldrich, see Sedgwick, 162. For evidence that Aldrich would print only positive reviews of the Old Guard, see Leonard Lutwack, "The New England Hierarchy," *New England Quarterly* 28 (1955): 178-181. For Horace E. Scudder's efforts at canonizing the Boston Brahmins, see Sedgwick, 213; and Baym "Early Literary Histories," 83-84. Scudder's works that helped canonize these writers include *American Poems* (Boston, 1879); *American Prose* (Boston), which went through fifteen editions before 1885; *Men and Letters; Essays in Characterization and Criticism* (Boston, 1887); and *Literature in School* (Boston, 1888). All were published by Houghton, Mifflin, the *Atlantic's* publisher. In "Charles Chesnut, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Intersection of African-American Fiction and Elite Culture," in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, eds. Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville, VA, 1995), 257-274, Kenneth M. Price detects a return to elitism during the 1880s as regards racial issues; quote on 258.

35. Mott believes that the *Atlantic* was "friendly" to the cause of women's suffrage because Higginson, Howe, and Gail Hamilton were contributors (3:91). The last two were no longer with the magazine in Aldrich's years. See notes 27 and 28.

36. Harriet W. Preston, "A Woman of Genius," *Atlantic Monthly* 45 (April 1880): 450-451. Charles Worcester Clark, "Woman Suffrage, Pro and Con," *Atlantic Monthly* 65 (March 1890): 311, 315.

37. Because the overall effect of the reviewers' responses to women's writing is most important here, this section will forego the chronological approach of the previous section. Dates cited throughout this section refer to the year the book was reviewed, not published. Reviews were not signed, and the index does not always include reviewers' names. In some cases, I have been able to attribute reviews based on my reading in other sources.

38. John Paul Pritchard, *Criticism in America: An Account of the Development of Critical Techniques from the Early Period of the Republic to the Middle Years of the Twentieth Century* (Norman, Okla., 1956), 103-104. Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), 249, 254, 257.

39. Review of *Country Living and Country Thinking*, by Gail Hamilton, *Atlantic Monthly* 10 (December 1862): 771.

40. Horace E. Scudder, "American Fiction by Women," *Atlantic Monthly* 52 (July 1883): 119. Horace E. Scudder, "Recent Novels by Women," *Atlantic Monthly* 59 (February 1887): 266, 269.

41. Review of *An Old-fashioned Girl*, by Louisa May Alcott, *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (June 1870): 752. Review of *Red as a Rose is She* (anonymous), *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (April 1870): 512.

42. Scudder, "Recent Novels by Women," 269. Review of *Red as a Rose is She*, 512. Review of *Unforgiven*, by Berriedale, *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (June 1870): 762-763.

43. Review of *Parthenia: or the Last Days of Paganism*, by Eliza Buckminster, *Atlantic Monthly* 1 (February 1858): 509. Review of *The Foe in the Household*, by Caroline Chesebro, *Atlantic Monthly* 28 (July 1871): 126. See also Horace E. Scudder, Review of A

Country Doctor, by Sarah Orne Jewett, *Atlantic Monthly* 54 (September 1884): 419; and Harriet W. Preston, "Girl Novelists of the Time," *Atlantic Monthly* 60 (November 1887): 705-714, where she praises women writers who avoid "[e]asy lots, conventional virtues, natural pieties, and innocent delights" (705). Preston, a frequent reviewer for the *Atlantic*, is so rarely mentioned in the sources consulted for this article that a more in-depth discussion of her role at the magazine has, unfortunately, not been possible.

44. For representative reviews see Scudder's assessment of Woolson's *East Angels* in "Recent Novels by Women," 267-268; William Dean Howells, Review of *Studies for Stories*, by Jean Ingelow, *Atlantic Monthly* 15 (March 1865): 378-379; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Review of *Azarian*, 515-516; and Horace E. Scudder, Review of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Through One Administration*, in "American Fiction by Women," 121-122.

45. William Dean Howells, Review of *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*, by J. W. DeForest, *Atlantic Monthly* 20 (July 1867): 121. For reviews that point to the female author's youthfulness or "immaturity," see Horace E. Scudder, Review of *Anne*, by Constance Fenimore Woolson, *Atlantic Monthly* 50 (July 1882): 112; William Dean Howells, Review of *Studies for Stories*, 379; and James Russell Lowell, Review of *Sir Rohan's Ghost*, by Harriet Prescott (Spofford), *Atlantic Monthly* 5 (February 1860): 253. In Scudder's "American Fiction by Women," he claims that Mary Hollock Foote's novel "betrays an unpracticed hand" in its depiction of men's affairs (119). On the other hand, male writers were rarely deemed incapable of portraying female characters or their affairs, as the critical successes of Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion* attest.

46. Review of *The Pearl of Orr's Island*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Atlantic Monthly* 10 (July 1862): 127. Review of *The Foe in the Household*, 126.

47. For representative reviews see Horace E. Scudder, Review of *Play Days*, by Sarah Orne Jewett, *Atlantic Monthly*, 42 (December 1878): 779; and Scudder's praise for Charlotte Dunning's *A Step Aside* in "Recent Novels by Women," 269.

48. Review of *Hedged In*, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (June 1870): 756. William Dean Howells, Review of *Poetic Studies*, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Atlantic Monthly* 36 (July 1875): 108-109. Harriet Preston, Review of *The Story of Avis*, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Atlantic Monthly* 41 (April 1878): 486-489. See also Harriet Preston, Review of *Sealed Orders*, by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Atlantic Monthly* 45 (January 1880): 50-51.

49. Horace E. Scudder, Review of *Anne*, 111-112. Scudder, "American Fiction by Women," 119, 120. For subsequent reviews see Scudder, "Recent Novels by Women," 267; and Review of *Jupiter Lights*, by Constance Fenimore Woolson, *Atlantic Monthly* 65 (January 1890): 126-128.

50. Lowell, Review of *Sir Rohan's Ghost*, 252-254.

51. Trowbridge, "An Early Contributor's Recollections," 587. Higginson, *Letters and Journals*, 103.

52. Higginson, Review of *Azarian*, 516-517.

53. George Parsons Lathrop, "The Poems of Mrs. Spofford, Owen Innsly, and Miss Hutchinson," *Atlantic Monthly* 49 (April 1882): 552.

54. The earliest work of my sampling, Charles F. Richardson's *American Literature, 1607-1885*, 2 vols. (New York, 1888) grants ample space to Margaret Fuller and Stowe and briefly mentions at least twenty-three other women writers, including Jewett, Phelps, Spofford, and Woolson. Subsequent literary histories feature fewer and fewer women writers. See Henry Beers, *Initial Studies in American Literature* (New York, 1895); Mary Fisher, *A General Survey of American Literature* (Chicago, 1899); Richard Burton, *Literary Leaders of America* (New York, 1903); Walter Bronson, *A Short History of American Literature* (Boston, 1908); and Edwin W. Bowen, *Makers of American Literature: A Class-Book on American Literature* (New York, 1908), which includes no women at all. All of these works, though, agree on the position of those authors the *Atlantic* helped canonize; Emerson, Hawthorne, Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow are covered in detail by each of them. For a more thorough survey of early literary histories, see Baym, "Early Histories of American Literature." She briefly comments on the exclusion of women writers in note 18, page 105.

55. See Tompkins, especially chapter 7, and Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 123-139.

56. See Coultrap-McQuin, 198; Michael Davit Bell, *The Problem of American Realism* (Chicago, 1993); Alfred Habegger, *Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature* (New York, 1982); and Christopher P. Wilson, *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens, Ga., 1985).

57. George P. Lathrop, Review of *The American*, by Henry James, *Atlantic Monthly* 40 (July 1877): 108. Horace E. Scudder, "The East and West in Recent Fiction," *Atlantic Monthly* 52 (November 1883): 705-706.

58. Baym, "Early Histories of American Literature," 105. See also Hedrick, 291; and Coultrap-McQuin, 39. Tompkins contrasts the forces that combined to create Hawthorne's reputation to the lack of such forces for Susan Warner (32-33). Hedrick emphasizes that Stowe "attempted to do single-handedly what Hawthorne had a whole network of college friends, editors, and literary associates to do: keep her fame alive" (346). See note 53 for a discussion of early literary histories.

59. On antebellum women writers, see Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1984). For Stowe's tendency to not take herself seriously as an artist see Kelley, 184-186, and Hedrick, 314-315. Fetterly discusses the choice of women to write in the "inherently minor" genre of regionalism (20). Scudder, Review of *A Marsh Island*, by Sarah Orne Jewett, *Atlantic Monthly* 56 (October 1885): 561. See also William Dean Howells, Review of *Deephaven*, by Sarah Orne Jewett, *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (June 1877): 759; and George P. Lathrop, Review of *The Mate of the Daylight, and Friends Ashore*, by Sarah Orne Jewett, *Atlantic Monthly* 53 (May 1884): 712-713.

60. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to elaborate on their ambitions, which is the subject of my dissertation, "From 'Scribblers' to Artists: The Emergence of Women Writers as Artists in America." For works suggesting that Phelps and Woolson possessed serious ambitions as artists, see Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1991), 11-12; Carol Farley Kessler, *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps* (Boston, 1982); and Cheryl B. Torsney, *Constance Fenimore Woolson: The Grief of Artistry* (Athens, GA, 1989). Very little attention has been paid to Spofford, although it appears that she possessed a similar ambition.

61. See Lowry; and John Tomisch, *A Genteel Endeavor: American Culture and Politics in the Gilded Age* (Stanford, CA, 1971). Alan Trachtenberg, in *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982), discusses the formation of a male cultural elite as a reaction against the cultural power of women (145-147).

62. Norton, 580.

63. Review of "Stedman's Library of American Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 66 (1890): 707.

64. Lutwack discusses the formation of the canon as part of the elite's reaction against social change (170). For the *Atlantic's* opinion of Twain, Howells, and James, see Sedgwick, 220-221.