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BAWDY TALK: THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S PUBLIC SPEECH IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

Bawdy Talk: The Politics of Women's Public Speech in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture

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Caroline Field Levander

Throughout the pages of nineteenth-century American fiction men remain fascinated by the sound of women's speech. Literary depictions of men's intense interest in women's pleasing and distinct utterance occur with a frequency that suggest not so much that there "are" unalterable differences between American men's and women's speech, but that the imagining of that difference is central to the nation's understanding of itself as a distinct entity or to the creation of what Lauren Berlant calls a "national symbolic." These lengthy depictions of women's speech thus participate in cultural work of a profound, enduring, and to date unspecified nature. It is the project of this dissertation to describe the cultural burden placed on women's language in mainstream nineteenth-century American literature and, then, to carve out new ways of thinking about the public significance of women's speech and its impact on the nineteenth-century political arena.

In chapter one, I analyze the writings of, among others, Henry James, Sarah Hale, and Noah Webster in order to show that the separation of women's speech from the public arena was a process that depended for its success on the attention that men paid to the sound of women's talk and to the desire that sound produced. In
short, I establish a clear relation between the creation and reinforcement of the public sphere and the depictions of women's speech that occur repeatedly in American fiction. In my second chapter, however, I show that by mid-century a minority of American writers, including Herman Melville and E.D.E.N. Southworth had begun arguing that the sexually explicit subject matter, rather than eroticized sound, of women's language recenters their speech in the public sphere. Using their figuration as a departure point, I show, in chapters three through six, how Maria Monk, Caroline Lee Hentz, Harriet Jacobs, Lillie Devereux Blake, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps employed and foregrounded this alternative paradigm of women's speech in their political fictions in order to influence, respectively, the nativist, pro-slavery, abolitionist, women's suffrage, and labor reform movements. My analysis thus revises the critical consensus that nineteenth-century women's speech failed to impact America's political life.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank David Minter for his unfailing encouragement and support throughout this dissertation and for his careful and generous reading of each of its chapters. I would also like to thank Scott Derrick, Deborah Harter, and Helena Michie for their intelligent and discerning input at crucial moments in this project's evolution. For the conversations that consistently sustained and pushed me intellectually, I am indebted to Eileen Cleere, Jane Creighton, Stephen DaSilva, Carolyn Haynes, Rebecca Stern, and Debby Thompson. For consistently providing the economic support that has made so much good thought possible, I would like to thank Rice University, the Department of English, and the Lodieska Stockbridge Vaughan Fellowship fund. The unflagging enthusiasm over the years of Germaine and Charles Field, Ann Gelber, and Meg Mandel has heartened and often amazed me. Finally, for his consistent encouragement and heartfelt belief in me as a scholar, despite head injuries and other minor setbacks, I am indebted to Alan Levander.
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"the bright, up darting flame of her talk rose and fell like an improvisation on the keys . . . it's the voice, you know- the enchanting voice! . . . Its richness was quite independent of the words she might pronounce"

--Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (1890)

"She had a slow, quaint way of talking, that seemed a pleasant personal modification of some ancestral Yankee drawl, and her voice was low and cozy. . . . She never says anything you can remember; nothing in flashes or ripples . . . but [has] a sort of droll way of looking at things"

--William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)

"her voice gave a curious charm to [his] old favorites when she read them; and many hours he listened contentedly to the voice whose youth made Montaigne's worldly wisdom seem the shrewder; whose music gave a certain sweetness to Voltaire's bitter wit . . . whose pitying wonder added pathos to the melancholy brilliancy of De Quincey"

--Louisa May Alcott, *A Modern Mephistopheles* (1868)

Throughout the pages of nineteenth-century American fiction men remain fascinated, and often transfixed, by the sound of women's speech. Beginning with Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798) and extending into the early twentieth century with F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), American novels take up immense amounts of textual space with descriptions of how women's voices sound, what happens when women speak, and the reactions that women's speech produce in their male listeners. Literary
depictions of men's intense interest in women's pleasing and distinct utterance occur with a frequency that suggest not so much that there "are" unalterable differences between American men's and women's speech, but that the imagining of that difference is central to the nation's understanding of itself as a distinct entity or to the creation of what Lauren Berlant calls a "national symbolic."¹ Rather than surfacing within American novels as merely descriptive passages, these lengthy and meticulous depictions of women's speech participate in cultural work of a profound, enduring, and to date unspecified nature. It is the project of this dissertation to describe the cultural burden placed on women's language in mainstream nineteenth-century American literature and, then, with that knowledge as a context, to carve out new ways of thinking about the public significance of women's speech and its relation to and impact on the nineteenth-century political arena.

My project moves from the 1830s to the 1880s--the period during which American culture reacted to, and reordered itself around, an emerging industrialization and the urbanization it triggered.² These developments in turn led to the creation of a public, male arena in which political decisions as well as money were made and a private, female sphere in which familial ties and emotional community were fostered. Acting synthetically, the public and private spheres became a profound sign of nineteenth-century Americans' transition from, and nostalgia for, the economically and emotionally fluid communal networks of the eighteenth century.

Because scholars have focused on the masculinity that characterizes the public sphere rather than on the mechanisms
underpinning their association, they have inadvertently reinforced a sense that the two were synonymous. In both literary critical and cultural historical accounts of the nineteenth century's public sphere, and more particularly of the language spoken there, scholars without exception either have assumed or asserted that women's displacement from the political arena was total. The wealth of recent work on nineteenth-century American oratorical culture consistently ignores women, defining public speech as an exclusively male practice, while the recent work of feminist cultural historians simply assumes that by the mid-nineteenth century women were effectively marginalized from the public arena.3

My task in this dissertation is to dispute these existing equations between gender and the separate spheres. In my first chapter, I argue that the separation of women's speech from the public arena, rather than being either inevitable or total, was a process that depended for its success on the attention that men paid to the sound of women's talk and more particularly to the desire that sound produced. In short, I establish a clear relation between the creation and reinforcement of the nineteenth-century public sphere and the depictions of women's speech that occur repeatedly in American fiction. By examining one novel from the 1830s and one novel from the 1880s that directly address the role of women's speech in public life--Sarah J. Hale's The Lectress (1839) and Henry James's The Bostonians (1886)-- I analyze the strategies by which rapt male listeners interpret women's eloquent and politically charged talk in order to reinforce the "natural" gender differences that they assume to be innate in women's speech. By tracing the
process through which men's attention to women's speech works both to marginalize women from public life and to consolidate the masculinity of an emerging political arena, I make visible the special interests at work within, and furthered by, literary figurations of women's speech. I show that, far from being inevitable, the separation of women both from public life and from the speech that shapes it is a process continually reenacted within the pages of American literature for the purpose of stabilizing the masculinity of the newly reconfigured public sphere. But I also suggest that precisely because women's public liminality is a process, it becomes susceptible to intervention and even to reversal.

The disruptive potential of women's public speech is the subject of my second chapter, which begins by assessing the critique mounted by a minority of literary and linguistic thinkers of the 1850s, first, against the separation of the public and private spheres that came to dominate American culture and, second, against the role that women's speech played in shaping them. I then show how, in a related move, Herman Melville and E.D.E.N. Southworth, in Pierre (1852) and The Fatal Marriage (1859) present alternative accounts of women's speech that illustrate how the sexually explicit subject matter, rather than the eroticized sound, of women's language recenters their speech in the public sphere from which it has been displaced. In so doing, I argue, these writers complicate and even temporarily destabilize the imaginative apparatus by which nineteenth-century America defines and recognizes itself. In Southworth's and Melville's fictions, women's voices, as Homi Bhabha has noted, operate as "counter-narratives of the nation that
continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual" and thereby "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities." In short, I show, first, that by mid-century a minority of American writers and thinkers had begun presenting women's sexually specific articulations as direct, complicating interventions in the nation's understanding of its own ideological construction; and, second, that their figuration constitutes an important departure point for practical reconsideration of the impact of women's speech on nineteenth-century American political life.

In chapters three through six of my project I assess the political uses to which women writers throughout the nineteenth century put this newly loaded cultural paradigm of their language. In showing how a diverse group of novelists foreground the female voice and its articulation of sexually explicit content in their political fictions, I revise the critical consensus that holds that nineteenth-century women's speech failed to impact America's political life.

Beginning in chapter three with the nativist movement that flourished in the 1830s, I show that Maria Monk's tract The Awful Disclosures (1836) provoked unprecedented anti-Catholic sentiment among its readers by describing the sexual abuse that nuns experience within convents as a series of constraints and assaults on their speech. By transposing the sexual content of her story onto the voices of the nuns who tell it, Monk enabled women's speech to carry immense political sway with readers who were anxious about the Roman Catholic immigrants who were invading their geopolitical
borders and threatening the bodily boundaries of the iconographically figured "American woman."

Turning, in chapter four, to the slavery debates that overlapped with and were largely indebted to nativist political activism, I show how Caroline Lee Hentz and Harriet Jacobs use women's speech to critique both southern sexual codes and the antebellum male oratory that reflects and enforces those codes, thereby persuading readers of *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) to accept their divergent political views. In chapter five, in an analysis of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's contribution to the women's labor reform movement of the 1870s, I argue that *The Silent Partner* (1871) details how working women's speech directly reflects the extremity of their work conditions and more specifically the sexual consciousness that such dire conditions create. By depicting the diversity of working women's sexuality, Phelps extends existing labor reform rhetoric that consistently invoked bourgeois sexual standards as normative. Finally, in chapter six, I show how the women's suffrage project of "gaining a voice" depends, in Lillie Devereux Blake's *Fettered For Life* (1874), on the ability of a woman cross-dresser to speak publicly, first, about the sexual exploitation that women experience because of their traditional clothing, and, then, about the sexual and political freedom available to women who can pass as men. In this chapter, as in the three that precede it, I show that women's speech, as it is depicted and foregrounded in women's political fictions, carried significant political power throughout the nineteenth century.
By uncovering this rich tradition of women's political activism I revise the notion that women's speech failed to impact political debate in the nineteenth century and also provide a historical context in which to place subsequent accounts of gender, sexuality, and language. As Camille Roman has stated, the question of how or if language is "comprehended and used differently by women and men" in America has "consistently recurred in the fields of psychoanalysis, anthropology, linguistics, and literary criticism and theory since the turn of the century." My work provides a larger historical continuum in which to place and to reconsider the language debates that have absorbed so much critical attention in the twentieth century. From the context I establish, we can see, for example, that the complex, compelling relationship between language and sexuality, forged by Freudian and more particularly Lacanian psychoanalytic thought, extends into the twentieth century paradigms that have been rooted in American thought since the early nineteenth century. Jacqueline Rose points out that "the force of psychoanalysis is . . . precisely that it gives an account of patriarchal culture as a transhistorical and cross-cultural force." As I show, it is precisely because the interplay between sexuality and language that underpins psychoanalytic theory worked in nineteenth-century America to construct and consolidate the separate spheres within the nation's social, political, and cultural structures that psychoanalysis was able so quickly and persistently to resonate in American thought.

Recent anthropological, psychological, and empirical linguistic studies continue to show the force of nineteenth-century figurations
of women's speech as well. Methodologically diverse scholars concur in reporting that in the United States "gender-based differences in language are fairly minimal in language structure, but pervasive in language use." This has led many scholars to produce a "two cultures" view of Americans' speech that oddly echoes separate sphere ideology. As summarized by proponent Deborah Tannen, the two culture theory holds that "boys and girls grow up in different worlds . . . and as adults they travel in different worlds" which inculcate and then reinforce "different expectations about the role of talk." Calling for an interdisciplinary practice that would overcome the limitations of any single methodology, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet encourage studies of language and gender that explore how "'women' and 'men' are constructed as social categories." By providing an assessment of that process in nineteenth-century America, my work shows how and why the ground for its continuation in the twentieth century was prepared.

Throughout my dissertation I rely heavily on historical documents to carve out new contexts for reading less well known and even ignored literary texts. It is precisely because, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese claims, "previous generations have bequeathed to us . . . which texts to read and . . . how to read them" that I have turned to a wide array of letters, manuals, self-help guides, and political propaganda in order to resituate our understanding of how some nineteenth-century thinkers understood such issues as women's speech, cross-dressing, and anti-Catholicism. These documents disclose thought processes in nineteenth-century culture that enrich our understanding of a wide range of canonical and noncanonical
literary texts. However, throughout my project I concurrently assess the systems of power that permeate both nonliterary and literary texts, and that are disseminated effectively through a complex interplay between the two genres. My project thus is committed simultaneously to discovering new sociohistorical grids through which to read novels and to tracking what Fox-Genovese has called "the changing relations of power and their multiple consequences" (217) within those new grids. I thus consistently push at the ideological boundaries separating historicist and new historicist thought in order to produce a literary and cultural history of women's speech that both recognizes its categorical specificity and interrogates the particular, strategic ends for which women's speech was constructed in nineteenth-century America.
Notes


2 For discussion regarding the impact of this shift on particular communities, see for example, Mary Ryan, Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986).


4 Homi Bhabha, Nation and Narration (London: Routledge, 1990), 300.

5 For a complete discussion of the interrelations between slavery and nativism see Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).


8 Penelope Brown, "Gender, Politeness, and Confrontation in Tenejapa," The Women & Language Debate, 323.


10 Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, eds. "Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as Community-Based Practice," The Women & Language Debate, 455.

Bawdy Talk: The Politics of Women's Public Speech in James's *The Bostonians* and Hale's *The Lecturesse*

In an 1813 letter to grammarian John Waldo, Thomas Jefferson wrote that in the United States "the new circumstances under which we are placed, call for new words, new phrases, and for the transfer of old words to new objects."¹ Jefferson's comment has come to epitomize, for scholars who study American linguistic and political reform, the links between the two. As Cynthia Jordan notes, antebellum "authors' views on language were tied in with their views on sociopolitical leadership."² Kenneth Cmiel likewise traces in public speakers' move from "aristocratic" to middling, or "common," rhetoric the changing political atmosphere of mid nineteenth-century America.³

Central to political reform projects throughout the nineteenth century was the assertion, among both linguists and politicians, that politics and public language were unequivocally male prerogatives. These abiding links between masculinity, public language, and political influence were forged, according to Jordan, at the earliest moment of American national identity and resolved one of the first problems facing American statesmen: "The problem confronting the founding generation . . . was how to devise a system of sociopolitical leadership capable of securing popular acceptance, and the solution they envisioned was the creation and maintenance of a male educated elite that could use language as a means of social and psychological control" (18). By the nineteenth century changing
attitudes towards these elite men compelled them, as Cmiel notes, to modify their rhetorical practices, identifying with their audience rather than preaching to it, in order to maintain their control. Yet if the tone of the male elite speakers became more conciliatory and less erudite in attempts to simulate their audience's education level and consciousness, the content of their speech relied more on images of manhood, often, as in Lyman Beecher's speeches, invoking the explicitly classed and gendered image of "the common man" and the political conflicts facing him in order to evoke audience response.

Women began to intervene in this historically male arena of American politics in the 1830s. Yet, as numerous scholars have pointed out, women's involvement in public life initially depended upon the "physical weakness, sentimentality, purity, meekness, [and] piousness" that defined their femininity. Rather than calling into question the gender identifications of public and private spaces, women's political activism relied on the power accruing to domesticity and so failed to challenge overtly the masculinity defining the nineteenth-century political arena. Nevertheless, as "the right of women to influence politics by speaking from the public platform became a heated issue," those who dominated the political arena began to develop strategies to ensure that the public sphere remained an exclusively and "naturally" masculine domain.

The masculinity of American political culture was subsequently consolidated by political processes that continually reenacted the exclusion of women. As Baker notes, "The notion of womanhood served as a sort of negative referent that united all white men. It . . . made gender, rather than other social or economic distinctions, the
most salient political division. Men could see past other differences and find common ground with other men" (630). Election locations reinforced the increasing homosociality of nineteenth-century American politics. Occurring in saloons, pubs, and other public male meeting places, political elections, as well as political rhetoric, identified and prescribed dominant forms of manhood.

By defining the characteristics of "male" language as distinct from women's speech, language reformers, as well as politicians, attempted to enforce the strict masculinity of nineteenth-century American politics. Yet they accomplished this not so much by creating theories of men's language as by producing a linguistic discourse on women's speech. In highlighting the tone of "woman's language," as opposed to its content, and in linking that tone to the female body, linguists tried to place woman's speech firmly in the private arena. Claiming to have discovered a "natural," socially unconstructed link between the female voice and body, linguists strategically policed women's intervention in political culture. The enduring effectiveness of their strategy is evidenced by current critical accounts of women's speech in nineteenth-century America, which consistently fail to acknowledge the political interests structuring the associations between women's speech and sexual identity.⁷

Within this context of linguistic theories of women's public speech, I will focus on the anomalous figure of the woman political orator as she is imagined in the two nineteenth-century literary texts that take women's speechmaking most centrally as their subject; Sarah J. Hale's *The Lectress, or Woman's Sphere* (1839) and Henry
James's *The Bostonians* (1886).8 Though the two texts focus upon women speakers during distinct phases of the nineteenth-century suffrage movement, both emphasize the public's response to the woman speaker, which depends less on her specific politics than on the political implications of her physical intrusion into a supposedly male arena. By depicting listeners whose reactions to women's public speech replicate those of linguists, Hale and James critique the prevailing assessments of women's relation to language. *The Bostonians* and *The Lectureess* show linguistic theories for what they are: rhetorical strategies masquerading as "essential truths" in order to marginalize women from the political sphere. Yet Hale and James focus on listeners who interpret the woman orator's speech in terms of her body not only in order to highlight the strategic maneuvers by which male audience members attempt to consolidate the exclusive masculinity of the public arena, but also to point out the limits of that strategy by revealing the ways in which the public male identity that so adamantly defines itself in opposition to women's public speech in fact tacitly constructs itself around the body of the speaking woman. In delineating the underpinnings of the publicly constituted identities of the men who listen to the women speakers, both texts problematize the static masculinity that defined politics and public language in the nineteenth century. Arguing that the feminine inevitably lurks beneath the masculinity that continues to define the nineteenth-century public sphere, I show the role that women's "disorderly" speech plays in constructing and sustaining the supposedly natural and therefore unalterable maleness of the public arena.
"Twanging, "Whiffling," and "Whining": Women's Language

The preeminent linguist Otto Jesperson summarized and gave "scientific" credence to the long held view that "woman's language" was incapable of accommodating factual information and thus was essentially tonal when, in 1924, he claimed that women's speech was characterized by parataxis. Parataxis, the joining of clauses through coordination rather than subordination, refuses the prioritization of information because it fails to distinguish the relative significance of associated ideas. Jesperson claimed that women primarily use "and," "or," and "but" to link ideas, while "male" clause joining, in structurally distinguishing more important facts from lesser points, is inherently more capable of accommodating and sorting information. According to Jesperson, "the linguistic . . . peculiarity of feminine psychology" renders women incapable of marking hierarchy within the grammatical structure of their language, and so they must do so "emotionally, by stress and intonation, and in writing by underlining," in short, by the tone of their voices.9 The "violent changes in intonation" which characterize their speech make women less innovative speakers of English, which Jesperson characterizes as "methodical, energetic, business-like and sober."10 Indeed it is the "vigour and vividness" of English, in stark opposition to "languid and insipid . . . women's expressions" (Language, 247), that make English "expressly masculine, . . . the language of a grown-up man [with] very little . . . feminine about it" (Growth, 2).
With resounding unanimity theorists of American English likewise defined women's speech as essentially tonal in order both to determine and to delimit the impact of women's speech on the creation of a distinctly American elocution. Beginning with his 1783 *Grammatical Institute* Noah Webster argues that, because "the business of Americans [is] . . . to promote virtue and patriotism . . . [and] to diffuse an uniformity and purity of language,"'11 "young ladies should be taught to speak . . . with purity and elegance."'12 While Webster asserts that the "little misses" of America are "sweet little beings, with voices az [sic] melodious az [sic] the notes of the nightingale," he cautions adult women to "let the prime excellence of your karacters [sic] be discovered in all your words" (*Collection*, 406-8). Forty years later in *Notions of the Americans*, Fenimore Cooper asserts that "we speak our language, as a nation, better than any other people speak their language"'13 because the "voices of the American females are particularly soft and silvery" (175). Arguing that "the language, a harsh one at the best, is made softer by our women, especially of the middle and southern states," Cooper specifies the beneficial effects of women's vocal tone on American English (175). In his 1881 "Women and the Alphabet: Ought Women to Learn It?" Thomas Higginson argues that, if women speak publicly, their articulations should draw attention exclusively to the aesthetic quality of their voices: it "is proper for [women] to sing, but indelicate [for them] to speak in public."'14 William Dean Howells likewise finds in women's singing a vocal ideal when, in his 1906 article to *Harper's Bazar* entitled "Our Daily Speech," he asserts that the American woman "must speak as she sang."'15 Reflecting that
"the American woman" of the nineteenth century "without doubt . . . had the sweetest voice in the world," Howells subsequently claims that it is her "duty" to "trill sweetly as hermit-brushes, or murmur softly as doves," in short "to speak beautifully" (930-33). He thus summarizes over a century of linguists' thoughts on the significance of the vocal tone, rather than content, of American women's speech.

Linguists, emphasizing the link between women's vocal tone and body, often conceptualize America as one of the tonally pleasing women who supposedly populate the country. Webster claims that for an iconographic "America in her infancy to adopt the present [rhetorical] maxims of the old world, would be to stamp the wrinkles of decrepit age upon the bloom of youth and to plant the seeds of decay in a vigorous constitution" (Grammatical, 14). Almost a hundred years later Richard Grant White in Words and Their Uses similarly equates vocal tone or "style" with "the blush of a blooming beauty."16 Claiming that "without dinner, [there is] no bloom; [and] without grammar, no style," White goes on to specify the metonymic link between style and the female body. Style, or tone, bearing "no relation whatever to the soundness or the value of the thought which it embodies," is, like its women users, "mere clearness of outline, beauty of form and expression" (64).

Nevertheless, as women's interest in politics increased, linguists correspondingly argued that the tone that defined their speech was deteriorating. Richard Grant White, in his 1881 Every-Day English, claims that, while American women are physically attractive, when they open their mouths, they produce "a mean, thin, nasal, rasping tone, by which you are at once disenchanted."17 According to William
Dean Howells women's speech is not adequately feminine because its users, in focusing too much on "brilliant" content and on unwomanly expression, sacrifice sound. The woman speaker, according to Howells in his Harper's Bazar article, "sometimes spoke through her nose, she twanged, she whiffled, she snuffled, she whined, she whinnied the brilliant things which she was always incontestably saying" (930). In his 1906 article to Harper's Bazar, entitled "The Speech of American Women," Henry James describes American English as threatened by the tonal deterioration of its female population as they claim political equality with men. James links women's focus on the content rather than sound of their own voices with their burgeoning interest in the public sphere, when he writes that "the voice of the American woman, enjoying immense exercise, is lifted in many causes, but the last it anywhere pleads is that of its own casual interest or charm." James records a conversation with a young, politically active woman who resents his suggestion that "the vocal sounds with which a woman affects the ear of man may almost at any time save her situation" (38):

Intelligibly expressed, my young lady's attitude was that discriminated sounds . . . were at the best such a vocal burden that any multiplication of them was to be viewed with disfavor: I had indeed to express this for her, but she grunted (her grunt had, clearly, always passed for charming) an acceptance of my formula. . . . Syllables and consonants . . . might be almost unlimitedly
sacrificed without absolute ruin to a rough sense (47).

This disregard, even aversion, to their vocal tone is, according to James, a prerequisite of feminist politics, and so, "since the emancipation of the American woman would thereby be attested, the . . . sound" of women's speech is sacrificed (48).

Linguists warn that the cacophonous speech resulting from women's interest in politics poses a direct threat to the future of the nation. When safely ensconced within the private arena of the home and even more particularly the nursery, women's language reinculcates, by example and ideological articulation, the gendered notions of speech that are needed in order to maintain a coherent, cohesive and male political rhetoric. Yet its most eloquent practitioners, as women's political activity increases, expend an impressive amount of their own vocal energy bemoaning the general dissipation to which vocally uncooperative American women subject the nation. As early as 1724 Thomas Wilson in The Many Advantages of a Good Language to Any Nation warns that, because it is increasingly characterized by "Silliness," the speech of women threatens national cohesion.19 Because "the forming of the Tongue . . . and Pronunciation of Children, are the Works of Mothers," Wilson argues that "we shall never improve our Nation to any great purpose, till we make our Language easy" for women to understand and therefore inculcate (38). Over a hundred years later James Fenimore Cooper in The American Democrat reiterates Wilson's point, commenting that "Contrary to the general law in such matters, the
women of the country have a less agreeable utterance than the men, a defect that great care should be taken to remedy, as the nursery is the birthplace of so many of our habits." In his 1906 article William Dean Howells holds the cacophonous utterings of American women responsible for the general dissipation of men's language, claiming that men's speech will not improve "because nothing good is to be expected of them until their mothers and wives reform" (931). James likewise warns, in his 1906 article, that America, in putting up with the unruly speech of its women, is flirting with social chaos and that "the word, stripped for action . . . [will] become an inexpensive generalized mumble or jumble, a tongueless slobber or snarl or whine, which every one else would be free, and but too glad, to answer in kind," the end result being a completely dehumanized American English sounding like "the moo of the cow, the bray of the ass, and the bark of the dog" (48-49). In an attempt to avert the general contamination that a deteriorated and bestial woman's language threatens, James appeals directly to his listeners: "'don't let us have women like that . . . in the names of our homes, our children, our national honor, don't let us have women like that!'" (49). The link that linguists create between women's correct tonal enunciation and "our national honor" allows them strategically to rework their figuration of woman's language as dissociated from content-oriented public speech. In arguing that the tone that defines women's speech is mandatory to the maintenance of public and national welfare, linguists and "men of letters" define a public function for women's speech that reiterates its gendered difference. In so doing they
consolidate and perpetuate patriarchal notions of language and gender.

Such writers describe and attempt to curb women's persistent public outspokenness by invoking, as an emblem of women's vocal disorder, the body that they think of as determining female language. They consistently evoke the female body both as a symbol for woman's language (and all that is problematic about it) and as a vehicle for enforcing women's conformity to that feminine language. Noah Webster makes the link between women's vocal and sexual disorderliness explicit by asserting that "the moment a woman suffers to fall from her tung [sic] any expressions that indicate the least indelicacy of mind . . . she is no longer respected" (Collection, 408). Specifying the kind of vocal transgressions that lead to accusations of impurity, he notes that "when a woman . . . suffers double entendres, indecent hints and conversation to flow from her lips in mixed companies, she remooves [sic] the barriers of her reputation" (409). In her 1801 text The Accidence; or First Rudiments of English Grammar, Designed for the Use of Young Ladies Ellin Devis likewise claims that for women verbal forwardness leads to charges of sexual forwardness and that "a multitude of words, is no advantage to . . . women."21 With increasing frequency nineteenth-century linguists and social philosophers invoked the precarious sexuality of the speaking female body in order to control women's public utterances. Yet if commentators on women's language attempt to explain women's "aberrative" speech by equating it with the sexual proclivities of their bodies, the frequency with which linguists do so reveals the extent to which their exertions
are necessary in order to inculcate women's supposedly "natural" language.

Epitomizing the maneuvers of a wide array of nineteenth-century writers, James figures the disorderliness of American vocal tone as a woman when he compares it to European tone. James imagines American tone to be an "unfriended heroine" and argues that, "whereas the great idioms of Europe . . . have grown up at home and in the family, the ancestral circle (with their migrations all comfortably prehistoric), our transported maiden, our unrescued Andromeda . . . was . . . disjoined from all the associations that had helped to form her manners, and her voice."\(^22\) Having tied the supposed vicissitudes of women's speech to their bodies, James describes how both speech and body lose value for the men who control and rely upon them.

We have simply handed over our property--not exactly bound hand and foot, I admit, like Andromeda awaiting her Perseus, but at least distracted, *dishevelled*, *despoiled*, divested of that beautiful and becoming drapery of native atmosphere and circumstance which had, from far back, made, on its behalf, for practical protection, for a due tenderness of interest. (28, emphasis added)

Because American tone has deteriorated, the woman who is both its symbol and primary user is figured by James as sexually as well as linguistically compromised. She finds herself in this situation, furthermore, as a result of her insensitivity to and her challenging of
the social norms in which she is fixed. Unlike their European sisters, American women exist without proper fear, the key to tonally pleasing woman's language. In Europe, according to James, it is an unwritten law that a lady shall speak as a lady . . . she affronts this sensibility at her peril; so that here immediately . . . she finds something to be afraid of . . . she is really perhaps more afraid of it than of anything else in the world; and if that degree of dread . . . strike us as . . . disproportionate, we yet note on occasion that it often accompanies . . . high civility, true urbanity, of the feminine type . . . and it guarantees such felicities. ("Speech," 35)

If American language is to improve, American women must first learn again "all those attitudes of fear that [have] been immemorially considered, in 'Europe,' to grace the feminine character" (34). And women's bodies serve as the vehicles through which fear and thus refined tone are instilled. Once again metonymically linking female language to the body, James punishes vocally dissenting young women by claiming that they are "all articulating as from sore mouths, all mumbling, whining, and vocally limping and shuffling" (47). As this strategic invocation of the female body suggests, commentators on American English historically have attempted to ensure the exclusive tonality of women's speech by emphasizing the sexual risks that accompany every female attempt to develop a more openly content-oriented speech.
These nineteenth-century accounts of the tone of women's speech not only remained unchallenged but also were often reinforced by subsequent Freudian, Lacanian, and feminist psychoanalytic formulations of the female voice's exclusively tonal role in the psychic and linguistic development of the modern subject. In his 1905 case study of hysteria, Freud repeats linguists' strategic invocations of the female body by dismissing the content of his patient Dora's account of how her sexual mistreatment has led to her tonal aberration in order to link her vocal malfunction to the frustrated sexual desires of her body.\textsuperscript{23} If Freud's account of Dora's tone reiterates linguists' links between women's speech and sexuality, Lacan's description of language acquisition bears an uncanny resemblance to Jesperson's account of strictly gendered speech roles. Associating women's language with the emotive, "nonsensical" sounds that define mother/child communication, Lacan locates women's speech firmly in the nursery and poses it against an essentially virile, phallic, and content-oriented language wielded by the father. While the subsequent efforts of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray have diversified psychoanalytic constructions of the female voice, their work has not challenged its basic linguistic assertion that women's speech is essentially tonal.\textsuperscript{24}

My summary of the historical treatment of women's speech suggests an extensive narrative that testifies to the monopoly that male language and its linguistic theorizers have over vocal content. Yet, as I suggested earlier, these articulations, though they masquerade as the norm, are the exertions of a system that is not inherent and total, but are its attempts to maintain the perception of
its complete power. While the alignment of tone, rather than content, with women's speech has consistently justified women's relegation to the private sphere, some feminist linguists have recently begun to reevaluate the ruling assumption that content is an essentially male linguistic characteristic and to reconsider the importance of vocal content to women's speech. Deborah Cameron, for instance, has argued that twentieth-century linguistic theories, both structural and semiotic, have fallaciously assumed that content, what Lacan terms the symbolic, is patriarchal. Cameron's analysis has provided a critical point of departure for reanalyses of women's relationship to language and subsequently to the public sphere. While the ensuing readings of The Bostonians and The Lectures take part in a current feminist commitment to discerning the extent to which enduring notions about gender and language are culturally constructed, rather than innate and natural, as linguists have historically argued, I will argue that both texts in turn critique, even though they eventually capitulate to, the essentialism of nineteenth-century linguistic models of women's speech. Thus, once placed within the context of contemporary accounts of women's speech, I will show that James's and Hale's fictional models of the public world that the woman speaker enters highlight the maneuvers, always dependent upon the speaker's body and vocal tone, by which heterosexist manhood came to be equated with and consolidated within the public arena so thoroughly that the language spoken there continues to be considered inherently male.
Boston Lecturees; Singing Bad Music

The heroines of The Lectress, or Woman's Sphere and The Bostonians are both Boston lecturees who personally confront, in a male listener, the sexual oppression that forms the subject of their public speeches. That confrontation, enmeshed in a love plot for both Marian Gayland in The Lectress and Verena Tarrant in The Bostonians, is sustained by the male suitors who, in ignoring the woman's discourse that theorizes their sexual politics, finally silence the woman speaker's critique. Yet if William Farrinder's and Basil Ransom's desires demand the privatization of women's language along with the privatization of their bodies, it also ensures a faltering male identity a secure place within the public arena and political culture that both men so actively police but to which they feel marginal.

Both texts begin by describing men in private spaces that suggest their masculine marginalization. In The Lectress William is reading in his own study, while in The Bostonians Basil is reading in his cousin Olive's parlour. Embedded in the intense interiority that the minute description of his room suggests he has painstakingly constructed, William reads about public lecturees and remarks to himself that it is "time for men to turn hermits, when women become preachers" (4). Although William justifies his seclusion by appealing to the unruliness of women's speech, he is an atypical man according to his cousin George. You "shut yourself up here, in your study," he tells William, "till you forget all that is going on in the world about
you. You have no idea of the rapid march of improvement; and there is no reason, that I know of, why woman should not partake of its advantages" (6). If men who are out in the world understand its operations and the changing role that women play in them, those men who remain inside the home and outside of normative male culture have lost touch not only with women but with other men as well. In fact it is to "get William out of the house" that George convinces him to attend Marian's public lecture. He uses the female mouth, rather than the words it produces, to seduce William into attendance by saying, "come with me to hear Miss Gayland assert her rights, and then tell me, if arguments uttered by coral lips have not double the influence of those which issue from lips that boast a beard" (7).

William's study, the product and sign of his wealth and leisure, is precisely what Basil desires but feels unable to acquire because of his position as a marginalized Southerner. Olive's parlor is a new kind of interior for Basil who "had never felt himself in the presence of so much organized privacy or of so many objects that spoke of habits and tastes" (45). He is jealous of the privilege that such an interior connotes and, as Judith Fetterley states, is "galled by the sight of women enjoying what he does not have."28 After numerous professional setbacks, Basil, under the influence of Mrs. Luna's parlor this time, considers asking her to marry him in order to establish himself permanently in such an interior. He imagines himself "in that very chair, in the evenings of the future, reading some indispensable book in the still lamp-light" (206). Basil is "saved" (216) from being economically kept and feminized by Mrs. Luna by a
chance conversation about the public lectureress Verena. His mental image of Verena serves Basil as a timely reminder of the power accruing to him because of his masculinity. As Lynn Wardley writes, Basil, "when faced with actual social fusion . . . seeks to resurrect a democratic body governed by visible distinctions," but, in order to do so, "he must recover sexual difference." If he cannot hold his own against the more affluent and better educated Boston women surrounding him, Basil can exert his heterosexual desire in order to assert his power over Verena and thus to dominate the women who listen to her.

If both William and Basil are, in distinct ways, marginal members of the male communities that they inhabit, they are their communities' most vociferous advocates for strictly gendered speech codes. While Basil consistently employs the rhetoric of Southern chivalry in his discussions with Verena in order to contain the challenge that her public speech poses to his sense of male entitlement, the strength of his position on women's speech breaks through his otherwise seamless veneer of gentility causing him to claim, with a fair amount of hysteria according to Claire Kahane, that because their "whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases" (327). Bearing an uncanny similarity to the attitudes of nineteenth-century American linguists like Howells, Basil's commentary on women's speech poses the "hollow phrases" of women orators against a "masculine character" that is subsequently endangered. Fraught with fears of feminine linguistic contagion, Basil's own language evidences his
acute sense of the contingency of his masculinity. In *The Lectures*
William is likewise an unusually adamant opponent of women's
public speech. As he tells Marian, "I have a strongly rooted dislike,
call it prejudice if you will, against woman's speaking in public" (38).
Though William does not explain to Marian why, though otherwise
opinionless, he feels so strongly about her public speech, his domestic
fantasizing is revealing. In his ideal world, woman is to be "the
beloved companion of man, when, tired of the noise and tumult of
business, he hastens to his home, rendered happy or unhappy
according to his choice of a partner" (39). A wife must unequivocally
reside in one arena so that a husband can be unequivocally identified
with the other. Marriage for William, then, is a wish fulfillment in
which his own masculinity can be once and for all resolved by the
"correct" behavior of his spouse. Both men's rhetoric on women's
speech then reveals the extent to which their masculinity depends
upon their ability to control that speech.

William and Basil, though they end up as members of
audiences that listen to lecturers speak on women's rights,
maintain their categorical resistance both to women's public speech
and to the ideology of equal rights that makes up its content by
constructing their own narratives about the women who are
speaking. William, though lured out of his study by the thought of
coral lips, does not actually agree to attend Marian's lecture until
George tells him that Marian speaks publicly to support her mother.
This explanation provides him with a way to neutralize what she
actually says and to reread it as a reassuring example of familial
love. As he listens to her lecture on equal rights, a lecture ironically
informed by her childhood remembrances of her mother's oppressed life, William becomes "[f]ascinated by her beauty and conversation; he listened with eager attention to the beautiful thoughts and feelings to which she gave utterance, fancying them a transcript of his own" (32). William's act of hearing rewrites the content of Marian's speech to conform to his notion of appropriate and desirable feminine language. Basil commits an equally dramatic act of mishearing. If Marian speaks because of her mother, Verena speaks to please her father. This rationale allows Basil to dismiss what she says: "[S]he didn't mean it, she didn't know what she meant, she had been stuffed with this trash by her father, and she was neither more nor less willing to say it than to say anything else" (85). While listening to Verena, he transforms her into "a touching, ingenuous victim" whose "charm was her own" and whose "fallacies [were] . . . a mere reflection of unlucky circumstance" (251). In short, he reproduces the patronizing oppression that she describes and uses it to marginalize her speech. Thus both men strategically dismiss the women's offensive speech by replacing it with the appealing speaker.

William and Basil fix on the speakers' superior vocal tone, which they tie to the female body, in order effectively to marginalize the political content that linguists and writers consistently claimed to be "naturally" incompatible with a pleasing, feminine tone. Before William attends Marian's lecture he imagines her to be "a coarse, masculine-looking woman, uttering her opinions in a harsh, discordant voice" (10). Yet for William, both her body and vocal tone are so powerfully feminine that they overpower the content of her first speech, which is excised from the text and replaced, for both
William and the reader, by his response to it. His response, in focusing on both the tone and body of the woman speaker, indelibly links the two: "Much more she said to the same effect. Her language was pure and elegant, her voice full and round, but at the same time sweetly toned" (12). The "fullness," "roundness," and "elegance" that describe Marian's voice simultaneously describe the feminine appeal of her body and so authorize William's interest in the "sweetly toned" way in which Marian speaks rather than in the content of her speech. The content of Verena's speech at Mrs. Birdseye's home is similarly replaced by Basil's reaction to it. That reaction dramatically spotlights the strategic maneuver by which male listeners dismiss the political content of women's speech, focusing instead on the vocal tone that, according to Basil, indicates woman's "essential nature." Overwhelmed by the appeal of Verena's "tone [which is] so pure and rich, and yet so young, so natural" (265), Basil reconstitutes the political parameters of her project, claiming that

the necessity of her nature was not to make converts to a ridiculous cause, but to emit those charming notes of her voice . . . to please every one who came near her, and to be happy that she pleased. . . . He contented himself with . . . regarding her as a vocalist of exquisite faculty, condemned to sing bad music. How prettily, indeed, she made some of it sound! (85)

The pleasing sound of Verena's voice is reinforced by the pleasing image of her body as she speaks. That convergence further justifies
Basil's erasure of the political content of her speech: "the effect was not in what she said, though she said some such pretty things, but in the picture and figure of the half-bedizened damsel . . . the visible freshness and purity of the little effort" (84).

By focusing on the links between the woman speaker's tone and body, both Basil and William uncover their burgeoning desire for the speaking women. Yet both men's erotic interest, while supposedly produced by women's public speech, actually operates as a strategy to contain that speech and thus to consolidate the exclusive masculinity of the public sphere. William's love for Marian is the direct result of his obsessive attention to the metonymic relation between her body and vocal tone. To William Marian seems "to become more lovely with every word she uttered; her eyes, those clear, bright eyes, shone through the tears the subject called forth, and her voice, low and tremulous, was like the sweet tones of music of which we sometimes dream" (29). William's compensatory amplification of Marian's feminine desirability escalates as he listens to her arguments for women's emancipation, operating as an effective containment strategy for his rising male anxiety. As Verena's career becomes increasingly successful, Basil imbues the feminine attributes of her speech with additional power. When after a year, Basil first hears Verena's voice again, he thinks that it "had developed; he had forgotten how beautiful it could be when she raised it to its full capacity" (265). Her matured speech fixes "his attention . . . in a way it had not been yet" (266), almost forcing Basil to acknowledge its content. But he contains Verena's more powerful rhetoric by interpreting the political message he hears in terms of his
erotic interest. Although "certain phrases took on a meaning for him" (266), they make him conscious, not of his latent sexism, but of his desire. He subordinates Verena's compelling political rhetoric to his newly discovered love. Listening to Verena speak, he "simply felt her presence, tasted her voice . . . [H]e found himself rejoicing that she was so weak in argument, . . . it was a proof that . . . she was meant . . . for privacy, for him, for love" (269). Thus, in a self-servingly tautological move reminiscent of linguists' invocations of women speakers' sexuality, Basil constructs Verena's desirability as a product of the tone of her voice and simultaneously as the rationale for not hearing its content.

Both William and Basil's desire for women speakers is, as I have shown, produced by women's public speaking, yet both men claim that their desire is "naturally" in conflict with the fact that the women speak publicly. This tactic authorizes them to demand that the women accept public silence as a necessary condition for marriage. While Marian and Verena are able to refuse such marital conditions on strictly ideological grounds, the importance that William and Basil have assumed in their audiences threatens and finally subverts the women's ability to speak publicly. Though his desire initiates William into public life, causing him to neglect "his books [and] his tastefully fitted-up study" (32), that desire requires that Marian become a private woman. His marriage proposal becomes the first step in William's active campaign against women's public speech. Marian refuses marriage by refusing to become silent and disabuses William of his misreading of her motives by saying, "I do not, when I appear before the public, merely echo the opinions of
others, learned from books. Every word I speak is dictated by my heart. . . . Mr. Farrinder, remember that you are addressing a lectueress—a public defender of the rights of her sex" (35).

If Marian adeptly can refuse William on strictly ideological grounds, it is only because she has yet to understand how much she has come to depend upon him as a public listener. In her first speech after his proposal she realizes the extent to which her public speaking has become a private act between herself and William.

That night an assembled crowd gazed in admiration upon the faultless beauty of the lectueress, and listened to her eloquent appeal in behalf of woman. Loud applause rang through the vaulted hall. The voice of the many expressed pleasure, if not approval; but the sounds were unheeded and scarcely heard by her for whom they were intended. There was in the vast crowd not one being for whose approval she now cared. One form was missing, one whom night after night she had seen there. His place was now occupied by another. She should not hear his voice at the close of her labors. (43)

William's continual presence in her audience, made possible by his rewriting of her motives and mishearing of her lectures, evokes a private dependence in Marian. She comes to rely on both his physical presence and the pleasing sound of his voice, separated from its sexist rhetoric on women's public speech. His voice both produces her love and epitomizes its absent object when, having
rejected him, Marian recognizes that "years may intervene, before the sound of that dear voice shall gladden her ear" (44).

Separated from William, Marian decides to construct a new audience for herself in the South. Her geographic relocation engages her in national politics which infiltrate both the content of her lectures and her audience's reactions to those lectures. Believing Marian to be an abolitionist, her audience becomes hostile: "It was a severe mortification to Marian, when, instead of the shouts of applause which had always attended her appearance, she was met by hissing and revilings" (54). Marian responds to the vocal aggression of the audience by addressing the source of their hostility. The change in lecture content from equal rights to abolition further antagonizes the audience, and "assailed on every side by threats and menaces, encountering wherever she turned her eyes malignant and angry looks . . . voice after voice joined in the fearful cry" (56), Marian is finally silenced. Though she escapes, she "was herself no longer" (57). The hostility of the voices in the audience causes Marian to reanalyze her own voice and then to hear another one during her ensuing illness. The "still, small voice of conscience, unheard or unheeded amid the noisy shouts of popular approval" (57) convinces her that she speaks out of pride rather than conviction. Attacked both from without and from within her own psyche, Marian finally capitulates to the legal silencing that William demands.

If William's absence from her audience leads to Marian's humiliation and silencing, it is Basil's relentless presence in Verena's
audience that finally keeps her from speaking publicly. Basil's realization that Verena was "meant for something different--for love, for him" initiates a courtship that overwhelms Verena with an antagonistic rhetoric and finally makes Basil's presence in her audience completely incapacitating. His resisting presence does not impede her lecture at Mrs. Burrage's house and may even enhance it, in part because she enjoys attempting conversions. But after listening to Basil talk for a whole afternoon, Verena returns to Olive silenced and shamed. Huddled in a corner, "unwilling to speak," she seems so "crushed and humbled" that Olive sees it as "a kind of shame" (399). Verena is shamed first into private and then into public silence by Basil's persistent and hostile presence. Though Basil buys a ticket to hear the public speech that should launch Verena's career, "he was not one of the audience; he was apart, unique, and had come on business altogether special" (414). This business is to assert forcefully his right to make Verena's speech private. His desire "to speak to her in private" ensures that Verena will henceforth speak only in private. She tells Basil, "I saw you in your place, in the house, when you came. . . . Then I felt too nervous to speak! I could never, never, if you were there . . . if I attempted to speak--with you sitting there--I should make the most shameful failure . . . from the moment I knew you were on the other side I couldn't go on. I was paralysed" (emphasis added, 428-30). Basil's public presence repeats the shaming of his private presence. Though Verena pleads that Basil let her "soothe" her hostile audience "with a word," he relentlessly enforces her public silence by telling her to "keep your soothing words for me" (430).
While *The Bostonians* and *The Lectures* thus end with women speakers shamed into public silence and marriage, they also end with formerly marginalized, silenced men in control of public discourse. If William and Basil confront, in the image of the woman public speaker, the limits of their own power, they also use that image to propel themselves into the public arena to which they aspire. Both novels illustrate the strategic maneuvers by which women's speech is continually, and often violently, policed into its "natural" role of private language by its male listeners' amplification of both the vocal tone and the sexual desirability of the woman speaker. Both texts also suggest that this impetus to amplify the "feminine" is produced by listeners' anxiety about their own limited power, not just in relation to patriarchy, but in relation to the successful public speaking of women who seem to be too comfortably ensconced within its power structure. By observing the ways in which women's public speech is bound up in and filtered through the female body, we can discover the process by which women have been effectively excluded from the political arena, and so we can revise the pervasive notion that the political and public are "naturally" male domains.
Notes


4 Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," American Historical Review 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 629. Similarly, Nancy Cott's pivotal argument that women's purity or "passionlessness" allowed them unprecedented political interaction has provided the starting point for the work of numerous other scholars of American culture who have consistently shown the political effectiveness that nineteenth-century women derived from moral suasion. See Nancy Cott, "'Passionlessness': An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," Signs 4 (1978): 219-36.

6 I would like to thank one of *American Literature’s* reviewers for this invaluable insight.

7 Arguing either that women orators lost femininity and were considered masculine or that their femininity made them sexually vulnerable once they entered the public arena, the accounts of cultural historians and literary critics have continued to rely upon the links that linguists forged between women’s public speech and the unruly sexuality of the speaking female body.

8 Sarah J. Hale, *The Lecturess, or Woman’s Sphere* (Boston: Whipple and Damrell, 1839) and Henry James, *The Bostonians* (1886; rpt., New York: Penguin Classics, 1987). All subsequent references will be to these editions and will be incorporated parenthetically in the body of the text.


23 Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905; rpt., New York: Collier Books, 1963). As the proliferation of feminist discussion about Dora's case history illustrates, Freud's silencing and rewriting of Dora's story has generated compensatory dialogue between otherwise divergent feminisms. For discussion see Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case*:

24 Helene Cixous is a notable exception, when she writes, "Too bad for [men] if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men. . . . But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be that women aren't castrated?" See "Laugh of the Medusa," Signs 1 (1976): 885.

25 My choice in capitalizing "symbolic" reflects the project of this essay, which is to gradually dismantle the identification of the symbolic with the phallus.

26 See Deborah Cameron, Feminism and Linguistic Theory (London: Macmillan, 1985) and The Feminist Critique of Language (New York: Greenwood, 1989). After pointing out that Lacan offers no explanation for "why the symbolic order is patriarchal," Cameron argues that if semiotic linguistic studies, by assuming that the symbolic is male, unjustifiably denies women access to its main modes of discourse, structural linguistics, including its various forms of feminist structural linguistics, is guilty of the same determinism (Feminism, 124).

27 My reliance on James's linguistic attitudes to delineate the limits placed on women's speech is not inconsistent with the following discussion of his treatment of women's speech in The Bostonians. Claire Kahane has persuasively argued that James's ambivalence about women's public speech produces, in The Bostonians, often hysterical narrative interjections. See "The Bostonians and the Figure of the Speaking Woman," Psychoanalysis and . . .,
163-75, and "Hysteria, Feminism, and the Case of The Bostonians," Feminism and Psychoanalysis, 280-98.


"Foul-Mouthed Women": Disembodiment and Public Discourse in Melville's *Pierre; Or The Ambiguities* and Southworth's *The Fatal Marriage*

Though audience attention to the sound of women's speech, as I showed in chapter one, resulted in women's displacement from public life, theorists of American English throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consistently assert that the American woman's elocution refines the quality of public debate in which American men engage. Acting as "a young man's best security against . . . a dissipated life,"¹ American women's speech, according to Noah Webster in his 1790 *Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings*, successfully prepares men to enter the public sphere and to elevate the rough political language spoken there. Though the vast majority of women did not engage directly in public debate, throughout the nineteenth century American men, as historian Dennis Baron states, "were advised to listen to women" because their "language was said to bring polish and civilization to an otherwise rude and barbarous tongue."² Fenimore Cooper attests to the profound impact of the sound of women's speech on America's public language when he declares, in *The American Democrat* (1838), that women have "the highest quality of eloquence" and therefore are "the natural agents in maintaining the refinement of a people."³ The American "Female's conversation" was able to elevate American men's language and by extension the entire nation's speech because, as language theorist
John Pintard asserts, it was a direct manifestation of women's own physical as well as mental "pur[ity], chast[ity], and unaffected[ness]."4

Convinced by linguists that their speech reflected a sexual purity which in turn elevated the entire nation's utterance, American women became fastidious speakers, committed to maintaining the "great degree of [linguistic] purity" in which Webster had taken such pride5 and careful to avoid the "slovenly and uncouth utterance" that William Dean Howells claimed, in his 1906 article "Our Daily Speech," indicated women's sexual dissipation.6 The linguistic efforts of American women caused late nineteenth-century European language theorist Otto Jesperson publicly to remark that the speech of "American and especially Boston ladies" was singularly "prudish."7 Reporting that these women "invent innocent and euphemistic words" because they "are shy of mentioning certain parts of the human body . . . by the direct . . . denominations,"8 Jesperson notes with dismay that they speak "of the limbs of a piano" (Growth, 240), rather than of its legs. Yet, despite late nineteenth-century European linguists' criticism of the extremes to which American women went in order to articulate their sexual virtue and thereby raise the expressional level of the nation, American men of letters continued to concur with Webster's earlier contention that the purity of women's conversation had a major "influence" on "the manners of [the entire] nation" (Collection, 28).

Though the vast majority of American linguists enthusiastically endorsed the refined feminine speech that supposedly infused the public sphere and produced a pure, cohesive national utterance, a countermovement of transcendental language theorists in the 1850s
became openly critical of bourgeois Americans' increasing linguistic avoidance of the body. By emphasizing the "centrality of female purity" and "impos[ing] limits on public expression of sexuality,"9 the American middle class rising to prominence in the 1850s, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, was "corrupting" rather than refining both Americans' subjectivity and their speech.10 Because of its rejection of the body, the passionless, bourgeois woman's speech so valued by most linguists was destroying the rugged, physical subject matter that, according to transcendental thinkers, characterized American English and the national identity of its users. As the English that middle-class women spoke increasingly failed to reflect in its subject matter the experiences of Americans' bodies, this minority of theorists argued that the vigorous vocal content that once typified the nation's language also was destined to become devoid of bodily experience and sensation. Dramatically breaking with the majority of language commentators, they thus encouraged American women to restructure their speech to include the physical and sexual experiences of Americans' bodies.

Using as a starting point this contradictory opinion regarding American women's employment of sexually explicit subject matter, I will focus on the anomalous figure of the "foul-mouthed" woman speaker as she appears in the two mid-century novels most interested in the disjunction between women's voices and bodies; Herman Melville's *Pierre* (1852) and E.D.E.N. Southworth's *The Fatal Marriage* (1859).11 As I will show, Melville and Southworth manipulate the dispassionate female voice that language commentators categorically declare enforces bourgeois consciousness
in order to subvert the middle classes' hegemonic association of men with the public sphere and its speech. In order to challenge linguists' assessment that women refine but do not naturally engage in public speech, Southworth and Melville emphasize the gap between women's sexual experience and language by depicting women's speech as physically disconnected from their bodies. As Kaja Silverman suggests, "disembody[ing] the female voice . . . liberates the female subject," providing her with "enormous discursive range" and enabling her to talk about "heteroerotic desire." In *Pierre* and *The Fatal Marriage* the dislocation of women's voices from their bodies similarly enables women to recover command over the sexually charged subject matter that they have surrendered in their attempt to raise the nation's vocal standard. Working together, both the sound and content of these women's disembodied voices, first, highlight bourgeois women's covetousness of men's public privilege and, second, overpower men's own talk with descriptions of sexual practices which further undermine men's position in the public arena. In so doing, the disembodied speech of Southworth's and Melville's heroines destabilizes linguists' "natural" identification of men with the public sphere and the language spoken there. Thus by incorporating and extending in their fictions transcendental theories of women's speech, Southworth and Melville highlight the constructedness of bourgeois gender and language codes in order to reimagine the role of women's speech in American culture.
Strong Coarse Talk

In his early 1850s commentary on language, compiled in *The Primer of Words*, Walt Whitman describes the effects of a burgeoning middle-class consciousness on Americans' language. Appalled by "the remarkable non-personality and indistinctness of modern . . . talk," Whitman attributes America's linguistic decline to its users' "lack of an avowed, empowered, unabashed . . . sex."\(^{13}\) He holds responsible "'good folks'" whose "linguistic prudery" seems to him to "lingeringly pervade all modern . . . conversation." With their "delicate lady-words . . . [and] gloved gentleman-words" the "castrated persons, impotent persons . . . men not fond of women, [and] women not fond of men" who, according to Whitman make up the middle class, destroy Americans' "strong, cutting, beautiful rude words" and by extension "the liberty and brawn of these states."\(^{14}\) America's linguistic deterioration has been brought about not by the sexual licentiousness of its women speakers, as linguists suggest, but by the language's refusal to register the full force of the sexuality that constitutes and defines the American subject. This failure, according to Whitman, leaves a profound gap between American consciousness and the English that represents it. Because "poets, historians, biographers, and the rest" have capitulated to "the filthy law" that makes "sex, womanhood, maternity, desires, lusty animations, organs, [and] acts . . . unmentionable," these bodily realities are forced "to skulk out of literature with whatever belongs to them" (Whitman to Emerson, 737). Asserting that "this filthy law
has to be repealed" (Ibid.), Whitman suggests that linguistic "filthiness" results less from the articulation of bodily drives as the bourgeos claim, than from the failure of American English to reflect the bodily experience of its users.

Whitman finds in the working class, rather than in the middle class, a more physically oriented American English that realigns sexuality and speech and thereby provides a paradigm for American English as a whole. Using his own body to emphasize the physical immediacy of workers' speech, Whitman admits that he loves "to go away from books, and walk amidst the strong coarse talk of men as they give muscle and bone to every word they speak."15 The muscle that the working man brings to his job structures his speech as well, creating a more physical language. Though in "polite" company there "have not yet been served up . . . words to be freely used in books, at table to specifically mean the act male and female" (Primer, 745), Whitman finds that "among fighting men, gamblers, thieves, [and] prostitutes" "many of the slang words . . . are powerful words" and argues that "these words ought to be collected--the bad words as well as the good--many of the bad words are fine" (Primer, 735). Though the middle class's refusal to supply "Words" that demarcate the actions of sexually healthy bodies results in "putrid cadaverous meaning" (Primer, 745), the unrestrained, bodily vocabulary that is produced by and reflects the physical work that people do, according to Whitman, provides a healthy linguistic alternative and therefore should make up "the great Dictionary of the future [which] must follow the open voices of the Americans--for no other nation speaks with such organs" (Other, 811).
While Whitman advocates using words that are more descriptive of Americans' physical and erotic lives, the tone in which these "limber, lashing-fierce words" are spoken must enhance their content as well. While "all the passions" should be "latent . . . in a great user of words" (*Primer*, 742), the orator must carefully balance them both in life and in the speech that reflects it. Because "all sorts of moral . . . deformities are returned in the voice" (*Primer*, 737), Whitman advocates sexual awareness but cautions against sexual excess or "deviance." According to Whitman "Gluttony" and "brandy" are "generally fatal to the perfection of the voice," while "masturbation [and] inordinate going with women, [also] rot the voice" (*Primer*, 738). And so in order to achieve "great vocalism" one must have "experience with woman and . . . experience with man," but remain sexually moderate and therefore "chaste" (Ibid.). If successful, the tone, or "fibre and charm of the voice" in turn will be able to "make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, [and] bear children" (*Primer*, 742). Once Americans combine the body-oriented content of the working people with this erotically infused tone, Whitman is convinced that "the Americans are going to be the most perfect word users and are going to be the most fluent and melodious voiced people" (*Primer*, 732).

To that end transcendentalists suggest that all language users but especially women reincorporate a vigorous sexual energy into both the tone and content of their talk. While Emerson argues that all Americans should make use of obscene words normally "excluded from polite conversation,"16 Whitman targets the women's speech that is responsible for making the body and its sexuality "impolite"
talk in the first place. Because "the words of Maternity" include not only the diminished vocabulary of the pure, middle-class woman, but "all the words that were ever spoken," Whitman argues that "the mouth of the full-sized mother, daughter, wife, amie, does not offend by using any one" of these "reborn words" (Primer, 734). Whitman asserts that women are capable not only of recovering words prohibited by middle-class culture, but of producing new ones that undermine bourgeois ideology as well. Because "an immense number of new words are needed" to describe "the vital equality of women with men . . . politically, socially, and in business" (Primer, 737), Whitman predicts that women will expand American English to accommodate a new feminine consciousness that challenges middle-class ideology.

Committed to achieving equality between the sexes, writer and public orator Angela Heywood became one such woman by devoting her career to changing the passionless utterances of America's middle-class women. With transcendental thinkers like "Higginson, Bronson Alcott," "Garrison . . . [and] Emerson" for her "immediate teachers,"¹⁷ Heywood began lecturing publicly in the 1880s as part of a program to implement freer, more sexually explicit rhetorical practices and thereby to enforce sexual equality among the sexes. Heywood was immediately attacked by moralist and politician Anthony Comstock who claimed that of all the "public meetings [that he attended] where foul-mouthed women" advocated Free Love practices in order to destroy sexual chastity, Angela Heywood's "vile" speech was "the foulest address" he "ever heard."¹⁸ In her response to Comstock, Heywood implements her program to use "true words"
to describe sexual functions and organs. Reversing his claim that it was she who was "lost to all shame," Heywood proclaims that "if Comstock's own penis was well-informed and behaved he would not" object to her "open" and "frank" conversation "about man." Heywood contends that the inequity in men's and women's ability to speak about "the mysteries of Sex, the secrets of coition, [and] the momentous potencies of Love" results from the role that women's pure speech plays in "civilizing" Americans' speech and enables men like Comstock to dominate women sexually and vocally. As long as "the penis is known about . . . [but] not spoken out about" and women continue to lack "formulas of expression concerning the male generative organ," Heywood argues that there will be "no companionable exchange in dialect" or sexuality. Using as her rhetorical arena public lecture halls and Free Love publication, The Word, a vehicle of communication that specified the idiom in which her sexual revolution was to take place, Heywood claims, as had her predecessor Whitman, that, once "we . . . have true, proper words" ("Personal Attitudes") for human sexuality, society will be transformed.

Though men enforce women's sexual and vocal inequality, Heywood argues that as long as the bourgeois woman continues to believe that her purity is reflected in the bodilessness of her speech, she will continue to be complicit in destroying women's freedom. Pretending "that intelligent expression . . . [of] sex . . . is 'obscene,' 'vulgar,' [and] 'dirty',' "refined,' 'learned,' [and] 'delicate' women" not only are masking the real extent of their sexual knowledge, but more importantly tacitly "are supporting pillars of social evil"
("Personal Attitudes"). Thus Heywood claims that the purity and virtue upon which bourgeois women pride themselves are in fact "'pure' ignorance and idiotic 'virtue'" that make girls unable "to speak of the beauty, fullness, exhilarating [sic] and creative value of the Penis" ("Woman's View No.4"). This vocal inability creates in woman either "an over-charged, vibrating Womb unduly craving the offices of . . . the Penis" (Ibid.) or an "acquiescing, dead-level [sexual] servility."26 Even worse, in men it produces a "lecherous, treacherous irresponsibility" (Ibid.) that "manufactures 'prostitutes,' 'harlots,' 'whores,' [and] 'strumpets,'" instead of "glorify[ing] woman."27 Thus because the bourgeois woman equates female purity with vocal denial of the body, she inadvertently endorses the sexual victimization of all women.

In their first step toward equality Heywood contends that women must appropriate existing sexual vocabularies, clearly articulating hitherto tabooed words. Appalled by "'ladies' in parlors who call man's penis his 'teapot' and his 'thing',"28 Heywood argues that "If man says 'womb' without rising heat or dishonest purpose . . . woman [should] say 'penis' without blushing squirm or sheepish looks."29 Arguing that the "penis, its doings and not-doings, its use and responsibility has much need to be . . . talked . . . about," Heywood asks her female audience why they "cringe and blush at [the word] penis?" ("Personal Attitudes"). According to Heywood, "the force of woman's tongue" publicly describing men's "penises [as] over-loaded with white, child-making blood"30 would go far not only toward asserting vocal equality between the sexes, but toward controlling male sexual activity in private. In saying "penis" publicly
Heywood attempts to bring the politics of the bedroom under public surveillance and so to control "predatory penis commerce" ("Men, Women," Dec. 1883).

Once comfortable articulating words with a sexually explicit content Heywood argues that women and all speakers should choose words that have a sound more consonant with the meaning of the word defining male procreative anatomy. Thus because "man's vigor is not [exactly] expressed by" the word "penis" ("Sexual Nomenclature"), women should consider replacing "penis," once they are comfortable using it, with words that in sound as well as in content "exactly define sex-organs and their mutual use" ("Penis Literature"). Though her attitude toward sexuality and women's speech diverges from most nineteenth-century linguists', Heywood endorses the prevailing linguistic equation of vocal tone with women's speech\textsuperscript{31} when she notes that, because "penis is a smooth, musical, almost feminine word, . . . man is instinctively true to [his] nature in coining the word cock to define [his] creative power" ("Sexual Nomenclature"). In arguing that "cock," because it "sound[s] harsher, should be used instead" of "penis" (Ibid.), Heywood, like Whitman, argues that, in both their tone and content, words should reflect the sexual activities that they describe.

Though this minority of language reformers actively and often successfully encouraged women for over half a century to incorporate sexuality into the content as well as the tone of their daily speech, twentieth-century language commentators have overlooked the movement's significance in their own historical, psychoanalytic, and structural and semiotic linguistic formulations of
women's relation to language. Their own attitudes inadvertently shaped by the dominant pre-twentieth-century linguistic assessment of women's speech, these scholars, in their subsequent analyses, have reinforced the notion that women's speech avoids socially and sexually seditious subject matter in order to adorn and elevate American English, rather than to contribute directly to its political content. Scholars have interpreted contemporary women's residual vocal traditions as a sign, not of the enduring prescriptive power of the earlier model of women's speech, but of its essential accuracy. Therefore they either have concluded that men "naturally" have greater ability with a broad range of subject matter while women have a greater natural facility with the sound of language or they have studied the cultural, linguistic, and social effects of such unalterable differences.32 Because this significant and diverse critical work has not accounted for the cultural and historical origins of pervasive social attitudes toward gender and speech in America, it has extended and consolidated the hegemony of dominant nineteenth-century accounts in our current consciousness of gender and language.

Yet by reassessing Melville's and Southworth's fictional depictions of "foul-mouthed" women speakers within the context of transcendental thinkers' alternative accounts of women's speech, I will argue that we broaden our understanding of women's relation to vocal content and the public sphere in which it is spoken, not only in the 1850s but in the late twentieth century as well. By incorporating and extending transcendental theories of women's speech in their fictions, Southworth and Melville undermine the prevailing attitudes
toward gender and language that the linguistic minority criticizes but fails to dislodge. Because women's speech in both novels physically is dissociated from their bodies it is able to highlight middle-class women's desire for public power and to produce desire in male listeners that displaces them from the public sphere. Women's disembodied voices thereby destabilize the separate sphere ideology that produces and enforces regressive accounts of women's speech. Thus by depicting women as contributing to public, highly political debate, Southworth and Melville reimagine the role of women's speech in nineteenth-century American culture and alter the persistent sense that public language is an exclusively male prerogative.

Idolatrous Devotion

In Pierre and The Fatal Marriage both Melville and Southworth depict men who are dominated by their mothers in the domestic arena. Yet both novelists proceed to outline the ways in which these men rely on women's disembodied speech in order to recognize their mothers' strategic attempts to subvert their masculine authority. Pierre Glendinning and Orville Deville, the male protagonists in Pierre and The Fatal Marriage, though on the verge of achieving manhood, remain within upper-class homes ruled by women invested in impeding their maturation by controlling their sexuality. Though Lady Elizabeth Deville and Mrs. Glendinning seem to encourage their sons' acquisition of the privileges of upper-class manhood, both women's overweening love masks their desire to
make permanent their temporary control over the vast estates through which the women wield public as well as familial power. In order to ensure her continued hegemony Orville's mother, Lady Elizabeth Deville, thus asserts that her "one predominant affection" is "maternal love" (66). "Her one ruling passion [being] her son," Lady Deville's "devotion to him reache[s] idolatry" (66). Mrs. Glendinning likewise finds in her "reverential and devoted son . . . lover enough," despite being "a lady who externally furnished a singular example of the preservative and beautifying influences of unfluctuating rank, health, and wealth" (24).

The mothers' passionate affections cause them to plan adult erotic relationships for their sons that will ensure their own continued emotional and practical hegemony over Orville and Pierre and the estates the men will inherit. Though in retrospect Mrs. Glendinning rejoices that Pierre's "little wife, that is to be, will not estrange him from me," and is grateful that "he loves her and not some haughtiness with whom I could never live in peace" (41), Lady Elizabeth takes a more premeditated role in channeling her son's desire. At her brother's deathbed in Scotland, she arranges and has executed the marriage of her twelve year old niece, Adelaide, to fifteen year old Orville, and so imagines that "the great dread of her future" - "a daughter-in-law to make her miserable" has been averted. In the years between the marriage and its consummation, Orville goes to Eton while Lady Elizabeth takes Adelaide to River- view, the family seat, in order to "melt, mould, and train this gentle girl into a model wife for her darling son--a perfect pattern of a daughter-in-law for herself" (66). Upon Orville's return, Lady
Elizabeth attempts to solidify her centrality in the sexual relationship that she imagines is about to commence by reminding her son that "in your great happiness do not utterly forget your mother whose care has secured you your greatest blessing" (91).

Though both mothers are confident that their positions not only in their sons' esteem, but in the patriarchies which the men will acquire with their impending majority, are ensured by Orville and Pierre's choice of sexual partners, neither woman can ultimately control the nature of her son's interest in women. Both Orville and Pierre secretly become fascinated with women whose radical dissimilarity to the erotic choices provided for them is signified most profoundly by the women's relationship to speech. The meekness that makes Adelaide and Lucy so desirable to the men's mothers is evidenced by their speech as well as by their manners. While Lucy is "noiseless . . . except with Pierre; and even with him she lives through many a panting hush" (47), Adelaide has "smiling lips," "balmy breath," and a "holy voice" (69). Though Lucy and Adelaide's speech exemplifies nineteenth-century linguistic paradigms of women's language, Pierre and Orville are attracted to Isabel and Lionne because of the women's wildly disembodied speech. "Ominously heralded by lightning and thunder," as well as by her "huntsman's horn" with its "clear, sweet, short notes of the recall" (12), Lionne arouses Orville's interest by the sounds preceding and emanating from her. When she finally does break "upon his sight" (12), uttering "picturesque and poetic language [that] was as strange to him as every other circumstance relating to her" (17), Orville is convinced that she is "beautiful beyond comparison with any woman
he had ever before gazed upon" (12). Pierre is similarly transfixed by a woman whose speech seems only "incidentally embodied" (73). Envisioning a woman's face which "without one word of speech" is able "to reveal glimpses of some fearful gospel"(67), Pierre later hears "a sudden, long-drawn, unearthly girlish shriek" (69) which he imagines to come from the face. Unable to see "the person from whom it came" Pierre is all the more moved by the disembodied voice which "seemed to split its way clean through his heart, and leave a yawning gap there" (69). It is because he encounters the face and the voice separately that each influences him so profoundly. Acknowledging belatedly that "the long-drawn, unearthly, girlish shriek [that] pealed through and through his soul . . . came from the face . . . that wrought upon him" (73), Pierre's extended interest in Isabel is produced by the tenuous relationship that continues to exist between her voice and body.

As they listen to the content of the women's subsequent talk about the effects of male independence from the domestic sphere, the men recognize as grasping their mothers' attempts to confine them to the family circle in order to maintain control over their patrilineal inheritance. "Forgotten by her father" who remains absent, "buried in his dreams and schemes and correspondence--political, radical, revolutionary," Lionne describes to Orville her resulting sense of profound dispossession. Alienated from experiences which in retrospect seem "like glimpses of a preexistence, seen in dreams, or like descriptions read in books," Lionne continues to feel isolated and displaced even in the "mountain lodge, where [she has] been living eight or nine years" (39). Acknowledging
that she feels without "a friend or companion in the wide, wide, world" (41), Lionne describes her sense of alienation with the words that in the 1850s most powerfully signify young women's experience of psychological disorientation and crisis because of family dissolution. Likewise asking Pierre for "pity, pity" as she "freeze[s] in the wide, wide, world" (89), Isabel describes a past life in which "real things" are indistinguishable from "the unrealest dreams" (146). As she tells of the isolation and neglect that she experienced as a child because of her father's abandonment, Isabel convinces Pierre of a consanguinity that radically alters his recollection of his father's relation to the domestic arena. Reviewing a hitherto unrecognizable portrait of Mr. Glendinning in light of this new information, Pierre imagines that it confesses to being "thy father as he more truly was" (109). Isabel's physical resemblance to this unfamiliar, "strangely translated" (139) image of his father thus transforms Pierre's understanding of men's relation to the domestic sphere and of the women who inhabit it.

The tone in which Isabel and Lionne speak combines with the content of their dramatic accounts in order to produce a desire which provides the men with an effective means of frustrating their mother's attempts to supplant their power. Initially enticed by "her innocent disclosures" (41) Orville is finally forced to admit that it is Lionne's "tones [that] have power to thrill my whole nature" (32). Commenting on the vocal tone that he finds sexually appealing Orville asks, "Is the voice of the river so musical? I do not know, for the supernal melody of one voice has spoiled me for all others!" (20). Once confronted with the "sweet wild power of the musicalness of
her voice" (140) Pierre likewise experiences sensory and erotic stimulation that transforms the "life . . . which he had vowed to Lucy" (78). As Isabel reveals the "inmost tones of [her] heart's deepest melodies" (141) to Pierre, he immerses himself in those "low melodies of her far interior voice" as they hover "in sweet echoes in the room" (145). Creating a sexual attraction unimaginable, according to the narrator, had Isabel been "a humped, and crippled, hideous girl" (135), the "low, sweet, half-sobbing voice of more than natural musicalness" combined with Isabel's beautiful "face . . . mutely mournful" (139) cause Pierre to experience for the first time the sexual impulses that are "the inevitable . . . lot of men" (135).

After marrying the women they so desperately want,36 Orville and Pierre return home, but, because of their illicit liaisons, they are able to resist the sexual relationships that their mothers advocate in order to extend maternal authority into the male arena. Orville returns to River-view and, though he does not disclaim his marriage to Adelaide, he refuses to consummate it "because of the fetter of sin that binds" him (105). Hoping to overcome Orville's sexual abstinence, Lady Elizabeth lures him into Adelaide's bedroom and demands that he sit beside her on Adelaide's couch. Acting as a standin for his wife, to which Lady Elizabeth takes this opportunity to remind him he has a sexual right, she achieves her goal of overcoming his palpable sexual anxiety and bringing "him through that communicating [bedroom] door" for the first time. Yet Orville's prior sexual encounter fortifies him to withstand even this maternal onslaught, and though he acknowledges to himself that "he might have a legal privilege, . . . he felt that he had no moral right to enter
there! . . . he . . . felt as uncomfortable, as much out of his sphere, as a sinner might feel in heaven!" (108). Pierre's precipitous marriage to Isabel similarly allows him to defend successfully against the sexual alliance that his mother self-serveingly promotes, and Lucy's bedroom likewise becomes the space in which Pierre articulates his resistance. Entering Lucy's bedroom as she sleeps, Pierre "advance[s] slowly and deliberately toward her" in order "to pronounce to her her fate" (215). Pierre's declaration to Lucy that he is married precedes and so reinforces his disclosure to his mother. After hearing Pierre's admission, Mrs. Glendinning immediately asks if he has told Lucy. Pierre's positive assertion finalizes the breach between both Lucy and Pierre and Mrs. Glendinning and her son.

"Everything to Avenge"

While Orville and Pierre rely on both the content and tone of Lionne and Isabel's stories in order to recognize and to curb their mothers' appropriation of their patrilineal power, the women's subsequent speech about the men's illicit sexuality affects, in ways the men cannot control, their position in the public arena. Though neither Orville nor Pierre imagines that his illicit marital alliance will jeopardize his social position, neither man can control the effect of the women's voices once they infiltrate the public arenas over which the men preside. While Lionne's disembodied speech, as we will see later, enters the public sphere in which Orville wields the power enjoyed by the Devilles in order to divest him of it, Isabel's voice, once reinforced by her guitar, produces a public narrative that
destroys Pierre's social privilege. Isabel's guitar both corroborates her story and amplifies her own oddly disembodied speech. Asserting that she knew from the first time she saw it that "there was a melodiousness lurking in the thing . . . that the guitar was speaking to me" (153), Isabel goes on to describe the role that the talking guitar plays in her discovery of her mother and patrilineage. Because "all the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable; all these wonders are translated in the mysterious melodiousness of the guitar" (153), Isabel is able to discover the personal identity denied to her by a society unwilling to acknowledge the illegitimate offspring of its upper-class men. She proves the guitar's vocal power by having it "sing to thee the sequel of my story; for not in words can it be spoken" (155). While the guitar produces "low, sweet, and changefully modulated notes" without being touched, it more specifically "breathe[s] the word mother" (178) and so in both its tone and content verifies Isabel's own account of her identity. This second disembodied speech, once combined with Isabel's own voice, overwhelms Pierre, who is "bewitched" and "enchanted" by "first the enigmatical story of the girl . . . the haziness, obscurity and almost miraculousness of it . . . and then, the inexplicable spell of the guitar, the subtleness of the melodious appealings of the few brief words from Isabel sung in the conclusion of the melody" (156).

Profoundly affected by the "mystical," disembodied speech of Isabel and her guitar, Pierre fashions his revisionist account of bourgeois, male sexuality on the stories that they tell. His memory jogged by Isabel's speech, Pierre suddenly recalls incidents from his childhood which shed "another twinkling light upon her history"
(166) and by extension on his own. While the "mystical corroborations in his own mind . . . substantiat[e]" (166) Isabel's story, they also disclose a repressed family history of duplicitous male sexuality that produces both Isabel and the ostracism that she describes. His own desires for Isabel corroborating the disorderliness of his father's sexuality, Pierre suddenly "catch[es] glimpses, and seem[s] to half see, somehow, that the uttermost ideal of moral perfection in man is wide of the mark" (310). Deciding to "write such things . . . [to] gospelize the world anew, and show them deeper secrets than the Apocalypse" (310), Pierre begins a writing career inspired by Isabel's voice and the story it tells. Relying on both, Pierre has Isabel play "her mystic guitar till [he] felt chapter after chapter born of its wondrous suggestiveness" (320).

Yet because both the tone and content of his descriptions of bourgeois male sexual consciousness are structured by Isabel's speech, his fictional narrative destroys Pierre's elite position in the public arena he tries to refashion. In the process of analyzing middle-class society, Pierre's own position within it shifts. Because his writing focuses on a subject both socially seditious and "eternally incapable of being translated into words" (320), both Pierre and his book are banned from polite society. Pierre learns that the Glendinning's rank is not innate, but the product of social and economic forces which are regulated by the community he critiques. Though he "determines at all hazards to hold his father's name inviolate from any thing he should do" (203), Pierre's literary career destroys not only his own social and economic status but finally the Glendinning line. Forcing his sole male relative to retract his
slanderous words by returning the written version of them wrapped around a bullet, Pierre "slaughters the only outlawed human being by the name of Glendinning" and so with "his own hand . . . extinguishes his house" (402) in its entirety.

While Isabel's account of men's illicit sexuality works through Pierre to arrest the attention of the public and so to displace the Glendinning men from the public sphere in which they are preeminent, Lionne maintains control of her own speech, strategizing ways to maximize the power of its discrete relation to her body in order to compel an unrepenting Orville to acknowledge publicly his seduction. While the first section of The Fatal Marriage details the effect of Orville's secret marriage on his power within the Deville household, the rest of the text focuses on identifying and publicly disseminating his action. Once Orville returns to River-view, he wonders, appalled, "What had he done? . . . He dared not answer his own question. He shrank shuddering from the thought of the name that the law would have given his crime"(80). The question "What had he done?" (88) and the response "A felony to which he dared not give its legal name" (93) register the action that is unspeakable in the upper-class domestic world he reenters and become refrains validating the subsequent actions of Lionne. While Orville hopes to leave his "crime" unnamed, Lionne manipulates the relation between her body and voice in order to disseminate an account of Orville's sexual past that finally forces him to surrender his "natural" position within the upper eschelons of the public arena.

Lionne's dramatic claim that she has "EVERYTHING TO AVENGE!," uttered in a "low, deep, steady, [and] terrible tone" (173)
epitomizes her strategic vocal interventions in the public gatherings over which Orville presides. Lionne has not only been deprived, because of Orville's seduction, of the Deville name, but of her father's name and estate as well, which Orville, as his nephew, inherits. Thinking Lionne dead, her father, now restored to his Scottish earldom, toasts Orville and Adelaide as the "next Earl and Countess of Glen Lennark" at a banquet held in their honor. Yet "not from the rosy lips of Adelaide" comes the response "Lady Glen Lennark accedes and thanks your courtesy!" (269), but from an unlocated, "deep-toned solemn, vibrating voice that tolled like a death bell through the room" (270). Responding to Orville's demand to know "Who spoke?," Lionne's disembodied voice answers, "Leonora, Countess of Glen Lennark and Baroness Lochburn" (270) and so publicly dispossesses Orville of the Glen Lennark estate. While Orville does "as the awful voice commanded," "leav[ing] title, castle, and estate" (274) out of a "secret, unconscious regard for his imperilled honour," he is enraged by the realization that while "the spring of wealth, rank and honour (are) within his reach, Lionne's voice alone is enough "to deprive him of rank, honour and liberty" (276).

Not content to reclaim from Deville her title and inheritance, Lionne continues to intrude in the public ceremonies that mark Orville's political and familial rites of passage in order to destroy both his personal and professional life. At the christening of the Deville's first child, for example, "a deep, bell-toned, authoritative voice" breaks into the communal prayer in order to proclaim that "the first-born daughter of Orville Deville is beyond your prayers"
"The tremendous effect of this horrible speech, uttered as it was, by the hollow voice of an invisible speaker" (280) devastates Adelaide who becomes so obsessed with the disembodied voice that she cannot control her own talk about it. Even after she once again becomes silent about the voice, Adelaide still remains incapable of "banish[ing] it from my mind as from my tongue" (280). Seeking solace for his troubled marriage in a public career, Orville turns to politics, and "because of his high rank, ample fortune, splendid talents, and not too scrupulous honour . . . he was elected to the House of Assembly" (316). Contemplating the restorative effect of his election on his marriage, Orville is "just about to open his mouth to commence" his political acceptance speech when he is again publicly silenced by "the single word LIONNE--that tolled like a death-bell through the room" (318).

Foiled at every stage by Lionne's disembodied speech, Orville finally acknowledges both publicly and privately his sexual criminality. Breaking the domestic silence that he has for years enforced about his seduction of Lionne, Orville tells Adelaide that "the time has come when all concealments . . . must be at an end" (355). Foregrounding his confession to Adelaide by acknowledging that "Lionne . . . told . . . nothing but the truth, truth until now unacknowledged by me," Orville insists on the importance of telling Adelaide his story in full detail, rather than continuing to base their discussion upon her "conjecture as though it had been a mutually recognized truth" (356). The importance that he ascribes to naming the events surrounding his marriage to Lionne leads Orville to articulate for the first time the legal term for his action, when he
admits to Adelaide that "the certificate of my--yes, I will speak the fatal word--felonious marriage with herself is in her possession" (357). That certificate forces Orville to accept the public as well as private sentence for bigamy. On trial for his crime, Orville's successful plea of "not guilty" depends upon convincing the jury that his offense is "the act of youthful passion and folly" and not "a felony, since intention constitutes [sic] the crime" (374). While "few present looked for other than a full acquittal for the accused," his plea is overridden with "one tremendous word from the foreman of the jury" which, in language reminiscent of Lionne's, "fell like a thunderbolt upon the accused. That word of doom was--'GUILTY'" (375). And so finally Lionne's vocal tone and content, because dissociated from her body, compel Orville to answer publicly the question that she first poses to him: "If Adelaide is your wife--what then is Lionne?" (94).

In both The Fatal Marriage and Pierre women's speech ultimately displaces men from the public sphere. Both texts thus am mend prevailing nineteenth-century linguistic accounts of the role of women's speech in American culture. By depicting women who publicly produce sexually explicit narratives and thereby upset men's control over the public sphere, both Southworth and Melville alter the linguistic consensus that American women's speech, because of its purity, elevates but is incapable of directly engaging in and contributing to public debate. Incorporating and extending transcendentalists' contention that the content and tone of women's speech must reflect all aspects of their social and sexual lives, Pierre and The Fatal Marriage show how women's sexually explicit speech
destabilizes bourgeois constructions of gender and language and thereby reshapes the public sphere in which middle-class ideology is enforced. In so doing the two novels force us to rethink prevailing accounts of American women's speech not only in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century as well.
Notes

1  Noah Webster, A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings on Moral, Historical, Political and Literary Subjects (1790; rpt., Delmar, N. Y.: Scholar's Facsimiles, 1977), 28.

2  Dennis Baron, Grammar and Gender (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 56.


7  Otto Jespersen, Growth and Structure of the English Language (1906; rpt., Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1919), 240.


I am indebted to Jesse Batten's "The Word Made Flesh: Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late Nineteenth-Century America" for introducing me to Angela Heywood's writing.


See chapter one.

33 While temporarily allowing the men to separate the two spheres, women's speech, as I will show, successfully undermines the integrity of both arenas.

34 See chapter one.
35 Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, published in 1851, was one of the most popular sentimental fictions of the 1850s and to a large extent defined the genre. Novels like Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter* rework the plot of a young girl abandoned by her family and left to make her way in "the wide, wide world" by herself. Cathy Davidson argues that this plot resonated with female audiences because it so closely described the realities that women faced due to the high mortality rate associated with childbirth. (See *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

36 Though legally fictitious, Pierre's declaration of marriage to Isabel produces the same social effects that a "real" marriage to her would.
Incarnate Words: Nativism, Nationalism, and The Female Body in Monk's *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery*

The anti-Catholic movement in nineteenth-century America initially developed in reaction to the dramatic increases in immigration beginning in the 1830s, primarily from Roman Catholic Ireland, but the movement gained political force in the three decades preceding the Civil War. Because the anti-Catholic or nativist movement reimagined the nation as originally peopled with "native" or "pure" Americans, and as only suddenly threatened by immigrants' invasions of its boundaries, it held particular appeal for a nation increasingly aware of the regional and racial conflicts burgeoning within its borders.¹ As the anonymous author of the nativist tract *Sons of the Sires* (1855) argues, early immigrants to America "were men who . . . contributed to the strength and wealth of the nation" and so "were essentially different in their principles and character from the . . . idlers, paupers, and criminals . . . who now form the unbroken current which is pouring its millions upon our soil."² By creating dramatic distinctions between "native" (or at least third-generation) Americans and inferior, invasive outsiders, nativists externalized the nation's conflicts and consolidated its sense of national identity.

*Awful Disclosures*, Maria Monk's 1836 account of her experiences in a convent, generated crucial and to date unexplored momentum in the early stages of this nativist movement.³ Yet, despite its immense political sway in the years preceding the Civil
War⁴ and its undisputed status as "the greatest of nativist propaganda works,"⁵ Monk's text has been overlooked by scholars of nineteenth-century American culture. Barbara Welter concludes that this critical avoidance is the result of the violently exclusionary and prejudicial politics of the nativist movement.⁶ Yet I will suggest that if we want to understand the immense impact that nativist rhetoric had on antebellum Americans we must assess Awful Disclosures and more particularly its rhetorical reliance on the figure of the sexually endangered female body. Lynn Hunt has pointed out the ways in which the female body comes to signify the national body in Europe during such political upheavals as the French Revolution,⁷ but members of the nativist movement, because they were concerned exclusively with the increasing permeability of America's borders, became particularly susceptible to the iconographic power of the sexually vulnerable American female body. Provoking overwhelming nativist sentiment by centering her novel on the sexually endangered women trapped behind convent walls, Monk created the nativist iconography that, as I will show, shaped over two decades of highly successful and, according to historians, innovative nativist rhetoric.⁸

Assessing the political uses to which Monk put this iconographic American woman not only enriches our understanding of the subsequent outpouring of nativist propaganda, but it also revises our current critical understanding of the role that the woman icon played in the creation of nineteenth-century American nationalism. By linking the female icon's persuasive power to the sexual violation to which she is vulnerable, Monk's text expands
current critical assessments that the power of the nineteenth-century American woman's "ceremonial representation" depended on her lack of "sexuality and passion."9 Similarly, by depicting women within the convent as innovative commentators on their sexual victimage and by emphasizing the vocal indoctrination that accompanies their sexual abuse, Awful Disclosures revises the prevailing contention that, not only the sexual purity, but the "silence" of the nineteenth-century American woman icon is "fundamental to her . . . national power."10 Thus in addition to enriching our understanding of the powerful mechanisms underpinning antebellum nativist sentiment, Monk's text revises our understanding of women's political and vocal power in nineteenth-century America.11

From Virgin Soil to "Soiled" Virgin

In order to persuade their audiences that America's national identity is threatened by the Catholicism of a swelling immigrant population, nativists overwhelmingly depict America as one of the pure women who inhabit the nation. In Immigration: Its Evils and Consequences (1856) nativist Samuel Busey asserts that the unified "identity of the population of . . . [the] country is essential to the preservation of good order, to the perpetuity of its established institutions, and to the protection of its citizens," but he concludes that the recent influx of immigrants is destroying the ideological and physical unity of America's citizens.12 In order to convince their audiences that immigrants are threatening the integrity of America's
geographic and ideological boundaries, nativists figure America as one of the nation's female citizens. Anna Carroll begins the chapter entitled "Men of America" in her popular nativist tract *The Great American Battle* (1859) by depicting America's literal birth as both a nation and a woman. Writing that "with irresistible will America . . . started to life; . . . she opened her young arms to mankind, and offering them her life, her truth . . . called all men brethren," Carroll not only figures America as a woman, but defines America's relation to the "men of America" as familial and platonic.13 Because of her sisterly relation to all of her men, America is prototypical of the "passionless" women who, according to Nancy Cott, increasingly came to represent middle-class American womanhood in the nineteenth century.14 The passionlessness that defines America's femininity also clarifies her reliance on American men. The iconographic America is emblematic of her womenfolks' "stern virtue," but she is also vulnerable to attacks upon that virtue, and thus dependent upon her men for protection (14).

While nativists depict America as the kind of dispassionate woman that defines her middle-class female populace, they also characterize her as sexually as well as ideologically under attack from Catholics' penetrations of her borders. Though America has been "the foster-mother that shelters and nourishes those outcasts who fled to her bosom for protection," she is suddenly threatened by the very individuals that she succors.15 The author of *Sons of the Sires*, identifying himself only as "an American," compels his readership to envision the effects of unchecked Catholicism on both the nation and the identity of its future citizens when he asks, "Shall
we see a many-headed monster springing from the womb of the virgin of Liberty?" (19). The progeny from America's coupling with Catholicism not only signifies the "unnaturalness" of the union, but attests to the perceived perversity of Catholic sexuality in general. Thus Carroll asserts that as a nation "we contend against a foe of feverish passions. . . . It is the Romish Hierarchy, the Jesuit Priesthood, the political church in America" (47). While George Mosse notes that "lack of control over their passions characterized all outsiders," Lynn Hunt specifies the particular susceptibility of European Catholics to accusations of sexual excess. Ultimately fearing that Catholicism's uncontrollable and "unnatural" passion will transform America from virgin soil to soiled virgin, Carroll demands, "Is America to become the Sodom and Gomorrah for this machinery?" (48).

The threat that Catholicism poses to the sexual purity defining America's femininity in turn challenges and consolidates nationalistic notions of nineteenth-century American manhood. Claiming that historically "America was manned with that inextinguishable spirit of liberty, which would not suffer her to be smitten on the cheek, or hung between two dogs -- and then ask are we men?," Carroll makes the physical vulnerability of the national female body explicit in order to highlight the responsibility accruing to America's men because of their masculinity (46). Thus endangered, America "calls aloud for . . . manly hearts to shiver off, to tear away, to fling afar, the source of these stifled groans and distressing sobs, which is taking all the lustre from her eye and paralyzing the very limbs of America" (42). If America's body is deteriorating because of the
assaults it suffers, its impending dissolution offers America's men a prime opportunity to prove the quality of their patriotic "manliness." As Carroll exclaims, "Oh, what a moment for America's men, when their families, their wives and children, are endangered by an influence which impregnates her air, her temperature" (50). It is the direct effects of the sexually violated body of America on the women who inhabit her land that justifies the nationalistic and manly exertions of her male populace.

As Benedict Anderson argues, the nation is "imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail, . . . the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship," but that comradeship in the American nativist movement is consolidated around the female body and the quality of masculinity that its endangerment evokes in America's male citizens.17 Noting that "America had her men. There was Washington . . . Madison, Hamilton, and Jay . . . when at Mount Vernon . . . the Constitution of the United States of America was conceived," Carroll argues that "real" American men have a history of being able to control America's conceptions both ideological and biological (44). Yet she goes on to specify the particular kind of masculinity that successfully allows "the breath, the energy of true men" to "people" America (44), when she notes that America "wants all her men, every one of them; not crying men with pocket-handkerchiefs to their eyes, but men who decide all and are men" (51). Claiming that these kind of men "are her national guard, her troops, her power, to hoist her flag when and where the nation wills it," Carroll suggests that her men not only protect America's feminine
virtue, but fetishistically empower her in turn to plant her own nationalist emblem in foreign soil (48). Yet, should they fail, America reserves the right to "reject and condemn the very men who gave the whole world America" (48).

Though nativist propaganda invokes the physical boundaries of a female America in order to bolster the masculinity of its male-dominated audience, its national political instrument, the Know-Nothing Party, figures itself as the male body that, because of its secrecy and lack of visible boundaries, is able to keep America's national identity intact. America's vulnerability to the phallic intrusions of a foreign power structure both the form and content of Lyman Beecher's nativist argument that "we, around the entire circumference of our nation, leave wide opened the door of entrance, and all the vital energies of our institutions, accessible to any influence which the anti-republican governments of Europe may choose to thrust in upon us." In proclaiming itself the protector of this endangered America, the Know-Nothing Party imagines itself as just the kind of male that Carroll claims America needs. The author of Sons of the Sires (1855) figures his party as "the child of the people . . . he is now a youth of rare capacities and of glorious promise . . . very much in appearance like the pictures of manly Washington" (14). Because this manly nativist youth is clearly the purebred progeny of America's most vital men, he is immediately under Catholic attack, according to the narrator's story, and only escapes his fate by going into hiding. Resurfacing "yonder, and there, and everywhere," the youth emblematic of the Know-Nothing Party is able to defy fixed physical boundaries in order to shore up the
borders that mark off America's geographic and ideological identity (10).

In her 1836 nativist novel *Awful Disclosures* Maria Monk illustrates the threat that an invasive Catholic population poses to the nation by structuring her narrative around her own and other nuns' experiences of sexual violation while in a convent. The immediate and energetic reaction of the public upon reading her account ensured that the image of the sexually endangered woman would remain, as I have illustrated, at the center of nativist rhetoric for the next thirty years. Yet *Awful Disclosures* not only generates the rhetorically powerful image of the sexually vulnerable American woman, but, in addition, it depicts that woman in terms that alter our understanding of women's political power in the nineteenth century. In particular it revises the prevailing critical contentions that the political sway of nineteenth-century women and iconography depended on women's sexual purity and silence. By showing, first, how women's silence ensures their sexual victimage in the convent and, second, how women's free and uninhibited speech protects them, and by extension the nation, Monk radically revises existing critical paradigms of the nature of women's political intervention in nineteenth-century America.

**Breaking Silence**

As the institutional site in which repressive Catholic ideology is practiced, the convent looms large both in Monk's account and more generally in the minds of anti-Catholic nativists. Its architectural
structure reinforcing Catholicism's resistance to outside regulation, the convent becomes a symbol, for nativists, of the antisocial behavior that they imagine goes on behind its walls. As one anonymous contributor to the American Protestant Vindicator (1836) puts it, "uncleanness and murder are the corner stones of the nunnery, its walls are built up with the most heinous crimes, and the cement is the blood of innocence."^{20} British diarist Frederick Marryat argues that Americans' anxious speculations about convent life grow out of a strong "national feeling that nothing must be kept veiled" and finally motivate the 1834 burning of the Ursuline convent in Boston. "Americans," he writes in Diary in America (1839), "cannot bear anything like a secret -- that's unconstitutional." and so, because "the Convent was sealed to them," the Boston mob "determined to know what was in it" by storming it and burning it to the ground.^{21} If Protestant Americans' anxiety about the convent was produced by its physical position outside of the realm of public surveillance that Foucault claims produces, interprets, and controls sexual activity, Monk's text provokes its audience by emphasizing the unmonitored, sordid sexuality practiced behind the convent walls and so hidden before public inspection.^{22} Relying on the convent's institutional resistance to public surveillance, Monk seeks narrative authority in her text by enjoining her audience to search the convent that she describes in order to verify the anti-social activities that she claims remain hidden behind its walls. She asks her readers to provide a delegation to accompany her through the convent so "that they may compare my account with the interior parts of that building, into which no persons but the Roman Bishop and the Priests
are ever admitted." In so doing the narrator emphasizes the convent's essential privacy in order to provoke a predominantly Protestant public's anxiety about institutions both ideologically and architecturally resistant to the communal, Foucaultian policing that, according to cultural critics and historians, epitomized nineteenth-century American culture.24

Because the convent resists public scrutiny, nativists fear the resulting power of Catholicism's main mode of surveillance -- the confessional. Lyman Beecher articulates a general nativist concern when, in A Plea For the West (1835), he writes that, "by the confessional (Catholicism) searches the heart, learns the thoughts, and motives, and habits, and condition of individuals and families, and thus acquires the means of unlimited ascendancy over the mind by the united influence of both worlds" (132). Its dual access to both the public and private worlds of its parishioners and its lack of public accountability combine to make confession the most dangerous Catholic practice in the minds of nativists. Because confession is the least susceptible of all Catholic practices to outside intervention, nativists consistently imagine that its rituals authorize particularly deviant sexuality. In "The History of Priestcraft" (Advocate, June 1837), for example, William Howitt asks his readers to imagine "the effect on domestic purity" of the "millions of monks and secular priests" who, "forbidden to marry" and "pampered in . . . voluptuousness," have been "let loose on the female world as counsellors [sic] and confessors."25 "With secrecy in one hand, and amplest power of absolution from sin in the other," these priests, Howitt asserts, destroy the sexual purity of every woman who
confesses to them. In *Awful Disclosures* Monk provokes this anxiety about the unpolicied sexuality practiced behind the convent walls by making the confessional the physical space within the convent in which Catholic ideology is most effectively inculcated and sexual transgression is thus most overtly institutionalized. The narrator, Saint Eustace, first discovers the sexual politics of the confessional from a girlfriend who tells her of "conduct . . . criminal and shameful" by a priest during confession. Recalling that "these stories struck me with surprise at first," the narrator admits that after many confessions, "I gradually began to feel differently, even supposing [the stories] true, and to look upon the priests as men incapable of sin" (29). It is only after attending confession and having her attitudes shaped by the Catholicism espoused by priests, that the narrator is inducted into the sexual license that comprises the activity of the confessional. Thus she notes that "it was not until I had been several times, that the priests became more and more bold, and were at length indecent in their questions and even in their conduct when I confessed to them" (29).

The complete privacy of the confessional makes it the place of most extreme sexual exploitation, but in Monk's text and in the nativist rhetoric it generated that exploitation is described as primarily vocal. In a special issue of the *American Protestant Vindicator* (1836) devoted to Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures*, an anonymous contributor, in describing convent life, asserts that "the first precept includes a death-like silence." Once the newly inducted nun learns to be silent, "she is initiated into the [convent's] mysteries . . . by the priest in the confession box. Through the application of
questions which inculcate ideas that gradually extirpate all modesty," this priest ensures the debasement of every nun who confesses to him.26 A source for this and numerous other exposes on convent life,27 Monk's *Awful Disclosures* similarly describes how priests, while listening to the nuns confess "put questions . . . which were often of the most improper and even revolting nature, naming crimes both unthought of and inhuman" (42). The priests' sexual license is not confined to their own articulations, but involves compelling the nuns' vocal complicity as well. Thus while Monk's narrator Saint Eustace admits to hearing "from the mouths of the priests at confession what I cannot repeat," she also relates that "several females . . . have assured me that they have repeatedly, and indeed regularly, been required to answer . . . questions, many of which presented to the mind deeds which the most iniquitous and corrupt heart could hardly invent" (29). Simultaneously maintaining and disrupting the sanctity of the confessional, the narrator admits that "far more guilt was often incurred than pardoned; and crimes of a deep die were committed." These crimes are sexual and, though Saint Eustace reiterates her inability to "speak plainly on such a subject," the confessional structure of her narrative, as Foucault suggests, gives specificity and therefore validity to the sexual activities to which she alludes. Admitting that, among the nuns waiting outside the confessional, "there was often a contest . . . to avoid entering the apartment as long as we could, endeavouring to make each other go first, as that was what most of us dreaded" (125), the narrator's confessional recollection lends shape and substance to her accusations of sexual abuse.
If the priests' talk, from the hegemonic side of the confession screen, constitutes their female penitents' sexual exploitation, from the other side of the screen, the nuns' ritualized responses and their enforced silence alike become signs of their oppressive experience in the convent. While Saint Eustace's desire to learn a second language motivates her to join the convent, once she takes the veil, she finds that all unmonitored speech is disallowed according to convent rules. Because "the preservation of silence was insisted upon most rigidly," the narrator finds that she is "never allowed to speak" freely (106). "Permitted to speak with each other only on such subjects as relate to the Convent, and all in the hearing of the old nuns" (35), newly inducted nuns are unable to communicate their fears and impressions to each other. Should the old nuns notice the novices' surreptitious attempts to speak, they inform the transgressors that they "have broken silence," and thereby enforce the silence and controlled speech that make up the daily routine of convent life. Beginning with the old nuns' declaration that "the Lord cometh," and their charges' prescribed response, "Let us go and meet him," the nuns' daily routine revolves exclusively around organized prayer, "silence-bells," sermons, song, and lectures (64). Vocal surveillance extends even into the nun's sleep, and the narrator reports a "proneness to talk in our sleep" and "to hear the nuns repeat their prayers in the course of the night, as they frequently did in their dreams" (176). Their enforced vocal conformity extends into the women's personal thoughts as well. As the narrator admits, because they were "forbidden to converse freely on" their sexual exploitation, the nuns "thought but little about it" (185).
As further signs of Catholicism's vocal surveillance and control, those nuns who become vocally unruly are subjected to punishments that distort and torture their resistant mouths. Having noted that she has "seen half a dozen [nuns] . . . gagged and bound at once," Saint Eustace discloses her own subjection "to the same state of involuntary silence. . . . My hands . . . tied behind me, and a gag put into my mouth, sometimes with such force and rudeness as to lacerate my lips and cause the blood to flow freely" (186). While gagging distends the victim's mouth, it also silences her. Saint Eustace admits that during a particularly painful penance, "If I had not been gagged, I am sure I should have uttered awful screams" (200). To stress the physical cost of challenging the regulatory regime that constitutes women's experience of Catholicism, the narrator describes the direct pain the gag inflicts as it is put into the mouth:

the rough gagging which I several times endured
wounded my lips very much; for it was common . . . to
thrust the gag hard against the teeth, and catch one or both the lips, which were sometimes cruelly cut. . . . A gag was once forced into my mouth which had a large splinter on it, and this cut through my upper lip . . . leaving a scar (190).

Admitting that she has "seen the blood flowing" from the numerous female "mouths into which the gag was thrust," the narrator reminds
her readers that Catholic practices place the American female body, as well as women's speech, in jeopardy.

Yet those women who do speak out nonetheless serve as inspirational mouthpieces of communal resistance, before they become examples that further police the nuns' speech. For instance, one evening, as the women prepare to sleep, the "usual silence" is disrupted by "the most piercing and heart-rending shrieks" from a newly inducted nun. The cries of the sexually assaulted woman produce a corresponding, spontaneous and disorderly outcry from the usually silent sisters: "Every nun seemed to rise as if by one impulse, for no one could hear such sounds, especially in such total silence, without being greatly excited. A general noise succeeded, for many voices spoke together, uttering cries of surprise, compassion, or fear . . . [and] for once we forgot rules and penances, and gave vent to our feelings" (149).

While one woman's inadvertent vocalization of her fear produces the responsive, chaotic speech of the other women, Saint Frances, another newly inducted nun, threatens the entire structure of institutionalized oppression by refusing to accept her vocal and sexual subordination. Saint Frances is on trial as much for her physical resistance as for her vocal disapproval of the convent's sexual practices. Dragged from her room, Saint Frances, "without even speaking a word," submits to the harsh speech that sets the tone for her punishment (113). Yet if "Saint Frances spoke not a word" on the way to her hearing, her speech once there proves disorderly. She repeats her vocal unruliness publicly, and "in reply to some questions she was silent; to others I heard her voice reply
that she did not repent of the words she had uttered" (115). While the Superior and priests gag Saint Frances in order to ensure her silence, her words prove powerful for the nuns and particularly for Saint Eustace, who admits that her speech "made a lasting impression on me" (115).

Having depicted Catholicism's overt silencing of women's subversive speech, Monk goes on to show how it uses the vocal unruliness of one nun to consolidate its power. While initially seeming to offer successful resistance to Catholic oppression, the disorderly speech of the narrator's friend Jane Ray finally reaffirms the pervasiveness of Catholicism's hegemony. The most vocally disorderly nun in the convent, Jane Ray sets "at nought . . the rules of silence, which others were so scrupulous in observing" (137). She not only "speaks aloud when silence is required" but encourages vocal unruliness in the other nuns by saying and doing "things on purpose to make us laugh" (37). Thus the narrator recollects that:

Often, while perfect silence prevailed among the nuns, . . . Jane would break forth with some remark or question that would attract general attention, and often cause a long and total interruption . . . her loud and well known voice, so strongly associated with everything singular and ridiculous, would arrest the attention of us all, and generally incline us to smile, and even force us to laugh. . . . I have repeatedly known her to break silence in the community as if she had no object, or none beyond causing disturbance (108).
Jane's unruly language produces the corresponding and irrepressible speech of her peers, but her tricks also cause the old nuns to scream inadvertently and so to find themselves accused of "breaking the silence" that they are in charge of enforcing (134). While the disorderly speech that Jane provokes leaves all the other nuns vulnerable to censure, she is judged by the Superior to be unable to control her irresponsible talk, and therefore is not held accountable for it.

Occupying the privileged position of a madwoman, Jane continues to subvert the religious language and ideology of the convent. Because she is able to speak both French and English, she is charged with teaching novices the "official church language." Instead, she uses her bilingualism as part of her attack against the convent's vocal regimes and inculcates "irreverent passages from songs" (142). Jane not only teaches nuns a subversive religious language, but creates a parodic version of the religious words that they are forced to speak. Fixing on the Canadian nuns' slight deviation from prescribed speech, Jane repeats their term "for the God" until it becomes a code phrase which the nuns use in order to express their disdain for convent rituals. Not content with creating a parodic version of the church language in order to give the nuns a way of articulating their feelings, Jane also becomes the public articulator of the emotions that the nuns are afraid to express. Because she is particularly resistant to the confession which all the nuns are forced to undergo, Jane decides instead to write her confession. Yet, as she reads it before the Superior and all of the
nuns, it becomes clear that "it was full of offenses which she had never committed evidently written to throw ridicule on confession" (139). Because of the unique role of Jane's speech in the convent, she not only is able to parody with impunity the Catholic practice most feared by the other nuns, but also becomes the communal mouthpiece for the nuns' anxiety about the prolonged absence of their Superior. Thus, intimating "her suspicions more plainly than any other of the nuns would have dared to do," Jane "spoke out one day . . . and said 'I'm going to hunt in the cellar for my old Superior'" (180). Her unusually beautiful singing voice reinforces the defiant content of her words. As Saint Eustace reports, Jane had "a very fine voice, which was so powerful as to be heard above the rest." She uses it publicly to oppose the religious singing in which the Superior forces her to take part. Thus "sometimes she would be silent when other nuns began; and the Superior would often call out 'Jane Ray, you do not sing' . . . she would then strike up some English song, or profane parody, rendered ten times more ridiculous by the ignorance of the Lady Superior" who speaks only French.

Though Jane functions in the community in the vocally subversive role of madwoman, she also serves an important function in ensuring the nuns' compliance. Jane's vocal antics disrupt the linguistic rituals of the convent, but they also maintain the nuns' spirits and so complicity in those rituals. Saint Eustace notes that "nothing but the humors of mad Jane Ray, could rouse us for a moment from our langor and melancholy" (125). As a result, she admits that she "was inclined to think the Superior was willing to put up with some of her tricks, because they served to divert our minds
from the painful and depressing circumstances in which we were placed" (136). Jane's vocal recuperation within the system of oppression that she actively resists is the final and most dramatic act of vocal appropriation in Monk's account and reveals the full extent of the convent's institutional hegemony. As a result of its scope and completeness, the Catholicism practiced in the convent is imagined by nativists as capable of destroying both the nation as they conceive of it and the hardiest women who live in it.

Speaking Out

With this world of often violent vocal surveillance as its subject, Monk's narrative becomes a dramatic example of breaking the silence of women not only in the convent but in the nineteenth-century American political sphere as well. Selling over 20,000 copies within a few weeks of its first publication, Awful Disclosures immediately became the best-selling, as well as the "most influential, single work of anti-Catholic propaganda in America's history" (Billington 24). Because of the instant public interest that her literary account of convent women produced in her own body and voice, Monk entered the public sphere and transformed herself from a silent American female icon into a nativist political orator. Her physical appearance as "an innocent young girl," first, reinforced the veracity of her autobiographical narrative and, then, imbued her body with the iconographic power of the women in her text. Imagining that Monk was susceptible to the same fate as the women
she described, public audiences actively feared that the priests who
oppressed her in the convent would, according to the *American
Protestant Vindicator* (1836), "obtain possession of Maria Monk, so as
to inflict upon her the Papist gag law" (2). The iconographic power of
Monk's body thus created, among audiences, a demand for the free
and uninhibited female public speech that would reassure listeners
that the nation, as well as the female body that represented it,
remained intact.

In addition to broadening our current understanding of
women's public and political speech in mid-nineteenth-century
America, assessing Monk's creation of nativist iconography also
expands our understanding of the rhetorical strategies that
subsequent writers employed in order to promote pro- and anti-
immigration sentiment. While antebellum nativist rhetoric, as I have
illustrated, made extensive use of Monk's iconographic paradigms,
*Awful Disclosures* continued to influence immigration propaganda
even after the nativist movement ended with the Civil War. Mary J.
Holmes's pro-immigration novel, *The English Orphans* (1871), for
example, directly employs the persuasive techniques originally set
out in the pages of Monk's text. Like Jane Ray, Holmes's mad female
character Sal has "a command of language" that is "proportionately
greater" whenever she seems "crazier than usual."29 Produced by
the physical beatings and sexual oppression she suffers because of
her immigrant status, the ironic "references to grammar" (65) that
denote Sal's insanity nonetheless protect and finally authorize the
speech of the novel's orphan heroine, Mary. Her own career as "a
splendid minister spoiled" (90), Sal devotes her energy to helping
Mary overcome the tortured speech and distorted mouth that are her Catholic inheritance. Impaired by teeth, "which, on each side of her mouth grew directly over the others, giving to the lower portion of her face a peculiar and rather disagreeable expression" (8), Mary epitomizes the "horridly miserable creatures" (20) of which anti-immigration proponents complain. Yet Sal's speech lessons and the operation that she underwrites transform Mary into an attractive, pure woman equipped with speech that is powerful enough to repel the advances of intemperate and predatory men. The political impact of Holmes's text is produced by Mary's metamorphosis from a silenced and sexually vulnerable orphan into a representative of passionless bourgeois femininity, but the full resonance of Mary's conversion can only be understood once Holmes's text is placed within the context of Monk's Awful Disclosures and the subsequent nativist rhetoric it generated. And so, even though Monk's narrative and her subsequent public oratory contributed directly to the regressive politics of religious intolerance burgeoning in antebellum America, her groundbreaking depictions of the female body and its speech broaden our understanding of the rhetorical as well as the literary power that American women wielded throughout the nineteenth century.
Notes


3 While Monk's exclusive authorship of *Awful Disclosures* has been inconclusively contested, the content and structure of the text are indisputably attributed to her.


6 See Welter, "From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard," 44.


Anna Ella Carroll, *The Great American Battle: or, the Contest Between Christianity and Political Romanism* (New York: C.M. Saxton, 1859), 41.


George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 134. In her introduction to *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of*
Modernity, 1500-1800 (New York: Zone Books, 1993) Hunt notes that in France the "Catholic clergy were depicted as capable of almost anything" (41).


18 See Bennett's "Women and the Nativist Movement" regarding women's membership and role in the nativist movement.

19 Lyman Beecher, A Plea For the West (Cincinnati, 1835), 160.


23 Maria Monk, The Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery (1836; rpt., Hamden: Archon Books, 1962), 15. All further references will be to this edition.

24 See Welter, "From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard." Monk's strategy did produce enough concern about the female bodies still within the convent that a search was conducted, but no conclusive evidence was uncovered.


While Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* (1835) aroused anti-Catholic sentiment in Boston, Monk's *Awful Disclosures* was, according to Jenny Franchot, "the most widely read convent captivity narrative." See Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 154.


Mary J. Holmes, *The English Orphans; or, A Home in the New World* (New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1871), 65. All further references will be to this edition.
"It is doubtful if there has ever been a society in which the orator counted for more than he did in the Cotton Kingdom," observed historian William Garrott Brown in his 1903 cultural history, *The Lower South in American History*. Permeating all sectors of antebellum southern culture, this oral tradition, according to southern historians and commentators, produced a passion for rhetoric that effectively impeded the production of a distinctly southern literature. Because of an "intense desire to master the spoken word," early twentieth-century historian Virginius Dabney concludes that "the cherished ambition of almost every young Southerner was for a public rather than a literary career." Nineteenth-century southern novelist William Gilmore Simms attributes Southerners' literary disinterest to their lack of urban infrastructure when he comments that, while "purely agricultural people . . . have produced great orators," they have never been able to "produce a national literature." Yet in this chapter I will argue that the southern oratory that flourishes over the forty-year period preceding the Civil War, rather than impeding the development of a southern literary tradition, in fact shapes southern women's pro-slavery and abolitionist fiction writings. Though on opposite sides of the slavery debate, both Caroline Lee Hentz, in her pro-slavery response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854)
and Harriet Jacobs, in her autobiographical narrative of slavery, 
*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), place the southern 
oratory that matures in response to increasing anti-slavery feeling at 
the center of the southern worlds that they create in their fictions. 
More specifically, Hentz and Jacobs both depict in dramatically 
different ways the heightened "passion" that characterizes the public 
articulations of southern men and the kind of speech that such 
oratory demands of women in order to persuade their reading 
audiences of their political views. Once read within the context of 
antebellum accounts of southern oratorical practice, we can see the 
extent to which Jacobs's and Hentz's literary productions rely upon, 
and also critique, southern oratorical culture and women's place 
within it.

"Fiery, Voluptuous and Indolent": Southern Oratory

As early as 1785 Thomas Jefferson quantified reigning 
perceptions regarding the regional differences in America when he 
commented that "in the North they are cool, sober, laborious, [and] 
persevering, while in the South they are fiery, voluptuous, indolent, 
[and] unsteady."\(^4\) These regional distinctions determined the kind of 
English that Americans speak as well. Charlestonian Reverend Best 
argues in his *Dissertation Upon Oratory* (1800) that American English 
as it is spoken in the North "has little or no inflexion [sic]" because of 
the "rugged harshness" of its speakers' elocution.\(^5\) The "asperity of 
sound and roughness of tone [which] predominate" are, according to 
Best, "injurious to melody" and "repugnant to delicacy" (49).
"Destitute of . . . smoothness and harmony" (47), American English, particularly as it is spoken in the North, is reduced to "a jargon of various tongues," according to Maria McIntosh in Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward (1850). Though numerous language commentators, as I have shown in earlier chapters, claim that this harsh tone is characteristic of American elocution at its best, southern writers on American English argue that Americans need "to cultivate 'Melody of Language'" (Best, 43) in order to produce a more aesthetically compelling speech. Rather than inhibiting political oratory as northern linguists contend, this pleasing speech is even more rhetorically and politically persuasive than the existing rhetorical style because, according to Best, "various intonations of the voice" are needed in order to "irresistibly seize the hearers, and lead the passions captive" (79).

Directly reflecting the "voluptuous" and "fiery" character of the region, southern oratory in the antebellum period became distinctive and rhetorically powerful because of its implementation of this melodic speech. In his Literature of the South (1910) Montrose Moses claims that it is the extravagance of "plantation life" that produces the "expansiveness of expression . . . [and] plethora of high-sounding phrases, colored by excess of feeling" that typify southern oratory. The antebellum southern orator, according to George Wauchope, is "almost histrionic, stately, excessively dignified, [and] fervidly eloquent." According to Charles Kent, he speaks his mind "in the richest tones of forensic eloquence . . . with a freedom approaching volubility and a [great] love of ornamentation." This orator uses what Thomas Watson describes in History of Southern
Oratory (1909) as a "well modulated voice . . . [full of] charm and a sense of melody" to produce a "flamboyant, ornate . . . type of oratory" characterized by "copious floridity" and "unspeakable . . . exalted passion."¹¹

The southern orator's inherently more melodic and embellished speech in turn produces passionate reactions in his listening audience. In Sterling's Southern Orator (1866), for example, Richard Sterling describes the orator's "big manly voice" as "by turns patient and indignant, bold or yielding, as it suits his purpose."¹²

Alternately "exhorting, threatening, supplicating, [and] persuading," this paradigmatic orator successfully compels his listeners to "hang breathless on his lips [and] to . . . follow him in all his windings, through every change of feeling and passion" as "he lashes his opponents with his satire; withers them with his scorn; [and] annihilates them with his terrible, his resistless powers" (42). In A Southern Speaker (1856) D. Barton Ross theorizes the reasons for the southern orator's profound impact on listeners. The speaker's combination of "logic with eloquence and emotion" is designed to inspire his audience "with noble and generous passions" because, according to Ross, "the great truths . . . are taught to us" not by reason alone but also "by our instincts, our sentiments, and our passions."¹³

Fifty years earlier Reverend Best had argued that it is only when "sublime truths" are "accompanied with animated delivery" that "the moving fibres are shaken, the soul is moved, and . . . we feel ourselves changed, converted, regenerated" (80). The orator who perhaps most successfully "converted" Southerners to his political views was Jefferson Davis. Speaking "with an even tuneful
flow of words . . . the lowest notes of which . . . rose as a sound of a trumpet," according to Thomas Watson, Davis was able "to convey the strongest emotions," filling the "hearts of his hearers with [an] unspeakable passion" (55) to protect the geopolitical autonomy of the South.

Devoted to increasing regional pride and identity, southern oratory played a crucial role in Southerners' increasingly passionate defense of slavery as a social institution. Claiming that "oratory . . . is the instrument of freedom" and "eloquence is the satellite of liberty," Reverend Best, at the turn into the nineteenth century, calls for all white southern "men of abilities . . . to cultivate oratory" (29) as a means of ensuring the continued autonomy of the South. And southern oratory did in fact flourish as southern identity was challenged. As "the voice of the Old South increased in volume" (Moses, 195), the characteristic emotionalism of southern oratory also became, according to Watson, "more acute, concentrated, and impassioned" (37). This heightened emotion combined with "the greatness of the political issues" to make the antebellum era, according to Thomas Watson, "the period of exceptionally great oratory -- the greatest era of the spoken word in all constitutional history" (30,35). Yet, rather than ensuring liberty for white Southerners as Best contends, the speech of pro-slavery advocates carried the South into a war that resulted in the abolition of the slave system upon which white cultural identity had come increasingly to depend. Admitting that Southerners "were wrought upon, by passionate appeals, to fight out a question which in every other country was adjusted to without loss of a single human life," Watson
concludes that southern orators singlehandedly "plunged us into the War of Secession" (88).

In their exploration of distinctly southern institutions, antebellum orators speak at length not only about slavery but also about "the southern woman" and the kind of speech that characterizes her. In her landmark study of nineteenth-century southern womanhood, The Southern Lady (1970) Anne Firor Scott argues that "the image of the lady took deep root" in the South with "far-reaching social consequences." Descriptions of the southern "girl" are as diverse as they are plentiful. She is "nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident, and dependent," according to George Fitzhugh in his 1854 Sociology for the South, and "delicate, dainty, mischievous, tender, God-fearing, [and] inexplicable" according to Thomas Nelson Page in his retrospective Social Life in Old Virginia (1897). In 1863 correspondence the novelist Augusta J. Evans agrees that the southern girl is "graceful, pretty, witty and pleasant," but she also describes the southern girl's "scanty" information, "defective" judgment, "dwarfed" reasoning faculties, and "weak and frivolous" aspirations" as disturbing. Yet, although much thought is devoted to her physical and intellectual characteristics, Evans and others place greater stress on the southern girl's speech. Unlike the "strong-minded women of the North" who have "the stern character of the lecturer upon the rostrum," the southern woman, as Henry Jackson describes her in The Southern Women of the Second American Revolution (1863), is "characterized by soft words of friendship whispered into the ear of [the] lonely and forlorn." The southern woman's goal, according to Maria McIntosh
in *Woman in America* (1850), is to produce a "nicely modulated voice, whose subtle melody steals sometimes to the heart wrapped in selfishness" (84). The "delicious, low, slow, musical speech" that Thomas Nelson Page describes as characteristic of the southern woman's talk enables her to "lay the bed rock foundation of innate virtue" with which to "calm the unruly passion of sons and husbands" (56). Because "the celestial music" of the southern "woman's soothing voice" is able to "speak those sweet words of comfort," Henry Jackson concludes, in *Southern Women of the Second American Revolution* (1863), that it follows that she must dutifully use "her gentle voice" to produce "cheerful conversation" that makes the southern man forget all "disagreeable subjects" (22).

Though women are often the subject, they are never the speakers of southern oratory. Posed against the "impudent clique of unsexed females" in the North who take to "the platforms of public debate and enter into all the rough and tumble of the war of words," southern women are applauded, by John Cocke in an 1853 letter, for their refusal to engage in any speech, public or private, that challenges the highly patriarchal structure of southern society.19 According to Maria McIntosh, the southern woman should exercise "her influence, not by public associations, and debates, and petitions, but in the manifestation of all feminine grace," and in so doing "soften by her influence both master and slave" (118). In order to remind southern women readers of the unseemliness of women's public speech, McIntosh describes a fictitious northern woman, Flirtilla who "talks and laughs very loudly at all public places, lectures, concerts . . . and has sometimes even in the house of God,
expressed audibly her assent with or dissent from the preacher" (74). Even after the war, Captain J. M. Taylor compliments southern ladies, in an 1868 speech, for not enraging "the delicate retirement of their sex, by an open and active participation in the political issues of the day."20

The silence that characterizes the southern woman in public also characterizes her private life. Even in the private sphere "a woman ought not to speak what she pleased" Robert Charlton told the 1853 graduates of La Grange Female College, because a woman's husband "must answer for her words."21 In an 1828 correspondence Judge John H. Bryan sought to control legally women's private as well as public speech by passing a law to punish "a woman who abuses her husband to strangers" by having "her tongue cut out, or slit at least."22 Such attitudes pressured southern women to stifle their speech in private as well as in public. Newly married, Anne Beale Davis vowed in her diary never to offend with her "tongue," but to "hold it in with bit and bridle and speak charitably of all persons."23 In Recollections of a Southern Matron (1839), Caroline Gilman tells all American women who want "domestic happiness" that they must learn "to repress a harsh answer, to confess a fault, and to stop (right or wrong) in the midst of self-defence [sic]."24 "A good wife," she concludes, must speak in "tones of cheerfulness [even] when her frame is drooping" (257).

By silencing all public and private speech that might challenge their subordination to men, southern women deprived themselves of the passion that southern oration provoked in its speakers. In his 1835 defense of slavery, Thomas Dew argued that slavery elevates
the southern woman from a position of servitude as a "mere beast of burden . . . the slave of men" to "the equal and idol" of man, "the cheering and animating centre of the family circle." 25 Yet, as we have seen, this "elevated" position depended on a woman's willingness and ability to stifle her speech, to suppress her "most violent feelings," and to "curb her most ardent desires." 26 The southern lady, according to Dew, is one who "cannot give utterance to her passions and emotions like a man" (498, emphasis added). Such passions, Dew assures his audience, are a part of what the slave system holds in check. They can be unleashed he adds, only by emancipation. Should such abolition succeed, the southern lady would be transformed from "the pure and simple" icon of "domestic life" into a "licentious" female who indulges in "the feverish joys of a dissipated hour" (Pro-Slavery, 445).

Antebellum speakers center their oratory on the two institutions that for them most powerfully typify southern culture: the slave system and southern womanhood. Though orators contrast the slave's to the southern woman's social circumstances, the condition of the two groups is in many ways analogous because, as Anne Firor Scott notes, slaveholders must control white women in order to maintain control over slaves. In 1850 South Carolina planter James Hammond reflects in his diary that women, like slaves, are "mostly fools and savages and not to be called either civilized or thinking or reasonable Beings." 27 In light of Hammond's statement Mary Chestnutt's famous but controversial comment that "there is no slave, after all, like a wife" gains added force. 28 According to Chestnutt, it is because "women sell themselves and are sold in
marriage," that "all married women," end up "slaves" (729).
Reverend Frederick Ross concurs, in his 1857 _Slavery Ordained of God_, that "the slave stands in relation to his master precisely as the wife stands in relation to her husband."29 In 1845 a writer to the _North Carolina Standard_ who identifies himself only with his initials argues more specifically that the similarity in the status of white women and slaves occurs because there is "no essential difference between the legal condition of the married woman and that of the slave."30 In its commentary on the article, the _North Carolina Standard_ agrees that it is an "undeniable fact that the wives of Christian husbands are as much slaves, so far as privation of rights is concerned, as the negroes of the utmost South." "The parallel," it concludes, "between what the slave is and what the wife might be, is both striking and complete."31 Indeed antebellum laws regarding child custody, domestic violence, and cohabitation consistently enforced white women's servitude to men. Like slave women, white women had no legal control over the children they bore. Because men had complete custody of their children, the southern woman only gained the legal right to her offspring if her husband named her as guardian.32 Men's proprietary rights extended to their wives as well. Until 1857 a husband legally was allowed to beat his wife, provided the weapon was "not thicker than his little finger," according to the _Raleigh Register_ (1825), and the practice was socially accepted long after it was outlawed.33 When women tried to escape such physical abuse, their husbands ran advertisements for their fugitive wives. Almost as numerous, according to historians, as notices for fugitive slaves and stray horses, these ads included
physical descriptions of the runaways and injunctions against harboring or seducing them, as men through 1861 could collect damages for such offenses.34

While comparisons between the condition of the slave and the white southern woman have had a complicated and politically vexed role in nineteenth-century abolitionist and feminist rhetoric,35 I want to focus specifically on the political uses to which two mid-nineteenth-century southern women writers put the ideological interplay between slavery and southern femininity in order to show that Caroline Lee Hentz and Harriet Jacobs make significant contributions to pro-slavery and anti-slavery sentiment, and that they do so by focusing on how women deploy stereotypes of their submissive, dispassionate speech in order to impact the politically powerful oratory of southern men. Caroline Lee Hentz seeks to instill pro-slavery sentiment in her readers, I will argue, by showing how the speech of a proper, passionless woman restores political authority to a pro-slavery orator whose personal and rhetorical potency have been damaged by the sexually explicit articulations of a southern woman. Harriet Jacobs, on the other hand, promotes abolitionist sentiment among her readers by depicting a woman whose talk transgresses the codes for both slaves' and women's speech in ways that undercut the oppressive power of southern male orators and the pro-slavery content of their speech. Hentz and Jacobs, then, produce very different political rhetorics by showing how women use their speech to authorize and undermine the oratory of southern men. In so doing they revise, first, the notion that southern oratory has a deleterious effect on the creation of a
distinctly southern literary tradition, and, second, the notion that antebellum oratorical practice was an exclusively male pursuit.

"A Heroine. For All That" 36

In *The Planter's Northern Bride* Claudia Moreland undermines the plantation life over which she presides by describing passions that proper southern women are not supposed to articulate. Trained as a child for "public exhibition in song and dance" (373), Claudia learns early how to produce "wild, passionate bursts of harmony" (367), which set her apart from the community of southern women she attempts to join by marrying an affluent planter named Mr. Moreland. Once on Moreland's plantation, Claudia refuses to submit to the vocal and sexual control that slaveowning men exert over their wives in order to reinforce authority over their slaves. The disorder that reigns among Claudia's musical instruments is matched by the unruliness of the voice that accompanies them. The "harp with broken strings," the "guitar in the same neglected plight," and "the piano with uncovered keys, and burdened with music books" (464) correspond to the force and destructive violence with which Claudia speaks about the "dark passions" (323) she feels, first, for Moreland and, then, when he fails to satisfy her, for other men. Blaming himself after his marriage for "yielding to the impulse of passion" (462) that Claudia provoked in him, Moreland tries to regain control over both his and her insatiable passion by redirecting their energy onto slaveholding and the acquisition of "more land." But Claudia responds to this manipulative strategy with sexual hostility, and then
with a critique of the slave system to which her desires have been sacrificed. Having recognized the similarity between her husband's tyrannical treatment of herself and his slaves, Claudia describes Moreland as a master and tyrant who wants her "to cringe to his will, like the slaves in the kitchen" (366). Hoping to safeguard his dwindling authority, Moreland contends that his wife is more of "a slave" to "her own wild passions" (344) than to him. Though admitting that a woman "without impulse or passion may wear the yoke without feeling it" (366), Claudia finally decides to reject Moreland's authority and leaves him for another man.

Abandoned by a "corrupt" southern woman, Moreland goes North in order to find a wife whose speech reflects the kind of passionlessness that can restore his authority on the plantation. Imagining that "the hearts of people" become increasingly "cold" the further that they live "from the burning sun of the tropics, and that passion, the great central fire of the human bosom, [is] wanting in the less genial latitude" (60) of the North, Moreland goes to church and listens to the choir hoping to find "among the voices" one that meets his needs (34). One voice, that of a woman named Eulalia, seems to Moreland "to drown every other" as, "sweet and soft and feminine beyond expression," it rises above the rest "like the imagined hymn of an angel, clear and swelling" (34). Overpowered by Eulalia's remarkably pure voice, which keeps "rolling and warbling round the arching walls of the church, till the house [i]s filled with their melody," Moreland begins to imagine her voice as "something visible as well as audible" (35). "Surrounded by a halo of music and prayer" (61), Eulalia seems to him to be pure enough to control not only her
own passions but his as well. As Eulalia and Moreland sing together, "her warm, pure breath float[s] against his glowing cheek" (69), provoking his desire. Because of the passion he feels, Eulalia's "seraph voice" evokes in Moreland the memory "of a voice which had in other hours enthralled his soul but had breathed of the passions of earth" (44). But the "purity and bloom" (36) that distinguish Eulalia's voice from Claudia's convince him that even "in the wildest paroxysm of anger, [her] voice would soothe [him] into peace" (307).

Eulalia's speech continues to distinguish her sexually from Claudia even after Moreland and Eulalia marry. The "pure sweet fresh womanliness, virgin delicacy" and "deep, genuine, but unobtrusive piety" that Eulalia possesses equip her, in Moreland's mind, with "every qualification wanting in the brilliant but misguided Claudia" (101). While "not so dazzlingly white as Claudia's snowy, but perjured hand" Eulalia's hands remain attractively "pure from stains of labour" (64). Though Eulalia's "simple travelling dress" as well as her hands bear "little resemblance to the brilliant and magnificently decorated being who had once before clasped Moreland's plighted hand," the marriage vows that she takes are "pure and holy" (175) in a way that Claudia's were not. Even after marriage, Eulalia's "meek, deprecating speech" seems to Moreland a model of "truth, simplicity, and purity" impossible to the "fashionable belle" (156). Even after the birth of a child, Eulalia retains the "child-like, virgin innocence" which reminds Moreland of her days as "a vestal in the white-robed village choir" (422). "Grave, serene, and holy, [with a] youthful purity" that remains untouched by sexuality, Eulalia is able to preserve in Moreland a love that, unlike his passion
for the "transgressing Eve" (365), "can never change" (106). Yet while the women's physical and sexual differences are profound--"evil passions" darkening "the brilliant face of the one" and "purity, goodness, truth, and love" imparting "to the other an almost celestial charm" (363)--, it is their speech--the "divine sweetness of [Eulalia's] voice" as opposed to "Claudia's impassioned gestures" (376)--that signals most clearly the differences between them.

Eulalia uses her speech not only to differentiate herself from sexually unruly southern women, but also to inculcate in Claudia's daughter Effie the feminine passionlessness on which Moreland's peace of mind and power depend. Though Effie has inherited the "passionate and wilful temper" of her mother, "heaven" intervenes, placing "her in Eulalia's keeping" (377). In order to "neutralize" "the curse" of vocal and sexual rebellion that has been "transmitted" to Effie from her biological mother, Eulalia must teach Effie how to speak properly. Fluctuating between passionate outbursts and language "vulgarized by African phrases, learned by constant association with the negroes," Effie is a "wilful little being whose childish prattle" (479) reflects Claudia's influence as well as her maternal disinterest. A writer for the Hillsborough Recorder in 1825 encourages the southern mother not to trust her child with any caretaker exhibiting improper maternal sentiment, because the child "may learn to lisp vulgarity and obscenity" and might acquire "a pronunciation and accent, such as may never by fully corrected."37 Though Effie's speech has been doubly damaged by her mother's and the servant's influences, Moreland asks Eulalia to "make her like yourself . . . all that is lovely and good" (217). If successful he will
reward Eulalia by forgetting that Effie "ever had another mother" (217). In order to displace Claudia and successfully exert her own maternal influence, Eulalia appropriates the piano that epitomizes Claudia's sexual and vocal dissonance. Whenever Effie resists her authority, Eulalia subdues "her into the gentlest obedience, by singing a few simple strains" (306) to the tune of the piano. Admitting that she is "a good girl, when mamma sings" (306), Effie gradually is prevailed upon to replace Claudia's "coarse, violent language" with Eulalia's "angelic sweetness" (464). Continually reminded by Eulalia against saying, "'I won't,'" Effie of her own accord finally "says gently 'I'd rather not,'" and transfixes Moreland with her "transformation from passion to gentleness" (311).

Only after traditional southern femininity, as reflected in women's speech, is restored, is Moreland able to overwhelm his abolitionist opponents with the oratorical skills that define southern manhood. Like all traditional southern orators, Moreland is equipped with "an exceedingly clear, sweet, and finely modulated voice" that swells "like a well-tuned melodious instrument" in order to "charm the ear" (87). Yet his rhetorical skills fail to persuade his northern listeners of his pro-slavery arguments. Though he "defies all the eloquence of the North to induce" the slave with whom he travels to escape (15), Moreland fails to convince his audiences that the "clanking chains of which [abolitionists] speak are mere figures of speech" and that one hears slaves' "voices singing in the fields of labor" (51) rather than screaming in pain. Because Eulalia wants her abolitionist father "to hear him talk, and to listen to his eloquent self-defense" (56), Mr. Hastings finally "throws down the gauntlet" of
politics while conversing with Eulalia's suitor. Yet the "fine and flattering speech" that impresses Eulalia sounds to her father "very much like one prepared and polished for the occasion" (63). In comparison to the "thick and incoherent" (87) rhetorical style that characterizes Mr. Hasting's "yankee" speech, Moreland's "lofty tone" and "high words" (107) fail to impress and then finally offend Mr. Hastings.

Yet, once his plantation is under the influence of the "seraphic voice" which, with its "tone of more than mortal sweetness" (348), influences the slaves as well as Effie, Moreland is able to quell the abolitionist "eloquence" (496) that sways his slaves. Accepting into his home the itinerant northern preacher Brainard, Moreland initially is impressed by the preacher's "voice of rare and winning power" (459). Because the planter initially is unaware of the preacher's politics, Brainard is free to orchestrate insurrection among the slaves by speaking "burning words" to them in his "low, sweet-toned voice" (456). "Gifted with an eloquence passing that of sons of men" (489), Brainard wraps "his influence" around the slaves in order "to gratify his own unhallowed passions" (458) and almost succeeds in causing a rebellion before Moreland intervenes. Facing his slaves, Moreland employs all the skills of southern oratory to convince his audience that they desire their own servitude. "His voice deepening into sternness and his eye kindling with indignation" (500), Moreland articulates his pro-slavery arguments with "indescribable emotion" (502). "Looking earnestly in his face, and drinking in his words with countenances expressive of shame, remorse, and returning devotion" (502), the slaves finally are moved by their master's arguments to
prostrate themselves before him. Reduced to "entreat for pardon, and imploring with tears and sobs not to be sent away from him" (505), Moreland's slave audience finally testifies to the superior effectiveness of his oratorical skills.

"Stinging, Scorching Words"38

In the pro-slavery southern world depicted by Caroline Lee Hentz, it is women who threaten the slave system by speaking about their unruly desires. In Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, however, sexual disorder and tyranny are endemic to southern men's speech, and, rather than undermining slavery, sexually overcharged oratory reinforces women's experience of it. It is "by the talk around" (6) her that Jacobs's autobiographical heroine Linda Brent first learns that she is a slave, but she only realizes the extent of her servitude once she hears her master speak. When Linda turns fifteen Mr. Flint begins "to whisper foul words in [her] ear" and to crowd her "young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of" (27). Unlike the passionate oratory that convinces Moreland's slaves of their servitude, the "stinging, scorching words" that Flint uses to tell Linda that she has been "made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing" because she is "nothing but a slave" scald her "ear and brain like fire" (18), strengthening her resolve to resist his authority. Forced to "listen to such language as he [sees] fit to address to" her (32), Linda finds herself in the common situation of "the slave girl" who, more often than not, is victimized by "the foul talk of her master and his sons"
(51). The sexually lurid speech that passes from one generation of southern men to the next ensures that Flint's male relatives will pour "vile language into the ears" of Linda's "innocent . . . child" (179) as well. Yet by making overt the program of sexual abuse submerged within and furthered by southern men's oratorical practice, Jacobs calls the rhetorical power of their pro-slavery program into question.

Although southern men in Jacobs's account use their speech not to maintain an orderly and equitable slave community but to sexually victimize the slave women who come under their power, it is the silence that these men demand from their slaves about their sexual abuse that constitutes their greatest violation of human rights. Swearing to kill her if she is "not silent as the grave" (28), Mr. Flint depends upon Linda's voicelessness to conceal his sexual assault. But his sexual tyranny also requires the silence of a larger community of slaves. Flint's slaves do not dare "to ask the cause" of the women's screams that they hear because they are "aware that to speak" of "the guilty practices" that occur in Flint's house is "an offense that never [goes] unpunished (28). Momentarily forgetting that it is "a crime for a slave to tell who [is] the father of her child" (13), one of Flint's slaves reveals their sexual relations. To check her vocal freedom, her master promptly reinforces her lack of physical freedom by selling her and their children, an act he justifies by telling her, "You have let you tongue run too far, damn you!" (13). With such examples before them, slave mothers do not "dare to tell who [is] the father of their children . . . except in whispers among themselves" (35). Aware that a slave's "free" speech only occurs under the compulsion of the whipping post, Flint, like many slave
owners, refuses to whip the women he rapes, fearing that "the application of the lash" might lead inadvertently "to remarks that . . . would expose him" (35).

Southern men exert their tyrannical control over speech not only to silence their slaves' accounts of sexual abuse but also to squelch their discussions about slave conditions in general. Only rarely are slaves "bold enough to utter [abolitionist] sentiments to their masters " in response to "the enormous lies" that masters "tell their slaves" (44) about the quality of their life compared to life in the North. By overpowering slaves' own accounts of their condition with pro-slavery rhetoric, masters enforce a silence that keeps their slaves from objecting to the atrocities that are committed on the plantations. In describing the terrible "cruelties" that occur under one master's rule, Jacobs focuses on the terrified and complicitious silence that the slaves are forced to maintain. The murders that this master commits "pass without comment" among the slaves, "no words [are] used" to describe the tortures he inflicts, and in general "nothing [is] said" (46) by the slaves about his sadism. Because any slave who voices even the mildest critique is "beaten for telling lies about white men" (64), "slaves dare not tell" any visiting Northerner the truth even "if he has asked them" (74). Though slaveholders, including Flint, often join the Church and publicly mouth religious doctrine in order to "end all the damned slang" (75) about their abuse of power, "the conversation of the doctor" at least, once he is alone with his slaves, gives "no indication that he ha[s] 'renounced the devil and all his works'" (74), Jacobs writes. Hearing only the master's side of the slavery story, rhetorically enhanced by religious
overtones, the visiting Northerner "suppresses every thought and feeling at variance" with slavery (44) and becomes a pro-slavery advocate. Though slaves are compelled to be silent, Jacobs cannot understand why the "free men and women" who make up her reading audience allow their own "tongues [to] falter in maintenance of the right" (30). Rather than entertaining themselves by listening to the southern orator or "the thrilling voice of Jenny Lind in Metropolitan Hall," Jacobs tells her northern readers to listen to "the thrilling voices of poor hunted colored people" that go "up in an agony of supplication" (191). Once they do so, they will be forced to tell "American slaveholders" that "it is wrong to traffic in men" (73), and then they will see how superficial southern oratorical strategies really are.

In the southern world that Jacobs depicts white women as well as slave women suffer because of the sexual excess that characterizes southern men's speech, but, unlike the slave woman, the southern lady uses the power of her own language to punish the female slaves with whom she competes for her husband's attention. Like the slaves who wait on them, southern white girls also learn, by overhearing "such talk as should never meet youthful ears" (52), about the illicit sexual practices in which southern men indulge. It is because he has "no regard [for] his marriage vows" (36) that the slaveholder uses his speech to seduce and even to compel slave women into having sexual relations with him. Yet the degree of stress that these extra-marital activities exert on southern wives finds expression chiefly in the passion of their speech. Susceptible to "violent outbreaks of jealous passion" (28), Mrs. Flint for example
tries to speak "kindly" to Linda but increasingly loses "control over her passions" (34). As the frequency with which the husband and wife exchange "angry words" regarding Flint's interest in Linda increases, Mrs. Flint's speech fluctuates between pity for herself and hostility for Linda. Weeping and "sometimes groan[ing]," she speaks about her husband's inconstancy "in tones so sad" (33) that Linda pities her. Yet, while Linda admits that "one word of kindness from her would have brought me to her feet" (32), Mrs. Flint begins instead a program of verbal abuse so offensive that, according to Linda, "no terms were too vile for her to bestow upon me" (32). Not content with verbal assault on Linda during the day, Mrs. Flint mimics her husband's words to Linda at night. Approaching Linda's bed as she sleeps, Mrs. Flint, according to Linda, "whispers in my ear, as though it was her husband" and then listens "to hear what I would answer" (34). While justifying her activity by accusing Linda of "talking in [her] sleep" (34), Mrs. Flint hopes to discover, in an unconscious exchange of words, the sexual details of Linda's relationship with Flint.

Though few slaves rebel against their servitude, Linda resists the sexual oppression that her owner tries to impose on her by insisting on the importance of her own speech. As children Linda and her uncle Ben commiserate about their condition; but once Ben becomes a man, he actively resists slavery with his speech. Refusing to "seal" his "lips," he talks, sings, and laughs when he pleases, incurring the wrath of his owner. When, with a "firm set mouth," Ben finally tells his family that he is running away in order to avoid being incarcerated for his rebellious speech, his mother "shudder[s]
at" the subversive strength of "his words" (22). Like Ben, Linda uses her voice to fend off the oppression that changes "slave girls' laughter [into] sighs" (29). She refuses to acquiesce silently to Flint's sexual demands, and she speaks to him about her own desires, thereby declaring her autonomy within an institution that denies her individuality. Enraged by Linda's assertion that the free black man she loves has higher morals than her master, Flint beats her, but he still fails to silence her. Unable to stop her speech to him, Flint then tries to contain Linda's conversations with her fiancé. Risking his threats to "cowhide" both lovers if they speak to each other, Linda talks to her fiancé in order to encourage him to go "where his tongue would not be tied" (42). While Linda's rebellious speech causes Flint's own voice to become "hoarse with rage" (75), her insistence on controlling her own sexuality poses an even greater challenge to his authority. When the affluent landowner Mr. Sands first approaches Linda she is surprised to find that she does not "tremble within hearing of his voice" (55). "An eloquent gentleman" (54) who "speaks kind and encouraging words" (58) not only to her but to her whole family, Mr. Sands impresses Linda because of his difference from Flint. "Encouraged by his kind words" (54), she accepts him as a lover because the relationship offers her vocal and sexual equality. Admitting that there is real "freedom in having a lover who has no control . . . except that which he gains by kindness" (55), she increases both her sexual and her vocal autonomy.

While her affair with Mr. Sands safeguards Linda from Flint's sexual advances, it also transforms the way in which she speaks. Having resolved to "be virtuous, though a slave" (56), she discovers
that by discussing her sexual activity she undermines her vocal authority. When she attempts to "utter the dreaded words" of her affair and pregnancy in a "confession" to her grandmother, "the words" stick in her "throat" (56). Initially, her admission to Flint silences him; he leaves her "house without a word" (56). Although she has preempted his sexual advances by choosing a white man who can protect her from Flint's physical abuse, she cannot stop his vocal assaults. Admitting that "I no longer had the power of answering him as I had formerly done" (81), Linda "resolves to bear Flint's abuse in silence" (58). That verbal abuse increases as her pregnancy becomes more pronounced. Responsible for her pre-natal care, Flint visits Linda and inflicts on her "talk such as would have made the most shameless blush" (59). Though "humiliated" by "such language," Linda feels "too feeble to dispute with him" and so is forced to listen "to his remarks in silence" (61). Repeatedly "subjected to such insults as no pen can describe" (77) in the past, Linda must now, with "words choked in [her] throat" (100), listen silently while Flint "utters oaths terrible enough to palsy a man's tongue" and heaps "every vile epithet he [can] think of" (77) on Linda and her child.

Yet while her silence reflects the oppressive conditions under which she as a slave must live, Linda learns to use her speechlessness in order to ensure her own and her children's freedom: she enforces her own silence by hiding in the garret of her grandmother's house. There she overhears a number of "conversations not intended to meet [her] ears" (117). The most sustaining and frustrating aspect of her "silent days . . . in [the] dreary den" (165) lies, according to Linda, in seeing her "children's
faces and [hearing] their sweet voices" without being able "to say, 'Your mother is here'" (148). Though she gets solace from the "merry laughter" (115) of her children, she must sit in silence and helplessness while Mr. Flint tries "to coax and bribe [the] children" (117) to tell him something about her escape. When her son is bitten by a dog, she must bite her own lips till they bleed "to keep from crying out" as she listens to his screams (123). Admitting that it is "torture to a mother's heart, to listen . . . and be unable to go to" (123) her children, Linda nevertheless remains silent, temporarily surrendering "the power of speech" (122). Only when she hears that Mr. Sands is moving away does she break her silence. Imagining that she hears the "two little voices" of her children pleading with her "not to let their father depart without striving to make their freedom secure" (125), she speaks to the father of her children through an open window. Though "years [have] passed since" they have spoken, Linda begs Mr. Sands to let her "speak a few words . . . about emancipating my children" (126). Successful with Mr. Sands, Linda proceeds to free herself. Imagining that she hears her mother's "voice . . . whispering loving words into my wounded heart" and her father's "voice . . . bidding me not to tarry till I had reached freedom or the grave" (90), she makes her own escape and meets her children in the North. Once safely together with them, Linda regains the ability to speak freely about slavery. Proclaiming that "hot weather brings out snakes and slaveholders," and admitting that she likes "one class of venomous creatures as little as [she does] the other," she concludes by saying, "what a comfort it is to be free to say so!" (174).
Though they promote divergent political agendas, both Caroline Lee Hentz and Harriet Jacobs center their novels on the oratorical culture that was so central to antebellum southern identity and on the complex and provocative role that women's speech played in sustaining and in undermining that culture. In *The Planter's Northern Bride*, Hentz tracks the restorative effects of a northern woman's traditional, passionless speech on a southern community which has been damaged by the passionate and therefore disorderly speech of one of its female members. Enabled by the speech of his northern wife, the slaveholder Moreland recovers his masculine authority and the effective oratorical skills that go along with it in order to become, by the end of the novel, a successful pro-slavery orator. Thus, by advocating traditional relations between gender and speech, Hentz promotes the political content of Moreland's oratory. On the other hand, Harriet Jacobs encourages abolitionist sentiment in readers of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by focusing, first, on the sexual disorder that she characterizes as endemic to the speech of southern men, rather than southern women, and, second, on the way in which a female slave uses her own voice to resist a slaveholder's sexual and vocal abuse. Although their divergent accounts of women's speech produce diverse politics, Hentz's and Jacobs's shared interest in the impact that women's speech had on southern oratorical tradition expands our understanding of the mutually dependent relationship, first, between southern oratory and literature, and second, between women's and men's speech in the antebellum South.
Notes


7. The historical sources from which I draw span an almost one hundred year period, but all comment either retrospectively or immediately on the distinctive characteristics of antebellum oratorical practice.


12 Richard Sterling, Sterling's Southern Orator (Macon, Ga: J. W. Burke and Co, 1866), 42.

13 D. Baron Ross, A Southern Speaker (n.p., 1856), 306.


15 George Fitzhugh, Sociology for the South; or, The Failure of Free Society (Richmond, Va: A. Morris, 1854), 213.

16 Thomas Nelson Page, Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), 58.


31 Ibid.


34 See Eleanor Boatwright, "The Political and Civil Status of Women in Georgia, 1783-1860,"; rpt., *Unheard Voices*, 182.

35 See for example, Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) and Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and...*

36 Caroline Lee Hentz, The Planter's Northern Bride (1854; rpt., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 318. All further references will be to this edition.


38 Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861; rpt., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 18. All further references will be to this edition.

39 In both his own home and Linda's grandmother's house, Flint repeatedly compels Linda to be the single audience to his salacious oratory. His manipulation of southern oratorical tradition, as Jacobs asserts, indicates the pervasive practice of slaveholders and thereby complicates and extends our understanding of southern oratorical culture.
Partners in Speech: Reforming Labor, Class, and
The Working Woman's Body in Phelps's *The Silent Partner*

Summarizing the assessments of "scholars who study the
economic, the political, and the realistic novel," Carol Farley-Kessler
concludes that Elizabeth Stuart Phelps is "without exception"
considered to be "the first American novelist to treat the theme of
urban, industrial blight" in her 1871 novel, *The Silent Partner*.¹ Yet
literary critics who have recently begun to evaluate the novel's
depictions of women labor reformers have argued that the novel is
politically conservative, even regressive. Focusing exclusively on
Perley Kelso's quest to develop her own voice despite her status as a
silent partner in the mill, scholars have argued that, while the book
does address the crucial question of how a bourgeois woman can
productively use her voice and hands, Perley's benevolent speech
and work end up reinforcing rather than contesting or subverting the
middle-class gender codes that confine her. And so finally the novel
"serves the interests of the middle class, registering what is already
changed at the sphere boundaries."² While Perley's speech and work
are indisputably the result of her class, I will show, first, that the
political progressiveness of the text does not depend upon the
success of a middle-class woman's attempts to exert herself in order
to benefit "the hands" of her mill; second, that by focusing on the
middle-class woman, rather than on the working women that abound
in the text, in order to determine the novel's political liberality,
scholars have inadvertently replicated the rhetorical strategies of the
bourgeois women who controlled the women's labor reform
movement in the 1870s and filtered its politics through a middle-
class lens; and third, that by placing the novel within the historical
context of the nineteenth-century labor reform movement and its
women reformers' descriptions of the wage-earning women with
whom they were concerned, we can see that *The Silent Partner*
radically subverts the movement's representations of gender and so
is in fact a politically innovative text.

Analyzing *The Silent Partner* in terms of the labor movement
to which it contributed allows us to assess both the movement's
classist assumptions and the ways in which Phelps's fictional text
deconstructs the gender stereotypes produced by those
presuppositions. In their labor rhetoric bourgeois reformers equate
working women's femininity with their own "passionless, innocent,
and sexually pure" womanhood and then highlight the sexual
dangers to which these women are susceptible in order to promote
women's labor reform. In light of the identity politics espoused by
labor reformers, any rare glimpses of sexual divergence among the
women they champion only serve to reinforce the political
importance of purity. With this middle-class reformatory insistence
on sexual similarity as its point of departure, Phelps's text imagines
alternative relations between reformers and the working women
they attempt to represent and protect. In *The Silent Partner* it is the
woman mill worker Sip Garth, rather than the bourgeois woman, who
shapes reformatory paradigms of laborers' sexuality. Sip's insistence
on the differences between wage-earning and middle-class women
radically revises both existing labor rhetoric and her middle-class
listener's attitude toward laboring women's sexuality. Once we
analyze late nineteenth-century labor reform tracts and more specifically their depictions of the wage-earning women which form their exclusive subject, our attention, along with Phelps's, shifts from the affluent silent partner Perley to the working girl Sip and to the other silent partner in the text, her mute sister and companion, Catty. As we refocus on the working women, it becomes clear that The Silent Partner radically revises the gender and class codes embedded in the 1870s women's labor movement.

"Death or Dishonor"

Because middle-class women imagine wage-earning women's sexuality to be constituted by the "piety, purity, and submissiveness" (Meyerowitz, 50) defining their own femininity, their labor reform rhetoric makes extensive use of the image of the sexually threatened body of the passionless working woman. In The Working Girls of Boston (1889) Carroll Wright asserts the sexual purity of all American women by claiming that "the working girls are as respectable, as moral, and as virtuous as any class of women in our community."4 Lillie Devereux Blake links the pure working woman's subsequent sexual vulnerability to existing labor practices when, in 1883, she tells a Congressional Committee that "you have to give [women] a respectable means of income or else you are apt to drive them to vice."5 Labor activists argue that working women's sexual peril is the direct result of limited employment options and women's ensuing poverty. In her popular 1869 labor reform tract Think and Act, Virginia Penny contends that "Many [working women] are
degraded by their poverty; and their degradation is the cause of nearly all the crime that is committed." As Caroline Dall succinctly states ten years earlier, "the question which is at this moment before the great body of working women is 'death or dishonor:' for lust is a better paymaster than the mill-owner." Deprived of other high-paying jobs, at least "one fourth of the lost women of . . . New York [are] driven to the streets and brothels by destitution" rather than by inclination, according to Penny (99).

Because working women's sexual disorderliness results from repressive labor policy rather than their own unruly desires, both sexual and civic order can be restored, according to middle-class women reformers, by opening labor markets to women. Claiming that "there are very few women that would go astray if honest employments were provided for them at living prices," Penny argues that "the opening of new employments will do much to prevent prostitution" (25). Middle-class reformers' contention that expanding women's access to labor markets and improving their wages would eradicate the sexual unruliness of their passionless but impoverished sisters had little impact on women's working conditions, and so reformers stepped up their campaign by warning that the economic plight of working women threatened the feminine purity not only of women's bodies, but of the national body as well. Because "the social, moral, and intellectual condition of woman has much to do with the honor and standing of a nation," Penny argues that "depravity of the female sex" is "often the first indication of the downfall of a nation" (336). The resulting impact of working women's sexuality on a female, iconographic America poses a direct threat to the nation.
"America . . . goes forth in the freshness of a young and prosperous nation," according to Penny, "but a cancer is consuming her life. Well may she blush for the disgrace that . . . thousands of her women . . . are prostitutes this day from want of remunerative labor" (153). 8

Activists use the rhetoric of women's sexual endangerment not only to expand workers' access to jobs but to reform the labor in which women are already engaged. Thus reformers claim that while limited labor opportunities lead working women to prostitution, the work readily available to women also fails to protect their femininity, contributing to their sexual downfall. Dr. G. C. Holland, as cited by Penny, argues that manufacturing girls' "appearance, manners, and moral natures" are the product of their "half-civilized" work conditions. "Constantly associating with ignorant and depraved . . . young persons of the opposite sex," Holland notes that the girls "naturally . . . throw off all restraint in word and act, and become as bad as men" (64). For Caroline Dall the inability of women coal mine workers to distinguish themselves, by clothing or conduct, from male miners becomes symptomatic of their oppressive work conditions. Noting that "all are clad in male attire, and oaths that men might shudder to hear issue from lips born to breathe words of sweetness," Dall, like Holland, cites the breakdown of visible signs of workers' femininity as the most extreme byproduct of unregulated labor and as resulting in women's "depravity" (47). According to Penny the strains that "the noisy and exciting labor of a manufactory" exert on workers' femininity results in women operatives who are "impulsive" and "often of a desperate and daring character," and finally "brings about [the] dissipation" that ensures their sexual impurity (57).
Reformers warn that the failure of existing labor conditions to reinforce gender differences in the workplace threatens not only women's feminine purity but male workers' masculinity as well. Noting that "some [work] in which men now engage is beneath their dignity as men, and unworthy of their strength," Virginia Penny concludes that "a strong healthy man . . . on his knees fitting ladies' shoes . . . is as much out of place, as a woman chopping wood" (25). In her 1863 *Series of Appeals* Mrs. Nemo argues that "Surely, it is time that men ceased to unman themselves by retailing . . . trinkets and gewgaws, and . . . apply themselves to the ax or the anvil, or some calling worthy of their physical endowments."9 Caroline Dall extends the gendered ideology of separate spheres into the public workplace in order to critique men's work. Convinced of the appropriate work for each sex, she exclaims, "Fancy a strong man winding silk for a whole day, or sorting colors in floss! How has he ever degraded himself to such girl's work?" (66). Reformers warn that the dissipating effects of "feminine" kinds of commerce on American men's masculinity can have physical manifestations. Claiming that "the effeminate manners and habits, and fragile constitutions, in the United States, of young men, arise . . . from the nature of their occupations," Penny demands, "How can they become strong, healthy men, without exercise? Men were made for manly and vigorous pursuits" (289). Focusing on the men who "are employed, by many ladies, to dress their hair," Penny specifies the physical cost of such "effeminate" pursuits by noting "the pale faces, delicate forms, and slender fingers of these men" (290). Mrs. Nemo argues that men "so unmanly as to determine to adhere to their
frivolous occupations" should be forced to resemble the women they displace. "Provided with skirts and shawls, and exquisite little bonnets," Mrs. Nemo is convinced that these men, "with their hairy faces, would doubtless form striking pictures" (20). Thus by insisting on the gender specificity of certain kinds of work in the marketplace, labor reformers argue that expanding women's work options will reinforce rather than erode gender differences and result in more manly, healthy men as well as more feminine, pure women.

Although the passionless working woman's purity and the danger that labor poses to it form the cornerstone of reformatory rhetoric, a few labor activists uncover sexual practices that conflict with the kind of femininity that reformers describe. Yet, whether describing working women's endangered sexual purity or its undercurrent of potential "foulness," middle-class reformers depict women as sexual victims. In this, their accounts consistently reveal more about their own sexual consciousness than about wage-earning women's. Helen Campbell, in her 1887 "famous expose" (Meyerowitz, 66), The Prisoners of Poverty, documents, with increasing horror, the different sexual codes that she discovers in workers' tenement homes. Initially inspired by Penny's reformatory mandate to "save her sisters from degradation" (206), Campbell begins a personal campaign in the tenements of New York. Yet instead of finding pious but impoverished women in the tenements, Campbell uncovers a den of sexual "foulness" with "dark halls" which she hints "have other uses than as receptacles for refuse and filth."10 "Hiding behind doors or in corners, or grown bolder, seeking no concealment," the young inhabitants of the tenement only emerge, according to Campbell, in
order to "teach each other such new facts of foulness as may so far
have chanced to escape them" (128). According to Campbell the
tenement's sexual "foulness" is inescapable for the working women it
shelters. The "over-crowding, the impossibility of the slightest
privacy, and the constant contact with the grossest side of life" that
constitute tenement life "soon . . . destroy every gleam of modesty or
decency" and guarantee "sure corruption for every tenant" (234).
Prostitution not only fails to repel women raised in these conditions
but becomes "merely the final step . . . to the story of ruin and
licentiousness that has always existed" for them (234).

As these women interact economically with other groups, they
threaten to infect all sectors of American society with the sexual vice
coterminous with tenement life. According to Campbell "the
tenement-house stands . . . not only as the breeder of disease and
physical degeneration for every inmate, but as equally potent in
social demoralization for the class who ignore its existence" (235).
Because that class hires tenement women as servants, working
women's sexuality spills out of the tenement and into the parlor. As
Campbell declares, "hundreds upon hundreds of our domestic
servants" come "out of these houses" and "bring inherited and
acquired foulness into our homes and lives" (235). These women
accordingly are held responsible for any sexual vice that occurs in
the middle-class families they serve. Because of their sexual
background, tenement women "enter a family prepared to meet any
advances, and often directly the tempter" (234). Campbell imagines
these working women's sexuality as a "foul stream" that remains
"decorously hidden from view" but that contaminates middle-class
sexual purity like a "virus." Because it is "portable," the virus carries a "taint that may be discovered even in the remote country" (236). Campbell's anxiety about her own susceptibility to sexual contagion causes her to comment defensively, upon entering the tenement, that even "the most determined visitor feels inclined to burn every garment worn during such a quest" (129).

As their contagious sexuality threatens to erase sexual distinctions between women, Campbell heightens her readers' awareness of tenement women's more general dissimilarities in order to reinforce the feminine purity and moral superiority of middle-class women. In her account of tenement women Campbell stresses the "ignorance and blindness and . . . pride, and the many stupidities on which their small lives are founded," offering exhaustive examples to support her opinion (77). Citing women of "all degrees of ignorance and prejudice and stupidity," she nevertheless forces her middle-class audience to "face then--the ignorant, blind, stupid, incompetent" and to realize that "no count of such indictment alters our responsibility toward them" (244, emphasis added). The final line that she draws between "us" and "them" ensures that the purity of the more powerful class will dominate, despite the threat that tenement women's sexuality poses. Thus the sexual difference that Campbell highlights finally reinforces the hegemony of bourgeois purity.

Faced with wage-earning women's disorderly sexuality, reformers rely on the persuasiveness of their own speech to ensure the predominance of their purity model. Activists insist on the power of their own language, arguing that the speech of pure women
is capable of coercing even the most resistant, impure women into becoming the fallen but passionless victims that reformers depict. Women reformers' language not only presents working women as the sexual victims of oppressive labor conditions; it also assumes that wage-earning women will imagine their sexual exploits in those terms. As Penny argues, "the voice, the words, the manners of refined and amiable women will do much to influence the ignorant and degraded of their own sex" (205). If reformers want "vice and crime . . . to give way to virtue and purity," Penny says, they must be prepared, when "addressing persons of inferior station," to "use simple language, but . . . not fear to put substance in it" (204). With "tongues of fire," pure women have the power to penetrate "the very fibres of [the] hearts" (99) of working women and thus to transform their sexual consciousness.

While wage-earning women's moral conversions are the result of reformers' pure speech, their "own" confessions of vice, as recounted by reformers, describe their sexual activity as a vocal, rather than a physical, "decline" and so strengthen reformers' contentions about the purifying effect of their language. In The Working Girls of Boston Wright reports that working women describe their experiences of sexual harassment as experiences of verbal assault. Some working girls

say that the . . . men placed in charge are in the habit of speaking very roughly--. . . they use violent and sometimes bad language before them; others are said to curse and swear at the girls. . . . One girl says she has
been subjected to rough words . . . from the foreman . . .
other girls speak of the bad language used by employers.

(119)

In *The Prisoners of Poverty* Campbell describes one such working
girl's gradual sexual "fall" by noting her altered speech. Initially a
girl with her "father's quick tongue and scorching words" (22) for
those who attempt to assault her purity, Rose Haggerty's speech and
sexuality are transformed by her entry into the work force. Rose
learns the importance of "choking down rash words" and maintaining
"silence" in order to survive in an unjust labor market. Even these
survival strategies eventually fail, and Rose ends up a prostitute.
According to Caroline Dall the workplace has produced countless such
"histories of pure, untarnished names" which tell tales of subsequent
sexual abuse with "dishonored lips" (20).

In activists' rhetoric, wage-earning women testify to the
effectiveness of reformers' pure speech not only by describing their
"foul" sexuality as an ethereal vocal decline, but by fashioning
accounts of their sexual activity on middle-class narrative
prototypes. Dall recounts working women's tales in her reform
literature claiming that "if their own words do not touch you, mine .
will fail" (20). Yet if the greater authenticity of working women's
accounts lends persuasive power to Dall's argument, those accounts,
as Dall reports them, consistently enunciate reformers' assessments
of wage-earning women's sexual condition. As one woman admits "I
was a good girl when I first went to work, and struggled hard to
keep pure; but I had not enough to eat" (21). Once morally reformed,
these women become the most effective proponents of middle-class femininity, making it the cornerstone of their own subsequent labor reform rhetoric. In *Darkness and Daylight* (1895) Helen Campbell describes the public speech of a former prostitute. Her great success is not only the result of "a wonderful gift of language and great natural wit" but "the pathos of her story" which, because of its middle-class appeal, "moved to tears" and held "spellbound" her "vast audiences."¹¹

In *The Silent Partner*, however, Phelps subverts reformers' confidence in the power of their own language by depicting a working-class woman whose speech infuses sexual difference into labor reform's rigidly enforced identity politics and so upsets the monolithic model of feminine purity that dominated women's labor reform. Once understood within the context of women reformers' sexually prescriptive language, *The Silent Partner's* concern with working women's efforts to enunciate their own experience of labor and sexuality alters our sense that the central site of political contestation in the text is the gender conflict that critics have highlighted by stressing Perley's speech, and with it the middle-class woman's negotiation of the love plot. In the speech that middle-class and working women exchange, the "factory-girl's" language transforms both bourgeois women's perceptions of their "sisters'" sexuality and their resulting speech about it. Phelps thus revises activists' rhetorical reliance on feminine purity by altering the sexual consciousness of the movement's middle-class proponents and by reimagining the movement's new speakers to be the wage-earning women who are its central concern.
"God's Words--and Catty's"

Extrapolating from the concern with women's speech that dominates her text and drives its revisionist politics, Phelps more generally describes the relationship between industry and laborers as a contentious fight for voice. In this struggle workers' unified speech has a brief but transformative effect on their ability to resist the dehumanizing effects of unregulated labor. Acting as the mouthpiece for the mill owners, the dam that drives the mill "mocks . . . with peals of hollow laughter" its workers. The work bells "whose very tongues seem to have stiffened with the cold" (34), control the actions of the mill workers who "alone are stirring in the dark" because of their "iron voices" (72). Once in operation the mill literally comes alive, competing with the workers that run it for vitality. The "weaving room engines respire" and, because "with every throb of their huge lungs" they force workers to "swallow their breath," weavers "cough a little [and then] cough a great deal" (75). From coughing-fits the workers "take to swearing roundly" and then to singing. While the mill produces reactive sounds in its workers, it is incapable of containing the effect of their singing. Amidst the dirt of the mill the song emerges "of simple, spotless things" and the "contest between chorus and the din, . . . the struggle of the melody . . . from loom to loom, . . . from lifted face to lifted face" (76) begins. The machinery becomes a gauge for the momentary shift in power that the song produces, as it "falls into a rage . . . throws its arms about, . . . shakes at the elbows and knees . . . and . . . bends its
impotent black head as [the] song sweeps triumphant" (76) through the mill. If their song briefly unites the workers, unrelieved deprivation ultimately creates schisms within their ranks that ensure the owners' hegemony. And so, though potentially revolutionary, "the pretty song creeps, wounded, back for the engines in the deserted dark to crunch." "The melody of the voices" likewise vanishes "with the vanquished song," and the workers' speech once again becomes "hoarse and rough" (77).

With this world as a backdrop, Sip and Perley's speech, while initially exemplifying their respective roles as worker and owner, begins to map alternative kinds of speech between hands and owners. Perley typifies the insensitivity of the mill owners as she sits in her father's library during a storm reveling in her own comfort while others suffer because of the weather. Placing "her two hands like sheets of rice-paper over his own," her fiancé, Maverick, ensures that Perley's avowed "weakness for an occupation" (12) will not be fulfilled and that she will remain enshrined in the protected atmosphere in which the mill owners live. The language spoken in the library is as empty as Perley's experience there. Her friend Fly's voice is "like boiling candy" and, as she talks, Perley listens "lazily" to its sound rather than its content. Focusing on the "idle, soft, and sweet" sound of Fly's voice, Perley absents herself from the conversation and the world in which it takes place by drifting off to sleep. She decides to converse with Sip in order to relieve the tedium that results from the seamless affluence that surrounds her in the library. While "watching . . . the many muddy people . . . that . . . the sleet did not wash . . . as fast as the mud spattered," Perley
finds particularly entertaining "the manful struggles of a girl . . . who
drew out with her hands as a boxer would" (17). Sip's voice, like
her hands, attests to a struggle against economic and environmental
elements about which Perley is ignorant. Noting that "the girl's lips
moved angrily, and that she said something in a sharp voice which
the wind must have carried the other way," Perley asks Sip to talk to
her in order to satisfy her curiosity about the words that she
missed. Expecting the girl's talk to entertain her, Perley instead feels
compelled to reconsider the extent to which her own affluence
depends upon, rather than is completely dissociated from, the
condition of the people she watches.

In Phelps's text it is the talk of the working girl, rather than
that of the bourgeois woman, that proves most powerfully
persuasive. Through a series of discussions about the mill, Sip's
speech gradually alters both Perley's language and her attitudes
towards labor reform. Suddenly resistant to a morning of sitting in
the library, Perley ventures out of the mill town, "following the river
almost out of hearing of the mill machinery, and quite into the frozen
silence of the upper stream" (41). Surrounded by a silence that
signals the potential for different power relations between worker
and owner, Perley once again encounters Sip. As they speak to each
other the women recognize the dissimilarity of their experiences, but
they also struggle to establish a common ground for conversation.
Because she is "at a loss how to pursue the art of conversation" with
"an ignorant factory-girl" (44), Perley's clumsy, class-conscious
comments are met with Sip's "suppressed laugh of 'discontented
labor'" (51). But it is only after Perley attempts to "reintroduce
conversation" by telling Sip of her first visit to the mill that the women develop a shared interest. Uttered "with an interrogatory accent" like that of a "puzzled scholar," Perley's comments initiate Sip's account of women's experience in the mills. As she speaks about the factory-girls, Sip's rhetorical powers become evident. Filled with a desire to refine the theatrical orations of the actresses that she has watched, Sip's talk about factory life soon forces Perley to realize that "the girl was not far wrong in fancying that she could 'do it over'" (117). Glancing sideways "at her visitor's face," Sip in turn realizes that the theatricality of her description of factory life has caused the "old, home-like boundary lines . . . to waver before" (98) her listener.

It is more specifically Sip's first-hand account of working girls' sexuality and speech that converts Perley from a socialite into a reformer. Insisting on the irreconcilable differences between middle-class and working women's experiences of language and their bodies, Sip's talk diverges from standard labor rhetoric but nonetheless moves Perley to reformatory action. Telling of "girls . . . who can't even talk beyond a whisper" because of "a peculiar, dry, rasping cough," which Perley learns later "to recognize as the 'cotton-cough'" (82), Sip specifies both the vocal effects of oppressive labor conditions and the resulting impossibility of working women's voices ever resembling those of women reformers'. As Sip and Perley walk through the town at night, the discordant voices of immigrant factory-girls on the streets epitomize the effect of the mill on both the content and sound of women's speech. The "knots of girls . . . singing . . . fragments of murderous Irish threats; shattered bits of
sweet Scottish songs; half-broken English brogue; German gutturals . . . [and] only now and then the shrewd, dry Yankee twang"(118) reinforce Sip's account of the radical dissimilarities between bourgeois and working women's speech. The abuse that the factory girls experience strains their sexual propriety as well as their voices. Describing working women's sexuality, as well as their ravaged speech, as another result of their labor, Sip tells of the temptations of a pretty Scotch girl, Nynee, who has been "put to work next to . . . the miserable Irishman, Jim." Because the managers "put him where the work was" and "didn't bother their heads about the girl," "she spends the day with him . . . [and] gets used to him" (123). Although Nynee is "wildish . . . but a good girl," the temptation of the situation, according to Sip, will prove too much for a person otherwise deprived of pleasure, and "she'll go to the devil, sure as death" (123). While Nynee's purity is in jeopardy because of circumstance rather than economic want, another factory-girl whom the two women meet on the street has already turned to sexual activity as a release from the tedium of labor. Describing Dib as "a wicked little devil" who "knows more wickedness than you've ever thought of, Miss Kelso" (119), Sip reiterates the vast difference in sexual experience that separates working from middle-class women.

Sip's sharp depictions of the effect of labor on women's speech and sexuality results from the direct consequences that unchecked labor practices have had on her family, especially her sister Catty. Catty is a product, and for Sip becomes a symbol, of oppressive labor conditions. Forced to work overtime in the mill while pregnant, her mother, Mrs. Garth, has prematurely delivered an infant that is deaf
and mute. The mother believes that her child's defect is a result of "the noise . . . of the wheels." According to Sip, "she said [the noise] beat about in her head. She come home . . . and say to herself, 'The baby'll never hear in this world unless she hears the wheels'; and . . . it is true enough that Catty hears the wheels; but never anything besides" (96). Forced to listen "for what she never heard" and to speak "that which no man understood," Catty develops an alternative mode of communication with Sip. "Their silent language" on "work-worn fingers" (85) signals both the extremity of work conditions for women and the possibility of speech unlinked to the power struggle between laborer and owner. The term most often exchanged between the sisters, "for love's sake," becomes a special code between them signalling motivating desires that exist in some special place outside the capitalist economy of wage labor.

Catty's sexuality, as well as her speech, has been irrevocably altered by mill work. Speaking with increasing specificity about her sister's sexual behavior, Sip forces Perley to recognize the profound differences between working-class and middle-class women's experience of sexuality. While their "finger-talk" ensures that Sip "can always understand Catty," it cannot control Catty's impulses for sexual adventure. Deprived of other sensory stimuli, Catty resorts to the excitement of walking the streets by herself all night. Sip attempts to specify Catty's sexual habits by telling Perley that "there's times [Catty] slips away from me . . . there's times she doesn't come till late" (82). Faced with Perley's continued puzzlement, Sip tries again to explain the "things you couldn't understand" by telling of being "turned off on account of Catty" (82).
After exclaiming that "I told you there's things you couldn't understand," Sip proceeds to specify them by saying that "Catty's queer. . . She runs away . . . sometimes she drinks, . . . there's sometimes she does--worse" (84). Only after Perley repeats the euphemism "worse" uncertainly does "the young lady's pure, puzzled face" drop "suddenly" with recognition (85, emphasis added). Forced to hear for the first time a description of female sexuality that exists in direct conflict with the "purity" that defines her own, Perley finally recognizes the distinct consciousness and conditions that define the lives of wage-earning women.

Perley's advocacy of laboring women results from her dawning understanding of the ways in which working women's sexual desires, problematic as they are to the middle-class notion of women's unifying purity, stimulate lives otherwise deprived of sensual experience and pleasure. The dirt that surrounds and defines working women alters their sexual desires, according to Sip. Claiming that "I don't suppose you'd ever guess how much difference the dirt makes" (82), Sip proceeds to highlight its effects on her sister. Pointing to Catty, she exclaims "That's the difference! To be born in it, breathe it, swallow it, grow on it, live it, die and go back to it--If you want to go to the devil, work in the dirt. Look at her!" (88). Looking at Catty forces Perley to recognize in grim detail the extent to which women's desires are inevitably the product of the work they do. Resisting Sip's request that she come inside rather than seek sensory excitement on the streets, Catty justifies her impulse for public roving "with a shrewd, unpleasant smile" (87). As she stands "scowling . . . a sullen, ill-tempered, ill-controlled,
uncontrollable Catty . . . as one could ask to see" (85), Sip's sister embodies the extremity of mill women's simultaneous sensory deprivation and desire. Yet Perley's sympathy for Catty is provoked rather than obscured by the physical and sexual "ugliness" that Catty so powerfully displays. Once forced to "look at her . . . very loathsome under lip [and] . . . not pleasant eyes" (88), Perley is rendered momentarily speechless by her condition. Her resulting tears become an expression of empathy and advocacy for even the most sexually repulsive working women, and so emend the reactions of prototypical labor reformers when faced with working women's sexual difference.

Though initially speechless when forced to recognize that working women's desires contradict reformers' interpretative paradigms, Perley's subsequent speech is transformed by her realization. Speech becomes her work, and she learns both to advocate a labor reform sensitive to working women's differences and to articulate her resulting heightened awareness about her own desires. While Perley initially feels that she has "no words to say how these people seem to me to have been thrust upon my hands" (139), her subsequent conversations with Mr. Garrick, a self-made partner in the mill, and with Maverick register the results of her labor. Because of Garrick's wage-earning background and his resulting inability to "find any dainty words" in which to describe his "passion . . . to bring other people . . . out of the mud" (146) Perley is able to perfect, in her talk with him, her own ideas about reform. Sensitive to the clumsy evolution of her own language as it evolves to accommodate the ideas she wants to express, Perley shares with
Garrick her earliest frustrations about the reformatory apathy of the other mill owners. Once she starts to voice her reform agenda, Perley and Maverick's latent incompatibility intensifies, and Perley breaks off their engagement. Refusing Maverick's self-serving conflation of her competing commitments, she tells him to "never mind about the poor factory girls . . . it is you that I do not love" (160). Perley's labor reform work finally enables her to assert concisely her feelings to Maverick and, with a verbal "thrust which even Maverick could not lightly parry," to insist that he recognize her emotional autonomy.

While Perley's speech reflects her altered perspective, it also serves as an example to Sip of the middle-class language that she needs to master in order to become a successful public speaker. Claiming that she even learned how to speak in the mill, Sip insists on the constitutive effect of mill work on her consciousness. Sip's language acquisition contributes to her inability to ever "feel clean" because it has been tinged with the everpresent "dirt" of the mills. After asserting that "I learned to swear when I learned to talk," Sip expresses a desire to redirect the language that she acquired onto her teachers by calling "curses down on . . . a woman that I used to know for the way she talked to little girls" (202). Yet after listening to Perley speak, Sip realizes that she needs to add bourgeois refinement to the wage-earning authenticity of her speech if she wants a career as a public speaker. While Perley's words, uttered "with the instinct of a lady," initially prove "remarkable" to Sip, her talent for oratory is subsequently nurtured first passively and then actively in the evenings of "culture" that Perley conducts in her
parlor. Sip is initially part of the audience that listens to Perley's playing and recitations, but her long-held desire to "do it over" leads Sip to adopt a performative role in the evening entertainments. Her readings from Victor Hugo quickly become the most highly acclaimed performances among her diverse listeners. The blend of high culture and Populist politics resonates with the workers and bourgeois alike, and Perley admits that "we have nothing so popular . . . as that girl's reading and recitations." The persuasive power produced by Sip's effective combination of wage-earning and "cultivated" speech suggests to Perley that "there might be greater than Siddons in Sip . . . but not altogether of the Siddons sort" (233).

It is Sip's rhetorical ability to approximate the codes of middle-class speech while retaining the working woman's experiential perspective on labor and sexuality that makes Sip's subsequent career as a public speaker successful. Pivotal to Sip's decision to become a public speaker is Catty's death. Left alone in their apartment while Sip shops, Catty, now almost blind, is drawn to the flooding river by its familiar noise. Unable to remain at home, Catty is drowned by the river that drives the mill and so finally becomes a complete victim of uncontrolled labor forces. If, while alive, Catty "spoke that which no man understood" (278), once dead, she becomes "grandly eloquent" (280) not only to Sip but, through Sip's speech, to a larger public as well. Because "Catty had never talked like other people" and the sisters find other ways to communicate, they cannot "be parted like two speaking people" (279). Sip is thus spared "the silence of death" because Catty continues "to find . . . ways to speak to her" (280). Believing that Catty talks to her and that "there's
things she'd have me say" (291), Sip attends religious meetings. Initially taking the floor as Catty's surrogate voice, to communicate the "things [that Catty] had to say," Sip also realizes that "there's been more than I could say" ever since "I saw people's faces lifted up and listening . . . when I talked and talked . . . Catty's words" (292). Catty's words of sensual frustration and desire, once placed within a middle-class religious context, ensure Sip's successful career as a public speaker. Her blend of "God's words--and Catty's" forms a compelling narrative reinforced by the more genteel mannerisms that she has acquired. The hands that Sip initially curled into fists she learns to hold sedately "together at the knuckles" (294) as she speaks. The style proves rhetorically effective for her audience, and the middle-class women onlookers are forced to admit that "there was a syntax in Sip's brown . . . and bent hands" (295).

The Politics of Identity and Difference

While Sip's public speech successfully blends multiple experiences, Perley's commentary on it illustrates Phelps's vision of middle-class women's role in the 1870s labor reform movement. As Perley watches Sip speak, she admits to Fly that "I undertook to help her at the first . . . but I was only among them at best; Sip is of them; she understands them and they understand her; so I left her to her work, and I keep to my own" (293). Willing to help Sip, Perley nevertheless realizes the importance of shared experience between reformer and audience. Perley notes the limits of her own empathy
when she tells Fly that "we do not understand--we who never need" (301). While Perley, as Phelps's model reformer, has not let the middle-class ideology of purity, with its undercurrent of abhorrence for sexual difference, impede her understanding of working women's psychic and sexual condition, Sip's speech highlights the unavoidable limits of Perley's ability to dissociate herself from the gender ideology defining her class in order to reform labor. Sip's public speech, though sanctioned by Perley, finally reiterates the unbridgeable distinctions between the women's classes. The narrator intrudes to insist that the middle-class reader take part in the final consolidation of class distinctions, when she asserts that "in that little court Sip was eloquent . . . on the parlor sofa, in clean cuffs and your slippers, she harangues you" (295).

Sip and Perley's joint effort to expand their speech in order to revolutionize relations between wage-earning and middle-class women operates as the benchmark of reformatory progress in the text. Yet the final unbridgeable rhetorical distinctions between the two women, rather than subverting the reformatory politics of the text, display its most powerful revisionist goal. As I have shown, Perley's activism, unlike that of other middle-class women reformers, acknowledges rather than erases or vilifies wage-earning women's distinct sexuality and speech. It thus offers a revisionist departure from the labor reform practiced by bourgeois women throughout the 1870s. Yet Phelps finally imagines even this enlightened middle-class reform entirely replaced by the political agitation of working women who identify themselves as a politically significant entity in their own right. With its final chapter devoted to
the wage-earning preacher and her audience of workers, Phelps's
text offers the earliest vision of the women's working-class
solidarity that would propel wage-earning women into the center of
their own labor reform movement by the 1890s.
Notes


7 Caroline Dall, "Woman's Right to Labor;" or, Low Wages and Hard Work: In Three Lectures, Delivered in Boston, November, 1859 (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Co, 1860), 5.

8 See "Incarnate Words: Nationalism, Nativism, and the Female Body in Maria Monk's Awful Disclosures" for a lengthier analysis of female iconography and American nationalism.

9 Mrs. Nemo, A Series of Appeals: or Lectures Addressed Not Behind A Curtain to One Unfortunate Man, but to All Men and Their Families (Albany: J. Munsell, 1863), 19.


12 Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, The Silent Partner (1871; rpt., New York: The Feminist Press, 1983), 34. All further references will be to this edition.
"Queer Trimmings and Limp Hats": Dressing, Cross-Dressing, and Women's Suffrage in Blake's *Fettered For Life* 

Women "find themselves voiceless in the making of the laws . . . having large interests at stake, they find their tongues tied and their hands fettered"  

--Mark Twain, *Europe and Elsewhere* (1873) 

"the [woman's] gown . . . seems to fetter, in adamantine chains, every circle and rank of society"  

--Thomas Branagan, *The Excellency of the Female Character* (1807) 

As the title of her 1874 suffrage novel *Fettered For Life* suggests, Lillie Devereux Blake relies on the rhetoric of dress reformers as well as suffrage activists in order to persuade her readers that, as Mark Twain and equal rights advocates phrase it, women's tongues must be untied and their political voices heard. In so doing Blake appropriates the tactics of the nineteenth-century suffrage movement as a whole. In his sartorial history entitled *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930) J. C. Flugel states that there is traditionally a "correspondence between conventionality in dress and in politics," and then concludes that "clothes reform tends to receive support from the generally rebellious, as a welcome symbolic expression of revolt."2 Certainly as nineteenth-century American women's dress increasingly came to symbolize "the sexual stereotypes which had become established . . . with the rise of bourgeois" society,3 the woman's suffrage movement argued with growing vehemence that women's clothing typified and even
reinforced women's political voicelessness. Contending that women's
dress so amplified their sexuality that it finally obscured the vital
differences between sexually pure and impure women, dress reform
and suffrage advocates attacked the female "passionlessness" that
defined bourgeois femininity in order to agitate for change.4
According to both reformers and the confessional accounts of many
women, the only effective way to protect women's sexual purity was
to adopt dress that obscured one's womanhood altogether. The
increasing frequency with which newspapers, "from 1850 on . . .
reported the death of men who turned out to be women"5 and the
numerous autobiographical accounts of women who cross-dressed in
order to serve as soldiers in the Civil War attest to the public's
growing fascination with women who, defying the psychological and
sartorial confines of bourgeois femininity, managed to maintain their
sexual purity while interacting with men as equals.

Rather than "discovering" the woman transvestite's sexual
inversion as they claim, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century
sexologists extend and reconfigure these mid nineteenth-century
accounts of and by women cross-dressers in order to neutralize the
increasing political power of the woman's suffrage movement.
Revising Victorian reformers' contention that "the tendency . . . to
adopt male attire"6 denotes women's purity, sexologists claim instead
that it indicates woman's sexual inversion or impurity. They proceed
to attack "the modern movement of emancipation" by arguing that if
not "directly the cause of sexual inversion," women's suffrage at the
very least "develop[s] the germs of it" (Studies, 99). Claiming that
women who have "been taught independence of men" tend "to carry
this independence still further and . . . find love where they find work" \textit{(Studies, 100)}, Havelock Ellis and other sexologists effectively transform the cross-dressing suffragette into what cultural historians call "a sexual anomaly and a political pariah."\textsuperscript{7}

Yet, in their assessments of the regressive impact of sexology on woman's suffrage, these same scholars not only accept sexologists' claim to have "discovered" the sexual invert; they also base their accounts of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movements on the distinctions drawn by sexologists between Victorian and modern women's sexual consciousness. Thus they maintain that nineteenth-century women were politically reliant on the innate "sexual purity and sacrifice" \textit{(Disorderly, 295)} that defined bourgeois women's femininity, and then conclude that modernist women have broken entirely with the tradition of their Victorian predecessors by deploying for political ends the subversive sexuality first ascribed to them by sexologists.

An analysis of \textit{Fettered For Life}, however, exposes as constructions both the political rhetorics of women's purity and impurity and the critical paradigms that depend upon and reinforce them. Poised between two supposedly distinct ideological eras, Blake's text deconstructs the oppositions between nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movements that scholars have promulgated in order to differentiate more clearly between the two. Groundbreaking in its depiction of a woman cross-dresser who is a sexually as well as politically subversive proponent of women's suffrage, Blake's text complicates nineteenth-century reformers' paradigms of the cross-dresser's irreproachable purity and so refutes
the scholarly contention that the socially and sexually seditious woman transvestite is a creation of early twentieth-century modernism. In addition Blake depicts the debilitating effect of feminine clothing on women's sexual and social lives. Arguing that their existing dress ensures women's sexual victimization, *Fettered For Life* employs reformers' accounts of women's dress as part of its political rhetoric and so revises the critical conviction that bourgeois women so clad could ever depend on the social power inhering in their purity for their political activism. When we analyze nineteenth-century portrayals of women's clothing and transvestitism, we see clearly that Victorian women's political power had more complex and sexually charged roots than we previously have realized. Through a political polemic that is structured by and also complicates nineteenth-century descriptions of women's dressing and cross-dressing, Blake's text forces us to revise our account of nineteenth-century suffrage activism.

"Capricious, Contagious, and Contaminating": Women's Dress

Throughout the nineteenth century writers argue that women's clothing, if "incorrectly" worn, obscures the passionlessness from which bourgeois women derive much of their power and thereby endangers the entire social structure. Thomas Branagan's commentary on women's dress in *The Excellency of the Female Character* (1807) most succinctly describes how much feminine dress, because it is "inappropriate," erases the sexual distinctions between bourgeois and working women that it ought properly to
highlight. Asserting that "there is nothing in nature more capricious, contagious, and, at the same time, contaminating, than fashion,"8 Branagan details the sexual confusion that men experience when women dress improperly. Because "ladies high in estimation" become "slaves" to the "most obscene and indecent" fashions, they strut "through the streets, with the disgraceful and obscene appearances peculiar to lewd women" (14). Unable to determine from women's dress their class and sexual status, men inadvertently make sexual advances to "many virtuous and . . . respectable ladies" (18). With "dress more indecent than the vilest prostitutes" many pure women "not only . . . entice, but almost force the male of ardent passions to acts of violence, as well as to acts of seduction" (18). According to Branagan social and sexual order can be restored only by clearly differentiating those women who can be sexually victimized from those women who cannot. And so he demands that "laws . . . be enacted to keep female fashions within the laws of decency; and to fix the distinction between lewd and virtuous women" (18). While Branagan argues that women's dress provokes men's "uncontrollable" acts of sexual violence, Dr. Mary Walker focuses on the effect of women's clothing on women's own sexual drives. A prominent woman physician who cross-dressed for most of her life, Walker contends in Unmasked, or The Science of Immortality (1878) that women's clothing keeps women "unnaturally excited, or in a condition to be easily excited sexually."9 And so throughout the century reformers insist that, by sexually provoking men and exciting women, women's fashions threaten the sexual purity of the bourgeois women who wear it.
Joining in the debate, suffrage advocates argue that the sexual vulnerability that women experience because of their dress is symptomatic of the more pervasive inequality that their clothing both produces and enforces. In *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (1838) Sarah Grimke asserts that women's dress plays a pivotal role in sustaining women's political inequity: "I do believe one of the chief obstacles in the way of woman's elevation to the same platform of human rights . . . with her brother . . . is her love of dress. . . . so long as we submit to be dressed like dolls, we never can rise to the station of duty . . . from which [men] desire to exclude us."\(^{10}\) In his 1855 correspondence with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gerrit Smith concurs that equality will never be achieved unless every "woman attire[s] her person fitly for the whole battle of life" which "she is bound to fight as man is."\(^{11}\) Commenting on the "radical revolution in female costume made in America"\(^{12}\) which Smith's daughter initiated with her bloomer, Mrs. Oliphant, in her 1879 manual *Dress*, bemoans the physical as well as political restrictions enforced by women's clothes. Admitting that "the gown of the present day . . . has drawbacks," she asserts that "the bondage of this dress at times reaches . . . the extravagance of preventing movement altogether, so that a lady can hardly walk and can [only] with difficulty get up stairs" (70). The "whole female race," because it is "more or less tied into narrow bags," becomes a "painful spectacle" (73) in need of liberation. In her autobiography Elizabeth Cady Stanton notes that it was the "difficulty" of climbing upstairs "with flowing robes," compared with "the ease and grace" with which her bloomer-clad
cousin ascends the stairs, holding "a lamp in one hand and a baby in the other," that convinced her of the need for dress reform.\(^{13}\)

The bloomers, or "emancipated garments," that became a powerful symbol of women's desire for equality also encouraged some women to consider adopting complete male disguise in order to experience greater physical freedom and sexual invulnerability.\(^{14}\) The two years that Stanton spent in bloomers convinced her that mannish clothing offered "incredible freedom" (201) to its wearers. A "woman is terribly cramped and crippled in her present style of dress," she concluded, and therefore, "should dress just like a man [to] enjoy entire freedom" (Pedestal, 129). Invoking the ability of "the distinguished French woman, George Sand," "to see life" and to "[speak] at political meetings" (129), Stanton wonders whether transvestitism might not offer American women greater physical and sexual freedom as well. She speculates that, "in male attire, we could travel by land or sea, [and] go through all the streets and lanes of our cities and town by night and day . . . without fear of insult, or the least sacrifice of decency or virtue" (129). Concluding that "if nature has not made the sex so clearly defined as to be seen through any disguise, why should we make the difference so striking?" (129), Stanton implies that because transvestitism can succeed it should succeed.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's interest in the sexual and physical freedom that transvestitism offers American women reflected a more general fascination in America with the figure of the cross-dressing woman adventurer. Menie Muriel Dowie's nostalgic reflections on the woman cross-dresser in Women Adventurers
(1893) suggest the enduring importance of the transvestite to the nation's fantasies about the illicit power of its women. Bemoaning the way that "women who step out of the ranks to-day [sic] and go forth adventuring, do it all in the cold seriousness of skirts," in short "do it as women . . . with . . . some rather fine purpose"15 in view, Dowie imagines how the woman "adventurer" of the mid nineteenth century might offer an appealing alternative for subversive activism. "The picturesqueness" of the woman adventurer's appearance and "the dashing poetry of her swagger" fascinate Dowie, who confesses that "the fine female blusterers's" effectiveness results from her "being ever at masquerade" (xx). "Passing for a man most of the time," the woman adventurer exhibits her superior shrewdness by "imitating . . . his part or bearing" so successfully that she is never "discovered" (xx). Dowie looks forward to a day when women's clothing will "be neither help nor hindrance" and "adventures may be sought, life tasted and work done, without removal of a corset" (xxii). But until social and political equality are achieved, the woman adventurer who cross-dresses in order to assert herself in public life and politics will continue to embody women's fantasy of immediate and unimpeded activity in all aspects of American life.

The numerous accounts written by and about women cross-dressers during the nineteenth century both detail their adventures and specify the sexual purity that passing as men ensures. For example, in his 1866 biography of Deborah Sampson entitled The Female Review, John Vinton claims that Sampson joined the Revolutionary army in disguise in order to protect the sexual purity of America's female population. Upon learning "that many of her sex
were either ravished, or deluded to sacrifice their chastity," Sampson experiences "sensations to which she had hitherto been unaccustomed."16 Because she cross-dresses in order to preserve the passionlessness of her American sisters, Sampson's adoption of male clothes reinforces, rather than calls into question, her own femininity. According to Vinton "prudence . . . appeared in her plain, but neat attire . . . delicacy trimmed her dislocated hair; and virtue wreathed her" as she "dressed herself in a handsome suit of man's apparel" (115). By successfully passing as a soldier, she protects women without endangering her own purity. And so, although she "mingl[es] constantly with men, day and night, in all their exercises, through so many months," she maintains "her virtue unsullied" (xxx). Even after her sex is discovered, she continues to cross-dress. As she puts it in her journal, she prefers her "regimentals, because in them I should be more safe from insult" (220). In his introduction to Women in Battle (1876), the editor of Loreta Velazquez's autobiographical account of her participation in the Civil War similarly asserts that despite her "exploits as a spy and an officer" she irreproachably maintained her "feminine qualities" of virtue.17

Though male disguise never endangers and often safeguards their heterosexual purity, women cross-dressers consistently acknowledge that their transvestitism satisfies unspecific but irresistible desires that flourish despite the mid-century feminine ideology of passionlessness. Once she hears of the endangered purity of American women, Deborah Sampson is "filled . . . with a kind of enthusiasm" (Female, 78) to adopt male disguise; but she later admits, according to Vinton, that enlisting "as a soldier" is the only
"method for gratifying the roving propensities which had now acquired full possession of her mind" (117). Asserting that "none . . . could take cognisance [sic] of the effusions of passion" that Sampson experienced "on assuming her new garb" (126), Vinton concludes that while "there is no denying that she felt the impulse of patriotism, . . . this seems not to have been the principal motive" (117) behind her decision to cross-dress. In her Women in Battle (1876) Loreta Velazquez in turn claims that "the principal motive" behind her own "overmastering desire . . . to assume the dress of the other sex" is "enjoyment" (19). Yet immediately adding "if I can designate my peculiar emotions by such a word" (20), Velazquez registers the inability of existing linguistic codes to describe her feelings accurately. Though finally unable to find language that articulates her urges, she nonetheless specifies their intensity, writing, "ridicule, as well as danger, was what I resolved to brave when putting on male attire, and I really dreaded it less than I did my own heart burnings" (16) in the event of remaining in women's clothes.

The compelling but unspecifiable desires that lead women to cross-dress often lead to the intimate female relations that sexologists would later identify as sexually inverted. "Received everywhere as a blithe, handsome, and agreeable young gentleman" (Female, 129), Sampson inspires a "giddy passion" (191) in a young woman. Thinking that she is in love with a man, Miss P- agrees to consummate their relationship, and they finally become "mutually and tenderly attached" by "reciprocating their love amidst the dews of dawn" (191). According to Vinton, women readers likewise are
susceptible to Sampson's "dazzling enchantments" and so are "ready
to yield the pride and ornament of [their] sex" (243) to her. Yet
because physical intimacy between women must necessarily be
"platonic," the woman reader and Miss P- who engage in sexual
relations with Sampson, whether in "fact" or in fantasy, nevertheless
"preserve inviolate . . . [their] virginity" (243). Although Miss P-
may be fooled by Sampson's male attire into a same-sex liaison,
Sampson's homoerotic desires prove to be more overt. While
insisting that "sickness had abated [Sampson's] acuteness for . . .
love," Vinton nonetheless admits that Sampson "doubtless embraced
the celestial maid and could not but participate in the genial warmth
of [the] passion" (198). Later, when her "irresistible attraction"
draws her "again to the presence of the amiable Miss P-" (213),
rather than "confess[ing] to her who and what I was," Sampson
instead resumes their relations, and so the "two lovers [part], more . .
. constant than" ever (214). The homoerotic "passion" that sexologists
would clearly identify as sexually inverted by the early twentieth
century is described as "laudable" (215) by Sampson's biographer.
Thus because the nineteenth-century woman's "correspondence with
her sister sex" is characterized by its "purity" and "animal love, on
her part," is imagined to be "out of the question" (225), the woman
cross-dresser has the authority to intervene in the political and
public life from which she would be marginalized by the twentieth-
century medical discourse of sexual inversion.

In addition to sartorial disguise, voice both identifies
nineteenth-century women cross-dressers and enhances their ability
to intercede effectively in politics. In Women in Battle (1876) Loreta
Velazquez argues that many women's speech can pass for male because "so many men have weak and feminine voices" (5). Thus even a woman with "a very high-pitched voice need have very little fear" of discovery, "provided the clothing is put on right . . . and the disguise in other respects is well-arranged" (5). Nevertheless the ease with which the voices of women transvestites pass as male indicates considerable vocal capability. Equipped with only her "exquisite though uncultivated voice, the soft, winning notes of which were as free and unrestrained as one of her prairie birds,"¹⁸ Pauline Cushman is able to begin a "battle with [the] great world" (35) that leads her quickly into the Civil War. Heeding her "little yet all powerful inner voice" (67), Cushman cross-dresses in order to join the Union army and then proceeds to talk people into relating vital information. Deborah Sampson began as a child to make "herself mistress of pronunciation and sentences" by "listen[ing] to everyone . . . [who] read[s] and speak[s] with propriety" (Female, 156). Eventually her "deliberate speech" and "firm articulation" (134) make her seem like a "masculine and serene," rather than an "effeminate" (134) man. In Unsexed; or, The Female Soldier (1864) Emma E. Edmonds describes the various "tone[s] of voice"¹⁹ that she assumes as she changes male disguises in order to glean information from the rebels. In the process, she becomes quick to detect other women's vocal and sartorial passing as well. Hearing "in the tone and voice" of a disguised woman "something" that makes Edmonds "look more closely at the face of the speaker" (271), she discovers another cross-dressed woman spy and so wins accolades on the battlefield.
Yet sexologists argue that women's vocal masquerade, like their cross-dressing, is a definitive sign of the woman transvestite's sexual inversion. For Havelock Ellis, sexually inverted women not only "tend to adopt male attire" (Studies, 95), but also to imitate male modes of speech. Ellis concurs with Richard Von Krafft-Ebing's claim in Psychopathia Sexualis (1893) that the woman invert's "rough, deep voice . . . betray[s] rather the man than the woman."20 Having asserted that "the direct speech, the inflections of the voice" suggest women who "ought to have been men" (Studies, 96), Ellis goes on to argue that the difference in "tone of voice" is due to "anatomical modification" and then to cite the work of a scientist who "examined the larynx of twenty three inverted women, and found in several a very decidedly masculine type of larynx" (Studies, 97). By claiming that the sexually inverted transvestite can be identified by tonal and even anatomical signs of masculinity, sexologists reinforce the more general medical discourse designed to discredit women suffrage advocates. According to Dr. William Lee Howard, for example, writing in the New York Medical Journal (1900), women who advocate reform based on "masculine ideas of independence" inevitably speak with a "pseudo-virile voice."21 Thus by reconfiguring the vocal and sartorial masquerade of many of the most adventurous female reformers of the nineteenth-century into signs of their sexual inversion, sexologists helped to silence the political voices of dissenting women.

In Fettered For Life Lillie Devereux Blake sought to counteract suffrage advocates' increasing marginalization, first, by insisting that it is the femininity, rather than the masculinity, of women's dress
that is responsible for the sexual impurity that results in their political voicelessness, and, second, by creating a cross-dresser who combines sexologists' ideas with nineteenth-century readers' thoughts about the woman transvestite. Published four years after Westphal "first put the study of sexual inversion on an assured scientific basis" with his "detailed history of a young woman who . . . was sexually inverted [and] liked to dress as a boy" (Studies, 25), Blake's text calls into question emerging sexological distinctions between the nineteenth-century pure "woman adventurer" and the twentieth-century inverted "political virago" by showing the similarities between the two. By placing the woman sexual invert within the context of Victorian cross-dressing, Blake makes her recognizable to readers and so temporarily neutralizes sexologists' attempts to contain her political power. Recovering the sexually subversive woman cross-dresser as an effective political tool for the suffrage movement, Blake depicts the transvestite as using the power that continues to inhere in her voice in order to speak for women whose political and personal voicelessness is in turn signified and enforced by their dress. While Blake modifies nineteenth-century descriptions of the politically active cross-dresser, she employs unaltered dress reformers' rhetoric in her advocacy of women's rights. Throughout Fettered For Life Blake consistently uses feminine clothing in order to do three things: to gauge the extremity of women's political and domestic voicelessness; to spotlight the sexual vulnerability women suffer because of that lack of voice; and, finally, to track one woman's gradual acquisition of a voice powerful enough to articulate her own sexual and social rights. By insisting
that it is women's dressing rather than cross-dressing that results in both their sexual impurity and their silence, and by imagining a woman transvestite who combines Victorian with sexological ideology, Blake challenges sexologists' equation of cross-dressing with sexual "deviance." And in so doing, she alters our sense that the nineteenth-century suffrage movement's politics depend exclusively on the sexual purity of its bourgeois members.

"Stopping Their Talk"

In agitating for women's voting rights Blake, in *Fettered For Life*, exploits the terms in which nineteenth-century woman's suffrage is couched. She equates women's desire to gain the vote with their desire to gain the use of their voices, and she presents women's political silencing as indicative of a more general refusal to hear women's speech. In the act of voting men are characterized by Blake as exerting a political agency that is signified and embellished by their "discordant songs, shouted words, and coarse laughter."22 While "profess[ing] to honor [women's] goodness and purity," the government "refuses [women] all voice" (68), because, as the prominent suffrage activist and doctor Mrs. D'Arcy claims, the otherwise "sensible people" that the government represents "seem to think that if we can vote, we shall all grow loud-voiced, . . . coarse and masculine" (258). Convinced that denying political voice to women ensures that their outlook and elocution will remain "gentler, purer, and more religious than [men's]" (258), policy makers fail to acknowledge the more pervasive vocal aberrations that result from
the suppression of women's political articulations. Asserting "that the agitation of woman suffrage is only the work of a few discontented souls," they fail to "understand that the demand for political equality is but one of the public utterances of a great dumb cry, that goes up from millions of" women (54).

The "lack of voice" that characterizes women's political status results in their voicelessness even in the homes that are supposed to be their domain. Indeed, men's tyrannical control over women's speech in the home emerges as the novel's primary justification for giving women the vote. Claiming that "men don't mind what wimmin [sic] folks say [because] they don't go to 'lection" (31), the washerwoman Biddy articulates the domestic impotence produced by political voicelessness. Though initially a respectful son to Biddy, Pat changes when he is old enough to vote because he understands that as a male he can enforce in the home the silencing of the female voice that he enacts in the voting booth. Thus Biddy complains that Pat refuses to acknowledge the importance of her words by saying "Don't ye be a talkin', mither . . . Yer'e only a woman" (30). Marital relations likewise replicate the power inequities produced by women's political voicelessness. Mr. Moulder feels authorized to speak to his wife in a "loud, angry voice" (82) because he is confident that he will encounter no vocal resistance. His sense of unchecked vocal supremacy becomes a model of gender relations for his son who, by the early age of five, has learned that he is entitled to tell his sister to "hold your tongue" (289). When Mr. Bludgett enforces his domestic supremacy by demanding his wife's silence, Mrs. Bludgett capitulates by saying, "in a trembling voice . . . [that] was
very plaintive," that she "should not have the same right to ask [Mr. Bludgett] questions, that he has to ask" her because "he's a man" and therefore entitled to "use hard words" (19). Bludgett enforces his "words," consisting of "an oath . . . ending with a vile word" (61), by physically abusing his wife. Enraged by his wife's ability to provoke remorse for a murder that he committed and she witnessed, he becomes "absolutely savage" (374) and beats her in an attempt to stop her "sniveling" and "whining" (375). Determined to silence her voice as it pleads for mercy, he stamps "his heavy boot-heel on [her] helpless mouth" (379), and commits a second murder in his attempt to quiet his guilt over the first.

Reassured by women's political voicelessness, Judge Swinton, the most politically powerful and violently misogynistic man in Blake's novel, asserts his corrupt authority by disfiguring the mouth of a woman named Rhoda and then attempting to silence her account of that event. Though otherwise attractive, Rhoda's mouth is left "drawn and drooping, while the loss of two front teeth disfigure a set otherwise white and regular" (56). Both physical and sexual abuse create "a strange expression of gloomy longing . . . about her mouth, with the underlip caught beneath the two teeth that stood each side the vacant space in the centre" (90). The experiences that epitomize in the mutilation of Rhoda's mouth also shape the words she produces with it. She becomes well-known for having "a sharp tongue and a sort of ready wit, that [are] at once fascinating and repellant [sic]" (120). Her verbal canniness equips her to defend herself against the subsequent demands of her abuser. With a "sneering emphasis" to her "fierce words" Rhoda keeps Swinton's
account of their affair from becoming the dominant narrative. Rejecting his attempt to bribe her into "holding her tongue" about his abuse, Rhoda provides indisputable evidence of the gravity of his crime when, "pointing quickly to her mutilated mouth," she demands, "'Do you think I have forgotten the coward blow that has disfigured me for life?" (125). While Rhoda is able to defend her account against Swinton's attempt to suppress it, however, the narrator insists that women's more general "voicelessness" is responsible for the sexual victimage to which Rhoda's mouth and the words it produces bear witness. We must "look . . . at poor Rhoda," the narrator asserts, mindful that, "if she were a voter, with influence over voters, she would be treated very differently by men" (257). Without the means to seek redress for the sexual and physical abuse that she has suffered, Rhoda is forced to trade in the male sexuality that appalls and threatens her by working in a saloon where she is compelled to wear dresses "cut low" for the pleasure of male customers who remain "none the worse for saying and doing what stamped her . . . with infamy" (121).

In Blake's account it is the clothing that women wear that signals the extent to which they are deprived of personal as well as political voice. Forced to come to work dressed "low" because her bare shoulders "are worth a dollar a night to" the owner, one of Rhoda's friends unsuccessfully tries to "wear just a little scarf round [her] throat" (58) because it is sore. Told that she "can't come covered up like an old woman" (58), the woman exposes her attractive neck until she is seized "with a fit of coughing" and dies from a broken blood vessel. Mrs. Bludgett's clothing likewise makes
explicit the extent of the abuse that she suffers at the hands of her husband. The "rent" visible in her "dingy black alpaca" (165) metonymically visualizes the violence done to her flesh by Mr. Bludgett. While Mrs. Moulder's hat is merely last year's style and missing a bow, Mrs. Bludgett's headgear rises "very high over her forehead in some absurd past fashion, making her pale face look paler in contrast with the yellow and red roses which filled the space above her scanty hair" (166). Though the relative oppressiveness of women's domestic conditions is gauged by the state of the clothing they wear, Mrs. Bludgett's deteriorating attire signals her impending dissolution. Usually "shabby and dirty" (14), Mrs. Bludgett's costume, on her final house call, is particularly slothful: "shabbily dressed, . . . her wonderful bonnet was on one side; her shawl was dragged up over one shoulder; [and] her dress . . . showed traces of street mud (218). The displaced bonnet and shawl anticipate the bodily dislocations she is about to suffer, while the splashes of mud on her skirt become metonymic for the "spurt[ing] . . . blood [that] drop[s] over her pallid face" (375) when her mouth finally is destroyed by her husband's effort to stop its talk.

Women's dress, in addition to reiterating their private voicelessness, also, from girlhood, polices them into accepting their own silencing. When Mrs. D'Arcy visits a girls' school and discovers an abundance of "pretty delicate creatures" with "transparent complexions [that] indicate a total lack of vitality" (74), she attributes their physical lassitude to the dress which they are compelled to wear. Cloaked in "dainty white frocks" that are "the extreme of the latest fashion," their "slender figures" already "show the impress of
the corset that [will] mould [sic] [their] pliant forms into stylish smallness of waist" (74). Angered by the physical distortions required by stylish women's clothing, Mrs. D'Arcy wants "to strip off the oppressive finery, and the stifling steel-clasped garments" and to replace them with "plain, serviceable frocks" (74) that will allow the girls the freedom of motion requisite to feminine health. Likening America's education of women to the Chinese regimen for disciplining them, Mrs. D'Arcy argues that "a fashionable training so hampers a woman's body and mind that one can no more expect freedom of action [in American women] . . . than one can expect the Chinese ladies with their distorted feet to walk" unhindered (161).^23

Flora Livingston's career exemplifies the role that such sartorial constraint plays in women's unavoidable acceptance of vocal and sexual oppression. Flora reveals the extent to which her traditionally aristocratic upbringing has influenced her attitudes regarding femininity and dress, when she admits that she expected Mrs. D'Arcy to "be old-maidish, and to wear spectacles and a very short dress" (70) because of her career and suffrage work. Swayed by "conventional caricatures of strong-minded women" (70), Flora is as incapable of altering her preconceptions regarding nontraditional women as she is of changing her own mode of dress. "Attired in the most tasteful of walking suits" (70), Flora appears to be a model of femininity to Ferdinand Le Roy, the most eligible bachelor in New York. Though Flora does not want to marry Le Roy, her father insists that she act as "a true woman" (101). In an effort to elicit Flora's cooperation in his plans for her marriage, Mr. Livingston gives her money "to buy a new dress" for a ball and thereby ensures that "a
match will . . . result" (103). In her toilette of silk and lace, Flora presents a picture of "dainty loveliness" (126) that Le Roy finds irresistible. Le Roy's marriage proposal and his refusal to hear her response to it initiates the oppressive silencing that Flora will suffer in their marriage. While Flora remains "passive" as Le Roy forces a kiss of acquiescence from her, she experiences "a passionate revolt . . . wholly impossible to put into words" (128). Though incapable of articulating her feelings of sexual revulsion, Ferdinand's kiss nonetheless lies "in her memory as a mark of servitude" (147). The mouth from which Ferdinand forces a kiss becomes the gauge of the resulting sexual revulsion that Flora cannot vocalize. Her "finely formed" mouth, while initially evidencing "great possibilities of passion" (39), becomes distorted. The force that Le Roy uses in their first sexual encounter proves characteristic and produces "around [Flora's] mouth . . . a shade of disgust" (262). She thus utters her marriage vows with "a shade of blueness around [her] mouth" and with "lips parted as if in some mute entreaty" (245).

Invested in ignoring Flora's feelings and her attempts to "put them into words," her family and fiance strategically assume that Flora's well-being is produced by the clothes she wears. Asking "Are you pale or is it your dress?" (230), Le Roy reads the pallor produced by Flora's disgust for him as the effect of her clothing. By suggesting that she "wear pink, like Maud" (230), Le Roy reminds Flora of the contingency of her value to him and the importance of maintaining that value by dressing to advantage. Able to signify her domestic and sexual resistance only with "piteous moans" and "cries of utter anguish" (241), Flora nonetheless acquiesces to her husband's
sartorial demands. "Dressed in a costume of green silk in several shades; a French dress, wonderful in elaborate beauty of design" Flora appears "to the casual observer" to be "the fortunate wife of a wealthy man" (284). In an attempt to overcome the despair produced by the gap between her public appearance and private condition Flora turns to her writing. Yet once again her speech is stymied by Ferdinand who, in the act of tearing up her poetry, elicits from Flora "a cry as if he had been tearing her own flesh" (333). On her deathbed Flora cites her unhappy marriage as the cause of her impending death, but must still fight her mother's attempt to stifle her speech. Overriding Mrs. Livingston's demand that she not speak "such wild words [because] the doctor has forbidden your talking much," Flora asserts that "they are not wild words, and it will not hurt me to talk now" (351). Yet the effort to voice her domestic unhappiness and sexual disgust for Ferdinand, while finally successful, costs her her life.

"The Caricature That Lurks in Clothes"²⁴

By shedding women's clothing and the vocal and sexual constraints that it enforces, Frank Heywood is able to use his own voice to defend women against male oppression. ²⁵ Successfully passing as a man to both fictional and reading audiences, Frank moves through all parts of New York collecting stories for the Trumpeter. Acting in the capacity of reporter to and representative of the public, Frank uses the public voice to which his transvestitism gives him access in order to protect the women he encounters on the
streets and to curb the actions of men who view those women, because of their personal and political voicelessness, as sexual prey. Mrs. D'Arcy asserts that the "two great professions" open to women are "medicine and journalism" (64). But since one is held by a matron and the other by a cross-dresser, neither seems open to women who traditionally have the greatest sexual appeal to men. When Frank finally reveals her sexual identity at the end of the novel, she justifies her decision to cross dress by claiming that, because she is "a very good-looking girl," she encountered, when she first arrived in New York wearing women's clothing, persistent persecution from men. Realizing that her "beauty" was hindering her job search, Frank buys "a suit of boy's clothes" (366) and experiences the physical, emotional, and economic freedom inhering in men's garments. Suddenly able to "move untrammeled" in public, Frank visits "places and scenes" which she admits she "could not have visited in the garb of my sex" (367). The greater mobility that Frank gains because of men's clothes enables her to report and so police acts of sexism that occur outside of the public's surveillance. The compatibility between Frank's journalistic and feminist projects, combined with an account she reads "of a physician . . . who died and was discovered to be a woman" (366), result in Frank's determination to make her masquerade permanent. Initially appearing in the text as "a good-looking young man, apparently about twenty-five, with . . . a chestnut moustache, shading a mouth that, but for this, would have been effeminate" (10), Frank first uses his authority as vocalizer of news stories to protect the ill clad saloon girls detained and freezing in the local jail. Seeing that they "had
only light shawls and cloaks," Frank tells the women's jailer, in a voice that "was grand to hear," that if they aren't "made warm and comfortable, he'd put an item in the paper about it" (58).

While Frank defends women with a speech empowered by both his vocal and sartorial masquerade, his extended interactions with Laura Stanley allow him to enjoy fully the physical adventure and sexual invulnerability that characterize the nineteenth-century cross-dresser's experience, according to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Deborah Sampson. Because of her father's domestic tyranny Laura decides to leave her affluent home and support herself in the city. Yet Laura's dress and speech make her immediately subject to the same oppressive male authority that she is attempting to allude. Arriving after nightfall without a place to stay, Laura is accosted by men from whom she requests help and finally finds refuge at the local police station. Rounded up with the prisoners, Laura inadvertently finds herself before Judge Swinton who, because of the quality of her clothing and speech, marks her out as his next sexual victim. Though grouped with "miserable prisoners [who] shiver in their wretched garments," Laura, "neatly, but very plainly dressed," stands out from the other women who are "gaudily habited" (7). While her dress is "simple," "there [is] an indescribable something in the arrangement of the luxuriant brown hair, in the neat white ruffle at the throat, in the look of the pretty traveling satchel which she carried, that indicated refinement" (8). When asked to account for her homelessness, Laura's "accent, her modes of expression, the tones of her voice" likewise identify her as "an educated lady" and so undermine her claim that she is a domestic laborer. The sartorial
and linguistic traces of refinement both pique Swinton's sexual interest and suggest to him that he can gratify it. Identifying Laura as an abandoned and therefore defenseless woman, Swinton plots to abduct her. After Frank knocks him down and escapes with Laura, the judge attempts to win Laura through coercion rather than compulsion. Judge Swinton both explains and apologizes for his criminal behavior by telling Laura that "your dress was so plain that I was deceived as to your real rank" (88). Frank saves Laura from a second abduction by waylaying and entering the carriage in which she is confined. Opening the carriage door in the full expectation of seeing "a pale and swooning girl," the judge is instead face to face with "Frank Heywood's alert figure" (190). Announcing himself as "a reporter for the New York Trumpeter," Frank threatens to "make an item of this for the paper if you like, Judge" (190). Thus by brashly replacing the silence of the drugged woman with the voice of the Trumpeter, Frank enjoys the physical and sexual freedom of his disguise while defending Laura's sexual purity.

During the friendship that subsequently flourishes, Frank protects Laura not only by wielding the public voice to which his vocal and sartorial passing gives him access but by teaching her how to control her own voice in order to speak with authority. Sensitive to the fact that it is his "clear, young voice" (22) that enables Frank to "resent" the judge's rude and insolent speech for her, Laura becomes "strangely fascinated" both with the range of Frank's conversation and with "the tones of his low musical voice" (48). "Confiding in him in a way that surprised her" (48), Laura admits to her own impulses to join in "the cry [of rage] that has gone up from so many women"
(64). Listening to Frank speak makes Laura realize that she is often "less cautious in her utterances than [is] wise" (18). With increasing self-consciousness she admits, "I am so apt, in arguments . . . to lose my temper, and say sharp things, instead of really answering objections" (289). Because they "think [Laura] would know what to say" (247), her female students ask her to present to the schoolmaster their petition to give their own address on the last day of school. Though she persuasively presents facts to get his endorsement of the plan, the schoolmaster's sexism enrages Laura whose "quick temper" leads her to "imprudent speech" (251) and thus causes the students' plan to be vetoed. Remorseful as she later describes the situation, Laura admits that she "was dreadfully imprudent [and] . . . ought not to have spoken" (254) so rashly. Gradually attuning herself to her own rhetorical shortcomings, Laura becomes increasingly able to adjust the manner in which she speaks to her audience. After a heated discussion about suffrage Laura makes sure that she has not alienated her listener by asking if "you will think me terribly fierce, Mr. Bradford, to be talking so strongly on this subject" (67).

Laura's increased ability to speak effectively safeguards her from the kind of oppressive marriage to which her more vocally timid friend Flora is condemned. While Guy Bradford is "full of unspoken . . . passion" (245) for Laura and "long[s] to testify his sympathy in words" (52), his actual speech does not further his suit. Guy tries to assert his proprietorship over Laura by invoking the repressive dress codes against which women like Frank and Mrs. D'Arcy so actively struggle. Guy admits to Laura in a "tone [that] was
somewhat imperious" (293) that he "only wish[es] you could wear a veil; that is, provided you took it off for me" (206). While Guy, "manlike . . . [thinks] of nothing . . . but the passion that absorb[s] him" (282), Laura remains as disturbed by what Guy does not say as by what he does say. Simultaneously annoyed by both the content and vagueness of Guy's words and his expectation that they adequately communicate his feelings, Laura silences him by asserting that she "cannot make all sorts of admissions in reply to a few vague words" (283). When Guy finally does speak, his preemptive demand that Laura tell him where she spent her first night in New York causes her to silence and dismiss him. Laura's refusal to enter a relationship characterized by linguistic and sexual inequity forces Guy to rethink his attitudes and to realize that he needs "to pick his words" carefully if his wants a life with Laura. Admitting that he has no "right to ask" Laura for "a strict account of every act of her life" and that "in the sight of God, men and woman are equal" (378), Guy again attempts "to win from her own lips an answer to his question" (379). But this time he asks her to marry him without demanding an account of her sexual past and with a commitment to a relationship based on mutual trust in which both partners are "equals in all things" (379).

Laura's transformation of dress, as well as the vocal equity she achieves, signals the parity of her relationship with Guy. Though Flora attempts to alter Laura's "dreadful" hat when they first meet in New York, Laura asserts that her friend "can't make me stylish on any terms" (40). Laura's poverty, as much as her rural background, keep her from dressing fashionably. Because she refuses to rely on
others for clothing money, the state of her garments indicates her financial success. After working hard to support herself, Laura finally is able to "purchase for the first time in nearly a year, a new dress... tastefully made, the dark blue trimmings with which it was ornamented... giving the costume a tint and character" (279). Taking "unusual pains with her dress" (279), Laura, at the art opening honoring her work, appears not only as an attractive but as a financially independent young artist. She thus "acquires that indescribable air of style which had once been wanting in her appearance" (279) as much through her increasingly sophisticated aesthetic sensibilities as through her increasingly successful career. Armed with "a trunk containing a renovated wardrobe... the cost of which she had earned every penny" (362), Laura is able to look her best without sacrificing her economic autonomy. Indeed her stylish dressing signals the achievement rather than relinquishment of that autonomy.

While Frank and Laura's friendship resembles the intimate but platonic female relations of the nineteenth century in that it prepares Laura emotionally and psychologically for marriage, their intimacy also evidences the homoeroticism that sexologists argue characterizes the woman transvestite's inversion. Laura's latent preference for Frank and Frank's reluctance to step aside to Guy suggest that, in a culture typified and controlled by the violent, predatory behavior of its males, the fact "that women seem with special frequency to fall in love with disguised persons of their own sex" (Studies, 94) is not as "noteworthy" as Havelock Ellis would later have us believe. While Mrs. D'Arcy repeatedly places "a slight
emphasis on the word friend" (65) when speaking to Laura about Frank, Laura continues to find "very attractive . . . his handsome melancholy face" (48), with its "look . . . of perpetual unrest, of yearning" (10). Though Frank uses his voice to defend silenced women, it is his eyes, which shine "with a lustre that Laura had not seen in them before," that register his feeling for Laura. While admitting that he has "not enjoyed anything so much for a long time" (191), the satisfaction that Frank derives from keeping Laura from sexually aggressive men like Swinton evaporates as soon as Guy requests Laura's company. Saying "it is better so" as he looks on with "melancholy eyes" (143), Frank recognizes that he has no right to intervene in women's voluntary heterosexuality. Yet Frank fails to register Laura's own ambivalence about Guy's company. She is only "half glad of the exchange" of male escorts and is "haunted" by "the sad hungry look of [Frank's] mysterious eyes . . . for hours afterward" (143). Able to "read [Guy] like an open book" (196), Laura remains "half provoked" (282) by the "big honest fellow" (197). Thus it is much to Laura's "consternation" (197) that Frank announces that he is going away. As he embraces her and "touch[es] his lips to her cheek," "Laura never thought of resenting the action; indeed she was half minded to return the caress; Frank seemed so different from other men" (216). Categorically dismissing her abundant signs of interest, Frank sails with the "deep yearning" once again evident in the "gaze [of] his strange eyes" (222).

While Frank attributes Laura's attraction to the success of his transvestitism, it is Rhoda's discovery of his "true" sex that causes Frank to acknowledge the nature of women's attraction to one
another. After her sexual liaison with Swinton, Rhoda becomes attached to a working girl who she "love[s] . . . with the strength of a passionate nature, concentrating all its affections on one object" (271). Recognizing in Frank's protectiveness over Laura the kind of feeling that she has for Maggie, Rhoda alerts him when she uncovers Swinton's abduction plot. In the fervor of his desire to save Laura, Frank inadvertently reveals his "true" sex. "Fascinated strangely" as she watches Frank's "slender figure [and] . . . the movements of [his] slender fingers, as he tossed his papers into some sort of order," Rhoda's face, "pale with a strange wistfulness in her intense gaze," meets Frank's "deep mysterious . . . eyes" and causes him to start visibly as he confronts "in the eloquent earnestness of [her regard] a mute question" (169). It is not until they are both in danger of drowning, as they float in the ocean together holding onto a small piece of their sinking ship that Rhoda admits, "I know your secret" (277). Already determined to drown in order to ensure Frank's survival, Rhoda asks Frank, "Will you give me a kiss?" (277). As "their cold lips meet in a strange despairing embrace" (277) Frank recognizes both the same sex desires bound up in yet covered over by the intimacy of female relations and the unique access that his transvestitism gives him to articulating those desires.

Although momentarily "unable to frame a word" after his encounter with Rhoda, once Frank does regain his voice, he becomes committed to using that voice not only to speak for silenced women but to speak for himself. As the political spokesperson of voiceless women he continues to vote in elections, but he reacts to Rhoda's words and gesture by devoting his career to articulating publicly his
most radical views. In a concise statement of professional purpose Frank details to Laura the ideal relation between his own voice and the public voice to which his journalistic career gives him access: "I want to be editor-in-chief of some great journal, so that I can conduct it according to my own views, and make it the medium of my own thoughts . . . the experience has never yet been tried as I hope to try it" (301). Frank immediately puts his radical project into practice by confessing to Laura that, while he seems like a brother to her, if she could think of him as a "sister, it would [be] nearer the truth" (364). Though Frank thinks that Laura's interest depends upon the visibility of his maleness, Laura makes sense of her attraction by arguing that it is based rather upon Frank's underlying feminine consciousness. In a statement that simultaneously asserts and neutralizes her homoerotic attraction, Laura admits, "I thought you entirely different from any man. . . . I loved you . . . as I might have loved a woman" (365). The "hearty kiss" that Laura gives Frank upon learning that he is a woman signifies and reasserts the sexual innocence of women's bonds in nineteenth-century America, even as Westphal began "initially questioning" (Disorderly, 264) those bonds by focusing on the woman cross-dresser. Yet because the women's kiss precedes and so preempts the heterosexual kiss with which the novel closes, it, like Rhoda and Frank's earlier kiss, also acknowledges the subversive power of that emerging same sex desire.

As I have shown, Blake's Fettered For Life advocates women's suffrage by focusing on the illicit sexuality inherent in women's dressing and cross-dressing. In so doing it extends our
understanding of the strategies that nineteenth-century women used in order to achieve political voice. Revising the notion that Victorian women's political power depended on their greater "sexual purity" (264), Blake centers her suffrage rhetoric, first, on the sexual impurity that women experience because of the femininity of their dress; and, then, on the sexuality unacknowledged in nineteenth-century accounts of the woman cross-dresser. By incorporating early medical accounts of the sexually inverted transvestite into her depiction of the adventurous cross-dressing suffragette, Blake temporarily undermines the sexological "discovery" that would effectively silence equal rights advocates by the early twentieth century. Thus, as a revisionist account of the underpinnings of Victorian women's political activism, *Fettered For Life* creates an important segue between the supposedly divergent political strategies employed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movements, and in so doing complicates our critical paradigms of both.
Notes


Mrs. Oliphant, *Dress* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1879), 64.


Because successful transvestitism afforded immediate if subversive social equality many suffrage activists, frustrated by their exclusion from the suffrage amendment that their activism helped to pass in 1869, donned Elizabeth Smith Miller's bloomers and often experimented with garments that allowed them to pass as men.


22 Lillie Devereux Blake, *Fettered For Life; or, Lord and Master* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1874), 154. All further references will be to this edition.

23 Elizabeth Cady Stanton similarly comments that, after experiencing society's disapproval of her bloomers, "I have never wondered since that the Chinese women allow their daughters' feet to be encased in iron shoes . . . for great are the penalties of those who dare resist the behests of tyrant custom." *Eighty Years and More (1815-1897)*, 204.


25 The pronouns that I use to refer to Frank reflect his acknowledged gender in the text. Because Frank identifies himself as female only at the very end, pronoun shifts are minimal.
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