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Book History, Volume 6, 2003, pp. 57-93 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/bh.2004.0013](https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.2004.0013)

BOOK HISTORY



Volume 17
2014

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READING WITH A TENDER RAPTURE



Reveries of a Bachelor and
the Rhetoric of Detached Intimacy

Lisa Spiro

If you looked at an illustration of a nineteenth-century American family enjoying domestic comforts, a book would probably appear somewhere in the picture. As scholars studying the cultural functions of reading have argued, the book ranks as one of the most important instruments and symbols of domesticity. In the iconography of the home, the book represents taste, shared learning, and love. Consider, for instance, Figure 1, “Home.”

In this domestic tableau, a father relaxes with his newspaper and cigar, while a mother reads a large book, perhaps a primer or a Bible, with her three children. The mother points out a significant word or idea to the children, who look on attentively. One child even reaches out her hand, as if to touch on the same point and to connect with the mother. Instructing the children seems to be the work of the mother, but the family comes together around the act of reading, enjoying productive leisure, intimacy, and comfort.

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 2002 Early American Fiction conference in Charlottesville, Virginia. I would like to thank Jessica Feldman, Steve Railton, Marion Rust, Joseph Kett, Michelle Allen, Amanda French, Elizabeth Outka, June Griffin, Virginia Zimmerman, Bob Spiro, Richard Johnson, and the anonymous reviewers for *Book History* for helping me to shape the essay, as well as Barbara Ryan for generously providing me with a copy of her paper “... next to the Bible, it was the book.”

This drawing renders a scene that recurs throughout nineteenth-century domestic fiction. In novels such as Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* and Maria Cummins's *The Lamplighter*, family members and friends develop their love for and sympathy with each other by reading, at first together, then apart.¹ What begins as a close human relationship—the mother reinforcing lessons of Christian rectitude through conversation—is displaced into a textual relationship, as the book comes to represent the loving authority of the mother. As Richard Brodhead argues, domestic novels bring attention to the act of reading itself, treating it as “the nurture-centered home’s chief pastime, gathering point, and instrument of domestic instruction.”² According to Brodhead, the middle-class family embraced reading to teach the mutually reinforcing values of obedience and sentiment, or, in his terms, to inculcate “disciplinary intimacy,” discipline through love.

While Brodhead focuses on reading's disciplinary functions, other critics contend that reading in sentimental literature was escapist, luring readers away from an engagement with serious issues into an artificial view of the



Figure 1. “Home.”

world. Perhaps Ann Douglas most eloquently voices this position: “‘Reading’ in its new form was many things; among them it was an occupation for the unemployed, narcissistic self-education for those excluded from the harsh school of practical competition. Literary men of the cloth and middle-class women writers of the Victorian period knew from firsthand evidence that literature was functioning more and more as a form of leisure, a complicated mass dream-life in the busiest, most wide-awake society in the world.”³ According to Douglas, such reading fed a consumerist ethos in which Americans purchased mass-produced fantasies, placing greater value on what one owned rather than what one had made.

Both of these descriptions of reading assume that the typical reader is female, and both emphasize the power of an external force (whether domestic or consumer culture) over her. But what if we focus instead on someone outside the normal domestic circle? What if we examine how the unwed male reader was imagined in the nineteenth century? Consider, for example, Figure 2, “By a City Grate.”

In some ways, the two images are similar. Both show scenes of leisure set by the hearth, and both include an elegantly but comfortably dressed gentleman lounging over a cigar and looking over—or beyond—a text. But of course “By a City Grate” lacks elements crucial to the conventional image of domestic intimacy: wife and children. Instead of portraying a contented family sharing in the purposeful project of learning, “By a City Grate” shows a solitary man absorbed in thought. While the first illustration projects a sense of warmth, calm, and edification, in the second a shadow hovers about the thinker, suggesting his melancholy mood. Books are scattered on his table as if he has just thrown them aside, and a letter rests in his lap; but the reclining figure focuses on something else, something to which the viewer has no access. In reading the letter, he seems to have become distracted from the parlor before him and been transported into a private dream world, a world elsewhere. While the former image portrays a relationship of family harmony centered on the book, the latter suggests a dream relationship, as the man turns his thoughts from the letter to something not quite visible, but still powerfully moving. Although the dreamer has stopped reading, the letter seems to have sparked an act of creation, perhaps an attempt to reach, through the imagination, the sender of the letter.

As incisive as both the disciplinary and the escapist descriptions of reading are, they ignore the ways in which reading relies upon distance as well as identification, and how distance leads to desire and imaginative power. Moreover, both theories deny readers any self-consciousness and instead view them as passive pawns in the reading process.⁴ In contrast, “By a City Grate” represents a mode of reading and relating to the world that I



Figure 2. "By a City Grate."

call detached intimacy, in which the reader, though swept over by feeling, still keeps fantasy at arm's length, wrapped up between the boards of a book. According to the conventional view of escapist literature, the reader becomes so engrossed in fantasy that she loses herself in it, unable to distinguish between dream and reality. Yet detached intimacy suggests that the reader can engage in a profound identification with the book even as she remains conscious that she is actively constructing a fantasy. Detached intimacy fits somewhere between narcissistic escapism and rigorous discipline: although the reader is aware of social responsibilities, he or she is inspired by the book to dream up different ways of fulfilling or stretching these roles. Whereas theorists of disciplinary reading argue that the book stands in for the sentimental authority of the mother, and the escapism thesis contends that the commodity substitutes for experience, detached intimacy is both relational and solitary. By investing him- or herself in a book, the reader develops an imagined intimacy with its central characters and narrator, while remaining a singular, self-conscious individual. Detached intimacy thus functions as a rhetorical strategy, an epistemology, an interpretive approach, and a means of self-exploration.

This self-creating, fanciful approach to reading appears perhaps most compellingly in the literature of bachelor sentimentalism, which focuses on the fantasies and sufferings of the single man. As Vincent Bertolini argues, “bachelorhood was an obsessive preoccupation of antebellum American culture,” represented in dozens of sketches, poems, songs, and novels that were published in America between 1800 and 1860.⁵ In these narratives, the bachelor, free from the obligation to support a family, emerges as a solitary, speculative, and remote reader. Donald Grant Mitchell (a.k.a. Ik Marvel)’s *Reveries of a Bachelor*, one of the most popular works of the 1850s, offers a rich opportunity to study detached intimacy, since it focuses on fantasy and uses a rhetorical strategy that simultaneously invites readers’ participation and pushes them away.⁶ *Reveries* sold more than a million copies by the end of the century, sparked dozens of piracies, and inspired several imitations.⁷

So influential was the book that one late nineteenth-century critic compared it to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁸ The popularity of *Reveries* suggests that it spoke to deep desires in nineteenth-century America—among others, the desire that literature stimulate feeling, legitimate fantasy, and establish, through the text, relationships that are full of feeling yet controllable. Reverie epitomizes this detached intimacy, since the dreamer abstracts herself from the body and from concrete reality, yet remains awake and conscious. As the title suggests, *Reveries* centers on the production of dreams, offering four sketches in which Ik Marvel, a sentimental bachelor, fantasizes about what it would be like to be married. To put into context the

illustrations discussed above, Figure 2, from a 1906 edition of *Reveries*, shows Ik Marvel dreaming, while Figure 1, from a 1931 edition of *Reveries*, represents his vision of married life.⁹ While Ik daydreams that marriage will bring him into true sympathy with another soul, he fears that he will lose his independence and control by committing himself to another. As perhaps the most significant work of bachelor fiction, *Reveries* offers a glimpse of the attractions of self-aware fantasy.

Detached intimacy was not only advanced in *Reveries* but also embraced by its readers. As Jane Tompkins argues, critics must try to “see how and why [sentimental fiction] worked for its readers, in its time, with such unexampled effect.”¹⁰ Likewise, Susan K. Harris raises incisive questions about the meaning of sentimental novels within their specific cultural contexts, asking, “What needs did they serve for their audience? . . . What is the power of fascination that the texts hold?”¹¹ Answering such questions requires examining not only the structures of texts but also the lived experiences of readers. As James Machor argues, reader-response critics essentialize reading by failing to examine the “historically significant conditions by which reading proceeds and through which audiences are engaged.”¹² Rather than depending solely on published reviews or on the rhetorical structures of texts themselves, we can also discern the emotional and cognitive effects of reading by examining the personal evidence left behind by the reader in the form of journal entries, annotations, and letters. Although such evidence is often difficult to locate, direct reader reaction to *Reveries* includes at least twenty-four fan letters to Donald Grant Mitchell and two sets of marginal annotations.¹³ These documents shed light on many pertinent questions, such as how and why readers read, why they found *Reveries* so compelling, how they presented themselves to the author, and how they incorporated the text into their own lives.

As we will see, the fan letters received by Mitchell reveal that *Reveries* sparked fantasies of alternative identities, appealed to men as well as women, and stimulated challenging responses. In their letters, readers practiced detached intimacy as they voiced their sympathy with Ik Marvel, playfully questioned him, and asserted their own autonomy as interpreters and creators. Readers embraced *Reveries* in part because it allowed them to imagine themselves beyond the gendered spheres of work and domesticity, so that men embraced leisure, home, and feeling, while women dreamed about traveling across the ocean, engaging in a wild romance, or creating works of art.¹⁴ As much as fans identified with *Reveries* and saw it as a source of wisdom, they also questioned whether Ik was a reliable dream guide, and whether the dreams of a bachelor were applicable to a mother, a husband, and, in particular, an unmarried woman. To explore the cultural and personal effects of detached intimacy, I will examine how

Reveries defines and promotes this mode, how fans responded to the book, and how it was revised by female readers and writers who created the more communal or socially conscious reveries of a spinster. Through my examination of *Reveries* and its readers, I seek to ground studies of American culture in the lived experiences of readers, analyze the relationship between fantasy and reading, and investigate the dynamic between identification and detachment.

A Most Unassured Whimsical Being: The Bachelor as Fervent Observer

In *Reveries*, Mitchell promotes detached intimacy through his rhetoric of controlled fantasy and the example of his charming but distant narrator, a bachelor and connoisseur of feeling named Ik Marvel. In a sense, the book is a metadream, a fantasy about the power of fantasy, as it focuses on four reveries dreamed up by Ik and his responses to them. A liminal state between waking and sleeping, control and passivity, reverie suggests “day-dream, meditation . . . illusion, enchantment . . . conscious fantasy.”¹⁵ As befits his marvelous name, Ik Marvel insists upon the superiority of the dream world, which was to be the title of Mitchell’s follow-up work to *Reveries*. As each reverie leads Ik through various possibilities—the dreamer might be bound to a cold-hearted flirt, or he might lose wife and children to disease, or he might find true happiness—it is shot through with the bachelor’s uncertainties and indecision. Yet Mitchell deals with this indecision by embracing it, putting forward the idea that the dreamer can embark on imaginary excursions but still return to his solitary, independent life.

While the subtext reveals the bachelor’s desire to remain a detached, self-sufficient dreamer, Mitchell uses several rhetorical and stylistic strategies to create the illusion that Ik’s readers can come into his private space and know his soul, as if distance breeds intimacy and insight. By narrating both dreaming and returning to consciousness, and by crafting prose characterized by gaps, hesitations, questions, shifts in perspective, and moments of self-revelation and coy withdrawal, Mitchell replicates an imaginative mind at work and trains his readers in detached intimacy, as they are alternately pulled into and pushed away from the bachelor’s reveries. Through such a seemingly spontaneous, sincere style, Mitchell preserves the “private character” of his reveries and makes readers participants and correspondents, inviting them into the private parlor of the sentimental essay.¹⁶ Yet the bachelor remains a mysterious figure who holds back personal information even as he effusively describes his dreams.

Although the narrator is a man of feeling who “dashed a tear or two from my eyes” at the close of a somber reverie,¹⁷ Mitchell deliberately contrasts him to those who come under the sway of the literature of sensibility, which we might see as sentimentality without the self-control of detached intimacy. According to Mitchell, sensibility takes advantage of “a weak, warm-working heart,” as it does with a reader of Mackenzie who finds that “your eye, in spite of you, runs over with his sensitive griefs.”¹⁸ Mitchell contrasts the sensibility indulged in by “you” (both a character within the narrative and, implicitly, the reader of Mitchell’s text) with the self-control exercised by the bachelor narrator. Yet Mitchell also challenges “you” to take control of feeling through reading: “And have you not the whole skein of your heart-life in your own fingers to wind, or unwind, in what shape you please? Shake it, or twine it, or tangle it, by the light of your fire, as you fancy best. . . . Reading is a great and happy disentangler of all those knotted snarls—those extravagant vagaries, which belong to a heart sparkling with sensibility.”¹⁹ According to Samuel Otter, the subtext of this passage is masturbatory, as the power of stimulation is in the bachelor’s hands.²⁰ Yet the passage is also remarkable in the way that Mitchell plays with the metaphor of heart strings. He puts the reader in the feminized position of one who knits by the fire, yet he emphasizes that the creative activity the reader engages in is winding and unwinding, a means of working through a maze rather than presenting a nicely knitted end product. Mitchell thus promotes a reader-centered aesthetics, where the reader can determine how—and how long—he or she will spin out the dream before reeling it back in.

Mitchell makes his readers identify with, yet remain at a safe distance from, the bachelor’s reveries by shifting between different perspectives. Although Mitchell narrates the frame tales surrounding the *Reveries* from the first-person perspective of Ik Marvel, the reverie itself either focuses on “you” or is projected onto Paul, the narrator of the fourth and longest reverie, “Morning, Noon, and Evening.” Ik is the producer and interpreter of fantasies, while “you” are the protagonist. Describing a young man whose hopes of marrying a beautiful young woman have been frustrated by the machinations of her status-seeking uncle, he writes, “You struggle with your moods of melancholy, and wear bright looks yourself—bright to her, and very bright to the eye of the old curmudgeon who has snatched your heart away.”²¹ By displacing the story onto “you,” Mitchell at once dissociates himself from the fantasy and brings his readers into it as both the objects of sympathy and fellow interpreters. In terms of the narrative, this “you” is a male upset that he can’t marry a young woman because he lacks money and reputation, but the “you” has stereotypically feminine qualities, since “you” are melancholic, consumed with thoughts of your broken heart but determined to put on a social face. At the same time, as

female “you’s” are invited into the narrative, they “become” male. Whereas the reader might feel like a voyeur spying on other lives, by including a “you” who experiences events, Ik becomes the voyeur reporting on what he sees and coming under the sway of its excitement. In turn, the reader feels the thrill of being both the watcher and the watched, the reader and the read, so that the distinctions between reader, character, narrator, and author fade.

As David Leverenz has argued, the rhetoric of “I” and “you,” narrator and reader, structures many antebellum works. Alienated from the bourgeois male identity, writers such as Melville, Emerson, and Hawthorne set up their readers as “foils,” both attacking them and attempting to re-fashion them through their dense, distancing, and evasive texts: “A conventionally manly ‘you’ is accused and appealed to, as double, potential convert, and comrade for the self-refashioning ‘I.’ Male rivalry looms under the fraternity . . . and the rivalry returns in the self-refashioning.”²² Such an argument helps to account for the difficulty and elusiveness of the American romance, but it assumes that the typical reader is male and associates the “I/you” rhetoric with aggressive competition rather than sympathy. In contrast, Samuel Otter and Katherine Snyder contend that male sentimentalists such as Mitchell employed the “I/you” rhetoric to establish bonds with their readers. Snyder argues, “The rhetoric of ‘I and you’ in *Reveries* effects a sentimental commerce between author and his readers which finally troubles the boundaries of individuality and the bounds of normative manhood.”²³ As Otter and Snyder suggest, one of the key rhetorical strategies that distinguishes male sentimentalists from now canonized authors such as Hawthorne and Melville is the way that they address their audience, seeking fellow feeling rather than rivalry.

In arguing that Mitchell brings his readers into his fantasies, Otter and Snyder focus on the author’s perspective, overlooking how actual readers responded to Mitchell’s invitation and negotiated sentimental exchanges with him. Both distance and intimacy define the pose adopted by bachelor narrators such as Ik; to use a chemical metaphor, polarity—setting two opposites in relation to each other—forms bonds. As some of his readers realized, Mitchell’s embrace of his audience was conflicted; through his evasions and shifts in tone, he pushed away even as he extended the circle of feeling. By casting his readers as characters, Mitchell drops them into an emotional landscape of his creation, while still retaining the authority of the interpreter to comment upon the fantasy and to establish sentimental boundaries. That is, though Mitchell participates in a sentimental economy, it is a protectionist one, in which the narrator can determine what passes into the heart. Likewise, readers guarded the borders of their own selfhood, sharing their dreams with Ik while protecting their privacy.

In the letter Mitchell finds a rhetorical form that meets his simultaneous desire for intimacy with and detachment from his audience. After publishing his first reverie in *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1849, Mitchell received a number of notes from sympathetic admirers.²⁴ In his second reverie, “Sea-Coal and Anthracite,” Mitchell refers to these letters as evidence of the emotional power of his work, reminding his current readers that his words have moved mothers and fathers wrestling with the deaths of their children as well as girls confused by love. To articulate how the letter both elicits and contains feeling, Ik describes a cherished packet of correspondence that he rereads when he wants to evoke a particular mood. In this packet he keeps not only the letters of family members, but also testimonials from people who were moved by his first reverie. Discounting the public statements of critics, Marvel places most value on these fan letters, since they measure literary success through sympathy. As he touts the feeling that he inspires in readers and that they inspire in him, Ik makes the packet of letters represent his own heart: “Let me tie them together, with a new and longer bit of ribbon—not by a love knot, that is too hard—but by an easy slipping knot, that so I may get at them the better. And now, they are all together, a snug pacquet, and we will label them. . . . Souvenirs du Coeur.”²⁵ Just as Marvel terms his packet of letters “Souvenirs du Coeur”—keepsakes of the heart—so Mitchell subtitles *Reveries* “Book of the Heart,” suggesting that the text produces, commemorates, contains, and stands for the heart, which itself is a metaphor for feeling. In describing his love of letters, Marvel reimagines the author as a reader, collecting private experiences to prompt his own reminiscences and feelings. Despite his passionate declarations, Ik remains a bachelor even in the way that he treats his correspondence. Rather than tying a “love knot,” which would imply commitment and single-mindedness, he uses an “easy slipping knot” to slide into—and out of—states of feeling. (An “easy slipping knot” can be a knot, or not, as the situation requires.) There is sympathy and correspondence, but Ik can maintain control over his emotions; he is able to take out the letters when he wants to fall into a reverie, but then can tie them up when he wants to turn to other modes of feeling.

“For Private Use”

By rhapsodizing over the moving experience of reading—and rereading—his correspondents’ “heart-letters,” Mitchell inspired many of his readers to write to him (or to Ik, who represented the ideal dreamer). Referring to Ik’s habit of treasuring letters as the artifacts and vehicles of feeling, one

correspondent indicated her desire to participate in a two-way exchange with Mitchell, “not only aspir[ing] to having my letter placed in the ribbon bound packet with those other treasured ones but also indulg[ing] in hopes of receiving a reply.”²⁶ As his fans hoped, their letters did move Mitchell, enough so that he diligently preserved at least twenty-nine poems or letters received between 1851 and 1899.²⁷ These fan letters, which no scholar seems to have commented upon since Waldo Dunn’s 1922 biography of Mitchell, offer an excellent opportunity to study the culture of letters in which *Reveries* participated, particularly nineteenth-century reading practices, notions of authorship, and male sentimentalism.²⁸ While most commentary on reading scenes and practices is based on interpretive speculations, these documents allow us to ground theories of reader response in a historical study of reading practices, as we examine how actual readers (at least a self-selected group of enthusiasts) received *Reveries*.

As Barbara Ryan and Amy Thomas note, more needs to be known about “real readers” and the processes of reading itself, particularly how and why readers read and how they incorporated what they read into their lives.²⁹ As the historical study of reading gains prominence, readers’ letters constitute an important body of evidence.³⁰ Although James Machor contends that we cannot fully recover the private activity of reading, in fan letters readers often provide a coherent description of their reading, “reveal an honesty of emotional interaction rarely found in printed documents,” and articulate a sense of self.³¹ By examining fan letters as a group, we can detect patterns in the ways that the work was read and how readers represented themselves. Unlike entries in a diary or comments made in the margins, fan letters are consciously shaped for a particular audience, as readers-turned-authors construct their own personae and interact with the creator of the work they admire. In the letters that enthusiastic readers sent to Ik Marvel, a narrator whom many viewed—or wanted to view—as both a real person and the embodiment of fantasy, we can follow how intimacy developed between reader and author, an intimacy made possible through the exchange of the written word and negotiated around the literary personality constructed in the text.

In their letters, Mitchell’s fans insisted that they were continuing a friendship initiated when they first opened *Reveries*, that the personal, spontaneous style of the book established such a vivid tone of invitation that readers presumed to write directly to Ik just as he had, they assumed, written directly to them.³² Since they took Ik as their audience, his correspondents focused on what he meant to them and even what he could do for them, and they often constructed personae calculated to appeal to Ik’s sensibilities. Even so, they acknowledged that the friendship might be a fiction, detecting remoteness in Ik Marvel’s professions of feeling and

questioning whether Ik the narrator and Mitchell the author were the same. Conscious of Mitchell's performance, they staged their own, using his celebration of fantasy to justify their experiments in identity. In their approach to *Reveries*, Mitchell's correspondents exemplify detached intimacy, since their relationship with Mitchell—and with their own dreams—depended in large part on distance and control. Through their letters, readers became authors and creators, denying the commonplace that sentimental literature forms passive readers who lose themselves in mass-produced fantasies.

My analysis focuses on twenty-four letters in the Mitchell collection that offer direct commentary on *Reveries* and that exemplify the playfulness and self-awareness of his correspondents.³³ In addition, I have examined the marginal notations that Patrick Henry of Vicksburg, Mississippi, made in his copy of *Reveries* in 1886, as well as the annotations that Emily Dickinson marked in her copy and the letters that she wrote expressing her delight with Mitchell's work. Mitchell carefully preserved his fan letters, in many cases writing the name of the correspondent and the place from which she or he was writing on the back. Often correspondents writing after 1851 expressed their enthusiasm for both *Reveries* and *Dream Life*, *Reveries*'s successor. Although all of the correspondents seem to be middle class and white, they are diverse in gender, marital status, age, and region. Based on the information that the fans offer about themselves, sixteen were female, nine male; eleven unmarried, eight married, with the marital status of six difficult to determine. At least fourteen appear to be under thirty, five over thirty, and six do not reveal enough about themselves to venture a guess. Responses came from across the United States, with nine from the Northeast, four from the Midwest, four from the South, and six from unknown locations, as well as one from England and one from Canada. Nineteen letters were written in the 1850s, and the rest trickled in during the 1860s, 1880s, and even in 1899. In the twenty-four letters, thirteen address Donald Grant Mitchell, seven Ik Marvel, and four omit direct addresses altogether.³⁴ Five of the correspondents (all women) sent Mitchell Valentine's greetings, while three (apparently all women) enclosed poems. In describing their admiration for *Reveries*, readers commonly used words such as "heart," "love," "fancy," "life," "thought," "dream," "write," "read," "feel," "pleasure," "beautiful," and "sweet," language that suggests feeling, imagination, and abstract thought.³⁵ In general, most of the letters that Mitchell preserved from the 1850s were written by young unmarried women and men looking for inspiration and approval from their mentor. In contrast, most that he saved from the 1880s (after he published the second revised edition of *Reveries*) were from married middle-aged men thanking him for taking them back to the dreams of their youth, indicating that younger readers read hopefully, older readers retrospectively.

According to critics and indeed to Mitchell himself, *Reveries* held particular appeal for the young. William Dean Howells, fondly reminiscing about his own boyhood reading, remembered that along with Irving, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and Cervantes, he admired “the gentle and kindly Ik Marvel, whose *Reveries* and whose *Dream Life* the young people of that day were reading with a tender rapture.”³⁶ Howells’s response demonstrates the extent to which readers identified the book with its benevolent narrator as well as its power to stimulate feeling and dreaming. Critics recommended the book to men in particular. As an anonymous reviewer for *Literary World* noted, “Reader, bachelor or Benedict, you will be all the better for possessing this daintily arranged book of Ik Marvel’s *Reveries*.”³⁷ Even though the reviewer identifies the audience as being predominantly either married or unmarried men, he uses a term of refinement, even femininity, to describe the reveries, as if such “daintily arranged” musings would add a necessary touch of ornate delicacy to a man’s life. The book’s appeal, however, was not limited to men. Writing in the early twentieth century, Waldo Dunn characterized Mitchell’s most fervent readers as women who wooed the author: “Languishing Adas, and Claras, and Carries, and Jennies, and Dorothys, and Mary ‘darlings,’ showered him with Valentines. Other and more ardent maidens wrote to inquire whether the author really was a bachelor; and, with the assurance that their hearts alone could understand and comfort that of Ik Marvel, coyly offered themselves in marriage.”³⁸ Dunn’s condescending tone reveals his own biases, but male and female readers did present themselves differently in their fan letters, with women more often apologizing for the intrusion or marveling at their daring in writing to him. Yet women as well as men took on aspects of the bachelor’s pose, joining him in fireside fantasies. Still, some wondered if a bachelor’s reveries could really be a woman’s, whether he could really know a woman’s heart, and whether women would have the freedom to enjoy Ik’s rapturous leisure. Just as Ik was a fickle, ever-changing figure who could bridge public and private, the real and the ideal, so his readers used him as the touchstone for their own attempts to transcend boundaries. Yet readers did not bow to Ik Marvel or read uncritically; they detected his distance (and were drawn to it), wondered over the claims that he made, and revised his fantasies to construct their own.

In their responses to *Reveries*, readers demonstrated several kinds of reactions, sometimes simultaneously: identification with Ik Marvel, the need to question and challenge the authorial persona, and the desire to push beyond the fantasies spun by Ik and articulate their own. Throughout these letters, we see readers borrowing from Mitchell’s language in expressing their attraction to his persona and asserting their own dreams. Just as Ik described his heart as “a bundle of letters,” so Carrie, a savvy reader from

Ohio, invoked the metaphor in explaining how he had uncovered her own feelings, writing in a tone of amused outrage that

I have just finished the last chapter of your “Reveries” and lay down the book, feeling that you are indeed, a *marvel* of a man: for, how did *you* know what I had been thinking and feeling for this long time? How did you know that I had such an affection for letters, and find out that [I] had such a packet tied with a ribbon “almost too short”? By what necromancy did you get even a blind peep into that one corner of my heart which, I thought, was hermetically sealed—Didn’t you see the label “For private use”?³⁹

Even as she accuses Ik of voyeurism, Carrie plays with his metaphor for his own experience of reading letters and transforms it, rethinking the packet as her own heart and Marvel as its sympathetic reader. Thus she exchanges the reader/author positions with Ik and asserts her own imaginative authority, challenging the “you” who presumed to pronounce the feelings that she had been keeping bound up in private and affirming the integrity of the “I.” In constructing her own pose as a witty, self-revealing reader, Carrie imitates many features of Mitchell’s style—quotation (here from Marvel himself), punning (on “marvel”), and questioning—to suggest her own intense, almost surprising investment in the text. Teasingly protesting Ik’s transgression, Carrie describes him as a sort of magician who can bridge the gap between public and private through the mutuality that reading and writing make possible. Then she takes on that power herself. Ultimately, what Carrie and many other readers sought in Ik was not just sentimental connection but also imaginative license—the power to peer into possible futures and to look at themselves from different perspectives, to play with new possibilities for the “I” in the same way that Ik invented and spectated on his dream selves.

What readers found most compelling about *Reveries* was Mitchell’s insistence that dreams possessed even greater value than everyday experience, a message reaffirmed in *Dream Life*. As he wrote in defending his reveries, “What if they have no material type—no objective form? All that is crude—a mere reduction of ideality to sense.”⁴⁰ In addressing the author, many readers emphasized that he seemed to understand them as no one else did, suggesting their own alienation from a culture that seemed to place material reality above dreams. For instance, Carrie lamented that she was mocked by practical thinkers for expressing her feelings and fantasies, but thanked “Ike Marvel” for validating her sentimental self-expression:

Enthusiastic and impulsive, I gave full expression to the emotion that seemed, at the moment, my very life, but my *friends*, the bystanders,

only stared at me, and one man laughed. You remember it?—It was the sort of laugh which you might expect an iceberg to make if it only *could* laugh. And, when he said something about “romantic aims”—I became, suddenly, silent and have remained so ever since. But you have come to my relief and spoken for me, giving utterance to so many things which during the long silence I have thought and felt.⁴¹

Here Carrie asserts that the sentimental community established through reading matters more than real-life associations; her friends are “bystanders,” belittling her through their laughs and stares, while Ik Marvel is a soul mate who can understand and express her feelings even though he has never met her in person. Just as Mitchell uses “you” to make his readers present in his reveries, so does Carrie, who casts “you,” Ik Marvel, as a spectator (and savior) at her scene of humiliation. At once Carrie records her disenchantment with materialist values and describes how she was able to recover a relation to others—a voice—through a sentimental union with Ik.

By imagining Ik as a gallant hero defending dreams, Carrie implies that she needs him to be a public voice for private values, yet she also asserts her own right to see the world romantically. When, to her glee, Mitchell wrote back to her, Carrie acknowledged that she would violate social convention by continuing a relationship in letters with the beloved author, but she insisted that the values of the heart should overrule those of the head: “Shall I write to you again? This is a question which I have asked myself many times and many voices, conventional and providential, have croaked me out an ugly ‘No’—But one voice, clearer and more powerful than the rest, and coming from out my heart—says, simply, ‘Write’—and, so—.”⁴² For Carrie, exchanging letters with Ik meant not only that she could find a spokesperson for an idealist philosophy, but also that she could speak for herself in the strong, clear voice of the heart.

So intensely did some readers identify with Marvel’s *Reveries* that they compared themselves to, or even described themselves as, characters in his work, eroding the boundaries between self and other, fiction and reality. For instance, in the extensive marginal notes that Mississippian Patrick Henry made in his copy of *Reveries*, he recorded his deep sense of identification with the bachelor narrator, even writing a ditty about the sad lot of the “poor old bachelor” in the margins.⁴³ When Ik described “a Bachelor of seven and twenty,” Patrick crossed out the seven and wrote in “four,” presumably inserting his own age and thereby merging his identity with the bachelor narrator’s (see Fig. 3). By rewriting the text to reflect himself, Henry worked through his own fears and aspirations as a bachelor, since he shared “self-same feelings” with Ik.

While most male correspondents identified with the bachelor, young women often imagined themselves as his beloved in the text, and some older women related to Ik's unmarried aunt. Playing with the fiction that Ik was real and that she was a part of his reveries, Carrie of Ohio enthusiastically observed the correspondence of her name with the name of the beloved wife in "Morning, Noon, and Night": "It will not be hard for you to direct your letter, for my own, *real* name is *Carrie*."⁴⁴ For Carrie, such a coincidence in names helped to explain why she felt such a deep sympathy with Ik; it is almost as if mailing the letter were an unnecessary step, since Carrie saw herself as the living embodiment of the dream wife that Mitchell had created. But Carrie did mail the letter in order to make real a relationship that had only been imagined in *Reveries*. While Carrie's imaginative relation was based on romance, Dorothy, a middle-aged unmarried woman, identified with Ik's spinster Aunt Tabithy, gently chastising him for calling her "old" at forty and for saying that she took snuff.⁴⁵

As much as these correspondents attempted to insert themselves into Mitchell's fantasy (which we might also regard as a savvy attempt to elicit his attention), there is an important difference between the Carrie that Mitchell created and the one who wrote to him: unlike Mitchell's creations, his correspondents articulated their own desires and shaped their own

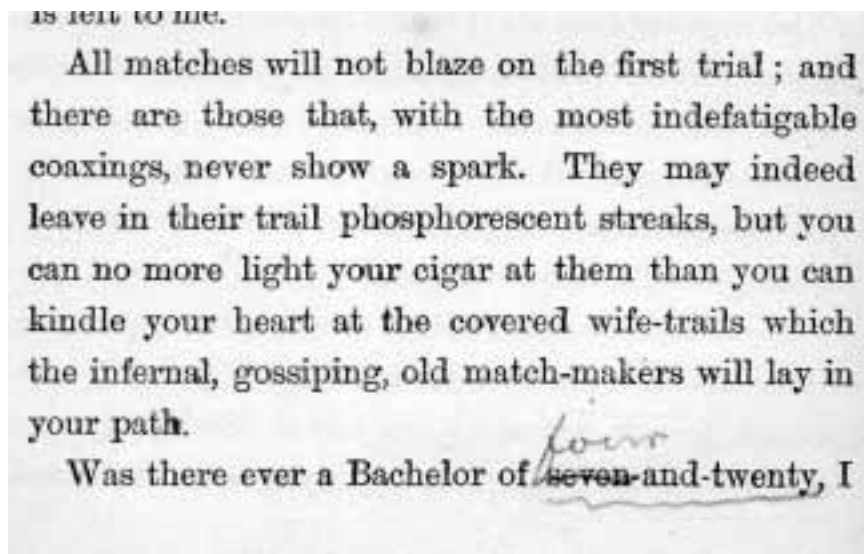


Figure 3. Patrick Henry replaces Ik Marvel's age with his own in 1886 copy of *Reveries of a Bachelor*.

fantasies, talking back to him. When Mitchell wrote back, Carrie articulated her excitement and wonder that a dream relationship could assume tangible form:

You *did* write to me—dear Ik Marvel!—When the letter was brought to me, I held it in my hand, wondering—doubting, half-fearing that it was only a snowflake which the driving storm had sent in; and that, in the glow of my excitement, it would *dissolve*—and be no more.—But, it *is* a real letter—with your seal upon the envelope, and your spirit in its words. I have it safe—*there* in my covered work-basket—I see it shining through the meshes—and there it shall stay—unless, indeed, it should some day have a companion—*then* I will get them a snug little box where they shall go to house-keeping.⁴⁶

Just as *Reveries* is concerned with the relationship between the real and the ideal, so is Carrie's letter, as she expresses surprise that something produced by the evanescent Marvel could assume stable physical reality. Yet as much as Carrie delights in the "spirit" of Mitchell's words, she dwells upon the letter's material form, which is the sign of her connection to the author. To describe her hopes that she will receive another letter, Carrie chooses a metaphor that might have terrified a bachelor by suggesting that the two notes would marry and set up housekeeping, making the relationship in letters a domestic one. Whereas Mitchell describes tying up his letters and setting them aside, Carrie places her letter from Mitchell in her work basket, where it is enclosed but visible from behind the meshes, part of an arrangement of domestic tools within easy reach. For Carrie, it seems, the letters introduce an element of radiant fantasy into home life, even as they are being integrated into that life.

In striving to establish a sentimental relationship with Mitchell, fans praised his virtues, professed interest in his personal life, and imagined themselves as part of his reveries. Yet their letters also attest to the ways in which the narrator's distance both intensified their fascination with him and caused them to refuse the straightforward union between I and you. Perplexed by the ambiguity of the author's identity—was Ik Marvel simply a pen name, or was he an invented narrator entirely separate from Donald Grant Mitchell?—readers persistently questioned whether Mitchell was recording his authentic feelings. What drew particular attention to the relationship between the real and the ideal, and more specifically between Mitchell the author and Ik the narrative persona, was the debate over whether Mitchell really was a bachelor. Following the publication of the first reverie, "Smoke, Flame, and Ashes," a critic stirred up the controversy by asserting that a bachelor could not possibly write such rich descriptions

of domestic life. The debate opened up crucial questions about genre, literary persona, and authorship: to what extent is a work that presents itself as the authentic thoughts of a narrator autobiographical, and to what extent should it be? Can a bachelor understand marriage? By frowning upon Mitchell for supposedly inventing his bachelorhood, the critic implied that the conventions of the sentimental essay demanded a correlation between the author's experience and the narrator's musings, that the sentimental essayist must inscribe reality rather than explore fantasy.⁴⁷ To the charge that he made up his bachelorhood, Mitchell replied, "I thank [the critic] for thinking so well of me," then went on to assert that the bachelor best depicts domesticity because he is apart from it and without bias.⁴⁸

Mitchell's fans went a step further in promoting his bachelorhood, insisting that the idealist, one whose only experience of marriage is imagined, provides the truest description of domesticity precisely because he is not restricted by crude fact. As an anonymous reader stated in her Valentine message to Mitchell, "Still I can scarce conceive it possible for one to describe as you have, love, domestic happiness and what a 'good wife' should be without having experienced it all:—yet I have heard others reason that proves the very fact of your bachelorship."⁴⁹ According to the idealist view, Ik's sentimental power resulted from his very distance from domesticity, since as an unmarried man he could feel all the more intensely what he lacked and use his imagination to create moving images of family life. Although readers valued truth, that truth could be imagined rather than directly experienced; hence their own reading was validated. In his preface to *Dream Life*, his follow-up to *Reveries*, Mitchell concurred, insisting that what matters is not fact, but feeling. If his work made someone weep real tears, then it was in a deep sense true: "if I have made the feeling real, I am content that the facts should be false. Feeling indeed has a higher truth in it, than circumstance."⁵⁰ Mitchell claimed that the bachelor, who could "scud off under each pleasant breeze of feeling," was best positioned to explore the nature of feeling and consciousness because he was not moored to any set reality.⁵¹

Still, readers wanted to know the truth about Mitchell, to verify that the feelings, if not the experience, were true. By writing to Mitchell, many readers hoped to peek behind the veil shielding his privacy and come to know this sympathetic but intensely detached author. In her Valentine (addressed to Mitchell, not Ik), Aggie Bee Smallwood admitted, "I have wondered while perusing it, whether your real heart of hearts, breathed forth those beautiful words and ideas. 'Twould seem so, and I wish to believe it.—I would love, so dearly, to become acquainted with the history of your life."⁵² Using sentimental language such as "heart of hearts" and "breathed forth," Smallwood tests the sincerity of the words that so moved her. By

“real,” she means the emotional conditions of Mitchell’s life, especially his relationship with female family members: Is he married? Has he, like Smallwood, lost a mother? If so, author and reader share a common experience, putting them in greater sympathy. Even as Smallwood embraces sentimental values, she hints at her fear that Mitchell’s beautiful words might be illusory, produced by the brain rather than the heart.

While Smallwood worried whether Mitchell the author matched Ik the narrator, other readers were drawn by Ik’s remoteness. One, a seventeen-year-old who called herself “Enigma,” contended that Ik (whom she addressed rather than Mitchell) was the real enigma:

I wish I knew you—I always wish it—when I finish reading one of your precious volumes, all of which I hold as sacred works in my own little library—why I always put a paper between your books and the ones on either side. . . . What a strange man you are—how you must hate the world—do you? you have such a fine mind, such a noble heart—do you pity or despise us—or is pity mingled with scorn—I cannot tell your character by reading your books, for you change so often, and draw your pictures equally well—Do you *wish* any one to know *what* you *are*—oh! how strange.⁵³

Enigma’s letter, broken up and intensified with dashes and asides, captures the tension between separateness and intimacy that drives *Reveries*. In Ik, Enigma senses both ideal, “noble” feeling and a protean, detached, almost godlike observer. As she organizes her library, Enigma imitates Ik’s own moves in setting him—or at least the “sacred works” that embody him—apart, suggesting that for some fans his remoteness led to even greater adulation. Enigma links the bachelor’s ability to “draw pictures” to his variability, as if his habits of self-disguise and self-transformation contribute to his artistry. In this passage, in which “I” attempts to understand “you,” Enigma takes on the voice of an author as she expresses her admiration and suspicion of this mysterious creator. She too assumes a mask, protecting her privacy and making her reader wonder how to decode the enigma.

Paradoxically, many readers’ identification with Mitchell depended on their distance from him. By peering at him from afar, they could protect their vision of him—and of themselves. Fans of *Reveries* responded enthusiastically when Mitchell, capitalizing on the success of his book, embarked on a lecture tour, since they were able to sit in the audience and study the beloved author without having to engage directly with him. Remarking on her experience watching Mitchell lecture, an anonymous reader confessed that “To speak truly, I was slightly disappointed when I first saw you last Monday evening but the fire of genius that shone through your eye and

the kindness and gentleness that spoke through your lips, completely won my—fancy. And as I watched you I could not help imagining it was yourself alone, I had portrayed to my mind before.”⁵⁴ To recover from the disappointment that Mitchell was not as she imagined him to be, this correspondent activated her imagination to recast the actual speaker as the dreamed-of Ik, an “Ikon” that she cherished in private. Replicating Mitchell’s own habit of transmuting everyday objects into spiritual symbols, she read his face and speech for signs of virtue, for what she wanted out of the ideal narrator: genius, kindness, and gentleness. The power of this scene of reading—an interpretation of Mitchell’s physiognomy rather than his writing—comes from the correspondent’s ability to see him without being herself seen. By inserting a dash before “fancy,” she upsets the expectation that she will make a traditional romantic declaration that Mitchell has won over her heart, instead emphasizing the creative imagination. In reading *Reveries*, writing to the author, and listening to his lecture, readers claimed the power to control the sentimental fantasies sparked by the book.

Even as they scrutinized and reimagined Ik, many readers imitated him by drawing a veil over their own private lives. Nine of Mitchell’s correspondents—all presumably women writing to him in the 1850s—either adopted pen names, used only their initials, or left off their last names from their letters. As much as they participated in what Samuel Otter calls the sentimental project “to make the personal public and to scrutinize the subjective,” his correspondents wanted both to protect their own privacy and to claim a personal intimacy with Mitchell.⁵⁵ Women, it seems, were especially afraid that they were trespassing by contacting an unknown author, suggesting that the author/reader relationship was more complex and fraught than a simple transaction in the sentimental economy. Yet by keeping their identities mysterious, Mitchell’s fans could also arouse his curiosity and assert their ability to create their own personae. Staging self-conscious performances, readers were thrilled to present themselves as more romantic and more courageous than they thought themselves to be in everyday life. Enigma acknowledged that she was creating a braver self in her letter and predicted, “You will know who I am some time—but will not recognize me as the same independent soul—of creature, who writes to strangers on her own account merely to please her fancy.”⁵⁶ Even as she admitted that she differed from the self shaped in rhetoric, Enigma nevertheless asserted her own pleasure in this imaginative game, as under the cover of a letter she could construct a mysterious, fantastic identity that might shade into the self she revealed to others.

As Enigma’s comments suggest, several correspondents acknowledged that how Mitchell perceived them would reflect who they were—that is, as

authors, how their audience received their “work” (the self as constructed in their letters) would help to define it. Readers thus wanted to imagine Ik as a sentimental, kind-hearted reader and author, hoping that he would view them with the same softness as he did his dream characters in *Reveries*. But such hopes were disturbed when one fan, Carrie, began reading *The Lorgnette*, the book that Mitchell had published under the pen name Timon immediately before he wrote *Reveries*. In an inverse of *Reveries*’s emotional registers, the cynical bachelor Timon narrates a satirical account of New York society. The essence of Timon’s kind of bachelor narration is represented by the picture that heads every chapter: a gentleman holds up to his eyes a lorgnette (opera glasses), obscuring his face (and therefore his identity) and making his prying gaze the focus of the picture (Fig. 4).⁵⁷ While Ik gazes with misty eyes at his dream creations, Timon scrutinizes the pretentiousness and foolishness of the fashionable. Faced with this discomfiting image, Carrie refused to be brought under such terrifying, anonymous scrutiny, protesting, “Do not ever peer at me through those great Owlsh glasses—which ‘boo’ at one. . . . I am yet true to the ‘Reveries’—and would be regarded only by the kindly—meditative eye of Ik Marvel.”⁵⁸ Although Carrie wanted to believe that Ik and Donald Grant Mitchell were essentially the same, she worried that Mitchell might be more Timon than Marvel. By contrasting Ik with another bachelor narrator, Carrie makes clear what was important about the beloved figure: his gently thoughtful, “kind” eyes, eyes through which she wants to be seen and defined. If Timon squints at her, she might be a silly, superficial belle; if Ik beholds her, however, she is a beautiful icon of womanhood, invested with spiritual meaning. A keen reader herself, Carrie defines her own ideal reader, demanding the power not only over *what* she read but also *how* she would be read.

If Ik was going to drive their fantasies, then his readers wanted to exercise some control over how he would appear, preferring text to experience, Ik Marvel to Donald Grant Mitchell. For them, Ik represented a romantic, dreamy, and transitory mood, the kind of mood that encouraged, for instance, flirtation with an unknown bachelor. In this sense, Ik’s distance made him all the more enthralling, since his persona invited interpretation and revision. Acknowledging the attractiveness of the dream persona, an anonymous correspondent blurted, “So farewell and remember if you think too harshly of my forwardness, that I have written to Ik Marvel the ideal, and not to Donald Mitchell the substantial—and also it is St. Valentines day and leap year” (14 Feb. 1852). Even as this correspondent defends her own action in boldly addressing Ik, she also suggests that she can write precisely because Ik is not real, because she is tapping the misty feeling that he represented. By insisting that their fantasies of Ik were more compelling

than the real thing, his readers claimed their own authority as interpreters and creators.⁵⁹ Readers were so insistent on defining their Ik Marvel because they used him to prompt, even mediate, their own fantasies.

For many men, Ik demonstrated that manliness and sentimentality were compatible, and that a man could hold on to the dreams of youth even as the concerns of adulthood pressed on him. As Dr. J. Holton wrote,

I have found it really a book of the heart—of my heart—an echo of my own reveries, for I too like you have even in my childhood hours been a dreamer and every thing that was then bright for me lived in the future.... Through my professional studies I was a dreamer still.... For while poring—with a indulgence which necessity could alone enforce—over the musty pages of scientific research, such a volume as your “reveries” was worth more to me than a thousand that contained the records of the healing art.⁶⁰



Figure 4. Donald Grant Mitchell's leering bachelor narrator from *The Lorgnette* (1850).

While professional books focus on objective knowledge and present necessities, *Reveries* offered Holton broad, subjective visions of the future, yet it also connected him to his personal past, to the living energies and hopes of youth. Holton loved the book because it called to mind his idealized conception of himself as a dreamer and enabled him to heal himself through feeling. While Holton associated *Reveries* with his own youthful dreams, other men emphasized how the book guided them through the stages of manhood. Writing in 1886, after the second revised edition of *Reveries* was published, J. Macdonald Oxley commended Mitchell for producing a book that aided his own growth as a man. He noted how he read this book, a work of “perennial power and charm,” at different stages—as a youth, as he was preparing for marriage, as a young father, and as a middle-aged man—and how each reading illuminated new feelings: “I enjoyed the dear delicious *Reveries* more than at the first. . . . I know that I owe you no small debt of gratitude because of the pure ennobling image you present of love that is guiltless of lust, and of the profound impressions that your work made upon me in the formative period of my life.”⁶¹ For Oxley, Mitchell provided a vision of love and marriage that shaped his own life, as if the ideal expression preceded and enhanced the actual experience. With Mitchell as a touchstone, Oxley constructed a model of manhood that emphasized dreaming and feeling over work and reputation. Like Carrie, Oxley describes how *Reveries* had different meanings at different times, as the fluidity of the dream stimulated readers’ experiments in shaping themselves and their understanding of the text according to their psychological needs.

Holton’s and Oxley’s appreciation for the ways in which *Reveries* rejuvenated them and shaped their sense of manhood echoes the book’s published reviews. Although Katherine Snyder argues that *Reveries* offered an alternative vision of manhood in which the inner life is given priority, reviewers of *Reveries* articulated a more dialectical view of masculinity, in which a few hours spent cultivating the inner life prepared a man for return to the public life.⁶² As a reviewer for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* wrote about the illustrated edition of *Reveries* (which was issued just in time to satisfy the sentimental urgings of the Christmas holidays), “We can recommend Ik Marvel’s lifesome, soul-ful pages to all whose spirits are chafed with the wear and tear of this working-day world.”⁶³ This reviewer recognized an interaction between, rather than a strict separation of, work and leisure, viewing feeling as a necessary balance to industry but insisting that *Reveries* had value in restoring men to the “working-day world.”

Even as some men read *Reveries* as a validation of home and leisure, others saw it as a celebration of bachelor independence, feeling, and fraternity. Like Oxley, William Thompson claimed that *Reveries* helped to

make him into a thinking, feeling man, but he insisted upon maintaining his distance from domesticity: “I am poor and illiterate—know nothing but what I learnt from newspapers and magazines, was almost old enough to marry before I began to think, about *anything*—but thank God I am not married—I tried for a long time to find something to read that suited my feelings and never found it till I got your ‘Reveries.’”⁶⁴ Thompson describes himself as a self-made man—or rather a man in the making—and suggests that Marvel furnishes a model for determined independence that is energized by feeling.⁶⁵ In order to preserve this sense of autonomy, Thompson contends not only that he needs to remain single, but urges his role model to do the same, begging, “Dont marry for a while, Ik. I’m going to New York, and I’ll see you some of these days: but you’ll never see me. Just write a few words, Ik.” Thompson’s letter captures the tension between intimacy and detachment, as he insists that his mobility and his emotional energy depend not only on Ik’s continued availability but also on his own ability to remain hidden. At once Thompson expresses his desire for emotional connection (he signs himself “your friend”) and for distance, his hope to gaze at Ik but not be seen by him. By peering at Ik, whether on the street or between pages, Thompson could get a thrill, but he didn’t risk the direct give-and-take of an actual relationship.

In a sense, Thompson’s note is a love letter in which he voices a deep identification with Ik, yet draws back, implying that part of the appeal is the author’s very inaccessibility. Likewise, many women sent Mitchell letters in which they professed love for the author yet acknowledged the fragility of their feelings. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, five of the sixteen letters written by women are explicitly Valentine messages. By writing to the meditative bachelor, female readers could commit a small rebellion against social boundaries without exposing themselves to real danger. Imagining Ik as an ideal lover, an anonymous reader attested to the conflict between domestic duty and romantic inclination that *Reveries* called forth. Touting the book’s sentimental values, she wrote in her Valentine message, “I lay down your books, always with a sense of humility, a fresh clinging love for home, and its inmates, and a kindlier feeling towards the world in general.”⁶⁶ Yet in this same letter, the correspondent blurts out that she has evaded the surveillance of her father in order to write to Ik:

it is a little, secret romantic mystery to think over—a happy consciousness that you (perhaps not) have read, actually read words that I have written—an involuntary impulse to—pshaw—what would dear Papa say (if he only knew) who is now sleeping so contentedly below, little dreaming what his “sissy Mary” is doing just over his head, well I cannot write so well or so bad by daylight, it throws

too broad a matter of fact glare over nonsense, but when all the household is still, and I alone with odd thoughts and fancies, at the witching hour of night—why then, I feel as if I could dare to cast off the restraint of “what would the world say” if—as that little if what a world of joy or sorrow it is the gate to.⁶⁷

This anonymous reader seems to be inviting Ik to be a voyeur, to sneak past the supervision of her father and stare at her moonlit fantasies, creating an intimacy through language that unites the looker and the looked at (for she is peering at Ik just as he is staring at her). In writing to Ik, the correspondent takes one step toward resisting “what would the world say” and following her own desires, which are tinged with eroticism, pursued in solitude, and activated by the seeming availability of the bachelor-dreamer. Nevertheless, she indicates that these dreams, like Ik’s, are only temporary, and that once day returns she will continue to be governed by the authority of her father.

While some female readers were inspired by *Reveries* to dream of love, others expressed professional ambitions. E. C. W., a young woman from North Carolina, asked Ik to use her letter as a “specimen” in judging whether she could make money as an author.⁶⁸ For her, the dream of authorship presented an alternative to domestic work. However, sensing that her culture frowned upon female economic enterprise, E. C. W. insisted that she would write only to support her family:

This is only one of those pet schemes that will give me incalculable amount of pleasure if it succeeds; but there will be no harm done if it lives only in my fancy—Beyond making my home a happy one to Father and brothers, lightening my Mothers cares and smoothing the path of my only sister—a child as yet—I have no ambition—and I will sit down as cheerfully to home duties Mr. Marvel with your rebuke for my presumption in my pocket along with the keys, as if I had dreamed of any higher priveledge than the making of puddings and pies for these dear ones to eat—⁶⁹

Here the writer articulates a central tension, found in many of the women’s letters, between obligations to home and dreams of transcending their quotidian tasks through artistic expression. Yet E. C. W. is careful to put her dream of writing into practical, self-sacrificing terms, as she promises that she would support her family through her imaginative efforts. Like many readers, she backs away from the violation that a career as a writer might imply—and from the possibility of disappointment—by saying that she is content to let the dream remain just that.

If men embraced *Reveries* because it could restore their sentimental energies, women often enacted a more resistant yet fascinated relationship with the text, both seeking the ideals represented by the bachelor narrator and questioning whether they were appropriate. As compelling as many women readers found Ik Marvel's *Reveries*, they detected some distortions in his depictions of women and therefore asserted their right to speak for themselves. Rather than present complex, developed female characters, Mitchell dreamed up stereotypes of women: the flirt; the crusty but tender-hearted spinster aunt; the sweet but dying girl cousin; the outwardly beautiful but inwardly cruel wife; and the bluestocking. Disturbed by such stereotypes, Carrie reprimanded Ik for presuming to know women's inner dreams: "But, Isaac, though you are an excellent reader of hearts—you, a man, cannot read a *Woman's* heart-writing. It has hieroglyphics which a woman, alone, can translate. You might, perhaps, understand something from *her* interpretation."⁷⁰ In chastising Ik for his presumption, Carrie asserted women's right to translate the mysterious language of their hearts and to become writers as well as readers. Taking on the powerful voice of Ik's Aunt Tabithy (who also calls him Isaac), Carrie demanded that he read what women have written (both literally and metaphorically) rather than pretend to produce their stories himself.

Why Not Have the Reveries of a Spinster?

As Carrie asserts, Ik's reveries could not be equated with the dreams of a woman. However, several female authors rewrote *Reveries* from a woman's perspective, rejecting the solitude and solipsism of the bachelor's model of sentimental production and instead constructing one based on human relationships. An anonymous author published "The Reverie of an Old Maid" (1851) less than a year after the original *Reveries* was published; and Mitchell's book continued to claim cultural importance forty-six years later, when Helen Davies wrote *Reveries of a Spinster* (1897).⁷¹ In a sense, we could label these texts "spinster fictions" rather than "bachelor fictions," since they focus on single women and the challenges they must face, as they consider but ultimately reject the bachelor's habits of detached fantasizing. In "The Reverie of an Old Maid," the unsigned author angrily repudiates Ik's idealism and detachment. Focusing on the suffering of a solitary spinster, the author insists that, for women, happiness can be found only in marriage: "A bachelor is a solitary being certainly, but men do not feel, like women, the need of home sympathy and home affections. . . . He does not feel any craving for family joys; he has no vacant chamber, haunted by

a sense of its own loneliness, in his heart.”⁷² This author reworks Mitchell’s sentimental language by giving priority to the home, equating a vacant house with an empty, unfulfilled heart. According to Mitchell, fantasy both provides insight into suffering and offers a means of avoiding it; yet the unmarried woman in this story discovers that fantasizing only increases her despair by tempting her away from Christian acceptance of her fate.

For literary women facing the conflict between domestic obligations and artistic ambitions, detached intimacy probably held greater appeal. Even as they “represented themselves to self and society as nothing more or less than private domestic women,” they could imaginatively project themselves into characters who more openly pursued art and scholarship.⁷³ In Susan Warner’s *Queechy*, for example, the heroine Fleda strongly identifies with her great-uncle Dr. Gregory, a bachelor librarian who allows her to roam through his vast book collection and is both intellectually autonomous and emotionally available.⁷⁴ Yet even at the end of the century, Helen Davies warned in *Reveries of a Spinster* that dreaming and artistic expression might lead women away from domestic satisfactions. Inspired by *Reveries of a Bachelor*, the novel’s heroine, Marjory, becomes an *improvisatrice* who turns her own reveries into beautiful, emotional music. Yet at the end of the novel, the “virgin knight” Marjory understands that she has sacrificed too much by trying to realize her dreams, that she instead longs for the love of a husband and children, “tangible and real.”⁷⁵

Both the appeal and the limitations of the detached intimacy advanced in *Reveries* are perhaps most vivid in Emily Dickinson’s complex response. Even as Dickinson embraced the act of dreaming, she rejected the pure solitude that Ik represented, positing instead a vision of companionate dreaming and radical creation. Although (and perhaps partly because) Dickinson’s father, Edward, detested *Reveries*, his children Austin, Emily, and Lavinia adored it, using it as the touchstone for their own dreams and as a justification for art.⁷⁶ As Emily laughingly lamented in a letter to Austin, their father could not comprehend their attraction to such “frivolous” writing:

Father was very severe to me; he thought I’d been trifling with you, so he gave me quite a trimming about “Uncle Tom” and “Charles Dickens” and those “modern Literati” who he says are *nothing*, compared to past generations, who flourished when *he was a boy*. Then he said there were “somebody’s *rev-e-ries*,” he didn’t know whose they were, that he thought were very ridiculous—so I’m quite in disgrace at present, but think of that “pinnacle” on which you always mount, when anybody insults you, and that’s quite a comfort to me.⁷⁷

Reveries brought out a fundamental generational conflict over “sentimental” versus “serious” literature. Yet Emily Dickinson adopts a typically Ik Marvelish response in dealing with her father’s disdain—she jokes and separates herself from her father’s views, imagining herself above it all with Austin on Parnassus.

Why was Emily Dickinson so enamored of this book? We can find some hints in the copy of *Reveries* that once belonged to the Dickinson family and that is now held by the Beinecke Library, for in this volume Emily Dickinson drew lines or asterisks next to passages that held special significance for her.⁷⁸ Dickinson marked Ik Marvel’s meditations on love, death, and the idealized future, as well as his resistance to the social injunction that he marry. Though Dickinson’s marks are enigmatic, she—like many other readers—appeared to be moved by Marvel’s idealism, as well as by his sense of passion and potential bubbling beneath the surface. Thus she marked, “There lies in the depth of every man’s soul a mine of affection, which from time to time will burn with the seething heat of a volcano, and heave up lava-like monuments, through all the cold strata of his commoner nature. . . . Affection is the stepping stone to God. The heart is our only measure of infinitude.”⁷⁹ For Dickinson this passage, one of the vital statements of this “book of the heart,” might have signified the yet unrealized power of feeling to achieve transcendence, an explosion of the everyday. Like Mitchell, Dickinson incorporated the metaphor of volcanoes in her own work, exploring the tension between external and internal, between what is and the disruptive potential of what could be.⁸⁰ Dickinson also joined Mitchell in mocking shallow women, placing marks next to passages belittling flirts—“She is always gay, because she has no depth of feeling to be stirred”—and busybodies—“some country women, who wore stiff bonnets, and eat fennel, and sung with the choir.”⁸¹ A passage about overzealous relatives pushing the young toward marriage merited enough attention for Dickinson to put a plus sign next to it, as if she shared Marvel’s annoyance at “pleasant old ladies, and trim, excellent, good-natured, married friends, who talk to [the bachelor] about nice matches—‘very nice matches,’—matches, which never go off?”⁸²

One is tempted to hypothesize that Dickinson admired Mitchell in part for giving grandeur to being single, representing it as a state of heightened imagination and independence of thought. Through celibacy, both Mitchell and Dickinson were able to commit their resources to contemplation and creation, crafting artistic identities that attempted to elide gendered divisions by positing a zone of imaginative production that existed in tension with both. In a letter to Mrs. Josiah Holland, Emily Dickinson developed metaphors for the fluidity of identity and playfully referred to her own bachelorhood. Imagining the thrill that Holland would feel upon her

husband's return from a lecture tour, Dickinson wrote, "I gather from 'Republican' that you are about to doff your weeds for a Bride's Attire. Vive le fireside! Am told that fasting gives to food marvellous Aroma, but by birth a Bachelor, disavow Cuisine."⁸³ In this ambivalent portrait of domesticity, Dickinson suggests that the wife's state of being is entirely dependent upon the husband, so that his absence makes her a widow who must renounce pleasure, while his presence brings about a wedding feast of sorts. Yet Dickinson's almost monastic asceticism, her refusal even to taste fine foods, yields its own rewards; if she doesn't know what she is missing, she doesn't feel the lack. Whereas the wife's identity shifts between widow and bride, Dickinson asserts that her bachelorhood is inherent, with her from birth. By claiming this conventionally masculine identity, she asserts the power of deliberate renunciation. Perhaps in describing the "marvellous Aroma" that fasting brings to food, Dickinson is punning on Mitchell's pen name and playing with his aesthetics of distance. In disavowing rather than making vows, she may have had in mind Ik Marvel's version of bachelorhood, where the dream is preferable to the fulfillment and where pleasure comes from the imagination rather than physical experience.

Yet Dickinson rejected Mitchell's insistence on solitary dreaming and claimed the right to succeed him and enact her own shared dreams.⁸⁴ Using *Reveries* as the inspiration for her own imaginative flights, she wrote to her close friend (and future sister-in-law) Susan Gilbert,

It was such an evening, Susie, as you and I would walk and have such pleasant musings, if only you were here—perhaps we would have a "Reverie" after the form of "Ik Marvel," indeed I do not know why it would'nt be just as charming as of that lonely Bachelor, smoking his cigar—and it would be far more profitable as "Marvel" *only* marvelled, and you and I would *try* to make a little destiny to have for our own. . . . Dont you hope he will live as long as you and I do—and keep on having dreams and writing them to us. . . . We will be willing to die Susie—when such as *he* have gone, for there will be none to interpret these lives of our's.⁸⁵

By using the word "interpret," Dickinson explains why Mitchell was so important to his readers: rather than imposing a vision on them, he seemed to give significance to their own dream lives and validate their fancies. Although Dickinson suggests that Marvel brings meaning to the inner lives that she and Susan lead, she moves beyond Marvel's fantasies and builds one of her own—a fantasy of mutuality, of shared dreaming between two female friends, a fantasy that she hopes to put into practice, for personal "profit" and pleasure. What Dickinson wants to implement is dreaming as

a loving bond that is revelatory and comforting, “companionable and productive, pointing to a possible future.”⁸⁶ We find in Dickinson’s dreams of collaborative dreaming a description of her own evolving relationship with Susan Gilbert Dickinson, which Martha Nell Smith has shown to be crucial to Dickinson’s development as a poet.⁸⁷ With Emily Dickinson, then, we see two modes of reading coming together: individualist and social, receptive and creative, practical and fantastic.

Mitchell continued to be a touchstone for Emily Dickinson’s imaginings, yet in her comments on his next book, *Dream Life*, she asserted an almost Bloomian will to surpass the bachelor author. As she wrote in a letter to Austin, “‘Dream Life’ is not near so great a book as the ‘*Reveries*[’], yet I think it full of the very sweetest fancies, and more exquisite language I defy a man to use; on the whole I enjoy it very much, tho’ I can’t help wishing all the time, that he had been translated like Enoch of old, after his Bachelor’s Reverie, and that the ‘chariot of fire, and the horses thereof,’ were all that was seen of him, after that exquisite writing.”⁸⁸ Here Dickinson invokes the tale of Elijah to explain her sense of Mitchell’s diminishing creative powers after *Reveries*—and perhaps her desire to become an Elisha, performing her own aesthetic miracles while infused with Mitchell’s spirit. The narrative that Dickinson taps is one of succession: the prophet Elijah is to be carried away by God, but his servant Elisha insists on accompanying him and asks that he “inherit a double share of [Elijah’s] spirit.” A chariot and horses of fire take Elijah to heaven, as Elisha shouts, “My Father! My father! Chariot of Israel and its chargers.”⁸⁹ Elisha goes on to become a great prophet himself, charged by Elijah’s spirit. For Dickinson, this story might have represented her own ambitions to become a great poet, to draw upon Mitchell’s powers as she replaced him.

Did detached intimacy manifest itself only in *Reveries of a Bachelor* and reader responses to it, or did it have wider cultural significance? Providing a complete answer would require a much more comprehensive study of the interaction between readers and texts in nineteenth-century America. Perhaps people responded so powerfully to *Reveries* and its detached intimacy because it reflected and validated their own practices as readers, as they used their reading to prompt their own fantasies yet were ultimately able to close the book and return to their everyday lives. Indeed, the playful, self-reflexive approach to reading advanced by Mitchell and embraced by his fans resembles what Victor Nell calls “ludic reading”: reading for pleasure. According to Nell, reading and reverie are analogous, as the reader is transported to an alternative reality and engages in “relaxed contemplation,” yet is still conscious and in command of the will.⁹⁰

Although by the 1840s reading for pleasure was gaining increasing legitimacy, suspicion toward fiction lingered, as the conflict between Dickinson

and her father suggests.⁹¹ Social commentators such as Rev. John Todd urged readers to seek instruction and maintain a critical distance by reading “*very slowly and deliberately*.” According to Todd, reading “bad books” would lead to “roving of the imagination, by which the mind is at once enfeebled, and the heart and feelings debased and polluted. It is almost inseparable from the habit of reverie.”⁹² While Todd contended that fiction could lead to sinful self-indulgence, through detached intimacy readers balanced sentimental identification and fantasy with skepticism and self-control, so that the roving imagination could make delightful discoveries.⁹³ Published reviews of and references to *Reveries* echoed fans’ letters in suggesting that the book cultivated sympathy, moral insight, and the imagination.⁹⁴ For instance, in “Fact and Fiction” (1854), the children’s author Oliver Optic contrasts the reading habits of two sisters: Mary, who is “open-hearted” and “independent,” and Susan, who is dutiful and keenly aware of “the good opinion of others.” While Mary reads Mitchell, Dickens, Irving, and other fiction writers, Susan studies only religious texts recommended by her hoped-for fiancé, a minister. Although the minister does not approve of Mary’s reading *Reveries of a Bachelor* and *Dream Life*, she convinces him that reading for pleasure can serve rather than undermine moral awareness, ultimately winning his heart.⁹⁵ Likewise, Fitz-James O’Brien recommended *Reveries* for providing relief from labor and intellectual abstraction: “When you have been all day long slaving at some hard, dry business, that chokes up all kindly sympathies, and parches every secret spring, come home, put on your dressing-gown, place a cup of delicate French chocolate on a table near you, and read the third chapter of ‘*Reveries*.’”⁹⁶ Using sensual language, O’Brien suggests that when the demands of enterprise have sucked readers dry, they temporarily remove themselves from social obligation and become like Ik by dressing in comfortable garments, savoring a sweet beverage, and spilling tears over a sentimental book.

The example of Emily Dickinson and other correspondents suggests that reading frequently prompted creative expression and imaginative self-fashioning. Examination of fan letters to Mitchell in the context of *Reveries* reveals how readers modeled themselves after the narrator while still maintaining a distance from him, embracing his call to dream but insisting on their own rights to control their dreams. The I/you relationship was not so much a balanced sentimental exchange as a constantly renegotiated treaty in which each party declared common interests but also imaginative independence. In reading *Reveries*, Mitchell’s fans were able to peer across the boundaries of identity in bourgeois America, so that women could shape more daring dream selves and men, too, could imagine themselves as leisured dreamers.

Notes

1. Susan Warner, *The Wide Wide World* (1850; reprint, New York: Feminist Press, 1987); Maria Susanna Cummins, *The Lamplighter* (1854; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

2. Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 45.

3. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977; reprint, New York: Noonday Press, 1998), 10.

4. Brodhead has valid reasons to avoid associating domestic fiction with fantasy, since past critics have discounted domestic novels by labeling them escapist. But my study of *Reveries of a Bachelor* suggests that the dreams stimulated by reading are not delusional or controlling but self-creating. This study builds on work by historians and critics who argue that reading is productive and creative, a means of identity formation and social connection. For example, in her wide-ranging study of female readers in antebellum America, Mary Kelley finds that they used reading as a “vehicle for what the Renaissance scholar Stephen Greenblatt has called self-fashioning,” shaping their own ways of interacting with the world and experimenting with different identities (“Reading Women, Women Reading,” in *Reading Acts: U.S. Readers’ Interactions with Literature, 1800–1950*, ed. Barbara Ryan and Amy M. Thomas [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002], 55). See also Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 215–56; and Barbara Sicherman, “Sense and Sensibility: A Case Study of Women’s Reading in Late-Victorian America,” in *Reading in America: Literature and Social History*, ed. Cathy Davidson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 201–25.

5. Vincent J. Bertolini, “Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s,” *American Literature* 68 (Dec. 1996): 707.

6. Margaret Becket, “Charles Scribner’s Sons,” in *American Literary Publishing Houses, 1638–1899*, ed. Peter Dzwonkoski (Detroit: Gale, 1986), 412.

7. James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 98. After publishing the first edition of *Reveries* in 1850, Scribner’s reissued the book many times, releasing an illustrated edition with etchings by Felix O. Darley during the Christmas of 1852, revised editions in 1863 and 1883, and special limited or illustrated editions in 1884, 1888, 1893, and 1907. In part, the book’s continued popularity resulted from Scribner’s and Mitchell’s savvy in marketing new editions as aesthetic objects, promoting a sense of connection with the author, and associating the book with “youthful sentiment” (Donald Grant Mitchell, third preface, *Reveries of a Bachelor* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1883], 5). For example, the 1884 large paper edition includes an engraving of Mitchell as well as a dedication in autograph form, making it seem as though Mitchell himself had signed the book. For a more comprehensive textual history of *Reveries*, see my online critical edition of “Smoke, Flame and Ashes,” the first reverie, at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/users/spiro/Contents2.html>.

8. Arthur Reed Kimball, “The Master of Edgewood,” *Scribner’s* 27 (1900): 187. The cultural longevity of *Reveries* challenges attempts to categorize reader response according to literary period.

9. C. B. Falls provided the woodcuts for the 1931 edition of *Reveries of a Bachelor* (New York: Holborn House), while E. M. Ashe’s color plates were included in the richly illustrated 1906 edition (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill). I have chosen illustrations from early twentieth-century editions rather than the 1852 illustrations by Darley because they better represent the scenes of reading that I am describing: familial reading vs. detached intimacy. Furthermore,

by making a letter or book central to each image, these illustrations suggest the ways in which *Reveries* came to be identified with reading.

10. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 127.

11. Susan K. Harris, “‘But Is It Any Good?’: Evaluating Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Fiction,” *American Literature* 63 (March 1991): 52–53.

12. James Machor, introduction to *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), vii. There is a growing body of scholarship on the history of reading; see, for example, Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jonathan Rose, “Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (Jan.–March 1992): 47–70; Davidson, ed., *Reading in America*; Ryan and Thomas, *Reading Acts*; Leon Jackson, “The Reader Retailored: Thomas Carlyle, His American Audiences, and the Politics of Evidence,” in *Book History* 2 (1999): 146–72; and Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “‘Have You Read . . .?’: Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52 (1997): 139–70.

13. For a discussion of some of the methodological difficulties facing the study of the history of reading, see Christine Pawley, “Seeking ‘Significance’: Actual Readers, Specific Reading Communities,” in *Book History* 5 (2002): 143–60. The fan letters and other personal papers associated with Mitchell are held by the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library as part of the Yale Collection of American Literature (ZA Mitchell 56). The Beinecke also holds a copy of *Reveries of a Bachelor* with Emily Dickinson’s annotations. In addition, I have examined Patrick Henry’s extensive comments in the margins of an 1886 edition of the book.

14. Although Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray contend that most antebellum readers rejected “secularized fancy” (“Have You Read . . .?” 162) in favor of moral instruction, readers of *Reveries* embraced it, saying that the book “wakened in them the loftiest dreams, the sweetest emotions of their nature” (Madeline Monroe, Marshall, Texas, 1 Oct. 1852, Mitchell Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, ZA Mitchell 56).

15. Elizabeth T. de Bianchedi, “Creative Writers and Dream-Work Alpha,” in *On Freud’s Creative Writers and Day-dreaming*, ed. Ethel Spector Person, Peter Fonagy, and Sérvulo Augusto Figuerira (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 128.

16. Donald Grant Mitchell [Ik Marvel, pseud.], *Reveries of a Bachelor, or, A Book of the Heart* (New York: Baker & Scribner, 1850), vii.

17. *Ibid.*, 49.

18. *Ibid.*, 66.

19. *Ibid.*, 67.

20. Samuel Otter, *Melville’s Anatomies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 220.

21. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, 127.

22. David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 34.

23. Katherine V. Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 60.

24. Donald Grant Mitchell, “A Bachelor’s Reverie,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 15 (Sept. 1849): 601–9.

25. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, 58.

26. E. C. W. to Donald Grant Mitchell, Wilmington, N.C., 16 Sept. 1853 [?], Mitchell Papers.

27. We cannot necessarily assume that these letters represent the typical response to *Reveries*, since few of the book's readers wrote to Mitchell, and the author may not have saved all of the letters he received. Still, they provide detailed evidence of how a group of enthusiasts read. For more on the methodological difficulties of studying fan letters, see Barbara Ryan, "... next to the Bible, it was the book": Fan Reactions to *Ben-Hur*" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, Williamsburg, Va., 21 July 2001).

28. Waldo Dunn, *The Life of Donald G. Mitchell* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922).

29. Ryan and Thomas, introduction to *Reading Acts*, x-xi.

30. For examples of recent scholarship on readers' letters, see Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Barbara Ryan, "A Real Basis from Which to Judge": Fan Mail to Gene Stratton-Porter," in Ryan and Thomas, *Reading Acts*, 161-78; Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*; and Jennifer Parchesky, "'You Make Us Articulate': Reading, Education, and Community in Dorothy Canfield's Middlebrow America," in Ryan and Thomas, *Reading Acts*, 229-58.

31. Machor, introduction to *Readers in History*, xxi-xxii; Karr, *Authors and Audiences*, 154.

32. In the fan letters they studied, Ryan and Karr have observed similar generic features: correspondents typically address the author as a friend, apologize for disturbing him or her with their letters, attempt to justify why they have written, and testify that the work brought new insights and meaning to their lives. See Ryan, "... next to the Bible, it was the book," and Karr, *Authors and Audiences*, 152.

33. Mitchell collected two letters by Carrie, so there are twenty-four letters and twenty-three correspondents. Henry and Dickinson are included in the counts for age, gender, marital status, and region, but not for mode of address.

34. Since readers did not necessarily distinguish between Ik Marvel the narrator and Donald Grant Mitchell the author, in citing reader letters I will use whatever name each correspondent addressed in his or her salutation.

35. These words all appear at least ten times in the letters.

36. William Dean Howells, *My Literary Passions: Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1910), 64.

37. Review of *Reveries of a Bachelor*, *Literary World* 6 (14 Dec. 1850): 478-79.

38. Dunn, *The Life of Donald G. Mitchell*, 230.

39. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 30 Oct. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

40. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, 56.

41. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 30 Oct. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

42. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 12 Dec. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

43. Patrick Henry's comments were discovered in the margins of an 1886 edition of *Reveries* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons) held at Alderman Library, University of Virginia, PS2404.R4 1886. As H. J. Jackson argues in her compelling study of marginalia, readers typically annotate what is personally significant to them (*Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 178).

44. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 30 Oct. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

45. Dorothy to Donald Grant Mitchell, 1 March 1852, Mitchell Papers.

46. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 12 Dec. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

47. Such questions about the "reality" of the narrator's *Reveries* reflect antebellum American readers' use of verisimilitude as an important standard by which to judge books

(Zboray and Zboray, "Have You Read . . . ?" 150–53). Elizabeth Nichols explains that readers in the early Republic were so invested in the relationship between the author and his or her work because they assumed that "writing reflected character" (16). This assumption guided how they read and how they expressed themselves in their own correspondence.

48. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, ii.

49. Anonymous to Ik Marvel, 14 Feb. 1852, Mitchell Papers.

50. Donald Grant Mitchell, *Dream Life: A Fable of the Seasons* (New York: C. Scribner, 1851), 15.

51. *Ibid.*, 18.

52. Aggie Bell Smallwood to Donald Grant Mitchell, Tomsville, Ohio, 14 Feb. 1853, Mitchell Papers.

53. "Enigma" to Ik Marvel, n.d., Mitchell Papers.

54. Anonymous to Ik Marvel, 14 Feb. 1852, Mitchell Papers.

55. Otter, *Melville's Anatomies*, 218.

56. "Enigma" to Ik Marvel, n.d., Mitchell Papers.

57. The etymology of "lorgnette" suggests why some found Timon's pose objectionable: it comes from the French verb "to leer."

58. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 12 Dec. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

59. My findings thus concur with John Fiske's analysis of fans' responses to popular literature: "Fans are productive: Their fandom spurs them into producing their own texts" (*Understanding Popular Culture* [London: Routledge, 1989], 147).

60. Dr. J. A. Holton to Donald Grant Mitchell, Kent, Md., 20 Feb. 1853, Mitchell Papers.

61. J. Macdonald Oxley to Donald Grant Mitchell, Ottawa, Canada, 14 May 1886, Mitchell Papers.

62. Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel*, 62.

63. "Literary Notices," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 4 (1852): 274.

64. William Thompson to Ik Marvel, St. Louis, Mo., 1 July 1852, Mitchell Papers.

65. Another male reader likewise viewed the book as a defense of bachelorhood. Sharing his own "reveries of a married man," Mitchell's friend Charles Astor Bristed criticized what he took to be the book's message that a man should avoid marriage because his wife might die or become a shrew (Charles Astor Bristed to Donald Grant Mitchell, New York, 11 Feb. 1851, Mitchell Papers).

66. Anonymous to Ik Marvel, 14 Feb. 1852, Mitchell Papers.

67. Anonymous to Ik Marvel, 14 Feb. 1852, Mitchell Papers.

68. Some readers were inspired by *Reveries* to create their own art. While three readers sent poems, Charles Henri Lassrnlly dedicated a polka to Mitchell and asked him to be "god-father of my music" (Charles Henri Lassrnlly to Donald Grant Mitchell, Kinderhook, New York, April 18, 1852, Mitchell Papers). William Dean Howells cited Mitchell as an influence (*My Literary Passions*, 64), and Henry James recalled his "very young pleasure" in "the prose, as mild and easy as an Indian summer in the woods," of Melville, George William Curtis, and Donald Grant Mitchell (cited by Merton Sealts, "Reception of the Short Fiction," in *Pursuing Melville 1940–1980* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982], 234).

69. E. C. W. to Donald Grant Mitchell, Wilmington, N.C., 16 Sept. 1853 [?], Mitchell Papers.

70. Carrie to Ik Marvel, Urbana, Ohio, 30 Oct. 1851, Mitchell Papers.

71. "The Reverie of an Old Maid," *Littell's Living Age* 31 (1851): 412; Helen Davies [Tainter], *Reveries of a Spinster* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1897).

72. "The Reverie of an Old Maid," 412.

73. Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 184.

74. Susan Warner, *Queechy* (New York: Putnam, 1852).

75. Davies, *Reveries of a Spinster*, 180, 214–15.

76. David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 34. According to Alfred Habbegger, *Reveries* was “the most immediately inspiring book Dickinson read in her early twenties,” and Austin admired it so much that he included it at the top of his list of books that he “kept by his side” in the fall of 1851 (*My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* [New York: Random House, 2001], 249).

77. Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, 2 April 1853, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1976), 1: 237–38.

78. According to Richard B. Sewall, who has studied these markings along with many others found in books once owned by the Dickinson family, the lines and asterisks found in the margins of *Reveries* are likely Emily’s—and if not hers, then they belong to another of the younger Dickinsons (*The Life of Emily Dickinson* [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974], 2:678–83). Likewise, Habbegger describes the markings as Emily Dickinson’s “notches” (*My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, 250).

79. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, with manuscript notes by Emily Dickinson, Za M692 850rb, copy 1, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 259.

80. We can also see resemblances between Mitchell’s style and Dickinson’s, particularly the frequent use of the dash and symbolic images such as light and smoke.

81. Mitchell, *Reveries of a Bachelor*, 74, 173–74.

82. *Ibid.*, 133.

83. Emily Dickinson to Mrs. Josiah Holland, 2 March 1859, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 2:350.

84. In a subtle way, Dickinson became like an editor of Mitchell’s prose when, on page 112, she inserted in her copy of *Reveries* an “m” after the second “who” in the phrase “you wonder who the tall boy was, who you saw walking with her.”

85. Emily Dickinson to Susan Gilbert, 9 Oct. 1851, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 1:144.

86. Habbegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*, 250.

87. Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

88. Emily Dickinson to Austin Dickinson, [c. Feb. 1852], *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 1:178.

89. 2 Kings 2:11, *Jerusalem Bible*.

90. Victor Nell, *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 2. In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), Janice Radway questions whether pleasure reading supports or subverts patriarchal culture. Although female romance readers see their reading as both pleasurable and as a means of asserting their own needs, Radway suggests that it may discourage constructive collective action in “the real world” (212).

91. Michael Davitt Bell examines the “bias against fiction” in *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For more on the increasing acceptance of fiction in nineteenth-century America, see Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), and Thomas Augst, “The Business of Reading in Nineteenth-Century America: The New York Mercantile Library,” *American Quarterly* 50 (1998): 267–305.

92. John Todd, *The Student’s Manual* (1835; reprint Northampton: Hopkins, Bridgman,

& Co., 1859), 141, 146–47. New editions of *The Student's Manual* continued to be published in the United States until 1891.

93. I do not wish to suggest that detached intimacy became the dominant interpretive mode or was universally embraced. From one perspective, detached intimacy could be equated with self-delusion and voyeurism; from another, it could be criticized for fostering self-obsessed fantasy rather than encouraging readers to work toward transforming existing conditions. For instance, in *Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne satirizes the bachelor sentimentalism of Ik Marvel through his depiction of the self-deluded bachelor-narrator Miles Coverdale. As he observes from a distance and maps his own fantasies onto others, Coverdale reveals his blindness, “[b]igotry; self-conceit; [and] an insolent curiosity” (Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* [1852; reprint New York: Norton, 1978], 152). While Hawthorne questions the reliability of the dreaming narrator, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* seeks to overcome readers’ detachment from real suffering. For instance, the introduction to the 1878 edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* includes letters from prominent readers who testify that the novel has led to social transformation (Introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* [Boston: Jewett, 1878]; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture*, <http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utcl/index2f.html> [28 Dec. 2002]).

94. Of course, the rhetoric and purpose of fan letters and published reviews differ, since reviews attempt to shape public taste, while fan letters testify to the personal significance of a text. Nevertheless, these two kinds of evidence both suggest the cultural impact of *Reveries* in promoting the pleasures of detached dreaming.

95. Oliver Optic, *In Doors and Out; or, Views from the Chimney Corner* (Boston: Brown, Bazin, 1854), 266, 272.

96. Fitz-James O’Brien, “Our Young Authors: Mitchell,” *Putnam’s Magazine* 1 (Jan. 1853): 74.