



EVERYDAY EPISTLES:  
THE JOURNAL-LETTER WRITING OF AMERICAN WOMEN, 1754-1836

by

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*For my daughter, Emmeline.*

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## *Introduction*

### Locating the Journal-Letter

“My time for writing is after I have got Sally a sleep,” explains Esther Edwards Burr to her friend, Sarah Prince, in a journal-letter entry on October 9, 1754. With a five-month-old daughter to care for, Burr is troubled to find that she now “cant get much” time for writing or reading (52, 50). As I read her words, my three-month-old daughter lays in the cradle beside me, softly snoring. I know that I have perhaps an hour, if I am lucky, before she will awake and redirect my attention away from the intellectual tasks of critical reading and writing that currently occupy me. This is the first hour since her birth that I have stolen for study. I feel a certain kinship with this woman as I study her words, knowing that they speak to my own experience even from the distance of so many years. In the ensuing months, I will read and write in snatches, sometimes like Burr at “Two O.Clock in the night” with a child asleep in the cradle and “I a rocking” with one hand (114). The culmination of my work resides in the following pages; the culmination of Burr’s in the journal-letter writing that serves as the subject of the first chapter of this study.

I first read Burr’s text as a graduate student preparing for my qualifying examinations and found myself perplexed by the form in which she wrote. I asked my exam director for advice on how to place this text within the nicely delineated boundaries of my exam list that identified and separated women’s texts as diaries or letters. She cleverly encouraged me to place it wherever I wanted. I naïvely concluded that she meant to show me the differences were negligible, for a text could just as easily be a letter or a diary; the distinction was not significant enough to trouble with. But this text continued to confront me with its

unwillingness to fit into established categories and its resistance to my conventional ways of reading. As my exams receded in the distance, I sought out other texts that were similarly puzzling in their format and found that this type of writing – writing that is both diary and letter – was indeed an acknowledged medium, though few spoke of it beyond the point of recognition. As I began to see these texts as shape-shifters that existed outside the realms of current scholarship, the project before me, a study of the journal-letter writing of American women, came into sharper focus.

### *Locating the Journal-Letter Historically*

I take the term journal-letter from the *Oxford English Dictionary* which defines this medium simply as “a letter written as a diary” and dates the earliest published use of the term to 1756 (“Journal-Letter”).<sup>1</sup> One of the earliest eighteenth-century examples of the form is Jonathan Swift’s *Journal to Stella*, published posthumously in 1766. The letters were written to Swift’s lifetime friend, and some allege secret wife, in daily entries between 1710 and 1712, after which time he began to compose conventional letters to her instead (Aitken). Swift’s use of the journal-letter, which he never designed to publish, may have been an effort to solve his dilemma with the diary form which centered on “the futility of recording diurnal details without the prospect of imparting them.” Although Swift’s use of the form was purely personal, Stuart Sherman shows that by mid century, the travel journal-letter had found a “comfortable commercial niche,” replacing the “navigation-centered sea journal as the most popular diurnal mode in travel writing.” Journal-letters seemed the perfect medium for capturing and marketing one’s travels. While the structured format of the diary offered a

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<sup>1</sup> This type of text may be referred to by a number of names including letter-journal, letter-diary, epistolary journal, and epistolary diary. I have selected the term journal-letter because it is the term recognized by the *OED* and was actually used by some authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

tidy manner of packaging copious amounts of material, the letter's concern for the attention span and interests of its reader offset the journal's "potential for quotidian prolixity." Jonas Hanway describes this benefit of the journal-letter form in his *Journal of Eight Days Journey to Portsmouth* (1756): "But, madam, a mere journal, without any striking occurrence, could have given me as little pleasure in writing, as you in reading. I therefore threw this in the form of *letters*; if there is any spirit in them, it is derived entirely from the persons to whom they are addressed." Though these travel writers emphasized their attentiveness to keeping an "exact journal" of their adventures for a specific reader, prefaces often included a "redaction trope" explaining that the original letters had been "remade" – either through abridgement or enlargement - prior to and in service of publication. In fact, Hanway's text was so transformed as to read not as a journal at all, but as letters on various moral subjects, most of which concerned the deleterious effects of drinking tea and gin (Sherman 179-83).

Though Sherman's discussion focuses on male examples of the form, women including Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Wollstonecraft, writing at the beginning and end of the eighteenth century respectively, also composed travel texts in the journal-letter style. Maryanne Cole identifies the "familiar letter, written to friends at home as a record of the journey" as a "popular and prolific" form of travel writing in this period. This form was particularly useful for women since it allowed them to "enlarge their literary skill" without "transgress[ing] gender norms." Montagu and Wollstonecraft both wrote with an eye to publication, focusing their "letters" on the culture and politics of the countries in which they traveled, particularly as they related to women (Cole 1285).<sup>2</sup> Wollstonecraft's text departs

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<sup>2</sup> Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* were not published until 1763, a year after her death, due to and despite of her daughter's efforts to keep them from the public (How 78). Wollstonecraft composed these letters to her lover, Gilbert Imlay. The resulting *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* was published in 1796 (Barros and Smith 344, 347).



from the conventions of other contemporary travel narratives in its emphasis on her personal reactions to experiences. Though she notes trying to excise the first person from her account, she finds the resulting text “stiff and affected,” prompting her to let her “remarks and reflections flow unrestrained” (Barros and Smith 344). Despite this difference, like the authors of sea journals, Montagu and Wollstonecraft both revised their texts for publication. In this mediated manner, male- and female-authored models of the journal-letter form passed into public consumption. Ordinary writers could now adopt the journal-letter as an appropriate medium for recording experiences of travel.

Moving into the nineteenth century, a preoccupation with the journal-letter as travel narrative remains, although existing accounts have placed greater emphasis on texts that were written by ordinary writers and not explicitly intended for publication. While the eighteenth-century use of the form has been identified with sea voyages, in the course of the nineteenth century, the form comes to be aligned with the experience of migration. Andrew Hassam and David Gerber identify the diary written for an audience – neither one uses the term journal-letter – as a tool employed by British immigrants in Australia and North America to inform and remain connected with loved ones at home. Lillian Schlissel and Brigitte Georgi-Findlay show that American settlers moving westward over the course of the nineteenth century also composed a “special kind of diary” meant to be sent home and sometimes shared with wider audiences. As expected, the use of this type of journal-letter by American writers diminishes with the waning of mass migrations west after 1870 (Schlissel 9-10). Kathryn Carter identifies 1850 as a critical moment for the journal-letter form as used by British immigrants in Canada, since the postal system began to function more smoothly, allowing women to write diaries or single letters, “practices that did not result in the hybrid

journal letter” (16-17). Though these dates do not signal the end of the journal-letter form – which continues in use to the present day at such varied sites as online blogs and the composition classroom – together with the rise of the sea journal-letter in the mid-eighteenth century, they offer useful parameters within which to situate and contextualize readings of journal-letters in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

When I began this study, I was pleased to find that historical accounts of the journal-letter form did exist, although I was troubled by their seeming privilege of the journal-letter as a form of travel writing since three of the four texts I had chosen for my study were not composed during periods of travel. Although Harriet Blodgett relates in her study of English women’s diaries that, by the eighteenth century, “the practice of keeping letter-diaries had begun: writing an ongoing, daily dated letter, addressed to a recipient which functioned simultaneously as a diary and as correspondence” (24), I was unable to find any works that addressed how or if average people employed the form in their everyday lives. This lack of research on the journal-letter has resulted in a skewed historical and intellectual understanding of the form as an aesthetically and retrospectively crafted travel account written primarily for publication in the eighteenth century and adopted by the masses in the nineteenth century as a tool for recording experiences of travel, particularly migration. An obvious, though inaccurate, conclusion follows: individuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries employed the journal-letter as a convenient manner for recording significant journeys, not for recording and transmitting to readers the daily, ordinary moments of their lives.

*Locating the Journal-Letter in Current Scholarship*

This limited understanding of the use of the journal-letter form by ordinary writers is accompanied by a limited understanding of the form itself. Admittedly, a text that is both letter and diary is also, ironically, neither wholly letter nor wholly diary, and thus fails to fit into traditionally recognized categories of autobiographical writing. This difficulty of classification has led to the journal-letter being excluded from individual studies of diaries and letters. In Blodgett's seminal work on women's diaries, *Centuries of Female Days*, the author explains that her study purposely excludes journal-letters because they are "intended for immediate reading by a second party" and she presumes (quite rightly) that this may "affect self-presentation" (13-14). It is exactly this effect on self-presentation that should interest us as scholars, but because journal-letters do not fit into the boundaries of what she conceives of as a diary – they are written for an audience and are thus considered less "private" – they reside outside the scope of her study. On the contrary, Gerber believes these texts more closely resemble diaries than letters. He points out that immigrants sometimes "put their diaries in letter form" and sent them to their families, but claims that although these diaries "could certainly be shared, [...] they lacked the ability to speak to the intimate bonds [...] men had with those with whom they wished to correspond." He narrowly concludes, "A diary may be a dialogue with oneself; a personal letter is an intimate, if long-distance, conversation with another." For Gerber a diary "in letter form" cannot ultimately "fulfill the emotional expectations of the correspondents" and therefore does not find a place in his study of letters (2).<sup>3</sup> It seems the journal-letter simply does not belong.

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<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Blodgett or Gerber should have included journal-letters in their studies. Of course, any scholarly work requires critical parameters. However, I wish to point out that whenever a kind of text is excluded from critical study, it is important to consider the reasons for and implications of that exclusion.

Instead of avoiding the form altogether, other scholars have ignored the distinctiveness of the journal-letter by simply reading it as a diary or a letter. For instance, although William Scheick identifies Burr's text as an "epistolary journal," he analyzes it as a letter, comparing it to other conventional letters written by Burr without considering how the conventions of and possibilities offered by diary writing may have also influenced her authorial choices (72). Similarly, although Steven Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna identify Burr's text as an "epistolary diary," they proceed to analyze it as a diary proper, noting that Burr only "imagine[s] that her entries were communication" (51). Amy L. Wink includes at least one journal-letter in her study of nineteenth-century women's diaries, that of Mormon immigrant Jean Rio Baker. Wink notes that the text is "directed to [Baker's] relatives and friends in England," but she reads it as a diary, ignoring how the requirements of epistolarity may have affected Baker's self-presentation (31). Such readings fail to acknowledge these texts' hybridity and therefore ignore the potential implications of form on function.

There are a few scholars who have addressed the form of the journal-letter in a more detailed and purposeful manner. Helen Buss was one of the first scholars to consider this form in depth. In *Mapping Our Selves*, Buss analyzes two diaries composed by female British settlers in Canada, Elizabeth Simcoe and Mary O'Brien, written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries respectively. These texts also functioned as letters to family and friends. This type of writing, which she refers to interchangeably as a diary, letter, or diary/letter, is "a public record of travel and settlement, a private record of their own development, a letter home to family and friends in the old country, and, fortuitously, a history and literature of women's pioneer Canadian experience" (37). Buss's reading of Simcoe's text in particular attends to the complications involved in simultaneously

composing a personal diary and a letter to a specific group of correspondents, forms that invite intimate details and restraint at the same time. Her insights highlight the complexity of the journal-letter form, which can only be explained through recourse to both of its constituent parts.

Building on Buss's foundation, Carter analyzes Frances Simpson's 1830 "Journal of a Voyage from Montreal," concluding that the journal-letter form "brings with it generic conventions and assumptions" that scholars must consider in reading these types of works. She reads Simpson's text as a "semi-public document" that "does not offer access to an inner self, nor does it explicitly record her concerns, anxieties, or hopes" but rather "tells us much about what constitutes acceptable subjects of discourse and knowledge for a woman of her social standing at that particular historical moment" (17-18). These conclusions, based on a single text, beg other questions. Is the journal-letter always a semi-public text? Does it necessarily guard against access to the writer's "inner self" or can it be a space for heightened intimacy? My study reveals some surprising answers to extend and complicate Carter's findings.

Finally, Andrew Hassam, in his studies of British emigrants sailing to Australia, also identifies the diary written to an audience as a specific form utilized by a particular group of travel writers. The need to negotiate a wide variety of readers differentiates this form from the letter written to a single correspondent, and in Hassam's opinion, ultimately makes it a less successful text. Though Hassam does distinguish this type of text from conventional letters, he finally concludes that it is not substantially different from any other emigrant diary, which he claims is always written for those who remain at home, resituating these texts back in the realm of the diary and denying their hybridity (*No Privacy for Writing* 34, 41-42).

Each of these works offers important insight into the journal-letter form, while revealing the need for additional scholarship to test these findings, particularly as they relate to American writers and applications of the form outside the realm of travel writing.

*(Re)Locating the Diary and the Letter*

A reluctance to allow or create a place for the journal-letter amongst the diary or the letter identifies this form as what Caren Kaplan has termed an “outlaw genre,” a mode of writing that “resists” established forms and requires new “strategies of reading” (122). Rather than avoiding analyzing the journal-letter because it is a messy form, or avoiding the messiness of the form in analysis of the journal-letter, my study highlights dualism as the defining and enabling characteristic of the journal-letter. I read the simultaneous presence of epistolary and diary elements within the form as illustrative of the creativity and adaptive ability of four ordinary women writers in colonial and early America. A full and nuanced reading of journal-letter writing, therefore, requires attentiveness to the specific ways in which elements of diary and letter writing may be fused together to create successful, reader-directed texts.

Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler contend that, “[f]or most of America’s history, women simply had no public forum in which to express the way they saw their own country. Letters (and diaries, but that’s another book) were their only outlets for recording what they saw of, what they felt about, and even how they helped to shape the world around them” (2). As such, both diaries and letters prove valuable sources for studying not only the historical realities of women’s lives, (how they have been used until only recently), but also the ways in which women have used personal writings as avenues for, among other things, making meaning out of their existence, maintaining relationships, continuing education, and

examining and constructing the self. Sharon M. Harris, in the introduction to *American Women Writers to 1800*, admits that the study of diaries and letters is not new, but that these texts are usually studied when their authors are recognized for other achievements or for more “literary” writing. What is new, then, is the study of diaries and letters of women “for whom these nontraditional genres were their *primary* means of literary expression” (7). This is a field ripe for harvest since scores of American women – particularly in moments of perceived historic importance such as wartime or mass migration – penned their experiences in one or both of these forms of personal writing.

The problem, then, is not a dearth of material for study. Every year witnesses the publication of new collections of letters and diaries, and the work of recovery quickens in archives across the nation. Rather it is how we are reading these texts – or how we are not reading these texts – that requires reevaluation. As Grunwald’s and Adler’s comments attest, although diaries and letters are often grouped together in general discussions of women’s personal writing, these texts are not often studied or presented together. In fact, these forms are rarely studied in conjunction unless used to offer insight into the life of a famous person or a significant event. For instance, one might study both Louisa May Alcott’s journal and her correspondence in order to understand more about her as a writer and as a person. Or, diaries and letters of women who made the trek west on the Overland Trail may be studied together for insight into how women experienced and understood the journey.<sup>4</sup> Yet when it is not the person or the event but the text that is of primary significance, the critical study of

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<sup>4</sup> See Schlissel, *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982)

diaries and letters tends to occur separately. Chapter divisions serve as visual depictions of the intellectualized genre boundaries that govern scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

This division seems curious considering that diary and letter writing were the two types of writing most available to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women – and available to the most women – in their daily lives (Gilroy and Verhoeven 2). In fact, many women both kept a journal and kept up with correspondence on a daily or nearly daily basis. Although diary writing was considered more indulgent than letter writing – a family responsibility – both activities usually occurred in the home – unless the writer was on a trip – and perhaps more importantly, in an hour stolen from work or sleep. Furthermore, the activities of diary and letter writing intertwined in certain ways. For instance, women such as nineteenth-century missionary Mary Richardson Walker and journalist Ida B. Wells religiously recorded their receipt and writing of letters within their diary entries, even copying letters of importance into their diaries at times. Conversely, women such as Margaret Fuller copied portions of their diaries into letters sent to family and friends or used their diaries as references in order to accurately relay events to correspondents.

Not only did many women engage in both forms of writing, diaries and letters came to be specifically identified with women during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their introduction to *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, and Culture*, Amanda Gilroy and W.M. Verhoeven suggest that letters became associated with women during the eighteenth century when moral instruction often occurred through the medium of the letter, both in

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<sup>5</sup>There are studies that have attempted to analyze diaries and letters in conjunction. One notable work is Elizabeth Hampsten's *Read This Only to Yourself: the Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*. Hampsten draws from the diaries, letters, and memoirs of various North Dakota farm women to consider how they conceived of class, place, language, sexuality, disease, death, and love, among other things. Although Hampsten brings these diaries and letters together as sources of evidence, she does not distinguish between them or consider the implications of writing one kind of text rather than another.



conduct manuals and in narrative fiction (2). At the same time, women were encouraged to engage in diary keeping as a way to improve and monitor their behavior. Early novels directed towards a reading audience of women were not only written in the form of letters, but also in the diary form as well (Podnieks 51, 54). It is not surprising that as women were theoretically confined to the private sphere, those types of writing that took place in the private sphere – the letter and the diary – came to be associated with the female voice.<sup>6</sup> That diary and letter writing are periodic forms of writing that often overlap and are composed in similar settings, under similar circumstances, and within similar constraints, offers a strong connection between the diary and the letter, a place for scholars to begin looking at how the diary and letter functioned together in women’s lives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

However, it is not my purpose to erase or even minimize the differences between these two kinds of texts, which I think are substantial. Perhaps because of its origins in the Christian desire to chart spiritual progress, the diary is often seen as focused primarily on the self (self-examination, self-reflection, self-discovery) and thus as monologic in form. Jennifer Sinor writes of the diary: “What makes the diary more difficult to read and categorize than other genres or kinds of texts are the same qualities that mark the diary as a distinct kind of writing: the fact that a diary is immediate rather than reflective, open rather than closed, and that the diary is daily” (28). Letters, the older of the two forms with beginnings in antiquity, are most often written to a specific, external audience and thus considered dialogic in form. Therefore, Hugh Blair considered the letter a “distinct species

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<sup>6</sup>There are numerous arguments in diary and letter scholarship considering whether or not either of these forms can be considered inherently or essentially feminine. See Lensink, Blodgett, Podnieks, Cook, Gilroy and Verhoeven, and Goldsmith for varying positions in each field.

of composition [...] when it is a conversation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a distance” (3.62). Throughout history, the diary and the letter have also been viewed differently in terms of artfulness. While the diary has often been read as “an artless transcription of reality” (Doll and Munns 10), promises to teach “the art of letter writing by imitation” made by late eighteenth-century letter writing manuals reflect a centuries long tradition of identifying letters and letter-writers with craft and ingenuity (Bannet xiv). Furthermore, while the diary is shaped by dailiness and continuity, the letter is more obviously shaped by the temporal and physical distances that separate writer and recipient and thus frustrate a sense of continuity.

The most significant difference that has served to separate criticism of diaries and letters – and banish the journal-letter from both fields – is a belief that the diary is writer-centered while the letter is reader-centered. Comments distinguishing and differentiating between the two genres is commonplace in diary and letter scholarship. In *Daily Modernisms*, Elizabeth Podnieks identifies the diary’s supposedly secretive nature as what has been seen as the crucial distinguishing factor between the two forms. She explains: “Even the letter, no matter how confidential, has an external addressee. Of all the literary genres, the diary is the only one that, to be imaged ‘authentically,’ must be written with no consideration of an audience beyond the writer herself” (18). As Podnieks points out, however, this concept of authenticity in diary writing is challenged by looking at the practices of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for whom “diary keeping was commonly a collective activity” with diary entries being read to and by other women and even being continued on by family members of the next generation (26).<sup>7</sup> Janet Gurkin

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<sup>7</sup>Although Podnieks agrees that the diary may have an external addressee, she does not see this as a potential connecting point between the diary and the letter, but rather between the diary and the novel.

Altman, author of *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, also acknowledges that diaries may have an audience; however, she continues to seek a point of differentiation between the diary and the epistolary text in what she refers to as the epistolary pact:

I insist upon the fact that a reader is ‘called upon’ to respond. [...] [This] alerts us to that fundamental impulse behind all epistolary writing; if there is no desire for exchange, the writing does not differ significantly from a journal, even if it assumes the outer form of the letter. To a great extent, this is the epistolary pact – the call for response from a specific reader in the correspondent’s world. (89)

Her point is well-taken. A diary written to a general audience such as “posterity” or one’s children, an audience that will not likely respond during the writer’s lifetime, does seem substantially different from a letter written to elicit a response from a specific reader. While diaries read in groups of friends may have invited, or even required, verbal responses from listeners which in turn encouraged a verbal or textual response from the writer – mimicking in some ways the reciprocity of the letter genre – the influence of such potential audiences must remain largely speculative.<sup>8</sup> Yet there is one form of personal writing that erases this fundamental distinction between the letter and the diary – “the call for response from a specific reader in the correspondent’s world” – that Altman identifies. This form is the hybrid journal-letter.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the journal-letter, then, is that it cannot undergo appropriate analysis without a loosening of genre boundaries and expectations. It frustrates efforts to separate studies of the diary and the letter by asking us to direct our focus away

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<sup>8</sup> For more on this generalized sense of audience in the diary form, see Martinson, p.6.

from explaining how these forms are fundamentally different and redirect our focus to the ways in which they are complementary.

*Locating American Women in the Journal-Letter Tradition*

Through elucidating the historical and cultural exigencies that produced the journal-letter form, analyzing it through the application of diary and epistolary theories, and examining the ways in which women adopted and adapted the form, I offer a way into this intriguing medium as a starting point for further inquiry. I have chosen to focus on the journal-letter writing of four women – each representing a significant period in American history between 1754 and 1836 – Esther Edwards Burr, Anna Green Winslow, Mary Jackson Lee, and Narcissa Prentiss Whitman.<sup>9</sup> Because our general knowledge about the journal-letter medium usually identifies it with its most common manifestation in the form of travel writings, with the exception of Whitman’s journal-letter, I purposely selected texts that were not written during periods of travel. (I felt it necessary to include Whitman’s text, which details her experience of overland migration, because this historical event precipitates an increase in this specific form of writing to narrate a uniquely American experience.) By analyzing texts that were composed for different audiences, including friends, husbands, and parents, in addition to wider audiences including the extended family and larger community, I hope to offer a sense of the versatility of the form. It is also important to note that all of the women in this study came from white New England families with significant, or at least sufficient, economic and cultural means. All engaged in some form of formal schooling and

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<sup>9</sup> Other American examples of the journal-letter form include: *Sally Wister’s Journal* written by the sixteen year old to a school friend during the British occupation of Philadelphia in 1777-1778; *A Journey to Ohio in 1810 as Recorded in the Journal of Margaret Van Horn Dwight* written to a cousin during Dwight’s journey from New Haven to Ohio where she married and settled; Jean Rio Baker’s “By Windjammer and Prairie Schooner, London to Salt Lake City” detailing the experiences of this Mormon mother of seven on the Overland Trail for relatives at home in England; Fanny Kemble’s *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* composed originally for a close friend, but revised for publication in 1863.

were, consequently, more than literate. Regrettably, my research did not lead me to any journal-letter texts composed by women of other races, social classes, or literacy abilities, texts that I am confident would have delightfully complicated my findings.<sup>10</sup> But, of course, there must be limits to any study and, since this is the first book-length analysis of the journal-letter form, it will undoubtedly ask more questions than it answers, hopefully opening up the field to a new line of inquiry and opening up a new group of texts for analysis.

Chapter 1 examines the *Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*. This “journal” is actually a series of long letters, written in nearly daily diary entries and sent to Burr’s friend, Sarah Prince, in Boston. Writing at mid-century, Burr’s appropriation of the journal-letter form coincides with the ascendancy of the familiar letter as a vehicle of communication utilized by the middle class. A figurative heir of the Puritans and literal heir of Calvinist-minded minister Jonathan Edwards, Burr joins the familiar letter of friendship with the spiritual journal, creating a text that operates as a vehicle of internal and external spiritual accountability. Utilizing the intimacy of the diary form and the possibility for connection offered by the letter, Burr creates and participates in a community of “like-minded individuals” that is not available to her in her lonely position as a minister’s wife. This chapter argues that Burr’s adoption of the form is deliberate and historically specific, growing out of the models of letter and diary writing culturally available to her – including Richardson’s epistolary novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* – but also revealing her agency in crafting a text that questions and rejects limiting contemporary notions of womanhood.

Chapter 2 takes the pre-Revolutionary *Diary of Anna Green Winslow, A Boston School Girl of 1771* as its subject. Winslow’s “diary” is kept at the insistence of her parents

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<sup>10</sup> Archival location of journal-letter texts is complicated by the fact that these texts are usually catalogued as diaries or letters.

who are living in Nova Scotia and to whom she sends regular installments. Winslow, who is twelve years old for the majority of the text, keeps this record while residing at her aunt's home in Boston in order to attend writing, sewing, and dancing schools. Her text operates on one level as a commonplace diary, focused on the imitation and copying of texts, and on another level as a familiar letter of news, focused on relaying family and public intelligence to various audiences. In this way, Winslow's text evinces a curious mixture of copying and original composition. Unlike Burr who wrote to a peer, Winslow writes to authoritative audiences – her parents and her aunt – who act directly and indirectly to constrain her creativity and voice. Despite these restrictions, writing in this hybrid form offers her the space to speak up and take authority over her text in ways personal diary writing does not. In an unexpected turn, Winslow shares the pen with her Aunt Deming, becoming the only journal-letter writer in this study to create a collaboratively-authored text, complicating current notions of the possibilities for and purposes of collaboration in women's diaries and letters.

Chapter 3 highlights the "Journal of Mary Lee, 1813-1816." Lee keeps this journal-letter for her husband, Henry, while he is away on business in India during the War of 1812. This text is unique from the others in the study in that it was never sent to its intended recipient as mail, but was composed over time and given directly to Henry when he returned home. Lee's text is a response to historical circumstances that made correspondence over oceans during wartime a precarious and dangerous act and to cultural messages offered in letter writing manuals of the time that touted the letter as a fulfilling source of connection with the absent. Frustrated and unfulfilled by letter writing, Lee turns to a hybrid form that she believes is better suited to meet her needs for safe, intimate connection with her husband.

Throughout the course of the text, she also begins to use this form of writing as an avenue of continued education – a purpose for which women were encouraged to use letter writing in the early national period – in order to improve herself that she may fulfill her duty to raise children who will become educated, responsible citizens. By getting outside the constraints of epistolarity, Lee finds a way to make the letter, in journal form, work for her.

Chapter 4 discusses “Mrs. Whitman’s Diary,” the overland journal-letters of Narcissa Whitman composed in 1836. Whitman writes as one of the first two white women who crossed the Rocky Mountains to serve as missionaries to the Indians of Oregon. Her text was composed in the form of a diary addressed to her parents and siblings who remained at home. Since most of the existing work on journal-letters is based on travel and emigrant writings, I chose to include Whitman’s text in order to offer a different reading of the function of this hybrid medium for writers in physical transition. Thus, although readings of women’s experiences of migration have often focused on how women used writing to maintain a stable sense of self, Whitman’s journal-letter evidences a woman embracing the unsettled nature of the journey to adopt and fashion new, sometimes unconventional, identities. The journal-letter’s appropriateness for this type of identity exploration resides in its own genre instability, for it too, like the woman on the Trail, exists as a shape-shifter cut loose from many of the conventions that bind the diary or letter proper. Tellingly, Whitman ends her journal-letter after she is settled in her new home and the range of identities available to her is once again circumscribed.

This study begins in 1754 in a period when the concept of the journal-letter was popularized by published travel accounts and the epistolary fiction of Samuel Richardson. It ends in 1836 at the beginning of the mass migrations that will inspire thousands of emigrants

to write and preserve their experiences in the diary, letter, and journal-letter forms. In the interim, I have attempted to chart a preliminary “history” of the journal-letter’s development through the examples of four intriguing women. Through their texts, the journal-letter emerges as anything but a static form. It is indeed a product of the mediums of writing historically and culturally available to women at a particular moment in time, but it is also highly adaptable to the purposes and needs of individual writers. Ultimately, these “everyday epistles” test the boundaries of diary and letter writing, offering a unique medium for writing the self in the presence of others.



## Chapter 1

### The Familiar Meets the Spiritual in the “Journal-Wise Letters” of Esther Edwards Burr

“I assure you I was never so *charmed* with Letters in my Life as since you have wrote in this method,” confesses Esther Edwards Burr to her close friend and correspondent, Sarah Prince, on October 4, 1754 (49). This method of writing with which Burr is so enamored is none other than the journal-letter, the unique medium she and Prince chose for their semi-public correspondence. Written between October 1754 and September 1757, Burr’s journal-letter records her first three years as a mother, which were also her last three years of life. The journal-letter is comprised of nearly daily journal entries that she bound up every so often and sent to Prince in Boston. Prince kept a comparable journal that she sent in installments to Burr at Newark and later Princeton.<sup>11</sup>

The young women had known each other since childhood when Prince’s father, Boston minister Thomas Prince, became an early proponent of Burr’s father, Jonathan Edwards, during the Great Awakening.<sup>12</sup> We know little else about their relationship prior to the beginning of the journal-letter, but it seems clear that a close friendship had developed by 1752 when twenty-year-old Esther Edwards agreed to marry Aaron Burr, sixteen years her senior, after a brief five-day courtship. Two weeks later she was bound for her wedding and her new home in Newark, New Jersey, hundreds of miles away from family and friends. The last time the two friends met in person occurred in the spring of 1754 when the young wife

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<sup>11</sup> Prince’s journal-letters have not survived, but Burr’s references to receiving packets of letters from Prince assure us that the activity was reciprocal.

<sup>12</sup> Historians use the term “Great Awakening” to refer to the period between 1740 and 1743 when a series of evangelical revivals swept America’s eastern seaboard leading to heightened religious activity. Edwards was a key figure in this movement, which was criticized for what many saw as the excessive, and potentially dangerous, emotional fervor of its preachers and adherents. For a recent study of the revival and its connection to evangelical Christianity, see Thomas S. Kidd’s *The Great Awakening*.

invited Prince for a long visit to Newark just before giving birth to her first child, Sally (Karlsen and Crumpacker 13-15). If marriage and distance made it difficult to see each other, motherhood was sure to make it more so. Perhaps it was this realization that led the two friends to devise a plan to keep and send journals to one another in order to maintain and nurture their long-distance relationship.

In *Centuries of Female Days*, Harriet Blodgett dates the practice of journal-letter writing to the eighteenth century, defining the form as “an ongoing, daily dated letter, addressed to a recipient which functioned simultaneously as a diary and as correspondence” (24). Early examples of the form include Lady Mary Coke’s voluminous diary written to her sister Lady Strafford (1766-1791), Frances Burney’s journals (re)written as letters to her sister Susan (1768-1840), and Dorothy Wordsworth’s *Grasmere Journal* written to her brother William (1800-1803). Thanks to the thriving field of autobiographical studies, these Englishwomen’s lifewritings are now relatively well-known among scholars. Less well-known, however, are the works of American women writing during the same period. With the early start date of 1754, Burr’s journal-letter offers insight into the historical exigencies promoting the development of the form in colonial America, as well as the specific ways in which one woman appropriated this distinctive medium to record, interpret, and publish her life experiences.

*The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757* remained in a rare books collection in manuscript form until Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker transcribed and edited the text for publication in 1984. Since then, several scholars of American history and literature have mined Burr’s journal-letter for first-hand information regarding women’s roles in the mid-eighteenth century and their experiences of family, work, and religion. Surprisingly,

though they may cursorily mention that the text is a letter written in diary form or vice versa, no analyses of this text reflect the implications of Burr's choice of medium on the work's message. Given this omission, an analysis of the journal-letter form itself seems necessary.

Instead of reading the work as primarily a letter or a diary, I read it as a blending of the two forms holding the unique properties of each, yet combining them in such a way as to create a new form. Significantly, the journal-letter form was a practical choice for correspondents in colonial America for whom sending letters was an unpredictable business. Yet is also noteworthy that this particular journal-letter joins the two forms of writing most accessible to women in the mid-eighteenth century: the familiar letter and the spiritual diary. Burr's text reveals not just an adoption of these forms, but an adaptation. Instead of limiting herself primarily to the concerns of courtship and marriage, as popular letter manuals of the time proposed, Burr employs the familiar letter as an avenue for textually investigating the meaning of female friendship while developing an intimate textual friendship with other females. Because the text is also a spiritual diary addressed to a fellow Christian, the connection sought through letter writing is infused with the intensity of divinely-ordained relationship. For Burr, journal-letter writing is distinguished from conventional letter writing in that she considers it a more permanent text with the public purpose of encouraging other women. Furthermore, through the act of daily writing, Burr mounts an incremental attack on damaging gender expectations that prevailed in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, expectations that made courtship the focus of a woman's life while denying her the capability to make reasonable decisions. Beset with innumerable responsibilities, Burr constructed a text to meet her needs. Her journal-letter served as a place to consistently confide in a close

female friend, a means of sharing community with a larger group of like-minded women, and a personal legacy for a woman who was publicly overshadowed by all the men in her life.

*“I expect every day to hear of an opportunity to send this”:  
Corresponding in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*

Scholar of Canadian women’s autobiography Kathryn Carter claims that this form flourished in North America in the early nineteenth century, “the tenuous postal link to Britain serv[ing] to fuel the popularity of journal letters” (10, 16-17). Though Carter’s focus is on the Canadian colonial experience, her assessment that the postal system between Britain and the colonies was erratic at best holds true for the American colonies as well. Writing journal-letters helped correspondents stay “one step ahead of the post” since one might have little notice prior to a ship arriving or setting sail (15-16). Clearly such circumstances promoted the writing of letters that could be added on to indefinitely until the anticipated opportunity arrived.

But Burr is writing in the mid-eighteenth century and to a friend in a nearby colony. The choice of the journal-letter as an appropriate form for her correspondence may not be as readily apparent since the two were not separated by a vast ocean. To begin to understand the historical conditions that fostered the rise of the journal-letter, it is necessary to contextualize the way eighteenth-century Americans conceptualized distance. According to William Merrill Decker in *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications*, the “unprecedented mobility” of the population in eighteenth-century America made living at a distance from family and friends an increasingly common experience (10). Without efficient transportation networks within and between the colonies, traveling was extremely difficult and could offer more risks than rewards. For instance, in New Jersey where Burr resided, existing roads were not designed in such a way as to afford

comfortable travel. Stumps were left behind when trees were removed, the surfaces were ungraded, and a lack of ditching led to washouts with roads resembling “seas of mud” for most of the year (Lane 40-41). No wonder that although she continually voices a desire to talk with Prince in person, Burr also laments the improbability of such a meeting given the lack of efficient methods to bring them together. One evening, when longing for a letter packet from her friend, she complains “O along, Long 350 Miles distance separates us—Why has not art contrived some method more commodious and quick to pass such a large space of Earth without all the butteenges [*buttings?*] of traveling a long journey in a Tumbling Chaise or Troting on Horse back” (240). The three hundred and fifty miles between them represented a nearly insurmountable distance to these two women. They might hope to see each other once again in their lifetimes, but they could not hope for much more than that.

Moving away from loved ones was thus tinged with the air of finality. Once Burr has a child she finds that “a journey seems a Vast thing,” and after one and a half years of separation, she admits to Prince, “I dont think I shall ever see you in this World” (102, 165). Again and again when letters are delayed and months have intervened since last receiving word from her dear friend, Burr automatically assumes that Prince has parted from this world. “Perhaps the true measure of distance in pre-electronic communication,” claims Decker, “is the degree to which correspondents reflect upon the fact that they are far enough away from one another that one might die without the other knowing about it for some time; such reflection has a way of making all intervening space and time appear as so much annihilation of human connection” (87). Though the two friends did not again enjoy a face-to-face encounter in this world, they did correspond regularly, the only means by which they could remain connected. In this context, the letter occupies the space separating writer and

reader, lying “halfway between the possibility of total communication and the risk of no communication at all” (Altman 43). Living in an age of instantaneous communication, we cannot fathom a world in which pen-and-paper communication is the only alternative to “no communication at all,” but this was certainly the case for Americans well into the mid-nineteenth century. Decker explains:

Although letters made of paper and ink continue to flow, the practice of writing and awaiting a reply is not what it was before the emergence of the telegraph, telephone, and electronic mail. In a crisis, even the most traditional epistolarian seeks access to faster modes. Until recently [...] [d]istances were more formidable, [...] and separated parties more commonly created elaborate texts of their relationships. (3-4)

These texts were correspondences, forged between loved ones in an effort to minimize the perceived distance between them. The journal-letter represents an even more elaborate textual creation for it not only fulfills the need to periodically “stay in touch,” but creates a space where correspondents can feel as if they are virtually living and experiencing every day together.

In this period, letters made the journey that loved ones did not have the time, resources, or strength to endure. Although it was easier to send letters than to travel oneself, correspondence was also hindered by long distances. In the mid-eighteenth century, the colonial postal system was not incredibly efficient or widely used for personal correspondence.<sup>13</sup> As Richard D. Brown reveals in *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*, post offices were not extensively available or

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed history of the postal system in colonial North America see William Smith’s “The Colonial Post-Office,” *American Historical Review* 21.2 (1916): 258-275.

generally used by most of the population until after 1820, and in fact postage rates were so high that most people relied on friends or acquaintances to deliver their letters until well into the 1840s (13). We know that Burr avoided using the postal service, preferring instead to send her packets of letters through acquaintances traveling to the letter's destination. For example, in an entry on July 18, 1755, she implies that the postal system is unreliable, equating the fate of a letter in a post office and a letter that has miscarried: "tis two long since I have sent to you, but I cant hear of good oppertunitys, and I am discouraged about sending at random, for fear my Letters should be lost, or get into the Post-office" (135). In a later journal-letter she directly criticizes the postal service, which she describes as "carless" (272), though she offers no explanation to account for her disdain. Given the difficulties of sending by the post, as well as an apparent mistrust of this method, the search for "good oppertuntintys" to send a letter signifies one of the conventions, as well as one of the troublesome aspects, of letter writing unique to this period. Whereas letter-writers in later periods often write of being under the pressure of the postman, Burr's writing is characterized less by the pressure of needing to send a letter immediately – though this does happen occasionally – than by the continual wait for a safe conveyance to present itself.

This period of waiting may frustrate both writer and recipient since the news the letter contains is dated the minute it is finished. However, the medium of the journal-letter allows the writer to continually add entries up until the moment the text is called for, adding to the writer's enjoyment as well as her reader's. By the time the journal-letter is sent, it may contain many pages of writing, resulting in a much longer text than what we usually conceive of as a letter. (For instance, Burr's Letter No. 10 spans twenty-five printed pages, and probably was even longer in its original handwritten form.) Rather than sending such a

document by the post, which would have been considerably expensive since the cost of postage was calculated by the number of sheets and the distance traveled, colonial letter-writers sought out friends and acquaintances traveling in the right direction as impromptu couriers, allowing them the freedom to write more as well as more freedom to write. The lack of a reliable and affordable postal system in the mid-eighteenth century directly contributed to the practicality and popularity of the journal-letter form within the colonies, as well as between the colonies and England.

*“Your dear letter”: The Rise of the Familiar Letter*

With conditions favorable to the sending and receiving of journal-letter correspondence, it is no wonder that letter-writers found this form to be, in Burr’s words, “exactly the thing I have always wanted of my absent friends” (49). Yet what exactly is the journal-letter? When mentioned in literary or historical studies, the journal-letter is usually described only superficially as “a letter written as a diary” or vice versa (“Journal-letter”). This generalized definition may be helpful in passing, but if we propose to examine these texts, we must investigate how the elements of the letter and the diary work together to create the hybrid journal-letter, a form distinctive from its constituent parts. Furthermore, since diaries and letters do not constitute homogeneous genres, journal-letter writers may combine the two forms in any number of ways.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the mid-eighteenth century is also noteworthy for the emergence of a distinct kind of letter writing, the familiar letter. It is this particular type of letter that forms one half of the foundation of Burr’s text. In “The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800,” Konstantin Dierks defines the familiar letter as “a mode of letter writing devoted to the expression of affection and duty among kin, family and



friends.” Dierks credits the publication of Samuel Richardson’s *Letters Written To and For Particular Friends on the Most Important Occasions* (1741) with prompting the rise of the familiar letter in both England and the American colonies by “depict[ing] the familiar letter as a mode of letter writing suitable for all occasions in life and for all people in society” (31-32).

Richardson’s letter-writer, as well as his epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747), offer insight into Burr’s understanding and appropriation of the familiar letter form. Although there is no direct evidence that she read Richardson’s *Letters*, she engages in a reading of *Pamela* during the course of her journal-letter writing and mentions having previously completed *Clarissa*. Her familiarity with Richardson’s fiction, along with the widespread popularity of his letter manual, suggests the probability that she knew of this manual or at least one of his imitators.<sup>14</sup> Though it is wise to exercise caution in assuming that letter writing manuals necessarily reflect the content and function of real letters of the period, they are a useful resource for determining how dominant cultural beliefs about the purposes and propriety of letter writing were disseminated to their main audience, the middle class.<sup>15</sup>

Richardson’s *Letters* follows the usual pattern of letter-writers by offering sample letters on various subjects, but also represents an emerging trend in its incorporation of more model letters written to and by women. For instance, there are letters “From a young lady to her Father, acquainting him with a Proposal of Marriage made to her”; “To a Daughter in a

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<sup>14</sup> Burr also mentions Richardson’s novel *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) in her journal-letter, attesting further to her familiarity with his works (62). Eve Tavor Bannet’s *Empire of Letters* (2005) offers a full analysis of the most popular letter manuals in England and America in the eighteenth century.

<sup>15</sup> William Merrill Decker addresses this issue in *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (1998). He claims that most writers modeled their letters on the ones they received, while letter writing manuals played a secondary role in encouraging letter-writers to adopt particular conventions (95).

Country Town who encourages the Address of a Subaltern [A Case too frequent in Country Places]”; and “Advice of an Aunt to a Niece, in relation to her Conduct in the Addresses made her by Two Gentlemen” (Table of Contents). Although there are a few letters written to, and presumably by, women that deal with more mundane matters such as recommending servants, it is clear from a quick perusal of the contents that, when women are involved, the primary purpose of correspondence is to advise women to accept appropriate advances, shun inappropriate ones, and maintain their reputation in order that the former may be realized. If Richardson’s letters modeled what kinds of subjects occupied the pens of eighteenth-century women, one may surmise that matters of love, lust, and matrimony figured prominently in their minds and overflowed into their correspondence. The epistolary novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* add credence to this assumption for each of Richardson’s heroines utilize the form of the familiar letter primarily as a means for communicating her experience of seduction and receiving advice from friends and guardians. Similarly, Eve Tavor Bannet finds that, “More aggressively from mid-century on, manuals also focused on the control of young women in courtships, on the disposal of daughters in marriage, and on the proper marital choices for men of different ranks. One might note that domestic and courtship novels occupied the same ground” (38). The potential dangers of young women making this decision without proper direction – and through the improper use of letter writing – are made manifest in epistolary novels published in America in the later decades of the century, including such works as William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* (1787) and Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* (1797).

In line with the models of familiar letter writing and fictional works they had access to, Burr’s and Prince’s journal-letter correspondence predictably deals with matters of

courtship and marriage. Since Prince remains single throughout the duration of their correspondence, Burr acts as the experienced married woman, offering advice on prospective suitors and critiquing her friend's often coquettish behavior towards them. Without Prince's half of the correspondence, Burr's comments are sometimes difficult to interpret, especially since she usually avoids discussing such matters overtly instead directing Prince to her "privacies" for more information. Burr used this term to refer to the private letters she and Prince composed in addition to their journal-letter correspondence. These letters were sent within the larger packets and constituted a distinct form of communication for the two women. Karlsen and Crumpacker describe them as "secret letters" that "were always sent with trusted friends and were burned as soon as they were read" (Burr 48 n 9). According to the correspondents' wishes, none of these letters survive, leaving us uncertain as to their contents or their exact purpose. However, we get a brief glimpse into this private writing when Burr accidentally writes a story in her journal-letter that she should have written "on a pice of paper by it self," presumably as part of her privacies. She tells of an uncomfortable meeting with the wife of one of Prince's old suitors during which she is forced to defend her friend's behavior. In the next entry she asks Prince to burn all she has written up to that point in the letter – probably because she used the real names of this couple – adding that she has not numbered the pages yet and doing so will "do the publick no harm" (48). (Clearly Prince does not follow Burr's instructions since the pages remain intact and are, in fact, the first surviving pages of their journal-letter correspondence.)<sup>16</sup> With this comment, Burr offers a

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<sup>16</sup> Since the journal-letter begins with Letter No. 9, there were apparently eight previous letters that have not survived. Decker discusses the irony in the survival of letters that were supposed to be destroyed: "The letter writer's plea that the recipient burn the letter after it has been read is commonplace in printed volumes of letters; nothing so drives home the ironic relationship that readers of published letters bear to these texts than the appearance of this request amid the material evidence of its disregard" (25).

clear distinction between the two types of writing. The privacies are just what their name suggests; they are not to be shared with or saved for the “publick”.

Only one other time in the journal-letters does Burr have such a strong reaction to reading Prince’s private letters that she cannot hold her pen and must vent her response, probably meant for their private correspondence, in her journal-letter. She sharply chastises her friend for playing hard to get with a suitor and perhaps ruining her chances of marrying. Instead she recommends a more honest approach to romance admonishing,

tis most likly that he thinks that you dislike him, or elce that you are a Mortal proud creature, which must sink you in his opinnion, and may lay a foundation for unhapyness all your days after Marriage for my dear no man likes a woman the better for being shy when she means the very thing she pretends to be shy off. (195).

Here Burr advises her friend to avoid playing games in affairs of the heart, an action that could possibly damage her reputation and negatively affect her ability to procure a worthy mate. As expected, Burr and Prince play the roles carved out for them in familiar letter writing manuals and contemporary fiction: the latter a single woman a little too fond of her freedom and the former a voice of discretion and proponent of marital felicity. Unlike the previous example, Burr is careful here to leave out any names or particulars that might identify the would-be suitor. Prince need not expunge these pages from the journal-letter record as she was supposed to the last. In both of these examples Burr overtly discusses past and present suitors, something she does not do in the rest of the journal-letter text, suggesting that Burr and Prince limited specific, personal discussions of courtship matters to their more private form of writing.

Since they were corresponding on a nearly daily basis in their journal-letters, it may seem odd that these two women felt the need for additional correspondence. Clearly, they viewed their “privacies” as a different form of communication than their journal-letter writing with a distinctly different purpose. Even though the journal-letter writing acted as a means of sharing the details of their daily lives with one another, Burr’s comments suggest that it is only in their privacies that the young women could be truly honest about their affairs (in both senses of the word):

I am of your mind, it is very needful, this private way of corresponding, (I mean our billets to be burnt.) We can no other way be let into one anothers circumstances, which would give us both much distress, but tis very hard to commit any thing of so dear a friends to the flames. It grieves me so I can hardly bare it. I have promisd and will not break my word, nor give you uneasiness. (59)

These letters were so private, in fact, that Burr finds it necessary at one point to compose a fake private letter to Prince when she fears an acquaintance who offers his services as courier may ascribe to the outdated belief that it is proper to read another’s correspondence. The secretive, impermanent nature of the privacies offers greater insight into how Burr viewed her journal-letter writing, and how readers should as well. Of course, we should not be tempted to read any letter as unadulterated expression, but by her own admission, the privacies are less guarded than the journal-letters because they are written with the expectation that they will be kept private and will not, because they are sent only with trusted couriers and are quickly destroyed, ever fall into the wrong hands. In our desire to recover letters from the realm of the private, we may be too hasty in suggesting that all letters were

open to a larger circle of potential readers than that offered by the address line. While it is true “that letters were not construed by eighteenth-century manuals, or indeed by writing masters, as a primarily private or closeted genre” (Bannet xvii), it is perhaps more accurate to think of letters as existing on a continuum than as either public or private. If letters written for publication represent an extremely public version of the genre and letters written for the flames represent the other extreme, then Burr’s journal-letter writing exists somewhere in between.

Though these private letters were extremely important to Burr, they are not ultimately what she hoped would constitute her legacy. This fact is what ultimately distinguishes the two types of writing. Though it is composed of daily moments, Burr constructs her journal-letter writing for permanence. Tellingly, these women conduct their discussions of courtship not in the journal-letter, but in their private letters. The temporary nature of suitors and the relationship concerns that exist within courtship seem well-suited for the privacies. However, in the journal-letter, Burr’s discourse concerning issues of love and marriage is not confined to the occasions Richardson and other epistolary authors model. Instead her discussions of marriage are more theoretical and thus applicable to a wider audience than just Prince. Sometimes her theories are humorous, as in an entry from January 1755 when she proposes that the greater number of weddings occurring in the winter can be attributed to people’s “fear of laying cold, and for the want of a bedfellow” (79). Other times her comments are of a more serious nature. For instance, she cautions, “It requires a good store of prudence to live and behave in the married state as we ought but many, very many poor young thoughtless creatures think nothing of this is needful after marriage, but vainly imagine that happiness comes of consequence” (199). A year later, she continues to consider the

married state, detailing three “tender Concern[s]” she has for the newly married who, she claims, rarely know what they have gotten themselves into (265). Her journal-letters indirectly critique works such as Richardson’s that concentrate so relentlessly on the events leading up to marriage, for as a wife and mother Burr knows that the choice of a mate, however important, is only the beginning.

Therefore, the expectation that married women’s familiar letter writing should concern itself nearly exclusively with encouraging other women to find suitable mates and escape the snares of seducers is challenged through a reading of Burr’s journal-letter, which deals with such concerns only intermittently. In *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*, Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven find the traditional epistolary canon, which includes both of Richardson’s epistolary novels, problematic for it “serves to equate the epistolary with the romantic/erotic and (in almost all instances) places a female figure at the center of a male-authored text” (4).<sup>17</sup> Unlike Richardson, Burr shows that romantic subjects are not the only, or even the primary, concerns of female letter-writers. Though she clearly believes marriage is important – she calls a spouse “the nearest and dearest Relation” (265) – her journal-letter writing to Prince focuses more on the relationship they share as friends, rather than on their romantic relationships with men.

*“The Sister of my heart”: Fostering Female Friendships through Correspondence*

In fact, Burr and Prince take the decision to form friendships as seriously as the decision to marry. This concern is prominent from the beginning of their correspondence, for as early as fourth entry of the first surviving journal-letter Burr thanks Prince for her “9

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<sup>17</sup> Gilroy and Verhoeven do not quibble with the fact that the majority of these texts are also fictional. The traditional epistolary canon includes: “*The Portuguese Letters*, the letters from Héloïse to Abélard, *The Life of Marianne*, *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, *Julie; or, the New Eloise*, *Dangerous Liaisons*, and *Evelina*” (4).

observations of choosing a friend” (49). (Interestingly, there are no comparable observations on how to choose a spouse.) In the remainder of their journal-letter correspondence Burr considers forming friendships with various women, but from her reticence to do so we see that friendship, like marriage, is not a relationship to be entered into lightly. As a writer, Burr is perhaps best known for her passionate insistence on the primacy of friendship as a sacred bond – Karlsen and Crumpacker describe her text as “one of the earliest-known expressions of sisterhood in America” (34) – a stance that reflects the evolving conception of friendship during the eighteenth century paralleling the rise of the familiar letter.

In her comprehensive history, *Women and the American Experience*, Nancy Woloch identifies piety and friendship as two “loopholes” in the negative self-image of eighteenth-century women. Using Burr’s journal-letter as an example, Woloch explains that the meaning of “friend” changed during the eighteenth-century to denote an ally who was not a family member, but a peer (44). Tellingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* shows no usages of friend as “a kinsman or near relation” after 1721 (“Friend” def. 3). Instead, a friend came to mean what it does presently, “[o]ne joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy, [n]ot ordinarily applied to lovers or relatives” (def. 1a). The word “friend” is also of interest to the familiar letter tradition emerging in the eighteenth century since it is in the full title of Richardson’s manual, which boasts of “*Letters written to and for Particular Friends...*” Interestingly, Richardson’s letter manual includes both letters written between relatives and unrelated friends. He seems to be using the word friend in both its senses, offering further evidence to support Woloch’s claim that the word’s meaning was in flux at this time. What is perhaps most telling about Richardson’s use of friend resides in the fact that there are few letters written to friends (in its present sense) in the collection – most are



between family members – and in all but one of those letters at least one of the correspondents is male. The solitary letter from “A lady to her Friend” predictably offers advice against marrying a man of unequal fortune. If one takes Richardson’s manual as indicative of the kind of correspondence taking place between female friends, one might suppose that female friends did not have much occasion to correspond.

Only six years after the publication of *Letters*, however, the serial publication of *Clarissa* (1747) began, offering a window into the changing nature of friendship. Whereas Richardson’s first epistolary novel, *Pamela* (1740), was published just before *Letters* and relied primarily upon the young heroine’s correspondence with her parents, *Clarissa’s* preface indicates that her story will be told somewhat differently: “The following History is given in a Series of Letters, written principally in a double, yet separate, Correspondence; Between Two young ladies of Virtue and Honour, bearing an inviolable friendship, and writing upon the most interesting Subjects” (iii). While *Letters* and *Pamela* seem to share an understanding that writing between family members is of the utmost importance, *Clarissa* represents a shift in which a woman may confide just as, and in *Clarissa’s* case more, comfortably in a close female friend as she can her parents. It is perhaps not coincidental that Burr read *Clarissa* prior to beginning her journal-letter correspondence with Prince, a move that may have been influenced by the popular novel.

Both the fictional and the real correspondents are effusive in their praise and declarations of love to one another. In the opening pages, *Clarissa Harlowe’s* close friend and correspondent Anna Howe begs *Clarissa*, “[w]rite to me therefore, my dear, the whole of your story.” As the letter ends, Howe speaks passionately of their relationship; they are so

close that she feels she need not apologize for asking Harlowe to share the intimate details of her life:

Yet, why should I say Pardon me? When your concerns are my concerns?  
When your honour is my honour? When I love you, as never woman loved  
another? And when you have allowed of concern and of that love; and have  
for years, which in persons so young, may be called many, ranked in the first  
class of your friends. (4)

Howe's request for correspondence is not based on the sense of duty growing out of a hierarchical relationship, but rather on the love they share as equals, as friends.

Early in their journal-letter correspondence, Burr offers similar praises to Prince, while contributing to the emerging distinctions between familial and friend relationships:

It is a great comfort to me when my friends are absent from me that I have  
'em some where in the World, and you my dear for *one*, not of the least, for I  
esteem you one of the best, and in some respects nerer than any Sister I have.  
I have not one Sister I can write so freely to as to you the Sister of my heart.  
There is a friend nerer than a Brother, *certainly*.... (53)

Here she distinguishes between the biological bonds of family and the spiritual and emotional bonds of friendship, which she identifies as the stronger of the two. If there was an inherent obligation to correspond with family members, corresponding with friends was a choice. As Woloch adds, friendship “provided an escape hatch from authoritarian relationships within the traditional family” by offering an “independent, egalitarian connection” (44). Such a connection would have been especially attractive to Burr, a woman whose close relations, her husband and her father, were highly influential and powerful men.

Enhanced by the medium of the familiar letter, which “concentrated [...] on the display of emotion and sincerity” (Dierks 34), letter writing between friends held the potential for greater freedom and, in turn, greater satisfaction.

Thus, when Burr refers to herself as Burissa in Letter No. 11 of her journal-letter, she is clearly channeling Clarissa Harlowe, a woman who reclaimed a degree of freedom through correspondence with a female friend. It is the first time she refers to herself by this name, but it is probably not coincidental considering she was reading Richardson’s other epistolary seduction novel, *Pamela*, while writing this particular journal-letter. Appropriating the name of a famous historical or mythological figure was one convention adopted by letter-writers during the eighteenth century in order to display literary knowledge and gain “temporary freedom from Puritan morals and manners” (Butterfield and Kline 4). For instance, John and Abigail Adams referred to each other as Lysander and Diana in their early letters, and later Abigail donned the more mature identity of Portia (Adams 19-47, 159-65). Decker refers to such names as “alter egos,” particularly useful in courtship letters, for these identities serve as “proxies” in an as yet unproven love relationship (80). But what about the use of alter egos in a correspondence between female friends? From Burr’s letters we know that Prince went by Fidelity, and the other members of the Sisterhood, a group of women Prince met with in Boston, had pseudonyms as well. In Letter No. 19, Burr catalogues a Marina, Constancia, Confidentia, Laura, Simpathia, Leomira, and Julia (184). Burr’s pseudonym differs from the others, however, in that she does not assume the identity of “mythological, historical, or dramatic figures” (Decker 80). Not the normal fare for pen names, hers is a hybrid creation, a cross between her name and that of a character in a piece of contemporary fiction. Instead of taking on a personality or character trait, she chooses to

maintain part of her own identity, adding to it the identity of a woman she, presumably, admired. What is it about Clarissa Harlowe that Burr saw in herself?

The two outwardly share little in common. Burr is a dutiful daughter, a minister's wife, a mother. How different from Harlowe who is estranged from an uncaring family, rejects all offers of marriage preferring instead the independence of the single life, and tragically dies after being victimized by, but refusing to succumb to, the libertine Lovelace. Yet the enormous popularity of Richardson's works demonstrates that Burr and thousands of other women in Britain and the American colonies found much in his heroines to relate to. In fact, the editors of Burr's text highlight the significant influence of Richardson's strong female characters in prompting eighteenth-century women to write. Karlsen and Crumpacker suggest: "Anxious to reaffirm religious values in their own social worlds, Esther and Sarah could easily accept Richardson's premise that pious women, armed with their letter writing talents, had the power to influence their destinies" (23). Letter writing, then, provides the important connection. No matter what course Harlowe's fictional life took, she was in control of the telling of her/story through the letter form. This control is evidenced from the novel's opening letter when Howe encourages Harlowe to write and send an account of her actions which would serve as her justification, should "anything unhappy" occur (Richardson, *Clarissa* 4). Many unhappy things occur in the course of the novel, not the least of which is Harlowe's death. The story that would have died with her, or remained only through the telling of others', lives on in her surviving correspondence, serving as her justification not only to her immediate audience of family and friends, but also to the wider audience achieved through publication. Thus, the growing practice of familiar letter writing between female friends, reflected in and encouraged by Richardson's *Clarissa*, provided

mid-eighteenth-century women with a new justification for taking to the pen, as well as a significant means of developing and maintaining female intimacy.

*“Not one person that will talk freely to me on religion”:  
The Spiritual Journal as a Forum for Religious Conversation*

With this model before her, Burr takes up a new kind of letter writing seeking, just as Harlowe did, justification in life and death. Yet unlike Harlowe, Burr’s quest for justification is less rooted in the realm of familiar letter writing than in the Puritan-influenced activity of keeping a spiritual diary. For heirs of Puritanism like Burr and Prince, obtaining justification did not just concern public acceptance of one’s external actions; it was, more importantly, finding spiritual acceptance and assurance. The *OED*’s definitions of justification confirm both its secular and spiritual meanings. In a secular sense, Clarissa sought justification through her letters: “[...] showing something to be just, right, or proper; vindication of oneself or another; exculpation” (“Justification” def. 3). The following definition, however, highlights the theological side of justification: “The action whereby man is justified, or freed from the penalty of sin, and accounted or made righteous by God; the fact or condition of being so justified” (def. 4). Burr employs her journal-letter writing not just to maintain connection with a distant friend. As did her Puritan ancestors, she also employs writing to determine if she has been justified before God. By keeping a record of her daily actions and spiritual states of mind she could look for evidence of salvation and the work of sanctification – that which follows justification – in her life. Since sanctification is a lifelong process, one would need a long-running spiritual inventory in order to determine whether or not, and at what rate, the refining of the self took place. In this way, Burr takes the familiar-letter form and adds to it the function of the spiritual diary resulting in the hybrid journal-letter.

Steven Kagle identifies the spiritual journal, specifically the Puritan diary, as one of the parents of the American diary tradition (*American Diary Literature* 27). It is a type of lifewriting that has historically been understood as an extremely private venture. As Kagle proposes, the spiritual journal represents the Puritan alternative to an intermediary between man and God, the journal serving as “a companion in their spiritual isolation” (26). Instead of turning outward to a priest, Puritans turned inward to the self, the diary offering a space to “privately consider the conviction of sinfulness which [their] society viewed as a necessary step toward salvation” (30). The Puritan diary served as a record of an individual’s spiritual progress and backsliding. Such a record was necessary in a faith system where members were constantly questioning whether they were one of the elect, God’s chosen few marked for salvation, and constantly fearing that they were not. In “‘Come and Hear’: Women’s Puritan Evidences,” Kathleen M. Swain explains: “Under the shadow of predestinate damnation, Puritans honored Calvin’s insistence upon a scrupulous examination of conscience for signs and proofs of salvation or damnation, by eagerly studying, recording, and reinterpreting the details of their spiritual lives” (34). Diaries offered tangible proofs for examination and interpretation, but they were only part of a complex web of activities through which Puritans gained spiritual assurance, and by extension, secured full membership in their community. Swain observes:

One earned it [church membership] after intense introspection and extensive discussions with the minister, elders, and others, as well as through careful Bible reading and attention to sermons, prayers, prophesyings, Bible readings, church disciplinings, alms, covenant makings and renewals, and other church ordinances. It meant also associating intimately and continuously with other

believers in smaller social and family devotional exercises, in conferences, counsels, and godly conversations with peers, advisors, and potential or lapsed converts. At the private level, Puritans also regularly practiced ‘closet’ devotions, meditations, and diary keeping. (33)

Swain places diary keeping on “the private level,” distinguishing it from interactive processes such as attending church, having family devotions, and engaging in godly conversations with peers. Daniel B. Shea also identifies Puritan diaries as “by definition, private records” (88).

Although vestiges of the myth of the diary as private document remain, scholarship in recent years has done much to complicate our understanding of the diary form. Diaries have not always been kept under lock and key, hidden from the prying eyes of the outside world. Instead, similarly to letters, diaries too have been shared documents, whether willingly or unwillingly. As Elizabeth Podnieks points out in *Daily Modernisms*, early diaries were not audience-less texts, particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when “diary keeping was commonly a collective activity” with diary entries being read to and by other women and even being continued on by family members of the next generation (26).<sup>18</sup> In fact, Burr probably assumes that most of her journal-letter will be shared with Prince’s female prayer group, the Sisterhood, whom she often mentions in her writing. Additionally, an audience need not be invited, for Harriet Blodgett cautions in *Centuries of Female Days* that “husbands may expect diary privileges” (57). Although Blodgett seems to view this as

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<sup>18</sup> Such scholars include Lynn Z. Bloom whose “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents” identifies a sense of audience as the characteristic that transforms private diaries into public documents, as well as Deborah Martinson whose *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction* studies diaries that were read by the woman diarists’ husbands to consider the effect of a reading audience on the diary text. Walter Ong and Mikhail Bakhtin also emphasize the significance of even an imagined audience on all forms of writing.

an unwelcome imposition – and there are certainly countless instances when it was – we do know that Burr often invited her husband to read her journal-letter, consulting with him before composing certain responses and even asking him to add to the text at times. Even if Burr welcomed her husband’s input, as Blodgett concludes, the knowledge that one’s spouse – or any audience for that matter – may read one’s writing, necessarily complicates the designation of such writing as private.

If a diary did not have an immediate audience during its writer’s life, an audience might have been expected after death, especially during the eighteenth century when many women kept diaries with the knowledge – and perhaps the desire – that their contents might be edited and published by a clergyman after their death.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Jonathan Edwards’ publication of women’s conversion experiences may have been a primary factor encouraging evangelical women to “keep written accounts of their souls’ concerns” (Karlsen and Crumacker 21). Burr notes reading “Mrs Housemans Diary,” a diary published by a male minister, most likely Houseman’s husband, after her death. Even as she reads this diary in the hopes that it will be a “blessing” to her, she is constructing a diary-like text that she hopes will one day be a blessing to other women.<sup>20</sup> With a famous father, a husband who was prominent clergymen and president of Princeton, and a mother whose conversion story had been (re)written and published by her father, Burr would have been more than justified in thinking that her writing might also be published after her death.<sup>21</sup> Brief comments

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this practice see Ann Taves, “Self and God in the Early Published Memoirs of New England Women,” *American Women’s Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory*, ed. Margo Culley (Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1992) 57-74.

<sup>20</sup> *The Power and Pleasure of the Divine Life; Exemplify’d in the Late Mrs {Hannah Pearsall} Housman, of Kidderminster, Worchester, As Extracted from Her Own Papers*. Eed. Rev. Mr. Richard Pearsall (London, 1744). Reprinted in Boston, 1755.

<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Burr’s journal-letter was not published in its entirety until 1984. This omission can most likely be accounted for in that she was not survived by her father or her husband, the two most likely editors of her life in



throughout her text also suggest she believes that her words probably will be read by the larger “publick.” For instance, as we have seen, Burr does ask Prince to burn the first part of Letter No. 9 when she accidentally writes an unflattering account of one of Prince’s old suitors. Her instructions confirm her anticipation of a public audience for the journal-letter: “It will do the publick no harm if tis all burnt, as what I now write is not paged in order but I will leve that to you” (48). Thus, although Karlsen and Crumpacker suggest that Burr’s spiritual record is “an essentially private document” written with only the “faint possibility of a wider audience” (23), historical evidence and her own words confirm otherwise.

Significantly, Karlsen and Crumpacker identify Burr and her correspondent Prince as “latter-day Puritans” and suggest that their journal-letters “can be located in the tradition of introspective Puritan diaries” (19-20). Taken together, the Puritan legacy of diary keeping as an essential element of community membership, along with the specific encouragement given to evangelical women during the religious revivals of the eighteenth century to maintain spiritual journals, provided Burr with both historical and contemporary inducement to record her spiritual journey. Yet, her spiritual writing differs from both of these model forms most significantly in that it is also a letter written to a specific, invited audience. Ironically, it is the absence of a close community with whom to share her life and her writing that encourages Burr to send her record into circulation.

When she exchanged her childhood home in Northampton, Massachusetts for the lonely position of a minister’s wife in Newark, New Jersey, Burr left a community of close friends and family behind. In her new home at Newark, and later Princeton, she had a difficult time finding female friends with whom she could develop deep relationships. This

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writing. At the turn of the twentieth century, a clergyman, Jeremiah E. Rankin, published a “ladies’ gift book” which he titled *Esther Burr’s Journal*, but which was largely his own creation (Karlsen and Crumpacker ix).

is a complaint that surfaces often in the text, each time revealing her heightened desire for Prince's companionship. Back in Boston, Prince is lucky to have the Sisterhood – "*friends that one might unbosom their whole soul to,*" – while Burr laments, "*There is not one person that will talk freely to me on reigion in this Town*" (112). For this minister's wife, "*relegious Conversation*" is a necessity, "one of the best helps to keep up reigion in the soul, excepting *secret devotion*" (112). Her emphasis on "relegious Conversation" hearkens back to earlier Puritan communities where the faith and the fate of the individual were inextricably connected to the faith and fate of the larger community. Tellingly, she connects the activities of diary keeping and religious conversation in this passage as vital and complementary. But Burr is in a state of isolation during her years in New Jersey, despite the crowds of visitors that continually interrupt her writing. She lives within a faith community, but does not feel connected to that community, particularly once she finds she has become a subject of gossip, condemned for being too proud (127-28). Members of the community may be displeased with her, but she is equally displeased with them for failing to meet her standards for friendship. Although she does find one woman, the "poetes" Annis Boudinot, who intrigues her, she offers biting criticism of most of the young women she comes into contact with, calling one group of women she has over to tea "as stupid as horses," and complaining that "[i]t would be casting Pirls before swine to say any thing about reigion before them" (248). A lack of spiritual affinity with her husband's congregation must have been a difficult cross to bear, especially for a woman who took friendship very seriously, even considering "true friendship" a sacred connection that "does not belong to the *world*" but "will *burn* to all *Eternity*" (92).

Despite her complaints, Burr does not miss out entirely on “religious conversation” since her husband frequently has theological discussions with visiting pastors and other male members of the community. In the same entry, she juxtaposes the ignorance of the women she must have to tea against the divine conversation of Mr. Burr and his male associates, calling the latter “a Heaven upon Erth” (248). Her position as a woman probably limited her involvement in these discussions among the men, suggesting that though she may have received the benefit of listening, she had limited opportunities for participation herself. One entry in particular confirms this assumption. During one of Mr. Burr’s trips to Boston, she spends time imagining what is happening in Boston at the moment she is writing. She predicts:

I imagine now this Eve Mr Burr is at your house. *Father* is there and some others. You all set in the Middleroom, *Father* has the *talk*, Mr Burr has the *Laugh*, Mr Prince gets room to stick in a word once in a while. The rest of you set and see, and hear, and make observations to yourselves, Miss Jany amongst the rest, and when you get up stairs you tell what you think, and wish I was there too. (54)

In this imagined scenario the women take part in a secondary conversation wherein they have the chance to voice the observations they silently made while the men were talking. However, this dream that is so pleasing to her is in stark contrast to her present reality, for Burr does not have anyone to continue the conversation with upstairs.

Therefore, when Burr turns to writing as an avenue for the perfection of her faith, she does not simply keep a spiritual diary; instead, she fashions a text that will satisfy her need for religious conversation as well. When her church communities in Newark and Princeton

do not fulfill her needs for spiritual companionship, she invites Prince to act as a spiritual “Monitor” (59), and vice versa, based on individual choice rather than physical proximity.<sup>22</sup> With a husband who is almost constantly away and without close friends to bear witness to her life, Burr’s journal-letter correspondence must supply her craving for spiritual affinity and mutual encouragement. Karlsen and Crumpacker identify sisterly friendships such as that between these two women as serving to “reinforce piety in women” during the eighteenth century, as women offered instruction, accountability, and encouragement to one another in their daily spiritual walks (36). Sending this journal away to Prince – who likely shared some of Burr’s journal-letters with the Sisterhood – and participating as reader of Prince’s journal-letters allows her to partake, if only vicariously, in a community of women joined through the bonds of Christianity and textually-shared experiences.

*“This Letter or what ever tis most proppor to call it”: Adopting/Adapting the Journal-Letter*

Through recourse to the historical and cultural context of Burr’s life, I have dissected the form she chose to write in, considering how its various parts combine to constitute a distinct genre and naming that genre the journal-letter. Burr does not engage in such a conscious examination of her text, nor does she consider why she has chosen this particular form for the recording of her life. According to Decker, nonprofessional writers rarely offer meta-commentary in their letter writing; instead we must look to professional writers for such self-analysis (100). However, although she may not spend much time analyzing her style of writing, there are moments when Burr talks about the form she is using, moments that are useful for theorizing about and naming this genre.

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<sup>22</sup> In an entry from November 1, 1754, Burr writes: “You say I have excepted the office of *Monitor* but on no other conditions than that you be one to me. *Mind that*” (59).

The first instance of such discourse occurs in the first extant journal-letter. After Prince suspects Burr is tired of her “*dry journals*,” Burr assures her friend, “I was never so *charmed* with Letters in my Life as since you have wrote in this method” (49). In the same sentence, Burr refers to their chosen style of writing as journals and letters. Four months later, in Letter No. 10, she again demonstrates that her text escapes easy definition when she refers to it as “[t]his Letter or what ever tis most proppor to call it” (89). By the time she composes Letter No. 11, Burr has begun reading Richardson’s *Pamela*, which the *OED* cites as the first published text to utilize the term journal-wise.<sup>23</sup> While held captive by Mr. B, Pamela does not have the opportunity to regularly send letters to her parents so she keeps an ongoing journal for them. In the 1742 edition she writes, “At last I end my Journal-wise Letters as I may call them” (“Journal-wise”). Perhaps it was reading *Pamela* that offered Burr a name for this kind of writing she delighted in so much, for it is only after this point in the text that she refers to her method of writing with this same term. She boasts to Prince, “I am very proud I assure you for the good Man [Mr. Burr] has followed our example and has wrote journal-wise from day to day just as we do to each other” (202). Part of the success of this form for Burr rests in the fact that she feels enough authority as a journal-letter writer to pass it on to her husband.

Open to the purposes and conventions of both the letter and the diary but restricted by neither, the journal-letter offers up a space with immense potential for innovation, particularly for women, since these were the two types of writing women of the period were encouraged to engage in. Blodgett excludes journal-letters from her study of Englishwomen’s “private diaries” finding such works problematic since they are “intended for immediate

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<sup>23</sup> The *OED* cites two uses of the term journal-wise in Richardson’s *Pamela*. The first instance occurs in Volume one, printed in 1741: “Having written it [the account] journal-wise, to amuse and employ her time.” The second is quoted above.

reading by a second party,” requiring the writer “to present herself and [...] no longer just express herself” (14). Here Blodgett acknowledges that diaries written and sent to specific, invited readers are fundamentally different kinds of texts than “private diaries,” requiring analysis that takes this difference into account. However, although Blodgett considers the presence of audience a constraint upon the writer’s self-expression, the chosen, trusted audience of the journal-letter can also open up possibilities for self-expression, especially when the writer’s self-expression is restricted in other areas of her life.

Increasing women’s opportunities for uninhibited self-expression most assuredly was not an intended purpose of diary keeping in the eighteenth century. Without the lofty purpose of probing one’s spiritual state, diary keeping would have been seen as a self-indulgent activity, particularly for women. According to Margo Culley, it was only with the emergence of secular autobiography, of which Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography is considered the paradigmatic example, that women were able to claim a new purpose for writing: usefulness (11). Sharing one’s life story in order to be useful to other women fueled female autobiographical writing into the twentieth century, obscuring egotistical motives for writing that would have been considered “unwomanly” (14). Though Burr clearly believes she writes for the benefit of a larger public, her text predates the emergence of secular autobiography – Franklin’s *Autobiography* is not published until after his death in the 1790s – which Culley credits with offering women this particular inducement. Sandwiched between the era of the Puritan spiritual diary and the development of secular autobiography, Burr writes in a transitional moment. Though the example of published memoirs edited by clergymen gave eighteenth-century women some justification for diary writing, it also limited the range of that writing to the spiritual. By joining the functionality of the letter to

the diary, Burr expands the range of acceptable topics for female diary writers to include the secular matters that often found their way into correspondence.

This is not to suggest that letter-writers were unconcerned with spirituality. On the contrary, Decker contends that the familiar letter served as an appropriate medium for the expression of religious sentiments. He writes,

Familiar correspondence in early America was frequently occasioned by circumstances that prompted religious reflection and commentary. In addition to the obvious situations in which correspondence reports an affliction, a blessing, or a concern, there is the condition in which one person longs for another's company or word, and wishes against the possibility of the addressee's death or disappearance to be reunited. (74)

Clearly, letter writing often took on religious tones, particularly for women such as Burr and Prince for whom spiritual matters were paramount.<sup>24</sup> However, returning to Richardson's letter writing manual reveals that although letter-writers were encouraged to write moral letters, they were not restricted to religious subject matter. In fact, Richardson's model letters are distinctly "of the flesh," concerned with such issues as marital matches, educational choices, money-lending, and employment. Letter-writers understandably deviated from the spiritual; it is the nature of the letter to do so, at least occasionally. The functionality of the letter as a connector between two people separated by distance allows for some indulgence in the secular aspects of life, for events must be recounted, news about family and friends relayed, and advice asked for and given.

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<sup>24</sup> See also Judith Sargent Murray's *First Hundred Letters* for an example of a letter-writer whose letters dwelled chiefly on the spiritual. For a typical example from Burr's journal-letter see the entry for Jan 25, 1755, p. 84.

Furthermore, the external audience of the letter makes this form appear less self-indulgent than the diary since, theoretically, one writes in duty to another rather than to please oneself. In “Female Rhetorics” Patricia Meyer Spacks shows that eighteenth-century women used letters to “avoid the troubling threat of egotism” in a culture where “[s]elf-revelation constitutes an ‘impertinent’ act unless it is justified by profound friendship” (178-79). Writing letters to a close friend afforded women the needed justification for writing, and specifically for writing about the self. If diary writing should be a private enterprise concerned exclusively with the spiritual, lest it be considered an unnecessary and unwomanly indulgence, letter writing was not subject to the same constraints, allowing eighteenth-century women more freedom to indulge. The journal-letter form, which marries the diary and the letter, offers the opportunity to engage in self-examination and self-expression simultaneously.

As part spiritual journal, part familiar letter, both forms women were encouraged to write in during the eighteenth century, Burr’s journal-letter writing asserts itself as a text that is seemingly beyond criticism. We have seen that even Burr’s husband encourages her in this pursuit, but descriptions of her husband throughout the text reveal that she does not consider him representative of other men, and that other men are not as understanding of her desire to write. For instance, when Burr exhibits distress about the ongoing war, she acknowledges that most men think women should not concern themselves with “publick affairs” but instead “be content to be destroyed.” She proudly adds that Mr. Burr “is not one of that sort” (178).<sup>25</sup> A little less than a month later, she demonstrates of what sort Mr. Burr is not, namely the sort to criticize her method of corresponding. She indirectly exposes this

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<sup>25</sup> Burr writes during the French and Indian War (1754-1763). She discusses the war in several entries, mostly concentrating on her disappointment in the colonies’ inability to unite and fight for a common cause.



difference in her discussion of a Parson and Mrs. Brown who come to visit. Though Burr thinks Mrs. Brown's "friendly heart" would be delighted by her journal-wise correspondence, she avoids informing Mrs. Brown of her arrangement with Prince for fear of the parson's reaction. She explains, "I was afraid she would tell her MAN of it, and *he* knows so much better about matters than *she* that he would certainly make some Ill-natured remarks or other, and so these *Hes* shall know nothing about our affairs *untill they are grown as wise as you and I are*" (183). She concludes that not everyone is wise enough to appreciate their manner of corresponding, though she does suggest that a woman might be more understanding of, and even amenable to, such an idea than a man who supposes he "knows so much better about matters."

Over a year later Burr continues to exhibit sensitivity about how her writing is viewed by others when upon the arrival of company she tells herself "lay down your pen or they will wonder what this Woman does a writing forever, for these same people have seen me at it last Night" (253-54). Through her sarcasm are glimpses of a woman who feels compelled to keep her writing a secret from community members. Interestingly, it is not the act of writing itself that she supposes will evoke censure. Living at such a distance from her family, others would certainly expect her to write letters home, as well as write the other types of letters she mentions throughout the journal-letter, including letters of business and letters of "complement" (184, 187, 252). It is the kind of writing she engages in, writing that could be suspected of excess, that she feels compelled to hide. Although she acknowledges the possible disapproval of others, she believes this disapproval is simply due to ignorance; she may cease writing or talking about her writing in mixed company, but she will not cease writing altogether. Instead, she will turn to the journal-letter, finding greater freedom and

room for expression on pieces of paper intended for a dear friend, than she does sitting in her home among a host of acquaintances.

*“O dear Miss Prince pray For me!”:*

*The Journal-Letter as a Medium of Spiritual Accountability*

Not only does Burr find greater freedom in writing than she does in face-to-face interactions with community members, she also writes more freely in her journal-letters to Prince than she does in letters to her parents. In *Authority and Female Authorship in Colonial America*, William J. Scheick compares Burr’s “public” letters written to her parents with her “private” journal-letters kept for Prince, finding Burr’s negative assessment of her spiritual state throughout the journal-letter as evidence of her inability to connect to God and her preference for communi(cati)on with her husband and her friend (72-73).<sup>26</sup> Scheick argues that Burr hides her unauthorized feelings from her mother, her father – a representative of masculine, religious authority – and perhaps even herself, indirectly confessing her “transgressive tendency to idolize friendship and authorship” only to Prince (81). He finally concludes that “[u]nknown to Esther, human companionship – intimate, loverlike – had become the surrogate religion of her heart” (Scheick 81, emphasis added). Yet if we read the text as a journal-letter, a different interpretation emerges, one that acknowledges Burr’s conscious use of the form to express, examine, and attempt to extinguish sentiments in conflict with her Christianity. Because the journal-letter medium represented a more intimate arena of discourse for Burr than conventional letter writing, it is probable that she felt more freedom to voice unauthorized feelings in this form than in the latter.

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<sup>26</sup> Though Scheick calls the letters between Burr and Prince “private,” he is not referring to their privacies as these are no longer extant. Instead these designations reflect his belief that letters written to the Edwards represent a public stance, while letters to Prince communicate more private feelings.

Burr's journal-letter clearly exposes a conflict between her duty and desire to love God best and her intense love for and attachment to the things of the world – particularly her husband, her best friend Prince, and I add, her children. Scheick's analysis suggests that the views expressed in the journal-letter are more representative of her true feelings than those expressed in letters to her parents since she would likely have felt the need to conceal potentially blasphemous thoughts from her famous father, next to George Whitefield the most well-known leader of the Great Awakening. Clearly this is the case. However, engaging in a more nuanced reading of the letters requires (re)consideration of the medium in which she is writing. Though Scheick refers to Burr's writing to Prince as a letter journal and epistolary diary, his analysis does not account for the material differences between Burr's correspondence with Prince and that with her parents, differences that may significantly alter our understanding of her seeming idolatry.

Janet Gurkin Altman's theory of the "epistolary present" may help clarify some of the distinctions between the conventional letter and the journal-letter genre. Altman characterizes the epistolary text as inescapably caught up in the present; however, it is an impossible present, "valid only for that moment" of writing (129). Thus, a letter represents the writer's feelings at a specific moment in time, the day she pens that particular letter. Altman's theory of the "epistolary present" suggests that conventional letters Burr wrote to her parents on the occasion of her husband's death – the letters Scheick relies on for his analysis – not only represent her feelings at the present moment of writing, but represent her present ability to control those feelings.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, when in a letter to her father on November 2, 1757, a month after Mr. Burr's death and while her son is seriously ill, Burr

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<sup>27</sup> Scheick bases his claims on two letters, both of which can be found in *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr*, p. 293-97.

exhibits a firm trust in God, saying “altho all streams were cut off yet so long as my God lives I have enough – [...] altho’ though slay me yet will I trust in thee” (295), we must be careful to recognize this response for what it is. Audience expectations are clearly significant here. Burr’s words represent both a church-authorized response to affliction written to a church leader and the response a dutiful daughter would write to her parents in order to calm their fears. When composed in the letter form, however, it also represents a state of mind that may change the moment the letter is sent, even the moment it is sealed.

What I have described here is, in Altman’s terms, the “temporal polyvalence” of the letter, or the reality that “any statement made in the present by a letter writer may no longer be valid when his letter is received” (133). Due to the time lag characteristic of correspondence, by the time Edwards reads his daughter’s letter expressing resignation to God’s will and even an ecstatic longing to join God in heaven, it is possible and even probable that her feelings have changed, that she has plummeted into despair once again or that she has risen to a deeper level of acceptance. Burr even acknowledges this characteristic of her journal-letter writing when she assures Prince that she does not read over her entries. What Prince reads are Burr’s “thoughts just as they then happen to be” (61). The letter form usually obscures this temporal polyvalence due to its status as a potentially independent text. As Altman claims, “the letter serves simultaneously as a text within itself and as a context informing the letters contiguous to it” (182). In fact, eighteenth-century letter-writers were encouraged, via letter manuals such as the *Instructive Letter-Writer and Entertaining Companion* (London 1769), to compose their answers in such a way as to “mirror” the letter to which they responding, thus creating an independently intelligible text for an audience of readers and listeners. According to Bannet,

This rule made it possible to read one side of a correspondence and get a fairly good idea of what had been said in the letter or letters one had not seen. This made it possible to read a single letter aloud to one's 'company,' as was the practice, without having to go into long, boring explanations about what had transpired in the preceding letter or letters, for it made each letter at once dialogical or responsive, and relatively self-contained. (78)

Due to this self-contained quality, an individual letter, unlike an individual diary entry, may be read independently of the larger "text" or correspondence of which it is part.<sup>28</sup> This is what happens when one reads Burr's two surviving letters to her parents without the context of her other communication with them; one may easily conclude that resignation and acceptance is the tone of all of her correspondence.

The journal-letter form, however, solves the potential problem of context because it is inherently contextual. Whereas Altman identifies the single letter as a discrete "building block" within a broader correspondence, whether an entire epistolary novel or a collection of real letters (183), the journal-letter form does not work according to the same premise. In order to account for the complexities of the journal-letter, it is important to remember that it contains characteristics of the letter and the diary. In a journal-letter, the letter is replaced by the journal entry as the smallest, discrete component of correspondence. Within one journal-letter exists a number of mini-letters, the dateline at the beginning of each entry representing a different "epistolary present." Several journal entries, compiled over days, weeks, or even months, join together to form a single journal-letter, representing the various moods and

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<sup>28</sup> There are various combinations that can constitute a body of letters: all letters written to a single reader, all letters written during a specific time frame, all letters written by a certain person, all letters written between two people, and so on. A letter is a unique form in that it is a complete text, but is also a fragment of a larger work, both of which are appropriate for analysis.

contexts within which the writer composed. The temporal polyvalence of the journal-letter is even more extreme than that of the letter, for with each individual entry there is the possibility that the emotions expressed therein are no longer valid when each subsequent entry is composed. For instance, on September 20, 1755 Burr has lost all hope that Prince will visit, confessing, “I give you up—you will never come again” (153). But, for whatever reason, eight days and three entries later in the same journal-letter she exhibits an entirely different sentiment when she writes, “I do hope and will hope that you will come here before winter” (154). Similarly to the diary, the complete reversal of feelings that may occur from day to day or even moment to moment is spatially dramatized in the pages of the journal-letter. As Altman shows, “To reread an old letter is to measure one’s own change against a point perceived as fixed in the past. To compare today’s letter with yesterday’s is to discover the distance traveled between two temporal moments” (102). The form of the journal-letter exposes the temporal polyvalence that the letter form, with its misleading claim to independence, often conceals, offering readers a fuller understanding of the continuities, contradictions, and complications of the epistolary text.

Thus, when Burr’s uncertainties about her trust in God compared to her certain trust in Mr. Burr and Prince come through in her journal-letter it is not simply because she is concealing such feelings from her parents. Though this may be the obvious reading, it is not a full reading. The diary component of the journal-letter makes it a medium more suited to the expression of such daily feelings than a conventional letter. In a letter the most significant news must be communicated, a brave face must be put on if possible. But this is not the case with a journal, particularly one of a spiritual nature. Thus, in order to understand the differences between Burr’s representations of her spiritual state in letters to her parents

and in her journal-letter to Prince, it is important to consider that the latter text is also a spiritual journal, a more fitting form than the letter for recording and ups and downs of her daily walk with God.

The Sabbath (nearly) always offers Burr the occasion to pause and reflect on spiritual matters, usually by recounting the sermon, offering a brief evaluation of its effectiveness, and examining the degree to which she feels spiritually alive, but Sunday is often the only day she finds, or takes, time to engage in this type of overt self-evaluation. In these passages Burr often describes herself as spiritually cold and dead. For example, in a Sabbath entry on June 22, 1755 she laments, “I fear I have got no good [from the sermon]—O my dear I dont live to God as you do! No I am *carne*, *fleshly*, *Worldly minded*, and *Devilish*” (127). These comments resound an expected refrain for Calvinists. Her self-indictment may seem severe, but it is certainly in line with her Calvinistic upbringing, the tone set by the emotional revivals of the period, and the example offered by her parents.

Though Burr writes over a decade after the Great Awakening, her words reflect the focus on emotional responses to God that characterized these revivals. After leading a revival among his own congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1734-1735, Burr’s father, Jonathan Edwards, became the most significant American figure in the larger awakening that followed the British itinerant preacher George Whitefield’s tour of the American colonies. When opponents of emotional excess criticized the revivals and sought a return to rational religion, Edwards criticized false philosophies of religion that denied its emotional side. He believed that religion should speak to both the mind and the affections, rather than divorcing the two (Zakai). No wonder in Burr’s assessments of her spiritual state she continually emphasizes her inability to feel rightly towards God.

The works of her father and mother reveal a similar internal struggle. In his *Diary*, the youthful Jonathan Edwards often notes having “dead, dull, and listless frames of mind” (Shea 192). For example, in one entry he laments, “This week I found myself so far gone, that it seemed I should never recover more” (qtd in Shea 192).<sup>29</sup> Sarah Pierpoint Edwards struggled for years to submit herself to God, dealing with bouts of depression and physical illness thought to reflect a depressed spiritual state. When Burr was ten, her mother underwent a dramatic religious transformation and was finally able to say: “[I]f I were cast off by my nearest and dearest friends, and if the feelings and conduct of my husband were to be changed from tenderness and affection, to extreme hatred and cruelty, and that every day, I could so rest in God, that it would not touch my heart, or diminish my happiness” (qtd in Karlsen and Crumpacker 12).<sup>30</sup> Through watching “her mother and dozens of other people alternating between elation and despair over the state of their souls,” Burr “learned at a young age the necessity of continual struggle against sinfulness within” (Karlsen and Crumpacker 9).

Thus, although Burr does bewail her condition frequently, we cannot overlook moments when these feelings are replaced by spiritual contentment, and even excitement, simply because they do not occur as often. For instance, after being possessed by “a strange gloom” for several weeks, Burr finally exclaims, “I think God has been Near to me this eve – O how good tis to get near the Lord! I long to live near him always – nor is it living unless I do” (176). A Calvinist, Burr predictably focuses on her disconnection from God, but her

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<sup>29</sup> Shea notes that Edwards’ *Diary* can be distinguished from his *Personal Narrative* in that the latter “minimize[d] emotions arising from dullness and insensibility in a narrative intended to be affecting” and thus edited out any hint of melancholy in the public record of his experience (192-93).

<sup>30</sup> Two versions of Sarah Edwards’ conversion experience exist. Her husband’s version was published first in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (Boston, 1743). Sarah’s version was published in Sereno E. Dwight’s *The Life of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830) 171-86. The quote above is from Sarah Edwards’ version, which I believe offers a better comparison to Burr’s writing than the ventriloquized version offered by her husband.



journal-letter entries also communicate longings to be near to God, as well as moments when she revels in that closeness. In the context of the period and the specific form she uses to record her thoughts, Burr's harsh self-evaluations of her spiritual state alternating with moments of exhilaration can be read as a normal and expected part of the process of sanctification.

It is important to acknowledge that Burr's journal-letter evidences various levels of contentment in her relationship with God in order to properly contextualize her seeming preference for interaction with Mr. Burr and Prince. Clearly she does, at least most of the time, express a deeper fulfillment in these relationships, and this preference sometimes comes across unperceived to herself. For example, on one Sabbath entry she confesses being "as dead as a stone" when she heard the day's sermon. In the same entry, she relates that she has been reading through Prince's former letters which "always excites" her with "an ardent desire" to enjoy her bosom friend's "company and conversation" (244). Here she finds no spiritual satisfaction in God or his scripture, but expresses satisfaction in reading Prince's letters – a narrative composed for her by a friend – and longs for her presence. Burr does not overtly connect these two very different reactions; in fact, she physically distances them by placing them in different paragraphs. However, the fact that she identifies herself as dead to God's word and invigorated by Prince's in the same entry without seeming to see the ironic connection between such different emotional responses lends credence to the argument that her conscious aim to privilege her relationship with God has been supplanted by the subconscious privileging of her relationship with a friend.

More often, though, Burr is completely cognizant of the preference she espouses for loved ones over God. Although she outwardly desires to love God best, she is also fully

aware that her love for others is in competition with her love for God. By admitting these potentially idolatrous feelings in writing, she attempts to gain control over them and surrender them to a jealous God. In one particularly emotional entry, Burr attempts to resign herself to the will of God during the illness of her daughter Sally, admitting, “I have *again*, and *again* given her to God and I hope by *faith* – I think if I know my own heart, I can trust her in the hands of that God I have indeavoured to give her to, after death” (105-106). While in the midst of a spiritual struggle, knowing that she must accept what happens to her daughter as God’s will, this uncertain wording reflects Burr’s inability to completely trust in God’s providence. Her emotions continue to build as she imagines the loss of her husband as well. She writes, “And I am affraid I provoke God the giver of all my many comforts by seting my heart two much on this dear gentleman, to take him from me – and – Alas what would all the world be to me if he were out of it! But hold – I am too gloomy – you must not let anybody see what I have wrote” (106). Here she betrays even more openly her internal conflict; she fears God will take her husband away because she depends on him for her happiness rather than on God. Her request that Prince not share this entry with others magnifies its significance for it demonstrates that Burr knows she is not expressing an acceptable Christian sentiment. Significantly, she does not excise the comment, revealing that she takes Prince’s role as monitor seriously and will not restrain from revealing her innermost thoughts and in return receiving consolation and advice. Her attachment to Prince is also emphasized throughout the journal-letters, especially in an entry when she admits that she loves her friend “too much” and fears that God will teach her “the vanity of all things under the sun” through “affliction and bereavement” (118). Again, she worries that God will take loved ones away from her because she loves them too much, perhaps even more than

she loves God. If it is a Calvinist convention to place one's trust in God, it is as much a convention to fear the wrath of a jealous God. Perhaps the most memorable of her father's sermons, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" preached over a decade earlier, provides ample justification for such a fear.

Undoubtedly Burr "veers toward a violation of the second commandment" (Scheick 77). What is crucial to understand is that she knows she is doing so, for her discourse remains at least partially scripted by the conventions of the Puritan diary, a text concerned with examination of the self and its potential for sinning. This is why nearly every reference to the delight she finds in human relationships is tempered by the acknowledgment that she should not set her heart too much on the things of this world but should find contentment in God. That she does not always find that contentment should not surprise us as readers, for it would not have surprised Burr's readers. Was not this struggle germane to all humanity? Exercising vigilance in recognizing and stamping out her tendency to idolize earthly relationships would have made Burr even more admirable to readers like Prince and the Sisterhood. Thus, when her husband is seriously ill, it is natural for her to confess, "I cant be resigned to the Will of God if it is to bereave me of all that is *near and dear* at one stroke! I can see it infinitely just, but I [c]ant be willing that justice should take place" (146). The following sentence shows that she seeks not to conceal her feelings, but change them, "O dear Miss Prince pray for me! O pray for that I may have a right temper of mind towards the ever blessed God!" (146-47). As her emotional response to God vacillates over the course of the journal-letter she remains steadfast in her desire to respond correctly to affliction, whether real or imagined, and in her acknowledgment that there is a very real possibility that she will not be able to do so.

If Burr had written of these struggles in a strictly spiritual diary, such a record would have been primarily useful as a place for confession of sins to God and to herself. When she deals with spiritual matters in letters to her father, a representative of godly authority on earth, she writes as a daughter and as a parishioner in need of instruction. But by utilizing the journal-letter, Burr constructs a unique space within which to confess sinfulness not only to herself and to God, but also to her chosen spiritual monitor, Prince. Therefore, the journal-letter functions as a text of external accountability. Interestingly, the writer is not accountable to a religious authority but to a peer, a fellow struggler after Christ. This reading acknowledges her agency in recognizing and attempting to keep her sinfulness in check, and in selecting the means by which she feels most comfortable doing so.

This distinction may sound subtle, but it signifies the difference between Burr exerting control over the use of her text and being controlled by her text. Instead of viewing her proclamations of intense love for Mr. Burr and Prince as subconscious slips revelatory of transgressive tendencies, they emerge as part of her journey towards spiritual sanctification, a journey that necessarily entails progress as well as backsliding. The journal-letter highlights the various stages of this journey by providing a visual manifestation of the good, the bad, and the mediocre moments existing side by side. When we witness Burr vacillating between spiritual highs and lows, we see not a model Christian, but a woman modeling to others what it looks like for a real woman to live as a Christian in a sinful world.

*“The married woman has something else to care about”*: *The Rhetoric of Real Womanhood*

This emphasis on real womanhood distinguishes Burr’s journal-letter writing from its constituent parts, the familiar letter and the spiritual diary, both of which encouraged women to strive for an idealistic version of womanhood, the former culminating in the attainment of

an advantageous marriage and the latter in the attainment of spiritual sanctification. In the journal-letters, Burr rejects the idealistic roles offered to her, instead asserting that a woman does not have time for ideals when she is living in the real world. Both directly and indirectly, she questions cultural imperatives that place harmful expectations on women. Carter finds in her analysis of Frances Simpson's 1830 text that "[t]he journal letter and its high degree of reader awareness play an integral role in upholding class and gender expectations" (28). Yet, Burr's text reveals that this is not necessarily the case with journal-letter writing, for it is precisely the "high degree of reader awareness" inherent to the form that allows and even emboldens Burr to challenge gender expectations.

Ruth H. Bloch identifies two "essentially mutually exclusive ideal images of women" found in the literature written and read in America prior to the late eighteenth century: woman as "help-meet" and woman as refined social companion. The former Puritan-based ideal emphasized women as good wives who, though deficient in reason, could be of help to their husbands "in both spiritual and worldly concerns." The latter upper-class ideal emphasized the attainment of such "accomplishments" as musical performance, drawing, and speaking French (59-60). Neither ideal placed much emphasis on motherhood, according to Bloch, nor was it until the late eighteenth century that the new ideal of the "moral mother" appeared in contemporary literature, giving women credit for their roles as the primary caregivers and influencers of children (66).

Within the journal-letter, Burr struggles with both feminine ideals available to her. Ornamental refinements are superfluous to the reality of her life, namely the demands of running a minister's household. Though we know little about the kind of education she received, the journal-letters offer enough evidence to conclude that she would not have been

considered “accomplished” in the genteel sense. Interestingly, when Mr. Burr is learning French and desires that his wife do the same, she turns down the opportunity. “The married women has something elce to care about besides lerning French,” she explains to Prince, “tho’ if I had time I should be very fond of lerning, but I must give up writing to you if I did, and I could not bare that” (125-26). Though she has a desire to extend her education, she is a realist; she knows her duties as wife, mother, and hostess to the community must come first. She chooses her writing, a practical, useful, and enjoyable activity, over the attainment of ornamental refinements. She may have the inclination, but she does not have the time to strive for this ideal.

Though Burr cannot claim to be a woman of refinement, she can claim status as a “good wife.” However, this ideal also poses problems for her, for it characterizes women as beings devoid of reason, a belief she takes strong issue with. Happily for us, when this “good wife” takes a stand for women as rational beings, she proudly records the event. Near the end of the journal-letters, Burr records a “smart combat” she has just engaged in with Mr. Ewing, a man with “mean thoughts of Women.” When Ewing claims that women are “hardly capable of anything so cool and rational as friendship,” she cannot keep quiet. She passionately relates:

(My tongue, you know, hangs prety loose, thoughts Crouded in—so I sputtered away for dear life.) You may Guss what a large field this speech opened for me—I retorted several severe things upon him before he had time to speak again. He Blushed and seemed confused. [...] we carried on the dispute for an hour—I talked him quite silent. [...]. One of the last things that he said was that he never in all his life knew or hear[d] of a woman that had a

little more learning than [common?] but it made her proud to such a degree that she was disgussful [to] all her acquaintance. (257)

From the very first surviving entry of the journal-letters when Burr describes a woman who has helped her with the house as “a very valuable person” with “some very just thoughts about friendship” (45), it is clear that theories of friendship greatly interest this young woman. Within the text she quotes from various authors who discuss friendship, asks Prince to do the same, notes conversations upon the topic with friends and acquaintances, and postulates her own theories. The entire journal-letter may be seen as a training ground for this moment, an arsenal of thoughts on friendship which Burr can use to mount her counterattack on Ewing.

Although she does not relate her precise arguments – one can guess the basic theme of the discussion based on her fervent praise of female friendship throughout the preceding text – her description of the event reveals her to have triumphed through rational argumentation. While she describes herself as besting Ewing from start to finish, retorting “several severe things” before he was able to get a word in and eventually talking him “quite silent,” Ewing actually takes on stereotypical feminine characteristics, for in response he “Blushed and seemed confused.” Through this passage Burr turns the stereotype of the irrational woman on its head, refusing to conform herself to a womanly ideal that denies women’s capacity for reasoning, and by extension, true friendship.<sup>31</sup>

Through her rejection of the idealistic roles offered up by the published literature of the day, Burr pieces together a portrait of womanhood and sisterhood that more accurately reflects the reality of her experience. Throughout the journal-letters are direct and indirect

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<sup>31</sup> Burr believed it was important for friendship to combine “rational and emotional elements” much like a Christian’s relationship with God (Karlsen and Crumpacker 35).

comments revelatory of Burr's beliefs about womanhood, but the most succinct and complete rejection of the ideal in favor of the real woman occurs when she exegetes a portion of scripture, perhaps the most compelling passage of the entire work. Her analysis demonstrates not only her ability to formulate and execute a rational argument, but also provides an alternate reading of contemporary biblical imperatives directed towards women.

Burr does not usually speak directly about scripture unless she is recounting a Sabbath sermon. In one instance, however, she does so when Prince desires her and Mr. Burr's thoughts on "what Solomans good woman kept a candle a burning all Night for" (69). The scripture she cites is from the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs containing King Solomon's description of the virtuous woman. King Solomon begins by asking "Who can find a virtuous woman?" and spends twenty-one verses relating in great detail the characteristics of such a woman. Such a woman would be a rare find, as Solomon intimates, for she excels in all aspects of life, as wife, mother, businesswoman, artisan, household manager, and philanthropist.<sup>32</sup> Published in the early eighteenth century, Matthew Henry's biblical commentaries offer insight into how women of the period were encouraged to emulate this biblical example. In his discussion of Proverbs 31, Henry advises women "who desire to be truly beloved and respected, useful and honourable" to "daily study" Solomon's description (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary*). It is no wonder, then, that this passage would occupy the minds of two such women as Burr and Prince, their journal-letter correspondence acting as a venue for investigating their scriptural duties as women.

However, for Burr to assume the right to independent scriptural interpretation was a bold move since female authors in the eighteenth century were not expected to enter into the

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<sup>32</sup> This passage is likely the inspiration for the Puritanic ideal of the "good wife," but is substantially different in that it does not include such later additions as the belief in women's innate lack of reason. In fact, the emphasis on this woman having an acute ability to conduct business seems to contradict such an opinion.



masculine realm of biblical exegesis. As a woman, she would not have been accorded the authority to interpret scripture, but as a correspondent she is beholden by the requirements of reciprocity to answer Prince's letter instigating a discussion of this passage. Significantly, Burr does not have the time, though she may have the knowledge and the inclination, to offer a full commentary on the Proverbs 31 woman. We only have her thoughts on one verse, the eighteenth verse of the chapter: "She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night" (Henry, *An Exposition* 565). Prince expresses the opinion that this woman must have stayed up reading most of the night, but desires another opinion. Though Burr asks her husband for his thoughts, "he will not be serious about it but said in jest that she kept a candle burning for the reason that Mr Pemberton did" (69). Burr resolves to ask him again, but this does not prevent her from taking the opportunity to interpret the passage on her own.

In colonial America female authors usually utilized biblical illusions in line with the "authorized male commentary tradition" disseminated through the pulpit as well as published works such as Henry's extremely popular Presbyterian commentaries (Scheick 12-13). Because she was Jonathan Edwards' daughter, it is highly probable that Burr would have known of Henry's commentaries, either directly through referencing these texts or indirectly through her father's instruction.<sup>33</sup> Turning to Henry's commentary on Proverbs provides insight into the sanctioned interpretation of Proverbs 31 with which Burr would have been familiar. According to Henry, the virtuous woman

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<sup>33</sup> Edwards' use of Henry in his own writing and preaching was extensive. In his introduction to Edwards' "Blank Bible," Stephen Stein notes that the minister's personal Bible included 205 citations of Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (63).

is careful to fill up time, that none of that be lost. When day-light is done, she does not then think it time to lay by her work, as those are forced to do whose business lies abroad in the fields (Ps. civ. 23), but her business lying within-doors, and her work worth candle-light, with that she lengthens out the day; and *her candle goes not out by night*, v. 18. (*An Exposition* 566)

According to Henry, Solomon's woman is not lazy; she will continue to work into the night if necessary in order to provide for her household. (This sentiment surely came as no surprise to female readers for whom work could not stop simply because the sun set.) Burr concludes, similarly to Henry, that the verse is meant to illustrate the woman's industry, "that her business did not cease as soon as night came" (Burr 72). However, Burr adds a caveat that Henry does not. If a woman should not hesitate to work after dark when necessary, this does not suggest that she should regularly work into the late hours of the night. This distinction is important since it rejects a reading of the verse that would place unhealthy, unrealistic expectations on women.

Burr provides support for this reading through analyzing the author's linguistic choices, the surrounding context, and her experience as a woman in order to establish the authority and rationality of her interpretation. First, she dissects the language of the passage. Based on common usage, she interprets the phrase "goeth not out by night" to mean "as soon as tis Night," revealing that the good woman need not, and probably did not, keep her candle burning all night. She then turns to the surrounding verses to argue that if the good woman "ariseth also while it is yet Night" and is not "made up of some other sort of *Matter*" than an average woman, it would be impossible for her to also stay up "a great part of the Night" and "live under it" (72). She continues,

for Soloman speaks of her as one of *US*, and that makes him *wonder so much, and admire her so greatly as to set her price far above Rubies*. I apeal to your own experience. You know you can't get up erly in the morn if you set up very late, don't you, *say?* But if you have any objections to what I have said, pray let me know it in your next. (72)

Finally, she appeals to Prince's experience as her final piece of evidence. If the average woman cannot stay up late and get up early, it stands to reason that the virtuous woman of scripture could not either. Significantly, she points out that this woman is "one of *US*," a real, flesh-and-blood woman with limitations, rather than a masculine-fashioned ideal. Burr's analysis of this passage demonstrates her ability to utilize reason, a faculty women were not thought to possess, to interpret scripture.

With a keen understanding of her immediate audience, which included Prince and presumably the other members of the Sisterhood, Burr utilizes logic to make her argument. Though an appeal to experience would not be credited as a logical appeal in the masculine rhetorical tradition, as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald argue in *Available Means*, women writers have had to step outside this tradition in order to find alternate means of persuasion (xxii). Significantly, this assessment demonstrates scripture's applicability to women's everyday lives, as well as women's capacity for understanding the word of God without special training. Henry, in the male tradition of biblical commentary, offers backing for his assertions through a learned historical and cultural knowledge of biblical times and a thorough familiarity with the rest of the scriptures, evidenced by frequent cross-referencing. Existing outside of this tradition, Burr cannot offer the same kind of analysis. Instead she employs her skills as a writer-reader to engage in a close reading of the text and her

experience as a woman to “read between the lines,” uncovering the unstated assumptions of the passage. Furthermore, by leaving room for Prince to respond, for the conversation to continue, she shows that she is not aligning herself with the commentary tradition by offering an authoritative interpretation; she is just as willing to be taught as she is to teach. Her use of the interrogative rather than the imperative also indirectly opens up the passage for interpretation by other readers who can bring their own experiences to bear on the issue. Burr suggests that scripture can be deciphered in the context of daily living and through conversations with Christian friends perhaps more effectively than through studying commentaries and sermons since the mass of married women did not live lives conducive to such activities.

Burr’s technique of rational analysis allows her to claim this scripture as an encouragement to women that Solomon’s virtuous woman is a real woman like them, rather than a paradigm of womanly perfection, as a literal interpretation may suggest. What a masculine reading of the passage might neglect – a woman needs sleep – she attends to. In fact, Henry finds no disconnect between requirements that a woman both stay up late and get up early. But to a woman reader like Burr such a model, like all of the other ideals discussed heretofore, has more significant, and possibly damaging, implications for the women who are expected to live up to its impossible standard. Rather than view the virtuous woman as representing an ideal to live up to, she interprets the passage to accommodate the reality she experiences as a woman, wife, and mother.

The importance Burr accords this subject is revealed in her diligent efforts to finish her discussion of the biblical passage. Ironically, her discussion of this biblical woman whom she believes is subject to human limitations, just as she is, is interrupted by what every

“real” woman must deal with, the encroachment of worldly cares. Her initial thoughts on the virtuous woman appear at the end of her entry on December 1, 1754, but she must lay aside her pen when the Sabbath meeting is let out and the people return home. She promises to continue the subject at her “first opportunity,” but given the demands of preparing for and hosting the Presbytery, though she writes several hurried entries in the interim, she does not return to Solomon’s woman until December 12 (70). In the intervening entries, she is bombarded with a barrage of house guests whom she must accommodate. She complains in a number of brief entries: “Extreamly hurried”; “Provided a dinner and nobody came”; “Dined eight ministers”; “Dined 10 ministers”; “I am by this time almost wore out”; “I am of the mind that my days are to be spent in a hurry of business” (70-71). When she finally has the time to write a more substantial entry, she finishes her discussion of the Proverbs 31 woman, noting that she had almost forgotten to do so. It is no wonder, given the immediate context of Burr’s life recorded in the journal-letter, that she would reject a reading requiring women to continually work late into the night and from the early hours of the morning – the life she has been living and barely surviving – in order to fulfill their duties to God and family.

The diary form, as many scholars have noted, is particularly conducive to women’s hurried lives because it allows them to write in fragments when fragments of time for writing present themselves. Drawing on the influential work of Stuart Sherman, Jennifer Sinor explains that it was only after the invention of the pendulum clock, when time began to be measured in minutes and seconds, that diarists were able to keep track of daily moments instead of just momentous ones. Though a man, Samuel Pepys, is noted as the first diarist to write in this new form of daily diary nearly a century before Burr, arguably women benefited

most from this change since their lives were full of un-occasioned moments. Women could now write “in the days” rather than just “of the days” (95). The incomplete entries that pepper Burr’s diary are just one example of how women were able to appropriate this incremental form of writing to record and validate their experiences “in the days.”

Furthermore, the main reason Burr’s analysis has validity, for us and her contemporary readers, is because the form in which she writes acts as contextual evidence supporting her argument. The experiences she daily narrates establish her as an authority in this area. Her audience of primarily single women, typified by Prince to whom she specifically writes, learn important lessons through Burr’s experiences. Rather than counseling her audience on proper courting behavior and thus promoting courtship as the most significant phase of a woman’s life, she shows that it is after courtship and marriage when the work truly begins with motherhood and a host of new, exhausting responsibilities. Significantly, Burr writes to these women at the precise moment when letter manuals are redirecting their focus on women’s concerns. According to Bannet, after 1750, three issues that were given more prominence in letter manuals included bankruptcy, the relationships between elder brothers and siblings, and “the conduct of courtship” (151). The most popular of these manuals “construct[ed] ideals of courtship and marriage that were sternly patriarchal” (167). Women were counseled that “seriously negotiating marriage is a good thing; courtship, with its attendant compliments, flirtation and focus on the power of a woman’s beauty, is a bad thing” (178). In a nutshell, courtship should be “absolutely no fun” (168). If letter manuals from mid-century onwards focused almost exclusively on courtship and marriage as the defining moments in a woman’s life, Burr’s text serves as a form of counter discourse. Despite what these manuals suggested, courtship must have been more

fun than attending to the cares of a growing household, all the while pregnant or breastfeeding. At least, this is what Burr indirectly suggests through her daily recounting of experiences.

Directly, through a personal analysis of scripture – not usual fare for women’s spiritual diaries of the period – and indirectly through the recorded experience of living, Burr’s journal-letter writing challenges gender expectations placed on women by the church and published literature of the period. She appropriates the authority of the married woman to write to an audience of sisters in the faith who are in need of instruction and encouragement. Rather than composing a model letter of advice, as proposed by letter manuals, Burr writes an ongoing narrative as a model for others that in no way poses as an ideal.

### *Conclusion*

In fact, Burr has no time for ideals. She is too busy with real life. Even more so than her lamentations of spiritual deadness, she complains of being so busy with life that she has no time to record it. And yet, in the midst of living life, she does record some of it, two lines one day, twenty lines another, and then nothing for days, weeks, and months. Whether she is writing or not, the impulse to write remains, showing itself in every entry that exists only to relate that she has no time to write.<sup>34</sup> One need not study cultural ideas about women’s writing during the eighteenth century to conclude that writing would have been considered an indulgence. One need only read this journal-letter, filled with entries attesting to the dozens of other tasks the writer must accomplish, to see this is the case. One entry attests to an existence so crowded with affairs that when Burr takes up her pen at five o’clock in the evening it is the first time she has been able to sit all day except to breastfeed or eat. Yet,

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<sup>34</sup> For example, see Letter No. 11, March 15, 1755, p.100.

despite the obstacles of her duties as wife and mother, the surprising regularity with which she turns to her journal-letter shows that her writing is a priority and she is troubled when she can find no time to write.

A convention in letter writing, Burr often apologizes to Prince when she is unable to write for some time. However, whereas in correspondence such apologies customarily take place only at the beginning of a letter if the response is delayed, in the journal-letter these apologies may happen much more frequently, for each day that goes by affords an opportunity to write as well as an opportunity to miss writing. Significantly, expressions of regret that she cannot write are often apologetic in nature, but even more often exhibit her own disappointment in missing out on the opportunity. At times she is frustrated that her allotment for writing is so little – “I am quite vext that I cant get time to write more” (70) – while other times she seems to mourn her situation – “I have to my great greife been silent almost two weeks” (210). Though Burr feels an obligation to write to Prince, it is clear that she is driven by more than the duty of reciprocity.

I have heretofore offered a few reasons Burr forged and continued her journal-letter correspondence. Initially at least, this correspondence functioned as a hybrid of the familiar letter and the spiritual diary, providing her with a means of maintaining and strengthening her friendship with Prince while examining her spiritual condition. As she continued to write in her journal-letter, additional purposes emerged. When Burr found herself an alien in the community where her husband served, the journal-letter became an egalitarian space for spiritual accountability among peers as she forged a community of correspondence with Prince and the Sisterhood. In the midst of self-doubt and spiritual lows, Burr turned to her journal-letter to record her struggles and seek encouragement. In this way she became a



minister to young women beset by a culture obsessed with courtship and marriage. There are many reasons Burr writes, only some of which I have considered in this chapter. However, the primary reason she writes, and writes in this particular form, is simply because she wants to.

If Burr did not want to write, one must conclude that, despite the benefits she hoped to gain from the activity, she would have given it up quickly. Finding time to write was a struggle for this young woman who was also juggling the demands of raising children and tending to a home perpetually full of houseguests. One of her earliest entries succinctly summarizes how writing fits into her hectic life. She explains, “I write just when I can get time. My dear you must needs think I can’t get much, for I hav my Sally to tend, and domestek affairs to see to, and company to wait of besides my sewing, {so} that I am really hurried” (50). As a minister’s wife, she must entertain countless visitors at a moment’s notice, curtailing her free time self-designated for writing. Entry after entry records the entrance of company and her annoyance that she must lay down her pen. Furthermore, as a mother, Burr must be very purposeful about finding time to write. In October 1754, when she has only one child, Burr writes after she puts the baby to sleep. By April 1756, she has two small children. If her “hands were tied” with one child, she now describes herself as “tied hand and foot.” She must get even more creative, writing in her journal-letter “with the Son at the Brest” (192). The illicit indulgence of writing when there is so much to be done is particularly obvious when she admits, “all the time I do get to write I steal” (61). Even when she is “almost tired to *death*” (105) or so ill that she must crawl to get paper for her letter (65), she continues to take up her pen.

Writing is by no means a convenient activity, but it is, in her estimation, a pleasurable and even necessary one. Burr refers to her journal-letter writing as “an agreeable imployment, and amusement,” especially since it gives pleasure to both reader and writer (108). If she writes for Prince, she writes just as much for herself. In fact, writing is such a necessary part of her life that being unable to write interferes with her sense of self. After missing a week of writing, at the end of a long entry she notes that through writing she has begun to “recover her senses,” explaining, “I have not felt right since I neglected writing to you” (104). Even when she provides a negative assessment of her skill and considers quitting writing altogether rather than subject Prince to such a “mess of stuf,” she eventually concludes, “To tell the truth I love my self too well to be indifferent whether I write or no” (89). Whatever the condition of her life or the condition of her text, Burr exposes what drives her to keep writing, a very un-Puritan sentiment: the love of self.

Engaged in the realities of living life as a real woman, Burr creates time for that which she loves. In doing so she indirectly encourages Prince and the women of her wider public audience to pursue their passions in the midst of a sometimes harsh reality. Though her privacies were meant to be burnt, the carefully numbered pages of her journal-letter were meant to survive. We cannot ignore that Burr composed this journal-letter as *the* text that bore witness to her life. Through the act of consistent writing that the men she encountered saw as foolish, Burr creates an enduring legacy for another woman, her daughter, both in the physical text as artifact and in her physical embodiment as writer. This influence on Sally can be seen in the entry when the small child crumples up the paper on which her mother is writing. Upon being scolded by Burr, Sally replies that she “was a going to write” (193).

Burr's anger subsides when she sees in her daughter the same desire that draws her to the page each day: the simple, but overwhelming, desire to write.

## Chapter 2

“Your Scribbling Daughter”: Copying, Composition, and Collaboration in the

*Diary of Anna Green Winslow, A Boston School Girl of 1771*

In the year 1770, a bright little girl ten years of age, Anna Green Winslow, was sent from her far away home in Nova Scotia to Boston, the birthplace of her parents, to be “finished” at Boston schools by Boston teachers. She wrote, with evident eagerness and loving care, for the edification of her parents and her own practice in penmanship, this interesting and quaint diary, which forms a most sprightly record, not only of the life of a young girl at that time but of the prim and narrow round of daily occurrences in provincial Boston. (Earle, Foreword iii)

With the opening words of her foreword, historian Alice Morse Earle introduces Winslow’s text to her late nineteenth-century readers and simultaneously instructs them concerning the “positive value” of the work as a repository of historical curiosities for the current generation (iii). Though she writes in 1894, her sentiments were reflected in scholarship through three-quarters of the twentieth century during which time diaries were valued as historically revelatory documents, but rejected as worthy subjects of literary analysis. That Winslow was a female adolescent writer in a field where the public diaries of important men have received the most attention has also contributed to a potential under-valuing of her text as no more than an “interesting and quaint diary.” In recent years, however, Winslow’s “diary” has gained a central place in composition history scholarship as an example of the literacy practices and abilities available to elite young women in pre-Revolutionary Boston. Building

on the work of composition scholars such as E. Jennifer Monaghan, I offer another thread to a now century-old conversation about this text by attending specifically to the form in which Winslow constructed her most valued piece of writing: the journal-letter.

Winslow's journal-letter joins the diary and epistolary mediums in culturally- and age-specific ways. The text resembles what may be thought of as a typical diary in its basic format with datelines followed by entries detailing the important events of a particular day. However, twenty-first century readers may be surprised – certainly more surprised than Earle's readers would have been – to find that many of the entries are comprised of copied materials, including sermons, verse, newspaper articles, and letters. The incorporation of “copies” into personal writings was a common eighteenth-century practice based on a centuries old tradition of recording “commonplaces” for future reference (Dacome 603-604). Winslow joins what I have chosen to term the commonplace diary with a particular class of familiar letter, the letter of news.<sup>35</sup> Eve Tavor Bannet identifies at least twenty classes of familiar letters represented in eighteenth-century letter manuals of which “letters of advice,” increasingly referred to as “letters of intelligence” or “letters of news,” were prominent. These letters, described by John Hill in the *Young Secretary's Guide* (London 1687) are “such as are sent to Friends or Correspondents to give them notice of their own Affairs, and the Affairs of others, wherein they are concerned, or of which we think they are desirous to be informed” (Bannet 57). Significantly, the letter of advice and the commonplace diary share a similar emphasis on imitation. While letter-writers were encouraged to model their

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<sup>35</sup> Though Bannet offers three different names for this type of letter, I have chosen to refer to it as the “letter of news” because I believe this term most simply and accurately reflects the main content of Winslow's journal-letter. Bannet notes that a final class of letter was the mixed letter, one that joined two or more classes of letter (56). Winslow's text could be described as a mixed letter because it certainly includes more diverse content than just news, but I believe this multiplicity of content can be attributed to the open-ended medium of the diary, rather than the epistolary nature of the text.

correspondence after the sample letters in letter manuals, the commonplace tradition encouraged writers to create a compilation of the best thoughts culture had to offer. This pairing of imitation-based genres can also be explained by Winslow's youth, since at the end of the eighteenth-century literacy education was focused on copying, and hopefully absorbing, proper attitudes and, by extension, proper behaviors.

As an example of extracurricular writing, the journal-letter provides valuable insight into how imitative writing instruction translated into writing practice for students in the late colonial era. Evidence from the journal-letter reveals that Winslow engaged in several different types of writing during the one and one-half years in which she penned her journal-letter. She transcribed "copies" and essays as part of her schoolwork; she kept a "text journal" for jotting down sermon notes; she penned invitations for friends' parties; she wrote short letters, or billets, to peers and family members. Each of these activities was completed with an eye to exactness, whether she was attempting to perfectly execute the lines of the handwriting in her copybook exercises, trying to capture the precise words of the minister, or following the conventions that regulated letter and invitation writing. Of all of these writing moments, the journal-letter stands out, because of its hybrid nature, as the form most open to invention and innovation.

The journal-letter also stands out from the other forms in its dual authorship. Despite the naming of Winslow as author in the title, this journal-letter is the production of two minds and two pens, that of Winslow and her guardian, Sarah Deming. This presence of multiple authors is both a function of the epistolary nature of the text and its use as a medium of extracurricular education, subject to the perusal and correction of an authority in a tutorial capacity. Deming's influence on the text is quite complex. She often serves an inhibiting role

as reader and co-writer, at times usurping Winslow's authority by limiting her to strict copying or contradicting her evaluations of people and events. However, she also operates as an important sounding board for Winslow through acting as a consistent, immediate audience for her niece's writing, an audience almost always absent from letter writing, because of its focus on distance, and often absent from diary writing. Perhaps surprisingly, it is Deming's presence that elicits Winslow's most creative moments of composition, as well as offers Deming an outlet for her own self-presentation. Ultimately, the collaborative relationship represented within this journal-letter is made possible precisely because of the unique form in which the two women are writing. Before considering the significance of the journal-letter as a forum for collaboration, however, I begin with a brief overview of late eighteenth-century writing instruction, as well as an analysis of the two forms in which she writes, in order to explain the historical and cultural conditions that contributed to Winslow's appropriation of the hybrid journal-letter form.

*"I can write pretily": Late Eighteenth-Century Colonial Writing Instruction*

When Winslow refers to herself as "your scribbling daughter" in a journal-letter to her parents written November 29, 1771, she identifies herself as part of a new generation of women with access to literacy instruction. Coincidentally, 1771, the year the first surviving pages of Winslow's journal-letter were composed, was also the year Massachusetts passed a law requiring reading and writing instruction for girls apprenticed under the Poor Laws. Writing instruction for boys had been required by law since 1710, primarily because writing was considered an "economic survival skill" for males. Sewing served as the corresponding survival skill for girls, a skill Winslow studied under the seamstress Madam Smith (Monaghan, "The Uses of Literacy by Girls in Colonial America" 3, 18). But sewing did not

represent the culmination of her education as it might have for the previous generation of women, for she also attended Boston's South Writing school under the tutelage of writing master Samuel Holbrook (Earle, Notes 92).<sup>36</sup> Despite this advance, female students were only allowed to attend school in the afternoons when male pupils left for a meal and were usually taught round hand, while their male counterparts learned up to eight different scripts (Monaghan, "The Uses of Literacy" 3). A young woman from an elite family, Winslow was not subject to the Poor Laws – her writing education was privately funded – but this law demonstrates that girls of higher social status would most decidedly have been expected to receive instruction in writing by this time.<sup>37</sup>

In her comprehensive study of colonial education, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, Monaghan reminds readers of what may seem like a surprising aspect of late colonial writing instruction: students like Winslow probably already knew how to write before they attended writing school (338). Indeed, though free writing schools only required that students be at least seven years old and able to read as a prerequisite (Seybolt 67), by the time Winslow moved to Boston in 1770 to take advantage of the educational opportunities

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<sup>36</sup> According to Thornton in "The Lost World of Colonial Handwriting," in order to learn how to write, people had to go outside the home to a writing master. Private classes for boys were often advertised in addition to bookkeeping skills, for females in addition to dancing, music, or needlework. Earle, editor of Winslow's diary, identifies several members of the Holbrook family who were writing masters in Boston schools during the last half of the eighteenth century when penmanship was still a craft. Samuel Holbrook, brother of Abiah Holbrook, "the most accomplished writing master in colonial America" (Thornton 58), became a writing teacher in 1745 at the age of eighteen. In 1769, after Abiah's death, he took over as master of the South Writing School where he taught Winslow along with hundreds of other students. The Holbrooks are credited with teaching the "Boston Style of Writing" (92-94).

<sup>37</sup> Despite this advance, prejudices towards women's ability to write well prevailed. For instance, in 1782 John Eliot describes the status of female education in Boston a few yrs earlier: "We don't pretend to teach ye female part of ye town anything more than dancing, or a little music perhaps, (and these accomplishmt must necessarily be confined to a very few), except ye private schools for writing, which enables them to write a copy, sign their name, &c., which they might not be able to do without such a privilege, & with it I will venture to say that a lady is a rarity among us who can write a page of commonplace sentiment, the words being well spelt, & ye style & language kept up with purity and elegance" (Woody 145,147).



afforded by the bustling city, she knew how to read and write quite well. Given that she was already able to form letters, compose sentences, and spell when she set foot in the South Writing School, a twenty-first century reader might assume that Winslow was sent to school in order to learn higher levels of composition. Such was not the case, however, since true instruction in composition was almost exclusively limited to Latin grammar schools where young men learned to write essays in classical languages. Instead, writing masters filled their classes by offering parents the opportunity to polish their daughters with the “genteel female accomplishment” of calligraphy (Monaghan, “The Uses of Literacy” 3).

Handwriting was accorded great significance in the eighteenth century and served as the end of instruction in most writing schools. As Tamara Plakins Thornton explains in “The Lost World of Colonial Handwriting,” the particular hand a writer employed identified him/her by sex, social status, and occupation. Merchants, gentlemen, and ladies were taught different styles of writing; to use the appropriate style “prevented any potential confusion of social status that would have occurred had all handwriting been executed in the same script” (64). Whereas an earlier generation of women were taught a script that was easy to learn – presumably because of their intellectual inferiority – by the late eighteenth century, writing masters, in search of more students, emphasized the beauty and delicacy of female penmanship (Monaghan, *Learning* 280-81). As Susan Miller shows, in eighteenth-century accounts when one spoke of writing it referred to handwriting, rather than “composing discourse” (111).

This focus on handwriting rather than composition is explicit in Winslow’s journal-letter writing. For instance, after receiving a letter from her mother in response to her last journal-letter, Winslow writes, “I am glad Hon<sup>d</sup> madam, that you think my writing is better

than it us'd to be – you see it is mended just here. I dont know what you mean by *terrible margins vaze*. I will endeavor to make my letters even for the future” (5). In other passages Winslow relates her guardian Aunt Deming’s “grief [...] that I don’t always write as well as I can.” She adds, with apparent pride, “*I can write pretily*” (48). Her proficiency is also evidenced by her professed ability to write lines in her “Book almost as well as the copy” (48, 39).<sup>38</sup> Even the editor emphasizes that the text offers evidence of Winslow’s aptitude in “that most indispensable and most appreciated of eighteenth century accomplishments---fine writing” and functioned as a place to gain “practice in penmanship.” According to Earle, “The writing is uniform in size, every letter is perfectly formed; it is as legible as print, and in the entire diary but three blots can be seen, and these are very small” (Foreword vi, iii). Clearly, Winslow attended school to learn the art of beautiful penmanship, an ability that would distinguish her as a lady of good breeding. By identifying when she does not employ her abilities properly, her mother and aunt also identify the moments in which she leaves herself open to an inaccurate and potentially damaging self-presentation.

Copying was the method by which a young woman learned to write in this socially sanctioned hand, and the handwriting model was the main pedagogical tool of writing masters. The master provided each student with a model of handwriting, either written by the master or taken from a copybook – a textbook that offered examples of fine writing in various hands – that she was instructed to mimic as closely as possible.<sup>39</sup> Students repeatedly copied these models, usually moving from individual letters and words to short sentences,

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<sup>38</sup> The “Book” Winslow refers to is probably the book within which she copied her school exercises.

<sup>39</sup> Copybooks were costly materials for writing masters to acquire since they included copperplate copies for students to imitate. However, these “printed slips” saved masters from the tedious task of individually setting copies for each student. George Bickham’s *Universal Penman* (1743), a work that twenty-six English writing masters contributed to, was probably the most widely used copybook by American writing masters and their students. (Monaghan, *Learning* 279)

poems, and essays in order to perfect a particular hand before tackling a more complex hand. “Rather than teaching a child to express himself,” Monaghan reveals, “the writing masters focused on those aspects of writing instruction that looked to its form, its purely visual properties. The job of the writing master was to teach a variety of scripts, and the fundamental task of the student was to learn how to represent the words of others in these scripts” (*Learning* 275). In the main, this form of writing instruction has been viewed negatively because of its emphasis on rote imitation. Thornton concludes that in the colonial era writing was taught through copying as a passive skill, not a means to authorship. Learned through the act of copying, it was expected that students would continue to use writing for this purpose, transcribing such worthy texts as poetry, essays, lectures, and sermons. Sadly, Thornton concludes, few “ever went beyond an understanding of writing as copying or transcribing to the practice of original composition” (61).

Monaghan similarly concludes that writing masters in late colonial Boston did not design to teach more than copying, but she adds the significant caveat that this does not preclude the possibility that their students might still learn to engage in composition. While the “formal properties of writing instruction [...] stressed self-control, discipline, submission to the desires of another (writing was presumed to occur in a work setting), and laborious work,” its subtext “viewed writing as a gateway to self-expression and self-identification.” Following on the heels of learning the discipline of writing, children might begin to express themselves through “the more subversive subtexts of writing instruction in unauthorized marginal notations in their copybooks, in diaries, and in ‘familiar’ letters of their own composition” (*Learning* 273). Monaghan identifies diary and letter writing as potential spaces for this subtext of writing to express itself, and thus the places that scholars must look

for evidence of how children actually employed the painstakingly acquired discipline of penmanship. “Probably because letters and diaries were considered innocuous,” suggests Lucille Schultz, “children were permitted to use those scenes of writing to contest received wisdom” (134). Since Winslow writes in the diary and letter forms simultaneously – despite the fact that the hybridity of the form has been addressed only in passing – it is no wonder that her text has been a focus of recent interest to historians of rhetoric and composition. Surprisingly, however, scholars have not yet examined the similarities between her text and the commonplace book, a reading that complicates current understandings of the purposes and effects of writing instruction for this young woman.

*“The means of Learning unto me allow’d”: The Commonplace Book Tradition*

When Winslow reminds her mother “Rome was not built in a day” in one of the last entries of her journal-letter, she employs a commonplace sentiment to explain her continued struggle to write well, while taking part in a tradition of commonplacing even older than the Roman Empire. Ancient Greek orators and writers are credited with founding the tradition of keeping commonplace books where they gathered quotations, maxims, and ideas that represented “shared cultural knowledge and values” as source material (Autrey 75). During the Renaissance, the practice was revived as an educational tool by Erasmus in *De Copia*, which advised students to store passages from their reading under various *topoi* that could later be synthesized and embellished in orations or compositions. The books in which this information was recorded were known as commonplace books, since they housed a variety of “commonplaces” grouped under particular “Heads” (Yeo 157-58). In the late seventeenth century, John Locke devised a popular update to the commonplace tradition in his posthumously published *A New Method of the Common-Place Book* (1706) which offered an

alphabetical grid system for indexing entries. This work established Locke's method as the dominant system of commonplacing used throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century (Dacome 604). According to Lucia Dacome, many eighteenth-century readers and writers were attracted to Locke's method not only because it provided a better system for ordering their reading but "by the promise that this technique could also help them to order their minds and thus turn them into better people" (604). Though a complex organizational system is absent, Winslow participates in a version of this tradition as she diligently copies a variety of passages into her journal-letter with the overt purpose of helping her to perfect her handwriting and the covert purpose of turning her into a better person. In other words, by the time Winslow employs this commonplace method in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, she does so in the service of formal writing instruction.

It is in this method of copying that late eighteenth-century writing instruction reflects the commonplace tradition, for although the most obvious purpose of copying was to perfect one's abilities as a technician, the materials used for copying represented culturally shared values and beliefs that students compiled on page after page of school exercises. For instance, one popular copybook displayed the following maxims: "Better to be alone than in bad company"; "Nothing more recommends a Youth than Modesty"; "Good name in Man or Woman, / Is the immediate Jewel of our Souls" (Monaghan, *Learning* 319-20). If viewed only in the context of the discipline of writing instruction, these maxims seem calculated as tools of socialization; in addition to teaching pupils to write properly, such copying activities would have the additional effect of inculcating proper ideas and proper behaviors. The only passage from her copybook that Winslow copies into her journal-letter clearly reflects this

purpose. After confirming to her parents an intention to be “very good,” Winslow concludes her journal-letter with the following passage:

Next unto *God*, dear Parents I address  
 Myself to you in humble Thankfulness,  
 For all your Care & Charge on me bestow'd;  
 The means of Learning unto me allow'd,  
 Go on I pray, & let me still pursue  
 Those Golden ARTS the Vulgar never knew. (47)

However, viewed in the context of the commonplace tradition, the act of transcribing such passages can be seen as an aid to composition rather than simply thoughtless imitation.

Erasmus's *De Copia* identifies commonplacing as a useful tool of invention for students of rhetoric and composition. After offering a system for arranging commonplaces, he advises students, “whatever you come across in any author, particularly if it is rather striking, you will be able to note down immediately in the proper place [...]. This has the double advantage of fixing what you have read more firmly in your mind, and getting you into the habit of using the riches supplied by your reading” (638). Students are to record striking passages of writing not just to help them remember these words, but so they can later use them. Erasmus then employs the oft-quoted metaphor of the student-as-bee to explain the process and result of commonplacing: “So our student will flit like a busy bee through the entire garden of literature, will light on every blossom, collect a little nectar from each, and carry it to his hive. Since there is such an abundance of material that one cannot gather everything, he will at least take the most striking and fit this into his scheme of work” (639). The emphasis here is on using the ideas of others to enhance one's own compositions, in

effect the basis of all scholarly writing. This practice continued well into the nineteenth century; such figures as John Milton, George Berkeley, Robert Southey, Robert Burns, and David Thoreau all kept commonplace books, some of which were later published (Yeo 158). To view the keeping of commonplace books as merely an exercise in imitation, then, denies its inventive purposes and connection to original composition.

Commonplace books were also referred to as “copie” books since they were supposed to allow for copia, or “the free flow of material for oratory” (Yeo 158). By the seventeenth century, there were two kinds of commonplace books used in rhetorical education. While students were still encouraged to compile their own commonplace books based on their reading, there were also published commonplace books, “gleanings of gems from the literature of antiquity,” many based on the collections of Erasmus himself (Clark 218-19). The copybooks used by writing masters in the late eighteenth century more closely resembled the latter texts, adding a new emphasis on the handwriting in which the passages were scripted. Copybooks of the eighteenth century housed “copies” – ranging from short maxims to longer poems and essays – drawn from accepted cultural knowledge as well as the works of classical and contemporary authors. These copybooks served a different purpose from the earlier printed commonplace books, however, since students were presumably offered little or no choice as to what passages they copied for their handwriting practice, which were transcribed onto loose paper or into books sometimes also referred to as copybooks. Furthermore, the overt purpose of such copying was to imitate the precise look of the handwriting, rather than to compile a store of useful knowledge. That students like Winslow often designated their school copies as gifts for parents and friends, confirms their “decorative value” in the minds of students, parents, and masters (Monaghan, *Learning* 338).

Yet, if education via copybook placed an emphasis on imitation not just of others' words but also their exact handwriting, it also represents at least a partial extension of the commonplace tradition in its emphasis on the transcription of valuable ideas. As Monaghan suggests, it is not in the copybooks themselves or in the exercises students copied that scholars must look for originality of composition, but rather in their extracurricular diary and letter writing. This is where the principles of copying learned in schools were put in the service of self-expression.

It is in Winslow's journal-letter, then, that I find a more fruitful adaptation of the commonplace tradition. I have previously said that Winslow's text is composed of two genres: the familiar letter of news and the commonplace diary. Oddly enough, the latter designation is somewhat of an oxymoron. In "Toward a Rhetoric of Journal Writing," Ken Autrey identifies the commonplace book and the diary as "two contradictory genres." While the commonplace book has served "to connect the self with the community," the diary, which is also as old as the ancient Greeks, has served "to individualize the self" (74, 76). A further possible distinction resides in the fact that the commonplace book has traditionally been considered "a means to an end, a part of the process, rather than a product in its own right," whereas diaries "are invariably end products rather than steps in a process" (83). Though I may quibble with carving such clear cut distinctions between the two forms of writing – I would argue for the significance of the process of diary writing as well as the emphasize that the personal compilation created through commonplacing is indeed a product in its own right – there is a sense that these two forms are inherently dissimilar.<sup>40</sup> Autrey recommends

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<sup>40</sup> See Wulf, "Milcah Martha Moore's Book," for an analysis of commonplacing as process. Wulf reads Moore's acts of commonplacing as active attempts to reinforce "bonds of intimacy and common knowledge" among a close circle of correspondents (22). Her analysis also joins the commonplace tradition and letter writing together in interesting ways.



bringing together the commonplace book with the diary to create a form of pedagogical journal for use in composition courses. The resulting journal would incorporate communal knowledge with personal insight as well as join the process-oriented act of commonplacing with the diary product, “the closest thing to a book many students will ever write” (86-87). I cite Autrey here because what he identifies as a “pedagogical journal” is very similar to the kind of text Winslow writes over two centuries earlier. In her journal-letter, Winslow joins the communal act of commonplacing with the (at least theoretically) individualized act of diary writing, engaging in an inventive process as well as creating a product of value, truly the “closest thing to a book” she will ever write.

*“Thou knowest not what a day may bring forth”: The Commonplace Diary*

Winslow often employs the skill of transcription, the primary tool through which she learned to write, in her journal-letter writing. Unlike her required copywork for writing school, however, when Winslow copies passages into her text they are of her own choosing. By selecting passages of importance to her, Winslow’s text participates in the tradition of the commonplace book. Furthermore, by incorporating these passages into her diary writing, she joins the process of commonplacing with the product of composition, revealing that the pedagogical exercise of copying joined with the diary genre could be appropriated by students in colonial America for acts of individual expression.

Sermons were perhaps the most obvious fodder for transcription. In fact, for Winslow, copying sermons constituted an involved, multiple-step process. Since she typically attended several sermons each week – twice on Sunday and at least once during the week as well – she had ample material to draw from. A text journal, which she kept in addition to her journal-letter, accompanied her to each meeting. Therein she took notes on

the minister's sermon, and when time allowed, she then copied or summarized these notes in her journal-letter. That Winslow transcribed oral texts as well as print texts underscores the rhetorical underpinnings of this activity. Often times, Winslow's aunt also asked her to orally recount what she remembered, revealing a movement from orality to literacy and back, a further connection to the commonplace tradition. Presumably, with each "copying" activity, the minister's words were reinforced in Winslow's memory, becoming a part of her store of knowledge for future use. Her journal-letter writing offers examples of each part of this process, from transcription to selection to composition.

In the second entry of the text, Winslow transcribes her first sermon. After recounting the scripture passage the minister preached on the previous day as well as a few of his key points, Winslow admits that there is much from the sermon she cannot remember. She concludes to relate only what she does remember, a portion of the sermon that the minister addressed specifically to his "dear young friends, you who are pleased with beauty, & like to be tho't beautiful" (2). What follows is a discourse on holiness as the source of true beauty and outward adornments as but a mask of deformity. Those who aspire to outward beauty are "all over black & defil'd, ugly and loathsome to all holy beings, the wrath of th' great God lie's upon you, & if you die in this condition, you will be turn'd into hell, with ugly devils, to eternity" (3). When Winslow chose to copy this section of the sermon into her journal-letter she participated in the activity encouraged by Erasmus; since she admits to being unable to "gather everything" the minister said, she selects the "most striking" and copies it down.

Given the larger context of the journal-letter, it is not surprising that this portion of the sermon would capture Winslow's attention. The minister addresses his words

specifically to those “who are pleased with beauty,” and Winslow certainly was such a young woman. That she had a penchant for fashion has been noted by nearly every scholar of her work, from its initial publication until today. In her introduction to the 1894 edition, Earle wonders if a “love of religion or a love of dress” is most prominent in the text, concluding, “On the whole, I think that youthful vanity, albeit of a very natural and innocent sort, is more pervasive of the pages” (Foreword iv). Even Monaghan ends her reading of the text with the acknowledgment that this adolescent girl’s “real passion was clothing and jewelry” (*Learning* 341). Following this initial sermon passage, the remaining pages of the journal-letter are peppered with discussions of her own clothing as well as the dress of those she encounters. Unlike her copywork for school, Winslow exercises selectivity based on personal interest when she chooses to copy this portion of the sermon into her journal-letter.

If sermons were in some ways a form of required copy work, there are many other passages that Winslow copies into her journal-letter based exclusively on personal choice. For instance, in one entry she copies a poem taken from her late grandmother’s pocket-book.<sup>41</sup> The lines are a shortened adaptation of an epitaph said to have been written by Massachusetts Governor Thomas Dudley before his death in 1653 (Earle, Notes 106) and copied down by her grandmother before her own death. The words bespeak an appropriate Christian response to the grave: “The dream is past, the shadows fled,/ My soul now longs for Christ my head,/ I’ve lived to seventy six or nigh,/ God calls at last, & now I’ll die.” Following these words, Winslow constructs an impromptu obituary, recording the exact day and time her grandmother “departed this vale of tears,” roughly six months earlier (22).

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<sup>41</sup> During the eighteenth century, a pocketbook could refer to a small notebook that was kept on one’s person for the purpose of taking down notes (“Pocketbook”). This is most likely the kind of pocketbook Winslow refers to here. Some women kept pocketbooks which they later expanded into diaries (Blodgett 25-26). That her grandmother kept a pocketbook also reveals that diary keeping was an inherited tradition for Winslow.

When grandmother Sargent copied these words into her pocket-book, she participated in the commonplace tradition of employing sentiments of communal knowledge that speak to one's particular experience or condition. When Winslow copies these words into her own text, she joins her grandmother's textual legacy with her own. In her study of nineteenth-century friendship albums, Karen Sanchez-Eppler explains the significance of copying poetry from published sources: "the value of each page comes not from the originality of the words written, but from the act of personal connection and care entailed in choosing particular poems and inscribing them. By copying poems in their own hands, friends turn generic sentiments into acts of relation and remembrance" (318). Similarly for Winslow, the act of copying represents a moment of remembrance inscribed into her journal-letter, rather than a pedantic exercise.

Death again becomes Winslow's subject with the passing of an acquaintance who she reminds her parents treated her "so kindly." After relating that she has no knowledge of "whether he engag'd the King of terrors with christian fortitude, or otherwise," she copies a portion of a hymn into her journal-letter. The hymn calls to readers/singers, "Stoop down my Thoughts, that use to rise, Converse a while with Death; Think how a gasping Mortal lies, And pants away his Breath" (44). For modern day readers, the incorporation of this short poetic sequence seems a bit jarring, since it is dropped into the text without introduction and immediately followed by an account of her activities from the previous days. But for her contemporary audience the reference would surely bring to mind the remainder of the hymn, which longs for reunion with Christ at death and acknowledges his right to bring about that death at any moment.<sup>42</sup> When Winslow includes this poem in her daily entry, she does not do

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<sup>42</sup> Stoop down, my thoughts, that use to rise;  
Converse awhile with death;

so haphazardly. Instead, she employs a fitting commonplace sentiment to reveal her reaction to this man's passing; it has caused her to turn her thoughts to death. When she uses the skill of copying to respond to a personal experience, she follows Erasmus's suggestion to "fit [commonplaces] into [her] scheme of work."

In addition to longer passages that are less obviously integrated into her writing, Winslow often incorporates brief commonplace sentiments, many of which are biblical allusions, into her sentences. When she sees an acquaintance who bears news of her family back home, she writes "because of him 'we hear of your affairs & how you do' – as the apostle Paul once wrote" (3). In a later entry she is unable to write since she is busy sewing, but has employed the hand of an "old friend, who being *near by* is better than a brother *far off*" (11). After becoming afflicted with painful boils, she humorously describes herself as "swath'd hip & thigh, as Samson smote the Philistines" (21). Again, when a whitlow afflicts her finger and she is unable to manage a quill or a needle, she resolves, "So I will lay my hand to the distaff, as the virtuous woman did of old" (22). She begins one entry in a serious

Think how a gasping mortal lies,  
And pants away his breath!

But, oh! the soul, that never dies!  
At once it leaves the clay;  
Ye thoughts, pursue it where it flies,  
And track its wondrous way.

Up to the courts where angels dwell  
It mounts, triumphant there;  
Or plunges guilty, down to hell,  
In infinite despair

And must my body faint and die?  
And must this soul remove?  
Oh for some guardian angel nigh,  
To bear it safe above!

Jesus! to thy dear, faithful hand  
My naked soul I trust;  
And my flesh waits for thy command  
To drop into my dust. (*The Sabbath Hymn Book* 268)

manner with a proverb, “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” before revealing that she has “met with a disappointment to day” and was unable to go visiting due to the weather (42-43). These references show Winslow positioning her experiences, and her understanding of those experiences, within a space of shared cultural understanding. “The commonplace book,” explains Autrey, “has historically provided a means of placing the self within a broader cultural context. Commonplace books rendered students better able to muster rhetorical support for speaking or writing” (82). For female students such as Winslow who were not allowed to advance to higher levels of composition training, this extracurricular form of writing offered a space for rhetorical practice in aligning personal experiences or opinions with shared cultural knowledge.

The joining of the diary form with the commonplace book tradition is what makes this productive form of copying accessible to Winslow. If the commonplace book, in its original form, housed only copied passages to be incorporated into compositions and orations, Winslow’s journal-letter does double duty as a repository for commonplace ideas and a place for their integration into her personal writing, as the previous examples reveal. In her study of commonplace writing, Miller identifies that commonplace books from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries were not limited to “the copied quotations that first defined their purpose.” Instead, they also included such materials as “notes, self- and school-sponsored essays, journals, correspondence, speeches, legal documents, school exercises, and many other familiar forms that now occupy literary, historical, and cultural analysis” (35). These manifestations of the commonplace tradition reveal that, when joined with other genres of daily writing like the diary, the commonplace book no longer fundamentally represents a product but a “*process* of keeping” (35). To place Winslow’s

writing within the commonplace tradition changes how one reads this text. Rather than a mere extension of her copywork for school, the commonplace diary is a medium where Winslow productively and creatively employs the learned skill of copying in the service of autobiographical writing.

*“My love and duty to dear friends”: The Familiar Letter of News*

Copying was not only the means by which students learned to form their letters, but also the means by which youth and adults alike learned to compose letters. Bannet shows that the letter manuals of the eighteenth century taught the art of letter writing through epistolary models that writers were encouraged to imitate.<sup>43</sup> In this way, letter manuals aligned themselves “not only with the practice of the classroom, but also with the way in which people expected to learn during apprenticeships, and with the ways in which learning was thought to occur in life” (94). Just as the passages recorded in commonplace books represented a shared cultural knowledge, so too did the common letters published in letter manuals. According to Bannet, “in the eighteenth century the ‘already seen’ and ‘already said’ extended to model letters, [...] which both the letter-writer and the letter’s readers would already have read, transcribed and imitated at home or at school, or which they would have encountered in letter-collection after letter-collection” (95). While the least skilled or laziest letter-writers might merely transcribe a model letter, more adept writers were expected to improve upon these models through “their inversion, amplification, adaptation or reinterpretation, and at best, their creative transformation into something that was really quite

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<sup>43</sup> Though Samuel Richardson’s familiar letter manual promoted familiar letter writing from mid-century on, it took considerably longer for letter writing to enter the formal writing instruction of children. Letter writing manuals directed specifically to youth were not printed in England until the 1780s or in America until the 1790s. By the 1770s, some Boston writing masters had begun to advertise instruction in letter writing to young ladies specifically. From this point onward, there is more evidence of children writing letters (Monaghan, *Learning* 298-99).

different” (99). (Notice the similarity between this expectation and Erasmus’s advice to students to take passages from great works of literature and incorporate them into their own ideas.) Therefore, when Winslow joined the familiar letter of news with the commonplace diary to create her journal-letter, she joined one imitative genre with another, but in the tradition of the skilled writer, she improved upon both.

I emphasize the epistolary nature of the text here because it is often neglected in the analyses of such works. Even Monaghan, who offers perhaps the most detailed discussion of Winslow to date and does describe the journal as a “running letter to her parents,” does not consider the implications of writing in this hybrid form (*Learning* 334). This omission is startling because apart from its purpose as a form of long-distance communication, Winslow’s so-called “diary” would not exist at all. Unlike the rest of the subjects in this study, Winslow does not choose to write a journal-letter; the form is chosen for her by her parents who wish to monitor her activities and her progress in writing from afar. She acknowledges this writing as compulsory when she assures her mother, “I comply with your orders [...] of writing in my journal every day tho’ my matters are of little importance” (61). However, although her parents chose the medium, Winslow chose what she would write.

As can be expected in a child’s diary, Winslow spends much time recounting her daily activities, including her school attendance, her reading, sewing, and copywork, and her daily round of visits. However, her writing moves outside the realm of the diary when she relays messages from herself, family, and friends in Boston to her parents in Nova Scotia. In “The Letter and the Fiction Reading Public in Antebellum America,” Ronald J. Zboray argues that the mobility of the population in the early United States made literacy for the purpose of letter writing a crucial skill, as letters came to serve as “an avenue of affectional



communication” for the “transmission of feelings, personal dilemmas, and community and family news” (29).<sup>44</sup> Winslow acts in the role of family messenger in her journal-letter, composing a text that most closely approximates the familiar letter of news, “among the most frequent, and among the most prized, of eighteenth-century letters” (Bannet 57). Letter-manual compiler Hill defines these letters as “such as are sent to Friends or Correspondents to give them notice of their own Affairs, and the Affairs of others, wherein they are concerned, or of which we think they are desirous to be informed” (Bannet 57). In fact, Winslow’s relation of information about relatives and friends is so prominent in the text that, for Monaghan, the journal-letter is best characterized as an “open site for family communication,” a “place where the family members could draw closer and exchange news” (*Learning* 335).

It is clear from the journal-letter that Winslow takes her role as a communicator of news seriously. She spends a good deal of time visiting relatives, providing her with ample information to share. One entry in particular reveals that she visits at least six relatives in three days:

Thursday last I din’d & spent the afternoon with Aunt Sukey. I attended both my schools in the morning of that day. I cal’d at unkle Joshua’s as I went along, as I generally do, when I go in town, it being all in my way. Saterdag I din’d at Unkle Storer’s, drank tea at Cousin Barrel’s, was entertain’d in the afternoon with scating. Unkle Henry was there. [...]. I might have say’d I was at Unkle Winslow’s last Thursday Eve<sup>g</sup>. (28)

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<sup>44</sup> Though Zboray concentrates on a slightly later period, the early nineteenth century, I think his observations are sound for the late eighteenth century as well since the familiar letter is the preferred mode of long-distance communication by this time.

She relates to her parents and siblings the delivery and lying-in of Aunt Sukey, the story of uncle Ned breaking his leg, continuing updates on the status of Aunt Storer's health and Uncle Henry's ailing feet, and her sharing of books with cousin Charles. Not only does she send her own "love and duty to dear friends," she also relays messages from others when instructed to do so. For example, she notes, "I saw Mrs. Whitwell very well yesterday, she was very glad of your Letter" (44, 4).

Furthermore, her role as a courier of news extends beyond information about family and friends to include events that she considered newsworthy. Bannet shows that, in addition to "intelligence about such private matters as births or the deaths of friends," there was an expectation that "even personal letters from family and friends would bring them public intelligence that they would find of interest or of use" (257). Winslow does not disappoint. Throughout the journal-letter she relays several salacious stories about a young woman Betty Smith whose illegal activities land her first in "gaol," then at the whipping post, and eventually "set upon the gallows" (65). Winslow also has a keen sense of what kind of news is passed along through correspondence and what is newspaper-worthy. For instance, she decides to leave out a description of the anniversary celebration of the Boston Massacre "because, no doubt there will be printed accounts" (40). In this way, her text includes not only those daily events that define her life – her trips to and from the various schools she attends, amusements with friends, and household chores – but also the events that define the life of the community within which she lives. Thus, when her dedication to seeking out and recording information leads one minister to label her a "Newsmonger" and a "daily advertiser," Winslow tells her mother this as a "fine compliment for me" (49-50). This may seem like an odd response from the young woman, but for Winslow it is this role as a conduit

of information between various parties that gives her writing purpose. This is precisely why titling the text *Diary of Anna Green Winslow* is so misleading. Though the text definitely incorporates the elements of diary writing – episodic entries relating daily happenings – it also fundamentally functions as correspondence precisely because it has a specific, reciprocating audience.

*“I shall trouble only you with this part of my scribble”:*

*Reciprocity and the Journal-Letter*

Discussions of the epistolary form cannot neglect the primary role of the reader. For Janet Gurkin Altman it is “the weight of the reader” that is the defining characteristic of the letter form:

If pure autobiography can be born of the mere desire to express oneself, without regard for the eventual readers, the letter is by definition never the product of such an ‘immaculate conception,’ but is rather the result of union of writer and reader. The epistolary experience, as distinguished from the autobiographical, is a reciprocal one. The letter writer simultaneously seeks to affect his reader and is affected by him. (88)

Since Winslow writes under compulsion, one might think that reciprocity is unimportant in this instance, making the text more like a journal than a letter. However, as Altman suggests, Winslow shows that reciprocity is key to her journal-letter when she refuses to address her writing to a reader who fails to reciprocate. This reader is none other than her father.

The journal-letter that begins on January 25, 1772 is addressed solely to “Hon<sup>d</sup> Mamma.” Winslow has revoked her father’s privileges as reader because he has not fulfilled his duty as correspondent by mentioning his approval of her journal-letter writing in his letters. She concludes that he either “never reads them, or does not give himself the trouble

to remember any of their contents, tho' some part has been address'd to him." His lack of interest in her writing causes her to reject her father as reader, assuring her mother, "for the future, I shall trouble only you with this part of my scribble" (18). Mr. Winslow has broken what Altman refers to as the "epistolary pact," the fundamental distinguishing characteristic between the diary or memoir written for a specific audience and the epistolary novel. Altman convincingly argues that the reader takes on much greater significance in the epistolary text than she does in other autobiographical forms due to the inherent reciprocity of the form. She explains, "[i]n epistolary writing the reader is called upon to respond as a writer and to contribute as such to the narrative." The fact that the reader is

called upon [...] alerts us to that fundamental impulse behind all epistolary writing; if there is no desire for exchange, the writing does not differ significantly from a journal, even if it assumes the outer form of the letter. To a great extent, this is the epistolary pact – the call for response from a specific reader in the correspondent's world. (89)

According to Elizabeth Hewitt, the letter's address to a specific reader "make[s] reciprocity all but ineluctable." "[T]he conventional superscription to a letter that qualifies the reader as 'dear,'" she concludes, "asserts an intimacy between reader and writer that the reader is given almost no space to resist" (6). Journals enter into the realm of the epistolary when they invite specific readers in, not just to examine the contents of the journal, but to respond to and influence the shape of the developing text.<sup>45</sup>

If the "weight of the reader" cannot be underestimated in conventional epistolary forms, neither can it be in the journal-letter form. Winslow's text is the best example I have

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<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more in-depth examination of Altman's "epistolary pact" as it relates to the journal-letter form.

found to illustrate the significance of the reader as a distinguishing factor of the journal-letter form. Its importance for Winslow is demonstrated, perhaps ironically, at a point when she has no audience at all. In June 1772 when Winslow's parents and little brother visit, she stops writing altogether for two months. When she finally picks up writing again – while her family remains in the Boston area – the frequency and length of her entries have dramatically decreased. Though she will include these entries in her journal-letter and eventually send it to her family when they return to Nova Scotia, the physical presence of her epistolary correspondents renders the text almost unnecessary and robs Winslow of her reason and passion for writing. The epistolary nature of the text disappears, and Winslow turns to a form that needs no audience other than the self (though it certainly may have one): the journal.

By no means do I wish to reinscribe the myth that the distinguishing factor between letters and journals is, in Benjamin D'Israeli's words, "We converse with the absent by letters, and with ourselves by diaries" ("Diary"). Deborah Martinson counters this reductive assumption in her study *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Martinson's focus on husbands as a very specific audience of women's diaries challenges the prevailing tendency of diary scholarship to acknowledge the presence of audience only in a general sense. The journal-letter form further promotes a revised understanding of the potential audiences for diary writers as it blends the daily writing associated with the diary with the specific, real audience characteristic of the letter. Rather than suggesting that the absence of a reading audience necessarily transforms a text into a more "private" genre of writing, I highlight this particular moment in Winslow's text in order to argue that the journal-letter form, for the women who choose it, is unique and distinct from the journal.

In Winslow's appropriation of the form, it is the presence of audience that distinguishes journal-letter writing from journal writing. Perhaps surprisingly, without an audience, the creativity with which Winslow once wrote vanishes. Since the writing in her journal-letter was compulsory, readers might expect more creativity from a young woman writing of her own accord. Instead, she records her family's comings and goings without further elaboration. Such entries are typical: "I visited with mamma at cousin Rogers'. There were a good many"; "Spend the days at aunt Storer's, the nights at home"; "Papa called in the morn<sup>g</sup>. Nothing else worth noticeing"; "Nothing extraordinary yesterday & today" (68-70). The king's coronation day, an event that surely would ignite the imagination of a twelve-year-old girl, only receives a cursory mention. She provides a succinct summary of the day: "The king's coronation day. In the evening I went with mamma to Col<sup>n</sup> Marshal's in King Street to see the fireworks" (69). One would expect a much more lively description of an event including fireworks, particularly given her previous proclivity for offering detailed descriptions of even the most mundane moments. For instance, the winter before she playfully wrote to her mother, "This day Jack Frost bites very hard, so hard aunt won't let me go to any school" before poetically adding, "The sun gives forth his rays through a vapor like that which was upon the water yesterday" (29). Another wintry day inspired this detailed description: "Everybody says that this is a bitter cold day, but I know nothing about it but hearsay for I am in aunt's chamber (which is very warm always) with a nice fire, a stove, sitting in Aunt's easy chair, with a tall three leav'd screen at my back, & I am very comfortable" (23). Yet when her audience is physically present – she attends the coronation celebration with her mother – and she no longer performs the role of family mediator, her

writing neglects to draw readers into a shared “epistolary present” by painting a picture with words (Altman 129).<sup>46</sup>

Instead, Winslow’s writing at this point more closely resembles what Lynn Z. Bloom classifies as a “truly private” diary. Bloom describes “truly private” diaries as “bare-bones works” primarily employed in record keeping, whether of financial transactions, the weather, visits, or significant public events (25). Though I am concerned by Bloom’s apparent privileging of the audience-centered, self-consciously literary “private diary as public document” over the “truly private” diary, I find her classifications helpful in understanding the change that takes place in Winslow’s writing. For Bloom, “it is the audience hovering at the edge of the page that for the sophisticated diarist facilitates the work’s ultimate focus” (24). Without an audience “hovering at the edge of the page,” Winslow’s text seems to lose its original focus. She continues to note the activities that occupy her days, but she is no longer occupied with writing. Lest we conclude that the demise of the journal-letter is simply a product of boredom with writing or outgrowing the exercise, when she is once again writing to her parents in Nova Scotia, she resumes her role as correspondent and her writing returns to life.<sup>47</sup> The entries become more like they were previously, including stories about and messages from family and friends. Though only three entries appear after this point, they are all one printed page or longer in length and are written over only the span of a week. In other words, they cover roughly the same space as the preceding nineteen entries written during the nearly five months her parents were visiting. She once more has a purpose in writing and an audience to write to.

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<sup>46</sup>For more on the epistolary present, see Chapter 1.

<sup>47</sup> There is a large gap between Winslow’s September entries when her parents are still visiting and the following set of entries which pick up in May of the following year. It is likely her parents returned to Nova Scotia before May 1773 when the journal-letter resumes. Transcriber Earle has inserted ellipses after the last September entry, but without a footnote of explanation, it is uncertain why this gap occurs.

To offer an idea of how drastically her writing in this latter portion of the text differs from the portion composed during her parent's visit, as well as to show how Winslow's writing matured over the course of the journal, I include one of Winslow's final entries. It is in this entry that Winslow composes her masterpiece, a most entertaining story centered on her experience with a "heddus roll," an accessory colonial women used to create towering hairstyles. With this description, she takes on the role of storyteller while poking fun at the hairstyle, and at herself.

I had my HEDDUS roll on, aunt Storer said it ought to be made less, Aunt Deming said it ought not to be made at all. It makes my head itch, & ach, & burn like anything Mamma. This famous roll is not made *wholly* of a red *Cow Tail*, but is a mixture of that, & horsehair (very course) & a little human hair of yellow hue, that I suppose was taken out of the back part of an old wig. But D----- made it (our head) all carded together and twisted up. When it first came home, aunt put it on, & my new cap on it, she then took up her apron & mesur'd me, & from the roots of my hair on my forehead to the top of my notions, I mesur'd above an inch longer than I did downwards from the roots of my hair to the end of my chin. Nothing renders a young person more amiable than virtue & modesty without the help of fals hair, red *Cow Tail*, or D----- (the barber). (71)

Here Winslow is not just jotting down her daily activities as a way to practice her penmanship. Instead she creates a story out of a daily event in order to entertain her readers. Through juxtaposing her aunts' opinions of the hair roll, she draws her audience into the story, inviting them to read on and render their own judgment. Even to twenty-first-century



readers completely unfamiliar with this hair accessory, Winslow's description of its elements, particularly her witty supposition that the human hair came not just from a wig, but the "back part of an old wig," paints a picture of humorous excess. To top it all off (pardon the pun), she offers the scene of Aunt Deming measuring her "notions" with an apron before officially pronouncing Winslow top heavy.

Following the formula of children's stories with which she would have been accustomed, Winslow ends with a moral promoting modesty in young women. Notice that she employs a commonplace piece of cultural knowledge here to support her original composition, while using her copying skills to create her own argument about modesty. Her point is well-taken; this extravagant roll is clearly not conducive to a modest appearance. This moral offers justification for including the story since it confirms that Winslow learned an important lesson from the experience. This story signals her maturation as a writer over the course of the text. She has learned how to write to please her audience and herself, a pleasure that is apparently absent when her audience is as well.

Winslow's journal-letter complicates our current understandings of the effect of audience on lifewriting. When she is no longer writing to anyone, the genre of the text changes. This fluidity of genre may be attributed to the diary nature of the text. Perhaps because diaries are written over periods of time – weeks, months, and/or years – a diarist may change her intentions multiple times throughout the life of the text. Both Harriet Blodgett and Judy Nolte Lensink note this fluidity of the diary form.<sup>48</sup> Blodgett, one of the first

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<sup>48</sup>In *Centuries of Female Days*, Blodgett shows that some of the diarists included in her study began writing ostensibly private texts, only to later begin to address an audience, either real or imagined (16). In "Expanding the Boundaries of Criticism: The Diary as Female Autobiography," Lensink uses the nineteenth-century diary of abused wife Emily Gillespie to show that the genre of a diary may change over time. Gillespie's diary began in sentimental mode, shifted to a travel diary, returned to sentimentality, later became a memento book, and in her later years resembled published accounts of "injured females" (47-48).

scholars to identify the distinctiveness of the journal-letter from the diary, focuses her study *Centuries of Female Days* on the “private” diaries of Englishwomen. She defines private diaries as “diaries not written or revised by the diarist for publication or intended for immediate reading by a second party” (13). A journal-letter such as Winslow’s clearly would not fit into the category of the private diary, and thus fits into the category of works that Blodgett chooses to exclude from her study. She reasons,

Common sense says that when a diarist has a live recipient for her words in view, she will have to adulterate her self-expression considerably. She will have to present herself and can no longer just express herself in terms of a personally acceptable image – at least to the extent that self-consciousness and the limitations of androcentric language allow her to. [...] [A]lthough the anticipation of being read by posterity may affect self-presentation, it still allows for some sense of present privacy and therefore potentially for more forthright self-declaration than does the sense of an immediate reader or public audience. (14)

A private diary, in Blodgett’s sense, would seem to allow for greater self-disclosure than a diary with an audience, particularly if that audience is in a position of authority over the writer, as is the case with Winslow. As Blodgett asserts, it is just common sense. But, if there is any consistency in the study of women’s autobiographical writing, it is that women writers continually defy expectations. Therefore, despite what one might expect, exactly the opposite happens in this text. Without having to meet the requirements and expectations of her audience, I would predict that Winslow would begin to write with more freedom, more self-disclosure. Instead, her writing seems much more forced at this point than it did when it

was forced upon her. One must conclude that the journal-letter form, even with an authoritative audience, provided a conduit for Winslow's creativity and self-expression in a way a "private" journal did not. For Winslow, both the diary and the epistolary components must be present together for her writing to be purposeful – and fun.

*"My Aunt says": Multi-Authorial Possibilities of the Journal-Letter*

It is this joining of genres that also invites an additional audience and writer, Winslow's guardian Aunt Deming, into the text. Throughout the course of the journal-letter, Winslow and Deming forge a complex collaborative authorship, the significance of which has been downplayed, if recognized at all, in current scholarship. For instance, in "The Web of Literacy: Speaking, Reading, and Writing in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century America," Deborah Keller-Cohen uses Winslow's text to suggest that Deming was only marginally literate, if literate at all. She explains that it was common practice in colonial America for one person to read aloud to a group of people as a means of including the non-literate or marginally literate in the world of literacy, offering Winslow's "daily custom" of reading to her aunt as evidence of this practice. The implication: Deming was not fully literate and needed her niece to perform this function for her (161). However, such a reading not only neglects the cultural basis for the oral sharing of texts, but also ignores the reality that, after Winslow, Deming's words are the most prominent in the journal-letter. By failing to acknowledge her literate presence in the text, Deming's influence remains unexplored.

Although Winslow's text is officially addressed to her mother – remember she rejected her father as audience early on – Deming actually serves as Winslow's most significant audience and thus helps shape the text in significant ways. More than once Winslow mentions reading her journal-letter aloud to her aunt or her aunt reading what is

written over her shoulder. Often times, Deming acts in a tutorial capacity. For example, after Winslow spells the fourth day of the week “wednesday,” she notes that her aunt has told her “it should be spelt wednesday” (9). Deming seems concerned, like Winslow’s parents, with monitoring the progress of her niece’s penmanship; more than once after looking over a page, Deming laments that Winslow has not written as well as she can (32, 39, 48). Monaghan also notes that Deming read the text regularly and “sometimes added pithy little remarks about its surface features” (335). Her analysis of Deming’s significance as reader seems limited to this tutorial role. However, this reading does not account for how Deming’s presence as reader affects more than Winslow’s orthography and penmanship.

To some degree, Deming becomes a more important figure than Winslow’s mother because she acts as a daily, present reader of the journal-letter. As such, she is a much different audience than that typically imagined by letter-writers. This is because the audience of a letter is characteristically absent and thus will not read the letter until the information is already dated. Separation between writer and reader is what makes the letter necessary in the first place; without it, the letter would not exist. Altman emphasizes this “particularity of the I-you” relationship in epistolary discourse. That is, the “I” of the letter always situates herself relative to the “particular you” whom she addresses. This “you” is distinguished by her absence: “The particular you whose constant appearance distinguishes letter discourse from other written discourse (memoir, diary, rhetoric) is an image of the addressee who is elsewhere” (140). If the absent reader, Mrs. Winslow, establishes this text as epistolary, it is the present audience of Aunt Deming that establishes the text also as a diary. Kathryn Carter suggests in her analysis of Frances Simpson’s nineteenth-century journal-letter that this form is characterized by a multiplicity of potential audiences. This possibility required journal-

letter writers to be “aware of audiences – both intended and accidental” and “anticipat[e] reader reactions” (18). While Carter refers to audiences that meet with the text after it leaves the writer’s hands, Winslow’s journal-letter shows that, for a text that is both letter and diary, the potential to come into contact with various audiences and the need to negotiate those audiences, both during and after the text’s composition, is greatly increased. The journal-letter form, then, requires that Winslow negotiate present and absent audiences within one text, quite a feat for a professional writer, but even more so for an adolescent.

Though Winslow never directly addresses her aunt within the journal-letter, she cleverly utilizes the text as a form of indirect communication. Such is the case in November 1771 when she receives a black hat as a birthday present. After graciously accepting the gift, she expresses fear that her aunt will have her pair this black hat with her “red Dominie” and predicts dramatic consequences: “for the people will ask me what I have got to sell as I go along street if I do, or, how the folk at New guinie do.” She petitions her mother, “Dear mamma, you dont know the fation here – I beg to look like other folk. You don’t know what a stir would be made in Sudbury street, were I to make my appearance there in my red Dominie & black Hatt” (7). Oddly, although the journal-letter closes with this entry, since she anticipates the dreaded change for the morrow, she cannot hope for her mother to intervene and save her. It is likely that the appeal would be more accurately addressed to “Dear aunt.” Since Deming adds a postscript to this journal-letter, it is probable she reads it before it is sent. Perhaps she will feel compassion for her niece and allow her to wear her “old cloak and bonnet together,” which Winslow offers in the entry as a possible alternative (8). What may come across as childish whining is actually a strategic use of daily writing by Winslow to assert her will and influence her fate.

At other times, Winslow offers brief comments directed towards her aunt. For example, after recounting to her mother her day's work, which included spinning yarn, reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, copying out of her text journal, playing "some," and laughing "enough," she defends her playfulness to her aunt by concluding "it is all human *nature*, if not human reason" (34). In a more serious instance, Deming criticizes Winslow's efforts to record a sermon. After dutifully recording her aunt's criticism, Winslow writes back in her own defense, "Mr. Bacon did say what is here recorded, but in other method" (54). In these instances, and others as well, Winslow succeeds in getting the last word through the use of the journal-letter, justifying her feelings, behaviors, and writing to her aunt as she could not directly through speech. The textual relationship between Winslow and Deming reflects William Merrill Decker's suggestion that communication through correspondence need not be predicated on great distances:

Although Abigail Adams's observation that it is 'more probable to unite Souls than Bodies' makes reference to the forbidding expanses of geographic space, it is also true that the smallest measure of geographic space may still be invested with insuperable barriers and that persons whose bodies occupy the same locale may well unite more readily through a steady paper converse. (94)

This is precisely what occurs between Winslow and her aunt, although it is within the same text rather than through a correspondence.

The paper converse between the two is complex. Sometimes Deming acts as a censor, restricting or contradicting Winslow's writing. For instance, after recollecting the contents of a sermon she attended the evening before, Winslow reads her entry to Deming and receives the following response: "Aunt has been up stairs all the time I have been

writing & recollecting this – so no help from her. She is come down now & I have been reading this over to her. She says, she is glad I remember so much, but I have not done the subject justice. She says I have blended things somewhat improperly” (51). Several days later Winslow again provides a detailed description of the sermon, this time going so far as to attempt to quote the minister’s words exactly. Yet this does not satisfy her aunt who laments that the girl’s memory does not equal that of her ancestors or she “might have done better justice to Mr. Bacon’s sermon” (54). Roughly three-quarters of the way into text, Winslow gives up recording notes from the sermon in the journal-letter, though she does mention that she has them “set down on a loose paper.” She states her reason for ceasing this activity: “But my aunt says that a Miss of 12 year’s old cant possibly do justice to the nicest subject in Divinity, & therefore had better not attempt a repetition of particulars, that she finds lie (as may be easily concluded) somewhat confused in my young mind” (56). Significantly, though she may note the passage of scripture, she never attempts to record another sermon in her journal-letter after this final admonishment from her aunt.

In these instances Deming restricts her niece’s use of literacy by making sure that she either employs her writing ability properly or does not write at all. In fact, as the person who provides Winslow with room and board, makes sure she regularly attends school, and reads over and provides critiques of her writing, Deming becomes, to use Deborah Brandt’s term, a powerful “sponsor of literacy” in Winslow’s life. Deborah Brandt defines sponsors of literacy as “any agents local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). While Deming outwardly enables and supports Winslow’s literacy development through boarding her and making it possible for her to attend school, she also

acts as an agent of culture, regulating and suppressing her niece's literacy activities when they do not conform to the strict uses for which writing was to be employed.

But, as I have said, Deming's presence in the text is complex. Although one might suppose that the handwritten nature of the letter would solve any questions about authorial responsibility, in *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke maintain that this is simply not the case. Within the letter form, "Even authorship is an issue, for the signing of a letter does not necessarily authenticate the identity of its writer. A signature is a token of responsibility, but not necessarily the mark of whose labor [or I add, whose ideas] actually produced the letter" (3). This is true for Winslow's journal-letter because Deming not only acts as her niece's daily reader, but also as an active collaborator. In line with the text's purpose as an instrument of family communication, Deming employs her niece's hand to relay greetings and messages to her brother and sister-in-law. Messages similar to the following are in many of Winslow's entries: "Aunt bids me give her love to pappa & all the family & tell them that she should be glad of their company in her warm parlour" (29). She also sends news of other family members and acquaintances in this manner. Yet, words from Deming are not confined to a line of greeting here and there. A quick perusal of the journal-letter reveals that the phrase "my aunt says" – or some version of it – appears on nearly every page. Winslow provides her parents with Deming's opinion on many matters, from the popish dress of congregational ministers to the severity of the weather to the importance of youth reading a variety of different genres (15, 60). And when she has nothing to write, Winslow often asks her aunt's permission to copy stories Deming has shared with her into the journal-letter (37-38, 46-47).



Aunt Deming's significance as a reader and contributor of information and opinions may also help explain the shift in the text that occurs in the summer of 1772. Since Deming is deprived of her audience as well, it is likely she no longer expends effort to help Winslow with her journal. In fact, Deming's name appears only twice in the entries for that summer with brief comment (68, 70). These instances suggest that the Winslows' visit disrupts the collaborative relationship that characterizes the journal-letter writing. It is both the loss of her epistolary audience, as well as the loss of Deming as audience, that are ultimately responsible for the change in Winslow's text. Understandably, then, it is the return of Deming as reader and contributor, in addition to her mother's absence, that signals the recovery of the journal-letter. Thus, in the first entry composed after her parents have returned to Nova Scotia, Deming once again becomes a key figure in the text taking part in Winslow's story of the heddu roll. Winslow notes at the end of this comical entry, "Now all this mamma, I have just been reading over to my aunt. She is pleas'd with my whimsical description & grave (half grave) improvement, & hopes a little fals English will not spoil the whole with Mamma. Rome was not built in a day" (71-72). This passage exemplifies the various roles Deming plays. Not only does she contribute to the telling of the story, she acts as both an encouraging and critical reader, praising the story's overall effectiveness without failing to deal with issues of correctness. The text, when at its best, is collaborative, but this collaboration is fraught with issues of power and authority.

Collaborative efforts almost always are. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson suggest that in collaborative autobiographical writings "power relations [...] are often asymmetrical" (191). Though they limit their discussion of collaborative life narratives to as-told-to, ghostwritten, or group-representative narratives, their findings hold true for the guardian-

minor collaboration that Deming and Winslow represent. Deming's self-imposed tutorial role is one such example. Not only does she criticize Winslow's spelling, grammar, and penmanship, Deming also engages in personal attacks, referring to Winslow as a "simpleton" on more than one occasion (41, 73). But the collaboration, though unequal, does not always serve to diminish Winslow's authority.<sup>49</sup> In fact, there are many positive benefits to Deming's influence in the text, which offered Winslow an immediate audience and fodder for composition.

Perhaps surprisingly, Winslow actually incorporates her aunt's ideas to enhance her own authority and reputation. The most common way in which she accomplishes this is by offering her aunt's judgments as supporting evidence for her arguments. In one entry she hopes to emphasize the bitter cold that keeps her from attending school. After describing the cold herself, Winslow adds, "my aunt says she believes this day is 10 degrees colder than it was yesterday; & moreover, that she would not put a dog out of doors" (29). Most often, she uses her aunt's words to confirm that she has worked well or been on her best behavior. On Christmas day she remarks that she "did a very good days' work," followed by the confirmation "aunt says so" (11). Again in February she describes her efforts reeling off yarn before offering that "Aunt says it is very good" (27). In March, she describes her day's work as a "piecemeal" and her writing as "nonsense," but Deming's estimation offers the evidence she needs to confirm her usefulness: "Aunt says, I have been a very good girl to day about my work however" (40).

Less obviously, Winslow uses her aunt as a mouthpiece for opinions she should but does not agree with. For instance, after her father finally reads and responds to her journal-

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<sup>49</sup> My thanks to Dr. Theresa Gaul for encouraging me to consider this relationship as a collaboration, rather than merely a usurpation of Winslow's authority.

letter writing, he simply writes that he approves of “some part of them.” This response puzzles and frustrates Winslow. Rather than respond in anger as she likely wished to, Winslow records her aunt’s words to offer an acceptable response: “indeed it would be wonderful, as aunt says, if a gentleman of papa’s understanding & judgment cou’d be highly entertain’d with *every little* saying or observation that came from a girl of my years & that I ought to esteem it a great favor that he notices any of my simple matter with his *approbation*” (57). Winslow avoids saying something she should not by appropriating her aunt’s words. Her use of emphasis, the choice to end the entry with her aunt’s opinion, and the fact that she never addresses another entry to her father after this point, reveal that these words do not represent her true feelings. Even if she “ought to” be thankful for her father’s condescension, she is not. She cleverly uses the collaborative nature of the text to her advantage, keeping her own voice quiet while still speaking her mind.

A final noteworthy element of this collaborative relationship is the fact that Deming not only reads and speaks into the text, she also literally writes her way into the journal-letter. This aspect of the text has only been recognized by Monaghan who confirms that Deming wrote comments into the text “using Anna’s own voice” (335). As proof she offers one manuscript page of Winslow’s journal-letter reproduced in the 1894 edition of the work.<sup>50</sup> This page shows a postscript written in a different handwriting from the body of the letter, presumably by the hand of Aunt Deming. For Deming to have added postscripts to Winslow’s journal-letters would have been in line with common practice in the eighteenth

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<sup>50</sup> It is probable that the manuscript of this journal-letter has been lost, for I have been unable to find it catalogued with the rest of the Winslow family writings. Editor Earle offers no indication of the location of the manuscript or its status after she transcribed it in 1894, and no scholars since then have mentioned having access to the manuscript. There are two existing manuscript diaries written by Winslow’s mother, also Anna Green Winslow, dating from 1749 and 1773. These are housed at the Winslow House in Marshfield, Massachusetts.

century. In fact, because they offered an opportunity to communicate with loved ones and friends at a distance, letters are perhaps the genre of autobiographical writing most open to collaborative authorship. Theresa Strouth Gaul highlights this “multi-authorial” characteristic of letters in her introduction to *To Marry An Indian*. In the Gold family correspondence Gaul transcribed, collaborative authorship manifested itself in a number of different ways:

Multiple authors sometimes contribute to the letters’ composition in overt ways, such as when two writers divide the space of the letter or when a second writer adds a postscript or marginal insertion. At other times, corporate authorship is less obvious but still operant, such as when letters reveal that other family members had input into or helped to revise earlier ones or when writers incorporate others’ sentiments by introducing them with devices such as ‘Mother says to tell you....’ (24)

Although the two never literally divide the space of the letter, Deming contributes to Winslow’s text in all of the other ways. As Gaul demonstrates, this characteristic can be attributed to the epistolary nature of the text, which seems to invite, or at least allow, for multiple authors. However, Deming’s choice to maintain Winslow’s voice when she writes in the journal-letter does not seem in line with the letter tradition, but may instead be a function of the diary nature of the text which requires the maintenance of a narrating “I” for coherence.

The diary has not often been viewed as a genre with collaborative potential. In fact, in this genre the image of the sole writer, the diarist, is key. Blodgett describes the diarist in individualistic terms: “A diary offers an individual perception of existence translated into

words, concrete images, and sequences that show a personality in process of being in a particular world” (7). Just as the diary “to be imaged ‘authentically’ must be written with no consideration of an audience beyond the writer herself,” (Podniecks 18), the “authentic” diary must also be written by one hand and in one voice. Of course, this image does not necessarily reflect reality. Scores of diaries, including that of Samuel Pepys, have been dictated at least partially to scribes and thus literally represent the product of multiple hands (Kunin 207).<sup>51</sup> The nineteenth-century diary of Iowa resident Emily Gillespie exhibits this form of collaboration since she sometimes had her children transcribe entries when she was too ill to do so (Bunkers 227). Even Winslow dictates entries to a friend when she is too busy or afflicted by pain to write herself (11, 20-21). Dictation is probably the most commonly identified and accepted form of collaboration, when it is understood as such, within the diary form.

Yet this is not the type of collaboration that characterizes Winslow’s journal-letter. Given the power differential between the two, it would be hard to imagine Deming acting as a scribe, faithfully transcribing each word her niece spoke. In fact, it is probable that the opposite takes place, as the many “My aunt says” comments throughout the journal-letters attest. Rather, when Deming writes into the journal-letter she does so at her own behest – sometimes when Winslow leaves the text unattended – and to communicate her own ideas. However, with the manuscript version unavailable, the moments that Deming actually pens the words on the page are difficult to decipher. The one manuscript page reproduced in the

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<sup>51</sup>In his *Diary*, Pepys sometimes dictated entries to his secretary. In his last diary, he “delineat[ed] a plan for a new, collaborative diary” that would be predominantly dictated to his “people,” but also contain marginal notations in his own hand (Kunin 207). See Daybell, *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing* for more on the effect of scribes on women’s epistolary acts. Daybell concludes, “Where women wrote their own letters or even merely penned a postscript, this resulted in freer forms of expression, unfiltered by a third party. Rising female literacy over the period therefore promoted greater confidentiality and led to more intimate and privy communications” (7).

1894 edition bears the mark of Deming's handwriting and offers explicit evidence of this practice. The postscript reads, "My aunt Deming don't approve of my English & has not the fear that you will think her concerned in the Diction" (8). Here, Deming absolves herself of any responsibility for the correctness of the foregoing journal-letter. The tell-tale shift in handwriting would have certainly alerted Mrs. Winslow that these words were not written by her daughter, and since she regularly corresponded with Deming, it is likely that she knew exactly who wrote this message. Deming's choice to add this postscript would not have seemed surreptitious to her contemporary readers as it does to readers today. It is only through recourse to the conventions of both the diary and the letter forms, however, that the confusing nature of this postscript finally makes sense. While Deming's choice to add this message derives from the epistolary nature of the text, her maintenance of the narrating "I" most likely reflects a desire to maintain the continuity of the text as journal.

Based on the print edition, it is difficult to determine how often Deming writes into the text.<sup>52</sup> There are only two other passages that were clearly written by Deming, although several others may bear the mark of her hand, and dozens others were dictated or influenced by her. In one such instance, Winslow has just related that her uncle and aunt both told her she was a "very good girl" today, something that had "not happen'd before this great while."

The passage continues:

I have been writing all the above gibberish while aunt has been looking after her family – now she is out of the room – now she is in -- & takes up my pen

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<sup>52</sup>See Decker, *Epistolary Practices* for a discussion of the materiality of the letter form which is fundamentally different than the printed, bound letters we have access to and necessarily shapes reader responses (7). Dan Doll's "‘Like trying to fit a sponge into a matchbox’: Twentieth Century Editing of Eighteenth Century Journals" claims that the moment a diary is edited and published, it may cease to represent the diarist's original work, which often includes such extra-textual clues as changes in the look of handwriting, insertions, deletions, pictures, recipes, and pressed flowers (213).

in *my* absence to observe, I am a little simpleton for informing my mamma, that it is *a great while* since I was prais'd because she will conclude that it is *a great while* since I deserv'd to be prais'd. (41)

The critical tone of the passage suggests a change in voice, but it is the convoluted acknowledgment that the aunt is taking up the pen in her niece's absence that confirms the author of these words is actually Deming. The aunt employs Winslow's pen to communicate indirectly with her sister-in-law about her daughter's behavior and her own. As in the previous entry, she intervenes when she feels the need to justify herself to Winslow's audience.

In the final entry of its kind, Winslow relates that a Miss Polly Vans has sent her love to Mrs. Winslow, and Deming cannot resist adding to the message.

Aunt Deming is this minute come into the room, & from what her niece has wrote last, takes the liberty to remind you, that Miss Vans is a sister of the Old South Church, a society remarkable for Love. Aunt Deming is sorry she has spoil'd the look of this page by her carelessness & hopes her niece will mend its appearance in what follows. She wishes my English had been better, but has not time to correct more than one word. (55)

If not for the admission that she has "spoil'd the look of this page," readers of the print edition would remain unaware that these words are written by Deming's less-practiced hand, although such confusing references to Winslow as both "her niece" and "my" seem to reflect the difficulty of adopting another's voice. In this passage Deming adds what she feels is pertinent information in order to give Mrs. Winslow a fuller context for interpreting the

message from Vans. She then, once again, acknowledges Winslow's shortcomings as writer, immediately excusing herself from culpability.

Each of these entries reveal Deming utilizing the journal-letter text for her own self-presentation to an audience composed of her brother and sister-in-law, as well as other visitors including ministers and extended family members who were treated to oral readings of the text.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the journal-letter, even when Deming is not literally writing into the text, she employs Winslow's hand to establish herself as a moral, upstanding guardian for her niece, a woman in whose capable hands any mother could place her child. Such a reputation would be invaluable to Deming who earned an additional income, "in a manner dear to Boston gentlewomen in those and later days," boarding young women while they attended Boston schools (Earle, Notes 75). Therefore, when Winslow implies that her aunt has withheld praise from her, Deming takes up the pen and calls Winslow a simpleton to diminish the girl's authority and enhance her own, assuring Mrs. Winslow that her daughter has not deserved praise in a "*great while*" (41). When Deming rejects responsibility for her niece's writing, she implies that the responsibility of a gentlewoman is only to provide her boarders with the opportunity for education, but not to ensure that they take advantage of it. Many of the moments when Deming seems to interrupt the text reflect this desire to create a particular persona and subvert any unfavorable pictures her niece might, if only unwittingly, use her skills of composition to create. For example, when Winslow relates attending a dance with several friends, Deming requires her to include the following disclaimer: "Aunt Deming desires that you would *particularly observe*, that the elderly part of the company were *spectators only*, they mix'd not in either of the above describ'd scenes" (17). When she

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<sup>53</sup> At times, Winslow was called upon to read her journal-letter to visitors: "I have just been reading over what I wrote to the company present, & have got myself laughed at for my ignorance" (72).



relates having difficulty getting to writing school due to muddy conditions, Aunt Deming chimes in to assure Mrs. Winslow, “if aunt had known it was so bad, she sais she would not have sent me, but I neither wet my feet nor drabled my clothes” (52-53). These instances add another dimension to the complex collaborative relationship between the two women, revealing that Deming harnessed the journal-letter’s potential to promote her own reputation amongst a wider audience. In other words, Deming utilized her position as a sponsor of Winslow’s literacy to “gain advantage [,,] in some way” (Brandt 19).

By now the considerable influence of Aunt Deming on Winslow’s journal-letter writing is evident. That the text ends with the aunt’s words, rather than Winslow’s, exemplifies how integral Deming was to the production of this text. But, oddly enough, with these words she admits to very little involvement:

Aunt [...] also says that I am a little simpleton for making my note within the brackets above, because, when I omit to do it, Mamma will think I have the help of somebody else’s head, N.B. for herself she utterly disclames having either her head or hand concern’d in this curious journal, except where the writing makes it manifest. So much for this matter. (73)<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps the aunt’s assurance that she has no responsibility for the contents of the journal, “except where the writing makes it manifest,” is what has kept readers from recognizing this text as a collaborative effort between two women. Perhaps the lack of interest in this collaboration has also stemmed from the hybridity of the form, which also puzzled Deming when she attempted to write her way into the text. This unique type of collaboration, which

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<sup>54</sup> Because Deming does not utilize the phrase “Aunt says” in the other passages we know she has written, but Winslow employs this phrase in most entries, I am inclined to conclude that the portion before the “N.B.” was written by Winslow at her aunt’s request and the latter portion may have been added by Deming before she sent the letter off to the Winslows.

joins the collaborative potential of the letter and the diary, prompts a further consideration of the collaborative potential of the journal-letter form.

### *Conclusion*

Accounting for the hybridity of this text encourages a reading that assigns greater authority and creativity to Winslow as a writer. Rather than viewing the journal-letter as another extension of her copywork for school or a compulsory activity in letter writing, the analysis I have offered here suggests that it is through the joining of forms that Winslow constructs a text that is both purposeful and enjoyable. Though the two mediums in which she writes, the commonplace diary and the familiar letter of news, are essentially imitation-based, the manner in which she brings them together offers an opportunity for her to use imitation for her own ends, to engage in original composition. Furthermore, due to the multiple audiences that characterize the journal-letter form, Winslow must use the same text to appease and communicate directly and indirectly with various readers, both present and absent. Perhaps the most interesting component of this text is the unique form of collaboration that takes place in its pages as a twelve-year old girl and her aunt discuss, disagree, and pursue their own agendas in turn. It is through the sharing of the pen and the first person voice that the complexity of this collaboration reveals itself, forcing scholars to ask questions about how the journal-letter may have encouraged collaborative writing in a manner different than traditional diary or letter writing.

But it is not likely that Winslow was thinking of any of this when she composed her text. Instead, she used her pen, sometimes with exacting effort and other times sloppily, to record the mostly unremarkable moments of her life. If editor Earle identified the value of Winslow's text as a "historical picture" of her day, for Winslow its significance resides

elsewhere. Therefore, near the end of the text when she asks her mother to return the pages to her possession – “Pray mamma, be so kind as to bring up all my journal with you” (63) – Winslow reveals what is most significant about this text. It is hers, “the closest thing to a book” she will ever write.

### Chapter 3

#### Beyond the Boundaries of Epistolarity: “Journal of Mary Lee, 1813-1816”

It is 1813, and Boston is experiencing the “heyday” of the East India trade. In the next three decades, the Pacific route to India will open up and this golden age will quickly end, but until then Boston’s ports will overflow with exotics from the East as well as sailors and businessmen eager to make their fortunes. One such businessman is Henry Lee. Henry comes from a long line of influential Boston merchants and marries into one as well.<sup>55</sup> So, when his business fails in the spring of 1811, it seems he cannot escape his fate to travel to India and finally “make good” for himself and his growing family. Little does he know when he boards the *Reaper* in August of the same year that he will not set foot on American soil, nor set eyes upon his wife and daughter, for five long years. Five years of living in Calcutta, doing business, hob-knobbing with diplomats, experiencing native culture, and effectively existing as a prisoner of war of the British Empire.<sup>56</sup> Yes, Henry Lee’s story is fascinating. The letters written home during his forced residence in India are exactly the kind of texts that have largely dominated the study of letters. Howard Anderson and Irvin Ehrenpreis demonstrate this privileging of public, male correspondence when they categorize the “best” familiar letters as those which are “substantive,” or “‘about’ something, an event of public interest, an extraordinary man, a new book” (276). In comparison, the journal-letter kept by his wife, Mary Jackson Lee, which cannot claim to be about something – at least not the way something is defined here – would seem to

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<sup>55</sup>Frances Rollins Morse provides an extensive overview of the Lee and Jackson families from which Henry and Mary Lee were descended, as well as their part in the India trade, in her introduction to the letter collection.

<sup>56</sup>Henry refers to himself as a “prisoner of war” in a letter to Lee written February 10, 1813, but assures his wife that his situation “will not be in any respect different from what it is now” (127).

exist outside the category of the “best,” falling instead into that realm of lackluster writing that is not about anything at all.

Since 1966, when Anderson and Ehrenpreis published this view, feminist scholars have diligently worked to counter such damaging claims. As Jennifer Sinor notes, because of these developments, the claim that her mother’s domestic work is just as significant as her father’s “public-minded” work is no longer “revolutionary.” We have learned to value what Sinor terms “ordinary” writing; however, just because we value this writing, does not mean we necessarily know how to read it. For Sinor, such works require innovative ways of reading. Instead of attempting to open up the literary canon to include them, as has been a popular means of reading these texts, she proposes that we read them for “difference,” as distinct forms of writing with their own rhythm, style, timing, and value (30). Though Sinor is referring to diaries specifically, her observations are relevant for other forms of “ordinary” writing as well, including the hybrid journal-letter that Mary Lee composes between 1813 and 1816. This text is vastly different from the letters her husband penned while in India, not just in content but also in form and purpose, requiring a different analytical approach than that applied to traditional correspondence.

This difference is even more pronounced since Lee also wrote traditional letters to her husband during the same period. It was, of course, what one did when a loved one was absent. Lee was practiced in doing so, having corresponded with her sisters, Hannah Lowell and Harriet Jackson, while they lived abroad in England and Scotland from 1810-1812 (Lee 89-108). After Henry left, as was customary, she composed and sent many letters on this lengthy journey via ships bound for India and the Far East; Henry did the same in the reverse

direction.<sup>57</sup> However, by January 1813, one and one half years after her husband's departure, Lee had grown discontented with their correspondence. Around this time she began to compose a journal-letter, a letter addressed to her husband but written in contiguous entries like a journal, as a supplement to her letter writing. Henry had also composed a journal-letter during his trip from Madeira to Calcutta, which he sent to Lee. This text, which is not included in the collection of family letters edited by their granddaughter, Frances Rollins Morse, probably reflects the somewhat common exercise of keeping and sending a journal of one's travels to an audience. Lee's journal-letter, on the other hand, exists outside of the travel writing genre since she remains at home during its writing.

Although her interest in the form may have been influenced by Henry's journal-letter writing, her decision to appropriate the medium was ultimately prompted by an inability of the traditional epistolary form to deliver on its promises. Furthermore, as she began to utilize this daily form of writing, it developed into a space within which she could pursue intellectual improvement. Lee was among the first generation of women in the new republic who had access to academy educations and were believed responsible for continuing their educational pursuits beyond the classroom. One popular method for doing so was through epistolary writing. However, just as correspondence proved unable to satisfy her need for intimacy with her distant husband, it also proved unable to foster the kind of intellectual stimulation she sought. By joining the letter and the journal, Lee improvised a distinct form of writing that could satisfy her desire for connection, conversation, and continued education without the anxieties attendant upon sending one's words into circulation.

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<sup>57</sup>None of the letters Lee sent to India are now extant.

*“I write in a spiritless way”: The Limitations of Epistolarity*

The letter is, when most effective, a delightful illusion, for its reception symbolically unites sender and receiver (Altman 137-38). A lost or detained letter shatters this illusion, uncovering the frightening possibility that sender and receiver are irrevocably separated. While there is hope and expectation when a letter is sent, and assurance and comfort when a letter is received, in the limbo between sending and receiving, there is chiefly anxiety. Even for a mid-eighteenth-century woman like Esther Edwards Burr whose correspondent lived only a few hundred miles away, the process of sending and receiving letters was fraught with apprehension. When an extended period of time has elapsed between letters, Burr expresses concern that her friend Sarah Prince may be ill or deceased, but also hopes that a letter is on its way, simply resting on someone’s mantle awaiting conveyance (Burr 81). If the act of sending and receiving a letter under everyday circumstances was an uncertain business, how much more so when the two correspondents are separated as far as Mary and Henry Lee, as far as Boston is from British Calcutta? Add to this distance the fact that the United States and Great Britain are at war and the situation the two letter-writers find themselves in is troublesome at best. Not surprisingly, a mingling of fear and hope surfaces often in Lee’s journal-letter as well as Henry’s letters from India, particularly since it took between six months and one year for letters to make their way from Boston to Calcutta and vice versa (Morse 76).

In this context, correspondence elicits contradictory feelings, alternately satisfying and frustrating. Receiving long-awaited letters affords Lee immense satisfaction. In a journal-letter entry on January 22, 1813, she gushes: “I cannot express to you how much pleasure your letters have afforded me – if mine have only given you one half as much

satisfaction I shd. bless the art of writing more than I ever before did and I have always had a high veneration for it” (168). Similar sentiments appear on March 21 of the following year. The previous day she received news that Henry did not return home on the ship the *Reaper* as expected. The entry for March 20 is filled with disappointment that Henry remains abroad and she remains without the hoped-for consolation of letters. The following day, however, Lee finally receives a packet of letters and effuses in her journal-letter: “My dear, dear husband, you can know only by comparing my feelings with your own how much delight your letters have afforded me – it is impossible by language to express it” (181). She finally comes close to being able to adequately express the invigorating effect of his letters when she claims that they operate on her “like electricity” (203).

Correspondingly, Henry offers high praise of his wife’s letters. On September 9, 1812, he assures her: “the two last letters that have been received afford equal delight with the others. You express yourself so happily always, with so much warmth, tenderness, and sincerity, that everything seems fresh from the heart, and for the moment I enjoy perhaps as great a happiness as your presence could produce” (113). The act of writing letters produces a similar sensation to reading his wife’s letters, providing even more inducement to write: “I fancy for the moment we are present to each other, and tho’ the illusion unhappily is too soon dissipated, yet I love to revive and cherish it” (113). Here Henry draws attention to the letter’s ability to operate on two figurative levels: metaphoric and metonymic. In other words, the letter stands for the lover both by conjuring up “interiorized images” of the beloved, according to Janet Gurkin Altman, as well as through physical contact with the text itself (19). His use of the word “present” is also telling, for it not only hints at the illusion of shared space, but also the illusion of shared time. For Altman, the “present” of the letter is



“as impossible to [the letter writer] as ‘presence’” since it is “valid only for that moment” of writing (129). Whether in the hands of the writer or the reader, the letter produces a pseudo-meeting between the correspondents, and as such is the closest approximation to actually being together.<sup>58</sup>

While the letter may afford gratification, this is not always the case. Like other transnational letter-writers, Henry must employ a complicated strategy to participate in a correspondence with his wife. In her discussion of the transatlantic culture of letters, Eve Tavor Bannet reveals a pattern of repetitive corresponding, as letter-writers were compelled to compose and send multiple copies of letters to ensure that at least one made it to its destination (258). Henry also notes sending duplicate letters via several ships in the hopes that some will make it through. A letter written March 6, 1813, gives some idea of the complications involved in sending letters on so long a journey.

I lost the opp’y of sending by the *Imega* for Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon. I now mean to put it on board the *San Fernando*, a Spanish ship for South America – the super-cargo has promised to have it forwarded from thence to U. States – or if no conveyance offers, then to London; it will be forever on the way, yet I choose to avail of the opportunity – if it is lost, no matter – if it comes to hand you will be gratify’d. I have by me two others intended for the next fleet to London and I shall write a few lines by two Portuguese ships for So. America and Lisbon – after which no more conveyances will offer for some time. (137)

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<sup>58</sup>In *The Converse of the Pen*, Bruce Redford identifies the familiar letter as “a form of *repraesentatio*, an exercise in ‘making present’ like the performance of a play. [...] The letter-writer is an actor, but a *magician-actor* who works on his audience by sustaining the illusion of physical presence. Consequently, the truest letter, we might say, is the most feigning” (7).

Given the state of affairs, Henry has accepted that “[i]t is probable all will not come to hand” and asks Lee to “make some allowance, therefore, for repetitions” (117). Letters, sent over long distances and in times of international struggle, often contained this detailed information about who carried the letters in order to give readers clues as to how open or guarded the letter-writer had been in writing. By including the dates of writing, letter-writers also helped recipients to reconstruct a coherent correspondence with the knowledge of which letters had and had not yet come to hand (Bannet 259). Though the inconveniences of corresponding under such difficult circumstances are clear, Henry, like other letter-writers in similar positions, was willing to expend the effort in order to communicate with home.

Corresponding is just as difficult for Lee. On May 11, 1813, she finishes a letter to Henry and passes it on to an acquaintance who will then search for an opportunity to send it. She says she does so “with very little hope” that it will ever be sent (182). A week later, Lee reports on the dismal prospects of sending letters:

I have a letter partly written in case any chance of sending should offer, but it is what I so little expect, and the probability of its ever reaching you is so very small that I write in a very spiritless way: added to this I have to repeat details which I have given twice before, and some of them thrice, and write with the constant dread of my letter being exposed, and my doing mischief should I even allude to any political events....I have, within two months, sent two long letters to you and a postscript to one of Frank's: the latter went to Eng'd, one of the others to China, and the other is still in Remsen's compting room. I do not think any of them will ever reach you, but it is the only way in whh. I can

appease my conscience for not having written before, and this does me no good—I never shall forgive myself. (183)<sup>59</sup>

What a bleak portrait of correspondence! While Henry asks his wife’s pardon for repeating himself, she is annoyed that she has had to do so. She describes her writing as “spiritless” because she has so little hope Henry will ever see what she has written. For Henry, writing and receiving letters constructs a temporary sense of his wife’s presence, but for Lee, corresponding does not provide the same degree of comfort. Instead she experiences “constant dread” that her letters may fall into the wrong hands. In October of the following year, letter writing remains a rushed, worrisome activity for Lee who must “as rapidly as possible scribb[e] three pages” to her husband when she receives word a vessel is sailing in “an hour or two for England.” She complains, “I always feel a little fearful when I write in such haste, that I may say something I ought not, or omit to say what is very important; indeed I feel this sort of jealousy of myself continually” (219). Clearly, the enjoyment of writing is overwhelmed by its obstacles.

Tellingly, even letter manuals that tout the letter’s ability to provide connection with absent loved ones ultimately reveal that this connection is no more “real” than a dream. In Turpilius’s words, letters are supposed to represent “the one thing which makes the absent present.” “It was in Turpilius’s oscillating, and merely virtual epistolary space between absence and presence,” says Bannet, “that letter manuals inscribed their household families” (41). Thus, by collecting together letters to and from various family members, letter manuals represented a space where those members could, theoretically at least, come together and connect. Included in manuals from the Renaissance onward, a specific category of “beyond

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<sup>59</sup>Editor Morse adds: “Grandmother had not written letters while expecting Grandfather’s return in the *Reaper* (which had arrived, without him, in late March) but had kept up this home Journal” (183).

the Sea” letters offered models for corresponding with loved ones at great distances (41). One such popular manual that was addressed specifically to women and included this type of model letter was *The Ladies Complete Letter Writer; Teaching the Art of Inditing Letters...Being a Collection of Letters, Written by Ladies* (London 1763). Reading Lee’s journal-letter against a letter from this collection exemplifies the paradoxical expectations letter manuals promulgated, while exposing the failure of letter writing as an ultimately fulfilling outlet.

Though many of the model letters in this volume predictably deal with matters of courtship, one section includes letters written by wives to their husbands. A letter of particular relevance here is a “beyond the Sea” letter presumably written by the wife of a military officer “whose Duty had called him into another Kingdom.” Though the wife is miserable without her husband, a point she reiterates throughout the epistle, she has two consolations. For one, she ascribes to the belief that the act of writing letters will connect her to her husband. She explains, “for while I am doing it I appear as I were talking with you; and Earth and Seas cannot, although they separate us so invidiously, prevent that Pleasure” (131). Her other source of consolation is in dreams: “You are in these imaginary Visits, just as in your real Presence, my Friend, my Counsellor, and my Adviser, I tell you every thing, and I am told by you how every thing shall be conducted” (130). Lee experiences neither of these consolations. As we have seen, the act of writing traditional letters does not offer the connection she desires. Furthermore, this fictional wife suggests that dreams substitute for real interactions providing opportunities for her to confide in her husband, as well as receive instructions for daily living.

Apparently, Lee's dreams are not as lifelike, for although she likes to "go to sleep with a lively recollection of [Henry] on [her] mind," doing so does not exempt her from uncertainty as to what Henry would want her to do. For instance, in the journal-letter she hints at a desire to contribute to their income by working "*a little*" while Henry is away. However, unlike the wife writing the model letter, she does not know if Henry would agree with her, or she would "most certainly act upon the principle" (178). Though the model wife's imaginings are lifelike and offer her complete insight, Lee complains to Henry, "I cannot possibly conjecture where you are at any moment" (178). In fact, when nearly a year has passed since the date of his last letter, she feels a desperate need for a more recent letter to give her knowledge of that which she should, supposedly, already know: "what were your determination, what your health, and the thousand questions which crowd upon my mind when I think of you" (210).

Yet Lee and the model wife have more in common than it first appears. What is most ironic about this model letter is that, even as it encourages readers to engage in letter writing, it indirectly exposes the limitations of this activity. While presenting the purpose of letter writing as diminishing distance through constructing an imaginary conversation between writer and reader, the wife also suggests that an even stronger connection is fostered through dreams. If writing a letter makes it appear as though the wife is talking to her husband, in dreams the two actually talk, a preferable alternative. The recourse to dreamlike interaction reflects a conventional trope of nineteenth-century letter writing: "a longing for transcendental or telepathic conduct" (Decker 37). In fact, Lee expresses such a longing when she wishes she could send her writing directly to Henry at the moment it is written. In *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications*, William Merrill

Decker identifies this motif as “draw[ing] attention to what letter writers often perceive as the discouragingly material condition of epistolary relations. [...]. Consciously projecting an impossible ideal, the letter writer’s fantasy of unmediated converse proposes an intersubjective accord beyond the complications of time and space, spoken and written language” (37). Similarly, Bannet concludes that “letter manuals signaled and naturalized the collusion of the imaginary with the real.” “Indeed, by encouraging reader-writers to ‘imagine’ that their correspondents were present before them as they wrote,” she claims, “manuals encouraged them to create, ‘in idea’ and in abstentia – by the power of words to summon up images before the mind – imaginary transatlantic families, imaginary circles of friends” (52). This imaginary ideal offered by letter writing is not ultimately fulfilling for Lee or the fictional wife, who both seek an alternative method of communicating with their absent loved one. While the model wife contents herself with dreams, Lee seeks a more productive outlet in her journal-letter. (Tellingly, neither of the latter mediums require a response from the husband in order for the wife to be content.)

Lee’s hopes for what letter writing could be, for what letter writing is supposed to be, do not correspond with what it is. However, in the early nineteenth century, discarding letter writing altogether simply was not an option. When loved ones were separated by distance, epistolary space was all that could unite them, for “a letter writer is, after all, a letter writer only because of the physical distance between reader and writer” (How 8). James How examines these “social spaces” within which people are able “to live and to think, and hence to act” in *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson’s Clarissa* (1). How argues that the concept of epistolary space was precipitated in England by the foundation of the Post Office in the 1650s. Once ordinary people began

sending letters to one another through an institutionalized service, the space between those people changed, not literally of course, but in the way that space was imagined. How describes epistolary spaces as “spaces of connection, providing permanent and seemingly unbreakable links between people and places. They are common spaces other people are also always using” (4). In other words, letters can be thought of as inhabiting the same space en route from sender to receiver, enhancing the correspondents’ sense of connectivity and shared experience. For the first time, letter-writers could expect to communicate in a continuous exchange, sending and receiving ideas and news through a common epistolary space (6-7).

But if epistolary space is ideally a space of connectivity, it is not necessarily, as Lee’s letter writing experience demonstrates. Even if they finally reach their destination months after their writing, for her letters more often symbolize disconnection than connection. Lee was unable to abandon the activity that served as her only physical link to her husband, but what she could do was add another type of writing to her repertoire in an attempt to make writing work for her. Against this backdrop of frustration with the exercise of traditional correspondence Lee began to keep a “home Journal” – as granddaughter and editor Morse calls it – for Henry during his absence. Disappointed in the ability of correspondence to meet her needs, Lee ingeniously fashioned a text that would provide her with a stronger sense connection to her beloved.

*“I long so constantly to be communing with you”*: Adding the Journal to the Letter

Lee writes to Henry in her journal-letter on a roughly weekly basis from January 1813 until April 1816.<sup>60</sup> Though addressed to “my dear H.,” the set-up of the text resembles that of a journal, or diary, since the entries are separated by datelines. Salutations and closings similar to what one would expect in a letter are, most often, absent.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the greatest distinction between the journal-letter and the individual letters Lee writes is that the journal-letter never exists as mail, never enters into the “epistolary spaces” How describes.<sup>62</sup> Like a diary that remains in the hands of its writer, the journal-letter will remain in Lee’s possession until she relinquishes it to Henry upon his return. Before or after this point, there is no evidence that she wrote any other text resembling a diary, although a lifetime of letters are written by her hand. This moment in her life is unique in drawing her to a medium of writing that she has not and never will adopt again.

Diary scholar Steven Kagle offers insight into Lee’s decision when he proposes that most diaries begin as “diaries of situation,” having their origin “in response to or in anticipation of some situation or incident that produces a dislocation in the diarist’s life, and there may be as many different types of diaries as there are situations” (*Early Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature* 65). In the foreword to *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, Mary Helen Washington bluntly states the case: “Every woman who has ever kept a diary knows that women write in diaries because things are not going right” (ix). Although I am hesitant to apply this blanket statement to all women’s diary writing, I do think that such

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<sup>60</sup>There may have been an earlier portion to the journal-letter written prior to January 1813, but this is the earliest entry that survives. There is also a gap between February and October 1815. Henry mentions hoping to find the missing pages when he returns from his second trip to India in 1821 (Morse 167, 222).

<sup>61</sup>There are a few instances when Lee closes an entry as one would close a letter, but these are exceptions to the rule. For example on August 12, 1814, Lee ends the entry, “Adieu, my husband. I pray God to protect you and return you in safety to your wife, M. Lee (215).

<sup>62</sup>This is also a distinguishing factor between Lee’s text and the journal-letters examined in the rest of this study which were all sent to their recipients as mail.



may have been the case for Lee. The year 1811 held more than her share of disappointment. Early in the year Henry's business failed, bringing on debt and embarrassment. In May their one-year-old daughter, Mary Cabot, died suddenly. On the sixteenth of August the Lees greeted another daughter, their first daughter's namesake, but their moments of joy were brief for the twentieth of August brought Henry's departure for India, leaving Lee as a single parent living as a houseguest among family members for the next five years. Within three months of losing a child and four days of delivering another, she lost her husband to another continent and for an indeterminate period. Within a few months of his departure, the United States was at war. It is likely that Lee was drawn to the journal form as a response to these various dislocations. Significantly, during Henry's second trip to India in 1821, Lee does not return to this form, engaging only in regular correspondence. She identifies a changed state of mind during this absence, which she explains in one of her letters to Henry: "I must acknowledge that I am more cheerful under [your absence] than I could possibly have expected to be. The difference in my cares, amusements, and occupations, owing to the situation and size of my family, is very great between now and the former period of your absence" (241). In other words, circumstances have changed and she no longer needs the journal-letter as an outlet. Her decision to create a hybrid text, both journal and letter, during Henry's first residence in India reflects her need to work through what is "not going right" – in her life and in her correspondence.

Even so, it seems odd that Lee would construct a text that does not promise connectivity as letters do. The journal form is not typically conceived of as "a connector between two points, as a bridge between sender and receiver" as is the letter, which physically and symbolically "straddles the gulf between presence and absence" (Altman 13,

43). Despite these differing expectations for the two forms, whereas Lee admits that she writes letters in a “spiritless way,” knowing full well that the words she pens may never reach Henry’s eyes, writing in her journal-letter is much more enjoyable since it fulfills one of the supposed functions of epistolary correspondence: transforming absence into (imagined) presence.<sup>63</sup> The difference between her response to traditional letter writing and journal-letter writing is glaring. For instance, Lee espouses a predilection for writing in her journal-letter in the evenings not only because she is “always more inspired” (191), but also because doing so enhances the temporary closeness gained through the act of writing. She explains: “I do love to scribble to you just before bedtime, my dear H., and I love to go to sleep with a lively recollection of you on my mind—there are not many moments in the day that you are not present with me, but while writing I *seem* to be nearer to you” (191). Similar language appears in an entry from March 20, 1813. After receiving the news that Henry has not returned home as she expected, she pours her feelings into her journal-letter: “You alone can sympathize with me, however, my beloved husband, and while I am expressing to you some of the disappointment I feel I may imagine you nearer to me and gain some consolation and support from you” (180). Finally, on September 26, 1813, Lee expresses regret at having let a week go by without writing, revealing, “I long so constantly to be communing with you in this way that I am always obliged to interrogate myself strictly, if I have a right to devote even as much time as I do to it” (204). Though her language is slightly different in this entry,

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<sup>63</sup> Decker also acknowledges, “Perhaps the most fundamental fiction of letter writing is that the epistolary utterance, despite the absence of addresser to addressee, if not precisely because of that absence, speaks with an immediacy and intimacy unavailable in the face-to-face communication that letter writing typically takes as its model” (5).

the sentiment that writing produces closeness remains the same, perhaps even stronger, since the act of “communing” suggests an additional spiritual connection as well.

Ironically, Lee’s one-sided journal-letter becomes the bridge through which she establishes connection with her husband, rather than through a conventional, reciprocal correspondence. She engages in her journal-letter writing to gain sympathy, consolation, and support from Henry during a tumultuous time. Yet how can she expect to receive these compensations when she knowingly writes without the expectation of response? The journal-letters heretofore studied operate according to the “epistolary pact” Altman identifies as the principal feature distinguishing letters from diaries written for a specific audience. According to Altman, the “desire for exchange” is the “fundamental impulse behind all epistolary writing.” Without it, “the writing does not differ significantly from a journal, even if it assumes the outer form of the letter” (89). To be a letter-writer, one must not only have an audience, but one must also desire to know – at least theoretically – what that audience has to say. Drawing on Altman, I have used this distinction to help define the journal-letter as a form that functions fully as both journal and letter. But can a text qualify as a journal-letter if the correspondence is one-sided and the reader is not “called upon” to respond? Lee’s journal-letter offers the opportunity to tackle this question head on. Operating at the half-way point between the journal and the letter, this text “straddles the gulf” (Altman 43) that divides our understanding of the two forms.

*“If the pages served only for the pastry-cook”: The Necessary Audience of the Journal-Letter*

In the eighteenth century, Cicero’s description of letters as “written conversation” became a common tenet of epistolary theory. According to Bannet, letter manuals proffered the familiar letter form as “suppl[y]ing the place of speech or conversation in all the

everyday personal, domestic, social, professional and commercial discourse of life” (44).<sup>64</sup> Letter-writers were encouraged, “when you sit down to write a Letter, remember that this sort of Writing should be like Conversation...and you will be no more at a loss to write than you will be to speak” (*The Complete Letter-Writer* 32). Hugh Blair’s extremely influential *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres* (London 1812) distinguished between the philosophical genre of the letter and letters written to specific recipients in the following way: “Epistolary writing becomes a distinct species of composition, subject to the cognizance of Criticism, only, or chiefly, when it is of the easy and familiar kind; when it is a conversation carried on upon paper, between two friends at a distance” (3.62). Even in her contemporary analysis of letters, Altman continues to ascribe to the conversation metaphor, adding the caveat that, given the time lag between sending and receiving, correspondence may be more accurately described as a “dialogue *ritardando*,” or a conversation taking place in slow-motion (21).

However, Henry and Mary Lee’s experiences reveal that, even in the latter sense, applying the word “conversation” to correspondence is an ideal that may not translate into reality. In their experience, the conversation is not just slow; it is virtually non-existent. Since letters arrive out of order, and some never arrive at all, reconstructing something resembling a dialogue is a complex task, even for scholars who have both sets of the correspondence in front of them. Imagine how hard such a task would be for the people involved in the correspondence who have an incomplete picture before them, a letter being written, another being read, and various others always “on the way.” Since Lee writes

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<sup>64</sup>Bannet shows that the encouragement to compose letters as one spoke in conversation contradicted the aim of letter manuals to teach “epistolography as an ‘art’ with rules and conventions.” This paradox seems to be connected to the fluid nature of the letter, which exists along the continuum between orality and literacy (44-48).

regularly in her journal-letter, recording each receipt of a letter from Henry, it is clear that corresponding under these conditions resembles piecing together a puzzle.<sup>65</sup> For instance, on September 6, 1813, Lee receives two letters, one dated December 1812, the other February 1813. On September 10, 1813, two more come to hand, but they are from November 1812, over ten months old. A step backwards, it seems. September 13, 1813 brings a prized communication, for it is wonderful to get “so late a letter” written only six months ago in March (203). But over a month later, on October 28, 1813, the letter that makes its way to her door is older than the last, dated February 14, 1813. Though there is not an exact picture of the fate of Lee’s letters to India, (mostly because Henry was not as methodical about telling when he received letters and what letters he received), it is likely that Henry’s experience as recipient was similar. Under these conditions, the epistolary dialogue can become “scrambled, so that the order in which words are read is not necessarily the order in which they were written” (Altman 136). And, for all the letters that make it to their destination, though late and out-of-order, there are also letters that fail to make it at all. Thus, even when the recipient of a letter is “called upon” to respond, the complications of corresponding over vast distances can turn potential conversations into disconnected monologues.

When Lee turns to the journal-letter she removes the barriers to “conversation” that plagued her letter writing. Instead of waiting for responses that may never come, she can continue her side of the conversation whether or not she has access to Henry’s part in the

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<sup>65</sup>Bannet notes that transatlantic letters usually included a list of all of the letters that had been received and when they were received, as well as those sent, when they were sent, and by what means. She suggests that the purpose in this practice was not only to “preserve continuity of communication” by letting writers know what information need be repeated, but also to help correspondents figure out what circumstances (captured ships, unreliable captains, or interception by the enemy) delayed their missives (259-60). Lee seems to follow this convention in her journal-letter writing, but because this text will not be sent to Henry, her purpose in doing so cannot reflect Bannet’s reasoning. Because diary writers often record the receipt and writing of letters in their texts, Lee’s actions probably reflect an adherence to both epistolary and diary conventions.

dialogue. In other words, the continuation of her discourse is not dependent on receiving word from her husband. An important question presents itself: Is Henry negligible to the journal-letter text? Yes and no. In some ways, Henry matters less than he did when letter writing was his wife's only outlet. It seems that the experience of writing in the journal-letter is rewarding enough that she would continue this activity, even if she knew Henry would never see it. For instance, on September 26, 1813, Lee notes having been "occupied about something or nothing" for over a week without finding time to write. When she finally takes to the pen she admits that she fears she has not the "right to devote even as much time as [she does] to it." She consoles herself: "You desire it, however, and this may quiet my guilty conscience, and if the pages served only for the pastry-cook, I should not regret having written, it has afforded me so much pleasure" (204-05). Though she begins the sentence asserting that she can assuage her guilt with the knowledge that she writes for her husband, in the second half of the sentence, she concludes that her writing would be just as worthwhile if written for an audience as (presumably) inconsequential as the pastry-cook. Her use of parataxis here is revealing. By choosing a coordinating rather than a subordinating conjunction, she rids the sentence of hierarchies. One audience is just as acceptable as another. Significantly, she maintains the need for an audience – though she is not picky as to who it is – for her writing to have purpose, but she will continue to write whether or not her husband will read what she has written.

In this sense, the journal-letter writer is not as dependent upon her reader as the letter-writer whose main purpose for writing is bound up in an obligation to a specific person. But this does not suggest that the specific audience of the journal-letter is unimportant. While Lee admits that she would still have enjoyed writing even if the journal-letter were not meant

for Henry, this does not negate the fact that her impetus to write was out of a desire to write specifically to him. Furthermore, Henry remains the specific, external audience of the journal-letter throughout the entire period of her writing. (She does not, despite her confession, redirect her words to the pastry-cook.) His significance as reader is further demonstrated by Lee's wish, a conventional trope of letter writing, to be able to engage in instantaneous communication with her husband.<sup>66</sup> She even admits that this is the only thing that could make her journal-letter writing more worthwhile: "Could I transmit the pages to you as I write them I should not think for a moment that it was time ill spent" (205). An expressed desire to communicate directly with Henry via her journal-letter confirms that Lee's writing remains audience-specific. I emphasize this point as it is precisely the distinction that Altman draws in order to exclude certain texts from the realm of the epistolary. To quote from Altman again, she contends that without the "*desire for exchange*, the writing does not differ significantly from a journal" (89, emphasis added). However, Altman seems to equate the "desire for exchange" with an intention to send the letter, receive a response from the reader, and incorporate that response into the next installment of the discussion. But what if the "desire for exchange" is merely that, a desire? What if the writer, like Lee, knows that whether or not she sends her text, given the conditions of corresponding, a true exchange is impossible? Lee's journal-letter writing still grows out of a desire for connection with the absent, while acknowledging through her choice of form that this connection is, ultimately, an illusion.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>It would be more than thirty years before the telegraph would make something approximating instantaneous communication possible. In 1844, the telegraph industry would gain momentum in the U.S. thanks to Samuel F. B. Morse's electric telegraph (John 74).

<sup>67</sup>Elizabeth Hewitt offers even stricter guidelines for identifying a text as a letter: "The letter is a letter only insofar as it is framed by an envelope, a salutation, or a subscription; and while a letter need not be delivered, it

Unlike the epistolary reader, then, Henry – who will not read the journal-letter until it is complete, its completion coinciding with his return – is not “empowered to intervene, to correct style, to give shape to the story, often to become an agent and narrator in his own right” (91), at least not as Altman suggests. However, although he will not influence the developing shape of the text through direct responses to Lee’s writing, his letters and his imagined presence do affect what she writes. For instance, after receiving a letter from Henry on April 26, 1813, begging her to write more often, she agrees to do so, oddly enough, in her journal-letter (182). In a later entry, she addresses a comment Henry made in one of his letters about failing to derive pleasure from reading the Bible. She commiserates with her husband in this, for she too feels the same, before proposing a plan of reading biblical commentaries together when he returns home (196-97). On August 15, 1813, Lee creates an “imagined dialogue” with Henry in which she anticipates his words and composes a response. Puzzled over how to govern their daughter, she imagines her husband offering her advice – “but my dear, the child must be taught obedience long before its reason has much influence” – only to respond by assuring him that she is doing just this, teaching their daughter “she *must mind*” (197). According to Altman, this imagined dialogue “substitutes what reality cannot supply. The world of the lonely person, or of the person separated from lover or friend, becomes so peopled with images that when he picks up the pen, it is natural that he should engage in an immediate conversation with the image conjured up by the act of writing” (Altman 139). In these moments and countless others, through the incorporation of

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does need the pretence that it *could* be sent (this ‘pretence’ might be found in the stationery, the date, the address, or the subscription, to name some examples)” (12).



real and imagined comments from Henry, Lee's text remains audience-driven and dialogic, like the letter itself.<sup>68</sup>

*“Put a little literary information into your letters”:  
The Idealized Curriculum of Correspondence in the New Nation*

Lee's journal-letter is not only a conduit for “conversations” with Henry, although this was its initial purpose. In addition to the desire for connection with her husband, Lee also exhibits an interest in improving herself intellectually, using the journal-letter as a space for discussing and evaluating her course of reading. The common practice of recording reading practices in one's letters reflected the use of epistolary form as an instrument of education, particularly for women, in the early republic. Indeed, based on the need for an educated citizenry, women of the new republic were the first generation of American females whose duty it was to take advantage of blossoming educational opportunities. Letter writing, both in its real and fictional uses, was an integral part of women's education within and beyond the classroom. However, for Lee, conventional letter writing fails to live up to her expectations in this realm as well. Consequently, Lee adapts her journal-letter writing to construct, in Anne Ruggles Gere's words, an “extracurriculum of composition” at a crucial moment in life thought antithetical to intellectual improvement.<sup>69</sup>

Both Henry Lee and his future wife, Mary Jackson, came from well-to-do Massachusetts families and, by all accounts, were afforded the best education available to young men and women in the early republic. Henry attended the Phillips Andover Academy, an all-male boarding school founded in 1778 and credited by late-nineteenth-century

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<sup>68</sup>Significantly, Henry does eventually read the journal-letter after his return from Calcutta in July, 1816. He evidently treasured the text so much that he took it with him on his second journey to India five years later (Morse 225).

<sup>69</sup>Gere describes clubwomen's activities at the turn of the nineteenth century as an important “extracurriculum of composition.” Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen identify epistolary forms in the early national period as representing a precursor to the activities Gere describes, constituting another “extracurriculum” to which women had access (“A Few Patchwork Opinions” 27).

historian Elmer E. Brown as “the recognized parent and prototype of a goodly company of schools of the new order.” This “new order” refers to the academy movement which began only after “independence had been declared and the cloud of war had begun to lift” (230) and amounted to nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of secondary schooling calculated to produce the educated citizenry necessary for a successful republic. The academy movement was particularly significant for girls coming of age in the new republic since it accompanied and was propelled by a changing understanding of the purposes and limits of educating the fairer sex. According to Mary Beth Norton in *Liberty’s Daughters*, “[t]he Americans’ vision of the ideal woman – an independent thinker and patriot, a virtuous wife, competent household manager, and knowledgeable mother – required formal instruction in a way that the earlier paragon, the notable housewife, did not” (256). It was now the duty of parents to ensure that their daughters received a proper education, and the duty of girls to make the most of the opportunity (276). In short, “advanced learning, so long forbidden to women in America, had become a goal to which they could legitimately aspire” (280).

Unlike the adventure schools of the colonial era, schools which Anna Green Winslow moved to Boston in 1770 to attend, the course of study for young women at the academies included instruction in much more than the “ornamental accomplishments” of sewing, music, drawing, and dancing. Young women could expect to tackle “the study of such academic subjects as composition, history, and geography” (Norton 259-60, 273). One of the schools created to meet the nation’s need for educated men and women was the Derby Academy in Hingham, Massachusetts, opened in 1791 based on the Phillips prototype. Whereas young ladies at the Derby Academy were taught writing, English, French, arithmetic, and sewing,

male students pursued knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, mathematics, and geography (“Old Derby”). While Henry pursued his studies at Phillips, in all probability his future wife attended Derby – since three of the four Jackson girls attended this academy – both taking part in the new form of schooling birthed simultaneously with the nation itself (Morse 44).<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps one of the most significant ideological developments brought on by the rise of the academy was not the new subjects women were taught, but the new way women were taught to perceive themselves in relation to education. Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen suggest as much in their rhetorical studies, “‘A Few Patchwork Opinions’: Piecing Together Narratives of U.S. Girls’ Early National Schooling” and “Gender and Writing Instruction in Early America: Lessons from Didactic Fiction.” Through studying hundreds of archival sources, in addition to published works such as novels and advice books, from the early national period, Eldred and Mortensen were able to identify a shift in the language used to describe the “ideal” female education. “Finishing” or “polishing” a young woman was no longer to be the purpose of formal schooling (“A Few Patchwork Opinions” 29). Rather, “[t]he rhetoric associated with [the academies] conveys more a sense of beginning than finishing. Graduates of these academies sense they are starting on a course of learning that should continue throughout their lives” (“Gender and Writing Instruction” 27). Hannah Webster Foster’s 1798 text, *The Boarding School*, offered one woman’s vision of what this continuation of study might look like. *The Boarding School* represents “a new kind of schooling fiction” in that it “describes the ideal female seminary for the nation, complete with imagined students and an idealized curriculum” (“A Few Patchwork Opinions” 32). What is most distinctive about this text is that it follows the students beyond

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<sup>70</sup>As Mary was the youngest, born in 1783, and the Academy was not in existence until 1791, it is probable that the three youngest sisters attended school here. There is no mention of Lee’s formal schooling in her journal-letter or in any of the other letters in Morse’s collection.

the sheltered walls of the classroom into the limbo in which young women existed after the cessation of formal schooling. Foster proposes that young ladies fill the indeterminate period of time between schooling and marriage with a curriculum of correspondence, which she models in the latter section of the text. In her fictional world, “letters replace commonplace books as the primary pedagogical tool” (“Gender and Writing Instruction” 39). Through letter writing, recent graduates continued their composition exercises by including poems, essays, and book reviews with and within their correspondence. For Cathy Davidson, not just correspondence itself, but novels such as Foster’s which pictured women in educational settings, “became a form of education, especially for women” (*Revolution and the Word* 10).

The interim between completing one’s formal education and marrying was significant for women as the last period during which they would have considerable leisure time to accrue knowledge, primarily through reading “good” books. Without assigned readings, women who graduated from academies were suddenly without direction. How were they to quickly judge which books were worth their time, particularly when the time they had to improve themselves was limited with marriage and children looming in the not-so-distant future? *The Boarding School* offers an answer. Women’s extracurricular reading was to be guided by “a network of recommendations” gained through correspondents who “read, reread, critiqued, and recommended or panned” texts in their letters (Eldred and Mortensen, “Gender and Writing Instruction” 40). Women who left these academies, and all those who could not attend, were responsible for continuing their improvement, seeking guidance from and offering guidance to others through the medium of correspondence. Whereas colonial sons had been admonished “to improve their time,” colonial daughters were merely encouraged to be industrious (Norton 276, 99). Significantly, then, this emphasis on

improvement revealed a new discourse being applied to American women for the first time. The emerging belief that women could improve themselves was disseminated and circulated, at least in part, by novels. Davidson shows that before 1820, nearly all American novels included some discussion of the necessity of improved education, particularly for females:

These writers' emphasis was not so much on public education as on personal, and they all encouraged individualistic striving toward self-improvement and self-education, typically on a rationalist model. [...] [T]he comments of these novelists reflect an important trend in American social thought in the new Republic and attest to the individual citizen's desire to achieve advanced literateness, both within and without the existing system of schools.

*(Revolution and the Word 65-66)*

Foster's suggestion that one's education could be continued through letter writing provided a creative answer to the difficult problem of nurturing female educational ambition outside the physical space of the classroom, particularly since universities remained closed to women until well into the nineteenth century. Learning and teaching were resituated within epistolary space.

Since Lee was of this generation of women, this unique historical moment is crucial to an understanding of her use of the epistolary form, both as a traditional letter-writer and as a journal-letter writer. This is particularly the case since the writers studied heretofore did not utilize their journal-letters for this purpose. In the 1750s, Esther Edwards Burr employed epistolary writing for the purpose of spiritual accountability and intimacy. Burr does not seem to believe it possible for a woman to continue her education once married, as she reveals by declining to learn French when her husband decides to do so, though she admits

“if I had time I should be very fond of larning” (125-26). In the 1770s, when Anna Green Winslow wrote to her parents, she was not expected to give evidence of intellectual improvement in her journal-letter. What her letters said, at least in her readers’ opinions, was much less important than how they looked. But by the 1810s when Lee is writing, the potential of letter writing for extracurricular intellectual improvement was blossoming. The obvious problem with this assumption, however, is that we do not know if the course of extended education imagined by Foster actually represents women’s experiences. In fact, Eldred and Mortensen acknowledge that it is quite possible that young women did not engage in this “idealized” curriculum through correspondence (“Gender and Writing Instruction” 44). From the ideal, then, I turn to the writings of two women with academy educations in order to glean some understanding of how and if letters functioned as vehicles of lifelong improvement. Lee and her contemporary Eliza Southgate Bowne, coincidentally also born in 1783 at the beginning of the great democratic experiment, are two such women.

Eldred’s and Mortensen’s primary example, the letters of Eliza Southgate Bowne, demonstrate both the potential success and failure of letter writing in this context. Southgate attended several boarding schools, including actress and author Susanna Rowson’s famous academy, and composed letters detailing her experiences from the age of fourteen to twenty five.<sup>71</sup> After her schooling is completed, she wastes no time in implementing correspondence for precisely the purpose Foster advocated. Her letters to a male cousin, Moses, offer

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<sup>71</sup>I will here refer to Bowne by her maiden name, Southgate, since she is not married during the period I am discussing. Susanna Haswell Rowson, perhaps best known as the author *Charlotte Temple* (Philadelphia 1794), holds the distinction of being America’s first professional novelist. In addition to working as a poet, novelist, songwriter, and actress, in 1797 she opened the Young Ladies’ Academy in Boston, which became “an almost instant success,” enrolling more than one hundred students in its first year. Young women at Rowson’s academy studied music, recitation, domestic economy, mathematics, geography, and science. Rowson also authored several textbooks, including *An Abridgment of Universal Geography* (1805) and *A Present for Young Ladies* (1811), which placed special emphasis on the historical contributions of women (Davidson, Introduction xxvi-xxvii).

evidence of a young woman “think[ing] seriously about her course of study” and “trying to figure out how to access and organize knowledge” (Eldred and Mortensen, “A Few Patchwork Opinions” 34), seeking the help of a correspondent who has received a superior education to do so. Southgate writes to Moses, explaining the situation in which she finds herself after completing school:

I left school with a head full of something, tumbled in without order or connection. I returned home with a determination to put it in more order [...]. But I soon lost all patience...for the greater part of my ideas I was obliged to throw away without knowing where I got them or what I should do with them; what remained I pieced as ingeniously as I could into a few patchwork opinions,—they are now almost worn threadbare, and as I am about quilting a few more, I beg you will send me any spare ideas you may chance to have.

(Bowne 55-57)

Moses rejects her request, however, and the intellectual correspondence between the two ends. Shortly thereafter she marries, and at this point the duties of wifehood ensure that “any plan of study is completely forgotten” (“A Few Patchwork Opinions” 38). Southgate’s experience is instructive, for it reveals the obstacles a young woman might encounter despite serious efforts to continue her education. Eldred and Mortensen use her example to conclude, “Despite the revolutionary-era promise of female education in the new nation, women like Eliza struggled to make their aspirations real” (39). Yet her story is only one piece of the patchwork that represents women’s extended education in the early republic. Lee, who survives her contemporary for half a century, weaves a particularly interesting thread into the patchwork of antebellum women’s writing.

Unfortunately, there are no extant letters from Mary Jackson during the months or years she probably attended Derby Academy.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, none of the letters she writes in the ensuing years ever mention her formal education, so there is little room even for conjecture. However, there is evidence in letters written during that crucial period between the cessation of schooling and entrance into the bonds of marriage that she took some pains to extend her education, though not in as detailed or systematic manner as Southgate. The earliest letter in the collection dates from 1804, when Jackson would have been around twenty-one years old. She writes to her lifelong friend Eliza Lowell a cheerful letter offering all the important details of a party she attended the previous evening, including what “beau” were present and who they paid attention to – not exactly the kind of serious epistle Foster would have advocated. However, the next letter, written to the same correspondent two years later, includes a brief assessment of an important literary work, James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791), which Jackson is currently perusing “with much pleasure.” She adds that this is not her first attempt to read Boswell, or even her second. She originally assembled with a group of girlfriends for the purpose of reading it, “but, as girls almost always do in such cases, talked more than we read, and, of course, did not proceed very rapidly.” At a later time she borrowed a copy, but “was obliged to give it up to some one else” before finishing the first volume (Lee 86). Her initial attempt at study sounds much like something Foster would have encouraged, for the author’s fictional curriculum included a morning gathering of the young ladies to do their needlework while one student read aloud (Foster, *The Boarding School* 9-10). However, without the structures of the academy, Jackson and

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<sup>72</sup>I will briefly refer to Lee by her maiden name, Jackson, since during this period she is not yet married. Uncertainty about the length of time a young woman might attend school is not unusual, for Eldred and Mortensen found that girls’ attendance in school during the last part of the eighteenth century ranged from a few months to a few years (“A Few Patchwork Opinions” 28).



the other girls do not accomplish what they set out to. Without any more letters, it is uncertain whether her third attempt to study Boswell's text was more successful than her first two, but this short passage indicates some attention to continued intellectual improvement, as well as the difficulties of reproducing academy methods of study outside of the institution itself.

In the collection, only these two letters document Jackson's experience as a single woman.<sup>73</sup> The rest of the letters in the collection were written after her marriage to Henry Lee. For women interested in improving their mind, marriage may have represented a lamentable milestone as the effective end to their education. Many educators and novel writers touted the married state as such, while still encouraging women that this did not have to be the case. As Foster's fictional preceptress reminds her students: "The duties and avocations of our sex will not often admit of a close and connected course of reading. Yet a general knowledge of the most necessary subjects may undoubtedly be gained, even in our leisure hours" (Foster, *The Boarding School* 202-03). Jackson's example reveals that, true to the preceptress's admonition, her efforts to study cannot be described as either "close" or "connected." In fact, once married, she seems to despair of ever improving much, although tellingly she still continues to seek a degree of improvement through corresponding with her older sister, Hannah Lowell.<sup>74</sup> In August 1810, with a three-month-old to care for, Lee writes to Lowell of recent family news, but ends her letter with an interesting plea: "You must put a little literary information into your letters to me that I may not be quite distanced by the *belles-lettres* world, as one interested only in shoes, head-dresses, etc" (92). Tellingly,

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<sup>73</sup> Morse includes fragments of other letters written before Jackson's marriage in her editorial passages. Such entries suggest that there may be more surviving letters documenting this time period but, for reasons Morse does not explain, they were not included in the published work.

<sup>74</sup> Hannah Jackson Lowell was married to Francis Cabot Lowell of the Lowell manufacturing fame (Morse 55-57).

she identifies a distinct and separate “*belles-lettres* world” to which one could gain access through literary study. Though she does not believe herself in a position to contribute to her sister’s improvement in the kind of reciprocal curriculum of correspondence Foster envisioned, she still hopes that Lowell’s letters may serve as a form of education for her and may induct her into the world of literary study, and perhaps even authorship.<sup>75</sup>

Just one month later, Lee again writes to her correspondent showing an interest in literary pursuits. This time she begins the letter by relating that she has read Sir Walter Scott’s latest poem “with much pleasure” and feels “a strong desire to meet him,” believing he might be kind enough to speak to one “with no literary taste or talent.”<sup>76</sup> However, feelings of inadequacy plague her.

I feel myself so much better suited to the cares of a family, etc., etc., than to anything else, that I do not sigh with envy when I think of your advantages. I can never much enjoy society when I feel myself *so little*, as I should in that which you probably frequent; a ridiculous pride, perhaps, and I sometimes fear, a dangerous one, as it may preclude the possibility of improvement, while it keeps me in society where exertion is unnecessary; but as there must be some good sort of people in the world, perhaps I may as well be one of that number. (92)

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<sup>75</sup>Lee’s comments here reflect the rise of the public sphere and changing notions of authorship emerging in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that allowed her to consider participation in a distinct *belles-lettres* world, even if only through private correspondence. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas argues “that the public sphere was transformed from a state of affairs in which authority embodied in special persons is represented before the people to one in which authority is constituted by a discourse in which people are represented” (Rice 181). Grantland S. Rice specifically discusses the American public sphere, identifying a “series of authorial reconfigurations” that accompanied the rise of the novel in America: the move “from an elite to a popular audience, the recasting of the site of critical pressure from the public and the political to the private and the domestic realm, and the change in critical focus from that in which political functionaries were made accountable for their actions in public roles to one in which private individuals were presented with fictional representations of domestic life (e.g., those of domestic production and reproduction)” (148).

<sup>76</sup>This is probably *The Lady of the Lake*, published in 1810.

Lee finally wonders if it is best to content herself with being one of the “moral people” who have no part in the intellectual sphere. Her uneasy resignation reveals a hint of desire to be pushed beyond the comfortable complacency she inhabits. Lee’s comments also show the permeation of the new language of improvement, while reinforcing Foster’s dictum that women need to be surrounded by other individuals invested in learning in order to continue to improve. Where such society is absent, concludes Foster, correspondence offers a possible alternative. One could construct such an intellectual community through a network of letter writing. However, Lee appears unable to do so. After this letter, there is no more talk of self-improvement in correspondence with her sister, even though she believes Lowell is the person in the best position to educate her, having benefited the most from her father’s efforts at instruction (185). Similarly to Southgate, at least in the letters to which we have access, Lee did not have success in employing correspondence as a means of education because she did not receive the kind of reciprocal intellectual exchange necessary for such a program.

*“Things of which I was deplorably ignorant”:  
Continuing Education through the Journal-Letter*

Apparently, Foster’s vision is dependent upon a relationship between like-minded individuals willing to pursue improvement together. The few examples of Lee’s letter writing as a single woman and a young mother are characterized by their inability to further her need for continued education beyond the walls of the academy because she fails to establish connection with such individuals, either in person or through correspondence. Despite the failure of letters to perform this function for her, evidence from her journal-letter reveals that her attempts at self-improvement did not end with marriage or motherhood. On the contrary, her determination to improve strengthened in light of the obligation to properly educate her child. In the three years covered by the journal-letter, Lee records reading texts in

various genres, including sermons, poetry, novels, religious texts, and works of history and philosophy. Her reading list boasts of such titles as Scott's *Rokeby*, Edgeworth's *The Patronage*, Goldsmith's *Roman History*, and Locke's *On Education*. More often than not she includes her assessment of each text, similar to what one might think of as a miniature book review. Very different are these evaluations from the trite mentions in her early letters of reading some text or another "with much pleasure." Her choice of the journal-letter as a medium within which to pursue her intellectual improvement represents an adaptation of Foster's intellectual community better-suited to meet her needs than traditional correspondence.

Lee's insecurities about her intellectual ability that take center stage in her letters to Hannah Lowell are all but absent in her discussions of texts in the journal-letter. Instead she exhibits a surprising degree of confidence in her ability to critique and recommend works. For example, within the first few entries of the journal-letter, she communicates that she has been reading the sermons of Fawcett recommended by her husband's friend, Reverend Joseph McKean, then the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard College (Lee 169, Morse 169).<sup>77</sup> Unconvinced that Fawcett's sermons are as deserving of praise as McKean, she states a preference for Porteous, whose sermons she also borrowed from the esteemed professor at her own request.<sup>78</sup> There follows a detailed explanation of her preference for Porteous on the basis of his style, which is "perfectly clear and unaffected," his language, which is "forcible" and "speaks to the heart," and finally his character, which exhibits "genuine piety and Christian Charity mingled with an independence of spirit" (Lee 169). Lee

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<sup>77</sup>She probably refers to the British Presbyterian minister Joseph Fawcett (1758-1804) and his 1795 publication, *Sermons delivered at the Sunday-evening lecture, for the winter season, at the Old Jewry* in two volumes.

<sup>78</sup>This is likely a reference to Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus (1731-1809), who published several volumes of sermons throughout his life. Porteus was an anti-slavery advocate, which could explain Lee's respect for his willingness to "fearlessly lash the prevailing vices of the times" (Lee 169).

continues to paint a picture of her literary tastes when she admits, “I think the works of men who have lived in our own times and of whose characters we have known something interest us more than those of older men” (169). She adds that her interest in Porteus’s works was “greatly increased” by her husband’s praise of the text. Tellingly, her choice of reading material is influenced by the recommendations of two men in her life, but in both instances she reserves the right to draw her own conclusions. Furthermore, by recording her observations on a text that Henry recommended within her journal-letter, Lee participates in the reciprocal intellectual activity Foster described.

It is probable, however, that Foster did not envision her curriculum of correspondence being shared between a husband and wife, particularly since women were theoretically engaging in this pursuit prior to marriage and since, despite advances in women’s access to education, beliefs in the intellectual superiority of men certainly prevailed. In fact, Southgate’s efforts to “enlarge” her mind through corresponding with her male cousin are frustrated when he refuses to help her execute this plan, which he views with disdain as her “incipient feminism” (Fizer 256). By contrast, Lee’s comments show she clearly felt more inferior to her older sister Lowell, with whom she never was able to establish an intellectual epistolary connection, than she did in relation to her husband. In fact, Henry’s letters from India are full of praise for his wife’s abilities, creating a textual relationship that spurs her on towards improvement. For example, on January 12, 1813 – the same month Lee’s extant journal-letter begins – Henry refers to his wife in a letter home as his “partner in business upon whose judgment [he] rel[ies] in all difficult cases.” He then spends two more pages extolling his wife’s many admirable qualities: “There is no subject in which I do not respect your opinion. I always consider’d you as having a sound and well-informed mind, and the

more I see of you and think of you the higher you rise in my esteem. The letters you have written would do honor to anyone” (121-22). Truly, such passages occur in nearly every letter, and Lee often notes his excessive praise in her journal-letter. Though she usually responds with self-deprecation, it is evident that she is pleased with his assessments. For instance, in one entry she pleads, “Dear, dear husband, do not, I beseech, I intreat of you, do not set up an ideal image in your heart, and when you return to the plain, homespun woman you left, feel a disappointment” (208). In another she seems more willing to be admired. She tells Henry, “I am not what you think me, but as the deception produces pleasure to us both, I shall never try to enlighten you” (204). Though Henry’s praises could be merely flattery, it is evident Lee believes him. This belief that she is considered able is, of course, paramount. Near the end of the journal-letter, Lee shows her desperate need for approval, from her husband as well as family and friends. When her mother-in-law critiques her parenting, apparently a common occurrence, she reveals how criticism negatively affects her. “[I]f I think my friends approve, it animates me to new exertion;” she explains, “whereas if I have the slightest cause to think otherwise it depresses me and palsies all my faculties, and thus of necessity produces self-disapprobation and its attendant discontent” (212). Henry’s approval has had exactly the former effect, stimulating her to pursue greater intellectual depth and understanding.

But why does Lee record these pursuits in a journal-letter instead of sending them to Henry so that he can participate more fully with her in her intellectual journey? Perhaps she does so for exactly the reasons she turned to the journal-letter in the first place. From the depictions of letter writing included in the journal-letter, it is evident that her letters to India are necessarily filled with family news – births, illnesses, deaths, business ventures – as well

as public news about the political situation in the United States and the progress of the war at home and abroad. Bannet addresses the private-public nature of transatlantic correspondence: “There was also a strong expectation on the part of transatlantic correspondents that even personal letters from family and friends would bring them public intelligence that they would find of interest or of use, as well as intelligence about such private matters as births or the death of friends” (257). Lee seems to view the journal-letter as a place where she can write those things that are considered of too little importance to be included in letters. She ascribes to the belief that there is more significance in recording events than feelings, and often reserves the latter for her journal-letter. Lee describes why she has hesitated to write in her journal-letter everyday: “[I]f there are not *events* there are always *feelings* to note down, and as I really want you to know *all I feel* I could write volumes, but I felt as it were a mere indulgence of my own weakness and have resisted the inclination. I shall do so no more – it will gratify you, you desire it, and that is sufficient” (182). Later in the text she admits her tendency to write of seemingly insignificant matters in the journal-letter: “I think you will notice throughout these pages an air of importance given trifles [...] let it not render me insignificant in your eyes, my beloved Hal – if it does I am sure I shall deeply regret having solaced myself by writing them: the fact is, when one is placed in a situation removed from care and responsibility, trifles gain importance” (202). In the journal-letter, there is more space – both literally in figuratively – for Lee to write what she desires, rather than what correspondence requires.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, many of Lee’s letters

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<sup>79</sup>Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests that women writing letters in the eighteenth century had to “avoid the troubling threat of egotism.” Similarly to Lee here, “When they write about their own actions, thoughts, or feelings, they worry about seeming too self-involved; often they deprecate the activities they report” (179). See Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days*, and Steven Kagle, *American Diary Literature*, for discussions of traditional distinctions between diaries as records of events and journals as records of internal concerns or feelings (Blodgett 39; Kagle 16).

are written in hurried moments when she finds, by some fortunate accident, that a ship is ready to sail. One morning a young boy drops by to tell her a vessel is leaving for England within the next two hours. Her response: "I immediately seated myself, and as rapidly as possible scribbled three pages to you, my dear Husband" (219). Under such hurried conditions, it is no wonder that she reserves less pressing information, such as discussions of the merit of a particular book, for the more leisurely, less prescribed writing that fills her journal-letter.

Additionally, the unpredictability that characterizes correspondence over such a great distance problematizes efforts to create a truly reciprocal program of sending reviews and recommendations of texts back and forth. An unlikely coincidence confirms this assertion. On March 2, 1813, Henry composes a letter in which he shares what he has been reading during his time in India. He attempts to take part in his wife's intellectual development by recommending the memoirs of Maximilien de Béthune, duc de Sully, as an "amusing" work with "much information" and characters who are "extremely interesting" (135). In a journal-letter entry from March 3, 1813, the day after Henry encourages her to take up this text, Lee communicates that she has just abandoned Sully's *Memoirs*, without finishing it, in order to begin Oliver Goldsmith's *Roman History*. The letter with Henry's suggestion does not arrive until June 9, 1814, fifteen months after she has already sampled and deserted this work. Though an extreme example, it exemplifies yet another of the many obstacles thwarting Lee's attempts to utilize conventional correspondence for the goal of self-improvement.

Even if the journal-letter, as adopted by Lee, cannot offer the reciprocity associated with a curriculum of correspondence, it does offer two things essential to her efforts at self-improvement: an encouraging audience and a space for textual contemplation exempt from



the frustrations of traditional letter writing. Although I would not describe Lee as a voracious reader or even a particularly committed student, she is a woman who applies herself when possible. Through reading and textually reviewing a diverse group of texts, including works intended for spiritual and/or intellectual improvement, works read for pleasure, and works associated with childrearing, Lee constructs her own “extracurriculum of composition.”

Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Roman History from the Foundation of the City of Rome to the Destruction of the Western Empire* (London 1781) is a work that falls into the first category. Rather than reading this text privately, Lee actually attended the reading of this work, since her sister and roommate, Harriet Jackson, decided to read Goldsmith “to herself” and Lee did not want to “lose the chance of hearing it” (179). The concept of reading as a solitary activity is a comparatively recent phenomenon made possible by mass literacy and the mass market availability of texts.<sup>80</sup> However, for most of history, reading was a shared activity, as demonstrated in *The Boarding School* when a large group of female students worked on their needlepoint while listening to another student read aloud. Lee finds fault with the mode of study – it is “almost impossible to fix [her] attention” – and with the text itself – which is “not minute enough to satisfy anyone, nor is the language good.” Despite

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<sup>80</sup>Davidson addresses the continued difficulties of determining precise rates of male and female literacy in the early national period, an assessment that is contingent upon one’s definition of literacy as the ability to read, sign one’s name, and/or write. Despite these difficulties, however, it is generally accepted that there was a rise in overall literacy during the eighteenth century, such that by 1850 the literacy rate was over 90 percent for white men and women. She also argues that “literateness” – a term she prefers to literacy – “was more valued, encouraged, and achieved in early America by men than by women” and “the early American novel became one of the single most vociferous sources for women in their striving for literateness” (*Revolution and the Word* 57-61). Though printers in the early Republic responded to the demand created by a new body of readers by printing more books, to readers “books were still unique and precious, not so much commodities as treasures.” The numerous inscriptions on a single text – sometimes as many as a dozen signatures – indicate that books “circulated among a wide community of readers” (69-70). Furthermore, since women often gathered together to jointly perform such tasks as sewing, these informal groups offered a natural opportunity for one woman to read while the others worked, often followed by a group discussion of the text and other matters. Says Davidson, “Not only was the novel thus made a part of the daily life of republican women, but the discourse of fiction was itself made contiguous with or incorporated into their discourse” (114).

these problems, she concludes, “I think I shall not regret reading it, as all I do glean interests me very much and will afford me information of things of which I was deplorably ignorant” (179). When the pair finishes Goldsmith, she takes the opportunity to offer a final critique in her journal-letter, describing the work as “so inferior to Hume, Voltaire, or Roberts that [she] could not relish it as [she] should have done.” Completing this one-thousand-page endeavor leads her to another one, for she mentions that along with her reading partner, she now intends to “take up Gillies’ Greece” which her husband recommended years ago (191).<sup>81</sup> It seems Lee has abandoned the passive approach to education that characterized her younger years. Unlike the school girl who gathered in a room of friends to engage in serious study, but was distracted by gossip and frivolity, or the young wife who asked her eldest sister to pass on wisdom through letters, this young mother is willing to press on despite inconveniences in order to actively engage in a serious educational endeavor. In fact, it seems as though the prolonged separation from her husband places her in a situation similar to that of an unmarried woman who theoretically had much more time to devote to serious study, but with the maturity to take advantage of the opportunity.

While Lee relies on recommendations from various sources to identify works for serious study – as Foster hoped her young graduates would – she also engages in lighter, pleasure reading which she describes as “the pastime of a moment.” She describes Sir Walter Scott’s new poem *Rokeby* as such a pursuit, providing a brief evaluation of the work: “[I]t is interesting, and he discovers his usual discrimination in drawing the characters which are extremely well supported, but it is not as pleasant a poem as *The Lady of the Lake*” (191). If reading poetry is an acceptable pastime, however, reading novels is decidedly less so. Davidson presents the novel in the early republic as a developing literary form under attack

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<sup>81</sup> John Gillies’ *The history of ancient Greece, its colonies and conquests* (London 1786).

on all sides. One of the primary arguments against the novel was that it could mislead women into dangerous paths. In 1798, a commentator in the *Weekly Magazine* claimed, “Novels not only pollute the imaginations of young women,” but also encourage “false ideas of life, which too often make them act improperly” (Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* 46). Lee anticipates her husband’s disapproval when she relates that she is reading Maria Edgeworth’s *The Patronage*. She could have easily neglected to mention this fact, but instead takes the opportunity to argue for the worth of such a book. Cleverly, she challenges Henry to read the book before he “pronounce[s] sentence against it.” She predicts,

if you do not gain one new idea from it you will be grateful for the entertainment one cannot but receive from such a book; there are perhaps faults; the characters are too numerous, etc., but they are so justly delineated that we must receive pleasure, as we do from the conversation of enlightened society, and I think you cannot read the book without forming a high idea of the talents of the author. She must have a keen, penetrating mind and lively imagination, aided and governed always by that plain good sense which alone enables us to draw right conclusions. (218)

Just as she is quick to mention that she reads one book or another based on her husband’s recommendation, Lee expects Henry to take her recommendations seriously as well. This moment is significant as the first recorded instance of Lee recommending a book to another person, suggesting a growing confidence in her literary taste as she reads and records evaluations of texts within her journal-letter.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Davidson cautions against searching “private” writings for evidence of how females reacted to the books they read, for letters and diary entries are more likely to inscribe “how readers thought they should read [...] than how they actually did” (*Revolution and the Word* 75).

The final type of reading recorded within her journal-letter includes works that will help her fulfill her duty to properly educate her daughter. By the spring of 1813, when Molly is approaching two years old, Lee begins researching different ideas about children's education. She records reading a "sermon on the formation of the minds of children," which impresses upon her how much she must learn before she can effectively teach her daughter (185). A few months later, she takes up Trimmer's *Sacred History*, a version of the Bible for children, to see if she prefers it to "the simple Bible" (217).<sup>83</sup> She does not favor Trimmer in the end, but she goes on to consider the efficacy of introducing the Bible to her daughter when she first begins to read or at a later stage in life, offering arguments for and against each option. The following month she reads Locke's *On Education*, which she is "much pleased with [...] but must leave to a future period [her] observations" (222). (Unfortunately, the portion of the journal-letter that may have held these observations is missing, so we are deprived of any further reactions to the text.) Significantly, in the interim between reading Trimmer and Locke, Lee begins to teach little Molly, at the age of three years and one month, to read (220). Passing on the ability to read was part of her duty as mother, and it was also her duty to research the best methods for doing so. She is precisely the kind of mother educators in the early nation hoped for, a woman who accepted her duties to her children and her nation, and was willing to educate herself for the sake of her own and her children's improvement.

*"I feel myself so miserably defective": The Intellectual Pursuit of Motherhood*

Despite her dedication to the task at hand, Lee's descriptions of the reading she engages in to prepare her for the demands of motherhood lack the confidence she exhibits in

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<sup>83</sup>Sarah Trimmer's *Sacred History: selected from the scriptures with annotations and reflections, suited to the comprehension of young minds* (London 1782). Trimmer (1741-1810) was the author of numerous educational works designed for children.

her assessments of other types of texts. How interesting that the educational imperative espoused in the early years of the republic – to prepare young women to educate their sons and daughters – did not include providing practical knowledge of how to fulfill this purpose. Therefore, even if raising children curtailed a woman’s opportunities for studying continuously and voraciously, it provided a real stimulus to improvement that may have been absent before, making it that much more important that a woman carve out time for study. As Lee concludes, finding leisure time for study may not be possible at any stage of life: “I do not yet find the leisure I have thro’ life sighed for and expected to find for reading – I am now free enough from occupation to indulge myself in this way, having no important work – but Miss Molly, who is very *literary*, will not allow me to hold a book in her presence” (175). Even if having a child limits her time for study, there are also benefits to her situation: “I really feel that I was peculiarly blessed to have the little creature sent at the moment she was,” for “as she advances she necessarily leads me to more intellectual exertion than I should otherwise be called to, and I am often, I assure you, in so torpid a state, that nothing but necessity could arouse me to exertion of any kind. I hope she will keep me from actual stagnation till you return” (220). When younger, Lee lamented the lack of intellectual society to stimulate her to self-improvement. Now, in the society of a preschooler, she finds the inducement for improvement she could not before.

However, the journal-letter is filled with anxiety that she will be unable to adequately perform the task before her of rightly educating her child. In fact, the words “I fear” surface often in Lee’s descriptions of her efforts to educate and regulate her daughter. For example, shortly after she has begun to teach Molly to read, she worries, “I shall, I fear, find it difficult to keep up sufficient emulation, as she is alone, to have her progress very rapidly.” The same

day she expresses concern that her efforts in other areas of parenting are also disappointing: “I fear I gain no ground with regard to the regulation of the heart and disposition” (220). These feelings, she proposes, are largely occasioned by the “faulty” nature of her early education, which she believes has ill-prepared her for the present moment. She worries, “I have so much to do for myself before I can do anything for my children that it makes me almost despond” (185). Then follows a brief autobiographical passage about her early education which makes no mention of formal schooling, but describes problems at home – a depressed income, a large family, an invalid mother – as making it “impossible for a child to acquire the habits of attention, industry, etc., that are so important” (185-86). This type of lament is not unique to Lee’s situation, but a generation of women confronted with this newly placed responsibility expressed similar concerns. Abigail Adams, in her letters to John, also emphasized the lack of education that limited her abilities as an effective mother: “With regard to the Education of my own children, I find myself soon out of depth, and destitute and deficient in every part of Education. [...] If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen, and Philosophers, we should have learned women” (153).

Adams’ comments reflect her appropriation of the emerging doctrine of “Republican Motherhood” – a term that was not used in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries but was coined by Linda Kerber – that offered women a justification for seeking education so as to be “better wives and better mothers for the next generation of virtuous republican citizens.” Kerber defines the Republican Mother as “an educated women who could be spared the criticism normally directed at the intellectually competent woman because she placed her learning at her family’s service” (93).<sup>84</sup> This move to educate women can be traced to the anxieties of the “Republican Experiment” which required an informed and literate citizenry

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<sup>84</sup>See also Mary Beth Norton’s *Liberty’s Daughters*, p. 256-99.

for its survival. If education began at home, and it almost invariably did, mothers needed the wherewithal to educate their sons and their daughters. In fact, essayist and playwright Judith Sargent Murray utilized this doctrine of increased agency for mothers in order to argue that the education of daughters be given special attention. After all, it is only logical that the daughters of one generation will be the mothers of the next. Murray reasons, “A mother is certainly the most proper preceptress for her children, and it [is] for this reason that I would educate a daughter upon the most liberal plan” (Skemp 88). While this doctrine offers Lee justification for her own intellectual pursuits, it also makes her more conscious of her limitations. Through pursuing her own improvement and that of her daughter, Lee shows her determination to make sure her daughter is not limited as she has been.

After consulting a resource on children’s education and making sense of her own educational history, Lee finally develops a plan for how to proceed: “I shall endeavor to improve our child’s memory [...] by exercising it, and I shall constantly strive to improve her habits of attention: these are two points in whh. I feel myself so miserably defective that I shall take every pains with her” (186). Tellingly, Lee believes it is her responsibility to cultivate traits that will help her daughter be an effective learner in the future, traits that she does not personally possess because of her limited education. An interesting change is demonstrated here. Because Lee’s mother was “much restrained early in life,” she too restrained her daughters, perhaps thinking “this the safest side to err upon.” Hannah Jackson sought for her daughters what late-eighteenth-century society expected of them. This expectation is typified by an after-dinner toast offered by a New Englander: “May our sons exceed their fathers and our daughters be equal to their mothers” (Norton 99). On the contrary, Lee’s goals for her own daughter indicate a changing atmosphere and a new

discourse of improvement in which daughters were also encouraged and expected to improve beyond their mothers.<sup>85</sup>

Of course, the belief in the female capacity for improvement was not universally held. Even Henry Lee is eerily reminiscent of the former colonial ideal when he writes to his wife in 1812, “may our child imitate and equal you” (117). Added to Henry’s physical absence as a contributing parent, then, is his lack of ambition for his daughter. Although he does discuss his daughter’s education in a few of his letters from India – clearly in response to requests in Lee’s letters – the tone of his responses is almost dismissive. He typically asserts his “entire confidence” in his wife’s abilities, and then identifies male figures who she may want to model her parenting on: her father and her brother (127). Without great aspirations for his daughter’s improvement, Henry finds his wife more than qualified to direct her and does not seem interested in discussing the matter further. That Lee must attend to the task of educating her daughter alone is more than clear. Since Henry’s responses do not satisfy her – she is quick to point out her own father’s failures in educating her – she turns to books for the knowledge she lacks and to her journal-letter as a space to work through her insecurities as a mother-educator.

Although her husband’s encouraging words make him a comforting audience in most instances, in this area they are merely frustrating, revealing another reason why the journal-letter offers a more productive space for Lee than traditional letter writing. With a mother-in-law ready to offer her opinions without being asked for them – Lee describes this family member’s “ideas upon the subject of education [as] less sound than upon almost anything else” – and an absent husband who appears less than concerned, it is no wonder she identifies

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<sup>85</sup>Norton identifies the early national period as the first time when American daughters as well as sons were told they could “improve” themselves, a new language of possibility to demonstrate the change in attitude that had taken place with regards to women’s potential (276).



her journal-letter, a text she begins at this critical moment of early motherhood, as the appropriate place for admitting her fears of inadequacy and studying to make herself equal to the task before her.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, because the journal-letter will not exist as mail, it is less available to the eyes and pens of other writers. Both Bannet and Kathryn Carter emphasize the precarious situation of transatlantic letter-writers who were unable to control who intercepted, read, and/or shared their missives and had to craft their words accordingly (Bannet 254-56; Carter 18). However, the fact that letters might have an audience prior to sending also affected what letter-writers could express. For instance, due to the complications of sending and receiving letters, Lee's mother-in-law, as well as other family members, would have expected the privilege of adding marginal insertions or postscripts to her letters to Henry, just as Lee would have in return.<sup>87</sup> The journal-letter, on the other hand, partly because it is considered by Lee and her husband as a "journal" and thus different from her letters, does not offer the same opportunities for others' perusal. Obviously, the complaints Lee lodges against her mother-in-law, though they are couched in politeness and respect, would not have been offered so freely in her conventional letters. Since Lee is able to limit the audience of this text, more so than letters that are placed into circulation, she enjoys more freedom to write.

Yet this freedom is not only a function of Lee's ability to limit her audience, a difficult task for letter-writers in this period, but also the unique sense of Henry as audience that is peculiar to the journal-letter. Since Henry will not read the text in time to influence her

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<sup>86</sup> Though Lee questions her mother-in-law's opinions, her husband offers glowing praise of his mother in his letters home: "I know of no one to be compared with her for soundness of mind, judgment, knowledge and for the best feelings of the heart. She is really a Christian and a philosopher in the best sense of the word, and the wisest man that ever lived might profit from her society. Let me remind you, my dear M., of the pleasure and advantage you enjoy in being so nearly connected and on such intimate terms with so inestimable companion and friend" (Lee 158-59).

<sup>87</sup> See Theresa Gaul's *To Marry an Indian* for more on reading the significance of such elements as marginal insertions and postscripts (23-29).

choice of educational strategies, it may seem odd that she spends so much time discussing her studies and opinions within the text. Although I have emphasized the journal-letter's ability to provide a sense of connection with Henry that letters did not, it may also exaggerate the distance between them since it will never perform the symbolic act of uniting the two correspondents that letters are meant to. Ironically, this reality offers Lee the space she needs to feel close to Henry at times and to distance herself at others, particularly in moments when she is questioning cultural conventions and expectations with which Henry may be aligned.

Altman views the letter, as utilized in epistolary novels, as an instrument of seduction. She notes that, “[g]iven the letter’s function as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the bridge” (13). In the novel of seduction, lovers may utilize the letter differently. For instance, “whereas the seducer regards the letter as his arm for overcoming the barrier between him and his lady, [...] [t]he letter affords her a greater distance and perspective from which to justify herself” (16). Though this journal-letter does not read as an epistolary seduction, it does operate in this manner for both Henry and Lee. As I have shown, Henry utilizes his letters to compliment Lee, even to the point of excess. In a response to Lee’s inquiries about how to educate their daughter, Henry seems more concerned with flattering his wife: “Your character, in my estimation, embraces every virtue that can dignify and adorn a woman, and make her the proper object of our love, friendship, and esteem. May our child imitate and equal you” (117). Rather than discussing his wife’s intellectual ability to educate their child, he instead focuses on her character as being pleasingly feminine. Henry acts in the role of the seducer here, but Lee is more interested in answers than flattery. Like the heroines of seduction novels, Lee uses this form of writing to attain “greater

distance and perspective” from Henry (Altman 16). The journal-letter form, able to be composed at her leisure and kept in her possession, creates a sense of disconnection from Henry that allows Lee the space to make her own decisions about how she will choose to govern and educate their child.

This focus on education that saturates Lee’s journal-letter is conspicuously absent from earlier women’s texts, such as that of Esther Edwards Burr. Writing in the mid-eighteenth century, Burr also recorded her literary pursuits in her journal-letter, but unlike Lee, discussion of her children’s education is limited to a few lines here and there. Comparisons of the types of texts these two women perused show that they both read sermons, poetry, and novels. But there may be more significance in the genres of reading that were not shared, than in those that were. While Burr also reads a spiritual diary and collections of letters, Lee reads histories, philosophical works, and religious texts, a few of which deal specifically with the subject of education. The kinds of works Lee reads echo the subjects educator Benjamin Rush thought women of the new republic should be familiar with – geography, religion, history, and natural philosophy – in order to instruct their children (Norton 268).

Thus, the reading Lee engages in exhibits a fundamental difference in purpose from that of a colonial mother such as Burr. Whereas Burr’s reading and discussions of that reading in her journal-letter focus on promoting her personal spiritual development, Lee concentrates on fostering her intellectual development with the additional goal of becoming a better teacher for her children. In fact, the only indication of the former’s prospects for daughter Sally’s education is a passing hint that she may send the young girl to be apprenticed to her friend, Sarah Prince, in Boston (Burr 253). Unlike Burr who expects to

share the task of “educating” Sally with a larger community, Lee feels the entire responsibility of directing the development of her daughter’s mind. Her intellectual improvement and her daughter’s are inextricably connected. Whether or not it was easy, Lee could not let her education end when she married and had a child. A commitment to educating her daughter beyond her own intellectual abilities required just the opposite. When a curriculum of conventional correspondence did not work for her, however, she did not despair. She simply adapted her writing to fit her situation, calling on the journal-letter form as an outlet during the unique period in her life when she was living and making decisions on her own.

While Lee’s reading may not represent a curriculum constructed to build a balanced knowledge of various disciplines, it is varied and purposeful. Guided by recommendations, availability of texts, personal preferences, and parental duties, she seeks and takes advantage of opportunities for collaborative and individualized literacy experiences. Unlike Eliza Bowne who reluctantly relinquished her pursuit of education when her chosen correspondent failed her, Lee pressed on. She took recommendations for reading from professors, her husband, and her sister. She read books on her own and listened to others read when the opportunity presented itself. Her education after marriage and motherhood intervened was piecemeal, but it was real, as evidenced by the meticulously written pages of her journal-letter.

### *Conclusion*

The limitations of correspondence as a tool for establishing connection, both interpersonal and intellectual, are apparent, despite the promises offered by letter writing manuals and conduct fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Lee’s

specific experience demonstrates the potential of a hybrid medium, the journal-letter, to fulfill the advertised functions of the epistolary form. Though initially adopted to meet these needs, she also employs the journal-letter as a space to work through her insecurities about her role as mother-educator in an era when mothers were taking on heightened importance in the development of their children and the nation at large.

This journal-letter, at its most fundamental level, differs from Lee's conventional letter writing in its method and timing of delivery. Each time she sent letters out into the vastness separating her from her husband, she risked losing her words to authorities, enemies, accidents, and distance. And Lee was right to be concerned. None of her letters written to Henry in India are now extant. The journal-letter, by comparison, remained safe at home, her words in order, in their fullness, waiting for her husband to read them. This journal-letter is a treasured document, safeguarded by its writer against accidental or intentional destruction. Yet the concept of writing that is at once daily *and* treasured may appear to be an oxymoron, particularly since the major hindrance to studies of women's lifewriting before the twentieth century has been the reality that so much writing has simply been lost.

Sinor attributes this loss of writing to the fact that most of the writing composed by women has been deemed "ordinary," and thus unworthy of preservation. She identifies three attributes of "ordinary" writing; it is unliterary, unnoticed, and usually discarded:

In determining the values of a society, you need only investigate what gets discarded. [...] Dumpster loads from our past would indicate that, in general, we value the new, the aesthetic, the whole, the extraordinary, the masculine, the Anglo, and the fast – not because our dumpsters are filled with these but

rather because our textbooks are. On the historical curb rest the domestic, the broken, the consumable, the useful, the female, and the ordinary. (3)

In this context, what is most extraordinary about ordinary writing is that it has survived at all (9). When ordinary writing does survive, we may be tempted to attribute its presence to little more than a fortunate accident. For the vast majority of these documents, such an assumption is probably, sadly, true. Sinor proposes that these works stop being ordinary and become extraordinary only once they are named and studied, presumably by a scholar who rescues a manuscript from a lonely archive or a descendant who digs a yellowed journal out of a box of dusty belongings. (Sinor reads her aunt's diary in both capacities.)

But what if such works did not require a third-party in order to become extraordinary? If cultural values required that nineteenth-century woman and her ancestors disparage their writing abilities and continually highlight their deficiencies, beneath this customary self-deprecation are hints that women who wrote considered their works extraordinary enough to be saved and shared. Lee seems to ascribe to the belief that her journal-letter is merely ordinary when she describes it to Henry as "this dull memorandum of passing events and feelings" (175). However, if she truly believed her text was not worthwhile, when it became difficult to write, one would assume that she would give up the exercise. With the cares of raising a toddler without her husband's help and the customary rounds of visiting required of women of leisure, her writing often must wait. For instance, on September 26, 1813, Lee notes having been "occupied about something or nothing" for over a week without finding time to write. When she finally takes to the pen she wonders if she has the "right to devote even as much time as [she does] to it" (204-05). Tellingly, this concern does not keep her from continuing to write.

Extraordinary may be too strong of a term to describe how Lee felt about her journal-letter. However, if ordinary writing is writing that is “discardable” (Sinor 5), she rescued her text from the realm of the ordinary when she made efforts to ensure that her work would survive. Clearly, when she chose the form of the journal-letter, she made a conscious decision to write in a genre over which she could exert greater control than traditional correspondence. She was correct. Although the earliest entries, as well as a portion from February to October 1815 are missing, the greater part of the journal-letter survived, while all of the letters she sent to her husband during his years in India are now lost. Evidence of the cherished status of the text, Henry took it with him on his second trip to India in 1822, rereading it and adding his own inscription on the final page. He describes the journal-letter as evidence of his wife’s sincere “attachment and esteem” for him, as well as a reminder of his duties to her “who has been so active and instrumental in promoting my happiness” (226). Unlike the traditional letters Lee wrote to her husband, the journal-letter was saved and treasured, even attaining status as a book to be read and reread.

Not only did Lee keep this journal-letter for Henry, but she also took pains to make it clear that she desired, or at least was not opposed, to sharing her words with other audiences. Morse includes a memorandum written by her grandmother in her introduction to the published letters as “a half permission, at least, to put portions of the letters and Journal which remain before the eyes of the younger generation” (74). I quote the 1830 note in its entirety as evidence of a continuing effort on Lee’s part to preserve her words, to salvage them from the discarded realm of the ordinary:

I have often felt that I ought to destroy the immense quantity of letters which passed between my husband and myself during his long absence, when

our minds were frequently in such a state of depression that our letters could have no interest after that period, to any third person – but when thinking of doing so, the recollection of the delight these letters afforded each of us at the moment when they were received makes me very reluctant to do it without looking over them, and this is a labour that I have neither time nor eyes to perform.

Still I keep them, thinking the time may come, and as I can recollect nothing that would be very bad for my children to read (though I should by no means want them to go over so much ground for the little instruction they would glean), I venture to leave them to Mary’s discretion or any other person into whose hands they may fall.<sup>88</sup> (Morse 74)

Lee places her words at the mercy of her daughter or “any other person,” but not before making a subtle plea for that person to keep and even read these letters which she was unable to destroy without “looking over them.”<sup>89</sup> The implication here is that the letters deserve at least to be perused before they are disposed of. She could have destroyed them or left them to their fate, but instead she included a note, one that suggests a desire for her writing to survive. This note gave Morse permission to name and study her grandmother’s words, to print them for a wider audience, and to ensure their permanence on a library shelf somewhere. How could Lee have known that nearly two centuries later a scholar of women’s writing would pick them up and begin to read that which she had “neither time nor eyes” to reread for herself?

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<sup>88</sup>Here she refers to the “Molly” of the journal-letter, her eldest daughter, Mary Cabot Lee.

<sup>89</sup>Lee refers to both her journal-letter and the letters Henry sent to her from India.



## Chapter 4

### Composing the “Unheard of Journey”: The Overland Journal-Letters of Narcissa Whitman

When Narcissa Whitman took to the Overland Trail in 1836, seeking a missionary life in the unknown land of Oregon, she also took to the pen. Her decision to record her travels was not an unusual one, since travel has provided scores of women with the impetus to write. This writing has taken many different forms, but for the majority of non-professional writers, diaries and letters offer the most accessible and obvious venue for cataloguing their movements, interactions, and reactions while “on the road.” In fact, Steven E. Kagle identifies the “surface dislocations of travel and exploration” as responsible for inspiring “one of the most common forms of the diary” (*Early Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature* 24). Moreover, it is in the genre of travel writing in particular that the hybrid journal-letter form has exhibited its most consistent and persistent usefulness.

Journal-letters proved a useful medium for emigrant writers in the United States during the Overland Trail migrations of the nineteenth century. Even if they do not use the term journal-letter, several scholars have noted that the kind of writing composed by these travelers was different from a “typical” diary. Lillian Schlissel acknowledges, “Overland diaries were a special kind of diary, often meant to be published in county newspapers or sent to relatives intending to make the same journey the following season” (10). Similarly, Brigitte Georgi-Findlay identifies the diaries of women on the Trail as “semipublic accounts” composed “for a limited audience of friends and relatives” (xiii). Emigrants clearly felt the need to document their journey for themselves, as well as for those they left behind and those they hoped would follow. In “‘Some is Writing Some Reading’: Emigrant Authors on the

Overland Trail,” Theresa Strouth Gaul proposes that diaries served as “part of the promotional literature engaged in offering practical information and enticing others to make the journey west” (6). These writers did not only intend their writings to be souvenirs of family history for succeeding generations as many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century diaries were. Instead they created active, audience-directed texts meant to recruit, caution, inform, and/or comfort their readers. The overland journey thus represents the first occasion in American history to inspire a common group of people to adopt the hybrid journal-letter as the most appropriate medium for recording and sharing their unique experiences. Given this striking feature, it is perhaps surprising that no one has yet considered the implications of the use of this form for the emigrant writers who chose it. If the journal-letter was indeed a “special kind of diary,” how did it differ from conventional diaries written by those on the same Trail? Was the journal-letter also a “special kind of letter”? How did the reality that these “semipublic accounts” might become “promotional literature” beyond the control of the writer influence her self-presentation?

The journal-letters written by Narcissa Whitman, one of the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains in 1836, offer an opportunity to consider these implications. Though there are hundreds of extant overland narratives, many of which have now been anthologized, I find Whitman’s text particularly useful for this study partly because she is one of the first two white women to ever make this journey. This distinction places her at the beginning of the overland writing tradition and thus makes her text an obvious starting point for an analysis of the journal-letter form as it is used by women writers on the Trail. Furthermore, since Whitman’s female companion Eliza Spalding composed a diary during the journey, I have the unique opportunity to read the two women’s texts in conjunction for

insight into how the diary and the journal-letter forms may allow for different ways of textually experiencing and recording the same physical journey. Analyses of these texts show that the emigrant journal-letter exhibits distinct characteristics from conventional diary and letter writing under similar circumstances. Furthermore, the journal-letter is a form in contradiction with itself, existing as both diary and letter but neither diary nor letter, and thus lending itself to the expression of the contradictions that characterize the emigrant experience. Because emigrants exist in an unsettled state, “betwixt and between” identities, they may utilize the journal-letter form to appropriate identities that are not available to them outside of the culturally specific experience of emigration.<sup>90</sup> For example, Whitman does so when she takes on the authoritative role of the emigrant guide, a role usually reserved for men. In other words, rather than using writing as an attempt to conserve a static identity, the journal-letter form actually fosters the creation and adoption, if only temporarily, of new identities. Ultimately, Whitman’s text highlights the distinctiveness of the journal-letter as a form, despite (usually unwitting) scholarly efforts to minimize or erase these distinctions.

*“A place for an (un)married female”:  
Narcissa Whitman and the Birth of the Oregon Mission*

In 1836 and 1838, before the mass migrations of the 1840s, two groups of Protestant missionaries made their way overland to Oregon. Though the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had sent delegations to Indian groups since 1816, the design to send missionaries as far west as Oregon did not gain momentum until March 1, 1833, when a curious article appeared on the front page of the Methodist *Christian Advocate* with the caption, “The Flat-Head Indians.” This article told the story of four Indians who journeyed from west of the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis in search of the “true

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<sup>90</sup>Here I use Victor Turner’s term for describing the state of individuals who are in the process of adopting a new identity through a rite of passage.

mode of worshipping the great Spirit” (Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman*, 29).

Protestant churches throughout the northeast felt these Indians were directly invoking their aid (28-29, 49). In the Presbyterian Church, two white women responded to the call:

Narcissa Prentiss Whitman and Eliza Hart Spalding.

Narcissa Prentiss was born in Prattsburg, New York, on March 14, 1808. Her father was a carpenter and a county judge. Prentiss had the good fortune of being part of the first class of girls admitted to the local high school, Franklin Academy, before moving on to complete her studies at Emma Willard’s academy in Troy, New York. Like many women with seminary educations, Prentiss went on to become a school teacher. In late 1834, her home church hosted a guest speaker, the Reverend Samuel Parker, who was on a fundraising tour to gain support for a mission to Oregon. Inspired by his plea, Prentiss approached him and inquired, “Is there a place for an unmarried female in my Lord’s vineyard?” After corresponding with Board Secretary David Greene, Parker received a negative reply; it was concluded that single women would not be “valuable just now.” However, during his tour he had also recruited a young doctor, Marcus Whitman, from the same area. No doubt desperate for volunteers, Parker decided to engage in a bit of matchmaking. After hearing about Prentiss from Parker, Dr. Whitman visited her and proposed marriage. She accepted. One year later, on February 18, 1836, the two were married and the next day began their “wedding journey” to Oregon.<sup>91</sup> Her decision to leave was a final one, for she ended her life in Oregon, never seeing her parents or eight siblings again (Drury, *First* 26-36).

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<sup>91</sup> The American Board appointed Ellen Stetson as its first unmarried female missionary to the Cherokee Indians of the Arkansas territory in 1821 (Maxfield; Valencius 19). By the 1830s, however, it began to prohibit unmarried people from entering into the mission field in the belief that married people were better able to cope with the hardships and temptations of the missionary life. The Board required men to be engaged for two months before leaving for the field and kept a list of “missionary-minded” young women who were “young, pious, educated, fit, and reasonably good-looking” as potential mates. Couples were often expected to leave on mission within a week of their marriage (Golossanov 3). There were a few exceptions to this rule, of course. A

Whitman began a series of journal-letters to her family on March 15, 1836, the day she boarded the steamboat *Siam* with the other members of the American Board's first mission to Oregon. Her overland journal-letter writings consist of three travel letters written to different family members over the spring and summer of 1836, as well as a longer document composed during the final months of the journey. She addresses the three shorter letters to her mother, her sister Jane, and her sister Harriet and brother Edward, respectively.<sup>92</sup> The longer document was originally composed for her mother, though at Dr. Whitman's request she also made and sent a copy to his mother. It covers a span of four months and as such was long considered Whitman's diary, while the shorter documents remained categorized as letters. In his study of the *First White Women Over the Rockies* (1963), Clifford Merrill Drury was the first to publish all five documents in order and in their entirety, as well as the first to argue that the entire group should be read in concert as Whitman's overland diary. This determination clearly arises from the observation that Whitman herself refers to her writing as a diary in her first journal-letter home. Within the first sentence she communicates that she has finally found it "practicable" to assent to her mother's proposal "concerning keeping a diary as I journey" (Drury, *First* 40). All four of the letters are in diary format, with entries written every day or few days that report on such information as the weather, their method of travel, and the varied scenery. Taken together they represent one long journal-letter of her journey on the Overland Trail. In deciding to keep this record of her experiences, Whitman joined a long tradition of female travel writing, dating back to the fourth century.

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single woman, Cynthia Farrar served as a teacher in India from 1827 until her death in 1862. Before 1861, about ten other single women also served as missionaries under the ABCFM (Welter 627).

<sup>92</sup>According to Drury, at least two other letters from the journey are no longer extant, one written to her husband's mother and another addressed to her own parents (*First* 40). A letter addressed to Whitman's sister and brother-in-law is also in existence and will be addressed later in the chapter.

*Female Travel(ers) Writing*

In *Moving Lives: Twentieth-Century Women's Travel Writing*, Sidonie Smith outlines the major periods and purposes of travel from the fourth century through today. In her overview, she identifies the scholar, the crusader, and the pilgrim as the three distinct species of European traveler from the fourth through the fifteenth centuries. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the opening up of the globe introduced the narrative of exploration and conquest as a new popular form of travel writing. These accounts presented male heroes who “jumped onto unknown shores, named the land and its inhabitants, conquered and pacified those who resisted, [...] and crossed frontiers.” Such blatant, and often bloody, attempts at colonization were gradually replaced by the more “scientific” work of naturalist-travelers who “eagerly collected, described, named, and cataloged” the new world opened up to the west. At the same time, young male aristocrats were engaging in a new version of the chivalric rite of passage known as the “grand tour.” By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, missionaries were spanning the globe intent on the “civilizing” mission, while travelers motivated by commercial interests brought their own “secularized version” of this mission to “underdeveloped” peoples. This particular breed of travel writer positioned himself as “representative of a superior and civilized culture and an agent of beneficial change” (Smith 1-7)

Smith's overview reveals that traveling and travel writing are historically specific forms, reflecting and reproducing ever-changing models of masculinity. According to Eric J. Leed, “from the time of Gilgamesh” what he terms “spermatic travel” has served as “the medium of traditional male immortalities,” allowing men to escape death through the act of journeying, as well as through the “record[ing]” of that journey “in bricks, books, and

stories” (286). In contrast to the heroic male traveler sits the “sessile” female, permanently planted within the home, in effect representing home itself (171). How interesting, relates Mary Morris, “that the bindings in women’s corsets were called *stays*. Someone who wore stays wouldn’t be going very far” (25). Moreover, female sessility is connected to the needs of the masculine hero since women represent home, or in Meaghan Morris’s words, “the place from which the voyage begins and to which, in the end, it returns” (12). Conversely, the male hero may seek travel in order to reject the static way of life represented by the female, as Huck Finn does when he lights out for territory in order to escape the restrictive, civilizing efforts of Aunt Polly. Either way, the concept of a journey is predicated on the existence of a fixed location, a home where females reside. Thus, the success of the mobile male depends on the cooperation (at least in theory) of the immobile female.

Yet, the image of the fixed female does not reflect reality. “[E]ven though travel has generally been associated with men and masculine prerogatives, even though it has functioned as a domain of constitutive masculinity,” counters Smith, “women have always been and continue to be on the move” (x). Throughout history women have engaged in many, if not all, of the major forms of travel. For one thousand years, from Egeria in the fourth century to Margery Kempe in the fourteenth century, women traveled and wrote as scholars and pilgrims.<sup>93</sup> In the age of conquest and settlement that followed, though “European women did not actively participate in discovering or in taking possession of other lands,” they did cross oceans as wives, daughters, indentured servants, convicts, and slaves. Women, too, became naturalist observers, participating in the cataloging of new species made possible by the previous era of exploration. Finally, women also set out on and

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<sup>93</sup>For a history of the pilgrimage narrative, including Egeria’s *Peregrinatio*, see Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1984).

recorded their experiences as grand tourists, as did Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in her series of journal-letters written while her husband was British ambassador to Turkey and published posthumously in 1763 (Smith 11-14).

Although Smith identifies the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a significant period during which male travelers took to the work of “civilizing” primitive peoples, she does not address this period from the perspective of female travel. Instead, she focuses on a new breed of female traveler emerging at mid century and represented by figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Nancy Prince, and Frances Kemble: “the woman of some independent means and some independence of mind who was just as eager as certain men of the time to expand her horizon of knowledge and her arena of agency through travel” (Smith 16).<sup>94</sup> Since Smith’s ultimate focus is twentieth-century women’s travel narratives, it is quite understandable that her path there includes leaps and bounds over particular periods. She even admits that her survey of Western travel is “all too brief” (10). Yet located within this gap is an unprecedented experience for the American female traveler, the overland migrations of the second third of the nineteenth century.

*“We have stopped our wagons to write a little”*: *Writing on the Overland Trail*

For Americans at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the 7,000 miles that lay between the United States and India – traversed on a regular basis by merchants – seemed much less formidable than the 3,000 miles that stretched westward across the prairies, through Indian country and over the Rocky Mountains. This distance did not long remain a mystery, for beginning in the 1840s, driven by hard-hitting economic depression and the promise of free land, emigrants took to the Overland Trail in increasing numbers. Between 1841 and 1866, roughly 350,000 people made the journey west to Oregon and California. Happily for us,

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<sup>94</sup> Wollstonecraft and Kemble both composed versions of the journal-letter form.



many of these travelers recorded the details of their journey in diaries and letters, aware that they were not just taking part in, but were also helping to create, a national history. In fact, the experience of overland migration inspired more personal writing than any other event save the Civil War (Schlissel 9, 24).

Though we usually think of travel as an experience embarked upon for the purpose of pleasure, following a circular path that originates at and returns to a fixed point, migratory travel problematizes this perception. Instead, as Jennifer Steadman reminds us, travel “fundamentally express[es] movement, mobility from place to geographical place, regardless of whether the mobility was forced or chosen” (4). This definition underscores the reality that travel does not have to begin and end in the same place; neither has it always, or even mostly, served the purpose of pleasure.

Scholarly work on travel writing has, perhaps unwittingly, contributed to narrow conceptions of female travel in particular. As Sara Mills notes, much of this work has been confined to the later Victorian period in an attempt “to disprove the stereotyped view of Victorian women” and complicate the ideology of separate spheres (33). The emphasis has centered on the leisure travel of the Victorian woman, revealing how travel allowed her to escape the restrictions of home, as Maria Frawley suggests, “getting outside of those boundaries to a place where one could do more” (14). Smith also concentrates on female travelers after mid-century since for these women travel and travel writing allowed them “to reimagine themselves away from the spectacles of femininity constraining them at home” (20). In consequence of this focus on a particular kind of Victorian woman traveler,

perceptions of how women have experienced and represented travel in their writing are skewed.<sup>95</sup>

Instead of setting off on a leisure trip “ambitious of adventure and knowledge” as did the independent Victorian woman (Smith 15), the women who took to the Overland Trail were not just traveling, but migrating. This difference is essential because they sometimes moved forward without a choice, and definitely without the comfort that they would be returning home, no matter how constraining that home may have been. Though many works have addressed the frontier or pioneer woman, fewer have focused on women’s experience traveling through and to the frontier.<sup>96</sup> Amy L. Wink identifies an essential difference between the writings of pioneer women and emigrant women. The former were composed while settled in homes where women “replicated the domestic places they had left as closely as possible,” while the latter “were maintained during a physical transition” when the knowledge of where they would end up was nebulous at best (6). This moment of physical transition is key to all travel writing, but takes on heightened significance in the writings of emigrants. “As these women traveled through the unfamiliar regions of the Overland Trail,” posits Wink, “the literal space between their former home and their new homes, as well as the figurative space between who they once were and who they would now become, also had to be safely traversed” (6). Through these experiences, geographic discovery and self-discovery coincided, writing performing a significant role in helping women negotiate these literal and figurative transformations.

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<sup>95</sup> In *Traveling Economies*, Jennifer Steadman shows that popular representations of the female traveler during the Victorian period were damaging and inaccurate. Parodies in periodicals such as *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* portrayed female travelers as foolish and impulsive in order to discourage other would-be travelers. Steadman argues that such representations of women amounted to the “erasure of other models of earlier female travelers—be they workers, activists, or journalists—such as those found in the pioneering journeys” (3).

<sup>96</sup>The fullest treatment of the Overland Trail experience in women’s own words is Lillian Schlissel’s *Women’s Diaries of the Westward Journey* (1982).

That women would choose to write their way through these experiences is not surprising, given that the acts of traveling and writing have long been interdependent. In fact, traveling has historically afforded women a sense of enhanced authority through experience. Smith shows that in the nineteenth century, “[t]ravel provided women an acceptable occasion to record, describe, catalog, analyze, reflect on, and report what they had seen, what they had learned, and what they had to do in order to see and learn” (19). Even if the words woman and travel were theoretically incongruent, women who did travel were encouraged and even expected to narrate their experiences. Such published works as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (1796), and Sarah Kemble Knight’s 1704 travel diary (1825), offered precedents of female travel writing for would-be writers. Family members also prompted travelers to keep a record of their journey to share. For instance, Whitman recalls in a letter home that before her departure her mother proposed she keep a diary of her journey (Drury, *First* 40). In her study of Frances Simpson’s 1830 journal-letter, Kathryn Carter shows that the family and friends of this upper-middle class British woman “invited and solicited” her response to the new world (27). Even without encouragement, Andrew Hassam identifies “the novelty of being transported to an alien environment” as a primary motive for keeping travel diaries (“As I Write” 47).

Furthermore, improved materials for writing and the material conditions of traveling in many cases offered female travelers increased opportunities for writing. The fact that writing accessories were more readily available and of better quality in the early nineteenth century undoubtedly contributed to a traveler’s ability to write away from home. For instance, by 1812 the Letts firm was producing booklets specifically for diary writing, and

fifteen years later advertisements boasted of “a portable quill pen” that would make a “very desirable and useful present” especially for ladies (Hassam, *Sailing to Australia* 22; Whalley 19). Additionally, the disruption of daily routines inherent in travel often gave women more time conducive to writing (Smith 19). Though the conditions could be harsh, particularly on the overland crossing, without the cares of running a household or the obligations of visiting family and friends, even women with small children in tow may have found more time for penning their experiences while on the road than while in the home. Therefore, travel provides women with occasions, inclinations, and conditions suitable for writing.

The conditions of travel also lend themselves to the adoption of the journal-letter form. This was likely the case in relatively uncharted territories, such as the American west of the nineteenth century, where access to institutional forms of sending and receiving mail was limited. For all emigrants the need to remain connected with home is threatened by the distance that they must traverse in order to make a new life. In such instances, travelers may create journal-letters as a knee-jerk response to conditions, indefinitely adding to letters they cannot find opportunity to send. For some shipboard emigrants to Australia in the nineteenth century, the desire to correspond impelled them to throw letters attached to lumps of coal onto passing ships headed back to Ireland (Hassam, *No Privacy for Writing* 27). Whitman also comments on the unpredictable opportunities for finding couriers of letters while on the Overland Trail: “a man from the mountains has come who will take this to the [post] office. [...] We have just met him and we have stopped our wagons to write a little” (Drury, *First* 54). As her account demonstrates, the members of the caravan found it worthwhile to stop the party’s progress in order to write home. Although some of the travelers probably scribbled hasty letters to one or two family members at this time, no doubt many of the

travelers, Whitman included, used this moment to add final remarks to open-ended letters (i.e. journal-letters) already in progress. The act of maintaining letters always in progress no doubt helped strengthen an emigrant's sense of connection with those at home since it afforded them the opportunity to be in continual "conversation" with loved ones.

If the journal-letter's hybrid nature caters to the physical circumstances of extended travel, it also reflects a writer's emotional and intellectual need to make meaning out of experiences away from home through the reference point of home. While the diary offers the opportunity for the creation of an ongoing, diurnal record, neatly ordered by date and time, the letter provides a sense of connection with home during the unsettling experience of traveling. Combining these two forms, the journal-letter encourages writers to create the fullest possible account of new experiences, while remaining grounded in the familiar experiences represented by the correspondent to whom the text is addressed. Letters, according to David Gerber, allow immigrants to connect with significant individuals who share common "memories of a shared past and an experience of place that we have thought of as a homeplace, both a physical location and a center of security, intimacy, and community" (3). In this way the journal-letter exists as a textual intermediary between the old and the new, the self prior to the journey and the self created through the journey. It is perhaps this function of the journal-letter that attracts travelers, wittingly or unwittingly, to its form. If the physical ground that an emigrant walks, rides, or sails is literally the space between her former home and a new one, the journal-letter text represents how she imagines that space and herself within it, as well as a mental bridge between the past and the future. It is a space for the negotiation of the multiple identities available to the emigrant traveler, where identities may be adopted, rejected, lost, and found.

*“Betwixt and Between”: Identity on the Overland Trail*

Travel writing is intimately connected with issues of identity. Kristi Siegel claims that travel writing “elicits [...] identity upheaval” since, in the process of travel, “[t]ravelers might lose their sense of identity altogether or, conversely, find their sense of self sharpened by the journey” (7). Frances Bartkowski also understands travel as a potentially identity-challenging event: “the demands placed upon the subject in situations of unfamiliarity and dislocation produce a scene in which the struggle for identity comes more clearly into view” (xix). Furthermore, Frawley shows that although female leisure travelers in the nineteenth century identified themselves with European values and mores, travel was also an occasion for trying on new identities as “different places” offered “different opportunities for self-fashioning” (37). Gerber views such opportunities as risky for immigrants in particular who “have always risked a radical rupture of the self, a break in their understandings of who they are” (3).

For emigrants, the issue of identity is even more complex since they will not return to the homes from whence they came. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, analyses of writings by women traveling through and settling on the frontier often emphasize the need for stability of identity during physical transition. Instead of embracing opportunities for identity transformation, Gayle Davis shows that the Victorian-woman-turned-pioneer employed diary writing purposefully for the maintenance of self-image; “the more her identity was threatened, the more crucial writing became” (8). Confronted with “foreign” people, places, and experiences, these women turned to writing as, in Davis’s terms, a “coping mechanism” (5). Similarly, in her analysis of women’s Overland Trail diaries, Wink posits that recasting alien landscapes in familiar terms allowed emigrants to “assure some constancy to their own

sense of identity” (3). She identifies a close correlation between the transitional territories through which emigrants traveled, the need to know those places through writing, and the ability to maintain a stable identity. According to Wink, female emigrants employed conventional romantic imagery to describe the sights they saw, “locat[ing] themselves [...] just as they had been positioned within the particular places they had previously known” and “reinforc[ing] and control[ling] their own sense of self” (10). Through analysis of two women’s overland diaries, she concludes that the act of rendering the landscape textually recognizable “enabled them to maintain the continuity of their identities” (48).<sup>97</sup>

Although women may have intentionally or unintentionally employed scenic description for this purpose, the view that writing necessarily produced stability of identity in the midst of the overland crossing seems a bit limited and limiting. Instead of finding constancy in her reading of women’s Overland Trail diaries, Georgi-Findlay characterizes representations of landscapes as “inconsistent and shifting,” reflecting the insecurities of their writers who saw themselves “one day as trespassers in a country they perceived as foreign” and “the next day [...] as tourists on a pleasure trip” (xiii). Here she touches on the complex negotiations of identity that emigrants faced, negotiations that were by no means stable or continuous and were necessarily a part of their textual records.

Transformation of identity is a chief component in cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s work on ritual processes, and as such can be brought to bear on the subject of emigrant writings. Turner bases his ideas about ritual processes on Arthur Van Gennep’s *rites de passage*. These rites exist in all societies and “indicate and constitute transitions between states,” or “relatively fixed or stable condition[s]” such as occupation, office, legal

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<sup>97</sup>One of the texts Wink references is actually a journal-letter in form, Jean Rio Baker’s “By Windjammer to Prairie Schooner, London to Salt Lake City” (1851-1852). Though Wink acknowledges the text is directed to her family and friends in England, the hybridity of the text is not considered in her analysis (31).

status, or rank (93). All rites consist of three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation. I quote at length Turner's description of these phases:

The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger') is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards. (94)

Turner's most influential work concerns the second, or liminal, phase. Significantly, most secular societies have no name for the ritual subject in this phase; she is effectively invisible, a "structurally indefinable 'transitional-being'" (95). This is precisely what makes limen so intriguing. The condition of the subject in transition is "one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories." Yet, existing within and perhaps because of this confusion, the liminal phase asserts itself "as the realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (97).

The transitional being of the liminal phase shares a certain kinship with the traveler on the Overland Trail. Having undergone separation from family, friends, and home, yet awaiting aggregation into a new community, the emigrant exists in and travels through liminal space. The overland crossing represents a physical limbo between the old



home/self/life that has passed away and the new home/self/life that looms on the horizon. Whitman not only faced the physical transition of relocating to Oregon, but also the psychological transition from singlehood to the married state, a process that Turner would include as a distinct *rite de passage* in nearly every society. Her doubled liminality had a profound impact on how she chose to write her experiences. While existing in this space of literal and metaphorical limbo, Whitman is freed from cultural conventions that limit her ability to take on strong, authoritative, even masculine identities. In her journal-letters, which also exist in limbo between two distinct forms of writing – the diary and the letter – she textually negotiates these provisional identities, using them to aid in her transition from Prentiss to Whitman, schoolteacher to missionary.

*“But I am not sad”: The Contradictory Identity of the Honeymooner*

When Whitman placed her feet upon the Overland Trail, she did so as a newlywed. Her sense of leaving home was perhaps heightened by the fact that she was not only leaving a physical place but also cleaving to a new husband. Given her liminal position as a newlywed, the journal-letter writing that Whitman composes can also be characterized as a honeymoon narrative. If the overland crossing did not constitute a typical honeymoon experience, it did constitute reality for Whitman who spent her first months as a married woman traveling 1,900 miles on horseback to Oregon. The western concept of the honeymoon trip dovetails nicely with Van Gennep’s second stage of the ritual process, limen. In between the wedding, the symbolic moment of detachment from one’s family and attachment to one’s spouse, and the aggregation phase of settling down together, there is the honeymoon. Though the concept of a honeymoon tour was originally the province of the upper classes, Helena Michie shows that by the 1830s and 1840s, the “honeymoon was

beginning to take a particular shape for middle-class couples” (19). Until the nineteenth century, the honeymoon had referred to a specific time, but by the early Victorian period, which coincided with Whitman’s journey, this initial period of marriage “began to coincide with the expectation of travel” (29). Michie sampled real-life honeymoon writings between 1829 and 1898 to conclude that the honeymoon acts as “a bridge between two clearly demarcated sites with different legal obligations and social duties, marked for women, for example, by expected differences in body, dress, and name.” As such it “becomes a geographical and psychological site for the transformation from single to married subject, a time and place for the shifting of bodily and geographical territories, for the checking of bodily coordinates against maps and expectations” (26). The physical movement away from the fixed point of one’s previous home to the temporary honeymoon destination and then finally to the fixed point of a new home symbolizes the figurative transition from single woman to honeymooner to wife. After leaving behind the rights and responsibilities of her former life, and before adopting the rights and responsibilities connected with her new status as wife and homemaker, the “honeymooner” exists as the “structurally indefinable ‘transitional-being’” of the liminal phase (Turner 94). The cultural work of the honeymoon is that of “reorientation” as each member of the couple must turn away from their birth family and turn towards a new family. In this transition, there are likely also moments of “*disorientation* as familiar points of reference recede and are replaced by new ones” (Michie 57).

For Whitman, the transitional identities of honeymooner and emigrant require that she establish a different relationship to and conceptualization of “home.” Not surprisingly, glances homeward are part and parcel of the writings of the newly wedded, as well as female

writers on the Trail. Mentions of homesickness arise often in newlywed diaries and letters showing that marriage represented “among other things, a real loss of connection.” For example, in 1850 Susan Miers writes in her honeymoon diary: “How I wished for my dear parents, particularly that one dearest of all, who would have been the one to give me to Frank” (Michie 61). Taking to the Trail also meant leaving behind “the domestic circle that had encased much of their lives in stable communities” (Schlissel 28). The pain of separation, which unlike that of the honeymoon was often final, was acute and long-lasting. Schlissel refers to the overland crossing as an “anti-mythic journey” for women who left their homes “with anguish, a note conspicuously absent from the diaries of men” (13). For married women with children, the central task of the journey was holding families together against the threat of dissolution (15), but women like Whitman who went forward without these larger kinship networks had a different task. This task was the same as that of the honeymooner – to create a new family.

Though Whitman desired to go on this journey, at the outset, remembrances of home evoke painful emotional responses that she must quickly neutralize through recourse to her sense of duty to her husband and her mission. Her contradictory feelings typify the struggle to leave behind her previous identity and take on a new one. In her first journal-letter home, she spends time describing their manner of travel, accommodations, and the beautiful scenery, much like any tourist; however, when she experiences a great disappointment, the reality of her situation sinks in. “We are now in port. Husband has been to the Office expecting to find letters from dear dear friends at home but find none. Why have they not written,” she inquires of her journal-letter, “seeing it is the very last, last time they will have to cheer my heart with intelligence from home, home, sweet home, and the friends I love”

(Drury, *First* 42). The emotional intensity with which she writes grows out of the larger cultural context of the early nineteenth century, a period when Americans began moving around more in search of better jobs, more land, and increased opportunities. Letters represented one of the few practical means of maintaining kinship ties at a distance. The obstacles to and costs of traveling long distance coupled with high mortality rates meant that there was a very good chance family members who left their home communities might never return. In Ronald Zboray's words, "Separation could well be eternal" (28). In this early entry Whitman gives voice to the pain of this separation. Repetition of the significant words dear, last, and home constitute an emphatic pleading for connection to her previous life as it fades farther into the distance.

Significantly, Whitman questions why "they" – rather than "you" – did not write. Since she does send this journal-letter home, her use of the third person pronoun to refer to her family members is a bit jarring. However, the reality that this text is also written as a diary in which she would have referred to her family in this way, probably explains the seeming incongruity. According to Helen Buss, this type of text is caught in the "double bind of needing to deal with the intimate on occasion while being intended for eyes other than the diarist's" (44-45). Moreover, such inconsistencies may hint at an internal struggle to distance herself from her family and accept her new position as a wife, adopting an "us" and "them" mentality that aligns her with her husband instead of her family. Here she retreats to the interiority of the personal diary form to consider a puzzling question. What does their silence mean? And, if they remain silent, where does that leave her? Their silence may indicate a more serious severing of ties than she expected. But before she has a chance to consider the implications of this silence, Whitman checks her emotions and becomes

audience-directed once more to reassure her readers, “*But I am not sad. My health is good. My mind completely occupied with present duty and passing events*” (Drury, *First* 42). Her former statements, however, belie this assertion, revealing that her thoughts are indeed divided between two seemingly irreconcilable desires: the desire for connection with her family and the desire to fully devote herself to her husband and her mission. The next day she notes that her feelings remain so “peculiar” she cannot “define them.” Then she immediately reaffirms her dedication to the Mission: “I have not one feeling of regret at the step I have taken but count it a privilege to go forth in the name of my Master” (42). Once again momentary uncertainty is followed by firm resolve. She employs the journal-letter form, which allows her to alternate between diary and letter writing, to give voice to these troubling, contradictory emotions.

Since she writes not only for herself, but an audience of family and possibly other members of her home community, the pressure to present herself appropriately undoubtedly plays a large part in her remarks here. Carter shows that nineteenth-century female journal-letter writers had to be “aware of audiences – intended and accidental” and able to “anticipat[e] reader reactions.” Since such accounts were “semi-public,” they could not “offer access to an inner self,” or “explicitly record [one’s] concerns, anxieties, or hopes.” Instead, they reveal “what constitutes acceptable subjects of discourse and knowledge” for women of a certain “social standing at that particular historical moment” (18). For Whitman this entails proving that she is content in the Lord’s work and also in her choice of a husband. No wonder at the end of the first journal-letter, after wishing she had one half hour to whisper “things which [she] cannot write” into her mother’s ear, she confirms, “Dear Mother, I have one of the kindest Husbands and the very best every way” (Drury, *First* 43). Her

scripted confirmation is undermined by a desire to say things that cannot be written. This is not to imply that she is actually unhappy with her husband, but rather that her sensitivity to possible audiences other than her mother precludes a full examination of her feelings, be they positive, negative, or neutral. Is she a homesick daughter or a Christian wife cognizant of her duty? Her uncertainty is reflected not only in textual inconsistencies but also in the meteorological conditions at St. Louis where it is “so late and foggy” that she finds her view of the city – and of herself – “quite indistinct” (42).

Identity confusion continues in the other two short journal-letters. Whitman writes one to her sister Jane and the other to her sister Harriet and brother Edward. Drury reveals in his editorial remarks that these manuscripts included several places where she marked out the personal pronoun “I” and wrote “we” over it. She even draws attention to this at one point when she writes, “I forget and speak in the singular number when I should say we” (Drury, *First* 46). This editing impulse may indicate an attempt on Whitman’s part to adopt the “conjugal gaze” that Michie believes is central to the larger work of “reorientation” performed by the honeymoon. Michie claims that the use of “we” or “us” by Victorian brides in their honeymoon writings signals the construction of a “joint point of view” as couples come to “see things literally the same way” (89, 12).<sup>98</sup> Whitman’s slip-ups reveal that her identity transformation remains in process, for even as she crosses out the “I” of her text, it lingers beneath the “we” as a reminder of the individual she once was.

Perhaps like any newlywed, Whitman resists, if only quietly, letting go of her former self. For women, this change was outwardly symbolized by the adoption of their husband’s surname. Both male and female honeymooners, Michie claims, comment on the changing of

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<sup>98</sup>Michie cautions that this gaze was not an egalitarian one, for if the couple were “to see with one pair of eyes, that pair would [...] usually belong to the husband” (12).

the wife's name in their personal writings. Some anticipated the change with excitement, others with mourning for a "loss of self" (81-82). Whitman does not comment directly on her name change in any of her extant writings; however, she does do so indirectly when she signs one of her journal-letters with her maiden name. The context surrounding this mistake once again suggests ambivalence about her identity. Just before closing the journal-letter she explains that Dr. Whitman has been unable to finish a letter to her parents due to a hurt finger. As if to make up for this neglect, she sends a message to her mother confirming her husband's worth: "Tell mother if I had looked the world over I could not have found one more careful and better qualified to transport a female such a distance." After this comment, she must conclude her letter at her husband's insistence: "Husband says 'Stop.'" (Drury, *First* 54). Whitman represents her husband in contradictory ways, both as her sense of security and as the person severing her from her family. Not only does he seem to avoid establishing ties to her family through letter writing – he only writes one letter to her family over the course of the journey while she writes at least four to his and copies her long journal-letter for his mother – but he is the voice telling her to stop writing, forcing her to lay aside her pen in order to continue moving farther away from her home. She signs this page with her maiden name, Narcissa Prentiss, perhaps an involuntary indication of this subconscious struggle.

The fact that Whitman writes in a form that is both diary and letter reflects and reaffirms her identity confusion. If a personal diary may have allowed her more space to indulge of moments of self doubt and questioning, the epistolary nature of her writing brings a premature end to such musings since she must also accommodate and comfort her audience. Although the hybrid nature of the form helps express the contradictions inherent in

a liminal existence, I will show that it also eventually contributes to the resolution of these contradictions as the liminal subject approaches the third and final phase of aggregation.

*“I wish to write so many ways”: The Liminal Medium of the Journal-Letter*

Whitman’s writing, like her identity, is also in flux, most closely resembling a collage of different genres and styles of writing. Although all of her journal-letter writing exhibits this mixture of styles, an early journal-letter written to her sister Jane helps illustrate this point. Whitman begins with a detailed description of attending mass, confirming her disdain for the Roman Catholic manner of worship - a common refrain in Protestant writings of the period - and affirming the rightness of her faith. She writes as a missionary, reminding readers of the need to stamp out unholy forms of worship with the truth. For a portion of the letter she enters into tourist mode, relating several curiosities including a description of two boats called “Uncle Sam’s Tooth Pullers,” her experience discovering a novel fruit, the prickly pear, and the manner in which westerners speak. At other moments, Whitman sounds as if she is composing a guidebook, noting how far they travel each day, the temperature, and the practical materials necessary for different aspects of the journey. The final mode she adopts in this particular letter is the discourse of the sublime to describe her charged reaction to a moment alone with her new husband amidst grand scenery (Drury, *First* 44-48).

That Whitman pulled from various styles or genres in her writing is not surprising. Diary, letter, and travel writing all test the limits of our genre boundaries. In fact, one of the reasons diary writing has remained on the margins of scholarly inquiry for so long, claim Rachael Langford and Russell West, is because it exists as a “misfit form of writing, inhabiting the frontiers between many neighbouring or opposed domains, often belonging simultaneously to several genres or species and thus being condemned to exclusion from



both at once” (8-9). Similarly, Jacques Derrida characterizes the letter in the following way: “Mixture is the letter, the epistle, which is not a genre but all genres, literature itself” (48). David Barton and Nigel Hall also claim that the versatility of the letter form arises from its indefinability, since “almost anything can be put in the form of a letter” (1). Travel writing, which often takes the form of diary or letter writing, is also comprised of a mix of genres; it is, in Mary Schriber’s words, a “literary carpetbag” (58). Though travel writing is traditionally a book-length depiction of a white male’s journey to a foreign land, the text often includes an amalgamation of factual reporting, meditations on scenery, reflections on interactions with inhabitants, and stories collected from other travelers to the same region. Percy G. Adams shows that travel writing, like other forms of literature, has varied in “its quantity and nature [...] because of political, religious, economic, and other social and human factors. And like them it includes countless subtypes that continually approach each other, separate, join, overlap, and consistently defy neat classification” (38). This patchwork quality provides authors of travel texts “a tremendous amount of freedom in both subject matter and style” (Steadman 16), and is likely what allowed women authors from mid-nineteenth century onwards to participate increasingly in this genre, not only through formal, published works, but also through personal diary and letter writing (Schriber 58). To write a travel journal-letter, then, is to write in all of these “mistfit” forms at once.

If the journal-letter is a misfit form, it still exhibits certain characteristics that distinguish it from letters and diaries proper. Its distinctiveness from the epistolary form is represented in another piece of writing Whitman wrote while on the Trail. In addition to the three short journal-letters Whitman sent to her family during the first few months of the journey when the party still had some access to institutional systems of sending and receiving

mail, she also composed one other extant letter during this time to her husband's sister and brother-in-law. However, I part from Drury by choosing not to include this letter as part of her "overland diary," as he calls it, for a number of reasons. For one, rather than being written in diary format to capture the events of the particular days she is writing, the document offers what we would expect from a conventional letter, a summary of all that has happened since her last writing. This letter is a perfect example of one of the significant distinctions between a journal-letter and a letter composed over a period of days or weeks. Since there is no design to record the daily, the fact that this letter is written on two different dates – three weeks apart – communicates only that Whitman decided to append the original letter with new information when she continued to have no opportunity to send it, an admission she makes in the text.

Furthermore, this letter is written to a completely different audience than the others. Although her other letters bear different addressees – her mother and various siblings – it is clear that Whitman believes them to be meant for a common audience of family and friends. This is made evident when Whitman writes to Jane, "This letter is free plunder [...]. I will write to you again but on reflecting what I say to one I say to all. I should like to write to each of you separately but I wish to write so many ways that all my time is so occupied that I cannot write as much as I want to" (Drury, *First* 47). Here she offers permission, though she probably need not have, to share her letter amongst the larger family. Her attempt to address letters to different family members was probably a means of gratifying them, but the fact that she avoids repeating information and offers asides to various family members in each letter reveals that the documents should be read as parts of a larger whole, all destined for a common audience of family and close friends. This continuity of audience is necessary for

the coherence of the journal-letter form. Because it does not record the daily or share the same audience, both prerequisites of journal-letter writing, the letter written to Dr.

Whitman's family cannot be read as part of the larger journal-letter record of her journey.

I emphasize this distinction between her journal-letter writing and her conventional letter writing because I believe the two serve different purposes for Whitman. When she writes to her husband's family, she responds to the pressure to adopt a stable identity, but in her journal-letter written to an audience with whom she feels much more comfortable – her family – the identity confusion she experiences cannot help but spill over onto the page. This difference can be seen in the format of the letter she writes to her in-laws. Dated June 27 and July 16, 1836, the contents summarize the high points of the journey from May 19 – presumably the last time she wrote to Dr. Whitman's mother – to the present moment. This consistency of content and form also results in a much more unified tone. Whitman presents herself as a serious-minded young woman dedicated to the mission before her. Where she waffles between regret and resolution in communications with her family, to her husband's family she appears unwavering. Intimate assurances of her personal happiness are replaced by trite declarations such as, "We feel that the Lord has prospered us in our journey beyond our most sanguine expectations" (Drury, *First* 57). Notice that she employs the plural pronoun "we" here; these assurances, when made to her family, are always in the first person singular. Whitman not only writes from the perspective of the unified "conjugal gaze," but also the gaze of the missionary, presumably shared by all members destined for the Oregon mission. Perhaps because she writes retrospectively, she also benefits from more temporal distance from events and feelings, distance which enables her to construct a more stable self-presentation. Jennifer Sinor, who identifies dailiness, or writing "in the days," as the primary

characteristic of diaries, also argues that a writer who writes in the moment is unable to create the kind of critical distance we associate with reflection. Thus, the “diarist cannot shape events or stories because she will never know when an event or story has begun or ended” (18). Furthermore, that her self-presentation would be less consistent and more vulnerable in her writing to her family – those who know and love her best – is not surprising. The diurnal format of the journal-letter, as well as the fact that it is written to loving readers, account for these differences.

Though the journal-letter shares this diurnal format with the diary, the diary is not usually written with the same focus on an immediate, specific readership that characterizes correspondence. Although diary writing by women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has come to be viewed as a semi-public activity, since these texts often were read aloud to family members and/or were expected to constitute an ongoing family history for succeeding generations, the audiences of such texts remain only “ambiguous and general” (Martinson 6). Schlissel shows, “As a general category, the nineteenth-century diary is something like a family history, a souvenir meant to be shared like a Bible, handed down through generations, to be viewed not as an individual’s story but as the history of a family’s growth and course through time” (10). In most instances, we cannot know who the writer had in mind as an audience during the act of composing, and thus cannot analyze the effect of this audience (potential or real as the case may be) on her writing choices. This is not to downplay the significance of such scholarly efforts, only to suggest that the diary with an audience, as it has been understood, is a distinct species from the journal-letter.

This difference has not been taken into account in analyses of Overland Trail writings, which rarely distinguish between the two types of texts. Instead, most simply

acknowledge that diaries of the crossing were often sent home to family members and may have been inadvertently published in local periodicals (Schlissel 10, Georgi-Findlay xiii). While this recognition is necessary in order to show that even if female accounts did not make it into national publication as male accounts did, they still participated in the public discourse of migration, it may also contribute to an erroneous conception that all such diaries were written with this (semi-)public purpose in mind. On the contrary, Whitman's journal-letter exhibits a higher degree of reader awareness than many of these diaries because she composed her text not just for a vague notion of posterity, but for specific readers with whom she shared deep emotional and familial relationships.

*"Came fifteen miles without seeing water": The Objective Identity of the Female Guide*

One of the significant differences I have found between diary and journal-letter writing is that, in the main, diary writers spend less time recording crucial information about what it took to survive on the Trail than journal-letter writers. In this way, journal-letters more closely resemble the kind of writing one would find in an emigrant guidebook. For example, of the six women who crossed the Rockies as part of the missionary parties of 1836 and 1838, three kept journal-letters and two kept personal diaries. All of the journal-letter writers (Whitman, Myra Eells, and Sarah White Smith) regularly noted practical information such as distance and food sources while the diary writers (Spalding and Mary Richardson Walker) only did so occasionally.<sup>99</sup> Whitman appropriates this discourse in her journal-letter writing, establishing her as not only one of the first women to physically cross the Rocky Mountains, but also the first to narrate and "publish" what is essentially a female guidebook to the Overland Trail. (I use the term "publish" here to represent the circulation of such

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<sup>99</sup> Smith's diary is recorded in Drury's *These Mountains We Have Crossed* (1999) and the diaries of Eells and Walker can be found in Drury's *On to Oregon* (1998).

documents among an audience of family, friends, and acquaintances, as well as the instances when portions of journal-letters were printed in local periodicals.) As Gaul notes, emigrant guides constituted “the dominant published genre emerging from the Overland Trail journey and, as such, were one of the most powerful cultural narratives describing the overland experience” (“Some is Writing” 5). Emigrants used these texts not only to determine what accoutrements should be procured for their journey, but also as “roadmaps” to their destination. Guides offered visual maps as well as textual descriptions of the Trail, including such significant details as where water, food, fuel, and shelter could be found and what one could expect the weather to be like during the months emigrants were likely to travel. These guides could be lifelines for those who had already decided to make the trek, but they also acted as promotional tools, beckoning potential emigrants westward with promises that the western territories would prove “a panacea for both agricultural and personal problems” (Schlissel 20). Writing for herself and only the possibility of a future audience, Whitman’s female companion Spalding clearly did not feel the need to record what readers today would consider tedious minutiae. However, this is precisely what the real, contemporary readers of Whitman’s text expected. And she did not disappoint them.

When Whitman channels this guidebook tradition in her journal-letter writing, she assumes an authoritative identity as a knowledgeable guide, an identity typically associated with the masculine act of exploration. This identity is available to her precisely because of her liminal status. Despite the fact that there are over eight hundred diaries and “day journals” kept by women who made the journey now published or catalogued in archives across the nation, and countless others that remain in private collections (Schlissel 10), there were no female guidebooks to the Overland Trail available in the heyday of migration.

Tellingly, Annette Kolodny identifies only two female-authored guidebooks published in the nineteenth century, both of which focused on settlement in the prairies (15, 99).<sup>100</sup> In the nineteenth century, then, guidebook writing was overwhelmingly “masculine in genesis and emphasis” (Gaul, “Some is Writing” 20).

Although specific guides to the Overland Trail were not in publication before 1836 when the missionary party departed, it is likely that the missionaries who made the journey were familiar with the guidebook genre. Percy Adams shows that by 1800 there were hundreds of guidebooks, ranging “from Pausanias in Ancient Greece, to itineraries for pilgrims headed for holy shrines, to road and river maps, to city plans, to lists of antiquities, to routes for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Grand Tour” (38). In the nineteenth century, such official records as the journals kept by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark during the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-06), which also proved to be popular reading material, provided a model for other travelers and explorers to imitate. Per presidential instructions, Lewis’s and Clark’s records included detailed descriptions of new plant and animal species, the appearance and behaviors of various Indian tribes, and straight-forward accounts of the party’s movements. Information about “personal attitudes” was discouraged (Kagle, *Early Nineteenth-Century* 27). Unlike the conqueror-explorers of an earlier period, the members of naturalistic expeditions such as this positioned themselves as “disinterested ‘scientists’ [...] men pursuing objective knowledge, not corrupting power” (Smith 4).

These men, as Smith identifies them, employed the pretense of objectivity to establish their authority as explorers. On a popular level, in the eighteenth century the Royal Society

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<sup>100</sup> Kolodny cites Mary Austin Holley’s *Texas: Observations Historical, Geographical and Descriptive* (1833) and Eliza Farnham’s *Life in Prairie Land* (1846) written about Illinois (98). The watershed of guidebook publication postdates both the 1836 and 1838 missionary crossings. One of the earliest was published by the Reverend Samuel Parker, one of Whitman’s associates, in 1838 and was based on a journal kept during his trip.

offered directions for would-be travelers highlighting the types of scientific information that should be recorded in travel accounts (Frohock 81).<sup>101</sup> Mary Louise Pratt dates this change in the tenor of travel writing to the publication of Carl Linneaus's *Systema Naturæ* (1735), which offered a simple classificatory system for all plant life. After this,

Travel and travel writing would never be the same again. In the second half of the eighteenth century, whether or not an expedition was primarily scientific, or the traveler a scientist, natural history played a part in it. Specimen gathering, the building up of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known ones, became standard themes in travel and travel books. [...] Travel narratives of all kinds began to develop leisurely pauses filled with gentlemanly 'naturalizing.' (27)

Like Smith, Pratt also identifies such writing practices with men; "naturalizing" was clearly a gentleman's pastime. Despite this association with masculinity, and perhaps because there were no female models to draw from, women also imitated this convention of guidebook writing.<sup>102</sup>

A few examples from one of the earliest guidebooks to the Overland Trail demonstrates what constituted typical guidebook material. Reverend Samuel Parker's journal-based guidebook, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (1838), is particularly significant to this study since it was he who originally proposed an Oregon

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<sup>101</sup>Richard Frohock identifies a symbiosis between the rhetoric of conquest and the rhetoric of science in eighteenth-century British accounts of exploration. Not only did scientists appropriate the discourse of conquest in their descriptions of the world, "conquest and empire provided science with specific aspirations: as the British became more knowledgeable about the wider world, they would also come to control more of it" (82).

<sup>102</sup>In her study of the Stewart sisters' overland diaries, Gaul shows that even though each of the sisters employed the discourse of the emigrant guidebook in their overland writings, it was ultimately inadequate for representing their experiences, requiring that they turn to other "cultural narratives" that held more "personal significance" for them, specifically the discourses of romanticism and female love ("Some is Writing" 5-7).



mission, recruited the Whitmans, and traveled ahead of them to survey the conditions. Furthermore, because he clearly desired to obtain support and funding for missionary activities in the west, his purposes in writing may more closely approximate those of the 1836 missionary party than secular guidebook authors. Information about mileage, topography, and sources of food and water were paramount: “To-day we traveled twenty miles, through a somewhat barren country, and down several steep descents, and arrived at what is called Jackson’s Hole, and encamped upon a small stream of water”; “Found some buffalo today, of which our men killed a small number. These were a timely supply, as our provisions were becoming scarce”; “We traveled four hours on the 25<sup>th</sup>, to another branch of Lewis’ or Snake river, and encamped in a large pleasant valley, commonly called Jackson’s large Hole. [...] This vale is well supplied with grass of excellent quality, which was very grateful to our horses” (Parker 82-85). In addition to calculating mileage and noting potential sources of food, Parker also includes detailed information significant to the naturalist, including geographic formations, animal and plant life, a meteorological chart of the high and low temperatures each day, and a map of the Oregon territory.

Whitman just as often recorded this kind of vital information, particularly in her longer journal-letter that she kept from July through December 1836. Entries might record only the most basic information, as did these: “20<sup>th</sup> came twelve miles in the same direction as on the 18<sup>th</sup> over many steep & high mountains. On the 21<sup>st</sup> our course was southeast in the morning. Traveled fifteen miles.” Or, more often, they included detailed information, while maintaining a characteristically objective tone. On July 25<sup>th</sup> Whitman writes:

Came fifteen miles today. Very mountainous. Encamped on Smith’s creek, a small branch of Bear River. Bear River empties into Salt Lake, called on maps,

Timpanogos. That Lake has not outlet & is said to be a curiosity by those who have visited it. Large quantities of Salt may be obtained from the Shore and that of the finest quality. We do not expect to pass it, said to be a tedious route, no water or buffalo in going from it. Endure the ride today very well notwithstanding its difficulties. Very mountainous. Paths winding on the sides of steep mountains. In some place the path is so narrow as scarcely to afford room for the animal to place his foot. Passed a creek on which were a fine bunch of Gooseberries, nearly ripe, relished them very much. They were not as sweet when ripe as those in the states nor prickly. (Drury, *First* 74)

A reader gleans a lot of important information from this one passage, including directions for traveling, information about dangerous terrain, warnings not to abandon the designated path to visit a “curiosity” where there is no food or water available, and evidence of a potential source of food. As one reads through both Parker’s guidebook and Whitman’s journal-letter, there is a similar sense that each writer is creating a textual map for others to follow, and that a wise traveler will heed what they have said.

Spalding’s personal diary provides a telling comparison to Whitman’s journal-letter since both women traveled together on the journey, yet recorded their experiences in different forms. Spalding was married to Henry Harmon Spalding, one of Whitman’s former suitors. In an ironic twist of fate, these two couples found themselves bound for Oregon together. But it was at least two years before their departure and within six months of her marriage to Henry, that Spalding originally evinced a desire to be a “missionary to the heathen.” While her husband was attending Lane Theological Seminary – where she also took classes in Greek and Hebrew studies – the two formed a club for missions-minded

students. In a letter to her sister in March 1834, she asked rhetorically, “What object can we engage in that will compare with the cause of missions?” For Spalding, nothing could compare: “For this object I wish to exert my powers and spend my strength. [...] When I reflect upon the wretched condition of those benighted souls who are sitting in the gloom and shadow of death, I actually long to depart and be with them, to tell them the story of a Saviour’s dying love.” Like Whitman, Spalding also felt the call to missions, not as obviously independent of her husband’s call, but at the very least in conjunction with his. Within a year and a half, the Spaldings’ desire to become missionaries was realized when the American Board appointed them to the Oregon Mission. On the day she departed from home, February 1, 1836, Spalding began a personal diary in which she recorded the events of the overland crossing. She continued to write in this diary, if sometimes sporadically, until July 28, 1840. In the introduction to Spalding’s diary, Drury concludes that this text was “evidently written only for herself” (Drury, *First* 178-81). Since Spalding never returned back east, and never expected to, the diary presumably remained in her possession until her death. It is therefore probable that the document never met the eyes of any of her family members.<sup>103</sup>

Spalding’s style of narration differs significantly from Whitman’s, for although she includes practical information every so often, for the most part her writing focuses on her personal experiences of, and reactions to, life on the Trail. Though Whitman records mileage or the number of hours traveled nearly every day, there is only one instance when Spalding notes the amount of distance traveled in a day, and there are a few scattered references to the

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<sup>103</sup>Her brother, Horace, is a possible exception since he migrated to Oregon in 1846 (Drury, *First* 181). Spalding’s diary was bequeathed to her eldest daughter, Eliza Spalding Warren, who published a portion of her mother’s diary in her own work, *Memoirs of the West, the Spaldings* (1916) (Drury, *First* 184).

mileage or distance in hours between two points.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the most significant cataloging of this type occurs on June 21, 1836, when Spalding locates herself in space: “This day we are to leave this post, and have no resting place in view till we reach the Rendezvous 400 miles distant. We are now 2,800 miles from my dear parent’s dwelling, expecting in a few days to commence ascending the Rocky Mountains” (Drury, *First* 192).<sup>105</sup> Rather than counting miles as evidence of accomplishment or as a guide for others, in this instance doing so serves predominantly to remind her of the distance separating her from home and all she holds dear. She feels weak in mind and body, concluding, “Only He who knows all things knows whether this debilitated frame will survive the undertaking. His will, not mine, be done” (192).<sup>106</sup> That she is closer to the Rendezvous, the annual meeting place of fur traders and the symbolic end of civilization, and to the “unheard of” task of crossing the Rockies than she is to her parents is a startling realization. Though she professes resignation to God’s will, her language projects despair. If Spalding is charting a map here it is figurative and personal, rather than physical and objective.

There are relatively few days on which Whitman and Spalding both wrote entries, but August 3 and August 6 are notable exceptions. Reading these entries side by side offers insight into what each woman believed significant enough to record. On the first of these days the ladies enjoyed a momentous event, their arrival at Fort Hall. Reaching the Fort was

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<sup>104</sup>Spalding’s full entry for July 13, 1836: “Move about 10 miles to day, to join Mr. McLeod’s camp, with whom we expect to travel the remainder of the journey” (Drury, *First* 194). Spalding continues to record events in her diary until March 1838 when the purpose of the diary shifts. From this point until the termination of the diary in July 1840 – four years after she left for Oregon – she records daily entries that consist of a passage of scripture and a short meditation (208).

<sup>105</sup> From 1824 until 1840, hundreds of trappers and thousands of Indians came down from the mountains to meet together at the Green River Rendezvous, where fur companies provided men with “supplies from civilization.” Drury describes it as the “great social event of the year” for trappers who usually lived in “lonely isolation.” The presence of white women at the 1836 Rendezvous proved quite a spectacle and many Indians traveled for miles in order to see this strange sight (Drury, *First* 63-68).

<sup>106</sup>Spalding reacted poorly to the diet of buffalo meat that the missionary party was forced to resort to for much of the journey.

a joyous occasion for both women, since “[a]ny thing that looks like a house makes us glad” (Drury, *First* 77). When they reached these beacons of civilization, the missionaries had the opportunity to sleep inside, wash clothes, and get a break from their monotonous diets. See the difference between Whitman’s and Spalding’s descriptions of this day relating specifically to food. Whitman writes, “Our dinner consisted of dry buffalo meat, turnips & fried bread, which was a luxury. Mountain bread is simply coarse flour & water mixed and roasted or fried in buffalo grease. To one who has had nothing but meat for a long time this relishes (very) well. For tea we had the same with the addition of some stewed service berries” (78). Spalding relates the same events, though with different emphasis: “[W]ere invited to dine at the Fort, where we again had a taste of bread. Since we left the Rendezvous, our diet has mostly been dry Buffalo meat, which though very miserable, I think has affected my health favorably” (195). Notice how Whitman offers much more specific information than Spalding. The former even describes the process by which fried bread is made, which would have been both a novelty to readers and a potential help to emigrants who needed information about what and how food could be prepared on the Trail. Though both women use the first person plural “we” to describe the experience, Spalding finishes her entry on a personal note, resituating the focus on her individual experience. In contrast, Whitman’s language depersonalizes the experience; rather than explaining her own reaction, she offers a generalization about how “one” in this situation would feel.

On August 6, both women found time to write again.<sup>107</sup> Whitman’s text included the following information:

Route very bad and difficult today, especially in the forenoon. We crossed a small stream, full of falls a short distance above where it empties into the Snake

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<sup>107</sup>Whitman, who wrote more regularly than Spalding, also recorded entries for August 4 and 5.

River. The only pass where we could cross was just on the edge of the rocks above one of the falls. While the pack animals both ours & the Company's were crossing there was such a rush as to crowd two of our horses over the falls, both packed with dry meat. It was with great difficulty they were got out, one of them was in nearly an hour, much to his injury. Had a fine breeze during most of the day. Heat very great when otherwise. No game taken today. We have a little rice to eat with our dry meat given us by Mr. McLeod, which makes it relish quite well. (81)

Between the difficult terrain, unfortunate accident with the horses, oppressive heat, and lack of game, this day was clearly a tough one for the entire party. Yet, although Spalding's corresponding entry also presents a portrait of danger and mishap on the Trail, it does so very differently.

Yesterday my horse became unmanageable in consequence of stepping into a hornets nest. I was thrown, and notwithstanding my foot remained a moment in the stirrup, and my body dragged some distance, I received no serious injury. I have suffered but little inconvenience in riding to day in consequence of being thrown from my horse yesterday. The hand of God has been conspicuous in preserving my life thus far, on this adventurous journey. Surely the Lord is my shepherd, and I shall have nothing to fear, if I will but repose my whole trust in Him. (195)

Not a single detail from one entry is repeated in the other. Instead, Spalding's passage focuses on the previous day, which was clearly more personally significant. In addition to reminding us that daily writing always depends on a process of selectivity, this contrast

demonstrates the different ways each woman found to negotiate and textually render her participation in a decidedly unfeminine experience.<sup>108</sup> Here again, Spalding highlights the journey's impact on her as an individual, while Whitman distances herself from the events to take on a more authoritative role as an objective guide. The form of the personal diary does not offer the same opportunity for the adoption of an authoritative identity for Spalding because it is not as obviously written for the benefit of others. However, because Whitman writes to an audience, she must also work to utilize that authority in an acceptable manner.

Tellingly, while Spalding focuses in on the self, in many of Whitman's entries the "I" pronoun virtually disappears. In her study of Frances Simpson's 1830 journal-letter composed during her emigration to Canada, Carter found that Simpson also discontinued the use of the personal "I" when she began making daily entries. A possible explanation for this omission resides in the grammar rules that govern diary writing. According to Liliane Haegeman, one convention that makes diary writing recognizable is the tendency of diarists to drop the subjects, but never the direct objects, of their sentences (Carter 23, 34). For Carter this absence of the first person voice also points to Simpson's need to uphold class and gender conventions. By avoiding the use of "I" in her journal-letter she removes herself from the position of an active subject, presenting herself instead in a more acceptable role as an objective observer (23). As Smith demonstrates, the traveling woman of the nineteenth century entered into a masculine realm when she left home and chose to write about it, running the risk of becoming ambiguously gendered.

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<sup>108</sup>Doll and Munns emphasize that, despite misconceptions about the lack of artifice in diary writing, diary writers always exercise selectivity: "But of course the diary writer always serves as an editor as well as a composer: a diary can never offer absolutely unmediated experience. There is always a principle of selection that filters and limits what can be recorded on the page" (10).

Women's travel narratives reveal the complexities in their negotiations of such an unbecoming subject position. [...] A bourgeois woman could not generously indulge herself in the autobiographical consciousness that was pervasive in men's writing during the nineteenth century and present herself as the hero of her own narrative. To do so would be improper. (18)

Female travel writers circumvented this potential problem by "muting their narrative 'I'" and thus "mask[ing] their curiosity and their agency" (18). Yet for Whitman this strategy seems more connected with the scientific stance of an objective observer, associated with the identity of male naturalist explorers in this era – ironically also a purportedly passive stance – than the passivity attributed to and expected of women writers in the early nineteenth century. Though her contemporary readers may have viewed the erasure of the narrative "I" as acceptable for a woman, in Whitman's case it is the liminal position she inhabits that allows her to take on the narrative voice of an authoritative, but disinterested guide, a voice typically reserved for men. The stance of the disinterested observer utilized in emigrant guidebooks works for Whitman, then, because even as it outwardly seeks to deny participation and agency, it indirectly inscribes experience and authority.

*"The best able to endure the journey": The Healthy Identity of the Female Adventurer*

To Spalding, the role of the emigrant guide was probably less appealing. Without the need to record information that would be helpful or even amusing to an audience, her work concentrates much more obviously on her internal and external struggles with emigrating and transitioning to the missionary life. Spalding is considerably less successful than Whitman in negotiating this change, at least textually. This is at least partially because Whitman must



downplay and eventually resolve her struggles in order to create a successful reader-directed text. Spalding simply must survive them.

Spalding presents herself in conventional fashion as a weak woman unsuited to the rigors of travel, but willing to make the journey only in answer to a divine calling. Self-sacrifice proved a noble justification for embarking upon such a journey (Foster, *Across New Worlds* 10), a justification Spalding points to time and again in her writing as she sacrifices her health and safety for a noble cause. As the missionary party moves farther away from home, Spalding's initial good health and hopeful attitude deteriorate rapidly only to rebound as they approach the conclusion of the journey and the prospect of resettlement. Early on, before they embark on the most difficult overland portion of the journey, Spalding claims, "Thus far, journeying has proved beneficial to my health" (Drury, *First* 187). However, soon thereafter a companion missionary bound for another field of labor, Mrs. Satterlee, passes away after the rapid onset of illness. Spalding includes a description of Satterlee's death and burial, similar to what one might expect from a sentimental novel: "after affectionately exhorting us to be faithful in our Master's service, she bade us farewell, assuring us that her hope and trust was in the Saviour, and soon without a groan, fell asleep (we trust) in the arms of Jesus" (188). After noting that they followed her "lifeless remains to the graveyard, to commit it to its mother earth," Spalding ends with a moment of spiritual reflection, reminding herself of the need to seek the direction of God, "in whose cause *we hope* we have embarked" (188-89, emphasis added). Spalding (probably subconsciously) constructs Satterlee's unfortunate demise as a cautionary tale. Will she too meet an untimely end as many a novel's heroine who stepped outside the bounds of feminine propriety?

From this point on, Spalding's health declines. Though sickness does not recommend her as a successful emigrant, it does attest to her femininity, since according to Buss, Victorian women were encouraged "to be frail in order to be feminine, to be weak of mind and body" (55). Spalding certainly plays the part. June through August proved to be the hottest and consequently the most trying months of travel for the missionary party. On June 10 she writes, "I have been quite unwell for several days – and attribute my illness wholly to change of diet" (Drury, *First* 191). Spalding associates her loss of health with the adoption of buffalo meat as the primary source of nutrition. As the missionaries moved farther away from "civilization" and used up their food stores, they were forced to turn to fresh game for survival. That Spalding did not thrive on buffalo, a meat associated with the way of life of Indian cultures, is fitting to her role as sentimental heroine. At the end of this entry, she confirms her resolve "not to feel anxious" since her "destiny is in the hands of Him who ruleth all things well" (191).

A pattern of mentioning physical distress then resigning herself to the sovereignty of God characterizes Spalding's diary. On June 21, just a few days before they are to begin crossing the Rocky Mountains, Spalding questions whether her "debilitated frame will survive the undertaking" before once again submitting herself to God's will (192). On July 8, four days after crossing the mountains, she notes that her illness increases and she is "happy to sink into His will, concerning what awaits me" (194). Once, when she notes some improvement in her health, she continues to wonder if she will live long enough to be situated at their post (194). By August 6 Spalding is "much fatigued" in a country that appears "dreary, rough, and barren," the landscape proving just as unforgiving as the physical strain of travel. Here she takes a moment to reflect on the journey thus far: "But

notwithstanding I have often spoken of the fatigue & hardship I have experienced on this journey, I have experienced many, many mercies which ought to dissolve my heart in thankfulness and cause me to forget the inconveniences I have endured on the journey” (195). Her choice of wording reveals continued misgivings. God’s mercies “ought” to evoke a grateful response and help her “forget” the physical hardships she has suffered; however, Spalding does not assure us that they do, in fact, have this affect on her. The intervening journey has not only diminished her physically, but also emotionally and spiritually, causing her to question, if only covertly, if she has made the right choice.

As they move closer to the end of the journey, her health improves little by little. Once they arrive at Fort Vancouver, which has nearly all the conveniences of home, and decide upon their place of settlement, Spalding’s outlook is decidedly more positive.

I now find myself not only rested from the effects of our long journey across the Rocky Mountains, but in the enjoyment of good health. The agreeable society we have enjoyed, & the luxuries of life to which we have been treated, during our stay here, has made us feel quite at home, and almost to forget what we passed through on our journey to this region. Surely goodness and mercy has followed us all our days. (Drury, *First* 197)

When once again situated in a place that feels like home, her health and her faith in the mission rebound. Reaching the endpoint of the journey is symbolic of reaching home. Home – settlement, sessility – is equated with health for this woman. Since, as Karen R. Lawrence observes in *Penelope Voyages*, “the female body is traditionally associated with earth, shelter, enclosure” (1), it is no wonder that traveling, or liminality, would be synonymous with illness or dysfunction. The experience of being “betwixt and between”

homes and identities is not a comfortable one for Spalding. Situated in a new home, Spalding is almost able to forget her experiences on the Trail. This emphasis on forgetting in the previous two passages is significant, for it suggests an impulse to pretend this transitional journey never took place, to embrace the fiction of the stable self.

But although this liminal space may have been a debilitating one for Spalding, for Whitman it is transformative and invigorating. While Spalding is troubled by illness, Whitman enjoys nearly perfect health and an augmentation of her natural abilities. This enjoyment of fine health is even more unusual since Whitman is pregnant during a portion of the journey – her daughter arrives in March 1837 – a condition that would certainly have made many women feel weaker (Drury, *First* 131). A trip that should weaken a woman, at least in terms of nineteenth-century cultural ideals about true womanhood, has the opposite effect. This distinction might simply indicate an innate difference in constitutions. However, even if this is partly the case, the needs of Whitman's various audiences are also bound up in this self-presentation. In the very first entries of the text, she establishes her fitness for the journey. For instance, she relates that the people they have met along the way congratulate her as being “the best able to endure the journey over the mountains.” When she compares her 136 pound self – a weight she seems proud of as indicative of her hardiness – to the other missionary women, she finds that Satterlee is quite “feeble” and Spalding “does not look nor feel quite healthy enough for our enterprise.” Interestingly, she does not just rate herself as the healthiest of the women, but shows that when the entire party gets sick from drinking river water, she is “an exception” (Drury, *First* 46-47). Whitman immediately tells readers what to expect from her; we are to expect her to be exceptional.

The context surrounding the first crossing of the Rockies by white women helps to explain Whitman's preoccupation with her physical fitness for the journey. When Whitman and Spalding set out on their way to Oregon, they were fully cognizant of the fact that they were taking part in a historic moment. If they survived the journey, they were to be the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains.<sup>109</sup> More than once in her letters home, Whitman refers to her undertaking as "an unheard of journey for females" (Drury, *First* 47). In fact, the question of whether or not a white woman could make this trip was a main subject of debate among the American Board, the members of the mission, and those they came into contact with, a debate that Whitman's husband eventually won. It seems many doubted the feasibility of taking women on such an arduous journey. For instance, an 1832 article in *New England Magazine* concluded that only men were capable of undergoing "the vicissitudes of the journey; none who ever made the trip would assert that a woman could have accompanied them" (32). The famous painter of Indians, George Catlin, also advised against the endeavor. Henry Spalding recorded Catlin's objections in a letter to the American Board: "the enthusiastic desire to see a white woman every where prevailing among the distant tribes, may terminate in unrestrained passion, consequently in her ruin...<sup>2nd</sup> the fatigues of the journey, he thinks, will destroy them (Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa* 166). The implication here is clear: the journey would destroy a white woman one way or another, either by rape or death. It is doubtful whether the first missionary party to conduct white women over the Rockies would have materialized had not Dr. Whitman been adamant in his assertion that if one could take a wagon over the mountains – a feat that Captain Bonneville had reportedly

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<sup>109</sup>Indian women had certainly already accomplished this feat, but they did so riding horses in the gentleman's fashion, that is, astride. Whitman and Spalding were to ride side-saddle and this was one of the primary concerns, at least with regard to how they would ascend and descend mountains as well as keep pace with the men. (Drury, *Marcus and Narcissa* 126)

accomplished in 1832 – then a woman could go as well (Drury, *First* 32-33). (Ironically, where a woman could go, a wagon could not, for the wagon did not complete the journey, but Whitman and Spalding did.)

Current readings of these texts are also no doubt influenced by present-day assumptions about the women who took to the Trail. Such assumptions are predicated upon scholarship that identifies female emigrants as unwilling participants. Schlissel's comments to this effect are now customary: "Women were part of the journey because their fathers, husbands, and brothers determined to go. They went West because there was no way for them *not* to go once the decision was made" (9). The claim is convincing; many examples Schlissel offers from women's overland diaries and letters do suggest that their writers disagreed with the decision to leave their homes and extended families for an uncertain fate, but were ignored by male kin possessed by "Oregon fever" or "gold fever" (31). As Bruce Elliott, David Gerber, and Suzanne Sinke remind us, the reality that women and children did not wield the same power for decision making as the men they traveled with must be brought to bear on our readings of emigrant letters (1). However, to propose that women were only involved because their fathers, husbands, or brothers required it of them neglects the agency and even excitement of some female settlers. Even the suggestion made by Cheryl J. Fish that accompanying missionary husbands proved a significant occasion for female travel in the nineteenth century implies that the women themselves were not missionaries, but merely travel companions (1). This was not the case for Whitman who offered herself as a missionary to the American Board before becoming acquainted with Dr. Whitman. In fact, one might say that Whitman married her husband in order to become a missionary, rather than the other way around.

This drive is not absent from her text. Even as they embark on the overland portion of the journey, Whitman shows she is more than able to endure the scorching heat, uncomfortable rides on side-saddle mounts, and lack of familiar food. Her record includes no mention of personal sickness, certainly atypical since most accounts of the Overland Trail journey are saturated with illness, epidemics, and fatalities.<sup>110</sup> On the contrary, in early June she describes their way of life as “far preferable to any in the States” and contends that she has never been happier or enjoyed such good health. At this point the group has transitioned to a diet of buffalo, a circumstance that weakened Spalding, but which has the opposite effect on Whitman: “I never saw anything like buffalo meat to satisfy hunger. We do not want anything else with it” (Drury, *First* 53).<sup>111</sup> Not only does she experience better health than Spalding, but she also fares better than her husband who often suffers from fatigue and rheumatism. On the same day that she mentions being able to “[e]ndure the ride today very well notwithstanding its difficulties,” her husband is worn out with “excessive fatigue” and does not appear as “fleshy” as he did the previous winter (74). A few weeks later, Dr. Whitman struggles to lead their cart across a stream, while she crosses “without the least fear,” despite the fact that at the beginning of the journey this was the activity she dreaded most (86). Whitman finds herself even stronger than she first supposed.

This is not to suggest the hardships of the journey do not take their toll on Whitman, but rather that her outlook on the journey, represented in part by a healthy self-confidence, remains overwhelmingly positive even in the worst moments. Only in the extreme heat of the end of July – early in her pregnancy – does Whitman admit that she is “nearly sick”;

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<sup>110</sup>Her self-representation here is not altogether unusual, for as Georgi-Findlay shows in her analysis of one fifty-year-old woman’s letters home from the Overland Trail, some women found themselves rejuvenated by the journey (80). The idea of travel as a healthful “tonic” was also a commonplace trope in the period.

<sup>111</sup>Later Whitman does admit that she is “cloyed” with buffalo meat, after eating only fresh meat for two months, but never suggests that it has a negative effect on her health (Drury, *First* 73).

significantly, she qualifies the term to show that she has not fully succumbed to weakness (Drury, *First* 77). She does, like all of the members of the caravan, admit to feeling fatigued after a long ride; however, a brief rest almost always restores her (89, 92). If it is extremely exhausting, Whitman also finds a hard ride in the mountains conducive to an increased appetite, and thus recommendable for “some of the feble ones in the States” (94). After the caravan arrives at Fort Walla Walla, which all viewed as the end of their overland journey, Whitman confirms, similarly to Spalding, that she is “remarkably well and rested” and “do[es] not need to lounge at all.” Even she is surprised by this fact: “I can scarcely believe it possible myself but it is true” (95). Unlike Spalding, however, Whitman’s good health is produced through the act of journeying, rather than as a result of the journey coming to an end. Rather than adopting the expected role of the “weak female,” Whitman utilizes the liminal space of the journey and the journal-letter to inhabit a role of strength and conviction.

*“This letter is free plunder”: Negotiating the Multiple Audiences of the Journal-Letter*

Whitman’s documentation of healthiness throughout the journal-letter attests to the ability of women not just to endure the journey, but to thrive. Her investment in establishing this fact was probably three-fold, reflecting the multiple audiences who would be privy to her finished text. That Whitman writes first to a loving audience must be taken into account in a reading of the text. Obviously, she would want her family to be assured of her well-being. Confirmation that she is thriving under tough conditions would surely convince them that she made the right choice in marriage and mission. Furthermore, the need for fellow missionaries, acutely felt by the small band especially once they arrived in Oregon and saw the work before them, no doubt played a part in this aspect of her writing. With a keen sense of the larger audience her text would interest, Whitman employs her pen to recruit help. One



such typical entry appears near the end of the journal-letter when the missionaries have decided upon their respective stations: “There are many other fields open ready for the harvest. O! that there were many other labourers here ready to occupy them immediately” (Drury, *First* 105). Comments such as this by William H. Gray, a single man who accompanied the mission party, show that all of the members of the mission were invested in using Whitman’s and Spalding’s experiences in order to promote the viability of this undertaking. After the completion of their journey, he writes home to a friend: “Our Ladys are quite rested and in good health after the journey. Mrs. Spalding has been quite well for the latter part of the way. Mrs. Whitman has indured the Journey like a heroine” (115). Since Gray then returned East in search of a wife who would accompany him with the 1838 reinforcement party, he likely viewed Whitman’s excellent health as a sign that this journey was possible for women. He downplays Spalding’s poor health, while casting Whitman as a romanticized heroine.

Since Spalding’s diary never made it back east, Whitman’s journal-letter served as the first female record of the journey ever to reach the “public” eye. In fact, a portion of her longer journal-letter was published in a local newspaper, as Whitman learned in a subsequent letter from her sister Jane. Whitman’s response to this knowledge was predictably self-effacing: “I regret you should have it printed, or any of it, for it never was designed for public eye” (Drury, *First* 71). Despite her invocation of the humility topos here, other comments throughout the journal-letter suggest that Whitman did envision a wider audience for her work; in addition to her entire family and her husband’s family – to whom she sent a transcribed copy of the longer journal-letter – she explicitly asks family members to share information with her home church in Angelica and gives permission for one aunt to be given

a copy to share with her friends in Onondaga (96, 114). Even her early admission, “[t]his letter is free plunder,” suggests a willingness that her words be shared. Additionally, the fact that publishing emigrant accounts in newspapers was already commonplace by this time suggests that Whitman may have been less surprised than she implies.

Finally, one must consider the reality that Whitman knew her experience would set a historical precedent for all other women and her writings would serve as her legacy to the future. She was both familiar with and likely part of, if unofficially, the discussions about whether or not a white woman could survive this journey. Near the beginning of their travels, she notes the unique character of their enterprise, “The way looks pleasant notwithstanding we are so near encountering the difficulties of an unheard of journey for females” (Drury, *First* 47). The refrain of this “unheard of journey” surfaces multiple times throughout the text. She even compares their historic journey to that of the Israelites, asking “Was there ever a journey like this” before offering the notable distinction that the “children of Israel could not have been more sensible of the ‘pillar of cloud by day & of the pillar of fire by night,’ than we have been of that Hand that has led us safely on” (81). If she survived, this feat would grant her distinction as one of the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains. The scores of letters sent home by other members of the mission party, in addition to her own writing, would inscribe her story in the annals of the ABCFM and “publish” her experiences to a wide range of present and future audiences. By textually presenting herself with strength of body and purpose, Whitman exercises control over how she will be remembered.

This multiplicity of readers Whitman must attend to grows naturally out of the journal-letter form. For Carter the potentially unbounded audiences among whom a journal-

letter may circulate constitute the “delicious treachery” of the form (20). No matter whose name fills the address line, these writers are certain of, and most times welcome, other readers. Hassam acknowledges this aspect of the journal-letter in his study of the shipboard diaries of British emigrants bound for Australia. He finds that most of the diaries, when they had an explicit audience, were addressed to a mother; fewer were addressed to a sister, father, friend, or former employer. “But even where the diary is addressed to a specific member of the family,” Hassam adds, “the diarist often has in mind a small circle of relations and friends rather than one particular individual” (*No Privacy for Writing* 34). What Carter and Hassam suggest, then, is that journal-letter writers, even more so than writers of conventional letters or personal diaries, ultimately exercise only a limited control over who will read their texts. Moreover, journal-letter writers must negotiate a variety of readers within the same text.<sup>112</sup> For Hassam, this necessity accounts for the “range of tones” and alternations between “the amusing and the informational” that characterize the form (34). Such is clearly the case with Whitman who sometimes follows a passage written in an objective tone to would-be travelers with a direct comment to a specific reader. For instance, after briefly describing the events of two “tedious days” that included “[l]engthy marches without water,” she addresses a passage describing the procedure for making fried cakes to her younger sisters remaining at home. She writes in parentheses: “(Girls if you wish to know how they taste, you can have the pleasure of taking a little flour & water & make some dough roll it thin, cut it into square blocks, then take some beaf fat & fry them)” (Drury, *First* 82). In another passage, she offers, for brother Edward’s “amusement & that he may know how to do when he comes over the Rocky Mountains,” a detailed description of the manner of leading cattle across a river (88).

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<sup>112</sup>In Chapter 3, I show how one journal-letter writer, Mary Lee, actually utilizes the form to limit her potential audiences.

These passages take on a much more conversational tone than other portions of the journal-letter, reflecting her intimate relationships with these specific readers.

In addressing specific readers, Whitman departs from the established conventions of the emigrant guide which addresses an unknown, generalized audience. That Whitman must accommodate readers with whom she has close personal relationships, acquaintances, and strangers attests to the complexity of the journal-letter form. Hassam finds this diversity of audience problematic for journal-letter writers and contends that the conventional letters that were sent home alongside journal-letters were “far less of a problem” since “emigrants would have known how to address a mother or a sister individually” and “much more could have been said” (*No Privacy for Writing* 41). Yet if there were limitations on what could be said – and there were no matter to whom a woman in the early nineteenth century was writing – this does not negate their potential effectiveness as texts. Whitman’s asides to particular readers, rather than constituting digressions from the important work of the text, add a personal dimension to her account that increases its effectiveness as a repository of information, a medium for recruitment, and a tool of familial connection. She caters to the needs and interests of specific readers, while continuing to provide relevant information. The “girls” and Edward are not the only readers who would have been amused or instructed by her relation of bread-frying and stream-fording basics. Other instances, such as when she encourages her sister Jane to “get a good husband as I have got and be a missionary,” advertises the healthful aspects of the journey for sister Mary, or chastises sister Harriet for presumably “mak[ing] up a face” when she mentions cooking with buffalo dung (Drury, *First* 47,50), all demonstrate Whitman appealing to wider audiences: the single woman, the sick woman, and the squeamish one. I have said Whitman effectively composed the first

female guidebook to the Overland Trail, but it is this personal component interwoven throughout the text, a component necessary to the journal-letter form, that distinguishes Whitman's relational version from the masculine discourse dominating the guidebook tradition.

*"When we converse about home": From Displacement to Replacement*

This attentiveness to multiple audiences, both general and specific, also distinguishes the journal-letter from its two constituent parts: the letter proper and the diary without an immediate audience. Hassam, one of the few scholars attending to the journal-letter as a form, disagrees with the latter conclusion. Instead, he posits that diaries written for an audience and diaries written for oneself are not theoretically different. He substantiates this claim with the supposition that all emigrant diaries, whether they state it or not, are ultimately written for the same audience: a small circle of family and friends who remain at home. In his words, the theoretical difference between the two types of diaries "has very little influence on the kinds of diary being written" (*No Privacy for Writing* 41-42).

However, the differences between these two types of texts are much more than theoretical. Whitman's text clearly illustrates this difference since the fact that this journal-letter will be sent to and read by her family offers her the opportunity, and even requires her, to textually work through the process of "leaving and cleaving" in a way a personal diary would not.

As a newlywed and an emigrant, the Whitman who composed these journal-letters occupied a liminal position. While on the Trail she existed "betwixt and between" the identities of single daughter and married homemaker, easterner and westerner. Her first journal-letter entries exemplified the ambiguous status of the liminal individual who is never really at home. Remembrances of home evoked contradictory responses, first sadness for a

loss of self, then a confirmation that she has made the right choice. The contradictions that characterized her first three journal-letters continue in the longer journal-letter she writes between July and November 1836. Thoughts of her “Mother’s bread & butter,” symbols of home, cause Whitman to envision herself “a hungry child.” This is one of the rare instances when she gives in to self-pity, going so far as to question “how [she] shall endure this part of the journey” (Drury, *First* 73). By the end of the entry, however, she notes enjoying a “peaceful and calm state of mind” and even prays that her parents “may never have cause to regret the sacrifice they have made for his Name Sake,” namely sending a daughter into the mission field (73). Significantly, this is the closest Whitman ever comes to admitting regret at the step she has taken. A few days later thoughts of her mother’s bread creep in again and she admonishes her sisters not to waste even the “driest morsal.” Her resolve is stronger this day for she immediately assures her family, “Do not think I regret coming. No, far from it. I would not go back for a world. I am contented and happy notwithstanding I sometimes get very hungry and weary” (75). Here Whitman attests to what seems nearly impossible, to be hungry, weary, contented, and happy all at once. Interestingly, these feelings are not only possible but expected from the liminal individual whose position is one of “ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all customary categories” (Turner 97).

One of the members of the 1838 missionary reinforcement, Sarah White Smith, who was a journal-letter writer as well, utilizes similar rhetoric to Whitman. Upon receiving a letter from home early in the journey, she admits that it causes her to weep, but maintains that this is not a sign of regret. Instead, she reassures her family, “I am very happy” (Drury, *These Mountains We Have Crossed* 65). Towards the middle of the journey, as conditions worsen and she finds herself sleeping in a rain-soaked tent, Smith conjures up the image of

her little sister in the bedroom they once shared “sleeping sweetly & quietly.” She insists that she is unshaken: “I did not wish to return nor did I feel that my lot was a hard one” (78).

Drury explains Smith’s sentiments thus:

Counterbalancing the exhilaration of getting married and starting out on the great adventure of an overland journey to Oregon, was the pain of leaving her home and the members of her family. Conflicting emotions tore her apart. Once she had answered the call to be God’s missionary, it was a sin to harbor any regrets. She had made a great decision which she thereafter felt necessary to defend. [...] Several times throughout her account of their overland travels, she reassures her folks that she is happy. Such expressions are evidences of her decision not to cause her parents to worry and at the same time, from a psychological viewpoint, reveal a continued inner conflict. She protests her happiness too much. (61)

These examples from Smith’s journal-letter and Drury’s editorial notes show that Smith, who is traveling as a newlywed emigrant two years after Whitman, also evidences a tortured relationship to home. For these women the identity of a protected daughter, an identity associated with home, is no longer accessible. (Hence the pain associated with realizing they no longer have access to their mother’s bread or a familiar bed.) Instead, their identities are in flux, for they cannot fully identify with the people they once were, nor can they imagine the people they are to become. If diary writing helped some women to maintain continuity of identity during the crossing as Wink suggests, the journal-letter writing of Whitman and Smith offered a space for negotiating the transformations that necessarily accompanied marriage and relocation.

For Whitman this change is symbolized by the adoption of a new textual rendering of, and relationship to, “home.” The transformation begins to occur at the beginning of August when she mentions riding alone with her husband “behind the dust of camp” where they “enjoyed a sweet repast in conversation about home & dear friends” (Drury, *First* 77). This represents the first instance when a mention of home does not evoke a strained emotional response. Perhaps not coincidentally, this is also the first time she notes talking with her husband. From this point on, the word home begins to take on different connotations for her. Several days later she confirms, “We love to think & talk of home [...]. It warms our hearts, strengthens & encourages us in the work of our beloved Master & makes our journeyings easy” (82). A few more days pass before a seemingly insignificant event takes on great meaning for Whitman. She is obliged to leave behind a little trunk given her by her sister. Whitman composes a soliloquy about the trunk, which she leaves to “abide here alone & no more by this presence remind me of my Dear Harriet” (Drury, *First* 82). Her focus on having to leave behind this possession reflects a commonplace strategy in pioneer women’s diaries to defer inexpressible emotions to a seemingly unrelated incident. Buss shows that these women may barely note a significant event such as the death of a child or parent, but later “in a detailed description of the grave or the sentimental rendering of a pet’s death [...] indicate the continuing ‘inexpressible grief’” (25-26). In this instance, the inexpressible emotion is tied to what she views as a final parting with home. Much like women who buried family members on the Trail and noted the exact location of the grave, she locates the place of her parting with the trunk, specifically “[t]wenty miles below the Falls on Snake River” (82). The circumstances of leaving behind a token from home offer her an opportunity to express her grief as well as to figuratively and literally move past it.



Tellingly, the next day she finds that she need not leave the trunk after all for another member of the party agrees to take it along. Her response is not at all what one would imagine, for she only states, “it will do me no good, it may him” (85). Here is further confirmation that the trunk itself was not as important as what it represented. Having composed a goodbye to the trunk – symbolic of “home” – she no longer has the same need for it.

In the remaining weeks, the “reorientation” work of the honeymoon completes itself as Whitman comes to identify more with her husband than her distant family. When she explains the manner by which the members of the party find rest in the heat of the day, she asks her sisters if they would “not think a seat by Mother in some cool room preferable.” Where once she would have probably wished for her mother, now she states that, because her husband is always ready to “provide a comfortable shade” for her, she need not contemplate turning back. The next day she again has the opportunity to ride alone with her husband and talk of “home friends” while the “tedious hours are sweetly decoyed away” (90). Within days of the journey’s end, she tells her mother that conversations about home are what have sustained her on this last leg of the crossing. Talking of home has the opposite effect it once did: “when we converse about home [...] I forget that I am weary and want rest (92). Home comes to mean something different for her than it once did, evoking a much more positive textual response. Whereas it originally invoked sadness and an immediate protestation of happiness, by the end home is a pleasant memory that provides a sense of connection with her husband.

In his study of British immigrant letters in the nineteenth century, Gerber shows that personal letters are not only an avenue for the maintenance of relationships. Instead, these

relationships “continue to grow, with the conventions, restraints, and opportunities presented by the letter forming a new context for their ongoing development” (4). Through daily writing to her family, Whitman negotiates a transition that every emigrant and married woman must. The acts of “leaving and cleaving” may have been physically achieved through her departure, but the psychological component remained. Since she did not keep a personal diary, but rather a journal-letter, part of the work of writing was to establish a new way of connecting with and relating to her family as a whole, as well as adopting a new identity as a distant member of this family. Thus for Whitman, the pain of separation and loss of identity that accompanied early reminiscences of life at home are minimized when she relocates discussions of home from her journal-letter to conversations with her husband. Instead of talking to her family about her husband as she does at the outset of her journey, Whitman eventually begins to talk to her husband about her family. This action not only helps her establish a more positive connection with home, but also to erase the contradictory emotions that characterize her early journal-letters.

### *Conclusion*

The journal-letter, then, in its own textual instability, highlights and gives play to the inherent instability of life and identity on the Overland Trail. If some women, like Spalding, employed diary writing to maintain a stable identity, even if it was a weak one, other women like Whitman utilized journal-letter writing to adopt and fashion new identities and relations. Some of these identities, like that of the emigrant guide or the physically strong adventurer, were available to her only while she inhabited the liminal space of the journey and through the audience-directed form of the journal-letter. Even her identity as writer is compromised once the journey ends. While waiting for her husband to settle on a location for their

mission, Whitman remains at Fort Vancouver under the hospitality of a Doctor McLaughlin. She writes in her journal-letter that the doctor immediately puts his daughter in her care, asking Whitman to hear her recitations. As a favor, she is also asked to sing with the children at the Fort in the evenings. Whitman feels herself beholden to the desires of the doctor who is providing her with room and board, but she complains to her mother, "I could employ all my time in writing & work for myself if it were not for his wishes" (Drury, *First* 105). A week later, she again mentions that these tasks keep her "wholly occupied" such that she "can scarcely find as much time as [she] want[s] for writing" (107). The leisure she had for writing is interrupted by her reintroduction into "civilized" society. Cultural expectations that she will naturally take over the education and care of the children at the Fort, expectations that she was free of during the crossing, are (re)placed on her, revealing that the possibilities provided by her liminal status have come to an end.

Wink concludes that women used their overland diaries to "maintain their identities" while in a "temporary position" as an emigrant. Consequently, she surmises that since their diaries ended with their travels, they "do not show any changes these women may have undergone as they were challenged by life on the frontier" (48-49). Of course, the implication here is that women could not avoid changing once they began to establish homes on the frontier, despite their best efforts to maintain some sense of stable identity while on the Trail. Whitman's text shows that this process of change did not begin at the end of the journey, but rather at its inception. With her first "Dear, Dear Mother" Whitman initiated not only a physical journey but also a textual one. In the course of that journey, she comes to view her writing and herself differently. The homesick child of the earliest journal-letters is eventually replaced by a young woman who has learned to employ writing to meet her needs

for connection. Whitman composes a final journal-letter home, between December 1836 and March 1837, detailing her settlement at the mission station at Waiilatpu and the birth of their first child. At this point, Whitman can confidently say: “Sweet as it used to be, when my heart was full to sit down & put into my mother’s bosom all my feelings, both sad & rejoicing, now when far away from the parental roof & thirsting for the same precious privilege, I take my pen & find a sweet relief in giving her my history in the same familiar way” (Drury, *First* 119). Tellingly, after this point, Whitman discontinues the use of journal-letter writing. Having negotiated a difficult transition, she no longer needs the daily discourse provided by the journal-letter form. Instead, her daily life will be shared with her husband and conventional letters will transport her “history” to the home that is no longer hers.

At the beginning of this last journal-letter, Whitman relates thinking of her “beloved parents” and musing on the “probability that I shall never see those dear faces again while I live” (Drury, *First* 120). Her words are foreboding to readers who know how this story concludes. A decade after the Whitmans arrived in Oregon and settled at Waiilatpu, the missionary couple met a tragic end. On November 29, 1847, several members of the Cayus Indian tribe, among whom the Whitmans were settled, attacked the missionaries’ home. Over the course of several days of fighting, fourteen people, including Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, were killed (161).<sup>113</sup> Though her death enshrined Whitman as a martyr of the missionary cause, it is her journal-letters, which offer her own version of history in a “familiar way,” that speak volumes about the life she lived.

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<sup>113</sup>Drury speculates as to the impetus for this massacre, including the severe winter of 1846-47 which diminished the Indians’ livestock and sources of food, the establishment of a Roman Catholic mission that introduced religious rivalry, jealousy over the material prosperity of the missionaries, and an outbreak of measles brought by the immigration of 1847, leading to a large death toll among the Indians living near the mission (*First* 161-62).

## *Conclusion*

### Relocating Scholarship: Implications and Directions for the Future

Based on the foregoing analysis, there are a few generalizations regarding the journal-letter form, as used by women throughout the last half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, that may be drawn. These generalizations are not meant to serve as restrictions on the form, but rather to open it up to further analysis and study in order to test, expand, and revise the findings I have offered here.

The first generalization that may be gleaned from this project is that the journal-letter form is often adopted in instances when institutional methods of sending and receiving mail are mistrusted or limited. This was true for Burr who relied on acquaintances to deliver her journal-letters to Boston. Her comments about the “carless” post office and her insistence on finding “good oppertunitys” to send her journal-letters reveal that, when possible, Burr avoided utilizing the postal service (272, 135). It is more difficult to speculate about how Winslow’s journal-letters traveled to her parents since there is no mention of the method by which correspondence was sent or received in her text. This omission is likely due to the fact that, as a child, Winslow did not take part in how her words were packaged or sent to her family. However, the reality that post offices were not widely used for personal correspondence until 1820 suggests that Winslow’s aunt and uncle may have employed a similar method as Burr for transporting letters (Brown 13). More obviously than any of the other writers, Lee rejected institutional methods of sending mail completely when the conditions of war made corresponding even more difficult, instead choosing to maintain possession of her words until she could personally hand them over to her husband. When

Whitman found herself outside of the United States and in uncharted territory, her opportunities for sending correspondence were virtually nonexistent. Much like Burr nearly a century before, Whitman and the other members of her party relied on people they met traveling in the opposite direction – people they may not have even known – to carry their letters back east. This characteristic reveals that the lengthy form of the journal-letter flourishes in historic moments and geographic spaces when and where the post fails to operate effectively. Furthermore, it begs a further consideration of how the growth of the postal service after 1820 may have affected both the quality and quantity of American correspondence.

Another characteristic that presents itself is the fact that all of the journal-letters in the study were used and useful only for a limited period of time: a moment when their writers were out of place or displaced in some manner. Although there are many lifetime diarists and lifetime letter-writers, the longest duration of journal-letter writing for any of these women was that of Lee at three years and three months. Burr composes her text for three years, Winslow for one and one half years, and Whitman for nine months. For each woman, this period of writing coincided with a time in which she was negotiating significant changes. For example, Burr begins writing shortly after she has her first child. At this time, she has recently relocated to New Jersey with her husband, away from family and friends in Massachusetts. The newly acquired demands of motherhood are added to the loss of community she suffers in consequence of the move, leaving her homesick for the comfort of friends like Prince. Living as a boarder in her aunt's household, Winslow also writes from a position outside of the home. Her writing coincides with adolescence, a period of significant change in a young woman's life, as well as with her attendance at adventure schools where

she was to “finish” her education. Like Winslow, Lee also lived as a boarder during the period covered by her writing. Since her husband was away for an extended period of time, it would not have been proper for her to live on her own; instead, she was forced to move in with family. Tellingly, Lee admits to Henry, “I never feel at home” (210). For Whitman, this displacement is even more literal since she writes from the position of an emigrant.

Consequently, she chooses to end her journal-letter not at the physical conclusion of her journey, but at its figurative end, when she is finally settled in a new home. For each of these women, then, writing in their journal-letters is one tool they utilize to give voice to, manage, and redirect the emotions that accompany being (dis)placed in uncomfortable new circumstances. When they regain a sense of place, their texts come to an end.

Perhaps because journal-letters are associated with such significant moments in their writer’s lives, another generalization that can be drawn is that these texts are usually written to close, trusted audiences. An acquaintance does not seem the proper audience for such a text. The care and commitment required from the journal-letter writer can only be justified when the words are composed for a reader with whom she shares deep personal bonds – and when that reader can be trusted to use and share these words wisely. Consequently, Burr writes to her best friend, Winslow and Whitman to parents and siblings, and Lee to her husband. This characteristic of journal-letter writing attributes enhanced significance to the reader of the text, problematizing readings of journal-letters, such as those by Gerber and Hassam, that deny the importance of a specific reader to the journal-letter writer. These women would certainly disagree with Gerber’s assessment that emigrant diaries written in the form of letters “lacked the ability to speak to the intimate bonds” writers shared with their

correspondents (2). On the contrary, for each of these writers, their journal-letters writing was valued even more highly than their conventional correspondence.

This leads to a final characteristic of note. I must call attention here to the seeming redundancy of the journal-letter as a form. Each of the women analyzed in this study wrote traditional letters as well as journal-letters to the same audience. And for each of the women, it appears that their journal-letter writing occupied a higher status than their correspondence as words worthy of preservation. For Burr, journal-letter writing offered an avenue for intellectual and spiritual accountability with fellow sojourner Prince in a form that could be passed on to future generations of women. In contrast, Burr instructed Prince to burn the individual letters she sent. Though there is less evidence as to Winslow's feelings about her journal-letter as compared to her regular correspondence with her parents, the fact that she asks her mother to return the journal-letter to her during a visit suggests an instinct to maintain possession of her words. This instinct drives Lee as well. That she refuses to send her words into circulation shows that she desires to keep them safe and whole, for herself and her husband, despite the fact that she continues to send single letters into the unknown. Going further to ensure the preservation and permanence of her text than any of the other women in this study, Whitman actually creates a second copy of her longest journal-letter, increasing the chances that her words will survive. She does not do so with any of her other letters. Thus, even if scholars choose to conveniently ignore the distinctiveness of the journal-letter as text, its writers were unable and unwilling to do so.

In the course of this study, I have tried to offer a strategy for reading the journal-letter form by bringing together theories of diaries and letters in a purposeful way. This project shows that the study of these two forms of lifewritings need not be separated, but can be



fruitfully joined, and that by joining them we can expand our understanding of each. By analyzing texts that are not typical travel writings, I have also sought to counter traditional understandings about what prompts and constitutes journal-letter writing, particularly for women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who typically enjoyed fewer opportunities for travel than their male counterparts. Furthermore, because existing scholarship that deals specifically with this form has focused on British subjects, my study reveals how Americans' unique experiences of space and identity influenced their adoption and adaptation of the journal-letter.

There is still much work to be done in order to offer a full representation of the possibilities of the journal-letter. An analysis of journal-letters authored by American men would complement the present study. Within their texts, both Burr and Lee mention their husbands writing travel journal-letters. Did American men, like American women, also experiment with non-travel based journal-letter writings or did they only, or primarily, adopt the form to document movement? Such a study would create a fuller picture of the cultural and historical development of the form, as would studies focused on earlier and later time periods and those representing writers of different social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Finding the latter will most likely depend on the process of recovering and identifying texts as journal-letters that have not been catalogued as such. Until then, our understanding of how and why Americans and others utilized this form will be limited to the few texts that have been deemed worthy of publication. This archival work will no doubt open up other avenues of investigation, not only leading to different manifestations of the journal-letter, but hopefully to other "misfit" forms of writing as well.

To conclude, I return to the beginning. My interest in the journal-letter as a form was initially piqued by reading Burr's text. It was my puzzlement with the hybrid nature of her writing that led me to search out other journal-letters from which to construct a study of an underrepresented form. When I finally returned to Burr's journal-letter in order to write the first chapter of this work, I began to read and relate to the text differently. I was no longer merely perplexed by the form in which this woman wrote, but enamored with it. As she wrote in a daily manner to a distant best friend, expressing delight in her young child as well as dismay at the unexpected loneliness of motherhood, I saw that we occupied common ground. In my own first year of motherhood, I daily harnessed the possibilities of e-mail or text messaging to send "everyday epistles" to a dear friend. Despite two and one-half centuries' separation, our topics in these textual interactions often mimicked those Burr included in her text. Sometimes we wrote of our infants' latest prattle or the illnesses that confounded and worried us; other times conversation turned to our husbands, our dissertations, our spiritual musings. When sleep eluded me in the late hours of the night, I reached out to my friend through the computer screen, sending messages that often did little more than document a haggard existence. A significant difference is the remarkable fact that the texts Burr wrote to Prince have survived. Text messages erased and e-mails relegated to an electronic trash can, the fragmentary "text" of my first year of motherhood is lost.

Though my friend and I utilized modern technologies that afforded the possibility for instantaneous communication, it has occurred to me that the impulse that drove our "correspondence" was the same that drove all of the women included in this study. In their anthology of women's letters between 1775 and 2005, Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler identify a common thread connecting all the letters they read, the thread that also connected

my experience to that of Burr, Winslow, Lee, and Whitman: “through all the changes” that occurred in the years separating our experiences, “the impulse women had to talk in writing never waned” (2).

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## ABSTRACT

### EVERYDAY EPISTLES: THE JOURNAL-LETTER WRITING OF AMERICAN WOMEN, 1754-1836

by Rayshelle Dietrich, Ph.D., 2008  
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This dissertation focuses on the journal-letter form as it is utilized by four middle-class women in colonial and early America. Admittedly, a text that is both letter and diary is also, ironically, neither wholly letter nor wholly diary, and thus fails to fit into traditionally recognized categories of autobiographical writing. This difficulty of classification is reflected in current diary and letter scholarship in two primary ways: either the journal-letter is excluded from studies of diaries or letters because of its distinctiveness or its distinctiveness is ignored in the interest of inclusion. On the contrary, my study highlights hybridity as the defining characteristic of the journal-letter, and I read the simultaneous presence of epistolary and diary elements within the form as illustrative of the creativity and adaptive ability of its writers.

The study begins in 1754, the moment when the concept of the journal-letter was popularized by published travel accounts and the epistolary fiction of Samuel Richardson. It ends in 1836 at the beginning of the mass migrations that inspired thousands of emigrants to write and preserve their experiences in the journal-letter form. I have attempted to chart a preliminary “history” of the journal-letter’s development through the examples of four intriguing women: Esther Edwards Burr, Anna Green Winslow, Mary Jackson Lee, and

Narcissa Prentiss Whitman. Drawing on such scholars as Janet Gurkin Altman, Eve Tavor Bannet, and Jennifer Sinor, I show how women joined these two forms of writing into a single text in order to make meaning out of their existence, maintain and strengthen personal relationships, continue their education, and examine and construct the self. Through their texts, the journal-letter emerges as anything but a static form. It is, indeed a product of the mediums of writing historically and culturally available to and associated with women at a particular moment in time, but it is also highly adaptable to the purposes and needs of individual writers. Ultimately, these “everyday epistles” test the boundaries of diary and letter writing, offering a unique medium for writing the self in the presence of others.