The first woman writer in America, Anne Bradstreet, was perhaps also the first American feminist. As early as 1642 she had written:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle better fits,
A Poets [sic]\(^1\) pen all scorn I should thus wrong,
For such despite they cast on Female wits: . . .
But sure the Antique Greeks were far more mild
Else of our Sexe why feigned they those Nine,
And poesy made, Calliope's own child;
So 'mongst the rest they placed the Arts Divine, . . .\(^2\)

For more than a hundred years thereafter, protests of this nature were to remain sporadic and half-apologetic; but during the later years of the eighteenth century, expressions of feminist convictions became more common. There was in England, for example, the well-known rise of the "female" author. This development of fiction, with its curious hospitality to edification, reform, sentiment, and romance, had bred a batch of daughters of Rousseau and of William Godwin whose voluminous earnestness upset the Tory proprieties. Americans read and enjoyed such British portrayers of domestic manners and

\(^1\) The spelling and punctuation of the original have been retained in all quotations.
romance as Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, Ann Radcliffe, and Jane Porter. Equally influential were the political and social radicalism of such British women as Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Mrs. Opie.

There is no question that feminism in Philadelphia was to a considerable degree inspired by European influences, just as Philadelphia in turn probably influenced other American cities. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the Philadelphia story was merely a reflection of the European, for there seem to have been native origins also. By 1776, Philadelphia was the second largest city in the British Empire and the emancipation of women was stimulated by its invigorating social and intellectual life. Colonial commercial prosperity had promoted a remarkable literary, scientific, and political development. This was the age of Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, Francis Hopkinson, and William Smith. Another liberalizing element in the Philadelphia scene was the Quaker population. Quaker women had experience in taking part in public meetings and had been taught to believe in their equality with men in the meeting and before God. They were given an equal place with men as members and ministers in the Society.

Perhaps one of the most important causes of the growth of feminist expression was the leisure which increased wealth had brought to the women of the middle and upper classes. Released to some extent from the complete drudgery of farm life, women had time to take stock of their position in society and to realize its limitations. Before the law, both her person and property were subject to her husband or father. In church activities, except among the Quakers, she was allowed little part. Even in her stronghold, the home, woman was expected to acquiesce to the dictates of the male members of the family. All this was based on the general assumption that woman was an inferior creature whose very being had significance only in relation to her father or husband.

The first reaction to this situation among at least a few women was to repeat the rather extreme assertions of feminine independence which abounded in the writings of such English women as Mary Wollstonecraft. Accordingly, vigorous statements, as in "Rights of

3 Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, Rebels and Gentlemen (New York, 1942), 4.
Women, By a Lady,” published in *The Philadelphia Minerva*, October 17, 1795, appeared:

Man boasts the noble cause
Nor yields supine to laws
Tyrants ordain;
Let Woman have a sphere
Nor yield to slavish fear,
Her equal rights declare,
And well maintain. . . .

Let snarling critics frown,
Their maxims I disown,
Their ways detest;
By Man, your tyrant lord,
Females, no more be aw’d
Let Freedom’s sacred word
Inspire your breast.⁶

If the rationalistic atmosphere of the eighteenth century had continued, the subsequent history of feminine thought would probably have followed this direct form of protest. As is well known, however, the prevailing intellectual climate became, in the nineteenth century, more and more romantic and this in turn served to sentimentalize woman’s position, glorifying her subordinate state and throwing a halo around her dual role as wife and mother. The pattern of her conduct was fixed by the prejudice of the very man she was most anxious to please. “An Elegant Description of Domestic Felicity,” printed in the *American Moral and Sentimental Magazine* for July 17, 1797, points this clearly:

The maternal solicitude of a reasonable affectionate woman is very interesting, and the chastened dignity with which a mother returns the caresses that she and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his station, is not only a respectable but a beautiful sight.⁶

When woman’s position was presented in this light, it seemed almost sacrilegious to question the lovely picture. And as a result, feminist thought had to compromise and tone down the violence of any demands in order to conform to the general conviction that ladies should express themselves only in the most genteel terms. A new

gentility was coming into fashion, based partly on the provincial American desire to rub off the raw edges of a new country and to emulate the English leisure class. This feminine sentimentality was by no means absent from English romanticism, and it certainly flourished in the early efforts of Philadelphia women to express their thoughts and talents.

Another basic handicap which delayed any rapid development of feminism was the low state of educational opportunity for women. The very fact that few women, even in a large city like Philadelphia, received the equivalent of a modern secondary education, made their leadership in this movement difficult. It is no wonder that, realizing this, one of the first things the more “advanced” women demanded was greater educational opportunity.

Educational privileges for women in Philadelphia were certainly relatively high, but the most that was available by the time of the Revolution was an elementary education for those girls who wished it. There were a few exceptions such as Anthony Benezet’s famous Quaker school, and in some of the wealthier homes girls were permitted to listen to their brothers’ tutors. But to provide at all for female education was a relatively new idea, and there was little thought that such education should go beyond the preparation of faithful mothers and dutiful wives. For example, the Academy for Females, opened in Philadelphia by John Poor in 1787, offered instruction only in Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Composition, Rhetoric, and Geography. The addresses of the young ladies at their commencements, however, were interesting for their persistent defense of female education and female oratory. 7

It is true, of course, that even before 1800, a few leading Philadelphians had demanded better things for feminine education. Benjamin Rush expressed his ideas in 1798 by urging as proper subjects for study: spelling, penmanship, and the ability to speak well, some knowledge of figures so that a woman might help her husband, and

An acquaintance with geography and some instruction in chronology will enable a young lady to read history, biography, and travels, with advantage; and thereby qualify her not only for a general intercourse with the world, but to be an agreeable companion for a sensible man. To these branches of knowledge may be added, in some instances, a general acquaintance with the first principles of astron-

omy, natural philosophy and chemistry, particularly, with such parts of them as are calculated to prevent superstition, by explaining the causes, or obviating the effects of natural evil, and such, as are capable of being applied to domestic, and culinary purposes.\(^8\)

Doctor Rush also added vocal music, as a remedy for consumption; and dancing, to encourage good health and as a substitute for the ignoble pleasures of drinking and gaming. The good doctor anticipated the time, however, when the “resources of conversation shall be so far multiplied, that the amusement of dancing shall be wholly confined to children.”\(^9\) Then he added two cautions: “The attention of our young ladies should be directed, as soon as they are prepared for it, to the reading of history—travels—poetry—and moral essays.” This will “subdue the passion for reading novels.” All these branches should be connected with regular instruction in the Christian religion.\(^10\)

The program of Benjamin Rush suggested the beginnings of a modern curriculum, but people in general were more timid than Rush about their daughters’ minds. We learn from an address delivered on June 27, 1801, by James A. Neal to his pupils at the Young Ladies Academy, that he had taught them Composition, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, and Astronomy. In the near future he hoped to add Rhetoric to the list of subjects but he assured the students that “no undue or painful exertions of your minds are required to comprehend its principles.”\(^11\)

Other criticisms of the ideas of Dr. Rush were even more pointed than those implied by Mr. Neal. Perhaps as a result of such criticism, but even more because of the developing sense of gentility already noted, the tendency during the first quarter of the nineteenth century was to expand the curriculum in girls’ schools along polite lines rather than in the more substantial directions advocated by Rush. Thus Mrs. Hopkins’ School, at Number 163 Spruce Street, in 1818 advertised extensive courses which were related to a romantic notion of social accomplishments:

> With the requisite aid of competent masters, the course of instruction will embrace the English, French, and Italian languages, Writing, Arithmetic, Music, Dancing, Dancing, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Astronomy, and Grammar.\(^8\)

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\(^10\) *Ibid.*, 81, 82.

\(^11\) *Philadelphia Repository and Weekly Register*, I (1801), 34.
Drawing in Crayons . . . Painting on Velvet, Embroidery, Tambour, Plain Sewing, and various fashionable fancy works, Sacred History, Ancient and Modern History, Mythology, Chronology, Geography, the Use of Globes and Maps, the Belles-Lettres, Rhetoric, Elocution, Composition, Moral Philosophy, and the Elements of Astronomy and Botany.

Although certain of these subjects would seem to be "scholarly," sacred history was simply Bible stories, moral philosophy was not philosophy in any modern use of the word but merely a teaching of morals and manners, and astronomy and botany were taught for the sentimental interest in stars and flowers. Apparently the primary object of such curricula was to qualify a well-bred young lady to attract a worthy suitor. There were naturally criticisms of this trend in education just as there had been criticisms of the ideas expressed by Dr. Rush. Many examples such as the following can be found:

Dancing, Music, and French, are considered as the only essential qualification. Far be it from me to condemn a genteel and liberal education, when parents have it in their power to bestow such . . . but what can be more ridiculous than making them the only requisites to perfection? . . . If we wish a reformation in female manners, let us begin one in their education; let them be taught that domestic usefulness is before modern refinement, and that to manage a family with economy, is far beyond touching a harpsichord.

It was not until the second quarter of the nineteenth century that there was a return to the demand that girls receive more substantial educational nourishment. In 1831, Sarah Josepha Hale, in Godey's Lady's Book, dared to advocate physical education for women:

Two things are needed. . . . One is a woman, who . . . will learn to demonstrate the anatomy of the chest and abdomen, at least, to all females, that they may know, for themselves and for their offspring. . . . Men may write, but people will not read, or cannot understand; and there is obvious impropriety in anatomical lectures delivered by men to classes of females—but, if a properly educated woman, of strong mind and heart, would undertake such a task in behalf of her sex, she would deserve the appellation of apostle of usefulness to a misguided generation. The other needful thing is a system of calisthenic exercises in a proper place, with proper apparatus—and under a scientific and practical instructor.

About this time, also, suggestions for a more practical education began to be heard. A few women, like Lucretia Mott, understanding the social complications in the problem of women's education, advo-

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12 Advertisement in Aurora—General Advertiser (Philadelphia), January 1, 1818, 4.
icated the radical plan of preparing them for economic independence. This was looked upon as most unwise by the conservatives, who actually said that if a woman were capable of earning her own living, she would be able to leave her drunken or criminal husband. Indeed, she might even become independent enough to decide that a “suitable” marriage was not the only acceptable lot in life. When Sarah Peter opened her School of Design in Philadelphia in 1850, the cautious appeal for assistance to the President of the Franklin Institute emphasized the financial need of some young women, but assured him that only those arts would be taught which could be practiced at home “without materially interfering with the routine of domestic duty which is the peculiar province of women.” Mrs. Peter would not counsel women to compete with men for worldly distinction.

Despite such slight signs of progress, as late as the middle of the century the education of women continued to emphasize chiefly their functions as mothers and therefore as teachers of children. Although this attitude pointed toward the primary influence which women later exercised in the teaching profession, the immediate effect was not constructive. “A mother should receive every advantage of learning which can improve her natural gifts as the teacher Heaven appointed for the young.” Thus spoke the wise and benevolent and very correct Sarah Hale. In similar vein she argued that a well-written book for children is of more value to human progress and more significant of its quiet but effective onward march than is a great work on philosophy.

The rather generally held conservative attitude toward female education during this period was well expressed by Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, a young Quakeress whose retiring ways led her to refuse an editorship as too worldly an occupation. She felt that the great effort of education should be to

qualify woman to discharge her duties, not to exalt her till she despises them; to make it her ambition to merit and display the character of the most amiable and intelligent of her sex, rather than aspire to emulate the conduct and capacity of men . . . [Here in America] women may hope to take their true, their most dignified stations, as the helpers, the companions, of educated and independent men.

15 Sarah Josepha Hale, Woman's Record; or Sketches of All Distinguished Women from The Creation to A. D. 1868 (New York, 1870), 871.
16 Ibid., 859.
Only afford them opportunities for improvement, and motives for exertion... let them... converse sensibly, without the charge of pedantry, and be intelligent without the appellation of a blue.17

Thus the chief aim of feminine education, until about 1850, was to teach a girl the nice things, the correct things—to be fashionable and to carry social responsibilities, to be prepared for domestic usefulness and for a moral influence over young men, to be a helpful companion to her husband and a dutiful teacher for her children.

The increasing interest in female education, together with the growing literary activities of women, stimulated widespread discussion concerning their capacities for learning. Probably the general assumption was that men were superior and that women wanted them to be.

Men need not have the smallest apprehension lest we should become their rivals in the pursuits of literature; for as Swift justly observes... all the knowledge that a woman can obtain is little more than that of a school-boy. In truth, the powers of our mind are as inferior to those of the men, as the strength of our body is to theirs.18

The opposite point of view was stated just as vehemently, and in the following instance it was a man who wrote:

It surely cannot be pretended that women’s intellectual natures are inferior to those of the other sex and incapable of equal improvement. ... Intellectual cultivation... fits the wife for what she is supposed to be. ... Who would be satisfied with a companion for life, who could entertain him with no other topics than those connected with the kitchen, the smoke house and the larder, the children, the servants, and the poultry yard? ... one who would contemplate the brightest displays of intellect with the vacant stare of an idiot, and look with a malignant and jealous eye on his books.19

It is difficult to assay the prevailing public opinion on this question which brought forth so many violent statements on both sides. However, since even the radical point of view which granted equality of ability if given equal training,20 seemed to imply that it would be

17 Benjamin Lundy, ed., The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler with a Memoir of Her Life and Character. Bound in the same cover, Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, Essays, Philanthropic and Moral (Philadelphia, 1836), 8, 9.
18 Anon., Female Mentor; or, Select Conversations (Philadelphia, 1802), 102.
20 This view was encouraged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the development of philosophical empiricism which held that the mind was a blank at birth and was formed by subsequent experiences. Those holding this view quite naturally felt that any apparently inferior group, that is, Negroes, as well as women, was capable of equal attainment if accorded equal opportunity.
unladylike to carry the education of women too far, it is probably 
safe to assume that masculine superiority was still widely conceded.

Discussions of this nature raised not merely the question of 
woman's capacity for education, but also that of her ability to 
participate in intellectual concerns of any sort. There is no better 
indication of this than the bitter arguments in the newspapers and 
magazines over the propriety of woman's entering the field of 
literature. At the beginning of the century, irate husbands and duti-
ful wives insisted that to bake a proper pudding was of more value 
and much more seemly than to waste the hours of the day in scrib-
bling verses. Even as late as 1821, Sarah Hall wrote to a Scotch-
woman,

Your flattering inquiry about my "literary career," may be answered in a word—
Literature has no career in America. It is like wine, which we are told must cross 
the ocean to make it good. We are a business-doing, money-making people. And as 
for us poor females, the blessed tree of liberty, has produced such an exuberant 
crop of bad servants, that we have no eye nor ear, for anything but work. We are 
the most devoted wives, and mothers, and housekeepers, but every moment given 
to a book is stolen.21

It may be added, however, that Mrs. Hall, the mother of eleven 
children, was still able to prepare a serious textbook entitled Conversations on the Bible. This led her to the study of Hebrew after she 
was fifty years old.

Those who felt that it was not womanly to publish verse and prose 
for the eye of the world to read, gradually realized that women were 
going to write whether they approved or not, and eventually modi-
fied their protests. It became fairly generally accepted that, within 
certain bounds, it was permissible and even advantageous for women 
to wield their pens:

No age has been more distinguished by the learning of its women than the eighteenth 
century. . . . But we admire them more as authors, than esteem them as women. 
. . . To forbid the use of pen and ink to ladies, is far from my intention. I think 
poetry a pleasing employment for their vacant hours, and novel-writing well 
adapted to female ingenuity. It is classical knowledge that I wish to withhold (as 
useless) from their study; and female pedantry is the object of my ridicule. . . . We 
admire the diligence and classical knowledge which could give us a correct transla-
tion of an obsolete author, form a perfect edition, or compile a lexicon; yet, when we 
learn that it is the work of a Lady, however highly we may prize her productions,

21 Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Sarah Hall . . . with a Memoir of Her Life (Phila-
delphia, 1833), xxviii, xxix.
we must pity that error of judgment which could engage her in pursuits so repugnant to female delicacy, so derogatory to the natural character of her sex.\textsuperscript{22}

The sentiments expressed above sound clearly the note that continues well into the nineteenth century. Verse, essays, character sketches, and stories comprise the major portion of the writing done by women, but the amount of this writing, small at first, became voluminous as women gradually broke away from a complete absorption in the occupations of the home.

As early as the 1790's, certain magazines published expressly for women began to appear, and ladies were encouraged to contribute prose and verse to these new ventures. A typical article advertising a new monthly magazine is found in the \textit{Philadelphia Album} of 1828:

"The Social Circle" conducted by Rebecca Bates has reached us in safety from Mount Pleasant, Ohio. It is neatly printed, and done up, very prettily, in a rose-coloured cover. A happy omen, for this blush of sweet modesty, "the colour of virtue," casts its delicate tinge on the following passage in the fair lady's address:— "The progress of more liberal sentiments, has softened the manners of the present age, and held out an invitation to us to adventure, though cautiously, and with timorous steps, into the pleasing walks of literature."\textsuperscript{23}

In the late twenties, gift books and annuals began to appear, and another outlet was obtained for female writing. As women gained confidence in themselves, book after book poured forth, signed at first "By a Lady," then "By a Lady of Philadelphia," or issued under a pseudonym such as "Laura" or "Edith May," and finally published with an actual signature. By 1855, the output of women writers had grown to such proportions that Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote in the famous letter to Ticknor, his publisher:

America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of "The Lamplighter" and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand.\textsuperscript{24}

American literature in the first fifty years of the nineteenth century is measured in terms of Irving, Cooper, Poe, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Melville. To attempt to force a place in such august

\textsuperscript{22} [From the Trifler] Signed "N," "On Female Authorship," \textit{The Lady's Magazine and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge}, I (1792), 69.


\textsuperscript{24} Quoted by Fred Lewis Pattee, \textit{The Feminine Fifties} (New York, 1940), 110.
company for any of the Philadelphia women writers is certainly not the purpose of this paper. But it seems clear that these women were obtaining a wide hearing and influencing thousands to whom their verse and prose seemed to be literature—sweet, pretty, and understandable. Thus they deserve a place in our intellectual history which, because of our present-day distaste for sentimentality, we are slow to accord.

Surely one reason for that large audience of which Hawthorne complained was the familiarity of the themes treated in this feminine literature. Women wrote primarily about love—the love of happy hearts, or of despairing, forsaken spirits. In prose and verse they celebrated these sentiments. There was also mother love! This led aspiring women to write books for children: such primers as *My Little Geography,* and *I Will Be a Gentleman*; or selections of literary nosegays for young ladies, as well as more pretentious textbooks like *The Handbook of Universal Literature,* which undertook to record the history of literature through the ages, and the *History of Architecture,* a really remarkable volume. The literary homebodies also wrote countless practical household books, cookbooks and books which listed household hints, and they wrote many articles in magazines on the proper care of home, food, and clothing.

The tremendous literary activity of the women of this era was a distinctly self-conscious movement. It was such a realization of the accomplishments of her sex which led Sarah Josepha Hale to prepare

26 Louisa C. Tuthill (Boston, 1846).
28 Louisa C. Tuthill (Philadelphia, 1848). Mrs. Tuthill lived in Philadelphia from 1847 to 1851, and it was here that she finished and published this book. The preface states that "nothing of the kind has hitherto appeared." Many of the statements made by Mrs. Tuthill are modern in tone. "Domestic architecture in this country must be adapted to the circumstances and condition of the people. . . . A cottage or a farmhouse may be picturesque without sacrificing one tittle of its convenience. The great and leading object should be utility. . . . With a due deference to the genius of the ancient, . . . an American architect must possess the power to adopt what is suitable to our soil, climate, manners, civil institutions. . . ."
29 Eliza Leslie wrote: "The works from which I have, as yet, derived the greatest pecuniary advantage are my three books on domestic economy: *Domestic Cookery Book,* 1837, is now in its 41st edition, each having at least a thousand copies, *The House Book,* 1840, and *Lady's Receipt Book,* 1846." John S. Hart, *The Female Prose Writers of America* (Philadelphia, 1852), 32.
her compendious Woman's Record; or Sketches of All Distinguished Women from The Creation to A. D. 1868.\footnote{New York, 1870. The first edition of this remarkable work was published in 1854, the second in 1855, and the third, which was a revised edition, in 1868. Editors in America and abroad used this book in preparing similar biographical anthologies. One London editor admitted his volume was chiefly a “condensation from a large and costly volume published in America and entitled Woman's Record, by Mrs. Hale, who states in her preface that it cost her three years of hard study and labour—a volume which in itself is a striking example of feminine ability in authorship.” Publisher's notice, printed in front of the 1868 edition.} In emphasizing this conscious feminism, however, women inevitably expressed those general ideas or ideals which dominated the age. Typical and striking illustrations of these several enthusiasms will be given from the writings of thirty-five Philadelphia women of the period from 1790 to 1850.

The growing freedom of expression among women was perhaps most daringly shown in their willingness to write poems and stories on the theme of love. There are literally thousands of sentimental verses with such titles as “Can't Thou Forget?” “The Bride’s Confession,” “I Sing to Him.” Typical of these verses are the following lines by Elizabeth Lorrain Swift:

\begin{quote}
I wander in a Paradise, where Love alone is heard!
I look into those beaming eyes, words of impassioned tone
Are gushing from the ardent heart I feel is all my own,
These wild flowers gathered by his hand are twined within my hair,
A coronal to deck the brow he thinks on earth most fair.\footnote{Thomas B. Read, The Female Poets of America (Philadelphia, 1851), 128.}
\end{quote}

Occasionally a more modern note of independence is shown, as in Grace Greenwood’s “Ariadne.” The heroine is exhorted to send her lover away:

\begin{quote}
Arouse thee! joy to bid him go;
For god above, or man below,
Whose love's warm and impetuous tide
Cold interest or selfish pride
Can chill, or stay, or turn aside,
Is all too poor and mean a thing
One shade o'er woman's brow to fling
Of grief, regret, or fear.\footnote{Rufus W. Griswold, Female Poets of America (Philadelphia, 1849), 391. Sara Jane Clarke Lippincott, who wrote under the name “Grace Greenwood,” was one of the earliest American women to become a regular newspaper correspondent. Her letters from Washington and Europe to leading New York, Chicago, and California newspapers were very popular. During the winter of 1847-48, she became an editor of Godey's Lady's Book. However, in 1850, Godey announced that he was dropping Grace Greenwood from his list of contributors.}
\end{quote}
The romantic hopes and yearnings of women were expressed in prose as well as in verse. Beginning with Susanna Haswell Rowson’s *Trials of the Human Heart* and *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times*, the pattern of the stories is fairly consistent. The novel, *Laura*, published in 1809, “By a Lady of Philadelphia,” is an interesting example. The heroine, a young and beautiful female, with uncommon powers of mind and a glowing imagination, loses her mother at the age of fifteen. She falls in love, but is pressed by her relatives into a marriage at which her feelings revolt, and prefers putting herself under the protection of her lover. From this first false step further imprudencies arise, and misery and destruction are the consequences. Contemporary criticism approved the “tale [since it] is related with a choice of expression so happy, and the language is so elegant and melodious, so chaste and unaffected.” Two months after this glowing review of the novel, “Orin” praised the book in a letter to the editor of *The Port Folio*, concluding, “Throughout are dispersed a variety of pertinent reflections, so artfully disposed as not to detract in the least from the interest of the recital. It affords an impressive lesson to the imprudent female, and speaks home to the heart of the libertine.”

because of her abolition tendencies. He was obviously eager to hold his Southern subscribers. Whereupon John Greenleaf Whittier addressed a poem to Godey’s

“moony breadth of virgin face
By thought unviolated.
Thou saw’st beneath a fair disguise
The danger darkly lurking,
And maiden bodice dreaded more
Than warrior’s steel-wrought jerkin.
How keen to scent the hidden plot!
How prompt wert thou to balk it!
With patriot zeal and peddler thrift
For country and for pocket.”


33 Philadelphia, 1795.
34 Philadelphia, 1798.
35 This may have been written by Mrs. Leonora Sansay (Mary Hassall?) who was also known as Madame D’Auvergne. Lyle H. Wright, *American Fiction 1774-1850* (San Marino, Calif., 1939), 172.
36 Anon., “Literary Intelligence,” *The Port Folio*, 3d n.s., I (1809), 68–70.
37 *The Port Folio*, 3d n.s., I (1809), 274, 275.
In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, fictional character sketches filled the magazines and were often collected and printed in volume form. In typical stories, the heroine, a virtuous young lady, is taken through a variety of adventures, but usually she is not allowed to make serious errors in judgment, for at the end of the story she must be rewarded with her heart’s desire. The settings are widely varied. Sometimes the young lady is from a wealthy home; oftener, perhaps, she begins as a poor working girl and is able finally to obtain a rich husband. In many of the stories the main character suffers a reversal of fortune which tests the strength of her nature. Her way may be made difficult by her neighbors’ envious gossip; or her youth and frivolity lead her to misunderstand her serious and kind, if older, husband. But through all trials and tribulations, through the physical perils of childbirth and the problems of motherhood, she at last attains happiness.

These narratives are constantly interrupted by moralizing sentiments. In this typical example a wedding scene calls forth the following comments:

There is a young and often thoughtless maiden, taking upon herself vows which but few understand, in the depth of their import, vows lasting as life, and on the full performance of which depends in a great measure, the joy or misery of her future years. Then, too, in her trust and innocence, she does not dream that change can come, that the loved one will ever be less considerate, less tender, than at the present hour . . . Then, too, the proud man that stands beside her, may be but taking that gentle flower to his bosom, to cast it aside when its perfume shall have become less grateful—leaving it crushed and faded; or, worse still—and still more improbable, though it is sometimes so—there may be poison lurking in the seemingly pure blossom, that will sting and embitter his future life. Oh, that woman should ever prove false to the vow of her girlhood!38

The sentimental love of the home and the importance of family ties were also expressed in the poetry and prose of these women writers. The natural human tendency to exaggerate past joys and to be wistful concerning childhood memories makes understandable such lines as these:

But oh, I long once more to view my childhood’s dwelling place,
To clasp my mother to my heart—to see my father’s face!39

or the following by Laura M. Thurston:

The green hills of my fatherland
   In dreams still greet my view: . . .
   I wonder if my home would seem
   As lovely as of yore! 40

And when young men left home to make their way in the world, there was a very real sense of fear for their safety. Months would pass before any word could reach home from the adventurer. Because the family unity was so often broken in this way, because separation was a common but always agonizing sorrow, people responded to its expression:

   Come home!
   Would I could send my spirit o'er the deep,
   Would I could wing it like a bird to thee,
   To commune with thy thoughts, to fill thy sleep
   With these unwearying words of melody:
   Brother, come home! 41

Another naturally interesting subject to women writers is the love of their children. The joys of motherhood, fears for the future, and prayers for God's protection furnish themes for many poems. There are also frequent descriptions of the child in his cradle, at play, and at school.

   What! my merry little one,
   Have I found thee all alone?
   Fast asleep, and, as it seems,
   In the far-off land of dreams? 42

The maternal spirit of responsibility is evident in “Little Children,” by Mary J. Reed, which admonishes the mother to “Speak gently to the little child,” teach him kindness and love for all human creatures and for God.

   Remember 'tis no common task
   That thus to thee is given,
   To rear a spirit fit to be
   The habitant of Heaven! 43

A love of children and a desire to help them led, as has been said, to the writing of children's books. This was not a new impulse, for

40 Griswold, Female Poets, 227.
41 Ibid., 217.
42 Caroline May, The American Female Poets (Philadelphia, 1848), 520.
43 Ibid., 531, 532.
From the days of the New England Primer, children’s books had been published. Until the later part of the eighteenth century these publications were primarily of a religious nature. But by the late 1700’s, a new secular emphasis appeared which was destined, after the turn of the century, to increase steadily. There was less use of adult material written down to the level of a child’s comprehension and a greater attempt was made to write for the children themselves. This was done in the usual sentimental manner, of course, and with the primary purpose of edification. For small children there were such volumes as Mrs. Hale’s Countries of Europe, written in verse, telling the story of each country and giving moral instruction at the same time. Under the heading “Spain,” the story of Columbus is told briefly, then Mrs. Hale adds that Spain has treated her colonies terribly:

And ever since that cruel day,
Gladness from Spain has passed away;
From Spain we learn that doing wrong
Is never left unpunished long.

For older children, Mary Townsend wrote Life in the Insect World in the form of conversations between Aunt Mary and her young friends. Sarah Hall’s Conversations on the Bible, in similar style, was widely used as a textbook. Another kind of book for children was Eliza Leslie’s American Girl’s Book: or, Occupation for Play Hours which was in its fourteenth edition in 1849. In addition to these more or less strictly educational books, Philadelphia women were writing, by the decade of the forties, stories for young people. They were extremely didactic, many of them written with the Sunday School library in mind, but they were fiction. Such were the little volumes, Helen Morton, and its sequel, Watch and Pray, written by Alice B. Neal. Emily Judson published a predecessor to the Horatio Alger stories in Allen Lucas; the Self-Made Man, which tells the story of a lad whose industry is aroused by a good teacher. Beginning

45 Sarah Josepha Hale, Countries of Europe, and the Manners and Customs of Its Various Nations (New York, 1860), 36.
46 Philadelphia, 1844.
48 Boston, 1849.
49 New York, 1848.
as a carpenter, he rises to fame and fortune as an architect. After one
disappointment in love, he wins a good and beautiful young wife. As a
contrast to Allen, Robert May, his boyhood friend, takes for
granted his family’s sacrifices to send him to college and law school,
and lets them suffer financially and die in want. He foolishly marries
for money and finds his life a most unhappy one. As the book ends,
Robert has obtained a seat in Congress but has degenerated physi-
cally and morally, and is a wretched old man.

When women writers went beyond the bounds of love and family
life for their subject matter, the most frequent theme, in poetry par-
ricularly, was nature. Occasionally this resulted in pure description,
as in the rather lovely poem by Fanny Kemble\textsuperscript{50} called “Winter”:

\begin{verbatim}
I saw him on his throne, far in the North,
Him ye call Winter, picturing him ever
An aged man, whose frame, with palsied shiver
Bends o’er the fiery element, his foe.
But him I saw was a young god whose brow
Was crown’d with jagged icicles, and forth
From his keen spirit-like eyes there shone a light
Broad, glaring, and intensely cold and bright.
His breath, like sharp-edged arrows, pierced the air;
The naked earth crouched shuddering at his feet;
His finger on all murmuring waters sweet
Lay icily,—motion nor sound was there;
Nature seem’d frozen—dead; and still and slow
A winding sheet fell o’er her features fair,
Flaky and white from his wide wings of snow.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{verbatim}

The description of scenes or creatures, however, was rarely objec-
tive. Usually nature was employed to point a lesson. One typical

\textsuperscript{50} In 1832 Fanny Kemble and her father came to America to tour with the Park Theater
Company. Her \textit{Journal} (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1835), is a record of her tour and expresses her
opinions of American people and places. She frequently notes her especial liking for Phila-
delphia. For example, the entry of October 9, 1832, reads, “[Philadelphia] is perfect silence
and solitude compared with New York; there is a greater air of age about it, too, which
pleases me. The red houses are not so fiercely red, nor the white facings so glaringly white;
in short, it has not so new and flaunting a look, which is a great recommendation to me”
(p. 139). In June, 1834, Fanny Kemble married Pierce Butler of Germantown, Philadelphia.
She lived in the Butler mansion at 8th and Chestnut Streets and in their summer place at
Branchtown, in suburban Philadelphia. “She was a great horsewoman and there are many
old residents of Germantown who remember often seeing her superb figure mounted on a
handsome gray.” From a newspaper clipping dated January 16, 1893, London, found in a
copy of the \textit{Journal} at the Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

poem pictures a young girl holding a silkworm. The poet, Sarah Josepha Hale, admits she "should have shrunk from such an object," but she gladly describes the scene and draws from it the necessity of sympathy with every harmless thing, "when with usefulness combined," saying we must,

Give them our love and gentle care,—
O, we might have a world as kind
As God has made it fair!\(^{52}\)

Another characteristic example is Juliet H. Lewis' "Night-Blooming Flowers." The fair buds bloom not in the bright sun of day, nor yet when the sunset paints its glorious hues across the sky, but with the coming of the silent watch of stars, "you burst your emerald bonds" and teach mortals to pray.\(^{53}\)

This didactic poetry won the whole-hearted approval of the American public. Rufus Griswold wrote:

It is a gratifying fact that nearly everything in the poetic manner produced in this country is free from licentiousness, and harmless, if not elevating in its tendencies. Thus far the chief distinguishing characteristic of American poetry is its moral purity. May it so remain forever.\(^{54}\)

The innumerable poems dealing with the death of a beloved person were no doubt the reflection of actual feeling, although these women lacked the poetic ability demanded for tragedy. Instead they substituted sentimentality, as in Catherine Waterman Esling's poem of the little lad who was "our father's darling," "our mother's cherub," "our sister's plaything," and "our brother's treasure," who now is "a blessed angel" whose "home is in the sky."\(^{55}\) Such verses as this are somewhat analogous to the pathetic but naive sentiments still expressed in the obituary sections of contemporary newspapers. A less sincere expression was often found in poems such as Harriet Fenno's "To a Withered Rose," which affects a melancholy feeling.

\(^{52}\) Rufus W. Griswold, Gems from the American Poets with Brief Biographical Notices. Bound in the same volume, Gems from American Female Poets (Philadelphia, 1848), 30.


\(^{55}\) Griswold, Female Poets, 217.
To me thou didst recall the time,
When hope and fancy wing'd my days,
When, in my joyous, youthful prime,
No pensive note e'er mark'd my lays. . . .

Poor rose adieu! may I, like thee,
When "death has laid my green head low,"
Have some fond friend to sigh for me,
And mourn for buds that never blow. 56

The preoccupation with death, which is partly a persistence of an earlier Puritan outlook, carried over into the prose stories. Clara Jessup Moore goes so far as to set the happy ending of "The Young Minister's Choice," in the graveyard where Gertrude has gone to mourn at the tomb of her parents. There she is found by her childhood sweetheart, Howard Beauchamp, whom she has regretfully put from her mind, believing that he has married his cousin, Ellen. Explanations are made, and the penitent Ellen confesses to the burning of letters and to the sending of false messages because of her passionate love for Howard. She is forgiven and "when they passed out of the graveyard, Ellen and Gertrude each leaned upon an arm of Howard Beauchamp—Ellen still 'sowing in tears' and Gertrude and Howard 'reaping in joy.'" 57

An appreciable number of the writings of these Philadelphia women go a step beyond mere moral teaching and can be listed as truly religious works. In addition to prayers written in verse by almost all the women, Mrs. Hall published a number of prose prayers, and Catherine Waterman Esling and Elizabeth Chandler wrote hymns. The women's magazines often carried accounts of missionaries and pleas for their support. "Fanny Forester" contributed

56 John E. Hall, ed., _The Philadelphia Souvenir, a Collection of Fugitive Pieces from the Philadelphia Press_ (Philadelphia, 1826), 169, 170. Harriet Fenno, daughter of John Ward Fenno, contributed poetry to _The Port Folio_ under the signature of "Violetta." Mr. Hall printed two of her poems in the _Souvenir_, but stated, "There are no incidents in the life of the writer that require to be related in this volume, even if delicacy would permit an investigation of the history of a lady. . . ."

57 Hart, _Female Prose Writers_, 344. Clara Jessup Moore (Mrs. Bloomfield Moore) wrote voluminously under her own name and the pseudonyms "Clara Moreton" and "Mrs. H. O. Ward." Hart (p. 335) says that "in describing the struggles of a woman's heart, when actuated by the passion of love, she is peculiarly happy. . . ." However, "authorship with her is an amusement rather than a profession. She wisely considers that the duties of a wife and mother are paramount. . . ."
sketches from India which, like her *Memoir of Mrs. Sarah B. Judson*, were very popular. Early in the century Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson had paraphrased the Book of Psalms.

During this period a growing interest in humanitarianism was noticeable. Societies for the abolition of slavery, free produce societies to boycott the products of slave labor, societies for temperance, and movements for women's rights were formed in spite of conservative opposition. Seamen's Aid societies, the Magdalen organizations, orphan and foundling asylums, the campaign for prison reform and for better treatment of the mentally ill—these struggling attempts to better the lives of human beings all expressed the increasing concern of the American people for their fellowmen. Indeed, many women expressed an intense patriotic fervor which they wrote into nationalistic verse and prose. Nor did their charity stop at home, for they were interested in the cause of humanity and freedom everywhere, especially in those lands beyond the sea where tyrannical oppression flourished.

This literary phase of the general humanitarian impulse made an interesting appearance in Susanna Rowson's play, *Slaves in Algiers, or a Struggle for Freedom*. Here are found abolition sentiments and feministic tendencies. The Epilogue, spoken by Mrs. Rowson, was addressed particularly to her female audience:

58 Emily Chubbuck ("Fanny Forester") spent the winter of 1845 in Philadelphia at the home of the Reverend A. D. Gillette, a Baptist minister. There she met Adoniram Judson, on leave from his mission field in Burma, and was employed by him to write the biography of his second wife who had died in India. "Over this sainted wife the two wept together, . . . he furnishing the facts and [she the tearful adjectives, and when the book was done they were married and she went with him to Burma." Pattee, *Feminine Fifties*, 283.

60 Elizabeth Graeme was a well-known figure in Philadelphia from before the Revolutionary War. One of the most interesting of her works is a translation of Fénelon's *Telemachus*. At one time she was engaged to Benjamin Franklin's son, William, but he broke the engagement, and for the next three years she buried her sorrow in the difficulties of this translation. The introduction observes that the author "is sensible that the translation has little merit" but that "it is sufficient for her that it amused her in a period that would have been pensive and solitary without a pursuit." Griswold, *Female Poets*, 24. While it is true that the translation "fails to do justice to the original, it represents a really massive performance for any English-speaking woman of her time, and shows her tough-minded enough to attempt a major undertaking in another language." Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen*, 113. More than twenty years later, she re-wrote the four volumes, adding occasional notes and observations. From this revision, Griswold printed four passages in *Female Poets*, 26, 27.

Well, Ladies tell me—how d'ye like my play?
"The creature has some sense," methinks you say;
"She says that we should have supreme dominion,
And in good truth, we're all of her opinion.
Women were born for universal sway,
Men to adore, be silent, and obey."\(^{61}\)

From this early period, as has been suggested, a growing number of poems and articles illustrate the trend of feminism. Its organization into the Woman's Rights movement and, later in the century, into a growing number of women's clubs is a well-known story.\(^{62}\)

Abolition sentiments were well expressed in the verse of Whittier's friend, Elizabeth Lloyd Howell, in Sara Jane Lippincott's writings, and perhaps in greatest volume in the work of Elizabeth Chandler. Her most popular poem was "The Slave Ship," which tells the story of a noble African chief confined on a slaver, mourning his lost freedom, his friends, and his bride. He speaks:

"Death, death once again in my country shall place me,
One bound shall forever from fetters release me!"
He burst them, and sunk in the ocean's dark breast.\(^{63}\)

Fanny Kemble, partly because of her stage popularity, gained a wide reading public to whom she addressed the *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-39*.\(^{64}\) This details the dreadful condition of the slaves belonging to her husband, Pierce Butler. The volume had considerable influence and excerpts from it were used to refute pro-slavery statements. A pamphlet entitled "Views of Judge Woodward and Bishop Hopkins on Negro Slavery"\(^{65}\) included several long quotations from Fanny Kemble's book, because her realistic descriptions showed the fallacies in arguments advanced by the judge and the bishop. Another booklet, "What Became of the Slaves on a Georgia Plantation,"\(^{66}\) was a sequel to the *Journal* and gave a har-

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\(^{61}\) Quinn, *American Drama to the Civil War*, 123.

\(^{62}\) Examples of feminist writing by these Philadelphia women in addition to those already mentioned include Sarah Hall's essay, "On the Extent of Female Influence and the Importance of Exerting It in Favour of Christianity," Elizabeth Chandler's poem, "Woman," and the sprightly verses of Eliza Sproat Turner.


\(^{64}\) New York, 1863.

\(^{65}\) Bound in *Secession* pamphlets, Vol. 10, University of Pennsylvania Library.

\(^{66}\) Bound in *Civil War* pamphlets, 1863, No. 23, University of Pennsylvania Library.
rowing picture of the slave auction at Savannah, Georgia on March 2 and 3, 1859.

Sarah Josepha Hale's abolition tendencies were written into her revision of the novel, *Northwood*. The hero, Sidney Romilly, retained and educated his slaves so that they might be prepared for emancipation. He believed that a great future awaited the Negro in Africa:

I am intending to help colonize Liberia. What a glorious prospect is there opened before the freed slaves from America. . . . If there is a country on earth where some future hero, greater even than Washington, may arise, it is Africa.  

These sentiments were expressed again by Mrs. Hale in *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiments*. This presents in slightly fictionalized form the difficulties of freeing the slaves, the beginnings of the American Colonization Society, the emigration to Africa, settlement at Cape Mesurado, April 25, 1822, and life in the new colony. A long appendix contains documents for the most part written by Negroes from Liberia.

Another of Mrs. Hale's humanitarian activities was the organization of Seamen's Aid Societies. To further this cause, she published a poem, "Harry Guy, a Story of the Sea," in pamphlet form "written with the kind intention (which we trust will be fully realized) of doing something in the cause of the much-neglected sailor." Louisa C. Tuthill was also an ardent worker for the same cause and carried her interest to the point of including the following verse in her primer, *My Little Geography*, placing it at the end of the chapter entitled "The Ocean":

O! pity the sailors who, far on the sea,  
Oft suffer with hunger and cold,  
And give a few pennies to build them a "Home"  
For all their disabled and old.  

The evils of strong drink were bewailed by many women, but again the most quotable examples are from the writings of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Tuthill. In Sarah Josepha Hale's *The Judge, a Drama of*

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67 This novel was first published in 1827 in two volumes entitled *Northwood; a Tale of New England*, and contained very little reference to slavery. The revision was *Northwood; or Life North and South: Showing the True Character of Both* (Philadelphia, 1852), 405.

68 New York, 1853.


70 Tuthill, *My Little Geography*, 47.
*American Life,* the prisoner has been convicted of murder, but his counsel pleads leniency because

The murderous deed his hand did was not done  
With heart consent—he knew it not. The fiend  
That rum evokes had entered him and changed  
His nature. . . .

he prays that all  
Would lend their aid to root intemperance out,  
And crush the horrid haunts of sin and ruin,  
Where liquid poison for the soul is sold!  

Pattern for countless sketches is Mrs. Tuthill’s “The Petition.” The children hear their father’s foot upon the stair and run to hide from him. “Why? He is a married roué—A dissipated father! He walks up to the magnificent pier-glass, and after looking at himself for a moment, exclaims, with an oath, ‘Sober!’” Turning away he hears his little girl praying for him, “O God, pity my poor father, and make him a good man.” Then Mrs. Tuthill addresses the man directly, “Walter Norrie, that arrow, from the quiver of the Almighty, has found a crevice in the armour with which vice has guarded thy soul.”

From women, too, has always come the expression of a strong desire for peace. Writers in the early part of this period remembered the Revolution and had lived through the War of 1812. Later came the Mexican War, and by 1850, a few of the more farsighted women were anticipating the disaster of civil conflict. Such lines as Elizabeth Chandler’s “Think on the dead, and on those broken-hearted,” were a poignant reality. And in the midst of the celebration over the successful conclusion of the Mexican War, Sara Jane Clarke reminded Americans that death and destruction were the means of gaining victory. “Light up, light up your homes” in triumph, she declared, only if the slain be forgotten.

71 *Godey's Lady's Book,* XLII (1851), 25. This play was published in the January, February, March, April, and May issues of the magazine. For a further account of Mrs. Hale, see Isobel Entriken’s unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled “Sarah Josepha Hale,” University of Pennsylvania, 1943.


74 Griswold, *Female Poets,* 393.
Other aspects of humanitarianism were also made the subject of a considerable amount of prose and verse. And parallel with this desire to better the conditions of unfortunate and misguided people, appeared the related determination to express a pride in American freedom as the tradition most likely to realize such social improvements. This nationalistic pride, typical of the era, was the basis for Susanna Rowson’s *The Volunteers* which tells the story of the Whiskey Rebellion, and for Sarah Josepha Hale’s *Ormond Grosvenor*, which is founded upon the celebrated case of Colonel Isaac Hayne, Revolutionary martyr of South Carolina. The latter “was written to illustrate the spirit of the American Revolution, or the struggle between the principles of civil liberty—then first developing their power in this country—and the proscriptive privileges of aristocratic domination in the old world.” Even in an essay on fashion, we find Mrs. Hale making such statements as the following:

If our citizens would only shake off this tyranny of fashion, imposed by the tailors of Paris and London, and establish a national costume, which would, wherever an American appeared, announce him as a republican, and the countryman of Washington.

A similar spirit is frequently found in poetry, as in this interesting “Proem” to Grace Greenwood’s *Poems*:

My lays, my lays,—would they might find
An echo in my country’s heart,
Be in its home-affections shrined,
Form of its cherished things a part! . . .

And would to Heaven that Freedom’s voice,
Wild, bold, defying, strong,
Might sometimes, like a martial strain,
Peal through my fearless song?

This same writer carried her nationalism into wider expression with a humanitarian sympathy for the oppressed and suffering

75 Performed January 21, 1795. Quinn, *American Drama to the Civil War*, 123.
77 *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, XVI (1838), 33.
78 Hart, *Female Prose Writers*, 98.
79 (Boston, 1850), 5, 6.
people of Ireland, in a poem entitled "Verses from the Old World: The Famine of Ireland of 1847":

Ho! freight the good ship to the wale,
    Pile high the golden grain!
A nation's life-boat spreads her sail,
    God speed her o'er the main!\(^{80}\)

Anne C. Lynch also appealed for an appreciation of the Irish situation, crying,

Hark! 'tis her starving millions cry,
    "Give Ireland liberty!"\(^{81}\)

Miss Lynch's numerous poems in defense of liberty, including "Day Dawn in Italy," caused Caroline May to characterize her poetry as "pure, fervent patriotism, that genuine love for the just and the free, and that indignant scorn for oppression."\(^{82}\)

It is, of course, not feasible to consider all the women who were contributing to the literature of the period from 1790 to 1850, even in one city. The journals of Sally Wister, Ann Warder, and Elizabeth Drinker, although valuable as sources for social history, were not written for publication. But the well-known work of Deborah Norris Logan should be mentioned. Perhaps her greatest contribution was the preservation of the family papers at Stenton. She deciphered, copied, and annotated thousands of pages of manuscript which make up eleven quarto volumes and give us a clear and vivid picture of Revolutionary days and early Republican Philadelphia. Indeed, John F. Watson admits his enormous indebtedness to her for help in compiling his *Annals of Philadelphia*,\(^{83}\) the first major attempt to write the history of this city. Her important contributions were recognized by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. She was the first woman to be elected a member of that Society, and at her death a splendid tribute to her great services was inscribed on the minutes of the organization.\(^{84}\)

It has been possible here only to suggest the scope of the literary

\(^{80}\) *Ibid.*, 93.
\(^{81}\) May, *American Female Poets*, 460.
\(^{83}\) Philadelphia, 1856, 2 vols.
\(^{84}\) "Recent Accessions," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LIX (1935), 204.
activity of women in Philadelphia during the first half century of the new nation, and to outline the principle social causes, intellectual interests, and artistic aspirations which motivated their expression. The literary quality of their writing was mediocre, but its social significance was considerable, and to a certain extent it influenced the popular aspects of American thought. Hampered as she was both by traditional limitations and by a sentimentality which almost precluded serious activities, the "Philadelphia female" was not altogether unsuccessful in declaring the rights and dignity of her sex.

*University of Pennsylvania*  

**Thelma M. Smith**