



4-14-2006

The Cult of Millennial Motherhood and the Rhetoric of Female Reform: Domesticity, the Millennium, and Gender Constructions in Antebellum America

Erie M. Roberts '06
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/history_honproj



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Roberts '06, Erie M., "The Cult of Millennial Motherhood and the Rhetoric of Female Reform: Domesticity, the Millennium, and Gender Constructions in Antebellum America" (2006). *Honors Projects*. 7.

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/history_honproj/7

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Erie Martha Roberts
Honors Research
Prof. Bushnell
14 April 2006

The Cult of Millennial Motherhood and the Rhetoric of Female Reform:
Domesticity, the Millennium, and Gender Constructions in Antebellum America

"While you thus keep our country virtuous, you maintain its independence."¹

Early American reform has long been a subject of study and interest for scholars of American history. The period between 1820 and 1850, during and directly after the Second Great Awakening, gave rise to myriad different reformers and reform movements, all with different agendas. Yet, within specific movements, and even among different ones, reformers held similar ideologies that wielded great influence over the movements they led. This was especially true of conservative female reformers, many of whom believed in domestic ideologies that prescribed a separate, yet equal sphere of influence for women. As Linda Kerber, Ruth H. Bloch, and Barbara Welter argue, post-revolutionary and antebellum America gave rise to the Republican Mother, the Moral Mother, and the Cult of True Womanhood.² Each theory proposes different ways of understanding how and why religious maternal domesticity became so influential in the early nineteenth century. However, these theories tend to overlook the role that evangelical millennialism played in the construction of these ideologies.

¹ "Female Influence: Columbia College Commencement Oration of 1795," quoted in Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 230.

² See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; Ruth H. Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815." *Feminist Studies* 4 no. 2 (June 1978); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" *American Quarterly* 18 no. 2 (1966).

Such is not the case with the work of Robert H. Abzug. As he convincingly proves in his book *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, underlying many of the major early American reformers was a strong sense of the coming millennium. However, while Abzug looks at the major reform movements of this period, his analysis overlooks conservative reform movements that help to fully construct this cosmic drama, including the majority of antebellum women's rights activists. This is especially evident in his analysis of Catharine Beecher and Lydia Maria Child, and by the reformers he neglects, such as Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, and Susan Warner.³ As my essay will show, by combining the theories of Kerber, Bloch, Welter, Abzug and others, a more comprehensive picture of early, non-radical female reformers becomes clearer, that of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood.

I. Gender Ideology in Post-Revolutionary and Antebellum America

Before an intelligent discussion about women's activism in antebellum America can take place, it is first imperative to understand the prevailing gender ideology of the time. In pre-revolutionary America, "woman" and "mother" were not thought of as inseparable terms, nor was "mother" a woman's primary role. In the late eighteenth century, there were two mutually exclusive feminine ideals propagated by contemporary rhetoric: the help-meet or the decorative ornament.⁴ As the Help-Meet, women were supposed to be an extension of male breadwinning, helping with the economic prosperity of the household; as the Ornament, women were decorative objects whose main job was to achieve as many refinements as possible, such as music, drawing,

³ It must be noted that Warner is not usually considered a "reformer" in the strictest sense. However, her novels brought her into the public sphere and, as demonstrated in section VII, in the antebellum period reading was a political act. Thus, Warner advocated the reforms posited in her novels and can be considered a reformer.

⁴ Bloch, 102.

languages, etc.⁵ Both of these ideals “dwelt primarily on women’s relationships to God and man as Christian, wife, and social companion. Neither placed much emphasis on motherhood.”⁶ In fact, during this period the tasks associated with childrearing often were assigned to fathers, perhaps as Ruth Bloch posits, because of “broader cultural assumptions about the inferiority of women.”⁷ What both ideals did emphasize was a woman’s “‘control and influence’ over the domestic realm.”⁸ However, it was not until several years after the Revolution that conceptions of gender and the woman’s proper role changed so as to make Mother her primary identity.

During this post-revolutionary period the concept of the “woman’s sphere” began to develop. This ideology worked to rationalize traditional patriarchies by “considering masculine and feminine ‘spheres’ as equal, and by stressing women’s common experiences as women.”⁹ The masculine sphere was public, thus reinforcing the male role as economic provider for a family and justifying his participation in political actions. The feminine sphere, on the other hand, was private, domestic, and moral. A woman’s rightful place was in the home, where she remained behind the scenes as the “moral center of the family.”¹⁰ As many historians have noted, such an ideology could only have survived in a context where women “believed at least some part of—and gained at least some benefits from” this separation.¹¹ These benefits (discussed in more detail below) revolve around a woman’s supposedly inherent piety, and protestant, evangelical religion helped create and sustain an antebellum gender ideology. The idea of separate spheres united women and religion so that both were enclosed “within the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 106-107.

⁸ Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women’s Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 59.

⁹ Boylan, 16.

¹⁰ Donald Pickens, “Antebellum Feminism and the Domestication of the American Revolution” 5 no. 8 (1984): 71.

¹¹ Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1990): 34.

generic boundaries of the domestic.”¹² From thenceforth, women, home, and religion were inextricably linked and the influence she wielded from within her sphere grew as the nineteenth century progressed.

II. Theoretical Contexts: Kerber, Bloch, Welter, and Abzug

According to Kerber, the change from wife to mother first began in the years following the revolution. The ideology of the revolution was based on democratic ideals of citizenship and participation; however, these were male ideals. The war raised questions about women and politics. In the new, free democracy, what was the woman’s role? Could women be political persons, and if they could, then how?¹³ Americans at the time wanted to construct a role for women that allowed “private female virtues” to easily co-exist with the “civic virtue that was widely regarded as the cement of the Republic.”¹⁴ Republican Motherhood provided the answer. In the new republic, because women were wives and mothers they shaped “morals and manners, [and] women were sent to make a crucial, though indirect, contribution” to society.¹⁵ The main source of the Republican Mother’s powers was “The influence women had on children, especially sons, [which] gave them the ultimate responsibility for the future of the new nation.”¹⁶ Woman “now claimed a significant political role, though she played it in the home.”¹⁷ Thus, the concept of Republican Motherhood politicized the domestic and “justified an extension of women’s participation ... in the civic culture.”¹⁸

¹² Tracy Fressendan. “Gendering Religion.” *Journal of Women’s History*, 14 no. 1 (Spring 2002): 166.

¹³ Kerber, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ Rosemarie Zagari, “Morals, Manners, and Republican Motherhood.” *American Quarterly* 44 no. 2 (June 1992): 205.

¹⁶ Kerber, 229.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸ Pickens, 70.

However, this did not mean that political women were universally accepted. Republican Motherhood “preserved traditional gender roles at the same time that it carved out a new, political role for women,” yet, women’s role remained “a severely limited one.”¹⁹ If women were “no longer prepolitical, they were certainly not fully political” at this point.²⁰ The change from Help Meet or Ornament to Republican Mother was more of a “rhetorical resolution to their intellectual conundrum,” rather than a substantial shift forward for women’s rights.²¹ The spheres remained separate, and the boundary between masculine and feminine spheres remained impenetrable; the Republican Mother was responsible for raising future leaders, but not actually leading the country.

Building upon Kerber’s work, Bloch’s conception of the Moral Mother centers on growing emphasis on “mother” during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. According to Bloch, the rise of the Moral Mother coincided with women’s growing role as childrearer.²² Although the Republican Mother was primarily secular, the Moral Mother put more emphasis on the spiritual. The Moral Mother was rooted in the “evangelical perspective on motherhood, with its stress on women’s religiosity rather than reason and its emphasis on the importance of their exclusively domestic role.”²³ This resulted in the growing belief that women had the “requisite mental qualities to take charge of the minds and morals of growing children.”²⁴ Over time, this arrangement resulted in “upgrading the social status of women” by giving women “an important field of special expertise.”²⁵ The result was “a compelling synthesis of the old and the new” that carved out a public role for women that was, at the same time, ensconced in the

¹⁹ Zagarri, 192.

²⁰ Kerber, 12.

²¹ Zagarri, 210.

²² Bloch, 115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

domestic sphere. Thus, despite the difference in their foundational assumptions, the Republican Mother and the Moral Mother achieved the same end: a larger role for antebellum women.

Continuing in the tradition of the Republican Mother and the Moral Mother, Welter's conception of the Cult of True Womanhood provides an explanation for the continuation of the limiting ideology of women's sphere. According to Welter, rhetoric of the time advocated an ideally domestic woman who could be judged according to "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."²⁶ These virtues emphasized the spiritual, thus differentiating it from the concepts of Kerber and Bloch. However, the True Woman was, first and foremost, a mother. She was the person upon whom the entire country depended to "raise up a whole generation of Christian Statesmen."²⁷ But the True Woman was also to focus her energy toward the home and domestic economy. It was not enough that she raise Christian sons; the True Woman must make home "a cheerful place, so that brothers, husbands and sons would not go elsewhere in search of a good time."²⁸ Women both inculcated virtue and insured that men remained virtuous. The future of the nation was in their hands.

The women who possessed these qualities were granted a kind of freedom society denied to other women at the time. With these virtues, the True Woman "was promised happiness and power;" without them, "all was ashes."²⁹ As long as women were perceived to adhere to True Womanhood, they were able to take small, halting steps into the public sphere. Most of these steps were mediated by the church. Religion held a central place in this cult, partially because it did not take women away from the home, her proper sphere.³⁰ Moreover, "church work would

²⁶ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 no. 2 (1966): 152.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman.”³¹ As long as action took place (or appeared to take place) within the church, a True Woman could advocate change, thus granting women a small place in the public sphere.

Like Welter’s, Abzug’s theory of antebellum reform emphasizes the spiritual dimension. According to Abzug’s theories, reforms were intended to restructure the cosmos in anticipation of the coming millennium, and the symbology and structure of the cosmic drama underlay most reform rhetoric. Building upon the ideas of scholar Max Weber, Abzug posits that early reformers were, in fact, a particular brand of religious virtuosos. According to Weber (who based his definition on medieval Catholic societies), religious virtuosos are “individuals whose consciousness in most cases seemed tuned to heavenly rather than earthly matters;” i.e. people such as monks or hermits who spent their life on earth preparing for the afterlife.³² This definition, when extended to relentlessly Protestant societies like America, includes individuals who “focus[ed] on the earthly and frowned upon formal holy orders, such types, as one scholar put it ‘find their honor and their struggle everywhere on God’s earth.’”³³ Thus, American protestant reformers operated within an evangelical religious framework as they tried to reform earthly economic, social, and political problems.

American reformers built upon the symbology of the American Revolution, specifically “The Revolutionary image of an American bathed in millennial splendor . . . [which] became for reformers the basis of a self-scrutinizing national piety.”³⁴ Operating within this evangelical, millennial cosmic worldview, reformers “created in the minds of many a sense that their era was what, in the twentieth century, the theologian Paul Tillich has called a *kiros* . . . a movement in

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

history marked by entry of the Kingdom of God into human affairs.”³⁵ Abzug extends this idea to specifically American reformers: people who “shaped their agenda from the social, political, and economic turmoil of the day, but within a millennial and sometimes apocalyptic sense of America’s role in the cosmic drama.”³⁶ Using Abzug’s reworked definition provides for new and useful insights into the underlying motivations of early American reformers.

For early American reformers, then, “social, economic, and personal issues came alive within the reform cosmology. It constituted a broad sacralization of the world, where sacred and profane were of a piece.”³⁷ The idea of religious virtuosos and the cosmic metadrama within which reform played out is a powerful way of understanding the varied and disparate aspects of reform during this time period. Working from ideas of “human nature, morality, society, and history [that] were clearly influenced by their faith,” early American reformers organized their rapidly changing society into one that functioned within an age-old cosmic, millennial symbology.³⁸

While few of the major reformers during this time period actively supported or campaigned for a new conception of a woman’s role, the development of various religious and reform groups allowed women to participate in the public sphere in new and unprecedented ways. Women were moving out of the home and participating in quasi-political actions, both radical and conservative. White women were among “the first to enlist for abolition.”³⁹ Even women who most closely adhered to traditional, evangelical views of a women’s role “were motivated by the central tenets of evangelical republican womanhood to play a significant role in

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ Mark David Hall, “Beyond Self-Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America” *Journal of Church and State* 44 no. 3 (2002): 484.

³⁹ Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995): 114.

[reform movements], and ... these activities required women to be involved in the public sphere."⁴⁰

This change manifested itself in several ways. Most conservatively, this change helped to entrench the idea that, even if women "should not be directly involved in public life . . . it is necessary for them to mold and shape the men who are."⁴¹ At the other end of the ideological spectrum, "evangelicalism's millennialism encouraged women to attempt to reform society as a whole, a test that led them to engage in public activities such as writing, organizing benevolent societies, and even participating in politics."⁴² Instead of working within the system, religious virtuosos, for various reasons, chose to work outside the realm of politics. Furthermore, wherever individual women reformers, activists, or religious virtuosos fell on this continuum they "reorganized [at] the limits of politics . . . they focused on strengthening institutions like families, churches, and voluntary societies."⁴³ Thus, a specific brand of feminine reform developed, one that focused on the family, and through family, society; one that focused on the particular role women played in developing society; one that worked through both conservative and liberal ideologies. In the process, they formed what I shall call the Cult of Millennial Motherhood.⁴⁴

III. The Structure of Millennial Motherhood

By manipulating these ideologies, women were able to find a way to actively work to change the future of America and her people and simultaneously maintain traditional gender roles. They did this by advocating increased and improved female education, which in turn led

⁴⁰ Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 495.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 483.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 499.

⁴⁴ This term is unique to this paper.

to increased opportunities for women that existed outside the home and participation in benevolent agencies. According to prominent nineteenth-century arguments, in order for society to function correctly, women had to be educated for their role as wife and mother. If women held the future of the country in their hands, then it was only logical that they were adequately prepared for their duties. As a result, "Domesticity was treated as a vocation, motherhood a profession."⁴⁵ Thus, "the changed conceptions of women's roles, which politicized the personal, provided justification for an unprecedented attention to female education."⁴⁶ Although the need to educate women seems implicit in any theory that gives women such influence on the future of the country, advocates of education reform did face opposition and "female seminaries were quick to defend themselves against any suspicion of interfering with the role which nature's God had assigned to women. They helped to enlarge and deepen that role, but not to change its setting."⁴⁷ Ironically, however, the expansion of women's education helped to move women out of the home, although it only took them as far as the classroom. Increased educational opportunities necessitated increased schools and teachers. Women, it seems, were perfect for this position because the role of teacher was similar to that of mother, and women teachers were paid less than men.⁴⁸ Thus, education not only presented new intellectual opportunities to women, it also provided new occupational ones.

The second way in which women manipulated gender ideologies in order to expand their field of influence was through the creation of and participation in benevolent societies. Many women of the time "used their piety and purity to gain access to public influence and

⁴⁵ Kerber, 210.

⁴⁶ Margaret A. Nash. "Rethinking Republican Motherhood," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 17 no. 2 (Summer 1997): 173.

⁴⁷ Welter, 168.

⁴⁸ Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (1993): 531-551.

authority.”⁴⁹ It was logical that, “while defending their home against drink, slavery, etc.” from the inside, women would create benevolent societies in order to prevent problems before they started. Thus, reformers were able to advocate change of all kinds, including proto-feminist views of equality or power, without the hostility shown to untraditional women like Mary Wollstonecraft.⁵⁰ Benevolent societies and female reformers were thus able to use conservative gender ideologies in order to move within the male political world. This benevolence also reinforced the relationship between mother, family, and religion. They created voluntary societies, such as the American Bible Society or the American Temperance Society, to help further their goals. The result was the convergence of domestic and evangelical ideologies, with antebellum moral reformers viewing the domestic as the main institution through which they could sanctify the profane. Unintentionally, therefore, those working within the Cult of Millennial Motherhood helped expand woman’s role outward into the community.⁵¹ Benevolent agencies and moral reformers began to look toward institutions such as family and school as “the means of effecting human regeneration” of God’s moral law.⁵²

Thus, the theories of Kerber, Bloch, Welter, and Abzug must work together in order to fully understand the writings and actions of antebellum women such as Beecher, Child, Sigourney, and Warner. These women worked within the ideologies—both political and religious—that permeated their society. Yet they also expanded these ideologies in order to create a larger sphere of influence for women. This process began in the private sphere, with reformers working to sanctify the role of the mother and emphasize a mother’s inherent role as educator. However, this process quickly moved into the public sphere as antebellum female

⁴⁹ Nancy A. Hewitt, “Taking the True Woman Hostag,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14 no. 1 (Spring 2002): 158.

⁵⁰ Kerber, 288.

⁵¹ Jeanne Boydstone. *Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women’s Rights and Woman’s Sphere* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988): 121.

⁵² Pickens, 71.

reformers extended this concept of mother to include teacher. As teachers and mothers, women could use their inherent morality and influence to consecrate both public and private, thus, preparing America for the Kingdom of God on Earth. It is this millennial hope that distinguishes the Cult of Millennial Motherhood. By working within it, these four women attempted to subvert the structures that supported them.

IV. Catharine Beecher

Catharine Beecher, one of the era's most prolific and influential female reformers, was a religious virtuoso who worked within the Cult of Millennial Motherhood in order to improve the condition of society on a large scale. The daughter of influential evangelical reformer Lyman Beecher and sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Catharine Beecher was a highly intelligent woman who "is a fine example of a Christian thinker who made a conscious attempt to integrate her faith with her life's work."⁵³ Throughout her life, Beecher used her intellect and religious fervor to improve female education, "specifically, a program of rigorous training for their special role as cook, housekeeper, and health keeper for the American home,"⁵⁴ as well as teacher in American schools and through these roles, to purify society as a whole.

As a child, Beecher's father Lyman cultivated her religious faith and education by including her in his ministerial work, including pastoral visits; he also encouraged her to imitate and emulate his thinking.⁵⁵ But her early Calvinist world-view was profoundly shaken when her fiancée drowned on a trip to Europe. Her father and his version of Calvinism could not comfort Beecher, because it was not proven that her fiancée converted before he died, a prerequisite to

⁵³ Mark David Hall, "Catharine Beecher: America's First Female Philosopher and Theologian," *Fides et Historia* 32 no. 1 (2000): 79.

⁵⁴ Gerald Carson, "Catharine Beecher," *The New-England Galaxy* 5 no. 4 (1964): 3.

⁵⁵ Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern and Mary Fuller* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 5.

salvation according to Lyman's theology. It was during this time of emotional turmoil that "Beecher discovered that theological rigor did nothing to assuage emotional pain."⁵⁶ As a result, Beecher "responded to her spiritual frustration by spelling out an alternative road to holiness, one that made her own life emblematic for women in general and offered new religious and social ideals," a decision that has prompted many scholars to argue that Beecher was not an evangelical Christian.⁵⁷

However, it is more near correct to assert that "she abandoned some of the 'harsher' tenets of Calvinism but remained firmly in the evangelical camp."⁵⁸ She also did not fully reject her father's stringent Calvinism; instead, it is better to claim that she "began to apply common sense," accordingly, modifying but not rejecting Lyman's religion.⁵⁹ Indeed, as Abzug demonstrates in his book, because Beecher was "Too strongly steeped in evangelicalism to abandon it, she instead reworked Lyman's evangelical cosmology by revaluing its consistent elements."⁶⁰

This revaluation is evident in nearly all of her written works, whether political, social, or theological. Throughout her body of work, Beecher created an ideological outlook that placed women in the center. Like other religious virtuosos, Beecher shared a conception of America's chosenness that began with the Puritans. Like them, Beecher "believed that America was a city on a hill destined to advance the kingdom of God on earth. Although God's victory was inevitable, America's leadership in this process was not. If America did not produce virtuous citizens, democracy could degenerate into majority tyranny."⁶¹ Only women could produce such

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁷ Abzug, 191.

⁵⁸ Hall, "Catharine Beecher," 74.

⁵⁹ Mae Elizabeth Haverson, *Catharine Elizabeth Beecher (Pioneer Educator)*, (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969): 32.

⁶⁰ Abzug, 191.

⁶¹ Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 486.

citizens. Even though Beecher's ideal women remained behind the scenes (per the rules of the women's sphere), according to her evangelical, millennial worldview, women were "the prime mover in the creation of values and models for a middle-class Christian society."⁶² It was solely through women's unique role as wife and mother, educator and housekeeper that society would improve.

This idea recurs throughout many, if not most, of her non-fiction works. Although her works show a great reverence for the ideals of American democracy (which would include, one would assume, separation of Church and state), Beecher clearly believes the only way to fulfill the promise of the Revolution is if "the marked boundaries between the Church and the world"⁶³ continue to fade away. And as they fade, it will become apparent that "The principles of democracy . . . are identical with the principles of Christianity."⁶⁴ Beecher is working not only within the Cult of Millennial Motherhood but also extending and qualifying it so that it contains her millennial worldview. Beecher's Millennial Mother stands at the center of her gender and moral ideologies.

Beecher continually circles back to the idea that only with Christian moral leadership can American democracy and her structures flourish. "The success of democratic institutions," she argues, "depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people."⁶⁵ Once the masses are morally educated, it will not be long, Beecher argues, until her millennial dream becomes a reality. Already, society is nearing the:

future condition in that perfected state of society toward which . . . humanity, under the guidance of Christianity, is steadily tending. When this state is fully attained, every man

⁶² Abzug, 191.

⁶³ Catharine Beecher, *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Women; with a History of an Enterprise Having That for Its Object* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co, 1851), 19.

⁶⁴ Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (New York: Source Books Press, 1970), 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

and every woman will *practically* love their neighbors as themselves, and all the institutions of society will emanate from this spirit.⁶⁶

God's kingdom of heaven on earth was near. In this respect, Beecher stands alongside the other religious virtuosos of her era. Her writings draw upon her father's evangelical symbology, one that was developed under the influence of a cosmic metahistory and anticipation of the coming of the millennium. However, in accordance with her view of the woman's role, Beecher saw the millennium coming, not through temperance, abolition, or bodily reforms, but rather through the correct education of women in the art and practice of domestic economy. It is only by teaching women not only the correct way to run and maintain a home, but also to build it, that a Christian society could ever come to pass.

Beecher's desire to form a Christian society by reforming private, often female dominated, institutions is evident in nearly all of her printed works, although most especially so in those treatises, essays, and books on religion, education, and domestic economy. In general, her books "present the foundational principles for the thoroughly Christian world-view . . . They also shed light on her political and social theory."⁶⁷ What is unique about Beecher's theory is the way that all aspects of it are bound together in Christian theology, unlike others who subscribed to the ideologies of motherhood. She did not simply write about women's education, or how to properly ventilate a house; rather, her works pay "simultaneous attention to cultural expectations and private agenda."⁶⁸ Thus, her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* is not simply "a home economics textbook, but it is one that addresses the central questions of political theory in a sustained and intelligent manner."⁶⁹ Like any true religious virtuoso, Beecher combines the sacred and the secular, the heavenly and the earthly, the domestic and the political, and combines

⁶⁶ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 24.

⁶⁷ Hall, "Catharine Beecher," 65.

⁶⁸ Tonkovich, 12.

⁶⁹ Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest," 485.

them in such a way as to make “women the central actors in the drama of social regeneration,”⁷⁰ shifting the focus from the masculine public sphere to the feminine private sphere.

Beecher was one of the first reformers to make such a radical shift of focus from the masculine to the feminine. While male reformers might have “recognized womanhood itself as a vital, flexible, and changeable sphere,” male reformers rarely tried to reconcile their vastly different view with the dominant one.⁷¹ Thus, by virtually ignoring the daily struggles of their sisters-in-arms, male reformers implicitly privilege the masculine public sphere. Furthermore, it was in the public sphere that these religious virtuosos worked and acted; their actions imply that it was only through the public sphere that they could conceive of achieving a true, lasting millennium.

Beecher did not reject this notion of an evangelically hierarchical society; however, she did significantly rework it. Most importantly, Beecher “recast both the teacher and the mother as female counterparts of the minister, charged, not only with educating of the mind, but within the perfection of the soul.”⁷² This idea is even more revolutionary, since few churches at this time let women become ministers, including her father’s. As she stated and implied in nearly all of her works, Beecher stridently believed that “if this country is ever saved, it must be by woman more than man.”⁷³ Like the majority of her political and social theory, Beecher’s view of the powerful role women played in the cosmic drama developed from both religious and real world study. She claims that “the Bible’s view of the case[,] . . . that it is far *more favorable* to woman’s increased influence and high position in social and domestic life than that of those who

⁷⁰ Abzug, 192.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Tonkovich, 19.

⁷³ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 242.

dissent from it,” is the way things should be on earth.⁷⁴ Hence, even though she was working within traditional male/female boundaries, and would even go so far as to write against liberal woman’s rights groups, Beecher reworked traditional evangelical thought to create a special and powerful role for women in society.⁷⁵

According to historian Jeanne Boydstone, women now had “the voice of the female minister,” and Beecher gave them the power and opportunity to use that power both in the classroom and in the home, the most powerful and important places in society.⁷⁶ It is to “intelligent, reflecting, and benevolent women—whose faith rests on the character and teachings of Jesus Christ”⁷⁷ that Beecher directs her work; these are the women who are fit “for the right fulfillment of your high and holy calling.”⁷⁸ that of nurturer, teacher, and mother.

Like many of her contemporaries, Beecher conceived of motherhood as being a social role that was best performed in the home. However, if one were unwilling or unable to properly nurture or educate her children, the female teacher was an appropriate substitute. To the woman, she gives the “*training of the human mind in the years of infancy and childhood . . . [their] appropriate and highest vocation.*”⁷⁹ Furthermore, “It is WOMAN,” she wrote “whom experience and testimony have shown to be the best . . . guardian and teacher of childhood, in the school as well as the nursery.”⁸⁰ Even her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, a home economics textbook designed for homemakers, mothers, and mothers-to-be, declared “all the responsibilities

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁷⁵ Abzug, 213.

⁷⁶ Boydstone, 121.

⁷⁷ Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *American Woman’s Home*, ed. Nicole Tonkovich (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 21. First published in 1869.

⁷⁸ Catharine Beecher, *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1852), 280. First published 1846.

⁷⁹ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 33.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 240-241.

in regard to health, morals, and manners, rest upon the female teachers.”⁸¹ Whether these female teachers exist within the home, or outside of it, “the upward progress of the age, and the advance of a more enlightened Christianity” depends upon their nurturing care.⁸²

Beecher’s conception of woman’s role gains even more power when it is examined in light of the cosmic drama in which Beecher’s reforms exist. Even though Beecher mostly keeps women in the private sphere of the home, with only the role of teacher as a viable, public alternative, she fervently believes that it is women, no matter what role they play, who will bring about the millennium by creating moral masses: “the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand.”⁸³ It is not only the young that women influence, but also men of all ages. “Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent,” she argued, “and the men will certainly be the same.”⁸⁴ Women are the prime movers in Beecher’s cosmic drama.

Beecher even extends the definition and ideology of “mother” so that it includes women who choose not to have children of their own. As Boydstone notes, Beecher’s writings reveal a belief that “Any woman, married or single, became a mother simply through her ministrations to others”⁸⁵ Unlike many evangelical reformers, Beecher argues, “No woman is under obligations to marry unless she chooses to do so.”⁸⁶ In her writings, the role of mother is always closely connected to that of teacher, both bound together by the idea of nurturing. In her *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, she groups together “wife, mother, educator, nurse, and house-

⁸¹ Beecher, *Treatise*, 36.

⁸² Beecher and Stowe, 21.

⁸³ Beecher, *Treatise*, 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸⁵ Boydstone, 119.

⁸⁶ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 227.

keeper.”⁸⁷ And she claims in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* that all women “are agents in accomplishing the greatest work that ever was committed to human responsibility,” regardless of whether it is “The woman who is rearing a family of children” or “the woman who labors in the school room.”⁸⁸ The mother, whether as housekeeper and wife or teacher and nurse, was the most important actor in Beecher’s cosmic drama.

But in order for a woman to become the perfect mother, she must first learn all the necessary domestic skills: cooking, cleaning, nursing, educating, etc. Like other proponents of antebellum gender ideologies, Beecher saw that the only way for her to do this was through the proper education of women; this is what Beecher’s life’s work became. There were two primary ways in which Beecher advocated the improvement of female education. One was by writing tracts and treatises, explaining why it was vital to society that women’s education became a rigorous and respected enterprise. Motivated by millennial hope, Beecher sought to argue that when “the Savior’s prediction in regard to his coming kingdom will be fulfilled: ‘The first shall be last, and the last shall be first.’ Whenever this golden period arrives, *all women will be educated*, and, what is more, they will all be educated *for their profession*.”⁸⁹ The millennium will only be achieved through the education of all women, not in ornamental skills such as drawing and painting, but in practical ones like domestic economy. Women were to be useful and trained for their job as moral leaders. As Mark David Hall notes, “Both her vision for the substance of this education, as well as her promotion of it, show that she wanted women to play an important role in the nation’s public life” through their private work.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Catharine Beecher, *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 186. First published 1855.

⁸⁸ Beecher, *Treatise*, 14.

⁸⁹ Beecher, *True Remedy*, 27-28.

⁹⁰ Hall, “Beyond Self-Interest,” 489.

The other way in which Beecher promoted female education is through her own textbooks on the subject. Her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt Book*, *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*, and *The American Woman's Home* (which she co-authored with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe) are all designed to teach young and inexperienced homemakers what they did not, and could not, learn in school. As she wrote in the introduction to *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, "It is painful, after years of trial and anxiety, to discover, that, in some important respects, mistakes have been made, which have entailed suffering and sorrow on ourselves, and on the objects of our care."⁹¹ Even fifteen years later, when *The American Woman's Home* was published, the same problems still existed. In the introductory chapter, Beecher and Stowe wrote that:

while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the disabilities and sufferings of their sex, [they] are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not dually appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful.⁹²

It is as a way to rectify this problem, as well as to "elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state" that Beecher devoted a large portion of her work to the direct instruction of women in the finer arts of domestic economy. Once women were educated for their job, Beecher believed that women were finally ready to engage in their domestic labors and assume their role within the Christian home.

Once Beecher firmly established the need for educating women, she then went about arguing for woman's divine role within the house. The family is sacred, holy, and divine. Several times throughout her works on domestic economy, Beecher uses evangelical and

⁹¹ Beecher, *Treatise*, ix.

⁹² Beecher and Stowe, 19.

millennial rhetoric to argue for the divinity of the family unit. She argued that Jesus Christ “came into this world to secure” the family state.⁹³ But even though her conceptions of family are based in a hierarchical, evangelical tradition, she placed educated, moral women at the center of a Christian household. Relying on typical gender rhetoric of the time, Beecher argued in many of her works that the “chief responsibility of *sustaining the family state*, in all its sacred and varied relations and duties, should rest mainly on the female sex,”⁹⁴ and that “The family state . . . is the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister.”⁹⁵ Beecher both uses and subverts traditional evangelical paradigms in order to help bring about the millennium.

One of the most unusual and powerful ways that Beecher establishes women as the prime mover of the millennium is through her ideas about the architecture of the home. These ideas are most fully generated in *The American Woman's Home*, which, although coauthored by both Beecher and Stowe, is primarily Beecher's work.⁹⁶

Through her amateur architecture Beecher wants to create “a Christian house,”⁹⁷ which is a house where “the wise woman seeks a home in which to exercise [her] ministry, she will aim to secure a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy, those cardinal requirements of domestic enjoyment and success.”⁹⁸ In choosing such a home, Beecher was, according to scholar Valerie Gill, trying to help the wise woman “prepare

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁴ Beecher, *Letters*, 188.

⁹⁵ Beecher and Stowe, 24.

⁹⁶ It was basically an “enlarged edition of the earlier book [*Treatise on Domestic Economy*] with some quotations from Mrs. Stowe's *House and Home Papers* and some material that was entirely new,” as well as incorporating some of Beecher's early newspaper and magazine articles. Haverson, 176.

⁹⁷ Beecher and Stowe, 28.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

her family for the stringent requirements of a Protestant heaven.”⁹⁹ Thus, the Christian home will not only help bring about the millennium, but it will also ensure that Beecher’s sacred family state will achieve its place in heaven.

In her architectural drawings, Beecher enshrines the Christian family, makes it permanent, and links “the secular home and God’s eternal home.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Boydstone notes that Beecher’s drawings were part of a larger attempt to domesticate Christ-like selflessness “within the walls of the middle-class home.”¹⁰¹ It is a tactile, lasting display of Beecher’s religious virtuosity, reliance on the Cult of Millennial Motherhood, and of the way her conception of the cosmos influenced nearly all of her attempts at reform.

Her Christian home grows and becomes “a centrifugal entity, a moral force that radiates outward from the center of the actual Christian house to the circumference of society.”¹⁰² Beecher opens the doors of her Christian house to include those in need of help—poor, indigent, and orphans. In *American Woman’s Home*, Beecher argues that “the present mode of collecting special classes in great establishments, though it may be the best in a choice of evils, is not the best method for the physical, social, and moral improvement of those classes,”¹⁰³ Beecher urges women to open the doors of their homes to those who need their ministry the most. While acknowledging the difficulties associated with administering to the poor and needy, Beecher argues that such work “is the peculiar privilege of women in the sacred retreat of a ‘Christian home.’”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, if the Christian home is built according to Beecher’s drawings, then the time saved “by the *selection and close packing of conveniences* . . . thus may be attained for

⁹⁹ Valarie Gill, “Catherine Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Architects of Female Power,” *Journal of American Culture* 21 no 2 (1998): 18.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰¹ Boydstone, 122.

¹⁰² Gill, 21.

¹⁰³ Beecher and Stowe, 319.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 318.

aiding to save the vicious, comfort the suffering, and instruct the ignorant.”¹⁰⁵ The Christian house thus creates a place from which woman’s ministry can effectively be extended to the community at large.

It is unsurprising that Beecher then turns her focus toward the community in general, and not simply to the individual family. In Beecher’s final chapter, Valerie Gill notes that “The Christian household evolves outward . . . into the Christian neighborhood.”¹⁰⁶ Beecher describes this ideal community as being a place where “a truly ‘Christian family’ [is] instituted in any destitute settlement, and soon its goodness and fields would cause ‘the desert to blossom as the rose,’ and around would soon gather a ‘Christian neighborhood.’”¹⁰⁷ At the center of this Christian neighborhood would be a multi-purpose building, once again designed by Beecher (Appendix 4), that will be “a small church, a school-house, and a comfortable family dwelling.”¹⁰⁸ The school’s aim would be “during the week, to collect the children of the neighborhood, to be taught not only to read, write and cipher, but to perform in the best manner all the practical duties of the family state.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, the Christian neighborhood would train more boys and girls to succeed at their roles in the Christian family; they will have the knowledge necessary to build a Christian house, to raise the proper Christian family, and to extend their ministry to those in need.

The result of Beecher’s plan is that “the ‘Christian family’ and ‘Christian neighborhood’ would become the grand ministry, as they were designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven.”¹¹⁰ For Beecher, the millennium was near; in order to achieve it, women must do their

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁰⁶ Gill, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Beecher and Stowe, 337.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 337.

all to sacralize their world. As mothers and teachers, it was women's duty to build, run, and maintain a Christian house, to raise a Christian family, and to develop a Christian neighborhood. But this could not be done without having an educated woman, one who was trained in her profession. Beecher politicized the sacred, private sphere and extended it outward so as to encompass the whole world. The Millennial Mother stands in the center, ruler of a public-private sphere that is mediated through the bastion of female power: the home. Because it is in the private, not the public, sphere that ultimate power rests, it is only through the private sphere that the millennium will come.

V. Lydia Maria Child

Like Beecher, Child was (and still is) an influential, well-known political activist. However, unlike Beecher, Child's work on domestic economy and her views on women's role in and out of the house are under-researched. Born Lydia Francis in 1802, Child's early years were far from happy. While close to her brother and mother, Child's father was "cold, shaded, and uncongenial."¹¹¹ When she was twelve, her mother died, her brother went away to college, and her father sent her to live with her older sister in isolated Gardiner, Maine. It was not until 1822, when Child left Maine and moved to Massachusetts with her brother, that her spiritual and literary selves began to develop. Although she "reluctantly allowed herself to be baptized a Unitarian," she found herself drawn to transcendentalism and began socializing with Ralph Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker.¹¹² It was during this time that Child renamed herself

¹¹¹ Lydia Maria Child to Lucy Osgood, 26 March 1847, quoted in Abzug, 193.

¹¹² Abzug, 193.

Maria, and, according to Abzug, “it was as if her new name brought the possibility of a new life”—one as author, activist, and millennialist¹¹³

In 1828, Maria Francis married David Lee Child and remained so for 46 years, although separated for ten of those years.¹¹⁴ Her marriage was troublesome, and some biographers of Child’s life believe her marriage was a “disaster, a bond that held her back from fulfilling the promise of her talents.”¹¹⁵ Yet, as Abzug deftly argues, her marriage also helped develop her sense of self and character; it “seemed to strengthen [her] powers of assertion and imagination, as well as her faith in both women’s spirituality and the essential unity of humankind.”¹¹⁶ Her marriage also encouraged her to write and forced her to develop a career that took her outside the home and into the world. Throughout her varied career, Child’s Millennial hope recurs, as do her beliefs about the moral power and influence of women as mother and teacher. It is this combination of millennial hope and domestic influence that place child within the Cult of Millennial Motherhood.

During their marriage, it was Lydia Maria Child who supported the two of them from the royalties of her numerous published works. While her more radical views, especially those on abolition, tend to get the most attention from scholars, it is her works on domestic economy that provided the steadiest source of income for the couple. *The American Frugal Housewife*,¹¹⁷ a scattered yet useful book on domestic economy that included recipes, household tips, and advice on how to survive poverty, went through 33 editions in the United States, as well as 12 in

¹¹³ All preceding biographical information from Abzug, 193-194.

¹¹⁴ Kirk Jeffery, “Marriage, Career, and Feminine Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America: Reconstructing the Marital Experience of Lydia Maria Child, 1828-1874,” *Feminist Studies* 2 no. 2/3 (1975): 113.

¹¹⁵ Abzug, 196.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *The American Frugal Housewife* was first published as *The Frugal Housewife* in 1829. The two titles can be used interchangeably.

England and nine in Germany.¹¹⁸ Her other major work on domestic economy, the advice manual *The Mother's Book*, was also a success and “won Child a tremendous ovation from the public, probably because it fulfilled a need no other work on the market yet addressed.”¹¹⁹ Together these advice books offer an interesting and often over-looked insight into the mind of Lydia Maria Child. According to Patricia Holland, these books are “fascinating for their revelations about women’s work and responsibilities. Besides practical advice, they contain suggestive reflections on the role of women as conveyors of moral values” and a sense of women’s broader role within the cosmic metadrama.¹²⁰

Partially due to the popularity of *The American Frugal Housewife* and *The Mother's Book*, by 1832 Child was well on her way to making “enormous strides in reimagining the spiritual and moral power of women and her place in society.”¹²¹ While Carolyn L. Karcher argues that Child’s domestic advice books are not influenced by the domestic gender ideologies, in actuality Child’s works on domestic economy helped elevate and promote the “role of mothers in the national project.”¹²² In fact, one reviewer commented that Child’s domestic works promoted “not only familial but national well-being,” effectively extending her potential influence to include the country and its future destiny.¹²³

Child’s positions regarding the proper roles for women underlay the advice in both books. However, before women could properly fulfill their roles as wife, mother, and moral

¹¹⁸ Patricia Holland, “Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880),” *Legacy* 5 no. 2 (1988): 46.

¹¹⁹ Haverson, 145.

¹²⁰ Holland, 49. This claim stands in sharp contrast to those of Carolyn L. Karcher, Child’s primary biographer. Because of Karcher’s tendency to overlook Child’s more conservative or domestic view points in favor of her more radical ones (and her tendency to misread Beecher), Karcher’s work will rarely be referenced. See Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Women in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

¹²¹ Abzug, 199.

¹²² Karcher, 142; Sarah Robbins, “‘The Future Good and Great of Our Land’: Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domestic Literacy in Antebellum New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 75 no. 4 (2002): 563.

¹²³ Robbins, 562. The review is in reference to one of a series of books Child wrote and edited titled *The Ladies Family Library*, a project designed to help properly educate the entire family.

guardian, they had to have the proper education. Throughout her domestic advice books, Child re-emphasized the importance and necessity for a “thorough, religious, *useful* education.”¹²⁴ One reason Child supported women’s education was because she believed that “a variety of knowledge ... [made] a woman a better wife, as well as a better teacher.”¹²⁵ Like Beecher, Child believed that as a mother one was simultaneously a teacher, and that part of the job description was “rearing beings for another world as well as this.”¹²⁶ In addition to this more conventional argument for women’s education, Child also posited one more unique to her sensibilities: education helped reduce poverty. Education was “the best security against misfortune, disgrace and poverty,” and if poverty cannot be avoided, then education was “all-powerful in enabling them to *endure* the evils it cannot prevent.”¹²⁷ And if one of women’s moral duties was to maintain the morality of their fathers and husbands through economic living, then only a proper domestic, religious education could do so. Women had to be educated in order for society to function properly.

Once a woman was properly educated, she could begin fulfilling her duties as wife, mother, and/or moral guardian. Although Karcher would argue that Child does not “promote housekeeping and childrearing as sacred vocations”—a stance that would be vastly different from Beecher’s and other adherents to the Cult of Millennial Motherhood—in actuality this was not the case.¹²⁸ While Child’s rhetoric might not be as extreme as Beecher’s, their essential beliefs generally conform, and Child felt that women must “perform their ‘duties’ in the

¹²⁴ Lydia Maria Child. *The American Frugal Housewife: Dedicated to Those Who Are Not Ashamed of Economy*. (Boston: Carter, Hend & Co, 1833), 111.

¹²⁵ Lydia Maria Child, *The Mother’s Book* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1972), 139-140. First published in 1831.

¹²⁶ Child, *Mother’s*, 74.

¹²⁷ Child, *Housewife*, 111.

¹²⁸ Karchner, 610.

significant roles of wife, mother, and moral guardian.”¹²⁹ In *The Mother’s Book*, Child explicitly stated that marriage was “unquestionably the most blessed of all human relations.”¹³⁰ Preparing children for “another world” was one of a mother’s primary duties.¹³¹ The future of “a country may be justly estimated by the character of its women.”¹³²

Furthermore, Child clearly believed—along with most of her contemporaries—that the female was the moral guardian of the male, a belief that can be seen in *The American Frugal Housewife*. Like most other members in the Cult of Millennial Motherhood, Child viewed housework as an essential part of all women’s duties—even her own. Despite her career, Child never felt that it was “inappropriate for her to do housework—all of it.”¹³³ As a result, the majority of the advice dispensed in *The American Frugal Housewife* was “gleaned from her own painful experience,” including the sections about having to endure poverty.¹³⁴ Perhaps taking a page out of the Manual Labor reform movement, Child argues it was obvious that new, high-tech gadgets, having servants, and other “expensive habits are productive of much domestic unhappiness, and [are] injurious to public prosperity.”¹³⁵ A large section of this book was dedicated to articulating the immorality—not of poverty—but of living beyond one’s means. It was women’s duty, as wife and daughter, to help change this situation. In fact, Child commanded them to do so, writing “Let their fathers and husbands see them happy without finery ... Let them prove, by the exertion of ingenuity and economy, that neatness, good taste, and gentility, are attainable without great expense.”¹³⁶ However, poverty wasn’t simply an economic issue; it was a moral one. Spending more than one makes was “morally wrong, so far

¹²⁹ Jeffery, 123.

¹³⁰ Child, *Mother’s*, 165.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³² Child, *Housewife*, 91.

¹³³ Jeffery, 117.

¹³⁴ Haverson, 129.

¹³⁵ Child, *Housewife*, 89.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

as the individual is concerned; and injurious beyond calculation to the interests of our country.”¹³⁷ Through their actions, mothers shape the morality of their male relatives and the future of the country.

Child’s view on woman’s role as a mother was perhaps most developed in *The Mother’s Book*. For Child, the most important thing a mother could do was “as far as other duties will permit, take the entire care of her own child.”¹³⁸ It was vital for a mother to care for her own children because children “come to us from heaven, with their little souls full of innocence and peace,”¹³⁹ and it was the mother’s duty to raise them in such a way so that theirs’ and others’ “influence should not interfere with the influence of angels” on babies.¹⁴⁰ Child worried about a mother’s education, temperament, and other qualities because she knew the influence they had upon their children, as well as upon future generations. She repeatedly cautioned mothers against raising their temper or bringing any other form of negativity into the nursery because “who can tell how much of *moral* evil may be traced to the states of mind indulged by a mother, while tending the precious little being, who receives everything from her?”¹⁴¹ The introduction to *The Mother’s Book*, which reprinted a small section of *Mr. Francis’ Discourse on Errors in Education*, further underscored this point. This excerpt repeatedly emphasized the profound impact that a single, fleeting moment can have on a child. “It has been said,” the excerpt stated, “that a stone thrown into the sea agitates more or less every drop in that vast expanse of waters. So it may be with the influence we exert on the minds and hearts of the young.”¹⁴² It went on to contend that whatever lessons mothers passed along to their children “may go down from one

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹³⁸ Child, *Mother’s*, 4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴² *Mr. Francis’ Discourse on Errors in Education* quoted in Child, *Mother’s*, vii

generation to another, widening and deepening its influence as it goes, reaching forth with various modifications, more or less direct, till the track of its agency shall be completely beyond human calculation.”¹⁴³ That Child chose to open her book with this passage is important. This sentiment was the first thing the new, nervous, or simply curious mother sees. From the beginning, Child stresses the influence mothers had, not only over their children but also over future generations, and thus the future of the country.

Furthermore, Child believed that the family was the best place to teach religion to children, and in *The Mother's Book* “Child expressed her liberal spiritual views on the Sabbath and religion in general.”¹⁴⁴ Like the more radical Quakers (a sect whose evangelical belief in the millennium is quite clear), Child believed that religion “should not be a garment reserved only for Sunday wear; we should always be in the habit of referring everything to our Father in heaven.”¹⁴⁵ Religion and spirituality was something a person should *do* and *be* all the time, not just one day a week. This was especially true for the mother, because “religion is not so much taught by *lessons*, as it is by our examples, and habits of speaking, acting and thinking.”¹⁴⁶ If a mother were to raise dutiful, spiritual future leaders, she must start by integrating religion into every aspect of her daily life and make her home a sacred space.

For Child, then, the domestic, the public, and the sacred were interconnected. Many of the essays in *The American Frugal Housewife* were attempts to “inculcate the values needed by a burgeoning capitalist state and democratic republic.”¹⁴⁷ As she noted in her *Brief History of the Condition of Women*, “The women of the United States have no direct influence in politics ... But perhaps there is no country in the world, where women, as wives, sisters, and daughters,

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, vii-viii

¹⁴⁴ Abzug, 197.

¹⁴⁵ Child, *Mother's*, 71.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Karcher, 130.

have more influence, or more freedom.”¹⁴⁸ Her advice books helped women achieve this influence by taking the domestic and bringing it into the public, capitalist sphere. Like Beecher, Child politicized the home as a way to bring about God’s just influence over the future of the country without upsetting traditional gender hierarchies.

VI. Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney

Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney was one of the most prolific authors of her day; her sentimental and political poetry, her advice manuals to young women and mothers, and her autobiography were all best sellers in their day, thus placing Sigourney among the “most influential women in antebellum America.”¹⁴⁹ Born in 1791 to Ezekiel and Zerviah Huntley, a lower-middle class New England family, Sigourney went to school until thirteen. Once her formal education ended, she learned “housekeeping skills but continued reading and writing on her own and studied Latin and Hebrew with local tutors.”¹⁵⁰ As she got older, Sigourney helped run a school for young ladies, a place that “offered a decidedly feminine education but avoided the superficiality of most female seminaries.”¹⁵¹ She continued teaching until 1819, when she married Charles Sigourney, a Hartford widower with three children of his own, although her “career as a moral instructor continued for the rest of her life.”¹⁵² After her marriage, much of her role as moral instructor came through her published works. Sigourney never stopped writing, and she continued to refine her technique. She eventually began publishing her work as a way to “continue contributing to charities and helping her parents,” although she published

¹⁴⁸ Lydia Maria Child, *Brief History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations* (New York: CS Francis & Co, 1845), 2:265. First published in 1835.

¹⁴⁹ Hall, “Beyond Self-Interest,” 484.

¹⁵⁰ Mary G. DeJong, “Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865),” *Legacy* 5 no. 1 (1988): 36.

¹⁵¹ DeJong, 36.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

anonymously because Charles opposed any conspicuous move into the public sphere.¹⁵³ Once published, Sigourney's move into the public sphere seemed inevitable, and her written works showed an "unconscious and uncanny ability to adapt herself to the patterns laid out for the women of her day, and exploit them."¹⁵⁴ Sigourney believed that literature's primary goal was to "aim at being an instrument' of promoting others' spiritual welfare."¹⁵⁵ By using the political and spiritual rhetoric of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood, Sigourney's written works—especially her advice books—gave her a platform upon which to advocate domestic, political, and spiritual reforms.

But before she could effectively use her works to advocate increased feminine influence and power, she had to present herself as a true—and unthreatening—Millennial Mother. Known as the "Sweet Singer of Hartford," Sigourney "advertised herself as a devoted wife and mother, nestling at her own hearthside, pouring out the poetic effusions of her feminine nature, and leaving her home only at the imperious calls of Christian duty."¹⁵⁶ This picture of perfect feminine subjugation allowed her to "extend her public identity beyond the narrow confines of Hartford," which she did through the enormous success of her published works.¹⁵⁷ In these works, Sigourney argued for increased and improved female education and expanding the sphere of feminine influence, all while working within and supporting traditional gender ideologies.

Like Beecher and Child, Sigourney wrote advice books for other women, specifically *Letters to Young Ladies* and *Letters to Mothers*. In these books, her women's rights advocacy was most apparent, as is her adherence to the Cult of Millennial Motherhood. In these works,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Ann Douglas Wood, "Mrs. Sigourney and the Sensibility of the Inner Space," *The New England Quarterly* 45 no. 2 (June 1972): 181.

¹⁵⁵ DeJong, 36.

¹⁵⁶ Wood, 166.

¹⁵⁷ Melissa Ladd Teed, "'A Large Sphere of Usefulness': Women's Education and Public Life in Hartford, 1815-1850" *Connecticut History* 39 no. 1 (2000): 7.

Sigourney clearly believed that men and women “are manifestly intended for different spheres,” a separation that was created by “Him who bids the oak brave the fur of the tempest, and the Alpine flower lean its cheek on the bosom of eternal snows.”¹⁵⁸ The home was the woman’s by divine right, and any attempt for her to either leave it to enter into the public sphere—or for the public sphere to invade this sacred space—was evil and morally wrong. But while the demarcation of male and female spheres necessitated “submission, imposed both by the nature of our station and the ordinances of God,” as Welter notes, this did not “imply inferiority, for it was part of that same order of Nature established by Him.”¹⁵⁹ In fact, this separation in some ways gave women more power than men had because “in point of precedence, she is next to the Creator,” and he was not.¹⁶⁰ The domestic was powerful, perhaps more than the public, but only if the role of wife and mother was properly understood and performed.

This necessitated improved and expanded educational opportunities for women. In order to achieve this, Sigourney drew upon the rhetoric of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood. She argued that if women are “that sex to whom Nature has instructed the molding of the whole mass of mind in its first formation” then they “should be acquainted with the structure and development of mind.”¹⁶¹ Women had to be educated in order to educate. And it was vital that they taught, because in a democracy teachers:

should be held in the highest honor. They are the allies of legislators. They have agency in the prevention of crime. They aid in regulating the atmosphere, whose incessant action and pressure causes the life blood to circulate, and return pure and healthful to the heart of the nation.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, *Letters to Young Ladies*, 14th ed. (New York: Harper, 1845), 286. First published in 1833.

¹⁵⁹ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 91; Welter, 159.

¹⁶⁰ Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Hartford, CT: Hudson & Skinner, 1835), 17.

¹⁶¹ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 10

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

Yet, despite its political importance, education was not simply a secular endeavor, but rather giving “The gift of knowledge, connected with right principles and purposes, is inalienable, never to be repaid in this life for it reaches beyond.”¹⁶³ Thus, the role of teacher was inseparable from “womanness”; they are one and the same. In fact, teaching was “The natural vocation of females.”¹⁶⁴ Sigourney asked her readers, “If you have a love of the country that gave you birth ... are you not willing for a season to devote yourself to the culture of her children?”¹⁶⁵ A teacher herself, Sigourney drew upon her own experiences in the classroom when advising young ladies and mothers about the necessity for a proper female education. Within her own school, she trained girls to be “society’s natural leaders” and encouraged involvement in benevolent societies “by legitimately integrating such activities into women’s ‘sphere.’”¹⁶⁶ In her advice books, she attempted to inculcate these values in her readers, who she hoped would become the next generation of moral leaders in the nation’s growing network of public schools.

However, women were also educators in the private sphere, and their role as teacher within the home was, to Sigourney, the more important of the two. It was “the province of women to teach” and within the home, “woman is inevitably a teacher. There she modifies by her example her dependents, her companions, every dweller under her own roof.”¹⁶⁷ And if one were a mother, Sigourney believed she was “advanced to the head of that profession.”¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, because teachers were “allies of legislators” and mothers were the ultimate teacher, then everything that a mother did within the home had political importance.¹⁶⁹ The home became political.

¹⁶³ Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, *Letters on Life* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1866), 73.

¹⁶⁴ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁶⁶ Teed, 3; *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 11.

¹⁶⁸ Sigourney, *Mothers*, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 12.

Women were politicized as well. Sigourney argued that “the vital interests of our country, may be aided by the zeal of mothers.”¹⁷⁰ Because of the political power given to women, it was vital that mothers know how to, and what lessons they should, teach their children. Those lessons, according to Sigourney, should be religious, moral ones. Thus, a woman’s political role was only one part of her nature, and like others who sought to bring about the millennium, politics and religion were rarely separated for Sigourney. This is especially true for the work women do within the private sphere. Sigourney told young women that they should feel it their “*duty* to be religious” because “It is of immense importance that religion be secured in youth.”¹⁷¹ The childhood years “may determine the character through life, and the destinies of Eternity.”¹⁷² As a mother, she was working for God to spread His word to her children—a sacred duty.

However, just as important to Sigourney was the fact that as woman “labours [*sic*] for God, so she labours for her country.”¹⁷³ Therefore, like other members of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood, Sigourney invested the private, domestic sphere with the divine power to influence the future good of our country. In *Letters to Young Ladies*, her attempt to inculcate specific views and values in the mind of future mothers and wives, Sigourney writes “In our own republic, man, invested by his Maker with the right to reign, has conceded to her, who was for ages in vassalage, equality of intercourse, participation in Knowledge, dominion over his dearest and fondest hopes”—all through her God-given right to reign over the home.¹⁷⁴ Thus, Sigourney recognized that even while ensconced within “the recesses of domestick [*sic*] privacy,” women render “a noble service to the government that protects her, by sowing seeds of purity and peace

¹⁷⁰ Sigourney, *Mothers*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 43.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷³ Sigourney, *Mothers*, 16.

¹⁷⁴ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 13-14.

in the hearts of those who shall hereafter claim its honours [*sic*] and control its destinies.”¹⁷⁵

Mothers held the future well-being of the nation in their hands.

However, this political power was not as important as the power she had to bring about the coming millennium. One common feature of evangelical, millennial reform rhetoric was images of time slipping away and past, present, and future becoming one. Once the cosmic metadrama for which these reformers were working collided with secular history, all time would be one as Christ ruled over Heaven on Earth. Sigourney, as a fervent believer in the coming millennium, believed that it was only through women’s influence that this would occur. Late in life, as she was writing her autobiography *Letters on Life*, Sigourney lamented “that those differences of doctrine and form which must always exist” should prevent people from dwelling “at last lovingly in the presence of one Redeemer, in purer light, and perfect unity.”¹⁷⁶ Yet, in both *Letters to Mothers* and *Letters to Young Ladies*, Sigourney used the paths open to her in order to influence the current and future generations of women spiritual and political leaders to eliminate these doctrinal differences so as to bring about the millennium. In both books, Sigourney invoked stunning and powerful symbolic images in order to impress upon her readers the importance of women’s role in the cosmic metadrama. In *Letters to Young Ladies*, Sigourney wrote:

Her place is amid the quiet shades, to watch the little fountain ere it has breathed a murmur. But the fountain will break forth into a rill, and the swollen rivulet rush towards the sea; and who can be so well able to guide them in right channels as she who heard the first ripple, and saw them emerge like timid strangers from their source, and had Kingly power over those infant-waters; in the name of Him who caused them to flow?¹⁷⁷

She ends this book with a charge to young ladies to remember this when mothers:

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁷⁶ Sigourney, *Life*, 291.

¹⁷⁷ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 14.

By the combined influence therefore of intellectual, moral, and religious obligation, by the unresisting voice of Time, Judgment, and Eternity, we are impelled to diligence, perseverance and zeal in duty, urged to 'forget the things that are behind, and read forward toward those that are before, and press onward to the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.'¹⁷⁸

Women of all ages, therefore, were given the task of guiding future generations toward proper righteousness and eliminating differences between past and present. In short, Sigourney politicized the home and the mother, giving her immense influence over the political future of the young democracy, and placing her at the center of her cosmic metadrama. For America to achieve its millennial splendor, it will only be because of her mothers.

VII. Susan Warner

Unlike Beecher, Child, or Sigourney, Susan Bogart Warner was a novelist who never wrote a book on domestic economy, an advice book for women, or an argument for women's education. However, she was the first author of a national best-seller in American history, and her novels, especially *The Wide, Wide World*, were a public act that advocated reform through its use and subversion of traditional domestic ideologies. Born 1819, Warner spent the earliest years of life surrounded by luxury and privilege. Her family's New York City townhouse was "not far from the home of the enormously rich real estate investor and fur trader John Jacob Astor," and during the summer, when the weather was unpleasant, the family "escaped to the cooler airs of Canann, where they had a summer house."¹⁷⁹ But this idyllic life did not last forever, and when her father lost most of his fortune in the financial Panic of 1837, the Warners sold the townhouse and the summer house and moved into a smaller home on an island in the Hudson River.

¹⁷⁸ Sigourney, *Young Ladies*, 295.

¹⁷⁹ Gary B. Nash and Julie Roy Jeffrey, editors. *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society, Volume One: To 1877*, 6th edition (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004), 333.

Such a sudden reversal of fortunes was not uncommon during the antebellum period, and Warner was not alone in having to learn domestic skills once thought beneath her and now “facing the necessity of making money.”¹⁸⁰ While some women in similar situations worked in factories or as domestics, seamstresses, or school teachers, Warner chose a different path. Warner’s Aunt Fanny, “Knowing that the steam-powered printing press had revolutionized the publishing world and created a mass readership, much of it female” reportedly told Warner, “Sue, I believe if you would try you could write a story.”¹⁸¹ Implicit in the statement, as Warner’s sister Anna later recalled, was “that ... would sell.”¹⁸² Warner soon set to work and wrote *The Wide, Wide World*, a sentimental domestic novel that in many ways reflected traditional domestic ideology. A first run of 750 copies sold quickly and within the two years the novel went through 13 editions. Furthermore, *The Wide, Wide World* was the first American novel to sell more than one million copies, making it one of the bestselling books of the entire century.¹⁸³

Thus, Warner’s work reached vast numbers of people and the influence it had over them can only be imagined. The very fact that the novel went through so many editions within the first two years clearly shows that the book must have had some influence over her contemporaries, even if that influence is difficult to measure. Furthermore, reading was a political activity during the antebellum period. According to Sarah Robbins, “home-based reading, writing, and conversation were meaningful public acts.”¹⁸⁴ Therefore, any novel that was brought into the home was being politicized in some way. And when said novel was

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ All biographical information from *Ibid.*, 333-334.

¹⁸⁴ Robbins, 581.

brought into millions of homes, its potential political influence cannot be denied. What it does with that influence is another question.

Many modern scholars tend to dismiss Warner's work as "juvenile novels, distinguished by sentimental piety."¹⁸⁵ It is true that for modern readers Warner's novel is difficult to read, so embedded in the language of female sentimentality, domesticity, and submission. However, as many other scholars have noticed, there is a disconnect between the superficial domestic submission and its sub-textual message, and "In the powerful unspoken messages presented by this disjuncture are revealed the hidden hand of feminine discontent."¹⁸⁶ Thus, Warner's simultaneous support for and opposition to the Cult of Millennial Motherhood created a public political message designed to be read and to influence those within the private sphere.

The Wide, Wide World follows the spiritual growth of Ellen Montgomery, a young girl eventually orphaned who is shunted from one caretaker to another. In the process, she must learn self-sacrifice, submission, and her role within a patriarchal power system in order to achieve the promise of marriage by the end of the novel. As Joanne Bobson argues, *The Wide, Wide World* "is perhaps the paradigmatic sentimental novel, presenting as it does a culturally extreme vision of a young girl's obligation to renounce self-determination completely and follow with passivity the dictates of the authority figures who surround her."¹⁸⁷ Such qualities are clearly consistent with various aspects of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood.

Ellen is taught these lessons in several ways. One is through the necessity of religious sublimation. Ellen's spiritual growth is accompanied by her ability to learn to submit her will to God and those who serve him. From the very beginning of the novel, the aesthetic of submission

¹⁸⁵ James D. Hart, editor, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1983), 802.

¹⁸⁶ Joanne Bobson. "The Hidden Hand: Subversion of Cultural Ideology in Three Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels," *American Quarterly* 38 (Summer, 1986): 227.

¹⁸⁷ Bobson, 227.

and sorrow is apparent. Warner opens with a quiet, domestic scene that is shattered by the news that Ellen's parents are traveling to Europe and at her father's insistence, Ellen is not allowed to come. Overcome with sadness at the thought of being separated from her beloved mother, Ellen "With a wild cry ... flung her arms round her mother, and hiding her face in her lap, gave way to a violent burst of grief that seemed for a few moments as if it would rend soul and body in twain."¹⁸⁸ However, the only comfort that Ellen receives from her mother is the reminder to "Remember, my darling, who it is that brings this sorrow upon us; though we *must* sorrow, we must not rebel."¹⁸⁹ From the very beginning, therefore, Ellen, and by extension the reader, are reminded of the awesome power of God and that we must submit ourselves fully to him. Thus, "the God Ellen is taught to respect is also a patriarch to whom she must submit, and while He is loving and understanding, He most often is presented in terms of His power and proprietary nature."¹⁹⁰ Warner presents her readers with a powerful example of the need to submit one's will to God's and that it is any woman's duty to do so.

Related to religious authority in the novel is Ellen's relationship with male authority figures. As common gender ideologies prescribe, Ellen inhabits a patriarchal society, and "most of the authorities to whom she submits are men. And each man's authority is linked ... finally, to the authority of a patriarchal God."¹⁹¹ John Humphreys, a minister-in-training and Ellen's love interest, is the head of this chain within Ellen's life, and a vast majority of the novel revolves around Ellen's attempts at learning to submit to his authority—and by extension God's. And by the end of the novel, because of her trial and tribulations, she is rewarded with the

¹⁸⁸ Susan Warner. *The Wide, Wide World with an Afterward by Jane Tompkins* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987), 11. First published in 1851.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹⁰ Erica Bauermeister. "The Lamplighter, The Wide, Wide World, and Hope Leslie: the Recipes for Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels" *Legacy* 8 no. 1 (1999): 20.

¹⁹¹ Isabelle White. "Anti-Individualism, Authority, and Identity: Susan Warner's Contradictions in *The Wide, Wide World*" *American Studies* 31 no. 2 (1990): 34.

promise of marriage to John, as long as she obeys his conditions: to correspond with him, to “Read no novels.”¹⁹² Ellen’s future as wife and mother, the ultimate role women can play, is dependent upon her ability to submit to John’s authority. Ellen has learned “to question herself, to control her natural indignation and emotions and to enter a marriage that mirrors her dependent relationship upon God.”¹⁹³ From this, it would appear that *The Wide, Wide World* inculcates the most restrictive aspects of contemporary gender ideology, and that Warner uses her political influence not to liberate or question traditional paradigms, but rather to support them.

However this is not the case, and as many scholars have noted there are many disjunctures between what Warner presents and what she implies. A close reading reveals that “even the most conventional [authors]—of whom Susan Warner is one—did have much to say about the painful nature of the sacrifices entailed by a woman’s conformity to the ethos that demanded the eschewal of autonomy and individuality.”¹⁹⁴ One reason is that the novel is “self-contradictory and conflicted in its presentation of authority.”¹⁹⁵ For example, while John is an authority figure Ellen should obey, her father is not. The reader’s distrust and disrespect for Ellen’s father begins early in the novel. It is because of her father that Ellen is separated from her mother. Adding insult to injury, Mr. Montgomery prevents Mrs. Montgomery from saying good-bye to Ellen before they depart. In fact, he delayed telling Ellen of their departure until moments before they left in order to make “the final leave-taking to be as brief as possible.”¹⁹⁶ Perhaps the grossest misuse of power is revealed when Ellen arrives at her Aunt Fortune’s house, her father’s sister and the women with whom she is to live while her parents are abroad.

¹⁹² Warner, 563-564.

¹⁹³ Bauermeister, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Bobson, 224.

¹⁹⁵ Bauermeister, 20.

¹⁹⁶ Warner, 61.

Although Ellen believes her father forewarned her aunt of her arrival, when she shows up on Aunt Fortune's doorstep, Ellen learns he had not.¹⁹⁷ Clearly, Mr. Montgomery is an authority figure not to be trusted and Ellen's submission to him leads only to misery, thus leading readers to question the legitimacy of complete feminine submission. Even John's authority is questionable, as John uses his power to "manipulate and control Ellen very effectively."¹⁹⁸ Thus, Warner implicitly questions the power structure she seems to support.

Furthermore, the end of the novel is unsatisfying and subverts the ideology Warner seemed to support. Specifically, by the end of the novel Ellen "has remained obedient, pious, and asexual;" she is promised to marry John.¹⁹⁹ Ellen "should be happy, but she is not."²⁰⁰ The traditional ending of sentimental novels, the marriage, is denied and Ellen remains separated from John. Thus, Ellen is prevented from fulfilling her duties and inhabiting the ultimate feminine roles: wife and mother. This unhappy and unsatisfying ending forces the reader to question the ethic of submission and sublimation that drove Ellen throughout her spiritual development. Furthermore, Ellen's continual response of anger and sorrow to instances of submission "can be seen as a quiescent rebellion; certainly it is a prerebellious development."²⁰¹ Warner seems to want her readers to wonder if such submission does not really bring happiness, then perhaps they should change their conceptions of a woman's proper duty.

Warner did more than simply question the gender ideologies she appears to support; she also implicitly urged women to re-work these ideologies so as to give women greater individual autonomy. Presenting submission as a less than perfectly ideal situation, Warner suggested to

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁹⁸ Mary Haitt, "Susan Warner's Subtext: The Other Side or Piety," *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 8 no. 3-4 (1987): 256.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ Bobson, 239.

her female readership that they should quietly assert themselves more. However, just as Warner kept her critique within the bounds of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood, her readers should keep such assertions within the given sphere of the home. Furthermore, by writing to support her family, Warner took over the male role as breadwinner, which “brought her at times to unexpected possibilities,” including “a room of her own.”²⁰² Long before it was universally accepted, Warner took small steps into the wide, wide world, and both by example and within her novel, she encouraged her readers to do the same.

VIII. Conclusion: Subverting Traditional Hierarchies

As scholars before me have noticed, women of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries shared a common ideology and rhetoric of a woman’s place. By combining the theories of Kerber, Bloch, Welter, and Abzug, the picture of this work becomes clearer, and intersects in ways that went unnoticed before. Emphasizing the spiritual role of mother and teacher, conservative female antebellum reformers politicized the domestic sphere and invested women with the power to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. In the process, they gave women a powerful public role: the Millennial Mother. These women were trying to consecrate the profane, to encourage others to work to bring about the coming millennium and to do so within the confines of the women’s sphere. By ignoring the domestic to focus on the radical, Abzug misses an important addition to his theory of evangelical reform, and by ignoring millennialism, Kerber, Welter, and Bloch overlook an important component of antebellum gender ideology.

²⁰² Susan S. Williams. “Widening the World: Susan Warner, Her Readers, and the Assumption of Authorship,” *American Quarterly* 42 no. 4 (December 1990): 582.

However, that is not all that scholars have missed. Because many of these ideas are conservative, many modern scholars both overlook their radical aspects and undervalue the place they hold in the development of the women's rights movement. Beecher, Child, Sigourney, and Warner used the written word as a way to create a sacred feminine space and then transformed that space into one that holds political power. They all achieved immense influence and power; their books were widely read and highly praised. They achieved so much because they advocated women's rights from within the private sphere. Those who worked outside of these ideologies, such as the radical Grimke sisters or Mary Wollstonecraft, were ignored or ridiculed by many members of the public; only those who worked within the system were not.²⁰³ By working within the system, women like Beecher, Child, Sigourney, and Warner insured that they would not worry those who held political power—those who published the books and passed legislation; i.e. men. They were read and, if not listened to by male authority figures, then they were at least ignored; they were not dangerous, and so could easily continue writing and acting within the public sphere without worry. And while this approach did not continue to advance the cause of women's rights, within antebellum America it was the conservative members of the Cult of Millennial Motherhood who were able to begin to take baby steps toward change.

²⁰³ Kerber, 288.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Beecher, Catherine and Harriet Beecher Stowe. *The American Woman's Home*. Nicole

Tonkovich, editor. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002.

Beecher, Catherine E. *Letters to the People on Health and Happiness*. New York: Arnos Press

and The New York Times, 1972.

---. *Miss Beecher's Domestic Receipt-Book: Designed as a Supplement to Her Treatise on*

Domestic Economy. 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1852.

---. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. New York: Source Books Press, 1970.

---. *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman; with a History of an Enterprise Having That*

for Its Object. Boston: Phillipps, Sampson, & Co., 1851.

Child, Lydia Maria. *The American Frugal Housewife: Dedicated to Those Who Are Not*

Ashamed of Economy. Boston: Carter, Hend & Co., 1833.

---. *Brief History of the Condition of Women in Various Ages and Nations*, vol. 2. New York:

CS Francis & Co, 1984.

---. *The Mother's Book*. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1972.

Sigourney, Lydia Howard Huntley. *Letters on Life*. New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1866.

---. *Letters to Young Ladies*. 14th ed. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845.

---. *Letters to Mothers*. Hartford: Hudson & Skinner Printers, 1838.

Warner, Susan. *The Wide, Wide World with an Afterward by Jane Tompkins*. New York: The

Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987.

Secondary Sources

- Abzug, Robert H. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Bauermeister, Erica. "The Lamplighter, The Wide, Wide World, and Hope Leslie: The Recipes for Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels." *Legacy* 8 no. 1 (1991): 17-28.
- Baym, Nina. "Reinventing Lydia Sigourney." *American Literature* 62 no. 3 (Sep. 1990): 385-404/
- Bloch, Ruth H. "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815." *Feminist Studies* 4 no. 2 (June. 1978), 100-126.
- Boydstone, Jeanne. *Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Boylan, Anne M. *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1791-1840*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Carson, Gerald. "Catherine Beecher." *The New-England Galaxy* 5 no. 4 (1964): 3-10.
- DeJong, Mary G. "Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865)." *Legacy* 5 no. 1 (1988): 34-43.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- . "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 2nd ed. Edited by David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins 1998. 878-889.

- Dobson, Joanne. "The Hidden Hand: Subversion of Cultural Ideology in Three Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels." *American Quarterly* 38 no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 223-242.
- Feller, Daniel. *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Fessenden, Tracy. "Gendering Religion." *Journal of Women's History* 14 no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 163-169.
- Gill, Valerie. "Catherine Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Architects of Female Power." *Journal of American Culture* 21 no 2 (1998): 17-24.
- Ginzberg, Lori D. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Hall, Mark David. "Beyond Self Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America" *Journal of Church and State* 44 no. 3 (2002): 477-499.
- . "Catherine Beecher; America's First Female Philosopher and Theologian." *Fides et historia* 32 no. 1 (2000): 65-80.
- Harveson, Mae Elizabeth. *Catherine Esther Beecher (Pioneer Educator)*. New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969.
- Hewitt, Nancy A. "Taking the True Woman Hostage." *Journal of Women's History* 14 no. 1 (Spring 2002): 156-162.
- Hiatt, Mary. "Susan Warner's Subtext: The Other Side of Piety." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 8 no. 3-4 (1987): 250-261.

- Jeffrey, Kirk. "Marriage, Career, and Feminine Ideology in Nineteenth-Century America: Reconstructing the Marital Experience of Lydia Maria Child, 1828-1874." *Feminist Studies* 2 no. 2/3 (1975): 113-130.
- Kerber, Linda K. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Karcher, Carolyn L. *The First Women in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Nash, Gary B. and Julie Roy Jeffrey, eds. *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society, Volume One: To 1877*. 6th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004.
- Nash, Margaret A. "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia." *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 no. 2. (Summer 1997): 171-191.
- Perlmann, Joel, Silvana R. Siddali, Keith Whitescarver. "Literacy, Schooling, and Teaching among New England Women, 1730-1820." *History of Education Quarterly*. 37 no. 2 (1997): 117-139.
- Pickens, Donald. "Antebellum Feminism and the Domestication of the American Revolution." *Continuity* 5 no. 8 (1984): 63-76.
- Preston, Jo Anne. "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England." *The New England Quarterly* 66 no. 4 (1993): 531-551.
- Robbins, Sarah. "'The Future Good and Great of Our Land': Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England." *The New England Quarterly* 75 no. 4 (Dec., 2002): 562-591.

Roberts, Mary Louise. "True Womanhood Revisited." *Journal of Women's History* 14 no. 1 (Spring, 2002): 150-155.

Tonkovich, Nicole. *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catherine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18 no. 2 (1966): 151-174.

Williams, Susan S. "Widening the World: Susan Warner, Her Readers, and the Assumption of Authorship." *American Quarterly* 42 no. 4 (Dec. 1990): 565-586.

Wood, Ann Douglas. "Mrs. Sigourney and the Sensibility of the Inner Space." *The New England Quarterly* 45 no. 2 (June, 1972): 163-181.

Zagarri, Rosemarie. "Morals, Manners, and the Republican Mother." *American Quarterly* 44 no. 2 (Jun. 1992): 192-215.