INTRODUCTION

Poetry in the Public Sphere

> For poetry is itself one form of social activity, and no proper understanding of the nature of poetry can be made if the poem is abstracted from the experience of the poem either at its point of origin or at any subsequent period.
>
> —Jerome McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections*, 1985[1]

On June 5, 1850, the *Louisville Weekly Journal* published "To My Child" by an author who signed him- or herself "S." No editorial explanation accompanied the poem, only a notice indicating that it was written for the *Journal*; that is, it was an original submission, not a reprint. In the poem, a female speaker bids good-bye to her child. She does not explain why they are parting, but a number of possibilities occur. The child is illegitimate, and the mother's relatives (?) are forcing her to give it up. The mother is a divorcée, who under the law of coverture has no rights to her child, or a widow, unable to support it. She could be a prostitute or criminal from whom the child is taken for its own good or a slave whose child has been sold away. More remotely, she could even be a Native American whose child is leaving for some far-off boarding school, where its ties to her and to tribal culture will be systematically destroyed.

Whatever narrative one invents—and historically speaking, any of these scenarios could apply—one thing is clear: the poem's speaker has had her deepest maternal feelings violated. Enraged by the forced separation, she lashes out not just against the "the Father's Law" but against the "'father to the fatherless,'" God. From her opening apostrophe to her concluding peroration, the speaker of "To My Child" resists her breaking, refusing to display the grief she feels lest her tears gratify those who injure her. Her willingness to "kiss the chastening rod" a thing of the past, she teases out for herself what remains of her relationship to the Almighty instead:

> Farewell! I will not part from thee in sadness and in tears,
> Nor darken this, our parting hour, with vain and fruitless fears;
> Though long and weary years may pass, ere we shall meet again,
> I will not lose the present hour in tears as weak as vain.
>
> Sweet baby! come and lean thy head upon my aching heart,
> And let me look into thine eyes, one moment, ere we part,

And smile as thou art wont to smile in thy young childish glee,
That so thy joy may reach the heart that bleeds to part from thee.

No grief shall mark my death-cold brow, no sorrow dim my eye,
In bidding thee a last adieu when other eyes are by;
But *here*, with none but God and thee to witness, let me tell
How bleeds the heart, that seems so cold, in bidding *thee* farewell!

We are alone, my sweetest child, no friend is left us now,
Save Him who blesses every tear that falls upon thy brow;
And He *will* bless thee evermore, for He has sworn to be
"A father to the fatherless"—then will He care for *thee*!

I leave thee with a breaking heart, a dry and aching eye,
For none may know the thoughts that swell within my soul so high;
I press thee in a last embrace—and *can* it be the last?
Can all the love I felt for thee be but as shadows past?

I have bent o'er thy little form, when cradled on my breasts,
Thy dark eye softly folded in its sweet, unbroken rest,
And my wild heart has gone above in gratitude to God,
And I *have* bowed in spirit there, and kissed His chastening rod!

My child! if in this breaking heart one feeling lingers still,
Which anguish hath not changed to gall, nor wrong hath made an ill,
It *is* the deep, redeeming love that fills my heart for thee,
And forms the last link, yet unrent, between my God and me!
(*NAWP* 419–20)

For a poem so thoroughly Victorian in form, metrics, and style, "To My Child" raises a surprising number of un-"Victorian" questions. Most obviously, given the aura of sexual guilt hanging over the speaker, the poem seems an odd choice for a family newspaper, let alone one found so far from a major cosmopolitan center. Then there is the date, 1850. This places "To My Child"'s composition squarely in the middle of what Douglas Branch dubs the "Sentimental Years," 1836 to 1860, when, we are told, domestic ideology was in full flower and the "empire of the mother" uncontested terrain. Yet, for all that the speaker of this poem is a mother, she is hardly sentimentalized. With her "wild heart" and stubborn will, she is no Ellen Montgomery, eagerly embracing her own humiliation, or Uncle Tom, forgiving those who kill him. If anything, the literary figure she resembles most is Hawthorne's erring-and-proud-of-it Hester Prynne. And if this mother, as she repeatedly says, sheds no tears—those certain signifiers of the sentimental persona—then how can we? Why, that is, does this poem invoke so many sentimental conventions—the erring mother, the innocent babe, the hoped-for redemption—only to disappoint them in the end? Why refuse the conso-

lation of sentimental closure? Put another way, why the "yet" before the "unrent"?

Then there is the mother herself. Neither Southern Belle nor True Woman, neither Bluestocking nor Coquette, certainly no Angel in the House, who is she? Prostitute, criminal, divorcée, pauperized widow, illegitimate mother, slave—any of these subject positions might fit, but which is hers? And how should we view her? Is she a sinner or one sinned against? Is her child a sign of her guilt or, as she herself insists, her only hope for salvation, a salvation others jeopardize? Why, moreover, does she repeatedly insist in this most public of private spaces—the anonymous newspaper poem—that she will never let anyone know her pain? Is this a poem in which, as T. S. Eliot puts it, the poet talks "to himself, or to nobody"?[2] Or is it a complaint, one whose very inwardness is transformed by the mere fact of publication into a vehicle for public work? In revealing the "injustice perpetrated against the speaker, or something the speaker represents," does this poem implicitly demand redress?[3] Indeed, if it is not the mother's complaint that matters here but its *publication*, what do we make of this fact? Whoever the author was, what did she (or he) hope to accomplish by placing such an ironic yet seemingly intimate and pain-filled work before the public eye?

I have chosen "To My Child" to open this study of American women poets in the public sphere, from 1800 to 1900, not because I have answers to these questions but because I do not. Indeed, I think many unanswerable, beginning with the author's sex. What makes this poem central for me is not what it says about one poet's concerns or even about one legally unentitled mother's plight, important though these matters are, but that it was published at all. As much by its provenance in a regional newspaper as by its resistance to closure, "To My Child" challenges key scholarly assumptions about nineteenth-century U.S. women and the poetry they wrote. Most especially, in publicizing one woman's (possible) transgressive behavior and (certain) tortured grief, "To My Child" suggests that the production of lyric poetry by nineteenth-century U.S. women may have more *political* significance than feminist literary and political historians have granted it to date.

"To My Child"'s publicity comprises this study's departure point and one of its principal concerns. Despite differences in theoretical framework, most mainstream twentieth-century Anglo-American literary scholars have, at least until recently, followed Eliot in situating lyric poetry within a late-Victorian/early modernist aesthetic of high culture. The unstable product of a forced marriage between Matthew Arnold's liberal humanism and elite pre-Raphaelite aestheticism, this concept of poetry—the poet speaking "to himself, or to nobody"—sought to preserve poetic autonomy and authenticity against the devaluating impact that mass-market technologies were presumably having on popular taste. Like the Victorians, modernists insisted that art should transcend immediate and material concerns. Identified thus, as quasi-private

or overheard speech largely devoted to meditative concerns—Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," for example—lyric poetry's other function as a "social activity" was restricted, at least in theory, to the poem's engagements with other texts in the same free-standing literary tradition.

For such a model, one predicated on lyric poetry's transcendent status as aesthetic artifact, the figure of apostrophe—the direct address of an absent presence—has been taken, as Barbara Johnson takes it in "Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion," as paradigmatic of lyric poetry's self-enclosed, intrasubjective nature as a whole. In an intricate argument to which I cannot do justice here, Johnson identifies lyric poetry as a literature of "demand," articulating "the primal relation to the mother as a relation to the Other,"[4] as in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," for example, or Dickinson's many poems to her "Master," a figure whose actual biographical reality remains moot. Intrusive in its peremptoriness, the speaker's voice commands what otherwise does not exist into being, animating it, as the voice in "S"'s poem animates her lost child. Viewed thus, lyric poetry is an internal drama of desire linguistically acted out. As such, it maintains tenuous ties at best to anything outside the author's head except those precursor texts to which it is generically related—whether Petrarch's sonnets or, as in the case of "To My Child," other women's complaint poems.

In valorizing a poem like "To My Child" as *public* speech, I am not denying lyric poetry's status as aesthetic artifact any more than I am denying apostrophe's importance to lyric production as a whole. Like "To My Child," many, possibly most, of the poems cited in this book address themselves to a someone or something not there, using the rhetorical conventions, whether satirical or sentimental, of their day. But even when structured apostrophically, poems, I would suggest, engage other, less theoretically abstract, audiences as well: a specific interpretive community, a magazine's readership, a biographically identifiable individual, other authors to whom the particular poet responds, a coterie of the author's friends, and so on. And it is the specific ways in which poems relate to these other, more concrete and historically specific audiences that concerns me here.

In this book, I bracket the text-based intrapsychic approach which using the apostrophic model enables in order to call attention to a body of poetry, largely complaint poems, whose social, cultural, and political affiliations give them historical value outside the aesthetic. Decontextualized or, as Jerome McGann puts it, "abstracted" from the specific social and material conditions which produced it, including the historically specific audiences to which individual poems are addressed, lyric poetry has, or seems to have, little to say to those concerned with the "cultural work" that literature does.[5] Scholarly interest in poetry has consequently steeply declined in the past few decades as literary theorists have shifted from viewing culture as text to viewing it, in Danky and Wiegand's terms, as "agency and practice."[6] Resituating

nineteenth-century American women's newspaper and periodical poetry within the tradition of social dialogue and debate from which it sprang and to which it belongs, will clarify this poetry's function as a form of *public* speech addressed to concrete, empirically identifiable others. Doing so, it will establish the vital role that women's poetry, taken collectively, played within the intersubjective framework of the public sphere.

Drawing examples principally from national, regional, and special-interest newspapers and periodicals published between 1800 and 1900, I examine nineteenth-century American women's poetry in terms of what the German social philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, calls "everyday communicative practise."[7] That is, I treat this poetry as an instance of speech whose expressive and mimetic power is organized explicitly or implicitly for argumentative ends—in order to achieve a practical discursive goal: persuasion. In this poetic form of speech, the author produces aesthetic pleasure, typically, as in "To My Child," through manipulation of affect. However, this pleasure is not an end in itself any more than is the poem's expressive function, the sheer personal voicing of complaint or injustice. Rather, as in "To My Child," both pleasure and expressivity are put in service to swaying the judgments of others on matters of concern to all—in this poem, a mother's violated rights.

Obviously, not all nineteenth-century women's poetry fits this description. Much of the genteel poetry collected by nineteenth-century anthologists like Griswold and Stedman encouraged aestheticization along with (the illusion of) personal expressivity; and the conventions governing such poems have been richly explored by scholars like Mary Loeffelholz, Elizabeth Petrino, Adela Pinch, Yopie Prins, Eliza Richards, and Cheryl Walker.[8] But, at the same time, a substantial amount of nineteenth-century poetry by both sexes is directed implicitly or explicitly toward social and political concerns, the concerns of the Habermasian public sphere: building solidarity in particular racial and ethnic communities, questioning prevailing ideologies or laws, criticizing national policy—for example, the removal of indigenous Indian populations—and so on. In these poems, the boundaries between the aesthetic and the political and between the sentimental and the ironic are breached as genteel poetry's rhetorical conventions are twisted to meet complaint poetry's reformist ends.

In the poetry I discuss, white women and women of color, coming from every caste and class, region and religion, address the major social and political issues of their day and those of special interest to themselves, their own entry into modernity not least among them. As a result, we can use their poems to track not only women's opinions on a broad range of social and political questions but also fundamental shifts in their own self-definition as the century progressed. In the brief space of these poems—poems which, when added together, represent thousands of differently sited individual

women—nineteenth-century women spoke out on who they thought they were and what they wanted for themselves and for their society. These are the issues that I explore here, treating their poetry as a specific form of communicative utterance directed toward real-world, or what Habermas calls "life-world," effects, by reaching "into our cognitive interpretations and normative expectations" in order to make us rethink and modify what we believe and do.[9] Although this book is about poetry, therefore, finally, it is even more about the women who wrote it and the political and cultural work their poetry did.

The best way for me to establish the cultural importance of the poetic praxis this book discusses is to describe, however briefly, the eighteenth-century publishing practices out of which it evolved. Newspapers had hardly started to appear in the colonies (circa the mid-1720s) when literate middle- and upper-class women began using them as venues for self-representation and public suasion on issues pertinent to themselves. Since early colonial newspapers were mainly devoted to disseminating commercial and political news, it seems likely that publishers viewed these female-authored complaints as harmless filler or else as cost-free ways to create community appeal. But whatever the case, by the mid-1730s, the spaces where women's writing appeared—typically, letter and poetry columns—had become the designated public sites for the discussion of gender issues.[10] In these sites, male and female writers, often directly rebutting each other, established an ongoing practice of gender debate that in various guises would persist right through the next century and was crucial, this book will argue, to the success of the women's rights movement in the United States.

To take a striking example, between 1724 and 1731, the *American Weekly Mercury* published the following: a letter from "Lovia," complaining of being forced into marriage with a man for whom she felt no desire; two poems by women, one describing the kind of man the author wanted to marry, the other, possibly by Elizabeth Magawley, critiquing this description; letters by "Martha Careful" and "Caelia Shortface" protesting a male writer's impugning of women; two letters of complaint against "Florio," one signed "Matilda," the other anonymous and advocating an end to the double standard; a letter by "Florio," defending his sex against women's complaints; an anonymous male's letter describing "our MODERN BELLES"; a long satirical poem, by a male author, entitled "The Journal of a Modern Lady" ("But let me now a while survey / Our Madam o'er her Ev'ning-Tea; / Surrounded with her Noisy Crew, / Of Prudes, Coquets, and Harridans"); a long editorial by the *Mercury's* editor, Andrew Bradford (a.k.a. "Mr. Busy-Body"), giving men matrimonial advice and railing against women, especially smart ones;[11] and finally, terminating this increasingly vitriolic, if witty, set of exchanges, "Generosa's" (Elizabeth Magawley's) heated debate in poetry and prose with men whom she dubs "The Wits and Poets of Philadelphia" over the relative merits of the sexes. "[A]s in

your Sex," Magawley writes, "there are the several Classes of Men of Sense, Rakes, Fops, Coxcombs and downright Fools, so I hope, without straining your complaisance, you will allow there are some Women of Sense comparatively, as well as Coquets, Romps, Prudes and Idiots."[12]

Magawley, whom Sharon Harris describes as a "razor-sharp satirist," was apparently responding to Bradford's over-the-top editorial;[13] but one can find equally feisty sentiments expressed by women, whether in letters or verse, in other newspapers of the time also. "But what, in the Name of Dullness, most venerable Sirs, could move ye to endeavour to impose on us, so severe a Task as that of *Silence*: Or (which is little better) speaking no more than is necessary? Nothing less, I fear, ye unconscionable Creatures, than a barbarous Avarice of ingrossing all the Talk to your selves," challenged Penelope Aspen in the 1731 *South Carolina Gazette*, speaking, one suspects, for a significant portion of her sex.[14]

Admittedly, the publication of women's texts such as these was dependent on editorial goodwill and not the writers' right to write. After publishing Magawley and Aspen, for instance, both the *Mercury* and the *Gazette* cease publishing women's writing for a time, whether by accident or design. But then the debate resumes, or is conjured up elsewhere. In 1733, the *South Carolina Gazette*, for instance, published a poem by an upper-class twelve-year-old "young Lady," who, according to the editor, wrote it for her brother. Finding him "busied in making his School-Exercise," writing a poem. "[I]f that be all," says she, "I'll write it for you"; and the young lady does, with, what's more, no small bite: "Oh, spotless Paper, fair and white! / On thee by force constrained to write; / Is it not hard I should destroy / Thy Purity, to please a Boy!"[15] Reprints of British verse in the *American Weekly Mercury* during 1735 suggest, moreover, that editors might even publish poetic signs of the gender times from abroad. After describing the highly successful preaching of the "noted & celebrated" Mrs. Drummond, a British Quaker, one article ends with a poem "By a young Lady" praising Mrs. Drummond:

> Too long indeed our sex has been deny'd,
> And ridicul'd by man's malignant pride;
> Who fearful of a just return forebore,
> And made it criminal to teach us more.
> That woman had no soul was their pretence,
> And woman's spelling, past [*sic*] for woman sense;
> 'Till you most generous heroine stood forth,
> And shew'd your sex's aptitude and worth.
> Were there no more, yet you bright maid alone
> Might for a world of vanity atone.
> Redeem the coming age, and set us free
> From the false brand of incapacity.[16]

A few months earlier, this same newspaper reprinted one of Mrs. Drummond's sermons in its entirety.

Published more than half a century before Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), these exchanges make clear that both American and British women were keenly aware that their lack of education seriously disadvantaged them. They use rhetorical suasion in poems and letters in order to encourage men to treat them better; and, like the young South Carolinian, they frequently point to their facility at verse as prima facie evidence of their wasted potential. Outraged by an attack on women in the *Philadelphia Chronicle*, a self-described "Circle of Ladies" declared themselves fed up with being blamed for faults for which they were not responsible. "You, Sir, with better *sense*, will justly *fix* / Our faults on *education*, not our *sex*; / Will shew the source which makes the female mind / So oft appear but puerile and blind; / How many would surmount stern custom's laws, / And prove the want of *genius* not the cause; / But that the odium of a *bookish fair*, / Or *female pedant*, or '*they quit their sphere*,' / Damps all their views, and they must drag the chain, / And sigh for sweet instruction's page in vain."[17] When men trash them, which happens quite regularly, they trash back, their arguments, as befits authors in the "Age of Reason," as honed as those of any lawyer.

Although none of this literature suggests that these women were working out any kind of systematic feminist understanding of their oppression—that had to wait for the likes of Judith Sargent Murray and Mary Wollstonecraft—their complaints, like a low grade fever, do not go away. On the contrary, by the end of the eighteenth century, American women's published writing—much of it devoted to critiques of colonial and early republican gender politics—had swelled from a trickle to a stream. In this stream were the works in verse and prose of such notable authors as Phillis Wheatley, Ann Eliza Bleecker, Susanna Rowson, Sarah Wentworth Morton, Mercy Otis Warren, Hannah Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray, not to mention a plethora of other, less well-known names. As is now well recognized, by the first half of the next century, the stream had become a flood, which some male authors, Hawthorne among them, claimed was drowning their own voices out.

In citing the precedent established by this lively male-female newspaper debate, I am not claiming that the late-eighteenth-century public sphere that Habermas describes was other than a profoundly masculinist and class-bound institution. As Nancy Fraser, among others, has forcefully argued and Habermas since conceded, the eighteenth-century public sphere was a male-dominated form of social organization structured on exclusions of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and class.[18] Indeed, to judge by John Adams's 1776 response to the plea of his wife, Abigail, to "Remember the Ladies," one of the public sphere's primary functions was to insure that men like Adams kept control. If women were not to be trusted out from under the "Masters'"

collective thumb, neither were "Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholicks, Scotch Renegadoes, Tories, Landjobbers, Trimmers, Bigots [presumably religious ones], and Canadians."[19] If nothing else, the comprehensiveness of this list suggests just how tight a circle men like Adams were ready to draw around those they deemed capable—or incapable—of governing themselves.

Yet if this be true, it is also true, as Habermas passionately argues, that one of the major differences between his concept of the public sphere and conventional Marxist formulations of class-based power is that Habermas's thinking takes into account the bourgeois public sphere's own internal mechanisms for self-transformation. Agitation by labor and by feminists, Habermas writes, "transformed . . . the structures of the public sphere itself. . . . From the very beginning, the universalistic discourses of the bourgeois public sphere were based on self-referential premises; they did not remain unaffected by a criticism from within because they differ from Foucaultian discourses by virtue of their potential for self-transformation."[20] To Habermas, the promise of the bourgeois public sphere lay precisely here. Using the power of public suasion, women and other subjugated minorities—for example, those on Adams's little list—could take advantage of the public sphere's transformative mechanisms to alter radically their own situations.

Depending on what dates one adopts, how one defines inclusion, and, finally, how one defines the public sphere, this process took, where women were concerned, at least two hundred years. Not precisely a record to cheer for. Nevertheless, the point holds: because in the liberal state the principle of open access was foundational to the public sphere, the sphere did change, becoming more responsive to the needs and demands of the alien elements, as Adams viewed them, within it. This, as even Fraser allows, is its strength:

> [The] idea of the public sphere also functions here and now as a norm of democratic interaction we use to criticize the limitations of actually existing public spheres. The point here is that even the revisionist story and the Gramscian theory [of hegemony] that cause us to doubt the value of the public sphere are themselves only possible because of it. It is the idea of the public sphere that provides the conceptual condition of possibility for the revisionist critique of its imperfect realization.[21]

On however ad hoc a basis, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century bourgeois women who published their complaints in newspapers and periodicals were using "the idea of the public sphere" as Fraser describes it. If, as we shall see, these women were no less ready to exclude others, those they would have excluded were nonetheless able to use "the idea of the public sphere" in precisely the same way. One need only look as far as Phillis Wheatley's newspaper publications, especially her brilliant and widely circulated open letter

to the Mohegan minister, Samson Occom, in 1774, to realize just how powerful such interventions could be.[22]

In order to show how nineteenth-century women generally used their poetry to achieve similar political ends, I will approach my subject from two different directions at once, one historical, the other, literary. Historically, I address how the self-transforming mechanisms of the Habermasian public sphere did indeed work in one specific instance: to wit, the revolution in women's social and juridical status between 1800 and 1900. It is my thesis that, with limited means at their disposal to gain access to the public sphere, women used their writing, in particular, their poetry, to demand, model, imagine, produce, and defend reforms that ultimately led to their acquisition of civil free agency and hence, as they defined it, to their modernity. Literarily, this book will link women's demand for free agency to their exploitation of the complaint genre. In discussing women's complaints, I focus on their ironization of sentimentality because sentimental rhetoric was widely used not just by poets but (in some ways more crucially) by male and female prescriptive authorities to encode the gender notions that these women contested. These were the notions that denied women *civil* free agency prima facie by defining them only in relation to their *social* location within the home, as, for example, in the nineteenth century's use of "public" as an honorific for men and a term of degradation for women.[23]

At the same time, however, this book will also argue that women's social advances in the public sphere came at a cost to women's poetry itself. In particular, as the barriers to female civil agency came down, women poets were not only free to compete with men as equals in the professional arena but, as a result, to separate their verse from their lives, rendering the very kind of female complaint poetry that I discuss here not just out of date but without status as "art." As the coda will observe, some mainstream and, especially, minority women poets continued to write protest poetry after 1910, as indeed did some men. At least until the 1960s, however, self-styled "serious" women poets overwhelmingly positioned themselves alongside their male peers in an Anglo-American poetic tradition that stressed individual achievement over collective concern: the poet talking "to himself, or to nobody." Read from this perspective, this book is not about progress—as if progress were possible in art—but, rather, about a complicated set of exchanges, about loss as well as gain.

Because I believe so deeply that no one story can be told of nineteenth-century century women or their poetry, I have tried to balance the chronological arrangement of this book, dictated by its historical narrative of U.S. women's struggle for civil free agency, with chapters whose internal discontinuities mirror the sometimes stunning differences characterizing these poets' lives and works. This book is consequently neither a unified historical overview of nineteenth-century U.S. women's poetry nor a study of particu-

lar writers. Connections among writers exist but never apart from equally significant disjunctions. No single writer or unified set of writers is treated as "representative" of the whole. Where some writers like Sarah Piatt and the Canadian Mohawk writer, E. Pauline Johnson, are given greater scope, it is because the variety of their writing allows them to appear in different chapters on different grounds. If I have erred, it will be in paying, perhaps, too great attention to differences. But in a field that has been so reductively treated over such a length of time, imbalance may be necessary, at least as long as global allusions to "nightingales," "sweet singers," and "poetesses" persist.

However, my emphasis on difference also brings problems of its own. For one thing, although this book is committed to a historical approach, the absence of an effective copyright system for poetry in the nineteenth century makes dating, attribution, and the establishment of correct texts difficult at best. Typically, literary scholars have been able to avoid this problem by speaking of nineteenth-century women's poetry, always ex Dickinson, as if it were an undifferentiated mass. As it is precisely this view that I am contesting here, however, such an alternative is not open to me. On the contrary, one of the chief reasons I have focused on newspaper and periodical poetry, is because the circumstances of its publication allow us to achieve much greater accuracy in dating in particular. Since any poem could appear in multiple venues, in different versions, with different attributions (or none at all), over a period of decades (not just years), errors, however, are inescapable.[24] Quite simply, I have done the best I could.

On a more mundane level, my emphasis on differences has also made the obligatory chapter summaries difficult. Suffice it to say, that part 1 deals primarily with antebellum sentimental poetry by mainstream and minority women writers. In chapter 1, I set the stage for late-nineteenth-century women's entry into gender modernity by examining the vexed relationship that earlier women had with domestic ideology and with the sentimental rhetoric that encoded it, rhetoric that, like domestic ideology itself, was disabling and empowering at once. In tracing this latter paradox, I postulate two very different, and in some ways antithetical, strains within sentimentality itself.[25] The first, which I call "literary sentimentality," originated on the Continent in the imaginative writings of Goethe, Rousseau, and other late-eighteenth-century proto-romantics. All but entirely mediated by literary texts, this form of sentimentality became the culturally sanctioned discourse of refined bourgeois sensibility in the United States, as abroad. In its close alliance to domestic ideology, it also gave rise to the vague, idealizing romanticism that we now identify as characteristic of the sentimental or genteel lyric.

In chapter 2, I examine the century's second principal form of sentimentality, namely, "high sentimentality." Like literary sentimentality, high senti-

mentality also originated in the eighteenth century but as an ethical/epistemological discourse of social reform. Where antebellum women poets were never entirely comfortable with literary sentimentality, largely because of its romanticization of hearth and home, their adoption of high sentimentality was, on the whole, as passionate and powerful as, today, it is problematic. My goal in these chapters is to untangle these two strains of sentimentality, which scholarly literature has largely conflated, and to suggest some of the ways in which both strains, together with the domestic ideology that supported them, were used, critiqued, and not infrequently ironized by women well before Seneca Falls.

Part 1's final two chapters focus on the extensive roles both forms of sentimentality played in the writing of women from four of the United States' principal minorities: African American, Irish American, Jewish American, and Native American. Unlike their mainstream peers, minority women poets tended to employ the strategies of literary and high-sentimental lyric poetry unironically through most of the century. In these two chapters, I speculate on why and explore how writers from each minority group inflected these strategies for their own purposes. I then look in depth at the problematics of minority representation as they appear in the work of four highly prominent minority women poets: Frances Harper, Fanny Parnell, Emma Lazarus, and E. Pauline Johnson. Of these writers, I argue that it was not "representativeness" but their peculiar positioning between minority cultures and the dominant society that enabled them to become such effective spokespersons for peoples in many respects fundamentally unlike themselves.

In part 2 (chapters 5 through 8), I examine how mainstream women's interrogation (repudiation?) of domestic ideology after 1850 led to their ironization of sentimentality both as a lyric mode and as a discourse of sociopolitical reform. Women no less than men continued to write genteel lyrics well into the fin de siècle. However, after 1850, many women also began to parody both gentility and literary sentimentality. As the social change brought on by feminist agitation made possible a new generation of professional woman writers, a deepening split developed between those women still concerned with politics—most notably, minority women poets, but also Sarah Piatt—and those whose desire for mainstream recognition led them in more purely formal directions. As these chapters unfold, my attention will become noticeably more text-oriented, in keeping with changes in the ways women wrote. Determined to separate themselves from both the gender values and the perceived rhetorical excesses of their sentimentally inclined predecessors, mainstream and minority fin-de-siècle poets made control of affect, or what I call "affective irony," the signature of their modernity. That is, they made *anti*sentimentality a defining feature of themselves as "New Women" and as artists of the "New."

However ironically, the success of these poets was thus predicated on the

demise of the very kind of writer who gave them birth. Some women continued to write in the social-protest tradition in the twentieth century, but the modernist woman poet is best understood as one produced not by the political agitation that made her emergence possible but by the split between high and popular culture that occurred in the final decade of the nineteenth century itself. In dismissing earlier nineteenth-century women poets *tout court* as irremediably inferior artists, whose popularity rested in their (feminizing) emotionality, fin-de-siècle women poets demonized their own roots, cutting early modernist women off from them also. However, where male modernists could repudiate their Victorian precursors without impugning their own authority as artists, serious twentieth-century women poets could not. Persuaded that to be a woman as they believed women were, or traditionally had been, was necessarily to be a bad poet, female modernists languished in a literary limbo for (if one believes Adrienne Rich) half a century or more, never really granted equality with male writers yet fearing to appeal to a (gendered) constituency of their own.

At its baldest, this is my argument. The complexities of its persuasion I leave to the chapters themselves.