ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Laura Steinert for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in English, English, and Women Studies presented on June 1, 1995. Title: Maria Susanna Cummins' *The Lamplighter*: A Revisioning of a Sentimental Writer of the Nineteenth-Century United States as Rhetor, Social Critic, and Feminist.

Abstract Approved: ____________________________

Dr. Anita Helle

Within *The Lamplighter*, a novel written in 1854, Maria Susanna Cummins defines a version of the sentimental novel that significantly differs from the prescriptive analysis male critics have offered for the genre. This thesis argues that feminist theory and recent rhetorical theory have caused a critical paradigm shift that has opened new possibilities for re-visioning this and other nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. Certain critics including Nina Baym and Susan K. Harris have suggested that sentimental fiction can be re-visioned by allowed ourselves the freedom to explore the texts through a critique of traditional canonical models. Harris' process analysis method of exploring texts acknowledges the shifting ideologies of nineteenth-century America and blends historical, rhetorical, and ideological methods of criticism in a system that allows the complex nature of
sentimental fiction to unfold. Process analysis centers the reading on the text, while valuing the cultural structures and historical context of the time in which it was written. The purpose of this thesis is not to devalue canonical literature nor to value all women-authored texts disregarding valid standards of quality but to demonstrate that we can discover a different value for the sentimental. The consequence of reading through this process is discovering that Cummins explicitly states the purpose of literature, her cultural contribution to the state of her nation, and women's responsibility to alter that condition through self-education, true concern for others, and development of autonomy. Through this reading I place The Lamplighter as a significant marker in the history of women-authored fiction.
Maria Susanna Cummins' *The Lamplighter*: A Revisioning of a Sentimental Writer of the Nineteenth-Century United States as Rhetor, Social Critic, and Feminist.

by

Laura Steinert

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Completed June 1, 1995
Commencement June 1996
Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies thesis of Laura Steinert presented on June 1, 1995

APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy

Associate Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy

Associate Professor, representing Women Studies

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of Department English

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Redacted for Privacy

Laura Steinert, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In addition to expressing my gratitude for the guidance and assistance of my committee members, I would like to thank Dr. Cheryl Glenn for her continuing personal, professional, and academic support; her assistance in the early stages of my research was invaluable. I am grateful to Dr. Michael Oriard for his support and assistance during my research. I also wish to credit Eva Payne who provided valuable reader response.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION:</th>
<th>page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Response to the Sentimental...........</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology: Re-situating the Sentimental.........</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion.........................................</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II: THE HOUSE OF FICTION:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cummins’ Reconstruction of the Sentimental Novel</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER III: THE LAMPLIGHTER AND CONTEMPORARY READERS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes..................................................</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References............................................</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography..........................................</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION: Traditional Response to the Sentimental

... few scholars have ventured to construct appropriate evaluative criteria. Rather, there appears to be an unspoken agreement not to submit nineteenth-century American women’s novels to extended analytical evaluation, largely, I think, because the evaluative modes most of us were taught devalue this literature a priori. (Susan K. Harris 43-44)

Most critics who have dealt with The Lamplighter, a novel written by Maria Susanna Cummins in 1854, have labeled it either domestic fiction or sentimental fiction—labels that have functioned to denigrate. Female American sentimental writers, as did many nineteenth-century British writers, dealt with what are now more or less abandoned "literary themes: feminine purity; the sanctity of the childish heart; above all, the meaning of religious conformity" (Ann Douglas 5), while their contemporary American male peers turned their sights principally on values and scenes that operated as alternatives to cultural norms . . . dramas of the forest, the sea, the city. (Douglas 5)
Writing on the "wrong" themes has left Cummins' work outside the canonical scope; however, there is still value in her work that today's critic is more aware of than past critics. Rhetorical or reader-oriented theory and feminist criticism have opened new possibilities for discernment.

I will argue that feminist theory and rhetorical theory have opened new possibilities for re-visioning this nineteenth-century sentimental novel. Exploring woman-authored sentimental fiction of the mid-nineteenth-century United States through new critical approaches allows us to value these stories and acknowledge the sophisticated cultural critiques and rhetorical strategies employed by the writers. It is my argument that through extensive readings we may develop successful ways of re-visioning those novels as well as the novels of later women writers. By focusing our evaluation of literature on the inherent strengths of the work rather than on the sex of the author or primary audience, I will argue, we allow ourselves to see a unique literary tradition and heritage that is truly an American literature.

Since The Lamplighter is relatively unfamiliar, a brief plot summary may be helpful. The Lamplighter is the story of female development: Gerty grows from nameless orphan to working woman to wife. This happens in three stages. First the protagonist is rescued from the abusive woman, who is charged with her care, by a poor, physically
disabled, old man. Through him, Gerty learns the meaning of home, friends, and love. Here she begins a superior education, the cultivation of her heart—her sentimental nature—and sets her life goals. Second, the old lamplighter dies, and Gerty moves into a upper-middle-class home to be the student of and companion to Emily Graham. In this section Gerty develops into an autonomous being.

The final third of the book is the denouement. Here all the coincidences are explained, the history of the characters is unraveled, and Gerty and Emily are married to the "right" men. On the surface this novel fits the general outline of the expected formula for sentimental novels of that era.

Critics of the era when the American canon was being formed had particular ideological concerns, which have until recent years excluded sentimental novels from the category of great literature. These texts appear to have been rejected not because of the actual quality of the work but because the women who wrote sentimental novels were assumed to have nothing of value to say to men. Nina Baym has argued that in the canonical construction of literary history, literature of the United States told one story—the story of the American male's struggle. Upon this limiting requirement rest most of the other criteria for great literature. Baym, Ann Douglas, Jane Tompkins, Mary Kelly, Judith Fetterly, and many other critics of the
literature of the United States are contributing to the study of woman-authored sentimental fiction as an important new territory for critical exploration in the development of American literature. These arguments, upon which mine builds, disprove the myths that suggest women's novels are simple formula stories, lack social value, and are poor quality. The myths are based upon hearsay for the most part and on opinions formed after hasty skimming by critics predisposed to devalue anything that might qualify as "women's fiction."

The nineteenth century approach to the institution of female authorship has been based on woman's "place" in society. The attitudes that at first excluded women from reading and writing and later from higher education, appear to be the foundation upon which their work was judged.¹ Inextricably linked to this ban on education was the belief that women had little to offer male society. This resistance to women's voices is formally codified by Fred Lewis Pattee, in his 1940 critical work The Feminine Fifties. Pattee makes his distaste for all women-authored, sentimental texts very clear, but he also despises novels written for women. Whether it was "the romantic young girl . . . , the old district school-teacher, the farmer's overworked wife, even the minister's wife," any women who felt "life had cheated them, that their dreams had not come true, that they were victims" read novels:
"In for life" and knowing it, they could, for moments at least and often for hours, live on vicarious romance under the spell of a novel that made them forget. (Pattee 53)

But this was not a benign spell; "women were taking to fiction as a narcotic, as a means of escape" (Pattee 53). Once formulated, this stance became the foundation upon which the formal canonical bias was structured.

The problem, it seems to Pattee, is that women authors "have read too much" or grown up in "nun-like seclusion" (54) or have merely attempted to while away the time until they pass into dreary spinsterhood. Other factors Pattee finds contributing to the poor quality of these sentimental novels are the authors' too close a reliance on God as their muse (56), uncultured mothers (59), and too strict a religious training in youth (59). Pattee detests the local color of the novels, but more to his disliking, and especially to the point of this thesis, is the emotion that sentimental novels evoke. His dislike for show of emotion is clearly demonstrated in his anecdote about the Cary sisters, poets and short-fiction writers, who often entertained the prominent publishers and writers of mid-century New England, and who are not like sentimental novelists. He tells his readers that although religion runs through [Phoebe's] poems, as it does through her sister's, like a major chord, she was not sentimental. Alice had had a disastrous love affair that had filled her poems with tears, but not Phoebe. "Believe me, I never loved any man well enough to lie awake half an hour, to be miserable about him." A very human
soul. If either sister had genius, it was Phoebe . . . (65)

And, if this rejection of emotion were not clear enough for his readers, he quotes from the *Christian Union* review of the Cary sisters' lives after the death of Alice in 1871:

> They began to write . . . of sorrowful experiences, of unrequited love, of painful illnesses, of hopes and fears plaintively mingled, and of untimely deaths. It was linked sadness drawn out. Tender regret and weak sentiment seemed to us—we say it unwillingly—the staple of what they wrote. (Pattee 66)

The problem is that by the late nineteenth century emotions in the context of women's work—once thought the evidence of cultivated taste—had become ugly and uncomfortable things to behold. Further, since Pattee's criticism is the basis of understanding literature, for most later critics "womanly" emotions have been unacceptable in canonical works unless they were Stowe's religious fervor or Alcott's "little" emotions that can be outgrown. Pattee seems on the edge of understanding the need of many readers for cathartic release, but he also turns on them for needing the escape. These sentimental novels are "feminine," "weak," "false sentiment," and at best "imitations" of real novels—real novels written by men, we must assume, although Pattee also places a few men in the "feminine" category.

Since the 1940's, Pattee has been one of the most influential reviewers of nineteenth-century popular fiction. He seems to be the first critical reviewer of the
twentieth century to re-evaluate The Lamplighter. His view of the novel suggests how difficult it was for a sentimental writer to be publicly esteemed. Pattee reviews The Lamplighter insisting that it typifies a feminine story, that the author had little control over the language and plot, and that it fails as an imitation of The Wide, Wide World. After belittling The Lamplighter, and quoting a parody rather than giving a description of the novel, Pattee delivers his most caustic blow by saying that it "was perfectly in key with its day; it sold 70,000 copies in its first year" (115). By Pattee's criteria, not only is The Lamplighter bad (and with it countless other novels written in the sentimental vein) because it sold, it is bad because people liked it, and it spoke to them of their own time and place.

Pattee does, however, give us the criteria of the day for literary worthiness. It comes from Harper's Magazine in an 1855 review of Fanny Fern's Ruth Hall:

Has it a single great literary merit? Is there a story at all? Is there any individualization or development of character? Is there any sentiment which is not sentimentality, of the worst kind? Is there any thought which is not a thin echo of some noble word of one of the great minds that warm the age with their humane wisdom, and so distorted in the echo that it becomes untrue? Is there any pathos that is not puerile and factitious? (119).

The problem seems to be two fold. First, Fern writes with emotion: "the whole book is embittered" (119). Second, the book is about a woman who rises "from penury to plenty,"
and the reviewer cannot see if, or why, he should be glad that "there is one less victim of poverty" (120). *Ruth Hall* demands an emotional response and is about a single woman supporting her children, a woman achieving the American Dream. Thus it is sentimental, and thus valueless.

The criteria offered in the Harper's piece, however, are fulfilled by both *Ruth Hall* and *The Lamplighter*: There is a story; the characters are individualized and most do develop; the sentiment is not "of the worst kind" but intended to be of the best kind. These are novels creating a new genre not creating empty echoes of a masculine tradition, and the pathos is mature and sincere. It may not have been evident to the critics of the day, but it is my argument that the literary merit of *The Lamplighter* should have been evident to later readers. Unfortunately, women's literary work has not been valued until recent years--and then only marginally. By labeling it a genre, and a poor one at that, critics have effectively prejudiced readers against a whole body of work that might have been of considerable value to both male and female writers.²

Pattee places Cummins' and Fern's work firmly in the genre of sentimental fiction, and in doing he so has lain the ground work for most critical theorists for evaluating such novelists. From "scribbling women," to "literary domestic," to "local color artist," to "female writer," to
"popular writer," Cummins' and her contemporaries' novels have suffered under many pejorative labels. One of the most derogatory labels, however, is "domestic literati" (it calls attention to the fact that these women did not write "in Latin" and that few could even read it). Building upon Pattee's work, Frank Luther Mott reported in his 1947 survey of popular fiction, *Golden Multitudes*, that sentimental novels written by the "domestic literati" were favorites of "the unthinking" the illiterati (125).3 Mott's description of these novels suggests that no one should care to invest even a little time in reading one:

> The middle-class American home was one of the focal points. . . . the home, with a saintly mother, a father saintly or otherwise, and a family of growing children, one of whom is the heroine, formed the basis. . . . this home-and-Jesus formula, emphasizing the strains of family life, the education of youth, with the religious solution for all problems, filled books which found hundreds of thousands of purchasers. (122)

This description falls only one paragraph below Mott's lengthy quote of Hawthorne's famous "damned mob of scribbling women" tirade.4 And Mott's description of *The Lamplighter* fares no better than the other sentimental novels he summarizes. One wonders if he actually read the novel--the above description in no way fits *The Lamplighter*--beyond the "first quarter of the new book, that is up to the death of Uncle True," which would "have formed a novelette of considerable pathos, sympathy, and dignity" (Mott 124).
The first section—up to Trueman’s death—is the most sentimental, the most bordering on bathos, and the most melodramatic section of the novel. The problem, it seems, is that from the death of Trueman this becomes a story about a woman’s "eventless" days. Mott’s reading leads him to describe the heroine, her father, and Willie Sullivan as "paragons" (125), although they clearly struggle, fall short of their own expectations, and engage in countless battles of conscience that they sometimes lose. Only Emily is a paragon of virtue and self-sacrifice—and Mott fails to mention her by name at all. (Mott also misses several fine points such as Emily marries her step-brother, not her brother.)

In light of Emily’s self-sacrificing example, one also questions Mott’s description of the heroine, Gertrude Flint, as given to "virtuous self-sacrifice and all that" (125). First, "and all that" is unclear and intentionally contemptuous. Second, Gerty would seem self-sacrificing only to the most cursory reader. She is more easily read as a woman who looks ahead to the outcome of certain acts, ponders the consequences, and chooses the one that will, in the greater scheme than the momentary, be the most advantageous to her—both in her own conscience and in the eyes of the few people she respects and admires.

It is the popularity of The Lamplighter, as well as other best-selling examples of sentimental fiction such as
The Wide, Wide World, and Tempest and Sunshine, that Mott finds most disheartening. In Golden Multitudes when Mott concludes his section on Cummins, he returns to Hawthorne to complete his attack: "We know definitely that Hawthorne did resent the great popular success of his fellow Salemite; and, her book being what it was, we can only share his indignation" (130).

Implicit in arguments against the sentimental are not only arguments about gender but arguments about class. Over and over, critics from Hawthorne (1850) to G. M. Goshgarian (1992) use the fact that domestic fiction, the "sentimental novel," sold in the hundred thousands to prove that it is worthless, an opiate for the masses. Jane Tompkins, however, believes that literature "has power in the world . . . it connects with the beliefs and attitudes of large masses of readers so as to impress and move them deeply" (xv). I suggest that the problem with popular books is that through them the masses are setting the standards for taste, and the elite--by gender, social status or education--are not. Taste can become a battleground on which the line of battle is drawn to keep the elite elite.5

These challenges to the American elite by the sentimental writers seem to focus in three areas: gender, class, and profession. First, gender relations were challenged by women writing to support themselves, their
families, and sometimes even their fathers. Women may have been the moral center of the home, but they were not in charge. Douglas tells us that as women gained the label of moral center of the home ministers were losing power over and control of their congregations prompting them to temper their praise of women with threatening undertones. Horace Bushnell, a well-known religious authority, Douglas says, told women "stay within your proper confines, and you will be worshiped . . . step outside and you will cease to exist" (44). Women may have been told they were physically and morally stronger than men, but they were expected to be submissive wives, daughters, and parishioners nonetheless.

Second, in the mid-nineteenth century, the financial boundary between the lower and upper class (which, in the United States, had replaced aristocracy and peasant class of the Old World) was being challenged by the new middle class which was only being named in America around 1848 (Lang 129). The new middle class was taking up literature, not as the narcotic Pattee suggests, but as a form of leisure.

Literature "was revealing and supporting a special class . . . defined less by what its members produced than by what they consumed" (Douglas 10). Because the middle class now outnumbered the upper class, and because they had more buying power en masse, the middle class was usurping the power of the rich to set standards of taste and refinement.
Third, women were barred from men’s professions and colleges; in fact, according to Douglas, female education was completely inadequate. Sometimes so informal and goalless as to be "flippant," education for girls was used as "a means of oppression" that focused more on educating girls to be consumers rather than on developing mental prowess (59). Women were not expected to compete with men, nor were they accepted when they did. The women writers of the mid-nineteenth century were not only competing successfully, in many cases, they were succeeding beyond the wildest expectations of male writers—and even of the first few editors who were willing to take a chance and publish sentimental novels by women.

In such a hostile climate, it followed that critics, the educated upper classes, and male authors often reacted violently against women authors and woman-authored texts, especially against those deemed sentimental. This reaction has become our literary heritage. Students of American literature have accepted such judgments for years on the authority of respected critics and teachers. It has not mattered, until recently, that the facts were never actually facts but inherited readings, that the definitions have not fit the novels, or that many of the critics who disparage Cummins and her contemporaries have either not read the novels, or have read them with terministic screens so firmly in place that they could not see the value of
women's writing. Our terministic screens are constructed of the language we use to identify, think about, and express what we experience. While "human" may include women, for many critics who follow Pattee's lead, feminine must exclude the masculine; thus, in the traditionally conservative fields of literature and higher learning, women-authored texts have often been viewed as valueless to men and men's work.

For many of the same reasons--gender and class prejudices--even after the beginning of the contemporary women's movement, most male critics were still devaluing woman-authored sentimental fiction. In 1968, Donald A. Koch edited a printing of The Lamplighter with which he offered to "conger wistful memories of the old 'Sunday-school libraries' . . . [and present] two rococo classics reflective of social and literary phenomenon of a century ago" (v). He labels Cummins a "bluestocking" whose first two novels, The Lamplighter and Mabel Vaughan were included in the Tauchnitz Library of British and American Authors only on specious grounds. This collection numbered only 4,800 titles in 1929, yet Koch can only assume that it is because the "venerable Leipzig publishing house earned its hallmark by specializing in Bibles and dictionaries" that Cummins' work was included on the basis of the novels being "appropriately charged with piety and superlatives" rather than on artistic merit (vii). Koch was able to recognize
that Cummins could not be ignored, but he had several generations of critical response to sentimental fiction pressuring him into devaluing, by what ever means available, sentimental fiction.

Given the past fate of sentimental fiction, it seems to some historical revisionists and feminist critics in the latter half of the 1990's that vast areas of our literary history have been ignored, lost or mislabeled. For example, Koch traces the history of what he terms "American domestic fiction" to English novels by Richardson and Sterne. However, he clarifies his comparison by pointing out that what occurred as "acceptable sentimentalism in Richardson and Sterne became mawkish sentimentality in the nineteenth-century American novels" which Koch attributes to "feeble talent" (ix). He does not, cannot, see women as creating new forms of sentimental literature, he merely assumes they were bastardizing old forms.

Critics of literature are only beginning to recognize that the sentimental novel may have had a different persuasive function for women than other forms of discourse. And some sentimental novels work in direct opposition to Richardson; they do not bastardize his form; they subvert it. In 1968, Koch still repeats the standard response to American women's writing of the nineteenth century: "romantic, not realistic," creating a "stereoptican reality," offering "impossible qualities and
improbable adventures," which are "drawn to interminable length"; they are "full of stock figures in repeated charades or postures", and "they were second- or third-rate, inferior, and imitative" (ix). Yet, even from his only slightly distanced perspective, Koch is able to admit that

the apparent shallowness of these novels is deceptive; they were, in fact, marvels of persuasion—all fraught with countless examples of the things society strove to reform, all charged with noble precepts, all sharply tuned to the exciting emotional pitch of the times. (xii)

This "persuasion" that was only beginning to be critically noticed in 1968 may be what draws readers, and critics like Nina Baym, to The Lamplighter today.

Nina Baym's rereading of sentimental fiction has a special place in recent history because she theorizes reasons for the negative value attached to women's domestic fiction in nineteenth-century America. Baym lists three partial explanations for the "critical invisibility" of women authors in the United States. First,

the critic does not like the idea of women as writers, does not believe that women can be writers, and hence does not see them even when they are right before his eyes. ("Melodramas of Beset Manhood" 64)

We have accepted "an a priori resistance to recognizing women authors as serious writers [that] has functioned powerfully in the mind-set of a number of influential critics" ("Melodramas" 64).
Second, "women have not written the kind of work that we call 'excellent' for reasons connected with their gender although separable from it." By restricting formal education to men, and by placing social restraints upon the type of writing they were allowed to do, women could not produce "excellent" literature, not because of their "gender per se" but through gender specific roles (Baym "Melodramas" 65). Until recently, only a tiny portion of literary women aspired to artistry and literary excellence in the terms defined by their own culture. There tended to be "a sort of immediacy in the ambitions of literary women leading them to professionalism rather than artistry" (Baym "Melodramas" 65).

Third, Baym posits that there are gender restrictions that do not arise out of cultural realities contemporary with the writing woman, but out of later critical theories . . . . [therefore] if one accepts current theories of American literature, one accepts as a consequence--perhaps not deliberately but nevertheless inevitably--a literature that is essentially male (Baym "Melodramas" 65)

It is not necessary to ignore or redefine literature that is essentially male to begin to value literature that is not essentially male. It is not my wish to devalue canonical literature, only to explore one method of re-valuing women-authored sentimental fiction to allow us an understanding of women’s literary heritage.
Methodology: Re-situating the Sentimental

"There is much, much more good literature by women in existence than anybody knows" (Joanna Russ 172).

Sentimental fiction can be re-visioned by allowing ourselves the freedom to explore the texts themselves through the clues the authors provide as to their intent rather than through misogynist theory. We must develop and explore new theories based on different ideological stances that acknowledge female sentimental authors as writers rather than as scribblers and readers of the sentimental as intelligent beings rather than as mindless addicts.

One method for evaluating sentimental fiction as art that seems valuable and effective is offered by Susan K. Harris in an article for American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography. While Harris does not include The Lamplighter in her in her argument, she does focus on novels from the same period, particularly The Wide, Wide World and Ruth Hall. Harris posits that the "revival of interest in nineteenth-century American literature" began with Nina Baym's publication of Women's Fiction in 1978 (43). Harris says at that time Baym proposed the invitation of an "on-going dialogue" that would "enable us to talk fruitfully about pre-twentieth-century American women's writing in terms of 'good' and 'bad.'" To do this, we must create valid methodologies:

One avenue is to learn how to describe noncanonical American women's literature in terms
of process—that is to see it within the shifting of nineteenth-century American ideologies. (Harris 44)

We can create methodologies that are inclusive of women-authored sentimental novels without ignoring or devaluing the whole of literary tradition.

My own reading of The Lamplighter is grounded in and draws from the synthesis of Harris’s ideas. Using Harris’s work as a guide allows us to approach Cummins’ novel from a new direction. As "imaginative literature" The Lamplighter springs from, reacts against, [and] responds to the plots, themes, [and] languages in the discursive arena that engendered it at the same time that it creates new possibilities for that arena. (Harris 44)

Harris writes that "literature works continuously to interact with readers to create, over time, new moral and aesthetic perceptions" (Harris 44). She quotes reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss:

The relationship between literature and reader can actualize itself in the sensorial realm as an incitement to aesthetic perception as well as in the ethical realm as a summons to moral reflection. (Harris 44)

The Lamplighter does both. Not only can readers feel the strong emotional appeal of the starving, abused toddler Gerty, but as Gerty’s ethical understandings increase, so do the readers’ moral reflections.

Harris wants us to accept fluid accounts of "the relationship between language, consciousness, and social change as the basis" for reshaping our ways of "perceiving
what imaginative literature is, what it does, and how it 'works'" so we will have a tool to help create criteria for evaluating noncanonical literature and "for acknowledging our own motives for doing so and the implications of our own critical acts":

What teleological shape the literature we are examining has is imposed on it by us, retrospectively; it is not inherent in the material itself. We are doing so, first, because we see ourselves positively, if not as end points then at least as significant markers; second, because we are drawn to nineteenth-century women's texts despite their apparent antithetical values and want to find some way of talking about them; and, third, because we are searching for antecedents to ourselves and the future we envision that we have not found in canonical texts and canonical ways of reading them. (Harris 45)

Once we look at The Lamplighter, or another text, as both reactive and creative, rather than demanding it to be universal or to "self-consciously embody 'timeless truth,'" we can begin to understand its "aesthetic, moral, and political values, both for [its] contemporaries and for us" (Harris 45). What we have not had is a workable formula that incorporates the essential elements of traditional literary criticism with our newly developed interest of defining women's literary heritage. Harris provides us that essential formula in her process analysis approach to re-situating the sentimental novel.

Traditional criticism tends to examine literary works from a single stance; historical, rhetorical, or ideological methods are sometimes mutually exclusive.
Several recent feminist critics suggest readings that blend more than one perspective create a more complex reading. And in criticizing both traditional and radical literary criticism, feminist critic Laurie A. Finke argues,

Challenges to the canon issuing from both liberal and radical feminists have tended to fall back on simple dialectics—good versus bad literature and oppressive versus liberating values—instead of inquiring into the dialogic nature of utterances about value. (153)

Finke agrees that those arguments have helped the rediscovery and reevaluation of women writers, but "none makes explicit what standards of judgment are necessary to any 'revision' of the canon" (153). The criteria for good literature need not change, in Finke’s view, but the monolithic assumptions that literature is essentially the story of men and men’s central position in the world must change. Perhaps in response to the same desire for change that informs these theories, Harris blends the historical, rhetorical, and ideological into what she has labeled "process analysis" investigation. Although the specific analytical tasks may look the same . . . the final mosaic produced by process analysis looks very different because it has shifted the hermeneutics and evaluative projects into a far more complex socio-temporal scheme. And unlike traditional Anglo-American criticism, process analysis foregrounds the relationship of the literary-critical task to the critic’s stance in her own time. (Harris 45).

From the present standpoint, our critical task is not to value all women-authored texts disregarding valid standards of quality, but to demonstrate that through Harris’s
process analysis we can discover the literary heritage of the women of the United States through investigation of sentimental fiction of the mid-nineteenth century. If we can uncover those roots, we can explore more critically the traditions of women of the United States writing "good" books that are intended to be literature of quality even if the authors themselves deny that they were trying to create "art" as men have defined it.

Harris posits that enough research has been done on sentimental novels written by American women between 1840 and 1870 to enable us to make some generalizations about the group:

For instance, critics have long noted--mostly with distaste--that the large majority of nineteenth-century American women's novels have "happy endings" in which their heroines marry and give up any idea of autonomy. Recent critics, however, have pointed out that a closer view shows that the novels also question that inscription, even when their structures submit to it. (Harris 46)

It is true that while many but not all sentimental novels end in marriage, the actual events and the rhetoric of many sentimental novels also challenge the idea of female subordination.

Because the "themes and structures tend to work at cross purposes," sentimental novels were once dismissed as confused; today such texts are more often read as dialogic (Harris 46). We have experienced a critical paradigm shift, Harris contends, that allows us new depth of access
to the novel through reader-response criticism and new structural approaches. Because "the dialogic patterning inherent in the novels' structure facilitates readers' participation in the novels' ideological debates" we are now able to recognize the challenges offered to readers of sentimental novels (Harris 46). Although this process cobbles together various readings and a feminist approach, it does and should draw on traditional theory.

Traditional views of and assumptions about nineteenth-century women's novels have been designed to limit the value of these texts. This may seem obviously wrong to today's feminist because it is sometimes difficult to understand patterns of the past without some background to make clear the socio-historical patterns, the ideological assumptions, and the rhetorical stances of the time. Harris's method allows us to re-vision what Fred Lewis Pattee offers as a background in his Feminine Fifties. Although limited by the terministic screens of his time (1940) and of his particular response to the era, Pattee offers a good background to begin our understanding of American women writers of the 1850's. Pattee's construction of the feminine genre, which later scholars (both male and female) have often relied upon in their evaluations of nineteenth-century writers (both male and female), is far too limited for the social patterns,
ideological assumptions, and rhetorical evaluations today's critic must consider.

Harris would have us start recontextualizing the sentimental novel by understanding Pattee's version of the social history of the 1850's. Pattee gives a critic's view of the New England of the mid-nineteenth-century United States. Large rural families of ten or more children were common. Sons "were forced to leave home early to secure jobs in the city" or "out west," while daughters were confined to the options of housework or teaching or marriage. Great numbers of girls during the forties and fifties left the farms where they were born and found employment in the mills . . . as loomtenders . . . , and many were held by home ties, often into dreary spinsterhood. (Pattee 52)

All women, Pattee says, were taught to read "more or less," and they were under the strong "influence of the churches and pastors." And "as a result, literature had fallen more and more into the hands of these women" (a state he finds disheartening) (Pattee 52). Pattee goes on to describe these women readers not as serious readers, but as taking to fiction as a narcotic, as a means of escape. . . . They could, for moments at least and often hours, live on vicarious romance under the spell of a novel that made them forget. (Pattee 53)

Harris helps us see that Pattee's vision of writing is based on a limited notion of history and historical sources; in his predisposition to ignore women's contributions, Pattee basis his history on his parents'
lives (Pattee 52) and ignores the women's movements of the mid-nineteenth century. In this version of history, men were "immersed in business, in professional work, in driving the affairs of a headlong age" (Pattee 52), while women escaped through the narcotic effect of sentimental fiction.

The process of revaluing the sentimental through Harris's method also requires us to grasp the ideological standards of the mid-nineteenth century, and to accept that they differ from our own--just as they differ from Pattee's standards. Pattee says,

One who reads [The Wide, Wide World] today finds it hard to realize how any critic at any time could speak of 'the almost faultless excellence' [of it] or could speak of it as an 'incomparable work read with the most heartfelt sympathy and delight'. (Pattee 56-57)

Yet the mid-nineteenth century, according to Pattee, was "stimulated by the intensity of the times . . . to crave added emotional stimulants." Religious emotion "expressed itself in a tearful flood of poems and novels and betterment movements" (Pattee 8). Pattee is unable to acknowledge his own point that the pathos was an essential element in this fiction because he is predisposed to devalue any work that may be labeled sentimental; sympathy and delight have no suasive power for him.

Harris argues that the "dialogic patterning inherent in the novels' structures facilitates readers' participation in the novels' ideological debates" and
before evaluating a nineteenth century novel, we must "establish the terms of the debate(s) in which the text participates" (46). Through the work of Douglas, Tompkins, and other recent social historians, we have come to understand that society limited women to public expression of their "place" as the emotional and spiritual center of the family. Limited to pathetic appeals and to stories of "improvement," women were restricted to the sentimental genre regardless of their intents and covert messages.

Many critics of the sentimental novel have acknowledged the power of sentiment in other types of persuasive discourse. Novels steeped in religious sentiment, highly moral, and often meant to educate also became platforms for--or were forced into the role of--social reform. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Retribution* by E.D.E.N. Southworth became abolitionist handbooks, and *Ten Nights in a Barroom* by Timothy Shay Arthur became the temperance novel of its day. These authors rely heavily on emotional appeals primarily to religious fervor and to pity and feelings of responsibility to fellow humans. In keeping with such religion-based appeal "the religious ideology within which [The Lamplighter] operates is made overt at the end of the first chapter" (Baym xix). Cummins writes, "Poor little untaught, benighted soul! Who shall enlighten thee?" (Cummins 4). Cummins holds the possibility of
enlightenment for everyone—even a poor abandoned girl-child who swears, has fits of temper, and who has never even heard of Christ the Savior. She is rejecting Calvinism and Evangelicalism for a humanistic feeling that "everyone has an inner light, but all need confirmation and strengthening through social relations" (Baym xix). According to the ideological standards of mid-century women were superior physically" to men, "more intellectual" than men, and morally the women of America [were] superior to the men, to a degree (the mere fact scarce need be asserted) which was never known before in the history of nations, [and,] "finally, in religion, taste, in general elevation of sentiment and in consistency of standard of opinion. (Pattee 93)

Still, Cummins' work was not "easy" for male readers to accept. Gently in The Lamplighter, then more forcefully in Mabel Vaughan, Cummins questions "whether a male ideology (stressing competition, individualism, and materialism) or a female ideology (stressing cooperation, community, and love) was better: for women, for men, and for the nation" (Baym xxviii). Both Trueman Flint and Willie Sullivan are womanly men (caring, nurturing, gentle) while Gerty is a manly woman (strong, powerful, and given to acts of supreme heroism); this creates a conflict of values for both the characters and the readers. Harris suggests that these novels challenge readers' assumptions through "their plots, their narrators' addresses to the readers, or their patterns of rhetoric" (46).
The third area of Harris's theory requires that we acknowledge the rhetoric of the 1850's as a powerful resource, a tool available to shape social attitudes. Through persuasion that acknowledged the ethical, logical, and emotional facets of the reader, sentimental fiction writers appealed to the whole woman, not just her ability to sympathize. It is difficult to determine the rhetorical training of the American women writers of the 1850's. Once damned as scribblers, there seemed little point in seriously investigating their work, their training, or their rhetorical strategies. We do know, thanks to Pattee, that Susan and Anna Warner had studied Blair's *Rhetoric*. Baym and several other recent critics who have been rereading American women's writing of the nineteenth century record that Cummins was educated primarily by her father who provided her with the classics. One suspects her education included rhetorical texts—perhaps, once her father discovered Cummins' talent for prose, even Aristotle's *Poetics*, upon which Cummins seems to rely for her own definition of literature and Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, who writes that it is the cultivation of taste that brings happiness.8 Blair acknowledged the power of pathos: "There is a certain string to which, when properly struck, the human heart is so made as to answer" (809). Properly awakened, the heart must respond.
The final element we must consider is the judgment by Cummins’ contemporary critics from which we may develop an idea of her insight into the standards and the demand for works of fiction. Although it is often difficult to recover criticism of mid-nineteenth-century novels, the attitudes of both open-minded and misogynistic critics can be seen in the criticism that has been preserved. Harris’s process analysis allows us to recognize that favorable reviews were ignored while belittling or sarcastic reviews were perpetuated in support of masculine repulsion at expression of emotion.9

The implications of Harris’s process analysis allow us to see that, unfortunately, Pattee has so placed all the work of women writers and of most men writers, too, of the 1850’s of America that he is not able to see them in any category or context but feminized versions of a male, truly masculine, reality. As the authority of the decade he says, "Realism, as far as Miss Cummins was concerned, was a device wholly out of place in romance that was to be read by women who had reread Jane Eyre and cried over The Wide, Wide World" (Pattee 111-112). Yet Cummins may well have been interested in a realism of women’s world, "a whole world he knows nothing of."

One further case of the problem of critically valuing the sentimental is the work of Pattee’s contemporary, F.O. Matthiessen, author of American Renaissance. For decades
the leading critical authority on the nineteenth-century male writers of the United States, Matthiessen acknowledged only men as great writers of the 1850's. Five men dominate his 1941 survey of the decade in which Cummins published, and only fleeting paragraphs are dedicated to women writers of the era--and no pre-Civil War women are accorded any literary stature with him even in criticism written later in his career. Matthiessen constructs a reality in terms of the flowering of Puritan New England literature as male--both as writer and reader.¹⁰

Nineteenth-century literature, for Matthiessen, has "one common denominator" that unites all male virtues: "their devotion to the possibilities of democracy" (ix). He posits that the "farmer rather than the businessman was still the average American," forgetting entirely that women comprised half the United States' population (xi). Matthiessen says, "during the century that has ensued, the successive generations of common readers, who make the decisions [of 'good and bad' literature], would seem to have agreed" with his choice (xi). One wonders who Matthiessen's common reader might be. The novels and authors he chose, Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Emerson, are not often read outside academic contexts, so it is easy to assume he meant the common reader to be the upper-class educated male who dominated the colleges and universities between 1850 and 1940.
Matthiessen excludes women’s writing, no matter how politically motivated or how devoted to the possibilities of democracy, and he bases much of his value not on the literature written by these men, but on the meta-discourse of the authors in which they commented on their own and each others’ philosophical assumptions. Matthiessen values in male writing what he repudiates in female writing. For instance, Matthiessen admits that

without Melville’s emphases [hand written notes in a copy of Hawthorne’s "Buds and Bird Voices"] it would hardly be possible to discern anything fresh in Hawthorne’s description of an eventless day, but with them we can sense something of the quiet delight of his contemporaries in finding their most ordinary surroundings and occupation reflected in the mirror of his words. (210)

Yet it is this very "finding their ordinary surroundings reflected" that makes women’s writing abhorrent to male critics, particularly those who have followed Pattee and Matthiessen’s prescriptive view of great works.¹¹

By privileging men’s texts, lives, and concerns, by glorifying the idea that these men could not sell their works to an ignorant or tasteless public, and by essentially ignoring all women writers before Sarah Orne Jewett, Matthiessen makes the creation of literature and criticism of literature man’s field. When he tells us "the soul makes its own world" (viii), when he says that "although literature reflects an age, it also illuminates it" (x), he is referring exclusively to men’s souls and the illumination of men’s minds.
Process analysis lets us situate Matthiessen as working within an age during which the inevitability of white male privilege and dominance went virtually unquestioned. His theory is the basis upon which is built most later theory of literature, and much of that follows Matthiessen's guidelines disregarding the changes in readership and scholarship. It was not possible for Matthiessen in the late 1930's and early 40's to envision a need to understand women's issues and women's writing. However, Matthiessen's close look at the theory that writers of literature employ, the need to explore the assumptions and values writers bring to their texts, has laid the groundwork for later critics to build upon. The political, philosophical, spiritual, and aesthetic qualities Matthiessen lays out for us are still valuable tools for reading and valuing literature of women, of people of color, of any marginal group, although Matthiessen was not yet aware of the need to value such work.

Matthiessen began to understand the role of women fiction writers with his work on Jewett, who is often described as a local color artist, and he set the precedent for further investigation into the realm of women's sentimental prose. Yet few critics, until after the women's movements of the 1970's, took up the threads of that investigation. And, although Matthiessen is still
highly valued, few scholars have attempted to follow his lead in taking women writers seriously--except Jewett and a few odd "exceptions."

**Conclusion**

Until recently, American literary criticism has been centered on the American male's ways of being in the world; literature of the United States has been presented as a narrow focus on things masculine. The few exceptions, Alcott, Stowe, Jewett, and Dickinson, have been held as exceptions, not as representations of other women writers. This one-sided view is being challenged on many fronts for many reasons. When Judith Fetterly says "that what we currently accept as American literature implicitly and explicitly defines as American only certain persons and only certain stories that serve the interests of those persons," she means white males--particularly upper and upper-middle class white males (Fetterly "'Not in the Least American': Nineteenth-Century Literary Regionalism" 880). Under the restrictions placed upon literature by Pattee, Matthiessen, and the traditional critics who followed their lead,

our current understanding of 'American' cannot encompass the privileging of women's relations to themselves or other women over their relation to men. Indeed . . . the literature we call American romanticizes the relation of boy to boy and man to man while it denies, if it does not vilify, the love of woman for woman. (Fetterly "Not in the Least" 884)
The exclusive nature of pre-1970's literary criticism effectively excludes women's stories about women's lives—and therefore nearly all nineteenth-century woman-authored sentimental novels.

As critics have created the American canon, they have naturally turned to the literature that most appealed to them. It is reasonable then that when only men were critics men's stories were most easily understood, most valued, and most included. Novels and their authors have come into and gone out of style, but essentially it has been the masculine experience, male desire, that has been given precedence. While there is not something necessarily evil or intentionally misogynistic in most traditional critics' intent, women's voices have not received the consideration they deserve. Through the work of Ann Douglas, Jane Tompkins, Nina Baym, Mary Kelley, and many other women interested in literature, we are discovering new ways to read and to value old, discarded texts.

The American canon has been designed to show the logical progression of literature in the United States. Literature has been assumed to have a linear progress—each generation building upon and reacting to the generation, or generations, before. This is a tidy picture only if select writers are used to represent each generation, and thus it has been necessary for certain writers, such as James Fenimore Cooper, to fall from favor and others to be
rediscovered at certain times. It assumes that men were writing in response to earlier (male) authors and building a particular myth of American (male) existence. But women, too, were building upon other women's stories, expanding and re-creating a myth of an American woman. For an example of a multi-voiced exploration of the American myth, Harris suggests a serious reading of the "'middles' of sentimental novels--the long narratives of the heroine's self-creation and social success" (50). Harris sees this self-creation section, essential to the novels of the 1840's-1860's, evolving into the "quests for autonomy" of later works. (I place Cummins' work firmly in the category of "quest for autonomy" since social success had virtually no meaning for the two main female characters of The Lamplighter.)

Building upon, constructing out of the theories proposed by Kelley, Baym, Tompkins, and Kolodny, Harris is pointing a way toward re-evaluation of the masculine construction of the novel of the 1850's created by Matthiessen, Pattee, and others. This re-evaluation does not ignore all literary conventions, nor does it minimize the essential criteria for "good" writing--it simply demands that the criteria be re-evaluated. Harris insists on consideration of structure and language in process analysis along with the presence of "shadow text"--a deeper meaning than the surface story. What cannot survive from
the old canon is the idea of one universal truth: There is not, cannot be, a single universal truth that applies to all people in all circumstances, and it is no longer acceptable to use white male experiences as the standard for determining all human aspirations and failures.

The literature of the United States must be a literature of all citizens—old, female, poor, and non-white—or it is not an American literature at all. As Fetterly so clearly puts it:

a culture that devotes itself entirely to the feeding of [boys' minds] as if they constituted the whole human race, and has nothing to say to old men, women, and children is crazy, if not malicious. (Fetterly "Not in the Least" 888)

Literature anticipates unrealized possibilities, says Hans Robert Jauss, and "broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens paths of future experience" (Harris 41). The need to value women's writing is far more than the desire to include their work in the literary canon of the United States; it is the demand that woman-authored fiction that explored and affected women's voices and experiences be made available for this and future generations of readers and writers.
CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF FICTION:
Cummins' Reconstruction of the Sentimental Novel

[Women] were expected to write specifically for their own sex and within the tradition of their women's culture rather than within the Great Tradition. (Baym Women's Fiction 178)

If, as I have demonstrated, sentimental novels have been excluded from and misrepresented in the traditional literary critics' discourse, then we need to read these novels in a new way to discover their value. Harris's process analysis is one such method. Process analysis is important because it centers the reading on the text, while valuing the cultural structures and historical context of the time in which it was written. No longer blinded by an ideology that classifies emotion and reason as exclusive states of being, we are free to rediscover the value of the pathos to the nineteenth-century sentimental author.

What can we learn about The Lamplighter as a particular instance of the sentimental by applying Harris's method? I read the novel as one in which the sentimental writer explicitly states what the author saw as her cultural contribution to the state of her nation and as her social responsibility to alter that condition. Through this reading, I place The Lamplighter as a significant marker in the history of woman-authored sentimental
fiction. Although re-reading one novel from new critical perspectives cannot change the bias against the whole genre of sentimental fiction, it can give us a solid footing upon which to begin our re-conception of the value of sentimental fiction as a whole. Not all sentimental novels fit into Cummins' mold, nor will all recovered novels be as well written. However, there may well be many other sentimental novels recovered that are as good as or better than *The Lamplighter*, and these may be more subversive, more feminist, more powerful presentations of women's options for development. This process of re-conception has begun in journals such as *Legacy: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers*. Only by re-valuing these novels through an explicit process can we begin to understand women's true literary heritage and then begin the process of re-evaluating women writers of the past and present.

*The Lamplighter* defines a version of the sentimental novel that significantly differs from the prescriptive analysis male critics have offered for sentimental fiction. Cummins positions herself within the expectations of the dominant culture of her time by accepting the rhetorical construction in the novel as overtly didactic, and she structures the first third of the novel on the characters and situations in conscious recognition of the most popular domestic novel of her time, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide
World. However, Cummins does not accept the assumption that women’s writing could only produce poor quality fiction; she intended her writing to be a significant contribution to literature that would "redefine the social order" as well as "embody enduring themes" (Tompkins Sensational Designs xi).

Cummins uses rhetorical devices and precepts in three ways. First, she shows the rhetorical construction of the sentimental novel as a means of modeling self-improvement. Then she builds a rhetorical construction of social betterment growing directly out of a self-improvement that allows women authentic education, true concern for others, and autonomy. And third, she uses pathos as the glue or bridge that connects women’s responsibilities in the private sphere to women’s responsibilities in the public sphere. Cummins supports the pre-feminist vision of activists such as Jane Adams and Elizabeth Cady Stanton moving toward women’s freedom to earn and keep their own money, freedom to make choices for their future, and freedom from the cult of true womanhood that stifles creative and political impulses.

Because Cummins refers to the rhetoric of the sentimental and to literacy in her narrative novel, we can use her narrative as a guide to a new reading and valuing of women’s novels. Included in The Lamplighter are Cummins’ theories on reading, teaching, and rhetoric. One
reads--or should read--Cummins says, to improve the self. Her heroine Gerty's favorite book is not a fairy tale or a novel; it is a science book. Gerty studies her astronomy because it is a "beautiful mystery, and one which she fully meant . . . to explore to the uttermost" (71). A respect for ambition to acquire knowledge as a means of self-improvement runs throughout the novel but is most clearly shown in this short passage where we learn that Gerty has ambition:

> And this ambition to learn more, and understand better, by and by, was, after all, the greatest good she derived [from books]. Awaken a child's ambition, and implant in her a taste for literature, and more is gained than by years of school-room drudgery, where the heart works not in unison with the head. (71)

How does one awaken a child's ambition? First by teaching her to read and providing excellent books. This point is illustrated in the relationship between Gerty and her mentor Emily Graham. Emily is Cummins' ideal teacher, one who teaches, as Blair would have her do, through a rhetoric grounded in ethos, pathos, and logos rather than relying solely on logic. Emily spends time with Gerty, during which Gerty is

> half-unconsciously, imbibing a portion of [Emily's] sweet spirit. Emily preached no sermons, nor did she weary the child with exhortations and precepts. Indeed, it did not occur to Gerty that she went there to be taught anything. (66-67)

These lessons that struck a chord in her heart were "implanted in her so naturally, and yet so forcibly" that
she never forgot them (67). Perhaps it was because Cummins herself was schooled at home that she favored this method, but it is clear that the school Gerty later attends does not do as much for her as her sessions with Emily, or her study sessions with Willie in her quiet little home with Trueman.

Not only does Cummins use her own experience of being educated as a model, she seems to model her characters after herself. Cummins creates characters that function as second selves. Cummins explores three roles she might have played in her life had circumstances been altered. Through the narrator, who seems to be Gerty's deceased mother/guardian angel, Cummins envisions a self that might have died young—a common occurrence of the day. Then through Emily Cummins creates a second self who teaches a young child in much the same way Cummins is attempting to instruct the reader. And, of course, Gerty is also a second self, one who has had none of the advantages Cummins herself enjoyed—family name, position, security, loving father, and extensive education. These second selves that Cummins creates all value learning, and they all struggle against cultural constraints as they develop. But it is Gerty who takes all three of Cummins steps to fulfillment of her potential: she reads for self-improvement, she uses her knowledge to imagine a better world through social reform, and she uses her sympathy and empathy to extend the
responsibilities of the private sphere to the public sphere.

Once Gerty learns to read, she spends many evenings reading to Trueman. The books, provided by Emily, inspired "keen and unflagging" interest. Trueman could be found "laughing when Gerty laughed, sympathizing as fully and heartily as she did in the sorrows of her little heroines, and rejoicing with her in the final triumph of truth, obedience and patience" (66). Books, then, should teach, move, and please their audience. They must hold the readers' interest, and they work best when they do not preach but persuade gently through examples. And they should inspire readers to have ambition for self-improvement and to read more literature. Literature should also evoke a wide emotional response and give satisfaction at the conclusion. In using this pattern, Cummins follows an accepted paradigm for nineteenth-century rhetorical novels as works which simultaneously delight and instruct the reader.

Having dramatized her goal as a writer of novels, Cummins then meets each of the standards. There may be some debate about the "keen and unflagging interest" The Lamplighter may inspire, but a careful reader can find many threads of plot in addition to the main story of Gerty's growth into an admirable woman, which still delight and instruct today. Three values Cummins explores are as
important to today's readers as they were for Cummins' contemporaries: Cummins suggests that women need to learn logic and organization a process that should begin when they are quite young (26). Women must also engage in meaningful work to fulfill the American work ethic: those who work will succeed and work is good for the soul (9, 28, and 39); and women need a solid education to prepare them for a world in which they may be forced to or may demand the right to support themselves (100-1). Women must become autonomous beings, and that is achieved through self-creation and moral passion or pathos.

Accepting Cummins' own words as criteria for what books should do seems most productive for an evaluation of sentimental fiction. If Cummins' goal was to awaken ambition and implant a taste for literature in her readers, then we should see how she attempts to do that through her novel, keeping in mind that the best teaching is "half-consciously imbibed" (66). First, Cummins needed to awaken a taste for literature in her readers. According to studies of popular literacy, women were already reading, and by most accounts they were reading anything they could find--regardless of quality. Like George Eliot and Jane Austen, Cummins seems to have a distaste for parlor books. Cummins recommends literature (which for Cummins seems to encompass well-written novels, history, and biography), foreign language, and science (such as astronomy) as books
for improving the mind. Women can, as Gerty does, grow in their reading ability and taste. While the best books for a young girl, who must learn the cultural constraints and social expectations of her society, may have been the manners books (which were the antecedents of Emily Post's work), it is literature and science that teach women how to maneuver the more complicated mores of adult life. Children's books may delight the imagination, Cummins implies, but knowledge is gained from science, language, and literature.

This stance on improving women's minds appears to make Cummins an exception to other sentimental writers, who Douglas suggests were merely providing books to function "as a form of leisure" (10). Still, until further serious studies of mid-nineteenth-century women's fiction are done, the exceptional nature of her stance is merely assumption. However, it is clear that the social history of antebellum America includes the rise of the middle class, radical women's movements (temperance, abolition, suffrage), and literacy as the norm for all citizens. Increased literacy marked the generation of American women at mid-century, opening a vast market for a literature which would treat the context of their lives--the sewing circle rather than the whaling ship, the nursery instead of the lawyer's office--as functional symbols of the human condition. (Kolodny 49)
Into this social tumult, Cummins and other women writers inserted didactic novels of female development and social responsibility designed to alter that human condition.

Because Cummins has presented literature as a means of discovering and exploring adult life and the world we inhabit, we must assume that she intended to live up to the standards she presents. Once her readers are awakened to the possibilities of self-improvement through the study of literature, Cummins may begin her real work—to awaken women's worldly ambition. Cummins tells us the restrictions that she felt were placed upon her by literature and common sense. Women "were expected to write specifically for their own sex and within the tradition of their women's culture rather than within the Great Tradition" (Baym Women's Fiction 178). But this release from the masculine tradition allows Cummins the freedom to write a multifaceted story of female development. Cummins writes a story that has several subplots, subverts dominant discourse, and re-visions woman's place in society.

This change in ideological perspective is the third area of the triad Harris would have us include in our re-valuing marginalized literature. Baym's introduction to The Lamplighter exemplifies this move as an approach to the re-valuing of this novel:

Without doubt, Cummins would have thought of her writing as a way of making a contribution to society. For both men and women in New England
at this time, writing had to be justified in social and moral terms. (Baym introduction xv)

By establishing a non-misogynistic ideology of literature, we construct a rereading of women’s sentimental texts that will allow us insight into another tradition—a non-canonical tradition:

that in which women taught one another how to read and write about and out of their own unique (and sometimes isolated) contexts . . . . all readers, male and female alike, must be taught first to recognize the existence of a significant body of writing by women in America and, second, they must be encouraged to learn how to read it within its own unique and informing contexts of meaning and symbol (Kolodny 49).

Through such a reading of Cummins and other women writers we open ourselves to the possibilities of a woman’s view of the world, her place in the world, and a literary history we have not fully considered. We open a path to our foremothers and sisters in the search for a literary tradition.

Women’s views, women’s place, and women’s literature create a double bind for the woman author of the nineteenth century United States. First, Cummins had no authority to teach men. Within the cult of domesticity, women of the nineteenth century were allowed influence only over other women and over young children. This limits her choice of characters both because female characters were essential for role models for her female audience and because she needed to write within the formula publishers would find acceptable for their buying public. Second, the formula
requires the character to dismiss her own desires in favor of the desire to fulfill her socially sanctioned role as wife and mother (Tompkins 160-163). Self-satisfaction for women was not socially constructed as satisfaction of self but of sacrifice for the satisfaction of husband, God, and country.14 Women were expected to play certain roles in life, and to step outside those bounds—marriage or "dreary" spinsterhood—was to be out of control. Such heroines could be written about only in comedic spoofs like Southworth's *The Hidden Hand: or Capitola, The Mad Cap* (1859). For women to sympathize fully, the main character had to be a not just a woman but recognizable as feminine. And "feminine" is the criterion for dismissal.15

However limited Cummins is by gender biases of the time, her heroine, Gertrude Flint, is not a standard sentimental heroine. Cummins accomplishes more than telling the story of an orphan who is rescued and marries well. Cummins pleases her publisher by seeming conventional, and she pleases her readers by acknowledging the conventions of romantic heroines, while subverting them. *The Lamplighter* can either be discussed as a conventional sentimental novel (using the masculine construction that critics have imposed upon women's novels), revealing all the romantic, idealized escapism of a weak genre, or it can be investigated on the level of its shadow text as a novel of protest, political and social
reform, and women's liberation. Gerty seems to rely on God, she seems dependent on Mr. Graham, and she seems to docilely accept the abuse heaped upon her by her "betters." Nevertheless, Cummins makes it clear that her heroine can control her outward appearance, giving the appropriate image to those around her while maintaining her self-respect, integrity, and individuality. What most critics have not focused on in this novel is the serious reform Cummins is implying women can initiate as individual resisters to patriarchal control.

What critics have been focusing on (and disapproving of) in the sentimental novel is the pathos. However, Jane Tompkins revaluation of the nineteenth-century novel has made apparent that pathos was an acceptable form of rhetorical appeal in novels of social protest. Pathos was still a respected and valued rhetorical appeal in the mid-nineteenth century. And Cummins uses it liberally in the first "third" of her novel. Gerty's rescue through Trueman's death is a relentlessly pathetic story. However, it is in this section that Cummins tells the reader she must move beyond "sympathizing fully" with her heroine (66) to the more sophisticated stance of insight into ethics and logic of the society in which she must live: Gerty's childhood lessons grew

within her, and her first feeble resistance of evil, her first attempts to keep her childish resolves, had matured into deeply-rooted principles and confirmed habits of right. (67)
The assumption of woman's natural ability to sympathize with those persons and situations she contacts was socially constructed as her true genius. Cummins affirms the power of this genius and redirects sympathy away from the private sphere and into the public arena. In Cummins rhetoric, sympathy is not what makes women weak and submissive, but it is the power through which they were able to create social change.

Cummins does not seem to demand radical change. The changes she implies that women should begin making are either internal control as a form of power or interpersonal relationships that extend democratic ideals to all people. In a foreshadowing of later Christian rhetoric of "each one save one soul," Cummins offers us a picture of the difference one woman can make in her daily contacts with others if she has achieved at least a modicum of autonomy.

The center of the novel, what several critics refer to as the hidden part of a sentimental novel, represents the internal workings of women's lives in the interest of furthering social change. Gerty is no longer under the control of her guardians and not yet confined by marriage. Once Gerty is an autonomous being she moves out of Mr. Graham's house (a patriarchal construct) into her own room (her self-creation). She is defining her own boundaries, reformulating the meaning of home. This is the section where Cummins most strongly subverts the formula of
sentimental novels; this heart of the novel is where she does her most important work. She redefines women's boundaries, women's duties, and women's responsibilities.

Unlike most middle-class, female American wards—the direct comparisons Cummins supplies are Belle and Kitty the other single women in the novel—Gerty is trained to support herself. Kitty and Belle are not "fit for anything" and would have been better off had they been put "out to learn a trade" (101). There is little chance for them to become self-creating, autonomous beings. This ability to support oneself is essential to the plot and to Cummins' purpose for writing. In a culture that urged women to marry, Cummins' father enabled her to continue her studies and her work without being forced to marry; similarly, her character has the choice to marry, to work as companion to Emily, to teach in a fine school, or to allow her friends to support her as she travels. Cummins envisions an incredible number of options for women in mid-century. Cummins opens possibilities for her readers beyond the norm—grow up, marry, become a mother—without entirely eliminating marriage as one possibility among the many.

The heroines of many sentimental novels learn early that submission to authority—both God's and the father's—is essential for women to find happiness. This was the focus of The Wide, Wide World. Standard plot summaries of
sentimental novels claims these novels teach that women's place is in the home; her duty is to sacrifice herself for her husband and children so that her reward will come in heaven, if not in a heavenly marriage. Supposedly, the better she learns these lessons, the more she commits them to heart and acts upon them, the happier the heroine becomes. However, for Cummins, submission and sacrifice are not the duties of true womanhood; sympathy allows women to acknowledge other people's needs, and intelligence allows women to determine her responsibility to respond to these needs.

Through the scenes with Nan Grant and Gerty, Cummins shows that love, charity, duty, and service are not virtues others may force upon women and label self-sacrifice. But women must develop and act upon their concern for others if they are to fulfill their roles as adults. Nan Grant is forced to let Gerty survive under her roof, but she makes no sacrifices to accommodate the child. Yet, when the adult Gerty finds Nan dying and penniless, Gerty's help is not a sacrifice, nor is it done from duty to God. Gerty knows what it is to suffer, and she knows that help from one who cares can change a life. However, it is not clear whether Gerty's help was primarily intended to assuage Nan Grant's suffering or the suffering of the niece who was forced to care for her although she had neither room nor resources to do so adequately. In either case, Cummins is
promoting social duty to alleviate the suffering of our fellow-women.

Cummins' narrative also teaches that the person is psychologically damaged who bases her self-worth on outward show rather than integrity. She has Gerty learn that a false sense of pride, feeling oneself better than others by accident of birth (as the housekeeper does), or a false sense of superiority due to economic circumstances (as Belle and Ben Bruce represent), is self-deception and self-destruction. Gerty realizes she can do nothing to change the past; if she is to neglect or harm Nan or increase her suffering, Gerty's conscience will trouble her long after Nan dies. She does what she can to make Nan's last days more comfortable, but only by enlisting aid and paying for it. Gerty does not attend Nan with the love and devotion she shows to Mrs. Sullivan, her first female friend, during her illness; Gerty is not a martyr.

Gerty's only act of self-sacrifice, at first seeming virtuous, is her one error in judgment. Cummins includes a crisis through which the heroine faces death. Because Gerty believes she is an orphan, and because she believes Willie is in love with Belle and will never return to her, Gerty chooses to save Belle's life rather than her own when they are shipwrecked. The reader knows Amory is Gerty's father, and most readers know that Willie despises Belle for her selfish and shallow nature; thus, we know this act
of self-sacrifice is tragic rather than noble. Cummins' warning against self-sacrifice seems clear.

Cummins resists the myth of woman as a creature to whom self-sacrifice is natural and rewarding; however, she does believe in duty: Women have duties to themselves, to each other, and to the people they love. This is a standard theme critics point out in sentimental fiction, to which they add duty to God. Cummins, of course, must deal with this convention. For Cummins, women's duties are primarily to themselves and then to the people they love, but duty to God is a shapeless idea that Cummins does not address until the very end of the novel when Gerty is trying to convert her father from heathen to citizen, so he may become an acceptable mate for Emily.¹⁶ Duty to other women, for Cummins, is an earned state, not a given. Gerty has more duty to the honest, overworked niece of Nan Grant, whom she had just met, than to the third Mrs. Graham whose house she shares. Gerty feels her duty; she does not need to have it imposed by social mores or religious authority.

For Cummins, duty is the by-product of earned respect. Mr. Graham demands that Gerty do her duty to him and accept his right to decide her course of action without consulting her. He demands filial obedience from someone whom he has scarcely noticed, someone whose devotion he has not cultivated. This stance was not unusual for the time. If children were property of their fathers, then wards were
less valuable property. Mr. Sullivan had no reason to suppose that Gerty would do anything but obey his commands—and the reader should have expected Gerty to obey. Yet I suspect it was no surprise to any generation of readers that Gerty would refuse Mr. Sullivan’s demands.

Gerty did not have to be taught duty and responsibility. She felt her duty to Trueman, and she nursed him with love until his death. She felt her duty to Mrs. Sullivan and Willie’s grandfather; she was willing to sacrifice her comfort and life of leisure and take a job to support them, while also nursing them through their last illnesses. Cummins makes it clear that true duty is felt, a sympathetic response, not an imposed course of action. In Cummins’ construction, autonomous women do not need outside forces to teach them duty, especially outside forces that are prescriptive—forces that label others’ wants as women’s duties. No reader can be truly surprised when Gerty refuses to honor Mr. Graham’s demand that she abandon her dying friends to relieve him of the duties of caring for Emily on their vacation. Even Emily, who depends on Gerty for companionship, daily care, and entertainment, realizes that her father is asking the impossible: one cannot justly impose his pleasure on another and call it duty.

Obedience becomes a vague and confusing concept in Cummins’ work only if the reader clings to the rigid
definition of it created for the patriarchal system of antebellum America. Obedience, in The Lamplighter, is not first to father and through him to God. Traditional critics, ones steeped as Mott and Pattee were in a social structure where man is supreme and woman subservient and domestic, must read these scenes as confused; for them, there can be no other explanation. For the women who would soon be writing even more subversive work, such as Susan Glaspell did in her play Trifles (1916), these scenes were not confused or confusing; they were and are scenes of self-empowerment or of women uniting for preservation of self and each other.

Unable to understand the pathos of many scenes in The Lamplighter, traditional critics have ignored or avoided Cummins' most interesting idea: a complex vision of woman's autonomy. In a short section of the story, Emily and Gerty are left alone in the United States by Mr. Graham, while he takes the new Mrs. Graham and her nieces to Europe. Emily and Gerty take a room in a boarding house where they are not responsible for the running of the household, have no father/guardian/husband to charm, delight, and satisfy, and may spend their time in each other's company, delighting in fulfilling and pleasing pursuits. Gerty chooses to return to work. Although Mr. Graham has provided them with ample support, it is Gerty's nature to be "usefully employed"; it
has been her goal since she was eight or nine when she learned the value of honest labor from Willie and Trueman.

In this room of their own, Emily and Gerty "read, walked, and communed." Here,

[in the undisturbed enjoyment of each other's society, and in their intercourse with a small but intelligent circle of friends, they passed a season of sweet tranquility . . . (252)

This escape from poverty and charity for Gerty and short respite from male dominance and feminized society for both Gerty and Emily is important to Cummins' overall purpose for writing. Yet it was not easily recognizable to most critics before the work of Virginia Woolf, although women readers found these lessons "naturally" and "forcibly" implanted in them.

In A Room Of One's Own Woolf writes of the change in her life following an inheritance from an aunt. Once she can afford the time to write, the space to sit and contemplate, she discovers that "fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground as science may be," but that it is attached like a spider web "to life at all four corners" (41). Woolf shows the conflict for women of the nineteenth century who desired to be writers. Most of them had neither the time nor the place in which to think critically. Their training was limited to "the observation of character, in the analysis of emotion." And, Woolf says, women's" sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common
sitting-room" (Woolf 67). Both Cummins and Woolf are insisting that women need space, separate from and secured against patriarchal influence, if they are to fully develop—as thinkers and writers for Woolf, and also as autonomous beings for Cummins.

Given a room of their own and enough money to assure necessities, two women find a life so peaceful and fulfilling that "Gertrude often recurred to it, in her after life, as the time when she and Emily lived in a beautiful world of their own" (254). While this section cannot be read as a sexual union between Gerty and Emily, it does support the radical lesbian feminist ideal of a separation from men and masculine constructs as a necessary step in women's liberation from restrictive roles and development of individual selves. Marilyn Frye's *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* explains why this section may have been overlooked. "Feminist separation" causes anxiety and hostility in men who dismiss it as a form of "female irrationality" (102). As such, there would be no need for Pattee, Mott, or other traditional critics to focus on this "irrational aside."

Interestingly, freed from the roles prescribed for them, Emily remains a passive, dependent woman, while Gerty is free to work, care for Emily, and manage their affairs. This is a complete subversion of the separate spheres society dictated at the time. They both enjoy their
leisure to learn, explore, and grow in knowledge and experience. They do not seek out "society" but enjoy an intimate association with others who have "cultivated their hearts" rather than assumed the posture of cultivated taste.

This episode bears further investigation in relation to the position of other women authors on women creating separate space. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) also investigates a woman's need for space, as do Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), and Glaspell's *Trifles* (1916), which create more extreme examples of the consequences of confinement. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, these and other comparisons must be made with multiple examples of sentimental women's novels of mid-century before we can definitively judge the meaning of these created separate spaces for readers and for women writers.

In addition to creating space for women apart from male influence, Cummins investigates how women can create space for themselves without entirely eliminating the possibility of a heterosexual partnership. One traditional generalization made to condemn sentimental fiction is that it is merely the story of a woman seeking a husband, that the central concern of nearly all antebellum women's novels seems to have been the finding of a suitable husband to replace the father. While that is one element publishers
and readers deemed essential, authors had their own styles of presenting this and individual preferences for the types of men they see as appropriate for the role of husband.

Cultural convention accepted that women’s "duty" was most often primarily and essentially the acquisition of a husband. If we read Gerty and Belle in a competition "to the death" for Willie, then Gerty’s decision to save Belle rather than save herself during the ship wreck is suicide. However, Cummins recontextualizes the search for husband by contrasting two characters that the reading public would expect to acquire husbands before the conclusion of the novel. There is little more to Belle than finding beaux, but there is far more to Gerty than the issue of who wins Willie. Gerty develops the true concern for others that Cummins defines as a central element of women’s responsibility and social duty.

When these two characters are fourteen, Cummins shows that Belle is already Gerty’s opposite. As Gerty lovingly walks Trueman slowly down the street because the doctor has ordered exercise, Belle watches them approach and is insulted and offended when Kitty suggests that Gerty has an "interesting face" (87). The problem it seems, to Belle at least, is that Gerty and True are

trudging along so slow[ly], with the sun right in her face, and he leaning on her arm, and shaking so he can hardly stand on his feet! [She] wouldn’t do it for anything. (87)
Gerty is not concerned with how she looks to others—only how she may help Trueman, who was the first person to help her. She loves him. Kitty, unaware that loved based upon human sympathy might be a motive for any action, suggests pity as a response to Trueman's condition. Belle is so shocked that she swears: "Lor! . . . what's the use of pitying? If you are going to begin to pity, you'll have to do it all the time" (87). This difference of character widens as Gerty matures and Belle gets older. Without the ability to have sympathy for others, to empathize, Belle is condemned to a shallow, useless life. She will never mature into an autonomous woman because she has not had a true education, she has not developed her ability to sympathize, and she defines herself through the men who surround her rather than attempting to become self-defining.

Belle and Gerty can properly be said to be in competition only in manners, a required theme in eighteenth century Richardsonian sentimental fiction. Cummins uses this competition to express her view of "womanhood." Rather than espouse the female-belle ideal, the cult of true woman, Cummins offers her readers a new vision of woman, which she shows is based not on cultivated manners but on the cultivation of the heart.

Gerty never hides the secret of true manners and genuine politeness: the ability to sympathize fully with
the other. Yet, when Belle overhears Gerty’s lesson for Fanny that for true improvement in politeness one must "cultivate your heart," "Belle look[es] glorious disdain" (Cummins 213). Belle has cultivated civilized behavior, while Gerty has cultivated her heart. Gerty’s politeness comes from the heart and is pure and radiant, while Belle has cultivated a tainted and flickering reflection of virtue: outward show. Belle lacks sympathy. A cultivated heart has the power to attract admiration and respect, while cultivated manners attract the shadows of these. Unfortunately for Belle, she seems incapable of grasping what to others is "undeniably a verity" (Cummins 213), and she goes on through life maintaining her vanity and shallow intelligence, and priding herself on never stooping to feel pity that once begun would have to be done "all the time."

While Gerty fulfills her duty in forbearance, offers a good example for Belle, and shows some willingness to sympathize, Cummins does not require her to like Belle; sympathy is tempered with logic and moral reflection. As an autonomous being Gerty does not require Belle’s admiration nor does she seek her friendship; Belle’s slights and meanness are not personal assaults for Gerty. Gerty, and the reader, can see that Belle hurts herself far more than she hurts Gerty. Cummins does not suggest that all women must be sisters, nor does she offer the hope that all women will want to work together for harmony.
Traditional critics have had trouble recognizing the way in which power relations are subverted in this novel and at least several others written in the same era. However, several recent critics, including Baym, have noted the way Cummins allows Gerty to manipulate meaning to justify her desires when they conflict with the desires of men (who were more powerful). Baym concentrates on Gerty’s insistence that Mr. Graham is unreasonable to demand she obey him and accompany him on vacation when she has made plans of her own that fulfill her duty to her friends. Baym reads this section as a "reformulation" of facts, of Gerty "[j]ustifying inclination as duty" (Woman’s Fiction 167), while I see the section as Cummins showing her readers that women can understand their own and others’ positions in disagreements through calm deliberation rather than merely reacting on emotional impulse. People’s motives, Cummins reminds the reader, have substance and validity. While Baym sees this as Gerty twisting an "I want" into an "I must" situation, I see Cummins as having Gerty determining the weight of obligation: Does she owe more to a man who has indulged his daughter’s desire with no thought of Gerty? Or does she owe more to the people who had almost nothing, yet made sacrifices out of compassion (a form of sympathy Cummins finds most desirable) that grew into love?
Cummins makes it clear that properly educated women are capable of making their own decisions about their responsibilities and desires. She uses this confrontation between Gerty and the most powerful male character available in the story to show that women must be allowed to judge for themselves. Mr. Graham acts from selfish desire and abstract logic, while Gerty acts from sympathy and noble feelings. When she turns eighteen, Gerty is ready to begin her teaching career, and just at that time Cummins has her learn that Mrs. Sullivan and Willie’s grandfather are dying. She sees that it is clearly time for her to leave the Graham household—as she has been trained to do. Gerty finds that Mr. Graham has planned a vacation with Emily which nicely coincides with her plans. She feels she is ready to leave their protection as she has been trained to do, she sees herself as an autonomous being, and she thinks she is no longer expected to be of service to the people who trained her for economic independence.

Mr. Graham, however, has assumed that Gerty will go with them; she is a fixture in his home, a convenience. When Gerty tells him she will be staying to nurse her friends, he is incensed, and he throws her (figuratively) out of his home with orders never to return. Cummins has Gerty retreat to her room where she remains undisturbed until she can reason through the situation. Gerty thinks
through her options, replays the events of her confrontation with Mr. Graham, and decides she must do what she feels is her duty. Gerty handles the situation the only way she can. She accepts responsibility for her acts and does what she knows is right. Her duty is to people who loved her when she was a violent, ugly child and who now regard her as their friend. Her duty is not to Mr. Graham, who took no notice of her "before he was led to notice in his daughter's favorite a quickness of mind and propriety of deportment which had the effect of creating an interest in her" [emphasis mine] (142).

This is not blatant disregard for authority, but it is a refiguring of who has authority. Cummins is empowering her character, and thereby empowering her reader through a redefining of women's emotional power. Sympathy and sensibility need not leave women at the mercy of others, but can become a powerful directing force for action.

The Sullivans' superior claim is upon Gerty's sympathy--their need for Gerty to ease their suffering and make their deaths as painless as possible. Mr. Graham needs Gerty to read the shipping news to him and to relieve him of the care of Emily. Gerty has daily repaid Mr. Graham's attention to her as she "spared no pains to evidence her sense of obligation and regard, by treating Mr. Graham with the greatest respect and attention" (142). Gerty could never repay the debt she owed to Mrs. Sullivan,
who helped Gerty learn the true meaning of home. Nor can she neglect Mrs. Sullivan when Willie has charged her with the responsibility of treating his mother as her own.

Cummins has Gerty realize that she "can never be a traitor to [her] own heart" (144) and reject, in good conscience, Mr. Graham's demands on her time. Gerty's actions define her own boundaries, and they are beyond the confines of the Graham house; Gerty's "home" includes people who are beneath the Graham's class and out of his view. Baym sees this as justifying inclination as duty, which would be an interesting subversion of the culturally prescribed lessons of a sentimental novel; however, it seems to be more. Cummins wants her reader to experience Gerty's thoughtful consideration of what truly constitutes duty and the definition of home.

Cummins gives her female character, and thus her female reader, the right and ability to define for herself where her duty lies. The character does this through her ability to reason and her ability to feel. Mr. Graham's arguments seem rational and logical, if one does not feel. But Gerty's arguments give ethos and pathos equal power in the process of deciding what is right.

The emotions Cummins suggest women need to base their deliberations on are not wild, unsettling mood swings; they are trained emotions of empathy, respect, and sympathy. It is Gerty's cultivated heart, rather than cultivated manners
and postures, that gives her power over Belle and other characters who have developed false pride. By simply not playing Belle’s power games over men, Gerty wins the respect and admiration of the admirable people around her, who dismiss Belle as a doll. Gerty never wins Belle’s regard because Belle is too shallow to admire a superior woman, but Gerty has won the respect, a second sentiment Cummins admires, of the Graham’s housekeeper, who suffers from a different form of pride. Through the experience with the housekeeper, Gerty learns a lesson that she later is able to apply to a broader social situation.

When Gerty first comes to the Graham household, the housekeeper feels threatened by Emily’s attachment to Gerty. This attachment, in the housekeeper’s view, is unacceptable because it moves her lower in Emily’s esteem, even though she can prove she is from "a good family" and thus is superior to Gerty in "point of station" (Cummins 101). She can have no sympathy for someone beneath her station. Once the housekeeper feels she has been displaced by an inferior, she plans revenge. She sends Gerty out of the house for the afternoon, then burns all Gerty’s mementos of Trueman and Willie—expecting the shock to throw Gerty into such a rage that she will be thrown from the household.

Fortunately, Gerty has been listening to Emily’s counsel. Rather than throw herself on the housekeeper
screaming, Gerty goes to her room to contemplate her situation. Under the pretext of getting help from God, Gerty paces the room, weeping and despairing. She realizes that a tantrum will not recover the destroyed mementos, but will disrupt the household and upset Emily. Gerty decides to say and do nothing. The housekeeper waits several days for the storm to come, but at last realizes that Gerty will not retaliate. The housekeeper suffers deep humiliation. The housekeeper "experienced a stinging consciousness of the fact that Gertrude had shown a superiority herself in point of forbearance" (118). Gerty proves she is a better person--parent-less and nameless as she is.

Gerty has not only developed power over herself in this situation, but Cummins wants the reader to know that one can gain power over others by not stooping to their level of intolerance and prejudice. Cummins shows how Gerty's ability to empathize with those around her—even her enemies—turned the housekeeper's pride into shame, and thus Gerty gained the upper hand in all their future dealings. And, further, once the housekeeper learns that Gerty holds no grudge, Gerty wins her admiration and devotion; they become equals. To reinforce this democratic idea of equality and to move it beyond the private sphere into the public domain, Cummins returns to it after Gerty is fully autonomous.
The lesson of false superiority is brought back to the reader's mind when Gerty is traveling with Dr. and Mrs. Jeremy and Emily. The waiters, hotel clerks, and service people become part of Gerty's extended home. Gerty's ability to sympathize fully with the people around her, as she learned to do with the heroines in her first books, allows her to build bridges between herself and others and to expand the boundaries of her house. Her refusal to participate in the assumption of superiority sets her apart from her traveling companions.

Here Cummins seems to be doing work that is in direct opposition to Douglas's reading of Stowe and Stowe's contemporaries. Douglas says that nineteenth century American society and the sentimental genre "tried to damage women like Harriet Beechen Stowe--and succeeded." In Douglas' research on sentimental fiction writers and the ministers of mid-century, she found that

women were oppressed, and damaged; inevitably, the influence they exerted in turn upon their society was not altogether beneficial. The cruelest aspect of the process of oppression is the logic by which it forces its objects to be oppressive in turn, to do the dirty work of their society in several senses. (Douglas 11)

Douglas sees the sentimental genre as a way of protesting power to which the authors have "in part capitulated" and which always "borders on dishonesty" (12). She suggests that the protests against the system woven into these texts in no way hinders the system, and that "sentimentalization
of theological and secular culture was an inevitable part of the self-evasion of a society" (12). Douglas also states that heroines "did not act or observe: they felt" (115). Yet Cummins' female characters not only carefully observe the overt acts of those around them they are keenly aware of the slightest actions, and, although seriously restricted to the type of acts they could commit, Cummins' women all engage in acts that manifest actions and reactions in others. Further, Cummins moves women's responsibilities to those outside the domestic scene by enlarging the field of woman's duty.

Cummins does not limit Gerty's abilities to make emotional connections to intimates only. While on vacation, Gerty and her new friend Miss Gryseworth feel a keen sympathy for inexperienced travelers, and Cummins' narrator intrudes to remind readers that waiters, hotel clerks, and hackmen are "important members of society" who are stigmatized and belittled by the unsympathetic traveler who has not educated himself on the "customs" of travel etiquette (Cummins 260). Although Gerty could clearly see the need to tip waiters and make reservations, she could not act because she was not a man. Cummins makes it clear that had Gerty authority to act on her observations the trip would have been more enjoyable. Her ability to empathize gave her great insights into the ways of the world Dr. Jeremy could not comprehend; he was locked into
the role of superior--alienated from those people not belonging to his "house" and unable to extend a democratic idea of equality to those people he saw as beneath him.

Lacking sympathy, Dr. Jeremy could never see the reason for all the problems with their trip because he thought only of his own comfort and expected people to change for him. His lack of respect (sympathy) for his fellow travels and the people who they met nearly made their vacation a disaster.\textsuperscript{18}

As Cummins lays it out through a text that gently implants its lessons rather than forces them through preaching and exhortations, cultivation of the heart is multifaceted. The heart, which sometimes seems to be exclusively a woman's organ, is where one learns sympathy, empathy, reason, pity, generosity, respect for others and self, true manners, genuine politeness, duty, honor, tolerance, forbearance, true pride, devotion, and love. Cummins puts all the goodness and purity she can imagine for her main character into this one category.

Although it may seem overwhelming to group all these things into one category, the sentimental novel was designed to focus on the emotions of women. Women were culturally defined by and limited to their emotional response, but Cummins connects masculine traits of reason, duty, and honor to the feminine emotions through this broad education she calls the cultivation of the heart. This
collapsing of masculine and feminine traits may seem confusing to some critics who are trying to read a simple story of a girl who grows up to be a worthy wife. However, to a critic who is trying to understand the criteria Cummins has identified for women's novels, this multiple, encompassing, broadening of "woman" into autonomous being, is not cacophony but complex harmony.

Cummins reconstructs the definition of woman as sympathetic being only in that her heroine is not ruled by sympathy alone, but Gerty finds a balance that allows her to function in her society yet allows her to be a fully emotional, logical, and moral being. One must, Cummins seems to say, develop all three areas in order to become fully autonomous.

Cummins had a plan for the rhetorical reconstruction of her novel. She reconstructs the house of fiction through The Lamplighter through her reconstruction of the house of confinement women endured in her era. Incorporating feminist ideals into the text, Cummins revisions women's education as a path to autonomy. She revisions emotions as positive forces of sympathy, empathy, and respect, which allow women influence beyond the private sphere. Through education and valuing emotion, women can become autonomous beings, capable of using their strengths to influence others in and out of the private sphere of home. Women are to take social responsibility for people
outside their intimate circle; they must reach out to other classes, must begin to value the poor and the service sector as fully human beings.

Cummins' women must be self-creating, but not self-centered. They must recognize their duties—not merely accept constraints placed upon them as duty by others who have impure motives. Women must make rational decisions about men, not fall prey to the seductions of money and physical appearance. Cummins warns that women must be prepared to support themselves rather than be wholly dependent upon the men in their lives, or they cannot be truly autonomous beings.

Cummins' women also know that outward appearance must be controlled. It is vital to appear submissive and in control of their emotions if they are to be taken seriously. A show of anger is not acceptable. Emotions do not need to obliterate good sense and thoughtful deliberation. Reason will win out over emotional venting if women are allowed a room of their own in which to think and the time they need to reason through their responses.

Cummins builds upon the standard formula of the sentimental novel, but she is not confined by that formula. Until recently, critics could not, or would not, see Cummins' reformulation. Without acknowledging the reformulation she describes, an accurate reading cannot be done. From the information she offers in the text we know
that Cummins saw herself as an artist, rhetor, social critic, and supporter of feminist ideals. If we respect the identity she creates for herself as author of the novel we can see connections to earlier women writers and, perhaps more importantly, to the women who followed in her rhetorical pattern.

Rather than condemn *The Lamplighter* for its dependence on emotional appeal, we must see the value of pathos as a means of teaching, moving, and pleasing an audience. Cummins was aware of the need for women to educate themselves because social constraints hindered attempts to join the academic community. She was aware that social constraints prevented her from stepping outside the conventional construction of women writers as sentimental renderers of female domesticity. And Cummins knew that only by pleasing her readers could she attract them, hold them, and teach them the lessons she felt called to teach.

*The Lamplighter* is an ambitious novel. It does not have the same appeal today that it did in a culture steeped in sentimental expression, but it is valuable, interesting, and entertaining. It is neither a beginning or an end point, but it is a significant marker in women’s literary history, and it must be investigated further both as a unique text and as a forerunner to and partner with other novels of women’s struggle for autonomy and social change.
CHAPTER III

THE LAMPLIGHTER AND CONTEMPORARY READERS

Whatever [some critics] may claim to do, in fact they treat literature as if it were a collection of tracts into which you dip for illustrations of your own polemic, falsifying and omitting as necessary, your argument being of more moment than the other person's work of art. (Patricia Beer ix)

Resituating the sentimental, as this thesis has done, is not easy. The difficulties are evident not only in the history of the novel's reception but in the way the novel is now being viewed. The contemporary reader who wants a clearer view of the sentimental finds the bias against the domestic novel can, and often does, cause a disregard for the craft, complexity, and rhetorical intent of the genre. For those of us who are trained to read for unity and convention, reception studies can be unsettling, but reception studies are one method that allow us a clear understanding of these complex novels.19

These novels are long and episodic; however, many of them are carefully planned, intentional works designed as suasive discourse. As more critics join the movement to find new ways to read novels, which like The Lamplighter have been consigned to oblivion, they often bring with them preconceived notions of the sentimental based on critical theories of the 1940's instead of the sense of obligation
they feel to take seriously the plots and characters of Victorian literature.

These novels have been dismissed and belittled because their structures are not intended to copy what have become our canonical models of literature. Perhaps it is because the texts appear to some critics to lack an internal coherence and resonance, in a canonical sense, that critics of sentimental fiction have manipulated the text to fit their arguments. The effect of this continuing attitude is disheartening; the effect seems to be that critics are locked into confining stereotypes that are being perpetuated beyond their usefulness.

Rereadings of the sentimental do not present a strictly linear development any more than the rereadings of other genre do. While many critics still denigrate the sentimental for the language of connection, the development of relationships, and the cultivation of the heart, and while many critics have approached The Lamplighter from this perspective, a few critics have taken the stance that reliance on pathos was only a part of what sentimental writers included in their novels.

It is important to note the narrow nature of some critics' assumptions about women's writing before we do further study of women-authored novels of the nineteenth-century United States. Criticism based on the continuing exclusion of pathos left unchallenged may become the
standard by which novels are judged. As we are becoming aware, narrow views of what is "good" have limited our understanding of the literature of the past and colors our understanding of today's writing.

In this chapter I will give three examples of recent critical evaluation of The Lamplighter that seem to perpetuate old stereotypes. I will then show Nina Baym's response to the novel as she attempts to blend serious traditional critical criteria with a respect for pathos and its persuasive and political power. Finally, I offer an example of a critic who is working to further complicate the question of the sentimental rather than to simplify it.

To begin our look at contemporary criticism of The Lamplighter, we should begin with Amy Schrager Lang's 1992 essay "Class and the Strategies of Sympathy." Lang's interest is the class system of the United States, in particular the development of the system during the "sentimental" 1840's and 50's, when "scholars, legislators, journalists, reformers, and writers of every political stripe" ventured their opinions about the "nature and ramifications of class in America" (128). Lang says that antebellum literature records the anxiety that accompanied the recognition and naming of class divisions in the United States in the years surrounding the European revolutions of 1848. (129)
Her study intends to reveal the role literature played in Americans' increasing desire for images of harmony. For Lang,

The consummate emblem of that harmony, bridging the economic and the spiritual, was the idealized middle-class home . . . . Nowhere is this image more clearly drawn than in domestic fiction, where the problem of class is neither resolved nor repressed but rather displaced, and where harmony—spiritual, familial, and social—is the highest good. (129)

As her example of this displacement of class by gender, Lang offers The Lamplighter, a "novel that conforms in every respect to one's assumptions about domestic fiction" (129). Unfortunately, Lang's assumptions are all negative. Lang misses many of Cummins' finer points—including the idea that maintaining the harmony of the Graham household does not fall within Gerty's calling once she is needed by those people who had loved her when she was unlovely. Lang also ignores Cummins' lengthy depiction of the class differences between the Grahams and the Jeremys and the service people at the vacation hotels they visit.

There are two causes for this misreading. First, Lang misreads Cummins' intent behind Trueman's gift of a kitten to Gerty as a matter of gender. Lang says the function of the gift is to show Gerty's "feminine fitness" to escape her "deprived and depraved surroundings" (129-130). Lang insists that Trueman gives Gerty a kitten when she needs shoes because of a cultural assumption that girls need
someone or something to nurture more than they need adequate clothing. What Lang misses is that Trueman, who is poorer than Nan Grant and living on charity himself, had nothing else to give Gerty. His gift was the only thing he had an excess of—a kitten for Gerty to love and to be loved by.

Second, in summarizing the first section of the novel, Lang reorders the events. By changing the order of events Lang creates a cause and effect pattern that does not occur in the novel as Cummins created it. Lang reports that

Gerty stops breaking windows in retaliation for injuries done her, she exchanges rage for patience, the terms of her identity shift from poor to female, and she is awarded a home. Once gender is established as the source of social mobility and the guarantor of social harmony, the narrative shifts from social justice to individual reform, from deprivation to self-control. (130)

However, this is not the story Cummins wrote. Once Trueman is aware of the abuse Gerty has suffered and is told that Nan Grant boiled the kitten alive, he takes Gerty in as his own child. He makes no demands on her at all; it is through his unconditional love—the only love Gerty remembers besides the selfish affection of her kitten—that Gerty begins to change. It is during her first two years with Trueman that she begins to learn patience and practice forgiveness.

Lang sees the sentimental novel as designed to control and feminize its readers rather than as designed to
redefine the place and social role of women. Yet, Gerty never becomes "feminine" though she rises to upper-middle-class society; she is a "manly woman." The wild "natural" child learns to love, and she becomes Trueman's nurse during his final illness. Gerty learns to read, keep house, and respect others, not because she is feminine but because she is given the opportunity to grow and develop rather than sink to depravity under the neglect and abuse of Nan Grant.

Lang is correct that Gerty moves up through the social classes; however, it is not because she earns her way up. Gerty becomes worthy of each successively more prestigious socio-economic class after she has been admitted to the group. With the help of friends who set examples, Gerty finds her way through the mazes of manners, customs, and power games of the middle classes--only after she is allowed access to that station. Willie, too, advances not because he is "worthy" or "masculine" but because he has friends who help him find opportunities for education and for training through positive influence. Both Gerty and Willie earn their way--but on their own neither one could have made such advancements. To say that Gerty becomes feminine to earn status, to imply gender is the source of mobility in Cummins work ignores education as the centerpiece of Gerty's transformation and Cummins'
insistence on the social responsibilities of all classes to help those who would help themselves.

Perhaps it is Lang's predisposition to devalue the domestic fiction of "scribbling women" and celebrate previously accepted works that prevents her from developing a convincing reading of Cummins. Lang's focus on Uncle Tom's Cabin and Life in the Iron Mills suggests that she values men's stories—even men's stories written by women—over women's stories.

Another narrow reading from 1992 based on preconceived notions, one equally interesting, is G.M. Goshgarian's. In To Kiss the Chastening Rod: Domestic Fiction and Sexual Ideology in the American Renaissance, Goshgarian stereotypes these novels and refers to women writers as "scribblers" throughout the text. He labels Gerty and other central female characters "scribbler heroines" and uses a tone of derision when he is not blatantly making fun of both the reader and the writer of nineteenth-century domestic fiction. It is Goshgarian's view that women's enforced purity was necessary because women are virtually uncontrollably incestuous and willing to seduce their fathers and brothers if not carefully watched.

Preoccupied with sex, particularly incestuous relationships—what he calls "The Facts of Life in the 1850s"—Goshgarian misses Cummins' main points as he struggles to make his own. By misreading several areas of
import in Cummins' design for *The Lamplighter*, Goshgarian compounds his overall misreading of her design for the novel and for her readers. But we should begin at his beginning. As he introduces *The Lamplighter*, Goshgarian chooses his words carefully to set a tone that permeates his commentary on Cummins:

> Heroines of domestic fiction suffer horribly . . . . . Gerty . . . [is] just barely emerging from the rigors of a childhood that makes David Copperfield's look like fun . . . her wicked stepmother [sic] gorily boiled her kitten alive, felicitously summing up the first chapter of a cataclysmic career." (76-77)

Clearly Goshgarian does not value "the Stygian world of scribblerdom" (77), and one should suspect his investigation may not amount to much more than "scribbler bashing." His self-granted freedom to rewrite characters hurts his ethos as a critic. Nan Grant, for example, is not a stepmother to Gerty--she is the landlady of the house in which Gerty's mother died. This distinction becomes important because Gerty is neither morally or legally responsible for Nan's care or expenses, which Gerty later finds herself willingly supplying. Nan Grant is merely keeping the child from complete starvation for fear her husband will return from his voyage and not find the child he has offered to protect.

Goshgarian also misreads scenes between Gerty and her father. He does not see that Cummins is offering a version of "like souls" attracting each other. He is convinced
that Cummins was writing about incest (perhaps, he suggests, her own submerged incestuous feelings for Judge Cummins). As Cummins has written her novel, Gerty sees a reflection of herself in her father, and he sees a reflection of the Emily he loved as a young man in Gerty's gentle, honest ways. Goshgarian sees these scenes as Gerty and her father trying to seduce each other—even after most readers would understand that Philip Amory realizes Gerty is his daughter. While Goshgarian "hesitates to take up a definitive attitude toward [Amory the] Mysterious Stranger," nearly any reader would already know the actual relationship (161). Goshgarian clearly has little respect for the reading ability (intellectual capacity) of people (i.e. women) who read domestic fiction.

Goshgarian asks, "But how can we accuse Gerty of taking incestuous interest in Amory when she doesn't even know him?" (169). He answers that she can fall in love with him when she doesn't know because it is the only time she "decently can" (169). An interesting idea, but not one supportable from the novel. It is clear that Gerty's interest in and attraction to Amory is not sexual but intellectual. Gerty's experience with men has been limited to five adult males: Trueman, illiterate, loving, kind; Willie's grandfather, bitter, pessimistic, discouraging; Mr. Graham, selfish, impatient, intelligent; Dr. Jerry, silly, incompetent (as a traveler and guide, if not also as
a doctor), generous; and Ben Bruce a rich, indolent rake. It is not until she meets Philip Amory that Gerty is aware of what a man can be.

Amory embodies the best of all masculine traits; he is a man with a cultivated heart. He is strong, sincere, gentle, intelligent, loving, kind, generous, empathetic, and patient. He is, in fact, what she believes Willie will become—a man to whom she could "look as the staff of her young and inexperienced life" and could "with confidence, turn to for counsel, protection, support, and love" (Cummins 312). Philip Amory is not Gerty’s first crush—he is her intellectual superior, her counsel, and the first adult male she could count on to support her as she had been the support of Trueman, Willie’s grandfather, and Mr. Graham. We can assume Cummins creates Amory as a mentor, not a lover, because her interest is in education, not sexual conquest.

In concluding his critique of *The Lamplighter* as a novel of hidden incestuous innuendo and desire, Goshgarian says, "There are barriers even scribbler heroines cannot cross: Gerty has to satisfy herself with Willie" (171). However witty Goshgarian’s intent, his reader who has also read *The Lamplighter* can only be disappointed that Goshgarian has missed all the important points of Cummins’ rhetorical strategy by trying to force *The Lamplighter* into a category to which it does not belong. To suggest that
that much sexual passion is woven into Cummins' work without her being aware of it—or worse that it was her intent to "not say" all the things Goshgarian insists she does say—simply is not believable.

It does seem that Goshgarian tries to use The Lamplighter mainly because Cummins twice uses the phrase "to kiss the chastening rod" (the title of his book). Neither time does it seem possible that she intended the line to be read as Goshgarian does. And Goshgarian ignores Amory's, Willie's and Gerty's educations; more importantly, he never mentions (and cannot afford to acknowledge) that each of these characters has cultivated their hearts as they have developed their minds. Baym, too, seems to reject Goshgarian's premise as I will show shortly.

Helen Waite Papashvily appears to have a far greater grasp of Cummins' designs for Gerty than either Lang or Goshgarian. Although her synopsis of the high points of Gerty's growth into autonomous woman only include that Gerty

at eight [years old] cleaned, cooked and in general managed her benefactor's home. After he was [completely] disabled she nursed him until he died and then went on to become the companion and solace of a young blind woman . . . [and] assumed responsibility of [Willie's] family, attended his ill mother and insane grandmother [sic]. (101)

It is not clear whether Papashvily meant Gerty attended Willie's senile grandfather or whether she was referring to Nan Grant, who was no relation but had gone insane by the
time Gerty found her and so became another one of Gerty’s responsibilities. This careless reading is not unusual for critics of nineteenth-century fiction. Alexander Cowie, too, has confused characters. Cowie writes that Nan Grant is Gerty’s aunt (420), and he reports that Willie "was merely urging [Belle] to take care of her sick mother" (421). Neither Cowie nor Papashvily have read past the surface; they see no doubling of meaning, no "shadow story." Cowie sees no subversive elements at all, and Papashvily says there are some—but fails to mention even one.

Cowie and Papashvily both claim to be critical readers, yet any reader of The Lamplighter knows Cummins has never mentioned Willie’s grandmother and that Belle’s mother died while Belle was in her early teens. Belle is neglecting her father on his deathbed, and Gerty nurses Willie’s grandfather. Perhaps it is a resistance to male characters who are frail and dependent upon women for care and support that has these critics confusing male characters for female ones.

Nevertheless, Papashvily is fairer and more evenhanded in her assessment of the novel than either Cowie or Goshgarian, and although she misses many of Cummins’ finer points, she gives The Lamplighter a place in the "quiet revolt" of women who waged their own devious, subtle, undeclared war against men--their manual of arms, their
handbook of strategy was the sentimental domestic novel. . . . the pages reveal the tactics women adopted, the weapons they chose, the victories they sought--and finally won. (24)

Papashvily implies that this novel was meant to teach, that it was a weapon in the battle women were fighting against masculine domination (24). Unfortunately, this essential element becomes a minor point in her investigation of the novel.

None of the critics mentioned above, nor any other critics I have been able to discover, have done the close reading of The Lamplighter that Nina Baym has accomplished in Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America. Limiting herself to five pages of review of the story, Baym covers important details, adds no characters nor confuses any, and addresses the real issues of Cummins' design. Baym avoids many of the errors other critics make simply by taking Cummins' work seriously and, in her way, quite literally. Baym does, however, place The Lamplighter in a genre--it is a "woman's" story:

Works of the genre that I call women's fiction meet three conditions. They are written by women, addressed to women, and tell one particular story about women. They chronicle the "trials and triumph" . . . of a heroine who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them. (Women's Fiction 22)

This genre is an American invention Baym calls the Female Bildungsroman, and she says of it that some male authors felt threatened by the apparently sudden emergence of great
numbers of women writers. "Their distress showed itself in expressions of manly contempt for the genre, its authors, and its readers" (Woman's Fiction 23). These critics' opinions have been preserved for us while more positive response has been "lost."

Fortunately, "recent scholarship in women's history and literature has created both a context and a reason for reexamining this literature" (Woman's Fiction 23), and critics like Baym are investigating not to promote a specific agenda or cause, but to recover an essential element of the history of the United States, one which includes and respects women and their work.

As a serious scholar, Baym moves beyond reporting the plot to investigation of the real, cultural work Cummins would have seen herself doing in her novel. Part of that cultural work was a move away from Calvinism and Evangelicalism to a "particular kind of Protestantism" which holds that "the possibility of enlightenment exists in everyone." It holds that "[e]veryone has an inner light, but all need conformation and strengthening through social relations" (Baym introduction xix). Baym sees Cummins as promoting social responsibility in and among the masses of people who migrated from farms into the cities. Removed from familiar extended family situations, displaced from their social network of community and family church, these migrants needed to be reminded of the value of
community, for social structures to provide a firm foundation for young people to build their lives upon. Cummins taught that all people have the duty to respect and help those around them who are, or seem to be, less fortunate.

Baym also acknowledges Cummins effort to re-vision social customs that value women based on Richardson's theories of the feminine and on the woman-belle ideal. Cummins was not alone in this effort; many women writers in the United States were echoing George Eliot's and Jane Austen's criticism of the poorly educated, social-climbing, flirtatious woman as an ideal for young women to aspire to. Many writers were battling the idea of woman as object, woman as man's entertainment, and "idle" woman as man's status symbol. Cummins harshly critiques women raised to be, or self-taught to be, belles who rely on falsity and hide behind mistaken notions of civilized behavior. For example, Baym notes the scenes between Belle and Gerty point up not only the falsity but the essential incivility of manners as they are practiced by the very group that defines itself as civilized. For they amount to nothing more than the repeated and self-conscious assertion of one's superiority to others; in The Lamplighter, the moment one lays claim to such superiority, one loses it. (introduction xxvii)

Women's superiority, as Baym reads Cummins, comes not from her ability to "undermine the Other" but from "sincere outward behavior" that corresponds to learned principles and feelings (introduction xxvi). "It is not the cult of
the heart, but the cultivation of the heart" that Cummins praises (introduction xxvi).

Cummins' method of cultivating the heart is education. A true education allows one not only to support herself but to engage in meaningful relationships, to envision the consequences of her actions, and to distinguish between the incivility of manners of the self-consciously superior, who assume dignity, and the true civility of manners of one who respects others and is awarded dignity.

Cummins envisioned the consequences of her act of publishing a novel. Baym tells us that "the women who wrote after 1820 detested Richardsonian fiction and planned their own as an alternative to it" (Woman's Fiction 25). These authors differentiated between social love and self-love. "From their point of view, the merely feeling person was selfish and superficial, hence incapable of love" (Woman's Fiction 25). If we are willing to accept this as credible, then clearly Cummins was not writing the text Pattee, Matthiessen, and Goshgarian have accused her of producing.

Cummins' design was not to create a novel which would be a "narcotic" for her reader, but one that could lead her readers to a more fully human existence. Rather than survive in the cult of the heart, Cummins expected her readers to live fully, through the cultivation of the heart, in a world of reason, laughter, wit, communion, and
love (Baym introduction xxiv). For Cummins these do not appear to be mutually exclusive questions. As Baym so succintly puts it: "Merely to feel strongly is to be at the mercy of oneself and others; it is to be self-absorbed and passive" (Woman's Fiction 25). Gerty is neither, and Cummins establishes Gerty as a role model. One could well argue that Cummins has taken a political stance insisting that through education women can become useful citizens and that emotions have political efficacy.

Citizens are those persons who participate in the world, not just exist in it. Baym refutes Goshgarian's arguments--although she does not mention his name. Women of the nineteenth century, Baym posits,

believed that, in the sexual domain, they were invariably victims. Because of this belief they tried to define encounters between men and women in such a way as to exclude sexuality altogether. This was a radical step, meant to force men to approach women as human beings with minds and hearts rather than as objects of lust. (Women's Fiction 254)

Gerty, then, is not playing the coquette with Philip Amory, nor is she in any way leading Ben Bruce on by ignoring his sexual attraction to her. Cummins is using these encounters to show that women do not need to be or to make themselves into objects of lust. What Goshgarian mistakenly reads as repressed incestuous desire Baym explains as the need to control sexual appetite:

Sexual appetite was one among many feminine frailties that nineteenth-century woman was trying to overcome as she prepared herself for
full participation in the world. . . . the liberated woman was sexually liberated, not in the modern sense but in the sense of being liberated from sex. (Woman's Fiction 224-225)

Cummins has Gerty expect to be treated as fully human—a moral, logical, emotionally complex being—not just the emotional complement to a rational man who weds her.

Baym is able to do this kind of reading for two specific reasons: She values women's ideas and struggles, and she takes these novels seriously. Further, her readings of nineteenth-century novels are more credible than the other critics mentioned thus far in this chapter because she is not trying to fit texts into her political agenda but investigating them through historical, ideological, and rhetorical strategies. Baym sees these novels as arising from a specific discourse arena and as attempting to influence that arena.

Another serious criticism of The Lamplighter is Erica R. Bauermeister's attempt to read The Lamplighter as a pivotal text in women's fiction by positioning it between two other popular novels. This complicates rather than simplifies the questions Harris and Baym have raised about the sentimental. She acknowledges critical work by Baym, Kelly, and Tompkins as creating a unified group of nineteenth-century writers, which presents "a more formidable challenge to the canon" than individual "exceptional" authors could (17). The strength "of that
unified challenge has been necessary to justify these authors as objects of academic study; however, now that nineteenth-century American women writers are beginning to become accepted as worthy of study, . . . it is important that we look more closely at the differences between works in order to see the richness of and variety among the ever increasing number of newly rediscovered texts.

It is the unique aspect of individual works that we must consider if we are to fully appreciate the novels and their authors.

Bauermeister notes that many critics view *The Lamplighter* as a bad imitation of *The Wide, Wide World* because they are looking for a simple formula that is supposed to define all sentimental novels. These critics are blind to the complexity of many sentimental novels. Skimming texts will not provide the insight necessary to discover the work being done;

yet a close examination of characterization and narrative conventions reveals that *The Lamplighter* actually revises the presuppositions of *The Wide, Wide World* and demonstrates the cultural and ethical complexity of nineteenth-century American women's fiction. (Bauermeister 18)

Cummins' heroine is not the "self-abnegating Ellen of *The Wide, Wide, World," but represents a far more independent ideal such as that most often found in "early nineteenth-century American women's novels characterized by adventure and social protest" (18). Bauermeister wants to connect Cummins' novel to Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824),
Hannah Lee's Tales of the Puritans (1822), and Catherine Sedgwick's A New England Tale (1822).

The strongest connection for Bauermeister is between Cummins' Gerty and Sedgwick's Hope of Hope Leslie (1827):

When The Lamplighter is placed in comparison with Warner's novel and Hope Leslie, the distinctions between the texts become clearer, and what appeared as inconsistencies in The Lamplighter are given possible explanations. (18)

By dispelling "the myth of homogeneity" we can see these novels as having unique sets of values. Bauermeister sees Cummins as attempting to reconcile the points of view of Warner and Sedgwick. Cummins was no doubt influenced by Sedgwick during her school years, when Sedgwick would read her novels at the school run by her sister and attended by Cummins, but Cummins seems to revision Sedgwick's structure, while she is dismantling Warner's construction of woman.

Bauermeister shows convincingly that Cummins' Gerty bridges the gap between Ellen and Hope. Cummins twists Warner's plot only after acknowledging its usefulness and pathetic appeal. Most critics have been unable to make their comparison of Cummins to Warner work efficiently after the first hundred pages of The Lamplighter, not because the novel is poorly written, but because they were unable to acknowledge Cummins' subversion of Warner's ideal woman. By bringing Hope Leslie into the equation, Bauermeister demonstrates that Cummins saw more to women's
lives than submission and acceptance--and more to her character than mere stereotype.

Gerty and Hope both love to have their own way, and they both are indulged, but Hope follows only her own instincts, while Gerty has the benefit of wise counsel, both male and female teachers who model Cummins' preferred method of instruction. A careful reading of the treatment of authority and submission in *Hope Leslie* and *The Wide, Wide World*, Bauermeister tells us, is the key to understanding Cummins' structure and purpose. Warner's values do not disappear; Gerty has several moments of self-control that echo Ellen's, and the temptations the two experience are much the same. However, Gerty moves from "self-conquest to self-assertion" as she matures; Ellen mires herself in self-conquest. Hope, who lacks a mentor, focuses only on self-assertion, thereby missing the essential stage of self-conquest. Cummins does move toward *Hope Leslie'*s humanistic religion, but not to the extreme Sedgwick offers. Cummins seeks middle ground upon which her readers may situate themselves in their efforts to assert their own autonomy.

An essential element Cummins includes that Sedgwick belittles is a mentor. Emily Graham, Bauermeister points out, both needs and is needed by Gerty. This reciprocal relationship allows Gerty to grow and mature. As she did with Trueman, Gerty moves from total dependent to helpmeet
to savior with Emily. In *The Lamplighter* the hierarchy of power is subverted but not negated as it is in *Hope Leslie*. Cummins can be seen as building bridges between two other writers, one more traditional and conservatively supportive of women's place, and one radical and vehemently revisionary.

Bauermeister is doing the type of re-visioning we must do on a grander scale as we move sentimental fiction to a more central position in our literary heritage. While she admits that taking account of the diversity of nineteenth-century women authors "will be a more complicated endeavor than we had initially expected," Bauermeister offers one way to begin such work (28). Acknowledging the complexity of nineteenth-century sentimental novels does not mean abandoning the work done to show it as a unique form of expression. What is required is the acknowledgement that these novels are not "stereotypically" conservative or progressive, they are not either one thing or an other, but a broad range of expression of women's place, desires, responsibilities, and possibilities.

Acknowledging that Cummins is not unique in her determination to create art, that she intended to teach, please, and move her audience rather than provide them with a narcotic escape, and that she was creating a new vision of woman, allows us to re-vision other sentimental novels of her period in relation to and in opposition to her
novel. In keeping with Harris’ formula, the rhetorical, historical and the ideological aspects of women-authored, sentimental novels of the nineteenth century may be the connecting material between these novels that allow them the diversity of voice, opinion, and design. These novels are similar in that they tell women’s stories, and they have common elements, but they offer a variety of coping strategies, survival skills, and forms of autonomy for the women of the mid-century United States.

In conclusion, this thesis posits that the primary value of Maria Susanna Cummins’ The Lamplighter is its attempt to change the culture from which it sprang and into which it made its way. Cummins comments on the state of the United States as she knew it, and offers practical solutions for a restructuring of its social hierarchy. Limited to addressing other women and children, Cummins had to do her work in the context of women’s world. Any changes she could promote had to be addressed to areas over which women traditionally had some control.

Many contemporary critics, who are well intentioned in their desire to give us a more ideologically-informed history of the sentimental novel, continue to overlook the rhetorical point: the nineteenth century women’s novel educates through emotional appeal. Sentimental novels educate the heart, and The Lamplighter does not apologize for that; in fact, Cummins sets out to cultivate the heart
through her gentle lessons implanted in her readers' hearts and minds. They were to sympathize as "fully and heartily as [Gerty] did in the sorrows of her little heroines, and rejoyc[e] with her in the final triumph of truth, obedience, and patience" (Cummins 66). While recent criticism by Goshgarian, Lang, and several others create arguments that are interesting and perhaps useful to some degree, the authors nevertheless disregard Cummins' stated purposes for her novel: to impart light to the soul, to teach the truths that make for virtue, and to model resistance to evil. These lessons were designed to help the reader develop "deeply-rooted principles," and to confirm "habits of right" (Cummins 67). Despite their efforts to rename the sentimental, some critics show that the distaste for pathos is still a strong force in rejecting the very strategy in which Cummins centers her work. Cummins embraces emotional appeal, she uses it heavily and intentionally in the early chapters and conclusion. The sentimental novel is designed to move the emotions, but it is through the emotional connections and emotional reactions that it does its social and political work: To cultivate the heart is to educate the whole person.

According to Baym, the sentimental novel was a new form of entertainment that was not mere entertainment but education and entertainment blended together so that the
"lesson itself is an entertainment" because the heroine's triumph over obstacles is "profoundly pleasurable" for the reader (Woman's Fiction 17). The readers who had learned to identify with the heroine could rejoice with her triumphs and "accept the author's solution to her difficulties as pertinent to their own lives" (Woman's Fiction 17). In the case of The Lamplighter these triumphs include Gerty's rejection of the Richardsonian equation of the female with permanent child in order to embrace the female as capable of moral and logical thought as well as superior sympathetic understanding. Baym calls this approach to creating a "more fully than less fully human" female character a "moderate, or limited, or pragmatic feminism, which is not in the least covert but quite obvious" (Woman's Fiction 18). Although not the feminism of the late twentieth century, Cummins' feminism interpreted experience within models of personal relations, rather than classes, casts, or other institutional structures for most women's lives were shaped by personal interactions, not by politically constructed membership.

Yet at mid-century, Baym says, women "were increasingly aware of their situations as gender determined and increasingly demanding of themselves and the world" (Woman's Fiction 21). Wishing their lives to be less brutal than their foremother's lives had been, women tended to idealize the pretty and tender even as they acknowledged
the less pleasant aspects of experience. For the woman author this meant assuming a "rhetoric that was intended to transcend the pain and crudeness of the things they had to represent" (Baym Woman's Fiction 25). They did not create novels of sensibility, however, because they knew, often from personal experience, that too much reliance on feelings and too little on logic often left a woman the victim of her first obstacle—a victim who might never recover.

Cummins, as did many mid-century writers, used emotional appeals to create a bond between reader and her heroine like the one modeled by Gerty as she learned to read. Once the connection is firmly established, the reader is both entertained and enlightened by the struggles and triumphs of her heroine. In the case of The Lamplighter, the identifying reader comes to understand that literacy and education are the foundation of liberation; that women capable of supporting themselves enjoy a level of autonomy unheard of a generation before; that honest labor, a clear sense of self, and a pride and temper under control are virtues that attract superior companions; that logical and ethical deliberations are as much women's sphere as men's; and that social responsibilities are the concern of all citizens.

Cummins begins with emotional appeals, but once a bond is created between the reader and Gerty, the pathetic
appeal becomes less dominant and Gerty models rational and moral deliberations. *The Lamplighter* becomes a complex novel for the critic who realizes that Cummins stresses logic and moral reflection above emotional reaction as the means for women to navigate the world in which they are placed at a disadvantage by social custom.

Cummins refigures women's home as the world they come in contact with; thus, women who identify with Gerty learn they must extend their sympathy, in whatever form best applies, to a wide variety of people and situations. For this sympathy to be an effective means of changing social and political circumstances, Cummins teaches that emotions must be tempered with logical and ethical reflection. Many critics have resisted the pathos of Cummins' novel because emotional appeals are not currently highly valued; however, it is only by acknowledging the power of pathos to draw and hold an audience that the critic can move on to discover the cultural work Cummins surely saw herself doing.
Notes

1. In *The Remembered Gate*, Barbara Berg discusses the "accepted theories of feminine inferiority" that received "vigorous reinforcement in the early nineteenth century America" (3-4). She describes the changes from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century in the way women were perceived and expected to perceive themselves. She contends that "a faulty education truncated feminine development and prevented true comparisons" between the intellectual capacities of men and women (17). The myths of womanhood, Berg posits, "cajoled, coaxed, and actually intimidated women into acceptance of prescribed position" (100). These myths constantly warned women against "unnatural" activities which would be suicidal blows to their womanhood, and they "authoritatively asserted woman's intellectual inferiority to man" (101-102).

2. Amy Devitt argues in her 1993 article for *College Composition and Communication* that

   genre is a dynamic response to and construction of recurring situation, one that changes historically and in different social groups, that adapts and grows as the social context changes. This new concept of genre has managed to overcome several dichotomies in our understanding of language use and writing. In uniting genre and situation it reunites text and context, each constructing and responding to the other in a semiotic interchange. . . . Genre is patterns and relationships, essentially semiotic ones, that are constructed when writers and groups of writers identify different writing tasks as being similar. Genre constructs and responds to recurring situation, becoming visible through perceived patterns in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of particular texts. Genre is truly, therefore, a maker of meaning. (580)

3. For a brief, clear explanation of these two terms see Cheryl Glenn’s "Medieval Literacy Outside the Academy: Popular Practice and the Individual Technique" in *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 44, No. 4, December 1993. p 498.
4. As The Lamplighter was breaking all sales records for any American book yet published, it is no wonder that Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose books were scarcely selling, should write to his publisher, Thackeray:

America is now wholly given over to a d--d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public is occupied with their trash--and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of The Lamplighter, and other books neither better nor worse? Worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the hundred thousand. (Pattee 110)

This tone of disparagement has been followed, not only in the formation of the American canon, but also in most critics' response to all woman-authored novels of the 1850's. The slur "scribbling women" is not only quoted, it is also used by many critics (men and women) as a term of belittling endearment for the authors who were selling, who were stirring the nation's sympathy to the betterment of people and society, and who were in touch with the reality of over half the population of the United States. Tompkins tells us that critics dismiss sentimental fiction as being out of touch with reality "because the reality they perceive is organized according to a different set of conventions for constituting experience" (159)

It is unfortunate that Susan Warner's response upon meeting Thackeray has been so neglected. Warner answered Hawthorne and many later condemners of women's writing when she said, "[Thackeray] is an excellent man, but there is a world he knows nothing of--a world which I know" (Pattee 58). It is this world we must explore if we are to understand and appreciate our literary heritage.

5. According to Berg, by 1850 white male suffrage was nearly complete, with only one state still requiring a man to hold property for the right to vote, prompting the rich to withdraw from the political arena. Just as politics were being taken over by the masses, masses of immigrants were invading the cities and taking wage labor positions, which devalued the status of the wage laborer. Women were also entering the labor force, seeking the vote, and challenging domestic isolation, thus further challenging male superiority. And, with the increased pressure to end
slavery and grant human rights to blacks, the wealthy, white, male supremacy was threatened at every turn.

6. Koch edits a double novel containing *Tempest* and *Sunshine* and *The Lamplighter*. He points out that they were published the same year and take place in part in New England. Although Koch also calls both novels "marvels of persuasion," there seems no solid basis on which to pair these two novels. It is not clear what Koch read in *Tempest* and *Sunshine* that he felt qualified as "countless examples of things society sought to reform, all charged with noble precepts, all sharply tuned to the exciting emotional pitch of the times" (xii). The two main characters, the sisters nicknamed Tempest (a dark-haired, violent, selfish girl who Holmes says curled up with serpents at night) and Sunshine (a fair-haired, sweet, gentle girl who sleeps beneath angel wings), are such extremes that they are mere caricatures. Holmes neither states nor implies any rhetorical design, nor does she explore the complexities of her characters' lives. Abolition is made fun of, and slaves treated as comic buffoons, who need constant supervision to keep them from running away or getting uppity. Women are either too innocent and naive to survive in the world, or wicked and cunning. And only Tempest supports herself—and then just at subsistence level in a menial job. Koch characterizes Holmes as a "good woman whose works served a good purpose" (xvi); Cummins, he says wrote "to compensate for an unfulfilled womanhood" (xvii). Perhaps this contrast in some way epitomizes Koch's desire to juxtapose these writers.

7. Co-authors of *Reading Texts*, Kathleen McCormick, Gary Waller, and Linda Flower divide types of reading into "old" (the meaning is in the text) and "new" (the meaning is created through active interpretation of the text) readings (4-7). Eileen Barrett and Mary Cullinan suggest in their 1992 study, *American Women Writers*, that there is a continuity among women writers, a history of literature we should make ourselves aware of if we are to be critics of women's literature. Themes range "from fears and fascinations of childhood to the social, artistic, political, and personal concerns of adulthood" (vi).

8. Cummins narrator tells us it is the cultivation of the heart that brings happiness, but Blair and the narrator agree that the "cultivation" is gained through the study of polite literature, through extending ourselves beyond our "main pursuit," and in the investigation of "all that relates to beauty,
harmony, grandeur, and elegance; all that can soothe
the mind, gratify the fancy, or move the emotions" (801). Persons of cultivated taste, Blair continues, are not a burden to themselves, nor are they obliged to "fly to low company, or to court the riot of loose pleasures, in order to cure the tediousness of existence" (801). Blair instructs his reader that "as a sound head, so likewise a good heart, is a very material requisite to just taste" (805). And, finally, Cummins echoes Blair's thought that it is from "consulting our own imagination and heart, and from attending to the feelings of others, that any principles are formed which acquire authority in matters of taste" (808).

9. Pattee reports one critical response to The Lamplighter, possibly that of N.P. Willis (Fanny Fern's estranged brother upon whom she modeled the foppish, ignoble antagonist in her automythography Ruth Hall), but does so not only in the book titled The Feminine Fifties (clearly a derogatory term meaning both not masculine and emasculated), but also under the chapter heading "A Damned Mob of Scribbling Women." Rather than discuss The Lamplighter in any useful sense, Pattee quotes a long passage (nearly 800 words) of a parody of one character Pattee mistakenly describes as a hero. True, Pattee does admit that this is an "extreme criticism of Miss Cummins," but then allows less than three lines to E.P. Whipple's response. Whipple "commended" The Lamplighter "owing to the simplicity, tenderness, pathos, and naturalness of the first one hundred pages" (Pattee 115). Still, one wonders why a book with only the first one hundred pages to recommend it "sold 70,000 copies [in the United States alone] in its first year" (Pattee 115).

10. Each age, Matthiessen says, "turns to particular authors of the past, not because of the authors but because of its own needs and preoccupations that those authors help make articulate." This "turning to" necessitates a turning away, which he does not mention as such, but he does say that "the writers whom an age most admires provide a frame of reference against which its own contours can be defined" (102). For Matthiessen those contours are strictly masculine. Nevertheless, keeping in mind that we can turn to the writers of an earlier age to help us illuminate our own age is valuable for women as well as men. Unfortunately women's literary heritage is not so readily available.
11. Many critics, particularly European critics, of Cummins' day enjoyed the realism of American novels for their intimate glimpses of the food, the fashions, the daily routine of dealing with servants, the types of chores American found essential, and interactions between women. Perhaps these seem valueless to the male critic who does not experience these trials and joys, but Matthiessen admits that without guidance he could not have learned to value Hawthorne. Therefore the fault is not with the text but with the uneducated reader. Had Matthiessen allowed himself to be educated in the realism of women's "ordinary surroundings and occupations" he, too, would have discovered the sense of "quite delight" available in sentimental fiction.

12. In addition to the major themes of women's education, autonomy, and social responsibilities, Cummins supplies us with timeless characters. One example of a character that a reader of the 1990's might find particularly interesting is Miss Pace. This character seems to be an early rendering of a "bag lady." Her clothes are odd, she carries her belongings on strings tied to her waist, and she seems to have lost some of her capacity to reason. She is an elderly woman when we first meet her, yet she imagines herself throughout the story as the intended bride of Willie Sullivan who is in his early teens at their first meeting. It is only after her death that we learn she has amassed and hidden a small fortune which would have allowed her a more conventional lifestyle.


15. How to Suppress Women's Writing, by Joanna Russ, includes a chapter called "Pollution of Agency," which brings to mind Pattee's thought that the fifties were polluted by the feminization of American culture. In this chapter, Russ gives multiple examples of critical responses to women artists—painters, poets, novelists—by both nineteenth-century and twentieth-century critics. These responses were designed to "promulgate the idea that women make themselves ridiculous by creating art, or that writing or
painting is immodest . . . or that creating art shows a woman up as abnormal, neurotic, unpleasant and hence unlovable" (25). As an example of this mindset, Russ tells us the response to Jane Eyre: "many critics bluntly admitted that they thought the book a masterpiece if written by a man, shocking or disgusting if written by a woman" (27).

Russ argues that women writers such as Kate Chopin, Willa Cather, Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti, and Emily Dickinson have been placed in wrong categories. Deliberately or not, by placing a writer in a genre--especially if one labels it a minor genre--critics limit the responses one can make to a novel, poem, or story. As an example of this process in action, Russ asks, if Chopin and Cather have been considered regionalists for many years, yet William Faulkner is not considered one, then what is a regionalist?

Cummins, too, might have fallen into the category of regionalist had she not written El Fureides, an exotic Palestinian romance. Since her rediscovery by Baym, Mary Kelly, Lucy M. Freibert and Barbara A. White, and others, it is more likely that Cummins will not be received as "literature (broad, general, humanist, universal) [but as mere] genre, 'women's studies' (narrow, special, political, biased)" (Russ 60). Russ disagrees with Baym on the placement of novels by women in the scheme of literature. Using Emily Dickinson as an example, Russ shows that women have had literary ambitions and did strive for excellence. Dickinson claimed to have not read Whitman, Melville, Poe, and Irving, yet she read and reread . . . Helen Hunt Jackson and Lydia Maria Child, and Harriet Beechen Stowe, and Lady Georgina Fullerton . . . [six other then well-known women] and everything George Eliot wrote. (81-82)

Dickinson also read Elizabeth Barrett Browning, often quoting her in letters. Perhaps these authors are not the primary ones men chose to read at that time, but Dickinson, in turn, has become a "foremother" or "Sister" to Amy Lowell, Adrieanne Rich, Suzanne Juhasz, and others (Russ 82). Perhaps the literature they produced does not fit neatly into a male-centered literary excellence, but many critics, including Russ, are suggesting that male ignorance of the female condition is no longer an acceptable excuse for ignoring, belittling, and suppressing women's art.
The anomalousness of the woman writer—produced by the double standard of content and the writer's isolation from the female tradition—is the final means of ensuring permanent marginality. . . . Canons of excellence and conceptions of excellence must change, perhaps beyond recognition. (Russ 85)

The desire is to alter not only the margin but also the discourse determining the margin. Even critics who use a less radical rhetoric agree with Russ that the change is an alteration in power of definition and value, not in simply the illusion of such power.

16. For a view close to Cummins' of man as citizen and suitable husband, see chapter two of Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman first published in 1792.

17. For an interesting view of the differences between women's and men's views on morality and upon how these differences affect moral interpretations see Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982. Her work implies that men focus on rights, claims, self-interest, duties and obligations, burdens, and autonomy, while women focus on responsibilities to respond empathetically, to show concern in close relationships, and to nurture and give aid. Although there are some limitations to her theory, it does suggest that my reading of Gerty's thought process is as plausible as Baym's.

18. Dr. Jeremy saw himself as a citizen of the upper class of his hometown, Gerty saw herself as a mobile but not secure citizen of ever changing economic and social classes, and Amory saw himself as an outcast from his desired place in the Graham household but a citizen of the world. How Cummins places the characters in the unfolding drama, the social roles she assigns them, and the actions and reactions she allocates them support her theme that the home is not only the single dwelling place that excludes the world, but a multifaceted changeable relationship with the world that includes all the people with whom they come in contact. Women's "home" puts her in contact with her "betters" and with her servants, trades people, neighbors, and charity cases. The woman who limits herself to her family is not participating in the reality Cummins wishes them to acknowledge. Gerty
follows Amory's example, and, by implication, so should the reader.

19. Nineteenth-century sentimental fiction has a complex nature that traditional critics have labeled confused. The continuing assumption that these stories have simple plots complicated by random, meandering asides and stereotypical, interchangeable characters tends to prompt critics toward listing the similarities between novels and authors rather than toward exploring each work as a unique piece of art.
References


Lang, Amy Schrager. "Class and the Strategies of Sympathy." The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender,


Bibliography


