

*Heroic Women Found: Transgressive
Feminism, Popular Biography, and the
'Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females'*

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IN AN American account published in 1847, Madame Roland was portrayed as an 'admirable woman, the heroine of the French revolution, and the martyr of liberty.' When her husband, a prominent French intellectual and political officeholder, was arrested during the Reign of Terror of the early 1790s, she 'performed a masculine part' and 'flew to the convention to defend her husband.' Condemned to death by the revolutionaries, 'she traversed Paris, amidst the insults of the populace, and received death with heroic firmness,' even seeming to experience 'pleasure' in making the ultimate 'sacrifice to her country.' Possessing a "republican soul" and speaking "with the freedom and firmness of a Napoleon," Madame Roland confronted her executioners with courage, declaring, "O liberty! what crimes are committed in thy name!"¹

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1. [Silas Estabrook?], *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* (Boston and New York, 1847) [cited hereafter as *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*], 30-31. Copies of two variant editions of this pamphlet survive; the second has the following imprint: 'Boston: Published and for Sale by All Periodical Dealers,' with no date. Unless otherwise indicated,

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That celebratory sketch of female heroism and martyrdom was published not in an early feminist tract (such as Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, first issued in 1845), but in a cheap, racy, gaudily illustrated paperbound collection of sexualized murder narratives and related accounts of lethal violence against women produced by an obscure Boston journalist named Silas Estabrook and entitled *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*.² On one level, Estabrook's work reflects the emergence of the motif of the 'beautiful female murder victim' in American crime publications of the first half of the nineteenth century. In that regard, the juxtaposition within his pamphlet of the glowing account of Madame Roland with lurid sketches of slain prostitutes and other disreputable women tends to challenge modern feminist assumptions about the sexualized representation of female victims of male violence.³ On another level, Estabrook's

all subsequent citations to this work are to the dated 'Boston and New York' edition. The attribution to Estabrook is based in large part on the identification of the author on the undated edition as 'A Clergyman, of Brunswick, Me.,' the same attribution as on *The Life and Death of Mrs. Maria Bickford, A Beautiful Female*, a pamphlet (of similar content and format) copyrighted by Estabrook. For a discussion of Estabrook's pamphlets on the murder of Maria Bickford, see Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207-12. It is possible that all of the pamphlets were actually written by an anonymous author in Estabrook's employ. As discussed below, Estabrook's account of Madame Roland was cribbed, nearly verbatim, from Samuel L. Knapp, *Female Biography; Containing Notices of Distinguished Women, in Different Nations and Ages* (1834; reprint, Philadelphia: Thomas Wardle, 1842), 434-40.

2. It should be noted that Margaret Fuller *does* include a laudatory sketch of Madame Roland in her *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, though her emphasis is somewhat different than Estabrook's (less on Madame Roland's political activism and more on her role as co-equal spouse in a 'marriage of friendship'); see Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845; New York: Norton, 1971), 73-74. Roland was one of the stock female heroines of middlebrow literary culture in the early republic, appearing in more than twenty notices or sketches in American magazines between 1802 and 1854 (claim based on search of *Index to American Periodicals, 1800-1850* on CD-ROM). See, for example, *The Lady's Monitor* (New York), May 29, 1802, 326; *Literary Tablet* (Hanover, N.H.), Dec. 22, 1803, 42; *The Visitor* (Richmond, Va.), Nov. 4, 1809, 157; *The Western Review and Miscellaneous Magazine* (Lexington, Ky.), June, 1821, [257]-69.

3. Those feminist assumptions will be briefly discussed near the end of this essay. For an overview of the origins and defining characteristics of the motif of the 'beautiful female murder victim' in Anglo-American culture, see Daniel A. Cohen, 'The Beautiful Female Murder Victim: Literary Genres and Courtship Practices in the Origins of a Cultural Motif, 1590-1850,' *Journal of Social History* 31 (Winter 1997): 277-306. For more on that motif in early national and antebellum America, see D. A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of*

eclectic compilation illuminates a much broader Anglo-American tradition of laudatory narratives of unconventional, heroic, and (in some cases) victimized women. Rooted in a number of popular early modern genres, images of female heroism, sacrifice, and martyrdom proliferated in the print culture of antebellum America, especially in numerous collections of genteel biographical sketches of 'celebrated women.' Though Estabrook's compilation was in many respects similar to other cheap murder pamphlets of the period, it can also be seen as a playful variant of the more staid, didactic, and respectable middlebrow genre of collected female biography.

This essay will examine Estabrook's *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* in conjunction with several popular antebellum compilations of 'celebrated women' produced by men (including one from which Estabrook plagiarized several of his sketches) and several others compiled by women. Some of those works celebrated the lives of women bold enough to violate prescribed feminine roles and to demonstrate such stereotypically masculine virtues as physical courage, martial prowess, and political conviction. Far from being deployed as warnings against un-

Grace, 167-248, passim; D. A. Cohen, 'The Story of Jason Fairbanks: Trial Reports and the Rise of Sentimental Fiction,' *Legal Studies Forum* 17:2 (1993): 119-32; D. A. Cohen, 'The Murder of Maria Bickford: Fashion, Passion, and the Birth of a Consumer Culture,' *American Studies* 31 (Fall 1990): 5-30; Karen Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 172-207; Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Knopf, 1998); P. C. Cohen, 'Sensationalized Murder in Antebellum New York' (unpublished paper, presented at the Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, Atlanta, Ga., Oct. 1994); P. C. Cohen, 'The Mystery of Helen Jewett: Romantic Fiction and the Eroticization of Violence,' *Legal Studies Forum* 17:2 (1993): 133-45; P. C. Cohen, 'The Helen Jewett Murder: Violence, Gender, and Sexual Licentiousness in Antebellum America,' *NWSA Journal* 2 (Summer 1990): 375-89; David Anthony, 'The Helen Jewett Panic: Tabloids, Men, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum New York,' *American Literature* 69 (Sept. 1997): 487-514; Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Srebnick, 'The Death of Mary Rogers, the "Public Prints," and the Violence of Representation,' *Legal Studies Forum* 17:2 (1993): 147-69; Andie Tucher, *Froth & Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 21-96, passim; David Brion Davis, *Homicide in American Fiction, 1798-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), 48-49, 123-25, 147-78, and passim.

conventional behavior, heroic women who came to violent ends were often presented to female readers as martyrs to be admired and even emulated. Such sketches and collections embodied a rich tradition of popular feminist discourse—designated here, in two variants, as ‘transgressive feminism’ and ‘heroic feminism’—that has frequently been overlooked by modern scholars of gender ideology.

Antebellum depictions of heroic women, however, tended to vary significantly depending on the gender and literary niche of the author or editor. Male writers such as Silas Estabrook produced true-crime pamphlets or sensational fiction for the lower end of the antebellum reading market, constructing ‘transgressive’ narratives that, on occasion, implicitly or explicitly celebrated women who boldly violated both contemporary gender norms *and* broader social rules cutting across gender distinctions (e.g., the prohibition against murder). More respectable male authors penned ‘heroic’ accounts that lauded exceptional women who transcended standard gender norms and adopted conventionally masculine roles or behaviors; yet such writers did not generally condone violations of more fundamental moral rules. Unlike the male authors, most female compilers of biographical sketches seemed uncomfortable with both the ‘transgressive’ and ‘heroic’ modes, preferring, even in such exceptional cases as Madam Roland, to celebrate female attributes and accomplishments that were more consistent with the dominant nineteenth-century gender ideology of ‘domesticity’ or ‘separate spheres.’ Although female authors have embraced the motifs of ‘transgressive’ and ‘heroic’ feminism in other periods and places, in the antebellum United States those ideas and images were more commonly purveyed by male writers and editors—resulting in a strikingly masculinist form of mid-nineteenth-century popular literary feminism.⁴

4. Because the antebellum biographical collections produced by male and female authors typically treated many of the same subjects, and even cribbed sketches, or parts thereof, from one another (or from shared earlier sources), the gender differences in ide-

It should be emphasized that the tradition of popular feminism embodied in the handful of antebellum texts examined in this essay animated hundreds of other Anglo-American publications of the seventeenth through twentieth centuries. Several scholars have previously documented specific subtypes in different periods and settings, such as Dianne Dugaw's study of Female Warrior ballads in early modern Britain, David S. Reynolds's exploration of non-domestic female character types in popular antebellum fiction, Martha Vicinus's work on late Victorian juvenile biographies, and Joanne Meyerowitz's discussion of sketches of public women in American middlebrow magazines of the mid-twentieth century. However, nobody, to my knowledge, has clearly identified those disparate genres as parts of a loosely coherent and nearly continuous Anglo-American tradition of popular feminist biography and literary representation. As an exploration of popular crime literature, this essay challenges modern feminist assumptions concerning the depiction of sexualized or 'beautiful' female murder victims; more importantly, however, it situates Silas Estabrook's exemplars of that motif in a much broader tradition of popular feminist discourse—a tradition that deserves more sustained and systematic study than it has heretofore received.⁵

ological positioning are generally most evident in the prefaces or introductions to the volumes and/or in brief evaluative assessments that often appear near the beginning or end of individual sketches. In addition to the examples of literary 'borrowing' discussed and documented in this essay, see Ben Harris McClary, 'Samuel Lorenzo Knapp and Early American Biography,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95 (April 1985): 39–67, esp. 54–56. The dominant antebellum gender ideology of 'domesticity' or 'separate spheres' will be described later in this essay.

5. See Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry, 1650–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 337–67; Martha Vicinus, 'What Makes a Heroine? Nineteenth-Century Girls' Biographies,' *Genre* 20 (Summer 1987): 171–87; Joanne Meyerowitz, 'Beyond the Feminist Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946–1958,' *Journal of American History* 79 (March 1993): 1455–82, esp. 1458–65. All of those works are discussed further in text or notes below. For a sense of the sheer scale of the tradition, note Dugaw's claim, discussed below, that no fewer than 120 different Female Warrior ballads circulated in Great Britain or Anglo-America between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, along with many other similar prose accounts (Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry*, 1–3, 10, and passim).

* * *

At the outset, it may be helpful to trace some of the roots of nineteenth-century ideas and images of female heroism and sacrifice to a number of earlier genres in the English and European traditions. One important early source for popular representations of female courage and sacrifice were accounts of the martyrdom of Christian women in late antiquity. Such stories were first recorded by various ancient and medieval chroniclers and were later revived in such popular post-Reformation English compilations as John Foxe's *The Book of Martyrs*—accounts that remained popular among American Protestant readers well into the nineteenth century. Although depictions of female martyrs varied dramatically depending on time, place, and author, such accounts, according to medievalist Karen A. Winstead, sometimes emphasized the women's 'brash defiance of male authority' and tried to 'provide inspiring models of heroism for women.' Indeed, according to one early-nineteenth-century English martyrology, Christian females of late antiquity sacrificed their lives 'with no less boldness of spirit than did the men.' Saint Agnes, for example, 'boldly resisted the wicked edicts of the [Roman] emperor,' 'stood steadfast in all courageous strength,' and faced martyrdom without fear. Similarly, Eulalia, an early Portuguese Christian, advocated her faith like 'a courageous captain,' showed 'bold courage' at her trial, and sang defiantly at her execution as her body was torn limb from limb. Accounts of the extreme violence inflicted on such early Christian martyrs were clearly *not* intended to warn women against violations of legal codes, gender norms, or social conventions, but rather sought to celebrate female courage and even inspire female readers to emulate their subjects. This essay will suggest that published accounts of the violent deaths of other types of unconventional women may have occasionally served a somewhat similar function in antebellum America.⁶

6. See Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), quoted at 14; *The Book of Martyrs*, Contain-

Although very different in spirit from pious martyrologies, early modern English murder ballads also sometimes provided striking models of female courage and gender inversion. One famous example will suffice here. Perhaps the single most widely circulated ballad in early modern Europe was 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight.' That ballad also became deeply embedded in the Anglo-American tradition, where, as in Europe, it assumed a dizzying array of variant texts and titles. In almost all versions, a treacherous man (or knight, sometimes with supernatural powers) beguiles a beautiful young woman to elope with him; the pair ride to a secluded spot where, the man announces, he has previously murdered several other women and intends to kill her as well. In many European versions of the ballad, the young woman is either murdered, commits suicide, or is rescued, but in still others she bravely kills the man herself (generally in the same manner that he had intended to murder her) and returns to her father's house unharmed. Significantly, almost all British and Anglo-American versions of the ballad incorporate that last dramatic denouement. Thus, as it turns out, the most enduring and famous 'beautiful female' in the Anglo-American murder-ballad tradition is no victim

ing, An Authentic Relation of the Persecutions Against the Church of Christ, Contained in Fox and Other Authors (London: Fisher, Son, and Co., 1829), 95–96. Some accounts also emphasized the physical beauty of female martyrs; see, for example, J. Milner, *The History of Christian Martyrdom . . .* (Philadelphia: D. W. Farrand, 1814), 65–66, 71–72, and 76–77; William Byron Forbush, ed., *Fox's Book of Martyrs* (1926; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 16–18. In ancient and medieval accounts of female martyrs and heroines, physical beauty was often linked not to sexual promiscuity or depravity, but rather to sanctity, virtue, good breeding, and/or high social status; see Susanna Elm, 'Perpetua the Martyr—Perpetua the Saint: The Cultural Context of an Early Christian Phenomenon' (typescript provided by author), pp. 10–11, forthcoming in M. Behrman and F. Schiffauer, eds., *Martyrdom Religious/Political: The Rhetoric of Fundamentalism in the Age of Globalization* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Institute for Religion and Society, 1999/2000); Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 118; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 52–54; Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 28, 34, and 50. I am grateful to Susannah Elm, Felice Lifshitz, and Nina Caputo for sharing their knowledge on that point. For evidence of the enduring popularity of accounts of early Christian martyrs among nineteenth-century American readers, see the examples of Mary Livermore and Lucy Larcom discussed near the end of this essay.

at all but a resourceful young woman who turns the tables on her would-be killer, sends him to his death, and returns to her father's house unscathed. While not all of the women depicted in English and Anglo-American murder ballads or narratives over the following centuries were so fortunate, many others would demonstrate a similar penchant for appropriating such conventionally masculine virtues as physical courage and prowess.⁷

A third important source of images of heroic women was the popular early modern tradition of the cross-dressing Female Warrior. Although no other female soldier ever achieved the lasting renown of Joan of Arc, the fifteenth-century French heroine cruelly martyred by the English, the stories of dozens, even hundreds, of other valiant warrior women were told and retold in a multitude of early modern publications. Literary scholar Dianne Dugaw has identified no fewer than 120 different Female Warrior ballads printed in Great Britain or North America between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, along with similar motifs in such other genres as 'epic, romance, biography, comedy, tragedy, opera, and ballad opera.' Indeed, she argues, 'the Female Warrior and masquerading heroines like her were an imaginative

7. See Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 vols. (1882-98; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1965) [cited hereafter as *Child*], 1:22-62; Arthur Kyle Davis, *Traditional Ballads of Virginia Collected Under the Auspices of the Virginia Folk-Lore Society* (1929; reprint Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), 62-85; John Harrington Cox, *Folk-Songs of the South Collected Under the Auspices of the West Virginia Folk-Lore Society* (1925; reprint New York: Dover Publications, 1967), 3-17; Henry M. Belden and Arthur Palmer Hudson, eds., *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore: Volume Two: Folk Ballads from North Carolina* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1952), 15-26. The variants in which the intended victim kills her treacherous lover occasionally contain striking images of gender inversion beyond the central reversal of outcome. In one version or another, the woman kills the knight in 'man-fashion' with his own sword or tosses him 'manfully' into the sea; after killing him, she mounts *his* horse to return home (sometimes with his severed head on her lap); upon approaching her father's house, she blows the knight's horn 'like any man'; after her return, the city's drums and trumpets sound, and she cries from her window, 'Now I am a heroine!' (See *Child*, 1:22-62, quoted at 25-27; Cox, *Folk Songs of the South*, 4, quoted.) Further, in regard to women turning the tables on men in popular murder literature: in the antebellum United States, a sub-genre of cheap, paperbound novels depicted young, often beautiful, women who themselves became murderers, frequently in response to wrongs inflicted on them by men; for a perceptive study of some of those novels, see Dawn Keetley, 'Victim and Victimizer: Female Fiends and Unease over Marriage in Antebellum Sensational Fiction,' *American Quarterly* 51 (June 1999): 344-84.

preoccupation of the early modern era.' The protagonists in that tradition were typically celebrated for their displays of undaunted courage and martial prowess while disguised as men. Female Warrior ballads and narratives probably functioned, in some instances, as proto-feminist genres; according to Dugaw, they served to 'subvert not only the privilege of one gender over the other, but the very category of gender itself.'⁸ As variously illustrated by pious martyrologies, profane murder ballads, and a myriad of Female Warriors (and that list is certainly not exhaustive), celebratory images of heroic women were deeply and widely rooted in early modern popular culture.

Such images of female valor were given further impetus during the nineteenth century by the Romantic movement's celebration of individual genius, heroism, transgression, and accomplishment. One of the most famous expressions of that dominant Romantic impulse was Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the*

8. Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry*, 1-3, 10, 158-59, 164, and passim. It should be noted that Dugaw does not explicitly identify early modern Female Warrior ballads and narratives as 'feminist' or 'proto-feminist.' For some of the other scholarship on early modern and nineteenth-century Female Warriors in literature and life, see D. A. Cohen, *The Female Marine and Related Works: Narratives of Cross-Dressing and Urban Vice in America's Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); D. A. Cohen, 'The Female Marine in an Era of Good Feelings: Cross-Dressing and the "Genius" of Nathaniel Coverly, Jr.,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 103 (Oct. 1993): 359-93; Judith Hiltner, "'She Bled in Secret': Deborah Sampson, Herman Mann, and *The Female Review*,' *Early American Literature* 34 (1999): 190-220; Elizabeth Young, 'Confederate Counterfeit: The Case of the Cross-Dressed Civil War Soldier,' in Elaine K. Ginsberg, ed., *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 181-217; Kathleen De Grave, *Swindler, Spy, Rebel: The Confidence Woman in Nineteenth-Century America* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995); Richard Hall, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (New York: Paragon House, 1993); Wendy A. King, *Clad in Uniform: Women Soldiers of the Civil War* (Collingswood, N.J.: C. W. Historicals, 1992); C. Kay Larson, 'Bonny Yank and Ginny Reb Revisited,' *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military* 10 (Summer 1992): 35-61; Larson, 'Bonny Yank and Ginny Reb,' *Minerva* 8 (Spring 1990): 33-48; Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London: Pandora, 1989); Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Jane Ellen Schultz, 'Women at the Front: Gender and Genre in Literature of the American Civil War' (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1988); Estelle C. Jelinek, 'Disguise Autobiographies: Women Masquerading as Men,' *Women's Studies International Forum* 10 (1987): 53-62; Curtis Carroll Davis, 'A "Gallantress" Gets Her Due: The Earliest Public Notice of Deborah Sampson,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 91 (1982), 319-23; Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

Heroic in History (1841). Although Carlyle's subjects included only heroic men, the broader cultural impulse that he expressed was not so limited. As Barbara Sicherman has demonstrated, even accounts of male heroes could, and often did, serve to arouse the ambitions of readers of the opposite sex. Thus, as a teenager during the early 1870s, M. Carey Thomas (later president of Bryn Mawr College) was inspired by Carlyle's classic work; the fourteen-year-old schoolgirl filled her copybook with quotations from *On Heroes* and claimed that it 'interested' her more than almost 'any book' she had 'ever read.' And for female readers who may not have been entirely satisfied with Carlyle's focus on men, there were, throughout the nineteenth century, numerous full-length biographies and collections of shorter biographical sketches of 'celebrated' or 'heroic' women to provide more direct inspiration.⁹

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Images of female heroism, and of female martyrdom, were also quite prominent in several of the accounts of bold but victimized women in Silas Estabrook's *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*, probably the first compilation of cases of female murder victims published in the United States. Evidently pleased by the public's reception of three somewhat similar pamphlets on the murder of a Boston prostitute that he had produced in late 1845 and early 1846 (one of which went into four editions), Estabrook, a journalist who had recently moved to Boston from New York, decided in 1847 to put together a short compendium of accounts of fifteen 'beautiful' women who suffered violent or sudden deaths, including the sketch of Madame Roland that opened this essay.¹⁰ Intermingling moralism, satire, and social

9. See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*, Norman and Charlotte Strouse Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Barbara Sicherman, 'Reading and Ambition: M. Carey Thomas and Female Heroism,' *American Quarterly* 45 (March 1993): 73-103, with Thomas quoted at 84.

10. There had been many earlier published American compilations of criminal cases but none, to my knowledge, devoted exclusively to cases involving *female* victims; for examples of more general murder or crime compilations, see Morris L. Cohen, *Bibliography of Early American Law*, 6 vols. (Buffalo, N.Y.: William S. Hein & Co., 1998), Entry #3903;

criticism, Estabrook's crime pamphlets of the mid-1840s are striking examples of what literary historian David S. Reynolds has characterized as a vast antebellum literature of 'immoral didacticism' or 'subversive reform.' (Indeed, Estabrook himself occasionally claimed the mantle of populist reformer, insisting in 1848 that a newspaper he briefly edited was 'the friend of the toiling million, and out-and-out for Reform and Progress.') According to Reynolds, publications in the popular tradition of 'subversive reform' regularly combined prurient content with serious social commentary, and often featured provocative depictions of unconventional women that challenged contemporary gender norms.¹¹

3987-90; 4170; 12,100-17; 12,260-68. For more on Estabrook and his three pamphlets on the murder of Maria Bickford, a Boston prostitute, see D. A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace*, 207-12. The portrayals of Bickford in Estabrook's biographies were in some respects similar to those of Helen Jewett by her early pamphlet biographers, as described by Patricia Cline Cohen (discussed and documented in note 53 below). With regard to the multiple editions of Estabrook's *The Life and Death of Mrs. Maria Bickford* (Boston: Published and for Sale by All the Periodical Dealers, 1845), copies from 1846 survive with notices on the front paper cover that identify them as 'SECOND EDITION,—REVISED' and '4th EDITION,—REVISED & CORRECTED.' Estabrook himself at one point claimed that his pamphlet biography of Bickford had been perused by 'not less than one hundred thousand persons' ([Silas Estabrook?], *The Early Love Letters and Later Literary Remains of Maria Bickford* [Boston: Published and for Sale by All Periodical Dealers, 1846], 6). Although that extravagant claim is probably not reliable, the appearance of four editions within the space of less than a year suggests that it was a popular and commercially successful work. Estabrook, about whom very little biographical information is available, seems to have moved from New York City to Boston during the mid-1840s, shortly before producing his pamphlets on the Bickford case. In 1847 or 1848, Estabrook began publishing and editing a weekly newspaper in Boston entitled *Rough and Ready* (of which copies of only a few scattered issues survive). In 1848 his paper supported Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate for president. In that regard, it may be worth noting that several historians have recently suggested that, of the two major political parties during the 1830s and 1840s, the Whigs were more receptive to political voices and active public roles for women; see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Summer 1997): 277-315; Elizabeth R. Varon, 'Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia,' *Journal of American History* 82 (Sept. 1995): 494-521; also see Kirsten E. Wood, "'One Woman So Dangerous to Public Morals': Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Summer 1997): 237-75. I have been able to find no information on Estabrook's life or career after his relatively brief stint as publisher and editor of *Rough and Ready*; indeed, as early as August 5, 1848, Estabrook's name no longer appeared as publisher on that paper's masthead, though he may have continued on for a time as editor (the paper evidently went out of business before the end of the following year).

11. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance; Rough and Ready*, June 10, 1848, 4. The women depicted in *The Lives and Tragic Deaths of Beautiful Females* variously conform, in

Viewed as commodities, Estabrook's pamphlets, priced at 12½ cents per copy, were also part of a veritable explosion of cheap paperbound publications, particularly crime pamphlets and works of romantic fiction, that revolutionized the lower end of America's rapidly expanding book industry during the 1840s.¹² Such pamphlets were typically sold at periodical depots, urban facilities that were first established during the previous decade as warehouses for the storage of newspapers and magazines but that quickly evolved into lively retail outlets for all sorts of cheap publications. According to historians Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray, these depots, typically located in commercial districts or near railroad stations, catered not only, or even primarily, to working-class readers but rather to a wide cross-section of 'people passing through the business, financial, and shopping districts,' including 'genteel shoppers and commuters.' A notice on the front cover of one of the two surviving printings of Estabrook's *Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* indicated that it had been published for, and was sold by, 'all periodical dealers,' placing it squarely in that new world of cheap print for a mass market.¹³

whole or part, to the character types identified by Reynolds as the 'adventure feminist,' the 'woman victim,' the 'feminist criminal,' and the 'sensual woman'; see Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 339–67, *passim*.

12. Notices on the front paper covers of Estabrook's *The Life and Death of Mrs. Maria Bickford*, 4th ed. (Boston: Published and for Sale by All the Periodical Dealers, 1846), *Excentricities & Anecdotes of Albert John Tirrell* (Boston: Published and for Sale by All the Periodical Dealers, 1846), and *Early Love Letters* all indicated that they were sold at 12½ cents per copy; *Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*, published the following year and very similar in format to Estabrook's other three pamphlets, was most likely marketed at the same price (and certainly no higher than 25 cents per copy). To put that price in perspective, Ronald J. Zboray has found that 'prices for hardcover books during the antebellum years commonly ranged between 75 cents and \$1.25' and that, 'while a handful' of paperbacks 'sold for as low as 12½ cents, they usually ranged between 38 and 63 cents.' See Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11–12. Since even an unskilled laborer might expect to receive between 80 and 95 cents a day in Massachusetts during the 1840s, Estabrook's pamphlets would probably have been about as accessible to members of the antebellum working class as cheap, mass-market paperbacks are to working-class readers today. For more detailed discussion and documentation of that claim, see D. A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace*, 327, n. 53.

13. See Zboray, *Fictive People*, 29–34; Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'The Boston Book Trades, 1789–1850: A Statistical and Geographical Analysis,' in Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens, eds., *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700–*

An advertisement on the back of Estabrook's pamphlet provided further hints of its intended audience. The publishers, Jordan and Wiley, announced that they carried 'Annuals [ornately illustrated books of short stories, essays, and poems, often given to genteel young women as gifts], Standard Books [a catchall designation for established, frequently reprinted works of nonfiction and belles lettres] and Juveniles [children's books] *very low* [i.e. at very low prices].' The publishers then provided lengthy descriptions of two of their new publications. The first was a translation of S. Henri Berthoud's *Peter, The Brigand*, originally published in a French family magazine. The author of this 'popular French Romance,' the notice assured American readers, produced works that were 'always entertaining, —often instructive from their historical sketches, but never impure or objectionable.' Jordan and Wiley's second new offering actually included two tales in one volume: Mrs. Hofland's *Blanche Livingstone* and Agnes Strickland's *Ellen Clare*. The 'beautiful tale' of Mrs. Hofland—a popular English author of didactic novels for young people, especially young women—was, according to Jordan and Wiley, 'well worth every daughters [*sic*] study.' The publishers further informed their readers that Agnes Strickland, the English writer of the second tale, was also the author of *Lives of the Queens of England*—a prominent example of the popular nineteenth-century genre of biographies of celebrated women. The paired tales of Hofland and Strickland were, the notice explained, 'issued in excellent print, although in the cheap form.'¹⁴

1850 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997), 258; *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females* (Boston), front cover. The emphasis placed by the Zborays on the probable middle-class patronage of the periodical depots contrasts with the hypotheses of other scholars that cheap, paperbound novels of the nineteenth century (along, presumably, with similarly formatted works of nonfiction) were consumed largely by members of the working class; see, for example, Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London and New York: Verso, 1987), 27–46. My own view is that such cheap pamphlets were often read by members of both the middle and working classes. For one evocative piece of iconographic evidence of a working-class readership for such works, see D. A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace*, 36 (illustration of Lowell mill workers and caption).

14. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females* (Boston), back cover. On the popularity of 'annuals' or 'gift books' in the United States from the 1820s through 1840s, see Samuel G.

Estabrook's audience, then, was a relatively new mass market of American readers, encompassing large portions of both the middle and working classes—and undoubtedly including some members of the upper classes as well. Judging from Jordan and Wiley's advertisement, such readers were generally cost-conscious consumers, eager for cheap entertainment, albeit with at least a veneer of edification (e.g., 'often instructive' but 'never impure') and aesthetic or material quality (e.g., 'excellent print') in deference to their self-conscious moral standards and genteel pretensions. Within that broad mass market, Jordan and Wiley's notice also suggested that the firm was, in this case, particularly targeting younger readers more than older, and perhaps female readers more than male (as implied by the emphasis on female authors, female subjects, and female readers in pitching the tales of Hofland and Strickland). Some additional support for the latter surmise is provided by a graceful contemporary inscription on one of the very few surviving copies of *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*, identifying its owner as 'Sophia E Parker.' Despite that genteel inscription, and Jordan and Wiley's staid advertisement, Estabrook seems to have operated near the seamy lower margins of antebellum Boston's mass-market publishing industry; in fact, the advertisement for such indisputably genteel authors as Mrs. Hofland and Agnes Strickland may have been placed on the back of the pamphlet, in part, to reassure readers of Estabrook's far more dubious claims to literary respectability.¹⁵

Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime, or Men and Things I have Seen*, 2 vols. (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Co., 1857), II:259–64. 'Mrs. Hofland,' whose full name was Barbara (Wrecks) Hoole Hofland (1770–1844), had died a few years before Jordan and Wiley reprinted one of her tales. On the popularity of Agnes Strickland's *Lives of the Queens of England*, particularly among female readers, see Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography & Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 110–11.

15. The copy with the early inscription is in the possession of the author. Somewhere beneath the level of Estabrook and his ilk was an antebellum publishing netherworld of pornographic books and pamphlets, brothel directories, and obscene engravings; for a good introduction to that 'subterranean' world, albeit with particular reference not to Boston but to New York City, see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: Norton, 1992), 143–60 and passim. On the different meanings, and connotations, of the terms 'respectable' and 'gen-

The sketches in *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* ranged from about half a page to six pages in length; the pamphlet as a whole contained less than thirty-two pages of text, along with four striking full-page illustrations on pink-tinted paper, proudly described on the cover of one printing as 'Elegant Portraits!' Several of the sketches were at least loosely based on fact; others were almost certainly pure fiction. The subjects included Helen Jewett, Mary Rogers, and Maria Bickford, three of the most famous American female murder victims of the antebellum period. Most of the other subjects were Americans, but they also included a few foreigners such as Madame Roland. Not all of the fifteen women were actually murdered: six were victims of homicide, narrowly defined; four were executed; two were assassinated with the connivance of political leaders; one drowned; one committed suicide; and one died of 'natural causes,' albeit triggered by emotional distress.¹⁶

Two of the shortest accounts depicted women as passive victims of seduction in conformity with the clichés of early Anglo-American sentimental fiction.¹⁷ Abby Hopkins was described as a cler-

teel' (and their cognates) in antebellum usage, see Daniel A. Cohen, 'The Respectability of Rebecca Reed: Genteel Womanhood and Sectarian Conflict in Antebellum America,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Fall 1996): 419-61, esp. 423-35. In brief, the term 'respectable' tended to refer to laudatory moral or religious traits, while 'genteel' denoted refined material or aesthetic qualities and accomplishments.

16. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*. It was the edition with the 'Boston' imprint that included four full-paged illustrations on pink-tinted paper, along with the notice on the front cover; the 'Boston and New York' edition included only two engravings on tinted paper, with the other two large engravings shifted to the front and back covers. I have found no documentation to verify the existence of the following subjects included in the pamphlet: Antoinette Delplaine, Abby Hopkins, Genevieve Burrill, Victorine Greaves, Elvira Jane Stevens, Janet Steele, Rosalie Phillips, and Anna Little. However, since Estabrook sometimes loosely based his sketches on real women with different names (as in the cases of Amaretta de Perez/Charlotte Corday and Charlotte Forrest/Ann H. Judson discussed below), it is quite possible that one or more of those sketches was based on an actual person as yet unidentified.

17. The scholarly literature on English and American sentimental fiction is vast and ever expanding; for several classic treatments, see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), esp. 83-150; Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 122-85; Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), esp. 135-238; Helen Waite Papashvily, *All the Happy Endings: A Study of the Domestic Novel in*

gyman's daughter from Vermont who was 'seduced' by a 'scoundrel' and abandoned in Boston, where she committed suicide. Similarly, Genevieve Burrill was a poor young woman from New Hampshire who went to work at a factory in Lowell, where she was seduced by a 'libertine' and began to 'sicken and pine her life away.' She finally died when 'her anxiety burst a blood vessel appertain[ing] to the heart.' A few of the other women, including Helen Jewett and Maria Bickford, were depicted as more aggressive sexual transgressors who were murdered by jealous men. All of those women, both sentimental victims and sexual transgressors, were among the first nine cases presented in the compilation.¹⁸

However, the last six women depicted in Estabrook's collection were very different. In none of those cases did Estabrook attribute the deaths to sexual transgressions; in all of them, the women demonstrated conventionally masculine virtues, such as physical courage and strong political conviction; and in all six cases, the subjects were either executed or assassinated in a context of social or political conflict. Amaretta De Perez was the daughter of a slave trader who tried to assassinate Thomas Paine in order to rescue her country from 'the establishment of an atheistical monarchy'; however, she killed the wrong man by mistake and was executed for her crime. Charlotte Forrest was a former prostitute who became a Baptist missionary in Rangoon and was executed by the king there in the wake of a British invasion. Madame Roland was imprisoned and executed during the French Revolution. Margaret Lambrun was a servant of Mary, Queen of Scots; she disguised herself as a man, tried to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, and was later killed by a 'court assassin.' Rosalie Phillips was a cross-dressing female pirate from Cuba who was executed after murdering a Mississippi planter to prevent him from beating a fe-

America (New York: Harper, 1956); Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (1940; reprint New York: Pageant Books, 1959); Robert Palfrey Utter and Gwendolyn Bridges Needham, *Pamela's Daughters* (New York: MacMillan, 1936).

18. See *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 11-24; the first sketch in the pamphlet, occupying pages 5-10, did not fully conform to either of those patterns.

male slave to death. Lastly, Anna Little was a paramour and brilliant mesmeric adviser to Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism; after instigating an attempt to assassinate Governor Boggs of Missouri, she was herself assassinated by the same mob that killed Smith.¹⁹

Despite some satirical elements, those last six sketches generally adopted laudatory stances toward their subjects. The narratives particularly praised them for their physical courage and political or religious conviction, comparing their exploits favorably to those of men and women of valor in the classical and Christian traditions. Having already described the pamphlet's treatment of Madame Roland, three additional examples will suffice. Amaretta de Perez was the daughter of a Brazilian slave dealer who settled in Charleston, South Carolina, before the American Revolution. Alarmed by the 'sudden spread of infidelity' during the 1770s, she developed an intense hatred of Thomas Paine and traveled to Philadelphia to assassinate him. Unfortunately, she murdered 'a broom manufacturer of the same name' by mistake, and was tried and executed for the crime without ever realizing her error. To the end, she remained convinced that she had 'rid the world of a sanguinary monster.' Although some viewed her as an assassin, others saw her as a 'heroine,' and all acknowledged her sincerity. The text even compared Perez to two courageous ancient Romans who also acted on their convictions with lethal violence: 'If Lucretia was right in sacrificing herself for her country, Amaretta could not have been wrong in sacrificing herself to God—if Brutus did a deed of glory by striking Caesar to the heart, this female, in the light of humanity, was not to be censured,—for infidelity mocks at virtue, and is ever eager to deluge a christian land in blood.'²⁰

Charlotte Forrest was the long-time inmate of a Baltimore brothel who was inspired by an angelic vision to become a Christian missionary. On board a ship bound to Burma, she married a

19. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 26–36.

20. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 26–27.

sailor who joined her in the pious enterprise. When the British invaded Burma in 1834 [*sic*; 1824?], her husband was arrested as a suspected spy. Somewhat like Madame Roland before her, Forrest tried to intervene with the authorities to procure her husband's release, but the enraged Burmese king ordered the execution of both husband and wife. 'She was enlightened, pious, and brave,' the account concluded, 'a meteor from the shambles of disgrace, she took up the cross and bore it admirably.' Much as the pamphlet compared Amaretta de Perez to Lucretia and Brutus, so did it equate Charlotte Forrest to two early female Christian saints and martyrs. 'If she had lived in legendary instead of historical times,' the text declared, 'she would have ranked with St. Agnes and St. Cecilia.' The reformed prostitute-turned-missionary was 'chivalrous and romantic' and 'marched fearlessly on to the death.' She was, in short, just the sort of heroic martyr to be emulated by American women: 'May the daughters of our country be as useful, and die with as pure a soul as Charlotte Forrest.'²¹

If Estabrook's accounts of Madame Roland and Charlotte Forrest were typical expressions of nineteenth-century 'heroic feminism,' his sketch of a female pirate and murderess neatly illustrated 'transgressive feminism,' its disreputable ideological cousin. In 'Rosalie Philips, The Terror of the Seas,' Estabrook presented his readers with the remarkable history of 'a young and beautiful female' who—despite 'a character distinguished for every vice that can disgrace humanity'—displayed 'the most daring, though brutal courage.' Born in Cuba, Phillips was disguised as a boy by her mother, and early in life displayed 'strength,' a 'manly disposition,' and a 'passion for wild adventure.' Garbed as a man, she initially enlisted in the Spanish navy and then traveled to Italy, where she served with 'great enthusiasm and intrepidity'

21. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 28–29. On the status of missionary work as a widely praised female vocation, often memorialized in published biographies, that allowed nineteenth-century women an unusual measure of 'self-assertion,' see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 140–41; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Mission for Life: The Story of the Family of Adoniram Judson* (New York: Free Press, 1980), 12–19, 79–106.

in one of the Pope's regiments. Later she joined a crew of Portuguese pirates, with whom she seized about a dozen merchant vessels. After marrying an American sailor, she and her husband obtained work as 'slave drivers' for a Mississippi planter. But she soon murdered her cruel employer in order to prevent him from beating a 'slave girl' to death. Phillips fled the scene but was later apprehended, confessed to the crime, declared her willingness to die for 'ridding the earth' of 'a monster,' and was executed.²²

It is impossible to identify a single, coherent ideological message that dominates Silas Estabrook's *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* in its entirety. Sentimental images of seduced victims, arguably misogynistic accounts of female sexual predators, and inspirational sketches of heroic and transgressive women are all represented in the flamboyant pamphlet. The attempt to discern coherent meaning amid the hodge-podge of inconsistent images is further complicated by satirical elements in some of the vignettes, as in Amaretta de Perez's humorously bungled assassination of a broom manufacturer in place of a revolutionary iconoclast. As David S. Reynolds has demonstrated, such mixed messages, pervasive ambivalence, and playful eclecticism were actually typical of antebellum America's popular literature of 'subversive reform.'²³ Nonetheless, the sequence of biographical sketches in Estabrook's compilation is certainly suggestive. The impact of the accounts of Madame Roland, Amaretta de Perez, Charlotte Forrest, and Rosalie Phillips (along with two others somewhat like them) was magnified by their being clustered together at the end of the pamphlet. That organization ensured that the thematic movement of the compendium as a whole was from the private to the public, from the personal to the political, from seduction to sedition, from stereotypically feminine vices to conventionally masculine virtues, and from ephemeral 'objects' of

22. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 32-34. The concepts of 'heroic feminism' and 'transgressive feminism' are defined near the outset—and again near the end—of this essay. It should be noted that, as an example of 'heroic feminism,' Estabrook's sketch of Charlotte Forrest was *not* typical in depicting its heroine's early life as a prostitute.

23. See Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, 54-91, 169-224, and 337-67, *passim*.

pity or reproach to inspiring historical 'subjects' worthy of admiration, if not emulation. The ideological momentum generated by those closing sketches was only slightly checked by a somewhat ambivalent caveat slipped in at the end of the narrative of Amaretta de Perez:

Though there are many acts of a high character, of doubtful morality, they are exceptions to the ordinary rules which govern humanity, and are not dangerous [*sic*] as examples. The scriptures abound in similar acts of retribution, sanctioned by God himself. But let those who praise them consider that such deeds, if to be admired, are not to be imitated, and thank heaven there are but few occasions that will call them forth.²⁴

* * *

Any simple ideological interpretation of Estabrook's pamphlet is further complicated by the fact that several of its 'historical' sketches were actually taken from Samuel L. Knapp's *Female Biography; Containing Notices of Distinguished Women, in Different Nations and Ages* (1834). Estabrook's plagiarism of those sketches does, however, serve to confirm his cheap murder pamphlet's surprising kinship to a very popular and far more respectable Anglo-American genre: nineteenth-century biographical compendia of 'celebrated women.' Although a few such works had already appeared in England and the United States by the late eighteenth century, they seem to have become particularly popular after about 1830—that is, during the decades immediately surrounding the formal inception of America's modern women's rights movement. Dozens of biographical collections, including reprints or translations of British or European works, were published in the United States throughout the antebellum period—sometimes addressed to children, in other cases directed to a more general, largely middle-class, audience of readers, especially women.²⁵

24. *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 27. As discussed and documented below, this caveat was actually plagiarized from Samuel L. Knapp's *Female Biography*.

25. Aside from Knapp's collection, other examples of the genre include Mary Pilkington, *A Mirror for the Female Sex* (London, 1798; reprint Hartford, Conn.: Hudson and Goodwin, for Oliver D. and I. Cooke, 1799); Mary Hays, *Female Biography; or Memoirs of*

Knapp, a lawyer, politician, and literary entrepreneur from Newburyport, Massachusetts, drew on many earlier individual biographies and biographical collections in putting together his own compendium; indeed, his sketches of Margaret Lambrun and Madame Roland (later plagiarized by Estabrook) were both likely derived from an earlier English compilation.²⁶ Knapp's *Female Bi-*

Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries, 3 vols. (London, 1803; reprint Philadelphia: Birch and Small, 1807); Mrs. [Anna Brownell] Jameson, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, 2 vols. (London, 1831; reprint New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832); 'An American Lady,' *Sketches of the Lives of Distinguished Females, Written for Girls* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833) [cited hereafter as *Sketches of the Lives*]; Madame Junot, *Memoirs of Celebrated Women of All Countries*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1835; orig. publ. [in French] Paris, 1833); Samuel G. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*, Twentieth Thousand (Boston, 1844; reprint Boston: Higgins and Bradley, 1857) [all subsequent citations are to the 1857 edition]; Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution*, 3 vols. (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848-50); J. Clement, ed., *Noble Deeds of American Women; With Biographical Sketches of Some of the More Prominent* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Geo. H. Derby and Co., 1851); Mary E. Hewitt, ed., *Heroines of History* (New York: Cornish, Lamport & Co., 1852); Henry C. Watson, *Heroic Women of History* (Philadelphia: Leary and Getz, 1857). For perceptive scholarly discussions of that American genre, or of individual examples, see Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, esp. 106-19 and 158-78; Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 214-39; Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 105-20 and 167-82; Baym, 'Onward Christian Women: Sarah J. Hale's History of the World,' *New England Quarterly* 63 (June 1990): 249-70; Scott E. Casper, 'An Uneasy Marriage of Sentiment and Scholarship: Elizabeth F. Ellet and the Domestic Origins of American Women's History,' *Journal of Women's History* 4 (Fall 1992): 10-35; Linda K. Kerber, 'History Can Do It No Justice: Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution,' in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 3-42; Susan P. Conrad, *Perish the Thought: Intellectual Women in Romantic America, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 93-133. On similar biographical sketches in the most popular women's magazine of the antebellum period, see Laura McCall, "'The Reign of Brute Force is Now Over': A Content Analysis of *Godey's Lady's Book*, 1830-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 (Summer 1989): 231-32; Janice Hume, 'Defining the Historic American Heroine: Changing Characteristics of Heroic Women in Nineteenth-Century Media,' *Journal of Popular Culture* 31 (Summer 1997): 1-21. On the parallel British genre, see Rohan Maitzen, "'This Feminine Preserve": Historical Biographies by Victorian Women,' *Victorian Studies* 38 (Spring 1995): 371-93. The authors/editors of nineteenth-century collections of female biography often privileged female readers in their texts, or even on their title pages; thus, for example, the anonymous 'American Lady' who wrote *Sketches of the Lives of Distinguished Female* (1833) explicitly stated in her subtitle that the book had been 'Written for Girls.'

26. Compare Hays, *Female Biography*, II:463-64 and III:307-421, passim, to Knapp, *Female Biography*, 290-91 and 434-40. Unlike Estabrook, Knapp freely acknowledged the many earlier works, including Mary Hays's *Female Biography*, that he relied on in putting together his collection (see Knapp, *Female Biography*, [502]); however, he did not generally specify the source(s) for individual sketches. For more on Knapp's method as a biographical compiler, see McClary, 'Samuel Lorenzo Knapp.'

ography came to more than 500 pages in length and consisted of dozens of alphabetically arranged sketches that ranged from brief paragraphs on several of his more obscure subjects to over twenty pages on a few of his favorites; it seems to have been one of Knapp's most popular works, appearing in at least seven editions between 1833 and 1868.²⁷

Estabrook's accounts of Amaretta de Perez, Charlotte Forrest, Madame Roland, and Margaret Lambrun (in sequence, four of the last six sketches in his pamphlet) were all derived, to varying degrees, from Samuel Knapp's volume. Although the first half of Estabrook's sketch of Amaretta de Perez, the Brazilian slave dealer's daughter who attempted to assassinate Thomas Paine, was probably concocted by Estabrook himself, much of the second half of the account (recounting her arrest, trial, and execution, and including the cautionary ideological caveat noted above) was taken from Knapp's sketch of Charlotte Corday, the assassin of the radical French revolutionary leader Jean Paul Marat. Estabrook thus playfully drew upon the account of a notorious female character of the French Revolution, well known to antebellum readers, in order to fill out his improbable story of a fictitious American analogue. Estabrook's sketch of Charlotte Forrest was a thinly disguised plagiarism of Knapp's account of the early republic's most celebrated female missionary: Ann H. Judson, a figure quite familiar to antebellum readers of female biography. The main substantive differences between Estabrook's Charlotte

27. Knapp, *Female Biography*. For the seven editions of *Female Biography*, see *The National Union Catalogue: Pre-1956 Imprints*, 754 vols. (London/Chicago: Mansell, 1968-81) [cited hereafter as *NUC*], 300:17. For the best, and most sympathetic, discussion of Knapp's career as a popular biographer, see McClary, 'Samuel Lorenzo Knapp'; for a less flattering assessment, see Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-37), 10:452. In contrast to Estabrook's inexpensive murder pamphlets (typically priced at 12 1/2 cents each), cloth-bound reprints of Knapp's volume were sold during the 1840s and 1850s for \$1.00 or \$1.25, placing them beyond the easy reach of many working-class consumers. See O. A. Roorbach, comp., *Bibliotheca Americana. Catalogue of American Publications . . . from 1820 to 1848, Inclusive* (New York: Orville A. Roorbach, 1849), 158; Roorbach, comp., *Supplement to the Bibliotheca Americana* (New York: O. A. Roorbach, Jr., May, 1855), 109. During the 1840s, unskilled laborers in Massachusetts typically earned 80 to 95 cents a day; for more details and documentation on the issues of pricing and affordability, see note 12 above.

Forrest and Knapp's Ann Judson were the former's disreputable past as a Baltimore prostitute (in contrast to Judson's genteel upbringing in Massachusetts), her marriage to a sailor (in contrast to Judson's marriage to a clergyman), and Forrest's assassination by the king of Burma (in contrast to Judson's death of a fever). Almost every word of Estabrook's sketch of Madame Roland was plagiarized from Knapp's somewhat longer treatment of the French Revolution's 'martyr of liberty.' Finally, Estabrook's account of Margaret Lambrun, the attempted assassin of Queen Elizabeth, was also lifted verbatim from Knapp's work; the sole variation was a single sentence at the very end of Estabrook's sketch which claimed that Lambrun, who had (by all accounts) been pardoned by the English queen, was subsequently murdered 'by a court assassin.' That spurious denouement was presumably tacked on by Estabrook in order to make Lambrun's story conform to the central unifying theme of his pamphlet: the violent deaths of 'beautiful females.'²⁸

As it turns out, then, many of the most striking affirmations of female heroism and martyrdom in Estabrook's racy pamphlet—such as the praise of Madame Roland as a 'martyr of liberty,' the

28. Knapp, *Female Biography*, 151–53, 278–82, 290–91, 434–40; *Lives and Deaths of Beautiful Females*, 26–32. The four plagiarized sketches appear together toward the end of the Estabrook pamphlet, and the last two sketches were cribbed with fewer divergences from Knapp's text than the first two, as if Estabrook was rushing to fill out his pamphlet while preparing it for press. The fact that the 'Boston and New York' edition of his pamphlet includes an illustration (at page 36) of a woman identified as 'Charlotte Corday' (someone not discussed anywhere in the text, but the historical figure on whom Estabrook based his fanciful sketch of Amaretta de Perez) suggests the sloppiness with which the pamphlet was concocted. Perhaps Estabrook originally intended to include a sketch of Corday but decided at the last minute to substitute Perez. In addition, that he or his compositor confused Charlotte Corday with Charlotte Forrest (his fictionalized substitute for Ann Judson) is suggested by the illustration's garbled caption in that edition; by contrast, in the 'Boston' edition, the illustration's subject is correctly identified in the caption as Forrest (see front cover of 'Boston' edition). For other antebellum accounts of Charlotte Corday, see Junot, *Memoirs of Celebrated Women*, I:173–84; Watson, *Heroic Women of History*, 359–67. For the life of Ann Judson, and its many literary representations in antebellum America, see Brumberg, *Mission for Life*, 14–19, 79–106; James D. Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah* (Boston: Lincoln & Edmands, 1829). While less common than accounts of Roland, Corday, and Judson, sketches of Margaret Lambrun also occasionally appeared in antebellum periodicals; see, for example, *Weekly Magazine* [Boston], July 4, 1818, 134; *Atkinson's Casket* [Philadelphia], 6 (1831), 137–38.

comparisons of Amaretta de Perez to Lucretia and Brutus, and the equation of Charlotte Forrest to St. Agnes and St. Cecilia—were actually lifted verbatim from Samuel Knapp's far more dignified compilation. Yet the sketches that Estabrook chose to borrow were by no means typical of Knapp's volume, which showed a marked preference for literary subjects over political assassins or other heroic martyrs. For example, Knapp's three longest biographies all dealt with female authors: he devoted twenty pages to Hannah Adams, a New England historian; about thirty pages to Francisca Anna Pascalis Canfield, an American author and poet; and more than twenty-five pages to Anne Radcliffe, the English Gothic novelist. Knapp also seemed to embrace many aspects of the dominant antebellum gender ideology of domesticity or separate spheres. Though an advocate of improved educational opportunities for women, he argued that it would be 'worse than idle to urge a similarity of pursuits' between the sexes and endorsed the 'conclusion' of the celebrated nineteenth-century American poet, Lydia H. Sigourney, 'that the sexes are intended for different spheres.' Indeed, according to the most perceptive modern scholar of Knapp's oeuvre, *Female Biography* displayed an 'almost monomaniacal emphasis on motherhood.' However, by lifting four atypical sketches from Knapp's volume, and then altering three of them to further suit his own central themes of female transgression, heroism, and martyrdom, Silas Estabrook conveyed rather different messages concerning woman's 'proper sphere.'²⁹

In fact, despite the direct borrowing from Samuel Knapp, Estabrook's pamphlet was thematically and ideologically closer to several other compilations of female biography produced by male authors during the mid-nineteenth century. For example, in 1844, Samuel G. Goodrich, one of the most prolific authors of didactic books for middle-class children in nineteenth-century

29. Knapp, *Female Biography*, vii–viii, [13]–33 (Adams), 109–38 (Canfield), 406–31 (Radcliffe); McClary, 'Samuel Lorenzo Knapp,' 53. Nineteenth-century gender ideology, and Sigourney's views concerning proper gender roles, are discussed further below.

America, issued a work entitled *Lives of Celebrated Women*. It was, like Knapp's *Female Biography*, a much more substantial and genteel production than Estabrook's paperbound pamphlet, over 300 pages in length and typically bound in attractive gilt-embossed cloth. And it appears to have been even more of a commercial success than Knapp's work; by 1860, American publishers had produced about a dozen printings or editions and over twenty thousand copies of Goodrich's compilation.³⁰

Given the many obvious differences between Estabrook's pamphlet and Goodrich's genteel volume, the underlying similarities in structure and message are all the more striking. Despite the disparity in length, Goodrich presented biographical sketches of only seventeen women (including two sisters combined in a single chapter), just two more than treated by Estabrook. Also, in contrast to Knapp's alphabetically-organized collection, there seems to have been a clear thematic trajectory in Goodrich's sequence of biographical sketches—one similar to that in Estabrook's pamphlet. Among the first eleven subjects were Lucretia and Margaret Davidson, two sentimental poets from upstate New York, both of whom died young; Abigail Adams and Martha Washington, wives of American presidents; Hannah More and Mrs. Barbauld, two didactic English authors and educators; and Empress Josephine and Marie Antoinette, two wives of European rulers. Although all of those women certainly were exceptional and even unconventional in various ways, their status or accomplishments—as respectable authors, educators of children, and loyal wives—could be reconciled without too much trouble to conventional antebellum gender norms. By contrast, the accom-

30. See S. G. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*, t.p. On the numerous editions of that work, see *NUC*, 206:445–46. Goodrich wrote most of his children's books under the pseudonym 'Peter Parley'; for more on his life and publications, see S. G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime*. Two editions of Goodrich's *Lives of Celebrated Women* (published during the 1840s and 1850s) retailed for \$.67 and \$1.00, respectively; the former edition was likely paperbound. See Roorbach, *Bibliotheca Americana*, 118; Roorbach, *Addenda to the Bibliotheca Americana* (New York: Wiley & Halsted, 1858), 90. Even the cheaper edition of Goodrich's *Lives* cost several times more than Estabrook's much shorter pamphlets, probably placing Goodrich's work, like Knapp's similar volume, beyond the easy reach of many working-class readers.

plishments of five of the last six women sketched in Goodrich's compendium were more blatantly transgressive of nineteenth-century gender boundaries. They included Madame Roland (the only direct overlap with Estabrook's collection); Mary, Queen of Scots; Elizabeth, Queen of England; Isabella of Spain; and, finally, Joan of Arc.³¹

At various points, Goodrich depicted those female political and military leaders (three of whom suffered violent deaths) as adopting conventionally masculine roles and behaviors. For example, he described Madame Roland as speaking "with the freedom and courage of a great man"; claimed that Queen Isabella not only showed 'courage and undaunted perseverance' in wartime but actually 'governed Castile as the real sovereign,' with her husband acquiescing 'in her measures'; and noted how the 'martial propensities' of Joan of Arc culminated in her 'heroic defence' of Orleans. Perhaps most striking was Goodrich's description of the liberatory impact of the French Revolution on the consciousness of Madame Roland. 'But the truth was, that her life at Paris [during the early stages of the Revolution] had opened a new prospect to Madame Roland, and excited new desires in her bosom,' he explained. 'Her activity and enthusiasm longed to employ themselves upon a grand theatre, and she panted to become great, as Plutarch's heroes were great, and to go down to posterity as one of the founders of her country's freedom.'³²

Further, while Goodrich's biographical subjects were, as a group, far less flamboyant in their transgressions than Estabrook's, the respectable pedagogue actually offered a far more explicit and forceful justification for their violations of gender norms. Like Estabrook's brief and ambiguous disclaimer (plagia-

31. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*.

32. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*, 277, 284, 341-42, and 349-50. For an example of Goodrich praising a woman for her effective assumption of a masculine role even while condemning her for violating moral standards applicable to both sexes, see his final assessment of Queen Elizabeth: '... though a tyrannical and selfish monarch, she must be ranked as among the best sovereigns of her time' (338). It should be noted, however, that some of Goodrich's specific criticisms of Queen Elizabeth probably do reflect gender stereotypes (e.g., his emphasis on her vanity).

rized from Knapp's *Female Biography*), it too was based on the notion that extraordinary individuals might justly adopt behaviors that violated or transcended social conventions. In contrast to Knapp, however, Goodrich seemed to allow considerably greater social space and ideological legitimacy for such exceptions to the norm. As he explained in the book's preface:

It may indeed be true that the *happiness* of women is generally to be found in the quiet of the domestic circle; but that all, without distinction, should be confined to it, and that whenever one of the sex departs from it, she departs from her allotted sphere, is no more true than a similar proposition would be of men. . . . If woman is only to be a housewife, why are gifts bestowed upon her, that make her often the rival, and sometimes the *master*, of the other sex, even in the higher walks of ambition? . . . Why had Sévigné such a magic pen, Roland so noble and dauntless a soul, the maid of Saragossa [Joan of Arc] a patriotism so inspired and inspiring, if they were designed by their Creator only to preside over the nursery, the dairy, and the kitchen? . . . While we repeat that, in general, women consult their true dignity and happiness by seeking a quiet domestic career, we still maintain that such among them as have endowments suited to exert a happy influence upon mankind at large, are as truly fulfilling their duty and their destiny, by giving them scope, as are the other sex in doing the same under the like circumstances.³³

There is some evidence that a willingness to endorse public and political roles for women was more than an abstract commitment for Samuel Goodrich and his family. During the 1830s and early 1840s, Goodrich became actively involved in Whig electioneering in his adopted state of Massachusetts, winning election to both houses of the state legislature, and stumping ardently for the Whig ticket in the presidential contest of 1840. His choice of party affiliation may itself have been a significant indicator of his gender attitudes: historians in recent years have argued that the antebellum Whig Party was significantly more receptive to political roles for women than were the rival Democrats. Indeed, Samuel Goodrich's wife seems to have played an active role in the

33. Goodrich, *Lives of Celebrated Women*, [5]-6.

election of 1840, presiding, for example, over a picnic organized by Whig women in Quincy, Massachusetts, attended by 3,000 supporters. The *Boston Post*, a Democratic newspaper, offered backhanded praise for Mrs. Goodrich's efforts, saying that 'she would make a better member of Congress than her husband.' The Democratic press also ridiculed the opposition's embrace of female activism, claiming that Whig men had been asked 'to remain at home and take care of the little whiggings.' Undaunted by such sarcasm, Samuel Goodrich publicly attacked the Democratic editors for trying to 'ridicule women out of the field of political influence,' claiming that female influence tended to 'substitute truth for falsehood, prosperity for ruin, the reign of reason for the dominion of party.' Goodrich's literary praise for such strong public and political women as Madame Roland, Queen Isabella, and Joan of Arc was thus paralleled, albeit on a more modest stage, by his own—and his wife's—political activism.³⁴

* * *

Samuel G. Goodrich's tolerant, even laudatory, depictions of women who appropriated such stereotypically masculine roles or attributes as political leadership, physical courage, and military prowess differed significantly from the stances typically adopted by female compilers of antebellum accounts of celebrated women. Take, for example, Anna Jameson's two-volume *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns* (1831), an extremely popular English compilation that appeared in at least ten American printings or editions between 1832 and 1900. Its author has been described as a 'British feminist' and 'liberal reformer'—and, with respect to one of her later works, as a source of inspiration for the early

34. Much of this discussion, including the quotes, is drawn from Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press During the 1840s,' *Journal of American Studies* 34 (Dec. 2000): 413–46, quoted at 429 and 433. I am very grateful to the Zborays for providing me with an advance copy of their article. On Whig gender attitudes more generally, see also works cited in note 10, above. For Goodrich's own recollections of his political activism during the 1830s and early 1840s (albeit with no reference to his wife's role), see Goodrich, *Recollections*, II: 339–54.

American feminist Sarah Grimké. Yet despite the collection's title and its author's 'liberal' social views, Jameson seemed more inclined to deprecate the characters and accomplishments of her subjects than to 'celebrate' them. Indeed, her generally dismissive assessment of female rulers must have been deflating to many female readers seeking inspiration from the great of their own sex. 'On the whole, it seems indisputable that the experiments hitherto made in the way of female government have been signally unfortunate; and that women called to empire have been, in most cases, conspicuously unhappy or criminal,' Jameson concluded in her preface. 'So that, were we to judge by the past, it might be decided at once, that the power which belongs to us, as a sex, is not properly or naturally that of the sceptre or the sword.'³⁵

The anonymous 'American Lady' who produced *Sketches of the Lives of Distinguished Females* (1833) also disparaged the accomplishments of female monarchs, invidiously contrasting the 'dazzling' and 'politically great' to the 'useful' and 'practically good.' After debunking a series of famous female sovereigns, including Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, the author turned away, with palpable relief, from the public (masculine) realm of pomp and power to 'the biographies of women in private life, among whom there is found more piety, more true excellence, and more exalted models of what women should be.' Her last four sketches, occupying more than half of the text, celebrated the lives of Elizabeth Smith, a translator and author; Lucretia Maria Davidson, a poet; Isabella Graham, an educator and founder of charitable institutions; and Ann Judson, the celebrated missionary to Burma. The thematic and ideological trajectory of the volume

35. Jameson, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, I:xix. On the many printings or editions of Jameson's work in the United States, see *NUC*, 277:28-29; for more evidence of its popularity among American female readers, see Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 110. For the characterizations of Jameson as a 'British feminist' and 'liberal reformer,' and for the influence of one of her later works on Sarah Grimké, see Elizabeth Ann Bartlett, ed., *Sarah Grimké: Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988), 154, quoted; Gerda Lerner, 'Comment on Lerner's "Sarah M. Grimké's "Sisters of Charity,""' *Signs* 10 (Summer 1985): 811-15.

was, then, the reverse of that adopted by Goodrich in his later collection; the 'American Lady' moved from largely hostile sketches of females who exercised political and military power to laudatory treatments of women devoted to literary, educational, charitable, and religious pursuits.³⁶

A similar trajectory was evident in a sequence of three volumes of female biography produced by Lydia Maria Child during the early 1830s, the first installments of her *Ladies' Family Library*. The initial volume in Child's series, published in 1832, consisted of long sketches of two highly unconventional French women: Madame De Staël and Madame Roland. In her treatment of Madame Roland, however, Child placed relatively little emphasis on the French martyr's political assertiveness and public courage, and greater emphasis on Roland's subordination of her talents to the needs of her husband. As Deborah Pickman Clifford, a modern biographer of Child, has put it, Child's Roland was 'the epitome of the selfless woman' and 'a discreet wife who knew her place.' That preference for female self-abnegation was even more evident in the two subsequent volumes in Child's series, *The Biographies of Lady Russell, and Madame Guyon* (1832) and *Good Wives* (1833). According to Carolyn L. Karcher, another recent Child biographer, those two works continued 'the trend toward more conventional images of women' established in the first volume's sketch of Madame Roland. In *Good Wives*, Child went so far as to characterize 'loyalty to her husband' as 'the only politics which belong to woman.' Clifford and Karcher each suggest that Child's embrace of conventional female roles in those publications reflected both a practical desire to 'maximize sales' and an unre-

36. *Sketches of the Lives*, xii and 58; this work is discussed in Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 109-111. In regard to Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots, 'An American Lady' concluded that 'the faults of both have been glossed over [by previous biographers], while their virtues have been exaggerated' (47). Note that the 'American Lady' adopted a broad conception of 'private life' that encompassed the careers of authors, educators, philanthropists, and missionaries. It should be noted as well that Samuel Goodrich also lavished praise on female authors, educators, and other 'non-political' women.

solved personal or psychological 'tension between Child's allegiance to domestic ideology and her marked deviations from it.'³⁷

Perhaps the most sweeping and dogmatic contrast to Goodrich's ideological stance is provided by Lydia H. Sigourney's introduction to Jesse Clement's *Noble Deeds of American Women* (1851). Clement's compilation consisted of literally dozens of celebratory accounts of physical courage and martial valor on the part of American women, organized into short chapters with such evocative titles as 'A Kentucky Amazon,' 'Heroism of Scoharie Women,' 'Bold Exploit of a Young Girl,' 'Female Intrepidity,' and 'The Heroine of Shell's Bush.'³⁸ Yet Sigourney's introduction appeared to be at war with the implications of the anecdotes themselves. While affirming the worthiness of womankind, Sigourney seemed far more committed than Goodrich to the proposition that woman's 'best happiness and true glory' were to be 'found in her own peculiar sphere.' Sigourney articulated the popular domestic ideology of 'republican motherhood' and repudiated the women's 'rights' movement then in its infancy. Women's 'participation in the pursuits, exposures, and honors appertaining to men' would only distract them from their 'home duties and affections' and thereby 'profit neither man, woman, nor the rising race.' Nothing should be done that might sacrifice or transmute

37. See Mrs [Lydia Maria] Child, *The Biographies of Madame De Staël, and Madame Roland* (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1832); Child, *The Biographies of Lady Russell, and Madame Guyon* (Boston: Carter, Hendee, 1832); Child, *Good Wives* (Boston: Carter, Hendee, 1833); Deborah Pickman Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom: A Life of Lydia Maria Child* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 85-87; Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 146-48. It should be noted that the two subsequent volumes in the *Ladies' Family Library* were Child's *The History of the Condition of Women, in Various Ages and Nations*, 2 vols. (Boston: John Allen, 1835), which became a major source for such classic works of early feminist theory as Sarah Grimké's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes, and the Condition of Woman* (1838) and Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Yet, according to Carolyn Karcher, even *The History of the Condition of Women* reflected Child's 'excruciating conflicts' between 'her impulse to rebel against her culture's restrictions on her freedom and her effort to live up to its crippling ideal of the "good wife."' Karcher, *First Woman in the Republic*, 220-25, quoted at 220.

38. Clement, *Noble Deeds of American Women*, 118-19, 221-22, 266-67, 361, 435-36, and passim.

'the innate delicacy and prerogative of woman, *as woman.*' God himself, Sigourney insisted, had assigned woman not to be 'a wrestler, a prize-fighter, [or] a ruler,' but rather, a 'helper' to man. Since 'the unerring Creator has assigned different spheres of actions to the sexes,' the 'true nobility of Woman' was 'to keep her own sphere, and adorn it.' That Sigourney and Goodrich, two close social acquaintances and literary collaborators from southern New England, should have drawn such different lessons from accounts of celebrated women, confirms that the latter's views were by no means uncontested in antebellum middlebrow culture—even in the realm of female biography.³⁹

Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century biographical compilations of celebrated women further confirms that the attitudes and preferences of Sigourney, Child, Jameson, and the 'American Lady' were typical of most of the female authors who produced such works. For example, Scott E. Casper argues that Elizabeth Ellet's *History of the Women of the American Revolution* 'reinforced nineteenth-century cultural ideas about women's "appropriate sphere of home."' Nina Baym suggests that the 'numerous published compendia of celebrated women' produced by American female authors after 1820 were animated by a 'hybrid Enlighten-

39. Lydia H. Sigourney, 'Introduction,' in Clement, *Noble Deeds of American Women*, xx–xxiii. On Sigourney's relationship with Goodrich, see Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime*, II:125 and 274. Many sections of Clement's compilation were borrowed verbatim from Elizabeth F. Ellet's three-volume work, *The Women of the American Revolution*. Several of the scholarly works cited in note 25 above discuss Ellet's biographical compilations; see also Philip Gould, "'Homely Heroism': Gender, Politics, and Publicity in Elizabeth Ellet's *History of the Women of the American Revolution (1843–50)*' (unpublished paper, 19th Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1997). For the most balanced and sympathetic account of Lydia Sigourney and her career, see Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History*, 151–66; for a very different view, see Ann Douglas Wood, 'Mrs. Sigourney and the Sensibility of the Inner Space,' *New England Quarterly* 45 (June 1972): 163–81. For the classic scholarly formulations of the ideology of 'republican womanhood,' see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Kerber, 'The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective,' *American Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1976): 187–205; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980); for a challenge to those formulations, see Margaret Nash, 'Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Spring 1997): 171–91.

ment-Victorian ideology' that embraced 'the notion of a separate woman's culture undergirded by a distinctively female mentality.' According to Baym, even such radical feminists as Margaret Fuller tended to read their biographical subjects 'according to the domestic gender allegories and sentimental fictions of the mid-nineteenth century.' Along similar lines, Rohan Maitzen concludes that nineteenth-century British 'historical biographies' of women by female authors 'participated in the codification and dissemination' of 'Victorian gender ideology'; in particular, 'the women they hold up as exemplary for their own time demonstrate not "importance" or "haughty daring" but all the domestic virtues.'⁴⁰

In general, female authors of the nineteenth century showed considerable ambivalence in their depictions of 'heroic' women, particularly those who assumed roles of leadership in the political or military realms. The reluctance of some, like Lydia Sigourney, to celebrate such women stemmed from an utterly conventional commitment to the dominant antebellum gender ideology of domesticity or separate spheres; in other cases, however, it reflected a more radical critique of the putatively corrupt, violent, male-dominated public sphere. Thus, after noting the accomplishments of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, Sarah Grimké claimed to 'rejoice that circumstances have prevented women from being

40. Casper, 'An Uneasy Marriage,' 15; Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History*, 119; Baym, *American Woman Writers and the Work of History*, 231; Maitzen, "'This Feminine Preserve,'" 371, 386. It should be noted that the arguments of Casper, Baym, and Maitzen are more nuanced and complex than might be suggested by those brief snippets: Casper cautions against any simplistic view of Ellet as 'an exponent of the "cult of domesticity"' (31, n. 26); Baym describes a broad but gradual 'ideological mutation from Enlightenment to Victorian values' between 1790 and 1860 and stresses that there was no necessary 'correlation between a woman writer's views of women's issues [such as the early "women's rights" movement] and her treatment of women in history' (*American Women Writers and the Work of History*, 218-19); and Maitzen suggests that, despite its highlighting of domestic virtues, the British genre was 'arguably emancipatory' (389). Casper's analysis of nineteenth-century American biography, female and otherwise, is presented more comprehensively in *Constructing American Lives*, an excellent study that appeared after this essay was first drafted. On female biography, in particular, see Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 106-19 and 158-78. In a formulation consistent with my argument in this essay, he concludes: 'Contrary to promoting a single ideology of gender roles and expectations, American biographies from the 1820s to the 1850s displayed many of the tensions that accompanied social and cultural change' (78).

more deeply involved in the guilt which appears to be inseparable from political affairs.' Similarly, after acknowledging the reputed 'courage of Joan of Arc,' early feminist Lucretia Mott insisted that such 'warlike' heroism would soon sink into 'merited oblivion,' displaced by more laudable models of 'moral and Christian heroism.' Even when female authors praised the military valor of women, they sometimes insisted on distinguishing the selfless motives of female warriors from the selfish purposes of men. Thus, Harriet Farley argued that Joan of Arc went to battle 'not as a man, urged in his proud career by mad ambition's stirring energies, but as a woman, guided in her brilliant course by woman's noblest impulses.' Finally, as suggested by Lydia Maria Child's ambivalent efforts as a biographer during the early 1830s, even reform-minded female authors sometimes also felt constrained by a complex web of practical, personal, and psychological pressures from enthusiastically lauding the public, aggressively 'masculine' roles assumed by certain famous historical women.⁴¹

By contrast, several of the antebellum men who produced biographical compilations otherwise quite similar to those written by women (and often treating many of the same subjects) seem to have been less wedded to essentialist gender-based distinctions between male and female character or conduct. Samuel G. Goodrich's prefatory comments have already been discussed. Likewise, in his brief introduction to *Heroic Women of History* (1857), Henry C. Watson insisted that even the most strenuous forms of heroism were peculiar to no country, no class, *and no gender*, despite (in the last case) acknowledged differences in physical strength. 'Heroism may exist in all its height, might, and grandeur, in the most delicate constitution,' Watson explained. 'Those who are

41. Bartlett, ed., *Sarah Grimké*, 48; Dana Greene, ed., *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980), 152; [Harriet Farley], 'Joan of Arc,' in Benita Eisler, ed., *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)* (1977; reprint New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 116; also see Dana Greene, ed., *Suffrage and Religious Principle: Speeches and Writings of Olympia Brown* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 50. For perceptive interpretations of Child's ambivalent efforts as a female biographer, see Clifford, *Crusader for Freedom*, 85-87; Karcher, *First Woman in the Republic*, 146-48.

generally regarded as belonging to the *weaker* sex can point with pride to the glorious names of Joan of Arc, of Charlotte Corday, of Madame Roland, and of Maria Theresa, to substantiate that they have a strength beyond the strength of sinews.' And Watson made it clear that he was not merely presenting cautionary tales of inimitably or deplorably masculine women who came to bad ends; rather, he suggested, 'the deeds of daring' that he recounted should 'arouse' in his readers 'the desire to imitate.' Thus, in the mid-nineteenth-century United States, male authors tended to be the most avid purveyors of 'heroic' and 'transgressive' feminism. But perhaps that should not be surprising; after all, those forms of popular discourse celebrated women for their successful adoption of conventionally *masculine* behaviors.⁴²

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It may be helpful at this point to step back and explicitly relate the ideas and images presented by such male authors as Estabrook, Goodrich, and Watson to the gradual evolution of gender ideology over the course of early American history and, more immediately, to the emergence of two distinguishable strands of American feminism during the mid-nineteenth century. In 'Vertuous Women Found,' her classic essay on gender ideology in early New England, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich described how the Puritans established spiritually-grounded conceptions of virtue and norms of behavior that tended to downplay or mitigate contemporary sexual distinctions and hierarchies. On the basis of her close reading of seventy elegies, memorials, funeral sermons, and other works of popular piety, Ulrich concluded that Puritan

42. Watson, *Heroic Women of History*, 13-14. Even Samuel L. Knapp, whose introduction to *Female Biography* endorsed the views of Lydia Sigourney on 'different spheres' for the sexes, seemed to approve of the political influence exercised by women in classical Rome, admired ancient models of 'high and heroic female conduct,' and complained that the education of American women was not 'sufficiently masculine' (Knapp, *Female Biography*, iv, vi, x). Still, the contrast between male and female authors/editors was by no means absolute; for example, one or two passages in a volume of female biographies edited by Mary E. Hewitt expressed attitudes somewhat similar to those of the male compilers; see Hewitt, ed., *Heroines of History*, [89].

clergymen (who wrote most of the publications in her sample) advocated a gender ideology based more on notions of sexual 'sameness' than sexual 'difference.' When New England ministers wanted to praise a woman, they always focused on 'the same asexual qualities: prayerfulness, industry, charity, modesty, serious reading, and godly writing.' The exemplary woman's virtues were no different from 'those of her brothers' and 'her deepest reality was unrelated to her sex.' However, Ulrich also noted that some of the early eighteenth-century ministerial publications already contained traces of very different gender-based conceptions of female virtue that would eventually gain wide currency in Anglo-American culture. In a number of the later sermons, she observed, 'we can see developing, as if in embryo, both the "genteel lady" of the eighteenth century and the "tender mother" of the nineteenth.'⁴³

If Puritan gender ideology was heavily influenced by spiritually inspired notions of sexual 'sameness,' the dominant gender ideology in antebellum America—variously designated by modern scholars as 'domesticity,' 'separate spheres,' and 'True Womanhood'—was based on sweeping assumptions of sexual 'difference.' Antebellum domesticity emphasized the divergent roles of the two sexes in society, assigning men to the competitive public spheres of politics and the marketplace, while consigning women to the nurturing private sphere of home and family. The popular gender code glorified marriage and motherhood as women's noblest aspirations and, in its most conservative formulations, urged women to adhere to the cardinal feminine virtues of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.⁴⁴ When modern feminism be-

43. See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735,' *American Quarterly* 28 (Spring 1976): 20-40, quoted at 32 and 40; for a very different interpretation of Puritan gender ideology, see Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The 'Weaker Sex' in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). My discussion in this section of the essay was enriched by medievalist Felice Lifshitz's brilliant analysis of a shift toward gendered conceptions of virtue during an earlier historical period; see Lifshitz, 'What Does It Mean for a Woman to have "Virtue?"' (unpublished paper, Florida International University, 1993); also see Lifshitz, 'Gender and Exemplarity East of the Middle Rhine: Jesus, Mary and the Saints in Manuscript Context,' *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 325-43.

44. A number of key works in the vast historiography of nineteenth-century American

gan to emerge in the United States during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, its exponents typically defined their goals and values in relation to that dominant ideology. In fact, as many scholars have noted, nineteenth-century feminism was not a single coherent ideology but consisted of two distinguishable if often interwoven strands, the early ancestors of competing approaches that continue to divide the feminist movement at the dawn of the twenty-first century. One strand was largely driven by notions of sexual 'difference,' the other by assertions of—or aspirations to—sexual 'sameness.'⁴⁵

gender ideology are Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1973; reprint New York: Norton, 1976); Daniel Scott Smith, 'Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,' *Feminist Studies* 1 (Winter-Spring 1973): 40–57; Gerda Lerner, 'The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson,' *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 10 (Spring 1969): 5–15; Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860,' *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–75. For several of the many subsequent challenges to those earlier conceptualizations, see R. J. and M. S. Zboray, 'Whig Women, Politics, and Culture'; Varon, 'Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too'; Nancy Isenberg, 'Second Thoughts on Gender and Women's History,' *American Studies* 36 (Spring 1995): 93–103; Laura McCall, "'With All the Wild, Trembling, Rapturous Feelings of a Lover": Men, Women, and Sexuality in American Literature, 1820–1860,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Spring 1994): 71–89, esp. 88; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. 121–56; McCall, "'The Reign of Brute Force is Now Over"'; Susan Juster, "'In a Different Voice": Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America,' *American Quarterly* 41 (March 1989): 34–62, esp. 57–58; Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,' *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9–39; Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s,' *Social History* 10 (Oct. 1985): 299–321. For a good synthesis, with a useful bibliography, see Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), I:114–53.

45. See Josephine Donovan, *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* new expanded ed. (New York: Continuum, 1992), esp. 1–63; Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), esp. 140–64; Karen Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,' *Signs* 14 (Autumn 1988): 119–57; Bartlett, ed., *Sarah Grimké: Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, 1–29, esp. 5–15 and 28–29. Not all scholars accept the characterization of the 'difference' strand of thought as 'feminist'; for a brief exchange on that issue, see Nancy F. Cott, 'Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,"' and Karen Offen, 'Reply to Cott,' *Signs* 15 (Autumn 1989): 203–9. Also see Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,' *Signs* 13 (Spring 1988): 405–36.

The branch of feminist thought based on assumptions of sexual 'difference' is often designated by modern scholars as 'cultural feminism.'⁴⁶ Even when applied to its earliest American manifestations, the label actually subsumes a spectrum of social and intellectual positions. At the conservative end of that spectrum were efforts by women, typically inspired by nineteenth-century evangelical (or Romantic) Protestantism, to reform society and enhance the influence of their sex while operating largely *within* the social and conceptual 'spheres' of the dominant gender ideology.⁴⁷ Near the radical end of the 'cultural feminist' spectrum were the writings of Margaret Fuller, an American transcendentalist inspired by the ideology of European Romanticism. Reacting, in part, against Enlightenment rationalism, early Romantics emphasized the emotional, the intuitive, the organic, and the communal, while positing a fundamental human need for individual self-development and transcendence—even if in defiance of social conventions or norms. Though Fuller demanded that 'every path' be 'laid open to Woman as freely as to Man,' she assumed that women would naturally develop in a very different direction. Were women truly free, she explained, 'they would never wish to be men, or man-like.' Like their twentieth-century successors, early 'cultural feminists' offered a radical 'matriarchal vision' grounded in assumptions of sexual 'difference.' In the words of modern feminist theorist Josephine Donovan, they embraced 'the idea of a society of strong women guided by essentially female concerns and values.'⁴⁸

46. See Donovan, *Feminist Theory*, 31–63; Offen, 'Defining Feminism.' In different contexts or with somewhat different connotations, 'cultural feminism' is sometimes also referred to as 'social feminism' or 'relational feminism.'

47. Demographic historian Daniel Scott Smith has even suggested that certain key aspects of nineteenth-century 'domesticity' should be relabeled and reconceptualized as 'domestic feminism.' (See Smith, 'Family Limitation.') Many scholars would no doubt reject the application of the label 'feminist' to the domestic ideology that he describes; see, for example, Cott, 'Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining Feminism."' For the characterization of nineteenth-century American Protestantism as 'Romantic,' see John L. Thomas, 'Romantic Reform in America, 1815–1865,' *American Quarterly* 17 (1965): 656–81.

48. See Donovan, *Feminist Theory*, 31–36, including quotations from the writings of Fuller.

The tradition of feminist thought that emphasized notions of sexual 'sameness' (in regard, at least, to legal, political, and economic rights) has been described by Donovan as 'Enlightenment liberal feminism.' As suggested by that designation, its early exponents were largely inspired by eighteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism, particularly the liberal Lockean conception of individual 'natural rights,' which they sought to extend to women. According to historian Debra Gold Hansen, antebellum feminists of the liberal school were 'less interested in women's biological difference from men than in their intellectual and spiritual equality with men.' Liberal feminists refused to 'consider women as a distinctive political or social category' and 'increasingly opposed sex-segregated activities.' The greatest early expression of American 'Enlightenment liberal feminism' was the 'Declaration of Sentiments' issued at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Modeled very closely on the Declaration of Independence, the manifesto demanded the extension to women of most of the basic legal, political, and economic rights that had been guaranteed to virtually all white men in the United States during the decades following the American Revolution.⁴⁹

The overlapping ideas and images contained in the compilations of Silas Estabrook, Samuel Goodrich, and others like them, cannot be comfortably subsumed within either of those broad categories of early American feminism.⁵⁰ Rather, they shared certain strong similarities with each tradition but also differed from

49. See Donovan, *Feminist Theory*, 1-30; Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood*, 161, quoted; Ofen, 'Defining Feminism'; Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 16-17; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 36; Smith, 'Family Limitation.' 'Enlightenment liberal feminism' is also sometimes referred to as 'public feminism,' 'individualist feminism,' or 'equity feminism.' The 'difference' and 'sameness' strands of early American feminist thought were intricately interwoven, and perhaps to some degree reconciled, in the concept of 'co-equality'; for a valuable explication of 'co-equality,' and of early American feminist theory in general, see Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

50. Nor can they be comfortably contained by previous formulations describing the amalgamation of those two traditions by nineteenth-century women, as in the scholarship of Nina Baym and Nancy Isenberg, already cited.

each in significant ways. Like early 'cultural feminists,' Estabrook and Goodrich were clearly touched by the spirit of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Several of the women in each compilation were depicted as Romantic heroines or martyrs, courageously acting on antinomian conviction and pursuing personal transcendence or self-development, even in defiance of dominant legal or social norms. But unlike most early 'cultural feminists,' who typically urged women to achieve transcendence *as women* (that is, in terms of talents, values, and aspirations conceived to be characteristic of their sex), Goodrich and Estabrook celebrated women who adopted virtues and behaviors—such as aggressive physical courage—conventionally coded as masculine. Thus, like 'Enlightenment liberal feminists,' they tended to encourage the expansion of female social roles and opportunities into spheres previously restricted to men—and they did so less on the grounds of women's unique gifts than on the basis of strengths and virtues shared by both sexes. However, the roles adopted and opportunities seized by Estabrook's and Goodrich's subjects suggest not the bourgeois rationalism, legalism, and universalism of the 'natural rights' tradition but the idiosyncratic and transgressive heroism of the Romantics.

* * *

Modern scholarship on sexualized depictions of murdered women has tended to focus on the cultural construction of 'male-as-subject' and 'female-as-object' in the context of enduring patriarchal power relations. For example, in *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder*, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer trace the modern emergence of the sexual murderer as cultural 'hero' to a Western intellectual tradition stretching from the Marquis de Sade and early nineteenth-century Romantics through twentieth-century French existentialists and American 'hipsters' of the 'Beat generation.' That misogynist tradition, according to Cameron and Frazer, has emphasized the male search for subjective 'transcendence'—experienced as power,

freedom, and pleasure—through forms of sexual ‘transgression’ that often entail the physical domination, and cultural representation, of women as ‘objects’ of both desire and contempt.⁵¹ Cultural historian Karen Halttunen has offered a provocative variant of that line of interpretation, claiming that sexualized murder accounts in nineteenth-century America established a new ‘gynecology of guilt’ that ‘demonized the female murder victim’ as ‘the real monster, whose intrinsic violence and criminality justified the violence committed against her.’⁵² Such formulations are powerful and insightful—but incomplete. Antebellum representations of ‘beautiful female murder victims’ certainly included images illustrative of the misogynist traditions identified by Cameron, Frazer, and Halttunen, but they also presented positive counterimages of *female* transcendence and subjectivity—part of a distinctive and long-lived literary tradition of popular feminism.⁵³

51. See Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 54–63, 152–62, 166–70, and passim; also see Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987); Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell, eds., *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 177–221, passim.

52. Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 172–207, quoted at 207. Though Halttunen briefly notes sympathetic or sentimental responses to chaste or seduced victims in some ‘sexual stories of murder’ (see 182), her analysis suggests that the new ‘gynecology of guilt’ was the dominant response, especially in cases involving such ‘unchaste’ victims as prostitutes.

53. It should be understood that the very different images described by Halttunen and discussed in this essay occupied extremes on a wide spectrum of representation; most antebellum accounts of murdered or otherwise violently victimized women described them neither as gynecological ‘monsters’ nor as heroic martyrs. Still, it should also be emphasized that the pamphlets of Silas Estabrook were by no means unique in their depictions of murdered women. For example, several literary representations of Helen Jewett, a New York City prostitute who became one of the most famous female homicide victims in nineteenth-century America, also presented sympathetic images that tended to challenge dominant gender norms. In her recent study of that highly publicized murder case of the mid-1830s, historian Patricia Cline Cohen notes that three contemporary pamphlet biographies of Jewett portrayed her as ‘a noble and spirited young woman’—‘fearless and feisty’—who was particularly ‘unafraid of and undereferential to men.’ On one occasion she showed ‘considerable courage’ by disarming a man who brandished a pistol. Further, Cohen suggests, the narratives repeatedly conveyed Jewett’s ‘strong sense of herself as a woman who could challenge men and demand justice.’ The biographies thus depicted the murdered prostitute less as a moral monster (as described by Halttunen) than as a proto-feminist martyr (P. C. Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 77–89). For Karen Halttunen’s very different reading of the pamphlets generated by the Jewett case, see *Murder Most Foul*, 199–203.

That tradition of popular feminism was rooted in a wide variety of early modern genres and motifs, including Christian martyrologies, murder ballads (such as 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight'), and a myriad of literary depictions of Female Warriors. During the first half of the nineteenth century, that tradition was given new impetus by popular Romantic conceptions of heroism. Its more extreme or flamboyant manifestations, as represented here by the accounts of Amaretta de Perez and Rosalie Phillips in Estabrook's *The Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*, might be conceptualized as 'transgressive feminism'—a label that refers to its tacit sanctioning of violations of both contemporary gender norms *and* broader social rules cutting across gender distinctions (e.g., the prohibition against murder). Its more restrained or respectable variants, reflected here in Estabrook's account of Madame Roland (as plagiarized from Samuel Knapp), in parts of Goodrich's *Lives of Celebrated Women*, and in a few of the other volumes of biographical sketches compiled by men, might best be characterized as 'heroic feminism'—an ideology that endorsed the right of exceptional women to transcend conventional gender roles but not to violate more fundamental moral rules.

The products of those enduring traditions of 'heroic' and 'transgressive' feminism have occasionally been analyzed by scholars of the popular literary culture of later periods. For example, in regard to the 'heroic' tradition, Martha Vicinus has described a genre of late Victorian and Edwardian juvenile biographies of unconventional public women like Dorothea Dix and Florence Nightingale, issued with such evocative titles as *Brave Women Who Have Been Distinguished for Heroic Actions and Noble Virtues*. Although Vicinus does not identify the genre itself as feminist, she does speculate that the 'formulaic biographies' may have 'engendered powerful fantasies' in girls that 'empowered the first feminist movement' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similarly, in her analysis of popular gender ideology in American print culture of the 1950s, Joanne Meyerowitz describes a genre of short profiles of such public women as Annie

Oakley, Helen Keller, and Dorothy McCullough Lee (a crime-fighting postwar mayor of Portland, Oregon) that regularly appeared in middlebrow magazines like *Reader's Digest* and *Ladies' Home Journal*. Meyerowitz suggests that such laudatory sketches of unconventional and 'nondomestic' role models helped lay the ideological groundwork for the resurgent feminist movement of the 1960s.⁵⁴

Of course, skeptics might plausibly question the designation of the popular literature described in this essay as forms of 'feminism'—and for several different reasons. First, it seems highly unlikely that scholars who have challenged the bona fides of 'cultural' feminism on both definitional and ideological grounds would willingly accept a further expansion of the 'feminist' rubric to encompass the 'transgressive' and 'heroic' variants proposed here.⁵⁵ Second, some would probably question the putative 'radicalism' or 'subversiveness' of Silas Estabrook's *Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females*, suggesting perhaps (in the words of literary scholar Christopher Looby) that its 'extreme literary effects' ultimately serve to bolster 'the domestic norm that it ostensibly violates.'⁵⁶ Third, one could make a case that the cheap

54. See Vicinus, 'What Makes a Heroine?', 171–87, quoted at 185 (also Casper, *Constructing American Lives*, 308); Meyerowitz, 'Beyond the Feminist Mystique,' 145–82, esp. 1458–65. For a somewhat similar genre of female biography in early-twentieth-century Egypt, see Marilyn Booth, "May Her Likes Be Multiplied": "Famous Women" Biography and Gendered Prescription in Egypt, 1892–1935,' *Signs* 22 (Summer 1997): 827–90.

55. For an example of a prominent feminist historian challenging the inclusion of the 'relational' tradition under the rubric of 'feminism,' see Cott, 'Comment on Karen Offen's "Defining Feminism."' However, the sheer quantity of scholarship and theoretical writing over the past few decades employing the concept of 'cultural' or 'relational' feminism (and related terminology) seems to have largely overwhelmed those advocating a narrower definition of feminism.

56. See Christopher Looby, 'George Thompson's "Romance of the Real": Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction,' *American Literature* 65 (Dec. 1993): 651–72, quoted at 665. Looby's essay analyzes a popular antebellum author whose writings are in some respects similar to those of Silas Estabrook. According to Looby, the plots of Thompson's 'porno-gothic' (662) novels tended to deflect readers 'away from political critique and toward voyeurism' (659); as already discussed, however, the trajectory of Estabrook's *Lives and Tragical Deaths of Beautiful Females* was, for the most part, in the opposite direction: from the private and sexual to the public and political. Obviously, Looby's formulation, based as it is on Thompson's 'porno-gothic,' would be even less applicable to the collected sketches of 'celebrated women' produced by such genteel, respectable authors as Samuel G. Goodrich and Henry C. Watson.

crime pamphlets of Silas Estabrook were designed as much to rouse the prurient interests of young male readers as to raise the consciousness of their sisters.⁵⁷ Fourth, even if such cheap pamphlets *were* intended, at least in part, to inspire female readers (as the more respectable biographies produced by S. G. Goodrich and others certainly were), some might argue that they served to propagate a form of feminist 'false consciousness' that frittered away women's energies in unlikely fantasies of individual transgression and achievement.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, there are good reasons to believe that popular early modern and nineteenth-century accounts of transgressive or unconventional women, even those who suffered violent deaths, *did* help shape the values and aspirations of female readers—and sometimes inspired them to question, challenge, or even defy normative gender roles in their own lives. As Barbara Sicherman has demonstrated, nineteenth-century women often 'used reading to act out fantasies of achievement, first in early adolescent role-playing, later, given the right circumstances, in life.' Thus, Mary A. Livermore, a prominent early crusader for female suffrage born in Boston in 1820 (who also worked as a military nurse during the American Civil War), recalled reading Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Ann Judson's *Memoirs* aloud to her father as a girl. She described Judson, the celebrated missionary who provided the model for Estabrook's Charlotte Forrest, as a 'heroine' whose 'life was romantic and thrilling in the extreme.' Livermore also remembered how violent martyrdom was once turned into a game by her mischievous cousins. 'Let's play Christian martyrs!', one suggested, and they then proceeded—with her reluctant consent—to incinerate little Mary's only wax doll. Along somewhat

57. Cutting against that hypothesis, however, is the admittedly inconclusive evidence, discussed earlier in this essay, suggesting that the primary 'target audience' for Estabrook's pamphlet was young female readers.

58. Meyerowitz acknowledges that such a critical interpretation might plausibly be applied to the biographies she describes; see 'Beyond the Feminist Mystique,' 1464. However, for a forceful, theoretically informed challenge to such a viewpoint, see Sicherman, 'Reading and Ambition.'

similar lines, Lucy Larcom, the well-known poet and educator who worked in the Lowell textile mills as a teenage girl during the 1830s and 1840s, recalled how she and her young friends were inspired by a published account of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, a female warrior of antiquity who, she recalled, 'held a lofty place among our ideals of heroic womanhood.' Larcom was also deeply moved by the lives and deaths of Christian martyrs. 'The history of the early martyrs . . . I read and re-read with longing emulation!', she recalled in her memoirs. 'Why could not I be a martyr, too?'⁵⁹

Examples of heroic literary models in the lives of unconventional mid-to-late-nineteenth-century American women can easily be multiplied. Cross-dressing female soldiers on both sides of the American Civil War described how their ambitions were aroused by reading stories of the martial exploits of heroic women. Sarah Emma Edmonds, a Union nurse, spy, and soldier who sometimes concealed her sex, reportedly attributed her military aspirations to her girlhood reading of a cheap American novel of the 1840s, Maturin Murray Ballou's *Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain*—a work very much in the same literary tradition (and sold at the same periodical depots) as the murder pamphlets of Silas Estabrook. On the other side in the conflict, Loreta Janeta Velazquez, a rebel spy and soldier, claimed to have been inspired by 'the glorious deeds of Joan of Arc.'⁶⁰ As a young patri-

59. Sicherman, 'Reading and Ambition,' 81 and passim; Mary A. Livermore, *The Story of My Life, or, the Sunshine and Shadow of Seventy Years* (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1897), 92–96; Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1890), 103, 244. The account of Zenobia referred to by Larcom was William Ware, *Zenobia: or The Fall of Palmyra. A Historical Romance* (New York: C. S. Francis, 1838), a popular work that was repeatedly reprinted through the late nineteenth century. Accounts of Zenobia also occasionally appeared in volumes of biographical sketches of 'celebrated women'; see, for example, *Sketches of the Lives*, 33–36; M. E. Hewitt, ed., *Heroines of History*, 25–36.

60. Loreta Janeta Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels*, ed. C. J. Worthington (1876; reprint New York: Arno Press, 1972), 36–37, 41–42, 51, 128; Sylvia G. L. Dannett, *She Rode With the Generals: The True and Incredible Story of Sarah Emma Seelye, Alias Franklin Thompson* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 23–25. For more on the particular influence of Joan of Arc, also see Larson, 'Bonny Yank and Ginny Reb Revisited,' 39; Schultz, 'Women at the Front,' 218–19, 268, 288–89; Elizabeth Massey, *Bonnet Brigades* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 79–80; Vicinus, 'What Makes a Heroine?', 183–85.

otic orator during the Civil War, radical abolitionist and woman's rights crusader Anna Dickinson, born in 1842, was frequently compared to Joan of Arc; one Providence, Rhode Island, newspaper even insisted that she displayed all 'the boldness of forty men.' Dickinson also delivered a wildly popular lecture on Joan of Arc nearly 500 times while travelling the lyceum circuit during the postbellum period. Later in her career, she added a lecture on 'Madame Roland' to her repertoire, wrote a play about Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, and even embarked on an abortive stage career in which she intended to play such male 'leads' as Hamlet and Macbeth.⁶¹ Finally, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, admiring black women repeatedly equated the fearless African-American anti-lynching crusader, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, to other courageously transgressive female heroines of earlier generations. The poet Katherine Davis Tillman, for example, compared Wells to 'Charlotte Corday for the English' and 'Joan of Arc for the French.'⁶²

Drawing on Stephen Greenblatt's concept of 'self-fashioning,' literary historian Mary Kelley has described the complex and creative ways in which American women of the early republic fashioned themselves, through reading, as 'learned women.'⁶³ But there were other American women whose reading led them to

61. Giraud Chester, *Embattled Maiden: The Life of Anna Dickinson* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 6, 8, 35, 51, 56-57, 59, 84, 101-102, 163-64, 198-99, 203, 206, and 215-34. Dickinson's hand-scrawled motto on a popular portrait of her also conveyed her heroically aggressive approach to life: 'The world belongs to those who take it' (Chester, *Embattled Maiden*, photo and caption opposite page 19). For a more recent and very perceptive scholarly treatment of Dickinson, see J. Matthew Gallman, 'Anna Dickinson: Abolitionist Orator,' in Steven E. Woodworth, ed., *The Human Tradition in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 93-110. For more on nineteenth-century American actresses playing male characters, see Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses & Audiences, 1790-1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 92-103.

62. Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 233 and 247; Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda M. Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 3.

63. See Mary Kelley, 'Reading Women/Women Reading: The Making of Learned Women in Antebellum America,' *Journal of American History* 83 (Sept. 1996): 401-24, esp. 403.

fashion themselves, or others whom they admired, in very different ways. Surely some of the female readers of the compilations of Silas Estabrook, Samuel Goodrich, Jesse Clement, and Henry Watson, among others, fashioned themselves, or at least imagined themselves, as 'heroic women.' Yet whatever the precise personal—and ideological—impact of the popular literary traditions discussed in this essay, there is no question that their bold celebratory images of 'heroic' and 'transgressive' women engaged many thousands of female readers of the generation that initiated America's modern women's rights movement. The view of 'beautiful female murder victims' (broadly defined) as feminist martyrs to male injustice is not simply a retrospective construction of modern (or post-modern) scholars; rather, it is embedded in numerous mid-nineteenth-century American accounts of the eventful lives and violent deaths of defiantly unconventional women.⁶⁴

64. It should be noted that other nineteenth-century genres by female authors also frequently depicted exceptional women as past victims of male tyranny; see, for example, Nina Baym's excellent discussions of travel literature and historical drama in *American Women Writers and the Work of History*, 130–51 and 187–213.

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