

*Reconstructing the Nation:
Frances Harper, Charlotte Forten, and the
Racial Politics of Periodical Publication*

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IN HIS 1893 book, *Women of Distinction*, African-American essayist Lawson Scruggs concluded his biographical account of Frances Harper by praising her as 'a great and profound writer in both prose and poetry, a lecturer of no ordinary tact and ability, a master-hand at whatever she applies herself. . . . Her pen is ever at work; her writings are many and varied.' In contrast, Scruggs's sketch of Charlotte Forten Grimké ends on a distinctly domestic note: 'Her life in the District has not been an eventful one, much of her time being spent in church work, and therefore she has not done as much literary work as she had hoped to do. She sometimes tries to find some consolation in the thought that possibly this is why her long-cherished dreams of becoming an authoress have never been fully realized.'¹

How did Harper achieve the status of 'a great and profound writer' by the 1890s, whereas Forten was never able to realize 'her

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1. Lawson A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (Raleigh: L. A. Scruggs, 1893), 13, 196.

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long-cherished dream of becoming an authoress'? Personal circumstances provide only partial clues. A well-established social activist widowed in 1864 after a brief marriage, Harper was free to continue her prewar lecturing and writing. In contrast, according to Scruggs, marital and social obligations as well as ill health prevented Forten from realizing her literary ambitions. Given that Forten's publication record had already decreased well before her marriage to Francis Grimké in 1878, it is also possible that, as a little-known single African-American woman, she needed to turn to a more remunerative career. I want to argue, however, that fully to understand the differences between Harper's and Forten's postbellum literary production, we need to look for clues of a broader cultural nature in the different strategies of patronage, production, and cultivation of readership pursued by each woman in the years following the Civil War. In so doing, Harper and Forten come to serve as vehicles through which to consider the larger political significance of African-American periodical publication during Reconstruction and its relationship to the newly emerging American nation and its culture.

As literary critics, we have found the task of reconstructing Reconstruction daunting. We are still hard pressed to account for that literary moment that lies between the American Renaissance on the one hand and American Realism on the other. In contrast, historians have extensively analyzed and debated the politics of this postwar period. Most recently, Eric Foner has suggested that one of the primary meanings of Reconstruction was the national effort to fulfill the ideals of democracy by granting African Americans citizenship and protecting their right to reap its benefits. These efforts were implemented even before the war's end with the Emancipation Proclamation, passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, and establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau. They were continued under Radical Reconstruction (1866-72) with the enlargement of the Bureau, passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and deployment of federal troops in the South to protect blacks.

As Foner has pointed out, however, Reconstruction was a complex process involving both the active participation of African Americans and the hostile opposition of Southerners. Radical Reconstruction enabled the achievement of significant black political power as well as grassroots activism. But these efforts toward racial equality were strongly resisted under Presidential Reconstruction (1865) as Johnson ceded authority back to the Southern states, instituted Black Codes, opposed the work of the Freedmen's Bureau, and refused to protect black civil rights. Resistance became even more pronounced after 1873 as a result of several converging factors: the continued mourning of the lost cause by Southerners; a rising tide of conservative opinion among Northerners willing to accede to Southern sensibilities; and dominance of a national economic agenda culminating in an alliance between Northern and Southern capital. The demise of Reconstruction became inevitable by 1874 with the ascendancy of a Democratic party determined to dismantle black civil rights, the rise of white mob violence in the South, and finally the withdrawal of federal troops from this region in 1877.²

I want to suggest that the ideologies of literary Reconstruction, like their political counterpart, did not so much reconcile social differences as recreate and exacerbate them. I develop Richard Brodhead's recent contention that postbellum culture reorganized the literary field by encouraging 'new sorts of internal differentiations within the American literary system'; these distinctions reworked existing configurations of 'high' and 'low' cultures located on either side of the antebellum 'domestic middlebrow world of letters.' According to Brodhead, much antebellum writing was a 'tutelary activity,' a significant portion of which centered on the domestic household and promoted a middle-class ethos of 'disciplinary intimacy' through which those in authority relied on love and moral influence rather than corporal punishment to regulate the American home. In contrast, the postbellum world of

2. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

letters came to promote high-cultural literary values embodied primarily in the new quality monthlies—the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Scribner's Monthly*, and *Century Magazine*—that flourished from the 1850s on. These magazines encouraged the development and institutionalization of new aesthetic interests: a 'cosmopolitan and classical production' derived from Europe and a home-grown 'vacation art,' both of which were addressed to a newly emergent leisured elite.³

To make his case, Brodhead examines the postbellum fiction of white writers such as Louisa May Alcott and Sarah Orne Jewett, as well as the black author Charles Chesnutt's magazine stories of the late 1880s. Missing from his analysis is any consideration of African-American writing during Reconstruction. Such an omission is not altogether surprising since historians of African-American literature have as yet uncovered few works from this period. To rectify this situation, I propose to analyze the literary careers of Frances Harper and Charlotte Forten from 1864 to 1878. I suggest that Harper chose to write within and for the black community, taking advantage of its publishing instruments, in particular the A.M.E. Church's *Christian Recorder*. Her work reconfigures the middlebrow model of domestic-tutelary writing, which informed an important body of nineteenth-century African-American fiction from William Wells Brown to Chesnutt, and rethinks the distinction between high and low cultures. In striking contrast, encouraged by the patronage of white men of letters, Forten sought recognition by the new quality monthlies that functioned as the gatekeepers of the nation's high-cultural domain.

Despite these differences, however, I believe Harper and Forten pursued common goals: as black women denied the power of the ballot but vitally concerned with issues of nationhood, they both turned to writing—and in particular periodical publica-

3. Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 77, 79, 17–21, 125; see also Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) for a discussion of the configuration of high and low cultures from the antebellum period to the end of the nineteenth century.

tion—to ponder how African Americans could share in the benefits of citizenship in the newly reconstructed nation. Their publication choices nicely illustrate the critical role of the newspaper as a vehicle through which members of a nation, or a subordinated social group within it, come, in the words of Benedict Anderson, to ‘imagine community’: the newspaper unites readers who otherwise might have no contact with one another by encouraging conversation among them over the various meanings of nationhood.⁴ Addressing a black readership, Harper articulated a vision that insisted on the familiarity of the African-American household within American society and made it foundational to the process of national political reconstruction. Seeking to situate herself within the nation’s community of primarily white writers and readers, Forten aspired to become an active participant in the reconstruction of America’s national culture. In the process, however, she was to discover the degree to which such participation depended on the representation of blacks as foreign.

My own goal in this project is hence threefold: at the most basic level, to tell the story of Harper’s and Forten’s efforts to achieve the status of ‘authoress’; more broadly, to illuminate how ‘mere’ recovery work can help us reconstruct a still obscure but crucial moment in African-American literary history dominated by the writing of nationhood; and finally, to demonstrate how the inclusion of African-American writers invites the construction of an American literary history different from the one commonly told.

Journalism historians have noted the importance that the black community has historically accorded to newspapers, especially in the postbellum period when new papers were being established at a rapid pace: a dozen were founded between April 1865 and January 1866; in 1887 alone, sixty-eight; and by 1890, a total of 575.⁵ The *Christian Recorder* was an antebellum paper, one of

4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 30–36.

5. Roland E. Wolsely, *The Black Press, U.S.A.*, 2nd ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 38.

the few to have survived the Civil War. Begun as the *Christian Herald* in Philadelphia in 1848 under the auspices of the General Conference of the A.M.E. Church, it underwent a change of name in 1852. It appears to have fared quite well in its first months, publishing writings by prominent black clergymen—Daniel Payne and J. W. C. Pennington for example—as well as by a number of black women, Sarah Mapps Douglass, Mary Still, and Frances Watkins [Harper]. But the years 1854–56 were to witness a reversal of the paper's fortunes.⁶

Indeed, the history of the *Christian Recorder* from 1854 on points to its lengthy struggle in helping African Americans imagine community, inviting them both to craft a group identity based on a shared past and to work toward the achievement of full national citizenship. In 1854, one of the bishops of the A.M.E. Church voiced his concern that: 'We live too much estranged from one another, and will ever be so until we will support a weekly paper that can connect every portion of the Church by weekly intelligence'; and in 1856 another complained that 'the chief cause [of the paper's failure] lay in the people. . . . Twelve months after the issue of the first number of the *Christian Recorder* there were not more than one hundred subscribers in the city of Philadelphia, notwithstanding there were at that time on the churches' registers about two thousand two hundred and seven souls, and in that district alone five thousand seven hundred and thirty-six members.' The Church's goals were achieved only when Benjamin Tanner, one of the most illustrious bishops of the A.M.E. Church, became the paper's editor in 1868, holding that position until 1884 when he assumed editorship of the new *A.M.E. Church Review*. Journalism historian I. Garland Penn's 1891 comment about 'the wide reputation of [Tanner's] journal, outside of his own denomination' suggests the *Recorder's* ability

6. Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1891), 278–305.

finally to serve as a vehicle through which African Americans nationwide could imagine community.⁷

Harper's writings appeared regularly in the pages of the *Christian Recorder* throughout the postbellum period. Born a free black in Baltimore in 1825, by the 1850s Harper was already a well-established antislavery lecturer, activist in the causes of racial uplift, temperance, and women's rights, and author of at least two volumes of poems in which she gave literary expression to her social concerns. Several of her public lectures and poems were published in the *Liberator*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and the *Christian Recorder*. After the war Harper's contributions to the *Recorder* became even more extensive: many poems, a series of short sketches, and three serialized novels, *Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Sowing and Reaping*, and, in the post-Reconstruction era, *Trial and Triumph*.

Harper's fictional narratives conform in many respects to antebellum middlebrow notions of writing as a tutelary activity that concerns itself with the welfare of the domestic household. But Harper adapted this model to an African-American perspective. For although she remained committed to the values of discipline, her model was no longer that whereby authority figures exercise discipline—whether through coercion or through love—over their charges. Instead, these latter must learn to discipline themselves; moreover, the practice of self-government must apply not only to individuals but to communities and nation as well. This disciplinary ideology reinforced African-American antebellum concepts of self-control as a strategy of resistance and survival for both slave and free black populations. Given her ethical beliefs, Harper could only view the postbellum expansion of a high-cultural aesthetic as suspect, responsible for encouraging self-indulgence and moral laxity both in the home and in society at large.

In her writing practice, however, Harper strove to deconstruct

7. Payne, *History*, 306, 335; I. Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and its Editors* (Springfield, Mass.: Wiley & Co., 1891), 80.

the distinctions of high, middle, and low cultures as she appropriated the 'high-cultural' form of poetry for democratic purposes. Her efforts are fully evident in her sketches, at least seven of which were published in the *Recorder*, the first in October 1871, and six more within an eleven-month period from February 1873 to January 1874. Most of the sketches are simply titled 'Fancy Etchings,' and focus on the same set of characters—Aunt Jane, her nieces Jenny and Anna, and her brother Uncle Glumby. Reflecting the interests of her creator, Jenny voices her aspirations to become a great writer: 'I think poetry is one of the great agents of culture, civilization and refinement. . . . I would teach men and women to love noble deeds by setting them to the music, of fitly spoken words.' Such a definition might well appear an endorsement of an elitist high-cultural aesthetic; this is the view of the 'sober and prosaic' Uncle Glumby for whom poetry is 'all moonshine.'⁸ But for Harper the true function of this high cultural form was to promote the disciplinary ethos outlined above to a broad audience for the purpose of community building.

Indeed, in Harper's fictional narratives the thematic focus is, as we have noted, the domestic household; by insisting on its very familiarity, Harper sought to construct a vision of home that would transcend race and class distinctions to situate itself within the larger national culture. To convey her vision, Harper relied on the narrative strategy of conversation which, according to Jenny, 'ought to be made one of the finest and most excellent of all arts.' Conversation is in fact the primary structural device of the sketches. It enables Jenny, Aunt Jane, and others to debate, and propose solutions to, the major problems facing African-American communities; and it enables these characters to build links across generations and bring forgotten historical knowledge to light. This potential of dialogue is replicated in the *Recorder's* own efforts to foster the imagining of community among its readers. Its success may be measured in the comments of one reader: 'The

8. 'Fancy Etchings,' *Christian Recorder*, Apr. 24, 1873, and May 1, 1873.



Fig. 1. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. *Iola Leroy, Or Shadows Uplifted*, 3d ed. (Boston: James H. Earle, 1892), frontispiece. Courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

Recorder [is] truly the colored people's organ in the United States, and the best family paper (colored) now published. . . . Fathers and mothers that cannot read, when the day's work is done, press the school children or some friend into service and the *Recorder* is read in the family circle. The sayings of the different writers are commented on, the news is discussed, and pleasant, instructive evenings are spent. It is thus giving food for thought during the day. The question is quite common now when a friend meets another to ask, "What does the *Recorder* say this week?"⁹

Even before writing her sketches, Harper had turned to serial fiction as a way of promoting conversation within the black community; the *Christian Recorder* published *Minnie's Sacrifice*, a slavery and Reconstruction novel, in its March 20 through September 25, 1869, issues; and it would later print a temperance story, *Sowing and Reaping*, which ran from August 10, 1876, to February 8, 1877. It is not clear whether Harper actually composed these novels as serial fictions or whether it was the *Recorder* that determined installment procedures. In either case, serialization functioned as a future oriented process that affirmed both the author's and the editor's commitment to the gradual development over time not only of the story but of the newspaper and the social group that supported it.

Nineteenth-century serial composition actively affected both writers and readers. Authors were often influenced by ongoing events, leading them to reshape their narratives and incorporate recent factual occurrences into their fiction. In turn, serial publication encouraged reader participation. This readership was undoubtedly more extensive than that of printed volumes, since newspapers were cheaper and available to a wider audience. Additionally, as the reader of the *Recorder* quoted above suggested, newspapers could be passed from neighbor to neighbor for perusal or even read aloud in groups. As they read 'in parts,' readers had time to reread the story at their leisure, to interpret

9. 'Fancy Etchings,' *Christian Recorder*, Feb. 20, 1873; letter, Jan. 18, 1877.

and reinterpret it; installment endings left them thinking as they waited for the next issue. Furthermore, readers never read the serial fiction in isolation from other 'texts'—items in the same newspaper issue, other novels, or even the readers' own lives and the world they lived in—but in close conjunction with them. Such an interplay meant that readers often immediately brought extraneous material to their reading of serial fiction, or conversely took the fiction into their own lives; at the extreme, fact and fiction merged in their imaginations.¹⁰

As members of the African-American community perused the pages of the *Recorder*, then, they found not only articles on current issues but also installments of Harper's serial novels in which she fictionalized many public events. In reading each episode, readers could relate its contents to the more factual articles printed nearby as well as to their own lived experiences and then discuss their reactions with others in the community. Yet Harper also needed to negotiate the literary scepticism of the prosaic Uncle Glumbys as well as a more general community apathy. Her awareness of this challenge is evident in her direct appeal to her readers at the end of *Minnie's Sacrifice* to ensure the paper's survival by nurturing its next generation of writers: 'We have wealth among us, but how much of it is ever spent in building up the future of the race? in encouraging talent, and developing genius? . . . Take even the *Christian Recorder*; where are the graduates from college and high school whose pens and brains lend beauty, strength, grace and culture to its pages?'¹¹

Minnie's Sacrifice dominates the issues of the *Recorder* in which it appeared. A story fictionalizing the history of African Americans from antebellum slavery through 1867, the novel reflected the chief concerns of the paper and nicely complemented the

10. For recent discussions of serial fiction, see Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991); Michael Lund, *America's Continuing Story, An Introduction to Serial Fiction, 1850-1900* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993); Carol A. Martin, *George Eliot's Serial Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994).

11. *Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Christian Recorder*, Sept. 25, 1869.

many contributions that focused on the social and political work of Reconstruction that had been, or was yet to be, accomplished. One regular column entitled 'Information Wanted' sought the whereabouts of relatives dispersed under slavery. Other articles addressed the importance of 'home building' or the quest for education within the African-American community. Turning to national issues, still other contributions excitedly but anxiously debated the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. Indeed, this tone of ambivalence characterizes much of the *Recorder's*, and Harper's, writing at this time. It is present, for example, in the double rhetoric of war and peace with which one correspondent anticipated the battle over the amendment: 'We are, in fact, preparing for war in the time of peace, and, hence, we are busily engaged in laying deep and sure our political cable, by which to work successfully in the campaign which is before us.'¹²

In contrast to *Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Sowing and Reaping* appears to be a purely domestic story in which neither time, place, nor race is specified. But this apparent narrowness belies a broader agenda: temperance is a national problem because the nation as a whole has become intemperate. In the words of Harper's fictional spokeswoman, Mrs. Gladstone: 'I hold . . . that a nation as well as an individual should have a conscience.'¹³ And, if the novel's characters are not racialized it is because temperance transcends racial categorization. Hence, the characters are to be imagined not as either white or black, but as both /and.

The rapid expansion of the temperance movement during Reconstruction was a response to the increase in liquor dealers and alcohol consumption after the Civil War. Contemporary commentators variously ascribed this social phenomenon to the bad habits of war veterans, the pressures of urbanization and industrialization, the economic panic of 1873, the influx of European immigrants whose cultures tolerated greater production and con-

12. *Christian Recorder*, Apr. 17, 1869; May 8 and 22, 1869; Sept. 4, 1869.

13. *Sowing and Reaping*, *Christian Recorder*, Jan. 4, 1877.

sumption of alcohol, and finally to changing attitudes that had turned drinking into a violation of a moral code. Whatever the causes, the consequences were clear: intemperance was undermining the strength of the nation and encouraging social disorder; in fact, according to Mother Stewart, a women's temperance crusade leader, it was a 'curse, more fearful than southern slavery.' At the historical juncture that was witness to both the celebration of the Centennial and the demise of Reconstruction, reformers were convinced that the United States could only be saved by its rebirth as a temperate nation. This vision was shared in particular by women, both black and white. With some confined to the home, many others financially dependent and physically vulnerable, and all politically disenfranchised, women remained the primary victims of intemperate fathers and husbands. Hence, from the 1870s on they were at the forefront of the temperance movement, marching in crusades, organizing, and disseminating information through the press. This activity culminated in the formation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1873.¹⁴

Harper's commitment to the temperance movement dates to the antebellum period and continued unabated during Reconstruction, evidenced by her affiliation with the WCTU. The editors of the *Recorder* evinced a similar interest in temperance, particularly during the early 1870s when the Women's Crusade was especially active. Surprisingly, however, little temperance writing appears in the later issues in which *Sowing and Reaping* was published; rather, these are filled with articles that chronicle the end of Reconstruction and most especially the violence that accompanied it. Particular attention is devoted to those acts of violence against blacks in which public officials either actively collaborated

14. Mother Stewart, *Memories of the Crusade* (Columbus: Wm. Hubbard & Co, 1888), 27; Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 6-14; Annie Wittenmyer, *History of the Women's Temperance Crusade* (Philadelphia: Office of the Christian Woman, 1878), 25-27; Jack S. Blocker, 'Give to the Wind Thy Fears': *The Women's Temperance Crusade, 1873-1874* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

or passively refused to intervene: the murder of Professor Gilliard in Texas, the Hamburg Massacre in South Carolina, and the 'Bargain of 1877' that resulted in the newly elected Hayes's surrender of federal authority to Southern state interests.¹⁵ Yet these articles are thematically linked to Harper's temperance concerns because they suggest a nation become intemperate, a nation whose intemperance has brought about the social evils that beset it. Temperance, then, is the tool that will reform the nation.

For Harper, novel writing became the tutelary activity through which to press for national reformation. In *Minnie's Sacrifice* and *Sowing and Reaping*, she offered readers a program that promoted the self-disciplining of both individuals and a society rendered intemperate not only by drink but also by the elite's accumulation of wealth and consumption of a cosmopolitan high culture that was finding its way into the new quality monthlies.

The early chapters of *Minnie's Sacrifice* take place in the antebellum period and are organized around a sectional contrast of South and North that has significant moral implications. The protagonists, Louis and Minnie, are born into Southern families as the products of the rape of a slave girl by her master; although the readers know the secret of their birth, they do not. In Harper's literary imagination, Southern slaveholding culture has its origins in the foreign Creole culture of pre-revolutionary Haiti and is characterized by ostentatious displays of wealth and moral self-indulgence. As such, it stands in negative contrast both to the many accounts of the independent black Republic of Haiti published in the *Recorder* and to Harper's vision of the North as a site of industrious free labor. Given Louis's dual racial heritage, these early chapters hint at the possibility of future sectional and racial reconciliation under his leadership. He is in fact presented to us as a Moses figure in a typological narrative that underscores the theme of heroic male leadership.

Harper's vision of the 'free' North centers on her portrayal of

15. *Christian Recorder*, Aug. 10, 1876; Oct. 12, 1876; Jan. 25, 1877.

the Quaker abolitionists who adopt Minnie; in contrast to Southern slaves and slaveholders, they embody free, self-disciplined labor. And yet, several ironies are at work here. Unlike in the South, black voices are not heard; rather, it is the white anti-slavery community that speaks for African Americans, arguing for their freedom and equality but also denying them the possibility of tracing their 'origin back to any of the older civilizations.' Neither can Minnie or Louis speak for blacks, since they remain ignorant of their ancestry and believe themselves to be members of the white elite; indeed, Minnie 'think[s] it is a dreadful thing to be a colored person in this country,' while on a visit to the North the still Southern Louis espouses strong Confederate views. Louis is placed in striking contrast here to the escaped slave Moses whose potential for heroic leadership is cut short by his death from exhaustion. This silencing of black voices in the novel contrasts sharply with the lively debates on 'Skilled Labor' and 'Home Influences' that were being carried out on the same pages of the *Recorder*.¹⁶

The national crisis of the Civil War brings about a personal crisis for both Minnie and Louis as each is informed of the secret of his/her birth. But whereas the nation is torn apart by sectional conflict, the self-divided protagonists are quickly reconciled to their racial heritage; they meet again and unite in marriage. The last five chapters then address the possibility of postwar national union. Black voices now proliferate, as Louis, Minnie, and the Southern folk among whom they reside discuss the work of Reconstruction. Foremost is the issue of racial identity and passing: if Minnie lists scorn for concealment, loss of self-respect, and love of mother as reasons for her refusal to pass, even more important is the need to disprove that racial characteristics are innate and to affirm the potential for black achievement. For Minnie and Louis, now the Moses of his people but not of the nation, this process involves providing education, encouraging land

16. *Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Christian Recorder*, May 1, 1869, and June 26, 1869; *Christian Recorder*, May 1, 1869.

ownership and the building of homes, and gaining the vote. But leadership is not the exclusive right of the elite characters, for in return the folk teach Minnie and Louis the important lessons of faith and endurance. Their collaborative efforts continue until Minnie's death at the hands of a white mob. The novel's ending thus emphasizes the shared cultural values—including those of community discipline—around which both elite and folk characters unite to carry out the work of reconstruction. Discipline itself is at the center of *Sowing and Reaping* as intemperance is perceived as a breakdown of discipline that pervades the nation. The narrative deconstructs two important dichotomies set up in the opening chapters to illuminate how intemperance has contaminated all spheres of life. First, intemperance exists in the elite's drawing room as well as the lower-class saloon; through this observation Harper continued her critique of a self-indulgent high culture no longer confined to Southern aristocracy but infecting a national population driven by the acquisition and display of wealth. Second, intemperance exists in the domestic as well as the public sphere as the intemperate husband or father brings excessive drinking into the home in the form of physical abuse, emotional distress, and financial hardship; as a consequence, women are forced out into the public sphere to fight for their survival. The tutelary functions of the novel are given to the protagonists, Paul Clifford and Belle Gordon, who try to reform a series of characters, the saloon keeper John Anderson, the young and wealthy Charles Romaine, the working-class Joe Gough. Through their stories, Harper suggests that even if intemperance may be viewed as an act of victimization on the part of the liquor industry, it is foremost an issue of individual moral responsibility.

The novel's most significant episodes center around Charles Romaine and his fiancée (and later wife) Jeanette Roland, as well as Mary and Joe Gough, who are introduced late in the fiction. The names of these last two characters invite us to read their story as a national narrative, for they recall Joe and Mary Morgan, the central characters of T. S. Arthur's famous *Ten Nights in a Bar-*

Room, as well as John Gough, a well-known temperance lecturer whose 1869 *Autobiography and Personal Recollections* detailed his own intemperate youth, conversion, and marriage to his wife Mary. In Harper's novel, the lesson that Joe Gough provides the reader lies in acceptance of moral responsibility for his intemperance following a conversion episode reminiscent of religious evangelical experience. Convinced by his wife and Belle to attend a meeting at the Reform Club, he listens to the temperance speaker, is persuaded, and signs the pledge. Joe has learned to discipline himself.

The fate of Charles Romaine stands in sharp contrast to that of Joe Gough. A victim of his elite culture's self-indulgence, Charles lacks the will to resist the temptations of social drinking offered him by Jeanette and his father. Portrayed as the victim of both an increased availability of liquor and a poor genetic make-up, Charles is nonetheless censured for his moral weakness; his inability to discipline himself brings about his death. The physical and moral dangers of intemperance are reinforced finally by the misfortunes that befall John Anderson and his family. At the beginning of the novel the saloon keeper had voiced his support of separate-sphere ideology, maintaining that he could keep his profitable liquor business separate from the moral welfare of his home. Yet by the novel's end Anderson's family is in total disarray: his wealth has infected the household, contributing to the self-indulgent and undisciplined behavior of his wife and children. All these characters stand in stark contrast to the now-married Belle and Paul, whose home represents the ideal of the familiar American household, characterized not by luxury but by its 'moral and spiritual nature,' not by lack of discipline but by firmness in 'household government.'¹⁷

The conclusions of both novels are all the more effective for the ways in which Harper introduced references to current events further to remind her readers that her fictions were indeed based on historical fact. At the end of *Minnie's Sacrifice*, for example,

17. *Sowing and Reaping*, *Christian Recorder*, Feb. 8, 1877.

Louis moves beyond community issues to consideration of the Reconstruction Act of 1867 and his fear of President Johnson's betrayal. This Act represented a triumph of black politics in the South in terms of both land acquisition and the franchise, but it was immediately followed by Northern Republicans' abandonment of African Americans at the polls and the growth of white mob violence in the South. We do not know whether Harper wrote the concluding chapters while these events were occurring or at a time closer to publication, suggesting in the latter instance a parallel between the periods right before the impeachment of Johnson and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment. But such parallels are readily established by the context of the *Recorder* itself: Louis's anxiety about Republican betrayal in 1867 may be read in relation to the September 4 article quoted above on the anticipated battle over the Fifteenth Amendment. Similarly, his recognition that under the Johnson administration blacks cannot count solely on federal government support is echoed in a September 11 article warning that the ballot is not a panacea: 'But don't expect the ballot to put brains in our head, money in our pockets, nor bread in our mouths.'

The historical realities on which *Minnie's Sacrifice* is based affirm that blacks cannot wholly depend on the efforts of the nation but must rely on community discipline. In contrast, the ending of *Sowing and Reaping* embraces a national women's project newly adopted by the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Although Harper had long been a proponent of women's right to vote, the WCTU had remained silent on this issue until Frances Willard's endorsement of female suffrage as a weapon of 'home protection' at its Philadelphia Convention in October 1876, most probably attended by Harper, as well as the Newark Convention held later that fall.¹⁸ In the last installments of the novel published in early 1877, Harper then doubled her argument on individual moral responsibility with advocacy of women's suffrage as a nec-

18. Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: H. J. Smith & Co., 1889), 351-53; Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 57-59.

essary disciplinary tool to combat intemperance; expanding on comments made by Minnie in the earlier novel, Mrs. Gladstone insists on women's need to possess not only 'persuasive influence' but also the 'enlightened and aggressive power' of the ballot.¹⁹ For Harper, then, the self-indulgent values of the elite's high culture must be replaced by disciplinary ideologies at work within the American household, community, and nation at large.

Harper's literary career stands in striking contrast to that of Charlotte Forten. In a diary entry written in May 1856, when she was nineteen years old, Forten confided her ambition to become a great writer: 'Oh! that I could become suddenly inspired and write as only great poets can write, or that I might write a beautiful poem of two hundred lines in my sleep as Coleridge did.'²⁰ Born into Philadelphia's black elite, a graduate of the Salem public school system, and a member of an interracial circle of prominent abolitionists, Forten certainly possessed the necessary literary skills to accomplish her goals. Yet she did not; I have analyzed elsewhere the social and psychological factors that might have prevented her sustained publication.²¹ Forten's antebellum writings consist then of a private journal, kept from 1854 to 1864, and a few published pieces—poems and travel sketches—that appeared primarily in the white abolitionist *Liberator* and *National Anti-Slavery Standard*; only one poem was printed in the *Christian Recorder*.

During and after the Civil War, Forten continued to seek a broad national readership beyond that of the black community. To do so, she turned to the patronage of two prominent men of letters: John Greenleaf Whittier, the abolitionist poet whom she

19. *Sowing and Reaping*, *Christian Recorder*, Jan. 4, 1877.

20. Charlotte Forten Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 156. All further references to the diary are to this edition and page numbers are placed parenthetically within the text.

21. Carla L. Peterson, *Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 177-79.

had known since childhood and who had encouraged her to go to the South Carolina Sea Islands in 1862 to teach the newly emancipated slaves, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, antislavery clergyman, soldier, and essayist, who had befriended her during her Sea Islands stay and become her literary mentor. It was through the intermediary of Whittier that the *Atlantic Monthly* published Forten's essay, 'Life on the Sea Islands,' in its May and June 1864 issues. For his part, in 1869 Higginson arranged for Forten to translate Erckmann-Chatrion's *Madame Thérèse* for Scribner's. And it was undoubtedly one of these two men who was responsible for *Scribner's Monthly's* publication of her essay, 'A Visit to the Birthplace of Whittier' in its September 1872 issue and her translation of an Erckmann-Chatrion short story a month later.

In contrast to Harper, then, Forten's literary practice represents a bold new departure for African-American writers. Indeed, Forten appears to have been convinced of her membership in, and authority to address, the nation's postbellum elite: former white and black abolitionists, New England and Yankee humanists, but also the new cosmopolitan and leisured social class that was emerging in the postwar years. As she wrote, the community that Forten imagined was not only that of African Americans working for social and political reconstruction on both local and national levels, but rather a community transcending racial borders and devoted to the creation of a new American high culture.

Forten was undoubtedly heartened by the *Atlantic Monthly's* acceptance of her 'Sea Islands' article. Yet her successes thereafter were few and far between. When Whittier wrote *Atlantic Monthly* editor, James Fields, in 1865, asking whether he could not offer Forten 'employment in translating French stories,' his request appears to have gone unanswered. And in 1885 Higginson proved unable to persuade the *North American Review* to publish her essay 'One Phase of the Race Question.'²² From 1872 on, she ap-

22. Whittier to Fields, Aug. 28, 1865, *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, ed. John B. Pickard, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 3: 99; Grimké, *Journals*, 519, 607n.



Fig. 2. Charlotte L. Forten. Courtesy of Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

pears to have published primarily, and sporadically, in two of Boston's abolitionist-inspired newspapers, the *Christian Register* and the *Commonwealth*. Forten had long been accustomed to interracial situations and relationships: she had participated in the activities of integrated antislavery societies in the antebellum period, mingled with white abolitionists and black freed people on

the Sea Islands during the war, maintained friendships with Whittier, Higginson, and other white Bostonians in the 1860s and '70s, and, most significantly, become engaged to a young white man during this same period.²³ Yet Forten was to find that the emerging postbellum literary system was rapidly reinstating racial barriers that she ultimately could not transcend. How did this process occur? Beyond the intercession of Whittier and Higginson, what made Forten's early writings acceptable to the quality monthlies? And why did they then stop publishing her despite Whittier's and Higginson's continuing patronage?

In its early days, the ethos of the *Atlantic Monthly* under its first editor James Russell Lowell had been one of Yankee humanism that preached rationality, tolerance, and open intellectual inquiry; as the war approached, it became unreservedly antislavery and anti-South. This tradition of progressive politics was continued under its second editor James Fields, who espoused radical Republicanism and published essays by Frederick Douglass. But Fields also brought to the magazine a concern for the market that had not previously existed; still further changes could be detected when William Dean Howells became Fields's assistant in 1866 and was charged with implementing 'new developments' which were then consolidated when he assumed editorship in 1871.²⁴

During this period, a shift was occurring in Boston from 'the expansive, socially engaged, liberal idealism' of the 1850s that reflected the vision of thinkers like Harper to a high literary culture that appealed to the tastes of the new leisured elite while purporting to represent the nation's most essential values. As a result of this shift, Howells was obliged to publish works that would cater to this elite's highbrow pretensions. As Brodhead has noted, one of the social markers that distinguished this upper class from the lower orders was leisure, which manifested itself most partic-

23. Judith A. Roman, *Annie Adams Fields: The Spirit of Charles Street* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 69.

24. Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 80.

ularly in the enjoyment of travel and the emergence of an 'imagination of acquisition.' One form of travel was the grand tour of Europe that enhanced the tourist's connoisseurship of European art; it produced a refined cosmopolitan literature best exemplified by the writings of Henry James. Another was the rustic-domestic vacation in which travelers could indulge in observing how rural folk lived. Their descriptions found literary expression in the genre of 'vacation arts.'²⁵ What characterizes these two genres is the degree to which they depend on an appreciation of the foreign in contrast to the domestic-tutelary model rooted in the familiarity of home to which Harper had turned.

Forten worked in both modes as she sought to adapt her writing to the conventions of this new high culture. Hence, her 'Sea Islands' essay falls within the tradition of vacation arts. Most often written from the distanced perspective of the dominant culture and functioning as a form of literary tourism, these travel sketches transported readers to unfamiliar locations and entertained them with tales of quaint folk characters. Critics have pointed out the degree to which many of these pieces appear to emphasize the purely local; portraying the visited place in terms of geographical and temporal containment, they offered readers a nostalgic vision of a homogeneous prelapsarian people untouched by historical change. More recent scholarship has argued that this local color writing was in fact vitally concerned with reimagining the nation and 'solidifying national centrality'; and it did so in one of two ways. Either the local place is inhabited by the primitive exotic other; if so, it is depicted as isolated; social difference is contained and national purity assured. Or the local place is envisioned as the repository of a shared past and inheritance; it represents, then, the common origins of the nation itself. Yet critics have also noted that contrary tendencies are embedded within the genre which work against national centralization. Characters or people are often geographically mobile, and the local place traversed by

25. Sedgwick, *Atlantic Monthly*, 123; Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 123-38.

translocal connections. Hence its population is marked by heterogeneity, by racial and ethnic difference, social hierarchy, and economic friction; the nation is not pure but inhabited by the foreign.²⁶

Viewed within the context of this emerging local color writing, Forten's 'Sea Islands' article underscores her problematic position as a black writer imagining herself as part of America's postbellum high-cultural community. She could not apprehend the 'foreign' in quite the same way that writers of the dominant culture could. Born into a well-to-do family but witness to its declining fortunes, upper-class but African American, protected by the black and white abolitionist community but the object of white racial hostility, Forten was constituted by elements sufficiently 'foreign' to one another that she could not construe any social entity as either totally familiar or foreign. Forten's composition of the 'Sea Islands' essay, based on entries taken from her diary, points to her consequent difficulties of self-representation. In the earlier Salem and Philadelphia entries these difficulties led to self-censorship; indeed, many passages read like a public document of abolitionist activity characterized by emotional self-repression rather than open expressions of racial hurt and anger. In contrast, the later Sea Islands entries betray a much greater degree of self-revelation which, however, is then again suppressed in the published *Atlantic* essay.²⁷

At the close of the Civil War, the Sea Islands had become a geographical crossroads into which people from different social groups and provenances poured to cohabit with the newly emancipated slave population. In Forten's diary, this mingling of heterogeneous peoples is best exemplified by the store kept by Mr. Hunn, a Northern Quaker, to which the ex-slaves came to buy

26. June Howard, 'Unraveling Regions, Unsettling Periods: Sarah Orne Jewett and American Literary History,' *American Literature* 68 (June 1996): 366; Amy Kaplan, 'Nation, Region, and Empire,' in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 250-53; Howard, 'Unraveling Regions,' 372-80.

27. For a fuller discussion of Forten's Sea Islands diary entries and published writings, see Peterson, 'Doers of the Word,' 189-95.

provisions and newcomers, like Forten herself, came to make their acquaintance: 'I foresee that his store, to which people from all the neighboring plantations come,—will be a source of considerable interest and amusement' (395). Here Forten is a tourist, yet her stance as insider/outsider to the observed culture is much more complex. Her initial perspective on the ex-slaves is indeed that of an outsider who perceives their customs as foreign. Forten tried at times to alleviate this sense of strangeness by emphasizing the degree to which the freed people exhibited traits familiar to, and valued by, the dominant culture: duty, honesty, industriousness, etc. Yet she was also deeply appreciative of the African-based folkways that had given them the strength to survive slavery. And as her stay lengthened, the foreign became increasingly familiar as Forten found herself drawn to the ex-slaves' ceremonies. For example, recording her observation of a shout one night she acknowledged her shy participation in it: 'L.[izzie] and I, in a dark corner of the Praise House, amused ourselves with practicing a little' (482).

Many of Forten's diary entries reflect upon the complex forms of cultural exchange that can occur when heterogeneous peoples come to mingle with one another. She herself maintained an ambivalent stance toward the freed people's culture, in which affective involvement alternated with amused distance. Yet she worried about their ultimate assimilation into the dominant culture, noting, for example, that: 'We c'd . . . hear them singing hymns;—not their own beautiful hymns, I am sorry to say. I do so fear these will be superseded by ours, which are poor in comparison' (477). Interestingly enough, in this observation Forten's use of pronouns indicates that the third person refers to the black freed people and the first to Northern white Christians; she aligns herself here with the dominant culture. Yet, if Forten was not a freed slave, neither was she a white abolitionist. In fact, for the entire period that she spent on St. Helena, she remained a self-divided figure ambiguously poised between these two social groups. Her sense of her own profound cultural difference is poignantly sug-

gested in a November 1862 diary entry: 'The effect of the [ex-slaves'] singing has been to make me feel a little sad and lonely to-night. A yearning for congenial companionship will sometimes come over me. . . . Kindness, most invariable,—for which I am most grateful—I meet with constantly, but congeniality I find not at all in this house [of whites]' (403).

Significantly, such discussions of cultural in-betweenness and self-division are entirely absent from Forten's published writings: two letters to Garrison, printed in the December 12 and 19, 1862, issues of the *Liberator*, and the later *Atlantic* article. In a letter to Fields Whittier had promised to 'omit a portion of it [the 'Sea Islands' essay] and reduce it to Magazine proportions.'²⁸ We have no way of knowing to what extent he might have reshaped it nor whether the changes were designed to accommodate the sensibilities of the *Atlantic's* readership. Yet the fact remains that the published version works within the most conservative parameters of local color writing: it presents itself as a piece of literary tourism in which the visitor perceives the visited place as geographically confined and its inhabitants as a picturesque primitive people; racial boundaries are firmly reestablished and social differences contained.

Forten's 1862 *Liberator* letters still evince a stance of ambivalence evident for example in her efforts to mediate between the strangeness of the freed people's folkways and the familiarity of their values. Her 'Sea Islands' essay, however, is marked by a repression of intimate personal experience and her retreat into the stance of an outsider who, unlike Harper, observes the ex-slaves' culture from a distanced perspective. Forten began her article by narrating the scene of arrival in which she gazes freely upon her subjects: 'A motley assemblage had collected on the wharf,—officers, soldiers, and "contrabands" of every size and hue: black was, however, the prevailing color.'²⁹ Most of the rest of Part I is

28. Whittier to Fields, Dec. 25, 1863, *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, 3: 55.

29. 'Life on the Sea Islands,' *Atlantic Monthly* 13 (May and June 1864): 587. All further page references to the essay are placed parenthetically within the text.

organized according to a temporal chronology based on the activities of the observer rather than the people observed. This chronological structure then gives way to description which is continued throughout Part II. Most of these descriptions are based on accounts of public events that Forten culled from her diary: the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation on Thanksgiving Day, attended by General Saxton; Emancipation Day itself; encounters with the rebels; the death of Colonel Shaw. The little new material that is included consists of portraits of the ex-slave population in which Forten attempts to individuate specific people; yet even here, these individuals remain picturesque stock figures representing black folk naiveté, religiosity, wit, etc.

Suppressed in this article, then, is the narration of Forten's intimate experiences with slave culture whereby the 'I' comes familiarly to inhabit the foreign, insider/outsider distinctions are questioned, and racial boundaries troubled. In its stead the reader is presented with an indeterminate and pluralized 'we'—agents of civilization from the North—who observe 'the people' now deemed to be in need of assimilation into the dominant culture. To the extent that the 'I' is employed, it is most often not an experiencing 'I' but a narrating 'I', the writing subject engaged in observing and analyzing what she has seen. On the few occasions when Forten represents herself in the text, she does so as a detached ahistorical 'I.' She portrays herself, for example, as constructing a history for the freed people from a safe pedagogical distance: 'I told them about Toussaint, thinking it well they should know what one of their own color had done for his race' (591). Or she inserts herself through generalized commentary as when she adopts an ethnocentric Christian perspective to interpret the shout as the 'barbarous expression of religion, handed down to them from their African ancestors, and destined to pass away under the influence of Christian teachings' (594). To the extent that Forten admits identification with the freed people, she does so only in the concluding paragraph by speaking through the voice of another, that of the biblical woman of Shunem in II Kings:

'While writing these pages I am once more nearing Port Royal. . . . I shall dwell again among "mine own people"' (676). In this published account, the freed people remain culturally contained and, in striking contrast to Harper, Forten leaves unaddressed the question of their agency in the reconstruction of the nation.

As Reconstruction progressed and Forten matured, I believe she could no longer tolerate the constraints demanded by local-color writing and hence found it difficult to publish in the quality monthlies. A personal conflict between Howells and Higginson resulted in the latter's abandonment of the *Atlantic* in favor of *Scribner's* and other New York magazines. But even the appearance of *Scribner's* in 1870, which quickly became the *Atlantic's* chief competitor, did little to facilitate Forten's further publication. *Scribner's* proved in fact to be less than welcoming to black writers in its linkage of the newly emerging postbellum national culture with the South. Indeed, the 1870s were characterized by the reimagining of national community based on sectional reconciliation—a 'romance of reunion,' to use Nina Silber's phrase, in which the quality monthlies played a vital role and from which not even Whittier and Higginson were immune. In 1875 Whittier insisted that the burden of overcoming 'the unchristian prejudice still existing against [blacks]' lay entirely on them, while in 1878 Higginson dared to suggest the existence of widespread black prosperity in the South.³⁰

Virginia-born Thomas Nelson Page succinctly summed up the monthlies' participation in this romance of reunion when he noted that 'the great monthly magazines were not only open as never before to Southern contributors, but welcomed them as a new and valuable acquisition.'³¹ In *Scribner's*, this trend was inaugurated in 1873 with a series of articles, 'The Great South,' by

30. Sedgwick, *Atlantic Monthly*, 134-35; Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 71, 96.

31. Quoted in Silber, *Romance of Reunion*, 113.

Edward King, which were then followed by the local-color, plantation, and dialect stories of George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, and Page. Promoting tourism in the South to the new leisured elite, King emphasized the charm and hospitality of its white inhabitants while celebrating the beauty of the physical landscape, in which blacks were featured as primitive figures performing quaint folk rituals. If King portrayed the Southern black population as picturesque, other writers like George Cary Eggleston, a contributor to the *Atlantic* from South Carolina and self-proclaimed rebel, insisted on their savagery and incapacity for civilization.

In the words of an editor, one of *Scribner's* chief missions was 'to enlighten our country concerning itself, and to spread before the nation the wonderful natural resources, the social condition, and the political complications of a region which needs but just, wise, and generous legislation, with responding goodwill and industry, to make it a garden of happiness and prosperity.'³² In this comment knowledge of nation is linked to knowledge of a particular region, the South, envisioned as the local place that will solidify national centrality. By now, however, Forten was well aware that she could not participate in this romance of reunion. So it is not surprising that she should have turned away from the vacation arts that promoted it. Eight years after her 'Sea Islands' essay, Forten could no longer position herself as a detached writing subject reporting on a 'primitive' people whose lack of subjectivity the nation assumed; nor was she willing to place herself within her text as a performer of this 'foreign' culture.

As noted earlier, Forten was able to publish a short essay, 'A Visit to the Birthplace of Whittier,' in *Scribner's* in 1872. To my mind, this piece represents Forten's most successful negotiation of a middle ground between her own artistic sensibilities and the new aesthetic tastes of the quality monthlies' readers; it fully expresses her ideal of American culture. Written in the tradition of

32. Quoted in Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938-69), 3: 464.

the 'country life' writings of British authors William Howitt and Mary Russell Mitford, the sketch differs sharply from the vacation arts. No longer positioned as an outsider witness to strange customs, Forten explores cultivated country life within a paradigm of liberal humanism familiar both to her and her readers. In her sketch she travels to the places of Whittier's childhood—the town of Haverhill, the Seminary, Kenoza Lake, the old schoolhouse, and homestead. The pleasures afforded by the visit depend entirely on her familiarity with Whittier's poetry and her ability to associate places seen with poems read; likewise, the impact of Forten's piece on her readers rests on her assumption of shared literary associations, indeed of a shared national culture.

Scribner's increasing sectional favoritism was undoubtedly enough to bar Forten from further publication, but her exclusion might also have been compounded by a letter she wrote that appeared in the June 27, 1874, issue of the *Christian Register*. Written in response to an article, 'The Co-education of the White and Colored Races,' published the month before in *Scribner's*, it represents a critical turning point in Forten's expression of racial consciousness. The article is a brief against interracial education in the South in which the writer insisted that, given the moral degradation of blacks, prejudice against them is natural, and decried the attempts of the Civil Rights Bill to legislate social change. In her response Forten countered that if moral degradation had occurred under slavery it had affected both white and black populations. Prejudice exists, she maintained, against 'condition' rather than 'color'; hence 'co-education is the surest means by which prejudice can be rooted out.' To buttress her argument she retold her own story—in the third person—of attendance and graduation from the Salem public schools and subsequent successful career as a teacher.³³

33. See also Peterson, 'Doers of the Word,' 218. The reader may also wish to refer to Forten's incisive critique of Rebecca Harding Davis's novel, *Waiting for the Verdict*, for an earlier expression of racial anger, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Feb. 22, 1868.

It is difficult to imagine that *Scribner's* would have printed any of Forten's future writings, and indeed from late 1872 on she seems to have published chiefly in two Boston-based papers, the *Christian Register* and the *Commonwealth*. The *Christian Register* was the main organ of Boston Unitarians; it was non-denominational, socially liberal and reform minded, and unequivocally antislavery before the war. The *Commonwealth* was even more radical in its racial politics. Founded in September 1862 and actively supported by Garrison and Phillips, it 'was recognized as a sort of organ of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in its relation to the national crisis.'³⁴ It was also at this time that Forten started experimenting with new forms of writing designed to appeal to the elite readership's emerging taste for the high-cultural aesthetic that Harper's novels so forcefully condemned. Forten published several such pieces in the *Christian Register*, in particular a three-part account of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia that appeared in the July 22, 29, and August 5, 1876 issues. They reflect her persistent hope that, in sharing the highbrow values of the elite, she too could participate in the work of national reconstruction.

The Centennial Exposition was designed to celebrate the newly reconstructed American nation, in particular its material and industrial progress, to the international community. Beyond that, it also promoted the new cosmopolitan aesthetic with which the postbellum elite had become fascinated, by providing a grand world tour that exposed visitors to the arts of Europe and Asia. Forten's articles record in great detail the vast display of luxury items from foreign lands that her readers had come to see as central to the formation of high culture. Thus, on the one hand Forten appears here to participate in the highbrow culture of the

34. George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America: A History of its Origins and Development* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 114-16, 356; Moncure Daniel Conway, *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols. (1904; rpt. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 1: 369.

elite; on the other hand she was well aware that she could never gain full acceptance into this dominant class, as her deteriorating relationship with the *Atlantic* and *Scribner's* made evident.

Indeed, despite her association with the new elite's high-cultural values, the mature Forten was now more than willing to express racial anger and demand racial justice. Thus, in a letter to the editor recounting a return trip to Port Royal, published in the September 21, 1872, issue of the *Commonwealth*, Forten condemned the economic alliance of Northern and Southern elites and the impatience of 'Northern settlers . . . who, coming down solely to make money, seem to expect perfection from a people so recently delivered from slavery and are disgusted with the whole race because they do not find it.' Still another letter, 'Mr. Savage's Sermon, "The Problem of the Hour,"' published in the December 23, 1876 issue of the *Commonwealth* elucidates even more forcefully Forten's wrath over continuing racial injustice. In the first part of the letter she angrily denounced Savage's justification of slavery, then proceeded to a critique of the present failure of Reconstruction: white Southerners 'had not, and have not, any desire to grant their rights to the colored people, but, on the contrary, a determination to reduce them to a condition as nearly like that of slavery as possible.' Forten's Reconstruction writings are characterized, then, by a bifurcation of sensibility and subject matter which resulted, I believe, in her increasingly problematic relationship to literary publication.³⁵

In their periodical publication of the 1860s and '70s, Harper and Forten followed strikingly divergent paths. Writing primarily—and successfully—for the black community, Harper reconfigured the antebellum middlebrow model of domestic-tutelary writing; in the process, she constructed an image of blacks that emphasized the familiarity of their domestic households as the basis for inclusion within American society. In contrast, Forten aspired to

35. See also Peterson, 'Doers of the Word,' 218–22.

participate in the high culture of the new emerging elite and write for the national quality monthlies; but she found her efforts hampered by the dominant culture's insistence on the representation of blacks as foreign. In many respects their literary activities after 1877 followed a similar pattern. The *Christian Recorder* printed yet another of Harper's serial fictions, *Trial and Triumph*, in 1888–89, and Harper herself was able to publish several volumes of poetry as well as an 1892 novel, *Iola Leroy*. Forten published only sporadically. Married and increasingly preoccupied with domestic and social duties, she was unable to take advantage of the *Atlantic's* renewed interest in African-American writers, evident in the appearance of Chesnut, Du Bois, and Washington in its pages from the late 1880s on, although she still published in such monthlies as the abolitionist-inspired *New England Magazine*.

Yet certain commonalities between the two writers are also evident. Faced with a largely indifferent audience in this period of hardening racial lines, Forten came to follow Harper's lead and seek an African-American readership, publishing in the *A.M.E. Church Review* and participating in the literary activities of the Bethel Historical and Literary Society.³⁶ In turn, despite Scuggs's fulsome praise of her, Harper was obliged on occasion to contend with the condescending attitudes of the Uncle Glumbys of the black community, the mixed reviews of *Iola Leroy* that appeared in the *Christian Recorder* and the *A.M.E. Church Review*, and finally the disappearance of her serial fiction until the 1990s.³⁷ Finally, until the past few years, both authors have shared the common fate of erasure from the canons of both American and African-American literature. Harper's serial fiction remained buried until the 1990s, while Forten's literary efforts have been overshadowed by those of Higginson's more famous protégée, Emily Dickinson. In this sequence of events, neither Harper nor

36. 'Personal Recollections of Whittier,' *New England Magazine* 8 (June 1893): 468–76; 'At Newport,' *A.M.E. Church Review* 4 (1888): 258; John Wesley Cromwell, *History of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association* (Washington, D.C.: R. L. Pendleton, 1896), 30.

37. *Christian Recorder*, Jan. 12, 1893, and *A.M.E. Church Review* 9 (1893): 416–17.

Forten were successful in their attempts at national Reconstruction. Perhaps our scholarly appreciation of them today will enable them finally to achieve the recognition they deserve.

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