

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: "THE WORLD, OUR HOME": THE RHETORICAL
VISION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS IN AMERICAN
LITERATURE, 1870-1920

Amy Laurel Hobbs, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

Dissertation directed by: Professor Martha Nell Smith
Department of English

Led by journalist J. C. Croly, writer Julia Ward Howe, and settlement house leader Jane Addams, the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) encouraged housewives to lobby for local reform, and, ultimately, national suffrage, under the banner of municipal housekeeping. The rhetoric of this all-female organization is an important, yet overlooked, context to what literary critic Elizabeth Ammons has identified as the renaissance of American women's literature that occurred during the Progressive Era. Ammons names seventeen women, writing between 1870 and 1930, whose work now stands at the heart of the canon of American literature, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, and Mary Austin. These five women had an intimate acquaintance with women's clubs. Placing their writing in the context of club rhetoric demonstrates how women used a particular set of tropes and themes to probe a central political debate of the Progressive Era: the "Woman Question." The women's club movement developed a stirring, feminine rhetoric to justify women's place in public life. Women writers used club discourse as raw material for fashioning

their own theories about gender.

For the past twenty years, historians and scholars in women's studies, such as Karen Blair, Anne Firor Scott, and Deborah Gray White, have emphasized the political importance of the women's club movement. Within the field of rhetoric, Anne Ruggles Gere's *Intimate Practices* (1997) thoroughly investigates how the club movement engaged national issues. However, to date, few literary scholars have examined the influence of Anglo-American club rhetoric on women's literature. Recognizing the political work of the GFWC allows us to read past unfavorable stereotypes about clubs, which formed in the twentieth century. Clubwomen were these writers' closest friends, their largest audience, and their companions in the struggle for equality. Fully understanding the importance of the women's club movement in American civic life exposes the tension women writers faced when they picked up the pen. Should they embrace the high-flying rhetoric of this popular movement, criticize it, or ignore it? How should they account for these real-life examples of feminized political work within their own ideas concerning gender?

“THE WORLD, OUR HOME”: THE RHETORICAL VISION OF WOMEN’S CLUBS
IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1870-1920

by

Amy Laurel Hobbs

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Martha Nell Smith, Chair
Professor Jeanne Fahenstock
Associate Professor Marilee Lindemann
Assistant Professor Peter Mallios
Associate Professor Robyn Muncy

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To my mother, Betty Stevenson, and
to my grandmother, Inez Halbert.

My memories of my grandmother's civic involvement in
the small town of Steelville, Missouri inspired this project.

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Introduction

In 1868, “Jennie June” Croly, a prominent New York journalist; her colleague Kate Fields; and poets Phoebe and Alice Cary organized a new club for women only. After the all-male New York Press Club barred Croly from a dinner honoring Charles Dickens, the women decided that they needed their own “women’s club.” While women had long created literary salons and reading societies, Croly’s club soon blossomed into a new political movement, dedicated to self-improvement and reform. Driven by national leaders, including Croly, writer Julia Ward Howe, and settlement house leader Jane Addams, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) encouraged housewives to learn study skills and apply them to political and community reform. Under the banner of “municipal housekeeping,” clubwomen lobbied for local and state reform, and, ultimately, national suffrage.

The rhetoric of this all-female organization is an important, yet overlooked, context to what literary critic Elizabeth Ammons has identified as the renaissance of

American women's literature in the Progressive Era¹. Ammons names seventeen women, writing between 1870 and 1930, whose work now stands at the heart of the canon of American literature, including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Sarah Orne Jewett, Willa Cather, and Mary Austin. These five women had an intimate acquaintance with women's clubs. Placing their writing in the context of club rhetoric demonstrates how women used a particular set of tropes and themes to probe a central political debate of the Progressive Era: the "Woman Question."² The women's club movement developed a stirring, feminine rhetoric to justify women's place in public life. Women writers used club discourse as raw material for fashioning their own theories about gender.

For the past twenty years, historians and scholars in women's studies, such as Karen Blair, Anne Firor Scott, and Deborah Gray White, have emphasized the political importance of the women's club movement. Within the field of rhetoric, Anne Ruggles Gere's *Intimate Practices* (1997) thoroughly investigates how the club movement conversed with national issues. However, to date, literary scholars have not fully examined the influence of Anglo-American club rhetoric on women's literature³.

¹ Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

² Historian Nancy Cott provides an excellent discussion of Progressive Era feminism in her essay "What's in a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism': or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History." *The Journal of American History* 76.3 (1989): 809-829.

³ Because Frances Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper were all national officers in the black clubs' organization, the National Association of Colored Women, much literary scholarship accounts for the black women's club movement. For an overview of the NACW, see Stephanie Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," *Journal of Women's History* 3.2 (1991): 10-25; Wilson Jeremiah Moses, "Domestic Feminism, Sex Roles, and Black Women's Clubs, 1893-1896," *Journal of Social and Behavioral Studies* 24.4 (1987): 166-77; Deborah Gray White, "The Cost of Club Work and the Price of Black Feminism," *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: U of

Recognizing the very real and valuable political work of the GFWC allows us to read past the unfavorable stereotypes about clubs, which formed in the twentieth century.

Understanding the political conversation women writers engaged in enables contemporary readers to find new political meanings in fictional representations of club life.

While the 1990s witnessed a craze for book clubs and reading circles, sparked by Oprah Winfrey's media empire, few women today know of the club work of the previous century. During the Progressive Era, women's clubs began by studying literature and the fine arts, but soon grew into vast departmental clubs with their own clubhouses, publications, and conventions (Blair 95). In large cities, a major club could have four to five hundred members. Across the country, women tackled a variety of community reforms. Women's clubs founded seventy-five percent of the public libraries in America; successfully lobbied for child labor reform, city and national parks, and pure food laws; and helped sustain the federal Women's Bureau with its popular Children's Bureau (Blair 118-119).

The club movement was widely recognized in its day for its political work. For Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Woman's Club was the most important voluntary organization of the nineteenth century because it "reached almost every one, and brought her out of the sacred selfishness of the home into the broader contact and relationship so essential to social progress" (*Living* 257). Jane Addams believed the club movement led women "from a sense of isolation to one of civic responsibility" and opened "new and interesting vistas of life to those who are ambitious" (qtd in Johnson 55). Clubs gained

Illinois P, 1993); and Shirley Logan, *We are Coming: the Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999).

enough political power that, after leaving office, President Grover Cleveland attacked clubwomen in print for threatening the “integrity of our homes” (3).

While Kate Chopin was writing her novel, *The Awakening*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman was promoting her ideas in *Women and Economics*, GFWC club leaders were busy writing and publishing their own work. This forgotten body of texts was written by prominent clubwomen to persuade other women to join the club movement and to convince skeptics of the value of their activities. Novels like *The Precipice* by Elia Wilkins Peattie and *The President of Quex* by Helen Winslow feature spunky “New Women” who express their political ambitions through the organized culture of the women’s club movement. In many of the novels, key scenes occur in club settings, like the department club meeting or the national bi-annual convention. There, the heroine rouses her audience to greater political accomplishment and confidently believes that the world will be transformed by the actions of clubs across the country.

In this context, paired with “club” novels, new readings emerge of women’s literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of the prominent writers Ammons studies had close personal ties to the women’s club movement, including Gilman, Chopin, Jewett, Cather, and Austin. Each of these women also fictionalized clubwomen or club rhetoric. At first glance, fiction like Chopin’s “Loka” may appear to be satire; however, in light of club rhetoric, a more nuanced reading of women’s political engagement emerges. Likewise, the formal rhetoric of the club movement appears in texts that seem to have nothing to do with club life, like Jewett’s *A Country Doctor* and Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*. Acknowledging that this vocabulary

carried a political connotation emphasizes the writers' engagement with emerging arguments for gender equity.

Women writers in the Progressive Era struggled with a vast dichotomy. On the one hand, their fellow clubwomen had created a buoyant rhetorical vision of transformation: a vision that called for the "awakening" of individual women, the reformation of the industrial excesses of capitalism, and the creation of new professions for women. On the other hand, this rhetoric circulated in a world where middle-class women still faced enormous pressure to marry and maintain a home, where working-class women and young children labored under inhumane conditions, and where no woman could vote in a national election.

These writers did not face this conflict in the abstract. They attended club meetings and read their own writing to audiences of clubwomen. Sarah Orne Jewett's close companion, Annie Fields, was at the center of the earliest clubs in Boston⁴. Kate Chopin read her fiction to an audience of four hundred Missouri clubwomen, the largest audience of her lifetime (Toth 227). Willa Cather faced harsh public criticism for mocking Lincoln clubs in the local newspapers (Stout 39). Charlotte Perkins Gilman made a living lecturing to clubs.⁵ Clubwomen were their closest friends, their largest audience, and their companions in the struggle for equality. Fully understanding the importance of the women's club movement in American civic life exposes the tension women writers faced when they picked up the pen. Should they embrace the high-flying rhetoric of this popular movement, criticize it, or ignore it? How should they account for

⁴ Rita K Gollin, *Annie Adams Fields: Women of Letters*, (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2002).

⁵ Ann J Lane, *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).

these real-life examples of feminized political work within their own ideas concerning gender, especially if they did not agree with the philosophy of the club movement?

The Political Work of Women's Clubs

Like their fellow writers, the national leaders of the club movement came from a very small segment of American society. In her history of voluntary associations, Anne Firor Scott places the club movement in context of the broader population of American women. In 1880, around the time that clubs were sprouting up across the country, about fourteen million women lived in the United States. Of those fourteen million, roughly two-thirds lived and worked on farms, including newly freed African-American women who still worked the fields of the South. The remaining third, close to five million women, lived in cities. Most of these women worked as well, as domestic servants, in shops and factories, or at home, supplementing meager incomes by taking in laundry, doing piecework or housing boarders. The women who joined clubs, white or African-American, came out of the small minority of the professional classes, mostly wives and daughters of prosperous, white-collar men (80). These relatively few urban, privileged women formed the core of the club phenomenon. In proportion to their numbers, however, their influence was widely felt in the popular culture because their privilege gave them access the national press. They also had the ability, money, and leisure to print and circulate their own writing. Through a tight network of national leaders, the club movement created a cohesive and influential view of women's purpose. Building on

the “feminine virtues” accorded them by the Cult of Domesticity, clubwomen argued that their talents in the home qualified them for a larger role in public life.⁶

Before the Civil War, women had been involved in a variety of associations. The roots of the women’s club movement reach back to the church organizations, temperance societies, and abolitionists of antebellum America. However, two main factors changed the nature of voluntary organizations for women: the Civil War and the opening of higher education to women. During the Civil War, women joined the Sanitary Commission in their local communities, and their organizational capacity to send food, uniforms, and blankets to troops in both the North and the South earned them the respect of many soldiers.⁷ The skills women learned in the highly organized Sanitary Commission were easily translated to the new club movement. In the early history of the New England Women’s Club, headed by Julia Ward Howe, the Sanitary Commission is directly cited as an impetus for their organization (Sprague 16). Besides the Sanitary Commission, the

⁶ Historian Glenna Matthews has identified a “Golden Age of Domesticity.” During the 1850s, the home was perceived by both men and women as a site of specific virtues that could not be found in the marketplace. These virtues led women to work with men in the major reform movements of the era: abolition and temperance. While stereotyped as the saviors of the hearth, women worked with men to prove that the values they embodied were needed in the public realm as well. Matthews cites Sarah Josepha Hale as the most influential example of this brand of domestic feminism. As editor of the enormously popular *Goodey’s Lady Book* from the 1830s to 1877, Hale promoted her interest in women and was a fierce advocate for women’s improvements. Historians of the women’s movement have often discounted her because she refused to endorse women’s suffrage. However, Hale believed in other forms of political engagement, such as lobbying, and led a long battle to create a national Thanksgiving Day to honor the importance of the home. Her mission succeeded in 1863 when President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday. According to Matthews, the ideals of domesticity were woven into the public rhetoric of nineteenth century. To ignore that rhetoric is to ignore women’s major contributions to public life. See: Glenna Matthews, “*Just a Housewife:*” *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).

⁷ See Judith Ann Ginsberg’s *Civil War Sisterhood: the U. S. Sanitary Commission and Women’s Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 2000).

opening of higher education to women inspired early study clubs⁸. While the clubs were in no way associated with universities, women who had won the battle to send their daughters to college were often the first members of these clubs (Scott 60). These women, who had sacrificed and fought for their daughters, were not content to sit on the sidelines and watch the next generation progress. Instead, they too wanted an education and often boasted that their clubs were “universities for older women” (qtd in Blair 51).

Besides the major cultural factors that influenced the formation of clubs, many older women joined for more personal reasons: they had leisure time as they finished raising children; they were interested in the emerging debate over the “Woman Question”; or they felt isolated in their homes. Therefore, when women heard about new study clubs forming in Boston and New York, they were inspired to begin their own course of study on Shakespeare or European history. Then, the national network of magazines and conventions encouraged them to join the reform work of other clubs.

Within a study club, programs were usually set a year in advance and focused on a particular theme. Popular topics included British and American literature, art history, the Bible, and American history (Blair 57). A woman would prepare a paper on the given topic, read the paper aloud, and then a designated critic might respond or there might be a brief general discussion. According to club historian Mary Jean Houde, clubs often supported women’s study efforts by providing reading rooms and collections of literature (76). These collections became the foundations of many local public libraries across the country (Blair 6).

⁸ For further information on women in higher education, see also: Barbara Miller Solomon’s *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) and Lynn D. Gordon’s *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990).

Drawing on a strong antebellum tradition of self-education in the North, African-American study clubs predated the white women's club movement.⁹ Anne Firor Scott points out that white women, in their exuberance over their new clubs, demonstrated no knowledge of the clubs that had long existed in free black communities along the East Coast, such as the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia, founded in 1831. According to Scott, the club "viewed itself as working for self-improvement and thus for the improvement of the whole black race. . . . These women not only pioneered in self-help literary associations, but also worked diligently to create and support schools for black people" ("Most" 112). These clubs formed as mutual aid societies in cities where there was little institutional support for African Americans. While literary clubs read Shakespeare and other prominent European writers, they also strongly supported developing an African-American body of letters.

Clubwomen learned how to compile information from a variety of sources and gained confidence by presenting their papers to their clubs. By reading to an audience that was supportive but could also be demanding, women learned skills they could not gain elsewhere. While the clubs were by no means radical, nor did they challenge mainstream thought in the beginning, Blair stresses that "a strong sense of sisterhood grew among these women, along with confidence, and skills in speaking, researching, and writing, which gave all a new sense of worth and enabled some members to move on to more political activity" (58). Clubwomen's study practices gave them a certain

⁹ For an excellent overview of African-American study clubs, see: Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2002).

confidence to extend their work into the public sphere. With this foundation, women confidently set about cleaning up their cities through municipal housekeeping.

Early literary clubs were soon replaced by department clubs with elaborate committees and multiple reform projects. Some clubs never took the next step, content to remain study clubs for the benefit of their members only. However, many did organize into large departmental clubs, or women created a new departmental club that included members from the older study club. Rather than studying Romantic poets or Roman art, committees in a department club would study specific community problems. For example, the Philadelphia study club, the New Century Club, branched into the Woman's Health Protective Association in 1893 with two hundred members. According to Scott, committees studied contagious diseases, water supply, and street cleaning. By first learning about a problem in committee and then suggesting lobbying tactics to the whole club, these organizations were often quite effective. The Woman's Health Protective Association, after visiting a water filtration system in Louisville and consulting with a Boston engineer, presented a plan for a better water system to the mayor of Philadelphia and raised enough public support to pass a bond issue and get clean water for the city (143). Throughout the country, Anglo- and African- American clubs lobbied their cities for better food, sanitation, parks, libraries, and social services.

Along with a long tradition of study clubs, African-American women also had a robust tradition of benevolent and mutual-aid societies. Jim Crow segregation and the violence of the late nineteenth century forced African-American women to rely even more on their own communities for help. According to historian Deborah Gray White, "the guiding principle behind all the clubs was racial uplift through self-help. Black

clubwomen believed they could help solve the race's problems through intensive social service focused on improving home life and educating mothers" (27). This philosophy of uplift was best expressed in the national club motto "Lifting as We Climb."¹⁰ African-American clubwomen, including Ida Wells, Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, Josephine Ruffin and Margaret Washington (Booker T Washington's third wife) formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896, fifteen years before the NAACP was created. The national organization was spurred by a letter written by James Jacks, the white president of the Missouri Press Association. He viciously attempted to smear Ida B. Wells and her effective anti-lynching campaign by calling all black women "prostitutes and thieves" (qtd in White 23). In response, Wells drew on an existing network of individual clubs to form the NACW.

One of the NACW's primary goals was to defend black women against attacks on their womanhood and, as president Mary Church Terrell declared, mobilize their numbers to "face that white man and call him a LIAR" (qtd in White 23). White emphasizes that part of the clubs' effectiveness came in their ability to see "a set of interlocking problems involving race, gender, and poverty, no one of which could be dealt with independently" (24). While African-Americans were able to see how class, race, and gender intersected, the white GFWC could not; their blindness, in part, led to their decline in the twentieth century. The white-led GFWC did little to further civil rights. Instead, they fell in line with mainstream racism such as the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision of 1896 that institutionalized segregation with its "separate but equal" ruling. In 1900, the

¹⁰ Historian Floris Barnett Cash expertly reviews recent critiques of the class bias expressed in the African-American clubs' approach in her introduction to *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood P, 2001).

Woman's Era Club, led by Josephine Ruffin, was accepted by the GFWC without realizing the club had African-American members. The board withdrew its acceptance despite the protests of northern clubs, saying it did not want to risk losing southern white clubs' memberships (Gere 5-6). Thus, the national GFWC prioritized the integration of white North and South over the integration of white and black in America and missed an important opportunity to help further the hard work of the NACW.

Despite their shortcomings, women of both races were able to spread their own ideas concerning democracy and community involvement in America. All clubwomen's work in founding libraries, investigating factories, improving community playgrounds, and lobbying to reform legislation were an attempt to buffer the rapid expansion of industrialization and corporate capitalism that characterized the Progressive Era. African-American clubs were on the leading edge of the anti-lynching campaign, provided childcare to women workers, health care for the elderly and many of the other social services their communities desperately needed. Historian Karen Blair sums up clubwomen's contributions elegantly: "Textbooks would have us believe that Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* was solely responsible for the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Law, or that conservation was a one-man campaign of Teddy Roosevelt. In fact, these measures, and others like them, were supported by the hundreds of thousands of active clubwomen who made it their business to transform America and the notion of what a responsible government should provide" (102).

The Rhetorical Vision of Clubwomen

To examine where and how club rhetoric appears in women's fiction, Ernest Bormann's fantasy-theme analysis is an especially useful rhetorical tool because of his

long-term investigation of group dynamics within small groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous. In his study “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality” (1972), he describes how a small group will coalesce through a series of rhetorical fantasy chains. A fantasy chain consists of a series of comments or stories about the past or ideas about the future. One individual may offer a comment that resonates with the rest of the group. Others in the group will then add to this comment, creating links on a chain that develops into a story. The fantasy chain becomes the basis of a common culture unique to the specific small group. Group members will then induct new members into this culture by drawing on these stories. By applying this theory to the women’s club movement, the narrative that bonded individual women together in a club emerges, which explains women’s enthusiasm for and loyalty to their clubs.

If offered at the right place and time, the fantasy chains can become powerful enough to create a national phenomenon, which Bormann identifies as a rhetorical vision. For example, he examines how Puritan groups in the late seventeenth century bonded through fantasy chains about their past and future missions. Their fantasy chains were soon woven into the rhetoric of the broader colonial culture, becoming a rhetorical vision. This rhetorical vision is a central foundation to America’s national culture, as Bormann explains in the preface to his 2001 edition of *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*. Once a rhetorical vision emerges, it usually contains dramatic characters and plot lines that can be alluded to by members of the community, which will cause an emotional response similar to the original fantasy chain. Bormann explains how such a vision can move a community to action: “The dramatizations which catch on and chain out in small groups are worked into public speeches and into the mass media, and,

in turn, spread out across larger publics, serve to sustain the members' sense of community, to impel them strongly to action . . . and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes" (398). This sense of rhetorical energy helps us understand what inspires individuals to act. By raising daily events to a heroic narrative through a rhetorical vision, the small group can create the force necessary to motivate individuals.

Bormann's fantasy theme analysis allows us to reconstruct the rhetorical trail clubwomen used to enter the public sphere and national politics. Because the rhetoric of the club movement was formed mainly in the small-group dynamic of club and committee meetings, Bormann's analysis of how such rhetoric is formed provides a way to make this neglected rhetoric visible in the texts of women writers. This study divides along the links of the women's club fantasy chain to investigate both how the club movement entered the national political dialogue and how literary women accounted for this important narrative. Each chapter juxtaposes the writings of national club leaders with the writings of literary women to clarify the gendered rhetoric of women's political engagement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Recreating this context also highlights the ways in which women writers engaged in these same political debates through the clubs' feminized vocabulary.

Consistently, clubwomen's narrative followed a trajectory of improvement. From improving the individual woman to improving the community to improving the country, these optimistic women genuinely believed that their feminine talents could change the world. Their rhetorical vision acquired a standard pattern in which transformed individuals transformed their towns and cities. This narrative formula energized

individuals and inspired them to take concrete political action like organizing a new small business to help women workers or writing a letter to their state senator. Successes encouraged women to convince their friends or relatives to join. When women moved to new cities they often sought out or started new clubs. As the movement nationalized, the intensity of the rhetorical vision strengthened.

Every club started by convincing individual women to join this new phenomenon. Thus, the first link of the fantasy chain of club life was a narrative of individual transformation. Repeatedly, club histories, bulletins, and magazines would characterize the “timid housewife” who tentatively joined a club, was too shy to speak out much at the first meetings, conscientiously wrote her club paper, and was soon transformed by the experience into a confident public citizen who was eager to tackle the next big reform project. Chapter One analyzes this club story by carefully investigating a variety of club material. Through this sampling of club histories, magazine articles, and short stories, the repetitive fantasy chain of transformation takes on a very political component. Women were clear from the start that their clubs were never mere social organizations like men’s clubs. Instead, their clubs were sites for work: first, work on the individual and then, work on the community. Thus, clubwomen created a new space that was neither entirely private nor entirely public in order to fashion new political identities for themselves.

To be a clubwoman was to be a reformer. Women did not join clubs merely to meet other women; individual women also joined to link themselves to this new, national rhetorical vision. This clarification allows for a reading of women’s political engagement where it was previously overlooked. This is true for Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Most

literary critics credit her rise to national fame to her association with Edward Bellamy's utopian fiction *Looking Backward* and the Bellamy circles that appeared after its publication. Chapter One argues that Gilman was much more involved with the women's club movement and that her associations with its national leaders, including Jane Addams, did more to propel her to national prominence than her connection to Bellamy did. A careful reading of Gilman's journals shows involvement with five clubs at once during her time in California. This involvement is reflected in two of her early novels that feature club rhetoric, *What Diantha Did* (1909) and *Moving the Mountain* (1911). These two novels borrow heavily from the rhetorical vision of the club movement and demonstrate how Gilman analyzed the utopian club rhetoric before writing the better-remembered *Herland* (1915).

While Gilman embraced the positive, optimistic trajectory of club life, other writers were more skeptical. Chapter Two examines Kate Chopin's club involvement and how she distanced herself from the "awakening" portrayed in the clubs' fantasy chains. Chopin was a founding member of the most prominent women's club in St. Louis, the Wednesday Club. This club included many society and professional women, including Charlotte Eliot, T.S. Eliot's mother. The second link of the clubs' rhetorical vision continues on a positive trajectory by describing what sort of education women, like Eliot, received in their clubs. Clubwomen claimed that their study practices qualified them for work in the public sphere. They argued that their educational achievements were a certification of credentials for public reform work. This narrative of education borrows heavily from the progressive narrative that circulated in the popular culture at that time.

Chapter Two analyzes the next link of the clubs' fantasy chains concerning education through club material, including Helen Winslow's novel, *The President of Quex* (1906). Winslow's heroine is transformed by her study club's work and soon becomes a community activist who successfully lobbies against child labor. This narrative pattern is remarkably similar to Chopin's short story, "Miss McEnders" (1897). While there is no direct connection between the texts, the similarity demonstrates a common trope that circulated about club life. The differences between the two texts emphasize Chopin's skepticism about the efficacy of club rhetoric. Likewise, understanding the club rhetoric concerning education allows for a more nuanced reading of Chopin's other short story about club life, "Loka." Finally, the women's clubs rhetorical vision appears in Chopin's most famous work, *The Awakening* (1899).

The third link of the clubwomen's fantasy chains emphasizes women's ability to enter public life under the banner of municipal housekeeping. This blend of civic and domestic vocabulary is the very core of clubwomen's ability to successfully influence politics without the right to vote. The municipal housekeeping phenomenon began in Boston early in the club movement. Chapter Three researches the life and writing of one early club leader, Abby Morton Diaz, who gained prominence in the tightly-knit community of upper-middle class Boston by serving as president of the influential Women's Industrial and Education Union (WEIU). This vast departmental club was housed in a series of buildings in Boston's civic center. Diaz's writings shaped the club's argument that women should enter public life because of their feminine talents.

Diaz also had connections with Annie Fields, a founding member of the New England Women's Club and a prominent social reformer. While many literary critics

have looked to Fields' relationship with Sarah Orne Jewett, no critic has investigated Jewett's close association with the women's club movement. Many of Jewett's friends were dedicated to their clubs and Jewett attended WEIU meetings. Reading the context of the influential rhetoric of municipal housekeeping offers a fresh interpretation of Jewett's early work. Her novel, *A Country Doctor* (1884), depicts one young woman's struggle to pursue a career. Within the novel, elements of club rhetoric can be found in the shading of several characters. This context furthers our understanding of Jewett's theories of gender. Jewett distances herself from the clubs' argument for equality based on their feminine talents; instead, she creates a heroine who must be judged as an individual rather than for her gender.

Finally, clubwomen strove to make their work permanent by creating new paid careers for women. The fourth link of their fantasy chain supported this struggle. The second generation of clubwomen came from the group of women who were the first to enter colleges and universities in larger numbers. After graduating, these women often returned to their hometowns and joined their mothers' clubs. There, they strove to reshape the club movement into one that would support their new careers and professional choices.¹¹ A club leader from Chicago, Elia Wilkins Peattie, dramatizes this struggle in her novel, *The Precipice* (1914). Based on the real life of Julia Lathrop, the first woman to head a federal bureau, Peattie's novel is steeped in club rhetoric. This cheerful novel epitomizes the final fantasy chain of clubwomen who either entered careers or supported the women who tried.

¹¹ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

Peattie is a contemporary of Willa Cather and Mary Austin. These two women knew of the club movement, but kept their distance. Cather briefly joined a club in Pittsburgh after denigrating the clubs of Lincoln. While Cather does not fictionalize clubwomen, the rhetoric of the club movement surfaces in her novel, *The Song of the Lark* (1915). In Austin's novel, *A Woman of Genius* (1912), the main character's sister is a happy and successful clubwoman. Borrowing from their contemporaries' rhetoric, both women depict the struggles and consequences of the clubs' rhetorical vision. Placed side by side, all three novels contain remarkably similar scenes of the main character's declaration of independence. Read against the clubs' work to reshape women's roles in public life, these novels highlight the varied decisions and compromises young women of the early twentieth century faced.

Study of the rhetorical vision of clubwomen clarifies an important phenomenon concerning women's lives during the nineteenth century. Over the past decade, feminist historians and literary critics have argued about the validity of the "separate spheres" model used to describe women's lives in the nineteenth century. Hugely influential as a way to imagine life before the second wave of feminism, the model centers women's lives in the home and men's lives in the public world. Since its inception, the metaphor of separate spheres has been criticized for ignoring issues of race, class and imperialism and for its inadequate description of the complex realities of a hundred years of American history.¹²

¹² In her anthology *No More Separate Spheres!*, edited with Jessamyn Hatcher, Cathy Davidson encourages scholars to challenge the model by disrupting its fixity in our imagination. In the spirit of the title, Davidson lists a series of manifestoes for critical analysis based on gender, including that "gender is a variable and limited category that does not exist by, for, in, or of itself. It changes over time; it is shaped and changed by

Critics have explained how the metaphor of separate spheres has been imposed by twentieth century critics and historians onto nineteenth-century realities. In her astute historiography, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” (1988), Linda Kerber outlines how the binary model came to be used widely by historians. By the mid-twentieth century, Alexis de Tocqueville’s account of women in his *Democracy in America* (1840) was one of the few canonized texts that directly attended to the situation of women in America; his account provided the image of a circle and the proscription to not step beyond it. Besides identifying the original model for the metaphor, Kerber analyzes the relationship between Barbara Welter’s famous “Cult of True Womanhood,” and Betty Friedan’s popular book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). First introduced in 1966, Welter’s model describes women in the nineteenth century as primarily segregated into the private, domestic realm. By depicting them as barred from full legal citizenship and socialized into a standard of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,” Welter portrays women in the nineteenth century as practically imprisoned in the home (21). Kerber characterizes Welter’s essay as a “frank attempt to do for the nineteenth century what Friedan had done for the twentieth” (162). Friedan’s popular study of middle-class housewives in the 1950s may fit the “Cult of True Womanhood” more than any situation in the nineteenth century¹³. Kerber’s analysis

other factors; and, in turn it shapes other conditions of existence” (23). Davidson’s emphasis on the historical context of gender emphasizes how scholars of women must always unpack the specific contexts of any group of women they study. Amy Kaplan even demonstrates how domesticity was used as a trope to define all of America as white and middle-class reminding us of the distinction we still make today between domestic and foreign affairs in her essay, “Manifest Domesticity” in *American Literature* 70.3 (1998): 581-606.

¹³ Nina Baym makes a similar point in her massive study of how women wrote history in the nineteenth century: *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860*

is an important example of the biases contemporary critics can bring to scholarship. Likewise, contemporary stereotypes of social clubs can blind us to the political work of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century clubs. While the club movement borrowed from the rhetoric of the separate spheres, the national leadership consistently worked to create a new place for women in public life.

The women's club movement, primarily middle-class, segregated by race and overwhelmingly mainstream, reveals how women used the dominant stereotypes concerning femininity to gain advantage in the public sphere. Their fantasy chains, particularly "municipal housekeeping," were so powerful because they resonated strongly with established gender norms. While far from encompassing the reality of all women, the *rhetoric* of the separate spheres was a powerful influence in nineteenth-century middle-class culture. Middle-class mores did emphasize women's special talents and moral domain. Additionally, many middle-class married women spent much more time with other women than they did with men.¹⁴ While the rhetoric of the separate spheres was influential, the reality it attempted to represent could never be static; even white, middle-class women did not confine themselves to exclusively domestic roles throughout the nineteenth century. Instead, women emerged in the public sphere by creating a separate, gendered space to challenge political inequality.

(New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995). Thinking that she might find, at most, a few dozen women writing histories before the Civil War, she instead found more than one hundred and fifty women writing on a wide range of issues. After acknowledging the influence of domestic ideology in the nineteenth century, she admits, "that to have selected these [domestic texts] and these only from the whole is a telling commentary on us, not a historically rich representation of them" (5).

¹⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relationships between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1:1 (1975): 1-29.

Rather than speak of a public/private gender division or separate spheres, it is more useful to envision a public/public model of civic involvement when analyzing women's writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Middle-class women used different rhetoric and tactical maneuvers, but were as engaged with major political questions as men were. In her seminal essay, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930" (1979), Estelle Freedman claims that "women's political culture flourished in separate institutions" (512). Freedman analyzes how women kept the issue of suffrage alive during the long years between the Civil War and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. After the Civil War, women's primary tactic was to create a separate, but public, gender identity through all-female institutions. Her attention to separate public female institutions like women's clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, women's colleges and settlement houses highlights how involved in public life Progressive Era women were. These separate institutions enabled women to become educated, influence legislation, and ultimately win the right to vote. Freedman names the women's club movement as "one of the largest manifestations of 'social feminism' in the late nineteenth century" (517). This mainstream movement affected politics through the force of its gender-based lobbying efforts. While written out of history in the twentieth century, women's clubs were probably the most popular all-female public institution of the Progressive Era, according to Freedman.

Clubwomen argued for entrance into politics based on their special talents as women. Twenty-first century audiences trained in Virginia Woolf's famous damnation of the "angel in the house" understandably may cringe at the ideology of the domestic

sphere; however, many women in the nineteenth century embraced it. For certain middle-class, white women, the constant validation of their contribution to society directly led to their confident entry into the public sphere, wielding the rhetoric of the mop and the broom. In the years after the Civil War, women were able to enter public life through all-female institutions to effect real change precisely because they did not contest popular notions of womanhood. Instead, they manipulated this rhetoric to create the separate, public sphere Freedman identifies. Identifying this neglected rhetoric in the texts of women writers demonstrates the ways these writers engaged the political work of their times. Gilman, Chopin, Jewett, Cather and Austin worked in this era of “public/public” spheres. As committed to political debates as their male counterparts, women writers incorporated club rhetoric into their texts. Their commitment to public life and their enthusiastic, energetic audience of clubwomen created a renaissance of women’s literature on which we continue to rely for engaging interpretations of women’s place in the world.

Chapter One

“The Women Woke Up”: Clubwomen’s Narrative of Transformation in the Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman

“Woman has laid down the broomstick to pick up the club,” quipped the *New York World* of March 27, 1868 (qtd in Cunningham vii). In fact, between 1868 and 1920, women in voluntary association swept their way across the country, reforming their cities in the name of municipal housekeeping. Club leaders such as J C Croly, Julia Ward Howe, Jane Addams, and Ida B. Wells created a rhetorical vision that urged women to undertake reform work in their communities. This chapter analyzes the first link on the fantasy chain of clubwomen’s rhetorical vision: the narrative of transformation. Repeatedly, clubwomen told a story about an isolated housewife who was reluctant to join a club, but became a new woman through the experience. Central to their vision was the idea that the education women gained in their clubs prepared them for work in the public sphere. The rhetorical vision of women’s clubs enabled ordinary women to enter the public sphere as reformers. Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a primary example of how this rhetorical vision could influence a writer’s body of work. She adopted the narrative of transformation both in her life and in her fiction, including *What*

Diantha Did (1909) and *Moving the Mountain* (1911), the two novels she wrote before the better-known *Herland* (1915).

To explain her professional development, most critics have focused on Gilman's involvement with Nationalist Circles, the clubs that formed to support Edward Bellamy's vision of a utopian, socialist America in his best-selling novel, *Looking Backward* (1887). However, a careful reading of Gilman's journals depicts an additional line of development. In the 1890s, Gilman spent more time at club meetings, club lectures and with clubwomen than she did lecturing to Nationalist Circles. This audience of women in clubs encouraged Gilman to develop her economic theories centered on gender, first published in *Women and Economics: The Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898). The club lectures and conversations in which Gilman participated later appeared in her writing. By analyzing clubwomen's rhetoric of transformation and evidence of such rhetoric in Gilman's writing, I demonstrate how this organized movement of nineteenth-century women transformed women's lives and women's literature.

Gilman's Club Life

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is now best remembered for her short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." The haunting tale of a wife who goes mad is based on her own disastrous experience submitting to Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell's "rest cure." Mitchell, a prominent physician, required a regiment of complete bed rest with no reading or writing for women who suffered from nerves or other physical ailments. In the fall of 1888, not long after her difficult "rest cure," Gilman, age 28, separated from her husband Walter Stetson and moved to Pasadena, California with her daughter, Katherine. Gilman's

connections to women's clubs began in the early 1890s, just as clubs were taking off across the country. With the support of her friend, Grace Channing, Gilman slowly recovered her strength and searched for a way to earn a living.¹⁵

In the spring of 1891, Gilman began to recite at several women's clubs. Enthused by the warm reception she received, Gilman was soon attending the meetings of as many as five clubs. Later, Gilman earned an international reputation based on her lectures and writings. From November 1909 to December 1916, she single-handedly published *The Forerunner* each month, writing the entire content of each issue (Lane 4). Gilman lectured across the country to socialist groups, churches and women's clubs, and she participated in national conventions for the suffrage movement and international conferences on women and socialism. By the early twentieth century, Gilman was considered a pioneer in the field of women's rights.

Largely ignored by literary critics in the mid-twentieth century, feminists in recent years have reclaimed Gilman's powerful work; "The Yellow Wall-Paper" now stands at the heart of Gilman scholarship.¹⁶ From Elaine R. Hedges' "Afterward" of the first edition from The Feminist Press (1973), critics have linked the story with other women

¹⁵ The most helpful recent criticism on Gilman includes: Sheryl L Meyering, ed, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and her Work* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1989); Joanne B Karpinski. ed, *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: G K Hall, 1992); Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995); Jill Rudd and Val Gough, eds, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Optimist Reformer* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1999); Catherine J Golden and Joanna Schneider Zangrando, *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2000); and *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts* (Tuscaloosa, U of Alabama P, 2004).

¹⁶ See: Catherine Golden's *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on The Yellow Wallpaper* (New York: Feminist P, 1992) and Julia Bates Dock's "*The Yellow Wall-paper*" and the History of its Publication and Reception: A Critical Edition and Documentary Casebook (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998).

writers' critiques of the limitations of nineteenth-century patriarchy. Hedges couples the heroine of the tale with Emily Dickinson's poetry, Wharton's Lily Bart and Chopin's Edna Pontellier; she describes all these texts as "all deliberate dramatic indictments, by women writers, of the crippling social pressures imposed on women in the nineteenth century and the sufferings they thereby endured" (qtd in Golden 132). In her analysis, Hedges defines a "class of defeated, or even destroyed women" that these writers emphasize in their works. She believes Gilman's story is dedicated to women crushed by the oppressive patriarchal ideology of their time. For many middle-class women, the confining routine of domestic life proved too much, and writers of this period dramatically fictionalize their struggles with illness and madness.

While Hedges analyzes the extreme costs of nineteenth-century patriarchy, other critics also look to the ways women fought back for equality. Like Hedges, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's epic study, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), highlights women writers' struggle against entrapment in the home and on the page. Unlike Hedges, they see Gilman's madwoman as triumphant, one who "creeps fast and far on the long road, in broad daylight" (qtd in Golden 147). Gilbert and Gubar find a more hopeful progress of nineteenth century women "out of the texts defined by patriarchal poetics into the open spaces of their own authority" (147). While there was no simple panacea, nineteenth-century women did find a myriad of ways to resist the constraints placed upon them. As recent scholarship has proven, Gilman left us with much more than a critique of women's difficult social conditions. She also left visions of new identities for women and utopian dreams of what the future might hold.

While Gilman's breakdown left her exhausted and her "rest cure" crippled her even more, when she did find a way out of the morass, she was eager to share her insight with other women. Just as the narrator of Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" (1972) arms herself by "First having read the book of myths, / and loaded the camera, / and checked the edge of the knife-blade" (53), Gilman offers her readers concrete tools for recovery throughout her voluminous writings. In her essay, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wall-Paper'" (1913), Gilman explains exactly what she did after her near-disastrous encounter with Dr. Mitchell: "using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist's advice to the winds and went to work again . . . ultimately recovering some measure of power" (349). While "The Yellow Wall-Paper" dramatically portrays one of the darkest moments in the lives of nineteenth-century women, Gilman's ensuing writing models how to recover from such oppression. Although she was completely isolated during the "rest cure," once Gilman recovered, she was rarely alone again.

For Gilman, the support of other women was central to her recovery. After her "rest cure," Gilman found relief with the help of close friends and the broader support of clubwomen. She made her living as a lecturer as well as writer; the physical audience she addressed at club meetings surfaced in her writing. Lecturing to clubs also meant dining and lodging with clubwomen. The time outside of club meetings for discussion served Gilman well. Immersed in discussions about issues important to women led her to pursue them even more eagerly in her own work. Gilman was a valued contributor to the rhetorical vision of club life and that vision is honed in her writing.

Gilman's biographers acknowledge that her time in California was crucial to her development as a writer. However, most critics focus on Gilman's involvement with the Nationalist movement and other socialist organizations to explain her professional training. Biographer Ann J. Lane does contextualize the involvement of women in reform movements in California and includes women's clubs in her list of organizations to which women belonged. However, in exploring Gilman's own involvement in these reform organizations, Lane still emphasizes Nationalism: "It was the Bellamyite Nationalist movement that she [Gilman] found most congenial" (161). Like Lane, Gary Scharnhorst relies on Nationalism to explain Gilman's growth as a writer in his article, "Making her Fame: Charlotte Perkins Gilman in California." Scharnhorst declares that Gilman "served an apprenticeship as a propagandist for Nationalism during the 1890s" (192). Gilman was recruited, perhaps by her uncle Edward Hale, to publish her poem, "Similar Cases," in the Nationalist magazine. Scharnhorst believes this publication was noticed by W. D. Howells and led to opportunities for her on the Nationalist lecture circuit. While these men did prove to be valuable connections for Gilman, women were central to her professional growth as well. Most critics acknowledge Channing's support and counsel, but few have investigated Gilman's ties to women's clubs.¹⁷

¹⁷ Polly Wynn Allen is one of the few scholars to acknowledge the extent of Gilman's involvement with women's clubs. Allen wrote her study, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism* (1988), to situate culturally Gilman's ideas on how public spaces could better serve women. In her examination of Gilman's years in California, Allen quotes one journal entry and includes the list of women's clubs that Gilman noted she belonged to in her autobiography: "The P.C.W.P.A., the Ebell Society, the Woman's Alliance, the Economic Club, the Parents Association, the State Council of Women" (41). Allen credits Gilman's popularity not only to Nationalist Clubs, but also to her "involvement with numerous women's clubs" (41). Allen thoroughly discusses the purpose of women's clubs during Gilman's age. After recounting how the cult of domesticity held wide ideological sway in the nineteenth

Given the subsequent erasure of women's clubs from public memory, it is easy to understand why critics might miss her involvement with such groups. Even the index to Denise D. Knight's edition of her journals, *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, has no entries in the index for "Women's clubs", "Clubwomen", or "Federation of Women's Club" even though all are mentioned in her diaries. The volume does index several individual clubs, including the Friday Morning Club and the Ebell Society, but one must know in advance that these clubs are a part of the GFWC. However, careful study of Gilman's journals yields a surprising amount of club involvement. She notes not only delivering paid lectures to clubs, but also mentions attending clubs, lunching with club members, and recruiting clubwomen for the seminar she taught. Especially during the California years, Gilman's involvement with women's clubs is surprisingly rich. Even her movement to the national stage is more complicated than previously thought. It was through her efforts to organize clubs into a Women's Congress or Alliance that she met Jane Addams. Addams's invitation to Hull House probably did more to launch Gilman's national career as a lecturer than any acquaintance with W. D. Howells. Gilman's connections through Hull House, including the Chicago Women's Club, helped her start her national tours.

century, thanks in part to the work of Gilman's two great-aunts, Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Allen describes how Gilman resisted such ideology. She quotes Gilman's frequent opening in lectures to women's clubs: "[o]n such occasions Gilman was fond of asking rhetorically, 'Shall the home be our world' Or the world our home?'" (18). This juxtaposition of separate domains persuaded women to extend their efforts into the broader arena of public life. Allen is one of the few critics who identifies the extent to which Gilman was involved in women's clubs; however, the purpose of her book only allows her to only mention the club movement briefly before moving on to her analysis of Gilman's ideas on architecture.

There is no denying that the Nationalist Club movement was an important influence for Gilman; she herself acknowledges so in her autobiography. However, the women's club movement also proved influential because the rhetoric of club life gave her a model of transformation to adapt to her own life. Recovering from her "rest cure" and searching for a new direction in her life, Gilman moved to California ripe for the opportunities clubs provided. While Gilman was a bit younger than the average clubwoman was, she had not been to college. The clubs' emphasis on education attracted Gilman. She was the perfect audience for their rhetorical tactics. She had been deeply torn about marriage and crushed by the isolation of domestic life. Clubs' claims to transform women into reformers on the broader civic stage surely inspired her. Gilman began to dust off many of her old ambitions and define herself as a professional lecturer.

Gilman first writes of an encounter with a woman's club in her journal on Sunday, January 11, 1891. She gave a lecture on "Nationalism and the Virtues" in the Temperance Temple in Pasadena and was asked to lecture soon to the Pasadena woman's club for \$5.00 (*Journal* 432). Wednesday, January 21, 1891 describes the lecture to that club. Most of Gilman's journals are brief listings of activities, with perhaps only a few words or a sentence noting her reaction. She used her diary more as a record of events than as a place for deep introspection. However, this specific entry is fuller than most and captures her early excitement speaking to this group of women. After listing her earlier activities for the day, she introduces the lecture: "It was a great success. Some of the women cried, and they actually clapped at times!" (434). For Gilman, such a responsive audience was crucial to building her confidence in lecturing; she notes in her autobiography that she had no formal training in public speaking (*Living* 122). Gilman

discovered her talent for oratory in front of an audience of women, and embarked on the personal transformation that was emphasized in club rhetoric.

Next, Gilman explains what happened after her lecture: “Then an attempt at organizing – lots of enthusiasm, and introductions without number” (434). In this entry, there is a sense of the clubs’ interconnectedness. Gilman notes being asked to speak to the club again in two weeks and “one in Rosedale to be organized” (434). Finally, she describes how she was paid: “Also \$6.20 in cash! That is worthwhile. And money more fairly earned I never saw -- free gift for well-appreciated honest work. It does me good” (434).¹⁸ Speaking to an all-female audience who appreciated her work and paid her for it was a new and valuable experience. With this first lecture to a woman’s club, Gilman saw the possibility of a new career open before her. By identifying with the clubwomen’s narrative of transformation, Gilman’s horizons expanded.

Club writers stressed that club meetings were times for work, not relaxation; likewise, Gilman’s encounters with clubwomen before and after meetings helped her develop the arguments she would soon publish. Her next engagement with a woman’s club came in early February. Like many lectures to follow, this one did not involve simply dashing in to do a lecture and dashing out. Instead, Gilman notes taking the train in with her daughter and spending the night with a club member, a Mrs. Howe. Gilman’s entry reads: “Good dinner & good bed. Speak in the evening after several others, at an entertainment in honor of Susan B. Anthony’s birthday. They kept me til last because they said ‘people will wait for her!’” (439). Gilman was delighted with her budding

¹⁸ The word “honest” is marked as illegible in Knight’s edition of Gilman’s journals. However, Gilman quotes this entry in her autobiography and uses the word “honest” (*Living* 124).

reputation and notes with pleasure that she was last to speak. The next day she remarks in her journal: "Talk with Mrs. Howe all morning. Lunch with her at the Hollanbec. She pays for it!" (439). Developing friendships with women such as Mrs. Howe gave Gilman a receptive audience to explore her new ideas. With lectures to women's clubs, Gilman built a vibrant network of women with whom to share ideas, benefiting from the interconnected nature of the clubs. Often she spent the night with the host of the meeting or the president of the club, sharing more conversation and debate into the evening and following morning.

In the space of a week toward the end of March 1891, Gilman engaged three more clubs: the Working Women's Club, the Century Club, and the Ebell Society. J. C. Croly describes the Ebell Society in her *History of the Women's Club Movement in America*. Located in Oakland, the society was founded in 1876 to "to develop thought and to promote independent work among women" (240). With its own building and four hundred members, a lecture in front of this group was no small undertaking. The first meeting of the Ebell society that Gilman attended drew on her literary background as well as her lecturing career. She notes that she "[r]ecited several poems with much interest, also speak a little" (446). During this time, Gilman was writing and publishing poems as well as lecturing; her first book was a volume of poetry, *In this Our World* (1893). Clubs provided not only a venue for her ideas on reform, but also her literary efforts. After she recited at the Ebell society, she writes of the next speaker: "a Miss Fisher recited, admirably, [a] slender girl, with a brain, heart and soul" (446). Again, the supportive atmosphere of club meetings proved valuable to Gilman. Not only did she gain experience speaking to audiences, she also learned by listening to other speakers.

By early April, Gilman had made enough contacts with local women's clubs that she started attending meetings along with lecturing for pay. She comments on one of her early meetings in a day full of engagements with women, including a Mrs. Prescott whom she met lecturing to the Working Women's Club. Mrs. Prescott was also a member of her local women's club and introduced Gilman to that club. Gilman describes her first meeting on April 6, 1891: "Nice talk with the Doctors, and then the Club. Which Club set by the ears with gymnastic tricks and the one word game" (448). Gilman's growing self-confidence is notable here, where she feels she set the Club "by the ears." Gilman developed a close friendship with Mrs. Prescott, noting almost daily activities with her. By the beginning of May 1891, Gilman has this to say in her journal: "Am talking with Mrs. Prescott a great deal these days, with mutual pleasure and profit" (453). This friendship began to form right before the more lasting and intimate relationship Gilman had with Adelle Knapp¹⁹. However, Gilman's close association with an active club member is evidence of her deepening connection to the club movement.

The journal for 1891 and 1892 documents Gilman's heaviest involvement with women's clubs, not just as lecturer but also as a member. Through this time, the titles of Gilman's lectures and the subjects of discussion at club meetings are reflective of the issues that eventually became the heart of her first book, *Women and Economics*. Like many women, Gilman used her time in clubs to further her education; club life gave her the opportunity to read and discuss topics that became central to her theories on gender. She notes that May 11, 1891 is a "Woman's Club night." She then briefly describes the subject of the evening: "have a mixed reading on the Economic dependence of women,"

¹⁹ Sheryl L. Meyering, ed, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and her Work* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1989).

a theme she developed in her writing (453). On May 20, 1891, Gilman gave a lecture to an audience at Berkeley University titled “Is it Proper in the evening for Young Ladies to go out together Alone?” (455). She also addresses this issue in *Moving the Mountain*. In her utopian novel, women freely travel, walk alone at night and live alone. These examples illuminate the kinds of conversations Gilman was having with clubwomen that later influenced her thinking.

Gilman found many intelligent and perceptive women in the Ebell Society; there, she joined smaller discussion groups that captivated her interest. By January of 1893, the Ebell society had started a special section on economics. Gilman mentions the first meeting: “Papers {--} by Mrs. Sanford, Mrs. Burbank and I. Good papers on immigration” (511). Later in the week, she describes an Ebell meeting in which they “discuss the tendencies of the time.” This entry notes that the club “decide[d] on the housekeeping questions as subject and talk earnestly thereon. Good meeting” (512). While this could be overlooked as a discussion of housekeeping methods or the servant question, it is important to remember that housekeeping is central to the theories Gilman developed more fully in her second volume, *The Home*. There, she outlines her ideas for kitchen-less homes and respectable living arrangements for single women. It is quite possible that her ideas began in club meetings such as this one in 1892.

During this time, Gilman also decided to teach a class on “Domestic Sociology.” As Lane notes, she used the class to develop her ideas and theories, preparing lectures for each of the class meetings (167). What Lane does not note, however, is that Gilman drew on her club connections to find students for her class. On Wednesday, October 21 1891, she notes going to the Century Club Building and talking with several women: “Mrs.

Lansing and Mrs. Mills take up my 'class' idea very kindly" (478). On October 31, she writes: "Go to Ebell Society w/ Kate, meet ladies & talk class" (480). She notes the first meeting on November 18: "'1st meeting of class in Alameda. Very pleasant -- \$20.00" (482). During this very busy period of her life, she still had the energy to organize, develop, and teach a class to fellow clubwomen.

In 1891, Gilman first lectured to the club she would become the most involved with, the Pacific Coast Women's Press Association (PCWPA) in San Francisco.²⁰ Croly describes the PCWPA in her *History* as a group of "progressive women all over the state" who were professional journalists and writers (253). Gilman remarks on her first address to them in her autobiography: "my paper read at the P.C.W.P.A. Convention made an impression, other engagements opened, both to write and speak" (130). This group of like-minded women would support Gilman through several endeavors. In 1893, the organization elected her president, which she notes happily in her journal with "the [sic] give me a floral tribute!" (554). In 1894, Gilman moved to San Francisco to take over the *Impress*, a small newspaper started by the PCWPA. While the paper eventually failed, the experience served her well later at the more successful *Woman's Journal* and her own publishing venture, *The Forerunner*. In Croly's description of the PCWPA, she makes special mention of Gilman, who was still using her first husband's name: "Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Stetson, a woman of original genius and power, was a member from the

²⁰ Lawrence J. Oliver and Gary Scharnhorst note Gilman's membership in the PWCPA in their article "Charlotte Perkins Gilman versus Ambrose Bierce: The Literary Politics of Gender I Fin-de-Siecle California" in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Contemporaries* (2004). However, their focus is in context of Bierce rather than women's clubs and the formation of the Women's Alliance.

beginning, and was one of the presidents” (254). Croly’s praise of Gilman is evidence of the influence she had within the women’s clubs of California.

Finally, toward the end of Gilman’s time in California, she put more of her energy into organizing a Women’s Congress. Inspired by Croly’s attempts to unite various women’s organizations into a more focused political force, Gilman joined the effort in California. The first mention came in April 1893: “Meeting in the afternoon at the Hotel Pleasanton -- 22 women, 12 societies represented. Much interest and energy” (527). Her journal accounted for weekly meetings to unite various societies for a large meeting, and soon she was on the Managing Board for the Woman’s Congress. The Board’s efforts were successful; in February 1894, the Woman’s Congress met for a week. Gilman notes the opening day and mentions, “addressed by Miss Addams & others. Splendid meeting” (573). Of the occasion, Gilman reflects in her autobiography: “Miss Addams’s championship was most valuable” (174). Gilman’s work with women’s clubs culminated in this Congress and a meeting with Jane Addams. Addams would soon prove an important contact as Gilman decided to expand her lecture efforts.

In 1895, at the age of 35, Charlotte Perkins Gilman left the California coast permanently. She signed the visitor book at one of her last stops before leaving, the Friday Morning Club of Los Angeles. In her autobiography, Gilman remembers: “I cheerfully inscribed, ‘Charlotte Perkins Stetson. At large.’ For the next five years that was a legitimate address” (*Living* 181). Her years in California had been profitable ones. Coming from a near-complete breakdown, she had recovered and created an energetic career for herself, lecturing and writing. The narrative of the club movement, which transformed women’s sphere from the home to broader civic involvement, is one that

Gilman adopted for her own life during these years. After studying and lecturing, often to women's clubs, after writing papers for club meetings, and spending countless hours engaged in conversation with clubwomen, Gilman had refined the main themes concerning women's roles that she would address for the rest of her life.

Throughout her career, she often lectured to women's clubs, attended the biannual conference of the GFWC, and sought out clubs and clubwomen wherever she stayed. In Chicago, she would attend meetings of the Chicago Women's Club and lived for a time with club member, Dr. McCracken and her husband (*Living* 189). When she moved permanently to New York City, she joined several clubs, including the radical women's club of professional writers and editors, Heterodoxy. Other famous members included writer Zona Gale, playwright Susan Glaspell, choreographer Agnes de Mille, and activist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn²¹. While Gilman dropped out after a short time, she remained close to Gale, who wrote the forward to her autobiography.

Gilman sometimes had sharp words for individual clubs or clubwomen, but she remained loyal to the women's club movement throughout her life. In her autobiography, written shortly before her death, she had this to say about the club movement in a reflection on the progress women made in the nineteenth century:

Women had claimed and won equal education, from the public schools to the universities; professional opportunity, and had made a place in medicine, law, the ministry, and all manner of trades, crafts and businesses; equal suffrage, and had made much progress in that demand. But the most wide-spread and in a way the most important of these various associations was the Woman's Club, which reached almost every one, and brought her out of the sacred selfishness of the home into the broader contact and relationship so essential to social progress. (257)

²¹ Judith Schwarz, *Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy: Greenwich Village, 1912-1940* (Norwich, VT: New Victoria, 1986).

Here Gilman echoes the optimistic narrative of change used by club leaders. She describes the transformation women experienced when they were exposed to the club movement by including her own experiences. While explaining that women had won the right to an equal education, Gilman depicts the club as a place where any woman could go to learn. Gilman's journals and autobiography demonstrate her commitment to club life and the positive effect that its rhetoric had on her own recovery.

The Clubwomen's Narrative of Transformation

Careful attention to the rhetoric of the women's club movement helps explain both the energy and accomplishments of clubwomen themselves and the contribution their rhetorical vision made to women's literature. The women's club movement created an eager audience for women's writing during the Progressive Era. Within the movement, national club leaders developed an identifiable pattern through their stories about club life. The story told by national leaders often inspired the development of local clubs. This standard narrative pattern contained three main features: careful attention to education led to civic involvement; civic involvement improved the cities; and finally, successful reforms led to the need for women's suffrage. This narrative pattern fused individual women into a collective force. By chaining out a shared story of civic reform in feminine language, these club leaders created a rhetorical vision that inspired individual women to identify as clubwomen, which empowered them to take action in their communities.

To understand the club movement's rhetorical vision, each "fantasy chain" must be unpacked. In Ernest Bormann's analysis of how small groups can create a national rhetorical vision through fantasy chains, he emphasizes the power of the story a group

will tell about itself (4). This story becomes vivid enough to shape the actions of individual members and fuse individuals into a single body. The narrative structure of the communications in a small group will heighten the individual's sense of purpose. Because the individual is present as the narrative is created collectively, she is deeply invested in the outcome. As new members join, the narrative is repeated, developed, and refined; thus, the story the group tells about itself becomes a powerful tool to connect new members to the group's purpose. Bormann emphasizes how the dramatizations, chained out in small-group meetings, create the energy needed to move individuals to action. He asserts that the collective narrative "provides them [individual members] with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes" (398). This narrative is the foundation on which all the groups' activities develop.

While we do not have literal transcripts of early club meetings to analyze the first fantasy chains concerning the formation of women's clubs, we do have club magazines, histories, how-to manuals, and yearbooks. Collectively, these documents repeat very similar elements of a "club story." This repetition is evidence of the strength of early fantasy chains and demonstrates how rhetorical visions are formed and dispersed. In the first link of the clubs' rhetorical vision, women consistently commented on what drove them into clubs in the first place: not so much a desire for friendship or socializing, but instead a desire to be educated. In fact, women emphasized that their clubs were very different from the men's social clubs already in existence. Women characterized men's clubs as a site of relaxation or escape; in contrast, they defined their own clubs as a site for work and activity. Finally, women described joining a club as a powerful "waking up" or transformation that created a new role for them in their communities. Women

described this awakening as a realization of broader issues outside the home that could be tackled by women precisely because of their talents within the home. Club leaders honed their rhetoric to appeal to their primary audience: middle-class housewives. By using feminine imagery and metaphors, club writers attempted to transform housewives into active social reformers.

Throughout histories of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), two clubs were repeatedly credited as the "original" women's club; the two clubs even maintained a friendly rivalry about who exactly came first. In 1868, Jane Cunningham Croly, a journalist, who was known as "Jennie June" to her readers, began a club in New York City after being snubbed by the all-male Press Club. Searching for a name for the club, Croly came across the term "Sorosis," defined as a group of flowers that bore fruit, in a botanical dictionary. She seized on the term as a fitting metaphor for her clubs' desires to produce something new through a gathering of individual women (Croly *Sorosis* 7-9). Farther north, the New England Women's Club, presided over by Julia Ward Howe was also founded in 1868. From the start, this upper-class Boston club emphasized culture by studying art and literature and heard from local luminaries including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott. The club was also concerned with reform, and often invited prominent reformers to meetings. These two clubs' published histories provide important insight into the early formation of women's clubs. Analysis of these texts, along with other club articles and essays, uncovers the rhetorical patterns early club members developed.

As clubwomen's rhetorical vision formed, club writers began their narratives by explaining how individual women's thirst for education was quenched through the club

experience. The club movement came of age just as higher education in America was tentatively opening its doors to young women. Older women fashioned their clubs to fulfill their own desires for education. Often, writers emphasized how thoroughly women were educated in their clubs. Olive Thorne Miller's 1891 handbook, *The Woman's Club, A Practical Guide*, describes how "[t]he club has been aptly called the middle-aged woman's college, and it does in fact offer to mature women some of the advantages their daughters reap from college life" (20). Miller's use of the phrase "middle-aged woman's college" illustrates the identity that these women wanted to fashion for themselves. They viewed their clubs as a place to learn and create for themselves the education they had been denied as young women. Miller develops this corrective exigence as she describes "the use of women's clubs:" "It [a club] opens one's eyes to the true dignity of womanhood, and informs her what her sisters are doing abroad in the world. The constant interchange of ideas on every subject enlightens her in regard to the books she should read, and in what branch of culture she is deficient . . . She expands mentally from day to day" (22). Miller, like other clubwomen, stressed how a women's club could help a woman gain the education she had always desired. Such a possibility was a powerful element of this first link on the fantasy chain of clubwomen's rhetorical vision because it defined a club as fulfilling women's thwarted desires for an education.

This desire was expressed not only in manuals written by club leaders but also in more mundane testimonials from individual club members. An anonymous 1892 club report from the Dayton Women's Literary Club reiterates the comparison to college: "The interest of the members seems never to have waned in the three years since the club was organized: it fills a want in the lives of busy women and makes us feel like school-

girls again in an advanced seminary of learning. The gray-haired ladies do not retire to their knitting and the chimney-corner, but they are on the alert with book, pen and paper, to keep pace with or even to lead the younger members” (*New Cycle* 116). This personal testimony emphasizes the desire to learn and explains how club life fulfilled that desire. Again, the corrective exigence of club life is repeated. These “gray-haired ladies” of Ohio are portrayed as active, busy women who knew something was missing during their years devoted solely to housework and children. The author credits the club for attending to this need for education. Club life helped the women recapture their youth and filled them with a sense of purpose when they would otherwise be relegated to the “chimney-corner.”

While clubwomen enthusiastically claimed their right to an education, they did so in a culture that was hotly debating the fitness of higher education for women. Male physicians and scientists claimed that education was excessively draining for women; activity in the brain drew needed blood from the womb.²² The New England Women’s Club often invited speakers to its committee meetings. In the annual report for 1873, a report by the chair of the work committee demonstrates the power this debate had for clubwomen. Chair Abby W. May reminds her audience that the committee was formed to discuss “practical matters” (*Report* 10). In 1873, the committee invited speakers for the topic: “women’s fitness for entering practical life,” which meant formal education and public work (10). Annual reports such as this one were common in large clubs; their purpose was to give a summary of the year’s activities and celebrate the clubs’ accomplishments. Usually each writer includes only a brief overview of the highlights of

²² Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor, 1989).

some aspect of the clubs' activity. However, in this instance, May chooses to argue with the first speaker, Dr. Edward H. Clarke, in her column. She uses subtle irony to describe Dr. Clarke as "the skillful physician, the jealous guardian of health, to whose notice comes daily most distressing knowledge of the suffering caused by a lack of it, especially among New England women" (11). May explains that Dr. Clarke "made a strong plea for saving women from the overpressure and false methods of living, under which so many men, as well as women, break down" (11). The bottom line for Dr. Clarke was that women were unfit for higher education.

The topic of education was very dear to many clubwomen because they claimed it as their central purpose. Thus, May seems unable to simply report the content of Clarke's paper. Instead, she first explains how the committee reacted to it: "But the discussion which followed the paper showed that the majority could not agree with Dr. Clarke, in charging much of the misery upon higher education, or the co-education of the sexes" (12). Dr. Clarke, like Gilman's physician, Dr. Mitchell, believed that the cure for women's illnesses was less mental activity rather than more. May breaks away from her summary of the discussion to directly refute this claim. She does so by arguing that people have a "five-fold nature . . . physical, mental, moral, affectional, and spiritual" (11). In her line of reasoning, both men and women must maintain a balance between all five aspects. Therefore, to claim that women need less education rather than more is in direct contradiction to this belief: "Who shall dare to say that mental culture must be kept on a poorer plane than the very best there is because of danger to a woman's body" (12). Instead, May argues, women should be free to pursue an education because no one should ignore or throw out of balance any aspect of their "five-fold nature." May's rhetoric,

appearing in an annual report that usually simply summarizes activity, indicates the passion many clubwomen felt about the issue of higher education and their efforts to enhance their own educations.

In her report, May looks much more favorably on the next speaker in their series, Dr. Mary J. Safford. Dr. Safford was a professor of women's diseases at the Boston University School of Medicine and had a private practice. Two years after this report, in 1875, Dr. Safford would become one of the first women to serve on the Boston School Committee. After a comfortable childhood in Illinois that included trips abroad, Safford found her calling in the Civil War. There, she worked for the Sanitary Commission and became a nurse for field hospitals. After the war, she enrolled in the New York Medical College for Women and finished in 1869 at the age of thirty-five. She then spent three years in Europe completing surgical training in Austria and Germany. By the time she married and moved to Boston, Dr. Safford had also become an avid advocate of dress reform for women (James 220-221).

May's work committee looked much more favorably on Dr. Safford's analysis of women's illness. Dr. Safford explained, while drawing on her own experiences in the war, that women's cumbersome clothing was at the root, "both directly and indirectly, of much of the inability – where any exists – of the sex to engage in practical work" (13). In her presentation, Dr. Safford argued that corsets and long, confining dresses diminished "the health which active living requires" (13). She, herself, wore simple skirts without any ruffle that hung an inch above the floor and comfortable shoes with a low heel (James 221). Apparently, the club was convinced enough by Dr. Safford's speech, and a presentation by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, another prominent dress reformer,

to take up the cause themselves. Club member and historian, Julia Sprague, described the club's activities in her 1894 history of the club. A separate committee formed in 1874 and planned a series of public lectures and a subscription paper. According to Sprague, "the committee soon became a bureau of correspondence throughout the United States . . . approving patterns, contending against the use of patents, buying material for manufacture, opening a store in Winter Street for the sale of dress-reform garments . . . and negotiating for the sale of the business when it was sufficiently established" (20). The club so thoroughly rejected Dr. Clarke's railing against education for women and embraced Dr. Safford's dress reform analysis that they became a major force for the movement in Boston.²³

For most clubwomen in the GFWC, marriages to middle-class professionals ensured their financial status and afforded them the leisure time to pursue self-education. Working women also desired an education but had little time to devote to researching and writing club papers. However, working women's clubs also offered classes and incorporated education into their mission. In 1888, a note in the *Woman's Journal* describes the activities of the Social Club of Working Women in Boston. The club was open to any working woman with minimal dues. Meetings were every Tuesday night, and the club president asked each person to "bring some quotation plainly written, and with the author's name attached, if possible. These fragments, as they are called, are collected and read during the evening, each member compiling her own little book of selections" (60). The author explains how the women did not have time for more study,

²³ For an interesting analysis of the antebellum roots of dress reform, see Gayle V. Ficher's *Pantaloons and Power: A Nineteenth-Century Dress Reform in the United States* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2002).

but that “the reading of these quotations is a great feature in the evening’s entertainment” (60). While the article is written from the perspective of a wealthier clubwoman and has such markings of condescension as calling the members’ books “little,” the example demonstrates how important education was across different types of clubs. For all women in clubs, education was a primary motivator and central to the story they told about why forming a women’s club was important.

Even women with more professional education, like J. C. Croly, still cited education as a primary reason for starting a club. Croly was not looking for gaps in her own education to fill; instead, she had more feminist ideas in mind. In *Sorosis: Its Origin and History*, Croly describes her motives, referring to herself in the third person: “Many women, she herself among the rest, were hungry for the society of women, that is, for the society of those whose deeper natures had been roused to activity, who had been seized by the divine spirit of inquiry and aspiration, who were interested in the thought and progress of the age, and in what other women were thinking and doing” (7). For Croly, the central purpose of her club was to unite women for political purposes. From the very beginning, *Sorosis* tackled feminist issues like dress reform and suffrage.

Croly became the backbone of the emerging club movement and initiated the General Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1890. Born in England in 1829, she came to the United States with her family as a young girl, settling near Poughkeepsie, New York. Croly was educated at home and read widely in her father’s library. When her father died in 1854, she was left without a means of support and moved to New York City. There, she began writing for newspapers and, in 1856, married David Goodham Croly, an Irish immigrant on the staff of the *Herald*. Three years later, the couple briefly moved to

Rockville, IL to be near Croly's sister and attempted to start a newspaper. While the newspaper did not succeed, Croly did have her first child, Minnie. The family moved back to New York City and both Crolys continued to work as journalists. They also had three more children, including a son, Herbert David, who became the first editor of *The New Republic* (James 410). Croly also maintained an active social circle and entertained such literary figures as Louisa May Alcott and Oscar Wilde at her Sunday salons. During her husband's long illness and after his death in 1889, Croly supported her family by spending mornings at home and working late into the evening at the office. Her many "Jennie June" columns were collected into three volumes, and she spent much of her final years working on her voluminous *History of the Women's Club Movement in America*, published in 1898. While Croly was not an outspoken supporter of suffrage, she was a firm believer in the Women's Movement and was a strong advocate for professional women throughout her career (James 410). Her dedication and energetic support of the club movement was essential to its rapid growth and influence.

As I explain in Chapter Three, Croly was crucial in the shift in club rhetoric from study to reform, but even she cites education as a primary reason to start a club, rather than socialization or relaxation. She desired a gender-centered education by wanting to learn "what other women were thinking and doing," but it was still a desire to fill a lack in her own education. Early club leaders and club members alike created a story for themselves that centered on their desire to further their educations. The first page of the story clubwomen wrote about themselves described clubs as a place to study unlike any other available to them.

As they wove the story about why they wanted to form a club, women were very clear that their clubs were distinct from men's clubs. In fact, a debate emerged early on within the women's club movement over the term "club" because of the connotation that carried from upper-class men's clubs. Men may have gone to their clubs to entertain, relax, or socialize, but women worked in theirs. In her handbook, Miller phrases it this way: "The first thing to be said of the club for woman, is that the name, having been so long the exclusive possession of our brothers, is somewhat misleading" (13). Miller laments the shortcoming of the phrase and explains how women often have to use words that do not quite fit their purpose: "Since however, the language furnishes no other so exactly fitting, we have adopted it, with the intention of developing the club in our own way" (13). Miller and others may have been frustrated with the comparisons to men's clubs, so she deliberately explains the distinction, stressing that for women, this was a very different form of endeavor. Instead of being a place to relax, the women's club provided individuals a place to work.

Julia Sprague's account of the formation of the New England Women's Club also emphasizes that the women desired a new place for work and not leisure. In her description of the early club meetings, she quotes Caroline Severance, who served as the first president of the club before Julia Ward Howe took over. According to Severance, "the Club was to be no lounging-place;" instead they wanted "a place where women should have the opportunity for culture in dignified and deliberate discussion" (qtd in Sprague 7). The women of the club, inspired by their activity in the Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, now wanted a place where they could learn and discuss new ideas.

After describing women's desire for education and defining clubs as a place to work, club writers emphasized how a club could transform individuals from tentative housewives to confident reformers. Writers emphasized this transformation to persuade new members to join their clubs. The report of the Chicago Women's Club in an 1892 *New Cycle* issue exemplifies this narrative of transformation. The report describes the debate within the club concerning changing from a study club to a departmental club:

It would be impossible to over-estimate the importance of this step, or to measure its far-reaching effect upon the members of the club. Timid women, who had known of abuses in public places, now felt the burden of responsibility upon them; those who had realized the sorrows and wrongs of their less fortunate sisters, no longer questioned "Am I my sister's keeper?" but set to work to right the wrongs, and secure needed legislation. (173)

In this instance, the author dramatizes how the skills learned in a club could change women. "Timid women," after participating in club activities, felt "the burden of responsibility" to become more active in their community. Wealthy women went from complaining, "Am I my sister's keeper" to a broader awareness of issues of poverty and attempted to help by lobbying their municipal leaders. At the end of the report comes a list of accomplishments within the city that is typical of an influential urban club, including a "protective agency for women and children" and the appointment of women doctors and night matrons to women's jails (173). To emphasize the work of their women's club, the author depicts the transformation from "timid women" to active social reformers. Central to this narrative is the role of education and distinction of the real work being done in a club. Throughout the narrative of transformation, clubwomen emphasized how club life could thoroughly change an individual for the better.

One of the original club members of Croly's pioneering club, Sorosis, offered an important testimonial to the transforming power of the club movement. Individual testimonials like these were frequent in the first link of the club movement's rhetorical vision. First-person narratives offered the immediacy and genuine enthusiasm of an individual, which was more likely to persuade others to join a club. These print narratives are also a trace of original verbal testimonials that probably inspired early fantasy chains. As one woman would describe how a club had transformed her, another might affirm the narrative or add to it, and then another, infusing the original statement with an energy unique to small-group communications.

Celia Burleigh was an original member of Sorosis, and Croly mentions her twice by name in *Sorosis, Its Origins and History*. First, Croly describes the discovery of Burleigh's talents at an early meeting: "It was at the November meeting of 1868 that Mrs. Celia Burleigh read the paper upon 'Womanhood,' which suggested her possibilities as a lecturer and preacher, and which was afterward enlarged into the first effort which she made for the public lecture field" (19). Croly depicts Burleigh as a woman discovering her profession within the structure of a club meeting who used her early papers as the basis of her profession as a public lecturer. This narrative of the professionalization of club activities became stronger in the early twentieth century, as described in Chapter Four. However, even early in the club movement, women found talents that they would then pursue as careers, notably as public lecturers. Like Gilman, Burleigh discovered her ability to speak effectively in public within a woman's club.

Later in the chapter, Croly includes the direct first-person testimonial of Burleigh, who left Sorosis to found her own club in Brooklyn, but remained in contact with the

women of her original club. Her testimonial describes the transforming power of the club: “Among the schools to which I have been sent, I reckon Sorosis the most valuable” (26). Like other clubwomen, Burleigh claims that club work functions as a school; she goes so far as to compare what she learned at Sorosis with her more formal education. Burleigh then testifies to how much the club has changed her: “One of the greatest needs of women is motive for mental activity – an hospitable entertainment of their thought. For me Sorosis met precisely this want; it afforded me an atmosphere so genial, an appreciation so prompt, a faith so generous, that every possibility of my nature seemed intensified, and all its latent power quickened into life” (26). She describes how she felt more alive and innovative after joining a club, just as the anonymous woman who would have otherwise been in the “chimney corner” did. This energy and excitement was central to the clubs’ narrative of transformation. The first link of their rhetorical vision was a powerful one precisely because they claimed that the transformation that happened in a club could not happen anywhere else.

Throughout their narrative of transformation, club writers were very aware of their audience. Club membership drew mostly on housewives who had some leisure time. In an early club magazine edited by J C Croly, *The New Cycle*, J M Lozier describes this audience: “[The women’s club] serves to bring into line the vast army of women whose only misfortune it is to have been born too soon -- the army of housewives and mothers . . . whose accomplishments have been buried under an avalanche of shirts and puddings” (64). In this 1892 article, Lozier opens by applauding the recent advances in higher education for women. She then explains how the women’s club is essential in aiding the middle-aged housewife who could not commit to the expense of college.

Rather than debate the merits of careers versus housework, these club leaders, many of whom were career women, reached out to housewives and encouraged them to participate in the Women's Movement through self-education in a club.

Club leaders encouraged housewives to join their movement through feminine language by connecting the new work of clubs to familiar domestic tasks. This continuity encouraged women to join the new movement because club activity would neither threaten nor detract from the home. Instead, club leaders directly addressed women's (and men's) concerns by explaining how club life would improve their home. For example, the time spent studying in a club would help at home because women would be better able to instruct their children. Along with directly addressing how club life could improve home life, club writers also used another tactic: they incorporated domestic symbols into their descriptions of how to start or join a club.

A prime example of the use of a domestic symbol occurs in *The Annals of the Chicago Women's Club for the First Forty Years of its Organization, 1876-1916*, compiled by Henriette Greenbaum Frank and Amalie Hofer Jerome. Here, the authors use a cup of tea as a symbol of the transformation of clubwomen:

When the cup of tea was first introduced at our meetings it did not mean to us what it meant to Dr. Samuel Johnson, who "with tea amused the evening, with tea solaced the midnight and with tea welcomed the morning." It meant to us merely a reason for biding a wee, either to discuss the program or to arrange for future meetings. Many of us mute, inglorious Miltons who had not the courage to speak our minds before several hundred in formidable array, expressed our humble opinions freely over the tea-cups. It requires no courage now to join the Woman's Club.
(13)

Frank and Jerome highlight their gendered connotation of a teacup by contrasting their meaning with that of Dr. Johnson. Instead of an accessory of intellectual activity, the

authors offer the teacup as a symbol of more humble domestic activity. They demonstrate how, as a symbol of domesticity, the cup of tea provided the transition from the private, feminine space that they inhabited to a more public forum. It enabled them to perform a previously foreign and frightening rhetorical act. Women who had been bred never to speak in public could share their voices “freely over tea-cups.” The authors manipulate the symbol to construct a transformation from the domestic activity of chattering women to the intellectual work demanded by club life. These “mute, inglorious Miltons” gained the skills in club life necessary to sustain intellectual conversation. Thus, by joining a club, women could transform themselves into public speakers by incorporating markers of their domestic life. The last sentence of this passage moves the reader to the present day, contrasted with this first moment of the club. Now, say the authors, such courage over tea is unnecessary. They argue that they have transformed women’s roles enough that their early fear to speak publicly no longer exists.

Another way that club writers used domestic symbols to induct women into club life was to portray the accessories of the hostess. For many potential clubwomen, entertaining was already an important aspect of daily life and an easy way to envision joining a club. However, writers were careful to emphasize that this was a different type of entertaining, transforming a social act into new and important work. Helen Cowles Le Cron and Edith Wasson McElroy wrote *How to Be a Clubwoman* in 1932. This instructional manual came late in club history, but is demonstrative of how clubs used the symbols of a hostess to transform individuals into club members. The authors suggest holding the first meeting in someone’s home, focusing the beginning of a woman’s club

with the familiar territory of entertaining. In the narration, home is emphasized with details of how to host the first meeting: “Suggest that they drop in around four; then have ready for them a plate of freshly made cinnamon toast and a pot of fragrant tea” (15). The inclusion of descriptive details like toast and tea began to create the bridge from the role of hostess to the role of an organized clubwoman.

From there, the authors switch to parliamentary language, providing instruction on how to make sure the club runs smoothly and efficiently:

When they are all comfortably seated, the suggestion should be made that a temporary chairwoman be chosen to take charge of the meeting and a temporary secretary appointed in order that a complete record of the club’s business may be kept from the very beginning. Another can then be made that the group organize itself as a club, the motion can be put to a vote by the president pro tem, and presto -- you are a club! (16)

When the transition from home to club is made, the narration relies more on the passive voice; the shift changes the mood from the informal comfort of the home to the more official, bureaucratic tone of a public club. The authors emphasize the rules of parliamentary procedure by transforming one or two close friends socializing over tea and toast into a president who runs a meeting and a secretary who keeps an official record. This identification with rules of order places the club in the civic sphere. By shifting the description from a social event to one guided by parliamentary structure, the writers add to the narrative of transformation by stressing the work of a women’s club. Throughout club narratives, writers honed such domestic symbols to reach out to their audience of domestic, middle-class women.

As the women’s club movement gained popularity, club writers would refer to the early history of the club movement to dramatize the movement’s transformation over time. Anna McMahan, in an article titled “To Women’s Clubs” in 1888, stresses the

innovation of early club members. Her essay to a club audience recites their early history, again highlighting the corrective exigence of early clubs: “The spectacle of women of mature years, of busy lives, whose schooldays were long past and whose only incitement was from within, coming together for mutual improvement, was twenty years ago, something new under the sun’ (260). McMahan underscores the “newness” of clubs’ study efforts. This definition of uniqueness heightens the importance of clubs to their members and encourages women to strongly identify with the movement because of its originality. Women would find something in club life that they could find nowhere else. McMahan concludes her essay by connecting clubwomen’s innovations to the progressive “spirit” of the times. She rouses clubwomen to rededicate their efforts and continue to transform their clubs:

We feel that we are a part of the great onward march of humanity, that with us rests the responsibility to help it forward, and – hopefulest sign of all! That we must fit ourselves to bear worthily our new burdens. In this endeavor, there is no means more generally available than the woman’s club. Let us learn from each other what we may concerning ways and means, that thus this new factor in society may realize ever more and more fully the aspirations on which it is founded (260).

Her call to action both argues for continued transformation and connects the aspirations of the club movement to the progressive rhetoric widely circulating in the late nineteenth century in America.

African-American clubwomen also created a narrative of transformation, but their rhetoric contained an important extra layer. As the story of the formation of the NACW attests to, black clubwomen organized nationally in direct response to racist attacks on their womanhood. While white clubs could draw on their feminine strengths to explain their reasons for joining a club, African-American women had to defend their claim to

middle-class respectability from racist attacks. Therefore, their rhetoric had the extra purpose of also attempting to transform the racist culture in which they lived and worked. Joeshpine St. Pierre Ruffin explained club efforts at the first conference of the NACW: “Now with an army of organized women standing for purity and mental work, we in ourselves deny the charge and open the eyes of the world to a state of affairs to which they have been blind, often willfully so, and the very fact that the charges, audaciously and flippantly made, as they often are, are of so humiliating and delicate a nature, serves to protect the accuser by driving the helpless accused into mortified silence” (qtd in Davis 20). Ruffin’s assertion emphasizes the additional work African-American clubwomen undertook to improve their segregated, racist communities.

Ruffin and other black clubwomen developed a two-pronged rhetorical strategy to refute arguments against them. First, they modeled the “ideal” tenets of womanhood in an attempt to place themselves squarely in the midst of middle-class respectability. This is evident in Ruffin’s description of clubwomen as “standing for purity;” these women boldly asserted their right to equality by describing themselves in the mainstream language of “true womanhood.” In addition to modeling behavior, Ruffin and others used the power of their group to refute charges they could not address as individuals. Thus, the collective NACW could stand and call men “liars” and defy rhetoric designed to shame them and strip them of their femininity. The unifying impetus of refuting racist attacks gave the NACW a collective power that laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement of the twentieth century.

The rhetorical vision that clubwomen created was an effective way to fashion a space for women in the public sphere. The first step of this vision was the rhetoric

women honed concerning their narrative of transformation. Within this narrative, club writers and leaders emphasized how clubs offered a unique place to gain an education, how clubs were a space for work not recreation, and how clubs could transform an individual woman by exposing her to a wider network, giving her an energy and sense of purpose beyond her family. In addition, African-American clubwomen added an extra layer to the narrative, which emphasized how they could collectively transform the harsh living conditions they faced in a racist country. Through their rhetoric, clubwomen garnered a new sense of purpose and developed a rhetorical vision that surfaced in the prose, essays, and poetry of the Progressive Era.

Gilman's Early Utopias: Club Rhetoric on a Grand Scale

Understanding the rhetorical vision of clubwomen sheds light not only on the biographies of women writers but also on the fiction they wrote during the Progressive Era. Along with acknowledging clubwomen's narrative of transformation in her non-fiction, Gilman manipulated the formula in her fiction. Understanding the political work of clubs emphasizes Gilman's commitment to the work these women were undertaking. She did not just lecture to clubs for pay, she also developed their rhetoric in her own fiction. Gilman drew on the ideas of fellow clubwomen as she worked out her own beliefs on gender and women's rights. She implemented components of clubwomen's rhetorical vision in her first long story published in *The Forerunner*, *What Diantha Did* (1909). Club rhetoric also appears in *Moving the Mountain* (1911), her first utopian novel. Gilman serialized the novel in her publication, *The Forerunner*: then, she and her second husband, George Houghton, later published a hardcover version through their

press, Charlton Publishing Company. They also published two more of her utopian novels: *Herland* (1915) and its sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916).

Both *What Diantha Did* and *Moving the Mountain* depict club scenes. However, *What Diantha Did* depends much more heavily on club life to advance the plot. In the novel, the heroine, Diantha, is dissatisfied with her work as a teacher. Her fiancé, Ross Warden, runs a small grocery store and attempts to support his mother and five sisters, all of whom embody the bourgeois ideal of ladies of leisure. Consequently, they offer no financial support to the family. Diantha worries that she and Ross will never marry because he will never be able to earn enough money to support the two of them. Therefore, she persuades her own parents to release her from her familial duties and embark on a business venture. She leaves her hometown and goes to a resort town, Orchardina, to start a housekeeping business. She hopes the business will not only be profitable for her but also prove that domestic life for all women can be revolutionized. In Orchardina, the young women of the prominent women's club become Diantha's clients and friends and are the foundation of her success.

Few critics have examined this early story, but Sharon M. Rambo calls for further critical attention to the novel in her article "*What Diantha Did: The Authority of Experience*" (1989). Rambo draws on Rachel DuPlessis's thesis concerning the unique development of the female writer.²⁴ Rambo argues that the novel depicts women's

²⁴ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985).

unique perceptions: “Essential to the dreams of woman’s culture is the concept of experience, not dogma, as the primary source of knowledge. Women of varied social groups, hence experiences, join together to construct a more integrated, even holistic Orchardina” (159). Rambo values the women-centered experiences that are the basis of the positive trajectory of the narrative. She does not discuss the club movement in particular, but club life thrived because of the sense of community and interconnectedness that came with it. Gilman herself drew on the energy of this movement to redefine herself as a professional. While scholars have not rushed to build on Rambo’s work, viewed from the perspective of clubwomen’s narrative of transformation, *What Diantha Did* is an excellent example of Gilman’s ability to manipulate club rhetoric to persuade her audience to adopt more radical positions. Like early club writers, she emphasizes clubs as a place of work rather than leisure. In addition, Gilman fictionalizes a club meeting and perhaps uses a real-life club enterprise as the basis for her heroine’s business venture.

Gilman develops the clubwomen’s rhetoric of transformation to emphasize the positive results of women working in the public sphere. She initiates this theme in the opening of the novel by belittling the passive role of women in the ideal bourgeois family. In the opening paragraph, Gilman describes the family home of Diantha’s fiancé: “the stately mansion was covered with heavy flowering vines, also with heavy mortgages.

Mrs. Roscoe Warden and her four daughters reposed peacefully under the vines, while Roscoe Warden, Jr., struggled desperately under the mortgages” (6). Roscoe’s mother and sisters do nothing to contribute to the family income, even though there is not quite enough money to make ends meet. Gilman depicts this adherence to bourgeois mores as outdated and absurd, and instead offers the plucky Diantha, who is willing to work, as her heroine. Club rhetoric stressed that a women’s club as a site for work rather than relaxation; this move opened up a new space where women could work outside the home. The club became a place to accomplish useful reform. Gilman uses this rhetoric to denigrate the bourgeois ideal of the “lady of leisure.” Throughout the novel, Gilman chastises women for not pursuing honest work. By creating a likeable heroine who wants to work, Gilman furthers the argument that work in the public sphere is acceptable for women.

An important component of the club leaders’ argument was the transition from domestic housewife to public reformer. To convince their audience, clubwomen used traditional domestic symbols to ease women into new spaces and roles. In order to create a sympathetic heroine, Gilman follows the same strategy. Early in the novel, she places Diantha in the center of the sacred domestic realm, the kitchen. There, in a scene with her mother, Diantha argues that she should move out and start her own business; while Diantha talks, she is busy at domestic tasks. Gilman carefully emphasizes Diantha’s domestic abilities: “from the pantry to the table she stepped, swiftly and lightly, setting out what was needed, greased her pans and set them before her, and proceeded to make biscuits. . . . Her mother watched her admiringly” (16). As Diantha expertly works, her mother acknowledges that she is the better baker. This scene sets Diantha squarely in the

domestic realm. She is no radical who wants to tear down the home; instead, she is a capable and earnest housekeeper in her parents' house. By initially placing her heroine in a domestic scene, Gilman is able to win over her primarily middle-class audience. She can then introduce her own ideas concerning the fitness of women working in the public sphere. Just as clubwomen borrowed heavily from domestic language to encourage women to undertake reform work, Gilman bridges her own argument from the private house to a public business.

In order to fashion an argument for women's work, clubwomen had to convince their audience to let go of stereotypes of women's domestic purpose. This often led to a clash between old and new, so club writers used gentle satire to align their audiences' sympathy with their aims. Gilman relies on this tactic in the chapter titled "Heresy and Schism," where she depicts the meeting of the Orchardina Home and Culture Club. She portrays the leaders of the club as society women of the old regime who adhere to the same bourgeois ideals the Warden women embody. Even though the club has younger "alert and conscientious women," the entrenched society ladies hold sway: "Most of the members were quite content to follow the lead of the solidly established ladies of Orchard Avenue; especially as this leadership consisted mainly in the pursuance of masterly inactivity. When wealth and aristocracy combine with that common inertia which we dignify as 'conservatism' they exert a powerful influence in the great art of sitting still" (56). The ladies of Orchard Avenue are described as women dedicated to leisure, and their attitudes toward club life mirror the social clubs of upper class men. Gilman's satirical depiction of the wealthiest members of the club enables her to contrast this villainous "old guard" with the new ideas Diantha injects. The current leaders of the

Home and Culture Club are depicted as old-fashioned and out-of-date. They pursue club life as an extension of their social rounds and see a club meeting as just another place to repose with like-minded women.

Gilman challenges this portrayal of club life with her character, Diantha, and the work she proposes when she reads a paper on the topic, “The True Nature of Domestic Industry” (54). This paper, centered on the work a club should undertake, confronts the leisured attitude of the club leaders. Her paper also describes the new housekeeping business that she has started in Orchardina. For Diantha’s business plan, Gilman draws inspiration from the real-life activities of women’s clubs. Diantha’s business is remarkably similar to a private enterprise initiated by real clubwomen in Massachusetts. Most of the rest of the novel follows Diantha’s trials and tribulations as she attempts to start her House Worker’s Union, a group of young women who live together and work as domestic servants in private residences from nine to five each day. She soon expands her business to include a hotel, restaurant, and in-home meal service for the wealthy families of Orchardina. First, Diantha begins by training young women for domestic service. The women all live in the House Worker’s Union Hall and leave each day for regular hours of domestic service rather than living in their employers’ homes. The women are carefully trained to be more efficient and are depicted as much happier having their own free time away from their employers (83).

Details of Diantha’s business enterprise are comparable to an actual experimental business started by clubwomen in Boston. After moving from California, Gilman served for a time as the assistant editor to the *Woman’s Journal*, which was founded by the suffragist, Lucy Stone, in 1870. In the early years of the twentieth century, Alice Stone

Blackwell was the editor, and Gilman, as assistant editor, wrote many notices and articles. A regular column, often on the front page, was the “Women’s Clubs and Clubwomen” report, which ran the various activities of clubs across the country, including San Francisco and Chicago. At the time, Gilman still had personal ties to clubs in both cities. Of particular interest is the 1904 January 9 issue, which notes an article that ran in the *Federated Bulletin*, the official magazine of the Massachusetts GFWC. This article praises the Household Aid Company, a private business started by clubwomen in the Women’s Education Association. The WEA was founded out of the original New England Women’s Club, and was the club that effectively lobbied MIT to admit women. The business plan seeks to professionalize household servants by providing separate living quarters for them. Women could then work set hours rather than living in as full-time domestics. At the end of the essay, the author urges clubwomen to support this women-owned business.

The original essay that the column references is “A New Solution of the Domestic Problem” by Caroline Stone Atherton. Atherton’s essay contains details that Gilman could well have adapted for Diantha’s venture including set hours of labor, a collective home for domestic workers, and an advertising circular that lists prices; all of these details appear in Gilman’s story. At the end of the essay, Atherton urges her audience to support the experiment, after chastising many clubwomen’s unwillingness to embrace new ideas: “But the time and the condition of labor in the home are fast bringing about results that nothing else could compass. Shall we not cordially endorse the efforts of those who are devoting time and thought to this subject so near every woman’s heart – the home?” (48-49). Atherton challenges her audience to support such experiments as

part of their mission as clubwomen. In keeping with the clubs' rhetorical vision, she urges women to support the move from domestic work to more public enterprises. Gilman too places her faith in women-owned businesses and the changes that clubwomen could enable. Her use of real-life examples of new ideas in the women's club movement demonstrates the inspiration and support she received from this organized movement. Such a connection would surely inspire her club audience and show a broader audience that the work clubwomen were doing would lead to very real and lasting changes.

Gilman persuades her audience by tapping into the rhetoric of the heroic club member. By highlighting the conflict of ideals that occurred in club meetings, Gilman is able to characterize her audience as "forward-thinking" by drawing on their sympathy for the intelligent and articulate Diantha. Diantha presents the details of her ideas of kitchenless homes and contracted domestic servants, much as Gilman did in her lectures and works of non-fiction. By voicing her ideas through the mouth of the likable Diantha, Gilman is able to use a different genre to drive home the same point. At the end of her paper, Diantha concludes by describing how housekeeping should be a respectable business venture like any other: "That is the way to elevate - to ennoble domestic service. It must cease to be domestic service - and become world service" (60). Echoing Gilman's own opening to club lectures, "shall the home be our world or the world our home?" Diantha elevates housekeeping to "world service" in order to persuade her audience that women should enter a sphere larger than their own homes. Through Diantha's speech, Gilman attempts to persuade her audience that working in the public realm is useful and noble. In this central scene, Gilman argues that women should not waste their talents inside their homes. Instead, they should look for ways that they can

enhance the public realm, through reform work or new businesses. Like other club leaders, Gilman urges women to transform themselves from housewives into public participants in “world service.”

Continuing to develop the theme of a women’s club as a site of work rather than leisure, Gilman depicts the club’s reaction to Diantha’s paper. The club is thrown into a tumult; the younger women are moved by Diantha’s presentation while the older ones see it as a blasphemous attack on the home and their way of life. One faction moves to take a vote of condemnation while another moves to endorse Diantha’s ideas. In the heat of the club meeting, those supporting Diantha’s ideas stand up and resign; one member declares: “We’ll have a New Woman’s Club in Orchardina with some warmth in its heart and some brains in its head - even if it hasn’t as much money in its pocket!” (62). These members desire a club where real work, such as that outlined in Diantha’s paper is accomplished. The split between clubs emphasizes the concept that the club movement was something new and unique and not simply a place to socialize. Gilman’s identification of her ideas with the “New Woman” serves to reinforce her argument with her audience. By dramatically portraying this schism in the club meeting, Gilman develops the narrative of transformation, adding to the rhetoric of domestic women transformed by club life into active reformers. Clubwomen who identify with the “New Woman” should separate from older, more conservative members of clubs.

By supporting Diantha’s business, the younger club characters experience a “waking up” similar to the transformation that occurs when women joined a club, according to the rhetoric of club leaders. In the novel, Mrs. Weatherstone, who becomes an important financial backer to Diantha’s business, explains the change to her mother-

in-law, a stolid member of the Home and Culture Club: “I was much interested and impressed. She [Diantha] is evidently a young woman of knowledge and experience, and put her case well. It has quite waked me up” (63). Just as the women in club magazines and histories “wake up,” so does Mrs. Weatherstone. For her, this change in consciousness starts in the women’s club and leads her to become a confident venture capitalist by the end of the novel. Gilman’s fictional portrayal of a club and the support clubwomen gave to businesswomen draws heavily on the rhetorical vision of club life. Understanding this context, including similar real-life activities of clubwomen, illuminates the world in which Gilman lived and worked. For Gilman, and many other clubwomen, women’s lives could be transformed through the meetings and network of club life. This community of women could change themselves, their families, and, ultimately, the entire country. Gilman experiments with this concept on an even broader scale in her next novel, *Moving the Mountain*.

In contrast to her experimental, futuristic utopia, *Herland*, *Moving the Mountain*’s near-future setting, 1940, allows Gilman to portray a society still very much connected to her own. Therefore, Gilman can persuade her readers by binding her story to the rhetoric of the women’s club movement. In *Moving the Mountain*, society’s transformation is not initiated by massive technological changes, economic revolution, war or catastrophe. Instead, Gilman attributes utopian development to a change in consciousness, a “waking up” that happens first in women. This “waking up” echoes the rhetoric created in the club movement of timid women who were transformed into active participants in their communities. Gilman draws on this rhetoric for *Moving the Mountain* as she experiments with how women’s participation in public life could permanently alter their society.

In the novel, John Robertson is an explorer who was lost in Tibet for thirty years. When his sister, Nellie, miraculously finds him, he accidentally falls and hits his head on a rock, losing his memory of the past thirty years. John returns home with no recollection of the years 1910 to 1940, years of a radical restructuring of American society in Gilman's tale. Through John's first-person narration, Gilman paints her vision of a new world, one in which women play an equal and very visible role. Nellie, John's sister and tour guide, is a college professor. Her daughter, Hallie, is a food inspector. In Gilman's 1940, women enter professions in equal numbers, travel and live on their own, and have socialized day care. She portrays a community motivated by a new civic consciousness, not economic factors. There is still private capital and businesses, but all corporations' primary goal is to contribute to the social good. While influenced by the novel *Looking Backward*, Gilman does not adopt Edward Bellamy's vision of equal pay for all. Instead, she describes how everyone has enough, even if some have more than others do. People must work only two hours a day and most willingly work four hours for the betterment of all.

In her utopia, Gilman attributes the restructuring of society to a major shift in consciousness, a centering of public, rather than individual, spirit. Club writers emphasized how clubs infused individuals with an awareness of the needs of their communities; likewise, Gilman describes similar changes in her characters. A vivid example is a scene that describes the revolution in the food industry. After eating a delicious, mostly vegetarian meal, Nellie reminds John what food was like in 1910: "The world was ill-fed. Most of the food was below par, a good deal was injurious, some absolute poison. People sold poison for food in 1910 - don't forget that! You may

remember the row that was beginning to be made about it” (64). Because Gilman sets her novel only forty years in the future, here, she alludes to the Pure Food movement, which prospered in the United States, thanks in part to the activities of women’s clubs. In 1904, the GFWC held its biannual convention in St. Louis to coincide with the World’s Fair. Pure food was central to the clubs’ convention platform that year, and the GFWC persuaded the Department of Agriculture to include club exhibits on the issue in the Department’s exhibition at the fair (Goodwin 141). To cite the Pure Food movement in 1910 is to remind Gilman’s readers of a movement led by women, many of them clubwomen. Gilman is able draw on examples of club activism to stress women’s role in public reform movements and identify how the spread of such rhetoric could transform society.

Along with emphasizing the transformation of public life, Gilman identifies changes in individuals that are similar to the club narrative of transformation. Nellie explains that the change in consciousness started with the Pure Food movement and grew: “Well that row went on - and gained in force. The women woke up” (65). At this point in the food discussion, John demands an explanation about the “waking up’ business.” Nellie responds: “Some women were waking up, tremendously before you left, John Robertson, only I dare say, you never noticed it. They just kept on faster and faster, till they all did - about all” (65). Here Gilman’s faith in the optimist narrative of transformation shines through. In her explanation of a new utopia, at heart is a change in women’s consciousness. Gilman utilizes the rhetoric of the “timid woman” who finds a new purpose rather than be relegated to the “chimney corner.” In context of the club

movement, this “waking up business” occurs on a grand scale, permanently changing social conditions.

Gilman herself identified with clubs’ narrative of transformation in her autobiography. Twenty years before that, she used the same sentiment as the basis for her utopia. Her depiction of change in *Moving the Mountain* is similar to the change in consciousness she credits to the women’s club movement in her autobiography: “which reached almost every one, and brought her out of the sacred selfishness of the home into the broader contact and relationship so essential to social progress” (257). Just as she attributes a shift in women’s consciousness to the women’s club movement in her autobiography, so does she in *Moving the Mountain*. While most club leaders began the narrative of transformation grounded in the individual, Gilman expands the idea in her utopia in order to transform a whole culture.

Gilman used phrases based in club rhetoric in both her fiction and non-fiction, often using each form to further her argument. For example, in *Moving the Mountain*, the narrator John asks his sister what exactly women did once they were “awake.” Nellie’s husband Jerrold responds: “They saw their duty and they did it” (65) which echoes Gilman’s earlier sentiments in a 1906 article for *The Woman’s Home Companion* in which she responds to church fears that women’s clubs are stealing church volunteers. Gilman describes the change in consciousness that comes with attending a woman’s club using a phrase similar to the “they saw their duty and they did it” sentiment she uses in *Moving the Mountain*. She explains: “We live now in a practical age, an age of applied intelligence; we are no longer to keep our faith canned and pickled on a high shelf, or wrapped in camphor and laid away for fear of moths. What we believe, we must do.

This is the real reason-for-being of the Women's Club" (qtd in *Literary Digest* 57). The justification Gilman uses for club activities in this article, "what we believe, we must do," becomes the past tense explanation of a new utopia in *Moving the Mountain*: "they saw their duty and they did it." The sentiment Gilman uses to describe the women's club movement is the foundation of the vision she paints in *Moving the Mountain*.

In addition to basing the development of her utopian society on a narrative of transformation similar to club rhetoric, Gilman also specifically mentions women's clubs in her explanations of how society changed. Here, Hallie, Nellie's daughter, mentions clubwomen in her description of the rapid expansion of businesswomen in the utopia: "These far-seeing women were pioneers - but not for long! Dozens are claiming first place now, just as the early 'Women's Clubs' used to" (70). Hallie's brief allusion indicates that Gilman was writing to an audience familiar with club life. While John, characterized as disinterested in 1910 women's movements, may not have appreciated the analogy, Gilman's contemporary audience probably would have. Most clubwomen would have known of the rivalry between New York's Sorosis and Boston's New England Women's Club to be remembered as the first women's club. Small details like this one demonstrate that clubwomen were an important audience for Gilman. She so believed in the ideals of clubs' self-education and reform work that she strived to convince her fellow clubwomen to work even harder so that women would have a permanent, equal, and visible place in public life in America.

Toward the end of the novel, Nellie's son, Owen, helps explain how changes in education occurred in the new utopia, paralleling club writers' emphasis on clubwomen's desire to become educated. While attempting to understand the new spirit of the utopia,

John muses: “Owen reminded me of the educational vitality even of the years I knew, of the university extension movement, the lectures in the public schools, the push of the popular magazines, the summer schools, the hundreds of thousands of club women, whose main effort seemed to be to improve their minds” (125). As John remembered life in 1910, he emphasizes the popularity of the club movement, remembering the central purpose of club life for “hundreds of thousands of club women.” Gilman identifies that central purpose as gaining an education, just as club writers did in their early texts. Gilman’s reference to the fantasy chain clubwomen created to express their desire for an education again highlights how the rhetorical vision of clubwomen influenced her early work.

First published serially in *The Forerunner*, Gilman’s utopian society in *Moving the Mountain* is remarkably similar to the narrative of transformation circulating in women’s clubs across the country. Gilman’s novel is grounded in the story of study that leads to a change in consciousness that leads to civic reform. In fact, she seems to be experimenting with how the country would look if clubwomen were given real and lasting power. Her central thesis in *Moving the Mountain* is that only a widespread change in values, a “waking up,” can lead to lasting progress in society; this thesis parallels the change in consciousness that clubwomen were claiming for themselves. This interconnection of club rhetoric and Gilman’s writing shows how deeply Gilman was influenced by the women’s club movement in which she played an active role as both member and national lecturer. It also shows how Gilman was writing to a club audience. Gilman pitched the tone of her work to appeal to club women, thus reinforcing

their ideals and urging them to do even more with their clubs, through the support of businesswomen and reform-minded enterprises.

What Diantha Did and *Moving the Mountain* are two of Gilman's early works that have been overlooked by critics. While "The Yellow Wall-Paper" may resonate more with contemporary critics, Gilman's early fiction demonstrates her ability to persuade one of her main audiences: the women's club movement. While Gilman was involved in other movements of the period such as Nationalism, the women's club played a fundamental role in her professional development and served as a life-long audience to both her lecture career and her writing. The power of the rhetorical vision of clubwomen influenced hundreds of thousands of women. Gilman's mastery of club rhetoric enabled her to nudge that audience to even more radical positions. She uses the early fantasy chains of club rhetoric in both pieces of fiction. In *What Diantha Did*, Gilman draws on the theme of club life as a new space for women's work. She extends this theme by fictionalizing a real-life example of clubwomen as entrepreneurs. The likeable Diantha attempts to inspire more clubwomen to support women-run businesses and even start their own. Gilman also embraces club ideals in her first utopia, *Moving the Mountain*. There, she fashions the rhetorical vision of club life into a foundation for a new world of equality for women. In contrast to Edward Bellamy's utopia where women still largely remained at home, Gilman creates a world where the club narrative of transformation became the model for a new society; her women-centered utopia experiments with what would happen if the ideals of the club movement became permanent.

In each work, Gilman's manipulation of the rhetorical vision of club life demonstrates her ability to inspire mainstream women. In their efforts to expand the club

movement, leaders fashioned a specific story: the narrative of transformation. In this story, timid housewives join a club to improve their educations. Once they learn valuable rhetorical skills, these women are able to use their clubs as a site of work rather than relaxation. These women are transformed into confident reformers who are active in the public sphere. Charlotte Perkins Gilman used the rhetoric of transformation to nudge her audience to a more radical stance. Gilman has been called the first serious thinker to center gender consistently in her writing; her initial audience of feisty, thinking women empowered her to spend a lifetime focused on the needs of women.

Chapter Two

“The March of Progress”: Clubs’ Narrative of Education in Kate Chopin’s Work

The women’s club movement in America was founded on principles of self-education. Before clubs lobbied for child labor reform or built libraries, they spent years as study clubs, gathering to read and discuss Plato, Shakespeare, Browning, the fine arts, and history. Having been denied a liberal arts education in universities and colleges, many clubwomen attempted to educate themselves. However, clubwomen’s study efforts were founded on their belief in the progress of civilization that was prevalent in popular culture in the late nineteenth century. Building on the recent work of historians, I demonstrate how white women’s clubs relied heavily on a narrative of progress to create the second link of their rhetorical vision. However, clubwomen made the dominant progressive rhetoric their own by arguing that their feminine talents were necessary for effective progress in the civic sphere. Through their narrative of progress, club leaders claimed that study practices learned within a club uniquely prepared women to shape the public sphere.

The Wednesday Club, a prominent study club in St. Louis that included Kate Chopin and Charlotte Eliot (T. S. Eliot’s mother), stressed this link of the clubs’

rhetorical vision. The influence of club rhetoric on Eliot's life demonstrates how inspiring this rhetoric was for some women. However, fellow club member, Kate Chopin, did not embrace the women's club movement. A close reading of her short stories about club life demonstrates her skepticism of the progressive rhetoric that underpinned the rhetorical vision created by clubwomen. For Chopin, the integrity of the individual outweighed any benefits gained in a group setting. Even in *The Awakening*, Chopin includes snippets of the clubs' rhetorical vision as a contrast to her individualistic heroine, Edna Pontellier. Chopin stresses a personal awakening rather than the collective awakening that occurred in the clubs' rhetorical vision. By contrasting her ideals with the women's clubs rhetoric, Chopin fashions her own beliefs about women's contributions to public life.

The Wednesday Club

Placing the activity of the influential Wednesday Club in context of the rhetorical vision of women's clubs highlights the political work of this exclusive club. Their political work rested on their rhetorical vision, which was based on their study practices. As women wrote essays, histories, and articles on how to start a club, they emphasized the study skills women would gain within a club. Often touted as universities for older women, the clubs' rhetoric mirrored the broader American obsession with education and improvement. Women used education both as a way to lure in new members and as a justification of their presence to outsiders. According to club leaders, a group of women formed a club to study literature and the fine arts. Once they had spent a few years primarily studying, the club was collectively "awakened" to the needs of their

communities. As the movement spread westward, this narrative encouraged individual women to join in the progressive work of their age.

The process for study within clubs was surprisingly organized, often with a set class outline and secondary sources for further research. The GFWC's national leadership included university professors and women with advanced degrees who would design possible courses of study for clubs. Karen Blair describes the actual activities that occurred once the clubs were formed.²⁵ Most clubs chose their topics a year in advance and separated the topic into subsections. Each woman was responsible for researching one subsection, writing a paper on it, and reading that paper at a designated club meeting. Blair lists the topics chosen most often by clubs: "the literature, mythology, or history of classical antiquity, the Bible, American or English literature or history, or the geography of a certain region of a nation along with its art, music, literature, religion, politics, and history" (57). Clubwomen remained attached to the liberal arts curriculum they believed was offered in colleges and universities. Blair notes that most women did not embark on the more rigorous study of classical languages within their clubs. Instead, they preferred to summarize the translations of scholars.

While clubwomen were sometimes more enthusiastic than disciplined, they still learned concrete skills as they collectively studied Shakespeare, Browning, or the Bible. Julia B. Anthony's essay "How a Club Paper was Written" from the October 1900 issue of *The Chautauquan* provides a humorous description of what went into writing a paper for a club. In the essay, the main character, Lois Vandewater, tells several of her friends

²⁵ See also: Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs, 1860 – 1910* (Boston: Beacon P, 1987). In addition, Anne Ruggles Gere provides detailed analysis of clubwomen's literacy practices in her volume, *Intimate Practices*.

that she does not know how to write her first club paper. Another character, a Smith freshmen, is quite confident of her newfound research abilities: "'Oh well,' chimed in the Smith freshman, 'look into your Poole and write'" (30). The next morning the college girls take their clubwoman friend to the public library and introduce her to the "Index to Periodical Literature" and the *Annual Literary Index*. In the evening, they gather together with a tidy outline from their day's reading, which is printed in full in the essay. At the end, Louis laments that it looks quite dull and dry. The Smith girl offers advice: "Decide which points you wish to make the most prominent, elaborate them in luminous exposition, enlivened by witty illustration, and I envy the Woman's Club its intellectual banquet" (32). While the essay pokes fun at the confidence of the new college woman, it also demonstrates the attitude many women had toward their club papers. The club paper was more of an annotated bibliography than a sustained argument. However, writing these papers did teach women important research skills. These skills, along with the confidence women gained as they spoke out within their clubs, became the foundation of clubwomen's political work.

Like many clubs in large cities, the Wednesday Club began as a typical study club, founded by several women who desired to study literature and the arts. In the fall of 1889, Cordelia Sterling, a prominent society woman, sent out invitations to the women of her social circle to study Percy Shelley's poetry. The women met fortnightly in each other's homes to read their papers on poetry of Shelley (Corbett 161). While their group might have continued simply studying the poetry of Shelley, they were inspired by Eva Perry Moore to form a larger departmental women's club. Moore had graduated from Vassar College in 1873; she moved to St. Louis in 1890, eager to start a club similar to

those she had known on the East Coast. Rather than focusing solely on studying the fine arts, Moore encouraged the women to apply their study skills to more practical issues in their communities. Thus, the Wednesday Club began in 1890 with seventy members. They met from three to five on alternate Wednesday afternoons to accommodate several teachers who were members.

While Moore had high ambitions for the club, the influence of Sterling's early study group was still felt during the Wednesday Club's first year. Their first meeting was devoted to an essay written by a club member, Miss S. E. Cole, on "The Influence of the Lake Poets." The club program indicates that discussion was divided into six parts, one for each major Lake Poet, including "Wordsworth, the Supreme Apostle." Charlotte Eliot was the discussion leader for the section on Coleridge (*Wednesday Club 1890-1891* 1). However, during the course of the year, essays broadened to cover a variety of topics from landscape painting to "The Nineteenth Century Conception of Humanity" to "The Dignity of Labor" to "The Single Tax" (*Wednesday Club 1890-1891* 3). The variety of topics reflect the clubs desire to continue their course of education in the fine arts, but also branch out to tackle the social issues that other clubs were studying.

Thanks to Moore's influence, the Wednesday Club was organized into smaller committees like the larger clubs on the East Coast, including Sorosis and the New England Women's Club. By 1893, they had divided into seven departments: art, current topics, education, literature and history, science, social economics, and social progress (Corbett 161). Like club members in the Northeast, the women soon made the transition to the civic sphere. The narrative of education created by club leaders supported this

shift; clubwomen argued that their study efforts uniquely qualified them to address social problems in their communities.

As in other cities, the club tackled a myriad of social problems facing the sprawling, industrialized city that St. Louis had become by the turn of the century. The club held classes for children and women working in the city's slums; they also lobbied for a clean air act in conjunction with the "Smoke Abatement Association."²⁶ The club started kindergartens and sent books and magazines to city institutions (Croly *History* 759). Their work made them visible in their community and established their reputation as the premier women's club in the city. The rhetorical vision created by club leaders helped transform the Wednesday Club from a small group of women who studied the Lake Poets into an effective reform organization in the city.

The rhetorical vision of club life inspired Charlotte Eliot to join the progressive reform projects in her community. Born in 1843, she was quite intelligent, but her family encouraged her to marry rather than pursue an education. Once she married Henry Ware Eliot and bore him seven children, she devoted herself to family life. Although she spent most of her adult life in the Midwest, both she and her husband were proud of their Boston Brahmin roots and maintained close ties to family in New England, summering each year in Massachusetts. After her children had mostly grown, she made reform a full-time occupation and was involved with several other clubs beside the Wednesday Club. Eliot's path was similar to other club leaders'; like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Helen Winslow and J C Croly, she poured her talents and energy into the work of

²⁶ For a full discussion of the smoke abatement campaign, see Joel Tarr and Carl Zimring, "The Struggle for Smoke Control in St. Louis" in *Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis*, ed., Andrew Hurley (St. Louis: MHS Press, 1996).

women's clubs and benefited greatly from the education and associations she gained there.

Much of the biographical information we have about Charlotte comes from scholarship on her more-famous son. Eliot scholars have often depicted his relationship with his mother based on his writing. This may tell us much about Eliot's feelings about his mother, but does little to describe her daily life. Instead, a one-sided portrait emerges of a thwarted artist who burdens her son with high expectations. Carole Seymour-Jones's description of Charlotte Eliot exemplifies this view:

His mother was delighted to see him excel at school, as she herself had done, but it was not easy to escape her control or her anger, for Charlotte was a frustrated woman who had not been allowed to go on to university despite her intellectual gifts. "I should so have loved a college course," she confessed to her son, "but was obliged to teach before I was nineteen. I graduated with high rank, 'a young lady of unusual brilliancy as a scholar' my old yellow testimonial says, but when I was set to teaching young children . . . I made a dead failure." (37)

In context of the mother-son relationship, Seymour-Jones characterizes Charlotte as "frustrated" and "controlling." By assuming Eliot did not have an outlet for her ambition and energy outside of her home, biographers may jump to conclusions about her relationship with her youngest son.

While Eliot probably did envy her son's opportunities at Harvard and envisioned a scholar's life for him, she hardly poured all her energy into the boy. As Elisabeth Däumer emphasizes in her essay on Charlotte Eliot, "even when portrayed sympathetically, the thwarted-artist-theory has served to legitimate a portrait of Charlotte Eliot that ignores her own writing while relying, instead, on the very partial evidence of her son's poetic representations of monstrous femininity" (481). Däumer demonstrates how easy it is to depict a woman from stereotype rather than from the more nuanced

details of daily life. T. S. Eliot's relationship with his mother was just one facet of her complicated life. When biographers emphasize Eliot's depiction of his mother, they may underestimate the importance of Eliot's club involvement and reform work.

Instead of being a monstrous character, Charlotte Eliot, an active clubwoman, left her own tangible mark on the city of St. Louis. Tom was her youngest son, born when she was 45 years old. Two years after his birth, Eliot helped found the Wednesday Club. Her two main reform causes were women's education and the treatment of juveniles in the prison system. Given her own desires, it comes as no surprise that Eliot would lobby for equal education for women. Along with a few years of teaching before marriage, Eliot taught at the Normal School in St. Louis, and substituted from time to time at the Mary Institute, a girl's school located next door to the Eliot home. The school was founded by the family patriarch, William Greenleaf Eliot. The formidable Eliot also founded the Unitarian Church in St. Louis and Washington University (Seymour-Jones 34, 37). Charlotte so admired her father-in-law that she wrote his biography.

Charlotte's ideas about education were influenced by the rhetoric of domestic feminism embraced by the club movement. Däumer analyzes Eliot's two articles on women's access to higher education. While Däumer does not mention the club movement in her essay, it is clear that Eliot's language borrows heavily from the rhetorical vision of club life. Däumer quotes Eliot: "a woman's first duty is to her own household" (483). Like many clubwomen, Eliot's brand of domestic feminism does not attack patriarchy's underlying structure. Instead, she accepts women's basic role in her society, but advocates an extension of that sphere: "But is this necessarily the limit? Are the mind and heart not large enough to understand and sympathize with whatever

concerns the community in which she lives, or the country to which she belongs?

Widening the circle until it embraces the earth, shall the claims of humanity anywhere be ignored?" (qtd in Däumer 483). Gilman's opening address to clubs, "Shall the home be our world, or the world our home," resonates with Eliot's argument. Eliot's claim is similar to many clubwomen's belief that they should expand their efforts from the domestic sphere to public life.

Eliot took her words to heart and widened her own sphere of influence through her work to reform prisons for juvenile offenders. In 1899, nine years after she joined the Wednesday Club, she worked diligently with another women's organization, the Humanity Club of St. Louis. Like many clubwomen, Eliot's energies were not limited to one group and she actively supported several women's clubs. The Humanity Club first turned their research skills to the treatment of juveniles in prison and lobbied for a probation law. They were successful and then secured a probation officer in 1901, a juvenile court in 1903, and a separate prison for young offenders in 1906.

Eliot used her connections to women's clubs as a base of support for her efforts. The 1902-03 *Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook* has this entry on Eliot's prison reform work: "Mrs. Henry W. Eliot of the Legislative Committee desires to present to the Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs a brief report of the workings of the Juvenile Probation Law in St. Louis during the first year of its operation" (22). Her report explains how 1,346 visits had been made by probation officers to 133 children on probation. According to Eliot, these probation officers "endeavor to improve home conditions while working for the reformation of the child" (23). By delivering this report

to the state-wide meeting of Missouri women's clubs, Eliot desired to imprint her issue in the minds of clubwomen and spread her work across the state.

In 1909, the *St. Louis Globe* singled Eliot out for her reform work, declaring her the "mother" of the city's juvenile system (James 568). Eliot also trained her oldest daughter, Ada, in the work of clubs and reform. Ada was involved in her mothers' clubs and served as the corresponding secretary for the Missouri Federation of Women's Clubs (Croly *History* 765). Like many clubwomen of Ada's generation, she made the leap from volunteer reformer to career woman. Before her marriage, Ada was a probation officer. Once married, she continued her work by serving as a director of a welfare institution, and wrote about social casework (James 568).

In context of the work of women's clubs, Charlotte had her own busy life and she benefited greatly from the study club she helped found. When read against the fiction of the Moderns, T. S. Eliot scholars have cast Charlotte as the frustrated woman bound to domestic life, who poured all her energy into her son. In contrast, by putting Charlotte Eliot's biography in context of the rhetoric of the women's club movement, a very different picture emerges. Eliot is a prime example of the ways in which the rhetorical vision of clubs aided individual women. Through her club connections, Eliot spread her reform work throughout the state.

Charlotte Eliot identified strongly with the fundamental emphasis on education in the clubs' rhetorical vision. However, not all women felt as thankful for their clubs. Fellow writer and Wednesday Club founder, Kate Chopin, left the club when she felt the focus was shifting too far toward reform (Toth 126-128). Chopin may not have felt

entirely comfortable in the reform-oriented club, but the audience of clubwomen and the rhetorical vision of club life still influenced her fiction.

After leaving the Wednesday Club, Chopin maintained ties socially with some women from the club, including Eliot. The publication of *The Awakening* may have been controversial, but clubwomen proved a responsive audience to her novel. In 1899, six months after the publication of *The Awakening*, The Wednesday Club organized an “Afternoon with St. Louis Authors.” Along with the 250 members of the club, clubs from around the state sent delegates, totaling 397 guests. Chopin read several poems and her short story “Ti Démon.” She was warmly received, and the audience was the largest for which she would ever read (Toth *Kate* 370). Understanding the significance of club life for Chopin’s audience in St. Louis sheds light on the support she received as an author; these educated and active women helped cement Chopin’s reputation in St. Louis. While Chopin may have distanced herself from the reform work of the Wednesday Club, she could not ignore the influential rhetorical vision of the club movement. Careful analysis of this vision shows how it may have influenced Chopin’s writing on the dominant themes of progress and education.

Clubwomen’s Narrative of “Progress”

Studying gave women the confidence they needed to refashion the public sphere with their rhetorical vision. As clubwomen continued to weave the narrative about the power of their clubs, education was a central component. In the opening fantasy chain, women’s desire for an education led them into the clubs. Once there, clubwomen testified to the importance of their study practices by explaining how education awakened them to the needs of their communities. According to the second link of clubwomen’s

fantasy chain, actually studying literature and the fine arts awakened women to a broader world. In keeping with the ideals of a liberal arts tradition, clubwomen believed that their educations prepared them to improve the civic sphere. The emphasis club writers placed on clubs as a unique venue for such study inspired women to remain dedicated to their clubs. Clubwomen shaped the dominant rhetoric of progress by claiming that their gender was especially suited for reform.

Club writers fashioned their rhetorical vision out of the ideas circulating in their culture. Historians have long called the era between the Depression of 1893 and the U.S.'s entrance into World War I in 1917 the "Progressive Era." While there has been much debate about who exactly participated in reform projects and why the rhetoric of progress was so prominent in this era, there is no denying that many individuals were influenced by it.²⁷ As rapid industrialization and corporate consolidation brought radical changes to many peoples' daily lives, new ideas emerged to cope with this change.

According to historian Peter Thompson, progressive thinking was fundamentally

²⁷ In the *Oxford Companion to U. S. History*, Robert Crunden offers a brief overview of interpretation of the era. According to Crunden, contemporaries viewed the period as a time to return to popular control of the government, first at the local level and then nationally. The next generation emphasized the continuity of reform from this period into the New Deal. Then mid-century historians reviewed the progressives as essentially white, middle-class people who nervously saw their power slipping away to major corporations and labor unions (623). More recently, historians have emphasized the multiplicity of reform projects, examining contributions by African-Americans, Native Americans, women, and immigrants. For further discussion, see: Paul S. Boyer, *The Oxford Companion to U.S. History* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001); David W. Marcell, *Progress and Pragmatism: James, Dewey, Beard, and the American Idea of Progress* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1974); Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism" *Reviews in American History* 10.4 (1982): 113-32; Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983); Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1977-1919* (New York: Norton, 1987); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion of Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991); and Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997).

optimistic, a belief that “social and political problems of the day could be tackled if people would simply embrace change and accept modern advice offered by experts” (328). This positive thinking was a comfort for many people facing the urban, industrialized, multicultural power that the United States had become. While they could not control the rapid changes around them, they could improve their own lives by accepting change and the plans of “experts.” The GFWC certainly embraced this optimistic belief and wove it into their rhetorical vision.

The GFWC’s emphasis on the transformative power of their clubs mirrored their contemporaries’ obsession with adult and higher education. The foundation of most progressive beliefs was the idea that higher education would lead to professional careers and improved social status. Historian Steven Diner claims that professions, including law, medicine, and education, began to demand more rigorous courses of study to credential new members. In antebellum America, very little regulation occurred in professions like law or medicine; to do so would have seemed undemocratic. After the Civil War and with the onset of corporate bureaucracy, professional organizations formed to carefully guard the qualifications of their members (176-195). Throughout the country, higher education was beginning to transform from the bastion of the very elite to a necessity for professional advancement. According to Thompson, the number of colleges and universities in America doubled between 1870 and 1910. Enrollment increased dramatically, from 52,000 in 1870 to 600,000 in 1920 (328). As individuals became the first in their family to go to college or even finish high school, the narrative of progress seemed very concrete. It was easy to project personal progress in education onto the larger society and believe that progress was an unlimited possibility. For

clubwomen, intimately advancing their own educations in a small group led to an eagerness to enlarge their sphere of influence by reforming their surrounding communities.

The idea of progress, which reached a fever pitch during the era when clubwomen were most active, is woven deeply into the rhetoric of America. From “the shining city on a hill” forward, Americans have embraced the belief that the future will be better than the past. According to Eugene Leach, no other country in the nineteenth century looked to its children rather than its ancestors the way that America did: “Nineteenth-century Americans loved to contemplate the prospects of their youthful society, blessed with empty land and innocent of the historical burdens of older societies. Notwithstanding the awful fact of slavery, the idea of progress suffused Americans’ sense of their national identity” (11). While the reality was very different from the rhetoric, Americans, more than any other nationality, believe that their futures will be better than their pasts. Within this context, the Progressive Era is distinct perhaps more for the widespread, practical attempts at reform than for inventing a new belief in the efficacy of progress.

Within general histories of this period, the women’s club movement garners very little attention. For several generations, accounts of the reform work of the Progressive Era were primarily masculine. Major influences were traced through educators like John Dewey, journalists like Jacob Riis and Upton Sinclair, and politicians like William Jennings Bryan. This lineage culminated in Theodore Roosevelt and his short-lived Progressive Party. While feminists have demonstrated that women contributed to civic reform as well, many surveys of the period only mention the settlement house movement and Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr. However, the mainstream women’s club

movement was the largest organization of women in the late nineteenth century (Pryor 218). Women's clubs and the settlement house movement were closely associated. Addams asked the members of the influential Chicago Women's Club for financial support; several early members of Hull House came from this club as well. Addams also actively participated in the national leadership of the GFWC and spoke at several biannual conventions. In addition, the women's club movement supported hundreds of reform projects across the country.

Clubs' rhetorical vision, while shaped by Progressive ideals concerning education and social improvement, also influenced the broader culture. In large part, their work and rhetoric fueled the enthusiasm for Progressive projects during this period. Careful examination of their rhetoric of progress highlights their unshakable belief in the power of education. For clubwomen, study qualified them to enter the public sphere and engage in the reform work of their age. However, clubwomen added their own twist to the rhetoric, arguing that their feminine talents made them experts in improvement and added to their qualification for public work.

To create their rhetorical vision, clubs took the dominant ideals of the Progressive era and made them their own. Clubwomen argued that because of their feminine sensibilities, their view of progress was particularly suited to reform. First, in this link of the clubs' fantasy chain, club leaders argued that their work as study clubs had opened their eyes to the needs of their communities. For example, "Effect of Club Work in the South," by Mrs. A. O. Granger, describes the transformative effect studying literature has on clubwomen. To explain why women join a club, Granger argues: "The club women who used to study Shakespeare have been looking around them upon life's stage. They

are finding through their study of civic conditions that an enormous number of life's players are performing their parts under adverse conditions" (253). Granger uses the famous "all the world's a stage" quotation from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to illustrate the transition from education to civic life. In her description, clubwomen took the study skills they learned in their clubs and adapted them to their communities. Studying literature was the gateway to engaging with social reform. This claim is consistent with club writers' fantasy chain concerning the importance of education: study awakened women to what was needed in their communities.

Some club leaders argued that clubs were uniquely qualified to influence their communities. As the chairwoman for the literature department for the GFWC, Mrs. William Thayer Brown made the claim that only groups who first learn study skills can engage in reform. In an address to the St. Paul GFWC biennial in 1906, Brown attests to the power of women's club educations. She first outlines clubs' credentials for reform work: "the influence of the club, which is felt so helpfully in its efforts to improve the existing conditions, could never have been so potent without the preparation and study which had gone before, for thought and knowledge must ever precede practical work" (15). In this speech, Brown declares that the clubs' effectiveness in their communities comes entirely from their study practices. The education they gained from reading, researching, and writing trained them for their present work.

More specifically, Brown believes that the empathy one gained from studying people through a course in literature prepared one to help others. She claims: "A knowledge of nature and nature's laws, a study of experiences of the race, a comprehension of the development of the human soul, with its ideals, its aspirations, its

temptations, its limitations, must be reached before there can be sympathetic understanding of conditions or effective work in philanthropy or reform” (16). Her rhetoric defends clubs’ time spent studying literature. Brown claims that only with such an education could people effectively assist in reform projects. Gere contrasts clubwomen’s claims of the efficacy of studying literature with nineteenth century scholars’ insistence on discipline and rigor: “For clubwomen, learning about life and the world could provide the basis for more effective benevolence and enhanced life experiences, while for professors of the scholarly tradition, literary study existed to strengthen the mind and develop intellectual capacities” (216). This contrast demonstrates how the clubwomen created their own claims for the power of literature that became the basis for their justification for work in the public sphere.

In another example, Abbot C. Page, repeats the claim that education prepared women for public work. While early club leaders claimed that the club was a “university for older women,” Page includes college-educated women in her essay, “The Twentieth Century Club Woman” (1907). She declares: “The study club has been considered, even by the college-bred woman, as a sort of post-graduate course, and has proved such a means of discipline and culture to the mind and heart that woman has found herself in a veritable new world. She finds her usefulness and influence not bounded by the walls of her own home” (149). For Page, an education earned women a place in the civic sphere. The skills a woman learned through the study practices in her club fitted her for a new world. Clubwomen claimed that the rigorous education they gained in a club awakened them to their purpose, and justified their presence in the civic sphere. In their rhetorical vision, education uniquely prepared these women for a new role in public life.

As club leaders incorporated the rhetoric of progress circulating in the popular culture into their rhetorical vision, they filtered it through their own feminine metaphors. This addition of gender distinguished the clubs' rhetoric from more masculinist discourse on progress. In it, women were especially suited for reform work because of their very talents as women. At the GFWC's organizing convention in 1889, Croly sums up the narrative paraphrased across club publications:

The [clubs] were all the same in beginning. Starting almost invariably with the desire of a smaller or larger group of women for intellectual culture and the moral and physical improvement of their environment, the pursuits of these objects had gradually displaced the old, meaningless social routine and substituted a broad, stimulating, educational, and helpful life in which latent faculties were exercised and opportunities of every sort multiplied. There was nothing aggressive in this work, no effort at propaganda, only the opening of doors and windows of souls, and consequent light and sunshine flowing in upon other minds and souls. (qtd in Houde 24)

In these remarks, Croly subtly notes that specific feminine traits have helped the club movement succeed. In keeping with the rhetorical vision, she explains how study of the fine arts was replaced with work that was "broad," "stimulating," and "helpful." At first, she simply repeats the concept that education leads to improvement in the individual. The improved individual then desires to improve her community. However, Croly genders her claim by insisting that there "was nothing aggressive in this work." In contrast to the masculine rhetoric of politicians like Roosevelt, Croly emphasizes the women's feminine qualities, like modesty. In addition, she relies on domestic metaphors, comparing the women's influence to airing out a house. The women's education has a positive effect on others, both directly and indirectly.

Demonstrative of this feminine improvement, Alice Hazen Cass's *Practical Programs for Women's Clubs* opens with the progressive narrative, proudly declaring clubwomen's evolved status. Cass declares:

As each year in the world's advancement brings upon mankind the ever-increasing demands of social and economic progress, woman has felt with peculiar acuteness the necessity of taking her place in the new civilization. Not only must she be master of all that has been her share of the world's work in the past, but she must also assume new and manifold duties in the fulfillment of the requirements of society. (1)

Cass confidently asserts the progress of civilization; she uses it as a wedge to insert women and declare that they must take their place at the very forefront of their society. Cass separates men's and women's work, but claims that, as the world advances, women realize that they must extend their work into the public sphere. Because the new world is more demanding, women's influence is needed even more.

J. M. Lozier's essay, "The Educational Influence of Women's Clubs," also repeats the fantasy chain that declared women were especially able to reform society. According to Lozier, "[w]e club women demand for all women not merely a literary and scientific education but a social and economical training, a moral enlightenment, a rousing of their whole nature, a quickening of their life and an enrichment of their thought, and we desire to show that organization is the only way to make education effective in the improvement of society (63)." Here, Lozier claims that clubwomen's purpose is to undertake not only "mere" traditional branches of learning such as literature and science, but also "a rousing of their whole nature, a quickening of their life and an enrichment of their thought." Lozier's advocacy of a more holistic approach to education supports her belief that women's clubs offer a unique structure for an education that will create lasting changes in the community. Thus, she supposes that the model of the

women's club is an educational model that attends to the whole person and can therefore change the whole society. Study emphasized the role of education in developing community awareness in this phase of their rhetorical vision; the feminine vision of improvement contrasted with masculine narratives of education that emphasized intellectual rigor and discipline.

This progressive rhetoric also appears in the rhetoric of the Wednesday Club. Charlotte Eliot's long tribute to the Wednesday Club demonstrates both the positive elements of club rhetoric and the blindness created by an adherence to progressive rhetoric.²⁸ The poem exemplifies the clubs' fantasy chain concerning the importance of education as clubs shifted from studying the fine arts to reform work:

Though culture may be our corner stone,
We cannot exist for culture alone
In scholarly retreat.

For lo! Grave problems press.
The pleadings of distress
Will follow the mind's sublimest flight,
A voice from the depths disturb the height,

When wrongs demand redress.
The Wednesday Club in its action leads,
Crowning progressive thought with deeds,
It works for righteousness (qtd in Oser 192)

²⁸ Charlotte Eliot's poetry has fueled those scholars who cast her as the "thwarted artist," often quoting her son's recollection: "I hope your literary work will receive early the recognition I strove for and failed" (qtd in Seymour-Jones 38). Since T. S. Eliot did pursue his vocation as a poet early, publishing "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" when he was in his early twenties, the narrative is a tempting one. Scholar Lee Oser looks directly to Charlotte's poem, "The Wednesday Club," for the structure and rhyme scheme of Eliot's "Prufrock." Lee's purpose is not to investigate the poem for the rhetoric of women's clubs, but he does unpack the underlying theme and compare it effectively to precisely the opposite message in "Prufrock." The famous "In the room, the women come and go / talking of Michelangelo" certainly calls to mind the sort of topic embraced by study clubs; one can easily imagine the young Tom passing through one of his mother's club gatherings.

Eliot's "The Wednesday Club" is a loving tribute to the purpose of club life. She acknowledges the foundation that her study club has given her, and argues that reform work is the necessary next step. Like other club leaders, Eliot describes the progressive arc of club life.

African-American clubwomen also adapted the dominant rhetoric of the Progressive Era for their purposes. Rather than studying the received classics, African-American clubwomen called for their own members to produce new texts to study. In addition to producing new texts, clubwomen re-examined the received "classics" in light of their own experiences. Critic Elizabeth McHenry claims that, "black women demonstrated the extent to which they both embraced and chafed against standard notions of culture. This tension forced a reassessment and redefinition of what constituted literature and literary study in crucial and lasting ways" (228). Within their clubs, women critically examined texts from multiple traditions, as they worked to influence their own communities.

Clubwomen's effort to read texts from both the traditional canon and their own history increased their ability to read literature critically. Historian Anne Meis Knupfer examined the study lists of the Phyllis Wheatley Club in Chicago and found a variety of African American writers including Paul Laurence Dunbar and Frances Harper along with Ruskin, Emerson, Ibsen, Shakespeare and Tennyson. In addition, the club focused on women writers. In one meeting in 1913 "a visiting club woman presented her original paper on 'The Women Writers of the Colored Race,' considered 'very interesting from start to finish.' The poetry of club women – Mrs. Birdie White Cook, Mrs. E. Wright, and Mrs. Moore, considered a poetess of 'no little ability' – were read, although not

available in publication” (118). For African-American clubwomen, the received tradition of white Western writers was open to revision and addition. The women of the Phyllis Wheatley Club were often more interested African American artists and writers, than in a traditional course of study.

More than their white counterparts, African-American actively promoted their literary sisters’ works as part of an agenda to reshape racist perceptions of them. For example, McHenry identifies ten titles by African-American women advertised on the back of the 1895 program for the Conference of Colored Women, including Anna Julia Cooper’s *A Voice From the South* and N. F. Mosell’s *The Work of Afro-American Woman*. The program also notes that all these books are available for purchase at the conference (231). This sort of active promotion of work by clubwomen was more prominent in the African-American club movement. Thus, McHenry defines clubwomen as “literary activists” because they believed that women could write new literature that would combat the racist social climate that surrounded them.

This call for a new “race literature” began with the formation of a national African-American club movement. On July 30th, 1895, Victoria Earle Matthews delivered an address to the First Congress of Colored Women in Boston. This congress met to discuss the formation of a national organization; out of it, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) began (McHenry 188). Matthews’s speech, “The Value of Race Literature,” was widely reprinted. The essay demonstrates clubwomen’s resistance to racist stereotype. While white clubwomen certainly supported their fellow writers and read works by women writers, they never asserted a similar call to arms. African-

American women deeply believed that by writing their own story, they could effectively refute the stereotypes that constantly framed them.

After attacking white representations of African Americans in literature, Matthews identifies how women can refute such charges. She believes that women are especially suited to the creation of new African American works: “Women’s part in Race Literature, as in Race building, is the most important part and has been so in all ages. It is for her to receive impressions and transmit them” (146). Matthews, like many clubwomen, believed that they had a unique capability to write and tell the world their story. African-American women also filtered the rhetoric of progress through their experiences as women. This fundamental principle of African-American clubwomen’s rhetorical vision demonstrates the faith they placed in the transmission of texts. Their efforts as “literary activists” were an important rebuff to the racism prevalent in the Progressive Era.

In the late nineteenth century, the rhetoric of progress circulating in popular culture also rested on emerging scientific advances as they were filtered through popular writers. America’s imperialism rested on the cultural privilege given to Anglo-Saxons.²⁹ By analyzing the rhetoric of a cultural construct like the all-white women’s club movement, these rhetorical structures, buried as neutral and natural “facts,” are exposed for the ideological discourse that operated in America. Clubwomen’s interest in literature, the arts and history rested on their perception of the progress of civilization,

²⁹ In her work, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, Amy Kaplan analyzes the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny and domesticity; she argues that the two share a common vocabulary that reinforced imperial progress both at home and abroad. She demonstrates how the anxieties and ambiguities of imperialism are central to the formation of American culture.

which reinforced their overwhelmingly all-white unity. Gail Bedermen contextualizes this popular version of “civilization” in her study, *Manliness and Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 – 1917*. While Bedermen uses Charlotte Perkins Gilman as one point of her analysis, she does not examine the formation of women’s clubs. However, her analysis of the rhetoric of progress embraced by Gilman illuminates the segregation of the women’s club movement.

The narrative was so widespread and popular in late nineteenth century culture because it was described in scientific language as “natural” and “inevitable.” The conflation of biology and culture was especially insidious when it came to education. In the era before Watson and Crick, Darwinian evolution was accepted in its sweep, but not understood in its details. The most popular theory of how one generation passed its traits to the next was Lamarckian biology. In this theory, each generation passed on the traits it learned (Bederman 26). Whatever education one gained in their lifetime would appear in the next generation as an inherited trait. Therefore, the middle class was able to appreciate the fine arts because of evolution, not financial resources. In this scheme, the “other” races would never catch up, and the white middle class rested firmly atop the evolutionary ladder (30).

According to this “Recapitulation Theory,” the intelligence needed to pursue the highest orders of thinking was only available to the most advanced races. Scientists envisioned an evolutionary road that children traveled, but only children of “advanced races” could travel to the very end of the road and only in adolescence. According to Bedermen, “Scientists believed that until adolescence, Negro children were often as bright or brighter than white children. At adolescence, however, Negro children stopped

developing, because their ancestors had never gone on to evolve higher intelligence” (93). This theory allowed professionals to comfortably advocate vocational training alone for African Americans in the South because it was assumed they did not have the intellectual capacity to do anything more. Bedermen explains how “Black adults were believed to be roughly as intelligent as Anglo-Saxon children, precisely because their intellectual development stopped in the evolutionary stage corresponding to white childhood” (93). Therefore, what were actually differences due to oppressive legislation and economic inequality were masked as “natural” distinctions in the evolution of the races. While Lamarckian biology quickly fell out of favor with scientists, its insidious hold on the popular imagination influenced pedagogy and educational practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Rhetoric like this, drawn from popular science, did occasionally surface in the GFWC’s rhetorical vision. In 1888, the New England Women’s Club published a description of the activities of the Discussion Committee in the *Woman’s Journal*. Woven throughout the essay are references to evolution, a topic the clubwomen focused on at one of their monthly meetings. The author first laments that not everyone in the committee knew each other well, ending the paragraph by declaring: “We’ve not advanced socially half far enough; the work of evolution is not yet complete” (204). This casual reference to the topic of evolution demonstrates how such rhetoric was picked up and used throughout the clubwomen’s rhetoric. The topic was later presented in a paper titled “Lessons from the Life of Darwin.” The title indicates the endorsement one clubwoman gave to Darwin’s ideas. The author explains: “After some general consideration of the effect of Darwin’s labors in furnishing a sound basis for the

establishment of the theory of evolution, she closed with a high tribute to the value of the doctrine of evolution, not only in the world of material things, but in the realms of social progress and spiritual attainment” (204). For this enthusiastic clubwoman, the application of Darwin’s ideas to social evolution was important. This social evolution was the framework for the Recapitulation Theory Bederman identifies, and the clubs’ discussion demonstrates how such ideas may have appeared in their study practices.

This rhetoric appeared not only in club histories, but also in study programs women created for clubs. Often club programs would follow a progressive arc from inferior origins to the culmination of a genre, such as the novel or Impressionist painting. For example, Alice Cass outlines a variety of such study programs in her book, *Practical Programs for Women’s* (1915). These outlines offered topics to write papers on for each meeting and included a list of resources for research. For example, the progressive rhetoric is apparent in the outline, “Evolution of the Novel in the United States.” In this outline, the American novel progresses from humble beginnings to the apex of civilization. The first entry is Charles Brockden Brown, “Our Pioneer Novelist.” Next comes Cooper and Simms, “Writers of Historical Romance.” James Fenimore Cooper is still widely remembered for his *Leatherstocking Tales*, but fewer may remember William Gilmore Simms, a writer and contemporary of Cooper. His historical romances include *A Romance of Carolina*, 1835, and *The Wigwam and the Cabin*, 1845 (Reuben). The next two entries are: “Hawthorne – An Artist of Imaginative Literature,” and “Harriet Beecher Stowe and Her Place in the Making of History.”³⁰ The list ends with contemporary

³⁰ It is interesting to note that Stowe makes the list; by the mid-twentieth century, most literary scholars had dropped her from their list of “great American novelists.” However,

novelists: Twain, Bret Harte, William D. Howells “The Foremost Delineator of Middle-Class Life in America,” and S. Weir Mitchell, a physician and novelist (the very physician who prescribed “rest cures” for Wharton and Gilman). The final name in the list is “Henry James – The Scientific Creator of Literature” (Cass 91). The list progresses from pioneers to the “scientific,” neatly mirroring the progressive history widely taught in America, one of pioneering roots and scientific glory, all achieved by Anglo-Saxons.

Sarah Decker Platt, the president of the GFWC for several years, invoked similar rhetoric of progress in her essay “The Meaning of the Woman’s Club Movement.” After listing the many important reform projects taken on by clubwomen, Platt summarizes the contribution of the club movement: “The Federation may become a mighty factor in the civilization of the century, if wielded as a whole, -- an army of builders, ready, alert, systematic, and scientific, not only a potent force in this generation, but transmitting to the next a vigor and strength which have never been given by any race of women to their inheritors” (6). Beneath this confident assessment is an adherence to the Recapitulation Theory. According to Platt, clubwomen would improve the next generation by passing on their progress. In context of the Recapitulation Theory, this remark can be read as not just environmental improvements to the city that will be passed down, but the very “strength and vigor” that clubwomen gain from their efforts.³¹ Platt’s remarks serve to argue that women, too, can be a force in the world. However, at the same time, she upholds the racist structure of such rhetoric because she refers only to the all-white GFWC in her praise.

even in this headline, she is remembered for her context in history, not her “literary imagination.”

³¹ See Bederman’s discussion of Teddy Roosevelt in *Manliness and Civilization*.

Some clubwomen accepted these scientific claims without question, but others manipulated the rhetoric to address the Woman Question and point out inequalities between men and women. For example, Julia Ward Howe, the president of the prominent women's club in Boston, the Saturday Morning Club, manipulated the line of progress for her own ends in an address to the Association for the Advancement of Women: "The Indian woman, in the march of the tribe carries the tent furniture and the household appliances. Our chieftains do not look after this primitive fashion, but symbolically, we do carry much of the heavy baggage of human society" (45). At first, Howe acknowledges the dominant narrative of civilization: in it, an advanced society is recognized by the separation of labor by gender. Bedermen describes how one way to identify a "civilized" race was through its proper gender distinctions (23). Thus, the separation of the sexes was often compared favorably to the more "savage" mingling of tasks in tribal societies. Thus, a "civilized" woman would not be expected to carry the furniture and appliances. However, Howe manipulates this line of argument to indicate that women still do carry a heavy load. According to Howe, perhaps the authors of such a narrative, the "chieftains," are not as advanced as they think.

When club leaders praised the study efforts of their members, they borrowed heavily from the dominant rhetoric of progress circulating in their culture. These women all came from middle-class or upper-class backgrounds and were proud to belong to large, exclusive clubs that were a prominent force in major urban areas like New York, Boston, Chicago, and St. Louis. Their own personal experiences with education and work outside the home reinforced their optimistic belief in change. For them, the overwhelming challenges facing American cities during this period of rapid change were

opportunities to expand their role in public life and leave a lasting mark by contributing to the progressive arc they saw the country following. Anglo- and African-American club leaders did not merely accept the ideas of progress attached to education; instead, they incorporated the experiences of their gender, seizing a perceived opportunity to expand the influence of women into the public sphere. Clubwomen also embraced dominant scientific and pseudo-scientific claims with varying degrees of success. However, throughout their work, their optimistic belief in change did empower them to make an impact in their communities and create their own rhetorical vision, which influenced fellow women and women writers.

Club “Awakenings” in Chopin’s Fiction

Understanding the nuances of the progressive vision of education espoused by club leaders enables readers to find new meanings in the work of writers like Kate Chopin. While Chopin did not embrace the club movement, examining how she used their rhetoric as a contrast to her own beliefs clarifies her interpretations of womanhood at the end of the nineteenth century. Like many writers, Chopin had to balance her desire to write for a broader audience against her own, more selective tastes. Rather than the progressive efforts of reformers like those in the Wednesday Club, Chopin preferred the lively debate among artists at her weekly salon. While Chopin remained friendly with some of the women in the Wednesday Club, including Eliot, she distanced herself from the club movement. In fact, she could be quite scathing in her remarks about clubs’ efforts at reform. In her private journal, “Impressions,” from 1894, she privately critiqued one woman, a Mrs. Stone, who was an avid club member: “The spirit of the reformer burns within her, and gives to her eyes the smouldering, steady glow of a

Savonarola. The condition of the working classes pierces her soul; the conditions of women wrings her heart. 'Work' is her watch word. She wants to work to make life purer, sweeter, better worth living" (*Private Papers* 186). Chopin mocks Mrs. Stone by referencing the Italian friar who was bent on reforming Florence. Girolamo Savonarola was excommunicated and hanged in 1496 for defying the authority of the Pope; he was made famous in the nineteenth century by George Eliot. Chopin uses Savonarola as a derisive reference in her journal demonstrating her distaste for the rhetorical vision of clubwomen. She acknowledges the rhetorical vision of clubwomen here by commenting on Mrs. Stone's desire to work and her zeal for improvement. However, the tone of the whole passage makes it clear that Chopin does not admire the progressive spirit Mrs. Stone exudes.

Chopin ends her observations about Mrs. Stone on a pessimistic note, bitingly commenting on the effectiveness of clubwomen. She sums up her assessment of Mrs. Stone: "Intentions pile up before her like a mountain, and the sum of her energies is Zero!" (186). For Chopin, reformers like Mrs. Stone were full of nice intentions, but they rarely produced results. In contrast, Charlotte Eliot embraced reform work and could point to quantitative results for her efforts. Eliot greatly admired Savonarola and wrote a long epic poem about his efforts in Florence, and her son helped her publish the poem in 1926 (Däumer 500). The tone of her poem underscores how differently Chopin and Eliot viewed the reform spirit.

By contrasting club fiction and Chopin's work, certain themes emerge related to the rhetoric of the women's club movement. Toth has identified several short stories that Chopin wrote after leaving the Wednesday Club. Because the scope of Toth's biography

does not allow for a thorough contextualization of club activities, one might read these stories as satires of society women and nothing more. However, by reading “Loka” and “Miss McEnders” against other club material, specific political themes emerge related to the clubs’ rhetorical vision. While clubwomen highlighted the positive effects of education for their members, Chopin was more likely to emphasize the dangers of adhering to the rhetoric of progress in her stories about club life.

Read against club activist Helen Winslow’s *The President of Quex*, one can see a different subtext to Chopin’s story, “Miss McEnders.” Helen Winslow, a president of the GFWC, believed wholeheartedly in the effectiveness of women’s clubs and helped circulate their rhetorical vision. Her novel, *The President of Quex* (1906), follows the same plot as Chopin’s “Miss McEnders” but her heroine accomplishes all that Miss McEnders fails to do.³² While there is no evidence that Winslow would have read Chopin’s story, the similar plot structure points to commonplaces about the rhetorical vision of women’s clubs circulating in America at the turn of the century.

Unlike Chopin, Winslow is quite happy to see women’s clubs take up reform issues. As a member of the national leadership of the GFWC, she hopes her novel will convert more people to the political work of clubs. Her descriptions of the shift in club activity from study to political work are similar to Gilman’s early novels. Winslow’s heroine, Nancy, is pressured to take over the presidency of her club, Quex, after listlessly mourning the death of her husband for months. Once she reluctantly takes the reigns of

³² Toth identifies the real-life reference for the short story. Ellen McKee was a prominent St. Louis reformer “who made a point of never wearing expensive jewelry.” Her father profited from the Whiskey Ring scandal and served several months in jail. Chopin wrote the story in 1892, but did not publish it because of the obvious reference. Interestingly, the story appeared several years later, to poor reviews, in *The St. Louis Criterion*, which was owned by Ellen McKee at the time (198-99).

the club, she endorses a course of study about child labor. Transformed by her study of the issue, Nancy successfully convinces her fellow club members to lobby for local child labor laws, institute schools and better housing for working families, and eventually shepherd a bill successfully through the state legislature. Winslow patterns the issue after the success of the GFWC's child labor reform platform, which was a part of their 1904 national convention in St. Louis. Nancy's transformation highlights the second link of the clubs' fantasy chain: how club education prepares women to effectively influence the public sphere.

In Chopin's "Miss McEnders," Georgie McEnders also belongs to a club and studies the problems of the working class. While the plot is similar, Chopin and Winslow develop very different interpretations concerning the education and work of clubwomen. In Chopin's story and Winslow's novel, both heroines discover that their fathers became wealthy through immoral actions. Winslow's Nancy finds out that her father's factory engages in the very child labor against which she is fighting. Georgie McEnders discovers that her father made his money primarily from selling whiskey. However, the reactions of the two characters could not be more opposed. Nancy is spurred on by the discovery to throw herself wholeheartedly into the cause and convinces the foreman of her father's factory to stop employing children. In contrast, when Georgie discovers the truth about her father's wealth, she "sank into the chair and wept bitterly" (754). Nancy is an active and vibrant reformer, inspired by her club; Georgie is a passive lump at the end of the novel, immobilized by the hypocrisy of her life. Thus, Nancy and her club are seen as real agents for change within the world of Winslow's novel. In contrast, Chopin's Georgie is full of good intentions, but they all seem hollow.

Throughout her story, Chopin portrays club reform as futile. The women in her story read papers and “investigate” by committee, but without result. Georgie presents a paper on “The Dignity of Labor” to her Woman’s Reform Club and travels with a club committee to investigate “the condition of the factory-girl,” but these events are depicted as secondary to her social life (750). Chopin’s intent is satire; she believes women like Georgie are essentially powerless. For Chopin, the women’s club will never be a successful political institution in the public sphere. The rhetorical vision of club life is thwarted in her story; instead of study leading to lasting changes in the public sphere, Georgie’s dabbling leads only to her futile collapse at the end of the story.

While women with such different perspectives on clubs like Winslow and Chopin would obviously write about them quite differently, both stories point to the national debate among women about how to engage in politics and reform. Modern audiences read “Miss McEnders” as a brief caricature of a silly, society woman, but Chopin’s audience would have been quite familiar with the prominent Wednesday Club and the national efforts of the GFWC. The rhetorical vision of club life was a powerful one; club problems and issues were a way for women to write about the public sphere and engage in the political issues of the day. Therefore, Chopin’s story also comments on the debate raging across the country concerning the political influence of American women.

While Chopin criticizes the effectiveness of club life in “Miss McEnders,” she extends her analysis to the shortcomings of the rhetoric of “progress,” in another short story about club life, “Loka.” Chopin wrote “Loka” five days after she resigned from the Wednesday Club, and published it in her collection *Bayou Folk* (Toth 10). The story comments on the type of clubwomen that Chopin so clearly disliked. In addition,

Chopin's sympathetic portrayal of the title character subtly negates the rhetoric of progress that the women's club movement enthusiastically embraced. In the story, a women's club is notified of an orphan in their community and takes her up as a new reform project. The club, the "Band of United Endeavor," is doubly marked as heterogeneous: they are both a "band" and "united." While the real club Sorosis had the motto "unity in diversity" to emphasize the different views of women in the club, Chopin's fictional club is a bland group of women with only one perspective. For Chopin, the women's club was a suffocating circle of identical women, all "unity" and no "diversity." Instead, any "diversity" is placed well outside the closed "band," an "other" that must be contained. This group is a unified, powerful tribe to whom Loka, the orphan, is held accountable.

From the opening lines of the story, Loka is defined almost solely by her ethnicity; she is described as "a half-breed Indian girl, with hardly a rag to her back" (266). While her parentage is split, the "half" that is mentioned is "Indian." The narration is third-person omniscient, but Loka is clearly described through the eyes of the clubwomen: "Loka was not beautiful, as she stood in her red calico rags before the scrutinizing band. Her coarse, black, unkempt hair framed a broad, swarthy face without a redeeming feature, except eyes that were not bad; slow in their movements, but frank eyes enough. She was big-boned and clumsy" (266). Loka is judged against the women's ideal of beauty; their perspective declares that she is "not beautiful." Instead, she is given masculine attributes such as a "broad, swarthy face," and "big-boned and clumsy." Compared to the Anglo-Saxon ideal of a small, neat woman, Loka is lacking, a negative identity against which the clubwomen can reaffirm their own accepted traits.

The rhetorical vision of the GFWC strove to create a separate, public space for women to create new identities. Chopin subtly undermines this attempt through her description of the clubwomen. Each woman is not given a name; instead, she is tagged by her husband's occupation: "the minister's wife," the judge's wife," "the doctor's wife," and "the planter's wife" (266). Chopin makes it clear that membership to this united "band" rests on each woman's social status. Each woman is married to a prominent, professional man in the town. Only by virtue of their marriages are these women allowed into the "Band of United Endeavor." By emphasizing the economic privilege of the clubwomen, Chopin discredits the theory that these women have reached their position through their own efforts. Instead, she stresses that each woman is a club member only because of her husband's social standing.

Chopin continues her satire of club rhetoric by manipulating their use of parliamentary procedure. One woman suggests, "the girl have a bath and change before she be handled, even in discussion" (266). For this wife, Loka is too offensive even to discuss and must be "cleaned up." However, the other women disagree: "the motion was not seconded. Loka's ultimate disposal was a urgent and difficult consideration" (266). Again, Loka is referred to only as a problem to be solved, an item on the club's agenda. Further de-humanizing Loka, the women refer to her as something that needs to be "disposed." One club member, "the planter's wife," suggests placing Loka as an indentured servant with a poorer family she knows named the Padues, believing work will transform Loka into something more acceptable. She will receive two benefits that she is judged not to have in her "natural" state: a work ethic and moral training. The clubwomen agree and give her clothes and shoes. Here, Chopin again undermines the

rhetorical vision of clubwomen. Club leaders consistently claimed that their meetings were a site of work rather than leisure. In contrast, Chopin's clubwomen believe that work will improve Loka, the item on their reform agenda, but they do not seem to do any serious work themselves.

After the club makes their decision, the action shifts to the Padues' farm. Once there, Loka's shoes are a telling symbol. At first they impede her: "Loka was afraid of treading upon the little Padues when she first got amongst them, -- there were so many of them -- and her feet were like leaden weights, encased in the strong brogans with which the band had equipped her" (267). The shoes symbolize the foreign existence in which Loka has been placed. The shoes weigh her down, forcing her to stay and work for a family whom she did not choose. Furthermore, the choice of shoes is telling of the kind of reform the band is willing to dispense. Rather than giving Loka any type of shoes that the club members would wear, they give her cumbersome work shoes, the brogans. The English word "brogan" comes from the Irish "brógán," a heavy work shoe. Here the class inflection indicates that the clubwomen were willing to help Loka only by dressing her in the clothing of a "lower" class. While Loka finds her shoes cumbersome and awkward, her employers leave for a shopping trip to equip their children in "shoes and summer hats." (268). For the family, these are two tokens of civilization, which they view as necessities. When a neighbor offers to lend the Padues a wagon to go to town for shoes and hats, it is described as an "opportunity . . . not to be slighted" (268). In Madame Padue's routine, outfitting her children with the proper shoes is a priority, in contrast to Loka's chafing at her footwear.

Up to this point in the story, Loka is described as awkward, foreign, and difficult. After the family leaves and Loka finishes all her work, she is able to rest. The narration shifts to Loka's perspective, and Chopin describes her idleness in rich and lush tones: "[Loka] let her eyes sweep lazily across the country . . . Beyond the river and the field and everywhere about were dense woods." (269). After scanning the plantations that represent the "apex" of the society around her, Loka focuses on the "dense woods." The woods trigger her memory, the first point in the story where Loka freely roams in her own thoughts: "Into her eyes came the absent look of one whose thought is projected into the future or the past, leaving the present blank. She was seeing a vision. It had come with a whiff that the strong south breeze had blown to her from the woods" (269). This is the first moment where Loka as a character is fleshed out past the orphan half-breed introduced in the opening sentence. She revels in the pleasures of her previous life: "The scent of the sassafras leaves hanging to dry in the shade! The pungent chamomile! The sound of the bayou tumbling over that old slimy log! . . . She knew the birds must be singing in chorus out there in the woods where the gray moss was hanging, and the trumpet-vine trailing from the trees, spangled with blossoms. In spirit she heard the songsters" (269). For Loka, the most poignant memories are the physical pleasures of the woods; she recalls the sights, smells, and sounds which are far removed from the realm where the Band of United Endeavor has placed her. While her former life also had difficulties, the overwhelming desire for her old surroundings is represented in the lush tone of Chopin's prose.

Chopin contrasts the confining shoes the clubwomen gave Loka with her previous footwear. In the next paragraph, Loka remembers her old shoes with pleasure: "How

good it felt to walk with moccasined feet over the springy turf, under the trees!” (269). While the heavy shoes now weigh her down, her moccasins allowed her to enjoy the “springy turf” and were a source of joy rather than pain. Loka’s memories then reach a climax: “Loka was sick for the woods. She felt she must die if she could not get back to them, and to her vagabond life. Was there anything to hinder her? She stooped and unlaced the brogans that were chafing her feet, removed them and her stockings, and threw the things away from her. She stood up all a-quiver, panting, ready for flight” (270). The heavy brogans, representing the cumbersome rhetoric of the clubwomen, are cast aside, and Loka stands ready to flee. Briefly, Chopin embraces the possibility that Loka can escape the world created for her by the clubwomen.

However, Loka does not return to her previous life. Instead, she takes the baby for a walk. The Padues return to find both Loka and the baby missing. Madame Padue is furious, so her husband, Baptiste, takes charge. When Loka returns, he delivers the pithy moral of the tale: Loka was tempted to run, but returned because she loved the baby too much. Thus, the Padues have successfully “civilized” her. Rather than the lush, beautiful memories of the previous passage, Loka is again reduced to the description placed upon her and the marked dialect that Chopin’s “civilized” audience finds foreign. By developing this contrast, Chopin is able to place the moral end on the story that will sell it to her editors, yet she leaves her audience unsettled.

The lush and vivid descriptions occur only in the middle section of the story, Loka’s memories of an uncivilized life. This passage is a sharp contrast to the chafing and confining role Loka must perform as a servant. Cognizant of the rhetoric of women like the “Band of United Endeavor” developed, Chopin chooses to emphasize the effects

of such rhetoric on people further down the hierarchical ladder. Instead of touting the impressive accomplishments of clubs, Chopin portrays women stymied or trapped by such rhetoric. While their moral directive seems to triumph at the end, the audience is also left asking “at what cost”?

Kate Chopin wrote her most famous work just five years before her death in 1904. Chopin’s short novel, *The Awakening*, was re-claimed by critics in the late twentieth century; to many modern readers it seems as new and fresh as anything recently published. Like Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-Paper,” *The Awakening* centers on a heroine who rebels against the constraints of domestic life. However, unlike Gilman, Chopin did not embrace the rhetorical vision of club life in her other writing to resist the confines of domesticity. Instead, she remained as suspicious of the exuberant rhetoric of club writers as she had been when she left the Wednesday Club. Any traces of the rhetorical vision of club life are brief and fleeting in the novel. However, the title, *The Awakening*, does resonate with the central idea of transformation within club rhetoric. Chopin’s choice of a title illuminates her resistance to the club ideals of transformation and progress. Instead of creating a utopian world where club ideals are the fundamental philosophy as Gilman does in *Moving the Mountain*, Chopin’s Edna Pontellier consistently “awakens” to her own needs rather than a collective goal. Instead of embracing a communal rhetoric, Edna’s revelations emphasize doing things her own way. Furthermore, Edna becomes estranged from her domestic duties in contrast to club rhetoric that is steeped in domestic metaphors. These contrasts highlight Chopin’s beliefs about the efficacy of progressive rhetoric and highlight why the novel seems much more modern to our sensibilities than the optimistic rhetoric of club life does.

Chopin's novel, with its secluded setting and Creole characters, is purposely isolated from the dramatic and rapid changes facing major industrialized centers like St. Louis. Thus, the progressive bustle of clubwomen, featured in several of Chopin's short stories, does not make an appearance in the novel. However, there are several passing references that can be read as allusions to club life. The passing glances that Chopin gives to clubs shows her own distancing from them in her depiction of Edna. In the first allusion, the narrator describes an evening of entertainment given by the host, Madame Lebrun: "Music, dancing, and a recitation or two were the entertainments furnished, or rather, offered. But there was nothing systematic about the programme, no appearance of prearrangement nor even premeditation" (40). This description of the evening's entertainments stand in contrast to the highly structured evening programs given by clubs, with printed programs and invited speakers. While clubwomen attended such events expecting to be informed and improved, the haphazard nature of Madame Lebrun's evening implies that her event is much more casual, with little expectation of improving anyone.

Another hint of the activities of clubwomen occurs after the summer ends, when Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier return to their home in New Orleans. There, Edna's internal changes begin to show externally. Mr. Pontellier finds them distasteful enough to worry that Edna is no longer "herself." He visits the family physician for advice. Without Edna present to speak on her own behalf, the two discuss her actions and possible causes for her changes. One possibility that is raised is that Edna has fallen in with a new group of women: "'Has she,' asked the Doctor, with a smile, 'has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudointellectual women – superspiritual superior beings? My wife has been

telling me about them” (109). While, again, this is not a direct reference to clubwomen, two cues point to the possibility. By saying that his wife has told him about them, the Doctor implies that the organization is relatively new, one with which he does not have direct experience. The other allusion is the use of the adjectives “pseudointellectual” and “superior.” With their emphasis on education and reform, clubwomen were often called this and much worse by bemused or hostile outsiders. Mr. Pontellier’s response highlights Chopin’s theme concerning Edna’s awakening “‘That’s the trouble,’ broke in Mr. Pontellier, ‘she hasn’t been associating with anyone’” (109). Edna, far from being influenced by the rhetoric of clubwomen, has been, in the view of Mr. Pontellier, changing completely on her own. This emphasis on solitude is different from the “awakening” clubwomen experienced in the presence of fellow women.

More often than not, Chopin creates a subtle contrast between the exuberant, communal awakening of clubwomen and Edna’s solitary awakening. Edna’s new ideas or experiences happen when she is alone, or they have an emphasis on doing things her own way rather than conforming to a communal vision of improvement. For example, after her father and husband leave, Edna does not seek out the company of other women. Instead, she is incredibly relieved to find herself alone. While she was upset as she said goodbye to her husband, once he left: “a radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone” (120). In the next paragraph, the author re-emphasizes her transformation: “When Edna was at last alone, she breathed a genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her” (120). For Edna, transformation and new feelings came when she was alone rather than acting or talking in a group.

While the rhetorical vision of clubwomen was based on women's effectiveness as homemakers, Edna resists the confines of her home as she transforms herself, ultimately choosing to set up a new apartment for herself. Clubwomen argued that their talents as women gave them the credentials to reform the public sphere. In contrast, it is only when Edna feels that she has loosened her duties as a wife and mother that she can become an artist. To succeed, she feels she must step away from the concerns of domestic life. Edna contrasts her feelings with what she sees as the efficiency of her friend, Madame Ratignolle: "The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could not see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui" (93). For Edna, domestic life stretched out as a bland and uninteresting routine. Unlike clubwomen who argued that their domestic work should be extended into the public sphere, Edna casts the work off completely, ignoring it increasingly in her final days.

Clubwomen constructed a clear rhetorical vision that women, like Gilman and Eliot, could use to transform their lives; however, Chopin never embraced this vision. Instead, she remained wary of its collective exuberance and feminine rhetoric. Her creation, Edna, consistently chooses solitude over collective action. Edna is awakened, not by a passion for reform or to improve her community, but by a passion to remain true to her unique identity and soul. Suspicious of the wisdom of the clubs' positive, progressive trajectory, Edna seeks her own wisdom from her body and the sea. Chopin describes the rhetoric Edna is most persuaded by early in the novel, during her first solo swim: "The voice of the sea is seductive . . . inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks

to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (25). Rather than relying on the rhetoric circulated by her peers, Edna is inspired by the sea. This rhetoric leads her far away from the progressive ideals so popular in the late nineteenth century. Instead, Edna must rely on her own vision of a woman’s place in her world.

Conclusion

The overarching rhetorical vision of women’s clubs was progressive and unflinchingly optimistic. Women went from unenlightened, lonely individuals to a collective, educated and enlightened political force that would clean up the city and the nation. The second link of clubwomen’s rhetorical vision was the narrative of education that claimed a space in the public sphere based on women’s study practices within their clubs. This vision is exemplified in St. Louis’s Wednesday Club where Charlotte Eliot thrived. However, Kate Chopin resisted the clubs’ rhetorical vision and instead penned “Loka,” which criticized the progressive rhetoric of clubwomen. For Chopin, this rhetoric of progress was transient and suspicious. Instead, she created one of the most memorable women in American fiction, Edna Pontellier. Rather than relying on the rhetoric of communal improvement, Edna remains stoically individualistic; ultimately discovering that the world she lives in will never fully embrace her.

Chapter Three

“A Woman’s Domain”: Sarah Orne Jewett and Clubwomen’s Municipal Housekeeping

This chapter analyzes the third link of clubwomen’s fantasy chain: the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. Club leaders used women’s reign in the home as an argument for their reign in the public sphere. By capitalizing on circulating stereotypes concerning their gender, clubwomen were able to carve out a new public space for themselves that rested on women’s moral virtues. They argued that, since they could efficiently run their homes, raise their children, and protect the moral values of their families, then they should run the schools, clean up the cities, and extend their moral virtues to the whole community. While the first two chapters analyze how club writers’ rhetoric of transformation convinced individual women to join the club movement and become educated, this chapter explains more fully how clubwomen used the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to influence politics within their communities. Clubwomen used their study club practices as credentials for their public work. This, coupled with their manipulation of gender differences, created a powerful rhetorical vision that shaped the feminism of the next generation and ultimately helped win the battle for women’s

suffrage. This rhetoric also appears in the literature of the Progressive Era; paying careful attention to the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping demonstrates how women writers engaged in this important dialogue on women and politics.

The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping was born in Boston. There, the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) emphasized the special qualities of women to carve a public presence in downtown Boston. Close readings of the writings of three prominent Boston clubwomen show how women writers formed the municipal housekeeping movement. Abby Morton Diaz, the long-time president of the WEIU, and Annie Adams Fields, club member and wife of *Atlantic Monthly* editor James T. Fields, both published non-fiction essays and books that furthered the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. Fields' close friend and companion, Sarah Orne Jewett, was an early member of the WEIU, and her novel, *A Country Doctor*, depicts women's entrance into the public sphere through their special talents as women. Jewett never fully embraced the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping and her skepticism highlights the heated debate over women's roles and functions in the late nineteenth century. By analyzing clubwomen's rhetorical construction of a public space and actual construction of separate civic institutions, Jewett's contrasting beliefs about gender are highlighted. While Jewett embraced certain tenets of the clubs' rhetorical vision, like abandoning the "lady of leisure," she did not embrace the clubs' feminine tactics. Instead, in her novel, *The Country Doctor*, Jewett argues that women should enter the public arena based on their strengths as individuals.

The Women's Educational and Industrial Union

Early in the club movement, the Women's Educational and Industrial Union became an effective lobbying force in the local politics of Boston. The WEIU was successful because its rhetoric incorporated the feminine strengths of domestic women in the late nineteenth century. The women of a certain class in Boston were ripe to embrace the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. White, upper-class women were part of a tightly-knit class that had long existed in Boston. Their interconnectedness reinforced their sense of place in the world. Critic Susan Harris notes how important community was to the Victorians. While Modern writers like Virginia Woolf saw connections as "fragile moments of unity among fragmented lives," the Victorians believed in a concrete reality: "they believed that community was possible and, even more importantly, that it had positive value. For them, 'influence' was a cultural, even moral, good" (5). Because they believed wholeheartedly that "community" was a necessary and positive concept, they were willing to dedicate the time and effort it took to sustain such community.

Demonstrative of how clubs transformed from study clubs to departmental clubs, the WEIU branched out of the New England Women's Club, one of the first women's clubs in the country. The well-connected New England Women's Club prided itself on its study efforts and its roster of prominent speakers, which included Henry James, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Elizabeth Peabody, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucy Larcom, Booker T. Washington, William Lloyd Garrison and Ellen Richards. Several club members also rose to national prominence and traveled on the lecture circuit, including Julia Ward Howe, Lucy Stone and Alice Stone Blackwell

(Sprague 15). The club, like other major clubs in urban centers, was quite particular concerning membership; the club's socially prominent and professional women allowed membership by invitation only. While the club was involved in the battle for suffrage for school boards and efforts for dress reform, they were less successful in bridging class boundaries.

Like other elite clubs in the country, the New England Women's Club perceived working-class women as objects of benevolence rather than equals. The Club tried opening rooms for working women to study and be taught by members in the evening, called the "Friendly Evening Association" in 1870. However, their charitable approach had little appeal for working-class women and attendance was quite low. The "Friendly Evening Association" was disbanded after only one year (9). While the club was successful at creating tight bonds between its members, it was far less successful at reaching out across class boundaries. Only when they formed the more socially-mixed departmental club, the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, were these leaders able to bridge class differences enough to enter the public sphere. There, led by women like Abby Morton Diaz, clubwomen developed the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping that they used to transform their hometown.

The Women's Educational and Industrial Union broadened its membership and soon became a major political force in the city. Along with NEWC members, Annie Fields, Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Garrison, Mount Holyoke president Mary E. Woolley, and reformer Kate Tannatt Woods joined the new WEIU in 1877 (Blair 76). According to Blair, the WEIU was the early prototype for two important aspects of the women's club movement: a wider idea of sisterhood across class boundaries and the rhetorical

tactic of municipal housekeeping (73). Membership to the WEIU was open to all and dues were quite low, only a dollar a year. Starting with forty members, the club expanded quite rapidly to four hundred members by the end of the first year. In ten years, there were twelve hundred members; by 1915, membership had grown to forty-five hundred (76).

By embracing the principles of domestic feminism, the Union aimed to enter the public arena through various activities related to women's "special functions." These activities included the care of children and the poor. By establishing a physical presence in the heart of Boston, the WEIU claimed public space devoted to women's issues. Rather than a purely benevolent approach to class issues, the Union focused on education and the social needs of immigrant women in Boston. Instead of encouraging women to enter male-dominated careers, the union tried to forge new career options for women. The leaders of the WEIU spread their ideas to other communities through the lecture circuit and various Women's Congresses of the late nineteenth century. Their efforts were a road map for women striving to carve out a public role based on their private virtues.

Unlike labor unions, this organization was seen as philanthropic and an extension of the New England Women's Club. Because the club emphasized the rhetoric of domestic feminism, it had widespread support from the public. In this way, the club adopted aspects of the rhetoric of separate spheres and used it to justify their extension into the public sphere. According to early WEIU member, Mrs. T.J. Bowlker: "Woman has a special function in developing the welfare of humanity which man cannot perform. This function consists in her power to make, of any place in which she may happen to

live, a *home* for all those who come there. Women must now learn to make of their cities great community homes for all the people” (qtd in Blair 74). According to this rhetoric, it was a woman’s duty to make a home for everyone in the city. By redefining civic space as home, the WEIU sought to actively participate in the public sphere. This formed the cornerstone of the rhetoric the Union used to lobby for change in Boston.

The WEIU institutionalized its mission by establishing buildings for services for women and children in the center of Boston, by lobbying the Massachusetts legislature to enact regulations and laws that aided women and children, and by setting up its own research projects to scientifically bolster its claims. Historian Sarah Deutsch explains that the WEIU manipulated the ideology of separate spheres to establish a separate, physical presence in Boston. The WEIU strategically situated itself close to City Hall by opening three main buildings, lunchrooms, employment offices, clinics and a pure milk station. According to Deutsch, by 1900 the Union had “turned Boylston Street into virtually a women’s mile” in sight of City Hall (390). This visible mile of buildings that housed the reform work of women was central to the separate public institution-building that clubwomen initiated. By creating a new physical space for women in the center of downtown Boston, clubwomen adapted that public space to reshape the “separate spheres” doctrine into a public/public split with separate roles for women in the civic politics of Boston. All of these efforts allowed the club to substantially influence local political issues.

Another way the Union institutionalized municipal housekeeping was through its research efforts. By 1907, Susan Kingsbury, a PhD in American colonial history who went on to teach at Bryn Mawr in 1915, was the Director of Research at the WEIU. She

directed systematic fact-finding investigations and gave \$500 awards to women graduate students for fieldwork. Several of her studies were cosponsored by the Massachusetts State Bureau of Statistics, and the Massachusetts legislative committee used these findings as a basis for state regulation of installment buying, sales of milk, retirement pensions, factory inspections and sanitation, minimum wages, protection for small-business loans and four weeks of maternity leave for all women in the state. This type of research legitimized the club's efforts and supported women graduate students by extending women's sphere into the public realm.

In keeping with their feminine vision, club members often worked to raise awareness about issues concerning women. In 1917, the club's Department of Research published a series of "Studies in Economic Relations of Women." The report on "The Food of Working Women in Boston" was written by the director of the Department of Research, Lucile Eaves, PhD, in co-operation with the State Department of Health. The report is grounded in the newly-emerging practices of social science with numerous statistics and charts on working women of various income levels in Boston. The main finding of the report was that working women of all levels spent more money on food than rent and laundry combined (83). The authors of the report clearly write with an eye to lobbying and influencing public policy: "Family standards of expenditure are not applicable to women adrift [unmarried women]. Any sort of legislation inaugurated for the welfare of workers should take into account the fact that a woman living away from home earning less money a week is economically below the standard maintained by the ordinary working class family in Massachusetts" (80). This report emphasizes that different accounting must be used for different constituents because the family unit

maintains a different standard of living than a single woman. By focusing on women's issues, the Union was able to make detailed recommendations in its lobbying efforts.

The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping that the WEIU emphasized went national mainly due to the efforts of one woman: J. C. Croly. As one of the founders of the club movement, Croly advocated the unique role of women's values in public life for many years. Right after founding Sorosis in 1868, she attempted to found a separate Women's Parliament in 1869. The Congress she envisioned would function as a separate sphere of government attentive to the needs of women. Aware that many women viewed the activities of suffragists as too radical, she envisioned the Parliament as a way for women to govern themselves without having to wait for the right to vote to be granted to them (Blair 40). While the meeting attracted prominent women from across the country and spawned the Association for the Advancement of Women and several more Women's Congresses, the separate governing body for women that Croly desired never materialized.

However, through connections with the Women's Congresses and the New England Women's Club, Croly was attracted to the ideals of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. The rhetoric of municipal housekeeping that grew out of the WEIU was similar to Croly's vision of a separate, public organization attentive to the needs of women. Inspired by the crossover of membership from the NEWC, Croly founded the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) in 1890. This organization gathered literary clubs into a national community with a monthly magazine, first edited by Croly, and biannual national meetings that clubwomen across the country traveled to attend. According to Blair, once formed, Croly diverted clubs from cultural programs to

municipal housekeeping: “[t]he Federation became the vehicle through which clubs were led to consider ways in which woman’s special sensitivity could be applied to the problems of the community” (93). Croly believed that, united into a national organization, clubwomen could collectively lobby legislators. While some local clubs ignored the national platforms of the GFWC, many women were eager to join the national movement (97). The GFWC created a rhetorical vision powerful enough to lead women into public reform work.

This national network of clubs became a central resource for the reform work of the domestic feminists of the late nineteenth century. These women did not break radically from traditional expectations for their roles, but instead claimed that their work as women qualified them to work in the public sphere. The ability of women to enter the public arena through their clubs rested on their rhetorical practices. By embracing the slogan of municipal housekeeping, women created a rhetorical vision that did not completely destabilize the status quo. They did not immediately create a feminist revolution, but clubwomen’s rhetoric opened enough doors for women to prove that they too were needed in the public sphere. Their rhetoric enabled them to tackle very real and lasting reforms like building libraries, reforming child labor laws, and demanding pure milk and acceptable food. As we shall see in the next chapter, clubs repeatedly began programs and then turned them over to state and local government so that the next generation of women could find paying jobs in those programs. This created a permanent place for women in the workforce that expanded throughout the twentieth century. The slow trickle that began with clubwomen’s rhetorical vision of their ability to “clean up

the city” developed into the rapid changes women experienced in the next few generations.

The Rhetorical Vision of Municipal Housekeeping

The women’s club movement was effective because it adhered to the principles of domestic feminism. Rather than argue from radical positions for full suffrage or gender androgyny, domestic feminists based their rhetoric in the ideals of middle-class, Victorian family life. Club leaders exploited widely circulating stereotypes about women for their own ends. Basing their arguments on their virtues as effective, efficient wives and mothers, club leaders claimed that they could run the public sphere as competently as they ran their homes. Their rhetoric repeatedly featured three main claims. First, building on earlier fantasy chains, leaders stressed how, through their self-education, women were “awakened” to the needs of their communities. Under municipal housekeeping, leaders then identified this “awakening” as a fundamental justification for shifting their focus from studying the fine arts to studying civic problems. To prepare women for this new relationship with the public sphere, clubs trained women to use parliamentary procedure. This language of civic responsibility taught women to communicate more effectively in public. Finally, club leaders, like Abby Morton Diaz, argued that women were uniquely qualified to enter the public sphere because of their domestic work. Diaz repeatedly claimed women should have equal rights because of their work as wives and mothers. Diaz and others argued that their work in public was a “natural” extension of their work in the home. This claim was the centerpiece of their vision of municipal housekeeping.

The success of municipal housekeeping rested on clubwomen's ability to manipulate existing masculinist stereotypes to their advantage. Often women seized on a particular quality or value and argued that it was underrepresented in the public sphere. The essays of John Ruskin are an important example of how club leaders used circulating stereotypes to their advantage. Ruskin provides the foothold women needed to reconfigure the rhetoric of the separate spheres to justify their community activism. Ruskin's popular lectures, "Sesame and Lilies," were delivered in Manchester, England in 1864. Published in 1865, the second lecture, "Of Queen's Gardens," defines the doctrine of separate spheres for women by using Coventry Patmore's poem "The Angel in the House."³³ Purporting to be a lecture about the appropriate education for women, Ruskin spends as much time delineating the role of women in their domestic realm as he does explaining how women should be educated. This essay was widely distributed on both sides of the Atlantic, and historian Walter E. Houghton has called "Of Queen's Gardens" "the most important single document . . . for the characteristic idealization of love, woman, and home in Victorian thought" (343). While Virginia Woolf famously murdered the "angel in the house," ushering in the modern feminist response to the rhetoric of separate spheres, Woolf's Victorian predecessors resisted the confining rhetoric in their own way. Ruskin's essay extols some of the worst stereotypes of the separate-spheres ideology, but he also praises women's virtue and encourages them to

³³In his essay, Ruskin praised Patmore, stating: "one cannot read him too often or too carefully" (120). Patmore's encomium of the home received little notice when it was first published in 1854; however, in 1887, a respected publisher brought out a series of cheap editions of "literature's greatest works." In the series of one hundred, Patmore was placed at number seventy. The edition reportedly sold 40,000 copies in the first two weeks. See: Ian Anstruther, *Coventry Patmore's Angel: A Study of Coventry Patmore, His Wife Emily and the Angel in the House* (London: Haggerston, 1992).

benevolent action, opening the door for the reform activities of the women's club movement.

Ruskin's biased rhetoric is strongest when he depicts an ideal education for women, because he consistently relegates them to a secondary or supporting role. Ruskin believes that women should be given knowledge, not so they may know facts and details, but so that they may refine their natural tendency to "feel and judge" (125). Ruskin claims that women should know what their husbands know, but differently: his education is "foundational and progressive; hers, general and accomplished for daily and helpful use" (128). Therefore, women should take an interest in what their husbands enjoy, but should not be educated enough to apply any such knowledge or to contribute to the "work of men." He claims that "modern novels and magazines" should be kept away from young women; instead "let her loose in a library of old classics. She'll naturally know what to read. A woman can't be chiseled into shape as a boy can." To illustrate his point, Ruskin compares a young woman with a fawn that naturally knows which weeds to avoid (135). Rather than challenging women with the same rigorous education given men, which was grounded in a thorough knowledge of classical languages, Ruskin encourages women to read whatever they are "naturally" drawn to. While far from an equal education, Ruskin's influential guidance was taken up in the households of upper middle-class families on both sides of the Atlantic; women from Sarah Orne Jewett to Virginia Woolf to Teddy Roosevelt's daughters all write of being allowed to read extensively in their fathers' libraries.

Ruskin's lecture embodies some of the worst stereotypes of women; however, he does make an important claim that women's club leaders will seize. Toward the end of

the essay, he defines woman's role as a helper: "All such knowledge should be given her as may enable her to understand, and even to aid, the work of men" (125). By allowing that women should "aid" the work of men, Ruskin allows them a small place in the public sphere. He ends the lecture by returning to the ancient definition of "lady" as "bread-giver" (138). Ruskin advocates women's entry into the public realm to minister to the poor and to stop all wars because he believes that only women can "spread virtue" in the world (139-141). He probably imagines that he is calling women merely to the benevolent service they have long performed in churches and at home. Therefore, he offers no practical advice on how they will "spread virtue" through the country without any access to avenues of power. However, it is precisely this call to action that women are able to manipulate to enter the public sphere through their municipal housekeeping.

Seizing on rhetoric such as Ruskin's essay on education, club leaders transformed the study club movement in America into a separate, public institution that was central to the progressive politics of the late nineteenth century. By circulating a fantasy chain that linked education and reform, leaders of the club movement capitalized on the hunger for education analyzed in the previous chapter. This tactic, coupled with the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping, created a forceful rhetorical vision. Precisely because this brand of domestic feminism carved a "separate" public institution, millions of women were able to step confidently into the public sphere without challenging dominant notions of womanhood.

To create this link of their fantasy chain, club leaders carefully defined their new place in the public sphere. Frank and Jerome's *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club for the First Forty Years of its Organization: 1876-1916* illustrates just how complete the

conversion from study club to civic organization was by 1916. In the early twentieth century, club leaders routinely emphasized the permanence of the women's club and its reform work by endowing it with the language of the institution. They backed up their rhetoric with efforts to build permanent, separate buildings for clubs rather than meeting in individuals' homes. The early, visible success of Boston's WEIU inspired large clubs in other cities. The way in which the WEIU was able to transform Bolyston Street into an established, public block for the work of women's clubs led many other clubs to emulate their success.³⁴

Published by the Chicago Woman's Club to give new members a sense of the club's history, the *Annals of the Chicago Woman's Club* is dismissive of its study club roots. By 1916, the club is so focused on civic work that the authors quote at length a 1907 article by Bertha Damaris Knobe titled "What the Chicago Woman's Club has done for Chicago." Knobe's commentary around the quote is telling of the club's changed attitude: "The insidious remark that 'In Chicago women pool their intelligence into clubs in order to understand Browning,' is roundly refuted by courses of study which might easily make a modern university envious" (21). Knobe believes that the work of their club now goes far beyond literature. She mentions a year-long course "The Needs of a Great City" that one department of the club undertook and sums up their work: "the Chicago Woman's Club is not an experimental station in sociology, but a finely equipped training school, wherein one thousand thinking women absorb the knowledge which is power -- power in the civic life in Chicago" (21). An earlier 1892 Chicago club report,

³⁴ Throughout the pages of J. C. Croly's massive *History of the Women's Club Movement in America*, she inserts illustrations of clubs' houses and describes their efforts to build houses as the crowning achievement of an individual club.

quoted in Chapter One, stressed the women's indecision about broadening the study clubs' activities and the discussion that led to a vote. Knoke's statement fifteen years later is much more assertive, directly linking women's power to their ability to effect change in the civic arena. By 1916, as the battle for suffrage intensified, Frank and Jerome chose to include Knoke's article rather than the less strident club notes of 1892. For the Chicago Women's Club, the transformation from studying housewife to active reformer was so complete that the writers were dismissive of criticism of their study practices.

Throughout later club publications, women were constantly urged to put their education to good work by joining the reform efforts of club leaders. In her *Complete Club Book for Women* (1915), Caroline Frances Burrell wrote under the pseudonym Caroline French Benton. She urged women to turn away from study practices and join the movement of municipal housekeeping, which she labeled "larger housekeeping": "Who can stop to write dull papers on Italian Art in this day of efficiency?" (3). Like members of the Chicago Women's Club, Burnell proposes that study should lead more directly to civic reform. However, she cautions clubwomen: "it is better to spend a whole year in study and accomplish only one practical work for town betterment, than enthusiastically to begin one dozen lines and yet really gain nothing substantial in the end" (12). Aware of public criticism of clubwomen as dilettantes, Burnell advises women to be systematic and thorough in their "larger housekeeping." Throughout club literature, catalogs of accomplishments and study programs centered on improving the community echo the rhetorical vision the club movement used to enact significant community improvements.

In writing club histories and handbooks, club leaders were explicit about exactly how women's raw desire for education could be transformed into a broader social consciousness. Their comments give us an important window into how this organization created its rhetorical vision. Women in clubs were not supposed to just read haphazardly but underwent systematic study. In addition to their study practices, most clubs strictly adhered to official parliamentary procedures. This training further prepared women to enter the public sphere by teaching them the language of civic organizations and local government. As Miller's 1891 handbook explains, each clubwoman was taught: "to express herself clearly with her pen; to speak impromptu; to take part in discussion; to work by parliamentary methods" (53). Miller acknowledges how foreign this work was for many women and explains how some clubs took extra measures to ensure that every woman learned such skills:

For example, one club whose workings I know well, aims to train its members not only to prepare papers, but to preside easily, and to lead in discussion . . . Each member is obliged to take the president's chair in her alphabetical turn, to write a paper, and to lead the discussion in the same impartial order. She understands the conditions when she joins, and no shirking is tolerated. (53)

For women's clubs, training in such skills as public speaking, leadership, and group discussion led to a growing sense of confidence in their members. Clubwomen then used these specific skills as they stepped into public work under the banner of municipal housekeeping.

Most clubs studied and followed rules of order. In one early club magazine, there are repeated advertisements for a traveling lecturer who will explain parliamentary procedure to women's clubs for a fee. The use of such procedure helped women's clubs broaden their role from classroom to civic organization and taught women how to

communicate in municipal committee meetings. In 1919, Emma Augusta Stowell Fox, a member of the national leadership of the GFWC, published the second edition of her *Parliamentary Usage for Woman's Clubs: A Manual of Parliamentary Law and Practice, Designed for the Use of Societies, Literary, Social, Musical, Philanthropic, and Fraternal*. As the rather lengthy title illustrates, this handbook consists of specific rules for women to follow in club meetings and provides an extensive chapter of forms to be copied by clubwomen. The manual is written in gender-neutral language and refers to women's clubs as just one among many organizations that use parliamentary rules.

Fox emphasizes the fundamental importance of parliamentary procedure. She argues that a proper club must follow proper procedure: "In these days of numerous organizations it should be considered as inexcusable to belong to any society holding regular meetings and remain ignorant of parliamentary law as to join in golf, tennis or whist and not familiarize one's self with the rules of the game" (2). Through her analogy, Fox cleverly asserts that parliamentary procedure is the foundation to any well-run club. Thus, to the uninitiated individual woman seeking to form a club, Fox's matter-of-fact tone is persuasive: learning parliamentary procedure becomes a necessary step to form a woman's club.

In addition, Fox claims that parliamentary practice is a key to accessing the wheels of democracy. She reminds her club readers: "Parliamentary law for the meetings of our various organizations is in some respects what civil law is for the community" (2). For women, denied direct access to the workings of democratic government, this comparison is quite important. By practicing such language and procedures in the safety of all-female meetings, women were able to move into the public sphere with more and

more confidence. Fox's chapter on voting is particularly striking considering the fact that her audience, even in 1919, was still denied the right to vote in national elections. However, the women's club familiarized individual women with elections and, by following strict voting procedures, suffrage seemed less foreign.

Lozier's 1892 essay, "Educational Influence of Women's Clubs," overtly makes the connection between parliamentary procedure and democracy. Lozier asks the question: "What is the education the club gives us?" and then answers with a detailed outline of five items, including the importance of rules of order: "Club methods and organization give us some conception of true democracy. We conform to parliamentary usages. We practice rotation in office and civil service reform. We have unsalaried officers, and believe in that policy which produces the greatest good to the greatest number. These features outline a modern Utopia or an earthly Paradise" (64). Lozier believes that by conforming to formal organization, women's clubs exemplify "true democracy." Her connection between democracy and women's clubs demonstrates how early club leaders believed educating women improved their opportunities in American democracy, here the "true democracy." Lozier argues that following these organizational rules will lead the club to a philosophy of "the greatest good to the greatest number." Following in the tradition of Emerson and the abolition movement, Lozier defines democracy in order to persuade her audience that it is illogical to deny women participation in a democracy to which they ably demonstrate a commitment. Throughout these essays, the emphasis on parliamentary procedure is an important tool to professionalize housewives and make them feel competent to contribute to a democracy.

Municipal Housekeeping in the work of Diaz, Fields, and Jewett

One of the most influential club writers was Abby Morton Diaz. Critically, Diaz has been overlooked. There is very little scholarship on her writing and no full-length biography of her life. However, Diaz's writing is worth examining because of her long and influential leadership role in the WEIU; she helped shape the narrative that clubwomen used to enter public life based on municipal housekeeping. Two of her books are focused on women's issues and gender relationships. A close reading of these two texts demonstrates how Diaz developed a philosophy of gender that emphasizes the perceived strengths of women's lives in the home and uses these strengths to argue for women's broader political involvement. Her rhetoric is demonstrative of the tactics used by clubwomen to develop their rhetorical vision through municipal housekeeping.

Diaz became president of the WEIU when the first president, Harriet Clisby, fell ill in 1878. She led the club for over twenty-five years, first as president from 1881 to 1892 and then as vice-president from 1892 to 1902 (Harth 77). Born in 1821, she was involved in reform efforts from an early age. Diaz's father took her to hear Rev. Theodore Parker when she was twelve years old, and she joined Plymouth's Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society where she was soon elected secretary. To contribute twenty-five cents a week to the Society, the young Abby knit garters and sacrificed butter (Ginzberg 103). Her father, Ichabod Morton, was a Unitarian minister and an impassioned reformer most of his life; he toured the country with Horace Mann, advocating widespread reform of public education. He also helped found the Normal School in East Bridgewater, MA and the high school for girls in Plymouth that Abby attended (James 472). Her father

then moved the family to Brook Farm for a while and Diaz stayed to teach kindergarten from 1842-1847.

At Brook Farm, she met and married Manuel A. Diaz, from Cuba. They had three sons, but the marriage failed and left Diaz to care for her two surviving sons (Blair 77). Diaz had to work to support her family and developed a close sympathy for working women as she taught a juvenile singing school, public and private schools, entered practical nursing, and ran a dancing school. She also worked as a summer housekeeper and cook, and delivered needlework to women sewing from home for factories. She then turned to writing and published her first story “Pink and Blue” anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1861. While she called her work nothing but “poverty-cake,” she became a popular author of magazine articles, children’s books and books on women’s issues (Blair 78). She published regularly in several juvenile magazines; her “William Henry” stories were quite popular and reportedly among Teddy Roosevelt’s favorites (Gollin 181). Concerned with spreading the ideals of the WEIU, Diaz traveled often and helped organize similar unions in Buffalo and Syracuse, NY; Washington DC; Providence, RI; Saco, ME; Portsmouth, NH; and St. Paul, MN (James 473). In 1876, she presented a paper to the Women’s Congress in Philadelphia titled “The Development of Character in Schools” (Willard 241).

Diaz’s work *A Domestic Problem: Work and Culture in the Household*, written in 1875, is exemplary of Diaz’s extension of the domestic sphere into public life. The tone of the piece is quite non-confrontational, asking simple questions about apparently simple situations. For example, Diaz’s opening sentence, “Our problem is this: How may woman enjoy the delights of culture, and at the same time fulfill her duties to family and

household?” addresses her middle-class audience with a question of balance rather than a question of revolution (7). However, her claims carefully lead women into the public sphere, and her rhetoric is grounded in the transformations used by other advocates of municipal housekeeping.

In keeping with the philosophy of domestic feminists, Diaz does not contest the role women should play in society as wives and mothers; however, she does contest how women should prepare for that role and how men should treat such a role. Diaz assures her audience that she does not want to alter women’s roles fundamentally. Instead, she wants to clarify how women should enact such roles. As she discusses the causes of the Woman Question, she limits the territory for her argument: “It seems to me that the great underlying cause – the cause of all other causes – is the want of insight, the unenlightenment, which prevails, not about what woman’s mission is, but the ways and means by which she is to accomplish it” (19). In this instance, Diaz bluntly states that she will not argue against “woman’s mission,” instead she will merely offer a few suggestions on how best to accomplish such a mission. Through this tactic, she appears not to examine the root causes of patriarchy. However, within the space of this argument, she is able to argue for very radical ideas, including equal access to education, full suffrage, and full gender equity.

Diaz frames her argument by asking how a traveler from a distant land would view the situation of women. In the imaginary conversation between traveler and a typical mother, the traveler asks if women have any special training for their chief occupation in life: motherhood. The woman responds that, unfortunately, she does not have any special preparation or time to read any books. The traveler reacts in surprise:

“No time? – no time to prepare for your chief mission?” (24). Here Diaz’s quick wit is revealed in the words of the woman: “It is our mission only in print. In real life it plays an extremely subordinate part” (24). Diaz astutely identifies the gap between cultural ideals and practice. While Victorians may have publicly bowed down to the primacy of sacred motherhood, few women were truly respected for that role. The traveler responds by asking what woman’s real role is; the woman replies curtly: “chiefly cooking and sewing” (24). By identifying the household drudgery that filled many middle-class women’s days, Diaz can emphasize what she perceives is woman’s more powerful role – motherhood. Diaz believes that by freeing women from those time-consuming tasks, they will have more time to educate themselves and wield more influence as mothers.

One of Diaz’s main claims is that women need to waste less time on frivolous household chores such as elaborate meals or excessive sewing. She appeals to men to encourage their wives to read and improve their minds rather than expending useless energy on such tasks. While this argument may seem superficial, Diaz is cleverly laying the groundwork for women’s entrance into the public sphere. In the next few pages, Diaz works her way to her most radical claim – that women are equal to men. Diaz boldly states: “Another step towards the immediate solution of our problem is, to establish the fact that woman stands on a level with man, and is neither appendage nor a ‘relic’” (95). Diaz believes that women are equal to men and widespread acknowledgment of that fact would greatly improve many housewives’ situations.

From her argument for equality, Diaz transitions to her rationale for women’s entrance into the public sphere. In her typical style, she starts with an ingenuously simple assertion that her audience must agree with: “Now, let us ask, under our breaths,

what are public affairs? The public consists of individuals. If there were no individuals, there would be no public” (97). With this seemingly naive claim, Diaz is able to control her definition of “public affairs.” For her, the public is simply a collection of individuals, much like a family. Demonstrative of the tactics of “municipal housekeeping,” Diaz’s analogy of the home to the public sphere allows her to argue that women are qualified to enter public life.

After defining the public sphere, she ridicules those opposed to women extending their sphere: “Let us ask, why, simply by being christened ‘public affairs,’ should they be turned into a great, horrid bugaboo, too dangerous for women ever to think of?” (97). Like other club leaders, Diaz appeals to the power of motherhood as qualifying women to participate in public affairs. She asks: “Schools are part of public affairs, and one would suppose it to be a part of woman’s vocation to ascertain what is the influence of these schools on the children she is bringing up; to learn whether they are working with her or against her” (97). Diaz emphasizes the connection between a mother’s role and public affairs. It seems difficult to argue against the claim that it is a mother’s duty to investigate the public school and ensure that schools are not undermining all her hard work. Demonstrative of the rhetoric of “municipal housekeeping,” Diaz claims that women’s efficiency as mothers qualifies them to lobby for issues related to children in the public sphere.

Finally, Diaz uses the rhetoric of domestic feminism to demand the ballot. She does so by defining voting as a very mundane activity. Discussing the fact that dangerous conditions might develop in a public school that is affecting a mother’s duty at home, Diaz claims: “it might become the duty of the mother to express her opinion by

dropping a slip of paper with a name on it into a hat or a box” (98). Here Diaz convinces her audience that women should vote by portraying suffrage in its most mundane terms as merely expressing one’s opinion via a hat or a box. Throughout *A Domestic Problem*, Diaz’s rhetoric emphasizes women’s talents and domestic role. Like other domestic feminists, she uses the strengths of domestic women to argue for entry into the public sphere.

In her full-length epistolary novel, *From Bybury to Beacon Street*, published in 1887, Diaz continues to advocate for women’s involvement in civic life based on their domestic expertise. The premise of the novel is that a group of neighbors decides to form a club for conversation. While patterned on the format of a woman’s club, the key difference here is that men and women may join. The neighbors meet weekly and cover a variety of topics concerning both genders. The novel is demonstrative of intimacy created in local clubs. In the beginning, the topics seem relatively benign, such as who is more vain, men or women? Diaz then asks serious questions concerning gender equity, as she had in her earlier non-fiction work, *A Domestic Problem*. The group of characters tries to decide how to “lighten the load for women” and comes up with similar answers: don’t iron sheets and towels, sew fewer ruffles and tucks, and dress simply. Just as she begins to answer the question of how to help women in *A Domestic Problem* by initially telling women to do less fancy work, the characters in this section decide that one way to lighten a woman’s load is to stop ironing unnecessary items.

Diaz follows the same rhetorical strategy in her fiction that she did in her non-fiction work. After laying out such benign, practical solutions that would free women’s time to become more involved in public life, Diaz examines the fundamental question of

gender inequality. Diaz titles chapter twenty-seven, “The Root of the Matter.” This section is where her club characters discuss the causes of problems for women. In the context of the discussion, one woman speaks up: “There is an important first step to be taken, a grand foundation sermon to be preached and practiced. The step is to place women on a level with man. The text for the sermon is equality – equality, I mean, of men and women” (226). This character introduces, for the first time in the novel, the notion that men and women are equal. From here, another character agrees and describes the first step necessary for equality: “train up the daughters, as well as the sons, to be self-supporting, not necessarily by men’s employment, but by any employment suited to their tastes or capacities” (230). She defines women as full equals, but she still allows for gender differences by claiming that women should work in the public sphere in accordance with their talents as women. Here, the issue of women working outside the home is introduced. In this example, Diaz actually goes farther in her argument than she does in *A Domestic Problem*. There, her claims centered on how to improve women’s situations at home, so she keeps her arguments within the bounds of the domestic sphere. In her fiction, however, she takes her argument for equality a step further by introducing the idea that all women should have the opportunity to be employed outside the home, the same as men. However, she follows the ideals of municipal housekeeping advocated by the WEIU by suggesting new niches for women’s employment.

In the next chapter, the group continues to discuss working women. Rather than discuss whether women should work in the public realm or not, the club changes the topic to pay equity: “For women, while not getting full price – that is, man’s price, for their work; pay full price for traveling, for entertainments, for religion, for reading-

matter, full rent and full taxes upon property” (236). Another woman offers the suggestion that if women are paid less then they should get discounts on all the expenses of life. Then a woman suggests how equal pay would actually improve women and men: “When the rule is equal pay for equal work,’ said Eunice, ‘what Mr. Johnson would call marrying for support would be much less common. Women will be more independent” (237). The other women in the club agree and decide that if women were more independent, they would demand more from the men they married. Diaz is careful to construct her argument without upsetting too much of the status quo. While she writes of equality for women and how women should be paid the same as men, she still circles her arguments back to domesticity by claiming that the final effect would actually be to improve men for marriage. This twist allows her the space to argue for radical claims but then return to the accepted domestic norm.

Most of this chapter is a discussion between the women of the club. The men do not have much to say and do not reinforce the women’s claims; instead they remain silent for much of these two chapters. Finally, one man speaks up, telling the women that they may stage a debate to decide if men and women are truly equal. Each side may argue its claim fully and then the men will act as judges and decide which side should win. The women of the club quickly point out that this is precisely the problem in the real-life debate over women’s roles: only men have the authority to settle an argument. One woman answers the men of the club: “The real question is not Shall women vote, but Who is to decide whether she shall or not? At present man has the legal right of decision, but this legal right is based on a moral wrong” (259). Through this character’s rebuke,

Diaz is able to highlight a fundamental inequality – women are left out of the legal decision-making process. She even goes so far as to claim that this is morally wrong.

Throughout her writing, Abby Morton Diaz walks a fine line between conservative and radical claims. While her books center on domestic issues or situations, her arguments develop into demands for gender equity, suffrage for women and equal pay for equal work. Diaz's rhetoric is an example of many club leaders' ability to balance their claims for equality with their perception of the domestic sphere. These women do not radically abandon their homes and families; instead, they argue for change from their domestic strengths. By beginning with very modest and rational demands, Diaz is able to find a responsive audience. Then, she moves to more and more destabilizing claims. However, her reasoned tone and seemingly simple logic frees her to demand suffrage and pay equity. By beginning quietly, she can articulate claims that are more radical without ever being accused of being strident or stepping out of her perceived role.

Each claim is carefully based in domesticity: women should be given the right to vote so that, as mothers, they will be able to ensure that their children are treated fairly in schools. Clubwomen across the country used this rhetoric to battle for and win suffrage for local issues like school boards. Clubwomen served on school boards across the country long before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920. Diaz also crafts her argument for pay equity within the framework of marriage, claiming that equal pay would make women more independent and lead them to be more particular about their choices for husbands, thus improving the character of men. This version of domestic

feminism allows Diaz to highlight an issue in the 1880s – equal pay for equal work -- that has still not been resolved in the twenty-first century.

Abby Morton Diaz's work and the rhetoric of the WEIU fundamentally influenced local politics in Boston and helped nationalize the club's rhetoric. The WEIU also supported women writers involved in the club movement. The connections between Diaz, Annie Adams Fields and Sarah Orne Jewett offer an important window into the ways club rhetoric influenced women writers. Understanding the influence that municipal housekeeping had on Jewett's contemporaries contextualizes Jewett's own ideas in this important debate. While critics have thoroughly examined the close relationship between Fields and Jewett, they have not yet examined how Fields' connections to the women's club movement influenced Jewett's writing. Reading Jewett against the clubs' rhetorical vision enlarges our understanding of the nuances in Jewett's work concerning gender. While she appreciates the influence of clubs in her community, Jewett demonstrates a fundamental reluctance to embrace their rhetorical tactics concerning gender. Rather than manipulating gender qualities to argue for equality as domestic feminists do, Jewett is much more likely to argue for equality based on the rights of the individual person. In Jewett's early fiction, the individual's integrity is stronger than the virtue of the collective gender.

Unlike Jewett, Annie Fields embraced a more traditional role for women for much of her life, as a wife, mother, and hostess. When she did enter the public sphere, Fields did so under the auspices of the club movement, embodying their rhetorical vision first as a member of the New England Women's Club and then in the WEIU. She was also involved with many of the reform efforts in Boston, most notably leading the well-known

Associated Charities. As a writer herself and a behind-the-scenes editor for her husband's work with the *Atlantic Monthly*, Annie Fields was able to champion many women writers, including Rebecca Harding Davis and Sarah Orne Jewett. She effectively organized a small salon of women writers in the early 1870s who met regularly to present new work; the circle included Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Celia Thaxter, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lucy Larcom (Gollin 155).

Annie married James T. Fields, the prominent *Atlantic Monthly* editor, at the age of twenty. She was his second wife and was expected to step effortlessly into the role. One of her main duties was to act as hostess to the many celebrated writers whom James brought home. Her home became a meeting place for many of the literary lights of Boston from Hawthorne to Emerson, and she organized formal events for Fields' visiting writers, most notably Charles Dickens. She continued the practice even after James died and Jewett became her primary companion. Many writers, including Henry James and Willa Cather, have memorialized Fields' home, 148 Charles Street. She herself recognized the insight she had into the most celebrated of American authors. For years, she kept a detailed diary that her husband often used for his work and that she used as the basis for her later essays and books.

During her early, married years, Annie's role was private, conforming to the ideals of True Womanhood. For example, critic Susan Harris explains how her work was decidedly feminine. In contrast to the directive work of a mentor such as Ezra Pound or even a more public salon keeper like Gertrude Stein, the hostess's role is to maintain a "domestic 'aura,' a stage where public figures could mingle" (4-5). Harris defines the most important trait of a hostess: she must never call attention to herself. This self-

effacement was important in the home, but Fields did learn other skills as a hostess that later translated to public life. As hostesses, women such as Fields learned a skill set of social and organizational techniques that they then used in public. Harris demonstrates this with Fields' work with the Associated Charities, but does not discuss her club connections. Analyzing Fields' work with women's clubs underscores the ways that the club movement appealed to many domestic feminists like Fields.

Fields was involved with the club movement from the very beginning. While in New York City in 1868, Annie Fields attended the first Sorosis club meeting with the journalist and writer, Kate Field (Gollin 130). The active, career-minded Field was also a lyceum lecturer, a trained singer, actor, playwright and the founder of a cooperative dressmaking association. Back in Boston in late May 1868, Annie Fields went to the first meeting of the New England Women's Club and soon attended regularly. While the club was organized and run by women, a few men attended occasionally, including Annie's husband, James. Fields was equally active in the literary and reform planks of her club and addressed the club on reform issues several times. In her club history, Julia Sprague mentions: "Mrs. James T. Fields' essay led to the appointment of a committee to make inquiries about 'homes for the poor.'" This essay, written in 1871, was persuasive enough that the club took action. Fields' diaries causally mention regular attendance to the club. When Kate Field visited Boston, she also attended meetings with Annie (Gollin 131). Finally, when Annie began her work with the Associated Charities, she spoke to the club about ways to become more involved (Sprague 45).

Abby Morton Diaz first met Annie Fields when she contributed anonymously to the *Atlantic*. She maintained the acquaintance, frequently attending informal gatherings

at Annie's house throughout the 1860s (Gollin 181). By the early 1870s, Diaz was also helping Fields with her philanthropic efforts. Fields asked her to oversee a project to create affordable housing at the Lincoln Street Home. Because Abby Diaz had worked much of her life to support herself, she was an able household manager and fit in well at the Home. Fields also asked Diaz to help plan a series of outings for schoolchildren at the North End Mission in 1874 (Gollin 181). Fields and Diaz became close friends, and Fields commented in her journal in 1876 when Abby was a houseguest: "Mrs. Diaz is struggling with her desire to enlighten the world and sometimes loses her balance, I fear, yet she is dead in earnest and if her culture were equal to her endeavor she could be a power indeed" (181). Fields writes fondly of Diaz's potential and recognizes her passion to improve her surroundings. Abby Diaz also joined Annie's informal salon with Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Lucy Larcom in January of 1877. Fields and Diaz then helped found the Women's Educational and Industrial Union later that year while also continuing to work with the New England Women's Club. While Fields was not as directly involved with the WEIU as Diaz was, both were deeply committed to efforts to bridge class differences and worked in reform for much of their lives (Gollin 182).

Before Fields found her vocation as a public reformer in the city of Boston, she had her own ambitions to write. In her diary, she mentions from time to time the difficulty she had finding unbroken time to write and study. More importantly, she struggles with the tension between her primary role as hostess and the authority needed to write. In one telling entry, Fields laments: "Yet I know there is a heart of a singer hidden in me and I long sometimes to break loose – but on the whole I sincerely prefer to make

others comfortable and happy as I can now do and say fie! to my genius if he does not sing to me from the sauce-pans all the same” (qtd in Roman 29). Fields often wrote verse and wanted to be a successful poet, feeling she had “the heart of a singer hidden in me.” However, she depicts this ambition as trapped beneath her primary role as wife to a successful editor. While Fields was close to many Boston women writers, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rebecca Harding Davis, her position did not allow her to devote herself to her writing. Biographer Judith Roman discusses the quandary Fields experienced. While surrounded by the most noted writers of her generation, she knew that her husband would not champion her own work past a few anonymous fillers in his magazine (29-31). Fields published several volumes of poetry and fiction, including *Asphodel* (1866) and *Under the Olive* (1881). She also published at least fifty poems during her lifetime, yet she was rarely commended as a poet. While her marriage allowed her to host many interesting people, it did not give her the time or confidence to blossom into a noted author herself.

Fields never received acclaim for her efforts in fiction; however, she did publish over fifteen volumes of non-fiction. Her peers celebrated her reminiscences of social life at Charles Street like *A Shelf of Old Books* (1894) and *Authors and Friends* (1896). In addition, she published a biography of Harriet Beecher Stowe and the letters of Celia Thaxter and Sarah Orne Jewett. Roman believes that Fields developed her talent during her long partnership with Jewett. Jewett was able to support her writing in a way that James Fields never could, and the two women could structure their social calendar to have time each day to devote to writing. Roman feels 1896, with the publication of Jewett’s *Country of Pointed Firs* and Fields’ *Author and Friends*, marked the height of

their successful partnership (132). Certainly, the close relationship between the two women helped Fields better envision herself as a writer.

Along with her close relationship with Jewett, Fields' work as a clubwoman and reformer gave her ample subject matter for writing. Like Abby Morton Diaz, Fields published many essays on her reform work, culminating in a full volume, *How to Help the Poor*. The book was first published in 1883; after three more printings, circulation totaled 23,000 copies (Roman 182). While the work is not as focused on gender issues as Diaz's volumes, Fields' writing embodies the call of domestic feminists to serve the broader community professionally and efficiently. In it, Fields describes the haphazard condition of aid to the poor in Boston and the efforts of the Associated Charities, which she led, to improve conditions. The volume outlines how other cities can follow the same path to improvement that Boston has. Fields' tone is brisk, efficient and confident. In sharp contrast to her difficulty in writing fiction, she is on firm ground in this work. Because of the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping developed early in her reform work at the WEIU, Fields sees her role in reform as completely fitted to her femininity. There is no humble posturing; instead, Fields briskly relates her successes. Thanks to the work of domestic feminists, Fields is assured of her right to speak on the issue.

Sarah Orne Jewett and Annie Fields' close relationship has been much documented. Jewett began visits to Boston in 1875. She met Annie Fields December 3, 1879, and, after James's death in 1881, Jewett made lengthy visits to 148 Charles Street in Boston (Silverthorne 71, 92-3). Fields encouraged Jewett's writing life and by the mid 1880s, Jewett had begun to publish short stories and her first novel, *A Country Doctor*. Because of Jewett's awareness of and involvement with the WEIU, her treatment of

gender in her early work is worthy of notice. Close attention to her early writing does show her perspective on the municipal housekeeping movement emerging in Boston. Abby Diaz and Annie Fields used their non-fiction writing on gender to advocate the same ideas that underpinned the WEIU; Diaz even featured club-like gatherings in her fiction. Jewett, however, did not feature clubwomen in her fiction. While intimate with women's clubs in Boston, Jewett's reticence on the subject reflects her ambivalence toward the type of domestic feminism advocated by the WEIU.

Her short story "A Mournful Villager" in her collection *Country By-Ways* demonstrates her attitude toward municipal housekeeping. She opens the essay by lamenting the loss of the New England front yard. At first glance, the essay seems to prefigure her later masterful portrayals of small New England village life. However, her nostalgic tone in the essay is complex. She recognizes the changing character of the country, but her statements about the present are full of ambiguities and contradictions. Early in the essay, she declares: "There is so much to be said in favor of our own day, and the men and women of our own time, that a plea for a recognition of the quaintness and pleasantness of village life in the old days cannot seem unwelcome" (119). While seeming to praise the advances of her times, Jewett also declares that a little nostalgia is necessary. Rather than repudiating the past, she feels that her look back is called for in the tenor of her progressive times.

Throughout the essay, she carefully links gender to the front yard – declaring it a woman's domain³⁵. The passage directly addressing gender seems to begin with a subtle

³⁵Margaret Roman makes the important point that Jewett goes on to refute this position in her later work. See: *Sarah Orne Jewett: Reconstructing Gender* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1992).

critique of the reform activities of her day. Jewett declares: “We are more likely to busy ourselves with finding things to do than in doing with our might the work in our hands already” (120). This statement could be interpreted in reference to the reform activities of women – seeking work and projects outside the direct domestic realm. This seems more plausible considering that the next sentence directly genders the front yard: “The disappearance of many of the village front yards may come to be typical of the altered position of woman, and mark a stronghold on her way from the much talked-of slavery and subjection to a coveted equality” (120). Jewett equates the loss of the front yard with the new progress of women in the late nineteenth century, thanks in no small part to the type of domestic feminism advocated by the WEIU.

In this passage, Jewett alludes to the separate sphere as outlined in Ruskin’s essay, “Of Queen’s Garden.” She writes “She used to be shut off from the wide acres of the farm, and had no voice in the world’s politics; she must stay in the house, or only hold sway out of doors in the prim corner of land where she was queen” (120). On its own, this statement seems to advocate the recent progress of women. Jewett’s tone is even stronger in the final sentence of the passage: “The whole world is their front yard nowadays!” (120). This exclamation is directly reflective of the rhetorical vision advocated by clubwomen like Diaz and Gilman, extending the home into the public life of the “whole world.” Jewett seems to triumphantly endorse the extension of municipal housekeeping into the public sphere. Women have cast away their individual front yards where they were bound as false queens to enter into the public sphere, the whole world, which she defines as a sign of progress.

However, in context of the whole essay, Jewett does not advocate this exodus from the front yard. Instead, she argues for the lost values of privacy and leisure that she feels the front yard stood for. Consistently, she links these values to gender; the front yard belongs to women. She recounts an anecdote of a dying man calling out for the front yard to be mowed so that mourners will not trample the grass at his funeral. Jewett comments on the unusual nature of such a request by a man: “It was not man-like to think of the front yard, since it was the special domain of the women, – the men of the family respected but ignored it, – they had to be teased in the spring to dig flower beds” (124). While earlier praising the progress of women, her lament for the loss of front yards defines them as a woman’s realm. At another point, she again links these lost values with women: “People do not know what they lose when they make way with the reserve, the separateness, the sanctity of the front yard of their grandmothers” (127). This interpretation is not of a genderless space in the home, but is specifically connected to women. Throughout the essay, Jewett’s lament for lost values is complicated by her acknowledgment of the “progress” of her age. Her ambivalence demonstrates her awareness of the effectiveness of the rhetoric of women’s clubs like the WEIU, yet her lamentation over the lost front yard reflects a belief that domestic feminism – the appropriation of the whole world as a front yard – may signal a loss of separate, unique values that Jewett links with the domestic, private arena of the home.

Jewett’s first novel *A Country Doctor* (1884) has often been discussed as a defense of Jewett’s choice of a writing life³⁶. While this is certainly true, in light of

³⁶ See: Gwen L. Nagel, *Critical Essays on Sarah Orne Jewett* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984) and Sarah Way Sherman, *Sarah Orne Jewett: An American Persephone* (Hanover: UP of New England for U of New Hampshire, 1989).

Jewett's association with the WEIU, the debate in the novel over the heroine, Nan, and her decision to become a doctor mirrors the emerging debate over women's separate, public spaces. In the sections where Nan visits Dunport, this debate is depicted through Nan's conversations with her upper-class aunt and the young people she meets through her aunt. The WEIU's rhetorical vision appears in Jewett's depiction of Nan, which embodies the WEIU's notion of public work for women; Jewett positively identifies with Nan's labor in contrast to the leisured life of Dunport society. This comparison is similar to Diaz's suggestions to cut back on frivolous sewing to have time to devote to reform projects.

In the novel, Nan (short for Anna) is a young orphan who is taken in by a kind, country doctor, Dr. Leslie. As a girl, she often rides along on visits with the doctor and soon feels that medicine is her calling. Dr. Leslie encourages her and funds her study in medical school. Nan's one surviving relative, her father's sister, was estranged because of his "low" marriage to Nan's mother. Thus, while she sends Nan a yearly allowance, Miss Prince does not maintain contact with the girl. Once Nan is a young adult, studying in medical school, she decides to pursue meeting Miss Prince and learn about her roots. A visit to the wealthy aunt in Dunport is arranged; among the "society" of Dunport, Nan encounters the first real resistance to her choice of profession.

The discord between Nan and Miss Prince's society mirrors the ideals of the WEIU, especially Abby Morton Diaz's exhortations to the upper class. Diaz consistently encouraged wealthy women to "set a good example" by working more and consuming less. Therefore, a life of productive work is preferable to excessively feminine acts such as unnecessary sewing and socializing. A similar dichotomy is depicted in *A Country*

Doctor. From Nan's first introduction to Dunport society, she is portrayed as nobly wanting to do useful work while the upper class of Dunport socializes excessively. Early in the visit, Nan reflects on her life in Dunport as compared to her recent studies in medical school. Jewett writes: "She wished to get Dunport itself by heart, but she had become so used to giving the best of herself to her studies, that she was a little shy of the visiting and the tea-parties and the apparently fruitless society life of which she had already learned something" (236). Nan does not wholeheartedly embrace the lifestyle of the leisure class of Dunport; instead, she holds herself apart and already characterizes her new friends' activities as the "apparently fruitless society life." Through this contrast, Jewett emphasizes the efforts of the WEIU to encourage privileged women to meaningfully contribute to their communities. Nan concludes that it is better to be among people with whom one shares genuine interests: "The feeling of a lack of connection with the people whom she had met made life appear somewhat blank" (236). This feeling of the blankness of society life stays with Nan throughout her stay in Dunport.

Early in this section of the novel, the young people whom Nan meets are repeatedly described as "pleasant," "pleasure-seeking," and "idle." They spend all their time creating socializing within their own set, but they do not reach out to their community. Nan is embraced by a social set "who had little thought of anything but amusement in the pleasant summer weather" (268). For Nan, the summer is a vacation, a rest after a year of difficult study. However, Jewett characterizes this "idleness" as a permanent state for the other young characters: "Picnics and tea-drinkings followed each other, and the pleasure boats went up river and down river, while there were walks and

rides and drives, and all manner of contrivances and excuses for spending much time together on the part of the young men and maidens” (268). Jewett emphasizes the extended socializing of the “young set” with her repeated descriptions of pleasure excursions and lists of leisure activities. Jewett characterizes all this activity as continuing on its own inertia and soon Nan is swept along as well: “There seemed to be a sort of inevitableness about the visit; Nan herself hardly knew why she was drifting on day after day without reasonable excuse” (270).

While Nan is slightly troubled by the sudden unproductive turn her life has taken, everyone else in her life encourages her to continue enjoying herself. This encouragement occurs in the context of Nan’s new upper-class peers; they perceive their idleness as part of their privilege. Jewett allows Nan to succumb to this pressure, by describing Nan as “going with the flow” and using water metaphors like “drifting” and “drift with the stream” to describe Nan’s actions. Nan passively adjusts to her new society’s expectations and ignores her own studies: “It seemed impossible, and perhaps unwise, to go on with the reading she had planned . . . and when the temptation to drift with the stream first made itself felt, the reasons for opposing it seemed to fade away” (270). The society Nan has entered has the feel of a lazy river slowly drifting downstream, and Nan finds it easiest to follow the current.

Jewett allows Nan to temporarily succumb to the lifestyle of her new peers, but she clearly favors Nan’s ultimate professional choice by contrasting Nan favorably with one particular unmarried Dunportian, Miss Fraley. Miss Eunice Fraley, the daughter of the dominant member of their social circle, is the only young person in Dunport who listens to Nan about her ambitions to be a doctor. Jewett characterizes her as having: “the

manner of one who dares to be a conspirator against public opinion and possibly the permanent welfare of society” (271). In a light-hearted manner, the narrator makes clear that Miss Fraley is a bit of a revolutionary for agreeing with Nan. While a “conspirator,” Miss Fraley is in no position to study for a profession or leave her family’s home.

The contrast between the two characters emphasizes Nan’s ability to pursue a new path and Miss Fraley’s entrapment in the domestic sphere. Jewett then draws her strongest comparison between the two: “poor Miss Fraley looked at her young friend as a caged bird at a window might watch a lark’s flight” (272). Thus, to take the route of domesticity that Miss Fraley seems destined for is to be a “caged bird.” Later, Jewett compares the two girls to two plants. Miss Fraley is “like a hindered little house-plant;” however, being near Nan allows her to take “a long breath of delight . . . and felt as if somebody had set her roots free from their familiar prison” (303). The houseplant metaphor depicts domestic life such as Miss Fraley’s as a confining container one must desire to escape. Not only is such a domestic lifestyle confining, but also it will never allow Miss Fraley to fully develop because she will never have enough space to reach her potential. Thus, Jewett subverts the typical nineteenth-century argument that a woman’s place is “naturally in the home.” Instead, Nan is depicted as more natural and free, while women’s typical domestic space is shown as cramped and confining

In the chapter “A Serious Tea-Drinking,” Nan faces her most serious rebuke for her decision to be a doctor. Up to this point, Jewett seems to favorably emphasize much of the rhetoric of the WEIU. She clearly portrays Nan as the more likable character, intent on pursuing honorable work rather than frivolous activities. However, in this chapter, she breaks away from the gendered argument clubwomen used to enter the

public sphere and instead argues for equality based on the talent of the individual. In this scene, Mrs. Fraley has invited Nan and Miss Prince to tea with the express purpose of telling Nan how wrong her decision is. As the leader of Dunport's social circle, Mrs. Fraley feels it completely necessary to tell the young Nan the errors of her ways. At tea, after telling Nan that she's heard the young woman wants to be a doctor, she says: "I hope that you don't countenance any such nonsense?" (277). Right away, Mrs. Fraley trivializes Nan's choice of vocation by calling it "nonsense."

In the confrontation between Nan and Mrs. Fraley, Mrs. Fraley marshals the traditional argument that women belong to a separate, domestic sphere. To combat her, Nan argues from the point of the individual, claiming that not all women are suited for marriage. While Nan does argue from the position that women's talents should be used to help others, she does not argue that her feminine talents are her credentials to enter the public sphere. In fact, unlike the women's club movement that largely consisted of married women, Nan's argument rests on her single state. Believing that she will never marry, she feels that she has the right as a talented individual to enter the public sphere. In this instance, Jewett counters the separate sphere rhetoric with the line of argument based on the power of the individual rather than making an argument based on gender as the WEIU does.

Much like Ruskin, Mrs. Farley argues that confining women to the domestic sphere is part of the natural order. In reference to Nan choice of a profession, Mrs. Farley replies: "My dear, it is quite unnatural you see" (282). From her perspective, Nan's desire for a professional life goes against the natural separation of the genders. Mrs. Farley continues, citing almost every cliché available for the doctrine of separate spheres:

“A woman’s place is at home . . . The best service to the public can be done by keeping one’s own house in order and one’s husband comfortable, and by attending to those social responsibilities which come in our way. The mothers of the nation have rights enough and duties enough already, and need not look farther than their own firesides, or wish for the plaudits of an ignorant public” (282). Here Mrs. Farley uses the conservative argument that women influence the public good by tending to their home; her main logic is that it is natural for women to remain at home. She also believes in women’s role as supporters who should do their work behind the scenes without any need for acknowledgement or fame.

Nan counters by arguing for the naturalness of the individual: “But if I do not wish to be married, and do think it right that I should be” (282). Nan believes instead that she has special talent as an individual, regardless of her gender. This talent outweighs her responsibility to a traditional gender role. She makes her claim as an individual stronger by arguing: “I won’t attempt to say that the study of medicine is a proper vocation for women, only that I believe more and more every year that it is the proper study for me” (283). Nan does not claim that all women should be doctors based on their talents as women; instead, she argues that she should become a doctor based on her individual talents. While Mrs. Farley argues in generalities for all women, Nan does not agree. Right before this declaration, she begins to argue that medicine is a worthwhile path for her because “if I can help my neighbors in this way it will be a great kindness” (282). It seems that she is beginning to construct the argument that her special qualities as a woman – the ability to help others that was so emphasized by women’s clubs for example – call her to medicine. However, she backs away from such an argument and

instead appeals to her individual authority by refusing to say that any single profession is proper for all women, only that medicine is proper for her.

In fact, Nan claims that no single path is right for all women: “It certainly cannot be the proper vocation of all women to bring up children, so many of them are dead failures at it; and I don’t see why all girls should be thought failures who do not marry” (283). In contrast to Mrs. Farley, Nan believes that each woman must decide for herself what her vocation is. Nan does cede the validity of separate spheres to Mrs. Farley: “it [marriage] is a natural condition of life, which permits a man to follow certain public careers, and forbids them to a woman” (285). Here Nan acknowledges that certain paths are open only to women while other, public, careers are available to men. In fact, she even describes it as natural. However, she bases her argument on the fact that she does not see herself as fit to be married; therefore, she should have to opportunity to enter a public career.

In this moment, we see the weakness in Nan’s argument as well. While she attempts to argue for the rights of the individual, regardless of gender, here she accepts that the rules are different for married women. In her logic then, she must not marry in order to pursue her career. This is quite different from the arguments for entrance into the public sphere that the married women of the WEIU were making. Jewett’s depiction of the debate over separate spheres in this passage shows the complications and slippery paths of several versions of such a doctrine; ultimately, no side seems fully satisfactory, and Jewett envisions a successful career for her heroine only as long as she remains single. While Jewett seems to agree with the WEIU’s cross-class advocacy, she also cautions against the extension of domestic feminists’ claims that women are uniquely

qualified to reform the public sphere. Instead, Jewett bases her arguments for gender equity on the rights of individuals.

Conclusion

Municipal housekeeping was the central tenet of the reform work of women's clubs in the Progressive Era. Rather than challenge gender discrimination directly, domestic feminists manipulated existing rhetoric to their advantage. For example, the essays of John Ruskin proved an excellent wedge for club leaders because his emphasis on a woman's role as a "true lady" stemmed from the root concept of "bread-giver." This etymology gave club leaders the ammunition to encourage women to enter the public sphere through reform work. Leaders built on this concept by stressing the preparation they had gained through years of studying within clubs. They also used parliamentary procedure to train women to communicate in public. Finally, women such as Abby Morton Diaz used the strengths attributed to women as wives and mothers to argue for entrance into the public sphere, suffrage, and full equality.

From the early debates over women's roles seen in the formation of the WEIU and Jewett's fiction, a clear vision of municipal housekeeping emerges, one that justifies women's activities in the public rooted in the gender-based values of the middle class. After the Civil War, clubwomen attempted to enter the public sphere by using the rhetoric of their unique qualities of their gender. While there were dissenters to this opinion, such as Jewett's arguments for equality based on the individual, domestic feminism became the most appealing route for the women who joined clubs after the Civil War. Clubwomen used the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to create a new niche in the public sphere. Their rhetorical vision influenced the politics of their

communities as they reached out across class boundaries. The writings of Abby Morton Diaz, Annie Adams Fields, and Sarah Orne Jewett demonstrate the important work it took to create new opportunities for women in the late nineteenth century.

Chapter Four

“Standing on a Precipice”: The Professionalization of Municipal Housekeeping

The club movement’s rhetorical vision transformed a generation of women from isolated housewives into a political force. As clubwomen and domestic feminists developed a rhetoric that balanced traditional ideas of femininity with political action, women writers spread this rhetoric and commented on its effectiveness. As the club movement grew, its goals changed; by 1900, a new generation of women added to the GFWC’s rhetorical vision. While self-education was a primary goal of the earliest clubwomen, a majority of this second generation had gone to college. Many of these women were not content to continue the volunteer work of their mothers. Instead, they attempted to professionalize such benevolent work and find permanent careers for themselves.

This chapter examines this second generation’s rhetoric concerning their new ambitions. These clubwomen helped create new careers by using the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. By incorporating traditional strands of gender behavior into

their ambitions and capitalizing on the network of women the club movement reached, they were able to forge new paths for women. Clubwoman and professional journalist Elia Wilkins Peattie shaped the rhetoric of this transition through her writing, which included *The Precipice*, published in 1914. The rhetoric in this novel reflects the strategy clubwomen used to create new careers. By relying on networks of activist women and incorporating feminine language, women filled the ranks of emerging professions like social work.

While clubwomen embraced this feminine rhetoric to create new professional identities, some women had a more difficult time entering established careers. Two women writers, Mary Austin and Willa Cather, depict such difficulties in their novels, *A Woman of Genius* (1913) and *The Song of the Lark* (1915). Published closely before and after Peattie's novel, these two works portray different professional ambitions. Austin and Cather never joined the club movement, but both had close, personal experiences with it. Their awareness of clubs' rhetorical vision is apparent in these two novels. How they handle club rhetoric sheds light on their perspectives about these communities of women in the first decades of the twentieth century.

These three novels demonstrate the tension and joy women experienced in the early twentieth century. Peattie's novel serves as a road map to the rhetoric clubwomen used to shrewdly create new career opportunities for women. By viewing the city as a site of liberation and declaring one's ambition through a feminine vocabulary, these women were able to create new lives. The rhetorical vision of clubwomen created new opportunities, from paid employment at the local level all the way to the federal government. Acknowledging the political work of this rhetoric enhances interpretations

of more established writers like Cather and Austin. In contrast to the rhetoric of clubwomen, their texts have a complicated relationship to the city. Neither heroine completely embraces the city as a site of freedom. While Cather and Austin do not depend on the feminine rhetoric of the clubs, both find ways to connect with their female audiences. Finally, all three novels serve as important models of how women embraced and articulated their new ambitions during this important period in women's history.

Club Work Professionalizes

The second generation of clubwomen focused on the professionalization of their club duties. Since many of them had attended college, they were less interested in studying the liberal arts³⁷. Instead, these women wanted opportunities to apply all they had learned in school. For example, Peattie dramatizes these feelings in her novel, *The Precipice*. Kate, the heroine, complains that her college education is being wasted after she must return to her small hometown. In a letter to her friend back in Chicago, Kate writes: "I am like a runner who has trained for a race, and ready for the speeding, finds that no race is on" (Peattie 8). Here, Peattie voices the common lament of women in this transitional generation. "Liberated" enough to get an education at universities and colleges across the country, these women were frustrated to return to homes where they were not able to apply what they had learned. Finding male-dominated careers closed to them, clubwomen strove to create new ones.

Before analyzing the rhetoric clubwomen used to shift from volunteer to professional identities, it is important to understand the climate in which these women

³⁷ For an interesting discussion of early collegiate writing courses and their effect on professional writers, see Katharine H. Adams's *A Group of their Own: College Writing Courses and American Women Writers, 1880-1940* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2001).

acted. Historian Robyn Muncy focuses on the connectivity of women's efforts to professionalize during the Progressive Era. In *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform: 1890-1935*, Muncy posits that middle-class white women in America continuously worked to reform their cities. These women, including many clubwomen, saw the city as an extension of their duties and a place to create new careers. Their rhetoric articulated women's professional ambitions and appeared in the fiction of many women writers of the period.

As women labored to transform their amateur efforts in clubs and other volunteer networks into professional careers, their gender proved a difficult constraint. Muncy explains: "By validating behaviors traditionally associated with men, professionalization put aspiring women into perpetual conflict. If they donned the behavioral garb appropriate to professional life, they invited criticism for being unfeminine. If they refused to wear the suit, they lost the aura of professional authority" (xiii). Just as the domestic feminists who led the early club movement had to negotiate a path between their own ambitions and the rhetoric of femininity, so too these early professionals found that the characteristics of traditional femininity, like passivity and self-sacrifice, put them at a disadvantage. This rhetoric was in direct conflict with the masculine behavior of the workplace, where confidence and ambition had to be articulated.

Therefore, to succeed, women had to walk a fine line between two clashing scripts. Often, rather than directly dismantling the rhetoric of femininity, these women sought to forge new careers especially suited to their "feminine talents." According to Muncy: "Women thus endured unique conflicts in the professionalization process, devised unique strategies for coping with those conflicts, and often followed unique

career paths as a result” (xiii). When women attempted to enter male-dominated careers like medicine or law, they faced fierce opposition and discrimination. Muncy explains that few of these women were able to mentor other women. Instead, they had to pour all their energies into clinging to their own careers. On the other hand, female-dominated professions like nursing or teaching did allow time for mentoring. However, these professions were still dependant on male leaders like doctors or school administrators (xiii).

Muncy’s study examines the new professions created during the Progressive Era that were filled with women. She focuses on social work, public health nursing, home economics and doctors in female specialties. These professions, often pioneered by the volunteer efforts of clubwomen, were able to reconcile the competing rhetoric of femininity and professionalization by appealing to the special talents of women. Muncy elaborates: “In these professions, women were freer in their attempts to reconcile professional ideals with values from female culture” (xiv). Thus, building on the work of early women, these women were able to create new ideals of professionalism.

Many of these new professions were pioneered in major urban areas. Muncy closely examines the dominion of child welfare policy centered around Hull House in Chicago (xvi). The settlement house was an important transition toward professionalization. For this younger group of women, the women’s club did not provide as satisfying an outlet as it had for their mothers. Often college educated, these women wanted to enter careers and develop their talents. However, women’s clubs were an important source of support for settlement houses; many of Addams’s early recruits came out of the Chicago Women’s Club. Muncy demonstrates how the settlement house

furthered the rhetoric clubwomen had initiated with their municipal housekeeping. According to Muncy Hull House was “an incubator for the new female-dominated professions and a peculiarly female professional culture that held public service to be its supreme value” (xvi). From this nexus, women in Chicago were able to launch a national platform: the Children’s Bureau. Muncy ably argues how leaders used national networks of women, including clubwomen, to lobby for legislation and the establishment of social workers and child welfare professionals. For these women, the city was the site of their networks and their careers.

Muncy’s work provides a useful metaphor of a dominion of professionalization. She shows how women, who had often worked together in clubs and women’s colleges, were prepared to build the networks needed to forge their new careers. She also shows the necessity of such careers. Male-dominated professions were not welcoming newly college-educated women. Instead, these women had to create new choices by manipulating the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to prove that they were especially suited for careers concerning the care of women and children.

At the core of the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping is the claim that women have always worked. The city was just a different venue for them to perform the same work they performed in the home. Club leaders may have incorporated stereotypes of domesticity into their rhetoric of municipal housekeeping, but they had to combat one important class-based stereotype in order to forge new career paths for women. Repeatedly, club leaders mock the “lady of leisure.” As demonstrated in Chapter One, clubwomen emphasized that their gatherings were a site of work, not relaxation. In Gilman and Winslow’s fiction, the clubwomen who saw their clubs primarily as a social

pecking order were consistently denigrated. In both novels, the heroines are younger women who emphasize the important reform work of clubs. As club leaders attempted to secure paying positions in local and state government for the social services their clubs provided, they emphasized that it was “natural” for women to work. In contrast to an unnatural leisure, clubs portrayed women throughout history as workers. Therefore, it was natural for women to continue to work in the public sphere.

Demonstrative of this claim, Caroline French Benton’s *Woman’s Club Work and Programs* outlines a detailed list of topics and books to study on a variety of topics, including “The Employment of Women.” In this outline, Benton suggests that clubs study the history of women’s work for seven weeks before moving to modern careers. Rather than simply identifying the labor of women or women’s work, Benton consistently describes the “employment” of women, demonstrating how women have long been paid for their work or participated in the public sphere, from the Middle Ages to the present. This designation arms women with an effective argument as they try to lobby their local governments to include more positions for women; not only have women long labored in the home, but they have been *paid* for their work throughout history.

Benton’s first five weeks of study cover traditional skills like pottery, spinning, weaving, embroidery, lace-making, and basket-weaving. Benton stresses the public uses of these crafts, as in the unit on spinning and weaving: “Notice the tapestries of later days, especially those first woven in Flanders and Arras, which were so valuable they were used only by royalty or in churches” (275). Along with studying textiles made at

home, Benton encourages clubwomen to study the tapestries that were used only in civic or public spaces like the court or cathedral.

From traditional crafts, Benton proposes a month of study on “Modern-Handicraft for Women.” Here, Benton wants women to see an expanded list of work for women. She emphasizes the professional nature of such work by instructing women to study “schools where designing is taught, and tell what is done there” (278). She wants women to study design work by women that must be taught in a professional setting; by highlighting the need for credentials to do this work, she emphasizes the professional aspect of “designing work.” Her list includes traditional work of women like quilting, knitting, crocheting, and patchwork, but she also lists bookbinding, jewelry-making, furniture, work in leather and wood, all of which may be considered as work done traditionally by male artisans. In this way, she expands the list of acceptable work for women and stresses the professional nature of such skills.

The next two months in Benton’s study outline cover women in the professions, the arts, and business. Here too, Benton blends traditional work of women with new careers. In the first month, she suggests looking at pioneers in different disciplines. Here, she mixes early women in masculine fields like astronomy (Caroline Herschel) and sculpture (Harriet Hosmer) with emerging career paths for women, including philanthropy (Elizabeth Fry) and “the lecture field” (Mary A. Livermore). She also suggests adding “doctors, lawyers, ministers, editors, teachers, and nurses” to the course of study, again blending masculine careers with traditional paths for women like teaching and nursing. This tactic allows Benton to point to women who were able to succeed in

male-dominated careers, while simultaneously elevating careers that are heavily populated by women, such as the lecture field and teaching.

Finally, Benton outlines a week of “summary” where she encourages women to evaluate their place in the professional field. She offers the following list of questions for discussion:

Close with a broad view of the whole subject. What about woman’s work in general? Is it well done and well paid? What of factory work, domestic service, and work in shops? Under what conditions is such work done? What of the question of equal pay? What of the ‘living wage’? What is being done for working girls? Do settlements, vacation homes, and the like meet their needs? Read Olive Schriener’s *Woman and Labor*. (280)

Benton’s suggestions for the last week read like suggestions for a twentieth-century consciousness-raising session. She encourages clubwomen to consider the fundamental nature of women’s labor and how they are compensated for it. She also encourages them to read Olive Schriener, a Progressive feminist who was popular on various clubs’ reading lists. Throughout Benton’s outline, she underscores the long history of women’s employment and expands career options for women by listing newer career choices for women along with traditional professions like medicine and the sciences.

In a 1915 issue of the *General Federation of Women’s Clubs Magazine*, Agnes Peterson makes a similar argument from tradition in her effort to secure women inspectors in factories. Peterson claimed that, in 1915, 8,000,000 women worked in industry in the United States, many of them under twenty-one. She calls for female inspectors to make sure that factory conditions are clean and safe. Peterson stresses that women are not new to the workforce, just new to this particular facet of the work force: she claims that women have “always worked.” Peterson continues her argument from tradition: “Woman has always been a manufacturer of clothing and food products. In

fact, each home was a manufactory unto itself until the invention of machinery took woman's work from the home and placed it in the factory" (18). Like other clubwomen, Peterson, in her effort to secure new professional jobs for women, claims that women have always been working; the only change is that now they perform that work in the public sphere.

To sustain their rhetorical vision, engage in reform work, and push for the creation of new jobs women could fill, clubwomen relied on a network of magazines and newspapers to broadcast work to other clubwomen. This allowed women to share ideas, strategies, and successes with other clubs. This rhetorical tactic encouraged women to try the projects other clubs had started and hope for similar results. A sampling of success stories from the second generation of clubs' publications show how completely they emphasized reform work to encourage other clubs to take up similar projects. The stories also demonstrate Muncy's thesis by describing how clubwomen created new jobs within their communities and then lobbied that fellow clubwomen fill them.

Typical of the praise of clubs' reform work is *The Mother of Clubs: Caroline M. Seymour Severance*. Severance was an original member of the New England Woman's Club who moved to Los Angeles and founded several large, successful clubs in California. The author praises the work of the Friday Morning Club, which was founded in 1891. She emphasizes the new jobs for women in Los Angeles that the club helped create: "it secured the appointment of a woman on the city school board and supported the candidacy of Mrs. Kate Tupper Galpin for county superintendent of schools; it has always stood staunchly by the woman librarians; it has taken a deep interest in establishing and supporting the Juvenile Court" (Ruddy 45). While many homemaker

clubwomen did not rush to fill professional positions in their communities, they were proud of their efforts to create good jobs and positions of influence for other women. Likewise, Dorothea Moore, in *The Work of the Women's Clubs in California*, describes the results of lobbying work in San Francisco: "The altruistic work of these clubs has been to assist in securing women physicians in insane asylums and homes for feeble minded throughout the state" (258). This is another example of clubs successfully using indirect means to create new professional jobs for women.

To justify women's entrance into the work force, clubwomen used many of the same arguments they used to justify their own volunteer reform work. By highlighting their special talents as women, they stressed that sometimes only a woman was suited for a particular job. This tactic was especially effective for the type of work clubwomen did, including social services for women and children. In her argument for women inspectors in factories, Agnes Peterson claims that only women will succeed. She says: "Men can safeguard machinery, look after fire escapes, etc., but only a woman can put herself in the position of another woman working long hours, day after day, week after week, in a poorly-ventilated room, or in an establishment where a low standard of morals is present. The standard of morals in an establishment is as necessary of consideration as anything else, and only a woman with woman's intuition can grasp at conditions as they are" (18). Since women have stereotypically been placed in charge of the protection of a moral standard, only women can enforce that standard in the work place. According to Peterson, the special ability of women, their "intuition," strengthens the argument that they should be paid for professional work.

As they made it their mission to create a permanent space for women in the public sphere, many club leaders realized that some limitations to their success could only be corrected with the ballot. While the GFWC did not officially endorse suffrage until 1917, many individual clubs began calling for the right to vote earlier. In 1910, William Hard published the pro-suffrage pamphlet “The Women of Tomorrow” and was reprinted in 1911 as “Chicago Women as Citizens: a Description of the Work of the Chicago Women’s Club.” This text was also widely cited by club leaders who encouraged study programs on suffrage. For example, Alice Hazel Cass cites Hard as an outside resource for clubs in her manual of club programs published in 1913.

The central argument of the essay is a clever twist on the claims of municipal housekeeping. In order to emphasize the need for women’s talents in the public sphere, Hard first claims that men have taken over the traditional work of women like the production of textiles. The pamphlet, one of the rare pieces about club work written by a man, takes an outsider’s perspective. A man and an unnamed woman stand on top of a tall building in Chicago, and the woman contrasts the raw materials of the city floating in on an ore-boat with the noisy life of the city below in a tenement. She places the ore boat in the category of producing wealth and calls it “well done.” In contrast, she describes the tenement as an example of “using wealth” and describes it as “done ill” (1). She creates a division between producing and consuming that would seem to reinforce the cult of domesticity’s division of spheres based on gender.

However, instead of reigning supreme in the women’s sphere, she claims that man’s sphere of industry has taken over many aspects of housekeeping such as manufacturing clothes and furniture, and says even children’s parks and playgrounds are

controlled by men: “You are increasingly housekeeper, and even mother. You not only control Working. You also control Living.” By stating that men have actually invaded the traditional women’s sphere, the woman can claim the imbalance needs to be corrected. She does so by emphasizing women’s special talents. She claims that men do not have the same homemaking instincts as women: therefore, “to make a city a home, to elicit from discordant elements a harmonious total of warm, charming, noble livable life – you will never do it by yourself” (6). The woman concedes that men may be excellent at generating capital, but she argues that they will never equal women at creating a home. In keeping with the clubs’ rhetorical vision, the argument for women’s involvement in the public sphere is justified by claiming that the whole city should be a home.

The man counters that women can influence the city through “good works,” supporting a traditional anti-suffrage argument based on women’s influence over men.³⁸ The woman seems to agree and lists the contributions of the Chicago Women’s Club from starting a kindergarten to classes at the Art Institute to teaching people in tenements. Then she sums up: “You have grown accustomed to all this. The Chicago Women’s Club, the scores of other woman’s clubs in this city, the thousands in this country – you expect them to be active. But you do not perceive the consequences” (8). The woman then argues that the work started by women in clubs needs to be finished by professional women in the public sphere.

She chooses two specific examples, a kindergarten and a school lunch program, and details how the daily workings of each program have been turned over to the

³⁸ For scholarship on the anti-suffrage movement, see: Jane Jerome Camhi’s *Women against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1994) and Thomas Jablonsky’s *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1994).

management of government, which means the management of men. Thus these women may initiate “good works” but men in the city still perceive them as ladies of leisure and bar them from leadership positions in the public school system and city government. Women are agitating for suffrage in order to manage the programs they began in clubs. In this line of thinking, fitting in the clubwomen’s rhetorical vision of progression, the next natural step is for women to lead the programs they began in clubs. To do so, they must gain the right to vote. As the woman says: “So let’s say no more about the suffrage agitation. It’s simply a sequel to women’s interest in the world’s housekeeping” (19). Therefore, women’s campaigning for full citizenship is natural-- not a radical overstepping of their bounds. They now need to vote to finish the work they began in women’s clubs. This pamphlet shows how women confidently portrayed their achievements and used them as a basis to agitate for more change, including the right to vote.

Peattie, Cather, and Austin: The Ambitions of Women Writers

The three women in this chapter do not have close biographical ties. While Cather and Austin met, we have no evidence that either knew Peattie. However, all three serve as fascinating examples of the second generation of women exposed to clubs. While Cather and Austin did not embrace the club movement, their lives follow the trajectory Peattie charts in her novel, *The Precipice*. Born in small towns, both Cather and Austin attended college, moved to larger cities, and eventually New York City. Both strove their whole lives to forge careers as writers. Both lived with the complicated tension of distinguishing their lives from the traditional model of marriage and children. Both intimately knew clubwomen and were aware of the clubs’ rhetorical vision, yet

neither fully embraced the clubs' use of traditional female stereotypes to carve a place for women in the public sphere. This awareness is reflected in their writing; neither wholeheartedly embraced the rhetorical model Peattie and other club leaders developed, but both adapted it to their own beliefs.

On the other hand, Elia Wilkins Peattie's long life mirrors the transformation clubwomen charted from volunteer to professional. As one of the first female journalists in Chicago, she witnessed the work of Addams and others to create new careers for women. She then fictionalized their efforts in her novel, *The Precipice*. Peattie has never been embraced by the canon of women's literature, yet she was a professional and prolific writer for over thirty years. Born in 1863, ten years before Willa Cather, Peattie's biography has several similarities. Peattie was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan; her father, a lawyer, moved the family to Chicago when Elia was nine. Like Cather, Elia was uprooted as a young girl. However, she was transplanted to the bustling city of Chicago rather than the lonely plains of Nebraska (Raftery 51).

Like many young women of her generation, including Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Peattie found the transition to adulthood very difficult. At the age of twenty, she was thrilled to have her first poem, "Ode to Neptune," published in the *Chicago Tribune*. However, the same year, she also suffered a mental and physical breakdown. To recover, her doctor suggested that she leave home and move in with a friend (51). Peattie blamed her father for her unhappy childhood and suffered from his disapproval of her relationship with Robert Burns Peattie (54). Peattie was fortunate to have a doctor who recommended distance from her controlling father rather than the debilitating rest cure other women of her generation were forced to endure. At her

friend's home, she recovered and married Robert Burns Peattie the next year, at the age of twenty-one. Both she and her husband began to write and publish stories to earn a living. Peattie then had two children in quick succession. However, she was able to keep writing, and the *Chicago Tribune* asked her to write regularly, covering society events and art. Peattie was the first woman reporter on the staff and thoroughly enjoyed her professional responsibilities (51).

In 1888, the Peatties moved to Omaha and both Elia and Robert secured positions with the *Omaha World-Herald*. According to Judith Raftery, "her eight years in Omaha were crucial to her development as a writer and as a woman independent of her husband" (51). Her professional life developed on several fronts. In addition to her regular work for the newspaper, the Northwestern Railroad Company commissioned her to write a travel guide on the Pacific Northwest and Alaska (Raftery 53). She left her family in Omaha and traveled extensively to research her book. She also became more involved with politics after an 1890 meeting with William Jennings Bryan. She was enamored with his populist platform and began churning out stories supporting his ideas. In one such story, "Jim Lancy's Waterloo," a family's isolated and difficult life on the Nebraska prairie is made worse by "the heartlessness of the railroad companies" (qtd in Raftery 53). The story was published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1894 and reprinted for Populist propaganda.

Like other writers in this study, Peattie's professional growth came while she was also involved with the women's club movement. Peattie joined the Omaha Woman's Club and proved a popular and dedicated member; the club soon elected her president. According to Raftery, Peattie praised the club movement in a 1929 unpublished memoir

as “making women’s existence bearable by ‘putting the social factor’ in otherwise ‘sordid and heartbreakingly dull lives’” (53). Peattie’s club supported her intellectually and helped her to continue writing while also raising a family.

After eight years in Omaha, Elia and her family moved back to Chicago in 1896. The last of her four children was also born that year. Her years in Chicago were even more productive than her time in Omaha. She published one hundred short stories in the *Tribune* in as many days to pay for renovations to her home in 1899 (Peattie xiii). Throughout her career, she published another hundred short stories in national magazines like *Youth’s Companion* and *Atlantic Monthly* because, in her words, “the stories sold” (qtd in Peattie xiii). In 1904, Peattie, in collaboration with Jane Addams, launched a series for *Harper’s Weekly* called “Woman of the Hour” (Szuberla 63). Then, in 1906, she became a full-time literary critic for the *Tribune* (Raftery 54). In her unpublished memoir, Peattie makes it clear that she wrote for the newspaper and magazines to pay the bills: “the eternal reading and reviewing of books. . . destroyed my originality and ate up my vitality. However, it brought in thousands of dollars. My talents were slain, but the bills were paid, the children educated” (qtd in Peattie xiii). While Peattie did not glamorize her work for the *Tribune*, she was pleased at her competency and ability to support her family.

Throughout her child-raising years, Peattie’s rhetoric was similar to most other domestic feminists. She praised women’s special talents and emphasized their concerns and needs. Like other domestic feminists, she believed in women’s ability to influence public policy through lobbying and indirect means. In the second decade of the twentieth century, Peattie began to support women’s suffrage. By this time, other domestic

feminists also were realizing the limitations they faced without the ballot. In 1910, Peattie published glowing reviews of Addams and Laughlin's books about Hull House. She also praised a suffrage novel, *Sally Bishop*, by Mr. E Temple Thurston; Thurston's novel laid the foundation for her own fiction (Peattie xx). After eight years writing literary reviews, Peattie published her first novel, *The Precipice*, in 1914. She described the novel as portraying "the idea that all women, willing or not, are caught up in 'the woman movement of the twentieth century'" (qtd in Peattie xx).

In *The Precipice*, Peattie follows the life of a young woman from a small town to the bustling city of Chicago to life in the West and a national career. Peattie loosely based the novel on fellow Chicagoan, Julia Lathrop. Lathrop was an intimate of Hull House and went on to head the Children's Bureau in Washington, DC in 1912. Lathrop was the first woman to head a federal bureau and used her national connections to clubwomen and settlement workers to wedge a niche for women in the federal government. The bureau began with a staff of fifteen and a small budget; however, in several years, Lathrop managed to dramatically increase the budget and get the staff up to seventy-six people (Muncy 63).

Muncy explains how reform workers were able to get Lathrop to head the Bureau; their work is demonstrative of the tactics used by domestic feminists to transform amateur reform work into professional careers. Legend has it that over breakfast in 1903, Lillian Wald and Florence Kelley got the idea to start a national Children's Bureau. Kelley had a request to do something about the high death rate of children in the city in the summertime. The two then saw an item in the newspaper about a study by the Secretary of Agriculture to investigate crops damaged by the boll weevil. Supposedly,

Wald exclaimed “If the Government can have a department to take such an interest in what is happening to the cotton crop, why can’t it have a bureau to look after the nation’s child crop” (qtd in Muncy 39). After several years of lobbying, Chicago reformers convinced President Roosevelt to hold the first “Conference on the Care of Dependent Children” at the White House in 1909. While both men and women attended the conference, female leaders like Kelley and Addams lobbied hard to have a woman lead the project, and in 1912, President Taft appointed Lathrop head of the bureau (Muncy 43-49). Peattie draws on these real-life events to show the possibilities of female networks in her novel. Through her heroine, Peattie fictionalizes the effective tactics of the network of women working for reform in Chicago.

Mary Austin also fictionalized Chicago in the early years of the twentieth century. While she was familiar with the work of the GFWC, Austin shaped a very different story about a young woman in Chicago in *A Woman of Genius*. Born five years after Peattie, in 1868, Mary Austin was raised in the small town of Carlinville, IL. Through her autobiography, *Earth Horizon*, Austin constructs a mythic narrative of the pioneer women of her past. However, she attributes much of her intellectual growth to her father, who passed away when she was ten (Lanigan 14). Late in life, Austin consciously constructs a similar literary biography to that of Sarah Orne Jewett or Virginia Woolf, who both credited their intellectual passions to the influence of their fathers. However, Mary’s mother, Susanna Austin, can probably be credited for Mary’s early education much more than her father can.

While Susanna did not join a woman’s club in Carlinville, she was very active in Frances’ Willard’s WCTU. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union existed

alongside the women's club movement and served many of the same functions.³⁹

Susanna became the president of her WCTU chapter in 1882 and invited Frances Willard to speak to the ninth annual convention in Carlinville. Infatuated with the enigmatic Willard, Mary joined the local temperance society for girls, the "Broom Brigade." (Lanigan 16). While Austin mildly mocks the women of the WCTU and claims that she did not agree with Willard's views, she also comments: "In all my life I have not seen anything so single-minded, so gallant, so truly Crusading, as those women and their Union" (*Earth Horizon* 143). Biographer Esther Lanigan sees the influence of her mother's work in the WCTU as profoundly affecting Austin. Her feminism began because "the ideas gleaned from the WCTU 'about marriage and politics, about the place of women in the scheme of things,' were radical and enduring" (16)

Along with her mother's political activity, Austin was influenced by her mother's educational pursuits. Susanna was a member of the local Chautauqua Library and Scientific Circle and often shared what she was studying there with Mary (Lanigan 17). Later in life, perhaps due to the influence of the literary men she worked with in Carmel and New York City, Mary grew skeptical of the efforts of Chautauqua, but her mother's work was a model for her as a young woman. Austin might have distanced herself from her mother's influence during her writing career, but, by the time she wrote *Earth Horizon*, she was able to see the nascent feminism in Susanna's choices. She offers this reminiscence of her mother after her father's death: "What Mary knew about her mother by this time was that Susie had always wanted another sort of life for herself . . . She [Susanna] used to say when other women commented a little enviously on the time she

³⁹ For background on the WCTU, see: Jack S. Blocker's "*Give to the Winds Thy Fears*": *the Women's Temperance Crusade* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1985).

found to spare for W.C.T.U., for Church and Sunday School: 'I served my time at staying at home when my children were little, Now I mean to enjoy myself.' It was what most women wanted; time and adventure of their own" (177). As Austin matured, and struggled with finding the same "time and adventure of their own," she grew to recognize a similar impulse in her mother's involvement with the WCTU and Chautauqua.

After high school, Austin attended the co-ed Blackburn College for two years in Carlinville. She then moved to California with her family in 1888 and began teaching, earning a measure of independence. In 1891, she married Stafford Wallace Austin and gave birth to a mentally disabled daughter, Ruth (Armitage 9). Her marriage was a difficult one, compounded by the challenges of raising her daughter. As a wedding present, Stafford gave Mary a pearl-handle pen, which Mary interpreted as a token of his blessing concerning her writing ambitions (Fink 83). However, Mary's ambitions did not mesh so well with the marriage, and she slowly separated. The two were finally divorced in 1914.

Mary's arrival in California coincides with both the nationalization of the women's club movement and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's move to California. While Gilman made numerous club contacts in Pasadena, Austin was much more isolated due to her husband's homesteading efforts. She did travel to San Francisco when she could, but did not live close enough to build the daily contacts Gilman had. In addition, Austin, like Cather, was more of a loner and had a tense relationship with groups of women. Literary critic Nancy Porter comments that "undoubtedly as a theorist Austin believed more in the individual genius leading the group than in the group itself, about which she remained skeptical. Groups of women irritated her. She was not an affiliator" (Austin *Woman*

311-12). Like Cather, Austin kept her distance from the club movement. However, like Cather, Austin too had to wrestle with the fact that these very groups of women were an important part of her audience.

While Austin did not embrace women's clubs, she was influenced by contact with Gilman, probably because the two cared deeply about similar issues. Gilman had recently fled an unhappy marriage and was struggling with how to care for her own daughter. Austin comments on Gilman as a role model in her autobiography: "I had been invited to meet her [Gilman] and was struck by her beauty, the fine lines of her head and the clear look of her eyes, the carriage of her shoulders so erect and precise. I was for her, and for the freedom from convention that left her the right to care for her child in what seemed the best way for her" (292). Austin comments not on specific physical qualities when she describes Gilman as beautiful, but the traits that emphasize her independence: the "clear look" in her eye and her freeing posture. Gilman's difficult choices allowed Austin to make the choices for herself that she felt were best. In this reminiscence, Austin mentions another clubwoman, Madam Severance, a "leading figure in Los Angeles society." She is probably referring to Caroline Severance, a founding member, whose tribute was quoted earlier in this chapter. Austin describes her as "the mother of women's clubs, who had started the first club in the United States the year that I was born" (292). Austin might have met Gilman through Severance and her reference here shows her acquaintance with clubwomen even if she did not embrace the movement completely.

After separating from her husband, Austin established herself with the writers' colony in Carmel for a few years and then moved to New York City. Living in

Greenwich Village, Austin became more involved in feminist causes with the advent of World War I. She continued writing and finished *A Woman of Genius* in 1912. Best known for her Western writing, she nevertheless wrote several more explicitly feminist novels, including *No. 21 Jayne Street*. Throughout the rest of her life, Austin earned a living writing essays and books; however, she often had to supplement her income on the lecture circuit. Like Gilman, she supported herself by lecturing to women's clubs throughout her career.

Willa Cather came of age during the height of the women's club movement, and was well aware of their activities while she was in college in Lincoln, NE. Biographer Sharon O'Brien places Cather's comments on clubwomen in context of her coming to terms with herself as a woman. Early in her life, Cather dramatically broke with the typical feminine behavior of Victorian women. Along with others in her generation, Cather attended college, wore more masculine and tailored clothes, and cut her hair short; as a young woman, she strove to live up to all that the concept of the "New Woman" embodied. However, by denying female role models and traditions, Cather constrained her own voice as a writer. According to O'Brien, "As long as Cather denied her womanhood she was unable to speak authentically and powerfully as a writer" (4). For Cather, the club movement represented traditional Victorian ideals from which she wanted to distance herself.

The first generation of clubwomen were largely middle-aged women who had raised children and finally had time to pursue the education they were denied as young women. Thus, for college-girl Cather, the club movement held little appeal. She ridiculed Lincoln's club women in her early journalism, describing a clubwoman as

“haunting the public libraries . . . stretching the seams of her best black silk, handling massive volumes and writing unreadable notes with her kid gloves on [then preparing to meet with her club to] mingle the ‘glories that were Greece and the grandeur that was Rome’ with tea and muffins and Saratoga chips” (qtd in O’Brien 123). Her comments were not well received; in fact, her attacks on clubwomen drew a rebuke in print from Mrs. James H. Canfield, the wife of the university chancellor and mother of Cather’s friend Dorothy Canfield (Stout 39). Even though she faced criticism, Cather held to her belief that clubwomen were little more than society dilettantes who dabbled in literature but did not have the necessary intellectual discipline to achieve much.

However, Cather’s long apprenticeship allowed her to grow and develop as an artist. While she never embraced the women’s club movement the way Charlotte Perkins Gilman did, she did join several clubs in Pittsburgh. In fact, her entry into prominent social circles in Pittsburgh came from her acceptance by the main women’s club. The club embraced her after she performed a bit of self-plagiarism, passing off a college essay on Carlyle as impromptu conversation during a club discussion. While Cather did not leap headfirst into club life, she did use the clubs to her advantage. Her favorite such moment was when she was able to introduce Mrs. Canfield to the leaders of the local clubs during her visit (O’Brien 226). Cather was rather pleased with her revenge after Canfield’s rebuke back in Lincoln.

Cather never waved the banner for the causes of women’s clubs, but she was able to come to terms with women, including clubwomen, as audience for her work during her time in Pittsburgh. Cather wrote the bulk of *The Song of the Lark* in her final years living with Isabelle McClung and dedicated the novel to her. Literary critic Evelyn Funda

analyzes the novel as the struggle for any artist to find an audience. She explains: “In this novel, Cather asks how an artist learns to read an audience, how the presence of an audience affects and completes art, and how an artist can express something sublime even to people who may not fully comprehend fine technique” (22). Funda goes on to analyze how Cather is often concerned with the response of her audience and sees her own art as “collaborative, mutual, reciprocal” (23). While Funda’s main thesis emphasizes Cather’s concerns about developing high art out of a Western landscape, her analysis of audience is useful for reading how, in *The Song of the Lark*, Cather accepts a female audience. Understanding the rhetorical vision of the women’s club movement enables us to examine in detail how Cather came to accept communities of women like the club movement.

Kate, Thea, and Olivia: Giving Voice to Female Ambition

These three very different writers all wrote stories of a woman’s professional development within three years of each other. Each novel is set in Chicago and charts a woman’s ambitions. At the height of the women’s club movement, the clubs’ rhetorical vision appears in each novel. The ways that these writers embrace or distance themselves from the rhetoric of clubs highlights the differing attitudes each writer had to this mainstream feminist movement.

One theme emerges in Peattie’s *The Precipice* that is essential to domestic feminists’ formula for professionalization: the city as a site of freedom. For domestic feminists, the city was a powerful lure because one had the freedom there to create a network of like-minded associates and friends. These fellow women provided emotional support and economic opportunities for the clubwomen who were determined to create

new professional lives. For these women, this network enabled them to enter new careers at a pace never seen in the nineteenth century. Peattie develops her symbol of the city as freeing through analogy, first by depicting Kate's return to her hometown after college.

For many women who came of age at the turn of the century, college represented a brief time of freedom that whetted their appetite for more opportunities. For these women, a return to their mothers' stilted lives in small towns seemed impossible after the freedom they enjoyed at college. While happy to be reunited with her mother, Kate nonetheless feels a huge distance from her: "Dear 'mummy' was . . . a willing and reverential parasite, 'ladylike' at all costs, contented to have her husband provide for her, her pastor think for her, and Martha Underwood, the domineering 'help' in the house at Silvertree, do all the rest" (8). Kate, proud of her newly acquired education and independence, feels that her mother has given up thinking for herself, content to let others work for her. Kate ends her reflection by summing up her mother, "She moved by her well-chosen phrases; they were like rules set in a copybook for her guidance" (8). Kate sees herself as squarely in a new generation, one that will burn the rules set out in any old-fashioned copybook. Therefore, her old hometown is a site of stifling suppression in direct contrast to the freedom Kate experienced in college in a large, urban city.

What makes the city so appealing to Kate is the variety of women she finds there. While Kate's mother represents the single stereotype of Victorian womanhood, the rest of the novel is peppered with different women, showing the many variations of womanhood available in the city. This range enables a woman like Kate to test a multitude of identities as she works to create a new life for herself. There is Honora, a scientist who dedicates herself to her husband's work to create life in a petri dish. Honora denies all her

femininity for her career only to have her husband leave her for her feminine cousin, Mary. Peattie describes Mary as “the quintessence of femininity, . . . she distilled upon the air something delicately intoxication, like the odor of lotus-blossoms” (47). While Mary represents the ultimate feminine seductress, other characters highlight different choices for women. There is Marna Cartan, a talented opera singer who happily gives up a career to marry and have children, much to Kate’s consternation. Another woman, Mrs. Ledger, gives up a large fortune to go into a convent in Naples, which astonishes Kate. Throughout the novel, she encounters women who must sacrifice one aspect of their lives -- career, children, money, or love -- for success in another. Despite their sacrifices, these women represent the multiplicity of choices in the city, which Peattie contrasts with the single route available to women in Kate’s hometown.

For Kate, the freedom of the city rests on the support network she finds of like-minded women, unlike the typical masculine model of freedom through independence. Instead, what makes the city exciting and inspiring to Kate is the community she can create. Like all the female characters in the book, Kate faces difficult choices, but the city’s community of women sustains and inspires her. One key example is the suffrage march that Kate joins. The crowd is estimated at twenty thousand, and Kate is rapturous about the whole scene:

[D]own the broad boulevard, in the mild, damp air of the May night, regiment upon regiment of women marched to bear witness to their conviction and their hope. Bands played, choruses sang, transparencies proclaimed watchwords, and every woman in the seemingly endless procession swung a yellow lantern. The onlookers crowded the sidewalks and hung from the towering office buildings, to watch that string of glowing amber beads reaching away to north and to south. (91)

This spectacle comes at the heart of the novel, and the string of “glowing amber beads” is demonstrative of the community of women that makes the city special. Unlike Kate’s mother, isolated in her house in Silvertree, these women dominate the street, illuminating it and inviting participation from the crowds. Thus, for Kate, the women, united in the street, represent the possibility and the pleasure to be gained only in the city.

After this important moment, Kate rapidly gains more confidence and soon heads to Washington to represent the Children’s Protective Agency, for which she works. As a forerunner of a social worker, Kate’s job is to supervise children’s homes and find foster parents for children with difficulties. As part of her job, Kate has police powers to arrest negligent parents. Demonstrative of the new career paths forged by clubwomen, such agencies sprung up across the country during the Progressive Era. In St. Louis, Charlotte Eliot helped start one, and her daughter was an agent before she married.

Dramatizing the life of Julia Lathrop, Peattie’s Kate comes up with the idea for a Children’s Bureau and spends much of her time giving talks and lectures to persuade others to join her cause. While Muncy has demonstrated that the inspiration for the Children’s Bureau was much more intertwined, Peattie still fictionalizes the ideas of female dominions in her novel. Kate relies mainly on women to support her ideas and nourish her career. One important moment of reflection comes when Kate prepares to speak at the bi-annual GFWC convention. There, she ponders Addams’s role in her career: “Just how large a part Jane Addams had played in the enlightenment of Kate’s mind and the dissolution of her inherent exclusiveness, Kate could not say. Sometimes she gave the whole credit to her. For here was a woman with a genius for inclusiveness”

(106). This inclusiveness, or uniting of various women, is the ideal Kate strives to achieve. For her, Addams is an inspiring role model and mentor.

In this section, the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping again appears. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, also a visitor at Hull House, so often encouraged women to make the world their home. In Peattie's novel, Addams makes a similar declaration:

A city, she [Jane] maintained, was a great home. She demanded, then, to know if the house was made attractive, instructive, protective. Was it so conducted that the wayward sons and daughters, as well as the obedient ones, could find safety and happiness within it? Were the privileges only for the rich, the effective, and the outreaching? Or were they for those who lacked courage to put out their hands for joy and knowledge? . . . She believed they were for all. . . Yes, always, in high places and low, among friends and enemies, this sad, kind, patient, quiet woman, Jane Addams of Hull House, had preached the indissolubility of the civic family. (106)

Like so many domestic feminists, Peattie here extols the importance of women's roles by extending their talents from the home into the city. She uses the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping to expand women's options and choices in the public sphere. Thus, for the fictional Kate, and many real women in the Progressive era, the city was not a place of alienation and discontinuity but an opportunity for community and connectivity.

Like *The Precipice, A Woman of Genius* portrays small-town life as stultifying and confining compared to the freedom of the city. Olivia, the heroine, does not have the opportunity to leave her hometown to go to college. Instead, the family spends the money to ensure that her brother is educated. Olivia's hometown, Taylorville, is similar to Kate's Silvertree, where traditional values concerning a woman's role reign supreme. Olivia describes the work of young women in Taylorville: "the real business of a young lady in Taylorville was getting married, but to avoid an obviousness in the interim, she played piano or painted on satin or became interested in missions" (48). Olivia, the

narrator and heroine, makes it clear that women in her small town were chiefly supposed to fill a domestic role. Any other talents or ambitions were secondary to the main work of winning a husband. Unlike her friend Pauline, who plots and schemes to marry, Olivia winds up married by accident at the end of the first section. Her steady boyfriend proposes; she starts to agree, and he quickly announces the engagement. The rest of the novel involves Olivia's struggles to make the unfortunate marriage work, pursue her own passions, and reconnect with the man she truly loves.

A Woman of Genius does not fully embrace the rhetoric of women's clubs, but does not dismiss it entirely either. While there are no scenes of rousing club meetings or conventions, Austin does mention clubs several times. However, her main distinction from club rhetoric concerns the difference between talent and genius. Olivia's story is the story of an artist; her gift as an actress is described as external and unique. In the opening explanation of why she is writing her story, Olivia attempts to define genius: "it is wholly extraneous, derived, impersonal, flowing through and by. I cannot tell you what it is, but I hope to show you a little of how I was seized of it" (4). As she describes her ability, she contrasts it directly to the work of clubwomen: "you must not understand me to speak as of a peculiar merit, like the faculty from presiding as a woman's club or baking sixteen pies of a morning, which distinguished one Taylorvillian from another" (4). For Olivia, her artistic talent is something special and beyond a "merit." Here, she lists leading a club merely as one of those merits.

While she seems to simply dismiss the club movement as one more extension of small-town domestic life in this scene, Austin shows a more thorough understanding of the clubs' work and connectedness at the end of the novel. After moving to New York,

Olivia has a triumphant opening night in part because her sister is part of the audience. Olivia calls her sister, Effie, a “wonderful, indispensable woman” (260). She then describes Effie’s activities: “She was president of the Woman’s Club, chairman of the book committee of the circulating library, and though she had a letter every morning and a telegram every night from the woman with whom she had left her two babies, it didn’t prevent her in the week she spent with me, from getting in touch with more Forward Movements than I was aware were in operation in New York” (260-261). Olivia, while not a member of any club, admires Effie’s abilities and activities. By praising Effie’s efforts, Olivia shows a more thorough awareness of the real work of the club movement. Effie is busy and connected, using her opportunities in New York to network with clubwomen and reformers. Much like Kate in *The Precipice*, Effie embraces the city as an opportunity to connect with like-minded women.

While Olivia, as an artist, does not feel that she needs to emulate Effie’s lifestyle, she does find inspiration performing in front of women. With Effie in the audience, Olivia proceeds to give one of her very best performances. She describes her interaction with the audience: “I played, oh, I played! I felt the audience breathing in the pauses like the silent wood; the lights went gold and crimson and the young dreams were singing” (261). She does not wish to lead the life her sister leads, but knowing that women like Effie are a part of her audience inspires Olivia to fully express her talent. Effie also encourages Olivia to reach out and support her fellow professional women and artists. In the conclusion, Olivia sums up her relationship with her sister: “I am very fond of my sister; we grow together. I owe it to her to have found ways of making things easier for women who must tread the path of work and loneliness. It is partly at her suggestion that

I have written this book, for Effie is very much of the opinion that the world would like to go right if somebody would only show it how” (290). Olivia acknowledges that Effie, a clubwoman, has been a major force in Olivia’s life. Within the novel, the rhetoric of clubwomen does not take center stage, but its belief in women supporting each other and working to improve their situations does inspire Olivia to tell her own story to other women.

Like *A Woman of Genius*, *The Song of the Lark* is the story of one woman’s journey to become an artist. The heroine, Thea Kronborg travels from Moonstone, Colorado to Chicago to the Cliff-Dwellings of Arizona to triumph as a diva in New York City. Throughout her progress, Thea struggles, literally to improve her voice, and figuratively, to give voice to her ambitions. In the central section of the novel, Thea finally finds artistic inspiration in the ruined dwellings of a vanquished civilization. Thea’s different reactions to fellow women in Chicago and to the relics of female artists she finds in the Cliff-Dwellings chart a distinctive change in her attitude toward women as an audience. Thea finds her contemporaries in Chicago, including clubwomen, distasteful and amateurish. Unlike Kate, Thea finds Chicago to be depressing and overwhelming. It is only when she escapes to the ruins in Colorado that she finds sustenance for her artistic talent. However, this awakening still comes from fellow women; the pottery fragments that become Thea’s central metaphor were made and used by the women who had once lived in the cliff city. Like Olivia, Thea comes to accept and find inspiration from women.

Significantly, the ruins of the Native American tribes were a pet reform cause of western women’s clubs. The Colorado Federation of Women’s Clubs actively lobbied

the federal government to declare the land of the Ute tribe a national park. They argued that the site was historically significant and should be protected from treasure hunters and wanderers. In a 1906 article in *The Federation Bulletin*, the national magazine of the GFWC, the creation of the Mesa Verde National Park is claimed as a victory for clubwomen, coming after eight years of intensive lobbying by Colorado's clubs. Throughout the country, clubs were involved in conservation efforts, and the cliff-dwellings of the West were of particular interest for clubs. Given the clubs' work to preserve and control cliff dwellings like the ones in Cather's novel, her portrayal of Thea's freedom and awakening in the cliffs of Arizona is a significant contrast to the rhetoric of clubwomen and their confident lobbying for the preservation of Native American ruins.

In "A Victory for Colorado Club Women," the author employs a curious blend of bureaucratic language and narrative technique to describe the Colorado Federation's efforts to create Mesa Verde National Park. Typical of club reform work, the women wanted to temporarily take control of the ruins in order to eventually transfer the land to the control of the government. The Colorado Federation created a separate organization, the "Cliff Dwelling Association," to persuade the Weeminuce Ute tribe to donate the land to the clubwomen. The chairman of the committee went to the tribal land in the southwest corner of Colorado to meet with the tribal leader. Here, the author describes the clubwoman's work: "She expected to find him at Navajo Springs, with a resident interpreter. Instead, he was far away, hunting amid the summits of the La Plata range. Thither the chairman prepared to follow him on horseback as coolly as if it were quite the customary thing for a club woman to pursue an Indian chief through the mountains" (61).

The author cannot resist highlighting the exotic setting and the masculine behavior of the clubwoman. Here, she portrays the committee chairman as prepared to gallantly ride off into the sunset in pursuit of the elusive Ute chief.

Once she does find the chief, the work shifts to the lobbying efforts of Mrs. Lucy E. Peabody and the land is passed to the control of Congress⁴⁰. By elevating the deal between clubs and the Ute chief to a “treaty,” the author grants clubwomen the sort of sovereign abilities J. C. Croly had dreamed women would have when she began to encourage clubwomen to reform work. That Cather knew of the cliff-dwellings of Colorado is partly from the work of clubwomen. While Cather never embraced the rhetoric of club life, she is able to weave this accomplishment of clubwomen into Thea’s journey.

Thea first hears about the Cliff-Dwellers from her close friend and potential lover, Ray. Thanks to his job with the railroad, Ray traveled extensively and relishes describing the sights to the Moonstone-bound Thea. His comments on the Cliff-Dwellers are the seed of Thea’s evolution. He describes them: “I guess their women were their artists.

⁴⁰ The encounter between the Ute chief and the clubwoman follows a surprisingly masculine plot with a few minor domestic touches. The “treaty negotiations” begin with the chairman “offering the chief some cherry cordial of her own making” (61). The chief approves of the wine and asks for more. The author then describes the proceedings: “Under the revivifying effect of cherry bounce the treaty proceeded” (61). While describing the wine as merely “revivifying,” it is easy to imagine that this “treaty” proceeded like many others with the white person getting the chief drunk before negotiating for control of his lands. Without much commentary, she describes the chief’s reaction to negotiating with a woman rather than a man: “Terms were discussed, and Ignacio said pathetically: “White woman, I am an old man, and many have lied to me. Speak the truth. Do the women of Colorado lie like the men?” (61). Tellingly, the author does not include the chairman’s reply nor does she comment on the quote herself. Instead, she slides back into the bureaucratic passive voice with “eventually, terms were reached and the Mesa Verde passed temporarily under the control of the club women of Colorado” (61).

We found lots of old shoes and sandals made out of yucca fiber, neat and strong; and feather blankets too” (116). This bit of foreshadowing is left to develop as Thea continues her life in *Moonstone*.

Once Thea is in Chicago, she struggles to develop as an artist and find her way. She finds the city dirty and hates the series of boarding houses she must live in. In the Chicago section, Cather scarcely mentions clubwomen. Rather than discovering a supportive network of women as Kate does, Thea must survive alone. There is only a brief mention of clubs in a description of her first employer, the minister, Larsen, who also plays his violin for “women’s culture clubs” (166). Other than that, clubwomen are non-existent in Cather’s novel. Without a network of women, the city in which Thea must struggle is continuously described in negative terms. While Kate finds the same city, Chicago, exciting and invigorating, Thea is exhausted by her surroundings. Cather depicts the city as trampling the young men and women who emigrate there: “The rich, noisy city, fat with food and drink, is a spent thing; its chief concern is its digestion and its little game of hide-and-seek with the undertaker . . . She [Fortune] flecks her whip upon flesh that is more alive, upon that stream of hungry boys and girls who tramp the streets of every city” (265).

While Cather does not depict clubs or club meetings in the Chicago section, she does portray several women who seem quite reminiscent of her college-journalism attacks on clubs. In Part III, “Stupid Faces,” Thea must play the accompaniment for several society women taking lessons from her teacher, Mr. Bowers. Cather’s humorous description of one woman in particular, Mrs. Priest, shows the same flair as her earlier writing about clubwomen: “A tall, imposing woman rustled in. . . She wore a beautiful

little green hat with three long green feathers sticking straight up in front, a little cape made of velvet and fur with a yellow satin rose on it. Her gloves, her shoes, her veil, somehow made themselves felt. She gave the impression of wearing a cargo of splendid merchandise.” (254). Mrs. Priest is splendidly dressed, just like Cather’s clubwoman in the library who was “stretching the seams of her best black silk . . . and writing unreadable notes with her kid gloves on.” Likewise, just as Cather depicted the clubwomen of Lincoln as intellectual dilettantes, Mrs. Priest’s singing is not quite up to Thea’s standards: “Since she had found out how dull the good-natured soprano really was, she felt a deep contempt for her. She felt that Mrs. Priest ought to be reproved and even punished for her shortcomings; that she ought to be exposed, -- at least to herself, -- and not be permitted to live and shine in happy ignorance of what a poor thing it was she brought across so radiantly” (254). Mrs. Priest is depicted as happily engaged in work that disgusts Thea because the singing is so bland. Likewise, Cather depicts a club meeting as women who mingled ‘the glories of Greece’ with their tea and muffins.

While Cather’s description of Mrs. Priest certainly echoes her depiction of clubwomen, this chapter does more than merely mock such women. Instead, it is through this section that Thea notes not only her own reaction as an audience but also the reactions of others to their audiences. The third-person narrator also clearly disavows Thea’s judgments and behaviors; instead, the narrator continuously insists that such judgments are detrimental to Thea’s development. Additionally, Mr. Bowers is offered as the very model of how Thea should NOT behave. Mr. Bowers is introduced as a talented but discontented musician: “He seldom missed an evening concert, and was usually to be seen lounging somewhere at the back of the concert hall, reading a

newspaper or review . . . At the end of a number her looked up from his paper long enough to sweep the applauding audience with a contemptuous eye” (250). Mr. Bowers holds himself aloof from everyone interested in music in Chicago, and encourages Thea to behave the same way. The narrator notes, “For the first time Thea had a friend who, in his own cool and guarded way, liked her for whatever was least admirable in her” (251). Mr. Bowers encourages Thea’s mocking and judgmental behavior, to her own detriment. However, at Mr. Bowers’ studio, Thea also meets a wealthy young man who becomes her benefactor and, eventually, her lover. This man, Fred Ottenburg, sees that Thea is sinking under the weight of her circumstances and finances her trip to Panther Canyon, Arizona.

Once in Panther Canyon, Thea’s artistic development begins. In club novels, like Gilman’s and Peattie’s, the bustling city is the site of professional inspiration and growth. In Peattie’s *The Precipice*, the heroine Kate beams about the connections she has to other women: “All about her were women working for the advancement of their city, their country, and their race. They gave their fortunes, of their time, of all the powers of their spirit. They warred with political machines, with base politicians, . . . with custom. What would have crushed women of equally gentle birth a generation before, seemed now of little account to these workers” (53). Kate draws strength and inspiration from the many women in the city, working toward a common goal. In sharp contrast, Thea is worn down by women in the city. For example, she describes the women with whom she boards: “I can’t work with a lot of girls around. They’re too familiar. I never could get along with girls of my own age. It’s all too chummy. Gets on my nerves. I didn’t come here to play kindergarten games.” (252). While the real women in the city exhaust Thea,

she finds solace and inspiration in the deserted city of the cliff dwellers: “All her life she had been hurrying and sputtering, as if she had been born behind time and trying to catch up. Now, she reflected, as she drew herself out long upon the rugs, it was as if she were waiting for something to catch up with her. She had got to a place where she was out of the stream of meaningless activity and undirected effort.” (299). Thea could not find inspiration from her experience in the real city of Chicago, but this ruined city does speak to her. Her time in Panther Canyon leads her to connect with her fellow women.

At first, Thea attempts to envision the women who lived in the cliffs, enacting their experience with her body. The narrator describes the scene: “On the first day that Thea climbed the water trail she began to have intimations about the women who had worn the path, and who had spent so great a part of their lives going up and down it. She found herself trying to walk as they must have walked, with a feeling in her feet and knees and loins which she had never known before, -- which must have come up to her out of the accustomed dust of that rocky trail. She could feel the weight of an Indian baby hanging to her back as she climbed” (302). Thea, the woman who had previously scorned and mocked other women, now felt the presence of women in her very bones.

The more time Thea spends in the cliff city, the more she comes to understand the women who had lived there. She feels that religion must have developed around water because, while men were responsible for getting the food, it was the women who carried the water: “The stupid women carried water for most of their lives; the cleverer ones made the vessels to hold it. Their pottery was their most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself. The strongest Indian need was expressed in those graceful jars, fashioned slowly by hand, without the aid of a wheel”

(304). Thea slowly understands how women's work could be art and could pay homage to the most precious elements of life.

Finally, Thea's discovery comes while she is bathing herself in the very water the Indian women had held so dear: "something flashed through her mind that made her draw herself up and stand still until the water had quite dried upon her flushed skin. The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element of life itself, -- life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars . . . In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals"

(304). Thea's final lesson comes, not from the male teachers or benefactors who befriend her throughout her life, but from the remnants of the women in the deserted cliff city. While other writers of the same period boldly proclaimed the necessity of fellow women in their professional development, Cather depicted similar ideas a step removed, in the ghostly presence of a lost city. However, after this inspiration and connection, Thea is able to pursue a successful singing career and accept the women in her audience as important.

While the three novels have varying perspectives on the support provided by the city, from Peattie's whole-hearted embrace of women's communities in the city to Cather's more removed portrayal of inspiration from the women of a vanished city, the main character in each novel must come to terms with her own ambition. As in real life, these female characters face challenges in shaping their ambitions. The women's club movement provided a protected space for women to try on various ambitions and helped

women in the Progressive Era forge new careers. However, the rhetorical vision of clubwomen circulated in a culture that still severely curtailed women's ambitions. The fiction of Peattie, Austin, and Cather demonstrates the complex terrain ambitious women had to navigate.

Feminist scholars of the late twentieth century have emphasized the link between ambition and power: to assert a desire for a career or a particular life path is a form of control, a way to gain control over one's life. Owning such power can be very difficult, especially for women who have been trained to submit to the control of others. In her astute exploration of the difficulty about writing biographies of women, *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun sums up the struggle. She writes: "Well into the twentieth century, it continued to be impossible for women to admit into their autobiographical narratives the claim of achievement, the admission of ambition, the recognition that accomplishment was neither luck nor the result of the efforts or generosity of others" (24). Heilbrun references a study of Progressive Era autobiographies like Jane Addams's *Twenty Years as Hull House* in comparison with the authors' private letters. This analysis shows a startling disconnect between the control and ambition women voiced in private and what they were willing to claim in public. However, owning one's ambition and desire is a necessary component of a healthy relationship to power. Heilbrun emphasizes: "Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter. This is true in the Pentagon, in marriage, in friendship, and in politics" (18). For any woman who wants control over her own life and wants her voice to matter in the public sphere, the power expressed in one's ambitions is a necessary first step.

In all three novels, the authors find difficulty expressing a woman's ambition. Both Olivia and Thea describe their talents as "gifts" or "powers" that come from outside themselves. In this way, they are able to downplay their own hard work and ambition. However, all three characters are forced to declare their ambitions during their proposal scenes with their love interests. The scene of a proposal usually comes as the dramatic climax of the marriage plot. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, all the dramatic tensions of the novel lead to a successful resolution where Mr. Darcy declares his love and proposes. However, these three novels set out to tell a more masculine story of professional development. Specifically, *A Woman of Genius* and *The Song of the Lark* rewrite the masculine *künstlerroman*, or development of an artist. However, these novels do not break completely with convention; all three still follow a romantic side plot. The proposal scene has the most tension because it is the moment of conflict between the masculine and feminine plots.

In each proposal scene, a woman's career and love come to a head. At the one time in the novel in which she is directly forced to declare her ambitions, the heroine can no longer explain her career in the passive voice. All three heroines want to continue their careers, so they must declare the importance of their professional ambitions to a lover who still wants them to fill the traditional domestic role of wife and mother. Thea clearly chooses her career over her lover. Olivia is desperately in love with Helmeth, the man who first awakened her passions but she did not marry. However, once Olivia's husband conveniently dies and the two can marry, she finds that she cannot surrender her career. After several extensive conversations, Helmeth makes the choice for her and leaves. Only Kate successfully negotiates a satisfactory marriage. Backed by a

community of women and the rhetorical vision of club life, she is most successful at combining the two roles.

In *The Precipice*, Kate successfully asserts her ambitions and voices her desires. She does so partly because she is mentored by other successful women, like Jane Addams. In addition, her ambition to start a bureau for children in the federal government fits closely with the rhetoric domestic feminists had been shaping since the beginning of the women's club movement. As Muncy discussed in her examination of the real Julia Lathrop, women of the Progressive Era were most successful at carving out new careers that the culture could perceive as closely matching widespread beliefs concerning women's work.

While it is true that Kate's ambition fits nicely with her gender, Peattie makes it clear that Kate wants more than the traditional role ascribed to women in the nineteenth century. In one scene in the novel, Kate discusses her goals with Mrs. Denison, Karl's housekeeper. Mrs. Denison, though a working woman herself, clings tightly to the ideals of "true womanhood." She chides Kate, declaring that she would be happier in a home without the idea of "public life" in her head. Kate responds, directly tackling the issue of ambition in women: "I don't say I'm not ambitious . . . but that ought to be a credit to me! It's ridiculous using the word 'ambitious' as a credit to a man, and making seem like a shame to a woman. Ambition is a personal force. Why should n't I have force?" (137). Kate defends her own ambition by pointing out the inequity of the connotation of the term. Instead, she believes she has an equal right to voice and defend her ambitions.

Of the three novels, Peattie's is the boldest in its proclamation of equality in ambition and career. Kate and her lover, Karl, hash out what is perhaps the first

commuter marriage in fiction. Karl would supervise his mines in the West, and Kate would divide her time between the ranch and her work in Washington, D.C. Thus, the novel ends in marriage, but the heroine does not have to compromise her professional goals or ambitions. Throughout the novel, Peattie relies heavily on the rhetoric of domestic feminists, culminating in Kate's speech to the annual convention of clubwomen. Within this framework, she is able to create a heroine who is triumphant in her ambitions.

In contrast to Peattie's novel, Cather's *Song of the Lark* depicts a more complicated relationship to ambition. Thea does not carve out a new career suitable to the rhetoric of a woman's life. Instead, she chooses to become an artist, an opera singer. Throughout the novel, Thea's true ambition is to create art. While she does not choose an typical ambition, Thea still grounds her calling in the creativity of women. Her time in Panther Canyon arms her with an argument from tradition; women have long been creative artists, as demonstrated in the pottery she finds in the ruins. The metaphor Thea uses to claim her calling as an artist is the clay pottery she finds in the canyon. She directly links this art form to women, as we have seen earlier. Through this connection, Thea finds strength and the clarity to adhere to her mission to create art.

The two novels have similar proposal scenes set in the wide-open spaces of the West. In each, the heroine claims her ambition in the face of a suitor. However, the two heroines have quite different purposes. Kate wishes to explain her ambition to Karl to convince him that she needs both a marriage and a career. When Karl asks what Kate wants in a marriage, she responds: "My own independent powers of thought; my own religion, politics, taste, and direction of self-development – above all my own money . . .

Then I should want work commensurate with my powers; and the right to a voice in all matters affecting my life or the life of my family” (208). Kate is able to convince Karl that she wants a full partnership and independence within her marriage. All the women in Kate’s network had to face the choice of marriage OR career; Kate refuses to make a similar choice. Instead, she is the heroine of the novel because she is able to forge a solution that ends happily in marriage with her ambitions still intact.

In contrast, in *The Song of the Lark*, Thea and Fred dance around a proposal, but before Fred can actually ask her, Thea cuts him off: “It’s not that so much. It’s waking up every morning with the feeling that your life is your own, and your strength is your own, and your talent is your own; that you’re all there, and there’s no sag in you” (317). While Thea and Kate express similar sentiments, Thea sees marriage and her pursuit of art as incompatible and refuses to marry. Instead, Thea believes that she must be an artist on her own and create a new path for herself. While Thea manages to find earlier female models for her ambition to be an artist, she does not find any romantic model, even a negative model, and so chooses to remain independent. In contrast to Kate, with her wide social network of women to help her navigate the constraints placed on women, Thea does not have a living network of women to help her find her place. Thus, she places much more value on the masculine model of independence and chooses to remain an unattached, but successful, artist.

Unlike the dramatic wide-open scenes in Cather and Peattie, Austin’s Olivia and Helmeth argue about their future throughout the fourth section of the novel. Helmeth first proposes when the two reunite in London. Olivia declares her ambitions clearly here, comparing her career to Helmeth’s passion for large-scale engineering projects in

Mexico. She tells him about her passion to act: "I can't explain, and I didn't realize until we got talking of it, but I don't believe I could live away from it. It is with me as it is with you about your engineering" (236). Olivia attempts to place her career on an equal footing with his. However, the two cannot agree because Helmeth has two daughters from a previous marriage; he does not want their stepmother to be an actress. Olivia does not entirely disagree, but finally declares that she cannot give up her career. After another argument, Olivia sums up her position: "It isn't that I don't agree with you about how a husband and wife ought to be with one another . . . it is because not even the kind of marriage you offer me would hold me" (269). Olivia realizes that her career is too important to her to sacrifice and move to Mexico or California. It has become essential to her sense of self: "I am an actress and I can't leave off being one just by saying so" (270). Olivia fully asserts her ambition here by declaring that her career is an integral part of who she is. She cannot give it up. Olivia and Helmeth do not negotiate a new path for their marriage, instead Olivia is unable to persuade him and finally he marries someone else. Like Thea, Olivia is unable to sacrifice her career for a traditional marriage; in each novel, the male character is unwilling to compromise. Only Kate, with her command of the clubs' rhetorical vision, is able to persuade her partner to re-think his idea of marriage.

Conclusion

The three heroines in these three novels articulate their ambitions and create careers for themselves. Each writer also incorporates a romantic side plot that succeeds or fails; only Kate's story ends with a marriage. Supported by a close network of women and the clubs' rhetorical vision, Kate is able to articulate her desires and successfully

negotiate a marriage. Aware of club rhetoric but distanced from it, Olivia desires a marriage but is unable to negotiate a compromise for her career. Thea, who is focused on a solitary path, does not seem to desire marriage as much and, instead, chooses her art. Each response illuminates the author's reactions to the influential rhetoric clubwomen developed to permanently enter public life. This feminine rhetoric worked because of the close bonds women developed through the national network of clubs. Their interdependence enabled them to collectively initiate new options for women early in the twentieth century.

Epilogue

From Municipal Housekeeping to “Desperate Housewives”

In their heyday, women’s clubs were able to pursue their political goals on both the national and local level. Their rhetorical vision of municipal housekeeping helped to create new roles for women in the public sphere. However, their feminine rhetoric left them vulnerable to attacks based on gender. Their municipal housekeeping project loaded domestic metaphors with political significance that destabilized the masculine domains of power. Men retaliated and, by the middle of the twentieth century, the word “housekeeping” was effectively drained of its political significance. Once the GFWC had nationalized the WEIU’s rhetoric of “municipal housekeeping,” the attacks began. Anne Ruggles Gere has shown how editors used humor and cartoons to trivialize women’s participation in clubs (258). Along with cartoons, men used public lectures and the pages of women’s magazines to respond to clubwomen’s tactics. Male writers minimized the clubs’ reform projects, scoffed at settlement houses, and increased the vituperative rhetoric of domesticity by constantly repeating that a woman’s place was in the home. Grover Cleveland, as ex-president, attacked clubwomen, calling them dangerous and subversive in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1905. Gere analyzes the *Ladies*

Home Journal editor, Edward Bok's, repeated attacks on clubwomen, including his publication of Cleveland's invective, "Women's Missions and Women's Clubs."⁴¹ Gere's astute, but brief, analysis of Cleveland helps explain why clubwomen were erased from our popular, collective account of American history (259).

In addition to trivializing club work in the popular press, groups opposed to the reform work of domestic feminism accused the clubs of having socialist ties. Gere explains that clubwomen's lobbying for the peace movement in the early twentieth century drew strong attacks from conservative organizations and the federal government. According to Gere, "perhaps the most vicious rendering of the clubwoman as reformer appeared in the infamous Spider-Web Chart" (264). The chart, created by the Chemical Warfare Service, grouped twenty-nine individual women and fifteen women's organizations together and declared they were "absolutely part of international socialism" (264). This chart circulated within the government, including the FBI, and conservative groups. Henry Ford published it in his *Dearborn Independent*, along with an article titled "Are Women's Clubs 'Used' by Bolshevists" (264). While clubwomen attempted to fight back, they became less active and slowly turned inward after World War I, focusing on benign projects and dropping their rhetorical vision of municipal housekeeping. The rhetoric against domestic feminism became so bitter that by the mid-twentieth century, the separate sphere of the home was devalued enough that no one found it logical to argue that housewives were qualified to enter politics.

Another effect of this line of attack was that little of the clubs' contribution has survived in mainstream acceptance of feminism. This effect has occurred throughout

⁴¹ See also: Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: the Ladies' Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

American history to all waves of feminism; one aspect may be accepted by the broader culture, but much is rejected. According to sociologist Arlie Hochschild, “American culture incorporated what of feminism fit with capitalism and individualism, but it resisted the rest. It incorporated the idea of equal pay for equal work and diversity but dispensed with any challenge to the priorities of the system women wanted in on” (254). While the goals such as equal pay for equal work have still not been realized, Hochschild believes that some ideas have been more accepted in our capitalist culture than others. However, the work of domestic feminists to resist the fundamental structures of capitalism and consumerism are in danger of being lost completely. She argues: “it isn’t simply that men are changing too slowly, but that, without quite realizing it, women are also changing in the opposite direction – in the sense of assimilating to old-time male rules --- too fast. Instead of humanizing men, we are capitalizing women” (29). The struggle that clubwomen and domestic feminists began over one hundred years ago is in danger of being completely ignored today. Conservative groups drained the clubs’ “municipal housekeeping” tactics of their essential effectiveness; today, women find it terribly difficult to change the male corporate model to fit their needs as women and mothers.

Because the rhetoric of clubwomen has been undervalued in popular culture, my first book will be a group biography of the leaders of the women’s club movement. While Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a central figure in the canon of women’s literature, few scholars have examined the lives and work of J. C. Croly, Abby Morton Diaz, Helen Winslow, and Elia Wilkins Peattie. Writing a collective study of Gilman, Croly, Diaz, Winslow and Peattie would allow for a more complete picture of the lives of these writers

who were the leaders of the women's club movement. Gilman, Croly, and Peattie all made a living as journalists, publishing for club magazines and the mainstream press. Croly and Diaz published non-fiction texts concerning gender relations and the place of women in their culture that serve as a valuable context for Gilman's non-fiction work. Winslow and Peattie published novels and short stories that add to our understanding of the influential fiction that circulated in the Progressive Era. Analyzing their unique tactics would bring this neglected component of feminism, domestic feminism, back into the study of women's literature.

As this dissertation demonstrates, canonized writers of the Progressive Era, like Jewett, Chopin, and Cather, were all aware of the rhetoric of municipal housekeeping. Clubwomen created a positive narrative of transformation that led women out of the domestic realm into separate, public institutions. Leaders like Gilman, Croly and Diaz had very ambitious aims for women, including suffrage, pay equity, and professional careers. However, they were able to manipulate stereotypes about their gender to appeal to a broad spectrum of women. By not directly challenging the status quo, but instead arguing for an extension of women's influence, club leaders created a national movement that brought feminism to hundreds of thousands of women across the country. Monthly club meetings, club projects, national magazines, and the biannual conventions brought energy and a purpose to women's political goals. Clubs' narrative of transformation laid the foundation for the second wave of feminism in the twentieth century. Ignoring the work of domestic feminists can lead contemporary feminists to overlook the exhaustive effort it took to extend women's work into public life.

Studying the club leaders' fiction and non-fiction helps widen our understanding of the spectrum of women's responses to the "Woman Question" and illuminates the ways that feminist theory develops. The middle ground in women's literature has been neglected. Often, our examination of women's texts comes in relation to the male canon of literature, or the extreme stereotypes of women that writers have reacted against. The head notes of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* first give a "masculine" reading of the major events of each era before describing women's relation to them. Within this technique, strategies or beliefs that do not dramatically contrast with masculine stereotypes are not examined as fully as the extreme responses are. For example, in the head note for the "Turn of the Century," the overview is: "female lives and letters on both sides of the Atlantic were transformed by the entrance of large numbers of women into the labor force, by increased educational opportunities, and by the emergence of militant suffragism" (961). All of this is certainly true, and all political movements need militants and extreme edges to help nudge the status quo toward their end of the spectrum. Nevertheless, the various tactics of domestic feminists also played a large role in transforming women's lives and calling women to political action.

However, in the head note, the vision of domestic feminists is splintered into individual mentions of settlement house workers, home economics, and the WCTU. No separate mention is made of the GFWC; instead the author sums up the section on the WCTU: "Throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, women attempted through reform groups, volunteer organizations, and clubs to extend their role as nurturers and moral teachers from the domestic to the public sphere" (974). This is followed by an analysis of white mothers' argument "as bearers of the race" and the

racist overtones this argument carried during the abysmal race relations of the Progressive Era (974). This small mention of domestic feminism damns the movement with faint praise before arguing for the effectiveness of the militant suffrage movement. The overall impression of the head note is that radical feminists and sweeping cultural changes did more to change the daily lives of women than domestic feminists did. What is lost in this analysis is the mundane work of hundreds of thousands of women who changed their communities and created a national dialogue centered on municipal housekeeping.

My generation of scholars is blessed to be able to investigate these kinds of nuances in American women's literature. Thanks to the hard work of Cathy Davidson, Jane Tompkins, Hazel Carby, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Emily Toth and countless others, we do not have to justify women's writing based on a male aesthetic or plead to teach a course in women's literature. Instead, we are free to unearth and investigate precisely these kinds of nuances to women's language and lives. Likewise, thanks to feminist scholars in women's studies and history, like Anne Ruggles Gere, Karen Blair, Anne Firor Scott, and Robyn Muncy, a full and vibrant picture of the women's club movement exists in the scholarship. However, there is much more that needs to be done. Domestic feminists need to be more thoroughly examined in women's literature. Their concerns need careful and considered study. Their work as women and writers needs to be re-valued because the feminist revolution in America has stalled. Perhaps these writers can offer us new ideas and rhetorical tactics as we sort out the next step.

My generation, full of women who were raised by the second wave of feminists to believe that we had unlimited choices, is slowly realizing that our lives do not look that

different from our mothers. Judith Warner, author of *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*, identifies us as the first post-baby boom generation, born between 1958 and the early 1970s. We went to school during the Regan/Bush era, embraced the individualism and perfectionism of the 1980s, and believed that we would have it all. Warner examines the promises made to us as young women: “Even the most traditional women’s magazines throughout the 1980s taught that the future for up-and-coming mothers was bright: The new generation of fathers would help. Good babysitting could be found. Work and motherhood could be balanced. It was all a question of intelligent ‘juggling’” (44). Instead, we have come to realize that there are no good choices. As my friends and peer group start families, all the women I know have had to make serious compromises; few of the men I know have had to make sacrifices. Warner demonstrates that this phenomenon is far from anecdotal. After interviewing 150 young mothers, she found that many of the women felt out of control and tried to be perfect mothers in a world that does not support them. While Warner begins with humorous anecdotes of women who over-parent, she concludes that, in a way, they must: “Women today mother in the excessive, control-freakish way that they do . . . because, to a large extent, *they have to*. Because they are unsupported, because their children are not taken care of, in any meaningful way, by society at large” (48).

Warner found disturbing similarities between the women she interviewed and the women in Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique*. Because our generation was, for the most part, raised to believe that the good fight had mostly been won by the baby boomers, we did not come of age with a collective sense of self. Warner argues: “most women in our generation don’t think to look beyond themselves at the constraints that keep them from

being able to make *real* choices as mothers. It almost never occurs to them that they can use the muscle of their superb education or their collective voice to change or rearrange their social support system. They simply don't have the political reflex – or the vocabulary – to think of things in this way” (46). Without the political training of the previous activist generation, women today act out their feminism on a personal, rather than collective, level. We lack a political voice and vision to see that our own individual choices are not bad; rather, there are simply no good choices out there.

The leaders of the women's club movement were often writers; their writings influenced their contemporaries to take concrete action. Careful study of these domestic feminists, on their own terms, broadens our understanding of women's responses to capitalism. My generation of women needs to realistically examine what worked in this mainstream feminist movement as we attempt to put child care, universal health care, paid vacations, and parental leave into the national conversation. Just as clubwomen lobbied for child labor laws, pure food reform, and local playgrounds as a buffer against the rapid industrialization they witnessed, so too our generation needs to lobby against the polluting elements of capitalism that are drowning our attempts to lead balanced and sane lives. While much cannot translate from clubwomen's rhetoric, the optimistic vision, the ability to accept feminine elements of women's conversations, the strategy of bringing more “conservative” or “traditional” women into the movement all seem like applicable tactics for our times.

A collective biography of club leaders would allow for a thorough analysis of clubwomen's rhetoric of “municipal housekeeping.” Their rhetorical tactics and goals need to be re-examined in light of our own turbulent times and the state of feminism

today. I see writing an extended investigation of how clubwomen developed their tactics with an eye to how my generation of feminists could use similar tactics to get concrete results. In this era of bitter political rhetoric, terrorism, and conservative values, women's issues are increasingly being pushed aside. Just as the Progressive Era was dominated by industrial consolidation and masculine politics, our own times see few meaningful, national conversations on how to protect our health as women and oversee the welfare of all our children. Faced with the constant chatter about "red" and "blue" America, it is time for women to unite across this political divide for our own interests and the interests of our children. The club movement began in 1868, shortly after the deepest divide in American history: the Civil War. While the movement never successfully bridged the racial divide, it did offer women across the country a way to focus their energies and work together during the painful process of Reconstruction. Just as clubwomen without careers supported their daughters and friends' businesses and professional aspirations, perhaps it is now time for working women to fully support our friends and relatives who are raising children. Just as domestic feminists argued from their "natural" strengths to enlarge their influence in the public sphere, perhaps it is time for women to argue that the public sphere should now better support the private endeavor of raising children.

Club leaders created an organization that was optimistic and energetic enough to encompass women of varying political points of view. The national leadership deliberately shied away from taking a stand on controversial issues like suffrage. Instead, they tried to welcome women with various perspectives into the movement. Club leaders looked for practical, local solutions to national problems and then circulated them around

the country. What one club accomplished in one city was picked up by other clubs through the national publications and bi-annual conventions. Many women were nervous about national suffrage, but found it entirely reasonable that women should vote in local school board elections. Thus, while the GFWC did not endorse suffrage until 1917, leaders encouraged clubs to lobby for women to vote in local school board elections and then championed women, often club members, to serve on boards. Through tactics like these, the controversial national issue of suffrage gradually became more palatable. Likewise, clubwomen consistently started programs at the local level like libraries or social services. Then, they turned them over to be run by the local or state government, and, finally, lobbied for women to be paid to run them. In this way, they started seventy-five percent of the public libraries in our country. These types of tactics could help put women's issues back on the national agenda today. While universal, government-subsidized day care may seem like an impossible goal today, a group of women starting a collective day care in their hometown and eventually lobbying their city council to fund it does not seem impossible. The key to clubwomen's success was their national network. By getting programs started in city after city, they were able to change the idea of what services a responsible government should provide.

Today's global economy, changing structure of wages, and rising cost of living are no more daunting than the rapid industrialization and urban transformations club women witnessed at the turn of the last century. However, those women were able to rise to the challenge and improve themselves and the lives of their families. For all the shortcomings of the Progressive Era, including racial violence and wrenching poverty, we can point to women's concrete accomplishments: winning the right to vote, lobbying

for temperance, and creating access to new professions. Studying clubwomen's tactics could give contemporary feminists new ideas to buffer the effects of our own rapidly changing world.

As it stands today, the canon of American women's literature provides us with rich and varied voices, from Anne Bradstreet and Phyllis Wheatley to Harriet Beecher Stowe and Linda Brent to Kate Chopin and Frances Harper to contemporary writers like Leslie Marmon Silko, Toni Morrison, and Joan Didion. Yet, there is room in this canon for the literature of clubwomen and domestic feminists. Today, we need to read their stories about cooperating with different and difficult women, like Gilman's early novels. We need their stories about how to find our path when the roads all seem new, like Peattie's *The Precipice*. We need their stories that use a light touch to persuade individual women to act, like Diaz's essays. As feminists, we constantly strive to include all voices: women of all colors, women of all sexual orientations, and women of all ethnic backgrounds. Their stories enrich our world and teach us to listen to the multiplicity of voices alive in America today. As we once again struggle to change the masculine rules that dictate our lives, we need the guidance of all the writers of previous generations. They have much to teach us about how to communicate with women who disagree with us, how to listen to the needs of women, and how to inspire women with a brighter vision of a new world.

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