

Old Texts, New Conversations

**an exhibition at the Richard E. Bjork Library
Stockton College**

May 2, 2013

Old Texts, New Conversations: Recovering 19th-Century American Women Writers

The Project

This exhibition presents research produced in one of the Literature program's Senior Seminar classes for Spring 2013, taught by Dr. Deborah Gussman, focused on Recovering 19th-century American Women Writers. Students in the seminar had the option of researching and writing a thesis on a recently recovered writer and text about which little criticism has been written, or uncovering a text that has not yet been recovered and starting a new conversation about that writer and her work. Students working on a recently recovered text had the opportunity to participate in a discussion about a work in the early stages of its critical conversation. Students attempting to discover a work had the chance to dig around in archives, ranging from the Stockton's own recently acquired Munn collection of South Jersey literature to on-line collections such as "Wright American Fiction, 1851-1875" to massive public archives such as Google Books, hoping to find a "lost" or overlooked gem, and provide it with a new audience.

~ Professor Deborah Gussman

The Purpose, or What is Recovery?

The recovery of literature can be seen as a revival of literature: giving pieces that have been neglected and forgotten a second breath of life. Literary recovery requires researchers to look beyond the literary canon and to examine lesser-known pieces that may not fit the stereotype of nineteenth-century works. Throughout this semester, our class has had the opportunity to learn that some U.S. women's literature from the nineteenth-century can abide by our expectations of woman's fiction – such as Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Married or Single* – yet some can also transcend what we assume to exist in the literary field. Pieces such as Julia C. Collins's *The Curse of Caste* or Julia Ward Howe's *The Hermaphrodite*, for example, are not considered canonical, yet there is good reason to study them. Works such as the aforementioned allow students to realize not only that women's writing of this era is more than marriage plots and slave narratives, but that marriage plots, slave narratives, and other genres in which women wrote are more complex and rewarding than previous criticism may have acknowledged. Recovery is essential in expanding the literary canon and reshaping literary history as well as redefining an era of literature.

Also, many pieces that have been recovered give the authors the recognition they were unable to receive during the time in which they wrote. Literary recovery projects allow for these female authors to be studied, appreciated, and brought into a long-awaited conversation. While our recovery projects may not

seem like much to a third party, it is an honor to be a part of a project that is able to give a voice to those women who were silenced as a result of society's view of what literature can and cannot be.

~ Meagan Amador



“The Night Before the Wedding.” Illustration from *Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1856.

CASE 1

Another Definition of Literary Recovery

Literary recovery is the process of uncovering unpublished or relatively unknown texts in history. By discovering such works and bringing them into a new light, we can question and rework the literary canon and better examine literary history. The scope of this exhibition is the recovery of nineteenth-century works by American women. The various texts read, researched, and written about are texts most readers have never heard of before, and there is very little conversation surrounding them. By working in this field, we broaden the conversation, work towards adding to the canon, and are better able to examine the nineteenth century. Through this process of recovery, new views, questions, and methods of examination arise concerning the nineteenth century and issues prevalent during that time, such as gender and race. Recovery helps to ensure that certain important works are no longer excluded from the narratives of American literature and demonstrates that there is always more to learn and discover in literary history.

~ Kim Thomas

Eliza Leslie, “Mrs. Washington Potts” (1832)

Eliza Leslie, a talented 19th-century writer, was born in 1787 in Philadelphia to a well-to-do family. Leslie mostly focused on women as the audience for her writings. She wrote domestic manuals, cookbooks, juvenile stories, how-to books, and many short stories in multiple genres. Leslie is unusual because she uses a satirical tone in many of her works. She critiques aspects of her daily life, such as social circles and women’s roles. For instance, her story “Mrs. Washington Potts,” published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, uses the setting of a party to satirize the hierarchies of social class in antebellum America.



Portrait of Eliza Leslie from frontispiece of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 1846.

Many of Leslie’s influences came from her early education. Her family moved to England for a few years of her life. She was blessed with private tutors

and a huge library. She began writing when she was very young, and due to her father's friendship with a publisher, began her career as an author with ease. She wrote for many magazines and newspapers, and was known as appealing to the public. Leslie adds greatly to the literary canon of women writers. She had a strong and confident, yet genteel tone, and used her writing to address issues of importance to women readers during this time period.

~ Michelle Winter

Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney,
***The Voice of Flowers* (1846)**

The Voice of Flowers is a collection of poetry and prose based on flowers by Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865). She was a famous poetess in the 19th century, but was forgotten soon after her death and never made it into the literary canon, in part because of Modernist critics who thought her work to be overly sentimental. *The Voice of Flowers* uses a popular form of expression called "the language of flowers," in which 19th-century society was fluent. The language of flowers dates back to Shakespeare, but became very popular in 19th-century literature and culture. Sigourney took full advantage of this trend and used it to gain popularity. She wrote many works using this language throughout her life, and towards her later years Sigourney decided to collect these works into a single volume.



Lydia Sigourney, pre-1865, photographed by Matthew Brady.

It is important today to recover Lydia Sigourney's work because of its relevance to 19th-century culture. She was a beloved writer in America in her time, and that reason alone should motivate us to look back on her writing and to discuss it. She is an important figure in American literary history and deserves our attention in the future.

~Arianna Donzuso

**Anne W. Maylin, *Lays of Many Hours*
(1847)**

Anne Walter Maylin was born September 19, 1806 to Sarah Walter and Thomas Maylin. She was the eldest child, and was followed by two brothers, Charles and Edward. Until 1817, the family lived in London, England. When Anne was 11 years old, they moved to Gloucester County, New Jersey. Five years later, Thomas and Sarah moved to Ohio leaving Anne and her two brothers in New Jersey. Anne remained in Gloucester until her 18th birthday, when she moved to Salem, New Jersey and began her career as a teacher. Anne taught for 20 years before failing health forced her to resign. She stayed in Salem until her death in 1889.

Maylin published a book of poetry titled *Lays of Many Hours* in 1847. Another book of her essays was published after her death in 1890, titled *Here a Little There a Little*. Her poems and essays are often sentimental and religious. Maylin was often trying to help others. She contributed to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and was secretary to the First Benevolent Society. Her students loved her; they saved money and dedicated a horse trough to her.

~ Michelle Hopkins



Anne W. Maylin Memorial Fountain 1891. Relocated to the grounds of the Salem Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey.

CASE 2

Julia Ward Howe, *The Hermaphrodite* (c. 1846-7)

HOWE BIOGRAPHY

Julia Ward Howe was born in 1819 in New York City. In 1843, she married Samuel Gridley Howe, a reformer twenty years older than she who worked for improvements for prisoners and education for the blind. Their relationship was tumultuous due to the clashing of Julia's sense of independence and Samuel's traditional opinions of the duties of a wife and mother. Together they had seven children, one of whom did not survive infancy. She is best known for her song, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," published in 1861 and transforming her into one of

the most well-known and celebrated women in 19th-century America. However, she should be noted for other reasons as well. A collection of her poems, titled *Passion Flowers*, created a sensation in Boston society after its publication because of her poems' intimate content. She was also very involved with issues such as prison reform, education, abolition, and women's rights. The issue of women's rights was most important to her and she became known for her activism for women's suffrage. Throughout the years, Howe became an established writer, poet, preacher, and reformer before her death in 1910. Her manuscript, *The Hermaphrodite*, remained unheard of until very recently. It was written in the 1840s but not published until 2004. Its recovery adds an important element within the narrative of 19th-century American literature.

~ Kim Thomas

THE HERMAPHRODITE AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

Julia Ward Howe's book, now called *The Hermaphrodite*, was never supposed to be published. Written during the 1840s, it focused on a very controversial issue. It was not common for women to write about or bring up sexuality in the 19th century. However, Howe went against the norm and wrote about a character named Laurence who was a hermaphrodite or what is now referred to as intersex. *The Hermaphrodite* explores the problems that Laurence, the protagonist, faces throughout the book and how he unveils his secret of

being a hermaphrodite to the other characters. He has a very dark childhood and his parents do not accept him for who he is because of his ambiguous sexual identity. His father raises him as a son, but what is he really? Howe uses one simple plot, and a predominately male point of view, to describe the experience of being a hermaphrodite.

~ Aliccia Hans



“Hermaphroditos,” marble sculpture, Roman copy of Greek statue c. 2nd BC, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

THE HERMAPHRODITE: GENDER AND GENRE

Although it was never published, it can be argued that *The Hermaphrodite* is the best example of all of the ways in which Julia Ward Howe was ahead of her time. The book tackles topics such as social and education reform, family legacy and inheritance and gender equality, and also mirrors Howe’s personal views on race relations in the 1800s.

The protagonist being both male and female and spending equal parts of the book living as each gender shows the different ways in which people are perceived based on sex alone. It can be argued

that Howe never attempted to get the manuscript published due to its taboo nature, but the mere fact that Howe was writing about hermaphroditism two centuries before the rest of the world says a lot about her ambition as a writer.

While *The Hermaphrodite* does stand apart from the genre of woman's fiction, there are still some ways in which it relates to it and many other genres. The most appropriate genre into which *The Hermaphrodite* fits is the Bildungsroman, or a coming-of-age story. The manuscript follows Laurence, from his early life as a college student to a world traveler seeking a comfortable place in society. He loses his friends and family inheritance before finding a place where he belongs in Rome. Laurence's death at the end of the book connects it to the marriage plot, which basically states that you either get married or you die. Although Laurence finds love in certain parts of the book, his gender identity keeps him from being truly happy in love and finding marriage.

~ David Quaille



Photograph of Julia
Ward Howe c. 75 years
of age.

**Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative*
(c. 1853-1861)**

The Bondwoman's Narrative was written by Hannah Crafts. The text may be the first novel written by a female fugitive slave and an African American woman. The manuscript was discovered by literary scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in 2001. After thorough textual and material analysis, including testing of the original manuscript paper, Gates determined that it was written sometime between 1853 and 1861. Gates published the text using a style that mimicked the actual manuscript, so readers could see where Crafts made corrections with grammar and word choice. The text is a fictionalized account of a self-educated slave's escape to freedom in New Jersey, where she later married and became a teacher. There is much debate over the true identity of the author. The name Hannah Crafts was most likely a pseudonym. There is also debate about the author's race, and whether she was, in fact, a runaway slave. Since the novel's publication, scholars have continued to look for evidence regarding Hannah Crafts' identity. The book made the *New York Times* bestseller list in 2002. The original manuscript of *The Bondwoman's Narrative* is now in the collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

~ Blair Warner

CASE 3

**Ethel Lynn Beers, *General Frankie:*
A Story for Little Folks (1863)**

Ethel Lynn Beers was born in Goshen, New York in 1827 and died in Orange, New Jersey in 1879 at the age of 52. Interestingly, Beers predicted she would die before her book collection was published. Her prediction was accurate.

Beers published much of her writing in *Harper's Weekly*. Most of her works of literature have a theme relating to the Civil War. She is best known for her poem "The Picket Guard," featured in the 1861 October issue. The first appearance of her character General Frankie was in a story in *Harper's* in February 1862, titled "General Frankie: a Story for Little People." A year later, Beers rewrote the story of Frankie because it was very close to her heart and she felt that its first appearance did not reach her chosen audience. Her final version of the story materialized in book form in 1863 with the title *General Frankie: a Story for Little Folks*. This short work is about a young boy conquering the challenges that come into his life, which Beers represents allegorically as other generals and colonels that General Frankie has to battle, with the help of God, and others that come to assist him.

~ Amanda Bevacqua



“All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight.” Illustration of a poem by Ethel Lynn Beers, 1866.

Julia C. Collins, *The Curse of Caste, or Slave Bride* (1868)

Julia C. Collins, a free black woman who lived in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, wrote *The Curse of Caste; or The Slave Bride* in 1865, as the Civil War was coming to an end. Many scholars believe the book to be the first novel published by an African American woman. The novel was published serially in a nationwide newspaper titled *The African Methodist Episcopal Christian Recorder*, and judging by the responses the story generated, it was well received by its readers. Unfortunately, Julia C. Collins died of tuberculosis before she could ever publish the ending to her story. However, due to recent recovery work by two scholars, William L. Andrews and Mitch Kachun, readers now have two possible endings to

the story, both published in their scholarly edition of the novel, where readers can decide for themselves how they think Julia Collins would have ended her story. The story itself incorporates several genres, including the typical 19th-century marriage plot, the seduction novel, the slave narrative, the gothic novel, and more.

~ Michelle Black and Sherreé Evans

**Eleanor Kirk, *Up Broadway, and Its Sequel*
(1870)**

Eleanor Kirk was a 19th-century woman writer who was far ahead of her time. After escaping a dreadful, abusive marriage, Kirk made a name for herself as an activist and writer. Kirk was part of the “Working-women’s Club” in New York, an organization where woman united to help their gender rise above the inequalities of their time. Kirk worked alongside well-known women’s rights activists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and wrote articles for their newspaper, *The Revolution*.

The Revolution.

Banner of the weekly women’s rights newspaper
The Revolution, published between January 8, 1868
and February 1872.

In the book *Up Broadway, and Its Sequel*, Eleanor Kirk tells the tale of two women who were trapped in poverty because of failed/abandoned marriages that left them needing to support themselves. She discusses their unsuccessful efforts to become independent in a society that frowned upon them. Kirk emphasizes her belief that no man or contract could “bind soul to soul,” and that a woman or a man should be able to choose to escape an abusive marriage. Her views on the definition of marriage are relevant to discussions of marriage equality today. The question of same-sex marriage could be answered by Kirk’s insights: No man is to decide who is to be married, who is to stay married, and who is to escape marriage; let the love decide.

~ Kimberly Crooks

CASES 4 & 5

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Married or Single?* (1857)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Acclaimed author Catharine Maria Sedgwick was born December 28, 1789 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Sedgwick descended from one of the nation’s most prominent families. Her father, Theodore Sedgwick, was an influential lawyer and politician. His demanding profession left Sedgwick’s mother, Pamela

Dwight Sedgwick, to care for Catharine and her six siblings. Tragically, when Sedgwick was seventeen years-old her mother committed suicide. Following her mother's death, Sedgwick formed intimate relationships with all of her brothers and sisters, but the strongest relationships were with her four brothers. Sedgwick chose to remain single throughout her life, which was unusual in the 19th century.

A renowned and respected author in the 19th century, Sedgwick's writing lost recognition over the years. During her lifetime, Sedgwick composed six novels and more than one hundred tales and sketches; her most famous works include *A New-England Tale* and *Hope Leslie*. As more of Sedgwick's writing is recovered, it proves to be worthy of all the recognition it received in her lifetime.

~ Amanda Kennedy



Illustration, depicting Catharine Maria Sedgwick from the book *Female Prose Writers of America* by John Seely Hart, 1852.

MARRIAGE AND RELIGION IN THE NOVEL

Catherine Maria Sedgwick's final novel *Married or Single?* was published in 1857. The novel follows the trials and tribulations of Sedgwick's heroine, Grace Herbert. Grace is at the point in her life where she needs to decide between becoming one of her suitors' wives or living life as a single woman. Being a single woman during the 19th century was looked down upon by society because women were not able to fulfill their roles as a mother without a man by their side. Sedgwick's personal letters discuss the importance of religion being the foundation of a marriage, and these ideas are reflected in the novel. Grace, along with her sister Eleanor, was raised with Christian values and ideas about what a marriage should be. Through Grace's experiences, she learns that the decision to marry must be made based on her own beliefs and feelings. Sedgwick also makes sure to emphasize that religion is not only at the center of a marriage, but should also be central to a woman living a single life. In the end of the novel, we learn that Grace is "equal to either fortune": married or single, she will live a happy life because she chose it.

~Kristi Leigh Kaiser

CASE 6

**Anna Katharine Green, *A Strange Disappearance*
(1880)**

Anna Katharine Green is best known for being the mother of the detective novel. She was born in 1846 in Brooklyn, New York. She wrote more than thirty novels, and has been credited with developing the “series detective,” and influencing such mystery writers as Agatha Christie and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Her novel *A Strange Disappearance* is a typical mystery story involving the case of a missing young servant girl who works for a very rich man. Green was involved in debates about copyright law and other issues during her time. However, though she was an independent woman, she was not a feminist and disapproved of typical feminist views, such as woman’s suffrage. She married actor Charles Rohlf, who performed in a production of her most popular novel, *The Leavenworth Case*. She had three children, two of whom died relatively young. Green played a major part in the creation of the detective novel genre, shaping it to become what it is today.

~ Angela Iannello



Anna Katharine Green

**Margaret Crosby Munn, “Passages from the
Journal of a Social Wreck” (1882)**

Margaret Crosby Munn, born September 22, 1856, is a re-discovered gem among American women writers of the 19th-century. The stunning, quick-witted art of Margaret Crosby was recognized in 1882 when her short story, “Passages from the Journal of a Social Wreck” was published in *Harper’s Magazine* under a pseudonym, Margaret Floyd. Crosby presumably used a pseudonym because her story was a satirical response to an advertisement in *Harper’s* searching for men who would attend dinner parties for pay; she thought it was humorous for a man to take such a position.



Photograph of Margaret Crosby and George Frederick Munn.

Margaret Crosby continued to publish short stories in many prominent journals using her own name. Atypically for women writers in the 19th century, the women in Crosby's fiction did not get married. Crosby herself did not marry until age forty-two, when she met the artist, George Frederick Munn, fell in love and was married in less than a year. After her husband's death, Crosby wrote a highly acclaimed play, a biography of her husband's life, and a complete book of poetry. Much can be learned from Margaret Crosby, including her independent ways and beautifully strong style of writing.

~ Jennifer Robinson

**Constance Fenimore Woolson,
“The South Devil” (1889)**

Novelist and short-story writer Constance Fenimore Woolson was born March 5, 1840 in Claremont, New Hampshire. Woolson’s life was filled with travel and she often found herself on the frontiers of 19th-century America. Due to her siblings’ deaths from scarlet fever, Woolson’s family moved to Cleveland, Ohio, an action consistent with 19th-century ideals of beginning anew after tragedy. Here, Woolson penned traditional, sentimental works that were featured in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* and *Putnam’s Magazine*. Nevertheless, Woolson was dissatisfied with this triumph and decided to abandon her genteel roots after she and her mother moved to Florida.



Photograph of Constance Fenimore Woolson, c. 1887.

Inspired by her new Southern home, Woolson's writings delivered an unbiased view of the post-bellum South to her readers in the North. Woolson's short sketch, "The South Devil," strayed from her sentimental roots. While "The South Devil" was written a century prior to birth of the sub-genre known as "Southern Gothic," the sketch disputes the very birthdate of this form. Littered with Gothic elements, scenic Southern settings, and religious undertones, "The South Devil" challenges the accepted chronology of literary history. Recovery projects such as this are essential in redefining literature and an author's place in the literary canon.

~Meagan Amador

Recover: to find or identify again

Recovery means breathing new life into a work of literature. When we recover a work that has been lost, we give it new voice. The author used this voice during her time, and for one reason or another it vanished amongst the clutter. Not every voice can speak loud enough for all to hear, but that is where recovery comes in. We clean up the book, story or poem and present it to the world with a new appearance and a new chance; possibly a better chance to thrive where it didn't fit in originally. Every now and then our discoveries change history. These pieces can revise the literary canon as we know it. Other times, these texts do little in the way of changing our understanding of

the past. Occasionally, we find it is just a pretty poem or story. It isn't imperative that we all alter the world with these overlooked texts. Sometimes it is nice just to remember the ones that we have forgotten.

~ Michelle Hopkins

Acknowledgments

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Image Citations

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“Wright American Fiction, 1851-1875.” <http://www.letrs.indiana.edu-web/w/wright2/>

“The Night Before the Wedding.” Illustration from *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, February 1856. Image Source: <http://www.uvm.edu/~hag/godey/images/glb2-56se.jpeg>

Portrait of Eliza Leslie from frontispiece of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 1846. Image source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eliza_Leslie.JPG

Lydia Sigourney, pre-1865, photographed by Matthew Brady. Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lydia_Sigourney_-_Brady-Handy.jpg

Anne W. Maylin Memorial Fountain 1891. Relocated to the grounds of the Salem Historical Society, Salem, New Jersey. Photo by Stephanie Allen.

“Hermaphroditos,” marble sculpture, Roman copy of Greek statue c. 2nd BC, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. Image source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Borghese_Hermaphroditus_Louvre_Ma231.jpg

Photograph of Julia Ward Howe c. 75 years of age. Image Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34271/34271-h/34271-h.htm>

Banner of the weekly women’s rights newspaper *The Revolution*. Image Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Revolution_-_1868_banner.jpg

Illustration, depicting Catharine Maria Sedgwick from the book *Female Prose Writers of America* by John Seely Hart, 1852. Image Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Catherine_Sedgwick_\(crop\).png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Catherine_Sedgwick_(crop).png)

Anna Katharine Green. Image Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anna_Katherine_Green.jpg

Photograph of Margaret Crosby Munn and her husband George Frederick Munn from Munn, Margaret Crosby, and Mary Rogers Cabot, eds. *The Art of George Frederick Munn*. New York: E. P. Dutton and, 1916. <http://archive.org/details/artofgeorgefrede00cabo>

Photograph of Constance Fenimore Woolson, c. 1887. Image source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constance_Fenimore_Woolson

