In a poem entitled simply “Woman” (1850), Frances Sargent Locke Osgood describes an idealized female figure in terms of her natural beauty:

She’s stolen from Nature all her loveliest spells:
Upon her cheek morn’s blushing splendour dwells,
The starry midnight kindles in her eyes,
The gold of sunset on her ringlets lies.¹

In sentimental fashion, the poem extols woman’s aesthetic value and warns that the treasure of feminine grace will be destroyed if placed in “chain” to a masculine world of commerce and politics. The reader is cautioned to preserve woman’s unsullied beauty within a hallowed domestic space:

Not thus forego the poetry of life,
The sacred names of mother, sister, wife!
Rob not the household hearth of all its glory,
Lose not those tones of musical delight.

Yet while the poem locates aesthetic worth in the figure of the sentimentalized, domestic woman, few contemporary critics of literature would find aesthetic value within the formulaic tropes or tripping rhymes of such a poem. Indeed, in the critical tradition of American letters, placing sentimentalism and aesthetics together constitutes something of an oxymoron. Critical judgments of the sentimental writing of nineteenth-century American writers, particularly the poetry and prose of the “damned mob of scribbling women,” has been sum-
mary. Sentimental writing represents “an escape rather than a challenge,” according to Herbert Ross Brown. For Ann Douglas, it is language “gone bad”—“rancid writing.” These assessments accord, broadly speaking, with the disdain in high modernist thought for both mass culture and the sentimental. As Suzanne Clark argues, “[T]he term sentimental marks a shorthand for everything modernism would exclude, the other of its literary/nonliterary dualism.” In the past two decades, a burgeoning field of scholarship has focused on reevaluating sentimental writing, addressing in particular what Jane Tompkins has characterized as the “cultural work” of women’s sentimental writing. Shirley Samuels’s important collection, *The Culture of Sentiment* (1992), is representative of more recent assessments of sentimental women’s writing in the United States that make the case for its cultural rather than aesthetic value. This vital and growing body of scholarship thus might be seen as itself emblematic of a critical divide between the evaluative standards of an aesthetic criticism—in which sentimental literature retains an aura of failure—and the standards of cultural studies—in which, by virtue of its pervasiveness and popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, sentimental literature is a wellspring of cultural meaning and value.

A number of critics have noted the divide between cultural and aesthetic assessments of sentimental writing and have, indeed, called for an aesthetic reassessment of sentimentalism. Joanne Dobson, for instance, argues that modern literary aesthetic approaches miss the mark, failing to understand that a quite different set of values influenced sentimental writers. “Historically, blanket condemnations of sentimentalism’s ‘unskilled rhetoric’ and ‘false sentiment’ have misunderstood or trivialized its aesthetic purposes and/or focused selectively on exploitative or banal realizations of the tradition,” Dobson explains. “With an awareness of the values and literary practices of the sentimental ethos, critical readers can recognize in accomplished writers the inherent effectiveness of sentimentalism’s transparent language and the intrinsic thematic richness of its affectional tropes.” Dobson thus indicates that a version of cultural relativism is necessary to generate aesthetic understanding and value for sentimental texts. Rather than deploying aesthetic standards ushered in with modernism and New Critical reading strategies, the standards of the period need to be exhumed and placed back into service. With nineteenth-century lenses imposed upon our glasses, we might thus be able to
assign aesthetic, literary value to these texts rather than merely see
them as examples of dominant (or subversive) cultural formations.
Dobson’s argument resonates with recent attempts within the broader
field of literary studies to rehabilitate the category of the aesthetic in
the wake of the “cultural turn” of the discipline. In the introduction to
Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age, Emory Elliott writes that reevaluating
the aesthetic will entail developing alternative standards of value:
“For this time, we need to formulate new terms and definitions and
perhaps also a new system of analysis for describing the character-
istics of art and literature and the feelings and intellectual pleasures
they evoke in the particular diversity of the people we are today.”6
Described in this fashion, the category of the aesthetic is something
like a measuring stick—primarily an evaluative tool—that, having
been discovered to lack universality, needs to be recalibrated to spe-
cific cultural and historical moments in order to retain its capacity to
produce qualitatively accurate judgments.

Yet this new account of aesthetic value discards the claim to univer-
sality that has been central to the development of aesthetics. Precisely
in its link to universality, aesthetic judgment has far-reaching politi-
cal implications, particularly with respect to the development of lib-
eralism. In this essay, I would like to suggest an alternative approach
to negotiating the division between cultural studies and aesthetics by
offering a more thorough-going account of aesthetics as a political and
cultural practice and, in particular, a genealogical account of senti-
mentalism that points to its close links to the development of aesthetic
theory. My aim is not to rehabilitate sentimental writing—to answer
the relentless question of whether or not it is any good—but to illumi-
nate the function of aesthetics in relation to literary culture in a way
that accounts for both the prominence of sentimentalism in the nine-
teenth century and its subsequent debased status as an aesthetic form
in the twentieth century and today. Rather than viewing aesthetics as
an instrument of measurement that might be retooled to fit any cul-
tural or historical moment, I will examine the history of aesthetics in
western Europe and the United States as it developed in response to
the revolutions of the eighteenth century that ushered in liberal politi-
cal regimes and societies oriented around (newly) autonomous, self-
governing citizen-subjects.

Aesthetic theory in the United States arose primarily from two
sources: the Scottish strain of moral philosophy articulated by writers
such as Hugh Blair, Archibald Alison, Lord Kames (Henry Home), and Adam Smith; and the German idealism and romanticism of Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. I will discuss these ideas—particularly Schiller’s notion of an aesthetic state—at greater length, but for the moment, I want to underscore the fact that aesthetic theory developed in Europe and the United States in relation to a common political situation: the reconfiguration of social and political structures, which marked a turn from autocratic and monarchical regimes toward liberal and republican ones. Lodging new authority in the individual, in every instance, required developing an account of the individual’s right to that authority and the capacity to exercise it with responsibility. Aesthetic theory offered precisely such a description of the “moral law within” the individual, or what Kant would famously call a “conformity to law without a law.” Aesthetic judgment ideally produced subjects who enacted their freedom in a moral and lawful manner, thereby creating the ground for a new political community—a community of taste—united by individual consent and judgment rather than by constraint and subordination. Aesthetic theory thus engaged in the project of imagining and giving shape to the autonomous subject who could function in the political world of liberalism.

Sentimentalism in the United States has been seen as divorced from aesthetic theory and the claims to autonomy that define the liberal subject, in part because sentimentalism seems to point to moments of what Jacques Rancière calls “heteronomy” rather than “autonomy.” Critics such as Richard Brodhead and Laura Wexler have demonstrated the link between the discourse of sentimentalism and disciplinary control over women’s bodies; Ann Douglas and others, including Gillian Brown and Lori Merish, have linked sentimentalism decisively to the rise and dominance of consumer culture; and still others—Dobson, Marianne Noble, and Mary Louise Kete—have defined sentimentalism in terms of an anti-individualist ethos that emphasizes connective over autonomous relations. Sentimentalism would seem, then, to have little to do with autonomous subjects or the autonomy of the work of art. Yet sentimentalism has its roots in the same concerns with autonomy that define aesthetic theory of the eighteenth century, and as I will argue, it participated in defining the terrain of liberal subjectivity. I will begin my analysis by tracing that alignment before turning to the subsequent fractures that have
caused sentimentalism to be regarded as antithetical to autonomy. I aim, then, to trace the historical proximity of sentimentalism and aesthetics—a proximity that has been largely erased by modernist aesthetics and the critical trajectory of the late twentieth century—as well as to reflect more broadly on the vicissitudes of sentimentalism and aesthetics in their relation to the politics of liberalism.

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams defines aesthetics as “a key formation in a group of meanings which at once emphasized and isolated subjective sense-activity as the basis of art and beauty as distinct, for example, from social or cultural interpretations.” Williams’s definition touches on three important elements united in the term aesthetic: subjective sense-activity, a concern with the beautiful, and a relation to autonomy. Etymologically, the word derives from the Greek term, aesthetikos, referring to “things perceptible by the senses, things material.” Yet its contemporary usage dates only to the mid-eighteenth century when it was first employed by Alexander Baumgarten to refer to the criticism of taste. In the wake of Baumgarten, however, Kant argued for understanding the term in a sense closer to its Greek derivation, defining aesthetics as “the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception.” Thus, while contemporary usage tends to emphasize the criteria of taste and an intellectual concern with beauty, we might note that from its inception, aesthetics has been focused on bodily sensation. It is worth emphasizing the historical and etymological link between aesthetics and corporeality, given that aesthetics is often taken as a discourse of form rather than matter, as a philosophical calculus aimed at abstraction rather than embodiment. While it is indeed the case that aesthetic theorists such as Kant and Schiller aim to explain the meaning and value of what we might call the “formal feeling” produced by aesthetic experience, the sensate, felt aspect of aesthetic form is nonetheless resolutely tied to the subjective experience of bodily sensation.

Emphasizing the corporeal dimension of aesthetic discourse indicates, for my purposes, a significant point of connection with sentimentalism. Often characterized in terms of a capacity to produce or convey emotion, sentimental writing aims to generate sensation defined in quite material terms. “Reading [it] is a bodily act,” explains Karen Sánchez-Eppler. Sentimental writing “radically contracts the
distance between narrated events and the moment of their reading, as the feelings in the story are made tangibly present in the flesh of the reader.”¹⁴ As Sánchez-Eppler points out, the tears that sentimental writing seeks to evoke from the sympathetic reader register the physical nature of sentimental discourse. In related terms, Noble argues that sentimental writing aims to promote the voice of “embodied, affective personhood” over and against a disembodied, abstract, legal account of subjectivity. According to Noble, sentimentalism “affirms an embodied, affective personhood empowered to resist repressive legal definitions of personhood and to affirm one’s own self-definition of a personhood grounded in integrity and personal convictions.”¹⁵ Noble thus emphasizes that the physicality of sentimentalism has the effect of producing a strong sense of subjective identity: something about the immediate and material nature of emotional affect is allied to a capacity for “self-definition” or freedom from constraining laws (“repressive legal definitions” of the self).¹⁶ What is at stake in the link to the body shared by aesthetics and sentimentalism? If we return to Williams’s definition of aesthetics, an “isolated subjective sense-activity” is central to the meaning of the term. I suggest that sense-activity matters to aesthetic theory because it registers a form of subjectivity: sense-activity is what gives us access to the category of subjectivity. Aesthetics aims at producing feeling subjects who, insofar as they feel, are able to understand their own subjectivity as free—personal, unconditioned, and creative. It is the subjective feeling of freedom and personhood that eighteenth-century aesthetic theory links to the ideal of human freedom and the (putatively) universal rights of man that are central to liberal political theory. In related terms, sentimentalism links the capacity of individuals to feel deeply (often, to suffer) to an essential, shared humanity.

How, then, do we move from felt experience in the material world to the universalizing claims of human rights and freedom? In the aesthetic theory of both Kant and Schiller, to which I now turn, the subjective sensations of aesthetics and sentimentalism are decisively linked to the politics of liberalism. In the “antinomy of reason,” Kant asks how it is possible that we are both free and not free. How can humans be determined by the laws of the natural, material world (in the sensible, phenomenal realm) and yet still be essentially free and have moral agency (in the noumenal or supersensible realm)?¹⁷ In the Third Critique, Kant proposes the idea that aesthetic judgment mediates
between the sensible and supersensible realms and thus makes visible human freedom in the material world. According to Kant, the highest and most moral human end is freedom—a noninstrumental, nonconstrained relation to the world and to moral choice—yet people cannot exist in the world without being constrained by the rules that govern its material dimension. Aesthetic judgment is ultimately able to bridge this gap between the sensible and supersensible aspects of human existence because it involves an experience of the material world unconstrained by law: “The judgment is called aesthetic for the very reason that its determining ground cannot be a concept, but is rather the feeling (of the internal sense) of the concert in the play of the mental powers as a thing only capable of being felt.” 18 In response to the beautiful object, for example, the subject’s mental powers are set free—are able to “play”—rather than conform to any fixed concept, and this mental play is precisely the evidence of our capacity for freedom in the material world. Aesthetic judgment enables the realization of pure subjectivity in which what counts is not any quality of the beautiful object—any positive embodiment of freedom in the object—but the free play of the understanding and the imagination in the absence of a completed cognition. The aesthetic judgment is, Kant argues, both subjective and universal: it produces an experience that is universal for all subjects because it evokes subjectivity itself in its free and moral nature.

If Kant’s turn to the aesthetic represents the solution to a philosophical problem (how are we determined and yet free?), this aesthetic claim must also be seen as the solution to a political problem: how can humans be free, autonomous agents and yet subject to law at the same time? In many respects, this is the question posed by the revolutions of the eighteenth century in the Atlantic world. If all people have a right to liberty (as the highest end of humankind), how should they best be governed so as to preserve rather than destroy this basic human right? Kant uses aesthetic judgment to define both human lawfulness and freedom, to explain how a moral law within might be universally accessible and thus produce the kind of citizen who would not require an oppressive ruling authority. In this sense, the tradition of aesthetic liberalism that Kant inaugurates might be seen as the counterpart to the efforts of Locke or Rousseau to imagine just forms of the social contract—forms of liberal government. Rather than imagining a structure of governance that would enable individual freedom, Kant produces
an account of the liberal subject—the subject who could be capable of self-government and thus able to sustain liberal forms of rule. In the hands of Schiller, writing after Kant and—more important—writing in the wake of the French Revolution, the politics of aesthetics as a mode of liberal-subject production are explicit. Schiller argues that political revolution will fail unless a populace endowed with “moral character” is ready to sustain it: “The fabric of the natural State [of compulsion, of autocracy] is tottering, its rotting foundations giving way, and there seems to be a physical possibility of setting law upon the throne, of honouring man at last as an end in himself, and making true freedom the basis of political associations. Vain hope! The moral possibility is lacking, and a moment so prodigal of opportunity finds a generation unprepared to receive it.” According to Schiller, it is only the “aesthetic education” of the people that will make republican revolution sustainable. “[I]f man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice,” he writes, “he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom” (AE, 9). While Schiller turns decisively away from advocating political revolution on the order of that seen in France, he nonetheless aims at staging a revolution from within the subjective heart of the people—a revolution that, he imagines, will ultimately effect lasting change in existing forms of government.

How, then, might aesthetics effect a revolution? Schiller offers an answer related to Kant’s, but it is significantly more concrete. Influenced by the progressive account of history by the Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson, Schiller transforms Kant’s aesthetic bridge (thrown between sensible and supersensible, material and moral) into a developmental program. In order to be lifted from an originary state of compulsion, in which only the laws of nature apply, toward a moral state, which recognizes ethical laws of reason, “man” must enter the aesthetic state where nature and compulsion are replaced by choice and freedom. In order to realize his moral essence, “[man] does not stop short at what Nature herself made of him, but has the power of retracing by means of Reason the steps she took on his behalf, of transforming the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and of elevating physical necessity into moral necessity” (AE, 12). Here the aesthetic is described as transforming the compliance of humankind with external force—whether that force be political or natural—into a matter of choice. Nothing signifies this aspect of
human volition so clearly as the aesthetic, because beauty is precisely what is not required—it is decorative, appended, the product of will and desire rather than necessity. Schiller describes the transformative power of the aesthetic in terms of “semblance” and “play”: the “play-drive” (*Spieltrieb*) is a creative capacity that enables man to engage in the world in terms that are precisely not instrumental (*AE*, 61, 97). Only aesthetic understanding allows one to move away from mindless material need and compulsion; after this liberating aesthetic experience, we can begin to freely shape our world in accordance with the higher, universal laws of reason. “[T]here is no other way of making sensuous man rational,” concludes Schiller, “except by first making him aesthetic” (*AE*, 161).

Like Kant, Schiller uses the aesthetic to produce an account of the liberal subject who becomes aware of his or her freedom through the act of aesthetic judgment. Like Kant, Schiller suggests that this free play of the senses enables individuals to be free and also to follow a universal moral law, thus producing freedom and lawfulness at once. Yet unlike Kant, Schiller lodges some of the power of the aesthetic in the aesthetic object itself rather than only in the subjective experience of aesthetic judgment. The aesthetic thus acquires a concrete nature for Schiller that it never has for Kant. The result of this concretization of beauty and aesthetics in the object is the possibility of a didactic program attached to the aesthetic through which subjects can not only discover their own freedom but also be taught to do so. In political terms, this means that aesthetic education can serve as the means for the production of a liberal political community. No longer relying on the Kantian presumption of the universality of an aesthetic “*sensus communis*,” Schiller is able to lodge the claim of value in the beautiful object, which then serves as an Arnoldian touchstone of communal and cultural value. According to Schiller, “beauty alone can confer upon [man] a social character. Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it fosters harmony in the individual” (*AE*, 215). The aesthetic thus performs a remarkable political feat for Schiller: it both enables freedom and constructs social unity and agreement. The aesthetic instructs individuals about their own capacity for freedom while allowing the liberal polis to operate as a community of taste. In other words, it is not simply freedom that aesthetic education enables but a freedom rather miraculously aligned with social normativity and lawfulness.
The coincidence of freedom and social normativity in Schiller’s aesthetic state has made for a bifurcated critical legacy. In the hands of a critic such as the neo-Marxist Herbert Marcuse, Schiller proposes a radical critique of bourgeois hegemony embodied in the labor-resistant notion of play and its relation to aesthetics; in the hands of Terry Eagleton or David Lloyd, however, Schiller’s aesthetics function as a model for the internalization of disciplinary control in which brute force is not transformed into freedom via the aesthetic but into the intractable mechanisms of disciplinary culture. The compulsion that controls the subject is no longer conceived as simply a physical power (the laws of gravity or even the force of autocracy) but as a cultural and political force (the market forces of late capitalism, Gramscian hegemony), in which the aesthetic plays an accommodationist role. This polarized view of Schiller’s aesthetics might be seen to inform much of the broader contemporary discussion: either the aesthetic assists in breaking free of social stricture and is located radically outside of and beyond oppressive social norms, or it covertly functions to enforce normativity by masking the operations of power, helping to lodge ideology in the hearts and minds of docile subjects.20

Yet as Martin Jay suggests, an alternative reading of Schiller (and of aesthetics more broadly) is possible: rather than identifying aesthetic judgment with lawfulness and morality (and hence with internalized repression and hegemony), one might discern a space of heterogeneity within Schiller’s effort to conjoin freedom and lawfulness. Because Schiller does not wholly collapse the moral into the aesthetic, the aesthetic sustains the possibility of social heterogeneity. As Joseph Chytry argues, for Schiller, “The free play of faculties characteristic of aesthetic awareness ought to lead to awareness of the power of reason and the notion of a moral law, and any equation of this free play with the moral law itself reflects a serious misunderstanding of the experience.”21 In other words, Jay and Chytry indicate that the free play and formalization that characterize the aesthetic are not coextensive with the formalizing effects of hegemony but, rather, temporally distinct from one another. This temporal distance is enormously significant because it defines the mode in which the aesthetic and the law (morality) are conjoined. If the two are united reflectively, as Jay and Chytry argue, then this relation is open to political negotiation and contestation; it is thus not simply coercive and the subject is not entirely passive in his or her consent to social normativity. I cite Jay
and Chytry, then, not to buttress the claim that aesthetics is indeed productive of freedom, as Schiller argues, but to suggest that the idea of heterogeneity within the aesthetic offers a means of locating a space of analysis and negotiation through which to understand the operation of aesthetics as related both to freedom and hegemonic social and political formations.

The reflective link between aesthetics and morality, for Schiller, is directly related to sentimentalism. In his treatise *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1795–96), written after *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794–95), Schiller defines the ideal literary aesthetic object of the modern period as sentimental poetry. The treatise defines two forms of the aesthetic ideal: one ancient (naive poetry) and one modern (sentimental poetry). Whereas the ancients lived in harmony with nature and thus produced a naive poetry that was beautiful without a sense of self-consciousness, moderns sense their distance from nature and generate a self-reflexive poetics in which the ideal (as separate from nature rather than contained within it) is addressed in tension with the material world. Sentimental poetry, then, defines for Schiller a mode of fusing the ideal with the sensuous, just as the “play-drive” in his aesthetic theory conjoins materiality and ideality. Schiller’s concept of the sentimental, then, emphasizes not simply a felt response to the world but a self-conscious, formalizing response to sensation. As such, it seems markedly heterogeneous. Although it welds form and matter, it also opens a certain distance between the two in the self-reflexive moment of formalization. Far from imposing form as the natural and immediate effect of sensation, sentimental poetry underscores the considered work of connecting the materiality of nature with the ideality of form and, in so doing, makes visible the heterogeneity that obtains between the two. In naive poetry, this heterogeneity is not at stake, whereas in sentimental poetry it is definitive. Following Chytry and Jay’s reading, then, we might describe Schiller’s sentimental poetry as linked to an aesthetic that cannot be entirely collapsed into ideology (the violent imposition of form) insofar as it locates the possibility of freedom in the reflective space between matter and form.

Yet if sentimental poetry exemplifies the possibilities of aesthetic education for Schiller, does the sentimental writing of nineteenth-century women in the United States retain the same set of theoretical and political concerns? In other words, is the work of Osgood, Lydia
Sigourney, or Harriet Beecher Stowe related in any way to the aesthetic theory of Schiller? Both Schillerian aesthetics and American sentimentalism, I would argue, do indeed share a concern with establishing the freedom (the autonomy and constraint) of the liberal subject—a concern with the restructuring of subjectivity in relation to liberalism and capitalism. There is some evidence that Schiller’s work exerted a direct influence upon nineteenth-century writers and editors in the United States. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, for instance, editor of the popular and influential anthologies The Poets and Poetry of America (1843) and Female Poets of America (1849), was clearly familiar with Weimar classicism and its lines of aesthetic argument. In the introduction to Female Poets of America, for instance, Griswold extols the moral value of aesthetic sensibility, citing Johann Joachim Winckelmann—a key figure in inaugurating Weimar classicism, whose generative contribution to Schiller’s work involved his insistence upon the potential moral effect of the work of art on private and public sensibility. References to Schiller also appear in numerous periodicals of the era, including the International Magazine, a journal Griswold edited from 1850 to 1852, as well as the North American Review and the transcendentalist journal the Dial, which served as primary conduits of German idealism and romanticism. That Schiller was read beyond the circle of Margaret Fuller and company is evident in the 1859 poem by Frances (Fanny) Anne Butler Kemble, “Lines: On Reading with Difficulty Some of Schiller’s Early Love Poems.” The speaker in Kemble’s poem finds much of Schiller’s work foreign and unrelated to her, except for his powerful evocations of the suffering of women. Kemble thus homes in on the feminized pathos of Schiller’s sentimentalism to define a universalized voice of sensibility and sympathy: “In foreign accents writ, that I did ne’er / Or speak, or hear, a woman’s agony / Still utters a familiar voice to me.”

Yet while Margaret Fuller evidently discussed Schiller’s aesthetic theory with her conversation groups in Boston, the work of Schiller that circulated in the United States was primarily his poetry and plays rather than his aesthetic treatises. Indeed, an English translation of On the Aesthetic Education of Man was not published in its entirety in England until 1844 or in the United States until 1861. Thus, although Schiller had a U.S. readership, it would be incorrect to argue that his aesthetic theory had a widespread, direct influence on sentimental women writers in the United States. Rather, I suggest that they
share a common genealogy—a common grounding—in the politics of bourgeois liberalism and the transformations of subjectivity linked to that politics, as well as a common grounding in Scottish Common Sense moral philosophy and aesthetics. We might view Schiller, then, as the articulate spokesperson for a cluster of ideas that emerged about sentimentalism and aesthetics based in part on the Scottish tradition, including the writings of Adam Ferguson, Blair, Alison, and Kames, which were widely published and taught in the United States.27 Claims for the pedagogical quality of the aesthetic are particularly pronounced in nineteenth-century U.S. sentimental discourse, and this vein of thought is clearly indebted to the Scottish Common Sense school. Gregg Camfield has shown the influence of Scottish Common Sense philosophers on sentimental literature in the United States, particularly on Stowe’s work. Camfield demonstrates that Stowe was well schooled in the philosophy of Alison and Blair, “two of the most important popularizers of Common Sense philosophies.” As Camfield points out, Alison “gave America its most cogent and most popular exposition of aesthetics” and “distilled much of the thought of the Scottish Enlightenment into his Essays on Taste,” including that of Smith, Hutcheson, and Kames.28 In particular, Alison emphasizes that emotion or sensibility is linked to moral development; the moral sense within is influenced by taste, and taste can be taught as a means of creating a moral community. Like Schiller, Alison contends that taste combines the experience of the material world with the imaginative capacity, and morality lies precisely in this capacity.

In Alison’s concern with the imaginative (or what he typically defines as the “associative”) aspect of aesthetic judgment or taste, he mirrors Schiller’s interest in the free play of thought that defines human autonomy and capacity for moral action. Yet Alison insists far more than Schiller on the claims of morality that are produced in this experience. According to Alison, it is through aesthetic experience that “the material universe around us becomes a scene of moral discipline.”29 The moral law that is made evident through the use of imagination thus has a far more substantive presence for Alison than for Schiller. Alison describes the pedagogical power of the aesthetic in the following terms:

[I]t is of so much consequence in the education of the young, to encourage their instinctive taste for the beauty and sublimity of nature. While it opens to the years of infancy or youth a source of
pure and of permanent enjoyment, it has consequences on the character and happiness of future life, which they are unable to foresee. It is to provide them, amid all the agitations and trials of society, with one gentle and unrepining friend, whose voice is ever in alliance with goodness and virtue, and which, when once understood, is able both to sooth misfortune, and to reclaim from folly. It is to identify them with the happiness of that nature to which they belong; to give them an interest in every species of being which surrounds them; and, amid the hours of curiosity and delight, to awaken those latent feelings of benevolence and of sympathy, from which all the moral or intellectual greatness of man finally arises.30

While the moral sense is within each individual (not within the object), aesthetic experience allows the individual to discover or “awaken” it. As this passage indicates, the morality that aesthetic judgment helps to awaken, for Alison, is more closely linked to sympathy—to the shared norms of community behavior and mutual understanding adumbrated in Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*—than to a Kantian ideal of freedom and autonomy. A sentimental aesthetic, thus articulated, involves the capacity to bind a community through feeling and through affectively internalized moral codes.

If we turn to accounts of sentimental writing in the United States, we can see the ubiquity of Scottish Common Sense claims concerning the relation of the moral and the aesthetic. Caroline May’s anthology, *The American Female Poets* (1848), for instance, praises Frances Osgood’s poetry in terms that evoke Alison’s notions of taste and aesthetics: “[G]race, wit, fancy, feeling, and a delicious adaptation of sound to sense, are equally observable. . . . But Mrs. Osgood possesses, also, loftier qualities than those which merely fascinate. There is a fine moral awakening power, in her noble and spirited lines . . . which evidently proves that she can be—more than fanciful, witty, and tender,—an eloquent teacher of wisdom and truth.”31 Using language identical to Alison’s, May describes the aesthetic effect of the sentimental poem as that of “awakening” a moral sense. Or consider Griswold’s praise for the writer Elizabeth Oakes Smith: “[T]hrough all her manifold writings, indeed, there runs the same beautiful vein of philosophy, viz.: that truth and goodness of themselves impart a holy light to the mind, which gives it a power far above mere intellectuality; that the highest order of human intelligence springs from the moral and not the reasoning faculties.”32 The highly wrought moral tone of sentimental
writing might be here recognized as the product of aesthetic theory, rather than solely the language of Christian reform, as critical treatments of sentimental writing often claim. Beauty is taken to awake a moral sensibility and effect a didactic purpose. The didactic and disciplinary claims of sentimentalism thus emerge in conjunction with a theory of aesthetic education.

As in Osgood’s poem “Woman,” morality and beauty are often associated with women’s domestic position in sentimental discourse. For feminist critics—even those inclined to celebrate the work of women writers in the period—it has been difficult to view the sentimental elevation of domesticity to moral calling as anything other than prescriptive and repressive for women. Yet placed within the context of Schiller’s aesthetics, it seems possible to view ideas of free play and autonomy as constituting a strong line of logic threaded through sentimental celebrations of domesticity. For instance, adornment, semblance, and play are all important aspects of the domestic space within sentimental discourse. While women are intensely identified with the private space of the home in sentimental literature, this space is also figured as determined by free will, love, and desire rather than by material need or compulsion. The space of the home, imbued with feminine affect, thus helps to produce the freedom of the liberal subject through affective abundance and nonutilitarianism. Jürgen Habermas thus describes the bourgeois family as representing the freedom of the liberal individual: “To the autonomy of property owners in the market corresponded a self-presentation of human beings in the family. The latter’s intimacy, apparently set free from the constraint of society, was the seal on the truth of a private autonomy exercised in competition.” Habermas suggests that the capitalist marketplace gives individuals freedom and autonomy (or the illusion of it), and that this freedom is culturally identified with privacy and the space of the home where individuals are seemingly able to act as they wish. In slightly different terms, Pamela Haag defines the freedom of the marketplace and that of the family as historically differentiated forms of autonomy in the United States: freedom was initially conceived primarily in economic terms in the nineteenth century but later became increasingly associated with the private space of the home. While classic liberalism described freedom in terms of laissez-faire economic policies, this freedom began to disappear with increased state regulation of the marketplace and labor relations at the close of the nine-
teenth century. Although Haag locates this shift from classic (eco-
nomic) liberalism to modern (domestic-sexual) liberalism in the early
twentieth century, the logic that associates the nuclear family with
freedom and citizenship is abundantly evident in nineteenth-century
sentimental texts.34

What occurs in the home in Osgood’s poem “Woman,” for instance,
is described as “the poetry of life” and the production of song, rather
than, say, the production of dinner and the caretaking of children. As
historian Jeanne Boydston has argued, a “pastoralization” of women’s
household labor occurred following the market revolution in which
domestic work by women was increasingly viewed outside the rubric
of economics. That is, women’s work in the home was not seen as
a contribution to the family’s financial well-being but as a moral and
aesthetic endeavor.35 This pastoralization is writ large in sentimental
discourse, a central premise of which is that labor does not occur in
the household. Reva Siegel, for instance, points out that a sentimental
logic of deinstrumentalization (pastoralization) structures women’s
legal status in the nineteenth century, particularly with respect to
marriage:

[Sentimental] marriage was an affective relation that subsisted and
flourished in a private domain beyond the reach of law. A wife
could not enforce a contract with her husband compensating her
for work performed in the family sphere because such labor was
to be performed altruistically, rather than self-interestedly: for love,
not pay. . . . By the turn of the century, courts seeking to justify
wives’ continuing legal disabilities described marriage as an emo-
tional relationship subsisting in a private realm “beyond” the reach
of law.36

Labor “for love, not pay” was a matter of choice rather than com-
pulsion, and was thus portrayed less as labor than as the unfettered
expression of emotion and volition. In her introduction to The Ameri-
can Female Poets, May quite literally enacts the sentimental and aesth-
etic pastoralization of women’s labor. A passage that begins by de-
scribing women as domestic workers ends by describing women as
pure and autonomous, affective (loving) agents:

It must be borne in mind that not many ladies in this country are per-
mitted sufficient leisure from the cares and duties of home to devote
themselves, either from choice, or as a means of living, to literary pursuits. Hence, the themes which have suggested the greater part of the following poems have been derived from the incidents and associations of every-day life. And home, with its quiet joys, its deep pure sympathies, and its secret sorrows, with which a stranger must not intermeddle, is a sphere by no means limited for woman, whose inspiration lies more in her heart than her head. Deep emotions make a good foundation for lofty and beautiful thoughts. The deeper the foundation, the more elevated may be the superstructure. Moreover, the essence of poetry is beauty; “the essence of beauty is love.” And where should women lavish most unreservedly, and receive most largely, the warmest, purest, and most changeless, affection, but in the sacred retirement of home “where love is an unerring light, / And joy its own security”? 37

The “cares and duties” in the opening sentence of this passage indicate that domestic work is a form of constraint on women. By the close of the paragraph, however, labor has been replaced by love, and women are able to expend love “unreservedly”—that is, without constraint of any kind. The domestic setting is thus transformed from a space of constraint to one of freedom, from the location of work to the location of aesthetic experience and moral truth. We might, indeed, invoke Schiller’s words to describe precisely the rhetorical labor of this passage in which the author “transform[s] the work of blind compulsion into a work of free choice, and . . . elevate[s] physical necessity into moral necessity” by redefining domesticity as love rather than work (AE, 12).

The way in which women, in particular, are seen to occupy a pastoralized space associated with aesthetic autonomy may go some way toward accounting for the feminization of sentimentalism in nineteenth-century American letters. If sentimentalism has its origins in a European tradition of masculine fellow-feeling as Julie Ellison has argued, then it seems important to understand how and why sentimentalism has become so strongly identified with women writers and women’s culture in the United States.38 While it is increasingly possible to identify versions of masculine sentimentality in the period, even these associations are correlated to an account of feminization and domesticity. Griswold, for instance, proclaims in his account of genteel poetics that “the most essential genius in men is marked by
qualities which we may call feminine.” If in the nineteenth-century United States liberalism defined itself increasingly in relation to doctrines of privacy—if as Haag argues, the home becomes the location of freedom rather than the marketplace—then we might see this shift as a transvaluation of the masculine “parliamentary” fellow-feeling identified by Ellison as the origin of the sentimental. From political fellow-feeling, sentimentalism becomes identified with a pastoralized aesthetic (associated with freedom and anti-utilitarianism) that appears in the writings of Schiller and is writ large in the domestic ideology of nineteenth-century sentimental women writers in the United States.

Yet if the pastoralization of the domestic sphere gave it a nonutilitarian, aesthetic value, we must also note that locating the ideal of the family space outside an economy of necessity was itself a fantasy. Habermas remarks, for instance, that the family represents itself as the space of freedom in order to make possible the perpetuation of capital and labor, to reproduce (as Marxist feminist critics have shown) the material conditions of production. I have pointed to the continuities between aesthetic notions of autonomy and sentimental discourse in part because this linkage has generally not been examined in critical accounts of sentimentalism. But any notion of pastoralization of domestic liberty is certainly subject to the same critique levied against the ideal of aesthetic autonomy—namely, that this form of “liberty” is far from free, and it is decisively linked to forms of social hegemony and coercion. In short, then, sentimental discourse would seem to pose the quandary we have seen in critical debates concerning aesthetics: sentimentalism concerns either autonomy or hegemony; either it stands radically outside the compulsory forms of market-oriented behavior or it is deeply embedded within them. As with the question of Schiller’s aesthetics, then, I suggest that the term heteronomy might be useful in negotiating the binarized terms in which this debate is cast.

In order to explain the relation of aesthetic heteronomy to sentimentalism, I turn to a second poem by Osgood, which meditates on the difficult nature of aesthetic value as linked to domesticity and womanhood. In “Lines Suggested by the Announcement That ‘A Bill for the Protection of the Property of Married Women Has Passed Both Houses’ of Our State Legislature,” Osgood examines the connection and disjunction between aesthetic autonomy and economic value. As the title of the poem indicates, Osgood is responding to the passage
of a bill that enabled married women to retain some separate property rights, including earnings for work performed outside the home. Surprisingly, however, Osgood is critical of the logic of the bill, suggesting that its passage is not a clear victory for women. She begins the poem’s address to the legislators by delineating a dualism between matters of the heart or spirit and those of the material world:

Oh, ye who in those Houses hold
The sceptre of command!
Thought’s sceptre, sunlit, in the soul,
Not golden, in the hand!

Was there not one among ye all,
No heart, that Love could thrill,
To move some slight amendment there,
Before you passed the bill?

We make our gold and lands secure;
Maybe you do not know,
That we have other property,
We’d rather not forego.41

Implicitly opposing the “ye” (male legislators) and the “we” (married women), Osgood aligns men with the logic of the material world and women with that of an immaterial spiritual and emotional realm. The “other property” she refers to in the third stanza is thus property that has internal rather than external value: it concerns the heart and the soul rather than the marketplace where “gold and lands” are traded.

The poem seeks to set forth the claims of women to this “other property,” which is not protected by the bill that has just passed in the legislature:

There are such things in woman’s heart,
As fancies, tastes, affections;—
Are no encroachments made on these?
Do they need no “protections”?

We waste on [men] our “golden” hours,
Our “real estate” of Beauty,
The bloom of Life’s young passion—flowers—
And still they talk of “Duty.”
Alas for those, whose all of wealth
Is in their souls and faces,
Whose only “rents” are rents in heart,
Whose only tenants—graces.

How must that poor protection bill
Provoke their bitter laughter,
Since they themselves are leased for life,
And no pay-day till after!

Osgood thus indicates that the property that women possess is aesthetic: the “real estate” they own is “Beauty”—a beauty related to taste, refinement, and morality, all of which make the home a place of value. Yet “Beauty” is not protected in the women’s property bill and thus has no value within the legal and political terms dictated by the marketplace. Two opposed readings of the poem thus seem plausible. On one hand, Osgood seems to applaud the fact that the aesthetic (and thus moral) value of women is transcendent and remains distinct from the grasp of the market and the legislature, yet she simultaneously seems to demand some form of recognition of the invaluable nature of women’s aesthetic “real estate.” Is it, then, the case that women’s aesthetic value is intrinsic or extrinsic to a masculine economy? Given Osgood’s penchant for incisive wit, particularly with respect to matters of gender, and her skill as a writer, she appears to be more than simply confused on this issue. She appears, rather, to be bringing into sharp focus the contradictory nature of women’s value as posed in aesthetic and sentimental terms.

From a feminist perspective, it seems strange and unsettling that Osgood would contest the passage of the women’s property act, which was crucial to dismantling the traditional, debilitating policies of coverture for women. On the other hand, Osgood’s poem also protests the bill in the name of a concept of women’s value that resists integration into simple economic terms; indeed, part of women’s aesthetic value lies in that very resistance—in the dualism proposed from the outset of the poem. Osgood ends the poem with a reference to the private sphere as women’s domain, which holds intrinsic value for men too:

By all the rest you fondly hope,
When ends this lengthened session,
That household peace, which Woman holds
Thank Heaven! at her discretion.
If a light of generous chivalry,
This wild appeal arouses,
Present a truer, noble bill!
And let it pass—all houses!

In her reference to “all houses,” Osgood ultimately conjoins the public space of the legislative house with the private space of the domestic home, indicating that the private space is located in an important political relation to the public sphere. Osgood’s poem indicates a contradictory set of values: a desire to simultaneously join and dissever public and private, sentimental aesthetics and the marketplace, the feeling heart and formal legal standing.

How might one make sense of this radical oscillation in the claims of Osgood’s sentimentalism? I suggest that the ground of this ambivalence is written into sentimentalism itself. By definition, sentimentalism involves both emotion and a subsequent reflection upon that emotion—a putting to use of emotion, as for instance, when it opens a subjective path toward autonomy or moral sense. As in Schiller’s notion of sentimental poetry, matter and form are conjoined in the reflective, sentimental conjunction of the two. In the context of U.S. sentimental writing, June Howard points out that sentimentalism, even in its vernacular usage, is tied to a notion of excess. It involves a kind of emotion, she argues, that is recognizably cultivated, even constructed: “[S]entiment and its derivatives indicate a moment when emotion is recognized as socially constructed.” The excessive nature of sentimentalism might be seen to lie in the way in which emotion is placed in the service of other ends. While emotion is produced subjectively and thus generates within the individual a sense of subjective autonomy, it is nonetheless then connected to a higher moral and political end in sentimental discourse. Sentimentalism thus concerns both an affective immediacy (subjective autonomy) and a formal heteronomy—the connection of emotion to political and cultural ideals and aims. The social construction of sentimentalism Howard refers to might thus be seen as the heteronomy within the sentimental or the way in which its very materiality and subjectivity get transformed into formal and universalizing claims. Howard concludes: “Most broadly, when we call an artifact or gesture sentimental, we are pointing to its use of some established convention to evoke emotion; we mark a moment when the discursive processes that construct emotion become visible.” The irony of this moment of heteronomy is that it at
once makes sentimentalism valuable—it gives it political and cultural meaning—and exposes it as false or mediated by culture rather than immediate, and thus as constraining rather than liberating.

In using the opposition between heteronomy and autonomy to describe the dialectic nature of sentimental discourse, I use an analytical framework Rancière has proposed with respect to aesthetics. According to Rancière, the aesthetic is itself defined by a dialectics of autonomy and heteronomy. On one hand, a philosophical tradition has linked aesthetics to modernist notions of the autonomy of the work of art. Yet on the other hand, the experience of autonomy—Schiller’s free play or Spieltrieb, or Kant’s lawfulness without law—is placed in the service of a greater political narrative concerning social cohesion, freedom, and morality. Schiller’s “aesthetic State” perfectly embodies this contradiction. The autonomy realized in aesthetic judgment becomes the building block for the liberal state, and the autonomy of the aesthetic is thereby rendered purposive, heteronomous. The autonomy of the work of art may thus stand as a resistance to the mechanisms of state, market, and culture or, alternatively, may serve as the political (heteronomous) vehicle to advance the claims of those regimes upon “consenting” subjects. According to Rancière, then, the force of the aesthetic lies in the very dialectic between a resistance to constraint (autonomy) and a metapolitical claim for the reforming force of the aesthetic (heteronomy): “[T]he life of art in the aesthetic regime of art consists precisely of a shuttling between these scenarios, playing an autonomy against a heteronomy and a heteronomy against an autonomy, playing one linkage between art and non-art against another such linkage.”

Osgood’s poem, I suggest, shuttles between these two poles as well, imagining versions of women’s aesthetic value as outside the market and imagining that this very value will transform the materialist nature of the market.

Rancière’s analysis indicates why the aesthetic (like sentimentalism) has tended to be viewed in contemporary criticism either as a form of ideology or as its opposite—the site of emancipation from ideology. To the extent that the aesthetic is seen as valuable in the twentieth century and beyond, it is because it embodies a dream of the outside—of a location beyond social and cultural control. Sentimentalism, in which formalizing aims are so evident, recognizable, and even excessive, thus seems entirely distant from this dream of exteriority, and it is for this reason that sentimentalism is so seldom viewed as the
location of aesthetic value today. Yet if following Rancière, we recognize the implausibility of the dream of the outside—even the extent to which this dream is always already embedded within the ideological space of the inside—then the heteronomous failures of the sentimental may look less like duplicity and more like the plausible means of playing through and giving scope to the inevitably interrelated spaces of inside and outside.

One of the most trenchant examinations and critiques of sentimental discourse in recent years appears in the work of Lauren Berlant, who has argued that in conjoining affect with message, sentimentalism tends to privatize suffering and to foreclose the possibility of political debate concerning the causes of suffering. Berlant has thus persuasively argued that sentimentalism is willfully apolitical and depoliticizing insofar as it recasts political issues in terms of private feeling. “[W]hen sentimentality meets politics,” she contends,

it uses personal stories to tell of structural effects, but in so doing it risks thwarting its very attempt to perform rhetorically a scene of pain that must be soothed politically. Because the ideology of true feeling cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain, its cases become all jumbled together and the ethical imperative toward social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy. The political as a place of acts oriented toward publicness becomes replaced by a world of private thoughts, leanings, and gestures.45

Berlant suggests that casting politics as a set of feelings, particularly feelings of suffering, makes these feelings resistant to debate or negotiation. Yet I would argue, in turn, that because the subjective, autonomous feelings of sentiment are never autonomous, they remain the subject of debate and the location of political meaning and value.46 Sentimentalism fails, aesthetically, because it overreaches—because it reveals the ideological, formalizing effects of the aesthetic link between feeling and form. I mean to suggest, however, that we can locate in this excess (as, I think, Schiller did) modes of possibility rather than simply failure. Rather than pursue the dream of the outside, one might examine the possibilities of the self-reflective, formalizing moment of sentimental heteronomy. This is not precisely a rallying cry for sentimentalism or a claim that sentimentalism instantiates a liberatory politics so much as an argument that sentimentalism is allied with both
the possibilities and the limitations of the aesthetic. The critical divide that currently separates aesthetics from cultural studies opposes two versions of aesthetics: one in which aesthetics operates as a form of ideology (the cultural studies model) and one in which aesthetic value operates precisely against the restrictive force of cultural normativity. Yet the community of taste (a sensus communis, an “aesthetic state”) generated in aesthetic judgment is indissolubly linked to the concept of aesthetic autonomy and the politics of liberalism. As such, it seems important to view aesthetic judgment in its connection with community formation and thus with heteronomy, as well as to see sentimentalism as linked to versions of political agency, to the reflective connection of emotion to culture that enables (rather than forecloses) political negotiation. In short, it seems possible to regard both aesthetics and the devalued aesthetic terrain of sentimentalism in far more dialectical fashion, as terms related to one another rather than wholly distinct. Ultimately, then, one might locate aesthetic and political possibilities—conjunctions and disjunctions, negotiations between inside and outside—within rather than beyond the formulaic feelings of sentimental discourse.

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Notes


10 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 32.


12 Immanuel Kant, cited in *OED*, s.v. “aesthetic.”

13 “Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body,” writes Terry Eagleton. “That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together—the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal biological insertion into the world” (*The Ideology of the Aesthetic* [Oxford, Eng.: Basil Blackwell, 1990], 13).


Both Sánchez-Eppler and Noble emphasize the extent to which the physicality of sentimentalism creates sympathetic connections among individuals. For Noble in particular, the force of this sympathy is to create a nonindividualist mode of subjectivity, which she provocatively explores in terms of masochistic dynamics. In emphasizing her claim that a free subjectivity results from feeling, I’m reading Noble somewhat against the grain of her own thesis, yet it strikes me as significant that the feeling of self generated in her account of sentimental emotion is autonomous with respect to certain forms of existing law. In other words, sentimental feeling is related to the production of autonomous subjectivity at some level, even if that subjectivity is also cast as intersubjective.

In The Critique of Judgement, Kant explains the nature of the disjunction between the sensible and the supersensible: “The realm of the concept of nature under the one legislation [Understanding], and that of the concept of freedom under the other [Reason], are completely cut off from all reciprocal influence that they might severally (each according to its own principles) exert upon the other, by the broad gulf that divides the supersensible from phenomena. The concept of freedom determines nothing in respect of the theoretical cognition of nature; and the concept of nature likewise nothing in respect of the practical laws of freedom. To that extent, then, it is not possible to throw a bridge from the one realm to the other” (36–37).

Ibid., 71.


According to Eagleton, for instance, the project of Schillerian aesthetics is deeply implicated in ideological forms of constraint: “[T]he aesthetic signifies . . . a kind of ‘internalised repression,’ inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (Ideology of the Aesthetic, 28). David Lloyd, in turn, describes the formalizing aim of Schiller’s aesthetics as one that eliminates heterogeneity in the name of a unified State: “The effect [of aesthetic ideology] is to pose a single type for human individuality in which the specific differences which might characterize human experience are annulled” (“Arnold, Ferguson, and Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics,” Cultural Critique 2 [winter 1985–86]: 166). Alternatively, George Levine argues: “However thoroughly absorbed into dominant ideological formations the aesthetic has been, it has always served also as a potentially disruptive force, one that opens up possibilities of value resistant to any dominant political power” (“Introduction: Reclaiming the Aesthetic,” Aesthetics and Ideology, ed. George Levine [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers


23 “One endowed with an [aesthetic] apprehension . . . ,” Griswold writes, “becomes purer and more elevated, in sentiment and aspiration, after viewing an embodiment of any such conception as that specimen of genius materialized, the Belvidere Apollo, ‘at the aspect of which,’ says Winckelman, ‘I forget all the universe: I involuntarily assume the most noble attribute of my being in order to be worthy of its presence’” (preface to The Female Poets of America [Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1849], 8).


Boston, Eng.: Univ. of Essex, 1982), 180–97. “Shaftesbury’s . . . category of ‘moral sense,’” Mitchell writes, “is reproduced in Schiller’s ‘beautiful soul’ (schöne Seele), and an instinctively harmonious personality-type in whom duty and desire do not have to conflict, as in Kantian ethics” (188).


30 Ibid., 417–18, my emphasis.

31 Caroline May, headnote, The American Female Poets (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1848), 381–82, my emphasis.

32 Griswold, Female Poets of America, 177.


tic leisure nonetheless had real effects insofar as it shaped public policy
36 Reva Siegel, “Why Equal Protection No Longer Protects: The Evolving
Forms of Status-Enforcing State Action,” *Stanford Law Review* 49 (May
1997): 1119. On the sentimentalization of marriage in legal discourse in
the nineteenth century, see Laura Korobkin, *Criminal Conversations: Sen-
timentality and Nineteenth-Century Legal Stories of Adultery* (New York:
Columbia Univ. Press, 1999).
37 May, introduction to *The American Female Poets*, vi.
38 See Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion*
(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999).
39 Griswold, *Female Poets of America*, 7. See also Chapman and Hendler,
eds., *Sentimental Men*.
40 The long-standing critical debate over the value and meaning of sen-
timental writing in the United States reflects this binary opposition. Most
famously, Douglas describes sentimentalism as a capitulation to capital-
ism and a market economy, whereas Tompkins views sentimental writing
as embodying resistance to patriarchy and women’s passivity. For useful
discussions of this debate, see Chapman and Hendler’s introduction to
*Sentimental Men*; and Laura Wexler, “Tender Violence: Literary Eaves-
dropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform,” in *The Culture of
Sentiment*, 12–32. For a recent discussion of Douglas’s work on sentimen-
talism, see *differences* 11 (fall 1999), a special issue devoted to the work
of Ann Douglas (*America the Feminine*, ed. Leonard Tennenhouse and
Philip Gould).
41 Frances Sargent Locke Osgood, “Lines Suggested by the Announce-
ment That ‘A Bill for the Protection of the Property of Married Women
Has Passed Both Houses’ of Our State Legislature,” *New York Tribune*,
17 April 1848.
42 June Howard, *Publishing the Family* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press,
2001), 219.
43 Ibid., 245.
45 Lauren Berlant, “Poor Eliza,” *American Literature* 70 (September 1998):
164.
46 Paula Bennett’s work on sentimental poetry published by women in news-
papers and journals has made visible the fact that the terms of debates
over affect, gender, and aesthetics were taking place in the public sphere
of print (Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of Ameri-
can Women’s Poetry, 1800–1900 [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press,
2003]).