

Fall 2010

# Christine

Laura Curtis Bullard

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

Bullard, Laura Curtis, "Christine" (2010). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 32.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/32>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.



Christine



Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers

*Series Editors*

Sharon Harris, University of Connecticut  
Cindy Weinstein, California Institute of Technology

*Advisory Editor*

Karen Dandurand, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

*Board of Editors*

Martha Cutter, University of Connecticut–Storrs  
France Smith Foster, Emory University  
Susan K. Harris, University of Kansas  
Mary Kelley, University of Michigan  
Venetria Patton, Purdue University  
Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Amherst College  
Elizabeth Young, Mt. Holyoke College



Christine



OR

Woman's Trials & Triumphs



LAURA CURTIS  
BULLARD



EDITED AND WITH  
AN INTRODUCTION BY  
DENISE M. KOHN



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS  
LINCOLN AND LONDON

[Buy the Book](#)

© 2010 by the  
Board of Regents  
of the  
University of Nebraska

All rights reserved  
Manufactured in the  
United States of America



Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Bullard, Laura Curtis.

Christine, or, Woman's trials and triumphs /  
Laura Curtis Bullard; edited and with  
an introduction by Denise M. Kohn.  
p. cm. — (Legacies of nineteenth-century  
American women writers)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-8032-1360-9 (pbk.: alk. paper)

I. Feminists—Fiction. 2. Women's rights—  
Fiction. I. Kohn, Denise, 1963—  
II. Title. III. Title: Christine.  
IV. Title: Woman's trials and triumphs.

PS1199.B355C47 2010  
813'.4—dc22 2010015349

Set in Quadraat by Kim Essman.  
Designed by R. W. Boeche.

## Contents

Acknowledgments . . . . .	vii
Introduction . . . . .	ix
<i>Christine Or Woman's Trials and Triumphs</i> . . . . .	I
Notes . . . . .	379



## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the many people who have been supportive of my work on Laura Curtis Bullard over the years. Sharon Harris and Karen Dandurand have provided invaluable feedback on the introduction, and without their support or patience it would not have been possible for *Christine* to be republished.

I want to thank Baldwin-Wallace College for the summer grant I received for this project, and Greensboro College, which also awarded me a summer grant for early research on Curtis Bullard. I am indebted to the Maine Women Writers Collection (MWWC) at the University of New England for giving me a summer fellowship, and most especially to Cally Gurley, director of the MWWC, for her inspiring enthusiasm and help, not only to me, but to all of those researching American women writers. Charlene Avallone kindly shared with me a paper she delivered at the 2005 Modern Language Association convention on *Christine, Isa, and Mary Lyndon*, which introduced me to the two latter novels. Elizabeth Stevens, a research librarian at the Bangor Public Library, and Earle G. Shettleworth of the Maine Historical Commission were extraordinarily generous in their help. As always, I am motivated by the example of Dorothy Baker, and

this project would have been impossible without her encouragement. I also want to express my thanks to the editorial department of the University of Nebraska Press, and especially to Sara Springsteen, who was the project editor, and to Monica Phillips, who was the copyeditor for *Christine*.

I would also like to thank my parents, Dennis and Judy Kohn, and especially my mother, for her expertise as a librarian and her knowledge of New York City. Curtis Bullard dedicated *Christine* to her parents, who, she wrote, “have listened to these pages as I wrote and have at once been my audience and my critics.” I, too, dedicate this book to my parents and also to my husband, Robert Shelton, who graciously acted as my audience and critic and, most of all, buoyed my belief that Curtis Bullard and her work should be placed back into history.

## Introduction

The only painful thought that filled her heart was the knowledge that she could do so little, and with *words of power* she endeavored to inspire her hearers with a desire to seek out and relieve the distressed, as well as to press forward to claim the wider field which she pointed out as before them. — Laura Curtis Bullard, *Christine* (199; emphasis added)

When Laura Curtis Bullard wrote *Christine: Or Woman's Trials and Triumphs* she created one of antebellum America's most radical heroines: a woman's rights leader. Through the creation of her unconventional title character, Curtis Bullard gave voice to her own support for female suffrage, careers, and economic independence, which was termed the "woman's rights" movement in the mid-nineteenth century and was considered scandalous, even sinful, by many Americans.<sup>1</sup> Curtis Bullard was twenty-five when *Christine*, her second novel, was published in 1856, and she was the editor of a newspaper for women, the *Ladies' Visitor*. She continued her career after she was married and became a mother, and in 1870 she succeeded Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony as editor of the suffrage newspaper the *Revolution*, publishing essays about the social problems caused by women's inequality that she had earlier dramatized in *Christine*.

*Christine* is written in the tradition of the bildungsroman and the reform novel of the nineteenth century. In an era when

women were considered to “unsex” themselves by public speaking, *Christine* sympathetically portrays a young woman who defies her family to join the lecture circuit for female suffrage and education. Curtis Bullard depicts her heroine’s public career as a natural extension of women’s charitable and reform work in the nineteenth century, thus asserting the “true womanhood” of woman’s rights leaders at a time when they were reviled by many middle-class Americans.

While Curtis Bullard was editor of the *Revolution*, she was accused of adultery in the New York press, and the rumors resurfaced again as part of the notorious Beecher-Tilton trial. She spent her later years in less publicly prominent ways, writing essays, translating novels, and maintaining her friendships in the transatlantic literary world.

Although she had once been well known, Curtis Bullard and her work fell from history, and she was relegated to the level of footnote, if mentioned at all, in American literary and political histories. Until this edition, *Christine* had remained out of print since it was first published in 1856, and little biographical information had been known about Curtis Bullard.<sup>2</sup> Literary critic and cultural historian David S. Reynolds argues that “of all the oversights of literary and social historians of America, few are more heinous than the almost complete neglect of Laura Curtis Bullard” (*Beneath* 393). The goal of this edition is to introduce a new generation of readers to Curtis Bullard and her novel *Christine*.

#### *Laura Jane Curtis: Novelist and Newspaper Editor*

Laura Jane Curtis née Bullard was born in Freedom, Maine, on 21 November 1831.<sup>3</sup> She was the eldest of the five children of Lucy Winslow Curtis and Jeremiah Curtis, who believed in political engagement and entrepreneurship (Mosher 17).<sup>4</sup> The Curtises moved their young family to the northern Maine town of Calais, where Jeremiah Curtis helped to found the city’s first

bank and the state's first railroad. He became a leader in the antislavery Liberty Party, losing campaigns for governor in 1841 and for Congress in 1847 on the Liberty ticket ("Jeremiah Curtis" 7; "Movement" 3; "National Intelligencer" 2). In 1850 the Curtis family lived in Bangor, where Jeremiah Curtis began the pharmaceutical business that eventually made him a millionaire.<sup>5</sup> Curtis Bullard's maternal grandmother, Charlotte Winslow, was a female physician known for her creation of a morphine-based tonic used to treat teething in children and aches and pains in adults. Although Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup had been sold since 1835, Jeremiah Curtis patented the formula in 1852. Through a barrage of newspaper advertising, trading cards, and recipe booklets, he made his mother-in-law a household name (Holcombe 116).

By 1854 Jeremiah Curtis had moved the family pharmaceutical business to New York, which would become home to Curtis Bullard (Holcombe 116). In the same year, at the age of twenty-three, Curtis Bullard anonymously published her first novel, *Now-a-days!*, which drew upon her own knowledge of life in backwoods Maine. The novel's heroine, Esther Hastings, rejects a marriage proposal and must earn a living after the sudden death of her wealthy father. Esther, accustomed to a life of ease, leaves Bangor to work as a teacher in Aroostook County in northern Maine. Like the narrator in Caroline Kirkland's 1839 westering story, *A New Home—Who Will Follow?*, Esther learns about the manners and customs of frontier life as she is faced with different frameworks for domesticity. Although *Now-a-days!* has received little critical attention, it deserves to be read and studied within the traditions of the female bildungsroman, the pioneer novel, and regional realism.<sup>6</sup> The novel's rich detail of lumber camps and representations of dialects are evidence that as a young woman Curtis Bullard was familiar with the life and people of rural Maine.

After publishing *Now-a-days!*, Curtis Bullard founded and edited her own newspaper in New York, the *Ladies' Visitor*, and

*Drawing Room Companion*, which was published monthly from 1855 to 1861. The *Ladies' Visitor*, similar to many other popular newspapers of the day for women, published poetry, fiction, anecdotes, reviews, recipes, fashion news, and domestic advice. Curtis Bullard began her lifelong friendship with Louise Chandler Moulton, also a popular writer and novelist, who was a contributor to the *Ladies' Visitor*. The publisher of the newspaper was Curtis and Company, a part of the family's pharmaceutical business, and Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup was one of the largest advertisers. The relationship between the family company and Curtis Bullard's work as a writer was mutually beneficial: Her paper helped support pharmacy sales to the target audience of women while Curtis and Company helped support her work as a writer and editor. Curtis Bullard's professional position as editor was important to her—the first page of each issue prominently names “Laura J. Curtis” or, after her marriage in 1859, “Laura Curtis Bullard” as “EDITOR.” She also published her own short fiction in the paper, including the sensational story “My Husband's Mother,” in which a couple gets divorced but later is reunited after the heroine visits her dying ex-husband, who soon recovers. Curtis Bullard's emphasis on sentimental reunion in the story's closure demonstrates the way that nineteenth-century women writers could address socially difficult themes such as divorce by using a narrative frame that was rhetorically sensitive to the values and plot expectations of middle-class readers.

The mid-1850s were an unusually active period for Curtis Bullard. In 1856, the same year she was editing her own newspaper and publishing her own short fiction, she also published *Christine*. Unlike her first novel, the title page to *Christine* included her name, “Laura J. Curtis,” as author, a sign that she was building a reputation as a writer. She dedicated her second novel to her parents, “who have listened to these pages as I wrote, and have been at once my audience and my critics” (vi). Most antebellum

women writers were careful to avoid appearances of asserting themselves or selling their work in the literary marketplace, let alone even suggesting that writing was both a career and a business. Curtis Bullard, however, unabashedly used the *Ladies' Visitor* to promote *Christine*. Several editions include large advertisements for the novel with the headline “Twenty Thousand Sold, and the rush still continues,” along with excerpts from favorable reviews from newspapers around the country.<sup>7</sup> An excerpt from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* praises *Christine* as “an admirable tale, differing from the generality of stories in that the author has marked out for herself an almost new path, and has acquitted her work with ability and excellence.” The *Courier and Enquirer* calls Curtis Bullard “an artist, with her pen of more than uncommon power,” especially praising her depiction of New England village life, while the *Montgomery Mail* reports that the novel has “created quite a sensation with those who keep up with the current of new novels.” The *Baltimore Clipper* asserts that the “book is truly delightful; the author has marked out for herself a new field.” The comments that Curtis Bullard chose to print were, of course, positive, but they are also consistent with other reviews that she did not include. *Peterson's Magazine* states that *Christine* “is so graphically told . . . that the reader, who has once begun the book, is reluctant to leave it till the end is finished” (“Reviews” 399). The influential *Knickerbocker* says the book is “well-written,” with “characters finely drawn, and well sustained,” even though the magazine carefully assures readers that “we do not quite agree with the author in her advocacy of Woman's Rights” (“New” 109). This praise from the mainstream press suggests Curtis Bullard's success in creating a novel with a heroine who is radical yet sympathetic to a middle-class readership.

Three years after she published *Christine*, Curtis Bullard married Enoch Bullard of Boston, an executive in the family's pharmaceutical business who later became president of the company.<sup>8</sup>

Enoch Bullard was twelve years her senior, and the marriage, at least by some accounts, may have been difficult at times. Louisa May Alcott, who was pleased to meet Curtis Bullard at a party in New York, wrote to her parents that she had heard that Enoch Bullard was a drunkard but an amiable gentleman who adored his wife but preferred to stay at home to drink privately, leaving her to her own set of friends (*Selected Letters* 214–17). Curtis Bullard “keeps his house for looks sake,” Alcott reported.<sup>9</sup> Despite any marital problems, however, the couple was married for fifty-five years, until Enoch Bullard’s death in 1904 at the age of eighty-four.

After her marriage, Curtis Bullard continued as editor of the *Ladies’ Visitor*, but when she became pregnant at the age of thirty-one she left her position and the newspaper closed. For the next several years, Curtis Bullard devoted herself to her new role as a mother to her son, Harold Curtis Bullard.<sup>10</sup> During at least part of her marriage, she, her husband, and their son lived in the same large home in Brooklyn with her parents, with whom she enjoyed a close relationship throughout her life.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1860s she was immersed in reform groups and the growing women’s club movement. She was one of the first members of Sorosis, a society for professional and literary women, which was founded in 1868 when the New York Press Club refused to admit women journalists to a dinner in honor of Charles Dickens (Merrill 157). When Stanton and Anthony founded the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869, Curtis Bullard became the first corresponding secretary, along with Ida Greeley, daughter of Horace Greeley, the famous Republican leader and newspaper editor (Stanton and Gage 401). Curtis Bullard was also a NWSA delegate to the Woman’s Industrial Congress in Berlin, an international convention that called for women’s education and the rights of female workers. Other delegates included members of the reform elite such as Julia Ward Howe and Ernestine Rose, suggesting the

contemporary fame of the representatives (Stanton and Gage 406; Hume 217–19). Anthony regularly published Curtis Bullard’s travel narratives from London, Cologne, Lucerne, and Geneva in the *Revolution*, and she also read Curtis Bullard’s letters and essays aloud at NWSA meetings.<sup>12</sup> In 1870, Curtis Bullard founded the Brooklyn Woman’s Club with her friend Elizabeth Tilton, who was poetry editor of the *Revolution* (“Brooklyn” 3). Elizabeth was married to Theodore Tilton, the well-known editor of the liberal *New York Independent* and the protégé of Henry Ward Beecher.

*The Revolution, Woman’s Rights, and Free Love*

In July 1870 Curtis Bullard became editor of the *Revolution*, the radical suffrage newspaper that Anthony and Stanton founded as the political organ for the NWSA. The paper, first published in January 1868 with Anthony as publisher and Stanton as editor, had faced many obstacles since its inception. Anthony and Stanton, who had campaigned with Republicans for abolition and universal suffrage, felt betrayed when the Republican Party decided that it would seek enfranchisement for African American men only. Stanton and Anthony defied the Republicans by campaigning for a constitutional amendment for universal suffrage, and at times they descended into racist rhetoric in their opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment (DuBois, *Reader* 92; Williams 425–26).

The motto of the *Revolution*, not to mention the name itself, expressed Stanton and Anthony’s commitment to universal suffrage and their outrage with the Republicans: “Principles, Not Politics. Justice, Not Favors—Men Their Rights and Nothing More; Women Their Rights and Nothing Less.” In this motto, Stanton and Anthony declared that the Republicans had abandoned the principle of universal suffrage in favor of political expediency in the belief that Americans were ready to enfranchise African American men but not women. Granting suffrage

to women was simply justice, not a favor, the *Revolution* argued, and women were entitled to the same rights as men. In hope of financial support that never materialized, Anthony and Stanton allied their weekly paper with Democrat George Train, an outspoken racist, further angering Republicans, even though the Republicans had earlier arranged a joint speaking tour for Anthony and Train (Barry 173–87). Anthony incurred further criticism when she trained women as typesetters during the strike of a male typographical union (Barry 214–15). As a result, Greeley refused to run any notices for the *Revolution* in the *Tribune*, as did Wendell Phillips of the *Liberator* (Barry 186). Women’s groups considered the *Revolution* so radical that they refused to share office space with it (I. Harper 360).

As publisher, Anthony had personally shouldered the financial responsibility of the *Revolution*, and by the spring of 1870 she could no longer ignore her mounting debt (Barry 223). Stanton refused to help Anthony by supporting the paper financially or by managing its daily operations. Anthony had hoped that editorial contributions from Harriet Beecher Stowe would sell more subscriptions, but Stowe asked that the name of the paper be changed to something less inflammatory, such as the *True Republic*, a suggestion Anthony refused (I. Harper 356–57; Anthony 225–26). After twenty-nine months of publishing the *Revolution*, Anthony assumed the paper’s debt and sold the paper in May 1870 for one dollar. In a farewell editorial, Stanton introduced Curtis Bullard as the new editor, describing her as a “young, brave, brilliant, and beautiful” woman who brings to her work “rare culture, clear moral perceptions, enthusiasm, untiring industry and a liberality that comes from extensive travel, reading, and thought” (Stanton, “Who Shall” 328). Although Anthony anguished over giving up the paper, Stanton was relieved that Curtis Bullard had “generously assumed the care of the troublesome child” (Stanton, *Eighty Years* 182).

As the new mother of that “troublesome child,” Curtis Bullard strove to make decisions to resolve some of the *Revolution*’s

financial and political problems. Her experiences as a newspaper editor and as a member of a family involved in mass marketing likely gave her a stronger sense of the realities of the literary marketplace than Anthony and Stanton. In July 1870 Curtis Bullard published her first edition as editor in chief, with the Quaker abolitionist and financier Edwin A. Studwell as publisher. Her father became treasurer of the Revolution Association, a joint stock company formed to finance the paper, and trustees included two of her brothers, along with Stanton, Anthony, and Theodore Tilton (“Editorial Notes” 22). To increase revenue, the *Revolution* included more advertisements, including those from patent medicines, which Stanton and Anthony had rejected. Not surprisingly, many of those advertisements were for Curtis company products.

The members of the Revolution Association were also supporters of the newly founded Union Woman’s Suffrage Society (“Editorial Notes” 22). In May 1870, the same month Anthony sold the *Revolution*, the NWSA changed its name to the Union Woman’s Suffrage Society in hopes it could merge with the Boston-based American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and heal the rivalry between the two groups (Anthony 239–40). The *Revolution* was to be the official organ of the new organization, and the Union officers must have seen Curtis Bullard as a figure who would be accepted by both sides. However, the AWSA, whose president was Beecher, rejected the proposed merger at its annual convention in 1871 because it objected to the Union’s intent to combine arguments for suffrage with “the divorce question” (“A Woman’s” 360). When the merger failed, the Union changed its name again to the NWSA.

The “divorce question” was a controversial social debate about liberalized divorce laws, women’s inequality in marriage, and mothers’ lack of custody rights. These concerns were often seen as part of the larger issue of “free love” that was wreaking havoc in the woman’s rights movement in the 1870s. The term “free

love” was a broad one, but in general, free-love advocates emphasized that mutual affection and happiness were the most important aspects of marriage or sexual relationships between men and women, not religious or legal bonds. Free-love advocates argued for an end to sexual double standards for men and women, as did most woman’s rights leaders, but free-love advocates also argued against the institution of marriage (Curtis Bullard, “What” 104). By 1870 the national woman’s rights movement was losing support over free love, which had scandalized middle-class America and many of the Christian social reformers whose interest in temperance and abolition had led them to the woman’s movement. Stanton and Anthony shocked audiences by speaking openly about “legalized prostitution in marriage”—in other words, sex without mutual consent between a husband and wife. At a meeting in New York, Stanton announced that those “dabbling with the suffrage movement for women” should be aware that the movement supported “social equality, and next freedom, or in a word, free love” (DuBois, *Woman* 77–78). Although many suffrage supporters had been willing to discuss equality in marriage and liberalized divorce in smaller meetings, most tended to be more reticent at conventions. The public furor over free love made some activists question their support for suffrage and especially hurt the more radical NWSA and the *Revolution*.

The free-love debate puts into context one of Curtis Bullard’s major changes to the *Revolution*: the motto. By 1870 when Curtis Bullard had become editor, the Fifteenth Amendment had been ratified and thus was a moot point. Free love, however, was not. Under Curtis Bullard, the *Revolution*’s new motto became “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”<sup>13</sup> This verse from Matthew, frequently used in traditional wedding ceremonies, was printed directly below the words “The Revolution,” which seems paradoxical. However, Curtis Bullard carefully selected her motto to quell the

public's fear that woman's rights would be the end of the American family while at the same time defining "true marriage" as an egalitarian union.

Throughout *Christine*, Curtis Bullard's heroine argues that the Bible supports female equality and that those who disagree have simply failed in exegesis. As editor of the *Revolution*, Curtis Bullard took a similar stance, offering her own explication of the verse from Matthew. In an editorial about the new motto, she explains that a "true marriage" can never be ended by law ("Motto" 168). She pushes her argument even further, stating that the phrase "Whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder" also means that women should have an "equal place" with man "in the trades, in the colleges, in the lyceum, in the press, in literature, in science, in art, in government, in everything" ("Motto" 168). Using politically loaded terms, Curtis Bullard writes that women and men have been "systematically divorced" for too long in their work, but now woman can "enforce her marriage rights" to join man "in all the great ventures of human life" ("Motto" 168).

In the editorial "What Justifies Marriage?" Curtis Bullard critiques a social structure that means there is "no hope for two people shackled in the manacles of unhappy marriage, but a release by death," since the "fracture of the galling chain must be made at the expense of the reputation of one or both parties" (104). The editorial explicitly deconstructs the *Revolution's* new motto, arguing, "Man has bound in wedlock many whom God hath not joined together. Indeed, it is difficult for a close observer not to come to the conclusion that marriage, as it now exists, is a curse to society and to the human race; it is a source, far more frequently, of misery than of happiness. What God intended for the crowning felicity of mankind has been distorted by the race into its crowning wretchedness" (104).

In this editorial, Curtis Bullard invites her readers to reinterpret the paper's motto in a radical way that echoes free-love

philosophy. On the other hand, readers who were uncomfortable with free love could interpret the passage in a more moderate vein to mean that people should marry for love, not social or financial reasons. In this editorial, Curtis Bullard implicitly supports divorce but also carefully avoids using the word. Instead, she argues that people need to be more careful about choosing their spouses and calls for “a careful study” of the causes for success and failure in marriage.

The *Revolution's* new motto is likely what prompted Anthony's friend and biographer Ida Husted Harper to mistakenly claim that Curtis Bullard turned the *Revolution* into a “literary and society journal,” even though she praised Curtis Bullard as “much interested in reform work and possessed of literary ability” (I. Harper 361–63). Unfortunately, Harper's claim that Curtis Bullard changed the radical newspaper into a society and literary magazine has been asserted repeatedly throughout histories that mention the *Revolution*, relegating Curtis Bullard to footnotes that misrepresent her as the woman who abandoned the causes of the *Revolution*, if she is mentioned at all.<sup>14</sup> In reality the *Revolution* continued to champion woman's rights and, just as Anthony and Stanton had done, to publish fiction and poetry. Curtis Bullard's statement of purpose declares that the *Revolution* is “devoted to the welfare of Woman. . . . Called into existence to utter the cry of the ill-paid, of the unfriended, and of the disenfranchised, this journal is woman's voice speaking from woman's heart” (“Prospectus” 13).

After editing the *Revolution* for eighteen months, however, Curtis Bullard resigned.<sup>15</sup> In her last editorial on 12 October 1871, she expressed pride that as editor she called for women's social and civil equality with men—in other words, that she focused on issues of marriage and careers along with suffrage. However, she regretted that her “frequent and necessary absences from America render it impossible for me to do justice” to the paper (“Valedictory” 8). In closing, she adds the cryptic

comment that “strange to say, after an experience of a year and a half in a reform movement, I have not lost faith in human nature” (“Valedictory” 8). Though Curtis Bullard had gone to Europe with her parents and eight-year-old son in December 1870, she was still working as editor and contributing articles. She may have felt obligated to accompany her aged parents on their travels and found that motherhood left her little time for editing a national weekly paper. The initial financial support for the paper may have waned; the financier Studwell was listed as publisher for only about three months, leaving the other members of the Revolution Association liable for the paper’s annual production cost of \$20,000, which could have been too costly despite their personal commitment to woman’s rights (“Salutation” 360). These are all probable reasons why she gave up her position as editor, but her cryptic comment about retaining faith in human nature hints at another possible reason for her unexplained but “necessary” continued travel in Europe: to avoid malicious New York gossip.

In January 1871 Curtis Bullard was accused of adultery in the New York press. Three different papers, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, *New York Democrat*, and *New York Globe*, published articles alleging an affair between Curtis Bullard and Tilton. On 24 January the morning *New York Democrat* announced—with salacious delight—a “queer story” that was “particularly active in commercial circles downtown” (“Tilton” 4). According to the rumor, Tilton had sailed from New York to meet “Mrs. Laura Curtis Bullard, the editress of the *Revolution*,” who was in Europe (4). “There has been too much talk about these two of late, and it is now very much magnified,” the paper states, rather ironically, since it is the paper that magnified the rumors (4). According to the paper, Tilton had not lived at his home for several months, and Mr. Bullard, who was near death, had run off to Texas. Although the *Democrat* warns that the account should “be taken with allowances,” it also reassures readers that “we

have assurances from unquestionably good authority” that it is “strictly true” (4). Later that day, the *New York Globe* repudiated the story. The *Globe* sent a reporter to the Tilton home, where Elizabeth Tilton, “with flashing eyes,” denounced the story and said that her husband was not currently at home because he had just stepped out to conduct some business (4). The *Globe* also added that Mr. Bullard’s trip to Texas was for business, and that, instead of being gravely ill and consumptive, he was “a stout, robust man, standing almost six feet in his stockings” (4). Two days later, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, which claimed to have the largest circulation of any evening paper in America, reprinted the stories, including its own commentary under the headline “Tilton Traduced,” with subheads such as “Poor Tilton” and the “Tilton Scandal.” The *Eagle* characterized Tilton as a vain, though sincere, man whose downfall was a just reward for someone in the reform press who seemed to “worship no Deity but himself.” Women at the *Revolution* office told the *Eagle* reporter that “some enemy of Tilton” was responsible for spreading the scandal (4). And even the *Eagle* said that the “true value” of the rumored elopement was “very little” (4).

The ramifications for Curtis Bullard and her family must have been difficult, if not devastating. Though she was an outspoken supporter of woman’s rights, Curtis Bullard, like her heroine Christine, had striven to work within a framework of middle-class respectability. To argue for suffrage, egalitarian marriage, and better jobs for women may have been radical, but adultery was criminal. Such a charge would have cost Curtis Bullard the personal and public credibility she had worked so hard to earn as a writer and editor in the woman’s rights movement. She was a public figure, but she was also a mother and the wife and daughter of business executives. Regardless of whether or not she was having an extramarital relationship with Tilton, these published accusations of adultery in 1871 could have ensured that she would lose custody rights to her

son in the event of a divorce. Curtis Bullard and Tilton shared a close personal and professional friendship. They were both newspaper editors, active in the same woman's rights groups, and shared the same circle of friends in the reform movement. Theodore Tilton always denied the allegations of an affair with Curtis Bullard, even joking about them as if they were too ridiculous to take seriously. A month after the newspaper stories, in a letter to the suffrage leader Anna Dickinson, he said that his wife, Elizabeth, was busy "writing a sisterly letter to the lady with whom I was supposed to have run away to Europe" (qtd. in Fox 387). In a letter to Dickinson a year later, Curtis Bullard also implied that the rumors of her affair with Tilton were false. The two women enjoyed a strong friendship in 1872, and Curtis Bullard wrote to Dickinson that "nobody has made love to me—*nobody does*—I have a genius for friendships with men & women, but I am *not* one whom many men love. Sweet Anna I love thee" (qtd. in Gallman 112). The playful intensity of the correspondence between Dickinson and Curtis Bullard suggests a friendship that was both emotional and sensual, as were many female relationships in the nineteenth century (Gallman 112–15).

Curtis Bullard's relationships with Tilton and Dickinson demonstrate the nuanced complexities of interpreting heterosexual and same-sex relationships in the nineteenth century, especially amidst the free-love debates of the 1870s. Perhaps the greatest underlying truth of the stories about Curtis Bullard and Tilton in the New York press is that her reputation had become caught in the personal and professional battle between Tilton and Beecher.<sup>16</sup>

Several weeks before the newspaper stories, Henry Bowen, publisher of the *Independent*, had secured Beecher's support to fire Tilton as the paper's editor. Bowen had become incensed by Tilton's radical politics, especially his support for liberalized divorce, and he also told Beecher he was upset about a rumor

that Tilton was having an affair with Curtis Bullard (Fox 146–49).<sup>17</sup> Beecher expressed his concern to Bowen about the rumors, which he had also heard. To further complicate matters, Tilton believed Beecher had seduced his wife, Elizabeth, and Bowen delivered Tilton’s letter of accusation to Beecher, which demanded that Beecher resign from the pulpit (Applegate 401–2). A few days after Bowen spoke to Beecher about Curtis Bullard, a mutual friend angrily confronted Beecher and assured him that Curtis Bullard was innocent (*Theodore* 1:205). To Beecher’s credit, he wrote Bowen a letter saying that he no longer believed the stories against Curtis Bullard (*Theodore* 1:67). However, Tilton still lost his position as editor and the rumors spread, culminating in the newspaper stories a few weeks later in January 1871.

The allegations of an affair with Tilton continued to haunt Curtis Bullard. In the spring of 1872 the woman’s rights leader and free-love advocate Victoria Woodhull sent out anonymous blackmail letters to Curtis Bullard, Anthony, Lillie Devereux Blake, and several other suffrage leaders who opposed Woodhull’s growing influence in the woman’s rights movement (Kerr 75). Woodhull’s free-love platform combined with her cheerful declarations of relationships with different men—later she would say that Tilton was her lover—and her divorce and second marriage had made her a notorious public figure. Woodhull mailed Curtis Bullard and the other women dummy copies of *Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*, which included scurrilous stories of alleged sexual improprieties, and demanded \$500 not to print them (Kerr 75). Tilton and Anthony insisted that Woodhull stop her threats, but some of the dummy copies were circulating.<sup>18</sup> Woodhull always maintained that she had never tried to blackmail anyone; however, she defended blackmail as women’s “only method of righting themselves” in an essay in her newspaper (Farrell 120).

For Curtis Bullard, the blackmail threats seem rather belated since the accusations about her relationship with Tilton had

been publicized in the New York press the year before and she had resigned as editor of the *Revolution*. Any recurrence of the scandal in Woodhull's paper, however, would have put Curtis Bullard and her family through another round of public humiliation. Blake, a writer and reform leader who had praised Curtis Bullard for changing the *Revolution's* motto, was distraught that Woodhull might publish a false story claiming that she had been divorced (Blake 43; Farrell 127–29). Blake explained to her daughter that it did not matter that the story was untrue: “The truth never catches up with a lie! The lie runs too fast” (qtd. in Farrell 128–29). Blake's reaction to charges of divorce, which was legal even though it was not always considered respectable, puts into perspective the allegations of adultery against Curtis Bullard.

In November 1872 Woodhull published a story in her weekly newspaper that the married Beecher was having an affair with his parishioner and friend's wife, Elizabeth Tilton, including lurid allegations of “terrible orgies” in front of the Tilton children (Fox 157). In 1874 Tilton sued Beecher in civil court for adultery, and the trial splashed sensational stories of seduction and betrayal across the nation's newspapers, once again calling attention to the free-love debate that had set back the woman's suffrage movement. During the trial, part of the defense strategy was to show that Tilton was a hypocrite who had several affairs himself, and the story about an alleged affair with Curtis Bullard resurfaced again. At one point in the trial, the judge and defense lawyers discussed whether or not to state her full name in court, knowing that reading her name aloud would harm her reputation (*Theodore* 1:66–67). The judge determined that she could be referred to as “Mrs. B.,” but later in the trial Curtis Bullard's name was mentioned without hesitation, and the rumors about her and Tilton were referred to as the “Bullard story” (*Theodore* 1:206–7, 2:51). During his testimony, Tilton was careful not to repeat Curtis Bullard's name when he

denounced the New York press for making a “bold and vulgar allusion to a very honored lady in this city” when he sought to defend her—and himself—against the allegations of adultery (*Theodore* 1:512).

Stanton told her version of the beginnings of the Beecher scandal to the *Brooklyn Argus* in 1874; several days later her account was front-page national news (Fox 164). In the spring or fall of 1870, she, Anthony, Curtis Bullard, and the Tiltons had all been in Brooklyn together for the afternoon, which included a visit to the *Revolution’s* office, Stanton said (Fox 163). Stanton, Curtis Bullard, and Theodore went to the Curtis Bullard home, where they had dinner, while, through some sort of misunderstanding, Anthony and Elizabeth dined at the Tilton home, which greatly upset Elizabeth. Over dinner, Theodore told Stanton and Curtis Bullard the story of Elizabeth’s “faithlessness,” Stanton said, and later that night Elizabeth told a similar story to Anthony (Fox 163).

The charges and countercharges of the trial were intricate, but in the end Beecher was found innocent, and though his reputation was damaged he continued as a prominent minister and reformer. Elizabeth Tilton lived as a recluse in New York while Theodore Tilton, unable to secure a position as an editor, lived the rest of his life in relative poverty in France.

The trial, along with the blackmail attempts and the stories in the New York press, also took a toll on Curtis Bullard. To a certain extent, her career as a writer, editor, and activist in the woman’s rights movement had become a casualty of the philosophical, political, and personal conflicts that were part of the movement itself. Her stance on free love, which acknowledged that it was wrong for spouses to be tied together in misery but at the same time recognized that divorce was not a viable solution for many women, tended to be more conservative than Stanton’s, Tilton’s, and certainly Woodhull’s. Yet her loyalties in the movement were always aligned with Stanton

and Anthony, not the more moderate AWSA of Lucy Stone and Beecher. Her public position as editor of the *Revolution* and her own editorials on marriage added to the titillation of the stories about her and Tilton in the New York press, as did Tilton's support of liberalized divorce in the *Independent*. In the conflict between Woodhull and the NWSA, Curtis Bullard was one of the women who became a target. And in the trial that defined the personal and professional lives of Tilton and Beecher, Curtis Bullard once again was caught in the battle.

#### *After the Revolution*

In the opening chapters of *Christine*, before the young heroine thinks about becoming a woman's rights leader, she hopes to be wealthy, educated, and have "a splendid house, where I would have all the great people, the writers, and all sorts of talented persons come, and I would help the poor authors, who struggle on and die sometimes in the midst of their struggles" (7). After she left the *Revolution*, Curtis Bullard devoted the rest of her life to fulfilling her young character's earliest dream, welcoming other transatlantic writers and reformers to her home. Contemporary accounts describe her as a woman of elegance and kindness, known for her "sparkle, sweetness, and graciousness" (Townsend 185). She maintained a lifelong friendship with Stanton, who was a frequent guest (Stanton, *Eighty* 388). Curtis Bullard introduced Emily Faithfull, the British reformer and publisher, to New York reform society, launching her on a speaking tour of America (Ratcliffe 43). Faithfull, who dedicated her novel *A Reed Shaken with the Wind* to Curtis Bullard, characterized her as an intellectual and socially brilliant woman whose evening gatherings rivaled those at the "noted houses in Paris and London" (Faithfull 5). When Oscar Wilde came to the United States in 1882 for a lecture tour, he, too, visited Curtis Bullard (Curtis Bullard, Letter). Other guests included the French novelist Alice Durand, whose pen

name was Henri Greville, and Dora D'istria, a Romanian-Albanian writer and woman's rights advocate (Whiting 751; Stanton, *Eighty* 388). Along with Louise Chandler Moulton, Curtis Bullard supported the career of the blind British poet Phillip Bourke Marston (Moulton 173). Walt Whitman valued Curtis Bullard's praise and treasured a letter from her as a sign of his success (Reynolds, *Walt* 220, 528).

Curtis Bullard's wide-ranging, international friendships reflect the turn in her own literary career. She published several essays in Faithfull's *Victoria Magazine* and wrote an essay on Stanton in the book *Our Famous Women*. She translated three German novels, including *A Modern Midas* in 1884, which received a favorable notice in the *New York Times* and was popular enough to be reissued in 1900.<sup>19</sup> By the time she was in her sixties, her work as a writer seems to have ended, though she had not abandoned her old friends or the cause of woman's rights, making a donation for the support of the ailing Dickinson ("Little" 6). In 1904, after a long illness, Curtis Bullard's husband died at the age of eighty-four. In 1910, when she was seventy-eight, Curtis Bullard lived in Manhattan with her son.<sup>20</sup> She died at home on 19 January 1912 at the age of eighty-one and was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, next to her husband and his parents.<sup>21</sup>

Although Curtis Bullard had once enjoyed a transatlantic reputation, her death was not remarked upon in any detail in the press. Her brief obituary in the *New York Times*, which is part of a long list of death notices, identifies her only as a widow and daughter and requests that no flowers be sent ("Laura Curtis Bullard" 13). Her identity as a writer, editor, and woman's rights activist fell out of the record of her life, foreshadowing the way that Curtis Bullard and her work would fall from political and literary history. The fact that Curtis Bullard was forgotten by subsequent generations is not unusual; indeed, it is paradigmatic. Nineteenth-century authors such as Lydia Maria

Child, Rose Terry Cooke, Rebecca Harding Davis, Fanny Fern, Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick were largely forgotten throughout most of the twentieth century but have now resumed a place of prominence in American literature. Curtis Bullard, too, deserves to be remembered for her work as a novelist, essayist, editor, and reform activist, but most of all for her novel *Christine: Or Woman's Trials and Triumphs*.

#### Curtis Bullard and *Christine*

In writing *Christine*, Curtis Bullard created one of antebellum America's most unconventional novels and heroines. The story seems destined to follow the plot of much of woman's fiction in the nineteenth century until the likable eponymous character chooses to become a woman's rights lecturer and writer. Although her family and friends are horrified, Christine's mentor, Mrs. Warner, assures her that she is destined for "a higher calling" than "woman's usual life" of marriage and motherhood: "God has taken you from that sphere. . . . Christine, it is yours to be the champion of your sex. The pioneer in the march of progress. You are to rouse the indifferent—to give voice to the suffering of your sex. This is God's will. . . . You are to speak in *words of power*" (157; emphasis added).

In writing *Christine*, Curtis Bullard not only created a novel that gives voice to a strong female character, she gave voice to her own belief that women's words and agency were powerful enough to change American society. In a period when women were considered too emotional, and thus unsuited for many public roles and politics, *Christine* asserts the liberal egalitarianism espoused by woman's rights leaders at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. While many other antebellum novels by women writers have outspoken female characters who counter a social structure designed to silence women, *Christine* asserts the right of the heroine and all women to a public voice—and to a vote,

a career, and economic independence. The novel is one of the few of the antebellum period to have a woman's rights leader as a main character, especially as a sympathetic heroine.

When Curtis Bullard wrote *Christine* in 1856, woman's rights had already become its own cause separate from the temperance and abolitionist movements. In 1848 New York passed the Married Woman's Property Act, and later that year Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others presented the "Declaration of Sentiments" at Seneca Falls. In *Christine* Curtis Bullard represents the great opposition these women faced as lecturers during an era when most people thought that women should not speak in public to audiences of both men and women, let alone demand equality in education and politics. Woman's rights leaders were seen as violating traditional standards of true womanhood, making them unfeminine and thus unfit as wives and mothers. Since political and social equality would render women "unwomanly," many Americans feared that the so-called separate spheres of female and male duty would collapse, leading to the destruction of the family, the marketplace, and the government.

Curtis Bullard depicts one of the prevailing epithets hurled at woman's rights leaders in antebellum America when Christine's angry aunt warns her that she will "unsex" herself (163). This accusation of gender violation was common at midcentury; for example, the *Saturday Evening Post* declared that "the true dignity of womanhood can never be attained by woman's habitually unsexing herself" by lecturing on woman's rights ("Woman's Rights" 2). In gaining "political and pecuniary rights," the *Post* warned, woman may "lose the finer portion of her nature, and with it the love and reverence of man" ("Woman's Rights" 2). In 1852, an editorialist complained that the woman's rights convention in Syracuse illustrated the consequences of women leaving their "true sphere" (Stanton and Gage, *History* 853). The *Herald* pilloried the female delegates, describing them as "old

maids, whose personal charms were never very attractive . . . some having so much of the virago in their disposition, that nature appears to have made a mistake in their gender—mannish women, like hens that crow; some of boundless vanity and egotism, who believe that they are superior in intellectual ability to ‘all the world and the rest of mankind,’ and delight to see their speeches and addresses in print” (Stanton and Gage, *History* 853). The following year the national woman’s rights meeting in Brooklyn was dubbed the “mob convention” because the jeers from the hostile crowd made it impossible to hear the delegates. While Greeley’s *Tribune* wrote favorably of the female speakers, the *Herald* described the convention as a “gathering of unsexed women—unsexed in mind all of them . . . publicly propounding the doctrine that they should be allowed to step outside of their appropriate sphere” (Stanton and Gage, *History* 556).

In such a cultural climate, most nineteenth-century women novelists, including Curtis Bullard, eschewed public speaking because they needed to strive for middle-class respectability to maintain their writing careers, which already made them vulnerable to charges of unfeminine egotism. Fanny Fern, a best-selling author and newspaper columnist, supported suffrage but declined requests to speak in public (Fern 369). Fern’s subversive heroine in *Ruth Hall* (1854) considers many careers before becoming a writer, but she, too, never takes to the lectern. Harriet Beecher Stowe, the most famous writer in America, did not give public speeches during her European tours—she sat quietly on the stage as her remarks were read aloud by her husband (Hedrick 233–38). Louisa May Alcott, the creator of the intrepid Jo March, also avoided public speaking. When invited to speak to women at Vassar College and to members of Sorosis, Alcott, daughter of the orator Bronson Alcott, politely explained that she did not give public speeches, but in lieu of a lecture, she stood up, turned slowly around in a circle, and

sat back down (Alcott, *Selected Letters* 207–8). Although Curtis Bullard was actively engaged in the woman's rights movement, she, too, did not like speaking on the stage and preferred to work as a conference participant, writer, and editor (Tilton, "Legend"). The refusal of these women, outspoken thinkers who maintained legions of devoted readers, to speak publicly illustrates the degree to which the fictional Christine moves beyond middle-class mores when she becomes not only a writer but also a woman's rights lecturer.

A few antebellum reform novels published before Christine included female lecturers as characters. In the short novel *The Lecturess* (1839) by Sarah Josepha Hale, the central character, Marian, gives up her work as a lecturer on woman's education when she marries. Later, she defies her husband by joining an abolitionist society and befriending another reform speaker, who is a clever and scheming woman.<sup>22</sup> Marian's husband leaves her, and on her deathbed Marian repents of her reform principles, declaring that it is a woman's job to make her husband happy and subvert her will to his. Hale's novel ultimately works as a lecture against female lecturers, supporting Hale's view that women should wield authority within their homes, a philosophy she promoted as the influential editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Although Christine sometimes despairs that her work will never bear fruit, unlike Hale's heroine, she never repudiates her beliefs. Curtis Bullard, however, was careful that the radical nature of her novel did not cross into the notoriety generated by Caroline Chesebro's *Isa* (1852) and Mary Gove Nichols's *Mary Lyndon* (1855) and thus possibly alienate readers from the cause of woman's rights. Chesebro's main character, Isa, supports woman's rights primarily as a writer, not a lecturer, and she lives with her lover and coeditor, though the two are unmarried. Isa's rejection of marriage, not to mention her atheism, tended to validate many Americans' worst fears

of woman's rights, and Chesebro herself seems ambivalent toward her character.<sup>23</sup>

In Nichols's autobiographical *Mary Lyndon*, the main character scandalized readers with her divorce and promise to leave her second husband if she no longer loves him. Although Mary speaks on woman's rights, her primary focus is health reform and the water cure.<sup>24</sup> In a subplot of *Christine*, Curtis Bullard sympathetically illustrates the problems women faced in divorce and in sexual relationships outside marriage, but Christine herself remains "respectable," ensuring that her arguments for equality are not overshadowed by scandal. Nearly two decades after the publication of *Christine*, the novel's influence can be seen in Alcott's nostalgic reform novel *Work: A Story of Experience* (1873). Alcott's spirited heroine, Christie, becomes a woman's rights speaker at the novel's end.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, Alcott's novel was serialized in Beecher's *Christian Union* in 1872–73, the year after Curtis Bullard resigned from the *Revolution*.

*Christine* is both a literary and political text, blending sensational tales of seduction, insanity, and abandonment from nineteenth-century popular culture with the philosophy of American liberal egalitarianism. Curtis Bullard writes with humor, irony, and drama, weaving her text with local color and literary and biblical allusions. The novel's pattern is dialogic, shifting between episodes of action and colloquies about woman's rights, employing psychological realism and political rhetoric. Curtis Bullard's goal was to represent the need for woman's rights to a middle-class audience of novel readers who may have shied away from reading the essays of writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Margaret Fuller or attending the lectures of speakers such as Lucy Stone or Susan B. Anthony.

*Christine* builds upon the tradition of the female bildungsroman, the novel of education and development, as the text dramatizes the ethical, emotional, and economic imperatives for female equality. Curtis Bullard tells the story of a young

woman who leaves her rural home for an education and new life. Like the main character in a classic bildungsroman, she harbors an individualism and dreamy idealism that marks her as different from others. Christine embodies the traditions of the male bildungsroman, which focuses on the chronological development of the hero as he achieves independence, and the female bildungsroman, which emphasizes the heroine's interior quest and relation to community.<sup>26</sup> Since women's lives in the nineteenth century were measured by different markers than men's lives—familial connections and courtship rather than individualism and professional success—many popular female bildungsromane closed with marriage.

In *Christine*, Curtis Bullard melds the traditions of the male and female bildungsroman in the plot's structure. Christine's early failures on the family farm signify her inability to perform within community standards of practical, physical labor, especially female labor. She quickly proves herself inept at cleaning, cooking, and milking; even the simplest task of making beds proves to be difficult as she becomes engrossed in reading novels. Her passionate temper, lack of beauty, and love of reading are juxtaposed to the docile domesticity of her pretty sister, who is respected within the family and village. In the novel's humorous opening scene, Christine creates domestic chaos when she breaks the "household god," a china teapot, while reading a newspaper (6). She later is allowed to leave home and gain an education at the elite boarding school run by her widowed wealthy aunt, Julia Frothingham, whose cold elegance and autocratic power make her a negative example of female authority.

At midpoint in the novel, Christine seems to have fulfilled the plot arc of many nineteenth-century female bildungsromane: she leaves home, gains an education, and enjoys courtship. The novel should close, at this point, with references to wedding plans and the narrator's assurances of uninterrupted matrimonial bliss, even if those assurances are tinged with irony, à

la Jane Austen and E.D.E.N. Southworth. Instead, Christine's true education begins when she takes to the public stage as a woman's rights lecturer, arguing for universal suffrage and economic opportunities for women. Curtis Bullard shifts the plot structure to align her novel more closely with the paradigm of the male quest for independence as Christine fully breaks from her community and sets out to make her way in the world, to live life on her own principles and establish her career.

One of the ways that Curtis Bullard makes Christine's arguments for female equality "respectable" is by presenting them as a logical extension of traditional American political thought. Christine argues:

*Whatever a woman can do, and do well, we say let public opinion open the door for her to do, and let her be paid for her labor as much as a man would be, for the same amount. Let her try to do whatever she thinks she can do—if she fails, it will be no more than hundreds of men have done before her. And let her vote. She is under laws—let her have a voice in saying what they shall be. She is taxed—let her have the benefit of the principle which our fathers fought and bled to establish, no taxation without representation. (173–74)*

And though Christine struggles to understand women who are different from her, she ultimately realizes that not all women share her temperament, and she is tolerant of those who disagree with her. Curtis Bullard presents the reader with a cast of female "types" offering different versions of "the trials and triumphs" of women. As a reform novel, Christine focuses on woman's rights, never mentioning temperance or abolition, the causes from which the woman's rights movement grew. While Christine refers to her support for "universal suffrage," a term that denoted support for voting rights for all people regardless of gender or race, the novel's focus is on female suffrage.

The novel's engagement with the rhetoric of "separate spheres" represents how this discourse of public versus private shaped

middle-class women's experiences, and how woman's rights activists could reshape this traditional rhetorical stance for their own purposes. Feminist critics and historians have demonstrated that the demarcation between home and the marketplace was never a clear one, and Curtis Bullard's playful use of the word "sphere" suggests that it could also sometimes be more of a linguistic barrier than a literal one.<sup>27</sup> When Christine chooses to become a woman's rights lecturer, Mrs. Warner praises her for leaving the "sphere" of woman's "usual life" of marriage for a wider one (157). Instead of being "unsexed" by her choice, Christine is ennobled; she becomes the "champion of her sex," Mrs. Warner says, whereas marriage to a wealthy man would represent a "life of ease and self-indulgence" (157–58). Within this context, spheres are simply "usual," not natural or ordained, and Christine's rejection of convention is a moral choice that saves her from decadence. When Christine's friend Dr. Russell tells her of his "utter abhorrence to a woman stepping out of her sphere" into politics, Christine dismisses his objections as "sentimental nonsense" (331). Christine's response to Dr. Russell's use of the sphere mantra satirizes contemporary tropes of women as excessively emotional and sentimental; instead, in this case, it is the man of science who fails in logical reasoning.

Curtis Bullard also emphasizes the virtue of woman's rights leaders by portraying female social and political equality as a rational extension of women's culturally sanctioned benevolent work. By the 1850s, many women in the reform movement had become disillusioned with moral suasion and charity as means to change American society. Instead of focusing on traditional "female" methods of change, women activists began asserting the need for female suffrage and female leaders in benevolent institutions (Ginzberg 601–22). While the popular culture represented women in politics as power hungry and selfish, Christine is motivated by her desire to help others. In

the quotation that is the epigraph to this introduction, Christine's oratory allows her to turn female benevolence into direct political action. Christine combines benevolence with rights as she inspires her audience with a "desire to seek out and relieve the distressed *as well as to press forward to claim the wider field which she pointed out as before them*" (199; emphasis added). As an individual, Christine can help a limited number of people, but her public "words of power" inspire her audience to help those in need, especially through the cause of social and political equality for women. Christine's lectures can reproduce her personal ideals within the public, persuading and influencing the many instead of only those within the sphere of her domestic circle.

Curtis Bullard's work to contextualize Christine's "unacceptable" profession and ideals within "acceptable" frameworks is central to the novel's argument that woman's rights are a logical part of American society. Christine's career is legitimized by the midcentury belief in American progress and the tradition of American Protestantism. By leaving the family farm, Christine finds financial success in a consumer economy that values her intellectual labor rather than her manual and reproductive labor. As a lecturer and writer who runs a home in the city for working women, Christine rejects the fashionable female education represented by her aunt's boarding school. The virulent critique of Christine's work by her father and aunt seem antithetical to the expanding economy of capitalism and a religious culture that linked the transcendental individual to social reform. Christine's own spiritual musings earn her the nickname "the preacher" from her classmates, and Mrs. Warner teaches her to see woman's rights as part of her Christian duty. The wife of a sea captain who is often absent, Mrs. Warner enjoys the right to speak plainly in the tradition of Yankee individualism. As the figurative "mother" of woman's rights in the novel, Mrs. Warner combines the domestic and the political—she sews

constantly for her children and expounds the need for female equality. She tells Christine, “I have not lived entirely in vain. . . . Your clear voice will ring out words of power that startle the sleepers. . . . People will call you blessed! They will reverence you as one who walks with God” (162). Like Stowe, Child, and Sedgwick, Curtis Bullard gives female characters the power to express moral and religious views that link them to the role of the minister in American society. In the character of Christine, however, Curtis Bullard reshapes and expands woman’s role as a domestic minister into her heroine’s work as a national lecturer. Christine, as her name suggests, carries out her Christian duty through her political activism.

Curtis Bullard underscores this link between religious and political authority when Mrs. Warner asks Christine when she will write essays. Christine replies: “Perhaps never. Essays are too often read by those who do not need them. Christ did not disdain to convey truth in parables. I will write in a form that will bring my words to all—the good who seek for the right and true, wherever it may be found, will hear me, and to the careless, who never seek for truth, I will whisper lessons so gently that they cannot offend, and yet, that may bear with them seeds which may spring up in the heart” (139). In her preference for parable, Christine rejects the essay, the genre most associated with the woman’s rights movement. Although Christine does later write essays, this passage offers readers a deeper understanding of Curtis Bullard’s motives in writing a woman’s rights *novel* instead of a collection of essays. While the aesthetics of modernism tend to separate the literary and political, in the nineteenth century readers made no such distinctions. At the same time, however, a novel would attract readers who may have been hesitant or even opposed to reading an essay or treatise by a woman’s rights leader. And though many nineteenth-century novels functioned as parables of social problems, *Christine* is unusual.

While the novel calls for social change by depicting the plight of those in need, Curtis Bullard pushes the novel's cultural work further by focusing primarily on the character of the female advocate. As the character of Christine gives voice to those who suffer, the text of *Christine* gives "womanhood" to the "unsexed." Curtis Bullard's portrayal of Christine represents woman's rights leaders as a new type of "true woman"—as active, independent, compassionate, and politically engaged individuals represented by Christine in the novel and leaders such as Mott, Stone, Anthony, and Stanton in nineteenth-century America. Even Christine's friend Dr. Russell, who disagrees with her ideas on suffrage, tells her, "You have proved yourself a *true woman*; misguided as I may think you in some respects, I honor your sincerity, your loftiness of purpose, and the work that you have done will live after you" (332–33; emphasis added). For nineteenth-century readers, Curtis Bullard wrote *Christine* to create emotional sympathy for female lecturers in order to foster political sympathy for woman's rights. For modern readers, *Christine* offers a deeper understanding of our cultural and literary past through its explicit discussions of marriage, motherhood, careers, and politics for women; indeed, the text of *Christine* examines issues that are still often at the core of political and social debate in America today.

### Notes

1. I refer to her as Curtis Bullard on second reference because she published her novels *Now-a-days!* and *Christine* before her marriage under the name Laura J. Curtis and then later published essays and edited the *Revolution* under the name Laura Curtis Bullard.

2. For an earlier biographical study of Curtis Bullard, see "Legacy Profile" in *Legacy* 21.1 (2004): 74–82. Agger, Herndl, Leach, Reynolds, and Tracey discuss Curtis Bullard's work as a writer but also note the lack of biographical information. Agger includes a picture of a young woman in a riding hat with the caption "believed to be Laura J. Curtis Bullard, writer, editor, and advocate of woman's rights" (198). However, on the back of the original tintype, located at the Maine Historical Preservation Commission in Augusta, is handwritten "Bangor author/?Jane Appleton." I have been unable to find

any photos of Curtis Bullard or Appleton to verify the identity of the woman in the picture.

3. Laura Jane Curtis, Birth Record, Maine Department of Human Services, Vital Records/Statistics, Pre-1892 Delayed Returns, Microfilm, Roll 25.

4. 1850 U.S. Census, Penobscot County, Maine, Microform Roll 264.

5. 1850 U.S. Census, Penobscot County, Maine, Microform Roll 264. The census lists Jeremiah Curtis's occupation as "druggist."

6. *Now-a-days!* was published by T. L. Magagnos in 1854; University of Maine Press reprinted it in 1980 without critical or biographical material.

7. *Ladies' Visitor*, October 1860, 4. The quotations in this paragraph are from this advertisement for Christine, which was reprinted in other editions of the paper.

8. The couple was married in Brooklyn on 29 June 1859; see *New York Times*, 30 June 1859, 5. Enoch Bullard's family is not directly related to the more famous family of Eunice Bullard Beecher, wife of Henry Ward Beecher; see Bullard.

9. Alcott may have felt guilty about or doubted the veracity of this information, because part of this section of the letter was later crossed out, though it is still legible. See *Selected Letters* 217n8.

10. Harold Curtis Bullard was eighteen in 1880, according to the 1880 U.S. Census, which means he was born in 1862.

11. The 1880 U.S. Census shows Jeremiah and Lucy Curtis and Enoch, Laura, and Harold Bullard living at the same address in Brooklyn.

12. See "Workingwomen's" 8; "Weekly Meeting"; "Miss Anthony's"; and "Woman Suffrage Association."

13. Matt. 19:6.

14. For example, Dorr writes that Curtis Bullard turned the *Revolution* into a "genteel ladies' magazine" (225). Judith Harper writes that Curtis Bullard "planned a literary and social journal" (170). Barry writes that Curtis Bullard and Tilton turned the paper into a "literary and society journal" and that "the new editors refused to have anything to do with the old radicals" (223).

15. The new editor was Rev. William T. Clarke, and the paper shut down four months later.

16. While Goldsmith asserts that Tilton and Curtis Bullard were having an affair, Fox and Waller believe the allegations were not true. See Fox 387; Goldsmith 218; and Waller 120–21.

17. Bowen heard of the alleged Curtis Bullard–Tilton affair through a hysterical letter he received from Johanna Morse, Elizabeth Tilton's mother, who claimed that Tilton planned to leave Elizabeth and sail to Europe to meet Curtis Bullard (Applegate 401). Morse intensely disliked her son-in-law, and Applegate describes her as "crazy" (409). In her letter to Curtis Bullard on 13

January 1871, Elizabeth Tilton refers to a “cruel conspiracy made by my poor suffering mother” to “divorce” the Tiltons. Elizabeth also writes that the “slanders have been sown broadcast” and that Bowen has fired Theodore because of them (qtd. in Fox 345).

18. See also Barry 247–48; Farrell 127–29; Sachs 164–66; *Theodore* 1:157; Underhill 226.

19. *Gypsy Friedl and Faithful unto Death* were serialized in *The Golden Age*, a short-lived paper edited by Tilton. She translated a German edition of *Modern Midas*, written by the Hungarian novelist Maurus Jokai.

20. 1910 U.S. Census, Manhattan Ward 12, New York.

21. State of New York, Certificate and Record of Death, No. 2169, New York City Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives.

22. Herndl calls Christine a “feminist revision” of the “anti-feminist” novel *The Lecturess* (64).

23. For a discussion of *Isa*, see Bardes and Gossett 64–67.

24. For a discussion of *Mary Lyndon*, see Myerson.

25. Other similarities are the character Philip, the heroines’ early home lives, and the final scenes, in which Curtis Bullard’s Christine commissions a painting and Alcott’s Christie gazes at a commissioned painting.

26. See Buckley, who focuses on the male bildungsroman (16–27), and Abel, Hirsch, and Langland for a discussion of the female bildungsroman. Also see Fuderer and my essay “Reading *Emma* as a Lesson on ‘Ladyhood’: A Study in the Domestic Bildungsroman,” *Essays in Literature* 22.1 (1995): 45–58.

27. See Davidson and Hatcher; Elbert.

### Works Cited

- Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983.
- Agger, Lee. *Women of Maine*. Portland ME: Gannett, 1982.
- Alcott, Louisa May. *Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*. Ed. Joel Myerson, Daniel Shealy, Madeleine B. Stern. Boston: Little, Brown, 1987.
- . *Work: A Story of Experience*. 1872. New York: Schocken, 1977.
- Anthony, Katharine. Susan B. Anthony. Garden City: Doubleday, 1954.
- Applegate, Debby. *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*. New York: Three Leaves, 2006.
- Bardes, Barbara A., and Suzanne Gossett. *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1990.

- Barry, Kathleen. *Susan B. Anthony: Biography of a Singular Feminist*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.
- Blake, Lillie Devereux. "The Divorce Question." Letter. *Revolution* 21 July 1870: 43.
- "Brooklyn Women's Club." *Brooklyn Eagle* 7 Jan. 1870: 3.
- Buckley, Jerome. *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Bullard, Edgar J. *The Other Bullards: A Genealogy*. Port Austin MI: n.p., 1928.
- Curtis Bullard, Laura. *Christine: Or Woman's Trials and Triumphs*. New York: DeWitt and Davenport, 1856.
- . "Elizabeth Cady Stanton." *Our Famous Women*. Hartford: Worthington, 1884. 602–23.
- . Letter to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. 17 Nov. 1882. *Papers of Stanton and Anthony*. Microfilm reel 22, frame 745.
- . "Motto of This Journal." *Revolution* 15 Sept. 1870: 168.
- . "My Husband's Mother." *Ladies' Visitor, and Drawing Room Companion* Oct. 1856: 1.
- . *Now-a-days!* New York: Magagnos, 1854.
- . "Salutation from the Sea." *Revolution* 8 Dec. 1870: 360.
- . "Valedictory." *Revolution* 12 Oct. 1871: 8.
- . "What Justifies Marriage?" *Revolution* 18 Aug. 1870: 104.
- Curtis Bullard, Laura, and Emma Herzong, trans. *A Modern Midas: A Romance*. By Maurus Jokai. New York: R. Worthington, 1884.
- Davidson, Cathy, and Jessamyn Hatcher, eds. *No More Separate Spheres! Durham*: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Dorr, Rhetta Childe. *Susan B. Anthony: The Woman Who Changed a Nation*. New York: AMS Press, 1970.
- DuBois, Ellen. *The Elizabeth Cady Stanton–Susan B. Anthony Reader*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992.
- . *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- "Editorial Notes." *Independent* 26 May 1870: 22.
- Elbert, Monika, ed. *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1630–1930*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2000.
- Faithfull, Emily. *Three Visits to America*. Edinburgh: Douglas, 1884.
- Farrell, Grace. *Lillie Devereux Blake: Retracing a Life Erased*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002.
- Fern, Fanny. *Ruth Hall and Other Writings*. 1855. Ed. Joyce Warren. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1986.

- Fox, Richard Wrightman. *Trials of Intimacy: Love and Loss in the Beecher-Tilton Scandal*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Fuderer, Laura Sue. *The Female Bildungsroman in English: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism*. New York: MLA, 1990.
- Gallman, J. Matthew. *America's Joan of Arc: The Life of Anna Elizabeth Dickinson*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Ginzberg, Lori. "Moral Suasion Is Moral Balderdash": Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s." *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 601–22.
- Goldsmith, Barbara. *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*. New York: Knopf, 1998.
- Harper, Ida Husted. *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*. Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill, 1899.
- Harper, Judith E. *Susan B. Anthony: A Biographical Companion*. New York: ABL-CLIO, 1998.
- Hedrick, Joan. *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Herndl, Diane Price. *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture 1840–1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Holcombe, Henry. *Patent Medicine Tax Stamps: A History of the Firms Using United States Private Die Proprietary Medicine Tax Stamps*. Lawrence MA: Quarterman, 1979.
- Hume, R. W. "The Meeting of the Waters." *Woman's Advocate* 2.5 (1869): 217–19.
- "Jeremiah Curtis." Obituary. *New York Daily Tribune* 25 Mar. 1883: 7.
- Kerr, Andrea Moore. "White Woman's Rights, Black Men's Wrongs, Free Love, Blackmail, and the Formation of the American Suffrage Association." *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*. Ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler. Troutdale OR: Newsage, 1995.
- "Laura Curtis Bullard." Obituary. *New York Times* 20 Jan. 1912: 13.
- Leach, William. *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society*. Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989.
- "A Little Fund." *Brooklyn Eagle* 27 Apr. 1891: 6.
- Merrill, Margaret Manton. "Sorosism." *Cosmopolitan: A Monthly Illustrated Magazine* June 1893: 153–58.
- "Miss Anthony's Suffrage Association." *New York Tribune* 4 Aug. 1869. Papers of Stanton and Anthony. Microfilm reel 13, frame 623.
- Mosher, Elizabeth, ed. *Vital Records of Freedom, Waldo County, Maine, Prior to 1892*. Camden ME: Picton Press, 1991.
- Moulton, Louise Chandler. "A Fullfilled Prediction." *Critic: Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 23 Apr. 1887: 173.

- “Movement in Maine.” *National Era* 4 Feb. 1847: 3.
- Myerson, Joel. “Mary Gove Nichols’ *Mary Lyndon: A Forgotten Reform Novel*.” *American Literature* 58 (Dec. 1986): 523–40.
- “National Intelligencer, New York Express, and Abolitionists.” *National Era* 18 Nov. 1847: 2.
- “New Publications.” *Knickerbocker* July 1856: 109.
- Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*. Ed. Patricia Holland and Ann D. Gordon. Microfilm. Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1991.
- “Prospectus.” *Revolution* 7 July 1870: 13.
- Ratcliffe, Eric. *The Caxton of Her Age: The Career and Family Background of Emily Faithfull*. Upton-Upon Severn, UK: Images, 1993.
- “Reviews.” *Peterson’s Magazine* May 1856: 399.
- Reynolds, David S. *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- . *Walt Whitman’s America: A Cultural Biography*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
- Sachs, Emanie. *The Terrible Siren: Victoria Woodhull*. 1928. New York: Arno, 1978.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *Eighty Years and More*. New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898.
- . “Who Shall Fill Our Places.” *Revolution* 26 May 1870: 328.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. *History of Woman Suffrage*. Vol. 2. Rochester: Charles Mann, 1881.
- Theodore Tilton vs. Henry Ward Beecher*. 2 vols. New York: McDivitt, Campbell, 1875.
- Tilton, Theodore. “A Legend of Good Women.” *The Golden Age* 1 July 1871: 6.
- “Tilton Traduced.” *Brooklyn Eagle* 26 Jan. 1871: 4.
- Townsend, Virginia. “Summer Days in New York.” *Arthur’s Illustrated Home Magazine* Mar. 1874: 185.
- Tracey, Karen. *Plots and Proposals: American Women’s Fiction: 1850–90*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Underhill, Lois Beachy. *The Woman Who Ran for President: The Many Lives of Victoria Woodhull*. New York: Bridge, 1995.
- Waller, Altima. *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982.
- “Weekly Meeting at the Bureau.” *Revolution*. *Papers of Stanton and Anthony*. Microfilm reel 2, frame 45–46.
- Whiting, Lillian. “Dora D’istria.” *Chautauquan* Sept. 1895: 751.

## Introduction

---

- Williams, Melissa S. "Feminism as an American Project: The Political Thought of Elizabeth Cady Stanton." *History of American Political Thought*. Ed. Bryan Paul Frost and Jeffrey Sikkenga. Lanham MD: Lexington, 2003. 425–26.
- "Woman's Rights Convention." *Saturday Evening Post* 2 Nov. 1850: 2.
- "Woman Suffrage Association." *New York World* 4 Aug. 1869. *Papers of Stanton and Anthony*. Microfilm reel 13, frame 624.
- "A Woman's View of the Two Societies." *Revolution* 8 Dec. 1870: 360.
- "Workingwomen's Association." *New York Times* 6 May 1869: 8.