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Review of *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* and *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*

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Homestead, Melissa J., "Review of *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* and *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*" (2008). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English.* Paper 110.
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Published in *American Literature* (2008) 80(1): 170-172. DOI: 10.1215/00029831-2007-067.
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Book Reviews

Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America, by Angela Vietto. Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2005. ix, 1 pp. $89.95.

Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic, by Mary Kelley. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. 2006. x, 29 pp. $39.95.

Two books published in the 1980s had a deep influence on the study of American women novelists of the early republic and the antebellum era. Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (1984) presented twelve popular women novelists as deeply conflicted about their role as public producers of culture. The chapters in Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (1986) that treat women novelists and their readers as worthy of serious analysis significantly altered the course of scholarship on the early American novel. Angela Vietto clearly frames *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* as a response to the work of Davidson and subsequent scholars, asking: How would early American women's authorship look different if scholars did not focus so centrally on the novel and on print publication? What if manuscript circulation and print publication were placed on a continuum and forms other than the novel were included? Kelley does not frame *Learning to Stand and Speak* as a revision of her own *Private Woman*; indeed, the scope and the focus of her new project are different and much broader, extending back to the early republic and treating scores of educated women who left traces of their intellectual engagements in writing (both manuscript and print); nevertheless, *Learning to Stand and Speak* is likely to most interest literary historians for its revision of *Private Woman*.

For Vietto, authorship is primarily a discursive formation. Relying on Judith Butler's theories of gender as performance, she proceeds through a series of chapters tracing women authors' engagements with (and occasional parodic subversions of) gender ideology in literary texts: women authors affiliated themselves with other women's writing by representing "literary sorority"; they used the narrative authority of the republican mother to advise men on proper conduct; they referenced historical instances of women warriors in complex ways that simultaneously disavowed and claimed the agency enacted by these violent women; and they claimed the role of citizens, rather than only mothers of citizens, by

writing explicit political analysis. In a final chapter, Vietto analyzes shifts in gendered authorial strategies over time in works by Judith Sargent Murray, Mercy Otis Warren, and Sarah Wentworth Morton. Vietto usefully insists that scholars should read women authors as having careers. Arguing that "the relationship between authorship and gender is far from static," she claims that "each time a writer . . . set pen to paper, her work entered a cultural context that, in regard to both her gender identity and her vocation as an author, was constantly changing" (115). Her broad focus on a variety of authors and genres, manuscript and print, is welcome. Additional authors who make significant appearances include Hannah Adams, Hannah Mather Crocker, Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson, Annis Boudinot Stockton, and Sarah Pogson. Vietto recognizes and accounts for the fact that these are all elite white women, briefly suggesting how Phillis Wheatley's career might be understood within her paradigm. One might wish, however, that a study with the word "authorship" in the title would have been more archival rather than consist largely of close readings of literary texts.

Kelley's study is archival, drawing on a wealth of manuscript and print sources documenting the intellectual lives and civic engagements of women over a span of nearly fifty years. Organizing her chapters around "social roles and institutions" open to women, Kelley draws on two decades of scholarship rethinking notions of public and private spheres and how they are gendered. Having "adopted the term 'civil society' to include any and all publics except those dedicated to the organized politics constituted in political parties and elections" (5), she finds educated women deeply and broadly engaged in civil society through critical reading, lucid writing, and persuasive speaking. The central achievement of Kelley's book is her recovery of academies and seminaries as true institutions of higher learning for young women, equivalent in curriculum and intellectual rigor to colleges for men. And although women could not enter professions such as law, medicine, and the ministry after finishing their educations, academies and seminaries did contribute to the increasing number of women who became teachers, editors, and writers. For the many women who did not become paid intellectual workers, participation in reading groups and literary societies maintained their active intellectual engagements in civil society. African American women attempted to knock at the doors of civil society through these institutions, and Kelley documents the ways civil society—including their white female peers—denied them admission.

Authorship is not a central category in Kelley's study but one point on a possible trajectory for educated women. Whereas Kelley's *Private Woman* regarded women authors as domestic beings crossing a yawning gulf between private and public when their works appeared in print, print authorship in her new study is only a small step away from the norm

for educated women. When Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Fanny Fern make brief appearances in *Learning to Stand and Speak*, their lives and careers look entirely different than they do in *Private Woman*. And Margaret Fuller's "conversations" look like business as usual, rather than the extraordinary enterprise suggested in much Fuller scholarship. A number of the figures that Vietto covers (Stockton, Murray, Fergusson, Warren, Adams) as well as other print authors from the early republic (for example, Susanna Rowson) also make appearances in *Learning to Stand and Speak*. This broad chronological focus is also the book's greatest weakness—chapters move back and forth across chronology in dizzying ways, with the important distinctions that Kelley attempts to draw between the two periods getting lost or confused. Nevertheless, literary historians who hope to understand fully the intellectual and social contexts out of which women's writing emerged in both the early republic and the antebellum era will find Kelley's book essential.

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