Loving The Wide, Wide World: A novel, its fans, and their fictions

On March 1, 1852, a man signing himself “Alice’s Admirer” wrote a fan letter to Susan Warner about her novel *The Wide, Wide World*, published a little over a year earlier in December 1850. His written reactions to Warner’s novel cover some fourteen pages and are as wide-ranging as they are long-winded. He took exception to Warner’s unfavorable descriptions of the heroine Ellen Montgomery’s Scottish relatives, for he himself was a “Scotchman”; referred by page and volume to one of his favorite scenes; confessed that he could not read the words describing the death of the beloved character Alice Humphreys for the

tears that interrupted his sight; and jokingly described his frustrated matrimonial intentions for Alice, who is not only dead, but also, alas, fictional. Before making these observations, Alice's Admirer introduced himself and his letter as follows: "I have just finished the perusal of the 'Wide, Wide World', and feel, as if already, its author is a friend. At any rate I cannot help expressing to you the great pleasure I have experienced in its perusal. After having received, as this work has, the approbation of critics & competent judges it is of little consequence what the views of a more ordinary reader may be—& yet— (I don't know that I can give you a very good reason why)—but I must ask you to hear them."

Today, the novel that prompted this fan letter is primarily remembered as a bestseller of its time, a paradigmatic example of how astonishingly well sentimental novels sold and how fiercely the reading public embraced them in the nineteenth century. The evidence for this claim is largely twofold. "[C]ritics & competent judges," as this fan called them, recorded their approval of Warner's first novel in a number of favorable notices and reviews in publications like the *Christian Review*, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and the *North American Review*. The larger public voted with their pocketbooks and turned *The Wide, Wide World* into a runaway bestseller. In fact, at the time of its publication, its sales were unprecedented (though they would be topped by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* just a couple of years later): in less than a year, Warner's novel sold more than 40,000 copies, and that figure would grow to over 225,000 copies by the end of the decade.

Published reviews and sales figures certainly have their uses in outlining and starting to color in a picture of *The Wide, Wide World*'s pervasive popularity in the nineteenth century, but completing that picture requires paying attention to "more ordinary reader[s]" like Alice's Admirer, whom today we would simply call fans. Thankfully, some of those fans wrote letters to Warner, and some of those letters survive. Their exhilarating combination of compulsion, passion, earnestness, and idiosyncrasy makes them not only wholly entertaining, but also quite useful. Warner's fan letters can tell us why readers like (and unlike) Alice's Admirer devoured *The Wide, Wide World*, why they formed deep emotional bonds with characters whom they knew to be fictional, and why they chose to bare their souls in letters to a writer whom they would never meet. They can tell us why particular readers felt so strongly about this novel and why, for some, their attachment to it endured over decades. These letters can give us fresh perspective, then, on sentimental novels, ordinary readers, and fandom in the nineteenth century—and they do so by recording the varied ways that some ordinary readers and a sentimental author were brought together by loving *The Wide, Wide World*.

At the center of many of these letters is a novel that was quite well known in the nineteenth century but has dropped off the radar of ordinary readers today—I imagine that few of *Common-place*'s readers have heard of, much less read *The Wide, Wide World*. By way of introduction, then, Warner's first novel is a hefty two-volume work that chronicles the tears, travails, and occasional

triumphs of the girl heroine Ellen Montgomery. It tells what was a conventional story for that time—a young girl faces a number of hardships, sometimes big but often woefully small, and learns slowly but surely to submit her will to that of God and his male representatives here on earth. Like the heroines of so many other sentimental novels, Ellen Montgomery is a prolific crier—on average, her tears flow about once every two-and-a-half pages all the way through a 570-page novel—and her readers were expected to cry along with her.

Some of them did. The more than sixty surviving fan letters written to Susan Warner and her younger sister Anna, who was also a writer, are quite soggy, rife with descriptions of tears, whimpers, and weeping. (Anna, though never as popular or as skilled as Susan, authored many novels and hymns, including the still well-known hymn "Jesus Loves Me.") Over the course of long careers, Susan and Anna Warner would produce over seventy titles, sometimes individually and sometimes together, but none of them met with the popularity, acclaim, or, I'd imagine, the number of tears that *The Wide, Wide World* did.

The Warner fan letters are now held by the Constitution Island Association and housed at the United States Military Academy, which is right across the Hudson River from the Warners' home. They span the second half of the nineteenth century, dating from 1851 to 1904. More than half of the dated letters were written in the 1850s and 1860s, with ten letters sent to Susan Warner in 1852 alone. The Warner letters came from places far and near—from Boston, Detroit, and San Francisco, from Wisconsin, Utah, and South Carolina. About a quarter of the letters were posted from outside the United States, including a few each from England and Ireland and single letters from Germany and Austria. The writers were mostly women of varying ages, although one-third of them were men. More specifically, these writers were teenage girls, sea-faring men, recently converted Christians, aspiring writers, and older women who read *The Wide, Wide World* in their youths, passed it on to their daughters, and were still hoping for a sequel decades later. Of all the letters, the book discussed most often was Susan Warner's first novel: more than half of the Warner fan letters mentioned it.

Though *The Wide, Wide World* is probably not familiar to many people today, the concerns and claims of these fan letters, rather remarkably, may be. While fans today are more likely to approach and engage authors through more twenty-first-century means than the now old-fashioned letter, the queries, preoccupations, and often unbridled enthusiasm of fans then and now share certain qualities. Warner's readers in the 1800s wanted to know whether and when a sequel to a favorite book was forthcoming, whether a particular novel was founded on facts, how to succeed in writing a novel, and if Warner would be so kind as to respond, preferably with an autograph or photograph. Some readers quoted favorite lines back to Warner, with one reader going so far as to compose a full-length poem around a refrain in Warner's second novel, *Queechy* (1852). Many readers described how Warner's books kept a hold on them long after they put them down: readers wrote anywhere from a few minutes to twenty-four years after reading *The Wide, Wide World* and often described multiple re-readings,

with one reader writing that she'd read it three times alone and three times aloud in less than a year. For other readers, writing to Warner was an exercise in nostalgia, an opportunity to remember old times: one reader wrote, "I well remember my first introduction to you, some ten years ago, as gathering round a bright fireside in our old ivy covered home, an elder sister read aloud to 'the children'—the 'Wide Wide World.' Those happy, happy hours!— "

The scene drawn by this reader of a family gathered around the fire reading Warner's novel points to one of the most important and fascinating threads that runs through these letters—their emphasis on connection and even community among readers and an accompanying desire to include Warner in that community. However, the communities described (or sometimes just posited) in the letters are not always as tangible or straightforward as this one. For instance, for every fireside scene of collective reading, there is a contrasting scene of a reader alone and absorbed entirely in his or her book: one reader remembered when she "was a very little girl and stole off to read without interruption 'The Wide Wide World.'"

However, even this reader, who described herself as stealing away to read in solitude, did eventually seek out Warner. This fannish impulse to write to Warner derived, in part, from how readers imagined her. Her fans saw her as a confidant, a mother, a mentor, a minister, or some combination thereof; more basically, they imagined her as approachable and receptive. That expectation differed sharply from the attitude toward earlier American authors—mostly genteel, anonymous, and male. Whether because sentimental novels prompted unique responses in readers or readers felt differently about women authors than about men, these fans clearly believed that a relationship with the author of their favorite novel was a possibility.

Fig. 1. "Susan Warner," from a daguerreotype. Frontispiece from Susan Warner ("Elizabeth Wetherell"), Anna B. Warner (New York/London, 1909). Courtesy of

the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Susan Warner's fan mail demonstrates that, for these readers, the experience of reading sentimental fiction—alone or otherwise—helped to build connections, however much those connections remained in readers' imaginations. Their letters are the product of that sense of connection and a lasting testament to its existence and even its value. They therefore run counter to an enduring criticism of sentimental literature—that crying over the plight of fictional characters was inherently isolating, indulgent, and escapist, and that any sense of connection conjured from reading a sentimental novel was inauthentic and not to be believed or credited.

To be sure, there are reasons we might be skeptical of these letters and the particularly connective experience of reading they are so invested in. The grounds of connection here were largely imagined, and the reader-author bond was composed of an odd mix of anonymity and intimacy—a writer calling himself Alice's Admirer and withholding his real name even as he poured out his heart to a woman he'd never met, for instance. There were also many readers not represented in this archive for whom the point of reading novels like *The Wide, Wide World* was surely escape and not connection.

For readers like Alice's Admirer who wanted the latter, though, Warner's novels and their own imaginations combined to provide it. These fans did not want to escape the wide, wide world but to connect to others in it, to feel like a part of something larger—and reading sentimental fiction allowed them to do that. Whether or not we credit that feeling or that sense of imagined connection, these fans did, and it changed or helped or pleased them in significant ways. Their letters tell Warner, and us, how. This fan mail therefore not only gives us a glimpse into what reading *The Wide, Wide World* was like for a handful of readers in the nineteenth century, but also provides some highly specific, individualized answers to enduring questions—what do people read fiction for? What can reading novels do to and for us?

So far, I have been painting the Warner fan letters in broad strokes—by talking about their shared qualities and concerns, about readers' often anxious desire to get to know Warner on a more personal level, and about how they used her novels to connect to their own pasts. In many ways, though, it's difficult to step back and generalize about these letters or the readers who wrote them, as almost any generalization can be contradicted by another letter in the archive—indeed, the idiosyncrasies of these letters account for a great deal of the fun of reading them. Another wrinkle comes in the archive itself: the Warner sisters must have received many more letters than those that remain for us to read, but why they chose to save these letters in particular—or even *if* they chose to save these letters—is an important question without a definitive answer. The readers who didn't write must also be considered: sixty or so fans represent only an infinitesimal slice of the Warners' readership. Because of the limitations of this sample, these letters can't convincingly support generalizations about the experience of reading sentimental novels like *The*

Wide, Wide World in the nineteenth century. What they can do, though, is deepen our understanding of some of this novel's fans and their responses, not by telling us how everyone felt when reading *The Wide, Wide World*, but how particular individuals did. To understand what these readers gained from reading *The Wide, Wide World*—and what they hoped to gain by writing fan letters—I'll turn to a few letters that offer particular insight into the passion and connective power associated with reading it in the nineteenth century.

Fig. 2. "Deathbed of Alice Humphreys," between pages 186-187, Vol. II. of The Wide, Wide World, Elizabeth Wetherell (Susan Warner), illustrated edition, vols. 1 and 2 complete in one volume (New York, 1853). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

For many of Warner's fans, that passion and power were built on their belief in a form of personal connection to Warner herself and on the interest they took in the characters who came alive in her novel's pages. While half-in-earnest requests to marry one of those characters were not the norm, many fans believed Warner's characters to be more than fictional and used their love for certain characters to bridge the gap that separated them from Warner herself. Two letters from Cordelia Darrach written in April and June of 1852 make this clear.

Darrach began her letter, as many fans do, with a somewhat stilted apology for her intrusion on Warner's time, identifying herself as a "humble and unknown stranger" and hoping that Warner wouldn't find her letter either "presumptuous or offensive." She quickly became chattier. Darrach went on to offer intimate details of her life: by her description, she was a sufferer from spine disease and an invalid; she was evidently well read, quoting poetry and frequently alluding to other authors; she was also the mother of several children and helped to shepherd her family through financial troubles and their relocation

from high life in Philadelphia to a harder life in a "rude farm house" in New Jersey. She also took time to heap praise on *The Wide, Wide World*. After describing at length how her entire family loves reading it—from Darrach's husband, "a grave man of fifty seven," to a twenty-year-old daughter normally "*not* very fond of reading"—Darrach got to the heart of the matter: "But what has most touched the hearts of my household, and more especially my *own*, (the *mother's* heart) has been your beautiful and life-like delineation of the character of your noble Alice,—which we ourselves (and several of our friends) think bears a strong resemblance to our dearly beloved daughter who 'died in the Lord' at the age of twenty two. The closing scene was *very* like that of Alice; and *she* too, died at midsummer, and at midnight! Ah, dear lady, I have wept many, very many tears over your truthful delineations in that part of your work." For Darrach, this "strong resemblance" was the primary reason why she read *The Wide, Wide World* "with the most heart-felt sympathy and the most intense delight" and then chose to write her fan letter. Those "truthful delineations" made Warner "dear" to Darrach. The shared knowledge of death—one fictional, one real—fostered Darrach's strong sense of connection to this unknown author.

Darrach did test this connection: she closed her letter by asking Warner "for the very great favour … of a few, even *two* lines of your handwriting, to add to my treasures of Irving and Cooper and Longfellow and Halleck and Gould and Sigourney"—very nice company indeed for Warner to keep. Warner must have complied with this request, as Darrach's second letter, dated June 16, 1852, offered profuse thanks for Warner's "very welcome and highly prized letter." This second letter also gave Darrach the opportunity to write at more length of her deceased daughter Caroline, whom she now compares to Fleda Ringgan, the heroine of Warner's second novel, which she has just read—seemingly at Warner's suggestion. For Darrach, the similarities between Warner's fictional characters and Darrach's real-life experiences proved a heady mix: she confessed, "I have more than once wept myself into a hysterical state of nervousness over your closing scenes …" of dying characters, and wrote, "*Now* you will readily comprehend why." Darrach's desire for Warner to "comprehend" her loss and her suffering was a desire for recognition, for understanding, and even for a kind of intimacy. This desire took a different form in the final paragraph of her letter where Darrach switched from the sacred to the profane. While making clear that Warner, busy as she must be, was under no obligation to reply to her letter, Darrach also indicated her eagerness for "any crumbs of information you may vouchsafe to drop," including the very important detail of Warner's "being Mrs. or Miss."

Darrach's missive throws many of the conundrums of these fan letters into sharp relief: readers bared their souls to a writer whom they'd only encountered through the medium of a mass-produced book. These letters nonetheless emerged from the paradoxical intimacy of that reading experience, and they showcase the conviction that Warner must be a kindred spirit, someone who fundamentally understood her readers. There was a form of trust extended in these letters, a trust that Warner would take such letters seriously and in the heartfelt spirit

in which they were offered. Of course, that trust was not without its anxieties: it was one thing for Darrach to sit in her New Jersey farmhouse and imagine a kindred spirit as she read *The Wide, Wide World* and quite another to address that kindred spirit in the flesh by sending off a fan letter. In this case at least, Warner made good on that trust and sense of connection by writing back.

For many of these fans, the grounds of this trust and the community of readers and author it sustained were undoubtedly religious. Darrach, for instance, called *The Wide, Wide World* an "excellent publication which will, I trust, by the blessing of my Heavenly Father, help my children to conquer and subdue many of their evil tempers and infirmities, and may be the blessed instrument of bringing them to Christ …" Many other readers shared her conviction that *The Wide, Wide World* could help them do right: a young girl writing in 1881 compared Warner's novel to the Bible and then talked about her everyday use of it: "When I feel angry or out of temper I read in the book and find out how Ellen fought against temptations, and I am instantly put right in tune again and feel good desires …"

Warner's novel helped other readers in more dramatic fashion. Joseph Molyneux Hunter, an Irish man, composed his fan letter to Warner over the summer of 1862 on sea voyages between Ireland and Canada. He wrote nine years after he first read *The Wide, Wide World*to recount the lasting change that the novel worked in him. He stated, "In the summer of 1853 I was brought to the Saviour by reading a very few lines of the 'Wide Wide World.'" He continued:

> One evening I was going out to take a walk and while overhauling a drawer for something I wanted, I came upon a story book, as I supposed, and being very fond of novel reading I thought I had got a prize and forgetting my intended walk, shut myself up, and sat down to enjoy the book, but thanks be to God, the time was come when my poor mother's heart was to be gladdened and her prayers answered for one in whom her life, almost, was and is bound up. The book was the 'Wide Wide World.' By what the world would call chance I opened at that part when the death bed scene of the Irish boy—my little countryman—is described. I read to that line where he lifts his poor little arm and says 'Jesus.' Words cannot describe the instantaneous effect produced on me. I fell on my knees and tears and prayers and strong crying to God for pardon and salvation testified of the nature of the effect produced; it was the being born again, the beginning of life everlasting.

The scene Hunter described is "a very few lines" indeed; it occupies less than a full page in the most recent edition of *The Wide, Wide World*. This "instantaneous" change prompted Hunter to both acknowledge the distance that separated him from Warner—"you know me not and I have never seen you"—and

confess his feelings—"I love you very dearly and for years have been anxious to communicate with you." That paradox was—and is—part of the pleasure, part of the thrill of the connection felt by fans.

That connection may have been felt by Warner, too. Though little evidence exists of Warner's reactions to her fan letters, in a journal entry dated October 17, 1862, Warner described Hunter's missive as "a very remarkable letter—and one to give me great pleasure… . Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Given Warner's own religious faith, which was considerably deepened by an often difficult, scraping life on Constitution Island, her gratified response to this letter—and, we might imagine, others like it—is not surprising. Susan and Anna became members of the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church in New York in the early 1840s, several years before Susan began writing *The Wide, Wide World*. Their religious faith was a defining feature of their lives and work: Susan's journals abound with religious references, the novels and Sunday-school books she wrote are consumed with the question of what it means to be a Christian, and alongside the Warner fan letters are grateful letters from West Point graduates who as cadets came to the Bible classes that the Warners led on Constitution Island. In Anna Warner's 1909 biography of Susan, which relies heavily on Susan's journals, she wrote that *The Wide, Wide World* "was written in closest reliance upon God: for thoughts, for power, and for words. Not the mere vague wish to write a book that should do service to her Master: but a vivid, constant, looking to him for guidance and help … In that sense, the book was written upon her knees …" That posture of prayer was communicated through the medium of *The Wide, Wide World* from Warner to Hunter, who "fell on [his] knees" after reading those few lines and then wrote to Warner about it. Warner's short comment on this letter shows that she believed—along with at least some of her readers—that she could serve as part of a circuit that connected readers of *The Wide, Wide World* to Christ. Of all the forms of connection Warner experienced through writing her novel and reading her fan letters, it is this one, that of her readers to God, rather than between herself and individual readers, that appears to have given Warner the greatest satisfaction.

Not all of Warner's fans were as fraught as Darrach or as earnest as Hunter, nor are all of them so complimentary or adulatory. Even less friendly fans, though, didn't hesitate to claim connection with Warner. The letter from Alice's Admirer discussed earlier was accompanied by a letter from a friend of his who, as he preferred Ellen to Alice, styled himself "Ellen's Ardent Admirer." He began by stating that he had just finished reading *The Wide, Wide World* and then asserted, "There is a sympathy between us." He continued, "Ellen, I know would not upon such a basis be so bold as you see I am, but then Ellen is a girl. I am not." Capitalizing on the license that his "sympathy" and his gender afford him, Ellen's Admirer went on to criticize Warner's novel on several counts. He called Warner's decision late in the novel to relocate Ellen to Scotland "a bad move." "Still," he hoped, "it may turn out for the best," and added that "The first volume is generally the best but then you became a little tired at last, and we cant work well without the heart is in it … "

After offering this appraisal, Ellen's Admirer voiced his suspicion that Warner herself was Ellen; confessed, "I cannot get Ellen out of my mind, I don't try *very* hard"; and then declared—surely to Warner's excitement—that Ellen was precisely the kind of girl he would like for a wife. In a postscript dated several months after composing the body of his letter, Ellen's Admirer made a qualified apology for his generally obnoxious, if amusing, letter, calling it "the spontaneous effusions of my heart" and claiming that "*such* are removed above the fear or the reach of criticism." He assured Warner in closing "that if my love be not so *extravagant* as at first, 'tis none the less real, and I remain *now* as before, [signed] Ellen's Ardent Admirer."

While this "real" love, or this ardent admiration, assumed a unique form in his letter, Ellen's Admirer also broached a common topic—a sequel to *The Wide, Wide World*. He assumed that a sequel would be forthcoming—"of course we are to have a sequel" —and requested that Warner not use such locutions as "'the *far* corner'" and "'the *far* end'" in it, adding a willingness to correct Warner's grammar to his already considerable charms. Writing to Warner's publishers from Detroit in 1852, Sara Bingham couched her request for information about a sequel in less presumptuous language. Bingham began her letter by asking Mr. Putnam if there was "a sequel to that most interesting and affecting book, The Wide, Wide World" either already published or forthcoming. For Bingham, a sequel would allow Warner to "complete the good work she has commenced and raise the morals of the light reading of the day" and to give her readers even more "hours of pure and delightful entertainment." Despite this request and many others like it found in the Warner letters, Warner never wrote a sequel to *The Wide, Wide World*, leaving her fans ungratified on this particular point. As Bingham made clear, though, she was grateful for the hours of entertainment Warner had already provided, and therefore charged Putnam with communicating to Warner her congratulations and thanks, "humble as those thanks may be." Bingham made sure to drive home that sense of humility, explicitly asking Putnam (and Warner) to pardon her letter by stating, "I feel tis entirely unnecessary for so young a person to say anything, commendation not being needed, when so many older and wiser have testified to their value."

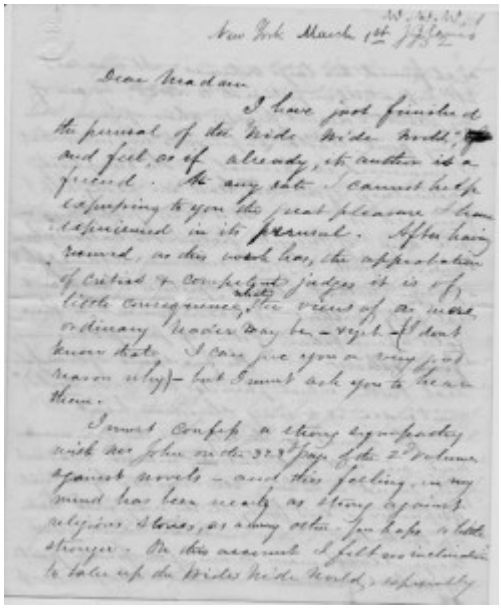

Fig. 3. 14-page letter written to Susan Warner by “Alice’s Admirer,” March 1, 1852. Courtesy of the Constitution Island Association, Inc., West Point, New York. Click on image to launch slideshow of entire letter.
For many of

Contrary to Bingham’s seeming dismissal of her own letter, and to the similar assertion of Alice’s Admirer that the acclaim of critics made it “of little consequence what the views of a more ordinary reader may be,” the fan letter gained its value precisely because it was an amateur’s genre, a mode aside from professional, more public commendation. The fan letter instead served as a place for making personal confessions, for adding more capital to an already significant emotional investment, for claiming and trying to prolong connection, for taking liberties.

Many of these letters spoke less of liberty than of constraint when readers addressed the question of why they were writing to Warner. Alice’s Admirer, by way of introduction, said he just couldn’t help expressing the great pleasure he felt in reading *The Wide, Wide World*. Other readers began their fan letters by arguing that they couldn’t help but write: one simply could not refrain from offering her thanks, another wrote that “impulse has overcome all prudence,” still another called “the desire to write … too strong to be resisted.” Why, though, should that desire to write be resisted? What was illicit about composing a fan letter?

A possible answer to that question is tied to another vaguely disreputable act to which the Warner fan letters were necessarily linked—novel reading. Opponents of the novel in the 1800s worried that novels activated a kind of “can’t put it down,” addictive reading, an idea that existed somewhat uneasily alongside these fans’ compulsive reading and re-reading of *The Wide, Wide World*—a novel in which the heroine herself is warned, unironically, not to read novels. The idea that readers simply couldn’t put novels down implied that they should, or at least that they should be able to—and the fear that they could not accounted for some of the suspicion felt toward this relatively new

literary genre. For many novel readers, their scruples about reading were swept away on a tide of emotion. For many of Warner's fans, their scruples, and even perhaps the nagging sense that Warner didn't really know her readers, that the praise of a young fan was unnecessary, that there was no good reason to write, were all swept away by what the sentimental novel and the fan letter offered—that powerful sense of connection and what it made possible. While these fans do speak of trepidation and boldness, impertinence and love, they most often speak of themselves. If writing a fan letter was itself a kind of compulsion for these readers, it was one that arose from the desire to be heard, to reveal oneself through talking about love for a fictional heroine, a deceased daughter, a loving god, or a tear-jerking novel.

Though readers made such personal confessions, they were still unknown readers writing to an unknown author, with little chance of ever meeting that author face-to-face. Warner's distance from them—geographical and otherwise—paradoxically made possible the intimacy of their fan letters and the connections they imagined: these letters could cross distances in ways that their writers most likely could not. The impersonality of this situation lent safety to readers' self-exposure, making heartfelt confessions about their personal lives less daunting. *The Wide, Wide World* is therefore just one kind of sentimental fiction that Warner's fans embraced; another is that the author of a sentimental novel, who told familiar stories and knew so well what would bring her readers to tears, understood her readers—that a strong and even life-changing connection was formed between author and reader through the medium of a bestselling novel. The Warner fan letters helped to write that fiction then and help us to recover it today.

Further reading

Should anyone like to read the novel that prompted so many of these fan letters, the most recent modern edition of *The Wide, Wide World* is available from the Feminist Press at the City University of New York and is edited by Jane Tompkins. For another consideration of the fan letters to Warner and their ramifications for Warner's authorship, see Susan Williams's "Widening the World: Susan Warner, Her Readers, and the Assumption of Authorship" (*American Quarterly*, 1990). More information on the Warners' lives can be found in Anna's biography of Susan, *Susan Warner ("Elizabeth Wetherell")* (New York, 1909). Corresponding readers were also represented within novels contemporary to *The Wide, Wide World*, including Herman Melville's *Pierre* (1852) and Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1855), while Barbara Sicherman writes about another famous sentimental novel and its readers in "Reading *Little Women*," the first chapter of *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill, 2010). For a list of other bestsellers in the 1850s as well as a larger discussion of the bestseller itself, see Frank Luther Mott's *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York, 1947).

Those new to the study of sentimentality may wish to begin with two foundational texts that have defined the field. Ann Douglas's opening sally,

which bemoaned the bad art and bad politics of sentimental literature, is *The Feminization of American Culture* (Knopf, 1977), and Jane Tompkins's classic work on how sentimental literature fell from grace and why we should read it now is *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York, 1985). For an overview of where the study of sentimentality has gone since then, see Hildegard Hoeller's helpful review essay, "From Agony to Ecstasy: The New Studies of American Sentimentality" (*ESQ*, 2006). Recent works that have brought new life to the study of sentimentality are many and include Glenn Hendler's *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill, 2001), June Howard's "What Is Sentimentality?" (*American Literary History*, 1999), and Karen Sánchez-Eppler's *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago, 2005), especially the third chapter.

Constitution Island is open to the public on specified days during the summer, and the Warner House itself, while closed for repair, can be viewed from the outside. More information about the Warner sisters and Constitution Island can be found on the Constitution Island Association's Website, www.constitutionisland.org/. In addition to the Warner fan letters, the Association holds a wealth of Warner family materials at their archive in Highland Falls, New York, which scholarly researchers are welcome to use by appointment.

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