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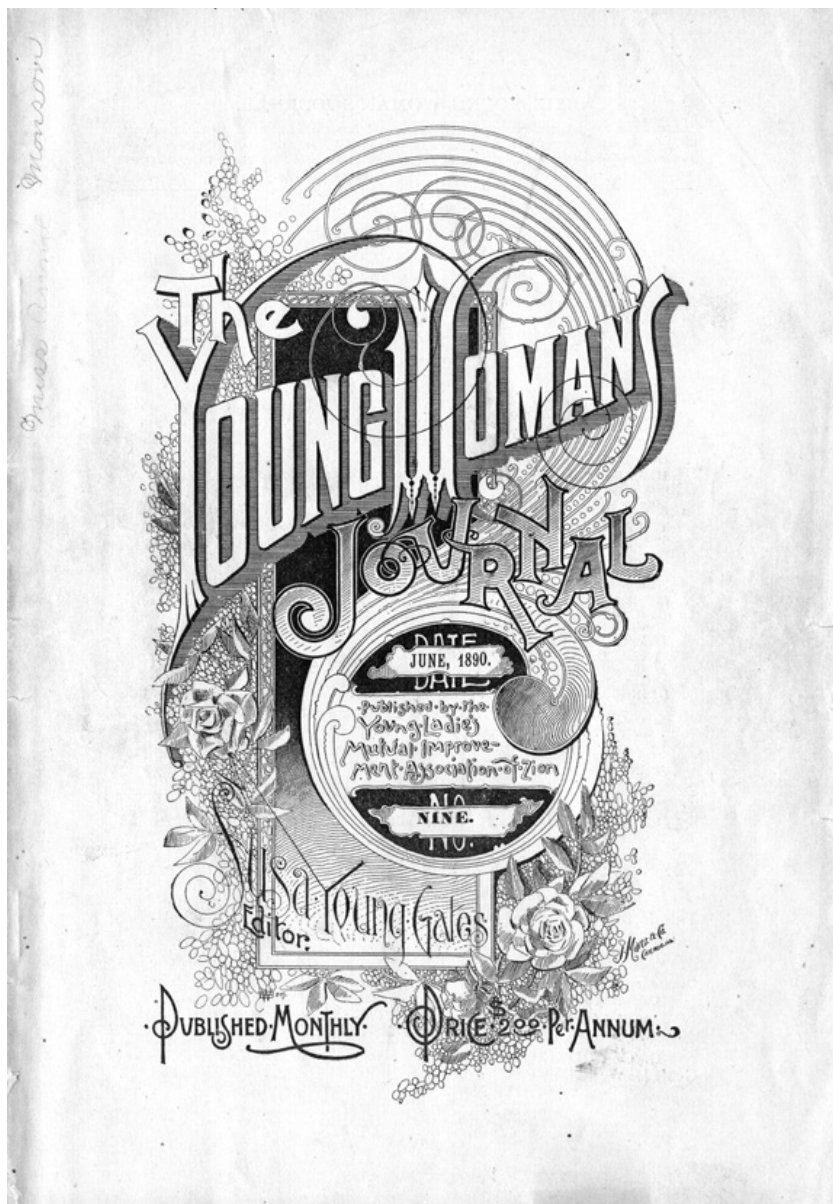
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The *Young Woman's Journal*, founded by Susa Young Gates in 1889, was one of the primary venues for Home Literature in the 1890s Mormon culture of letters. Courtesy Church History Library.

The 1890s Mormon Culture of Letters and the Post-Manifesto Marriage Crisis

A New Approach to Home Literature

Lisa Olsen Tait

To please while we teach important lessons, to implant solid principles of truth and nobility while chaining the minds and attentions with our seemingly “light literature;” these are some of our aims.

—Susa Young Gates¹

The literary department of the December 1892 issue of the *Young Woman’s Journal* features a story entitled “Judith’s Decision” in which the title character, a young woman in her early twenties, announces that she is planning to go to the World’s Fair in Chicago, set to open in the spring of 1893.² A “glowing account” of the fair given by a local man has caused “every fibre of my being” to be “kindled with a desire to go and see the magnificent sight,” Judith tells her mother, excitedly reporting that she has figured out how, “by denying myself a few of the luxuries of life,” she can save up enough money from her teaching job to pay her way to Chicago. Judith’s mother replies without enthusiasm, “It will certainly be a great thing for those who can go” (111–12).

Judith persists in trying to elicit her mother’s approval, describing all the exciting things to be seen, but Mrs. Randall is unmoved. “I wish you . . . were a little more spiritual-minded,” she tells Judith. “Have you ever thought about going to the dedication of the Salt Lake temple?” Judith replies that she has not but muses that perhaps she could arrange to go to both. Still unimpressed, her mother asks whether she has donated anything to the temple building fund. Judith assures her that she has promised to give five dollars—but then, at her mother’s prompting, admits that she is planning to spend over a hundred on the trip to the fair. “My dear, I wonder which is the most desirable, the good things of this life or the glories of the

Lisa Olsen Tait

My current project is a biography of Susa Young Gates, and I am finding (not surprisingly) that her fiction and her life experience are mutually illuminating. For example, Susa endured a miserable marriage and bitter divorce early in her life. In some of her stories, she writes “mentor” characters who guide the young protagonists in making wise marital choices by invoking their own disastrous decisions. In “Donald’s Boy,” young Phyllis is mentored by Winnie Selden, who has escaped an abusive marriage. “I have felt just like you do,” Winnie tells Phyllis. “I broke all bonds, disobeyed my mother; gave up everything for him and gloried in the thought that I could sacrifice everything on his altar. Well, the Lord says we shall have no other gods before Him, and in less than four months after my marriage my idol lay shattered at my feet and at the end of a year, there was not a spark of love in my breast for him” (June 1895: 309). While mentor characters were a common convention in woman’s fiction, the biographical resonances here are unmistakable. I have found that many other stories are constructed around plot lines and characters drawn from the real-life experiences of Mormon women.



I have also found evidence that these stories did make an impression. Reminiscing decades later, Elsie Talmage Brandley (editor of the *Journal* as it ceased publication in 1929) recalled that it was the magazine’s stories that first impressed her with the power of fiction. “Never has anything else I have heard or read on the subject found the same fervent echo in my heart as the words of Phyllis, in *Donald’s Boy*—‘I’ll be an old maid for the Gospel’s sake,’” she recalled. “I wept bitterly over her renunciation, and in the depths of my twelve-year-old heart, I cried, ‘I know how you feel, Phyllis. I’ll be an old maid for the Gospel’s sake, too!’” (October 1929: 685). Whatever else we can say about these stories from a strictly literary point of view, this anecdote suggests that we should not overlook their impact on the lived experience of young Latter-day Saints during a tumultuous era.

next world?” the mother asks pointedly (113). She then proceeds to voice two pages’ worth of counsel to Judith about her priorities. This dialogue, sounding as if it could be delivered over the pulpit, invites young women readers of the story to identify with Judith and evaluate their own desires:

Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven. This is the law and neither you nor I can escape from it. . . . Now you, my child, when you were asked for your contribution [to the temple] gave your name for five dollars. That was something, of course; but here comes along some man and tells you of the grand sights you are going to see in Chicago. Your imagination is so fired by the brilliant prospect that you are ready to pinch and almost starve for a year, and then you can give—think of it—one hundred and thirty dollars to gratify your own love of sight seeing, while you send up to the temple of the Lord five dollars. How do you think the Lord looks at that? (114)

Judith, “awed” by her mother’s “solemn and impressive tones,” promises to pray about her decision, though she expresses doubt at the efficacy of prayer because she has been praying for a worthy husband for years and, at age twenty-four, still has not found one.

Sometime after this exchange, Judith is invited to a costume party where she encounters Wilson Gray, an up-and-coming young man from the city who has been spending the summer with his relatives in her town. Judith is in love with Wilson, but she fears that he does not return her feelings. The young people at the party play a game in which each person must answer a randomly selected question. Gray is asked whether he is going to be married, to which he replies laconically, that he is not, because, he explains, “I have not found a girl who comes quite up to my ideal” (120).

The question Judith draws hits even closer to home: “Are you going to the Chicago Fair?” Without hesitation, Judith replies that she is not. Her friends are taken by surprise. “I thought you were saving up every nickel to go to that lovely Fair,” they exclaim, asking why she is not going. Judith considers for a moment before “bravely” answering: “Because I am going to send my mother up to the dedication of the Salt Lake temple.” As she makes this confession, Judith is afraid that it has cost her the good opinion of Wilson Gray. “No doubt this would make him look upon her as a girl with no public spirit, no appreciation of the artistic and beautiful,” she reflects—but she vows to herself that she does not care (120).

After the party, Gray suddenly offers to walk Judith home, whereupon he professes his love and proposes marriage, declaring, “When you dared to tell all those gapers and silly listeners that you loved your religion better than yourself and loved your mother better than you did your own selfish pleasure, then I could have claimed you before them all” (121). He has been in love with Judith all along, he confesses, but he had heard that she was not

very religious. Now he sees differently. He takes her into his arms and asks, “Are you not my own, my wife?”

“Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven,” Judith murmurs in response as he kisses her (122).

“Judith’s Decision” is a representative example of the fictional stories featured prominently in Latter-day Saint periodicals of the late nineteenth century. A young woman wavers in her faith, attracted by worldly pleasures. Her rescue is effected by equal parts of motherly love, authoritative discourse, and personal prayer. Her reward is the ultimate blessing of a worthy marriage to the man of her choice. In the story, the world’s fair and the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple are posed as events of equivalent cultural magnitude in an either/or dilemma that encapsulates Mormons’ sense of loyalties divided between their religious and national identities. And there is no room for compromise. When Judith suggests that she might be able to attend both events, her mother is unequivocal, in terms that express the symbolic nature of the dilemma: “You and I, dear, must choose between the temple and the Fair” (115). The purpose of “Judith’s Decision,” as of all these stories, is to motivate young Latter-day Saints to choose the “temple.”

LDS scholars and lay readers alike have long puzzled over what to do with these texts. They exist somewhere between literature and history. Clearly marked by their authors and original contexts as “literary,” to the modern eye they appear “long on plot and short on artistry and character development,” as one description puts it.³ This body of fiction—“Home Literature” was both the contemporary label and the term used by modern critics—received a brief flicker of academic interest a generation ago, largely in dismissive terms.⁴ Since that time, scholars have developed approaches to noncanonical texts that enable us to see them as productive sites for literary and cultural analysis, based on the “cultural work” these texts perform. In Jane Tompkins’s now-famous formulation, the plots and characters of popular texts provide society “with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers [share], dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions.”⁵ The key to a popular novel’s appeal is its “embrace of what is most widely shared” within a culture at a given historical moment.⁶

This article presents an approach to reading the cultural work of Mormon Home Literature.⁷ My focus is on the work of Susa Young Gates (the most prolific and perhaps most influential writer of the period) in the *Young Woman’s Journal* (one of the major venues for Home Literature) during the decade of the 1890s (the high point for this literary movement). My central points are these: Home Literature was largely a female enterprise, and the women who wrote it did so from within coherent cultural and

literary traditions. Home Literature is by and large a gendered, generational phenomenon, not only in its authorship, but also in its thematics and structure. These stories are about young women, for young women—but written by older women. Moreover, when Home Literature is read in light of the cultural crises (both perceived and real) taking place within Mormondom of the 1890s, it yields rich insights into the internal dynamics of change within the Mormon community at a critical juncture—including some of the ambivalences and uncertainties that existed beneath the surface. In particular, Home Literature grappled with the implications of the Manifesto as the Saints began their painful transition away from plural marriage.

Development of Home Literature

The late nineteenth century was a time of diverse, diffuse literary practice in the United States. Developments in technology made reading material cheap and widely available, while expansion of education and literacy created new audiences for literary productions of all kinds. Outpourings of mass-produced story papers were countered in other venues by high-minded discussions of art and literary theory. Immigration, economic and political turmoil, and the exploding sense of living in a “modern” world all contributed to a sense of dynamism and profound uncertainty that drove the cultural conversations of the day, many of which took place in the pages of magazines. In these conversations, fiction was a central feature, both as a topic and a means of discussion.

Scholar Richard Brodhead has described the literary landscape of this period as “cultures of letters”—the “differently organized (if adjacent) literary-social worlds” of the period, which existed “in differently structured cultural settings composed around writing and regulating” the social life of a particular group. In these cultures of letters, Brodhead explains, “differently constituted social publics . . . provided audiences for different kinds of writing”; that is, “each supplied a public for the particular selection or version of writing that spoke to its cultural identity and social needs.”⁸

Brodhead’s neutral term “cultures of letters” carefully avoids a hierarchical valuation of literary productions; labels such as “highbrow” and “low-brow” were still developing in the late nineteenth century.⁹ A broad range of people at this time felt they had claim on the “literary” as a means of expression so that, for example, publications of all kinds—labor union papers or fashion magazines—carried fiction and poetry as part of their regular contents. Even in high-culture venues, as Nancy Glazener has observed, the literary was constructed as “a general interest that could be advantageously pursued even among the very lowliest of the aspiring.”¹⁰ Given

these conditions, Brodhead argues that literary history must be understood in terms of the “multiform transactions” between texts and contexts, “the relation between literary writing and the changing meanings and places made for such work in American social history.”¹¹ The term “cultures of letters” provides a framework within which these different literary manifestations, including Mormon Home Literature, can be explored and valued on their own terms.

We must begin our discussion of Home Literature, then, with an overview of the Mormon cultural situation in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Having founded their communities in the West on separatist ideals of communal economics, theocratic politics, and plural marriage, the Latter-day Saints had lost a decades-long standoff with the federal government; they now had to make major adjustments on both the practical and theoretical levels. The 1880s were shaped by intense turmoil as increasingly punitive legal measures sent scores of polygamists to jail and countless others into hiding, severely disrupting the functioning of the institutional Church and the security of individual families. Finally, in September 1890, LDS Church President Wilford Woodruff announced a manifesto, declaring that the Mormons would “submit” to the law of the land and “refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden” by law.¹² This move ushered in the beginning of the end of polygamy. It was clear that the Saints had moved irrevocably toward the mainstream, but it was unclear what the ultimate result would be.

“We are certainly undergoing radical changes in our temporal and more especially our political affairs,” Susa Young Gates wrote the following year.¹³ This sense of profound and unsettling change in the community was focused in a perception of generational crisis, with fears for the future expressed as the tendency of the young people to be spiritually unmotivated, materialistic, and even rebellious. Such concerns appeared frequently in the *Young Woman’s Journal*. “Sister Snow spoke intelligently and with feeling of the indifference which seems to be growing up among the young in regard to spiritual affairs,” according to one report, while Sister Talmage deplored “the flippant way some young ladies have of referring to sacred things.”¹⁴ Talmage revisited the subject the next month, asserting that many young women were “‘running astray’ rather than being ‘led astray.’”¹⁵ Fictional characters voiced the concerns as well. “I tell you young people now-a-days don’t know what life means,” Aunt Betsy declares in one story as she watches her young niece prepare to be married. “They must begin it with everything heart can desire, consequently they can’t enjoy anything.”¹⁶

Such expressions can be seen as conventional rhetorical devices, and similar sentiments have appeared, then and now, in many contexts. There

were particular reasons, however, that these perceptions took on special urgency for Latter-day Saints at this time. There were real and significant changes taking place, not only in terms of the external pressures that had been brought to bear on the Mormons, but also in terms of the demographics and internal dynamics of the community itself. In the 1890s, Mormondom reached a demographic turning point: more new members were added by birth than by baptism.¹⁷ This was a reversal of the pattern of conversion that had worked to establish the community in its first sixty years, and the new trend would continue for another fifty years. Moreover, the generation of young people coming of age in the 1890s was an exceptionally large cohort. According to historian Davis Bitton, by the 1880s about 54 percent of the population of Utah was teenage or younger, and nearly 18 percent was age four or less. The 1880 census found that “Utah has more children under five years old, in proportion to its population, than any other division in the country.” These children were the teenagers and young adults of the 1890s.¹⁸

These young people—the assumed audience for Home Literature—were, like their parents, native-born Mormons, but in their early years the distinguishing features of the community were increasingly under pressure. They never knew isolation and insularity to the same extent as their parents, and the trappings of consumer culture were increasingly available to them, as were education and cultural refinements. In many cases, their parents began to prosper, providing a level of material comfort and social opportunity previously unknown. Meanwhile, these children grew up in a time of intense disruption and uncertainty brought on by the federal antipolygamy campaign. Even those whose parents were not polygamous must have experienced a great deal of insecurity and turmoil in their youth, only to be told, as they became teenagers and young adults, that they were not measuring up to the sacrifices of their elders.

Within this context, the reading material of young Latter-day Saints received particular attention. Suspicion of fiction was of course a time-honored sentiment in the United States, even as novels became the preferred reading of millions; the Mormon case is one example of how that sentiment died out unevenly and flared up occasionally throughout the century. By the late 1880s, however, a new generation of Latter-day Saints envisioned the development of a *Mormon* literature through which authoritative messages could be delivered by means of entertaining stories. An ardent sermon by charismatic young bishop Orson F. Whitney solidified the name of the movement—Home Literature.¹⁹

While Whitney’s sermon invoked the highest examples of poetry (“We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own,” he famously

proclaimed),²⁰ the primary focus of LDS literary ambitions was fiction. Writing under the pen name “Horatio,” Elder B. H. Roberts, newly installed editor of the young men’s magazine, cited contemporary examples such as *Robert Elsmere* and *Ben Hur* to argue that “it is becoming generally recognized that the medium of fiction is the most effectual means of attracting the attention of the general public and instructing them.”²¹ Indeed, he continued, “This class of fiction . . . is working its way into our own literature; and stories illustrating the evils overtaking young women, who marry those not of our faith, have appeared. . . . Nor do I think any one reading those stories can doubt their effectiveness; and I am of the opinion that this style of teaching can be employed successfully in other directions.”²²

Roberts’s call to turn fiction to communal benefit represented a departure from the previous decades of opprobrium that had been heaped upon novels by various commentators, criticism that was also expressed in terms of the potential effect of fiction on young people, especially young women. “Literature of this class extols a state of society utterly inconsistent with that which will exist when the government of God holds sway upon the earth,” Elder George Reynolds had opined in one notable discussion. People who read novels “imbibe a spirit . . . antagonistic to the teachings of divine revelation, which dwarfs their growth in heavenly principles and measurably unfits them for the realities of life.” Continuing, Reynolds made the gendered, generational concerns explicit: “Take, as an example, the young lady whose mind is crowded with thoughts and fancies of the impossible and unnatural heroes and heroines of romance, and whose matrimonial aspirations are turned in the direction of some modern counterpart of her beau ideal of chivalry[;] then how insignificant, how wearisome, how disgusting become the constantly recurring duties of her every day life as a wife and mother; whilst plural marriage she personally avoids as utterly incompatible with the notions she has formed of life.”²³

It is notable that these commentators seem to share some foundational assumptions about the function and power of fiction and the potential waywardness of the young—with particular concern, as Reynolds’s comments suggest, about the susceptibility of young women.²⁴

Just as those assumptions drove the resistance to fiction, they also enabled a call for the development of Home Literature. Roberts and Reynolds would have agreed with contemporary commentator George Clarke, who wrote in the *Arena* magazine about the mechanism of fiction’s cultural work. Fiction’s power, Clarke wrote, is that of “lifting us up out of the region of the commonplace, and transporting us among scenes of enchanting interest.” This power is achieved through the mechanism of identification: “The power which we have of sympathizing with others in their ambitions,

joys, and sorrows—that gift of the imagination by which we are enabled to contemplate the careers of others with a personal interest by identifying ourselves for the moment with them—supplies us with a means of obtaining a sort of happiness by proxy.²⁵ In this view, the power and danger of fiction were centered in its portrayal of human agents—characters—with whom readers would identify and whose thoughts and behavior readers would emulate.

If Mormons saw *identification* as the operative principle of narrative on the individual level, I would argue that they considered *idealization* the power of fiction on a collective level. In presenting characters worthy of emulation through identification, fiction can create ideals of thought and action. It can hold up a standard to which all should aspire, a standard that defines and delineates the boundaries of a community. Readers know that they belong to that community to the extent that they adopt and emulate the ideals portrayed.

This is not to argue that Mormon Home Literature was necessarily different than didactic or popular fiction of the period produced in other contexts. Indeed, that is my point. Mormon writers followed familiar genres and formulas. Edward Geary has argued that the Mormon characteristics of Home Literature were only “skin deep,” and it was characterized by a “superficial adaptation to Mormon themes,” charges that may very well represent an accurate, if limited, description of the aesthetics of nineteenth-century Mormon fiction.²⁶ My interest is in the motivation and cultural context for these texts—and those concerns were certainly more than skin deep. I would argue that the fears and ambivalences that registered in Mormon fiction—particularly those surrounding the demise of polygamy—were extremely difficult to articulate on a conscious level. Writers—especially women writers—could not openly question or challenge what they perceived as authoritative decisions by Church leaders, and in political terms they certainly could not appear to continue to advocate polygamy just when the outside world’s opposition was diminishing. Furthermore, it is probable that many Mormons, including Home Literature writers, welcomed the demise of plural marriage, at least on some level. Fear and ambiguity are most powerful when they are unexamined, and I would argue that the formulaic, sensational fiction created by Home Literature writers represented an attempt to express worries and emotions that were extremely difficult to articulate directly.

Moreover, we must note that the term “Home Literature” carried particular resonances for Latter-day Saints in the 1890s. Gates and her contemporaries had grown up hearing constant admonitions to support “home industries,” as opposed to buying from non-Mormons locally or sending abroad for “imported” goods from the East, and women were considered

important participants in this effort. Eliza R. Snow told the sisters that “each successful Branch of Home Manufactures [is] an additional stone in laying the foundation for the upbuilding of Zion,” and she taught that women who assisted in this effort were “doing just as much as an Elder who went forth to preach the Gospel.”²⁷ The “Home” in “Home Literature” echoed this same ethic; in adopting “Homespun” as her favorite pen name, Gates aligned herself with the tradition represented by that term in Mormon culture, implicitly claiming for her stories the cultural authority of the prophets and apostles who had established it.²⁸ The Saints’ goal of rendering themselves materially separate from mainstream America was all but dead by the 1890s; Home Literature attempted to maintain that ideal in the cultural realm. In this respect, Home Literature expressed one of the deepest of Mormonism’s aspirations.

Women Writers, Literary Contexts

While male authorities conducted the theoretical discussions about Home Literature, women set about writing the stories.²⁹ Beginning in the mid-1880s with a tentative trickle of “Christmas” stories and sketches of ambiguous fictionality, Home Literature gained steam rapidly. By 1890, the LDS youth magazines featured substantial amounts of fiction—between a fifth and a quarter of their contents, by one count, and throughout the decade this proportion increased.³⁰ A majority of these stories were written by women, and Susa Young Gates was one of the most prolific of the Mormon home authors.

Quantifying Gates’s literary output is a daunting task because of its sheer volume and because she used so many different pen names. Gates’s first fictional piece appeared in the *Juvenile Instructor* in December 1883. From 1884 to 1889, when she began publication of her own magazine, she contributed over thirty items, totaling over sixty pages to that journal. Not all of these were fictional, but as the Home Literature movement gained momentum, Gates’s work was increasingly dominated by fiction. After 1889, in addition to her voluminous output of material for the *Young Woman’s Journal*—by my count, she wrote up to a third of the contents of any given issue herself—Gates’s productivity rose even further, with over four hundred pages of fictional material (and dozens more pages of nonfiction) published in the *Juvenile* and the *Contributor* between 1890 and 1899. Most of this page count came from several long serialized novels or stories, which meant that in any given month in the 1890s, there was likely to be at least one fictional piece by Susa Young Gates published in the LDS youth periodicals.

Moreover, the women writers who featured prominently in the *Journal*—Ellen Jakeman, Sophy Valentine, Julia A. Macdonald, Josephine Spencer—also contributed frequently to the other magazines. In the December 15, 1891, issue of the *Juvenile Instructor*, for example, “Prof. Phil’s Christmas,” a five-page story by Homespun, was followed by “An Old Fashioned Surprise Party,” a story by Ellen Jakeman; a long story and a poem by Josephine Spencer; and a story by Sophy Valentine.³¹

In taking up the pen to write morally instructive fiction, Gates and her sisters were participating in a well-established tradition of female literary practice—that of the “literary domestics.”³² As described by Anne E. Boyd, these women—examples include Fanny Fern, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Susan Warner—stepped out from their supposedly natural and divinely appointed place in the domestic sphere to write “for God, family, or society.” As writers, they “viewed their roles as those of educators and moral inculcators” and presented themselves as “representatives of their sex rather than as unique individuals.”³³ Susa Young Gates’s comments about her own literary ambitions show that she shared in these assumptions, channeled through her commitment to her Mormon community. “My whole soul is for the building up of this kingdom. I would labor so hard to help my sisters in this same work,” Gates wrote to one correspondent, discussing her literary aspirations. She added, “If I have any desire[s] for personal aggrandizement, I most humbly pray they may be taken from me.”³⁴

Brodhead’s term for this mode of writing—the “maternal-tutelary”—captures the generational dynamics involved.³⁵ Women of Gates’s generation, who had grown up in a world that was largely structured along gender lines, expected to wield a decisive influence in initiating their daughters into the gendered ideology of femininity that formed the bedrock foundation of their lives. Like so many other things in the *fin de siècle*, that ideology and the intergenerational bonds through which it was communicated were being challenged and reconfigured as the cohort termed “young ladies” in a previous era were now becoming seen as “girls,” active participants in coeducation and consumer culture in ways that increasingly took them beyond the bounds of their mothers’ influence.³⁶ As we will see, in Home Literature stories aimed at young women, the central voice is usually that of the mothers.

Like much popular magazine fiction of the day, Home Literature featured plot-driven stories centered on intense emotional choices or situations, with dense adjectival description of landscape or character providing the “artistic” element. Most writers attempted to draw on Mormon cultural resources in their fiction, particularly the pioneer past,

the convert-immigrant experience, the social setting of the Mormon village, and, in a few cases, stories and characters from the Book of Mormon. Regardless of setting, the majority of Home Literature stories were structured around a marriage plot in which a young Saint (usually a young woman) had to make the right decision—that is, had to choose a mate who would represent a choice to remain loyal to the community and its ideals. Obstacles to this resolution included alluring non-Mormon suitors, the immaturity or worldliness of the protagonist, or the opposition of antagonistic family members. A strong variation on this pattern was the Mormon seduction tale, in which the disastrous consequences of an unsuitable marriage were unsparingly portrayed.

One of the clearest generic debts visible in Home Literature stories is to the sensation genre first made popular at midcentury in England by writers like Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon. These stories turned on shocking plots of deception, murder, and bigamy, reflecting Victorians' anxiety over rapid social change and ill-defined social status.³⁷ In the United States, as Karen Halttunen has shown, similar fears about the authenticity of identity gave rise in novels and advice literature to the figure of the confidence man, another trope that proved exceptionally useful to Mormon authors who were concerned about the intrusion of “outsiders” in their community.³⁸ In their configuration of this device, Mormon writers invariably imagined the confidence man as the cunning non-Mormon whose only intention was to seduce and ruin unsuspecting young Mormon women for the sake of his own gratification. Over and over in Home Literature stories, a suave Gentile man (or faithless Mormon) seduces an unsuspecting, usually undisciplined young woman, and she pays dearly.

The helpless victimization of the young women in these stories stands in contrast to others, especially Gates's longer serialized novels, that draw on the pattern defined by Nina Baym in her classic study of the genre she termed “woman's fiction”—mid-nineteenth-century American novels that enact stories of young women's self-development. In these stories, a young woman undergoes a process of refinement through which she “finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome” her trials and become a fully developed woman.³⁹ In Gates's imagination, that process was tied up in the equally crucial task of becoming a true *Mormon* woman—a thoroughly committed Latter-day Saint who would remain loyal to the faith and make the right choices.⁴⁰

Woman's fiction offered many useful conventions for portraying the conversion process, and while traces of this genre can be found throughout her work (not least in “Judith's Decision”), Gates's long serialized novels provide the best sustained examples. In “Seven Times,” for example, which



Susa Young Gates expressed her deeply cherished literary ambitions in a maternal narrative voice, writing domestic fiction aimed at shaping young women's commitment to the gospel. Courtesy Church History Library.

ran through all twelve issues of volume 5 (1893–94) of the *Young Woman's Journal*, Margery Stuart, a young woman from Scotland who has come to Utah to live with her LDS brother and his wife following her mother's recent death, undergoes a series of trials that convert her from a proud, resistant non-Mormon into a converted "true Mormon woman."

Margery's spiritual progression is traced in terms of her feminine development, often in contrast or complement to the masculinity of her noble young lover, Donald. Early in the story, Margery betrays her deplorable spiritual (and feminine) state when she tricks Donald into declaring his love so that she can humiliate him. (She is offended that Donald refuses to marry outside the faith, in spite of being in love with her.) In this scene, Gates's narrator constructs gendered ideals of spirituality by describing Donald's calm reaction in terms of his masculinity: "The gentle words, the manly self-control, melted her as nothing else. . . . She could have bourned his wrath, his scorn. But this dignified, manly renouncing of her heart, forever and forever, could she bear it?"⁴¹ If Donald's response is "manly" Margery, by implication, has been "unwomanly."

After Margery has been converted and Donald has returned from a mission, the association of gender and spirituality is made explicit as Margery ponders the changes in Donald: "What a manly man he had become! Margery secretly wondered if every man returned from a foreign mission so improved as Donald had done. . . . She hated men who were weak. . . . She liked manly men, as she herself was, with all her faults, a womanly woman" (572). As a mature, spiritually experienced Mormon, Donald is "manly." And now that she has humbled herself and embraced the truth, Margery can be called a "womanly woman." The narrator emphasizes this paradigm in the climactic love scene: "Margery loved him, and he was unspeakably happy. She loved him as he longed to be loved, with the depth and fire of a true woman. Not ashamed to show him the fullness of her loving soul" (574). Now that Margery has been converted to the gospel, her love can be that of a "true woman," whose soul is essentially "loving," just as we have already seen that Donald's "reserved nature" is equated with his manhood and spirituality.

In "Seven Times," the process of gaining a testimony and becoming a thoroughly committed Mormon is indistinguishable from the process of becoming a "true woman." Though Gates makes the story more dramatic by portraying Margery as a resistant non-Mormon, it is clear that her heroine is intended to be a proxy for the young women readers, modeling for them the process they must undergo to become true Mormon women themselves. The reward, of course, is marriage to a noble "manly man," himself a converted, committed Latter-day Saint—a choice, and a reward that

were especially urgent in light of the crisis taking shape in post-Manifesto Mormondom.

Narrative Structure and Cultural Work in Home Literature

So far I have been taking Home Literature essentially at face value and seeking to explain it on its own terms. Gates and her colleagues would, I hope, recognize their concerns and approaches in this description and would agree that Home Literature attempted to perform important cultural work for the community. As we look at the themes and structures of these stories, however, we will see that cultural work operating on several levels, some more conscious than others.

Home Literature was, of course, a fundamentally didactic enterprise and, as such, exhibited many elements of that tradition. Cathy Davidson has described a central difficulty in didactic novels, which she describes as being divided against themselves, structured around “two distinct and even contradictory discourses, a didactic essay and a novel, shuffled together and bound as one book.” In these texts, the didactic attempts to outweigh the dramatic, but the structure of the romance plot complicates those intentions: “The moralists have the . . . largest claim on the reader’s time and attention, while the lovers have the story. Differently put, the text’s primary residence is with one discourse while its primary concern is with the other.”⁴²

Home Literature stories, likewise, frequently find themselves in this same predicament, their primary loyalty being to the ideology they attempt to inculcate but their primary interest being in the romantic plot and the characters through which the story is enacted. These two competing discourses—the novelistic and the didactic—divide the story against itself by instituting competing demands on the narrative. Formally, the conventions of novels were well established, with the basic expectation being that a romance plot would develop along a trajectory leading to a satisfactory resolution in which the characters are rewarded, usually with a happy marriage. This discourse is about fantasy, wish fulfillment, and desire, fed and realized on an individual basis so that the reader’s experience parallels but also goes beyond that of the characters to produce “new needs [and] different desires” that urge her beyond the status quo of her own life.⁴³

It was precisely this formal aspect of fiction, according to some, that made it so potentially dangerous, as reflected in George Reynolds’s denunciation of the unrealistic desires engendered by novel reading. Therefore, the formal conventions of fiction had to be counterbalanced with a didactic discourse that kept the true principles of reward and punishment clearly in

sight. In “Judith’s Decision,” it is the mother’s voice that functions authoritatively to contain the individualistic desires of the character (and, it is hoped, the reader). In many other stories, the subversive potential of fiction is neutralized through the use of a strong narrator, who steps in frequently to control the reading experience.⁴⁴

In some stories, the generational dynamics, and therefore the cultural work, of this strong narrative voice are made explicit. “Aunt Alice’s Story,” a two-part serial by Katie Grover that appeared in the *Young Woman’s Journal* in 1895, is framed as a conversation between an older woman and her niece. Aunt Alice relates the story of her girlhood friend Jean who married a non-Mormon man and paid for it with her life when it turned out that he was a bigamist who poisoned her to avoid being caught. At the end of the story, Thelma, the niece, confesses that she was on the verge of becoming engaged to a non-Mormon man, but the story has changed her mind. “I have learned a valuable lesson,” she declares.⁴⁵ In another story, Aunt Ruth tells a similar tale to a group of young nieces, likewise convincing them to listen to their elders and make wise decisions about marriage.⁴⁶

In Gates’s stories, the narrator’s control is often quite subtle, though no less definite. Returning to “Seven Times,” in one scene Donald has proposed to Margery, unaware that she has been luring him into a trap because he had previously offended her. In this scene, the narrator makes her presence felt through her descriptions, using judgmental terms in the midst of otherwise straightforward narration to remind the reader of their common values. This is the description of Margery’s response to Donald’s proposal: “This was what she had waited for; this is what she had plotted for. With all the strength of her wicked purpose, assisted by the power of evil, to put from her the longing of love, which sought to pluck at her heart strings, she looked proudly and coldly up into the young man’s face” (369). With terms such as “plotted,” “wicked,” “proudly and coldly,” and “assisted by the power of evil,” the narrator’s purpose is to make sure the reader sees Margery’s actions as the narrator does, not as retribution for Donald’s self-righteousness, which is Margery’s (perhaps justified) perception.

At the same time, because of the uneasy blend of the literary and the didactic, these stories often express deep ambivalence and uncertainty about even the supposedly unquestionable verities they are ostensibly promoting. It is in these gaps—which do not always favor the didactic—that we can see the cultural work of Home Literature occurring on its deepest levels, particularly in regard to the changing meaning of marriage in post-Manifesto Mormondom.

“Suggestions” to the Girls: Marriage and Manifesto in Home Literature

Plural marriage rarely appears overtly in Home Literature stories, but it is no exaggeration to say that it shadows and shapes almost all of them. Indeed, fiction became a crucial element in a web of communal rhetoric through which Latter-day Saints worked out the implications of the impending shift from plurality to monogamy.

Writing in March 1891, a few months after the announcement of the manifesto ending plural marriage, Susa Young Gates predicted a dire crisis for young Mormon women who could no longer become plural wives. The Manifesto has resulted in some “laughing comment,” Gates began, “but only once or twice have I heard the matter spoken of in the grave and serious manner which it assuredly deserves.” “Oh, exclaims one of my bright young readers, I thought this manifesto made the men feel bad. I didn’t think I had anything to do with the matter!” Gates’s rhetorical reply was scathing: “You didn’t? Well, just wait ten years, and then see if this manifesto hasn’t as much significance for you, sitting at home with your empty dreams, as it has for the young married man, who has had his choice from a surplus of girls as good and good-looking as you are, and who now has . . . the comforts of home, with one wife and a growing family of children.” Gates concluded ominously, “Young girls will find that not all the advantage[s] of plural marriage belong to the married men.”

The problem, as Gates saw it, was the gender imbalance that had once been used to justify the necessity for polygamy. “It is a well known fact that there is a preponderance of females over the male population,” she asserted. Add to that fact “the number of miners, roughs, adventurers and dissolute men” and then “remember that as a people we have rarely among us a young man over the age of twenty-six unmarried,” and the scope of the problem begins to come clear. Throughout the territory, Gates claimed, there were more young women than men—definitely more *righteous* young women than righteous young men—leading observers to wonder, “Where are all these nice and really beautiful young women going to find a husband and a home?”⁴⁷

Researchers have found no actual “surplus” of women in early Utah, but it should be emphasized that the concerns expressed were based on perceptions of the numbers of *righteous* women versus righteous men, a number that would be nearly impossible to quantify.⁴⁸ Gates’s response therefore gauges the depth of fear and uncertainty that accompanied the abandonment of polygamy. Most urgent was the question of what the end of polygamy would mean for the marriage prospects of the young people. Young

women especially had to be fortified to make the right choices regarding marriage because, Gates and her colleagues feared, those choices were going to be severely curtailed or subject to corrupting influences.

The biggest threat was that, given the (perceived) demographic realities, young women would choose to marry outside the faith. “Be ye not unequally yoked together,” pled countless articles, editorials, and sermons, and over and over again the fiction dramatized the perils of marrying an “outsider.” Young women were constantly warned that they had to prepare themselves to make some tough choices. To this end, Gates reported the following conversation with her Sunday School class of teenage girls: “They . . . asked me which was better[:] to marry a man who, although born under the covenant and an heir to the priesthood, yet was not trying to live up to his privileges, perhaps smoked, drank and swore, and would not go to the Temple, and was not worthy so to do; was it better to marry such a man, or to marry a man not of our faith, yet who was upright, good and honorable.”

Gates responded in her typically outspoken way: “If a person was to ask me which I would rather have, the small-pox or the diphtheria, I should be almost at a loss what to answer. ‘May the Lord preserve me from either,’ I should be most apt to reply.” Instead, she insisted, “It would be far better for girls to die, or live single lives, than to wed either out of the Church or unworthily in the Church. Good gracious,” Gates exclaimed, “it is no disgrace to be an old maid.”⁴⁹

This message—that remaining single was preferable to marrying unworthily—became one of the foundational principles of post-Manifesto discourse on marriage. In editorials and articles, it had to be stated forcefully, unequivocally, and repeatedly. In fiction, however, it was possible (and perhaps necessary, given the demands of novelistic conventions) to both deliver and mitigate the message. In her novel “Donald’s Boy,” a sequel to “Seven Times,” Gates portrays the spiritual awakening of young Phyllis Jones, which leads her to break off her engagement to a wealthy, worldly non-Mormon man. He tries to dissuade her, promising that they will be married at once and go off in a “whirl of pleasure and excitement” to Europe. But Phyllis sees through this illusion. “But afterwards,” she cries, “there would still be an afterwards. . . . There would be times when I should want to go back to my people, the Mormons, I mean, and you would not like that. . . . It would make me miserable.”⁵⁰

When the fiancé refuses to relent and become a Mormon, Phyllis parts with him for good. Afterwards, she sits alone, overcome with grief, until her father comes home and worriedly asks what is wrong. “Oh papa!” she answers, throwing herself into his arms, “I’m going to be an old maid for the Gospel’s sake.”⁵¹ While readers were surely meant to internalize this

same commitment to the gospel, even at the cost of their own spinsterhood, the story ends with Phyllis happily married to a virtuous young Mormon man. Like almost every other heroine in Home Literature stories, she is rewarded for her faithfulness with marriage to an honorable Mormon.

Beyond offering fictional assurances of earthly reward for young women's faithfulness, Gates also explored more nebulous possibilities, probing at whether there was not yet some possibility that plural marriage could provide a solution to the problem. Some of her editorials, for example, fortify girls for the possibility of "single blessedness" in this life by holding out the hope that being "an old maid for the gospel's sake" did not have to mean eternal loneliness. "Women who prefer to spend their lives singly, and who keep their covenants and remain pure and true, need not fear," Gates assured her readers. "God will provide a partner for them in eternity, where men or man-made laws will not interfere."⁵² Gates here implied that women who remain single in this life will be able to become plural wives in the next.

From this possibility, in which plural marriage is entirely deferred to the next life, it was a small leap to an even more intriguing arrangement, dramatized in a subplot in "Seven Times," in which Gates attempts to retain plural marriage in the Mormon system without leaving all the arrangements until the hereafter. Early in the story, Margery Stuart's brother, Harvey, proposes to young Clara Jones (Donald's sister), asking her to become his plural wife. She rejects him and marries, on a whim, a foolish young man named Levi Miller. When Clara later comes down with diphtheria, Harvey goes to help the young couple and discovers that their marriage has been a "disappointment." Levi has not been able to make a living, and they have quarreled and been unhappy together. Clara, the narrator tells us, is "quite willing to die" (466).

Before she passes away, Clara rallies momentarily and begins motioning to the men as if trying to send a message: "She began to link her fingers together again and still again, and then would weave them back and forth as if weaving a chain of dandelions" (466). As she makes these motions, she looks "appealingly up at the Professor [Harvey] as if to beg him to speak." Levi is baffled. "She never seems to look at me," he complains to Harvey. "What is she doing, twisting her hands so, it seems as if it would drive me mad!" Finally, Harvey, who "felt that he knew what she was saying to him," bends his head slightly and looks "straight into the dazzling black eyes, deep into their very depths." Clara understands his meaning and closes her eyes "as if in silent happiness" (467). Shortly afterwards, she dies.

This scene might seem almost as incomprehensible to the reader as it does to poor Levi, but after Harvey buries her, he reflects on the meaning

of Clara's gesture. "He knew that some time in the great Beyond he should meet and have joy with the soul who had so repented her rash conduct," the narrator tells us. "She was his; he felt that she knew that it was so in the last awful struggle, and had symbolized the future for them both in her dying moments" (468). In other words, Harvey is to have Clara sealed to him as a plural wife for the eternities, even though he did not get to marry her in this life.

Improbable as this scenario might seem, to readers of the *Young Woman's Journal* it was not entirely unfamiliar. In this plot line, Gates dramatizes a creative idea posed by another article a few months earlier. Entitled "A Suggestion to the Girls" and signed by "Diener," this piece addresses itself to the fate of girls who remain single in this life rather than marry unworthily. "What will . . . become of the girls in eternity?" the writer asks. "My remedy," she continues, "would be, to have the union consummated after the death of one or the other person." She explains: "Supposing, for instance, a young woman, with no human prospect of a happy marriage here on earth, and no desire for any other union, becomes acquainted with a man already married, whom she can respect and love. National and Church laws forbid their union. But there is neither human nor divine prohibition of their being sealed for eternity after one or the other is dead."

In order to effect this arrangement, the young woman and the married man should "mutually agree in the presence of witnesses" or, even better, record their wishes in their personal papers to be found by their relatives after they die: "Then a union can be completed by vicarious work [in the temple], which God will sanction, and which will bring to the contracting parties, if they are and have been faithful, the blessings of 'eternal lives.'" Our writer acknowledges that men might be reluctant to propose such a scheme; therefore, women should be permitted to take the initiative, while men retain "the privilege of refusing." "If girls can adopt and console themselves with some such plan," the article concludes, "they will be able to more profitably spend their time than many do at present, in vainly seeking to capture the affections of some noble youth, or, failing in this, to accept the first creature in the form of a man who presents himself as a suitor."⁵³

Implausible as this "suggestion" may sound, the Mormon practice of vicarious temple work for the dead did leave at least theoretical room for such an idea. Regardless of whether the Church would have permitted such a practice, the key issue here is that this "suggestion" was an attempt to retain polygamy in the thought system surrounding Mormon marriage without violating any of the institutional constraints on its practice.⁵⁴ As our author says, "National and Church laws forbid" plural marriage. But the gospel, which Mormons viewed as a higher law, provided a possible

solution. Rather than leave it all to be determined in the next life, this “suggestion,” and Gates’s dramatization of it, attempt to resolve the post-Manifesto demographic problem with concrete action in the here and now.

Gates’s fictionalization of the “suggestion” in one of her most ambitious serialized novels gives it a certain level of prominence, but the idea does not seem to have gained much traction. Another idea advocated by Gates, however, proved to be much more influential. This was the idea of a “foreordained mate,” or, as Gates put it in one editorial, “the God-given companion designed for you from before the beginning of this world.”⁵⁵ The idea of a “soul mate” was not new, of course. For Mormons, however, it was rooted in their understanding of a premortal existence, a doctrine they believed to be unique to themselves. Gates did not originate the foreordained mate idea—it had been circulating in Mormondom for decades—but she played an important role in popularizing it.⁵⁶

The most striking example of Gates’s use of this idea is found in her novel “John Stevens’ Courtship,” which appeared serially in the *Contributor* in 1895 and 1896. In this story, Gates unmistakably replaces plural marriage with the foreordained mate idea. “John Stevens’ Courtship” dramatizes the events surrounding the Utah War in 1857, when President Buchanan sent a large contingent of army forces to Utah to subdue a purported Mormon rebellion. As one of Brigham Young’s trusted lieutenants, John Stevens is drawn into the conflict. His overriding fear is that the incoming soldiers will attempt to “ruin” the innocent Mormon girls of the community.

Before the foreordained mate idea is ever mentioned, Gates wrestles with the problem of polygamy. The story revolves around a love triangle for which plural marriage would provide an ideal solution. John Stevens loves Diantha Willis. Diantha’s friend Ellen loves John. Diantha is not particularly interested in John at first, and he half-heartedly courts Ellen. Meanwhile, a wicked army officer has set his sights on both girls. At one point in the story, John discusses his worries with Brigham Young. Brother Brigham counsels him directly, “Brother Stevens, why don’t you court one or both of those girls and marry them yourself?”⁵⁷

John does not respond to Young’s suggestion, and it is never mentioned again. The story makes it clear that John does consider marrying each of the girls, but not both of them. Considering that the suggestion of polygamy is voiced by Brigham Young himself, and considering that the story is set in a time when polygamy was practiced more freely than at any other time, its repudiation is unmistakable. Moreover, as if to add an exclamation point, Gates has Ellen murdered by a prostitute who used to be the mistress of the evil Captain Sherwood. In this story, there is not even theoretical space for polygamy.

Instead, Gates features the “foreordained mate” idea as the defining concept of Mormon marriage. Aunt Clara, the mentor figure in the story, preaches the idea to John this way: “There is a belongingness in love as in life. We are not married by chance. If that girl [Diantha] belongs to you, you will get her. If not, you don’t want her” (718). Later, in the climactic love scene, John embraces Diantha, fervently declaring, “I think I must have loved you, sweetheart, when we sang together with the morning stars and shouted in unison with our companions when the foundations of the earth were laid” (726).

Instead of plural marriage, we have two predestined lovers finding each other in monogamic bliss. By setting her moral in the context of the original community, Gates’s story enshrines the foreordained mate as the basis of Mormon beliefs about marriage. This move retains the idea of marriage as the monolithic doctrine of Mormonism but spins it to sidestep polygamy altogether. There is nothing about the way Aunt Clara explains the doctrine that would necessarily exclude the possibility of polygamy, but it establishes the foreordained mate as the *essence* of Mormon beliefs about marriage, effectively subordinating any other teachings about polygamy.

In 1890s Mormondom, then, a distinctive culture of letters organized itself to grapple with the dangers, the uncertainties, and the ambivalences that accompanied the profoundly “radical changes” taking place in the community. Drawing on well-established literary models and theories, Susa Young Gates and her colleagues energetically set about writing Home Literature stories that would complement other forms of discourse aimed at keeping the young people on the straight and narrow path, harnessing the potential of fiction to perform both overt and covert cultural work. Examined in light of this context, Home Literature was an important, if little-recognized, participant in the wrenching process of Mormonism in transition.

Lisa Olsen Tait (who can be reached via email at byustudies@byu.edu) received a PhD in American literature with a graduate certificate in women’s studies from the University of Houston in 2010. She is currently an adjunct professor of Church history and doctrine at BYU and has published articles in *American Periodicals* and the *Journal of Mormon History*.

1. Editor’s Department, *Young Woman’s Journal* 1, no. 3 (December 1889): 96. [^]
2. “Judith’s Decision,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4, no. 3 (December 1892): 111–22. The story is unsigned, but it was almost certainly written by Susa Young Gates. Throughout this article, initial references to fictional texts will be cited in the notes and all subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. [^]
3. Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, *A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (1974; repr., Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 257. [^]

4. See, for example, Eugene England, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 2 (1982): 131–60, and Edward A. Geary, “The Poetics of Provincialism: Mormon Regional Fiction,” *Dialogue* 11, no. 2 (1978): 15–24. Terryl Givens’s more recent survey essentially duplicates the earlier assessments. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 172–78. [^]

5. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200. [^]

6. Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, xvi. [^]

7. Though it was not the standard practice in contemporary sources, I have chosen to capitalize Home Literature for emphasis in this discussion. [^]

8. Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5–6. [^]

9. See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), for an influential discussion of this process. [^]

10. Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 246. [^]

11. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 8. [^]

12. Official Declaration—1, The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, 1981), 292. [^]

13. Editor’s Department, *Young Woman’s Journal* 2, no. 9 (June 1891): 425. [^]

14. Ann M. Cannon, “YLMIA Officers’ Meeting,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4, no. 2 (November 1892): 93. [^]

15. L. S. Cartwright, “YLMIA Conference,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4, no. 3 (December 1892): 141. [^]

16. S[ophy] Valentine, “In Days of Yore,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 5, no. 8 (May 1894): 377. Valentine’s first name is sometimes spelled “Sophie.” She also signed “S. Valentine” or “S. V.” sometimes, but “Sophy” was by far the most common. [^]

17. Dean L. May, “A Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830–1980,” in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 128. [^]

18. Davis Bitton, “Zion’s Rowdies: Growing Up on the Mormon Frontier,” in Davis Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 56, 66, quotation on 66, n. 4. [^]

19. Whitney was not the first to use this term. As I will discuss below, it was a natural extension of the ethic of “home industries” that had long prevailed in the community. Whitney’s sermon has often been cited as a watershed moment in the movement; I would emphasize that he articulated ideas that were already in circulation. I have not found any references to Whitney’s sermon in contemporary discussions of Home Literature, citing it as particularly noteworthy or influential. [^]

20. Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature,” *Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 300. [^]

21. Horatio [B. H. Roberts], “Legitimate Fiction,” *Contributor* 10, no. 4 (February 1889): 135. [^]

22. Horatio, “Legitimate Fiction,” 136. [^]

23. George Reynolds, “Influence of Outside Literature,” *Contributor* 2, no. 12 (September 1881): 358–59. [^]

24. “That most readers of novels . . . were thought to be women and youth made particularly ominous the implications of a novel reading based on self-gratification as opposed to social feelings,” Nina Baym observes in her study of antebellum book reviews. Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 39. [^]

25. George Clarke, “The Novel-Reading Habit,” *Arena* 19, no. 102 (May 1898): 670–79, quotation on 670. Reprinted in *The American 1890s: A Cultural Reader*, ed. Susan Harris Smith and Melanie Dawson (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 43–51. [^]

26. Geary, “Poetics of Provincialism,” 15. [^]

27. Quoted in Jill C. Mulvay [Derr], “Eliza R. Snow and the Woman Question,” *BYU Studies* 16, no. 2 (1976): 256. [^]

28. Gates’s identity as Homespun seems to have been widely known in the community. Her papers contain several letters addressed to her personally in which stories by Homespun are discussed, and in the announcement of the new journal published by Emmeline Wells in the *Woman’s Exponent* 18, no. 7 (September 1, 1889): 55, “Homespun” is parenthetically identified as “Sister Susa Young Gates.” [^]

29. In my view, it is striking that the few previous treatments of Home Literature have given it a largely patriarchal origin, tracing its development through Whitney’s sermon to B. H. Roberts’s early attempts at fiction and culminating in the work of Nephi Anderson. While I do not wish to ignore these men’s contributions to the field (neither the original authors nor the later critics), even a cursory glance at the early Home Literature will show that women writers far outnumbered men, especially in the early years. Moreover, the patterns I am describing in the fiction in the *Young Woman’s Journal* were prevalent across the board in all Home Literature stories published in LDS youth periodicals. All this having been said, there is certainly room for further investigation of gendered patterns in both authorship and thematics of Mormon Home Literature and youth magazines of the 1890s. [^]

30. Matthew Durrant and Neal E. Lambert, “From Foe to Friend: The Mormon Embrace of Fiction,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 331. [^]

31. I am currently working on a book that will consider these authors individually and collectively. There were differences in subject and technique between them, but overall their similarities are unmistakable. In this article, I am treating Gates as representative of Mormon women writers generally; at the same time, I would argue that her output, her position as a prominent editor and leader, and her recognition within the community as a literary figure did afford her a special status among Mormon readers and writers. [^]

32. See Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Indeed, the term “Home Literature” closely echoes that of “domestic novel,” which has been commonly applied to the work of these women. [^]

33. Anne E. Boyd, *Writing for Immortality: Women and the Emergence of High Literary Culture in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 3. [^]

34. Susa Young Gates to Zina D. H. Young, May 5, 1888, Susa Amelia Young Gates papers, MS 7692, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. [^]

35. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, 74. In my view, this is an understudied aspect of domestic and didactic fiction generally. [^]

36. Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), insightfully examines this “cultural revolution.” For the intergenerational pattern of gender construction, see Nancy Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Bio-social Construction of Femininity* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996). [^]

37. For an introduction to the sensation genre, see Lyn Pykett, “Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Dierdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 192–211. [^]

38. Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). [^]

39. Nina Baym, *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 22. While much has subsequently been written about sentimentality, domestic fiction, and women writers, Baym’s genre analysis has not been superseded. [^]

40. The term “true woman” was ubiquitous in nineteenth-century discourse. It was adopted by Barbara Welter in her influential study of “The Cult of True Womanhood,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151–74. Recent scholarship has worked to greatly problematize this and similar terms used in analyzing nineteenth-century women’s experience (“separate spheres,” “domesticity”), and I use it here with full awareness of its complexity. With Patricia Okker, I believe these terms are worth using because they appear in contemporary sources, but they should be considered as “rhetorics” that expressed idealized and largely unexamined assumptions about gender, not as a monolithic ideology or a straightforward reflection of “reality.” See Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 14. [^]

41. Homespun [Susa Young Gates], “Seven Times,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 5, no. 8 (May 1894), 370. The novel runs through the entire volume, which is continuously paginated. [^]

42. Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 99–100. [^]

43. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 44. [^]

44. Susan K. Harris notes that the “engaging” narrators in these texts guide readers through the hermeneutic process and severely limit the possible interpretations of the narrative by constructing what she calls the narrator-narratee contract, in which the narrator engages narratees “in a dialogue intended to teach them how—and how not—to live.” Susan K. Harris, *19th-Century American Women’s Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 40. [^]

45. Katie Grover, “Aunt Alice’s Story,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 6, no. 8 (May 1895): 360. [^]

46. Sophy Valentine, “Aunt Ruth’s Story,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 4, no. 1 through no. 3 (October–December 1892): 2–15, 55–60, 107–111. The concluding installment ran in the same issue with “Judith’s Decision.” [^]

47. Editor’s Department, *Young Woman’s Journal* 2, no. 6 (March 1891): 283–85. [^]

48. On demographics, see Davis Bitton, “Polygamy Defended,” in Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History*, 35–36. [^]

49. Editor’s Department, *Young Woman’s Journal* 5, no. 5 (February 1894): 244–45. [^]

50. Homespun [Susa Young Gates], “Donald’s Boy,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 6, no. 11 (August 1895): 498. [^]

51. Homespun, "Donald's Boy," 498–99. [^]

52. Editor's Department, *Young Woman's Journal* 5, no. 5 (February 1894): 245. [^]

53. Diener [pseud.], "A Suggestion to the Girls," *Young Woman's Journal* 5, no. 6 (March 1894): 279–80. [^]

54. I have found no other official or published references to this idea, but anecdotal evidence suggests that such arrangements might have been possible. One anonymous reviewer of this article, for example, recounted an incident from family history in which a young missionary whose fiancée died was sealed to her anyway, with her elder sister standing as proxy. Such incidents, whether fictional or actual, underscore the urgency of efforts to retain some form of plural marriage in the Mormon worldview without violating institutional boundaries. [^]

55. "What Is Your Mission?" *Young Woman's Journal* 5, no. 2 (November 1893): 92. [^]

56. The earliest reference to this idea that I have found is an 1857 article by John Taylor, "Origin, Object, and Destiny of Woman," which Gates reprinted in the *Young Woman's Journal* in June 1897. [^]

57. Homespun [Susa Young Gates], "John Stevens' Courtship," *Contributor* 17, no. 8 (May 1896): 498. [^]