As the nineteenth century opened, life presented few opportunities for women to experience personal freedom or growth. The prevailing view was that women were not equal to men; therefore, they must take their lead from them. This was so, even though many women, out of necessity, had worked alongside men in securing the freedom of the new nation. Whether this view was based on the Calvinistic teachings of Puritan New England or a more secular view, the result was the same; women had their place, the home, and they had best stay in it. As the nineteenth century opened, life presented few opportunities for women to experience personal freedom or growth. The prevailing view was that women were not equal to men; therefore, they must take their lead from them. This was so, even though many women, out of necessity, had worked alongside men in securing the freedom of the new nation. Whether this view was based on the Calvinistic teachings of Puritan New England or a more secular view, the result was the same; women had their place, the home, and they had best stay in it. However, as America evolved from a fledgling nation into a strong nationalistic county, the opportunities for, and expectations of, women began to change. The significance of women in the literature of the period not only reflected these changes; it influenced and encouraged them. While still attempting to define a woman's role in society along traditionally accepted paths, nineteenth century literature reflected a growing awareness of women's abilities.

In 1801 education for women was deemed unnecessary. A French book, *Shall Women Learn the Alphabet*, said that knowledge should be prohibited to them and "quotes authors weighty and various, to prove that the woman who knows the alphabet has already lost her womanliness" (qtd. in Cooper 333). Since women were seen as the weaker, less capable sex, they were denied the basic rights accorded to their male counterparts. Certainly most men supported the position of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote, " A plan of female education¼has occupied my attention only as far as the education of my own daughters occasionally required¼which might enable them, when [they] become mothers, to educate their own daughters" (490). It was only natural that Jefferson would write this, for a woman's province was the home. She had control of raising the children and was seen as a helpmate to her spouse. This popularly held view was reinforced by the literature of the day.

In 1830 the first women's magazine was published. Godey's Lady's Book dealt with fashion, manners, and a woman's place in the home. It sought to educate women about these matters in articles such as "How to Be the Perfect Housewife." In this article Godey told women that their duty was, "To ascertain her husband's income, its resources, its limits, the amount beyond which she cannot pass without entailing ruin upon him and misery on herself" (108). The success of the marriage, the family, and even the husband was a reflection of how well a woman did her duty. The poor woman who did not marry was pitied or scorned and the term "Old Maid" was a pejorative. So most young girls made marriage their main focus. And once married, they carried out the only honorable profession they were allowed — that of wife.

Washington Irving satirized the role of wife in his tale "Rip Van Winkle." In this story, Rip's adventure began as an attempt to escape the carping of his wife, who is seen as a shrew of the first order. As Irving says, "a tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use" (479). It is very likely that there was some truth to Irving's caricature. Women, denied any other outlet, often nagged their husbands. Many nineteenth century men must have agreed with Irving when he wrote, "it is the common wish of all henpecked husbands¼that they might have a quieting draught out of Rip Van Winkle's flagon" (487). In "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" Irving's humor again characterizes women as a breed apart, and he suggests that men should beware. He wrote that Icabod, "would have passed a pleasant life¼if his path had not been crossed by a being that causes more perplexity to mortal man than ghosts, goblins, and the whole race of witches put together, and that was—a woman" (494).

Evolving from minor to major depictions, the role of women flourished in the short stories, novels, and poems of romantic literature. However, according to Judith Fryer's book The Faces of Eve, male writers in the nineteenth century saw women as "types." Each of these types was a device used to tell an underlying story, which focused on how these women affected the male characters. The themes of self-reliance, evil, and repentance, common in romantic literature, were explored, not from the woman's point of view, but juxtaposed against the male dominated society.

The first of these types was the "Temptress" and Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, fits this category. Although Hawthorne uses a woman as the main focus of the story, on closer reading of this work we see that Hester is merely used to illuminate the underlying theme of man's sin. So while the story focuses on Hester, it is really the story of Dimmesdale's weakness and Chillingworth's duplicity. Still, Hawthorne's description of Hester presents a very strong image of her character. We see her first as the official led her from the jail. As she stood at its threshold, "she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity . . . and steppe d into the open air as if by her own free will . . . she took the babylon her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbors" (115). Even without the further description of her beauty and physical bearing we already have a sense that this was not your average woman. Because Hester was shunned by society, this tale was a reminder to women of the price that they too would pay if they chose to flaunt society's rules. As the story unfolds and Hester refuses to name the father of her child, she is not portrayed as noble or brave, but rather her silence is viewed as leading Dimmesdale further astray. "What can thy silence do for him except it tempt him—yea compel him, as it were—to add hypocrisy to sin?" (124). The irony is that it is Dimmesdale himself who makes this accusation, "and the infectious poison of that sin had been thus rapidly diffused throughout his moral system" (216). Hawthorne's implication that Hester ruined Dimmesdale is a warning to all men: Beware of temptation! Another of Hawthorne's short stories employs a similar

theme. In "Rappacinis Daughter," we are introduced to Beatrice. As she walks in her father's garden, the young man, Giovanni, sa ys, "Soon there emerged¼a young girl, arrayed with as much richness of taste as the most splendid of the flowers, beautiful as the day, and with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much. She looked redundant with life, health, and energy" (1046). Her very being tempts Giovanni, but she is tainted by her father's scientific experiments: "This lovely woman¼had been nourished with poisons from her birth upward, until her whole nature was so imbued with them that she herself had become the deadliest poison¼Her love¼poison—her embrace death" (1058). When Beatrice realizes that she has passed this poison on to Giovanni, she is distraught. She elects to drink a potion that may prove deadly, in an effort to cleanse the poison from her system. Her father does not understand her repudiation of her own potential. Why would she rather be like other women? He asks, "Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power nor strength could avail¼Wouldst thou, then, have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?" (1064). As she dies Beatrice replies, "I would fain have been loved, not feared" (1064). Beatrice's willingness to die rather than live without love advocates the view that, for women, love was more important than power.

Another Hawthorne book that explores this theme is The Blithedale Romance, which is based on his own experiences at Brooke Farm. According to Paul John Eakin in The New England Girl, the vibrant, exciting character, Zenobia, whom Hawthorne creates for this story is a reflection of his friend Margaret Fuller. Eakin states that Zenobia's thoughts and words often parallel Fuller's own work, Women in the Nineteenth Century. Highly intelligent and an ardent feminist, Fuller was part of the Transcendental movement. Since she resided at Brooke Farm with Hawthorne, it is easy to see the correlation between her and Zenobia. The other female character in The Blithedale Romance, Priscilla, is a "delicate, nervous young creature, not uncommon in New England" (115). In fact she is the more accepted vision of womanhood for the 1800s. Zenobia contemptuously says of her, "She is the type of womanhood, such as man has spent centuries in making it. He is never content, unless he can degrade himself by stooping towards what he loves. In denying us our rights, he betrays even more blindness to his own interests than profligate disregard of ours!"(139). As the story progresses and the emotions of the characters are revealed you can almost hear Margaret Fuller as Zenobia says,

"It is my belief – yes and my prophecy, should I die before it happens—that, when my sex shall achieve its rights, there will be ten eloquent women where there is now one eloquent man. Thus far, no woman in the world has ever once spoken out her whole heart and her whole mind; the mistrust and disapproval of the vast bulk of society throttles us, as with two gigantic hands at our throats! We mumble a few weak words, and leave a thousand better ones unsaid." (137).

While Hawthorne allows Zenobia to speak about women's rights, it is

clear that these are not his views, nor are they society's. Those views are more accurately expressed by the two male characters: Cloverdale and Hollingsworth. In response to Zenobia's outburst, Cloverdale makes this observation about women: "What amused and puzzled me was the fact, that women, however intellectually superior so seldom disquiet themselves about the rights and wrongs of their sex . . . they are not natural reformers, but become such by the pressure of exceptional misfortune" (138). When he asks Hollingsworth for his opinion of women, he receives this reply:

"She is the most admirable handiwork of God, in her true place and character. Her place is at man's side. Her office, that of sympathizer; the unreserved, unquestioning believer¼Man is a wretch without woman; but woman is a monster – and, thank Heaven, an almost impossible and hitherto imaginary monster – without man as her acknowledged principal!¼I would call upon my own sex to use its physical force, that unmistakable evidence of sovereignty, to scourge them back within their proper bounds! But it will not be needful. The heart of true womanhood knows where its own sphere is, and never seeks to stray beyond it" (139-140).

Hawthorne does not have Zenobia express outrage at these remarks. Instead, she becomes meek. She loves Hollingsworth and, seeing now that nothing can come of that love, sees herself as flawed. Hollingsworth prefers Priscilla, and Zenobia no longer finds life worth living. When she drowns herself, it is a repudiation of all the messages of strength and courage that have come before. In this way Hawthorne reinforces traditional values. Women are nothing without a man's love and society's approval.

Other romantic writers echo this theme. In many of Edgar Allen Poe's short stories and lyric poems, women are fragile creatures whose lives revolve around a man. Of "Annabel Lee," Poe writes, "And this maiden she lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me" (581.5 -6). Since Poe was drawn to the supernatural and morbid, his women frequently represent ethereal figures. Often the female he immortalized was doomed, and her death the result of loving unwisely, as in "Lenore":

> Come, let the burial rite be read—the funeral song
> be sung!—
> An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died
> so young—
> A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so
> young.
> "Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and ye
> hated her for her pride;
> And, when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed
> her—that she died:--
> How shall the ritual then be read—the requiem
> how be sung
> By you—by yours, the evil eye—by yours the
> slanderous tongue

That did to death the innocence that died and died
so young? (577.5-12)

Though the poem mourns the young woman and those that will not honor her memory are chastised, Poe has again portrayed an image of a woman who has paid the ultimate sacrifice for love.

In contrast to this, Walt Whitman saw no need to personify women in an artificial light. He wrote poems that were a celebration of life, and through his eyes we get the first real portrayal of women. Writing in open, free verse style, Whitman saw beauty in the commonplace activities of life. He captured some of these images in "Song of Myself". He wrote:

The young sister holds out the skein while the
elder sister winds it off in a ball; and stops now
and then for the knots,
The one-year wife is recovering and happy having
a week ago
borne her first child,
The clean-hair'd Yankee girl works with her
sewing machine or in
the factory or mill, (1089. 95-100)

These passages offered familiar and comforting images, although they still presented a very traditional picture of women which was in contrast to some of Whitman's other works. In "Leaves of Grass" he goes so far as to rank women equal to men. In this he was ahead of his time.

Society was experiencing a significant change due to industrialization. At first this shift in economic structure increased the stratification of gender roles. Later it allowed women access to more opportunities outside the home. Because of this, it is not surprising that women writers were becoming more vocal about issues that affected them. As the romantic period in literature gained strength, there were more opportunities to use the written word to stir the passions and feelings of readers. Many women began using their talents in an attempt to change not only society, but also the beliefs of men. One of the first issues that drew the attention of women was the issue of slavery.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's book Uncle Tom's Cabin helped give fire to the abolitionist cause. It was perhaps the most influential book of this period, and a woman wrote it. Some credit this book with starting the Civil War, but Stowe did more than just challenge slavery. She also painted a vivid picture of the female slave's strength. When Eliza learned that her young son was to be taken from her and sold, in desperation she decided to take the child and run for freedom. But this decision did not come easily. Beecher writes:

It was impossible to conceive of a human creature
more wholly desolate and forlorn than Eliza . . .
the risk she was running, in leaving the only home
she had ever known . . . the parting from every

> familiar object . . . But stronger than all was maternal love, wrought into a paroxysm of frenzy by the near approach of a fearful danger...She wondered within herself at the strength that seemed to come upon her. (1019)

Stowe allows us to empathize with Eliza as she makes her decision, gathers her child in her arms, fearfully beginning her journey. With this passage she also contests the perception of women as weak.

Unlike Stowe, most women writers of these early years did not use fiction, but rather essays and editorials to advance their position. Like the men of the revolution, their passion for freedom was evident in the themes of their writing. With the increased number of newspapers and magazines women had the opportunity to express their views and attempt to rectify conditions within society. In addition to abolition, they addressed the issues of women's rights, education, and employment reform.

The belief that women had more to offer than just being a companion or helpmate shaped the political view of the women's rights movement. Just as women were attracted to the abolition movement, freed slaves often joined in the push for women's rights. Sojourner Truth, a freed slave who led others to freedom on the Underground Railroad, attacked the prevailing view of women as weak and helpless at the Women's Rights Convention, in Akron, Ohio, 1851. According to reports she got tired of hearing ministers at the convention claim superiority over women, especially on religious grounds. She marched to the front of the room and rebuffed their claims. Standing six-feet tall, claiming she had the strength and the will of any man, she gave examples to prove her point. After each example she asked, "And ain't I a woman?" In response to one minister's claim that because Christ wasn't a woman, women can't have the same rights as men, she asked, "Where did your Christ come from?" and then answering the question herself she said, "From God and a Woman! Man had nothing to do with him!" (2). The words of this speech were recounted in an 1863 newspaper article written by Frances Gage. They became a rallying cry echoed by many in defense of women's rights.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the leaders of the women's movement, frequently wrote on the subject of a woman's right to vote. Male opponents of this right frequently cited the fact that women needed to be protected, that they could not deal with the harsh realities of life. To this Ms. Stanton replied, "When you talk, gentlemen, of sheltering woman from the rough winds and revolting scenes of real life, you must be either talking for effect or wholly ignorant of what the facts of life are" (153). Ms Stanton was correct. Life for most women in the 19th century was filled with hardship, misery and few opportunities, although men denied it. Even the women who led sheltered lives rebelled against the "Cult of Womanhood" which placed woman on a pedestal. As one woman is reported to have said, "You can't move much on a pedestal" (Whitehorne).

That is why so many women pushed for education reform. They saw education as a way for women to gain control of their lives. It was time for women to look beyond the home and forge a new path for themselves. Margaret Fuller, the most outspoken woman on this issue, wrote, "Women are better aware how great and rich the universe is, not so easily blinded by narrowness or partial views of a home circle. 'Her mother did so before her,' is no longer a sufficient excuse"(317). She continued, "Too much is said of women being better educated, that they might become better companions and mothers *for men*¼but a being of infinite scope must not be treated with an exclusive view to any one relation" (318). Fuller herself was definitely an independent woman and her views influenced many others.

Concern over the problem of education for women caused Harriet Beecher Stowe to write about this theme in her book, Oldtown Folks, written in 1869. In this story, she tells of two young men going off to college, leaving behind the young lady who had studied with them at home.

One of the men says,

> Tina's education was now, in the common understanding of society, looked upon as finished. Harry's and mine were commencing: we were sophomores in college. She was a young lady in society: yet she had . . . quite a good mind, and was fully as capable of going thorough our college courses with us . . . .However, with her the next question was, Whom will she marry?" (508)

Although many women now received some form of education, most were not expected to utilize this education outside of marriage. Securing a mate, one that could provide for her, was still the primary ambition for most women.

Another concern, that of women toiling to support themselves, was addressed by Louisa May Alcott in her book, Little Women. Set during the Civil War, the portrayal of the female characters struggling to hold their family together, when men go to war, accurately reflected the lives of many women adapting to independence. In the very beginning of this book, Alcott reveals one daughter's desire to put her talents to use in more than "womanly" ways. In this dialogue, she shows clearly how restrictive the roles for women still were. Jo says, " It's bad enough to be a girl¼I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy; and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!" (6). This story found a receptive audience with female readers, who clearly identified with the March sisters.

Of all the female writers in the romantic period, perhaps Emily Dickinson was the most talented. Unfortunately little of her poetry was published in her lifetime, so Dickinson herself never realized the impact she would have. She is

perhaps the best example of the paradox presented by women of this period. Reclusive and shy, she was well educated, yet she deferred to the opinion of a man regarding her poetry. When Thomas Higginson criticized her work, she never again attempted to have it published. But she didn't stop writing. After her death nearly 1,800 untitled poems were found. Ironically it was Higginson who helped to get them published in 1890. Lasting influence is attributed to Emily Dickinson in an anthology exploring America women writers. The editor, Wagner-Martin, writes: "More than any other American poet except Walt Whitman, Dickinson changed the way readers expected poems to 'mean' . . . Passionate and often acerbic her poems enabled readers to understand the full range of a women's emotional life" (274-75). As wonderful as it is to read Emily Dickinson's poems today, her voice was silent in her own time. One has to wonder how many other women's talents were buried under the weight of criticism and repression.

After the Civil War, Romantic literature gave way to a more realistic view. The industrial revolution and the influx of immigrants created a schism in society. This breech was held together by imposing strict guidelines for acceptable behavior. Women, seen as civilizing elements, became the dominant forces in society. Magazines continued to publish stories by and about women. But even with this focus on women there still seemed to be something missing in this literature. As Fanny Fern wrote in 1868:

> Authors and authoresses of little, and big repute, have expressed themselves on this subject, and none of them as yet have begun to grasp it: men — because they lack spirituality, rightly and justly to interpret women; women—because they dare not, or will not tell us that which most interests us to know. (321)

But change was brewing. Many of the authors of the latter part of the nineteenth century began to use literature as a way to examine the restriction society still placed on women. The fact that these stories showed the hopelessness of many women's lives reflected the pessimistic view of most realistic writing. One of their unifying characteristics was how harshly women were judged when they stepped outside society's accepted boundaries. Another common trait: The heroines met with tragedy.

As seen earlier the men writing in the nineteenth century saw their female characters as "types," and this continued to be true for authors like Henry James and Stephen Crane. According to Judith Fryer, the "American Princess" type is presented in the classic Daisy Miller by Henry James. With this particular type, "the princess is never truly self-reliant—she needs her prince" (86). Fryer goes on to say, " James gives us here a type of American girl who is both bold and good . . . It also suggests that the idea of innocence and self-reliance is tested in the portrayal of the American Princess only within prescribed conventional limits" (101). Since Daisy flaunts convention,

she is judged and condemned by appearances alone. In the beginning of the story, when Winterborne first sees her, he is captivated and thinks she looks so innocent, but when she speaks to him his opinion changes. "He was inclined to think Miss Daisy Miller was a flirt—a pretty American flirt" (210). Even so he develops a relationship with her and is alternately enchanted and shocked by her behavior. As a young girl touring Europe, Daisy is free-spirited and unconventional. She doesn't seem to understand or agree with the accepted rules of propriety. Her own intentions are pure and honest; she wants to deal with others in the same manner. But when she disregards the rules by going sightseeing with Giovanelli, Winterbourne thinks, "'A nice girl ought to know!' And then he came back to the question whether this was, in fact, a nice girl. Would a nice girl, even allowing for her being a little American flirt, make a rendezvous with a presumably low-lived foreigner?" (53). After giving this some thought, Winterbourne has to agree with his aunt that he should no longer be seen with a person of such low morals. He defends this position by thinking, "It was impossible to regard her as a perfectly well-conducted young lady; she was wanting in a certain indispensable delicacy" (53). His views seem to be justified when Daisy continues to break the rules, which Mrs. Walker, a society matron, is quick to point out to him. As for Daisy, she seems determined to do as she pleases. But before we can cheer her independence, James reveals the consequence of her ill-advised behavior. While out one evening with Giovanelli, to see the Colosseum, Daisy contracts a fever. Within a week she is dead. Winterborne now mourns her death; yet, at her graveside he is distraught as he learns the truth from Giovanelli: " 'She was the most beautiful young lady I ever saw, and the most amiable;' he says, then after a moment he added, 'and she was the most innocent' " (78). Once again the female character is used a device to show the hypocrisy and foolishness of society, and once again she pays the ultimate price for attempting to assert herself.

Stephen Crane presents another young women doomed by her place in society in his story Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. Born into poverty, with alcoholic, abusive parents. Maggie is a victim of both heredity and economics, even though, "She grew to be a most rare and wonderful production of the tenement district, a pretty girl" (115). Living in squalor, working in a dreary factory, Maggie yearns to escape. This make her easy prey for Pete, her brother's friend, whom she sees as, "a formidable man who disdained the strength of the world¼He was a knight"(118). In reality, Pete is a scoundrel. Crane adheres to the pessimistic tone of realism by portraying her as naive and easily manipulated by Pete, who uses her desire to escape the squalor of her life to seduce her. By the time Maggie realizes she has been used, it is too late. She is a fallen woman, whom even her drunken mother will not shelter. Seeing her dreams shattered and unable to face what she must do to survive she wanders the street, finally approaching a respectable looking man, hoping for some kindness. "But as the girl timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side step¼how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed

saving?" (147). After this rejection Maggie survives for a few months on the streets, but when the pain of her life becomes too heavy to bear she finds relief by ending her life in the river. With irony, Crane ends the story as Maggie's former neighbors are comforting her grief stricken mother, who too late laments, "I'll fergive her!" (154).

Examples of this thinking abound in literature. Even popular songs, like "Just Tell Them That You Saw Me," were written about fallen women. Other songs dealt with the despair of women trapped in an artificial world. Mark Twain had called this period the Gilded Age and songwriter Arthur J. Lamb took liberties with the term when he wrote, "A Bird in A Gilded Cage." The refrain of this song clearly states an everyday reality for many women of the time:

> "She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
> A beautiful sight to see.
> You may think she's happy and free from care,
> She's not, though she seems to be. (149)

Women writing during this period knew this to be true, and they used this theme in many of their stories. Some female authors based their stories on their own experiences. Writing from the heart, of their own despair and anguish, these stores provided a glimpse into the realities of life. Because they presented new and unsettling views of women, the stories, of Kate Chopin, Sarah Gilman, and Edith Wharton, shocked and disturbed readers in the late 1800s.

The topics of these stories often dealt with previously forbidden subjects, like extra-marital affairs or insanity, and therefore were considered scandalous. Even today, these stories present powerful images of women struggling to break free from their stifling lives any way they can. Chopin, Gilman, and Wharton, knew first hand about failed marriages and bouts of madness, and the underlying truths in their stories still ring true today. Yet, too often, their heroines see only death as an escape from the madness of their circumstances. It was death or resignation — what a sad indictment of the 19th century.

In one of her early works, "A Pair of Silk Stockings," Chopin tells the tale of a woman who wants to escape her submissive, responsible life. She comes into a small sum of money and we watch as she indulges herself for the first time. The story ends with her heading home after a day of frivolous fun. A man, riding the same trolley observes her, trying to figure her out, but, "he saw nothing unless he were wizard enough to detect a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever" (67).

Chopin expanded on this theme of the desire to escape from a dreary life in "The Awakening." Mrs. Edna Pontellier, summering on Grand Isle, south of New Orleans, slowly comes to the realization that her life is unfulfilled. She tells a friend that she is not one of those: "Women who idolized their children,

worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (169). She wants more from life, but is at a loss to define exactly what that something more is. Her husband treats her like a possession, which she can no longer tolerate. When another friend inquires what she would be willing to risk, she replies, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself"(198). As she struggles to discover what would make a difference in her life, she fancies that she is in love with Robert and would run off with him if she could. Knowing that her behavior would be considered scandalous, she says to herself:

> I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think—try to determine what character of a woman I am: for candidly, I don't know, By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it. (224)

When Robert leaves her, it shatters her fantasy. She sees her attachment to Robert, to her husband, even to her children as weights around her, dragging her down. In the mist of this depression she believes that she has given up herself. Seeing only endless days of misery ahead, she elects to end her life. The fact that Chopin would allow her character to choose suicide speaks volumes about the strength of gilded cages and the desperation of women trapped inside them.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman deals with a similar relationship. The female narrator of this story is trapped as well, both physically and emotionally. This wife is confined by illness to the bedroom of a rented house, and her physician husband appears to disregard her feelings. She writes, "John laughs at me of course, but one expects that in a marriage . . . . You see he does not believe I am sick" (42). We learn that the narrator resents her husband's treatment, when she confesses, "I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition" (43). The question is what has caused her nervous condition, in the first place. Gilman implies it is the patronizing attitude of the husband. We are allowed to witness the slow deterioration of the room, as the wife pulls the wallpaper from the wall, just as we witness the deterioration of her mind, as she slips into madness. This finally allows her to escape her husband and in the end she proclaims, "I've got out at last . . . and I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back! (53). Once more an author has used extreme measures to free their heroine from an intolerable life.

The paradox is that many women were entrapped by their own ambivalence. No one addressed this aspect better than Edith Wharton did. The short story, "The Fullness of Life," begins with the death of the female character, whose thoughts reveal, "a vague satisfaction . . . that she should never again hear the creaking of her husband's boots—those horrible boots—

and that no one would come to bother her about the next day's dinner"(12). Once she has died, she faces the "Spirit of Life." In this interchange we learn that this woman never felt as if she had really lived, that her marriage while comfortable, did not fulfill her inner desires. When asked if she was fond of her husband, she replies:

> I was fond of him, yes, just as I was fond of my grandmother, and the house that I was born in . . . . But I have sometimes thought that a woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall through which everyone passes¼the drawing room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go . . . but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors are perhaps never turned . . . in the innermost room . . . the soul sits alone and waits for a footsteps that never comes. (14)

Confessing that her husband never got beyond the sitting room, she is offered a chance to spend eternity with a true soul mate, and for a brief period she is rapturously happy. However, she is told that her husband will not be offered the same opportunity. He believed he had found his soul mate in her, so if she goes off with another, her husband will spend eternity alone. The weight of that responsibility is too much to endure, at least that is what she convinces herself. She decides to forgo eternal happiness for herself and wait for her husband to join her. When the Spirit reminds her that she said she did not love her husband the woman replies, "True¼but don't you understand that I shouldn't feel at home without him? It is all very well for a week or two—but for eternity! After all, I never minded the creaking of his boots, except when my head ached, and I don't suppose it will ache here"(19). Is she really being self-sacrificing, or is she blind to what really brings her happiness? Wharton seems to pose that question in this and many other stories. She wrote volumes on the subject of marriage, exploring the subject in all its complexity. Perhaps more than other writer of the time she spoke to a woman's soul, which often yearned for escape but only achieved release through fantasy.

One author who saw women's choices from a different perspective was Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. Her stories stands out from others of the period because her women are unique and they achieve what they want . In "A New England Nun," Freeman allows her heroine to choose spinsterhood over marriage. In this story, Louisa Ellis had made a life for herself while awaiting the return of her fiancée, for 14 years. She is now content alone. That she treats herself with respect is evident as we see her preparing her tea: "it took a long time¼but when it was ready it was set forth with as much grace as if she had been a veritable guest to her own self" (256). When her fiancée, Joe Dagget, finally returns home he resumes his visits, which are stilted and uncomfortable. After each visit, "Louisa got a dustpan and brush , and swept

Joe Dagget's track carefully" (259). It was as if she wanted to erase all evidence of him from her house. Louisa really doesn't want to marry, but she feels duty bound to keep her word. When she discovers that he loves someone else, but he too feels bound by honor to keep his promise of marriage, Louisa breaks off their engagement. The next day, sitting alone in her house:

> she felt like a queen who, after fearing lest her domain be wrested away from her, sees it firmly insured in her possession¼She gazed ahead through a long reach of future days strung together like pearls in a rosary, every one like the others, all smooth and flawless and innocent, and her heart went up in thankfulness. (264)

Freeman creates another strong woman, this time a wife, in "The Revolt of Mother." In this story, when Sarah Penn's husband decides to build a new barn instead of the long promised house, she at first attempts to talk to him about his decision. But her husband won't listen. His word was the final one and Sarah, though angry, seems resigned to his decision. But Freeman's character has more backbone than that. Even her physical description alludes to her determination: "her eyes, fixed upon the old man, looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own will, never the will of another" (256). Instead of resignation, Sarah concocts a plan. As the new barn is finished, she arranges to have her husband leave the area for a few days. She stops the new hay from being delivered and she moves into the barn. When news gets around town, "Some held her to be insane; some of a lawless and rebellious spirit" (264). But as she told her husband when he arrived back home, and found his world turned upside down, "Now, father¼you needn't be scared. I ain't crazy¼The house wasn't fit for us to live in any longer, an I made up my mind I wa'nt goin' to stay there. I've done my duty by you forty year, an' I'm goin' to do it now; but I'm goin' to live here" (265). With that she invited him in for a dinner. The husband, speechless, is now the one to meekly do as she requests.

Freeman's writing appears to fulfill the words of Margaret Fuller: "Another sign of the times is furnished by the triumphs of female authorship. These have been great and are greatly increasing. Women have taken possession of so many provinces for which men had pronounced them unfit, that, . . . it is difficult to say just where they must stop" (316).

The schism that began at mid century, widening the gulf between expectations and reality, was beginning to close. Because writers dared to expose the consequences of societal restrictions on women, attitudes began to change. Some states gave women the right to vote; some women pursued careers. There were new opportunities for personal expression and women were eager to be heard. Many agreed with Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, who wrote in Higher Education for Women:

> It is fair to demand from them for the twentieth century a higher type of civilization than any attained in the nineteenth. Relig ion, science, art, economics, have all needed the feminine flavor; and literature, the expression of what is permanent and best in all of these may be gauged at any time to measure the strength of the feminine ingredient. (325)

Born as a slave in 1858, Cooper graduated from Oberlin College in 1881. She worked as a teacher and in 1892 she helped to organize the Colored Women's League in Washington D.C, She was an example of the new opportunities for women. Her achievements could never have occurred in the first decade of the nineteenth century, but by its last decade there was a shift in the thought process of most Americans. Literature had contributed greatly in the establishment of this new paradigm. A woman's place was no longer restricted to the home. She now had choices: there was hope for the future.