

Great Works and Good Works: The Toronto Women's Literary Club, 1877–83

Heather Murray

Whereas a few ladies in the City of Toronto, having felt the need of something to keep alive their interest in mental growth and development, regarding, as they do, that continuous and concentrated effort upon any one course of thought or pursuit of object, has a tendency to cramp and narrow the views, to enfeeble the mind and powers of intellect, they have, this 3rd day of November, 1877, banded themselves together to form an association for intellectual culture, where they can secure a free interchange of thought and feeling upon every subject that pertains to woman's higher education, including her moral and physical welfare.

Preamble, Toronto Women's Literary Club Constitution¹

Book clubs generally, and women's book clubs particularly, are experiencing in the 1990s a North American renaissance comparable to their surge of popularity a century ago. The commercial potential of this phenomenon has become apparent to publishers and book-sellers, eager to exploit the new market. Fiction thought to be of special interest to book clubs (such as Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*) is issued concurrently with study guides and accompanying videos. Large-scale bookstore chains have hired book club coordinators, and some clubs have become "focus groups" for novels before their release.² This resurgence is as pronounced in Canada as in the United States, with newspaper features, magazine articles, and a newsletter available to readers interested in beginning book clubs of their own.³ The idea has even spread to newer media, such as *Chatelaine* magazine's "book club" web

¹Cited in Edith M. Luke, "Woman Suffrage in Canada," *Canadian Magazine* 5, 4 (Aug. 1895): 329.

²Doubleday's study guide for Atwood's *The Robber Bride* was its first such venture. In addition to a study guide, *Alias Grace* was accompanied by a videotape of Atwood reading excerpts and providing the historical context for the novel. Beverley Slopen, "Atwood makes video to attract U.S. buyers," *The Toronto Star*, 27 July 1996: L7.

³Val Ross, "Gathered together in literature's name," *The Globe and Mail*, 14 Jan. 1995: C1; C10. For an example of a "how to" club guide, see Diane Hart, "Join a book club," *The Toronto Star*, 3 Mar. 1996:E8. A Hamilton-based newsletter, *Book People*, has arisen in response to this renewed interest.

site, and the book club component of the Oprah Winfrey television talk show (which can boost a featured title to best-sellerdom.)⁴

This widespread and popular cultural practice has largely escaped the attention of academics. Feminist scholars might find in these groups an interesting mode of women's organization, and literary theorists an opportunity to examine reading practices. Book clubs of the nineteenth century (then more commonly known as literary societies) invite a similar wide range of inquiry. In the United States, there are already histories of the more prestigious eastern seaboard clubs, and feminist historians have examined women's reading groups as an element of the "clubwoman" movement. (The latter studies have emphasized civic reform plans and connections to a nascent first-wave women's movement over intellectual or literary activities.)⁵ In English Canada some preliminary material has been assembled by club archivists and local historians, but such groups have had almost no academic analysis.

Literary societies remained an enduringly popular form of cultural, educational, and social organization throughout the nineteenth century. My own research has uncovered almost 400 such groups in Upper Canada/Canada West/Ontario from the period 1820–1900 which were sufficiently established to leave archival material or other traces of their existence. (This figure counts only free-standing societies rather than the myriad "lits" associated with collegiates and congregations.) Doubtless a systematic search of local newspapers would reveal many more groups of lesser importance or

⁴Conversations (Book Club) on Chatelaine Connects at www.canoe.ca/chateleine. The Winfrey show stages a simulacrum of a women's book club, with invited fellow readers and a cozy living room set.

⁵See Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914* (New York and London: Homes and Meier, 1980), which devotes a specific chapter to the literary clubs; and Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs 1860–1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), which provides detailed examples of courses of study. The most sustained examination of the cultural agenda of these groups is provided by Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literary and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880–1920* (Urbana, Ill.: U of Illinois Press, 1997). African American women's literary societies are examined by Julie Winch, "You Have Talents—Only Cultivate Them": Philadelphia's Black Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade," in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994): 101–18. Many readers will have gained their knowledge of women's literary clubs from Helen Hooven Santmyer's best-selling novel "...And Ladies of the Club" (New York: Berkley Books, 1984), which traces the story of the fictitious Waynesboro Woman's Club from 1868 to the death of its last charter member in 1932, detailing its significant role in the lives of its members and its place in small-town life.

longevity, since this was where club news was most commonly reported. Samples from areas where records are well-maintained give some indication of the extent and density of the literary club movement: in St. Marys (Perth County) and its surrounding villages, for example, I have identified seventeen literary societies and six debating societies for the last quarter of the century.⁶ Significant not only as a colonial social and educational form, these groups provide a cultural continuum from that day to our own. The Literary and Philosophical Society of Québec (founded 1829) and the Eclectic Reading Club of St. John, N.B. (1868), the McCaulay Club (Chatham 1882), and the Peterborough Fortnightly Club (1897), to give a few examples, persist to this day. Several women's clubs also reached or passed the hundred-year mark: the Women's Literary Club of St. Catharines disbanded just before reaching its centenary in 1992, and the Saturday Reading Club of Woodstock did the same after celebrating that occasion in 1997. An offspring of the latter, the Tuesday Reading Club, and a women's Travel Book Club in Dundas, Ontario, still thrive as centenarians.⁷

Early women's clubs were what I term "demodidactic" educational institutions by which women hoped to construct for themselves the lineaments of a literary, and liberal, education. The Toronto Women's Literary Club (hereafter TWLC), in many ways characteristic of such early societies, provides a particularly dramatic example of the ways these women readers attached a social purpose to their reading activity. The TWLC is the best-known of the nineteenth-century groups, founded by the renowned reformer Dr. Emily Stowe, and although it was exceptional in its political commitments, the group provides well-documented instances of programmes and practices followed by succeeding sister organizations. Further, the literary study of the TWLC may be placed in relationship to the emergent discipline of English studies as it was developing at the University of Toronto.

Nineteenth-century literary societies usually went under that name, although a variety of other titles could be deployed: literary and philosophical, literary and historical, literary and scientific, societies; lyceums and athenaeums; reading clubs; and chauatauqua reading circles. They commonly

⁶The primary source for this is the index to the *St Marys Journal* and the *St Marys Argus*, maintained by the St. Marys Museum.

⁷For the St. Catharines Women Literary Club, see [Mrs.] E.M. Armstrong, *The First Eighty Years 1892-1972* ([St. Catharines Ont.]: Peninsula Press, 1976). For a history of the Saturday Reading Club, see Irene Crawford-Siano, *Reading, 'Riting and Roses* (Burlington, Ont.: North Shore Publishing, 1995). The Dundas club held a centenary exhibition in 1997 at the Dundas Public Library. I am grateful to Janet Inkstetter for telling me about the Dundas group.

undertook a broad range of activities in keeping with the generous nineteenth-century definition of the term "literature," including belletristic nonfictional prose such as essays, autobiography, history, and travel writing. Literary study was not confined to textual interpretation, but included the rhetorical arts of composition and oratory, later dismissed in large part from higher education. Thus a characteristic club meeting might include discussion of an assigned text; reading of members' essays on the text or on another scheduled topic; presentation of creative works by members; recitation of poetic selections; performance of dramatic scenes; formal debate (an especially popular activity); and other cultural activities such as instrumental and vocal music.⁸ This mixture of activities was playfully embodied in such names as the "Eclectic Reading Club" or "The Olio"⁹ of Coldstream, Ontario (1876), and variety is defended as a point of principle in the TWLC constitution quoted above. The term "literary" in itself signals such diversity.¹⁰

The literary societies may be understood to fall in the larger category of non-academic organizations by which nineteenth-century people gained access to literature or gathered to discuss it. Book clubs (which then were defined as circles for sharing privately-held volumes or for clubbing together for expensive periodical subscriptions), as well as circulating, subscription, and mercantile libraries, predated the Mechanics' Institutes libraries from which public libraries arose. "Penny Reading" series and amateur recitative and dramatic performances in the "literary hall" or "opera house" of a small town provided exposure to authors and their works, as did the tours of travelling lecturers and elocutionists. There was even a Canadian "Chautauqua Camp" at Grimsby Park, Ontario and a shorter-lived version at Niagara-on-the-Lake.¹¹ Formed with one eye to English and United States models, and

⁸Writing activity largely involved the composition of speeches or essays on set topics which the members would read or deliver at meetings. Although there is evidence of the composition of original poetry and dramatic sketches, I have located only one group-produced work of fiction in Ontario: the chaotic melodramatic novelette *Cora Ingram's Secret* by the Excelsior Literary Society of Binbrook. The women's groups especially stressed oratory—including debate and knowledge of meeting procedures—as a crucial precondition for participation in public life.

⁹The name is a translation of the Spanish word for "medley." See Edgar M. Zavitz, *History of the Olio* (Strathroy, Ont.: Age Printing and Publishing, 1885). Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (hereafter CIHM) 26113.

¹⁰For the purposes of my study I have winnowed out literary societies where book discussion was absent altogether (for example, in dedicated debating societies); and in the examination of the TWLC to follow, I concentrate on text-reading and discussion activities.

¹¹Dorothy Turcotte, *Greetings from Grimsby Park The Chautauqua of Canada* (Grimsby, Ont.: Grimsby Historical Society, 1985). The goals of the Niagara Assembly were announced in *The Chautauquan* 9, 1 (Oct. 1888), 46.

another to local demands, the literary societies went through several permutations of structure and purpose by century's end.

A brief first stage saw an educated elite taking as its model the English and European societies designed to provide a congenial *milieu* for book collectors and gentleman-amateur scientists and antiquarians. That model had mixed utility. The York [Toronto] Literary and Philosophical Society (founded 1831) eventually suffocated under the weight of its powerful patrons, but the Literary and Historical Society of Québec remained a formative and enduring anglophone intellectual force.¹² The early lyceum movement of the eastern United States, in turn inspired by the athenaeum societies of England, provided a model more capable of engendering popular support: the Halifax Athenaeum (1834), and the Fredericton Athenaeum and New Brunswick Literary and Scientific Association (1847) were two early and successful examples of this arrangement. The lyceums/athenaeums also followed their United States counterparts in beginning as mutual instruction societies but gradually relying increasingly upon visiting lecturers as their purposes became less practical and more cultural.

A later stage of the athenaeum movement is exemplified by the St. John's Athenaeum (1861). After absorbing several men's educational groups, its role devolved into the management of a reading room and a thousand-seat hall in which it staged lectures and entertainments.¹³ The democratic momentum lost by an increasing reliance on experts was regained in women's greater access when lecturers were deployed, since women were usually prohibited from discussion groups but often invited to public lectures. This was, for example, the case with the Toronto Athenaeum (1843), an organization doubly framed by the goals of the lyceum movement and Birkbeck College, which held lectures and *conversazione* for ten years until its absorption into the more scientifically-inclined Canadian Institute.¹⁴

The organizations named above were all literary societies insofar as literary activities were considered part of the nineteenth-century intellectual trinity of art, culture, and science. But as early as the 1830s we find societies with a more expressly "literary" orientation in the sense we would use the term today: the Toronto Literary Club (1835) (whose president was attorney-general Robert Jameson, a Coleridge circle habitué and husband of writer Anna Brownell Jameson), the Shakspeare [*sic*] Club (Montreal, 1840s), and the

¹²*Laws for the Constitution and Government of the York Literary and Philosophical Society of Upper Canada* ([York]: s.n., 1832). CIHM 63258.

¹³Louise Whiteway, "The Athenaeum Movement: St. John's Athenaeum (1861-1898)," *Dalhousie Review* 50 (1970-71): 534-49.

¹⁴*Prospectus of an Institution to be Called "The Athenaeum," A General Association for the Advancement of Literature and Science* ([Toronto: s.n., 1843?]). CIHM 43738.

Toronto Literary and Debating Society (1853) are examples.¹⁵ These groups were characteristically formed of clubbable young professional men, often lawyers, and the discussion and essay-reading format persisted in these societies, with debate remaining understandably popular.

By mid-century mark the literary society was widespread. The mutual instruction ideal persisted in societies such as the Western District Literary, Philosophical and Agricultural Association (Amherstburg, 1842), and those formed by Black settlers in southwestern Ontario. The Wilberforce Lyceum [1850] and the Amherstburg Literary Society [1881] are two examples of the latter, groups that imported the double agenda of the Black literary societies of the northern United States: adult education together with forums for abolitionist activity and community assistance.¹⁶ At mid-century literary study became a desired (if contested) feature of the Mechanics' Institutes' offerings. Patrons and workers battled over the inclusion of imaginative literature in lectures and libraries, and literary societies were, variously, amalgamated, initiated, or expelled in a series of institutional mytoses.¹⁷

The last quarter of the century saw an explosion of literary societies and debating societies, particularly the development of clubs for women. Despite the sensed need for mutual and self-improvement in the new nation, and despite the increasing importance of literary clubs as a form of civic and social organization, women had either been excluded from the societies or allowed only token visiting membership. A spirited letter from "Young Lady-Hood," written to the *Dutton Enterprise* (Ontario) in 1888, following a meeting of the Dutton Literary and Scientific Society at which would-be

¹⁵Laws of the Toronto Literary Club 1837. Miscellaneous Collection MU 2107 1837 #2, Archives of Ontario. For a more detailed picture of this society, see Heather Murray, "Frozen Pen, Fiery Print, and Fothergill's Folly: Cultural Organization in Toronto, Winter 1836–37," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 61 (Spring 1997): 41–70. See also Toronto Literary and Debating Society, *Laws of the Toronto Literary and Debating Society. Instituted 7th July, 1853* (Toronto: Printed at the Leader Office, 1856). CIHM 48195.

¹⁶*By-Laws of the Western District Literary Philosophical and Agricultural Association as Sanctioned at a General Meeting held at Amherstburg, Sept. 23rd. 1842. Together with the Discourse Delivered by the President on the Occasion....* (Sandwich, Ont.: Henry C. Grant, Printer, 1842). CIHM 21871. *Constitution and By Laws of the Wilberforce Educating Society, For Moral and Mental Improvement* (Amherstburg: I.B. Boyle, Printer, 1850). CIHM 38073. The first meeting of the Amherstburg Literary Society is reported in the *Amherstburg Echo*, 28 Jan. 1881.

¹⁷Although there have been a number of valuable examinations of Mechanics' Institutes in Canada and of their libraries, none to my knowledge has focussed on literary study in the Institutes. An excellent non-Canadian analysis is provided by Siobhan Lunney Kelly, "Disputing the Canon: Workers, Women and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century British Adult Education," PhD Diss. SUNY Binghamton 1991.

women members were discourteously treated, charged the members with betraying the aims of their own organization:

With what object was the society organized? I presume any of the members would answer, for mental improvement and instruction in science and literature. This is certainly a laudable object, but the objection to ladies becoming members is not so laudable— not in keeping with the progress in civilization on which such a society is proof. I presume that the gentleman (?) who made the first objection holds to the theory of the inferiority of woman, and thinks her utterly incapable of grasping the ponderous “logies” and “graphies” of his discussion.... If this society wishes to exclude women as members let them change its name. Give it some barbarous appellation savouring of those days when woman was little better than a slave.¹⁸

Frustrated by rejection, and aware of the new “clubwoman” movement in the United States, women began to form their own societies.¹⁹ In addition, women began to establish, and to participate in, a number of other types of literary societies. Many mixed-sex groups were formed during this period, sometimes devoted to the study of a single author (such as Shakespeare), and in turn often inflected by political or social interests (the progressive Browning circles, for example). Another format was offered by The Chautauqua School as it extended its organizational efforts beyond the United States. Many Canadian extension members took its “Great Books” courses by correspondence and gathered together into “Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circles” for shared discussion. (I have identified more than one hundred CLSC circles in Ontario to date.)²⁰ The closing years of the century also marked the establishment of “lits” in schools, colleges, and congregations (especially Methodist ones) for adults and younger adults alike: examination of some

¹⁸*Dutton Advance*, 2 February 1888. I am grateful to Donald L. Carroll for sending me this item.

¹⁹The number of such groups is difficult to ascertain. A turn-of-the-century survey by the National Council of Women of Canada listed 17 organizations in Canada. My own research has uncovered 20 free-standing women-only clubs established during the 1885-1900 period in Ontario alone, most of which seem to have been characterised by a blend of cultural and civic activity. This is not to mention the many mixed-sex clubs which arose at the same time. In addition, this period may have marked the commencement of more “private” book clubs for women (similar to those today), whose activities would not have been recorded in minute books or newspapers.

²⁰Unlike the travelling tent chautauquas of the 1920s and 1930s, with which more readers will be familiar, this original organization—still thriving today in Chautauqua, New York—was both a school and correspondence school, and for a time granted university degree credits. Its curriculum provided the basis for the better-known University of Chicago “Great Books” program. Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1974) is the most comprehensive history of the early phase of the Chautauqua movement.

minute books indicates—not surprisingly—that picnics and courtship sometimes predominated over cultural study in the junior groups.

Although the bulk of Canadian women's organized reading activity occurred in college or congregational literary societies, the freestanding women's-only organizations are especially interesting for their contribution to women's history and to the development of English studies. The Toronto Women's Literary Club (1877) is not, as it is sometimes erroneously assumed to be, the first women's literary society in Canada or even in Ontario. That honour (as nearly as I can determine) goes to several associations established by Black women in southwestern Ontario. The Windsor Ladies Club (1854) founded by Mary Bibb, and the Ladies Literary Society (Chatham, 1850s?) founded by Amelia Freeman Shadd, predated the organizations of their European-descent sisters by almost a quarter century. But the Toronto Women's Literary Club was ground-breaking in two other ways. In addition to being the first Canadian manifestation of the "clubwoman" movement initiated in the United States in the closing decades of the century, the TWLC would reconstitute itself after six years as the Canadian Woman's Suffrage Association, the first national suffrage association in the country.²¹ It is as such that the TWLC is primarily known, and women's movement historians have displayed some ambivalence about its literary activities. "Ostensibly a society for the development of women's intellectual interests," writes Carol Lee Bacchi, "the Toronto group was really a front for suffrage activity. In 1883, it dropped its disguise and emerged as Canada's first national suffrage association."²² Similarly, historian Wayne Roberts has referred to the "discreetly-named" society as "primarily a consciousness-raising group" whose members "were reluctant to focus on one issue, such as suffrage."²³

Two framing statements by the Club's own members may provide a different point of purchase. In the 1877 preamble to the club constitution, excerpted at the beginning of this article, the women reaffirm the value of the

²¹[Canadian Woman's Suffrage Association], *C.W.S.A. Constitution and Rules. Constitution and Rules of the Canadian Woman's Suffrage Association Inaugurated at a Public Conversazione Held in the City Council Chambers of Toronto on 9th March, 1883* (Toronto: Bingham and Webber, [1883]).

²² Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877–1918* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1983), 26. This ambivalence may be caused in part by Bacchi's belief that the TWLC was part of an earlier and uncompromised women-directed feminist movement, lost to this later suffrage organization which admitted men (28).

²³Wayne Roberts, "'Rocking the Cradle for the World': The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877–1914," in Linda Kealey, ed. *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s–1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 15–45. 20.

broad or liberal education more commonly received by men. In 1883, the Club revised its statement of purpose when it was reconstituted on the motion of its founder:

That in view of the ultimate end for which the Toronto Women's Literary Club was formed, having been attained, viz., to foster a general and living sentiment in favour of woman suffrage, this Club hereby disband, to form a Canadian Woman Suffrage Association.²⁴

What has appeared to later commentators as two divergent mandates struck participants as eminently compatible. They saw intellect-raising and mutual instruction as a necessary preparation for public life and political work. Indeed, this connection—and thus the bridge between the original TWLC and the succeeding suffrage society—was explicit in the quotation from Herbert Spenser placed on the title page of the CWSA's constitution: "As liberty to exercise the faculties is the first condition of individual life... the liberty of each... must be the first condition of social life."²⁵ Civic questions, the status of women, and the search for domestic and municipal improvements, were themes that helped knit together the TWLC's literary and cultural activities. Conversely, the topics raised by their fictional and historical readings could be referred to contemporary, even local, events.

The TWLC's goals remind us that, for many late nineteenth-century women, it was a desire for education, rather than a more abstractly envisaged "vote," that moved them to action and organization. In assessing the politics of the TWLC, we should remember the degree to which women's organization, for *whatever* purpose, was greeted with ridicule and hostility. The very fact of taking the name "club," a term connoted in that day with men's activities, was in itself a brave step. Indeed, there was often a greater suspicion of women taking time for themselves in reading and cultural discussion, than of women who worked for others in civic reform projects. The "private" rather than "public" agendas of these groups could prove the more controversial.

Historians have understandably paid attention to the group's suffrage work, given the renown of its founder for her reform achievements.²⁶ But in her own day and among her peers, Emily Stowe was viewed as a woman of broad interests and some literary talent and connection. (This provides

²⁴ Minutes 1 Feb. 1883. Cited Luke 330. I have been unable to locate the minute book(s) of the TWLC although Luke had access to them in writing her account in 1895.

²⁵ C.W.S.A. Constitution, title page

²⁶ There are numerous books and articles on Stowe, of varying degrees of reliability. The most complete biography is Mary Beacock Fryer, *Emily Stowe: Doctor and Suffragist*, Canadian Medical Lives No. 6 (Toronto and Oxford: Hannah Institute and Dundurn P, 1990).

further evidence that the literary and educational aims of the TWLC were far from prefatory or simply pretextual.) She came from a line of educators of many varieties, in a Quaker family noted for both its radical sentiments and intellectual attainments. The first school in the Norwich district was founded by her maternal step-grandfather in his own home; and through her own later teaching at the Nelles Academy, Stowe would become acquainted with that family of Methodist educators, one of whose members was the principal of Victoria College.²⁷ Boasting United States historian Benson Lossing on the maternal side, the family featured other amateur writers of occasional prose and verse, of which the family scrapbook gives several examples, including a particularly accomplished acrostic by grandfather Peter Lossing on the name of Stowe's mother, Hannah Lossing Howard (later Jennings).²⁸ Hannah Lossing, in turn, was known for "a natural love and taste for poetry which under other circumstances and in an older country would undoubtedly have given her a place among the literati," while a maternal aunt was lauded for being so "familiar with every line of Shakespeare" that she "could have readily detected a misquotation, though she had never entered a theatre or seen one of his plays enacted." Stowe herself would continue the family tradition, and on occasion she read original verse to TWLC members including a poem entitled "The Governess."²⁹ None of the poetry has been preserved, but we can credit accounts of her public speeches for evidence that Stowe was a stylist and rhetorician of some power.

Not only literary inclination, but education more strictly defined, was passed through the maternal line. Emily Stowe was educated at home and by her mother, apparently at her mother's insistence, although belonging to a community which advocated both liberal and practical education for women.³⁰ Stowe's mother could provide both, including a training in herbal medicine and traditional healing skills on which Stowe would continue to

²⁷On the political radicalism of the Lossing family see David Brearley, *Hotbed of Treason: Norwich and the Rebellion of 1837* ([Norwich, Ont.]: Norwich [and] District Historical Society, 1988).

²⁸Family verse in Green Scrapbook. Obituaries of Hannah Lossing Howard [Jennings] and of Ethelinda Wilson in undated and unattributed newspaper clippings, same source.

²⁹Stowe's obituary in *The Woman's Journal* (Boston) of 16 May 1903 would comment on the "strong literary and artistic ability" of Stowe and her ancestors. See also Green Scrapbook.

³⁰Background on the education of women in this community is provided by Cecilia Morgan, "Gender, Religion, and Rural Society: Quaker Women in Norwich, Ontario, 1820-1880," *Ontario History* 82, 4 (Dec. 1990): 273-87.

draw in her work as a physician.³¹ Stowe began working as a teacher at the age of fifteen, but then gained formal training and an honours certificate during the 1853-54 session of the Normal School for Upper Canada, and became a school principal at the age of twenty-three. Some ten years later, when her husband's worsening tuberculosis threw the burden of family support onto Stowe's shoulders, she left her children in a sister's care and enrolled (after apparent rejection by a college or medical faculty in Toronto) in the Quaker-established New York Medical College and Hospital for Women. Here she met such prominent United States feminists as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Although she began a Toronto practice on her return to Toronto, adding to her list of accomplishments the title of Canada's first woman physician, there is evidence she maintained her literary interests and connections (to Brantford-born authors Pauline Johnson and Sara Jeannette Duncan, among others).³²

In 1877 Stowe attended the fifth annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Women, a congress called to coordinate the many women's study groups which mushroomed in the United States in the post-Civil War period. Several accounts credit this meeting with providing the inspiration for the TWLC, but Emily Stowe would presumably already have been familiar with some precedents, including the famous "conversations" conducted by Margaret Fuller in Elizabeth Peabody's Boston bookshop. She may also have been aware of Peabody's own "reading parties," as well as the "schools" formed by young working women in the Lowell textile mills in the 1830s.³³

Most significantly, Dr. Clemence Sophia Lozier, founder and president of the women's medical college where Stowe had trained, was also a member of Sorosis, possibly the first and certainly the most influential of this new wave

³¹I am grateful to Dr. Florence Gibson for information about Hannah Lossing's work as a herbalist and midwife. There is some evidence that Stowe's adherence to these practices—and her later training as a homeopathic physician—were partly or largely responsible for her difficulties in gaining a license in Ontario: it was not simply a case of male misogyny. On this see Jacalyn Duffin, "The Death of Sarah Lovell and the Constrained Feminism of Emily Stowe," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 146, 4 (1992): 881-8.

³²Stowe was not the first female medical doctor in Canada: [James] Miranda Stewart Barry [1790?-1865], disguised as a man, was a British army medical officer posted to Canada in 1857 as inspector-general of military hospitals. See Isobel Rae, *The Strange Story of Dr. James Barry* (London: Longmans, 1958).

³³Fuller's "Conversations" were a topic of discussion at the TWLC's second annual meeting. Undated and unattributed newspaper clipping, Green Scrapbook. Martin provides a succinct history of the early United States study clubs in *The Sound of Our Own Voices*, 5-13.

of United States women's literary clubs.³⁴ Stowe may also have taken an example closer to home, having just completed a circuit of lectures for the Ontario Mechanics' Institutes on the topic of vocations for women.³⁵

Certainly, in its organization and activities the TWLC took something from all of the available models, allowing both directed discussion and the more structured research, writing, and recitation of the later women's study groups. The TWLC maintained the broad topical emphasis of the men's literary societies of the 1870s and 1880s, but it also followed the Mechanics' Institute practice of inviting expert speakers. Although it had many points in common with the newly-emergent women's literary groups in the United States, the TWLC differed in one important aspect from its sister societies in immediately combining reform and suffrage work with its literary activities. (The United States societies moved over time from cultural to municipal work, in many cases dropping cultural activities altogether.)³⁶ In this respect the TWLC marked a divergence that would continue between Canadian and United States societies. The Canadian clubs of this period would as a rule continue to combine educational and civic work, or—slightly later—would establish literary “branches” or “departments” in more practically-minded organizations such as the Women's Institutes.

The TWLC immediately attracted a coterie of public-spirited women, either the wives of professional men or themselves from the first generation of professional women. The coverage of the TWLC's activities in the *Toronto Daily Globe* yields a list of some fifty names of members, visitors, and guests,

³⁴Sorosis was founded when women journalists were refused admission to a dinner for Charles Dickens.

³⁵Her lecture on “Women's Sphere,” presented to the Town Hall, Bradford, was reported as follows:

Mrs. Stowe deprecated the position to which woman has been reduced, by the conventionalities of society, and vindicated her right to explore whatever fields of nature and science her God-given faculties qualify her for. She instanced distinguished examples to show what her influence on the world has been and exhibited to what a remarkable degree the literature of modern times has been morally elevated and refined since woman became a reader and a contributor.

Stowe also introduced a favourite theme, the need for girls and women to receive an education equal to that of boys and men. Undated and unattributed newspaper clipping, Blue Scrapbook, Stowe-Gullen Papers.

³⁶The much-noted “eclecticism” was a feature of the earlier clubs in the United States and continued in Canada. United States clubs usually became more specialized over time, choosing one or a few topics annually on which to focus. In addition, these clubs often designed a curriculum of study or followed pre-organized plans such as the Bayview or Delphian courses (Blair, *History*, 278) or university extension courses. Large clubs frequently split into “departments” as their membership grew.

to which could be added the sympathetic men who attended the annual open meeting and occasional entertainments.³⁷ Helen Archibald, Emily Stowe's friend and the group's co-founder, was integral to the group's foundation until her early death.

Press accounts indicate that Sarah Ann Curzon—a woman of letters, journalist, and noted amateur historian—was one of the society's most active members.³⁸ A poet, fiction writer, translator, playwright and essayist, her work appeared in a wide variety of journals from the *Canadian Monthly* and *Canadian Magazine* to the *Evangelical Churchman*, although she is largely remembered today for her comic play *The Sweet Girl Graduate*. (Loosely based on Tennyson's "The Princess," this fantasy about the admission of women to University College, Toronto, was published in the satirical annual *Grip-Sack* in 1882.) As an assistant editor of the temperance and reform journal the *Canadian Citizen*, Curzon would for two years publish a column that reflected the thinking of the TWLC.³⁹

Kingston author Agnes Maule Machar, well-known under the pen-name "Fidelis," was an honorary member, but she frequently contributed essays and poetry to be read at the members' meetings, and assisted the group's goals with her journalistic writings on behalf of higher education for women. (It appears that the TWLC had a number of such honorary and corresponding members, for Curzon was later to recall that "[t]he best female writers of the day in Canada had contributed valuable papers.")⁴⁰ Members with a more scientific inclination included Stowe's daughter Augusta (later Stowe-Gullen) and Jennie Gray (later Wildman) who would become, respectively, a trainee and a staff member at the Ontario Women's Medical College which TWLC members were instrumental in founding.

³⁷The *Globe* accounts, along with the Stowe-Gullen collection scrapbooks in the Wilfrid Laurier University Archives, are the remaining primary sources of information on the TWLC. I am grateful to Anna Sonser for collecting the *Globe* material. Some of the material on the TWLC has appeared in my earlier piece, "English Studies and the Case of Colonial Culture," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 56 (Fall 1995): 51-77.

³⁸On Curzon, see Lorraine McMullen's entry for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*; and Anton Wagner, "Sarah Anne Curzon," in W.H. New, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Canadian Writers Before 1890*, vol. 99 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990). 99: 82-4. Curzon was also a founder of the Women's Canadian Historical Society and the Women's Art Association.

³⁹I have been unable to locate the relevant issues of the *Canadian Citizen*. It appears that the original source for this information is Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950); entries on Curzon in biographical dictionaries have echoed Cleverdon's statement since.

⁴⁰Curzon cited in undated [1890?] and unattributed clipping re: first meeting of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Society. Green Scrapbook.

Club members were active in other associations: Margaret McDonnell, for example, was on the incorporating committee of the Toronto Woman's Christian Temperance Movement and would head the Dominion WCTU for a number of years. The characteristically multiple affiliations of clubwomen of the day provided an informal networking system among women's organizations through overlapping memberships. The TWLC corresponded with sister societies in both Canada and the United States, and also generated an off-shoot group, the Toronto Athenaeum Club (1881), a mixed-sex literary society whose first president was editor and educationist Graeme Mercer Adam.⁴¹

The TWLC began to meet regularly, and in various settings. Thursday meetings were held in members' homes, and an annual open meeting hosted by Stowe was the occasion for an audit of the year's goals and achievements. There were periodic open meetings and entertainments with men as audience and participants. Club meetings were covered in some detail in the *Globe*, through accounts presumably penned by one of the club's own members. A few excerpts will give a sense of the range of the topics and activities:

The afternoon's programme consisted of a continuation of her paper on phrenology by the President; a reading by Mrs. Wellington; a very interesting paper on Adelaide Proctor [*sic*] by Miss Stowe; a song by Miss Gibbs; and a pianoforte selection by Mrs. Mackenzie.⁴²

The programme consisted of instrumental music by Misses Hamilton and McCausland; songs by Miss Annie Gray and Mrs. Jenkin [;] humorous readings by Mrs. Wellington and Mr. Henry S. Alexander; an essay by Miss Stowe, on 'Women's Work' [;] a paper by Miss Archibald, on 'The Life of Margaret Fuller, of Boston'.⁴³

Mrs. Mackenzie next gave a fine pianoforte selection, "The Angels Dream" and was succeeded by Mrs. Llois, who read Longfellow's 'Robert of Sicily.' Dr. E.H. Stowe delivered a most able and interesting lecture on the eye, illustrated by diagrams and a dissection.⁴⁴

⁴¹The foundation of this club is noted in an account of the fourth annual meeting of the TWLC. Undated and unattributed newspaper clipping, Green Scrapbook. There is very little information on this group, but a letter from Sarah Anne Curzon to the publisher T. Bengough gives some tantalizing clues. Curzon notes that a recent issue of the *Christian Reporter* has reported that Mr. Piddlington—a club member and Yonge Street bookseller—stocks Bradley, Besant, and Tom Paine: is Bengough's reluctance to join the Athenaeum due to the unorthodox views of some of its members? Curzon inquires. She refers to the group as a "purely intellectual society"; it appears that this group was more directly literary than the TWLC. Letter S.A. Curzon to T. Bengough, 28 Feb. 1881. Mss. Byerly Papers, MU 455, Archives of Ontario.

⁴²*The Daily Globe* 10 Feb. 1879:4. Procter was a mid-nineteenth-century English poet and anthologist, noted for her verses on the social condition of women.

⁴³Undated, unattributed newspaper clipping. Green Scrapbook, Stowe-Gullen Papers.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

The "eclecticism" of study is quickly apparent from these brief extracts: poetry and phrenology, songs and suffragism present an odd mixture to the modern eye. Such diversity was quite characteristic of the women's groups of the day, in their attempts to least approximate the higher liberal education from which they had been barred and from which they would remain excluded even when their daughters had a hope of admission.⁴⁵ Women's descriptions of their societies as a form of "higher education," like their defenses of eclecticism, were the butt of much male merriment. (We may see these statements now as moving manifestations of the seriousness with which women approached this new endeavour.) The TWLC was hardly immune from such criticism, as witness one satiric newspaper account headlined "Woman's Rights. Make Way for Liberty. Great Cackalations. O.P. Dildock Visits the Woman's Club":

Our peripatetic reporter, having learned that some of the ladies, as an off-set to the Gentleman's Club, had organized one of their own (not of the rolling pin or broom handle persuasion) but of purely literary nature, determine [*sic*] to gain admission.... The exercises proper were opened by a gushing young maiden of some 39 summers... after the singing, a tall gaunt female read, through her nasal organ, an essay entitled 'Gain the confidence of your husband and what loose change he may have in his pockets when he leaves them off.'⁴⁶

The very fact that women were meeting *as* women was enough to unleash a battery of stereotypes; even a pre-Freudian could discern the anxieties of the tellingly-named "Dildock."

Like many other women's literary and cultural clubs, the TWLC would extend its quest for self-improvement into the larger community. But the TWLC differed from its successors in its ability to combine intellectual and political work into a coherent agenda, and in the greater sweep of its civic reform efforts. One of the TWLC's first tasks was to survey sanitary facilities in the city's shops and factories, which seldom provided separate accommodation for women. They would press for regulated hours, regular rest breaks, and separate toilets for female shop clerks and factory workers, and work for

⁴⁵An (unintended) exposure of the inanities of education for girls and young women is found in *Grace Morton*, a novel which takes place in a Toronto finishing school. The girls spend most of their time on domestic skills and economies, with some painting, needlework, French and German, and regular practice of pieties. Madame Skelton, *Grace Morton* (Toronto: Irving, 1873). Young women at the more proto-feminist seminaries, or even in their local collegiates, would have fared much better: but the range of subjects was still restricted and girls were often removed from school earlier than their male counterparts. Thus the compensatory role of the societies. By contrast, societies for European-descent men in the same period appear to have been largely devoted to debating.

⁴⁶Undated, unattributed newspaper clipping, Green Scrapbook, Stowe-Gullen Papers.

the municipal franchise for women. Their success in the latter task is both notable and notorious, for their tactical decision to request the franchise first for propertied women—a decision the group later considered ill-conceived—has led to the TWLC being considered a more conservative organization than was actually the case.

The TWLC played a key role in forcing the admission of women to the University of Toronto.⁴⁷ In co-operation with influential Toronto alumnus and indefatigable reformer William Houston (later an executive member of the CWSA), the TWLC sent a delegation to president Daniel Wilson in February 1882. Unable to move the implacable Wilson, the TWLC initiated a petition campaign, as reported the next month in *Varsity* [3 Mar. 1882]. (The TWLC used the offices of editor Andrew Stevenson to present their case to the university community; *Varsity* was strongly pro-women's entrance at this point.) This petition was forwarded to the provincial legislature, which moved to over-rule Wilson in the spring of 1884. Ultimately an order-in-council would be required to thwart Wilson's ingenious delaying tactics.⁴⁸ Neither women's entrance to the provincial university nor the Toronto municipal franchise were achieved until after the TWLC was reconstituted. Did the group reform in the knowledge that a more pointedly political effort would be needed to resolve these issues? Or had signs of imminent success heartened them to take on greater causes? In either case, the salient point would be that these initial undertakings were performed by the TWLC in its capacity as a *literary* society.

The integration of these seemingly disparate activities is illustrated by the programmes of the Thursday meetings, detailed in the "City News" columns of the *Daily Globe*. As indicated by the excerpts above, the programme featured musical selections, both vocal and instrumental, performed by the members, as well as recitations of well-known (and sometimes comic) verse—Longfellow and Tennyson were favourites—and some poetry written by

⁴⁷In addition to the efforts detailed below, members of the TWLC may have been behind an earlier assault on the provincial university. In 1879 a Hamilton Collegiate student, Alice Cummings, was the subject of a petition to the university by her principal and teachers when she was unable to use the scholarship in modern languages which she had earned in the matriculation exams. Although the evidence is circumstantial, letters from Alice Cummings to Elizabeth Smith Shortt (who would become a medical trainee with Augusta Stowe), suggest that Emily Stowe may well have known the Cummings family at this time. Elizabeth Smith Shortt Collection, Aberdeen and Related Papers, University of Waterloo.

⁴⁸The most complete account of the struggle for women's entry is provided by Donna Ronish, "Sweet Girl Graduates: The Admission of Women to English-Speaking Universities in Canada in the Nineteenth Century," Unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Montréal, 1985.

the members themselves. These lighter aspects of the programme often bracketed the more serious discussion components, which would be initiated by the reading of literary or topical material, or by an essay written by one of the members. A reading of material by and on Ruskin introduced a discussion of political utopianism on one occasion, and selections were often chosen from English and United States suffrage journals. Although Shakespeare appeared at times in a strictly literary capacity—a reading of *As You Like It* “under the management of one of the members, who would explain words and passages, correct faulty pronunciation, and criticize generally”—at other times, gender themes were emphasized: “The reading by Mrs. Shaw; of selections from ‘The Taming of the Shrew,’” noted one account, “led to enquiries as to what was woman’s proper position, which found an answer in an essay by Miss Curzon on ‘Our Sphere.’”⁴⁹

TWLC members themselves produced and read a wide variety of material, from poetry to papers on topical questions and philosophical issues. Histories and biographies of eminent women from classical to contemporary times were a favourite topic, whether writers like Charlotte Brontë or well-known feminists such as Margaret Fuller and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The “woman question” was considered from all possible angles—“The Enfranchisement of Women,” “Women’s Work,” “The Legal Aspect of the Woman Question”—and there was frequent debate of social and educational issues. Essays written by members considerably expanded the intellectual range of the Club: alcohol, Canadian history, compulsory education, domestic servants, the eye (complete with dissection), “fast living,” hieroglyphics, insanity, kindergarten, nutrition, play (benefits of), Queenston Heights (battle of), Rabelais, scepticism, school trustees, and travel, each had its turn as essay or discussion topic—not to mention a comic piece on “Men’s Rights” and a satirical treatment of “The Privileges of Women.”

These disparate topics clustered around a central set of concerns. First, the role of women: historically, in the present day, and as illustrated by interesting or exemplary lives. Second, civic improvement, with especial concentration on health and education as areas of municipal responsibility with which women were able to engage. Third, educational subjects in which women were likely to be un- or under-educated or inexperienced: science, philosophy, higher literary study, and foreign travel. The activities of the TWLC may thus be viewed as an attempt to provide regular (albeit compensatory) education for its members, as well as a method of knitting their “local” activities into the more “global” context of analysis those discussions provided. Emphasis on writing and speaking skills, debate, and conduct of meetings was intended—quite literally—to prepare women’s voices for more public forums.

⁴⁹*Daily Globe*, 6 Mar. 1880: 6; 7 Feb. 1880: 5. Semi-colon found in original.

The strengths of the TWLC's mandate have been emphasized in this article, although its inadequacies must have been apparent to women working to gain access to the colleges for their daughters. But it would be a mistake to see either the TWLC or its later sister societies as wistfully longing after, or lagging behind, the higher studies curriculum designed for men. I would argue that the TWLC's study represents a significant innovation *vis-à-vis* the literary studies then available in colleges and universities, especially in its ability to assimilate newer forms of study. In an important article on the women's study clubs of the United States, and in her recent book on the topic, Anne Ruggles Gere argues that the rise of the women's study clubs can be placed in juxtaposition to the developing concept of intellectual property in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, combining professionalization of authors and commodification of the literary text. Gere suggests that women's groups developed an alternative through communal retention (and sometimes collaborative creation) of the members' written texts; through cooperative consumption practices such as reading aloud and discussion; and through a free appropriation of published texts for their own purposes.⁵⁰ Similarly, I would postulate that the TWLC and its successor literary clubs for women responded to, and exerted pressure on, the developing discipline of English studies.⁵¹ The TWLC is a pertinent, if provisional test case for this consideration, given its intellectual proximity to the provincial university and its bold encroachments on the university's terrain.

Recent work on the history of English studies has examined the development of alternative literary studies curricula, and the ways these may have shaped the discipline in colleges and universities. Susan Bayley and Donna Ronish, for example, have demonstrated that modern language study in women's academies in England anticipated university curricula by some decades. Similarly, in her examinations of the Wesleyan Female Academy [Hamilton] and the Burlington Ladies' Academy, Anna Sonser has found that the students undertook an expressly "literary" study well before their

⁵⁰Anne Ruggles Gere, "Common Properties of Pleasure: Texts of Nineteenth-Century Women's Clubs," *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Law Journal* 10, 2 (1992): 647-63, and *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁵¹Gere also mentions this relationship in her article, noting that the literary discussion of the women's groups could be personal where the university's was philological; and that the predominant orality of the groups contrasts to the increasing privileging of the written text in the universities. She does not consider, however, how the one might have affected the other.

male counterparts.⁵² Although the influence of the Mechanics' Institutes on university scientific and practical instruction is better understood than their impact on the humanities, the first dedicated chair of English at Toronto was part of an effort to encourage men of the working class to enter the provincial university.⁵³ Overall, however, there has been little examination of the intersection and mutual influences of the literary societies and academic literary study.

A comparison between the literary discussions of the TWLC and the literary program at Toronto must be offered with a certain number of caveats. There is far less evidence for the former than for the latter; the TWLC's study was not primarily "literary" in the sense that would characterize book clubs of our day; and discerning their approach to texts involves a certain degree of speculative reading between the lines of newspaper accounts. Nonetheless, such a comparison is suggestive.⁵⁴ The literary "curriculum" of the TWLC may be viewed as both conservative and transformative, both *derrière garde* and *avant garde*, measured against the academic discipline as it was emerging in the latter decades of the century. The TWLC preserved an emphasis on oral skills, which had largely disappeared from the formal curricula of Canadian colleges by mid-century and moved into the extra-curricular domain of "lits" and drama societies.⁵⁵ Declamation, recitation, debate, elocution, pronunciation, dramatic performance, and the intricacies of parliamentary procedure were central rather than secondary to the women's clubs (and would be retained in such women's academies as the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression well into the twentieth century.).⁵⁶ The TWLC also maintained composition as a part of its mandate—

⁵²Susan Bayley and Donna Ronish, "Gender, Modern Languages, and the Curriculum in Victorian England," *History of Education* 4, 21 (1992): 363-82. Anna Sonser, "Literary Ladies and *The Calliopean*: English Studies at the Burlington Ladies' Academy (1846-1851)," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 64, 3 (summer 1995): 368-80; "A Respectable English Education: Innovation and Tradition in Literary Studies at Wesleyan Ladies' College (1861-1897)," *English Studies in Canada* 19, 1 (Mar. 1993): 87-103.

⁵³This chair was the result of an endowment by the City of Toronto, in an agreement whose terms the Toronto Mechanics' Institute may have had a hand in drafting.

⁵⁴An overview of English courses is to be found in Robin S. Harris, *English Studies at Toronto: A History* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1988); as well as in A.B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario 1791-1951*, Ontario Historical Studies Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 465-71.

⁵⁵On the shift from a rhetorical to a more expressly literary instruction, see Henry Hubert, *Harmonious Perfection: The Development of English Studies in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Canadian Colleges* (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1993).

⁵⁶On the literary, rhetorical, and dramatic curriculum of the Margaret Eaton School, see Heather Murray, "Making the Modern: Twenty-Five Years of the Margaret Eaton

largely expository writing but some presentation of original poetry as well—even as the writing of themes declined in importance in the universities. The writing of essays as a form of class assignment became the dominant mode of composition in the universities and colleges, with “comp” re-emerging as a separate area of study only in the newer western universities founded in the twentieth century. Creative writing would also fall into the extracurricular dimension of student journalism and literary magazines.

The TWLC differed from the increasingly-specialized University of Toronto in maintaining the inclusive definition of the “literary” formed earlier in the century, but it also anticipated the development of literary study at the provincial university. Although both the TWLC and the English program at Toronto featured a wide range of genres in their study—fiction, poetry, drama, biography and autobiography, and prose of thought—the principles of textual selection varied. Not surprisingly, the TWLC featured women-authored texts that rarely (if ever) appeared on courses at Toronto. Although “prose of thought” and historical writings would eventually appear on the university curriculum, the women of the TWLC drew on journalistic writing from newspapers and magazines as staples. With significant exceptions—notable women from the past and Shakespeare, whose heroines and thematics held such relevance for modern women—the authors chosen were in the main more contemporary than those to be encountered in English literature courses at Toronto. The TWLC favoured Browning, Longfellow, and Ruskin over Toronto’s Chaucer, Spenser and Pope, with Tennyson a shared interest for both sets of readers.⁵⁷

Other divergences may be noted. The TWLC showed no inclination to philological study of literary works, with the exception of some interest in the etymology of words. Nor did they consider literature as a primarily national or “racial” expression, as was the influential analytical approach of the critic-ethnologist Daniel Wilson. Instead, the TWLC was principally interested in the ideational content of literature. In this, and in the choice of texts studied, their approach anticipates the reformation in studies that would come to Toronto with appointment of W.J. Alexander to the chair of English in 1889. Alexander brought to the job an interest in contemporary literature and an idealist philosophical formation, and shared with the readers of the TWLC an especial love for Victorian poetry and the high-minded writings of the Brownings in particular. Alexander also broke with the use of

School of Literature and Expression,” *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales* 10, 1 (Nov. 1991): 39–57; and “‘We Strive for the Good and the Beautiful’: Literary Studies at the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression,” in H. Murray, *Working in English: History, Institution, Resources* (University of Toronto Press, 1996), 46–67.

⁵⁷Reference here is to the texts for examination for Toronto honours students.

dry historical surveys of literature—the source of bitter complaints by student writers in *Varsity*—in favour of a more expressly “literary” study of individual works.⁵⁸ Under this form of study, a critical form of post-Romanticism, literary texts were viewed as expressive of the distinctive concepts, feelings, attributes, and aspirations of individuals and cultures, rather than as evidences of philological development or of “racial” and national evolution.

Although this more distinctively “literary” approach to the study of texts characterized the work of the TWLC more than a decade earlier, a cause-and-effect relationship of innovation in literary study is not clearly traceable, in either direction. It is interesting to track in the pages of *Varsity* (and in journals such as the *Educational Weekly*) the juxtaposition of debates on reform of English study with those on higher on education for women. (This juxtaposition would soon to become a superimposition, as English rapidly became a “female” subject.)⁵⁹ One link between the TWLC and the English program at Toronto was TWLC supporter William Houston who, in 1884, would develop a detailed syllabus for “The Study of English.” Houston envisaged a complete overhaul of English courses at Toronto, published the plan in *Varsity* to enthusiastic editorial approval, and placed it before the university Senate. Although the plan was not accepted, it helped to create the pressure for reform to which Alexander’s eventual appointment was a response.

Daniel Wilson, fulminating in letters to McGill president William Dawson about the unsuitability of Houston’s curriculum for the delicate sensibilities of female students, would have been oblivious to the irony that Houston’s proposal—for a “literary,” idealist, and free-thinking study of texts—was based on many of the same principles as the TWLC’s own course of study.⁶⁰ There is a further irony that one of the final acts of the TWLC was to press for the admission of women to Toronto at the very moment when disciplinary specialization and a concurrent narrowing of the rhetorical arts would begin to render obsolete—or at least anachronistic—the inclusive definition of the “literary” which had enabled the meshing of the personal and public, the poetical and the political, in the TWLC’s own thought and work.

⁵⁸On Alexander’s appointment and his curricular revisions, see Heather Murray, “The Appointment of W.J. Alexander,” in *Working in English*, 17–45.

⁵⁹Half of the student body in the Honours English program at Toronto were women as early as 1889.

⁶⁰Copies of Wilson’s letters to Dawson on the topic are in the Marinell Ash fonds in the University of Toronto Archives.