

In Her Own Words: The Silent Partner Speaks

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“When the woman suffrage argument grew vigorous and wise,  
And was not to be answered by those opposite replies,  
They turned their opposition into reasoning severe,  
Upon the limitations of our God-appointed sphere.”

~ from “Women Do Not Want It” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The “God-appointed sphere” in this verse was private and domestic, safe and secure from the perils of the marketplace, political arena, and halls of higher education, the rabble of the world kept at bay by the bulwark of hearth and home; the claimed anointed spaces of feminine permanence, and while limited, power. Even as this verse from Gilman’s poem, “Women Do Not Want It” proclaims and describes the battle for women’s rights and the argument, once again, for access to the public spaces of the world, we understand that a battle has already been won because “She” speaks. “Woman” has found and claimed her voice and having gained access to the imagined new territory through language, articulates both thoughts and ideas. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps *The Silent Partner*, the author “speaks” and explores awakened understanding of gender role possibilities in preparation for opening the door and moving into spheres more commonly inhabited and commanded by men; the public square and the boardrooms of the world. Through her female protagonist, Perley Kelso, and new-found friend, Sip Garth, the author imagines changes in the structure and balance of gender roles, illustrated through attainment of personal freedom and access to language; “Woman” now armed with language and the ability to make choices about their lives unencumbered by the constraints of marriage and men. Outside of the

predisposed roles typical in the domestic space these newly imagined feminine characters, Phelps' paired "sisters," Perley and Sip, are anything but silent as they step into the public spaces to breathe, move, and speak.

For the purposes of this essay, let us begin with a clear definition and understanding of the word, speak. To speak, "to utter or pronounce words or articulate sounds; to use or exercise the faculty of speech; to express one's thoughts by words; to be expressive or significant; to make some revelation or disclosure" (*OED*) is the complex definition given for this simple word. Speaking connotes self-expression, the ability to offer an opinion, a creative idea, our personal history, the fact and fiction of our life and work, our thoughts on any given topic, intimate or corporate. Speaking also assumes an audience of at least one who receives that articulation, there is an expectation as the speaker that we will be heard. Speaking typically utilizes the voice box, the personal instrument for sharing thoughts; with all its idiosyncratic sound, dialect, local accent, or inherited resonance. It is the "voice" of Sip Garth that resonates with Perley Kelso. Her voice, her choice to speak across a class boundary and in a public place is the catalyst "that converts Perley from a socialite into a reformer... Sip's talk diverges from standard labor rhetoric but nonetheless moves Perley to reformatory action" (Levander 110). Their family histories have been shared, the trivial small talk of why they each are walking this particular path is out of the way and the conversation moves from cursory hello's to significance. When Sip speaks, Perley listens, and the story unfolds.

Carolyn Karcher, writing about women authors in the nineteenth-century, examines the idea of women speaking on significant ideas through literature. She states that there is “the assumption that men are more prone than women to tackle mighty themes, while women, conversely, are more prone to concentrate on private, domestic, and ultimately trivial matters” when they write and can therefore be “relegated to the margins of literary history” (Karcher 781-782). Many literary critics in the academic community have discussed similar aspects of this “marginalized” status and Nina Baym does as well as she remembers a portion of Hawthorne’s “scribbling women” diatribe. In her discussion of women’s authorship, she argues that they cannot be marginalized for they “constitute a mob” and that they, women authors, were “widely published and immensely popular” (Baym 3). The notion of the dismissal of their work as authentic classic versus popular fiction by the masculine-centric literary world is reiterated by Baym. Contrary to past assessments of the validity of women’s writing, Carol Kessler, in her biography of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, notes that “Phelps’s *The Silent Partner* has attracted scholars who study the economic, the political, and the realistic novel. Without exception, they consider her the first American novelist to treat the theme of urban, industrial blight” (Kessler 50). It is clear that Phelps’ writes about more than trivial issues in this text concerning the Five Falls industrial world and women’s personal autonomy and voice. Assuming the role and responsibility of a reformist text, Phelps’ *Silent Partner* speaks with a purpose and, like many of her “sisters” in the writing community, refuses to remain silent.

Citing Hawthorne's remark to a friend in 1855, Baym reminds us of the disparaging criticism that female authorship encountered and endured. The right to speak and be heard was a challenging and very real truth for women writing in this era and while Hawthorne's ill-fated comment to a friend about that "damned mob of scribbling women" existed even he later needed to admit they were not just profitable in their fiction but profound as well. The assumption that they would be crafting "parlour stories" and the like appears as an instrument to silence or at the very least belittle what these women had to say through their prose. Karcher says that "belying the caricature of them as concerned primarily with the private sphere of domesticity rather than with major public issues, women writers frequently used their art to speak out against Indian removal, slavery, racial prejudice, the oppression of the industrial working class, and the sexual double standard. Their record of engagement with radical causes in fact sets them apart from their canonized male peers" and further that "women writers produced a far greater proportion of radical reform literature than their canonical male peers. Its sheer volume... ought to elevate their tradition of "Art for Truth's Sake," as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps called it, to a prominent position in our literary history" (Karcher 784-785). Karcher's attention to the real topics tackled by these female writers helps to not only declare their legitimacy but affirms its importance in literary history and as social commentary; Phelps counted among them. In many ways, Phelps' life mirrored the women she sought to represent in *The Silent Partner* and by "writing about the life of working-class women, Phelps was implicitly acknowledging an aspect of her own identity as someone who always had to be a working woman. At the same time, she was claiming a new territory for herself as a writer, one that extends beyond

the domestic sphere” (Amireh 140). The ability of these female authors to use literature to both claim new territory and begin conversations built a platform upon which societal flaws and conflict could be examined and changes could be proposed. This literary convention has been the stuff of debate and disagreement but it is the means by which Phelps creates Perley and Sip’s story.

Perley Kelso and Sip Garth, the change agents of Phelps’ text, were fashioned, as Baym and Karcher might argue, as a means to highlight just such a “reformist” cause and hold significance in this story about property rights, marriage versus singlehood, and the ability to speak, and be heard, on important societal issues; the idea of woman in public spaces – the mill, the boardroom, the tenements, the public square and streets of the mill town. The example of the female authors that preceded Phelps inspired her “to dedicate herself to pleading the cause of the factory workers in *The Tenth of January* and *The Silent Partner*. All these writers broke with genteel conventions but experimented with new techniques of representation and narration in their efforts to articulate the experiences of the voiceless” (Karcher 787). *Silent Partner* speaks for the “voiceless” not only as a story containing reform rhetoric but in the soft, uncalloused hands of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, serves as an analysis of self-hood, of the American woman as an individual and who she can become. Phelps claims not only the argument but the authority to write from a uniquely feminine perspective by utilizing her own voice.

In Phelps’ text, she positions Perley and Sip in distinctly different spaces, one decidedly domestic, and the other painfully public. In the story’s beginning chapters, she quickly

causes an intersection of these worlds. Bored and resting in her carriage on a stormy night, Perley watches the muddy streets and bedraggled pedestrians as she rides along the street. “She was apt to be amused by the world outside her carriage” (Phelps 816). Perley is untouched by the weather or the people struggling in it. As the carriage door is left open while friends run an errand, Perley finds “something pleasant in the wet wildness of the storm; it came near enough almost to dampen her cheek...and the street came into the frame” (816). For Perley the doorway is simply an amusement, a wet panorama for her to enjoy while she awaits friends but Phelps uses this framed picture to reach across the divide between “resplendent” spectator and “miserably meagre” participant. “Their eyes met, when the girl (Sip) lifted her arms to tie on her hat” (816) and thus their worlds begin to collide. After a brief conversation between Perley and Sip, they part, but disquieting thoughts simmer in Perley’s head. “Nothing more definite than an uncomfortable consciousness that all the world had not an abundance of sachet,” that “it must rain on many girls while she sat in her sweet, warm, sheltered darkness,” that “it must be disagreeable...being out in the rain” and certainly that “it looked cruel and cold” (819). Much like Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Perley opens her eyes from the dream-state in which she has lived and moved and “looks with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper under current of life” (Chopin 156). Yes, Perley is awakening to her status and the reality of the world around her, outside the walls of her pampered home and as Perley’s vision clears from the dream of her spoiled, upper-class existence, the author scripts unimagined reformist changes for both Perley and Sip.

While Perley's world is cloistered and predictably private, Sip's is damp and dirty, and the smells of the world permeate every tiny corner – smells of the cellar, the drain, the river, the gutter and all the “unclassified smells of years settled and settling in the walls and ceiling” (Phelps 836). The room that Sip and her damaged sister, Catty, share is public to the degree where even the smell of everything is in it, the damp and stinking city that surrounds it have all become a part. It has only two spaces within, the main room, in a home typically divided and labeled as public spaces - living room, dining room, parlour, kitchen and so on, all exist in one sordid room, and the “closet bedroom” so small it barely defines a separate space. The activities of the surrounding tenants and street are no secret to Sip and her sister as it's all happening right there at their doorstep. Privacy from each other and the world is not an option. When Perley visits Sip and Catty, she listens to Sip tell about mill girls who “can't even talk above a whisper; lost their voices some time ago” (Phelps 837). She listens as Sip tells of the poor wages, the non-stop work after hours, the humble, horrid conditions of their homes and lives. Sip uses her voice and in doing so encourages Perley to do as well. It is into this public space that Perley “moves” to gain greater insight, to speak for and encourage the “voiceless” masses to find their voice as well. Her visit to Sip's rooms leads to other “home visits” and as she “learns about social responsibility and defines for herself an arena of action both within and beyond the domestic sphere... (she) moves freely from her home to the streets to the homes of the workers” (Albertine 242). This marks the beginning of Perley's transformation into a “public speaker” and “social worker” that crosses territorial lines and imagined expectation.

One result of Perley's transformed status is illustrated after her father's death. Mr. Kelso, partner in the Hayle and Kelso Millworks is killed in a train accident which leaves his daughter the sole heir to his partnership in the holdings. Perley attempts to explain to another partner, Maverick, also her fiancé, that she's unsure what she'll do now. "Perhaps I shall stay here and look after—things... the mills, for instance. My property, for instance" (Phelps 823). A later meeting between Maverick, his father, and Perley is the demarcation between Perley's notion of entering the workforce and the boardroom at the public mill and their assurance that it is not an acceptable option. The idea of joining the firm as a partner is quickly dispelled as the men laugh at the mere suggestion of Perley doing so. The narrator says, "She was half-vexed, and a little mortified. For the first time in her life, she was inclined to feel ashamed of being a woman... A faint sense of degradation of being so ignorant that she could not command the respect of two men sufficiently to the bare discussion of it possessed her" (829). Phelps entertains the idea of a woman, Perley, joining the men in the boardroom as an equal partner with equal power to manage and speak although it is quickly apparent that through their eyes she can only be a silent one as any "true woman" should be.

Jennifer Gehrman in her article on Phelps' writing reminds us "that the "true woman"... remained within the private sphere, applying her time and talents to creating comfort and beauty for those around her. She was allowed contact with the public sphere only as it was reflected in the person of her husband, brother, or father. To stray from her sphere, to seek interaction with the world beyond hearth and home, led effectively to a social, moral, and economic death sentence. If she failed to remain "in her sphere," the

entire Victorian universe might collapse” (Gehrman 123-124). The “true woman” that Gehrman alludes to is the definition Barbara Welter characterized in her 1966 article, “The Cult of True Womanhood.” She states the four main characteristics “by which woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society... (was) piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement, or wealth, all was ashes” (Welter 152). Perley seeking a position as an equal partner in the Hayle and Kelso Mills was an affront to this decree; a decree which labels men, not women as the “movers, the doers, the actors” (159). Perley dare not break the mold nor challenge the status quo.

For Perley, the status quo is her reality, a reality that existing property rights and the authority to speak and act as an equal partner do not afford. In her treatise on gender relations and woman’s societal role in the nineteenth-century, Margaret Fuller says that “if a husband dies without making a will, the wife, instead of taking at once his place as head of the family, inherits only a part of his fortune, often brought him by herself” in other words this was the dowry or property she owned prior to marriage, “as if she were a child... not an equal partner” (Fuller 12-13). Fuller draws attention to the reality of women’s legal status, highly limited beyond the status of a child, with regard to property and it is this aspect of Perley’s life that Phelps highlights and uses as a facet of the idea of moving and speaking in the world outside woman’s normal topics and sphere. Perley’s awakening is an eye-opening moment for the readership of *Silent Partner* as the author focuses attention on the rhetoric of the property rights issue and lobbies for equal consideration in the debate. Karcher would

agree with Phelps' tactics and declares that "women... needed to liberate themselves from an ideology of true womanhood that defined them... Through covert fictional strategies, as well as overtly didactic statements, they (women authors) did so to a much greater degree than has been recognized" (Karcher 788). It is through this writing convention, through the use of language, that Phelps continues to chip away at the wall placed between women and the world outside the "carriage window."

Women's language, their conversation, is represented by two types of women in Phelps' narrative, the social small talk of Fly and Mrs. Silver and the real world conversations of Perley and Sip. Fetterley highlights the reality that "our culture exudes commentary on the talkativeness, the irrepressible noise of women... a woman's tongue is never still" (Fetterley 17). In Phelps' text the assumption by the men that women have little import in real dialogue is consistent with Fetterley's worldly perspective but Phelps also stresses the ability of women to connect in genuine ways through shared conversation. Shortly after the carriage encounter in the rain Maverick and Fly are startled when Sip accosts Perley at the Opera House. Sip's forthright address begins, "Look here, young lady. I want to speak to you" and ends with "It ain't often you'll have the chance to hear truer words" (Phelps 820) as Sip warns Perley about the appropriateness of the Opera House setting for a lady. Sip does not speak with polished language or follow Godey's etiquette for polite conversation. Hers is rough, genuine, and to the point and, we note, in a public area of the Opera House that begins Perley and Sip's boundary crossing friendship.

Their next encounter is also public, and private, all in the same moment. They meet as they are each walking along the river and sit, at Perley's request, to talk. It is an intimate

conversation that could easily have happened in Perley's cozy parlour but instead occurs on the river path. Perley says, "I want you to talk without being questioned. I don't like to question you all the time. But I want to hear more about you" (826). Judith Fetterley explains this is Perley's way of "counteracting the silencing effect of the mills" (Fetterley 25); the whispers that arise from those lost to the factory, the lost lives and health of those the mills have simply silenced. Perley's invitation to speak allows Sip the opportunity to be heard. In their brief conversation on the bench Sip shares her family history and reveals details of life in the mills that Perley is surprised and saddened to hear. Sip concludes their discussion by saying, "Your own mills are your own affairs... You'd better find out for yourself. It ain't to complain to you that I talk to you" (Phelps 827). Sip has no ulterior motive for the conversation. She and Perley have made an unusual but real connection and she has spoken truthfully once again. It is this conversation that resonates with Perley's social conscience and gives birth to the notion of a partnership at the mill.

Judith Fetterley discusses Phelps' story as "essentially a novel about language. *The Silent Partner* explores the sources of speech and the reasons for silence... it investigates how those who are denied access to speech express themselves and how those who have access use it" (Fetterley 17). The Hayle men use language as a weapon to confuse and control the world around them as they do when Perley first broaches the subject of joining them at the mill as a partner. Maverick calmly explains that she could not "inherit" a partnership even if she was a man. He says, "The choice of a partner, or whether, indeed, there shall be a new partner, is a matter resting wholly with the Senior and myself to settle. Do I make it clear?" (Phelps 829). In other words, Perley, you have no power, it doesn't matter that your father

was our partner because we can choose to replace him or not. As Fetterley argues, “If Phelps understands that speech is a function of power, she also understands that power is a function of class and sex” (Fetterley 18). In this instance, the men win. This issue, as with those which Perley raises regarding the poor conditions of the mill workers, their inability to work safely, to live in sanitary conditions, to have access to medical care and culture, are all met with complex “business-speak” meant to confuse and divert the issue that Perley raises. When she and Maverick discuss some of the social problems that Sip has brought to Perley’s attention, and which she herself has witnessed, he asks her if she has spoken to his father. She says that they have had a conversation and that “he said something about Political Economy; he said something else about Supply and Demand. He said something, too, about the State of the Market” (Phelps 854). The power-filled voices of the men use language to discredit—Perley doesn’t understand the business and has no real place in it. They use language to discourage—regardless of the social problem noted there is no money to change the situation. And they judge the woman’s language as non-essential—her words fall on the “deaf ears” of the men for woman’s words are as foolish as Fly’s that are “like boiling candy.”

In the chapter titled, “Going into Society,” Phelps represents language of a different measure – small talk, if you will. The first four short paragraphs are all Fly and her inevitable “babbling” words about this person and that filled with sentences that have little or no meaning, especially in the order she uses them, and each paragraph ends with the unusual “etc, etc” instead of actual words to complete the foolish, empty thoughts. Phrases like, “Mamma begs me, with her love and acceptance, to assure you that she appreciates,” and

“they are charmed. It was just like you to remember them in your kind” (Phelps 884). What is this woman saying? Basically, nothing, for that is all she expects herself to say, as does society. In discussing the idea of language and the parlour setting, Fetterley says that “nothing serious can take place in a lady’s parlour” (Fetterley 20) and since Fly appears as a permanent resident of the domestic domain, the parlour, where speaking only manages topics of the household and social circle, she need not speak of anything at all, her words are simply nonsense.

As a man, Maverick is not accustomed to actually listening to women, even his fiancé, Perley. As Phelps has illustrated several times in her text, he appears to segment her, break her into convenient pieces, like an ornamental object and objects do not speak. During the “chess” conversation about the partnership between Perley, Maverick and his father, Maverick disconnects from the discussions and daydreams of having an artist render the beauty of her delicate hand. He watches her finger move along the chessboard and is barely aware that a conversation is happening. The narrator says as Maverick mentally wanders he thinks, “that Story, the next time he was in the country, should make a study of a hand upon squares of gray and green” (Phelps 828). Maverick’s objectification of Perley is more than physical as he also demeans her intellectual capacity by seeing her as only a series of parts. Fetterley argues that “Maverick insists on this status for her. Silencing Perley by simply not listening, Maverick metaphorically cuts out her tongue by seeing only her hand” (Fetterley 20). He cannot see her or hear her because his masculine expectation that she say anything that has bearing on his life, other than sweet nothings over tea, is not a possibility. But,

much to his surprise, words of substance are exactly the type which Perley uses in speaking to Maverick about their romantic relationship.

Perley begins the groundbreaking conversation with the frankness Phelps' readers have come to expect from Sip, "I do not love you, Maverick Hayle" (Phelps 862). Straight and to the point and Maverick quickly dismisses the notion with a vehement, "It is not possible" (863). Perley's attempt to articulate her lack of romantic feelings for him are expressed with thoughtful words. "I do not know how it is or why it is... I feel as if there had been a growing away between us for a great while. It may be that I went away and you stood still; or that we both went away and both in different ways; or that we had never... been in the same way at all, and did not know it" (863). She is not dismissive of his love but simply speaks the truth. The most telling blow to Maverick is when she says that she would miss him as much as the parlour piano. Fetterley argues that "Phelps acknowledges the different role romantic love plays in the lives of men and women. Contrary to patriarchal mythology, which insists that love is more necessary to women than it is to men" (Fetterley 23). It appears in this representational scene that Maverick is the more shaken by the broken engagement and that Perley is the more composed and able to speak her mind clearly.

Carol Kessler in discussing this pivotal scene states that Perley breaks the engagement "to avoid a sense of being "buried" as a "silent" partner in a marriage... she believes that she could not both fulfill the social requirements for being a properly perfect wife and continue to carry out her own self-appointed reform projects for the benefit of millworkers. In allowing Perley to choose public over private useful work, Phelps demonstrates that a marriageable woman might prefer to invest her efforts in a life conducted by herself, rather

than become a “silent partner” in a life conducted by a husband” (Kessler 84). Kessler clarifies this statement as a fictional device and also a very real reflection of Phelps’ own life. Since the author was beginning to “assert her independence... and establish a separate identity. She would have felt the need to be free from masculine control... She eliminated husbands from her fiction so that she might explore women’s lives when freed of submission to men’s wishes” (Kessler 57). Phelps, in assigning singlehood to her protagonist, is exploring a world where she herself was walking. This new-found, relational freedom was not a one-time occurrence for the women of *Silent Partner* for Perley refuses a second marriage offer and Sip avoids the marriage relationship altogether, albeit for different reasons; for Perley it is Stephen Garrick and for Sip a fellow millworker. Perley’s response to Stephen’s proposal is clear, “I believe that I have been a silent partner long enough. If I married you, sir, I should invest in life, and you would conduct it” (Phelps 897). Perley is truthful in her understanding and explanation that to marry means re-entering the domestic sphere, stilling her voice outside the home, and “living and speaking” only through her husband. This is something she is unwilling to do. Sip has forestalled marriage for many reasons throughout the story but when faced with an outright proposal from Dirk, she declines stating that like the slaves of the south who refused to bear children lest they too become slaves, she would foreswear marriage to avoid bringing children into the legacy of millwork. She and Dirk reach an impasse, she saying “I’d rather not talk anymore” and he that “Upon his word... If ever man loved a girl, I’ve loved you true. If I can’t have you, I’ll have nobody” (906). Talk, words spoken—everything significant has been said. The women have actually had the last word.

Phelps chooses to represent another distinct idea, not just language but location when she examines the idea of crossing boundaries between public and private spaces. Perley has been exposed and experienced the public areas of Five Falls in the sordid surroundings of her trips to Sip and Catty's basement home, Bub Mell's mill family tenement, and the streets of the lower parts of the city. Yet the author makes us equally aware of the parlour in the Kelso home, a woman's private sanctuary, and casts a possible alteration for this upholstered space. It is in the parlour that we first meet Perley sitting before a warm fire on a stormy night "languidly abandoned" to the moment - a private solitary moment. It is in the parlour that she has her meeting with Maverick and his father - a moment for business contracts, "public" business, denied by the men. It is in the parlour where she breaks off her engagement - a moment for accepted social contracts, again negated, this time by Perley. And it is in that same parlour that we, because we must, now give consideration to who has surprisingly received invitations to enter "in" to this now changed space.

The narrator describes the house and parlour in Mrs. Silver's words. "I am told that this superb house has been more like a hospital or a set of public soup-rooms for six-months past, than it has like the retiring and secluded home of a young lady. Those people overrun it. They are made welcome... She invites them to tea... They sit down at her very table" (Phelps 888-889). Who are "those people" that Mrs. Silver alludes to? The narrator describes them as "remarkable." "Now there was one very remarkable thing about these thirty people. With the exception of a little plainness about their dress... and an air of really enjoying themselves, they did not, after all, leave a very different impression upon the superficial spectator from that of any thirty people whom Fly might collect" (885).

Appearance aside, these thirty gathered in the parlour would seem the regular menagerie of folk that even our babbling Fly would entertain but since Perley has refused to fit into the mold of the domestic-focused woman and “remain secluded and private in her home, insisting instead on going out into the world and being public, it equally involves making her house public, refusing to define it as a territory off limits to the people through whose houses and territory she freely moves” (Fetterley 25). Fetterley notes the changed label for Perley’s home and also discusses the relationship built because of it; the simple reciprocal relationship of “visiting” between friend’s homes. This is Perley’s reality and a useful “tactic” to move Perley and her new circle of acquaintances, even though their class distinctions would preclude not allowing such movement, between public and private by negating the boundary that lies between. Her private space has been invaded, at her invitation, by “those people” who have had no voice to speak and no means of movement. This “creates pressure to imagine Perley in a more dramatic and ... effective role” (26); more effective than a parlour-dwelling, opera-attending, ornamental-wife and “silent partner,” her status is a bold statement of character and action that Phelps uses to argue the zip code of woman’s possible locations and at the same time turns up the volume of her newly realized voice. The louder she speaks, the more she moves, this “woman” engages the future of possible and proper places to live and work and simply be.

As we observe the “paired,” now public, Perley and Sip, they not only speak but move out to complete their twin transformation. For Sip, the death of her beloved sister and the reality of her growing spirituality call her to a literal platform of faith, not labor reform.

Phelps positions her “set up for a preacher” (Phelps 906) at the narrative’s conclusion. Sip is

both unwed and unfettered as she proclaims the Word and calls all who will gather in the public square to “listen.” The author arms Sip with not just words but The Word, the Bible, as her authoritative text to speak. For Perley, her moment arrives as a strike is brewing at the mill and Hayle Senior and Junior have ignored the worker’s murmurings. In her discussion of domesticity and the different spheres of influence between men and women Amy Kaplan states that “when we contrast the domestic sphere with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain” (Kaplan 582) and communicate in vastly different ways. As the narrator describes it, “Hayle and Kelso heard nothing” (Phelps 891). Consistent with their prior behaviors, the partners ignore any language that does not align with their own, they simply don’t hear it. Perley happens to be at the mill attending to the library where she “had been detained by the gathering crowd” (892). When Perley suggests that the partners send word to the group of disgruntled workers and articulate the economic difficulties, she is dismissed and told, “It is none of their business” (893). The symbolic “conversation” of the partner’s heated words in the counting room and the “noise” that swells from the gathered crowd of millworkers outside increases the tension of the potentially violent moment and serves as means of “communication” between the two parties who appear at an impasse. Perley suggests they send Mr. Garrick, a trusted partner, to speak truthfully to the men. Garrick hesitates but goes out and is met with exactly the cries he had anticipated, the repeated cries of “Let’s hear what the young leddy says to it” (893). Perley addresses the crowd and speaks to them, of the truthful state of the mill and the reality of the wage reduction that must happen and in doing so, she averts the strike.

Phelps gives her power in this triumphant moment to effectively communicate between two groups of men, between two spaces, and she is clearly heard.

Within Phelps' narrative we recognize a pair of women who speak and move outside the norms for their society. Acknowledging the legacy of reform-focused, female writers, Amy Kaplan states, "the 'cult of domesticity' and the ideology of 'separate spheres'... have together provided a productive paradigm for understanding the work of white women writers... in the nineteenth-century... this paradigm reveals the permeability of the border that separates the spheres, demonstrating the private feminized space of the home both infused and bolstered the public male arena" (Kaplan 581). Phelps seems to affirm this truth in her story of Perley, Sip, and Five Falls. In the safe domain of the page she has explored a new social construct where women's speech and action has "infused" the new territory with a conscience and new-found spirituality, a sense of social justice and moral rightness - a place where "woman" can both speak and be heard. As Phelps blurs the lines between the spheres, "the domestic sphere... became less distinctly the locale of hearth and home, it was redefined as a complex of attitudes, moral, social, and spiritual" (Albertine 260). This author has "redefined" the rules of speech and "realigned" the boundaries of the public and private spheres - no longer specific addresses but a matter of interiority. Perley and Sip are "at home" wherever they find themselves; public and private in this bold construct no longer inhibit them. She has mapped a new understanding of what it means to be private, what it means to be public, and what it means to be heard. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps has placed the toes of these two women across the imagined boundaries and given them a solid

place to stand and speak. She has given them a voice and admonished the readership to listen carefully, for in Phelps's imagined world, this silent partner speaks.

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