UNLV | University Libraries
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education

Volume 19
Issue 3 *The Affect of Waste and the Project of Value:*

Article 11

April 2020

Waste Is Women's Domain: A Review of a 19th Century Housekeeping Manual

Lucy E. Bailey
Oklahoma State University - Main Campus, lucy.bailey@okstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo

Recommended Citation

Bailey, L. E. (2020). Waste Is Women's Domain: A Review of a 19th Century Housekeeping Manual. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, 19* (3). Retrieved from https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol19/iss3/11

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Article in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

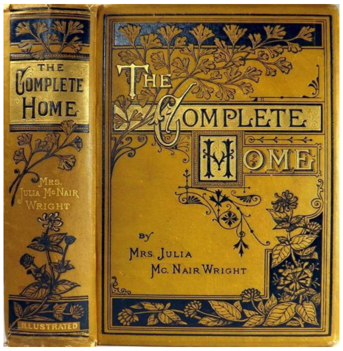
Waste Is Women's Domain

A Review of a 19th Century Housekeeping Manual

Lucy E. Bailey

Abstract

This essay focuses on the role of waste in a 19th century domestic encyclopedia written for middle-class housewives in the United States. I consider the generative role of waste as a household actant that helped produce white middle-class women's idealized, moral, and competent subjectivities for a greater nationalist project. I use textual analysis to consider which materials and actions in the manual constituted "waste," which features distinguished "waste" from that which was "useful," which wastes were named, and which lurked as absent presences, and how waste functioned as a gendered regulatory ideal. Managing household waste became an ideological, spatial and material site for women to measure their skill, efficiency, even morality in actualizing their place in the social order—and for others to measure them as well.



Lucy E. Bailey is an associate professor of Social Foundations of Education and Qualitative Inquiry and director of Gender and Women's Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. Email address: lucy.bailey@okstate.edu
© 2020 by Caddo Gap Press.

Introduction

> For national and social disasters, for moral and financial evils, the cure begins in the Household. …Where *souls* and *bodies* are nourished, where *fortunes* are *builded*, and *brains* are trained, there must be a focus of all *moral* and *physical* interests.
>
> —Wright, 1879, p. 3; emphasis in original

This review essay focuses on the role of waste in a 19th century domestic encyclopedia written for white middle-class housewives in the United States. The manual, *The Complete Home*: *An Encyclopedia of Domestic Life and Affairs* (1879), achieved such popularity it was reprinted until 1920. It consists of 22 chapters and 573 pages. The text shares characteristics of other massive domestic compendiums of its era, such as Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1869 text, the *American Woman's Home,* which was similarly ambitious in scope, stretching to 38 chapters and 500 pages. This popular body of pedagogical literature offers insights into domestic ideals during the late 19th century, the intricate and relentless labor involved in keeping homes of the time in working order, and the emerging field of domestic science as a specialized sphere of knowledge and activity in which women's expertise reigned (Bailey, 1997). Housekeeping manuals offered American housewives a tangible form of credentialing, equipment, and symbolic power in the growing "culture of professionalism" that characterized middle-class occupations during the late 19th century (Bledstein, 1976). This culture affirmed and cultivated the idea of the 'professional' who held unique knowledge, training, and dispositions within defined realms of expertise, with professional associations and credentials to facilitate and mark their achievements. For white middle-class women who aspired to be professional heads of the domestic sphere, such manuals testified to their important duties to nourish a locus of safety and order amidst the anxieties of increasing industrialization, immigration, and secularization shaping the social landscape. Managing household waste became an ideological, spatial and material site in which women measured their discipline, skill, efficiency, even morality in actualizing their place in the social order—and others measured them as well.

In this essay, I analyze the function of waste in one domestic manual, *The Complete Home,* to consider its generative role as a household actant that helped produce white middle-class women's idealized, moral, and competent subjectivities to serve a broader nationalist project. While I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Bailey, 2002; 2006) that 19th century women's didactic texts served this mission, I have not considered how the symbolic and material dimensions of waste in domestic manuals function as key vehicles for its expression and theorizing. Here I consider which materials and actions in the manual constituted "waste," which features distinguished "waste" from that which was "useful," which wastes were named, and which lurked as absent presences, and how waste functioned as a regulatory ideal. I begin with an overview of the text structure, then present four themes related to conceptualizing and managing household waste that illustrate its nuanced meanings: (1) the responsibilities of the competent (white) housewife to maintain order; (2) the variable dangers of waste and its potential re-visioning and re-use; (3) women's bodies as a site of discipline to prevent waste; and (4) the ultimate peril for women of unregulated waste. I consider both *why* and *how* women should act to manage waste as well as what household waste *does* in the manual, illustrating its function in affirming white women's competence and roles within the broader ordering systems that defined waste during this period.

Cumulatively, the pedagogical message of *The Complete Home* is that women's ability to conceptualize, recognize, manage, and at times, purge "waste" through accrued wisdom and corporeal control is foundational to the constitution of a gendered white domestic subjectivity instrumental to ordering national interests. Waste is a recurring, transmogrifying actant in the text and in homes—an agent of action that takes both non-human and human forms—that can challenge and reflect the American housekeeper's competence within a vital space for which she is responsible to ensure that "souls and bodies are nourished" (p. 3) to serve the family, community, and nation. Although the text rarely surfaces race explicitly, the book is thoroughly racialized in advancing Anglo-Saxon whiteness as the cultural norm in the late 19th century (see Bailey, 2002; 2006), occasionally referring to "foreigners" and people of "heathen" nations as contrasts to those in the American household who engage in civil dialogue and uphold moral order with the competent white housewife at the helm. The text constructs whiteness through such characteristics as propriety, cleanliness, good manners, controlled behavior, and reason. Class status is noted steadily through references to paupers, widows, servants, and upper-class people of fortune, all of whom have lessons to teach, either through wasteful practices that defy middle-class values, or as practices that Good Women must emulate.

Structure of the Text

This substantial text, like other domestic manuals of the time, addresses a wide range of topics in its 22 chapters, complete with a 9-page table of contents, 11-page index and recipes. Yet, unlike texts structured with detailed task lists and recipes (e.g., Mrs. Beeton's 1861 *Book of Household Management*), *The Complete Home* enacts its pedagogy primarily through fictional dialogue and lengthy narrative among various female characters who live in a small, safe, rural, friendly village. The conversational curriculum shifts between experienced housekeepers' expositions, questions from novice housekeepers to elicit detail, and the occasional appearance of authoritative male professionals who offer anecdotes from their professional realms of expertise to support the female leaders' opinions. The entertaining characters discuss how they enact their "homework," a broad field of activity that encompasses decorating, cleaning, time management, responding efficiently to crises, providing nourishing meals, managing children, and preventing illness. Silly, inefficient characters surface in the text as well, narrating their domestic foibles and feelings of bewilderment as their households erupt into chaos around them, threatening the American social order in the process (see Benjamin, 1997).

I list the chapter titles to illustrate the expansive domain of activities considered within women's purview. The multidimensional theme of "waste" is a steadfast concern in the text. The first chapter introduces Aunt Sophronia, the character of the "indefatigable diarist" (Wright, 1879, p. 11) who primarily narrates the book, relays the interactions with diverse villagers who wrestle with the machinations of their homes, and provides the domestic "notes" from which the text is presumably created. The other titles are as follows (the originals in roman numerals): (2) Order: Time Saving; (3) Economy: The Pounds and Pence; (4) Children: Their Rights and Liabilities; (5) Sickness and Wickedness; (6) Home Adornment; (7) Industry in the Home; (8) Literature in the Home; (9) Accidents in the Home; (10) Religion in the Family; (11) Hospitality in the Home; (12) Friendships in the Home; (13) Value of Good Manners; (14) Methods of Doing Work; (15) The Unity of the Home; (16) The Use and Abuse of Money in the Home; (17) Attention to Dress; (18) Mistresses and Servants; (19) A Young Man who Expects to Marry; (20) Ancient and Medieval Homes; (21) Model Homes; (22) Things That All Should Know. The ordering systems that define waste surface in the chapters through explicit concerns about its symbolic and material dangers, inefficiencies, and its reverberating moral dimensions.

The Responsibility of the Competent (White, Middle-Class) Housekeeper: Identifying and Managing Waste

> She makes her home a model of economy, beauty, and propriety, or it is a false light of extravagance, spurring others to waste….
>
> —Wright, 1879, p. 18

Conceptions of waste have geographic, cultural, and political dimensions that include themes of spatialized segregation, separation, and proxemics, hierarchy and value, purity and pollution, visibility and absence, and reconceptualization and transformation (e.g, see Douglas, 2003; Nagle, 2013; Strasser, 1999). *The Complete Home* reflects these theoretical nuances. The unfolding areas of scholarship and activism that take up these foci (see, for example, discard studies.com; worldwidewastejournal.com) underscore the cultural and historical dimensions of entities that people variously label, experience, sort, and discard as "waste."

Nagle (2013) uses the term "discard studies" to emphasize that complex systems (e.g. social, technical, economic) determine what is normative or discard-able in each locale and period. Mary Douglas' (1966/2001) well known book, *Purity and Danger,* has been an important theoretical touchstone in these areas of study in emphasizing how systems of ordering animate the cultural practices of separating "dirt" from non-dirt (p. 36), a valuing and sorting process that is fundamentally about power (see Liboiron, 2019, n.p.). "We do not simply condemn disorder," Douglas (2001) clarifies, "we recognize that it is destructive to existing patterns…and that it has potentialities" to disrupt ordering systems (p. 95). In this sense, symbolic or material waste, refuse, discards, or dirt in varying spaces are "analytical trope[s] about power" (Liboiron, 2019, n.p). This framing is generative for considering such tropes in domestic manuals because of their investment in elevating women's power to order The Home for the well-being of the nation.

In *The Complete Home*, managing waste is entirely women's domain. The text conveys that identifying and managing "waste" is central to women's specialized duties whether through cultivating skills of discernment to uncover the presence of waste wherever it lurked, to reconceptualizing and transforming "waste" into "useful" material, and/or using household resources more efficiently to expunge waste entirely from the home. The text treats waste as a dynamic concept that varies in form, location and historical context, even moment-to-moment and season-to-season as economic and corporeal needs shift in a woman's home. Notably, waste advances women's domestic self-actualization because they must have enough knowledge to recognize its diverse forms to combat or transform it where necessary. The discerning housewife must cultivate her skills through reading, dialogue, and experience to identify waste, manage it at a given moment and time, and teach other household members about its contours. Aligned with that education, women must familiarize themselves with diverse ways of life, whether through reading about other cultures or through experiences in their peers' homes, to shape new understandings of waste relevant for their duties.

The text conveys that women should approach their learning methodically to become competent practitioners of domestic science, a pattern of advocacy for women's education that was characteristic of other manuals as well (see Beecher, 1869). The characters insist that all who pursue a profession, including the female head of household, should read in the "line of your studies" (p. 204). "Wherever a woman is a sound scholar," Aunt Sophronia asserts, "she ought to be therefore the finer housekeeper" (p. 27). Chapters discuss the sensible order of reading, the appropriate genres to peruse, and methods of work that ensure women have time to read. In particular, the text commands, "mothers must read" (p. vi)—"it is your *duty* to satisfy [your child's mind]" (p. 114, emphasis in original). Such ordering ensures that women can "form . . . habits of thought" beneficial for their own intellectual and spiritual development (p. 203), for conversations with their husbands (p. 37), for instructing their children (p. 114), and for improving the "economy, beauty, and propriety" of their households (p. 18). In fact, the chapter on "Methods of Work" links insufficient study and idleness to patterns of madness. For example, one doctor notes that some of his patients are "indolent young women…whose minds being unfed gnaw on themselves and shrivel away" (p. 333). Learning can prevent such waste: "the mind occupied with questions of science, or philosophy, or history, has no time to become introverted, and brood to distraction over its own developments"

(p. 333). Busy housekeepers cannot afford to waste their time; learning catapults and refines their skills.

Waste is both a cultural and a moral matter. In Strasser's (1999) social history of trash, *Waste and Want,* she discusses *The Complete Home*, noting that the author was among those who "lashed out at American extravagance" in their writing after the Civil War (Strasser, 1999, p. 24). Indeed, the primary narrator, Aunt Sophronia, is particularly critical of wasteful practices among Americans in the late 19th century that emerge from vain and superficial preoccupations with consumerism at odds with the founding principles of the nation. The narrator's didactic, comparative and class-imbued analysis is worth noting at length for the ordering systems it reflects:

> We Americans are an extravagant people: our land is so wide for its population, and …can bring forth, so much more than its inhabitants consume, that we know nothing of the *saving and careful economy* of people of the Old World's thronged States. Lavish abundance of common things surrounded our ancestors, and they used it lavishly: we inherited the prodigal habit: but now our cities and some of our districts have a crowded population, and *want is the result of waste*. With us a poor laborer's family will spend more and waste more than a family in middle station in Italy, Germany or France; our middle classes *spend* and *waste* what would appall a Frenchman of fortune; in fact, we seem to lack the very means and methods of saving, which are open to all in the Old World; we despise saving; we call careful economy penuriousness; a woman who looks well to the ways of her household here is styled "stingy:" abroad she is a good housekeeper doing her legitimate duty. (Wright, 1879, p. 74; italics added)

Compressed within this robust paragraph is a blistering, sweeping commentary on Americans' thoughtless adoption of wasteful practices that run counter to current social realities, lead to "want" among those in need, and adopt as socially normative practices of extravagance that are eschewed as 'appalling' elsewhere in the world. The narrator conveys her awareness of the fluctuating meaning of waste through noting that "lavish" use of resources cannot serve present demands. In this passage, social class serves as a pedagogical touchstone to emphasize that Americans' wasteful practices are not only rampant across class status, whether one is a poor laborer, of middle-class status, or of fortune, but can destabilize proper class norms and hierarchies. Comparing American middle-class practices to upper-class behavior elsewhere in the globe reveals the group's distorted, even shameful, conceptions of waste.

Women's knowledge of the contextual variability of waste matters because ignorance impedes their power (Douglas, 2001) to resist ordering systems that normalize extravagance and to reframe Old World norms as still relevant for the new one. Characters often champion the careful practices of Europeans in the "Old World" as models for American housewives. Without awareness that governing norms are culturally situated, women miss opportunities to draw from diverse knowledge systems to reduce waste. Further, it can render those women who do embrace practices of economy vulnerable to critique as "stingy" rather than competent actors efficiently maximizing the full potential of their family's resources. In those instances, women's practices of economy become subject to misplaced ridicule rather than respect. The manual urges readers to reconceptualize thrift as a value, and the thrifty woman as the household's greatest resource.

"The Yawning of the Refuse Pail" (p. 71): The Dangers and Uses of Household Waste

> [B]etter sacrifice the carpets than the health.
>
> —Wright, 1879, p. 125

Managing waste is also a matter of health. The manual reflects broad concerns about sanitation and disease accompanying industrialization and population growth in the late 19th century and links the protection of family to maintaining a healthy Home (p. 125). An important task of the competent housekeeper is thus ferreting out dangerous waste from those materials which might seem refuse at first glance but, in fact, are promising materials to repurpose for the good of the Home. The refuse pail emerges as an actant in this text, its gaping mouth standing ready to consume whatever crosses its path, including the perfectly useful discards from a thoughtless American housekeeper's meal preparation. In her haste and ignorance, she might toss into the pail a "spoonful of beans," "slices of tomato," or "remnants of the macaroni" (p. 76)—that might transmogrify, in the French housewife's artful, efficient domestic sphere, into substantive ingredients for a tasty and nutritious soup. For the skilled housewife, knowledge, economy, creativity, and intentionality inform her arsenal against waste, from scraping rather than peeling vegetables, to repurposing scraps to feed fowls, to using vegetation of all types and sizes for fuel rather than sacrificing beautiful trees (pp. 78-79). She can also creatively save cloth scraps, repurpose material, and perk up last year's fashions with new collars or careful cleaning.

Waste inherently enacts notions of spatialization and proxemics that in this ordering system mark household boundaries and propel Good Housekeepers to police them, forming their subjectivities in the process. The health of the social body rests on their shoulders. Some forms of waste with invisible pollutants render such boundaries porous through seeping into the woman's home without her knowledge. For example, however well-meaning, a housekeeper bent on tidying her living space who neglects her sink drains or who flings soap suds in an area too close to her dwelling beckons an array of hazards. On the surface, discarding soap suds appears to protect the home, but a character asserts, "Some very tidy housekeepers do not realize the excessive caution that should be used with sinks and drains, where bath-water, dish-water and scrubbing water are cast out. More diseases than we now suspect are propagated by minute spores" (p. 125). Waste-water is riddled with particles excreted from soiled clothes, bedlinens, and dishes, all of which can cause disease. Some poisons reside in old wallpaper, "swill-pails," carpets, "cisterns" and "filthy rags" "foul enough to breed a pestilence" (p. 127).

Similarly, while making the bed in the morning appears to be a sensible and tidy act, it is in fact "a dangerous plan," a wasteful use of energy, and a practice that is "really very dirty" (p. 135). Instead, each morning, women should air out their beds because "pounds of insensible perspiration, carrying particles of waste matter, flow off from the pores of our bodies during sleep; this refuse matter fills the clothes we wear, and our bedding" (p. 135). Europeans, again, are more skilled and careful than Americans in this regard; Germans refuse the superficial concerns of tidy beds and are "healthy" because they air their beds at length.

These invisible pollutants are particularly dangerous to women's health. Sneaky actants such as spores eradicate the clear borders between de/valued spaces and potentially endanger women who must remain "sound in body and mind" to carry out their noble work (p. 24). Pollutants can emerge from attics, cellars, even deep within the bowels of the home. A character describes her concern about metal sink pipes as conduits for toxins:

> If the pipe is metal, the decay unites with the metal and produces mineral as well as animal and vegetable poison. A current of air drives up through the pipe, and carries with it viewless atoms of violent poison and dangerous decay, and they tremble in the air of your house, or ever you are aware, they have entered your nose, throat and stomach. (Wright, 1879, p. 126)

Polluted air from drainpipes can "produce influenza, diphtheria, fever" (p. 126) that damage the family or others in the community. Other pollutants can emerge from within the body. In fact, those women who are aware they carry an "organic disease" or "insidious madness" should police their own bodies through remaining single so as not to damage their future households and inflicting, in turn, "miseries on her children" (p. 24). Whether in the form of bad manners, vile language, or dirty bodies, waste that cannot be cast from the boundaries of the home must be eradicated in situ without delay. It is only the vigilant housekeeper—one who refuses superficial assessments, one who is familiar with scientific principles, one who discusses with other learned, sensible women—who can prevent waste from entering or remaining within her body/home. One character soberly notes the labor involved, "a housekeeper needs the hundred eyes of Argus to see that her home is free from these dangers" (p. 127).

Other sneaky forms of waste can invade households as well, manifesting in the latest trends in women's fashion and home décor. White women's preoccupations with fripperies and finery invite a seductive form of consumerist waste no less dangerous to the Home than organic disease or spores: the waste of women's precious time, energy, health, and financial resources on superficial matters. In periods of social uncertainty riddled with tax changes, failing banks, and natural disasters, women must lead the way in practicing economy (p. 56). There are powerful ordering systems governing such conceptions of value and waste. Aunt Sophronia offers a cautionary reflection on the circumstances of a woman poised to marry. She expresses,

> I should be sorry to have Miriam at once so engrossed in dress and fineries, which in two years will be out of date, and in twenty quite forgotten, that she will have no calm time for consideration, and to prepare herself to face and solve problems which shall be of the last importance, not only to herself, but probably to many others [in her home]. (Wright, 1879, p. 13)

Economy in emotion and behavior are values to celebrate. Women must resist desires for passing fashions, for vanity rather than substance, and for extravagance rather than economy. Characters advocate for getting "the best [materials] in quantity and then allowing no wasting" (p. 50) and avoiding all adornment that might tax a busy woman's energy. Like the vapors from dirty drains, keeping up with the latest fashion can damage women's well-being. One woman expresses, "it is foolish in a house-mother to exhaust her health, and deprive her children of her company, and herself of improvement, merely for the sake of a few tucks, ruffles, and puffs" (p. 51). A vain character, Helen, demonstrates her distorted values in her wedding plans for "buying lots of things and having them made up in the very latest style" (Wright, 1879, p. 16), rather than focusing on the skills and moral dispositions worthy of running a home that shapes the future of its members. The cumulative message is that the normative system of ordering (Douglas, 2001/1966) tantalizes Helen with vain and wasteful purchases at odds with women's noble pursuits. Women have the power to re-define the ordering system that distinguishes value from dross to celebrate plain adornment, economy, and well-being for the good of all.

Preventing Wasteful Actions:
Disciplining the Body to Manage the Home (and Nation)

> Every woman of good judgment and of any degree of observation, with a good physician to fall back upon, one whose style of practice she has carefully noted, should be able to treat the simple ailments of her family without fuss, excitement or doctor's help.
>
> —Wright, 1879, p. 142

The manual instructs women to discipline their movements, thoughts, and use of time to prevent damage to their bodies—to 'wasting a good woman,'—as they wrestled with incessant domestic demands. Women's labor involves controlling their energy to ensure they maintain a healthy pace of work and have the Presence of Mind (p. 218) to create an ordered and welcoming home. As the characters insist, do not "crowd work." Significantly, the text conveys that actualizing the art of domestic science involves substantial expertise and self-discipline, while also emphasizing, for the skilled housewife, that her work should never *look* like labor. The housewife testifies to her skill in domestic economy through the very appearance of ease and seamlessness in her movements and household processes. Like Nagle (2013) notes in her ethnography of contemporary sanitation practices in New York City, no one notices the skill and labor involved in managing and removing garbage until workers cease to do it.

Characters insist that women not only act to avoid waste but *feel* that avoiding waste in how they move their bodies, expend their energy, and engage with others is central to the home's smooth functioning and their very subjectivities as competent, moral, disciplined professionals. In this sense, the work of the artful housewife is not only completing varied tasks such as stoking the fire, baking biscuits, doing the laundry, and reading in her field of expertise. The book also outlines *how* women must carry out their work and how they should *feel* while carrying out their work. Women must discipline their bodies, emotions, and desires through exercising "self-restraint," careful planning, and cultivating cheerful dispositions that permeate the fibers of the home and reach into the social fabric outside their walls.

Preventing waste extends to managing even the most minute machinations of the body, a set of disciplining and productive practices (Foucault, 1979) that mothers must cultivate for themselves and nourish in their children throughout their early lives. As one character insists, women waste energy in 'fussing' 'fluttering and bustling about' (Wright, 1879, p. 182). In one example, a woman's chaotic preparation of dinner, clumsy movements, and emotional distress is juxtaposed with another housekeeper's seamless command of her kitchen. In another example, a character had "flung an avalanche of soiled clothes" down the stairs because she felt unsettled from the "turmoil" in her house (p. 43). A calm demeanor emerges from instruction throughout childhood, delivered with consistency and resolve, observing good models of behavior, and preventing drama and "fuss" (p. 182). Women should absorb this corporeal knowledge to prevent wasted time, suffering, and pain when a household faces trouble and they must respond quickly. The manual includes examples of women calmly extinguishing fires, attending briskly to spurting blood and nearly-severed digits, saving children from drowning, and protecting the home from rabid dogs. Posed against this competence are pedagogical examples of screaming, useless women, burned homes, and messy kitchens. These corporeal and material excesses would have been entirely preventable if women had cultivated "presence of mind." The narrator asks, "are we cultivating in ourselves a frame of mind which shall enable us to meet these mischances and conquer them?" (Wright, 1879, p. 217).

To discipline the body/mind to prepare for emergencies as well as mundane demands of the Home requires women's caring for their health and appearance. As the narrator remarks, "I heartily abhor an untidy woman" (p. 42). Like the home, the woman's body exemplifies the presence or lack of interior disciplining. Women must not waste precious energy on over-exertion. The book advises methods of self-care such as bathing one's eyes with cool water, reading upright so as not to strain the eyes, taking frequent breaks to rest, getting enough sleep, disseminating tasks to all household members, and keeping one's environment free of hazards. Aunt Sophronia insists, "the secret lies in industrious order—in what is called good management" (Wright, 1879, p. 35). The observant housekeeper watches, calculates, chastises, reorders, and "checks every waste" (Wright, 1879, p. 81). These repeated corporeal lessons in domestic science manifest in feelings of shame when behavior is out of order and satisfaction when accomplished competently.

Carefully managing the white female body and her other household resources have broader implications for the national home. The text teaches these corporeal lessons. As one character expresses,

> If people could only be taught that economy is a thing of *littles* and of *individuals* and of *every day*, and not a thing of masses and of spasmodic efforts, then a true idea would begin to tell upon the habits of our domestic life, and its effects would be seen in general and national prosperity. (Wright, 1879, p. 80)

From how a woman sets her table, to how she governs her children, she must also use her body efficiently because her "little" actions and "every day" labor at home influences the accomplishments of her family in the wider world (p. 18).

The Waste of a Good Woman: Maximizing Time, Aptitude and Talent (p. 32)

> What will a man's "habitual prudence avail him against the careless waste and extravagance of an uncalculating, unthinking wife?"
>
> —quoted in Wright, 1879, p. 365)

As a resource and instrument for achieving national prosperity, women must maximize their time and talents. In this manual, "indolence" and inefficiency waste good women. A female scholar in the text expresses, "more diseases arise from indolence than from overwork: idleness begets vice, and vice fosters disease" (Wright, 1879, p. 185), decimating women's vigor and potential in the process. The narrator emphasizes the connection among vice, idleness, and corporeal weakness that can threaten women's development. She notes, "wasting their lives in this wretched way…[with] luxury, folly and amusements…girls become extravagant and expensive in their wants, and weak in muscle, nerves and morals" (p. 185).

As fitting their moral role, white middle class women have responsibilities to ensure servants and children also use their time and bodies appropriately to serve the national Home. The text devotes one chapter (18) to the topic of "mistress and servants," underscoring the idealized role of middle-class housewife as manager of household workers who, if properly directed, must also prevent waste. As "members of the family," servants are extensions of the housekeeper's responsibilities, necessitating care, sensitivity, and mentoring under her watchful eye. Without such support, a female servant might become the "dirty and wasteful wife of some poor man, confirming him in all his evil habits, and bringing into the world a brood of semi-beggars, filthy and ragged and unschooled, to be the criminals and paupers of a generation to come" (p. 437). These mentoring decisions have clear social reverberations for the class and racial order: "How much worse is every town for one such degraded family? They are drunkards, thieves, murderers, incendiaries" (p. 437). In this cautionary tale, the white housekeeper must seize her role as guardian/savior to prevent waste in their children's and working women's reproduction of the citizenry. The housewife's work ensures that lives remain useful.

Mothers must also ensure their female children experience the joys of childhood to become proper stewards of their future homes. Characters describe households bursting with children in which "the figures and health and tempers of unfortunate little eldest daughters are sacrificed to being made reliable child's maids for their juniors" (Wright, 1879, p. 93). Women are to blame if they waste their eldest children's youth in forcing them to care for their siblings, becoming "prematurely old and care-worn" (Wright, 1879, p. 93), rather than ensuring they revel in playing and developing their faculties to fulfill such duties in due course. The extreme consequences of numerous children and neglected duties narrated here underscore the familiar trope and lofty construction of white women as moral guardians of the nation. While historians note a decline in the availability of household help as the century progressed (Mintz & Kellogg, 1987, p. 124), the ideal of having help, as articulated in this manual, was an important component of idealized gendered middle-class white subjectivity. Given all women's limited legal and political rights during the 19th century, the household hierarchy of leader/worker underscored the white domestic professional's power as a guardian and manager.

Another wasteful practice is for women to spend energy and time on tasks for which they have no aptitude. Although social norms might suggest that women should learn certain crafts or subjects, the manual reframes such norms as a potential waste of precious energy. For some, with no musical talent, studying music would be a "waste of time and money" (p. 32). Women should spend their time cultivating their natural abilities and interests. The effects of such waste can even be calculated. As one sensible character asserts,

> If I spend on music two hours a day during my four years' course [of study], I spend two thousand five hundred and four hours, and four hundred dollars upon music, and then can only drum on the piano, and not play with taste and sympathy. All those hours and that money, on the other hand, might put me in possession of some branch for which I have real aptitude. (Wright, 1879, p. 33)

Reducing waste thus extends to middle-class corporeal and temporal resources, even the physical spaces of the idealized middle-class home. One character insists that furnishing the nicest rooms in the house for visitors is "foolish." Families should use their home thoroughly rather than preserving places "where five or six times in a year a few visitors go to lay off hats and shawls…" (Wright, 1879, p. 272). Unfortunately, too often, "these best rooms are shut up and virtually wasted" (p. 272) most of the year. Notably, the narrator suggests the mother of the house should always have the nicest room. Investing in her health and well-being pay dividends for the family that should be manifest at every level of household practice, even in politics of spatialization.

Conclusion:
Waste is Women's Domain

> For national and social disasters, for moral and financial evils, the cure begins in the Household.
>
> —Wright, 1879, p. 3

Strasser (1999) argues in her social history of trash that "advice writing" of this kind reveals little information about the materiality of trash during this period (p. 19). This "kind of reform literature" in fact, is "often more intent on correcting the behavior norm than describing it" (Strasser, 1999, p. 25). In making this point, Strasser troubles realist interpretations of such domestic texts as reflecting the actual tasks women performed to manage their households each day. Indeed, such texts cannot operate as windows into a 19th century real, as an array of gendered textual silences haunt them, from the absence of bathrooms to little mention of bodily waste and diverse fluids that leak from infants, the injured and elderly, and menstruating and birthing women. The idealized homes, with "wasted" space and room to move, are places of imagination in women's control "where [no] wants" result from waste (p. 74).

Rather, this domestic treatise foregrounds white women as actors in nation building through their managing and reframing of waste. They wield power, in Douglas's (2001/1966) terms, through sustaining a kind of idealized discourse that champions through the massive pages of manuals the legitimacy of women's domestic expertise to manage dis/order. In this system of ordering, the threat of wasting lurks at every turn. "Waste" emerges as a multidimensional and transmogrifying actant, at times so furtive or normalized that only women's relentless scrutiny can identify it. One can waste bodies, time, money, energy, aptitude, health, household spaces, childhoods, material goods, food, talents, and opportunities for women's domestic self-actualization. Women can refrain from marrying if they carry organic disease and repurpose morsels of food that might otherwise be discarded. The steady references across the 22 chapters to waste teach women to identify where they might be participating in wasteful behavior and how to reframe and conquer these practices to affirm their competence.

The Complete Home underscores the historical and cultural dynamism of conceptions of waste, the intricate labor involved in policing its boundaries, and the championing of white women in the battle against wasteful practices. Waste is not a frivolous matter, but a generative site that constantly marks and tests white women's power to control disorder and serves as a vehicle for women's self-actualization as worthy agents of American nationalism. As the narrator emphasizes, "In a Home it must be order or ruin" (p. 47), a message that transcends the walls of the family home. Women's work to maintain order in the household is a "cure" to address the greater ills that plague the nation (Wright, 1879, p. 3) because disorder disrupts power (Douglas, 2001/1966). This domestic manual has a message for the nation, as one sensible character articulates: "Americans must learn this lesson of economy, for the noblest land cannot endure the drain of waste" (p. 80). Women must not only guard against household waste, but must guard against becoming waste themselves.

Notes

[1] I first considered this book as part of a larger unpublished study on educational texts (Bailey, 1997); the writer was a distant ancestor of the author (see Bailey, 2002).

[2] Lydia Child also decried the extravagance of the age and need for economy earlier in the century in *The American Frugal Housewife,* Boston, MA: Carter & Hender, 1832.

[3] Strasser (1999) quotes some of this material in her social history of trash, *Waste and Want,* wording which may have helped inspire her book title.

References

Bailey, L. (1997). *'A plain woman's story.'* Unpublished master's thesis. The Ohio State University.

Bailey, L. (2002). *The absent presence of whiteness in 19th century didactic texts: Julia McNair Wright's "hidden curriculum."* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. The Ohio State University.

Bailey, L. (2006). Wrighting-white: The construction of race in 19th century women's didactic texts. *Journal of Thought 41* (4), 65-81.

Beecher, C., & Beecher Stowe, H. (1869). *The American woman's home: or, principles of domestic science; being a guide to the formation and maintenance of economical, healthful, beautiful, and Christian homes.* New York, NY: JB Ford & Co.

Bledstein, B. J. (1976). *The culture of professionalism: The middle class and the development of higher education in America*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

Douglas, M. (2001/1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York, NY: Random House.

Liboiron, M. (2019, Sept 9). Waste is not 'matter out of place," *Discard Studies: Social Studies of Waste, Pollution & Externalities*. https://discardstudies.com/2019/09/09/waste-is-not-matter-out-of-place/

Mintz, S., & Kellogg, S. (1988). *Domestic revolutions: A social history of American family* *life.* New York, NY: The Free Press.

Nagle, R. (2013). *Picking up: On the streets and behind the trucks with the sanitation workers of New York city*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Strasser, S. (1999). *Waste and want: A social history of trash*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.

Wright, J. (1879). *The complete home*: *An encyclopedia of domestic life and affairs.* Philadelphia, PA: Bradley, Garretson, & Co.