Family Matters in Postbellum America

Ann Mary Crittenden Coleman (1813–91)

Coleman, daughter of the Kentucky senator John J. Crittenden, belonged to an “old and distinguished family lineage,” and this entitlement shaped her life and values. The second child and eldest daughter, one of the children from Crittenden’s first family of five, and one of nine children altogether, she was related to Thomas Jefferson on her father’s side and on her mother’s to Zachary Taylor, who became the twelfth president of the United States when she was thirty-five. She was accustomed from her childhood on to contact with prominent figures. Among others, Jefferson Davis was a family friend. At age eleven this precocious daughter, the most gifted and favored child of a powerful patriarch, recited an original poem for the Marquis de Lafayette when he visited Frankfort, Kentucky. Even as a child, she displayed the assertiveness that characterized her as an adult. At age fourteen she had the temerity to write a letter to her father criticizing the quality of the French lessons offered by the nuns at her boarding school in Bardstown, Kentucky, and reproaching him for not writing her. Two of her brothers served as generals in the Civil War: Thomas Crittenden for the Union and George Crittenden for the Confederacy. Until the defeat of the Union Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga, she could read in the Kentucky papers praise of Thomas’s skill as a “chivalric” leader and of his wisdom, prudence, and gallantry in battle.

Married at seventeen to Chapman Coleman (1793–1850), a prominent Louisville businessman and U.S. marshal for the district of Kentucky who was twenty years her senior, she was accustomed as daughter, sister, and wife
to negotiating a place for herself in a social system that favored men, and she well knew that this system functioned via social networks and alliances supported by women. The forming of connections figured importantly in her own life, and she called on these tirelessly to promote especially her son Chapman.

Living and translating in a moment of profound upheaval and change, the energetic Coleman cherished romantic notions of history and culture as made by wise and dashing men, even as the personal circumstance of her widowhood after a twenty-year marriage and the Civil War and its many economic and social consequences pushed her into a new age in which women were beginning to acquire greater agency and public recognition and were ever less dependent on the gallantry of men of honor. Her translations served her as she renegotiated her place and influence after the Civil War; the translations of Mühlbach's Frederick novels in particular aided her in sustaining a view of history, the family, military conflict, and paternal leadership that preserved the values and emotions that had attached her to the cause of the South during the Civil War, even against her father's wishes and her own best interests.

On September 17, 1857, Senator John J. Crittenden wrote a worried letter to his forty-four-year-old daughter Ann Mary, who in 1856, six years after the death of her husband, had left Louisville for Europe with six of her seven children in order to realize a long-cherished dream. Crittenden gently teased his daughter: “I am afraid we shall have to treat you on your return, as foreigners, & to have you Americanised again by subjecting you to the process of our laws of naturalisation.” For some time Coleman’s fascination with European royalty in general and her fondness for hobnobbing in court circles in Stuttgart in particular had given the senator cause for alarm: “Let it not be said that you are a seeker after Princes or palaces, or that you estimate yourself the more because you are received by them,” he had admonished her on February 10, 1857. “That privilege of admission is to be valued only as a recognition of your estimation & standing at home.” While in the 1850s Coleman could blithely ignore her father’s sage advice to remember her American values, the 1860s would give her reason to rethink what it meant to be an American and what it meant to her personally to migrate and mediate between cultures, foreign and domestic.

After a visit to Louisville in 1860, Coleman returned to Europe for a second extended stay. A few months later, on April 14, 1861, Confederate forces
fired on Fort Sumter. In July 1861 Coleman’s elder son, John Crittenden Coleman (Crittenden), died in a Confederate army camp in Florida under mysterious circumstances. Senator Crittenden, who had sought to prevent the secession of the southern states and preserve the Union with the Crittenden Compromise, did not pull punches when he later wrote Coleman on the subject of her son’s death and her attachment to the South on that son’s account. “Why should you love the Rebellion?” he wrote to her in April 1863, two months before his death. “Your son, you answer, ‘gave his life for it.’ Is it not a much truer statement of the case to say that the rebellion seduced & sacrificed [sic] your son, as it did thousands of other inexperienced & thoughtless young men.”

Crittenden’s admonition fell on deaf ears. Coleman remained a southern sympathizer loyal to the “noble cause” of the South despite her father’s further chiding about her enjoyment of the privileges of living under the Union while supporting the South. Upon returning from Germany in the fall of 1861 after having survived the maritime catastrophe of the famous luxury liner the Great Eastern, she moved to Baltimore where she frequented circles of southern sympathizers. She also delivered information on behalf of the South. Such actions were tantamount to treason from the perspective of the Union, but Francis Hudson Oxx, a historian of the Crittenden family, speaks of Coleman as an “unsung heroine of the war.” Even after the war she persisted in her sympathy for the South and determinedly petitioned the U.S. government on behalf of imprisoned Confederate soldiers.

In 1863 Coleman agonized over bringing the twenty-year-old Chapman home from Europe. If he failed to participate in the war and “quietly stayed in Europe,” she thought, it might “be forever a reproach.” As she well knew, whichever side he chose would cause pain to the divided Coleman family. Although she claimed not to have influenced her son, Coleman had taken sides; she accepted the rebellion and the idea of two countries. In May 1863 she wrote a heartrending, if melodramatic, letter to her father:

> It seems to me, if I have one son in the Southern army & the other in the Northern, my sons will have been born in vain! If Chapman comes home, cold & indifferent without the courage & manliness to take an earnest part in this great question, I shall be ashamed of him! If he goes into the Federal army I shall hear always a dear young voice from the grave reproaching him & me, if he goes into the southern army my heart & my hopes will follow him & his cause. I know myself in this, it cannot be otherwise! I go with my sons. Where they die, there also would I die & there would I be buried.
This passage suggests a heroic and highly subjective scripting of war in general and the cause of the South in particular, one akin to the romanticized view of history in the Mühlbach novels that Coleman and her daughters and son Chapman would translate just a few years later. Coleman’s vehement support of the rebel cause in this letter in painful defiance of her father and for the sake of her dead son, Crittenden, seems overwrought, given that the ne’er-do-well Crittenden had never seen combat. Although he was said to have succumbed to a fever, his death followed hard upon his involvement in an affair of honor while he was inebriated; the intervention of a cousin had prevented a duel.\textsuperscript{17} Crittenden by no stretch of the imagination died in the service of the glorious cause of the South.

In this letter Coleman also shows herself to be, as always, highly involved in her second son Chapman’s life. In his will her husband had given his wife a free hand in raising their children, and Coleman had taken charge with determination.\textsuperscript{18} While she never convinced her father of her views of the Confederacy—he died shortly thereafter—and while she wished that Chapman would not have to go to war at all, Chapman did sign on to the Confederate cause as she clearly wished him to.

Even as she styled herself a southern sympathizer, Coleman faced pecuniary hardship now that she was back in the United States and living in wartime Baltimore. Never one to spare expense, despite her repeated protestations that she was economizing, she now found herself in dire financial straits as a result of unwise speculation in gold, the vagaries of the wartime economy, and her own liberal spending.\textsuperscript{19} In April 1864 she wrote from Baltimore to her son-in-law Patrick Joyes, who managed her money and real estate back in Louisville, that her affairs were “desperate.” Five months later she commanded him simply to send her some money.\textsuperscript{20} In July 1865, three months after the war ended, she reported that she was having trouble paying her property taxes.\textsuperscript{21}

At some point during these desperate years of 1864–65, Coleman must have hit upon the scheme of translating as a means of increasing her income. Translation was in some respects an obvious choice for a woman of her intellectual gifts and social standing with years of living in Europe behind her; indeed, it may have been her only option, as her social class and family circumstances prohibited her from undertaking other forms of gainful employment and as she of course was not educated to ply a trade. With translation she could work at home with the help of three of her five daughters at a semischolarly pursuit while avoiding the risk of excess publicity. The decision to identify herself as “Mrs. Chapman Coleman” in all her published translations insists on preserving her gentility, as does the decision not to identify
by name her unmarried daughters who assisted her: Eugenia (1839–1916), Judith (1845–1929), and Sally Lee (1847–1903). Her beloved father, after all, had once counseled her: “There is a certain dignity & reserve that should always mark the conduct of a married lady—Just enough of it to proclaim that she is a wife, that she knows what is due to her & from her.” As I shall outline below, in the end, having once taken the step into print culture, Coleman did not show herself to be completely adverse to the publicity it brought her, reconciling it rather easily with the dignity due her.

**THE PUBLISHING HOUSE** Appleton dated its founding to the year 1825, when Daniel Appleton settled in New York and opened a general merchandise store whose largest section was dedicated to books. The first book with an Appleton imprint—a miniature book with religious content—appeared six years later in 1831. Like many other publishers in antebellum America, Appleton became involved in the business of reprinting standard English authors early on but also published translations of German religious and scientific works. Devotional, theological, and scientific works, along with such textbooks as Noah Webster’s *Elementary Spelling Book* and such reference works as Appleton’s *New American Cyclopedia*, dominated Appleton’s annual list. Not until the 1850s did the firm begin to publish novels for adults with regularity. The decision in the late 1860s to publish a series of novels by Luise Mühlbach marked a new direction and an enduring success for a publishing house seeking to expand its products to include more fiction for adults (as opposed to children’s literature).

As Samuel C. Chew, Gerard R. Wolfe, John Tebbel, and George E. Tylutki tell the story of the Appleton Publishing House, William Worthen Appleton, the grandson of the founder, Daniel Appleton, discovered the German writer Luise Mühlbach when he came across the translation of *Joseph II and His Court* by the schoolteacher and textbook author Adelaide de Vendel Chaudron while traveling through the states of the former Confederacy in 1865. Chaudron’s translation had been printed in Mobile, Alabama, in May 1864 on “wretched straw paper and bound in thick covers made of bright-colored wallpaper” and copyrighted under the Confederate government. According to Wolfe, Appleton republished Chaudron’s translation, which was an “instant success”; “the public soon clamored for more of Mme. Mühlbach’s works.”

In fact, Appleton did not republish Chaudron’s translation until early in 1867. Before that date it was available, even after the war, from the southern publisher Goetzel. By the time Appleton did bring out *Joseph II*, the press
had already published translations of two of the eighteen novels that would make up its series of Mühlbach's historical novels until the late 1890s: the Colemans' *Frederick the Great and His Court* (1866) and Amory Coffin's *The Merchant of Berlin*. Over the course of the remaining months of 1867, nine additional novels appeared. Numbers 4 and 5 in this series were two additional translations by the Colemans. If any of the novels constituted an “instant success” for Appleton, leading the firm to publish still more works by Mühlbach, then, as I shall explain, it was Coleman’s first translation, ungainly though some reviewers thought it was. “Instant success,” however, is a bit of an exaggeration.

We do not know how Coleman came into contact with Appleton. Coleman in any case played a larger role in the inauguration of the Appleton series than has hitherto been recognized—at the very least because her *Frederick the Great and His Court* was the first of Mühlbach’s novels to appear under Appleton’s imprimatur. More tellingly, correspondence from Appleton to Coleman indicates that Coleman peddled the manuscript as she would later Charlotte Ackermann, that is, she herself selected the novel for translation hoping for financial gain.

Alone among the four previously mentioned historians of the House of Appleton, Chew vaguely alludes to the fact that “translations of some of Madame Mühlbach’s novels had already been offered to other Northern publishers but had been declined,” but he then glosses over what happened next and incorrectly reports that Chaudron’s *Joseph II* was reprinted in 1866, adding, also incorrectly on almost all counts: “but arrangements were made for translations of all the other novels by this author—more than twenty in all. *Frederick the Great* and *The Merchant of Berlin* were soon out, and the series was completed by 1868.” A closer look at publication dates, reviews, and Coleman’s and Appleton’s correspondence reveals that this accepted account requires revision.

A letter from Daniel Appleton to Coleman, dated May 8, 1866, refers to Coleman’s “Ms which has been in our hands some time,” that is, *Frederick the Great and His Court*, which Appleton is now prepared to publish. Likewise, Appleton’s letter mentions that “our reader speaks very well of the translation, but in these days of high prices, it is difficult to estimate the results.” By June 1866 Appleton had announced the forthcoming publication of the novel. The time frame established by the letter and the announcement indicates that the translation, which became a densely printed 433-page book, was probably begun in the previous year, namely, 1865. Appleton stipulated the conditions for publishing the translation: “no payments [will] be made until we have been reimbursed for our investment, or in other words until we have sold
enough to secure ourselves against loss.” Such insistence hardly bespeaks a grand plan on the part of Appleton to capitalize on a sure thing. The Round Table announced the publication of the novel on September 22, 1866, following it with a review a week later.

The Round Table observed that Chaudron’s Joseph II “is scarcely known by American readers” and asserted, furthermore, that with Frederick the Great and His Court “Mr. [sic] Mühlbach has written an admirable work of the [modern type of the historical novel].” Privy to inside information about the publication of the Frederick novel, the reviewer added that Chaudron had almost completed a translation of the same book “but relinquished it on learning that others had essayed the task.” Given the flaws of the Colemans’ translation, the Round Table maintained, the “merits of the novel [i.e., Frederick the Great and His Court] deserve the publication of the suppressed translation.”

A letter dated December 6, 1866, from Coleman to Patrick Joyes tells a similar story. According to Coleman, Chaudron contacted Appleton about translating “Frederick and his Family” only to learn that Appleton already had the Colemans’ translation in hand. Coleman wrote her son-in-law: “I think this must have put a stop to her translation. She would not have run the same risk she did with Frederick & his Court.” Coleman’s Berlin and Sans-Souci appeared by February 15, 1867, and Frederick the Great and His Family by April 1, 1867.

How could Coleman have inserted her translations ahead of Chaudron’s if, as the four historians assert, Appleton had “discovered” Chaudron’s first translation in the South and decided to commission an entire series of Mühlbach novels based on the merit of Chaudron’s first translation? It appears more likely that Coleman had completed her first translation independently and pitched it to Appleton with impeccable timing. Coleman had not previously published translations or writings of any kind and thus had no reputation as a translator or author that could have prompted the publishing house to contact her with a commission.

Unlike Appleton, Coleman had the experience of living for several years in German-speaking Europe, where it would have been easy enough for her to come across Mühlbach’s popular historical novels, in particular the three novels that she and her daughters translated. These three novels had appeared with O. Janke in Berlin shortly before she and her children arrived in Europe: Friedrich der Große und sein Hof (1853), Berlin und Sanssouci oder Friedrich der Große und seine Freunde (1854), and Friedrich der Große und seine Geschwister (1855). Königin Hortense, one of the novels that Coleman’s son Chapman later translated, appeared in that same decade in 1856. During her
sojourn in the German territories, Coleman could also have become familiar with Adolph Menzel’s woodcut illustrations, which had been produced in the 1840s for Franz Kugler’s *Geschichte Friederichs des Grossen* (1840), or have known of the Frederick cycle that Menzel was creating on large canvas in the late 1840s and 1850s. She must in any case have had ample opportunity to discover how revered Frederick was in nineteenth-century National Liberal circles and with Prussian patriots. In short, she likely needed neither Chaudron nor Appleton to introduce her to Mühlbach, especially Mühlbach’s Frederick novels. Her life experience, her correspondence, the review in the *Round Table*, and the long-term success of the Frederick novels provide grounds for concluding that Coleman took an active role in promoting her translation to Appleton and that her Frederick novels provided more of a direction for the series than historians of the book trade and of the House of Appleton have acknowledged.

Coleman may even have exerted influence on subsequent publication of Mühlbach’s works. In 1867, after the publication of the three Frederick translations, Appleton thanked Coleman “for the remarks made in reference to the selection of her [Mühlbach’s] books for publication” and pointed out that Mühlbach’s works were “not all equally good.” Nevertheless, the firm planned to “publish them all, and have the greater part of them translated.” *Prince Eugen* was nearly ready, the letter reported. Chapman Coleman’s three translations, *Goethe and Schiller, Mohammed Ali and His House,* and *Queen Hortense,* did not appear until 1868, 1869, and 1870, respectively. In August 1867 Coleman still had the possibility of influencing the choice of novel as well as to secure work for her son Chapman as translator. Appleton’s letter suggests that she did so.

While Chaudron had selected a novel by Mühlbach that treated the history of Austria, Coleman chose three novels that formed a coherent core focusing on the life and times of Frederick the Great, historical material that was central to current developments in Europe and the self-understanding of the Prussian-led German empire that was on the horizon in the 1860s. Together the six volumes produced by the Coleman family constituted one-third of the set of eighteen (and as of 1897, twenty) volumes of Mühlbach’s historical novels, whose many editions with Appleton and other publishers testify to their popularity over five decades in America. For Chapman Coleman, who in 1867 was not yet gainfully employed, translation may have served in the immediate postbellum years largely as a stopgap. For his mother, Ann Mary, translation certainly was that, but it additionally became a source of pride and the stepping stone to further literary activity, public prominence, and—perhaps most important—more connections.
Coleman was not one to hide her light under a bushel. Just as she had not been shy about promoting her children, she did not hesitate to promote her translations. Considering novels about Frederick the Great worthy reading for the statesmen and generals of the United States, she sent a copy of *Frederick the Great and His Court* to President Andrew Johnson in 1866. In that same year she sent another to General Ulysses S. Grant, who assured her that he would place this volume in his library "with the acknowledgement written on the title page." In 1867 Robert E. Lee became the recipient of *Berlin and Sans-Souci*, which he acknowledged with a touch of condescension by referring to her famous father and their family ties: "I feel much flattered by your kindness, and am glad to recognize as relatives the worthy descendants of the distinguished statesman of Kentucky." The gifts attempted to curry favor and secure relationships. That to Grant may have marked the beginning of Coleman's lifelong friendship with him, a friendship that culminated in her vocal support of the Grant Retirement Bill in 1885, shortly before Grant's death.

In 1866, in the wake of the defeat of the South and the death of her famous father, this southern sympathizer and mother of a Confederate soldier needed to establish and renew relations with the Union. The contact with Grant bore fruit: in 1869, during the first year of his presidency, the Republican Grant appointed the former Confederate and Democrat Chapman Coleman attaché to the American Legation in Berlin, an appointment that secured for him a career in foreign service and made use of the German skills that his mother had forced him to acquire more than a decade earlier.

The publication and commercial success of the three translations of historical fiction may also have prompted Coleman to attempt a task still largely alien to women in the early 1870s, that is, the project of writing American history. Coleman set out to assemble a biography of sorts of her prominent father based on his correspondence and public speeches. While compiling this work, she wrote to dozens of prominent statesmen soliciting their memories of Crittenden and their correspondence with him. The undertaking of the onerous task of compilation in and of itself bespeaks energy, determination, and ambition on the part of the fifty-eight-year-old Coleman. Her work did not end with the compilation, however, since her profits from this effort depended on subscriptions as well as sales. She pursued these subscriptions with persistent determination as dozens of letters held in the John Jordan Crittenden Papers at Duke University testify.

Coleman's *The Life of J. J. Crittenden* appeared in 1871 with Lippincott, containing a dedication to her grandsons that provides a sense of her values and purpose: she had undertaken the task "that this record of a noble life may inspire them to unselfish patriotism and acts of love and kindness."
She could be secure in the thought that in 1871 and the restored Union her father’s patriotism would be unquestioned even if she and her children had been on the wrong side of history.

“It may not seem appropriate that the life of so great and good a man as Mr. Crittenden should be written by the feeble hand of a woman,” she initially apologizes, assuming a pose of modesty in her preface. Yet shortly thereafter she asserts her own importance: she in particular must write this history, and, as editor, she has been forced to make editorial decisions. She moreover included a number of letters from her father that address her personally and thereby doubly inscribed herself in history as author and player. This published undertaking visibly affirms the importance of the father-daughter relationship in Coleman’s intellectual development and her sense of her own place in the world. Inasmuch as her father died in 1863, at the very moment when the two were estranged on account of the Civil War, she must have felt a compulsion—both psychological and expedient—to reattach herself publicly to him. Tellingly, the title page of The Life of John J. Crittenden proclaims that it is “edited by his daughter, Mrs. Chapman Coleman”; the spine reads simply “edited by His Daughter.” There is no mistaking their relationship (the spine of the book avoids using her legal name, which, after all, no longer matches her father’s) or the filial devotion behind the project.

As translator and author, Coleman had by the early 1870s gained entry into the cultural scene in Baltimore and Washington, DC. When in 1874 the exclusive Literary Society was founded, she immediately became a member. There she further established and cultivated contacts with scholars and statesmen, including Rutherford Hayes, James Garfield, and Carl Schurz, and had the opportunity to associate with such women writers as Frances Hodgson Burnett and best-selling author E. D. E. N. Southworth. Members were required to present intellectual work in regular rotation. Not surprisingly, Coleman’s presentations at least occasionally consisted of new and never-to-be-published translations from the German.

The biography and the translations also merited Coleman an entry in 1872 in the first edition of Mary Tardy’s The Living Female Writer of the South, where Tardy writes of her: “She has always been ambitious of attaining to distinction and the highest degree of excellence in everything she attempted.” Coleman no doubt read with satisfaction Tardy’s conclusion comparing her favorably with her prominent father: just as he was “one of the most distinguished men of the country,” so she was “one of the most distinguished among the brilliant women of Kentucky.” At age fifty-nine this precocious daughter and favorite child of a Kentucky senator had at last received public acknowledgment, recognition partially enabled by the publicity and connec-
tions afforded her by translation. Nineteen years later her obituary claimed that in her “long and brilliant life” Coleman “had an influence in official circles that few men in the State have possessed.”

While Coleman gained recognition, she, ever lavish in her spending, remained dissatisfied with her financial situation most of her life. Her wealthy husband, Chapman Coleman, left her with substantial property, but upon his death she also confronted financial losses, as he had not conducted his business with his own death in mind and was overextended. The widowed Coleman had seven children to support, one of whom (Eugenia) remained unmarried and her lifelong financial dependent. Coleman’s letters to her son-in-law Patrick Joyes indicate that much of what she was able to rescue was in the form of real estate and rental properties. While the rental properties did provide regular income, the possession of large amounts of real estate must also have meant that she was persistently cash poor compared to her net value. It is also possible, though not easily verifiable from extant correspondence, that Coleman’s son-in-law tried to curb her spending by parceling out her revenues in small amounts that did not meet her perceived needs.

The mere fact that in 1861 Coleman booked passage home from Europe on the Great Eastern luxury liner, which offered only first-class seats, gives a sense of the style to which she was accustomed. Her correspondence reveals a woman who traveled frequently, sometimes staying at hotels and resorts, and who was not readily willing to forego such luxuries. Three years before her death she was still protesting that she was economizing and yet short of money. In October 1888 she insisted that she and Eugenia needed new cloaks and that they wanted other things, too. Two weeks later she wrote Patrick Joyes, again insisting on the cloaks. Eight months later she informed Patrick’s son Morton of her need for money, making the audacious suggestion that he not wait for the first of the month to collect her rents.

For a time Appleton proved a source of much-needed revenue for Coleman. Her correspondence with the publisher from August 1867 indicates that a balance of $3,761 was due her—a sizable sum at that time and generous compensation for her translation work. Nevertheless, it did not content Coleman; in November 1867 she wrote to Patrick Joyes, worrying over her finances: “in counting up their money the girls say they have not half enough. We must go to work & try to make some more.” Less than a month later, on December 3, 1867, she reported to Joyes that she and the girls expected to have two more translations ready by the end of January, one from German and one from French. They were currently translating Mon Village (1867), she wrote, “a series of stories all considered written by Ponson du Terrail.” This project was never published as a book. As she further reported, they
expected the German book—presumably she meant their translation of Otto Müller’s *Charlotte Ackermann* (1854; trans. 1871)—to do well, too; she and Eugenia planned to go hunting for a publisher.\footnote{57}

By 1871 Coleman and her daughters had managed to publish two additional translations, not with Appleton but instead with Porter and Coates in Philadelphia. Porter and Coates promoted both *Fairy Tales for Little Folks*, by Sophie Feodorovna Rostopchine, Comtesse de Ségur (1799–1874), and Müller’s *Charlotte Ackermann* on their respective title pages as translated “by Mrs. Chapman Coleman and Her Daughters, (The Translators of the Mühlbach Novels.)”\footnote{58} Despite the fact that Müller (1816–94) was considered a “starkes Erzähltalent” (a strong narrative talent) in Germany,\footnote{59} *Charlotte Ackermann*, based on the life of an eighteenth-century Hamburg actress who died at seventeen, did not sell in America. The Colemans’ *Fairy Tales* did not prove a success, either. Ségur’s moment in the United States did not arrive until the following century, when American translations of her tales multiplied.

Four years earlier, in 1867, Coleman had become infuriated upon learning from Appleton that the fee of $1,000 that she wished to charge for a new translation was double what the publisher considered market price.\footnote{60} In 1872, in a letter to her daughter Florence, she mentioned a manuscript that Eugenia was peddling to various publishers, declaring that she and the girls would rather throw it into the fire than offer it to Appleton.\footnote{61} Whatever the circumstances, the termination of relations with Appleton was not a wise move if Coleman hoped to continue to earn money from translation. Indeed, neither Coleman nor her son published further translations after 1872. As it turned out, $500 would have been a generous offer, especially compared with the honoraria Mary Stuart Smith was to receive from George Munro in the 1880s.

It is unclear what long-term financial arrangements Coleman was able to make with Appleton, who, according to Tebbel, garnered profits in the millions from her translations.\footnote{62} A letter of December 6, 1866, indicates that she presciently suspected that it would be a mistake to sell the copyright for the translations to Appleton: “The fact of Appleton wanting this Copy Right made me think it would be a good thing to hold it.”\footnote{63} Appleton had seven months earlier offered her 10% of the retail price of sales once his costs were covered and alternatively the possibility of her paying cash for the stereotype plates and Appleton’s paying for paper and print, allowing her 15% of the retail price of all sales.\footnote{64} This same letter indicates that she chose the former and that even as the first revenues came in, she expected more. When in August 1867 Appleton wrote her of the balance due her of $3,761.57, he also mentioned a previous offer of $150 for the copyrights of the books translated by her.\footnote{65} At this point, at least, she still held those copyrights. Twenty-seven
years later, her fulsome obituary in the *Louisville Courier Journal* asserted that the Mühlbach translations netted her more than $10,000. While minor mistakes in the article suggest that this figure may also be unreliable, the three novels unquestionably sold and sold and sold.

Coleman and her daughters’ work yielded approximately 1,500 densely printed pages with Appleton in less than two years’ time. Coleman put her name alone on the translations, subsuming the daughters’ work under an implicit idea of a family cottage industry. It is impossible to know how much of this work Coleman did herself and how much of a taskmaster she was. The manuscripts of unpublished translations that she completed later, held in the Crittenden Papers at Duke University, confirm at least that she herself could and did translate. While translation proved a boon in crisis, it did not become for Coleman a lifelong occupation as it did for Wister and Smith.

Not surprisingly, given the group effort and the speed, the Colemans’ translations are uneven. Contemporaries note their nonstandard use of “shall” and “will” and compare the Frederick novels unfavorably with Chaudron’s Joseph translation, which they, in contrast, praise for sounding as though it had been written originally in English. One can indeed frequently hear the original German in the Colemans’ sometimes awkward English. A figure in a painting in *Berlin and Sans-Souci* is, for example, the “seducing Cinnia”—verführend—rather than “the seductive Cinnia.” Throughout the trilogy Frederick will inevitably say something “smilingly” instead of simply “smiling,” or a character will say it “pleadingly” instead of just “pleading” or “making a plea.” In *Frederick the Great and His Court*, Queen Elizabeth of Prussia “exclaim[s] sympathizingly” instead of merely “sympathizing” and “look[s] frowningly” at another character instead of just “frowning” or “looking with a frown” at her. Moreover, the scheming courtier Pöllnitz awkwardly asks in the Colemans’ translation, “What do you here, Doris Ritter?” In *Berlin and Sans-Souci* the courtier Pöllnitz speaks of “quick advancement, which the king, no doubt, signalized.” Six formative years in Germany may well have had an impact on especially Coleman’s younger daughters’ English, but in fact the Coleman women had no professional experience of literary translation and no one to guide them in this task.

Yet even if the Frederick translations do not always testify to skill, and even if they are inconsistent, they are fluent enough for casual readers to enjoy; sometimes they read quite well. One reviewer even praised one of the Colemans’ translations as one “which in graceful ease of style, nice perception of idiomatic equivalents and smoothness of diction, it would be difficult to rival.” Overlooking the fact that the translation was the result of a collaborative effort, the reviewer went on to pronounce it to possess “that rarest merit
of a translation—it does not read like one.” Even so, Mühlbach, who turned out her lengthy volumes at an astonishing pace, was hardly the author to be read for literary style in the first place. Her appeal lay rather in the “element of interest” that permeated her novels. The Frederick translations assuredly delivered ample interest to postbellum American readers.

Ann Mary Coleman as Reader

While it cannot be proven that Coleman herself selected the Frederick novels to translate, circumstantial evidence suggests, as we have seen, that she did and that she can therefore be considered a primary recipient of the material that she and her daughters translated for an American audience. We may be permitted therefore to speculate briefly on the affective attachment to these stories of the monarch considered to have laid the foundation for the modern Prussian state of the well-connected and socially acute Coleman, the southern-sympathizing daughter of a U.S. senator who supported the North, and the sister of both a Union and a Confederate general.

Coleman was familiar with the intimate view of historical events from within a leading family. The small betrayals, opportunistic retainers, the tensions between Frederick and his brothers, his thwarting of his sister’s love for Trenck, and the blurred loyalties that come into play when German-speaking territories go to war against one another and when centuries of dynastic intermarriage assure that key players, including Frederick himself, have relatives, godparents, and godchildren on opposite sides of conflicts—Coleman knew this family landscape well.

Coleman also shared the romance with history that characterizes Mühlbach’s novels, romance that turns on the charisma, honor, heroism, wisdom, and sense of duty of a paternalistic monarch. Undemocratic yet interested in individuals, Mühlbach’s dramatic renditions of the enlightened monarch Frederick resonate with myths of the gallant rebel cause of the South on behalf of an emergent “civilization far superior to the one that existed in the North.” Coleman’s dramatic letter to her father concerning her oldest son’s devotion to the cause of the South expresses her shared sense of just such a superior civilization made by gallant men—in Kenneth W. Goings’s bitter formulation, the sense of those who “equated themselves with the knights of medieval England,” who had allegedly “lived according to their own unique and unbreakable code of honor; had administered their plantations in an enlightened and progressive manner.” Even if “enlightened and progressive,” these southern knights—in this romantic view of history—knew when to be
autocratic and how to assert their authority in the name of what they saw as “the good.” The Frederick novels, with their focus on personality and their grand sense of Frederick’s nobility and dash, as well as his personal suffering and sacrifice as king, bear an affinity to Coleman’s understanding of her own country’s recent history as revealed in her correspondence and her biography of her father.

The well-to-do Coleman had owned slaves, yet her extant letters allude only obliquely to the issue of slavery that led the southern states to secede from the Union and form the Confederacy. She accepted the rebellion and the possibility that as a result two great countries could exist simultaneously. This war, to which she claimed to have been opposed from the start, was for her a matter of personal loyalties and family connections, living according to high-minded personal principles that conveniently overlooked the slave system. She experienced it affectively, personally, and subjectively. An emotional letter to her father from May 1863 is telling. Here she avers, “it speak[s] for the South that these men [Lincoln and Butler] live”; in other words, by not assassinating Lincoln and Butler, the South proved its morality in contrast to the example of history since “there have been secret assassins formed in all ages of the world for such men.” She furthermore laments the destruction and terror wrought by the North, alluding cryptically to “the freed negroes.” The letter is peppered with the verbs “feel” and “think.”

Her biography of her father, in essence hero worship akin to Mühlbach’s adulatory portraits of Frederick, likewise contains no historical analysis, consisting as it does largely of a compilation of his correspondence or letters about him from prominent men. Although Coleman supplies some background information as a frame for the letters, she sets out here not to analyze the past, to explain historical conditions or events, but to illuminate the personality and sterling character of her father, the man who was to serve as a model for her grandsons. Introducing her father’s final will and testament, for example, she explains, “I give it as evidence of Mr. Crittenden’s generosity and simplicity of character.” History as the story of individuals of the finest character, beset by the evil-doing of those around them and circumstances not of their making, upholds a cherished notion of heroism, masculine strength, personality, and personal agency, one that the unprecedented carnage of the American Civil War should have cast into doubt. Mühlbach’s fictionalized account of Frederick the Great burnished anew this tarnished myth of history told in terms of personality.

Whereas Marlitt’s *In the Schillingscourt*, as we observed in chapter 3, appropriated American culture and history to recount a story of German nation, an American reader, positioned as was Coleman by her family, life
experience, and beliefs, could, at a stage of removal, read the Frederick novels as stories reflecting familiar situations and ideas of leaders, family, and country made pleasantly strange in German dress. While reading the Frederick novels, Coleman could side in the Silesian wars with the Prussian monarch, thus enjoying the vicarious experience of for once being on the right side of history.

The third aspect that may have appealed to Coleman and readers like her is Mühlbach’s portrayal of the monarch and the functioning of monarchy. While Mühlbach’s Frederick shows some interest in public opinion and is heartened by the loyalty of his subjects, public opinion in the end matters little for the decisions he makes. He appears taciturn and sovereign, following his own hidden wise agenda and in the end always besting his opponents, be they Maria Theresa of Austria or schemers in his own court. How different matters were in the political reality of the United States! In the years in which the Frederick novels first appeared, Americans were laboring under the burden of the hard-fought victory of the Union, the assassination of one president in 1865, and the near impeachment of another in 1867. Two years later, in 1869, they put a general in the highest office of the land, implicitly calling for discipline and order. Americans had to wonder anew whether their hard-fought republic, for the people and by the people, would endure.

Mühlbach’s novels and the Germany they created offered a countermodel of unification for Americans to ponder or at least to relish momentarily while lost in reading: unity under the will of a powerful enlightened king with the inherited right to rule, not unity by law and the will of the people. As Germany struggled toward empire under the force and charisma of the Prussian monarchy and its retainers, the United States continued the experiment of union under a constitution. Many of America’s citizens, however, remained, like Coleman, fascinated with European royalty and the idea of leadership as birthright.

The fragility of the American presidency had been on the mind of the translator’s father in the years before the war. Even as Senator Crittenden chided his daughter for her misplaced love of royalty, he expressed dismay that former president Pierce was then spending “so much of his time in Europe, rambling about obscurely in a manner . . . to diminish and cheapen the dignity of an Ex-President of the United States. Europeans must think that Presidents are cheap with us.” Presidents of a republic, leaders not by blood but by the will of the people, leaders who serve only temporarily, it seems, ever ran the risk of deflation in the European political economy; in Mühlbach’s novels, by contrast, elected leaders would never even have the
opportunity to test their mettle, for her German Frederick was always in command.

In Chapter 2 of An Old Fashioned Girl (serialized 1869), Louisa May Alcott stages a conversation about reading that features contemporary fiction. The virtuous Polly informs her new friends that the only thing she has read since her arrival is a historical novel by Mühlbach (by 1868 sixteen Mühlbach novels had appeared in translation in America, including the three Frederick novels; the seventeenth in the series was published in 1869). Polly likes Mühlbach’s novels, she explains, because “there is history in them.” On the other hand, she is, unlike her flighty acquaintances, ignorant of such popular fiction as The Phantom Bride and George Alfred Lawrence’s Breaking a Butterfly (1869). Mühlbach’s novels, the girls concede in response to Polly’s assertion of her preference, “are well enough for improving reading,” but the girls do not find them exciting; for excitement, one needs Ouida or Guy Livingstone or Edmund Hodgson Yates’s novels.

Polly’s friends, who preferred lighter and more sensational fare but whose parents no doubt wished them to read wholesome novels, could in 1869 have found a safe compromise in The Old Mam’selle’s Secret and Gold Elsie. Wister and Smith devoted most of their labor to the domestic fiction of Marlitt and her avatars, to pleasurable reading with moral messages and happy endings realized in German regional settings, German novels of remarriage, stories of gender made and secured in the family, where femininity appears to matter deeply and where it is assiduously cultivated and validated. A review of one of Smith’s translations celebrates this German fiction, implying that it, like Alcott’s Polly, is delightfully just a bit old-fashioned: “there is a charm about German romances that seldom finds its way into lighter American works of fiction. They are never harsh or pronounced in their treatment of life. . . . It is like a glimpse of another clime to drink in the details of a quiet and restful picture, like this, in the midst of the turmoil and hurry of modern life.”

Chapters 8 and 9 trace the Americanization of these “German romances” by Wister and Smith for American readers who longed for virtue and sentiment and did not always find their just reward in the “turmoil and hurry of modern life.”