The Rise of American Girls’ Literature

Elements in Publishing and Book Culture

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ABSTRACT: This Element looks at the publishing history of the genre, girls’ literature, in the United States spanning 1850–1940. The genre is set in context, beginning with an examination of the early American women’s literature that preceded girls’ literature. Then the Element explores several subgenres of girls’ literature, the family story, orphan story, school story, as well as African American girls’ literature. Underpinning each of these stories is the *bildungsroman*, which overwhelmingly ends with girls “growing down” to marry and raise children, following the ideals outlined in the cult of domesticity.

This Element also has a video abstract: www.cambridge.org/reese

KEYWORDS: *bildungsroman*, domestic realism, women’s literature, nineteenth century, twentieth century

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Contents

1 The Rise of Girls’ Literature 1

2 “Thus Shall the Star of Domestic Peace Arise”: Early American Women’s Literature 13

3 “Toward that Larger and Less Happy Region of Womanhood”: Family Stories 24

4 “The Joys of Being an Orphan”: Orphan Girls’ Stories 50

5 “Vassar Graduates Do Marry”: School Stories 68

6 “This is What Our Race Needs”: African American Girls’ Literature 83

7 Conclusion 98

Bibliography 101