



To Read My Heart: The Journal of Rachel Van Dyke, 1810-1811

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"The Journal of Rachel Van Dyke," a compelling primary document previously unpublished, offers insights into the life and mind of a seventeen-year-old young woman, while also providing a fascinating window into the cultural and social landscape of the early national period. Rachel was a thoughtful, intelligent, observer, and her journal is an important account of upper- and middle-class life in the growing city of New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her entries reveal her remarkably studied views on social customs, marriage, gender roles, friendship, and religion.

The journal is dominated by two interrelated themes: Rachel's desire to broaden her knowledge and her friendship with her teacher, Ebenezer Grosvenor. Since Ebenezer was both her teacher and her romantic interest, it is impossible to distinguish between the themes of education and romance that dominate her writings. On several occasions, Rachel and Ebenezer exchanged their private journals with each other. During these exchanges, Ebenezer added comments in the margins of Rachel's journal, producing areas of written "conversation" between them. The marginalia adds to the complexity of the journal and provides evidence of and insight into Rachel's romantic and intellectual relationship with him. The written interactions between Rachel and Ebenezer, together with discussions of friendship and courtship rituals provided throughout the journal, enrich our understanding of social life during the early national period.

To Read My Heart will be of interest to students of American history, women's studies, and nineteenth-century literature; all readers will be captivated by the rich expression and emotional experience of the journal. Whether she is relating the story of a young friend's wedding, the death of a small boy, or the capture of a slave in Guinea, Rachel's pages have universal appeal as she seeks to understand her own role as an emerging adult.

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