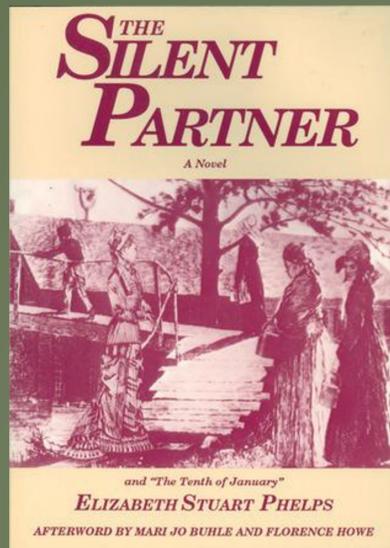


# Working Girl: Feminine mischief as labor in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner*



Elizabeth Stuart Phelps



Phelps grew up during a time of women's suffrage, this greatly influenced her and her work.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner* does much to illustrate the subtly of feminine mischief as labor in this novel. I propose the women who stayed inside this sphere and emerged much later were still actively participating in a form of labor by engaging in the public by using their feminine wiles. Feminine wiles being proper dress, demeanor, etiquette and the social graces of a woman. The main character Perley, an upper-class woman prepares herself for the outside world by acting like a lady and employing the aforementioned wiles. Thus being one of her driving forces throughout the novel, the social skills that she works at in her private sphere become the foundation for the public work that she does in the mill town. Perley's feminine attributes learned within the domestic sphere the foundation for her public work in the mill town. This essay explains how Perley's feminine nature and ability to fall back into her feminine wiles constitutes as labor but also hinders her from the entering society.

“[Perley] took a keen, appreciative enjoyment in having a lazy lover; he gave her something to do; he was an occupation in himself. She had [...] a weakness for an occupation; suffered passions of superfluous life [...]” (Phelps 12).

“She was apt to be amused by the world outside her carriage. It conceived such original ways of holding its hands, and wearing its hats. And carrying its bundles. It had such a taste in colors and disregard of clean linen, and was always in such a hurry; [Perley] had never been in a hurry in her life” (18).

“She was sitting in her father's library, with her hands folded, at the time when the weather occurred to her; sitting as she had been sitting all the opaque, grey afternoon, in the crimson chair by [the] [...] fire” (10).